

Chris Morley CCM425

Worthington Essay Contest

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Who were your parents? Who were their's? All of us, after we extend this question back through the generations, arrive at the same answer: immigrants. We are none of us American through racial ties or heritage: we become American through acceptance of certain principles and ethics. We express this ethic in our constitution and we attempt to uphold this ethic in our government. What has come under question recently is whether we extend the opportunity that our nation offers and, along with it, certain rights and responsibilities that make us American. It is proposed that we restrict the rights of immigrants in the United States in an attempt to halt the overpopulation of our nation-- the legislation would deny the citizenship of immigrants who give birth to more than two children while in the United States. While I recognise the noble effort to preserve the integrity of this nation, we must recognise that, by sacrificing the rights of those within our nation, we are left with nothing to preserve.

The solution proposed by the senator, while perhaps honourable in its intent to safeguard the integrity of the nation, is unfeasible in its practice. Immigration and population growth as they exist today are unsustainable. That is not the issue. Nor do I deny that there is a compelling state interest in imposing regulations and controls to preserve our natural resources, the infrastructure and the economy. However, the proposed legislation achieves the opposite of its goals-- the state's interest in preserving the integrity of the nation would be subverted by the restrictions placed on immigrants. The Senator proposes barring immigrants from citizenship who bear more than two children in the United States. This policy does not reflect the accepting and inclusive society that forms the basis of our nation; nor does it reflect effective policy making. The

legislation may well cause a decrease in the recorded number of legal resident aliens, but they will not cease to exist. We will see a rise in the number of illegal immigrants who, denied the opportunity for legitimate employment, only add to the already vast number of illegally employed aliens. Undocumented and unregulated employment of illegal aliens in the United States places a great burden on the economy-- contributing nothing in tax dollars and taking jobs from hardworking taxpayers. Illegal workers are typically paid in cash: they work outside of the traditional employment and are either paid without proper benefits and tax withholding-- reducing revenues in an already-burdened public-finance sector; or rely on forged or fraudulent identification, denying the worker the benefits associated with their contribution. This creates a cheap, expendable and often exploitable workforce that increases hardship for individual Americans and hinders the effective governing of state and nation. Illegals in the United States have been estimated by the Center for Immigration Studies to cost the United States ten billion dollars every year; the legislation that would increase their number is in fact *detrimental* to the economy. Moreover, the cost of enforcement of this legislation would further drain federal and state coffers. The US Department of Homeland Security spends millions of dollars a year on locating and deporting illegal aliens. If we are to place further restrictions on the process of naturalisation and prevent immigrants from gaining citizenship, the increased flow of illegal aliens across our borders would cost taxpayers millions more.

Equally problematic are the moral issues raised by the practice of this legislation. The bill in fact subverts the strong family values inherent in our society and is

impracticable when combined with any sense of compassion. Consider, for a moment, a female immigrant to the United States who bears three children. Under the Constitution, her children are American citizens, entitled to the protection of this great nation; yet their mother is permanently ineligible for American citizenship, can potentially be precluded from earning a living to support her children and could well be deported from the United States. A potential solution to this problem, and perhaps the most compassionate in the circumstances, is to place the mother and three children on welfare: supporting all four, putting the children through school, paying medical coverage, housing, utilities, food and any other foreseeable expenses until such time when all three children are self supporting and no longer require their mother's presence. At which point we deport the mother after a period which could well be over twenty years, a time in which she has made this country her home; or let her stay on as an unemployed welfare dependant-- neither option being truly feasible or compassionate. Alternatively, we could deport the entire family, denying three citizens their birthright, or deport only the mother, leaving the children in foster care and denying them access to vital maternal nurturing. Consider, further, that not all children are born in to the traditional model of a nuclear family and that the Senator's proposal is blinkered to the problems this may cause. Perhaps an immigrant-- a hard working man, marries another immigrant-- a single mother of two American born children. The man adopts her children and then the couple have a child of their own. What then? Are we to penalise just the mother as she has had three children? Or are we to sanction the father also as he, acting in the best of intentions, adopted the two children and fathered the third? A major reason for the increased fertility of immigrants is their

reliance on large families for economic support. If we are to restrict the number of children a couple may bear in the United States, then we risk facing the same issues that have troubled China since the institution of her One Child Policy. A preference for male children, who can earn more money and better support the family, may well cause an increase in abortion of unwanted female fetuses, neglect of daughters, a resurgence of misogynistic beliefs and even infanticide-- all of which would have stemmed directly from this proposal. We cannot form a logical, compassionate solution to these dilemmas under the proposed legislation. Indeed, the legislation contradicts the history of our nation as one which welcomes diverse cultures. "Here," said Walt Whitman, "is not merely a nation, but a teeming nation of nations." The senator's proposition creates an America that denies the hopes of many, an America that denies its own heritage, an America we cannot allow. We must stand, lifting the torch and welcoming new immigrants through the golden door.

The United States has been built on the backs of immigrants. They came across the Bering Strait, they came to Plymouth Rock, to Ellis Island and across the Rio Grande, from Asia, from Europe, from Africa, from South and Central America all hoping for a better life. But none found a better life here: they built one for themselves. There are those here who may be able to trace their ancestors back to the Mayflower. Are they more American than the descendants of the Italians who laboured in the mines? The Chinese who worked California's gold fields or built the Central Pacific Railway? The Jewish garment workers? More American than the Irish who built the New York Fire

Department? What makes an American is not lineage but ethic. The history of immigration, which may well be said to be the history of America, is a tumultuous one marked by prejudice, poverty, tension and violence; but if it shows us anything, it shows us that immigrants will come and that they will WORK. Immigrants have always been among the most hardworking, productive and patriotic members of our society. We see now a differing trend in immigration from the 1800's and early 1900's. Rather than the Asian and European migration that allowed industrialisation and built our most famous cities, we have a large flow of immigrants across our southern border. Is there any reason to believe that these immigrants constitute an innate threat to our nation? No! Is there any reason to believe that these immigrants will work less hard than those who built America? There is not. Visit any construction site in California, New Mexico or Texas; almost every labourer is Hispanic. These are people who have found employment and typically work *considerably more* than the forty hour work week. They work many hours of overtime to put their children through school so that they might achieve something higher. This is the traditional pattern of immigrants in the United States: a group, a person, a family traditionally disadvantaged by a lower standard of education, less capital and fewer marketable skills, through hard work, perseverance and education becomes integrated in to the American melting pot, bringing new culture, new knowledge and, most importantly, bringing America's greatest resource-- people.

America itself does not possess an innate spirit or character. We are not defined by a race, we have all of them, nor by geography, there is far too much of it, nor by our

government, which exists to be defined, not to define. The spirit of America lies in its people. A people who define the spirit of America each time they 'ask not what their country can do for them, but what they can do for their country.' An indelible mark is left on our nation by each person who sets foot here, wherever they came from. The Declaration of Independence bears the signatures of Cesar Rodney and William Paca, both of Italian descent. The list of firefighters who sacrificed their lives on September the 11th could just as well be a list of the citizens from an Irish or Italian town: Callahan, Byrd, McShane, O'Rourke, Agnello, Angelini, Canizzaro, Ragaglia. The most famous son of America's national sport, Babe Ruth was the grandson of a German immigrant and one of eight children. The work of William Friedman, a cryptologist born in Russia, allowed victory at the Battle of Midway, halting the Japanese offensive in the Pacific. Glen Seaborg, born of Swedish immigrants, discovered plutonium, won a Nobel prize, discovered other elements now widely used in cancer treatment and served in advisory capacity to every president from Truman to George H.W. Bush. The governor of the great state of California, from whence came this legislation I oppose, is himself an immigrant, and the father of four children. President John F Kennedy was the fourth generation descended from poor Irish immigrants who had four children, Kennedy's grandfather being the *youngest*. Although these stand as inspiring examples, equally inspiring are the millions of stories that do not get told-- the tales of those who came here seeking a better life and found it; found an opportunity to make a living, to raise a family, to enjoy and contribute to the wealth of opportunity of America. One out of every five people in America is a first or second generation immigrant, but *five* out of every five

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people in America are descended from immigrants. When we challenge the right an immigrant has to make new life, to bring children in to this world, we challenge the foundations of our nation and we weaken its future. Every single American is a descendant of immigrants. We enjoy the fruits of our parents' labour, the labour of people who came to build a better place for themselves and a better place for their children. Are we to tear that down?

My uncle told me repeatedly when I was growing up not to complain about a problem if I didn't have a solution. For all the complaining I have been doing, I feel compelled to offer an appropriate solution. Immigration exists; it will always exist and so we must work at ensuring that modern immigration is managed such that it is a fair, equitable system. One which will allow immigrants to enjoy the benefits of America, and America the benefits of immigration. Placing sanctions on immigrants for having too many children does not solve any problems, it creates more. While recent immigrants do form a sizeable portion of the population, they are an easy scapegoat for problems within our nation. Typically under-employed, under-represented and under-educated, they are the tired and the poor, the huddled masses that Lady Liberty welcomes in to New York Harbor. To effectively deny them their right to choose how many children they have is inconsistent with the strong values that this nation was built on. We must rather look to policy which upholds our American values and constitutional rights and benefits our society.

The first step is to come to terms with immigration, that it will always exist in one form or another. We need to expand the scope of *legal* immigration, increasing the flow of immigrants through legitimate channels. By doing so, we lessen the pressure on illegitimate means of entry, immediately decreasing pressure on the law enforcement departments involved with controlling immigration. thereby saving the millions of tax dollars that are spent every year on deporting illegals and preventing their entry. Immigration controls as they stand now and as they would exist under the immoral and impracticable proposed legislation are a threat to our nation's security. Law enforcement agencies direct much of their time, energy and funding towards fighting illegal immigration; to increase their task would be to draw much needed reserves away from combating the drug trade, preventing violent crime and fighting terrorism. Every illegal alien that the Department of Homeland Security must locate, apprehend and deport compromises our nation's security. The focus must be on the successful integration of a larger number of immigrants. Allowing for greater legal immigration allows in a larger number of immigrants who can be gainfully employed, pay taxes and stimulate the economy. Rather than using immoral sanctions to hunder the rights of immigrants to have children, we must evaluate and institute methods which allow immigrants to be an economic and societal advantage, instead of a hindrance. The provision of affordable health care to immigrants is a necessary step in preventing their becoming a burden on social welfare programs. Allowing immigrants access to health clinics providing sexual education, contraceptives and counseling will immediately reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies which contribute to overpopulation. While we work at reducing

the birth rate through the provision of support and information, we must also provide the opportunity for education to immigrants so they have the tools to build their life in America and become Americans. Affordable public education, government subsidised college loans, inexpensive community colleges-- these are the means to benefit from immigration. When we provide an education to immigrants, we invest in the future. Education helps immigrants get better jobs, integrate into our society, contribute to our culture and build America.

We must not fall in to the trap of creating a welfare state in which we are burdened with the unemployed. If we do, immigration becomes a detriment to our nation. Let us look to stimulating the economy, encouraging investment and growth such that immigrants become hard working members of society who earn and spend money, pay taxes, take pride in what they have achieved, contribute to our greatness and share our rewards. Rather than the creation of government built slums, let the government provide programs which help immigrants buy their own home. Counseling in money management and consumerism, even subsidised home loans or loan guarantees for low-income families which allow immigrants to build their assets through home equity all help build pride of place, create strong neighbourhoods and communities. This is the very realisation of the American dream that so many are seeking.

We do face a problem today of unsustainable population growth, but we must not succumb to unfeasible and unfair policies. Let us instead look forward to creative and constructive solutions. We must acknowledge that immigrants will always be here, but we must also realise that immigration built America, that immigration is a positive thing. Let us not institute a legislation which threatens the rights of immigrants and debases our moral code, let us accept new arrivals, help them build their lives here and, like so many before them, live their own American dream. We are all immigrants, and we are all American. Our ancestors worked hard to make this place their own and to

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make it available to those who came after them. When we hinder the rights of immigrants to bring their children in to this nation, we insult the principles our ancestors embraced when they came here. So ask yourself again: Who were your parents? And who will your children be?