

President Bush has proposed that there be a new “temporary worker program to match foreign workers with willing U.S. employers when no Americans can be found to fill the jobs” (we quote from the White House website). Senator Kerry attacked this plan as “exploitative.” Conservatives can find things to like and things not to like in this proposal; the *Wall Street Journal*’s editorial page recently discussed how simple immigrant-bashing may not be as politically popular as some Republicans think.

But there ought to be one thing all conservatives—and, perhaps, many liberals as well—can agree on: Affirmative action should not be a part of this program, meaning that no temporary worker—nor, indeed, any recent immigrant—ought to be given a preference on the basis of his or her skin color or country of national origin.

That ought to be an uncontroversial proviso for anyone, not just conservatives. Someone who has just entered the country can hardly claim a right to favored treatment to make up for past discrimination against him by American employers or the government. Yet, amazingly, many recent immigrants are benefiting from our bizarre system of racial and ethnic preferences.

What’s more, the premise of the President’s proposal, as quoted above, is that these temporary workers aren’t supposed to be in competition with workers already here anyhow, so denying them a preference shouldn’t affect their opportunities.

This last point might be turned around, and some might argue that it makes the antipreference proviso unnecessary. But this is not so clear.

For starters, the temporary worker might decide to do some moonlighting as a contractor, where frequently bidding preferences are awarded on the basis of ethnicity. Or he might take a second job in which he *is* competing with American workers. Or he might become eligible for a promotion after being here awhile, and the new job may be one that American workers want, too. Or he—or his children or spouse—might decide to enroll at a university, where ethnic preferences are also frequently awarded.

The profusion of such preferences is no far-

fetched fear. The bean-counters for employers and universities use racial and ethnic preferences all the time, and make no effort to distinguish between new arrivals and not-so-new arrivals in this nation of immigrants. If anything, indeed, universities are probably more likely to lower admission standards for the former than the latter. Student applicants with Cuban ancestry, for instance, were treated as whites by the University of Michigan law school in the case recently before the Supreme Court, while those of Mexican ancestry were treated as blacks.

The use of contracting set-asides is troubling here, too. Data are hard to come by, but there is abundant anecdotal evidence that a very high percentage of the companies that cash in on their “minority” status—in, for example, the automobile parts industry—are owned by recent immigrants.

No legal or illegal immigrant, including any of the newly proposed “temporary workers,” their families, and their children, should be eligible for any form of racial or ethnic preference, a.k.a. affirmative action. Unless this ban is a part of the proposal that the President submits to Congress, if and when it passes millions more people will qualify for preferences in education, contracting, and employment simply because of their national origin.

It is not too much to expect any new immigrant to our country to compete for jobs, schooling, and contracts on his own qualifications and efforts, rather than his skin color or ethnic heritage. Any immigration bill considered by Congress should include this proviso.

All this helps illuminate another critical omission in the President’s proposal to date, a part of a more general failure in our current immigration and naturalization policy, namely the woeful neglect of attention given to assimilating the immigrants once they arrive. Reasonable conservatives can differ about appropriate immigration levels, but whether those levels are relatively high or relatively low, we ought to demand that those who make their homes in America become Americans.

How to do that is a subject for another day, but here are ten requirements for new arrivals—and old arrivals as well, no matter their color or ethnicity, and

no matter whether they crossed the Rio Grande or came over on the Mayflower or a leaky boat in the South China Sea:

- Don't disparage anyone else's race or ethnicity;
- Respect women;
- Learn to speak English;
- Be polite;
- Don't break the law;
- Don't have children out of wedlock;
- Don't demand anything because of your race, ethnicity, or sex;
- Don't view working and studying hard as "acting white;"
- Don't hold historical grudges; and
- Be proud of being an American.

So we needn't single out immigrants. The vast majority of Americans (upwards of 90 percent, according to many polls) don't like preferences for *any* racial or ethnic group. As immigration levels increase, and America becomes an increasingly multiracial and multiethnic nation, the division of Americans into favored and unfavored groups becomes increasingly untenable. There needs to be less focus on the superficial characteristics of skin color and ancestry that we don't have in common, and more on the qualities of character that we should.

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