

Immigration and Decency

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ILLLEGAL IMMIGRANTS ARE USUALLY invisible unless they appear in your backyard or someone complains about them.¹

¹ We thank our wonderful editor Benjamin Lima for shepherding this piece through its many stages. Al Martinich and Tom Palaima have for many years now been collaborating on public intellectual pieces that try to get their readers to see and feel what human beings are going through in their lives, how they are treating one another and how we can do better. In writing this piece they used Michael Lesy's *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1973), *Bearing Witness* (1982) and *Looking Backward* (2017) as touchstones and sources of inspiration. Michael read the piece and offered comments and then agreed to become a co-author. He picked images that get across visually what Al and Tom are trying to get across in words. As a triumvirate we share in the ancient Greek idea that truly seeing—and feeling—is essential for truly knowing.

We thank Eliza Gilkyson for granting permission to use the full lyrics of her powerful song "Reunion" (GilkySongs BMI 2018), which can be found on her cd *Secularia* (Red House ASIN: B07D4ZPJQY). We thank Lisa Marine at the Wisconsin Historical Society; The Keystone Mast Collection at the California Museum of Photography (CMP), University of California Riverside; and Don Lavigne for permission to use the photographic images herein. Curator Leigh Gleason of the CMP went "above and beyond the call of duty" to provide digital files of the images from *Looking Backward* (2017). Don Lavigne as a personal favor took the photograph of the family cemetery plot (1873-1889) in the National Ranching Heritage Center, Lubbock, Texas.

Then they look larger than life. You have to deal with them. If you had to feed and clothe them permanently, or if you had to drive them out of your yard yourself, then you would be in a situation almost as dire as theirs. Within a civil society, you do not need to do either. Citizens jointly decide what is to be done about illegal immigrants and jointly carry the burden if there is one. There are officials, officers, enforcement agencies and agents who do their best to carry out what we through our government at local, state and national levels deem to be our collective will.

What should the American civil society do with illegal immigrants? We here use the term 'illegal' in order to forestall a semantic fight with those who take a legalistic perspective of immigrants who cross an American border, often the southern border, without visas. We think it is better not to argue over whether to use as an adjective 'illegal' or 'undocumented'. It is better to discuss the substantive issue.

People too quickly think that an illegal immigrant is one who deserves punishment, to be jailed or straightaway deported. That is not so. If Jesus Christ were to descend from heaven and land in the middle of Denton,

Texas, he would be an illegal immigrant, but not, we hope, punished or deported. This example simply shows that being classified as an ‘illegal’ does not decide the issue of what is to be done with the human beings who have illegally crossed onto our land.

More difficult than dealing with a possible divine arrival is to consider how we Americans ought to think about immigrants in order to formulate a reasonable policy. This is not a new question. It has been asked throughout our history as a nation. So our perspectives here, presented as food for thought, will include historical looks back. In almost every generation since just before the Civil War, we have viewed immigration as a crisis and believed that the immigrants were a threat to what the ancient Greeks would call our *politeia*, a notion that encompasses our way of life, our way of thinking about who we are and aspire to be, our customs and laws, our values and the divine beings who guide us.²

One policy for one group of immigrants that we think is unconscionable is to deport people who have been in the United States since childhood and who are either contributing to American society or well on their way to contributing to it through their hard work and determination. We are talking about the children who were brought to the United States when they themselves were too young to choose where they would live. They were brought to our country by their parents or by a ‘coyote.’ Most of these children have

lived exemplary lives. In light of their good behavior, President Obama instituted by executive memorandum in 2012 the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA). According to DACA, as long as these children continue to lead good and productive lives, they are exempt from deportation, for two-year terms, subject to renewal.³ They are illegal, but we offer them a safe haven so long as they live up to their ends of the bargain.

People opposed to the DACA program say that the children have no right to be here. No one can dispute this fact. DACA children have not entered the United States in accordance with the rules and regulations we have in place for lawful immigration. Nonetheless, if DACA children do not have a right to be here, it is also not right to deport them. In fact, in our view doing so would be cruel. The United States would be harming them when they are not culpable of any fault of their own. The fault lies with those who brought them here. To punish the children is to punish victims. This matter has been the subject of contentious debate within our national government and court system since Obama proposed it in June 2012. It will be reaching the Supreme Court in its next session, which begins in October 2019.⁴

We are looking for the right vocabulary to think about DACA children. The language of rights does not fit the bill. Neither does the dominant language in political theory for the last half-century, the language of justice, as derived from John Rawls’s book, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971). Talking about meting out justice to DACA children is no more appropriate than rights-talk. Why? Because justice applies to people

2 Our deep concerns and fears about immigration are reflected not only in what we write and read, what we sing and hear sung, and what we capture and see in still photographs, but also in motion pictures like those collected and available on the Criterion Channel (www.criterionchannel.com/the-immigrants-1/season:1) there described as “ever-urgent stories of hope, courage, struggle, and survival that dramatize the search for a better life in an often *hostile* new land.” One recently examined manifestation of our historical hostility is the way we have blamed immigrants for being carriers of disease and death: Robert A. Stribley, “Our History of Blaming Immigrants for Disease,” Apr. 12, 2019, at medium.com/s/story/our-history-of-blaming-immigrants-for-disease-2cf7c4749661.

3 See USCIS DACA Frequently Asked Questions, www.uscis.gov/archive/frequently-asked-questions.

4 See Michael D. Shear and Adam Liptak, “It’s Now the Supreme Court’s Turn to Try to Resolve the Fate of the Dreamers,” *New York Times*, June 28, 2019, online at www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/us/politics/supreme-court-daca-dreamers.html.

in the same situation or “equally situated.” The DACA children are not in the same situation as other children.

The correct term to use here and the appropriate concept or notion, we suggest, is decency. It is indecent to deport these children. Allowing them to stay as long as they are leading lives worthy of respect is the only decent thing to do. And the idea that they can grow up and contribute positively to our society as a whole is grounded in our historical experience with all other immigrant groups in our history from the 1850s onward. The children, and grandchildren, of immigrants generally assimilate to what we consider American values and contribute positively to our economy, culture and society, despite the negative prejudices directed at their grandparents or parents. We will provide some examples of this process below.

If the children are illegal and they are not culpable, how should we think of them? They are victims of happenstance. They did not choose where they would be born or who their parents would be, or even whether they would be born at all. Think about it. These same conditions apply to all of us who were fortunate enough to be born as American citizens. No one *chooses* any of these things.

Human beings are thrown into the world. Birth is the outcome of a biological accident, the first of innumerable contingencies in life. Some of us are the results of unwanted or unexpected pregnancies. Tom Palaima’s mother, after two miscarriages and a child who died thirty minutes after birth, was under strict orders from her doctor not to become pregnant again. But Tom is here with us today co-writing this essay.

The ancient Hebrews knew about the accidents of birth. One of the Israelite patriarchs is named Isaac, son of Abraham. The name means ‘he laughs or will laugh’ because his mother was so old and clearly

beyond child-bearing that her becoming pregnant was laughably out of the question. Even she laughed. And yet....

The ancient Greeks knew about the accidents of birth also. They devised a myth that explored the consequences of such contingencies. The Athenian playwright Sophocles wrote *Oedipus Tyrannus* or in English *Oedipus the King* in 429 BCE, the same year it was performed. It is the story of the male newborn of the king and queen of Thebes who was fated by the prophetic god Apollo to kill his father and to marry his mother. When the Greek audience entered the Theater of Dionysus in Athens almost 2,500 years ago, they knew that no matter what Oedipus tried to do to escape fate, he would fail. The play would present one gripping account of how his fate came to pass and the horrors it brought into being. His parents, fearing the prophecy, tried to kill Oedipus by the common practice of infant exposure. They had his legs bound—one interpretation of the meaning of his name is ‘swollen foot’ from the physical trauma this caused—then entrusted him to a royal shepherd to expose out in the mountainous unsettled lands where he tended sheep and goats. The moral reasoning here was that by having the infant placed alive in the wilds, the king and queen were consigning him to his fate, not directly killing him. They were thus absolved of all guilt.

The Theban royal shepherd, however, took pity on Oedipus and handed him over to a shepherd tending the royal flocks of the neighboring big city of Corinth. Learning of his awful fate in late adolescence, Oedipus tried to do the right thing, to get far away from the people whom he believed to be his birth parents. He ends up on the road to Thebes, the place of his birth, where his fate befalls him. Although we may no longer believe in the pitiless mechanism of the cosmos, the tragedy continues to resonate because we intuit the truth behind the false

name of fate. Most of our lives, including our births, are buffeted by contingency. Stuff happens.

More stuff happens to the poor and oppressed than to the materially well off and powerful. In order to understand what to do for those who are the worst off, we have to imagine their lives and feel them deeply. Texas songstress Eliza Gilkyson helps us do this in her recent song “Reunion” about desperate young women escaping abject poverty and brutality in Somalia and Ethiopia.⁵ Crammed into small crafts on the sea, their sole intent is to escape:⁶

*On the grey blue seas
Neath unforgiving skies
You can see them there
See the fall and rise
Of their pitiful boat
Drifting on the tides
Towards anywhere*

*See the trembling girls,
Hear their desperate cries
On the sickening swells,
Look into their eyes
But they can't go back
To what they've left behind
Going anywhere*

*And they cry to us
On our distant shore
And we cover our ears
Til they cry no more*

5 Quoted by permission of Eliza Gilkyson. Copyright © GilkySongs BMI 2018. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU5PepsU8Hw.

6 See Henry Wilson-Smith, “On the Move in a War Zone: Mixed Migration Flows to and through Yemen,” Migration Policy Institute, Feb. 6, 2019, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mixed-migration-flows-yemen-war-zone; and Lori Hinnant and Bram Janssen, “The hidden toll of migration: 56,800 dead or missing in 4 years,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 1, 2018, www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-missing-migrants-20181101-story.html.

*And we don't even know
We were longing for
Reunion*

Reunion

The girls flee from crushing poverty, from ignorance, from obstacles imposed to prevent them from using their minds and bodies freely in pursuit of happiness. They flee from societies where the haves at the pinnacles of tall towers abandon the have-nots who are scattered like crushed stones as the broad base.

If they survive their perilous passages in overcrowded boats controlled by mercenary human traffickers, they arrive in a new land where they are likely to be exploited as menial laborers or as sex slaves. This is not a new problem for the world or the United States to confront. Newspaper accounts and photographs in Michael Lesy’s remarkable *Wisconsin Death Trip* (1973) depict the desperate lives of mainly Northern European immigrant families in Black River Falls, Wisconsin between 1890 and 1910 (Figures 1 - 3).⁷ They came to our country legally with dreams of freedom and good lives. Profiteers in immigrant trafficking lured the poor with sugarplum fantasies of respectable lives on their own fertile farms and raising their children as healthy God-fearing Christians, like those in *Little House on the Prairie*. Sadly, even if their hopes had been fulfilled, they may not have been accepted into “decent society.” Instead, they endured cold poverty, social isolation, and sheer despair.

Men working in iron mines were tantamount to underground slaves—if they were lucky enough to be employed at all. Child mortality from diphtheria and influenza

7 Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973). See also Lesy’s *Bearing Witness: A Photographic Chronicle of American Life, 1860-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982) and *Looking Backward* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2017).



Figure 1 Photograph by Charles Van Schaick, n.d. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-11995. Public domain. See Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (Random House, 1973 / UNM Press, 2000).

epidemics and generally miserable sanitary conditions left mothers of many children childless. Local newspapers published many obituaries and accounts of funeral services. Professional photographers took memento photographs of dead children in fine clothes and handsome coffins. These children may never have been photographed or so well-dressed while they were alive. For some families, dressing up or photographing a living child would have been an unimaginable extravagance. The regularity of such ritual actions allowed for the public expression and public acknowledgment of parental grief; but, as Lesy explains, “Although it could comfort, it could not cure. ... The regularity of such newspaper obituaries, accounts, and reports may even have created a greater sense of doom.”⁸

At the National Ranching Heritage Center in Lubbock, Texas, a Victorian-era family cemetery plot has five headstones of the D. C. & I. V. Brooks family (Figure 4). All five children born between 1870 and 1882 were dead by 1889. The longest-lived died before her tenth birthday. Their first child died at the age of three, one month after their second child was born.⁹

Other sources that might sensitize us to act decently may be found in novels, such as Martin Andersen Nexø’s *Pelle the Conqueror*

(1906), the story of an aged Swedish itinerant farmhand who emigrates to nearby Denmark with his eight-year-old son Pelle Karlsson.¹⁰ Both take up bleak lives at the bottom of the farmhand economic ladder. Subsequent novels in the tetralogy follow Pelle as he grows up, struggling against deplorable labor conditions that keep him and others in subhuman poverty. The world is full of hopeless and forlorn immigrants driven from home by starvation-level necessity, extreme poverty, and other factors like war and many types of persecution. And it has ever been so.¹¹

During the Irish potato famine between 1846 and 1851, an estimated one million people died of starvation and epidemic disease. Another two million emigrated from Ireland between 1845 and 1855.¹² Those who made it to new worlds were greeted with cold welcomes and vicious expressions of anti-Catholic sentiments, some from icons of American culture like Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph, and Lyman Beecher, father of Harriet Beecher Stowe and the abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants at the top of the social and economic ladders of our country and Great Britain considered poor immigrants from Ireland to be “the very scum and dregs of Human nature” or “white chimpanzees” (Charles Kingsley, the author of *Water Babies*). The country they came from was “a human dog kennel” (Thomas

8 Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip*, no page numbers, 13th page of Conclusion.

9 For an understanding of the desperate significance of the grave markers as memorials in such life circumstances, see Thomas G. Palaima, “The Importance of Memory, Memory Triggers and Memory Agents in Mycenaean and Later Greek Culture: Some Linear B, Epic and Classical Evidence” in Elisabetta Borgna, Ilaria Caloi, Filippo Carinci and Robert Laffineur eds., *MNHMH/ MNEME. Past and Memory in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Leuven: Peeters, 2019) 591-600.

10 Martin Andersen Nexø, *Pelle the Conqueror Volume 1: Childhood* trans. Steven T. Murray (Fjord Modern Classics: Seattle 1989). For the living situation, compare Robert Frost’s “The Death of the Hired Man.”

11 For historical and anthropological studies of test cases revealing the causes and consequences of emigration and the ‘refugee phenomenon’ through millennia and in many different global cultures, see Jan Driessen, ed., *An Archaeology of Forced Migration* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Presses Universitaires de Louvain 2018). Read especially Jean-Pierre Legendre, “Vestiges of the Spanish Republican Exodus to France: An Archaeological Study of the Retirada,” pp. 55-73.

12 Jim Donnelly, “The Irish Famine,” BBC, updated Feb. 17, 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/famine_01.shtml.



Figure 2 Photograph by Charles Van Schaick, 1898. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-28975. Public domain. See Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (Random House, 1973 / UNM Press, 2000).



Figure 3 Photograph by Charles van Schaick, 1898. Wisconsin Historical Society, WHS-28977. Public domain. See Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (Random House, 1973 / UNM Press, 2000).



Figure 4 Cemetery plot of the children of the D.C. and I.V. Brooks family, burials 1873-1889. National Ranching Heritage Center, Lubbock, TX. Photo: Don Lavigne.

Carlyle).¹³ The great humanist Ralph Waldo Emerson distilled the hateful anxieties in an 1851 journal entry:

*Too much guano. The German and Irish nations, like the Negro, have a deal of guano in their destiny. They are ... ferried over the Atlantic, & carted over America to ditch & to drudge, to make the land fertile, & corn cheap, and then to lie down prematurely to make ... a spot of greener grass on the prairie.*¹⁴

Viewing such attitudes as these in the history of American society charitably, we can speak of a kind of prevailing ‘double

bind’ in our culture.¹⁵ As Howard A. Doughty puts it, “[American] thinkers and doers frequently try to maintain two contradictory ideas at the same time. The US purports to be the ‘land of the free’, yet it clung to the ‘peculiar institution’ of slavery and fought a hideous civil war over the matter so recently that I vividly recall a news broadcast announcing the death (of natural causes) of the last registered civil war soldier.”¹⁶

Put another way, the inscribed bronze plaque put on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty in 1903 gives us in visible speech the words of Emma Lazarus’s “New Colossus”: “Give me

13 Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010) 133-136, with discussion of views by Morse and Beecher.

14 Painter, p. 188. The symbol ... indicates the location on Emerson’s journal page where Emerson crossed out a word or the start of a word.

15 Gregory Bateson et al., “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia,” *Behavioral Science* 1 (1956) 251–264.

16 Howard A. Doughty, Review of Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, *College Quarterly* 18:2 (Spring 2015), collegequarterly.ca/2015-vol18-numo2-spring/index.html.



Figure 5 Americans of tomorrow - immigrants on deck of S.S. Amerika. New York. Keystone photo print, 7.18 x 4.18 inches. Keystone-Mast Collection, California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside. Public domain. See Michael Lesy, *Looking Backward* (W. W. Norton, 2017), p. 156.

your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to be free.” But it does not, strictly speaking, specify what we are going to do with them or what will become of them. That bronze plaque was erected right in the midst of the period of the Wisconsin death trip and a national hysteria surrounding yet another wave of immigrants, the Eastern Europeans, the Slavs, whose name is connected at least in popular historical etymology with our word ‘slave’ (Figures 5 and 6).

How was this second flood of legal

immigrants received? A look at the views of Tenney Frank, a prominent establishment-trained classical historian who taught at bastions of eastern White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, Bryn Mawr College and The Johns Hopkins University, gives one answer. The title of his study of personal names in Roman imperial inscriptions voiced a concern that preoccupied Americans in 1916: “Race Mixture in the Roman Empire.” Frank’s article appeared in *American Historical Review*, published by Oxford



Figure 6 Payday at the Steel Works - Lines of men approaching pay car, Homestead, Penna. Keystone photo print, 7.18 x 4.18 inches. Keystone-Mast Collection, California Museum of Photography, University of California, Riverside. Public domain. See Michael Lesy, *Looking Backward* (W. W. Norton, 2017), p. 100.

University Press.¹⁷ In it, Frank brought Roman history to bear explicitly upon the American immigration problem. He noted an alarming parallel. The good old names (the traditional *tria nomina*) that school boys read about in Livy and Cicero are scarce in Latin inscriptions along the Appian Way. They are replaced by foreign names. To Frank this raised a burning question: “Do these names imply that the Roman stock was completely changed after Cicero’s day, and was the satirist recording a fact when he wailed that the Tiber [the main river of Rome] had captured the waters of the Syrian Orontes?” Frank viewed the peoples from all over the empire immigrating to Rome as pollutants and asserted that the underlying cause “of Rome’s disintegration was, after all, to a considerable extent, the fact that the people who built Rome had given way to a different race.” To the immigrants who caused the “gradual diminution of the [old] stock” Frank attributed “lack of energy and enterprise, the failure of foresight and common sense, the weakening of moral and political stamina.” Those are nice ways to

¹⁷ Our thanks to James H. Dee for bringing Frank’s article to our attention.

describe the attitudes that prevail today about the ‘character’ of immigrants who cross our southern border. Frank also deplores the popularity of public monuments erected to please this ancient foreign ‘rabble’ “in much the same way that our cities are lining their park drives with tributes to Garibaldi, Pulaski, and who knows what *-vitch*.” This kind of immigrant radioactivity has had a strong afterlife. Lesy, comparing the attitudes of this period with those in our own times, speaks of “stereotypes that ... linked progress and poverty, respectively, with people who were ‘us’ and other people who were ‘them’.” Explicitly and implicitly, ethnocentrism, condescension, and contempt for others” persist and are pervasive.¹⁸ Yet we now even have Irish names like Kennedy and we know what *-ama* on our list of presidents.

If Frank were still around today, we would encourage him to look at a few other inscriptions. On the bronze plaques inside the pedestal of the Civil War Soldiers and Sailors monument in Cleveland, there are inscribed lists of names of the Civil War dead in regiments mustered in Ohio. On these mournful lists we read the kinds of English, German, Scottish and Welsh names that Tenney Frank would have found at least tolerable: McCanna, McClain, McDowell, Miller, Mills, Morgan, Ott, Parsons, Powell, Pratt, Randall, Rhodes, Rockefeller, Ryan, Sherwood, Smith. By World War II, the pollutants had triumphed. Alongside 18 Millers and 17 Smiths from Ohio who died in our good war against Nazi Germany,

¹⁸ Lesy, *Looking Backward*, 24.

fascist Italy, and imperial Japan are the names of other Ohioans: Miglionico, Migliore, Mignona, Mihalik, Miklich, Mikloc, Milczewski, Principio, Prochazka, Przewdziekowski, Ptaszek, Pusanski, Slusarczyk, Smolinski, Soltys, Stamatis, and, yes, Starceвич.

These American soldiers were following in a tradition documented as far back as the Greek Bronze Age and continuing through folk songs like “Arthur McBride,” which sings of the deceptive enticements British recruiters used during the Great Potato Famine to get starving young Irishmen to sign away their freedom and serve the cause of imperial England. As William Faulkner saw things, “[t]he lowly and invincible of the earth endure and endure and then endure, tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.”¹⁹ And often their endurance takes the form of proudly volunteering to die for the countries into which they have immigrated. It is now established that the first American soldier to die in Operation Iraqi Freedom, Marine Lance Cpl. José Antonio Gutierrez, was born and grew up in Guatemala City.²⁰ Gutierrez, an orphan, entered our country illegally claiming he was sixteen years of age.²¹

But we are concerned here with innocent children right now. The word “innocent” literally means “doing no harm.” In earlier periods, these are the conditions that prevailed for the children of poor immigrants. Pauline Newman immigrated from Lithuania

to the United States in 1901 at the age of seven.²² Fatherless, she joined her mother, brother, and three sisters. In October of the same year, she got a job at the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory, where 146 mainly immigrant women and children were killed in a fire on March 25, 1911.

Work started for these women and children at 7:30 in the morning and, during the many busy periods, lasted until 9:00 at night. Girls Pauline’s age received \$1.50 *per week* (\$44.61 in today’s money) to cut threads off finished fabrics with “kindergarten scissors.” During these long days workers were not permitted to sing or even to talk with one another. They needed to concentrate every moment on their work. She said: “You were not allowed to have your lunch on the fire escape in the summertime. The door was locked to keep us in. That’s why so many people were trapped when the fire broke out.”

Her older sisters made \$6 per week (today \$180). Again, this was for 80-hour work weeks. Workers were expected to work seven days a week. The highly experienced cutters made \$12 (\$360 today, or about \$4.50 an hour without benefits or social security of any kind). The trial that followed the catastrophic fire was an exercise in the kind of story of justice diverted or perverted that gives rise to songs like Woody Guthrie’s “Ludlow Massacre” and is typical of the age of robber barons.²³

Our point is that the poorest and lowliest immigrants, legal or illegal, have been exploited mercilessly and looked upon with fear and contempt during our nation’s history. If we view what we call our immigration problem without any grasp of what immigration has done for the economic and

19 William Faulkner, “Tomorrow,” *Saturday Evening Post* (November 23, 1940) 22-23, 32, 35, 37-39. Quotation from p. 39.

20 “Marine Lance Cpl. Jose Gutierrez,” *Military Times*, thefallen.militarytimes.com/marine-lance-cpl-jose-gutierrez/256506; Tom Palaima, “What we’ve lost in the Iraq war,” Jan. 31, 2008, historynewsnetwork.org/article/46981.

21 On Gutierrez and other ‘green card Marines’ among the 37,000 noncitizen soldiers at the outbreak of the Iraq War, see the moving profile by Mark Arax et al., “Green Card Marines: A Guatemalan orphan — artistic, poetic — sought a better life in the U.S.” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 2003: www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-green-card-marines-gutierrez-archives-snap-htmlstory.html.

22 Joan Morrison, *American Mosaic: The Immigrant Experience in the Words of Those Who Lived It* (University of Pittsburgh Press 1993) 8-14.

23 Douglas O. Linder, “The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire Trial: An Account,” www.famous-trials.com/trianglefire/964-home.

even military security of our country and without taking to heart how American citizens have had their lives improved by the exploitation of cheap labor, legal or illegal, we lose our chance to develop feelings of decency and use those feelings when deciding what to do about DACA children.

Shortly after President Obama's executive order in 2012, DACA children faded from view. This happened because the program works. They became conspicuous again when President Trump rescinded the DACA program in 2017, until a federal court blocked the rescission. In January 2019, he used the children as a bargaining chip in negotiations to fund a wall along the Mexican border. Democratic representatives rejected the offer. DACA participants have again disappeared from the news. Sad to say, some politician may use them again as "bargaining chips," probably offering to trade them for money. That's what kidnappers do. They trade people for money.

It would be indecent to deport DACA children, to make them strangers in a strange land. The country of their birth is not the country of their allegiance. The United

States of America is. It is the only homeland that most of them know, the only country that can give them a reasonable chance to live free human lives. Letting them remain in the U.S. will be little or no burden to taxpayers because they are well on the road to becoming productive Americans. To repeat, the fate of the DACA kids is a matter of decency, not justice. Justice was on the side of the Merchant of Venice in Shakespeare's play when he demanded a pound of flesh from Antonio. But what justice would have prescribed would have been repugnant to decent people. To paraphrase Shakespeare, the quality of decency should not be strained. Decency twice blesses: once the persons who are decently treated and once the persons who treat them decently.

The U.S. has the space and resources to embrace the DACA kids. It does not have the space and resources to embrace all deprived and oppressed people in the world. But it can embrace more than it is currently willing to embrace. How many more? Not more than it can afford, but not less than it is decent to accept. A

Postscript: The practice of keeping immigrant children, in the custody of the Federal Government, in squalid and emotionally deprived conditions during the spring and early summer of 2019 is as indecent as anything we described here above in our essay.