

TITLE: CENTER FOR HOUSTON'S FUTURE PRESENTS

TITLE: A RATIONAL MIDDLE PRODUCTION

Douglas Holtz-Eakin: An immigrant is someone born in another country with citizenship in another country who wants to come to the United States to pursue their dreams.

Charles Foster: We are a nation of immigrants. Except for Native Americans we've all come here from somewhere.

Ben Johnson: People coming here to make a better life for themselves and to be part of the American experience are what built this country.

Theresa Cardinal Brown: They come to join family. They come to work. They come for opportunity. They come because they believe in the American Dream.

Sam Myers: There's an interesting relationship between what our country needs and what immigrants give to our country.

Stephen Klineberg: This is the first nation in the history of the world that can say we are a free people and we come from everywhere.

TITLE: RATIONAL MIDDLE IMMIGRATION

TITLE: THE IMMIGRANT'S PROMISE

TITLE: DIRECTED BY GREGORY KALLENBERG

Charles Foster: Through early history it was overwhelmingly from European nations. They came because of religious persecution – the pilgrims. They came because of famine – the Irish – the potato famine and so forth.

Robert Juceam: The United States has been seen as a land of opportunity. Not that they knew what the opportunity was – it was just going to be a different place, and they could build their own life.

Ali Noorani: Up till the 1870s, the United States had really no immigration system. It was kind of whoever got here was here. And that took us from the days of Columbus through the Industrial Revolution.

Charles Foster: For the best part of America we were trying to fill up this continent – Manifest Destiny. We were doing everything to encourage immigration.

Ali Noorani: After the 1870s, you saw efforts to really curtail and control immigration so that it was only limited frankly to Western European countries.

Charles Foster: It was not until 1924 that we had our first permanent quotas. Quotas were imposed based upon the National Origin System so we would get the "right kind" of immigrants. But when Congress imposed quotas, they cut off virtually all avenues for people to come legally. Now this is the problem: If you think about it, we had huge barriers from most countries -we had the Atlantic Ocean and we had the Pacific Ocean. Latin America we have adjoining land borders and people could literally walk in here. We had literally centuries of what we call "circular immigration". People would come from Latin America, overwhelmingly from Mexico, to work they work they go home. They work and go home.

Laura Reiff: These immigrants came in because there was a job magnet here in the United States. There was a need to fill lower-skilled or lesser-skilled service jobs.

Charles Foster: Starting in the mid 70s we started increasing enforcement. People that would come back and forth and normally work within a hundred miles of the border - they did something quite logical: Instead of going home and seeing my family on the weekends I'll smuggle them in on a one-time basis. And that began to create this phenomena that has entered into our political debate of large-scale illegal immigration.

Ben Johnson: Being a nation of immigrants isn't just a key component to our culture it's been a key driver in creating the world's most powerful economy - the world's most dynamic economy.

Deborah Notkin: Immigrants supplement our workforce as landscapers, construction workers, service workers, hospitality workers. Although they may not have a lot of formal education, many of them come with skills and abilities that really contribute to these industries.

Laura Reiff: Immigrants actually fuel the economy you can't get to three or four or five percent growth in GDP without immigrant workers. And, you know, I find that to be kind of missing from the whole argument here that if you want to grow and you want to increase and expand US businesses in the United States you've got to have people to do the work.

Sam Myers: On the other side of things, immigrants bring creativity and they bring building businesses, starting businesses. About half of the dot-com companies that we have in this country were created either by immigrants or children of immigrants.

Ali Noorani: I mean these are big companies that are having a major footprint on the nation's economy, but then when you get down below that you see approximately 28% of small businesses have been founded by immigrants. So the economic impact of immigration is not just your Fortune 500 company, it's the small business on the corner who is creating jobs for American workers and their families that they're going to every day.

Sam Myers: That's the beauty of America. That's what I think makes America strong. It's essentially a concept of fairness based upon what a person can do as opposed to who a person is. That's what makes people come here.

Tony Payan: For this is a great paradox, I think: That we cannot think of the United States as anything else but a nation that migrants come to, inject vitality, inject dynamism, creativity, talent, and then become part of the society.

Ali Noorani: That immigrant who left any of a number of countries around the world to come to the United States to pursue their dream – they do that because they believe in the idea of America. The question is do Americans still believe in the idea of America as a nation of immigrants. We are seeing not just a tension that comes with this question but I think a tipping point for the country.

Ben Johnson: Our immigration system is stuck in the 1990s. Literally it's the last time that we have made any major renovations to our immigration system. Because of the failure of leadership in building an immigration system that's responsive to the modern economy that we have today, a lot of the immigration that comes outside of the system is happening because our system has closed itself off to the realities of our time.

Douglas Holtz-Eakin: We've never had immigration laws built on economics. If you build it on "You deserve this" – if people look and see someone here who's undocumented and here illegally – they think: "You don't deserve this". On the other hand if we say the purpose of immigration is to build a stronger economy, a greater social fabric, that's a very different framing of the problem.

Laura Reiff: I do believe that most Americans want to see that immigration reform. I think there are some out there on the fringe fueling this fear that immigrants are criminals sucking off of our welfare system and they are taking our jobs. Fact shows that's just not the case.

Ali Noorani: The majority of Americans are people of good will. They may not be Democrats, they may not be Republicans – they're living in the literal and figurative middle of the country. So I'm optimistic

that those Americans of goodwill will add their voices to the debate.

President John F. Kennedy: It is a proud privilege to be a citizen of the Great Republic – to hear its song sung. To realize that we are the descendants of 40 million people who left other countries, other familiar scenes, to come here to the United States to build a new life, to make a new opportunity for themselves and their children. I think it is not a burden but a privilege – to make this really as it was for them a new world. That's what this country has stood for for 200 years, and that's what this country will continue to stand for.

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