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Sonia Sotomayor: The future of America

The Senate's confirmation last week of Sonia Sotomayor as the newest justice of the U.S. Supreme Court moves this country closer to the "more perfect union" promised in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. President Barack Obama called it "a wonderful day for America."

As is usually the case in such proceedings, there were some senators who thought otherwise. Nonetheless, a vote of 68-31 is substantial. According to Obama, the vote demonstrates that "Sotomayor has the intellect, the temperament, the history, the integrity and the independence of mind to ably serve on our nation's highest court."

Political pundits have opined that various senators voted "nay" for political or philosophical reasons. However, little has been said about the concern of many white Americans because of the country's growing ethnic population.

When the 13 American colonies declared independence from Great Britain in 1776, most of the primary founders were white Englishmen. There was even a reluctance to admit freed slaves as citizens. It took passage of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution in 1868 to solve the problem by declaring that anyone born in the U.S. automatically becomes a U.S. citizen.

Even with such a generous citizenship policy, whites remained the overwhelming majority of the population. This statistic was reinforced by minimal non-white immigration over the years. In 1800, the total U.S. population was only 5,308,483, according to census data. It increased to 76,212,168 by 1900, and was estimated to be 304,059,724 in 2008.

According to Professor Peter Rogerson, a demographer at the State University of New York at Buffalo, more than half of all the people born in the U.S. since 1776 were alive around 1997. His data concluded that this will not change until 2030.

As recently as 1995, 74 percent of the nation's population as non-Hispanic white, according to census data. However, demographers now predict that between 2040 and 2050, the majority population of the U.S. will be either black, Latino or Asian. This shift has been primarily precipitated by a substantial increase in Latino immigration.

Some Americans find the addition of the Latin culture to their environment to be an imposition. While fear of change is a common human frailty, racial and ethnic discrimination against new emigrants cannot be tolerated. It is important to consider rationally the impact of the new immigrants on American society.

The Immigrant Learning Center of Malden recently performed a great public service by commissioning a special study on the impact of immigrants in Massachusetts. The study, entitled "Massachusetts Immigrants by the Numbers: Demographic Characteristics and Economic Footprint," was prepared by a consortium of several departments at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

The state's immigrant population as of 2007 was substantial, comprising 14.1 percent of the total, according to the study. Only 39.6 percent of the 912,310 immigrants were non-Hispanic whites, a category that includes 85.7 percent of the state's population. The fastest growing group is Asians, 24.4 percent of the immigrant total, and Hispanics come in second with 18.7 percent.

One surprising statistic is that 24 percent of recent immigrants have a master's degree or higher,



"Bienvenida, Justice Sotomayor!"

compared to 15.7 percent of native-born residents. Another is that the rate of incarceration of foreign-born residents is less than that for natives. The study concluded that in Massachusetts, immigrants are an important element of the workforce.

Sotomayor provides a stellar example of what can be accomplished in America through hard work, discipline and talent. Her success is an affirmation of the promise of America and an inspiration to others who commit to the path of achievement.

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