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How to be a good host

Although Philippe Legrain's "Let them in" (April 2007, p.52) makes some good points, it misses the heart of the immigration issue and dances around other crucial issues. First of all, the unfortunate title already sets up an "us and them" duality which only exists in theory. It is and has always been false and hypocritical for Americans to speak of "foreigners" and "natives" as Legrain does in this article. Perhaps in Europe one can do that, despite continuous intermixing with so-called "foreigners," but definitely not in the United States. Legrain's first sentence is "We take it for granted that restrictions on the movement of people should exist," and I wonder who he thinks he is writing for; in no way would I put myself in his "we." I have always protested such restrictions which I consider emblematic of a world built on inequality between the "haves" and "have-nots" on a global scale.

In addition, while debunking the

myth that immigrants "live like parasites off the host country," Legrain does not mention the fact that countless illegal immigrants pursue employment with false documents such as social security cards, thereby paying taxes that they will never benefit from, although the host country indeed receives these funds.

Furthermore, one cannot speak of immigration these days without mentioning the central aspects of racism, nationalism and the politics of fear. When "we" speak of illegal immigrants, "we" are generally speaking about brown-skinned Latinos, Arabs, Caribbean people, and Africans: A white Canadian has the mobility of a Haitian's dream. One of the relevant myths Legrain should be debunking is the one about a homogeneous national identity (again, especially in the U.S.). Fear of the Other in the post-9/11 world is a key factor as well.

Finally, Legrain's notion that we should let "them" in because somebody

has to do "dirty, difficult, and dangerous jobs" is frankly offensive. He then implies that this language is not in fact demeaning, and that it would be "perverse" not to allow people to work when they want to, there's work to be done, and it benefits everyone. Agreed, but the hot-button issue that immigration is today demands much more clarity... How about something like this: "Let 'them' in because they are us, and we will not resign ourselves to the hypocritical injustice of the First-, Second- and Third-World system." It is this scheme that is truly perverse, and we must see the full picture or we will be left focusing on a few details.

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