

## HAVE WE GONE SOFT?

We wrote previously about the permanent underclass and its probable result

As a society, we've become soft. I'm not immune to this even though I've always been able to find work in the technology sector. If I had to resort to manual labor or a mind-rotting, repetitive job, I'd go nuts. But I'm lucky. I've been able to wrap my brains around gizmos and gadgets and keep them running somehow. It's a talent.

Lots of people don't have that talent. I'm not being elitist here, just realistic. The trouble is, in our society, we've somehow gotten the idea that "work" work (anything resembling manual labor) is something for someone else to do. Our national ethic requires us to go to community college or a university in order to have the "education" to do the jobs we were meant to do.

We tend (as a culture) to look down on manual labor as demeaning and beneath us. When we try to visualize it, one of the main visions is that of a black field worker who is laboring for a plantation owner who is picking cotton and can be bought and sold. In our here and now culture, we tend to feel that working with our hands and doing physical work is something for a "lower class person" to do.

That "lower class person" can be the field hand (read illegal immigrant) that Alabama ran off. It can be the hotel maid that is willing to work for crap wages. It's the concrete or lumber carrier on a construction site. It's all the jobs that Americans consider themselves "too good" to do.

([http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/16/trump-immigration-crackdown-idaho-dairy-industry-215608?lo=ap\\_c1](http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/09/16/trump-immigration-crackdown-idaho-dairy-industry-215608?lo=ap_c1))

When we were still a frontier nation, and technology hadn't caught up with the work ethic, life wasn't easy. We had to dig coal to stay warm, or split firewood. Washing clothes involved having to use washboards and hanging laundry out to dry. Even in the cities, there was a lot of 'fetch and carry' that had to be done. It involved physical activity to live, and there weren't a lot of handouts except to those that physically or mentally weren't capable of doing the work.

At the risk of agreeing with the right-wing zealots that preach self-reliance at all costs, I have to agree with the right-wing zealots on this subject, at least. Technology and relaxed welfare systems have made us soft, and have degraded the idea of 'manual labor' to such a degree that we just won't (as a society) do it. Hence the necessity for the 'illegal' undocumented immigrant to maintain the underbelly of the American

economy.

I remember going to Juarez, Mexico many years ago, for the first time while I was in college. As many times happens in border towns, I got lost and wound up off the tourist strip. I was astounded to see the way these people lived. No indoor plumbing, open-air markets, and a standard of living that most Americans could not (nor would willingly) imagine. But to these people, it was tolerable. They were making a living (as bad as it was) from sucking cash off of the crazy Anglos that frequented the tourist strip.

These people are willing to work twelve hours a day at backbreaking jobs because they have come from places and countries that haven't grown soft. In their home countries, life is still hard and to live in America is a major step up on the economic ladder.

Over the years I've known a number of 'illegals' of one description or another. They're some of the hardest working, honorable people I've ever met. Of course, there's the same bad element that we have to contend with in our own ranks, but on the whole, their work ethic leaves us in the dust. There are farm workers here in the Northwest that I've seen work a twelve-hour day, and then tend their own gardens or cattle.

If we hew to the conservative dogma, and close the borders to 'illegals', we will be shooting ourselves in the proverbial foot. As was proven in Alabama, and may be proven in Idaho and elsewhere, we cannot get Americans to do the jobs that these people fill. We just won't do it either because we have an exalted idea that the work is beneath us, or because we're not desperate enough (or physically capable) of performing the work.

Currently, we're an elitist nation that is too good to get our hands dirty with menial labor. Until we change that ethic, and either get to work or allow outsiders to legally do that work, we're going to pay a price for our short-sightedness in both services, prices and quality of product. Cutting our noses off to spite our faces is not an answer.