

SCIENCE

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LETTERS

Fluorescent Tagging

Miriam Golomb's letter (28 Oct., p. 525) associates me with targeting "dark-skinned" people and mentions "yellow stars" because I proposed a relatively harmless alternative to the military-style procedures now being used to try to stop the flood of illegal immigrants on our southern border ("Fluorescent barriers to infiltration," 26 Aug., p. 1184). I wonder what Golomb would say about the Israeli security people who took great interest in the idea after I did the first experiments in 1968? They were also looking for less brutal ways to stop infiltrators who disrupt Israeli society. Indiscriminately harkening up the Holocaust to criticize an author or oppose an idea only creates indifference in disbelieving readers who should never forget that horrible history.

In the scheme I proposed, the fluorescent tagging material on the ground is only picked up by those who *break the law* by crossing forbidden areas. It would not be sprayed on innocent human beings. I clearly stated that use of this "low" technology was a decision to be made by our government, which would have to compare it with the barbed-wire fences, helicopters with search lights, military surveillance equipment, and armed guards now being used to no avail at a cost of over a billion dollars a year.

I wonder what Golomb would say if a million illegal immigrants invaded Missouri and the federal government demanded that the state pay for their welfare before Golomb's university salary? This is the reason a law to cut off the much-abused welfare and educational benefits to illegal immigrants was recently approved by 60% of California voters. Large numbers from all ethnic groups voted for this drastic measure, including many legal immigrants who have been pushed out of their jobs and communities by the onslaught of illegals in southern California. These are the same thoughtful people who voted in 1986 to grant amnesty to over 2 million undocumented aliens, most from Mexico, who were making their contributions to our country. As the host of a West Coast radio talk show, I led the battle in 1986 for approval of this initially unpopular legislation. Then we all stood horrified as 1.5 million more illegal immigrants flooded over the border. Most were well instructed on how to sign up for federally mandated, but state-paid, welfare and medical benefits not available to low-income citizens and legal immigrant fami-

lies who must pay the taxes.

The government is now building a "Berlin wall" on the Mexican border. I searched for more gentle ways to solve the problem. I doubt that I have qualified to be judged a racist by someone shaking Holocaust flash cards in the columns of a respected scientific journal.

Bill Wattenburg

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ESA's Planetary Program

Michael Balter's article "ESA plans for the early 21st century" (News, 21 Oct., p. 359) highlights the European Space Agency's (ESA's) plan for a Mercury Orbiter mission in the next decade. It does not mention, however, that an integral part of the same mission is the placement of two probes into the atmosphere of Venus while en route to Mercury. A close encounter of Venus is essential to obtain the trajectory change required for eventual insertion into Mercury orbit, but it is also a rare opportunity to further study this most puzzling of terrestrial planet atmospheres. The ESA committee proposing the Mercury mission, of which I was a member, recognized this as a part of the scientific justification for putting the project forward.

The Venus science is a key part of the political force behind a successful project. ESA planetary missions are so rare (only the Huygens Titan probe so far, if one does not count the Giotto and Rosetta cometary probes) that unless the community is broadly satisfied by the range of objectives proposed, internal dissent can damage any project's chances of funding in the inevitable competition with the much more successful and organized astronomy community.

The likely success of the combined Venus-Mercury mission, with its broad, balanced, and exciting range of objectives, offers the whole suffering planetary science community something really exciting to look forward to.

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