

THE STAR-SPANGLISH BANNER

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Body

The entertainers who collaborated on a Spanish version of "The Star-Spangled ***Banner***" are doing no favors for the cause of immigration reform. Their recording - titled, with all the subtlety of a thumb in the eye, "Our Anthem" - reinforces the damaging stereotype that America's newcomers see this not as a nation indivisible, but as two societies separated by language and culture.

The congressional nativists and all who are determined to deny a path to legitimacy for the country's 11 million illegal immigrants are going to have a field day with this ill-timed expression of ethnic pride. Already it has been dubbed "The Illegal Alien Anthem" by those who believe that there's a them and there's an us and that them must go.

President Bush got it right Friday when he said: "I think the national anthem ought to be sung in English, and I think people who want to be a citizen of this country ought to learn English and they ought to learn to sing the national anthem in English." This is no slight to any proud heritage; it's the American identity and the way of assimilation.

The country's immigrant leaders would do well to pay heed as the Senate begins again to wrestle with legislation that may or may not open the door to citizenship for illegal immigrants and may or may not establish a guest-worker program for foreigners who come for jobs unwanted by Americans. This is not the time to be waving Mexican flags or asking, "Oh say can you see a la luz de la aurora?"

In fact, sing-alongs of Francis Scott Key in good ol' English would be most welcome tomorrow when immigrants across the country stage demonstrations dramatizing their importance to the economy. In the city, large numbers are expected to form human chains in a variety of locations, with a march and rally set for late in the afternoon.

The human chains are scheduled to form at 12:16 p.m., a time meant to symbolize the date, Dec. 16, when the House of Representatives passed a bill that would make felons of the country's illegal immigrants, along with anyone who provides them assistance. But the more protesters take insult at the House legislation, the more counterproductive the demonstrations are likely to become.

Proclaiming victimhood, aggrievement or entitlement will not win what's being called comprehensive immigration reform, a mix of securing the borders, granting temporary work visas and a process for legalizing those already in the U.S. Decrying proposals for real or virtual border fencing will only harden the anti-immigrant right. Even worse would be demands for amnesty carrying the suggestion that life in these United States is a right, not a privilege.

Plainly, most immigrants - legal and illegal - want to assimilate, and they have become woven into the fabric of American life. Nowhere is this truer than in New York, and nowhere would gain more if Washington produced a

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measure granting lawful status to hundreds of thousands of working people. Loud and clear it must be sung tomorrow, "separate but equal" is not on the agenda.

Klein makes wrong call

Fact: In today's society, cell phones are ubiquitous. And for many people, they have become a necessity, especially to link parents and kids. It's no wonder, then, that Chancellor Joel Klein's edict against the devices' very presence in schools has set off an uproar.

Parents give children cells to stay in touch outside class hours, and many youngsters go from school to organized activities, volunteer work, even jobs. With pay phones fast disappearing from the streets, cell phones are critical to parent-child communication in many families. And they are a necessity in case of emergency. Millions of New York parents remember how cell phones played a major role on 9/11.

Against that reality, Klein and Mayor Bloomberg argue that cell phone use is disruptive: Kids chat in class, use text-messaging for cheating and take photos in locker rooms. Officials also say some bad kids use cells in drug dealing and gang activity. True, true, true. But this is where adult control comes in. Adults still do have control in schools, do they not?

Instead of ruling cell phones contraband subject to confiscation, Klein should ban their use on school property. The kids could carry the devices in backpacks or pockets, but the phones would have to be turned off. Anyone caught using a phone in school would have to surrender it. And if kids abuse the privilege, principals should have the authority to ban the devices in toto. It should be noted, however, that the principals union wants Klein to make the decision. The administrators are all too ready to abdicate responsibility on the issue. Cowards. Principals run their schools, don't they?

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