

Pillars of Portland

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To Whom It May Concern:

I have been asked to write a letter of recommendation for Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh pertaining to his immigration status. I can't honestly say I've ever had the pleasure of chatting with the chap but I don't think he should get booted. Here's why.

First, I'd better give you a quickie history on my credentials as an immigration expert:

- 1965 - 1970 Professional baseball player, Philadelphia Phillies and San Diego Padres
- 1971 - 1976 High School English teacher, Portland Public Schools
- 1977 - 1983 Freelance writer; credits include Sports Illustrated, Willamette Week, Oregonian and Idol Time, a book about the world champion Portland Trail Blazers; currently writing a CBS prime-time movie

In November, 1982 I spent three days in Rajneeshpuram researching a cover story on the Rajneesh. The story ran in the January 9, 1983 Northwest Magazine of the Sunday Oregonian.

When I was at the ranch, I stood by the roadside when Mr. B. cruised by in one of his shiney Rolls Royce. I watched the disciples reactions. If they weren't having a religious experience, then it doesn't rain in Portland.

And about those Rolls Royces. Lots of people think 28 of them is a bit in excess. Personally, I'd rather see 28 Rolls rolling down my street than 28 tanks. I heard they just sold four of the cars for \$30,000 profit a piece. If that isn't American, what is?

Another complaint about the Rajneesh is that they are ripping off the environment. Have you seen what the California land developers did to Beaverton? Come on. The land at Rajneeshpuram is the pits. The rocks don't even want to be there. What the Rajneesh have done with that land is nothing short of a miracle.

Is the Bhagwan brainwashing his people? All I know is that I

have never met a more healthy, happy and friendly lot. No drugs, minimal booze and if they are into wild sex, as it has been said, I didn't see it on my visit. And believe me, I looked.

Is the Bhagwan's silence the big issue? Heck, 99% of the world's leaders are a bunch of hot air anyway; maybe silence might be a refreshing change. Besides, Mr. B. has about 300 books and 100 video tapes to his credit. His religious philosophy is no mystery.

If the deciding factor in his deportation hearing is whether he is a religious leader or not, there should be little debate. 15,000 people from all over the world didn't pour into Rajneeshpuram to go duck hunting. They came on a religious holiday. A person does not have to act in Hollywood to become president; a person doesn't have to be 6'11" to coach basketball; and a person doesn't have to speak to be a leader. The key is the ability to inspire. Helen Keller was inspirational and she didn't speak too much either.

Just as there are different ways to skin a cat, there are different ways to go to church. I have no desire to become a Rajneesh; I have my own religion. But this country was founded on the concept of religious freedom. Isn't that why the pilgrims left England in the first place?

Another beef against the Bhagwan and his people is that they took over the town of Antelope. I can see the side of the townspeople. I wouldn't be too crazy about 500 people in red taking over my block either. But when blacks started moving into neighborhoods all over the country, they didn't try to send Martin Luther King to Africa. (They shot him instead.) Didn't we learn anything from the civil rights marches back in the 60s?

Some people are worried that El Bhag and his people are going to take over Oregon. Have you seen their arsenal? They don't have a gun to their name. They don't have any crime either.

Some people have said that getting rid of the Bhagwan will mean

his followers will leave too. If you believe that, maybe you'd let me sell you a piece of the Burnside Bridge. Bhagwan's presence in Rajneeshpuram is only the icing on the cake to his disciples; the ranch, the people and the project are the cake.

Every day this country accepts Asian refugees, Haitian runaways and Mexican laborers. We even harbored the Shah of Iran, who allegedly murdered thousands of people. Bhagwan hasn't hurt anyone.

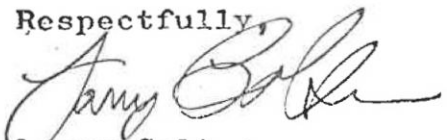
Religious tolerance may be the issue in this case. People aren't used to new ideas, like peace and harmony and love.

As I mentioned earlier, I don't want to join the Rajneesh. Then again, I wouldn't sell the condo for the Pope nor would I be thrilled if a new convent went up across the street. I'd probably move. That's the way it is.

Rajneeshpuram: Love it or leave it alone

I think it would be a great American tragedy if Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh is deported. Religious freedom is a vital part of our national fabric and clearly anyone who has stood side by side with the Rajneesh know that the Bhagwan is their spiritual leader.

Respectfully,



Larry Colton