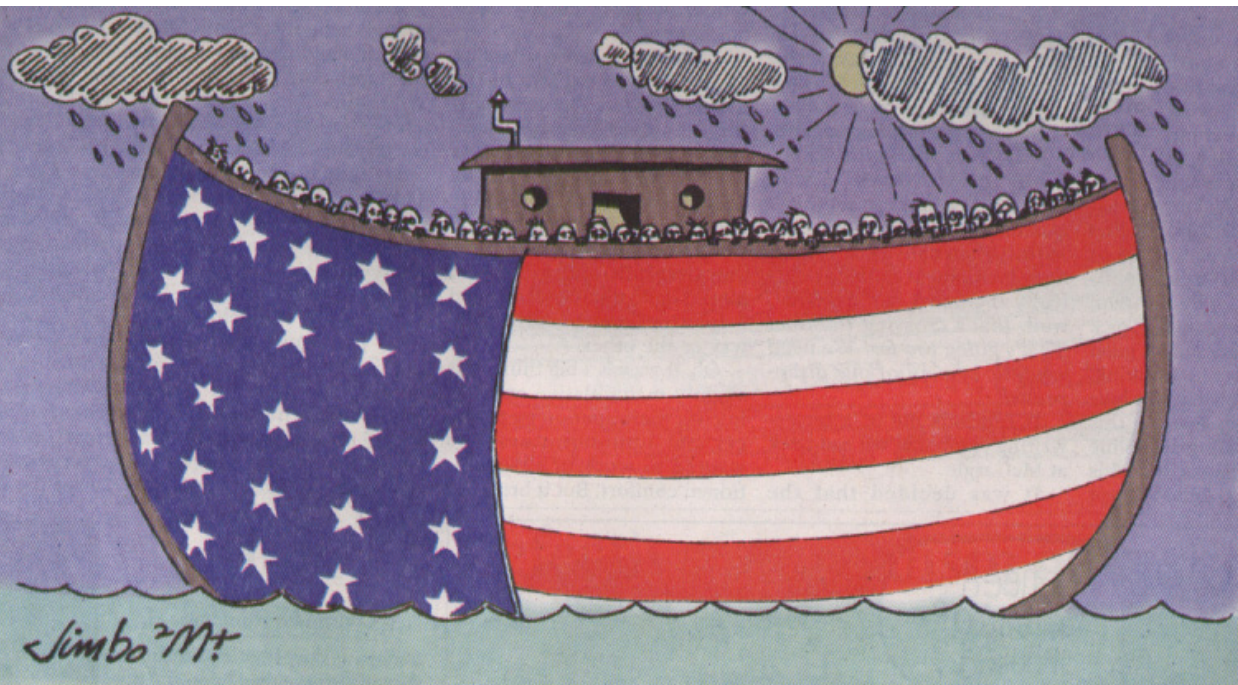




Immigrant from Iran urges 'wholehearted' Americanism

I came to America 23 years ago on a one-way ticket. I was 17.

I had no family here, had no money and could not speak English. My first job in America was as a pot washer and toilet cleaner at a restaurant. For months, I hung index cards with English words by the sink so I could learn my new country's language.

By age 24, I completed my computer science, mathematics, banking and electrical engineering degrees and bought my first business.

Although I was born in another country, I truly believe that from the very begin-

ning, I was born to be an American. In fact, immediately after I learned English, I took an American Constitution course. I was devastated after my teacher, Dr. Mark Bauman, told me that a foreign-born person never could become president of the United States.



**A. Hamid
Andalib**
Commentary

In fact, I told the teacher that either I would find out how a foreign-born person could become the president of America or I would drop out of the course. Dr. Bauman shouted, "Mr. Andalib! If you prove me wrong, you will have an automatic 'A' in this course and any other course you ever take with me!"

After two days of research in the library,

I found the solution to my dilemma and returned to the classroom. Dr. Bauman then said, in a very loud and facetious tone, "Mr. Andalib! Are you ready to tell us how you could become an American president?"

"Yes sir, I am ready," I replied. I then explained that if I really wanted to be president, and I wanted it badly enough, I would first become a Congressman, then I would present an amendment to the Constitution to allow the foreign-born to serve in the presidency. If I worked hard enough, I told him, I could get enough of the 50 state legislatures to ratify the amendment and ultimately change the Constitution.

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Americanism: Embrace it wholeheartedly

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Then I asked Dr. Bauman if he thought I would have a better chance than anyone else to become the first foreign-born American president if I could bring about such a change.

As you can imagine, everyone in the classroom began laughing and my teacher's face became extremely red. He dismissed the entire class and apologized to me. Of course, he gave me an 'A' in the class — and in three other history courses I took from him over the next three quarters.

I hope this lengthy example demonstrates my all-American heart more than any realistic desire to become a U.S. president.

My greatest secret to survival and success in America has been my ability to assimilate and become a full-blooded American. I mean American in heart, soul and being. Believe me, if you live in America and you are not a wholehearted American and are not living the abundant life of freedom and prosperity, you are living beneath your privileges.

America doesn't owe any of us a living. We are truly blessed to have the opportunity, like no other place on this Earth, to design a life and pursue happiness and prosperity.

As we celebrate our country's freedom and remember those who sacrificed their lives to guarantee that freedom, we must never take America for granted. I believe being an American is not a birth

or legal privilege. It is a priceless gift from God, that requires only our wholehearted acceptance, love and appreciation.

I challenge new Americans such as myself to love America with all our heart and soul and remain totally committed to America as our one and only country. I did not come all the way to America to remain Iranian. I came to America with a one-way ticket and burned my boat with no way out but to do or die.

America deserves much better than to have new immigrants bragging about their old country, unwilling to assimilate, and those who cling to their old culture (like living in a box) while living here in this great country.

I quickly learned the secret to being a good American was to be a good steward of this great country by working every day to make it a better place for all of us. I learned that with a spoon longer than our arms we must feed everyone around us, which ultimately results in total fulfillment and prosperity for ourselves.

Ultimately I learned that for better or worse, America is as good as it gets, and it is indeed the greatest hope for freedom on this Earth.

I am also challenging my children and fellow Americans who were fortunate enough to be born in the greatest country on Earth to never take America for granted. In fact, America is great not because we are so great — America is great because it is a true blessing to everyone on this Earth.

I am convinced that America's life and liberty will outlast all generations as long as it continues to glorify God by its good deeds for all humanity, especially those who live in the poorer countries and are much less fortunate than we are.

Sept. 11 showed all of us the worst of our enemies and the very best of America. I don't know about you, but it certainly made me a more proud and compassionate American.

Remember Sept. 11 not because of any bondage of bitterness, or grudges or hatred. Sept. 11 should be a loud and clear wake-up call and confirmation that our commitment and will to protect America must always outweigh our enemies' desire to destroy our homeland.

We must always remain united and indivisible with solid commitment to protect America with our entire being. We must protect America with all means so it may continue as the ever-shining light of freedom blinding our enemies' eyes.

In fact, the only privilege and honor greater than being an American is loving and protecting America with all our heart, soul and being.

We cannot expect a wholehearted America if we are halfhearted Americans.

May God bless America, the land that I love.

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