

Living With the Newcomers Among Us

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Body

Regarding David Walsh's Aug. 12 letter, "A Culture Clash is Not 'Racism' ":

It is clear that Mr. Walsh supports the kind of racism that is being enacted into anti-immigration law in Prince William County. Mr. Walsh asserts that the quality of life of county residents has been diminished by immigrants, thereby turning, in his words, "Pleasantville" into "Little Tijuana." His evidence for this is that Prince William County is plagued by "squawking chickens in back yards, a half-dozen cars in front, music blaring in the night, beer-induced brawls . . . and catcalls to women."

Surely Mr. Walsh can't believe that immigrants are the only people in Prince William who turn the music up too loud, start brawls or make catcalls to women. Even if such occurrences have increased as the county's population has exploded, these actions should not be stereotypically attributed only to immigrants. Mr. Walsh's support of Prince William County's new immigration laws is misguided.

JENNIFER DeCAMP

Fairfax

David Walsh tried to make the point that Prince William County's tough immigration laws do not stem from racist sentiments on the part of county residents. I don't know about the motivations of Prince William's residents, but Mr. Walsh makes his own attitudes quite clear with a portrayal of Latinos based on some of the ugliest, most racist stereotypes imaginable. Ironically, the tone of his letter indicates that he doesn't recognize his own prejudice, much less that of like-minded people in Prince William County. This cultural ignorance is sad and embarrassing.

MARIAN CONDON

Ellicott City

Regarding the Aug. 13 editorial "English, S?": As a teacher of English to nonnative speakers for over 30 years, I can attest that most immigrants deeply want to learn English. English-only laws aren't necessary for immigrants to see that living successfully in this country requires knowing English.

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For those Americans who have not experienced an immigrant's desperation about feeding a family in a hopeless situation and learning a new language and culture as an adult with little education, I would ask that they imagine themselves in similar circumstances and show compassion instead of scorn.

English isn't learned overnight. It takes years to develop adequate fluency to read government documents and communicate clearly.

English classes are in demand all over the area, and in some places there are waiting lists of eager learners. To deny public services to illegal immigrants is a spiteful, hurtful response that is out of proportion to the crime of entering the country illegally. What these new residents of our community need is education and acculturation to avoid the culture clashes that have understandably upset other residents. If given basic services, the children of these new immigrants will consider themselves Americans and follow the pattern of all who came to this country as hopeful, brave immigrants and became acculturated citizens.

GAIL SCHMITT

Rockville

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