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USC LEVAN INSTITUTE

ETHICS RESOURCES CENTER

THE NEIGHBOR WITHIN - What should we do about America's illegal/undocumented immigrants?



INTRODUCTION:

Calls for immigration reform are coming from across the political spectrum. The one thing almost everyone seems to agree on is that the current situation is unsustainable. Immigrants who circumvented the legal immigration process in order to find a better life in the United States are angrily accused of being a burden on social services, increasing unemployment and crime, and undermining the rule of law. Meanwhile, their undocumented status makes them subject to exploitation and forces them to live with the persistent fear that their families could suddenly be torn apart. What should our “nation of immigrants” do about our 11 million uninvited neighbors within?



INSTRUCTOR PREPARATION:

- Reading of suggested materials below
- General understanding of the major issues in question:
 - The problem with the status quo
 - The political debate on immigration
 - Questions of fairness involving other potential immigrants
 - The DREAM act and the special problem of those who were brought into the United States illegally as children

LIST OF SUGGESTED MATERIALS TO BE READ BEFORE CLASS:

Most of these are short and intended to give the reader an introduction to the problem.

- **Immigration Quandary: A Mother Torn From Her Baby** by Julia Preston, *New York Times* (November 17, 2007)
- **What are the solutions to illegal immigration in America?**, *ProCon.org* (May 22, 2009)
- **The Real Problem with Immigration... and the Real Solution** by Tim Kane, Ph.D. and Kirk Johnson, Ph.D., *The Heritage Foundation* (March 1, 2006)

- **Senate to vote on path to citizenship for young illegal immigrants** by Shankar Vedantam, *The Washington Post* (September 21, 2010)
- **Social justice framework and other discourses on the rights of children** by Julia Waldman (*Child Welfare Across Borders*, Dec. 2003)

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES:

Watch:

- **DREAM Act Debate**, *Fox News* (September 21, 2010) [VIDEO]
- **Codewords Of Hate in the Immigration Debate]** by Stacey Burdett, *Anti-Defamation League* (June 25, 2008) [VIDEO]
- **Which Is Acceptable: 'Undocumented' vs. 'Illegal' Immigrant?**, *NPR* (January 7, 2010) [AUDIO]

Do: Ask students to think about and discuss the following questions:

- Often an important part of a debate is an argument over the language used to describe the problem. (e.g. Pro-life v. Anti-Abortion) Is there an important difference between the "illegal" and "undocumented" immigrants? Which is more appropriate for describing this problem?
- People all over the world dream of someday immigrating to the United States. What would be the fairest way to determine who and how many are given permission to do so?
- Should we provide social services (such as emergency medical care) for those who live within our communities, but are here illegally? Is it fair to do so? Is it humane not to?
- Every child born in the United States is automatically considered to be a U.S. citizen. This is so even if the child's parents are here illegally. What are some of the ethical issues raised by such a policy?
- Attempting to remove 12 million illegal immigrants from within our communities and transporting them back to their country of origin would be extremely expensive and rip apart families. Does the injustice of illegal immigration justify such a course of action?
- What do we do with those brought to the United States illegally as children and have grown up in the United States? Do they deserve "a path to citizenship"? If so, what type of path would be most appropriate and who should it apply to?

* For additional ideas on assignments and lesson plan you might develop with this material, visit our [Suggestions for incorporating lessons ethics into your course](#) page.

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