

Edison High juniors shine spotlight on immigration

Orange County Register (California)

September 26, 2009 Saturday

Copyright 2009 Orange County Register All Rights Reserved

Section: LOCAL; Pg. B

Length: 645 words

Byline: By CINDY CARCAMO, The Orange County Register

Dateline: HUNTINGTON BEACH

Highlight: Students assume roles of immigrants filtering through early 1900s Ellis Island as part of social studies lesson.

Body

The immigration debate hit home Friday at Edison High School as juniors experienced firsthand the trials and tribulations of those looking to be admitted into the country.

During a two-day period, about 500 students at the Surf City high school went through an Ellis Island simulation of what it would have been like to be an immigrant in the early 1900s, filtering through what is often referred to as the Gateway to America.

Each student took on the identity of a real immigrant who came through the New York port of entry. They answered questions. They endured long lines and inspections and, at times, interrogations. All with the aim of finding out whether he or she would get to stay or end up deported.

The event was more than a re-enactment, however. It threw these teens into the heated issue of immigration through a lesson examining the past.

It gave students the chance to compare and contrast immigration issues a hundred years ago to today's immigration firestorm, with the main focus on those who are in the country illegally, specifically the Mexico-U.S. border.

"In 1908, we were processing thousands of immigrants legally a day, and today, obviously the dynamic has shifted," said Mike Walters, a social studies teacher. "That's the question we've posed to the kids. What's changed? Why not have the floodgates open in Ellis Island anymore? We let them debate it out."

First in line at the 11 a.m. simulation was Plato Aristophones, a single 29-year-old Greek man who was the son of a rich rug-maker. He wore an oversized green blazer and a black and white hat. Jesse Richards, a 16-year-old water polo player with sun-kissed hair, admitted to having nothing in common with his new identity but made his best attempt at impersonating the immigrant.

"You speak English?" asked a volunteer parent posing as an immigration official.

"Yes."

When asked whether he had a job, trade skills or college degree, Aristophones quipped back.

"I never worked. My father is very rich," said the aspiring rug-making entrepreneur who claimed to be a "strict monarchist" as part of his political affiliation.

Edison High juniors shine spotlight on immigration

Oh, yes, and one more thing.

Aristophones also carried \$15,000 to start his new venture.

By this time, the self-assured Greek immigrant thought he'd quickly win clearance and be sworn in as a U.S. citizen.

Instead he was ordered deported. He didn't have enough points, according to his paperwork.

"Sorry, you don't have enough skills for a job so you go to the deportation section," said an adult posing as yet another immigration official.

Bewildered, the Greek man sat apart from the others, soon to be joined by a 39-year-old Italian immigrant by the name of Loretta Piranini, who was played by Alex Dicus, 16.

"I'm being deported, too," she said, holding on to a baby doll that was supposed to be her 8-month-old baby. "Wait, for sure we got deported? I'm making an appeal."

Piranini only had \$23 in her pocket after paying her life savings for a monthlong boat trip that took her from her native land to what looked like deportation in a new land. She could only take the youngest of her 14 children on the trip, leaving her blacksmith husband behind to help fight soldiers in the war.

Leaving behind her role, Dicus spoke about her own immigration experience. The great-granddaughter of Japanese immigrants, she said the simulation and her character's deportation order made her more sympathetic toward people who come to the country illegally.

Soon after their deportation orders, it turned out the characters played by Dicus and Richards were not deported after all. It was a paperwork mix-up, the immigration officials said.

"Well, sometimes that happens," Walters said, adding that only 5 percent of people were turned away from Ellis Island. "When you process thousands of people a day, of course, you're going to have a mistake."

949-553-2906 or ccarcamo@ocregister.com

Graphic

Students at Edison High School take the oath of allegiance after completing a morning-long Ellis Island simulation Friday as part of a social studies lesson.

A parent volunteer inspects a student's mock passport.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: Story

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Edison High juniors shine spotlight on immigration

Subject: **IMMIGRATION** (94%); STUDENTS & STUDENT LIFE (90%); HIGH SCHOOLS (90%); DEPORTATION (89%); ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS (78%); PRIMARY & SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS (78%); TERRITORIAL & NATIONAL BORDERS (78%); MIGRATION ISSUES (78%); INSPECTIONS (77%); HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCE (73%); WATER SPORTS (72%); WATER POLO (50%)

Industry: HIGH SCHOOLS (90%); CARPET & RUG MILLS (68%)

Geographic: NEW YORK, USA (79%); UNITED STATES (92%); MEXICO (79%); NORTH AMERICA (79%)

Load-Date: September 26, 2009

End of Document