

"You shut up," I say.

Our father smiles. "Quiet," he whispers, "both of you. Maybe next year." He peers down the dim path in the woods, into the gathering evening. "Be real still now. They're a-comin'. And Ned—" He squeezes my shoulder. "You hold that light on 'em good and steady this time."

"Yes, sir," I whisper back. "Sure will, Paw."

Immigration and Liberal Taboos

*I*n the American Southwest, where I happen to live, only sixty miles north of the Mexican border, the subject of illegal aliens is a touchy one—almost untouchable. Even the terminology is dangerous: the old word *wetback* is now considered a racist insult by all good liberals; and the perfectly correct terms *illegal alien* and *illegal immigrant* can set off charges of xenophobia, elitism, fascism, and the ever-popular genocide against anyone careless enough to use them. The only acceptable euphemism, it now appears, is something called *undocumented worker*. Thus the pregnant Mexican woman who appears, in the final stages of labor, at the doors of the emergency ward of an El Paso or San Diego hospital, demanding care for herself and the child she's about to deliver, becomes an "undocumented worker." The child becomes an automatic American citizen by virtue of its place of birth, eligible at once for all of the usual public welfare benefits. And with the child comes not only the mother but the child's family. And the mother's family. And the father's family. Can't

break up families, can we? They come to stay and they stay to multiply.

What of it? say the documented liberals; ours is a rich and generous nation, we have room for all, let them come. And let them stay, say the conservatives; a large, cheap, frightened, docile, surplus labor force is exactly what the economy needs. Put some fear into the unions: tighten discipline, spur productivity, whip up the competition for jobs. The conservatives love their cheap labor; the liberals love their cheap cause. (Neither group, you will notice, ever invites the immigrants to move into their *homes*. Not into *their* homes!) Both factions are supported by the cornucopia economists of the ever-expanding economy, who actually continue to believe that our basic resource is not land, air, water, but human bodies, more and more of them, the more the better in hive upon hive, world without end—ignoring the clear fact that those nations which most avidly practice this belief, such as Haiti, Puerto Rico, Mexico, to name only three, don't seem to be doing well. They look more like explosive slow-motion disasters, in fact, volcanic anthills, than functioning human societies. But that which our academic economists will not see and will not acknowledge is painfully obvious to *los latinos*: they stream north in ever-growing numbers.

Meanwhile, here at home in the land of endless plenty, we seem still unable to solve our traditional and nagging difficulties. After forty years of the most fantastic economic growth in the history of mankind, the United States remains burdened with mass unemployment, permanent poverty, an overloaded welfare system, violent crime, clogged courts, jam-packed prisons, commercial ("white-collar") crime, rotting cities and a poisoned environment, eroding farmlands and the disappearing family farm, all of the usual forms of racial, ethnic, and sexual conflict (which immigration further intensifies), plus the ongoing destruction of what remains of our forests, fields, mountains, lakes,

rivers, and seashores, accompanied by the extermination of whole species of plants and animals. To name but a few of our little nagging difficulties.

This being so, it occurs to some of us that perhaps ever-continuing industrial and population growth is *not* the true road to human happiness, that simple gross quantitative increase of this kind creates only more pain, dislocation, confusion, and misery. In which case it might be wise for us as American citizens to consider calling a halt to the mass influx of even more millions of hungry, ignorant, unskilled, and culturally-morally-genetically impoverished people. At least until we have brought our own affairs into order. Especially when these uninvited millions bring with them an alien mode of life which—let us be honest about this—is not appealing to the majority of Americans. Why not? Because we prefer democratic government, for one thing; because we still hope for an open, spacious, uncrowded, and beautiful—yes, beautiful!—society, for another. The alternative, in the squalor, cruelty, and corruption of Latin America, is plain for all to see.

Yes, I know, if the American Indians had enforced such a policy none of us pale-faced honkies would be here. But the Indians were foolish, and divided, and failed to keep our WASP ancestors out. They've regretted it ever since.

To everything there is a season, to every wave a limit, to every range an optimum capacity. The United States has been fully settled, and more than full, for at least a century. We have nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by allowing the old boat to be swamped. How many of us, truthfully, would *prefer* to be submerged in the Caribbean-Latin version of civilization? (Howls of "Racism! Elitism! Xenophobia!" from the Marx brothers and the documented liberals.) Harsh words: but somebody has to say them. We cannot play "let's pretend" much longer, not in the present world.

Therefore—let us close our national borders to any further

mass immigration, legal or illegal, from any source, as does every other nation on earth. The means are available, it's a simple technical-military problem. Even our Pentagon should be able to handle it. We've got an army somewhere on this planet, let's bring our soldiers home and station them where they can be of some actual and immediate benefit to the taxpayers who support them. That done, we can begin to concentrate attention on badly neglected internal affairs. *Our* internal affairs. Everyone would benefit, including the neighbors. Especially the neighbors.

Ah yes. But what *about* those hungry hundreds of millions, those anxious billions, yearning toward the United States from every dark and desperate corner of the world? Shall we simply ignore them? Reject them? Is such a course possible?

"Poverty," said Samuel Johnson, "is the great enemy of human happiness. It certainly destroys liberty, makes some virtues impracticable, and all virtues extremely difficult."

You can say that again, Sam.

Poverty, injustice, overbreeding, overpopulation, suffering, oppression, military rule, squalor, torture, terror, massacre: these ancient evils feed and breed on one another in synergistic symbiosis. To break the cycles of pain at least two new forces are required: social equity—and birth control. Population control. Our Hispanic neighbors are groping toward this discovery. If we truly wish to help them we must stop meddling in their domestic troubles and permit them to carry out the social, political, and moral revolution which is both necessary and inevitable.

Or if we must meddle, as we have always done, let us meddle for a change in a constructive way. Stop every *campesino* at our southern border, give him a handgun, a good rifle, and a case of ammunition, and send him home. He will know what to do with our gifts and good wishes. The people know who their enemies are.

Wild Horses

What words, what images, what memories, best evoke the essence of the American West? These are some that come first to mind:

The odor of crushed sage in the hand. The fragrance of burning juniper. A mountain lion crouched on a canyon ledge. The word *canyon* itself. One black vulture soaring in lazy circles above the burning hills and ice-cream-tinted folds of the Painted Desert. Red mountains like mangled iron rising beyond dunes of golden sand. Stone ruins nestled in an alcove of a cliff. The cry of the coyote—first one, then a second, then a chorus as a full moon the color of a blood orange sinks beyond the skyline. The aroma of burning mesquite. One dust devil spinning across an alkali flat. An abandoned Model T Ford sunk fender deep in sand along a back road in the Arizona Strip. The sound, at night, of something bulky and *fierce* crashing through an alder thicket on the slope of Two Medicine Mountain in Glacier National Park—the smell of the grizzly. Red and yellow billboards along old US Highway 66 warning the westbound mo-