

Why can't Americans be isolationists just once?

The following is dedicated to Capt. **Tomislav Z. Ruby**, whose family immigrated to this country in the 1950s. Ruby, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, is an intelligence officer stationed at Shaw Air Force Base and was deployed to the United Arab Emirates during Operation Desert Storm.

We are a nation of immigrants, and the rivers of a thousand lands flow through our veins.

It is a heritage that makes us unique, a history that shapes our destiny. Other nations can't relate to it; we have trouble explaining it. And try as we might to be a nation of isolationists, we can't. When wars erupt, when crises befall others, we respond.

We are a nation of immigrants, and the rivers of a thousand lands flow through our veins. This fact can't be ignored: The overwhelming majority of us are new to this country. Even those who can trace their lineage in this land 300 years would find little to be proud about in comparison to the genealogical records of Greece, Rome and Egypt. An African wise man can recite 300 years of tribal history without pausing for breath. Most Americans experience being the new kid in school, the new family on the block, the new employee at work. Likewise as a nation, we will always be new compared to the rest of the world.

We are a nation of immigrants, and the rivers of a thousand lands flow through our veins. It is this, and this alone, that motivates us. Our interests around the world today are fueled not by the desire to colonize, but by that which flows through us. Nothing happens in the world today that does not affect at least some of us.

We are told that as Americans we are ignorant about the rest of the world. But the truth is that just as we are from a thousand lands, so too is our interests divided in a thousand ways. We do not all care about India, but some of us

do. We do not all care about Sweden, but some of us do. We do not all care about Zaire, but some of us do.

That's why when a bomb in Northern Ireland killed a family on their way to church, somebody in America cried.

And when South Africans seeking free elections were beaten to death in jail, somebody in America cried.

And when a Polish priest dared say the word "Solidarity" from the pulpit, and that night his body was found in a river, somebody in America cried.

And when the government of Ethiopia used drought to create an artificial famine to subjugate its people, somebody in America cried.

And when the Chinese army turned its guns on students whose crime was erecting their own version of the Statue of Liberty, somebody in America cried.

WE ARE A NATION of immigrants, and the rivers of a thousand lands flow through our veins. Because of this we constantly find ourselves reaching out across the oceans, back toward the lands from which we came. For whether we arrived here by choice or in chains, we are a nation of boat people. And though the seas separate us geographically from most of the world, it has never separated us emotionally from our forefathers.

This aspect of our nation is what makes us suspect around the world. Even in the midst of Operation Desert Storm there were those who wondered about ulterior motives, of covert desires by the U.S. to exert control over the Persian Gulf.

Since this country's inception, others have accused the U.S. of just that, of trying to take



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away the resources of others. But 200 years of American history prove that the other thing Americans have traditionally taken away from other nations is their poverty, disease, ignorance and illiteracy. To those who let us in we will send foreign aid, missionaries, the Peace Corps and the hospital ship Hope. Our service clubs raise funds to send overseas to eradicate diseases, and

provide glasses and crutches to the handicapped. Collectively they spend millions on scholarships for students in Third World countries.

And today as you read this, somewhere in America a husband and wife are driving to an airport to put a teenager on a plane so she can return to her native land after spending six months here. And as they young girl boards her plane, the American couple will weep as if they were saying goodbye to their own daughter, for not only did they open their home to this foreign exchange student, but also their hearts.

We are a nation of immigrants, and the rivers of a thousand lands flow through our veins. This week in courthouses on both sides of the continent, brown, black, white and yellow faces will recite the Pledge of Allegiance for the first time, and immediately be granted all the rights and privileges accorded the judge who sits before them.

And yet the scene is the source of continued friction, continued debate. Who should be allowed to immigrate? How many should be allowed to come?

My grandparents, just like millions of other immigrants, waited five years to become naturalized Americans. That has been the traditional standard, yet as thousands of Asians,

Mexicans, and Latin Americans beg to come here, voices rise up to say "that's enough."

Just three years ago a former U.S. Senator Lowell Weicker proposed waiving that requirement so that Czechoslovakian tennis pro Ivan Lendl could become an American in time to play in the Davis Cup. His legislation failed. And rightfully so. For if the truth be known, the brown-skinned man who comes into this country to take any job at any wage to put food on the table for his family is closer to the spirit of America than that of the tennis pro who moves here so he can make \$12 million instead of \$2 million.

To the world, American is a contradiction in terms. We destroy nations in war, and yet immediately offer to rebuild those very same nations in peace. The mistakes we make as a nation collectively haunt us until we pass legislation to end discrimination, to acknowledge in discretions, to pay reparations.

We tolerate the intolerable, empower the powerless, and make loans to those who will never repay. All the world's other countries combined have not given away as much medicine, money, technology and good will as the United States has.

And when war threatens the world, no country so willingly responds with its greatest natural resource - its young men and women.

Today in our city the President of the United States will speak of pride, duty and commitment. He will speak of a new world order and the United State's role in bringing that vision about. And yet when he is finished, some will still ask the question, "Why must it be Americans who do so much around the world?"

And the answer will be as simple and as complicated as this: We are a nation of immigrants, and the rivers of a thousand lands flow through our veins.