

PATRIOT GAMES, RACISM & IMMIGRATION

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Body

I bet not many people knew. More than 1 million "illegal immigrants" come from Europe. Yes, from Europe. And not only from poor countries like Russia. They come from all over the old continent.

If Census Bureau figures are to be believed, America is swarming with undocumented Brits and Germans, French and Italians, Russians and Polish.

"Send the Europeans back," though, has not exactly become a battle cry for those anti-immigrant groups always so outraged by illegal immigration. The question is why.

Come to think of it, when those "patriots" talk about illegal immigrants, what they mean is Latinos, Asians, Africans - You know the deal.

Sure, there are millions of undocumented Mexicans and other Latin Americans. Everybody knows that.

The surprise is that there are also lots and lots of illegals from all those countries that aren't normally thought of as sources of undocumented immigrants. I mean, is there such thing as an illegal Brit? C'mon. . . .

Well, yes. And more than one. One hundred twenty-three thousand, two hundred and forty-six of them, to be exact, according to the Census Bureau. Who would have thought it?

Yet, no outraged so-called patriot is known to have demanded, "Ship the British back to where they came from," or to have called for stricter U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service scrutiny.

The thing is, of course, that contrary to what happens to Latinos and Asians, no one thinks of Queen Elizabeth's subjects as illegal aliens. Besides, who cares?

"I mean, they're not exactly up in arms about all the illegal Brits or Germans, are they?" a Daily News colleague said. "I even suspect that Pat Buchanan would be pleased to know so many 'true Europeans' are sneaking over the border."

He probably would. After all, Buchanan is not famous for being enlightened on racial and ethnic matters. Actually, one of his pet issues has been preventing illegal immigrants from Mexico - repeat, from Mexico - from entering the U.S. by any means.

Taking his cue from the infamous Berlin Wall, he came up with the idea of erecting a fence - sometimes known as the "Buchanan fence" - between the countries.

"As for the Buchanan fence, it's already been built," he proudly told Salon magazine in December, although there is more to be done. "It's on the San Diego border, though the fence only extends into the desert."

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What's next? Alligator-filled moats?

Yet no one has ever heard the failed Republican presidential hopeful - or any "patriotic" anti-immigrant group for that matter - get all worked up into a send-them-back frenzy about the 113,327 undocumented Germans living in the U.S.

Or the 62,456 Italians, 92,684 Poles, 36,477 French, 344,877 from the former USSR, just to mention a few. Again one has to wonder why, although bigotry sounds like a convincing explanation.

Different color, same lives

But New York is the quintessential immigrant city, and here we are not easily deceived. We know that most undocumented immigrants - from Europe, Asia or Latin America - have strong family ties in the U.S., and many have American-born children.

And we know that white, brown or black, most of them contribute to society with their work and the taxes they pay, despite what xenophobic propaganda would have public opinion believe.

And finally, we know that, despite whatever bigots may say, they deserve to become legal, full-fledged members of society. No matter where they came from.

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