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Remember the immigrant dream

Kansas City Business Journal - by Fred Logan

My grandfather, Herbert Charles Logan, arrived at Ellis Island on the S.S. St. Louis on June 25, 1914.

The ship's manifest shows that the young man from Maidstone, England, was an "ironmonger" with \$8 in his pocket.

He advised immigration authorities that he was going to visit a friend in Kansas City. Then he stayed in this country.

I don't think his failure to return to England made him what certain talk radio dullards call an "illegal." But I believe that he dreamed the same dream as folks from Mexico who cross the Rio Grande in the dark of night.

My grandfather was a desperately poor man who dreamed of a better life.

I think of that dream when I read that legislators in Missouri and Kansas are going to get tough on illegal immigrants.

That's a terrible idea. States will compete with one another to enact the most punitive laws.

That's exactly what Ed Hayes, the Kansas leader of the seriously misguided Minuteman organization, wants. He maintains that illegal immigrants "know" that they should come to Kansas because it's a "sanctuary state."

So Kansas enacts punitive laws. Missouri responds by adopting more onerous legislation.

That scenario could encourage illegal immigrants to move back and forth across the state line from Rosedale to Westport and back to Rosedale. Maybe legislators think they'll get tired and return to Mexico.

That's the silly result you get when a state tries to address an obviously federal problem.

There's also a potentially ugly result.

In Kansas, some Republican legislators want to repeal the state law that gives in-state tuition to the children of illegal immigrants. Their counterparts in Missouri want to prohibit illegal immigrants from receiving college scholarships and financial aid.

That's self-destructive public policy. You ask a local school district to educate an English language-learning student. Then you waste a successful effort by limiting the options of the innocent, hard-working student.

It pains me that the most powerful nativist attacks on "illegals" come from folks who profess to be Republicans.

Abraham Lincoln probably would say of them what he said about the Know-Nothings of his day: If they took control, he would "prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty."

Jack Kemp and Ronald Reagan spoke eloquently of the importance of the immigrant dream in American life. Voices like theirs would improve the quality of the current debate on federal immigration reform.

My grandfather died without knowing that one of his sons would become an executive with **Procter & Gamble** and long before two of his grandsons became lawyers.

The immigrant dream was a good one for the young ironmonger from Maidstone.

It's a dream worth remembering today.

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