



IMMIGRANT OUTLOOK APPRECIATED...

I was heartened to read “Our Immigrant Nation,” by Grant Woods (July/August 2004 ARIZ. ATTORNEY, “The Last Word”). In his column, Grant spoke of being “roundly booed” by his party’s faithful for suggesting that the Martin Luther King Holiday needed to be passed. It’s what I’ve always admired about Grant’s public life. He said and did what his heart told him was right, instead of what the polls said was popular.

I, too, remember the first vote on the MLK holiday, but as an Arizona-born Chinese-American, I recall it from a slightly different perspective. The morning after it failed, I went to my eighth-floor office on Central Avenue, which looked southeast over the Valley, and I remember wondering how I could live in a place like this. I remember thinking that in more than half those homes and offices I looked out upon, there were people who did not value, as I did, what Martin Luther King, Jr., had done and what he stood for; who did not recognize, as I did, the value of diversity; and who did not understand how far short we still were in achieving equality, not just the kind we put on paper, but real equality we can feel in our daily lives.

My mother’s great-grandmother came to California in 1870. And my paternal grandfather came to Arizona in 1915. So on that morning after the voters rejected the MLK holiday, I thought about them and about the dreams they brought with them from their far-away lives in China. I wondered whether those dreams had been realized, if not in their own lives then in their children’s and grandchildren’s lives.

I think they had been realized. Their lives were better than they would have been in China. Our lives were better, too. We had educational opportunities here and a standard of living unequalled in the world. But as a grandchild and great-grandchild of immigrants, I wanted more for my children than just the rights to equal housing and non-discrimination in public accommodations and the workplace. I wanted the full promise of this country. I wanted to feel like an American—because that’s what I am.

In Arizona, though, feeling like an American and having a different skin color can be a tricky thing. On a personal level, I can’t count the number of times I’ve been approached by strangers asking “Where are you from?” or “Where were you born?” assuming I must be something more exotic than a native Arizonan. And I can’t recall the number of times strangers have approached me speaking slowly and loudly as if to help me understand their English. (To set the record straight, I was born on the fifth floor of St. Joseph’s Hospital in Phoenix, and, although, sadly, I don’t speak Chinese, I do speak English.)

Fortunately, these incidents don’t occur all that frequently, but often enough to remind me that while I may look into a mirror and see an American, many Americans look at me and see a “foreigner.” I suppose it’s a difficult thing to understand ... unless it’s happened to you. And in the same way, unless it’s happened to you, I suppose it would be difficult to understand how “foreign” some Americans might feel when we hear about the “need” for racial profiling in law enforcement work or in combating the war on terrorism; about the murder of an

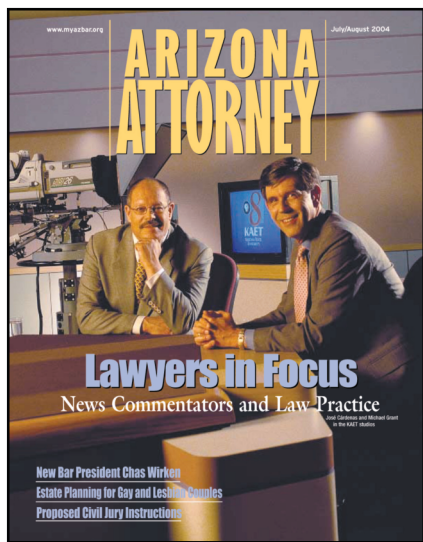
American because he wore a turban; or about the “need” for “English Only laws,” and curbs on immigration. I don’t think this part of America is the America my grandparents dreamed for their children, or mine.

My mother once told me that when she was about 12 years old, living in Los Angeles in the 1940s, she wore a tin badge that read “I’m proud to be a Chinese-American.” Even at that young age, she knew what it really meant: “Please don’t spit on me, as you are doing to the Japanese-Americans.” Maybe all non-white, non-Evangelical-Christian Americans should wear badges identifying their birthplace and religion, put bumper stickers on their cars, and fly American flags from their car antennas. Or maybe the answer is much simpler.

My wife and I recently returned from two weeks in Paris. Not having been there before, I didn’t know what to expect. I thought the French might perceive us to be Chinese and assume we spoke Mandarin, or recognize us to be Americans. To my surprise, they did neither. Instead, they presumed we were French and often approached us asking for directions in French. Interestingly, no one approached us speaking slowly and loudly, and no one asked us where we were born or assumed we were from China. To them, the color of our skin had nothing to do with our nationality. And even after they learned we were Americans, no one assumed or asked if we were born elsewhere.

So maybe that’s the answer. Maybe we don’t all need to wear tin badges. Maybe Americans just need to understand what much of the world already seems to know, that nationality, loyalty, patriotism and love of this country have nothing to do with a person’s color, race, religion, language or manner of dress. Sure, our differences make us, well, different. But the right to be different, to be proud of our differences, to take joy in our differences, and still be viewed by our fellow Americans as Americans ... that should be an American value. It should be more than just an American dream.

—Robert Yen
Yen Pilch & Komadina, PC, Phoenix



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AND IMMIGRANT OUTLOOK DERIDED...

I'm happy that Grant Woods clarified that the term "illegal" actually means "legal." Whew! I always thought "illegal" meant "against the law." But thanks to Mr. Woods, we now know that when talking about immigration, there is no such thing as "against the law."

All sarcasm aside, I find it hard to grasp that a former attorney general, charged with upholding the law, can argue that the immigration laws of the United States mean NOTHING. I would find his argument more persuasive if he advocated changing the immigration laws instead of ignoring them.

Mr. Woods, those of us interested in upholding the law don't want (as you say) to make our country "look and sound and act alike." All we want is for the laws of the United States to be upheld. It's a simple concept that even a former attorney general should understand, without the need to call others racists.

—Eric Speelmon
Attorney-at-law, Mesa

I don't like to be lectured to, especially by someone who believes he is absolutely right and everyone who disagrees with him is absolutely wrong. That is what Grant Woods does in his commentary on immigration. As a third-generation Arizonan, born and raised in a rural community that was approximately 40 percent Mexican-American, who had (and has) many Hispanic friends, who speaks Spanish pretty well, has traveled extensively in Mexico and understands the Mexican culture sufficiently to understand the difficulties faced by immigrants, legal and illegal, I don't need Mr. Woods telling me, particularly in his condescending and simplified manner, how we should be conducting ourselves with respect to the diverse and complicated issues caused by unrestricted immigration from Mexico.

Mr. Woods speaks of "the misguided attempts of some ... to run for ... office on the platform of stopping illegal immigration." That has got to be one of the most foolish statements ever uttered, particularly by someone who, for eight years, was the chief law enforcement official of the State of Arizona, sworn to uphold the laws of

Arizona and the United States of America. Is he now saying that it is wrong for a citizen to seek elective office on a platform of enforcing the laws against illegal immigration? If that is what he is saying, and I take his words at face value, he is simply wrong, wrong, wrong! On one hand, Mr. Woods boasts of his efforts to enforce the law and to defend the rights of citizens of the United States, but on the other, he condemns anyone who would enforce the laws against illegal immigration.

Regardless of what Mr. Woods thinks, it is possible for one to wish to see the immigration policies of the United States changed to recognize the practical situation created by many thousands of people who have entered the United States, albeit illegally, in search of a better life, and at the same time be in favor of strict enforcement of the laws against illegal immigration.

One thing many commentators, including Mr. Woods, fail to discuss is the abject failure of the Republic of Mexico to alleviate the necessity of its people having to come to the United States to find work.

In 1974, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Treasury for Law Enforcement, I went to Mexico City to meet with the Attorney General of Mexico concerning better enforcement of laws, both Mexican and American, against the illegal trafficking in firearms from the U.S. into Mexico. During a break in the discussions, I spoke informally with a Mexican official who had attended university in the U.S. and was well acquainted with the numbers and issues of illegal immigration—which were minuscule compared to now. He told me very candidly that, had it not been possible for the Mexican poor to emigrate to the U.S. and to find work there, Mexico would surely have had another revolution.

Hyperbole? Perhaps. But the sentiment was clear. The pressure of social reform on the Mexican government had been lessened by immigration to *el norte*.

The exportation of dollars from the U.S. into Mexico by Mexicans has been approximated at between \$14 billion to \$28 billion a year, depending on whose figures you use. These dollars are reputed to be the second-largest source of income for Mexico. It doesn't take a genius to figure out why Mexico doesn't want to see our laws regarding immigration, legal or illegal, enforced. If I were a Mexican official, I would take solace in Mr. Woods' article.

Rather than engage in accusations, Mr. Woods might better try to understand the real and practical problems caused by unrestrained, uncontrolled, illegal immigration into the U.S. He might, for example, read Victor Davis Hansen's book *Mexifornia: A State of Becoming*. Hansen, a professor at Cal State-Fresno, is no radical—or racist. He is the author of many respected works on a wide variety of subjects. He is also a fifth-generation Californian who runs a family farm in the Central Valley of California, one of the areas most heavily affected by illegal immigration.

I am not a member of any organization seeking to put the immigration initiative on the ballot, and I agree with Mr. Woods in that I also think it is a divisive effort. More important, I don't think it would accomplish anything constructive. I would rather see dispassionate and meaningful debate occur on the issues of immigration. But you don't accomplish that by accusations the likes of which are expressed and insinuated in Mr. Woods' article.

—Brent F. Moody, Phoenix