

Title:

Immigration in America - Not Everyone is Dying to Get Here

Word Count:

1203

Summary:

America is indeed still the land of opportunity but there is a downside about this nation. That downside is hard for us to see because we are isolated and too close to the problem. It comes under the heading of "can't see the forest for the trees."

Keywords:

Immigration,Mexico,Pan America,Mayans,Central America,Acapulco,Old Mexico,fiestas,El Norte,Gregory Nava,National Film Registry,Library of Congress,Oscar,brazos fuertes,San Diego,druggers,raped,Mayan,I

Article Body:

Not everyone in America views people from Mexico and Pan America as our little brown brothers to the south. With a deep culture and a rich heritage older than our own these people have much to be proud of. Economically and politically they are suffering behind the eight ball of progress but as in any country life goes on there.

This writer has family in Mexico and because of that I have had the good fortune of spending a lot of time in Old Mexico. The details are too much for this article but I will at the very least relate one single impression I had the first time I spent real time in the neighborhoods of Acapulco.

My first impressions as I viewed the small houses and open air markets were probably similar to every other American before me. I thought of only how poor these people are and how hard life must be for them. In a short time I changed my opinion. I watched as families clung close to each other and neighborhoods would band together closely to protect each other. There were simple peddlers carrying fish and cold gelatins around and children playing together with laughter. They worked hard and ate together at the same table. Respect was given to the elderly and heads of households whether male or female. Fiestas and much celebration were attended by large crowds and participation was hearty and genuine. Dancing, conversation and great food was enjoyed and a neighborhood seemed more like a family than a mere community of citizens. Who could find fault with this and why should we care if they don't have a lot of money?

Apparently it could not keep them from enjoying something we in America may have long since had a while but lost.

I was graced with my time in Mexico long before I had the pleasure of seeing the acclaimed movie, *El Norte*. This Pan American production was released in 1983 and will soon re-debut thru the DVD medium for those who may have missed it. Only three or four movies I have seen in my lifetime would I consider as "an experience" and not just a movie, *El Norte* is one of them.

El Norte (The North) is a grand drama produced by Gregory Nava in Pan America. It is considered the hands down best movie ever produced in Central America. It is also considered the best movie to "put faces" on the otherwise invisible people who pick our crops, clean our houses and care for our children. The immigrants of South and Central America and those of Mexico are not only depicted accurately in this film but they could learn from it as well. It is my opinion that if all would be immigrants were able to see this film before they dashed off to America that many of them would lay down the idea of getting here altogether.

The film is fictional but has a reality to it that cannot be contended. It is similar to the experiences of countless Latinos who enter this country illegally and legally. Its impact did not go unnoticed by the National Film Registry where it was selected by the Library of Congress in 1995. It was also nominated for an Oscar and won several other prestigious awards along its glowing path.

The plot of *El Norte* is based on the travels of a young brother and sister team who endeavor to overcome every obstacle set before them to immigrate (illegally) to the United States. The two siblings come from a Central American village of Mayan Indians. Their life there was simple and they were poor but all they ever loved was also there. They want to come to America and try along with others of their kind to overcome the idea of being no more than "brazos fuertes" (strong arms) that make up the grunt workforce for rich Americans.

Driven by the dream of a place where opportunity abounds and equality reigns they cross hundreds of miles of open deserts and long dreary roads in Mexico. They are robbed, raped, tricked, swindled and lied to but pass on undaunted still reaching for their dreams. With nothing left to lose they make the final crossing into the land into America by crawling on hands and knees for miles through a sewer duct from Mexico to San Diego. They are bitten by rats, exhausted and near to death when they emerge to the land of the free and the home of the brave.

The contacts and the promises that they expected to be there for them have

dissolved and they battle to find some means of survival. In time they both find housing and meager employment as domestics but the battle has just begun. The heart wrenching struggle they encounter is not just about making money but it is about making impossible adjustments to a culture not only foreign to them but completely undesirable.

They are pulled by druggers to touch and taste and demeaned by employers that work them hard for pittance. They see Americans in a great a race to gain everything but who seem to appreciate nothing. Add to this that one of the siblings' contracts a disease from the rat bites they incurred while crossing into San Diego and eventually dies.

Before the bitter end the film depicts what would be the mental dreams, visions and remembrances of their native village and their Mayan cultural upbringing. It is impossible not to feel the longing to return to their simpler and more meaningful life. Now it is harder to return than it was to make the first journey...fade to black.

As an American who loves his country this film stood as an indictment against our shallowness and preoccupation with everything that is ersatz and meaningless. I could never argue with the great principles this nation was founded upon but this movie only served to remind me that we are a long way from the founding principles today.

Although the present issue of immigration in this country cannot be ignored this film reminds us that there is an untold side to the issue. If the hearts of all the immigrants could be searched and weighed I'm sure we would find that a great deal of their contents would be disappointment, disillusionment and sorrow.

The lesson here is that it is not just our borders that need to be protected in a reasonable and rational manner but it is our hearts as well. Would be immigrants may want to consider that economic advantage is not all there is to life. Americans may want to remember that there was a time when that was not all there was to our lives.

Far be it for a man of God not to appendage a good didactic endeavor without making an allusion to the scriptures. This is the one that comes to mind. "And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Luke 12:15

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