

Podcasts United: Episode 4: Immigration and Assimilation

Transcription:

*3-Chord Music

Shoal: Hey listeners, welcome to the fourth episode of Podcasts United: Immigration and Assimilation I'm Shoal Luck,

Matt: and I'm Matt DeMoss.

Shoal: In this episode we invite you to join us in taking a look at current issues and their impacts of immigration, assimilation, and super, super, super, super-diversity.

Matt: We will surround ourselves in the impacts of the current immigration policy, hearing the personal stories of several immigrants from around the world and their experiences upon entering America. Looking at effects of today's society on current immigration rates, we see that there is a greater need for action to be taken to reform the system.

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Matt: Commonly, we hear stories in the news about immigration's impact upon Americans. We see the effects of it across the country, but concentrated more within larger cities and populations. There are news stories everywhere about the effects of super-diversity that are both beneficial and detrimental to the local society. In the wake of a major push for immigration reform in 2012, The New York Times published the article "*Don't Shut the Golden Door,*" addressing the issue of young illegal immigrants. The authors discuss the potential impact of deporting illegal immigrants who came to the U.S. as children. Doing so would create a beneficial impact within the United States, freeing space in jails and seats in schools.

Shoal: But the unforeseen major impact is on the young alien itself. The authors claim that immigration has kept crime and homicide rates lower than those of native born peers but the question is when it comes to reforming the American Immigration system, where do we draw the line? Where is there a good balance?

Matt: To answer this, perhaps we should go directly to the source: the immigrants themselves. Whether they are legal migrants or illegal aliens looking for a new life in America, their testimonies and stories tell a tale of struggle and strife as these people seek a better life for themselves.

Shoal: Warren St. John depicts the personal stories of conflict of being assimilated into American culture in his book *Outcasts United*. This text tells true stories of the trials and tribulations of those seeking refuge in Clarkston, Georgia, a suburb of Atlanta. Many of the stories in St. John's text involve families fleeing in fear of their lives from violence or political persecution. Many of them follow the same trail to America, with a loan for plane tickets and for rent provided by U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. Most are placed in the same towns, causing demographics to exponentially change. In the text, St. John makes light to the fact that in

these towns, such as Clarkston, new residents arrived from everywhere. Thus, in less than a decade, Clarkston actually became one of the most diverse communities in the country, representing the demographic change in America on a slightly accelerated scale.

Matt: This still occurs today. We found a fellow Missouri S&T student who migrated to America on a Visa status.

---“I have kind of assimilated towards the American culture. Although I’m not actively in it, I still do participate in everything that goes on with my fellow American friends. I go around on Halloween. I’ve done trick-or-treating and been to Christmas. I’ve attend Thanksgiving dinners with friends. Having come here at such a young age, I’ve assimilated almost equally into both traditions, but I’d definitely say my parents still have a more strict Indian tradition.”

Matt: Another immigrant we interviewed migrated from Canada, after attending college in the United States. He felt very welcomed here, and easily assimilated into the American culture.

---”It was pretty much when my wife and I got married. I had to decide whether to live in the United States or Canada. I was familiar with being in the United States, having been here for four years for college. I felt comfortable here and that’s why we moved here.”

Matt: Migration such as these two individuals have encountered, has led to drastic changes in population diversity.

Shoal: These demographic changes have led to minority ethnic groups being assimilated into the majority. PBS’s Maria Hinojosa discovers this in *America By the Numbers: Clarkston Georgia*.

---The numbers make it irrefutable. We’re living the largest demographic change in history. We asked social trend tracker Guy Garcia to help us make sense of the latest census numbers. Guy’s an expert on the “New American Mainstream.” The New Mainstream is the combination of great demographic changes, explosions in the populations of African Americans, Asians, and Latinos, even to a certain extent women, young people, LGBT’s. A hundred and ten million African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics--with buying power that exceed \$2 million. Today, already one in three Americans are multicultural. When you look at the population under 18, it’s already closer to a one-to-one ratio.

Matt: As we see, mainstream America is rapidly changing.

---By 2042, demographers project that we’ll be a multicultural-majority nation.

Matt: To key in on this specifically, these very diverse demographic changes have actually led to the coined term, Super-diversity. Renowned sociologist and leader of the African American W.E.B DuBois Institute Lawrence Bobo posted an exclusive article on *The Root* concerning the future of Super-diversity. After visiting the Southern California Westfield Culver City Mall in Los Angeles County, he found evidence of a super-diverse culture. Bobo observed a community with a majority of the population of differing ethnicities, yet they all worked together. Everyone was respectful and welcoming as they interacted with each other. He suggests that this is where America is heading; to a Super-diverse population, but stresses that it will work, just as it works in Los Angeles County.

Shoal: It makes me wonder, why does this occur? How do communities become so diverse? We could say that it is because of violence and persecution happening around the world. But, statistically there is regular migration to America, not just those seeking refuge. Assimilation of immigrants has likely been linked to the open, welcoming hand that Americans display. It is our generous and inviting culture that binds natural-born citizens with immigrants. An Intelligence Squared debate on immigrant assimilation has another answer, claiming that times have changed and fewer immigrants classify themselves differently.

---And that is one of the greatest engines of assimilation, I assume we can all agree on this, is the public schools. In the past-- for the last 100 years or so-- the public schools have been the primary engine of assimilation. That engine is not working anymore. According to a study done at a high school in San Diego, I think in 2000 or 2003, after three years of high school the proportion of students self-identifying themselves as Americans went down 50%. The proportion saying they were hyphenated Americans-- Mexican-American or something like that-- went down 30%. And the number that they were saying they are a foreign nationality after three years of high school went up 52%.

Matt: The debaters make an interesting point. The main instrument of assimilation has actually declined and many students don't consider themselves as Americans. Immigrants instead, are holding on to their own nationalities. That very well could be due to the fact that the mainstream media and society is grouping them in a separate class of their own: plainly immigrants.

Shoal: On the contrary, I think other's views of the United States from the outside are a little condescending toward the American culture. But could also be caused by little exposure, and to only certain parts of the United States. In America, it has been known that the northeasterners are less hospitable than southerners. Our Canadian interviewee explains how sometimes, foreigners see the United States differently than others. This can also affect the immigration rates as well as regional diversity.

---What were your feelings about America before you moved here? I think they were a little more negative. Most of the Canadian population, at least Eastern Canada is close to New York,

and so Canadian's exposure to Americans is just upstate New Yorkers. Sometimes that can be kind of negative. But when I lived in the Midwest and I've also lived in North Carolina, I realized not all of America is like New York, and there's really great people here.

Shoal: After researching, we found that much of what the media reports is about how immigration affects American citizens, but few reports actually take into account the impact upon the immigrants themselves. So we put on our reporter hats and interviewed several local immigrants ourselves, as you heard previously. For their protection, their identity is being kept anonymous, however their stories are what shows the impact of the immigration system. For one, his family moved to America from India when he was three in the year 2000, due to his father's company transferring him to the United States. In order to migrate, each person was required to have a visa. He states that each visa status is different.

---"Currently, I am a student here. But, because of my Visa status currently, I'm not allowed to work because working requires you to have a Social Security Number. However, my Visa does not approve of that. So, there are opportunities for me after I graduate and change my current Visa status to gain an occupation here. But, until then, I have no job."

Shoal: For others, it is easier to be admitted to the United States. As our other interviewee says, there are no problems as long as you follow strict guidelines. It is a rather simple task.

---There was a lot of logistics. I had to fill out a lot of paperwork and pay a lot of fees. I had to have an extensive physical and they wanted me to have an FBI background check for obvious reasons. Not major hurdles, but just things that have to be done.

Matt: This puts our Indian immigrant in an interesting position. He can go to school and pay to gain an education, however he cannot work to help pay for that. So in a way, the current policy still does control the immigrants residing in the country and reserves the right to take their visa status away and deport them from the United States. Nonetheless, the American society has still taken in his family and was assimilated into the American culture through his father's company and through the public education system, as the Intelligence Squared debate mentioned. With many opportunities at hand, he took advantage of these, one of which, getting a higher education.

---"In terms of opportunities, America is wonderful. I've lived on both sides of the spectrum. I've actually gone back to India during my education, so I've really been able to see the contrast between the two. Starting in its education system is wonderful. There are so many amenities available and schools have well-founded labs. When I was in elementary school, I was an active member of the school chess club and high school continued that. And, of course, being able to now move onto a university, like MST, is incredibly wonderful because of the number of design teams, mechanical opportunities, and research opportunities. Everything here is so much more than what you could get for the same amount of effort or monetary value in India."

Matt: Compared to him, our other migrant family has not necessarily been provided the same opportunities as others. Their children not are not only American-born, but also acknowledge themselves as Americans, which very well may affect some of the opportunities available.

---What kind of opportunities were you provided? Did you take advantage of any immigration scholarships or anything of the sort? I'm not afforded any additional opportunities. I imagine it's because Canada is so close.

Shoal: The immigrants we interviewed serve as examples of the challenges faced with legal migration to America for others all across the country. Since the big 2012 push for immigration reform, there has been constant debate about what will happen to both legal and illegal immigrants. In most cases, this will directly impact young migrants such as these foreign students and families, preventing opportunities and dreams to come true for them, with deportation likely as the outcome.

Matt: I think you're right. Many people seem to lean toward closing the borders to prevent further intake of immigrants. It seems like we hear more and more often about American citizens concerned that the American economy is going to significantly change as these immigrants are going to take their jobs. But that's a myth. I mean, look at what ends our interviewees have to go to just to be able to hold only a part-time job. The New York Times published an article, "*Debunking the Myth of the Job-Stealing Immigrant*" back in March. The publishing giant suggests that instead, immigrants do not take jobs away, but rather increase the demand for more. They state that immigrants not only increase the supply for labor, but simultaneously create a demand for it through wages earned for apartments, haircuts, food, and the list goes on.

Matt: With increasing the population, the economy reflects this pattern and increases and I think the Intelligence Squared debate hit on this issue as well.

---As I said earlier, studies have shown that the immigrants, as a class, have a higher rate of founding businesses than native born US folks. Mayor Bloomberg is correct. And that's what he has made the economic argument very powerfully for both more legal immigration and then doing something with the 11 million folks who are here illegally. It is not realistic that you're going to deport 11 million people because it would decimate the American economy. And because, and this isn't about dollars and cents, but because these people are human beings. They're human beings.

Matt: Throughout history, there has been a tendency for like ethnicities to group together geographically. This is what causes the super-diverse population, as Lawrence Bobo experienced in Los Angeles County. With the current demographic trajectory, America is on the path to become a super-diverse nation. Which is not a bad thing. As Bobo pointed out, and St. John hit

home in *Outcasts United*, populations like these thrive, creating close knit communities. Looking in from the outside, we not only see social interactions, but social entrepreneurship as well. Jobs are created, people are brought closer, and dreams are made. The greatest impact is on the lives of each immigrant living in America, while they play a vital role in the culture and economic growth of the county.

Shoal: As there becomes a greater urge to reform the current American Immigration System, it is important that all sides and factors are taken into account, especially as the presidential election draws near. Not only the short-term and long term effects on our population, economy, and overall impact to current citizens, but the impacts created upon immigrants themselves should be taken into consideration as well. America is the land of opportunity, and for them, living in America is the only way they live their dreams of freedom and prosperity. As legislators continue to draft bills into laws, it must be remembered we are talking about the lives of human beings, not just numbers and statistics. Every immigrant has a story, and they came to America for a reason; either to flee for safety and refuge or to live out their dreams through widely open opportunities.

Soft-toned Music

Matt: This podcast is produced by Matt DeMoss, Jacob Manka, Graham Stanfill, Shoal Luck, and Landon Pierce in partnership with Dr. Rachel Schneider's English 1120 course and the Missouri University of Science and Technology. With a purpose to reach out with current day issues, this podcast is intended for informative educational purposes only and may only be reproduced for academic works. Thanks for listening. We're off in 3...2...1.

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