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## **No Immigration Problem at the Checkout Counter**

**by Scott McPherson**

To hear anti-immigrant types and their spokesmen tell it, any intelligent American only needs to look around to see all the trouble that immigrants cause us.

A heterogeneous society just won't work, they say. Too many problems with language differences and clashing cultures.

And then there's the burden on the school system; students from non-English-speaking countries have to be accommodated, often at great expense.

Along with bilingual education, some people even want bilingual ballots. What's next, the anti-immigrant asks, street signs in two languages?

Law and order is being undermined as well, you should know. Illegal immigrants are "breaking into" to our country!

But while demagogues and nativists exploit these alleged problems, a headline from the September 3 *New Hampshire Union-Leader* aptly demonstrates a major flaw in their arguments. "As the nation becomes diverse," it reads, "so do grocery stores."

As that headline suggests, private enterprise seems to be handling the "immigration problem" just fine.

Walk down the aisle of Compare Foods in Raleigh, North Carolina, the story says, and "the shelves are lined with mainstream products: neat rows of Del Monte canned fruit, Sun-Maid raisins, StarKist tuna, and Capri Sun juice pouches."

The next aisle over, however, is a different matter altogether. There you'll find a large stock of Hispanic foods. "Traditional grocery stores and ethnic markets are adding new products, hoping to increase sales by making their stores one-stop shopping destinations," the story reports.

Compare Foods is run by Julian Hernandez. His clientele has traditionally been Spanish-speaking, but he wants to attract more English-speaking patrons, so he's stocking "mainstream" products and employing bilingual cashiers. Signs around the store are written in both English and Spanish.

The same thing is happening in the nearby town of Cary. At the Grand Asia Market, signs are written in Chinese and English and the employees are also bilingual. Two years ago they expanded to make room for more diversified stock and added a bakery and a restaurant. “We didn’t want to,” said the store’s owner, Jenny Chen, “but a competitor came into town.”

According to the Food Marketing Institute, 90 percent of grocery stores in the country offer some kind of ethnic food items, reflecting the growing purchasing power of America’s immigrants. Hispanics are expected to spend around \$992 billion a year by 2009; that same year, Asian Americans will be spending about \$528 billion a year.

“You have to find out what each group needs and then get it,” said Hernandez. Enough said.

Major food manufacturers are even getting into the act. Kellogg’s, Campbell’s, and Hormel are experimenting with new products, advertising, and labeling to attract ethnic shoppers.

Most important, no government edict was necessary to make any of this happen. While social engineers on both the political Left and Right fret over diversity, the marketplace seems to be a step ahead of them. Hoping to literally capitalize on people’s differences, many private businesses are radically changing the way they do business. Far from claiming anyone is “breaking in,” these intelligent capitalists are looking for ways to get more people into their stores.

This admittedly can require a measure of accommodation that some store owners would rather not have to supply, but unlike government, they respond to these challenges with efficiency, diversification, and ingenuity, rather than handwringing, bureaucracy, and demagoguery.

If a population made up of different kinds of people is unworkable, someone forget to tell the nation’s grocery stores. There, aisle by aisle, and in increasing numbers, Americans seem to be handling different cultures, languages, signs, and customs like grownups. When the ballots cast are dollars, the melting pot seems to bubble along just fine.

No doubt it could be argued that supermarkets and other private businesses are radically different from public-sector endeavors, like schools. These have the burden of answering to elected boards, city councils, and state legislatures — not customers.

This is no doubt correct. But given the deplorable state of public schools, and other government-run activities, shouldn’t that be just one more reason to free more of society’s undertakings from government command and control?

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