

Intelligent immigration; IN SHIFT, WORKING CLASS AND MINORITIES WANT BORDER ENFORCEMENT

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Body

When I wrote "Mexifornia" more than three years ago, much of the criticism came from the academic and open-**borders** left. The memoir was considered insensitive in our politically correct age for complaining that it was not wise or moral that millions were here illegally from Mexico.

But lately I have heard far more fault-finding with "Mexifornia" from the grass-roots middle and right, over both my advocacy for some sort of earned citizenship for most hardworking illegal immigrants and my objections, on both practical and ethical grounds, to mass deportations.

Why the **shift** in public opinion?

Broad **class** considerations are now transcending particular party, racial and ethnic views of illegal **immigration**, pitting the well-off few against the less-fortunate many. Many of the more privileged Americans who frequent fancy restaurants, stay in hotels and depend on hired help for lawn and pool maintenance, home repair and child care don't think illegal **immigration** is that big of a deal.

Those in the higher-paid professions do not fear low-wage competition for their jobs in law, medicine, academia, the media, government or the arts. And many who have no problem with the present influx live in affluent communities with good schools insulated from the immediate budgetary consequences of meeting the needs of the offspring of the 11 million here illegally. These wealthier people aren't so much liberal in their tolerance of illegal **immigration** as they are self-interested and cynical.

In contrast, the far more numerous poor and lower middle **classes** of America, especially in the Southwest, are sincerely worried -- and angry. Indeed, it is no longer possible to caricature opponents of illegal **immigration** as part of a small nativist fringe.

For the broad middle **class**, the poor and **minorities** -- people who dine mostly at home, travel infrequently, mow their own lawns and change their children's diapers -- inexpensive service labor is not seen as much of a boon to them. Plus, lower- and middle-**class** Americans live in communities where schools are more impacted by an influx of Spanish-only speakers. And as janitors, maids, groundskeepers, carpenters, factory workers and truckers, they fear competition from lower-wage illegal laborers. Immigrants who wait years to enter the United States legally can be particularly unsympathetic to others who cut in front -- in violation of the law.

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The public is also growing uneasy with three decades of multiculturalism while developing a new appreciation of the old multiracial melting pot. Other minorities don't understand why the Latino immigrant community needs bilingual ballots and special government translation help.

Because the United States is increasingly less a majority of whites of European ancestry and more a mixture of dozens of races and ethnicities, the need for a common unifying language and culture has never been more important. When Americans look abroad at the violent messes in the Balkans, Rwanda, Darfur and Iraq, the notion of emphasizing separation here at home by race, tribe, language or religion makes absolutely no sense. But the idea of letting only enough legal immigrants in who can be easily assimilated surely does.

So how does this new popular worry over illegal immigration play out among a variety of working-class groups and minorities?

While there remains controversy over amnesty and a guest-worker program, there is now little disagreement over first enforcing the law and closing the borders -- whether through periodic fortification, more Border Patrol officers, tough employer sanctions or viable identification cards.

In the past three years, while I haven't changed my views about the need for an earned-citizenship program or the impracticality of deporting 11 million illegal residents, an angry public has passed ``Mexifornia" by. Once caricatured as illiberal for calling for an end to illegal immigration, the book now reads as middle of the road, if not passe.

Indeed, if extremists continue to demonstrate for open borders, blare out ethnic and linguistic chauvinism, and flout the law, then this current public anger against illegal immigration will unfortunately appear mild in comparison to what is on the horizon.

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