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“!All Aboard! The other ship call.”

By Paul V. Montesino, PhD., MBA

I like to write about the unusual if I may. I don't do it just to be different, although difference has its reward, but because surprises awaken my creativity and, in my readers, interest if not amazement. After all, what would writing, and reading be without creativity, interest and surprise? Today, I want to write about the second ship that came to Plymouth Rock and has remained unfairly below our radar so to speak.

Every year, around the end of November, on the fourth Thursday of the month, we celebrate Thanksgiving Day. And when I say “celebrate,” I mean it. All the turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy, cranberries, walnuts, apple pie and liquors together making our lives with family and friends a feast not to be forgotten, never mind the extra calories that are difficult to dispose.

That date reminisces the arrival to the Plymouth Plantation of the famous Mayflower merchant ship with the earliest settlers of the American colony, and the welcoming they received by the Native Americans, still unaware of a future with more arrivals to the “piñata.”

This November commences a year that ends on the 400th anniversary of the Mayflower landing twelve months later. That was a game changer in the history of the world. It opened the doors to many dreaming Europeans who wanted out and built inroads to the virgin American continent starting in what soon would be called New England, the United States much later.

But we are entitled to additional celebrations that have remained, if not anonymous, at least ignored. Perhaps one Thursday party is enough, two Black Fridays too expensive. During the summer following the arrival of the Mayflower in November of 1620, that is the summer of 1621, another ship with additional pilgrims and religious exiles anchored in our shores: The Arbella.

The composition of the passengers of the two ships was different. The first brave optimists sailed with hope but little assurance of the success of their venture; the second was more confident of arriving and establishing themselves in the new land, making us wonder if the history of the millions who followed during the ensuing centuries didn't feel the same confidence.

These early colonizers were called pilgrims. The word is born in Middle English, from Anglo-French *pelerin*, *pilegrin*, from Late Latin *pelegrinus*, alteration of Latin *peregrinus* foreigner, from *peregrinus*, adjective, foreign, from *peregri* abroad, from *per* through.

Another word, 'wayfarer' is used as the basic definition of pilgrim by the Merriam Webster dictionary, followed by "one who travels to a shrine or holy place as a devotee" and finally, "one of the English colonists settling at Plymouth in 1620." Pardon me, but this description applies to very few American immigrants. The date distinction makes us believe that those who came in the Arbella should be actually considered migrants and not pilgrims in the same way that all of us who have come to America as immigrants cannot be considered pilgrims. This is a difference that we must keep in mind when we consider the old arguments in favor or against immigration.

There are some who feel they can claim pilgrim status because their ancestors came from Europe, any part of Europe, during the years following the Arbella's arrival to America up to the twentieth century, and then the pilgrim counting stopped. But the world has been full of pilgrims throughout the ages. The history of nations is actually the chronicle of latest arrivals to a land. And the word arrival is intrinsically a move by individuals who belong to the same group, the size of that group not necessarily important, and trying to remain within that group for protection.

If you read that long history you will soon realize that those moves were mostly bellicose enterprises. In our American continent, from the north down to the extreme south, for example, no natives extended an invitation to the British, Spanish or Portuguese kings that read "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!" (Emma Lazarus 1883.)

Those words engraved in the famous Statue of Liberty sent to us by the French and now standing on Staten Island, New York, were meant to be more welcoming than conquering, soothing, not conflictive. The Kings were more sanguine. She welcomes all castaways, misfits and homeless dreaming of freedom regardless of their tongues or accent versions. Accents are supposed to add flavor to the human experience, not shame. It was a new beginning, an effort to change the makeup of a nation that refused to be invaded but dared to be generous. America had become the land of the free by accepting the many who weren't.

Today there are some who would have no objection if we send Lady Liberty back to France, her extinguished torch included. Unfortunately, what we do is miss the biological, emotional and evolutionary nature of migration. People must be always on the move, whether we were the humanoids who populated the warmer lands traveling through the arctic circles on foot, the seafarers who built sails on tree trunks that could float the oceans, or those who walked through unofficial and nonexistent physical borders separating African from Middle Eastern and Asian nations taking shape.

That type of migration can no longer exist uncontrolled, we know that. But migration must be designed using new and unfamiliar, even experimental, behaviors. We must be reminded that “group thinking,” the inability to accept new ideas, is the beginning of the end of a group. It isn’t a matter of if, but when.

Societies don’t develop legally, culturally or biologically to handle new migration practices that have no logical basis in our human tradition. Survival has been a requirement of our evolution as a specie. People have to change, institutions have to change, geographical boundaries have to change, and it wouldn’t be surprising to see that such change will actually be precipitated by one of the most controversial of those changes these days: climate change.

We can build fences and mirrors between ourselves; the fences to separate us, the mirrors to let us look only at the reflection of images of those who look like ours, the different not needing to apply. But, as I said, that isn’t natural. It’s against our inbred tendency to move, to leave, to arrive and to join others “yearning to be free.” After all, we all yearn since the day we were born. We aren’t allowed the luxury to choose where we are born. We are only allowed the opportunity to choose where we’ll be buried. And in order to go from one to the other we must move. Welcome to the new world.

And that is my moving Point of View today.