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Human Smuggling Is Morally Good

by Scott McPherson

A great deal of moral criticism is leveled worldwide at the often brutal and unsavory business of human smuggling. Western leaders such as President Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair regularly condemn the practice, especially when the deplorable conditions suffered by illegal immigrants in transit are exposed.

In fact, state and local law-enforcement agencies around the United States joined with the Department of Homeland Security just this past November to form a “multi-agency taskforce” to thwart the illegal transportation of human beings across the U.S. border, under the umbrella of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Most people cheer such attempts to “tighten up the borders” — but freedom-loving Americans didn’t always think that way.

For example, in 1850 Congress was moved to pass a Fugitive Slave Law, which made it a criminal offense punishable by six months imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine to assist an escaped slave, precisely because of the success of the Underground Railroad in smuggling fleeing blacks to northern anti-slavery states and Canada. Abolitionists so despised the “peculiar institution” that they willingly broke the law and continued to help its victims reach freedom and a better way of life.

During the Cold War, passionate anti-communists, adventurers, and profiteers often delved into the risky and dark world of human smuggling to help those trapped behind the Iron Curtain get to Western Europe. One such story is told by Peter Dupre, a British citizen who smuggled East Germans and Czechs across the Yugoslavian border into Austria, in his book, *Caught in the Act* (published in 1988, after his release from a Hungarian prison). The Checkpoint Charlie Museum in Berlin displays the many ingenious contraptions and forms of deception employed by those wishing to escape from East Berlin to West— to freedom and a better way of life.

That so many would risk their lives and fortunes to escape communism was a symbol of pride for Americans, further proof of the moral superiority of a free society.

Today, however, the free world takes a dimmer view of human smuggling. Our governments now pass strict laws to punish anyone who smuggles another to freedom and a better way of life. Mexican, Cuban, and Chinese citizens regularly risk their lives under deplorable and dangerous conditions to reach the United States only to find that, where once our culture embraced those wishing to start anew, there now stands a new Iron Curtain designed to lock them out instead of in.

Human smuggling, insofar as it aids people in fleeing tyranny and unfavorable living conditions, is nothing less than an act of liberation. The dreadful circumstances endured by illegal immigrants in order to reach our shores only proves the great lengths people will still go to for freedom and a better way of life.

We once saw this as a sign of our great strength. All that has changed is our respect for human freedom.

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