

The Journey

THE WINCHESTER MULTICULTURAL NETWORK NEWSLETTER

March is Women's History Month

We walk in the footprints of phenomenal women, and we do so sometimes knowingly, but more often not knowing of their efforts, both their achievements and the cost they paid for them.

From the *Sheroes 2008 Womyn Warriors Calendar* published by the Gustavus Myers Center for the study of Bigotry and Human Rights



WINCHESTER
MULTICULTURAL
NETWORK

We Educate, Advocate and Respond.

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Looking Ahead

DATES FOR YOUR CALENDAR

"Who Does She Think She Is?"

Sunday, March 29 at 6:00 p.m.
at the Next Door Theater, 40 Cross St., Winchester

Celebrate Women's History Month by joining us for the screening of Winchester resident, Pamela Tanner Boll's, latest film, *Who Does She Think She Is?* This powerful documentary focuses on the lives of five women artists of varied backgrounds—an actor, two sculptors, a painter, and a printmaker—who are also mothers. Each of the women experiences the competing and often conflicting demands of pursuing her art, making a living, and parenting. "This is a universal story," says director, Pamela Boll. "It is the story of how one does the work one feels called to do while taking care of the people one loves . . . many men feel as caught by the need to make a good living in order to support themselves and their family, as these women do in struggling between the extraordinarily important work of care giving and their expressive work."

Boll was part of the producing team that won an Academy Award for *Born into Brothels* and Boll says that *Who Does She Think She Is?* "was my search to find some contemporary heroines to provoke and inspire all of us to demand more from our work, our creativity and our lives."

Jean Murphy of the Wellesley Centers for Women says the film "is not about being a woman or being a woman artist, but rather how to be human, how to find your true place in life."

This event is free, but an email RSVP to office@wmcn.org is required as seating is limited.

The Multicultural Network is grateful for generous grants from the EnKa Society, the Griffin Foundation, and the Winchester Cultural Council, which have made this program possible.

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DATES FOR YOUR CALENDAR (continued from p.1)

The Network will offer its yearly community workshop the last weekend in March.

Community Workshop

Friday evening, March 27
from 7:00–9:00 p.m., continuing Saturday,
March 28 from 9:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

WHO SHOULD COME? Anyone interested in fostering multiculturalism—the ongoing process of recognizing, understanding, and appreciating differences—in your family, community, in schools and workplaces.

WHAT WILL I GET OUT OF IT? You will come away with a framework and language, now shared by more than 150 others, for understanding and talking about multicultural issues of all kinds—racism, heterosexism, classism, anti-Semitism, ageism, and other “isms.” You’ll feel more confident having conversations across differences of all kinds—more comfortable with differences in general. And you’ll learn guidelines for discussion that will serve you well in every phase of your life!

Have you ever had a question: **WHAT DO I SAY WHEN I HEAR A RACIST, SEXIST, HOMOPHOBIC, OR INAPPROPRIATE REMARK OR JOKE?** Bring your question or concern to this workshop!

AM I EXPECTED TO DO ANYTHING AFTER I HAVE PARTICIPATED? No! But we know that you will bring new perspectives and ideas to your family, workplace, community organization, and faith community.

I DID A WORKSHOP FIVE YEARS AGO. WILL THIS BE THE SAME THING? Every workshop includes the basic framework, but each workshop is tailored to the needs and goals of participants. Those who have participated in more than one workshop find their initial learning reinforced and refreshed, with new understandings added.

WHAT DOES IT COST? The workshop is free, thanks to the generosity of contributors to the Network, but we welcome contributions of any amount to defray our expenses.

WHO GIVES THIS WORKSHOP? Angela Giudice, an independent multicultural consultant, educator and community activist, will facilitate the workshop using the VISIONS model for looking at multicultural issues. This model is the basis of the Network’s philosophy and approach to addressing issues of difference.

HOW DO I SIGN UP? Workshop space is limited so call the Multicultural Network office at 781-729-7100 or email office@wmcn.org.

“Caramel”

Monday, April 13 at 6:30 p.m.
in the Winchester Public Library Meeting Room

Come and bring your neighbors to the last film in this year’s International Film Festival sponsored by One Winchester, Many Traditions, a collaborative project of the Winchester Public Library and the Multicultural Network, funded by the John and Mary Murphy Educational Foundation. The project’s purpose is to welcome new residents from other countries and to celebrate the varied cultural heritages of all of Winchester’s inhabitants. This event is suitable for teens and adults and is free and open to the public.

Caramel is a film that tells the story of six women in Beirut. Four work at a salon: Nisrine, a Muslim woman engaged to Bassam, has a secret she shares with her co-workers: Jamale, a divorced mother of teens and part-time model, fears the process of aging; Rima, always in pants, is attracted to Siham, and is tormented by her attraction to women; Layale loves a married man and is willing to drop everything for him. There’s also Rose, a middle-aged seamstress, who cares for Lili, old and facing dementia. In this setting, their interactions often bring up universal issues, while the friendship that unites these women colors their world with hope, warmth, and joy.

For additional information about the film, contact Yvonne Coleman at ycoleman@minlib.net or 781-721-7171 x26.

International Connections

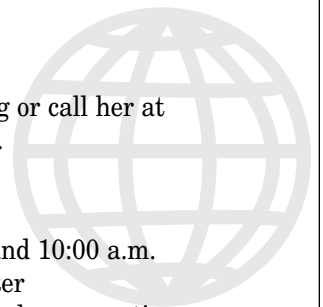
ENGLISH CONVERSATION GROUPS

International Connections volunteers facilitate English conversation groups for international residents who want to improve their conversation skills. Separate groups meet Monday mornings, Tuesday mornings, or Wednesday evenings for eight weeks.

Email Liz Sayre at office@wmcn.org or call her at 781-729-9242 for more information.

DROP-IN COFFEE

Thursday mornings between 8:30 and 10:00 a.m.
Café Dolce, 831 Main St., Winchester
Stop in and enjoy coffee and informal conversation.



Winchester as a Multicultural Community—a Sampling

(We welcome contributions to this column. Send a line or two to office@wmcn.org)

- The Winchester Multicultural Network held its annual family celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday with storyteller and musician Kemp Harris.
- The Network, along with Crawford Memorial United Methodist Church, the First Baptist Church, The North Shore Black Women's Association, the Mystic Valley Branch of the NAACP, St. Mary's Church, Winchester ABC, and the Winchester Unitarian Society celebrated King's birthday on the eve of the inauguration of our country's first African-American president with WGBH TV's Kim McLarin.
- The Literary Lunch Club, consisting of McCall sixth graders and members of the Winchester Seniors Association, met in February to discuss Project Mulberry in which a Korean-American girl and a friend learn about prejudice, patience, friendship, and more while doing a project for an after-school club. On March 5 the Literary Lunch Club discussed *Bread and Roses*. In this book two children try to survive and understand the 1912 labor protest known as the Bread and Roses strike of mill workers in Lawrence, MA.
- The First Congregational Church's February Youth Mission Trip was to urban Boston.
- The Jenks Center hosted a lecture entitled "The Ancient Silk Road—A Journey Across Central Asia" by photo-journalist Barry Pell.
- The First Congregational Church's Ruth Group read *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by Ishmael Beah and *Free Food for Millionaires* by Min Jin Lee.
- Members of the Winchester Unitarian Society viewed and discussed the documentary *Race, the Power of an Illusion*.
- The Multicultural Network sponsored an interactive program featuring an "African-American Timeline." The February event was presented by Culture Coach International at the Griffin Museum and was attended by about 50 members of the Winchester community.

The Multicultural Network's Response Committee

The Response Committee of the Winchester Multicultural Network provides support and advocacy for targets or witnesses of incidents of discrimination, bias, and/or hatred. Over the years the committee has responded to hate crimes, harassment, offensive remarks, bullying and workplace discrimination. The committee has worked with people who have been targeted on the basis of their race, religion, national origin, and ethnicity. We are committed to responding to bias based on differences of any kind, including gender, sexual orientation, age, and disability. The action we take in any situation primarily depends upon the needs and wishes of the target or witness. All conversations are confidential.

In response to a community incident our action might be public, such as a letter to the editor or a public forum. Other types of responses we have provided in the past include confidential consultation with the target or witness if he/she wants ideas on how to handle the situation; meetings with town officials and/or employees to discuss the problem and plan appropriate follow-up; and discussions with local business people and employers to address concerns and increase awareness of multicultural issues.

For more information, contact Response Chairperson Hillary Turkewitz at 781-721-6547 or email office@wmcn.org.

The Interchange Institute

The Interchange Institute, established in 1997, is a not-for-profit research organization whose mission is to promote dialogue and facilitate understanding between people who move to a new country and their new communities.

The Interchange Institute publishes a monthly newsletter, *Newcomers Almanac*, for people new to this country and on March 12–13 will present a two-day workshop: "Crossing Cultures With Competence."

For more information, go to www.interchangeinstitute.org, email info@interchangeinstitute.org, or call 617-566-2227.

Do You Know About WorldBoston?

WorldBoston is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing public discourse on global affairs and fostering professional exchanges with international visitors. WorldBoston presents an ongoing series of distinguished speakers and brings to Boston emerging leaders from around the world to share ideas, discover opportunities for mutual growth, and create bonds of friendship and understanding.

WorldBoston is celebrating the 60th anniversary of the founding of Boston's World Affairs Council this year. For more information, go to www.worldboston.org or call 617-542-8995

Other Events of Interest In and Around Winchester

“Faces of Winchester”

This month the Network will begin exhibiting photos by Caroline Hirschfeld at the Winchester Public Library. The photos feature Winchester residents who demonstrate the diversity that exists in our town. The photos will be displayed, one or two at a time, in the glass case as you enter the library at the Children’s Room level. Stop by and have a look. The Network recently launched “Faces of Winchester” as a monthly profile with photos in the *Winchester Star*. The project is part of an ongoing effort on the part of the Multicultural Network to promote understanding across difference and is supported in part by a grant from the Winchester Cultural Council, a local agency that is supported by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

Winchester High School Orchestra and Symphonetta Concert

Sunday, March 22 at 2 p.m. at the National Heritage Museum, 33 Marrett Road, Lexington, MA

In conjunction with the exhibition “Augustus Frederick Sherman: Ellis Island Portraits, 1905–1920,” members of the

Winchester High School Orchestra and Symphonetta will perform a concert of music celebrating the immigrant experience as part of America’s cultural heritage. John McCann, Director of Orchestras for Winchester High School, will present a family program that includes selections from Scottish, Irish, Chinese, and Klezmer music. This free concert is made possible through the young musicians’ commitment to Service Learning and represents one of several community performances this school year.

Art Exhibit at the Library. Art of the Human Condition

Ongoing at the Winchester Public Library

Jim Herbert is currently exhibiting his show, *Art of the Human Condition*, at the Winchester Public Library. His paintings include “African Madonna,” a figure of a mother and her starving child painted against a harsh landscape, and “Where the Poppies Grow,” which depicts a fallen soldier in the desert of Afghanistan. Herbert notes, “My work is inspired by the news we read every day, but I hope that it transcends the specific and asks the viewer to consider the larger issues.”

Discover Roxbury

Discover Roxbury is an organization to know about—a non-profit organization which promotes the economic development of Roxbury through sustainable cultural tourism that highlights the neighborhood’s rich history, arts, and contributions to the wider world. Since 2003, tours have given participants authentic and accurate portrayals of the neighborhood as led by resident guides from the community. Listed below are March and April tours. Log on to www.discoverroxbury.org to learn more and to sign up for email notices of their tours.

Roxbury Women

Saturday, March 21 from 10 a.m.–12 noon

The names and stories of Roxbury’s men are familiar to most people. But how many stories do you know about Roxbury’s prominent women? Marie Zakrzewska, Susan Dimock, Melnea Cass, Muriel Snowden, Elma Lewis, and others made important contributions to the neighborhood, Boston, and American society. Explore their histories and discover their legacies on a fascinating tour led by members of the Boston Women’s Heritage Trail. Cost \$10.

The Dimock Center—History and Architecture

Saturday, April 18 at 11:00 a.m. Free.

A 90-minute guided walk by Michael Reiskind, historian of the Jamaica Plain Historical Society.

The Dimock Center, on the Roxbury side of Egleston Square, was started in 1862 as the New England Hospital for Women and Children by Dr. Marie Zakrzewska to provide medical services to women by women. The present campus, on its 10-acre site, was laid out in 1872 and includes wonderful examples of Victorian Gothic, Georgian Revival, and Stick Style architecture. Come learn about early American medical history and Doctors Susan Dimock and Lucy Sewall, pioneer nurses Linda Richards and Mary E. Mahoney, and reformer Ednah Dow Cheney.

Meet at Dimock Entrance Gates, 1830 Columbus Avenue (near Jackson Square Station on the MBTA Orange Line). There is plenty of parking at Dimock.

Roxbury’s Black History

A trolley tour available for groups.

Learn the history of the Black community after leaving the north slope of Beacon Hill. This informative and exciting trolley tour travels through three centuries of Boston’s historic Black neighborhoods. Follow the progression of the Black churches, learn about the struggles of the Civil Rights movement, and hear about the many locally and nationally known people who call Roxbury home. For more information on any of these tours call 617-427-1006, email info@discoverroxbury.org or visit www.discoverroxbury.org.

English At Large

English At Large, a 38-year-old community-based non-profit organization, is looking for English literacy tutors. Over 200 learners are waiting to be matched with a tutor, and the list continues to grow. Volunteers attend a 15-hour training, during which they receive instructional materials, learn how to create a lesson plan, and look at different avenues of learning. Upon completing the training, tutors will be matched with a learner. Tutors and learners meet once a week for two hours. Tutoring sessions take place in public areas, such as a library or a café. Volunteer orientation dates are Tuesday, March 17, from 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m., at the Cary Memorial Library, 1874 Massachusetts Ave, Lexington, MA and Wednesday, April 8, at the Acton Memorial Library, 486 Main St. (Rte 27), Acton, MA. Call 781-395-2374 for information on training dates and to register, or email volunteer@englishatlarge.org. The web address is: www.englishatlarge.org. Tutors and learners with disabilities may receive reasonable accommodations with the assistance of the English At Large office.

What Do You Know About Transgender Issues?

The Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) is dedicated to ending discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression. The MTPC brochure states, “We envision a world where persons of all genders are treated with respect and fully participate in all areas of society, free from fear of prohibition, harassment or violence based on their gender identity and/or expression. To that end we educate the public, advocate with state, local, and federal government, engage in political activism, and encourage empowerment of community members through collective action.”

MTPC is currently lobbying for the passage of “An Act Relative to Gender-based Discrimination and Hate Crimes” that would strengthen our state’s non-discrimination and hate crime laws by including gender identity and expression, thereby helping to protect the rights of transgender people.

There is widespread prejudice and discrimination against people whose gender identity or expression does not conform to stereotypes about gender. Gender identity or expression is defined as a “gender-related identify, appearance, expression or behavior of an individual regardless of the individual’s assigned sex at birth.” The proposed law would ensure that “perpetrators of crimes that specifically target people because of their gender identity or expression would face the same penalties as those who target people because of their race, religion, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation. It would also make it clear that it is illegal for schools to discriminate on the basis of a student’s gender identity or expression, and would strengthen the school’s ability to protect students from violence.”

To learn more about MTPC or the proposed bill, contact the organization by mail (PO Box 301897, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130), email (info@masstpc.org), phone (617-778-0519), or visit their website (www.masstpc.org).

April is Fair Housing Month

A quick search on the web turned up the piece below, which summarizes the issues of fair housing in our country. For a report assessing the “State of Opportunity” in Massachusetts, go to www.kirwaninstitute.org.

Fair Housing Month is a time to celebrate the progress we’ve made in opening the doors of housing opportunity to every citizen of this nation, regardless of race, gender, color, nationality, religion, family status, or disability. It is also a time to acknowledge the fair housing challenges that still remain, and collectively commit to finding viable solutions to those challenges.

One out of every five Americans has some type of physical disability, yet there continues to be an acute shortage of housing to meet their needs. National studies show that while progress has been made, racial discrimination in housing still exists at unacceptable levels in our country. One out of every four or five Hispanics, African Americans, Asians, or Native Americans still faces discrimination in renting, buying, or financing housing.

Low-income people, seniors, and the disabled seeking to purchase, refinance, or secure a reverse mortgage, are often targets for predatory lenders or loan fraud. Predatory lenders take advantage of borrowers with a variety of abusive practices such as charging excessive interest rates or loan fees.

Illegal housing discrimination can take many forms, some quite subtle: showing apartments or homes only in certain neighborhoods, advertising housing only to preferred groups of people, denials of property insurance, discriminatory property appraisals, or refusals to make reasonable accommodation for persons with disabilities.

Whether people are trying to rent, buy, sell, or finance a home or apartment, as a tenant, homeowner, or landlord, they need to know the rights and protections provided by the Federal Fair Housing Act as well as state and local fair housing laws. It’s equally important for people to know where to file a complaint if they suspect they are a victim of discrimination or predatory lending.

Federal law makes it unlawful to discriminate in housing based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, or family status (families with children under the age of 18, or who are expecting a child). Broader protections are often provided under state, county, or city laws.

By John W. Meyers, HUD Regional Director

Hidden Differences

by Dotty Burstein

We define multiculturalism as “the ongoing process of recognizing, understanding, and appreciating differences.” Yet there are those whose differences are not readily apparent. For example, Kim has diabetes; she must monitor her blood-sugar levels and inject herself with insulin. Harry, a hard-working 15-year-old, was not able to sleep the night before his physics exam because of severe asthma. Nikki is a bright middle-schooler, but because of a neurological disorder called Asperger's syndrome, he is unable to read his peers' social cues or make eye contact with them. Each of these young people has a disability, yet, unlike people who are visually impaired or wheelchair bound, Kim, Harry, and Nikki's (not their real names) struggles may be misinterpreted or poorly understood. For example, some girls saw Kim inject herself in the ladies room at school and inferred that she was a drug addict. Harry's teacher was disappointed in his exam grade and chalked it up to laziness, while Nikki was often bullied by other kids because he had difficulty interacting appropriately with peers.

It is important to help our children understand how each person is unique, that just as hair and skin color may differ, so, too, can abilities and states of health. We, as parents and teachers, can model for our children ways of asking respectful questions of those who are not like us. The girls in the ladies room might have remarked to Kim, “That must hurt. Why are you giving yourself a shot?” Harry's teacher might have inquired, “Since you usually do so well in this class,

I was wondering what happened on the last exam.” Helping children to understand that neurological disorders are physical disorders and that mental illness is a health issue can go a long way in helping them develop the compassion to forgo the urge to ridicule, mimic, or otherwise bully someone. When they understand that a person who behaves differently can be really interesting, children are eager to ask questions, again, in a respectful way: “I was wondering why you look away (or down) when I talk to you.”

Our family has always loved reading Marc Brown's *Arthur* books and watching episodes about Arthur and his friends on PBS. These simple stories include characters with a range of differences—racial, religious, and cultural—and generally contain a conflict or problem (bullying, dyslexia, and even head lice have been topics in past episodes) that gets resolved in an appropriate way. Now the series wants to create a new character who has “a unique ability, character trait, or disability that might make life different, but no less fun.” From now until March 31, children ages 6 through 12 can enter the “Arthur and All Kids Can Character Search Contest.” According to Marc Brown, “The contest is aimed at helping young people (realize) that peers come in all shapes, sizes, and abilities.” To enter the contest, visit pbskids.org/arthur/allkidscan and print out the three-page entry form, which provides space for original art of a new character that your child would like to see added to the Arthur series.

Post-Inauguration Thoughts

by Sandy Thompson

With the election and inauguration of Barack Obama, our country's first African-American/bi-racial president, many people have been expressing the feeling, as *Boston Globe* columnist Jeff Jacoby did in mid-January, that “racial identity is no longer a barrier to even the most prominent position in American life.” In stating this as fact, Mr. Jacoby denies the experience of countless African-Americans, not to mention other people of color, who have faced obstacles that those of us who are white have never had to deal with. This point of view demonstrates a lack of awareness of the way in which racism has been institutionalized into our judicial, educational, religious, medical, and penal systems. This kind of “color blind” policy and attitude ignores the racism that has prevented talented individuals in all professions from achieving their potential throughout our country's history.

Those who have seen the documentary, *Race, the Power of an Illusion* have learned some of the history of the concept of

race and how racial discrimination has advantaged white people for many generations. In one of the many illuminating essays on the PBS website www.pbs.org/race, the following statement appears: “Racism is not just about personal slurs and animosity. While individual acts of racism take their toll on society, the greatest social and economic inequalities have risen from institutional structures that have given benefits to and advantages to one race at the expense of others. So while we may be witnessing fewer acts of blatant racism and discrimination on an individual level, we are still part of a system of advantage based on race.”

We cannot let the few who have overcome obstacles and succeeded in their chosen fields sidetrack efforts to recognize and address the often unconscious bias and racism that are embedded in our culture.

Recommended Multicultural Films

by Mindy Arbo

Films are available through The Winchester Public Library and its Minuteman Library Inter-library Loans, <http://library.minlib.net>, and/or at Video Horizons. All foreign films are subtitled. **F** = great for families; age specific when noted.

Snow in August

In post WWII Brooklyn, a fatherless Irish immigrant boy and an isolated Holocaust survivor/rabbi become friends through a mutual love of baseball. When tragedy strikes, the boy enlists the help of the mythic Hebrew Golem. **F**

Only Human

A 'normal' daughter visits the crowded multigenerational apartment of her whacky Jewish family in Madrid.

As farce spins out of control, she continues to attempt to explain that she is Palestinian. A real hoot throughout! **F** older teens.

Lackawanna Blues

The complex multigenerational community of an African-American boarding house in the 1960s is lovingly remembered by the grandson of its amazing matriarch. **F**

The Tunnel

The taut, engrossing true stories of a small band of determined Berliners who dig the first escape tunnel under the Berlin Wall and eventually bring thousands of new East Germans to freedom. **F** teens

Duck

A thoroughly engrossing story of a disenfranchised older American widower who, in the company of a pet duck, discovers the world of street life in 21st century America. **F**

Together

A rural Chinese peasant boy becomes a violin prodigy through the great efforts of his illiterate father. The two are uprooted to the cruel urban squalor of Beijing as the father endures sacrifice and humiliation to secure the best mentor for the boy. The story of their struggles and bond is sobering and touching. **F**

The Secret Life of Bees

An emotionally abused poor white Southern teenager escapes her violent widower father and is taken in by the solid, loving and spiritual August Boatwright, matriarch of a tightly bonded trio of sisters, and proprietor of a honey business. As one might expect, life's lessons abound here, but there are also many unusual twists to the rich tapestry. **F**

Brio: A Workshop for Everyone

Saturday, March 21 9:30–noon.

On Saturday, March 21, Network board member Sahar Ahmed Awerbuch will offer another theater workshop designed to “shatter prejudices and misconceptions about people with disabilities in the arts.” According to Sahar, president of the Brio Integrated Theater, more than two dozen people—children, teens, and adults, some with disabilities, others without—participated in the November workshop, which offered opportunities for movement, use of sensory integration, and other means of self-expression through music and art “without physical or social barriers.” The March workshop is free and open to the public. Another workshop is planned for May. To register for either workshop, contact Sahar at s.ahmed@briothheater.org

The Multicultural Network is grateful to....

The 170 individuals and families who have made a contribution to the Network so far this year. We are heartened and inspired by your support in these tough economic times. Each contribution is a voice of support and represents a joining in our efforts to make Winchester a community where everyone feels valued and welcome.

We also deeply appreciate the generosity of the following foundations and organizations who have made it possible for us to offer programs such as the inauguration eve celebration of Dr. King's birthday, the *African-American Timeline*, and our upcoming screening of the documentary *Who Does She Think She Is?:* The Cummings Foundation (Bill and Joyce Cummings), the EnKa Society, the Winchester Cultural Council, the Griffin Foundation, St. Mary's Church, the Winchester Unitarian Society, Winchester ABC, the North Shore Black Women's Association, the Mystic Valley NAACP, Winchester Rotary, and the First Congregational Church which provides us with office space.

Need For Foster Homes

The Massachusetts Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Program is looking for foster homes for refugee children coming primarily from Burma and several African countries. These children, the majority of whom are adolescents, have often spent many years in refugee camps, living with other families or in groups, and come to the U.S. with no parent or adult relative to care for them.

If you are interested in exploring what the commitment entails and what support services are available, call Karen Santella at 781-997-0835 or Marie Fitzpatrick at 508-791-4484.



Let Them In by Jason L. Riley
(Reviewed by Dotty Burstein)

Let Them In lays out a solid case for open borders by showing reasons why six common arguments against immigration do not hold up and why immigrants play an essential role in America's prosperity. The author, *Wall Street Journal* editorialist Jason Riley, disputes the often heard charges that immigrants are "overpopulating the United States, stealing jobs, depressing wages, stressing our social services, filling our prisons, and not assimilating." In fact, Riley asserts that a liberal immigration policy is consistent with our American tradition of welcoming immigrant groups from Europe and Asia in the 19th century. A policy of welcoming immigrants from Latin America today is consistent with a more secure United States. And by providing more legal ways for people to immigrate, the U.S. can free up border security resources to enable officials to focus on real threats.

In response to the argument that immigrants are stealing jobs and depressing wages, Riley notes that a third of all immigrants have less than a high school education, while a quarter have a college or advanced degree. By contrast, native U.S. workers are concentrated between these two extremes. In other words, immigrants tend to complement the native workforce rather than replace it.

Because of remarks by "restrictionists," or those who oppose immigration, much misinformation has been broadcast about undocumented immigrants, who constitute a third of all immigrants. Unlike what Americans may hear from the restrictionists, it is not the undocumented immigrants who are stressing our social services; they do not have access to federal welfare benefits.

In fact, many of the undocumented are reluctant to take advantage of the emergency health care available to them for fear of apprehension by the authorities. Only among legal, but unskilled, immigrants is welfare use higher than among native U.S. workers. This is because these immigrants have lower incomes and more of them are poor.

Another piece of misinformation about immigration concerns the immigrant crime rate. Americans are alarmed when they hear people like nativist Pat Buchanan state, "The enemy is already inside the gates. How many others among our 11 million 'undocumented' immigrants are ready to carry out truck bombings, assassinations, sabotage, sky-jackings?" This is the kind of rhetoric that plays on people's prejudices and fears. Yet data from the census and the Justice Department show that incarceration rates among young men are lowest for immigrants. This holds true in particular for the Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Guatemalans who make up the greater part of the undocumented population.

Finally, there is the question of assimilation. Many Americans prefer that immigrants discard their own culture and ethnicity upon arrival on our shores. In other words, these Americans want the country to remain a culture with a single national language and an "ethnically pure" Anglo-Protestant culture. According to Riley, "Americans still believe that our assimilationist model is working, even if the elites on the left and right who claim to speak on their behalf do not."

For updates on immigration issues, go to www.miracoalition.org

Winchester Multicultural Network

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