

Welcome, Good Citizen

By Lucja Swiatkowski

There is an image of the Old World immigrant getting off the ship at Ellis Island, gazing at the Statue of Liberty, and kissing the soil of America with its promise of liberty and democracy. This image affects official as well as popular behavior toward the newcomers, but few people realize that it is no longer valid.

People who emigrate from Europe to America today are no longer peasants from Italy or Poland seeking bread and land. They leave their countries for political or family reasons. Second, after Watergate, the Pentagon Papers, My Lai, Watts, and Newark, America is no longer a synonym of freedom and equality of opportunity. Nevertheless, immigration officials are still caught up in the simplified perception of eternally grateful foreigners.

How can I be probed for my belief in or support of Communism in a country of freedom of speech and belief, where the daughter of the bloodiest Communist tyrant is assured the political asylum from her own father's cronies, while a Lithuanian sailor seeking protection is kicked out of the country? Where her father's successor is invited by the President of the U.S.A. and given a King's welcome on his recent visit?

Why should I be asked whether I was treated for nervous disorders, when such people sit in the Senate of the United States? Why should I be suspect of adultery, prostitution, or trafficking in drugs, as a matter of course, just because I am a foreigner? Are Americans less prone to such behavior than others and why should I be questioned before there is any evidence against me?

The award ceremony further increased my feelings of unreality. The main speaker lamented over the material comforts and conveniences of contemporary American life and lack of concern for ethical and moral

values. Then he called upon us, the newly arrived, to recapture the strength and courage of the old frontier America.

But the characteristics thought necessary for such an endeavor were old-fashioned ones: individualism, patriotism, revival of the American challenge, selling of an American dream. They served the young country well in the past, but it's doubtful if they will serve it well in the future. So, we have to search for the new solutions to save Americans from themselves.

In the standard letter to his fellow citizens, President Nixon reminded us: "As an American, you now have the opportunity to engage in the most rewarding activity of free men: full participation in the democratic process of a self-governing people." It is an ironic comment from the man who systematically disregards Congress, intimidates the press, who is suspect of hiding the misconduct of members of his staff and maybe his own.

A little booklet I was handed on U.S. citizenship contains some more golden thoughts. It informs me that "I may think as I please" and "I have the right to try to improve my lot through various means." (Like John Dean and Jeb Magruder?) It also says that "by your vote you choose the public officers who are really your servants." (Try telling Richard Nixon that he is your servant, even if you voted for him.)

Although I was happy to receive my citizenship certificate, I resent being treated like a vacuity. How can one preach democracy, and then talk down to people as if they didn't see what is happening around them. The American dream is gone. In this new spirit, Americans should re-examine their attitudes toward foreigners in general, and the immigration procedures in particular, to catch up with the present.

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