Immigration 2 Essay, Research Paper

Immigration has recently become a controversial topic in America. Some feel that immigration is necessary to keep up the diversity in America. In addition, it creates a stronger economic base because immigrants will produce more goods than they use as well as filling in the lower paid jobs we aren’t willing to take. Others, like the right wing republicans, feel immigration is treading on thin ice. Indeed, they state that immigration is responsible for lower standards in our culture as a result of their values brought into our culture. In his article, “Immigrants and Family Values”, Francis Fukuyama, states this is not the case. Fukuyama acknowledges we are suffering from a cultural decline, but immigrants are not the ones responsible for it. Rather, it is the “contemporary elite culture of Americans”(11) that is ultimately to blame.

Fukuyama contends that liberal groups as well as conservatives criticize immigration. For example, the Sierra Club disagrees with immigration because it forces our country to expand economically in addition to just population growth thereby reducing the nation’s resources faster and eventually bringing down the environment. He notes right wing nativist republicans, like Patrick J. Buchanan, feel that the arrival of immigrants to America is detrimental. The conservative view is immigrants foster “lesser desirable cultural values”(1). Buchanan and other right wing republicans insist America’s identity is Christian, European, and Anglo-Saxon. They fear non-European immigration will dilute their own ideals and cultural values with their own. The identity of America is changing, and republicans do not like it.

Buchanan’s idea of America’s identity is an older nativist one. This influx of different cultures to our nation gives rise to a more diverse multicultural state. This causes a negative impact in the eyes of Republicans for they fear the probable loss of votes. It is for these reasons that helped Buchanan take on his current anti-immigration posture. Furthermore Fukuyama observes, “Buchanan has explicitly attacked the notion that democracy represents a particularly positive form of government, and hence would deny that belief in universal democratic principles ought to be at the core of the American national identity”(2). His perception of our nation is largely Anglo-Saxon and founded in Christianity. Fukuyama feels it is the values that lie herein that Buchanan fears will be overtaken by immigration, thus reshaping America’s identity. However, there are other arguments on what constitutes identity in America.

Fukuyama suggests one such argument. Unlike other democracies, American identity means that one prescribes to a set of universal principles. These principles are based on freedom and equality without fear of persecution. These ideas are not based on race or religion. Indeed, the Constitution prohibits the establishment of a national religion, as well as guaranteeing freedom of religion at the same time. Open to all, belief in the Constitution and what it stands for is the basis of America’s identity.

Fukuyama also notes however, that America’s identity goes farther than just believing in its universalistic principles and its Anglo-Saxon heritage. Actually, our nation has only started to uphold these universal ideas in the recent post industrialized years. Granted, democracy is absorbed by those willing to follow its laws, but democracy also has certain cultural values contained within. Fukuyama contends “virtually every serious theorist of American democracy has noted that its success depended heavily on the presence of certain pre-democratic values or cultural characteristics that were neither officially sanctioned nor embodied in law”(3). These characteristics are largely Christian in their nature and have been the foundation for our nation’s “economic prosperity and social cohesion”(3). It is no longer a question about whether immigration endangers these social values. Rather, it is a question about which groups further these values and which groups taint them.

Fukuyama asserts that immigrants coming into our country from Third-World societies are “likely to be poorer, less educated, and in possession of fewer skills than those from Europe, but they are also likely to have stronger family structures and moral inhibitions”(5). In addition, he notes, “immigrants are likely to be a self-selecting group with a much greater than average degree of energy, ambition, toughness, and adaptability”(5). It is these core values that immigrants bring with them that help them achieve their goal of success. Traditional family values are most apparent when looking at immigrants from Asian counties. Fukuyama observes that “mutually supportive family structures have long been credited as the basis for their economic success”(5). Asians typically have larger and more numerous family structures than whites and their rate of divorce are significantly lower. He emphasizes that more importantly they are also engrossed in the importance of quick adaptation, and have not insisted on infusing their own culture into America. While most Americans distinguish the importance and value the social aspects of Asians, Fukuyama thinks “the real fears of cultural invasion surround Latinos”(5).

Crime and other social calamities of the Latino immigrant population have created a negative influence on America’s whites. However, Fukuyama acknowledges “the evidence suggests that most Latin American immigrants may be a source of strength with regard to family values, and not a liability”(5). Latino families have a lower rate of female-headed households than blacks. When we accommodate economics into the equation, we find those single-parent households closely approaches whites. Also, different studies indicate Latinos are more probable to belong to families, have greater birth weight children, and attend church more so than blacks or whites. Fukuyama notices “While they [Latinos] are poor and unskilled, they have a work ethic and devotion to family comparable to those of the South and East European immigrants who came to the U.S. at the turn of the century”(7). He goes further and states that it is not the Latino or Asian immigrant culture that brings a decline to America’s cultural identity, but it is the contemporary culture of America that is fostering it.

Fukuyama reveals that old, traditional nativist culture still thrives today but it is covered by an additional elitist culture that tends to contaminate the cultural values of immigrants. He notes, “first generation is willing to work quietly at minimum- or subminimum-wage jobs, the second and third generations have higher expectations as to what their labor is worth”(7). Fukuyama sees the problem as promoting continual multiculturalism. Multiculturalism “is both a Western and an American invention”(8). The origin of multiculturalism can be found as a result of the civil rights movement. The subsequent failure to assimilate found African-Americans taking pride in their own separateness. This resulted in America taking a multicultural posture, although some immigrants didn’t necessarily need it. Chinese and Russian parents believed that direct immersion into English was the best way to learn how to function in American society.

The cultural decay we face is staggering. However, Fukuyama notes it is not the recent immigrants who we should find at fault. The culture and values they bring with them to our country is not responsible for deteriorating our American identity. It is our “contemporary elite culture of Americans”(11) that Francis Fukuyama holds to blame. It is America’s recent idealistic, multicultural views that should be held accountable for changing our society. He believes:

“The real fight ought to be over the question of assimilation itself: whether we believe that there is enough to our Western, rational, egalitarian, democratic civilization to force those coming to the country to absorb its language and rules, or whether we carry respect for other cultures to the point that Americans no longer have a common voice with which to speak to one another”(9).

We must ask this question of our nation as a whole. Is it enough?

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