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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Reform Judaism is the official voice of the Union for Reform Judaism, linking the institutions and affiliates of Reform Judaism with every Reform Jew. *RJ* covers developments within our Movement while interpreting world events and Jewish tradition from a Reform perspective. Shared by 305,000 member households, *RJ* conveys the creativity, diversity, and dynamism of Reform Judaism.

DEAR READER

Compassion Knows No Borders

No one can listen to CNN's Lou Dobbs without being struck by the thinly veiled contempt he expresses for the immigrants, legal and illegal, who make their way to America's shores.

Mr. Dobbs seems to think of immigrants as somehow less than human. Like Pat Buchanan, Tom Tancredo, and other anti-immigration ideologues, he speaks of them as if they were parasites who feed off the rest of us while destroying our economy and undermining our national identity.

It is true that we need a better immigration policy than the one we have—one with a more effective method of securing our borders, a system that will give illegal immigrants a way to earn citizenship, and a guest worker program that will provide the human resources our economy requires. But as important as these goals are for the next administration, it is even more important that our new president speak out against the disdain for other human beings that is at the heart of Mr. Dobbs' nativistic populism. Jews know from long experience that such attitudes usually have less to do with legitimate economic self-interest than with a petty, bigoted mindset that undermines American ideals.

More often than not, anti-immigrant hate-mongers are not talking about illegal immigration but about the Latino population as a whole, and what they fear, it appears, is the threat that Mexican and Central American immigrants supposedly pose to our national culture. While I don't object to anyone who argues that our country needs a common culture and language and a sense of history and collective destiny, I reject the baseless claim that Latinos are somehow incapable or unwilling to participate in our national narrative. Jews should remember that the same false claims were made against us in the early part of the 20th century.

As Jews, it is not only our history as an immigrant people that should make us sympathetic to the immigrant experience. Our sacred texts demonstrate an abiding concern with assuring the welfare of the stranger. As Leviticus 19:10 makes clear, the Children of Israel are commanded to show care not only to the poor but also to the foreigner.

In short, the Dobbsian contempt for the immigrant is the very antithesis of Jewish teachings. We Jews have learned that immigrants, especially in America, are almost always a blessing. We know that in welcoming others with compassion we inevitably strengthen ourselves. And we know too that people who close

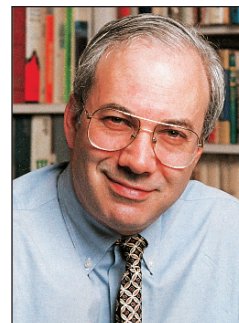


PHOTO BY HENRY GROSSMAN

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