

Take Two: Immigrants

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Immigrants are important to this country's past, present and future. From the beginning of our nation, immigrants—people who were foreign to this land—were the ones who helped in many important phases in this country's inception. The pilgrims were the first of the immigrants to come to this land. Then came the many that entered from Ellis Island from the early 1900s, many of whom were Irish, Italian, Polish and Russian.¹ There is a good chance that if you are a white American, then your ancestors were the first of the many immigrants who had come to this land for the opportunities it promised. They were the hard-working masses, the working class that worked in the factories during the industrial boom in America.

19th-century industrial growth “transformed American society. It produced a new class of wealthy industrialists and a prosperous middle class. It also produced a vastly expanded blue collar working class. The labor force that made industrialization possible was made up of millions of newly arrived immigrants and even larger numbers of migrants from rural areas. American society became more diverse than ever before.” (Industrial America). They came for opportunities and economic growth, and provide for their children: “Many came to the U. S. because it was perceived as the land of economic opportunity. Others came seeking personal freedom or relief from political and religious persecution. With hope for a brighter future, nearly 12 million immigrants arrived in the United States between 1870 and 1900” (Industrial America). That sentiment among immigrants has not changed today. They want nothing but the best for their children and their futures, like many others do.

Trump has famously said “We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in— and we’re stopping a lot of them—but we’re taking people out of the country. You wouldn’t believe how bad these people are. These aren’t people. These are animals.” (Lind, 2018) This is a blatant and racist lie because most of “them” helped to shape and build this nation to what it is today. Immigrants are the reason we have railroads, skyscrapers, and many other things.² Some newer invention also made by immigrants are flash drives, Atm’s, Radios, YouTube, Basketball, Jeans, pens, contraceptive pills, airplane and so many more. Although, arguably the most important contribution to the modern world is the phone—specifically iPhones, which were made by Steve Jobs who was the child of a Syrian refugee.

Steve Jobs’ success goes even further back to Alexander Graham Bell, another immigrant who invented the telephone. There are so many different aspects of American culture which was built upon the work and inventions of thousands upon thousands of immigrants and the stereotypes that immigrants are nothing but freeloaders is highly untrue. The contributions that immigrants made to the creation of this country make them worthy of being in the nation that was built up by them.

It has to be put into perspective that being an “immigrant” does not have the same meaning today that it had in the past. While there was still much discrimination against 19th-century immigrants from Europe, they did not face generations of discrimination. For example, many of those earlier immigrants were from Ireland and they were also treated harshly and discriminated against. “Ill will toward Irish immigrants because of their poor living conditions, and their willingness to work for low wages was often exacerbated by religious conflict. Centuries of tension between Protestants and Catholics found their way into United States cities and verbal attacks often led to mob violence...Protestants burned

down St. Mary's Catholic Church in New York City in 1831, while in 1844, riots in Philadelphia left thirteen dead.”(Religious Conflict and Discrimination). But European immigrants do not face widespread discrimination anymore while newer immigrants still do. Many people, when imagining an immigrant today, think of someone from Mexico or people from the Middle East and they focus on their darker skin or religion. Furthermore, “immigration enforcement has disproportionately targeted Mexicans and Central Americans. The racial bias can be found at both the federal and local levels, where local police are becoming increasingly involved in locating unauthorized immigrants.”(Institutional Racism in Enforcing Immigration Law).

Another aspect to remember is that a number of immigrants are fleeing from circumstances or events that they did not cause. An example would be Syrian refugees, who are legally able to seek asylum within the United States. “A ‘refugee’ is any person who is outside his or her country of nationality...is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group”(“Asylum Law and Procedure,” 2014). That is exactly what is happening actively, even now, to the Syrian population. The situation is so dire that some people send their children away from them on dangerous boat rides to safer places (even with the high chance of drowning out at sea).³ There is a legitimate urgency among the Syrian refugees because of their circumstances. People rightfully seeking asylum from horrible circumstances are turned away because of our 45,000 refugee cap (now down to 30,000). Thousands are turned away in their time of need because of United States’ policies.

This is similar to World War II and what happened to the Jewish people and how the United States helped too late:

Violence against Jews and their property was on the rise. During Kristallnacht in 1938, synagogues, businesses, and homes were burned and thousands of Jews were interned for varying periods of time in concentration camps...In July 1938, delegates from 32 nations met in...to discuss how to respond to the refugee crisis...most said that they were unable to increase their country's immigration quotas, citing the worldwide economic depression. The representatives spoke...not about people but about "numbers" and "quotas." In the end, only one country, the Dominican Republic, officially agreed to accept refugees from Europe. (Facing History and Ourselves).

We did not help the Jewish people because of what we already knew but because our own nation was attacked during in Pearl Harbor Although the truth of what was done by Nazi Germany was only apparent after we had acted, there were many events happening in Europe that the United States overlooked and refused to help with, such as the many killings and humiliating things done to the Jewish people even before the concentration camps were revealed.

Many of the negative stereotypes about immigrants are intensified and projected many times in the media. The way that the media portrays any kind of negative stereotype is something that is seen in many facets such as the news, movies, television shows, etc. Farris and Mohamed point out:

Recent research shows that U.S. media often show immigrants the way that the Trump

administration sees them: as males in detention facilities and in Border Patrol's custody. That influences Americans' attitudes toward those migrants. The current emphasis on showing children has offered a sympathetic portrayal of immigrant families that may be less common, according to our data. (Farris/Mohamed, June 27)

Most media has an agenda. Sometimes it is a good one, for example, some movies have morals and are supposed to help people, mostly children, find out what is right and what is wrong. But often the media, including the news media, shows immigrants as dark-skinned criminals who need to be detained and it very clearly pushes an anti-immigrant sentiment.

Most immigrants are the opposite of hardened criminals and are mostly made up of families striving to make a living for their families. Some immigrants report that they teach their children to work harder: "Jai Ghose, a junior math major said that while growing up his parents especially emphasized the importance of working hard because they were immigrants... 'We have to work this much harder to get this.' They did not have the same support structures [as other Americans]. '...a new immigrant coming to America has to entirely start over in a country where they... don't know many people and may not even know the language but have to find a way to support their families anyway'" (Perception of immigrants, Green). As I have stated before, most immigrants are just people who want the best for their own families and children. They are hard-working people who have to move to a strange land to make ends meet and they take this risk for many reasons. They can be fleeing a war zone, leaving to make a better future for their kids or simply because they want to live here.

How immigrants are looked at and have been looked at throughout the years in this country is wrong. We have history to show proof of that. Throughout this essay, I have been showing the many reasons immigrants have a rightful place in our society today. Many of those things include, showing the many modern and pivotal inventions and ideas many immigrants throughout history have given to the United States to bring it to the technological stage it is at right now. However, I should not have to name off the merits of immigrants to show that they are worth letting into the United States. Many immigrants are people fleeing or just trying to live their lives and they deserve to live here.

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¹ “U.S. Immigration Statistics: Immigration Station at Ellis Island, NY. .” *Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration*, 27 Oct. 2017.

² Herron, Antwan. “12 Things Immigrants Made That Americans Use Every Day.” *Wear Your Voice*, 17 Feb. 2017, wearyourvoicemag.com/more/politics/12-things-immigrants-made.

³ Bond, Kate. “A Syrian Boy Who Risked His Life to Cross the Sea.” *UNHCR*, UNHCR, 17 Apr. 2014, www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2014/4/534fc8b46/syrian-boy-risked-life-cross-sea.html.