

Daphne Vantine

Essay Question: Congress and the President have once again failed to reform immigration. Discuss what you believe an immigration reform bill should include and what it should exclude.

Unfortunately, the word "immigration" brings a feeling of distaste in the twenty first century. A country that has thrived thanks to the massive emigration over the past two hundred years now resents the passage of foreigners over our borders. The topic of immigration is now generally seen as a problem instead of a natural and healthy process. What has changed? The geographical distributions of countries immigrants flee from have changed. One hundred years ago, the vast amount of those emigrating to the United States were Western European. In 2011, 29% of illegal immigrants were Mexican. The Democratic and Republican parties have failed to reach a compromise that represents both of their beliefs.

The influx of illegal Mexican immigration has left a bitter taste in America's mouth. Mexico's close proximity to the United States has caused a lack of assimilation and the subsequent American disrespect. Sharing a border with the United States, Mexican immigrants do not have to leave much behind when communication and transportation to the motherland is now readily available. Author Samuel Huntington notes in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, "immigrants from Europe or Asia cross oceans; Mexicans walk across a border or wade across a river." They do not have to make the same cultural sacrifices that Chinese, Indian, or African immigrants must make. As a result, Mexicans are resistant to adopt the same "American dream" values that immigrants in the past have accepted. Huntington also notes, "...some evidence suggests that resistance to assimilation is stronger among Mexican migrants than it was with

other immigrant groups and that Mexicans tend to retain their Mexican identity." Their failure to adopt American customs of education, most importantly, puts them far behind in the pecking order. Subsequently, Americans, through no fault of their own, do not take Mexican immigrants or Mexican-Americans seriously. The experiences we have with different ethnic populations shape our thinking and attitudes towards those groups. It is not racism that fuels our distaste towards Mexican immigration, but rather the lack of positive and beneficial experience we have had with that group.

National security threats have prompted immigration officials and policy makers to place stifling restrictions on immigration. Colleges and universities in the United States are so welcoming of foreign students and pride themselves on their diverse student bodies. Yet the process for bright students from overseas to obtain VISAs is extremely challenging and time consuming. After graduation, it is still a struggle to obtain temporary or permanent work VISAs. In an attempt to keep the United States as secure as possible, bright students and professionals can be excluded from entering the country and contributing to the academic and specialized realms of our society. Those excluded may be foreign doctors, engineers, and professors who may be essential to the advancement of medicine, technology, and education – all of which would improve American life. Most potential immigrants are not trying to kill Americans. They seek freedom and opportunities to better themselves and their children.

But since the attacks on 9/11, the threat of terrorism has been unveiled to the American public and altered society in every imaginable way possible. Each American citizen and those who wish to become one pay the price for protection every day. There are attempted terror strikes frequently, more than we could ever imagine. Did the Olympics in Sochi really go off without a hitch? No. The Russian government spent billions to host the Olympics, much of

which was spent on security. They squashed any glimpse of violence. America *has* been doing the same things for years. The only stories of terrorism that actually reach the American public's ears are the successful attempts and those that reach mainstream media. The US government does not make every attempt at terrorism public record for at least three reasons: they do not want Americans living in fear, they do not want Americans to lose faith in law enforcement, and they also do not want to give future terrorists a roadmap of "what not to do" or "how not to get caught."

In the discussion of illegal Mexican immigration, we often forget that the "illegal aliens" are real people with real hopes and dreams. We cannot entirely blame them for their hopes to escape a dangerous country and provide bright futures for their children. There are different aspects to be included in immigration reform, two namely being the issue of the border and how to deal with illegal immigrants once they pass it.

We should take measures to secure the border, maintaining the physical walls and fences and ensuring the safety of border officials. But it would be a mistake to continue to build and construct a massive, impermeable wall. America should encourage legal immigration instead of sending the message that Mexicans are unwelcome. Especially since the American-Canadian border is hardly a border at all.

The heart of Congress and the President's failure to draft acceptable immigration legislation is because both parties grip so tightly to their principles. It is great that Democrats and Republicans feel pride for their party's founding beliefs, however with the issue of immigration, these principles are the sole reason that nothing has been decided upon. Instead of relying on principles, both parties need to focus on what is practical. There are 11 million undocumented

immigrants in the country, and the number will likely grow. We must decide what to do with the immigrants who have already arrived, not solely on filling the porous border that exists. A great place to start is with a "probationary legal status," an idea that Senator Marco Rubio has put forth. This requires illegal immigrants to pass background checks and pay fees before they can gain the opportunity for citizenship. Additionally, these immigrants will not qualify for federal benefits.

Decisions must also be made regarding the fate of illegal immigrant children who were brought to the United States at very young ages. Something must be done to give these children a chance to succeed. Since the DREAM Act failed to pass, Republicans have recently started to draft a very similar bill. Some may view the decision *as* amnesty, but these children are suffering in poverty due to their parents' unlawful actions. This is another example where we must think in practical terms. In years to come, these same children will grow up unskilled and uneducated. Maybe some will eventually become citizens. Then when they live under the poverty line, American taxpayers will have to finance the government assistance programs that these children and their families will then benefit from. It may not support our principles, but educating and improving the lives of immigrants will be the least costly down the road.

Immigration is not black and white, but rather a vast region of gray area. There are so many aspects that go into legislation, but Mexican immigration is our prime focus at the moment. We cannot build up our border and push every last illegal immigrant back to Mexico. We must continue to attract bright people and avoid appearing as an uninviting country that ignores its founding principles. It is now our duty to create a cohesive America society, one in which everyone obeys the law.