

CIVIL RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS

Immigration In a Land of Immigrants

Fix our immigration laws now

CIVIL RIGHTS OF IMMIGRANTS

Gamaliel's First National Issue

CAN YOU HEAR
THE
ROLLING THUNDER?



Teaching ordinary citizens to unleash power within themselves to collectively impact social, political, environmental, and economic decisions affecting their lives..

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In 2003 over 36 million Americans of Latino heritage exceeded African Americans as this country's largest minority. A huge percentage of this new minority are not citizens. The dimensions of the phenomenon of immigrants in this country becomes clearer by remembering to add recent arrivals from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East to this number.

In this land of immigrants, immigrants are often treated in a schizophrenic manner. Immigrants are encouraged, paid, and sometimes coerced to come to this country by employers seeking cheaper labor. Imported as strike breakers they are often targeted by the workers they have replaced. Immigrants come seeking better opportunities, fleeing from oppression in their home countries, or to join their loved ones. Throughout our history they have been welcomed by some, and reviled by many. Germans, Irish, Polish, Italians, Greeks, Jews came in waves to this country. Each new wave is exploited, ridiculed, abused by employers, and exploited as political pawns by demagogues seeking an electoral advantage. Many end up in ethnic ghettos, ridiculed and dehumanized by people who are themselves the children or grandchildren of immigrants.

While America has not always lived up to the invitation written on our Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me" each wave of immigrants has enriched this country by their labor, their enterprise, their ambition, their music, cuisine, dance, their faith, and their skills.

In the past, most immigrants were European, were white, and were part of the Judeo-Christian religious heritage. They spoke English in one generation. The new immigrants are not white, European, Jewish or Christian. They tend to retain their language from generation to generation. The current process of integrating immigrants into this country will not be sufficient for these newcomers.

The fate of immigrants in this country has been compromised by the tragedy of 9/11. Because the perpetrators were immigrants, all immigrants are suspect. Forgotten is the fact that hundreds of the victims were immigrants, many undocumented. Almost all those killed were descendents of immigrants.

9/11 crowded out many social and economic concerns in this country. Concerns for immigrants, their plight, and how they might be rationally integrated into our society dropped from the radar screen. Nevertheless immigrants continue to stream into this country, work in dangerous conditions, live in sub-standard housing, and are frequently denied access to health services, education and due process under the law. These problems are not going away. Immigration in this country is like steam boiling up in a sealed pot. We are not aware of much of a change externally, but internally enormous pressures are building that will have drastic consequences.

It is essential that immigrants participate in the economic and political decisions that affect them and their communities. This will make them stake holders in this country. The Gamaliel Foundation is uniquely qualified to play a role in this process. It works primarily with religious institutions, churches, synagogues and mosques, institutions that immigrants tend to trust. Gamaliel trains people to be leaders; it works with indigenous leaders to create vehicles for democratic participation. It has the capacity to train and communicate in both English and Spanish. It works in South Africa, Tanzania, and Canada. It has an understanding of cross-cultural educational methods.

In December of 2002, 600 delegates from more than 50 affiliates of the Gamaliel Foundation met in Northwest Indiana and voted to address the Civil Rights of Immigrants. This is the first time that the Gamaliel network has decided to address a single issue as a united network.