

Sojourners: God's people are to regard immigrants with love

From the Editors in the [July 11, 2006](#) issue

A few years ago, after government officials decided to return some unearthed Indian artifacts to the present-day descendants of their original owners rather than ship them to a museum, a *Saturday Night Live* spoof put this act of generosity in perspective: “As for the rest of North America, we’ll be keeping that.”

All of us in this country are, except for Native Americans, immigrants or the descendants of immigrants. That fact is often cited, and rightly so, by those in favor of providing immigrants who have been living and working in this country a straightforward path to citizenship. Those who want to clamp down on the illegal immigrants (as many as 12 million) complain that the immigrants are driving down wages and overwhelming American culture. The hardliners reveal signs of xenophobia or even racism. The concern that new immigrants stick to themselves, aren’t learning English and are threatening American culture was voiced in earlier eras about the Irish, the Italians and the Jews—who at the time were considered members of a different race from Anglo-Saxon Americans.

George W. Bush’s experience in Texas, a state that has always had a sizable Mexican population, may explain why he takes a moderate position on immigration, whereas representatives who come from areas that have not historically been home to large numbers of Hispanics use the issue for political demagoguery.

One hardliner, Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R., Calif.), has this response to those who say the economy would suffer without the immigrant laborers to pick and pack the nation’s fruits and vegetables: “Let the prisoners pick the fruits.” The notion that people in jail could replace immigrant labor in agriculture is absurd.

People with the will to work and the need for a job will go where the jobs are, even if that entails a dangerous or illegal border crossing. Having open borders for immigration is a logical corollary to having open borders for trade. It is odd to watch a political party that calls for limited government intervention in the workings of the

market calling for a complex barrage of government regulations on immigrant labor. (The hardliners might note that the Immigration and Naturalization Service is still processing paperwork from the last immigration “reform”—that of 1986.) It seems even more odd that immigration has just now become a political issue—until you notice that the November elections are looming on the calendar.

Jews and Christians share this scripture: “You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Exod. 22:21). Scripture says that God’s people are to regard sojourners not with fear, indifference or loathing, but with love and respect. Movements to criminalize millions of individuals, break up families and destabilize industries are bad enough. The notion that the alien among us is anything other than beloved elicits some of scripture’s strongest condemnations: “‘Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.’ All the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” (Deut. 27:19).