

Immigration 'Solutions'

By [Thomas Sowell](#)

Activists who are organizing mass marches and demonstrations in cities across America may well be congratulating themselves on the huge numbers of people they can get to turn out to protest efforts in Congress to reduce illegal immigration.

No doubt that will impress many in the media and intimidate many politicians. But how these marches will be seen by millions of other Americans is another question entirely.

The Mexican flags and the strident assertions of a right to violate American laws are a danger signal to this society, as they would be to any society.

The releasing of children from schools to take part in these marches and the support of the marchers' goals by some religious leaders demonstrate that this contempt for the laws of the land has spread well beyond immigrant communities.

For some, this is just another extension of their general anti-establishment attitudes and activities. They are ready to protest virtually anything at any time.

At the other end of the political spectrum are staid and sober representatives of business interests who simply want a continuing supply of cheap labor. They don't march, they lobby politicians.

Both liberals and free-market libertarians often see this as an abstract issue about poor people being hindered from moving to jobs by an arbitrary border drawn across the southwest desert.

Intellectuals' ability to think of people in the abstract is a dangerous talent in a world where people differ in all the ways that make them people. The cultures and surrounding circumstances of those people are crucial for understanding what they are likely to do and what the consequences are likely to be.

Some free-market advocates argue that the same principle which justifies free international trade in commodities should justify the free movement of people as well. But this ignores the fact that people have consequences that go far beyond the consequences of commodities.

Commodities are used up and vanish. People generate more people, who become a permanent and expanding part of the country's population and electorate.

It is an irreversible process -- and a potentially dangerous process, as Europeans have discovered with their "guest worker" programs that have brought in many Muslims who are fundamentally hostile to the culture and the people that welcomed them.

Unlike commodities, people in a welfare state have legal claims on other people's tax dollars and expensive services in schools and hospitals, not to mention the high cost of imprisoning many of them who commit crimes.

Immigrants in past centuries came here to become Americans, not to remain foreigners, much less to proclaim the rights of their homelands to reclaim American soil, as some of the Mexican activist groups have done.

In the wars that this country fought, immigrant groups were among the most patriotic volunteers, earning the respect of American citizens on the battlefield with their blood and their lives.

Today, immigrant spokesmen promote grievances, not gratitude, much less patriotism. Moreover, many native-born Americans also promote a sense of separatism and grievance and, through "multi-culturalism," strive to keep immigrants foreign and disaffected.

This is not to say that all or most of the illegal immigrants themselves share this anti-establishment or anti-American bias of many of their spokesmen or supporters. Most are probably here to make a buck and have little time for ideology.

Hispanic activists themselves recognize that many of the immigrants from Mexico -- legal or illegal -- would assimilate into American society in the absence of these activists' efforts to keep them a separate constituency. But these efforts are widespread and unrelenting, a fact that cannot be ignored.

Whatever is said or done in the immigration debate, no one should insult the American people's intelligence by talking or acting as if this is a question about the movement of abstract people across an abstract line.

What is likely to be done? A pretense of reducing illegal immigration and a reality of amnesty under some other name.

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