

“How to Protect America’s Borders?”

...Lay Policy, Not Stone

Chloe Makdad

2016 American Legion Essay Contest Winner

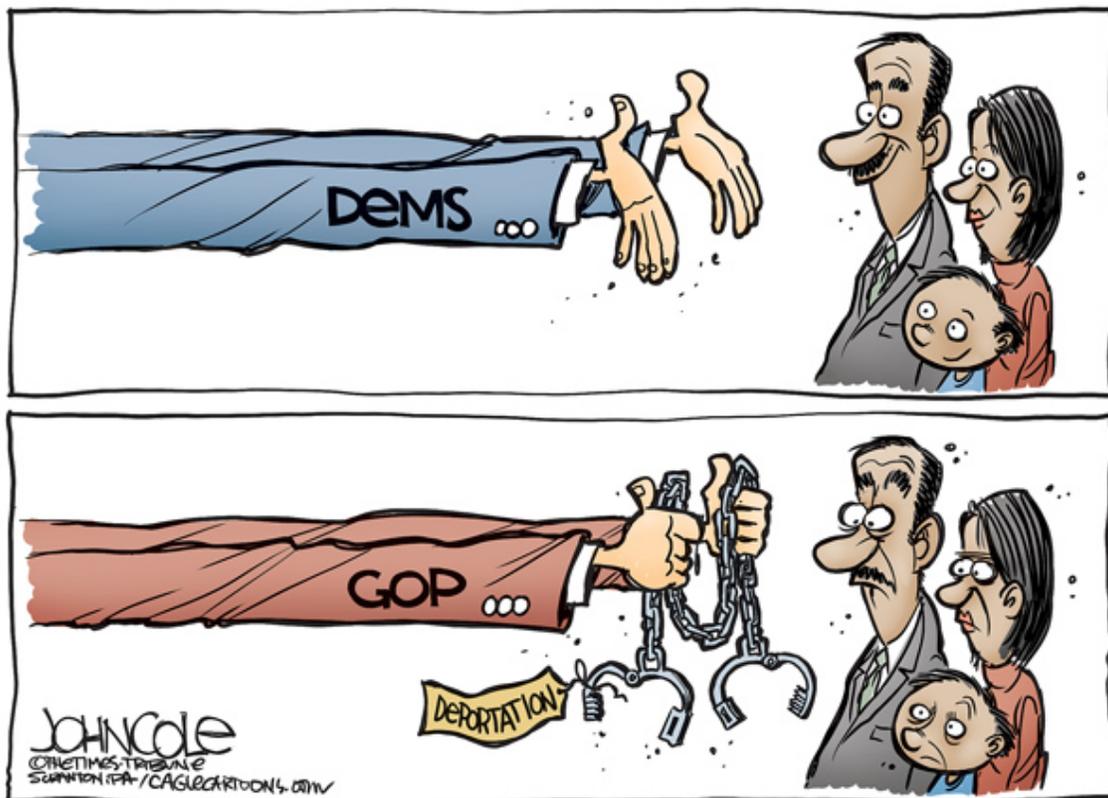
“Something there is that doesn't love a wall.”
— Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”

Philosopher George Santayana postulated that those who ignore history’s lessons are doomed to repeat them (Santayana 284). Many nations, America included, possess rich

histories of ignoring the past while addressing issues of the present. America has an even richer history of immigrants, not the least of whom is Santayana. From the anonymous nomads who trudged across the Siberian land-bridge of the Pleistocene to the Founding Fathers themselves, each American can trace his lineage to a foreigner. Escaping persecution, poverty, and even the vagaries of continental ice sheets, immigrants across epochs have set foot on this land with the same vision: a better life. Clouding that vision is the polar vortex of 2016’s political climate, where presidential hopefuls preach ideas as extreme as the weather and where substantive policy congeals at a glacial pace. Clinging to their extremist policies, posturing politicians may be overlooking the most effective solutions. Accurate assessment of the border threat, a nod to the history books, and rudimentary analysis of economic behavior can provide the United States with sound policy direction.

Asking how many real-estate moguls it takes to change a lightbulb may be unfair, but it

LATINO ‘OUTREACH.’



is fair to ask how many it takes to distinguish a legitimate border threat from a manufactured one. While the liberal media and conservative pundits alike blindly accept the notion that unauthorized immigration is rampant, a 2012 study by Pew Research Center found that more Mexicans are fleeing rather than rushing America's border, refuting a premise that politicians hold dearly and that many American voters are misled to believe (Gonzalez-Barrera 1). Complicating matters, images of anti-American sympathizers at the Boston Marathon bombing and at the bloody San Bernardino shooting are still fresh in the minds of many. While terrorism remains a prominent threat, voters must remember that these attacks were largely homegrown, not border-related.

Before the United States and Mr. Trump christen a wall more "magnificent" than any other in human history, it is worth noting that until 1882's Chinese Exclusion Act, Congress passed no laws restricting the flow of immigrants. The act spawned a series of laws targeting ethnic groups until the 1950's, when the Immigration and Nationality Act replaced ethnicity-based policies with national origins quotas (Ewing 1). Beneath each measure lay an economic motive, with pro-labor populists wishing to spare American jobs and management yearning for talent willing to work for bottom-dollar. These same motives resonate today in the corporate world's hunger for "workers to do the jobs that Americans won't do," and for visas recruiting foreign STEM workers at the expense of homegrown graduates.

A sustainable border solution must eschew political extremes and address economic forces. Opening the border to anyone wishing to enter is tantamount to throwing a welcome party for drug runners and Islamic terrorists. Conversely, building a border wall, especially a "magnificent wall with a beautiful door," would squander untold billions of dollars, assuming Mexican leaders are not infatuated enough with Mr. Trump's comb-over to front the bill (Fox 1). Walls, like Trump, make great theater but are abysmally ineffective, only deepening the abyss of the national debt (Randolph 1). The national debt would also sustain a fiscally irresponsible blow with the quarter-trillion dollar cost of mass deportation (Vinik 1). Likewise, Trump's

corollary solution of excluding entire religious groups will inadvertently stimulate ISIS recruitment and encourage anti-American attitudes. In fact, it already has.

Instead, a feasible border policy must discourage unauthorized immigration by addressing both the flaws within the current legal immigration system and the labor policies and economic dynamics that drive immigrants to the United States in the first place. According to the American Immigration Council, 98% of undocumented immigrants would prefer to live and work legally in the United States and would do so if they had the necessary family relations. Without family ties, however, they could wait upwards of two decades for a visa (Real 1). These protracted waits encourage illegal immigration, but by streamlining the current legal immigration system, foreigners would be empowered to enter the country legally. Alterations must include implementing more efficient processing of applications, of course, but also the allocation of visas in a manner proportional to the number of applicants from a country.

That said, streamlining the current legal immigration system is not a panacea. An economic solution to border control would make America less inviting for unauthorized immigrants. The 2012 Pew Research Center study points to the weakened recessionary job market as an integral factor in slowing Mexican immigration (Passel 1). Without the promise of jobs, not surprisingly, immigrants find the United States less appealing, and while Americans would prefer the job market to remain strong, means exist to mimic the recessionary effect. Immigrants often fill "the jobs Americans simply won't do," but removing long-term, able-bodied citizens from welfare programs, binding food stamps to job placement, and enforcing policies designed to discourage employers from hiring unauthorized immigrants would all dampen the economic factors that make the United States appealing to them. Loopholes exist that may perpetuate the economic lure for illegal immigration, but hunger is a potent motivator for natives and foreigners alike. Closing the gaps in United States policy that allow unauthorized immigrants to partake in social welfare programs would spare American tax dollars and eliminate

another draw to America. These types of policies would discourage illegal immigration, shrink the welfare state, and still allow documented immigrants of all skill-sets to contribute to American society.

Mass deportation, a ban on Muslim immigration, a wall with a beautiful door — all are costly endeavors that will inevitably fuel anti-American attitudes and feed an insatiable national debt. However, policies tuned to the recently decelerated wave of immigration can reshape the economic motives that produce the border-control malaise. As in Frost's "Mending Wall," walls of stone will fall. Only ones of sound policy will endure—and may eventually make good neighbors.

Don't They Just Get In Line? American Immigration Council, 14 Mar. 2013. Web. 01 Dec. 2015.

Santayana, George. *The Life of Reason*. Vol. 1. New York: Scribner, 1920. Print.

Vinik, Danny. "How Much Would It Cost to Deport All Undocumented Immigrants?" *TheNewRepublic.com*. 8 July, 1015. Web. 2 Jan. 2016.

Works Cited

Ewing, Walter A. Opportunity and Exclusion: A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy. Immigration Policy Center. *American Immigration Council*, Jan. 2012. Web. 18 Nov. 2015.

Fox, Lauren. "This Is How Much Donald Trump's Immigration Plan Would Cost America If Mexico Doesn't Pick Up the Tab." *National Journal*, 18 Aug. 2015. Web. 24 Nov. 2015.

Gonzalez-Barrera, Ana. "More Mexicans Leaving Than Coming to the U.S." *Hispanic Trends Project* RSS. Pew Research Centers, 19 Nov. 2015. Web. 01 Dec. 2015.

Passel, Jeffery S., D'Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. "Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero-and Perhaps Less." *Hispanic Trends Project* RSS. Pew Research Centers, 23 Apr. 2012. Web. 30 Nov. 2015

Randolph, Eric. "Wall for Nothing: the Misjudged Trend for Border Fences." *Nationmultimedia.com*. 25 Aug. 2015. Web. 2 Jan. 2015.

"The Real Story of Getting a "Green Card" and Coming to the United States Legally." Why