

Georgie Ann Geyer is a syndicated columnist and the author of several books on international affairs, most recently *Waiting For Winter to End* (Washington, DC: Brassey's Inc., 1994, \$23.00). This Commentary is reprinted with the permission of the Universal Press Syndicate.

Ethical Principles Must Underlie Immigration Policy

By Georgie Ann Geyer

Once again, immigration makes the news in America. Thousands of Haitian refugees flee that benighted island. The governors of America's border states sue the federal government for relief over the growing and insatiable costs of illegal immigrants. Even as we celebrate the principles behind the sacred independence of America this Fourth of July, few ever ask: What is the basis on which our crucial immigration decisions should be made? Indeed, as America flails around in an unrooted and ill-defined immigration discussion that sinks either into maudlin sentimentality or into the coldly cruel, is it not time to inquire, What *are* the ethical principles that should underlie those decisions?

First, the sentimental — talk about strange bedfellows! On this side one does indeed find the left — but right there alongside it are the libertarians ("free will" individualists), far-right businessmen such as the growers in the Southwest (who, above all, want cheap labor), and many Christians who incongruously believe in utopian open borders because we must love all mankind.

Perhaps libertarian philosophy professor James Hudson of Northern Illinois University best personifies this viewpoint, when he writes peremptorily that there is no "moral propriety in restricting immigration in any way." He counts, then, in political terms, "everyone," not "every citizen of my country."

In short, this position — extreme to be sure, given that the civilized world is just that *because* it has organized the world into nation-states — recognizes no right of the citizens of a nation to preference over illegal aliens.

The cruel group on the other extreme wants to close down the United States totally, but frankly this group is hardly ever heard from, largely because of

the epithets of "racist" and "nativist" bandied about these days. Then we come to the increasingly predominant centrists who want to see the United States itself decide what it wants and needs in terms of immigrants.

Philosophy professor John Lachs of Vanderbilt University supported this position at a recent conference on the ethics of immigration in Los Angeles sponsored by the Carrying Capacity Network. Implicitly attacking "philosophers who love to disregard the actual," Lachs affirmed that our ethical "obligations are specific, focused on ... people who occupy some special position with respect to us." Our first duty morally is to our own parents, children and fellow citizens. Everything else is nonsense that confuses the philosophers' "purified air of the ideal" with the necessary political imperatives and responsibilities of the nation-state.

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When Professor Garrett Hardin, the renowned scholar on population and global capacity, looks at the ethical question of how and when to be "my brother's keeper," he is even more adamant about first principles and first responsibilities. "Traditional ethics has an answer to this problem," he has said. "Charity begins at home. Why the restriction? Because the greater the distance between donor and recipient, the

more likely it is that well-meant charity will cause more harm than good."

Moreover, the ethical imperative grows ever more intense when we study the real outcome of pushing for uncontrolled immigration — and the concomitant lack of assimilation that invariably attends it. Because, as Hardin says, "when immigration is at a slow rate, cultural and linguistic distances can be overcome. But when immigration is very rapid ... the result is conflict."

As for the general altruism of loving everyone in the world and neglecting the reasonable welfare of one's own, perhaps Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek demolished that pretense most effectively. Loving all the world is a "meaningless conception," he said, emphasizing that man can care only for

specific individuals in concrete circumstances.

Moreover, the great diplomat George Kennan has written that, by absorbing the poverty of the Third World, the more prosperous society "is sometimes quite overcome, in the long run, by what it has tried to absorb." Any more prosperous society then diminishes itself so that it is no longer an example to the world, and necessarily diminishes the only hope that the poorer countries have to emulate and learn from.

Isn't it odd that a country stumbling over these watershed questions — all of them revolving directly or indirectly about what and who this "American" will become — should not be discussing what rocks we still stand on? ■

Those Unaware Lawmakers

Legislation restricting immigration was slow in being enacted although millions of Americans as early as the 1850s favored such restriction. Nativist organizations enrolled millions of members dedicated to the cause of immigration restriction, but legislation which significantly limited the number of immigrants did not become a reality until the 1920s. The cause of this lag is not at all mysterious. It inhered in the simple fact that legislators put foremost the interests of employers who sought an abundant supply of cheap labor. A copious supply of any commodity, which labor is when considered from the employers' standpoint, can always be purchased cheaply.

At the end of the twentieth century, the overwhelming majority of legislators still do not emerge from the class of employees. Although nine-tenths of the households represented by elected officials are dependent on salaries and wages, the overwhelming majority of elected officials are self-employed when they are elected to office, belonging to a class representing less than a tenth of the population. Most of them, moreover, are lawyers or businessmen active in commerce or finance. People in the latter fields have perennially welcomed almost any factor increasing the population of the U.S. More people, in their eyes, represent more clients, customers and borrowers. For most legislators, immigrants do not represent fellow slum-dwellers, fellow-homeless, or even competitors for employment.

— Brent A. Nelson in *America Balkanized: Immigration's Challenge to Government*, p.105
(Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation, 1994)

Ed Koch is a former mayor of New York City. This article is from the New York Post of September 23, 1994, and is reprinted with permission.

Our Policy Is A Mistake on Every Level

By Ed Koch

President Clinton has said our stay in Haiti will be short. But that's what he said about Somalia, where we stayed for more than a year, sustaining many casualties, including deaths.

If we are lucky, our "peace-keeping" troops in Haiti won't end up in guerrilla warfare, but don't count on it. Already, our soldiers have had to stand silently by as the Haitian police continued to assault and murder citizens. Being physically present and doing nothing makes us a party to the atrocities. One of our soldiers summed it up best when he told *The New York Times*: "I'm disgusted."

I was struck earlier this week by former President Carter's statement that, while he was still in Port-au-Prince negotiating with the Haitian leaders, he had been "disturbed" to learn that 61 U.S. warplanes were heading to Haiti to begin a military invasion. I suspect he felt somewhat like Secretary of State Cordell Hull did on December 7, 1941, when he learned that Japanese planes were attacking Pearl Harbor while he was conducting negotiations with Japanese envoys. Not exactly parallel, but close. FDR said that was "a day that will live in infamy." How will that day in Haiti be described by historians?

The fact that the planes were called back should not end the debate on President Clinton's actions: Did he have the right to order the invasion without congressional authorization, or is it an impeachable offense?

If the United States had common-sense immigration laws, we wouldn't even have considered invading Haiti. In his "pep rally" speech last week, Clinton said, "Three thousand more Haitians — 5 percent of their entire population — are hiding in their own country. If we don't act, they could be the next wave of refugees at our door."

Norman Mailer once asked in a book title, "Why are we in Vietnam?" Millions of Americans are now asking, "Why are we in Haiti?" The answer: to

prevent Haitians from fleeing to the United States. Undoubtedly, one of Clinton's fears is that in Florida, one of the major ports of entry for these refugees, voter backlash may help the Republicans win this fall's gubernatorial race.

The Clinton administration's current affection for the rights of Haitians is at variance with the way it distinguished between Cubans and Haitians. Cubans were encouraged to flee their country and were allowed immediate entry, while the Haitian refugees were not permitted to land in the United States. Most observers who are not Clinton sycophants would acknowledge the disparate, and disgraceful, treatment was racist.

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I am not one of those who believe it is inhumane to limit the entry of anyone into the United States. Our immigration laws are already among the most generous in the world, allowing 1 million people to enter every year. Those laws, however, are not effectively enforced, and that is what is driving concerned Americans crazy.

Such frustrations have caused California Governor Peter Wilson to foolishly urge a constitutional amendment barring children born in the United States to illegal immigrants from having automatic citizenship. His extreme position stems from the fact that annually tens of thousands of Mexicans cross the border illegally. They are arrested by border-patrol officers and sent back, only to return again and again until they finally make it across undetected. They then fade into the community,