

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

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What Nobody Seems to Remember About the Immigration Debate

I was listening to an old, obscure song that I downloaded on my tablet called Lazy Mary, by Lou Monte. It is a Sicilian/English song performed by a Calabrian/American before a Sicilian/American audience. It reminded me of what Americans have historically done when immigrants start coming into our country who do not have the same ethnicity as us.

When Great Potato Famine took place in Ireland, millions of poor Irish flooded our country. They were hated and discriminated against by the white people who got here before them. However, after a generation or two, they were assimilated and became the white people who hated the next wave of immigrants.

When the Sicilians and other Mediterranean ethnicities began coming into the country in waves, the Irish were among the people who discriminated against and hated them. They had the same fights in Congress about how to limit what they believed to be substandard humans from coming into our country. But a couple of generations later, Sicilian descendants are no different than the other white Americans.

Now we are faced with another wave of immigrants who are not like us. Xenophobia has reared its ugly head again in the Republican Party - the far right radicals led by President Trump. They want a wall to keep out what they believe to be a substandard species of humans. What they don't realize is that in a generation or two those same people who are now fighting to get in will be standing beside the other America First Radicals demanding that the next wave of unpopular immigrants be stopped at the border.

Our diversity is what makes us great. Each new wave of immigration adds new vigor to our society. We will never stagnate if we can keep new immigrants coming to America. Unlike other Old World countries, we don't have just one gene pool or one culture. We have a melting pot and even though we may not like the Muslims or Central Americans, it is that diversity which makes us great. In a generation or two, our descendants will be standing next to the other "white Americans" and we can either be trying to block the new immigrants or we can welcome them knowing how valuable their diversity is to our future.

Let's hope we learn to value what they bring to our country.