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## They're people too

REP. STEVE KING RECENTLY STOOD before the House of Representatives, razor wire in hand, and advocated electrifying the southern U.S. border with a current strong enough to be a "disincentive" but weak enough to keep from killing people. "We do that with livestock all the time," the Iowa Republican noted.

Maybe King should tune into FX. Tonight at 10, the cable channel will air a captivating episode of Morgan Spurlock's "30 Days" documentary program that people on all sides of the immigration debate should watch. In it, Frank Jorge, a member of the Minuteman Project border-vigilante group, spends one month living in a tiny, one-bedroom East L.A. apartment with a family of seven Mexican immigrants, most of them illegal, who he thinks should be deported. Jorge leaves his documents at home in Mojave, does handyman work with the stoic father and argues immigration politics over meals and golf rounds with the family's charming (and totally Americanized) teenage daughter.

The result is gripping television — not because the protagonists change their views significantly but because we get to watch Jorge register his slow-dawning shock that the same class of people he has pointed guns at can be noble, hardworking, funny, angry, God-fearing, sassy, patriotic . . . and, well, human.

This is a truism too frequently sidestepped. Restrictionists are fond of using terms of derision like

"illegals" (a word that somehow never gets affixed to tax evaders, pot smokers or scandal-embroiled politicians) and too often compare a class of mostly decent human beings to rodents or insects. "Illegals," Rep. Ted Poe (R-Texas) recently warned his colleagues, "have been drawn to Colorado like moths to a flame."

The set-up of tonight's episode is perhaps too loaded to be representative. Jorge himself was born in a foreign country (Cuba) and speaks Spanish. The Gonzales family seems almost impossibly likable; no trace of trouble or complaint is on display. And even though Jorge has since insisted that the show's editing makes him out to be more sympathetic to the family than he actually is, no editing could fake the bond that grows between them, and no shadow of a doubt clouds the episode's most powerful moment — when Jorge visits the Gonzales' brutally poor and run-down village in Mexico.

It's too much to ask of a television show that it solve a seemingly intractable dispute. But by showing the humanity on both sides of the issue, "30 Days" provides a valuable and timely public service.