

IMMIGRATION AND JEWS

This was the year that the American government tried to reform its immigration policy. During the course of that unsuccessful struggle, the American public was constantly asked what it thought about immigrants and immigration.

One response was particularly interesting. Americans were asked which immigrant groups had been "a good thing" for the country, or a "bad thing." The three groups which Americans think have been best for the country are the English, the Irish and the Jews. About 6 out of 10 Americans say that each of those three groups has been good for America, and fewer than one out of ten thought each of these groups had been bad for the country.

The Germans and Italians came in fourth and fifth in this appreciation poll. Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of that list is that there are so many more Americans of English, German, Irish and Italian ancestry than there are American Jews. In other words, in terms of Americans voting for groups other than the one they are connected to ancestrally, the Jews must come out as the single most appreciated group in the country.

Further down on the list are the Japanese, Blacks and Chinese. That may be partly a result of racism. Or it may be partly an objective evaluation of the results of racism, since these three groups have not yet been given an opportunity to as visibly contribute to the country as the top-listed groups. But even for these groups, in each case, more than 4 out of 10 Americans thought the Japanese, Blacks and Chinese had been "good" for the country; fewer than 2 out of 10 thought they had been "bad."

Then there is a sharp drop on this list, with six groups evaluated by more Americans as having been "bad" rather than "good" for the country: Mexicans, Koreans, Vietnamese, Puerto Ricans, Haitians and Cubans, in that order of decreasing appreciation.

Earl Raab

"Immigration and the Jews"

page 2

What distinguishes these groups in the American public mind? Why do Mexicans rank so much lower than Blacks? Why do Vietnamese (immigrants so many of whom are Chinese in ethnic origin) rank so much lower than the Chinese? The obvious answer is that they are the "latecomers." The negative response to the latecomers may just be a function of ignorance or prejudice. Not so long ago, the immigrant Irish, Italians and Jews were at the bottom of the American appreciation list.

But partly the negative response to the newcomers may be the American frustration about our unworkable immigration policy. In effect, there is no planned policy, because our borders are a sieve. Most Americans are anxious to cut down on illegal immigration.

The organized San Francisco Jewish community has actively supported Congressional efforts to reform our immigration laws with provisions that would: keep the country open for political refugees; increase legal protection for those seeking asylum; provide amnesty for our current population of illegal immigrants; provide stronger deterrence for future illegal immigration. But, so far, no formula has been found that works politically.

However, we have to try again. If we just leave chaos, our immigration policy is liable to get worse rather than better.