

Tri-State Unity Coalition

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To the Dispatch:

In February, a letter was printed in “Your Dispatches” that called for closing America’s doors to further immigration, especially from Spanish-speaking countries. The writer claimed that “prodigious procreation rates” from these countries are resulting in damage to his environment. Our previous letter to the editor was a response and called for the community to speak out against hate speech and discrimination. The Dispatch answered the call and took a firm stance for tolerance and inclusion. We applaud the Dispatch! The editor carefully selected a quote from Milton to illustrate that through discourse, “Truth” would prevail over “Falsehood.” The editor’s choice of the metaphor, “muzzle,” also did not go unnoticed by us.

Too often, preachers of hate and exclusion make broad generalizations about groups of people and fill their invectives with half-truths and falsehoods. They intentionally fail to include significant achievements of the groups they attack. World events of the past month have once again proved that these barking extremists are wrong and this is not an issue of political correctness, but one of factual correctness. Therefore, we celebrate the diversity of our community and nation by presenting some pertinent facts.

Throughout our history, the United States military has been one of the primary paths to citizenship, civil rights and success. Currently, more than 37,000 non-citizens serve in our armed forces with more enlisting every day. The military is also one of the best means for obtaining the necessary documentation for legal status. On July 4, 2002, President Bush signed an Executive Order fast-tracking naturalization for non-citizen soldiers who are defending our freedoms and rights. Members of Congress are now rallying to support this order with legislation to further expedite the process. The above does not take into account the tens of thousands of immigrants in the military who are already citizens.

We all mourn the death of **U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Jose Gutierrez**, an immigrant from Guatemala, who was killed in combat in Iraq, and then posthumously awarded U.S. citizenship. We all mourn the death of **U.S. Army Pfc. Diego Rincon**, a citizen of Colombia, who was killed by a suicide bomber at a checkpoint near Najaf on March 29. Rincon was posthumously awarded U.S. citizenship. We all mourn the death of Mexican-born **U.S. Marine Lance Cpl. Jesus Suarez del Solar** who was killed March 30 by enemy fire. We all mourn the death of Mexican-born **U.S. Marine Cpl. Jose Garibay** who was killed in Nasiriyah early in the war; he was posthumously awarded U.S. citizenship. On April 10, at Bethesda Naval Medical Center, two wounded **U.S. Marines, Master Gunnery Sgt. Guadalupe Donogean** (Mexican-born) and **Lance Cpl. O. J. Santamaria** (Philippine-born) were sworn in as U.S. citizens – with President Bush in attendance and commenting that this was a “very profound moment.” These are only a few of the stories that are coming out this current war – of immigrants from all parts of the world who are fighting and dying to defend America.

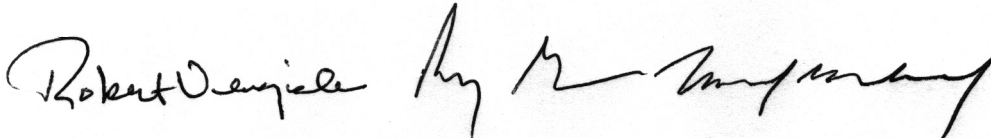
We are a nation of immigrants and nearly every American family can point with pride, honor and respect to those who have been willing to give their lives defending this country. It is quite telling that throughout our history, how closely the promise of full citizenship and civil rights is connected to service in the military.

We are reminded of another time and another war, when **Abraham Davis**, a young African-American joined the Union Army with the promise of citizenship. His honorable service, and that of many other African-Americans, was an impetus for the passage of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Following the war Davis used his pension to purchase property on High Street in Milford. For more than 100 years his family lived in Milford and contributed to the community. In the early 1950s, his family again answered the call to duty and paid the ultimate price. Abraham Davis' great-grandson, **Milton Bailey**, fought and died in the Korean Conflict and was the only person from Pike County officially listed as "killed in action."

According to Pentagon statistics, the Tri-State area is home to many of our immigrant military personnel. Regardless of the position each of us has on the war, we are firmly committed to support our troops and will not forget that many of them are immigrants and non-citizens. When our heroes come home, will they be welcomed with the respect, dignity and honor they fought for and deserve – or will they see letters such as "Close the Doors" as reflective of our community's attitude toward them and their families? Our civil and human rights, preserved by those who place their lives on the line, are guaranteed to all of us, regardless of our cultural background or national origin.

We strongly support freedom of speech, but all of our freedoms come with responsibilities. Speech which intimidates or directly results in harm to others is unacceptable. As citizens, we also have the responsibility to tell the whole truth and not distort it. All of us – individuals, community organizations, business and political leaders, and the press - have an obligation to the truth and to make our community a better place to live. We again applaud the Dispatch for taking a stand for tolerance, inclusion and truth – and we invite others to do the same!

TSUC is a non-political, non-profit 501(c)3 organization serving the Delaware Highlands area. Our goal is to celebrate diversity, promote human rights, create a moral barrier to hate, and enhance community harmony. Our meetings are held at the Dingman Branch of the Pike County Public Library on the second Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. The public is invited to attend.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Veneziale Perry Gower and Norm Gasbarro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert Veneziale, Ph.D., Perry Gower, and Norm Gasbarro, Ed.D.
Tri-State Unity Coalition, Board of Directors