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‘Apply compassion offered illegal immigrants to the most vulnerable citizens’

Carol M. Swain

This article is a response to Joseph H. Carens’s Case for Amnesty, and part of a [New Democracy Forum](#) on immigration.

Joseph Carens argues that states should exchange large-scale amnesties, case-by-case adjudications, and mass deportations for an immigration policy that rewards length of residence by granting special status to those illegal immigrants who have lived in the county the longest without detection. Long-term violators, he argues, have gained special membership rights and ought to be allowed to stay because it would be cruel and immoral to ask them to leave. Although Carens readily concedes that allowing long-term lawbreakers to remain could be considered unfair to other immigrants, he contends that their years of residence make them members of our community worthy of amnesty.

As an intellectual exercise, Carens’s analysis is compelling and worth pondering, especially when he introduces us to Miguel Sanchez and his quest for a better life that includes illegal entry via a smuggler, illegal employment in construction, eventual marriage to an American citizen, and the birth of a son on U.S. soil. Sanchez lives in constant fear of detection because he knows that any brush with the law might result in his deportation. Carens notes that U.S. law provides Sanchez and his family “no feasible path to regularize his status.”

While Sanchez’s decision to enter the country illegally and remain seems perfectly rational, Carens’s use of his story as part of a defense of amnesty loses some of its moral force because of his failure to take into consideration the impact of illegal immigration on the most vulnerable members of American society: native-born Americans and legal immigrants with low skills and low levels of education.

Who are the people harmed? Obviously, it is not university professors, members of Congress, journalists, lawyers, or doctors. The most vulnerable people are U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics with high school educations or less. Unlike Carens, who ignores these groups, I would argue that their moral claim to justice trumps the moral case of Miguel Sanchez and the unknown millions who are in the country illegally and have taken jobs and opportunities to which they were not entitled.

Let me tell you about Joe Johnson, an African-American descendant of slaves, who graduated from high school and eventually landed a dream job at a factory in Virginia. After overcoming initial racism, he worked himself up to a supervisory role earning twelve dollars an hour. Joe married, had three children, and owned a home. After years of having worked dead-end minimum wage jobs, he was living the American dream, albeit briefly. As so often happens for middle-class blacks, Joe was among a group of laid-off workers who learned about immigration first-hand. According to reports, the day after Joe lost his job, a truckload of Mexicans were bused to the plant and hired at a considerably lower wage to do the work that Joe and scores of other American workers had been doing. Because of Joe’s educational deficiencies, he was unable to get other employment at

comparable wages. Financial tensions quickly caused his marriage to deteriorate, and he eventually lost his wife, their home, and his sense of dignity. Unfortunately, Joe's story is repeated all over the South, as illegal immigrants are hired and used to displace low-skill, low-wage native workers. Many of them are African-American men like Joe, legal Hispanics, and working-class whites.

Currently, there are an estimated six to seven million illegal immigrants working in low-wage, low-skill positions that could be filled by U.S.-born workers with high school educations or less. A detailed breakdown of U.S. Census unemployment data released by the Center for Immigration Studies in February 2009 reveals startling levels of unemployment for U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics without a high school education. Blacks had a 24.7 percent unemployment rate and Hispanics were at 16.2 percent. Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for legal and illegal immigrants without a high school education was 10.6 percent.

It can be argued that illegal immigration is a form of theft in which the longest law-breakers should be given the harshest penalties—not membership rights. Instead of being rewarded with amnesty, perhaps they should be fined, sent home, and placed at the end of the line. Immigration law should favor those immigrants who have shown respect for the rule of law and those who have made good-faith efforts to comply with its rules and regulations. I would place into this category those immigrants who have fallen into illegal status due to no fault of their own.

We have the technology, but not the will, to address the problem of illegal immigration. We could identify illegal workers by using the Department of Homeland Security's E-Verify system. E-Verify is a highly effective voluntary program, which allows employers to check Social Security numbers against a national database. It has a 99.6 percent accuracy rate and can yield results in a few seconds. Unfortunately, the Obama Administration has not supported the expansion of the program, which is scheduled to expire in a few months. E-Verify should be extended indefinitely and made mandatory for all employers. This would protect workers like Joe Johnson from unfair competition from an unauthorized resident such as Miguel Sanchez, who has used fake documents to claim a job that would otherwise be held by a person authorized to work in this county. Without surplus laborers, U.S. employers would be forced to raise wages in many industries and offer employees better working conditions.

Carens and other amnesty advocates should apply their considerable intellectual prowess and compassionate hearts to the plight of millions of American citizens and legal immigrants who struggle at the margins of society and who have few advocates other than some mostly Republican members of Congress and media figures such as CNN's Lou Dobbs and Fox's Glenn Beck. Indeed, I have a dream of one day living in a society where elites apply the compassion offered illegal immigrants to their fellow citizens, especially citizens who continue to suffer racial discrimination, wanton neglect, and outright rejection, even while America celebrates the election of its first black president.

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Swain is absolutely correct. Decades ago jobs in construction allowed a worker to make a comfortable place in the middle class, buy a home and put children through college. Not now. Adjusted for inflation, wages have dropped for construction workers up to 40%, driven by illegal aliens working for less and not having job safety or any benefits. The American dream has been taken out of reach for millions of hard-working Americans, while over 7 million illegal aliens hold such jobs and line the pockets of criminal employers. The 1986 amnesty was a total failure! Never again!

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Enforce the 1986 Simpson/Mazzoli bill, the Immigration Reform & Control Act as enacted. Offer your support to Rep.Shuler (D-NC) on his gov website. Phone: 828-252-1651 and Senator Sessions (R-AL) (256) 533-0979

The majority in office are their adversaries that include Senator Harry Reid (D-NV), speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) Homeland Security Chief Napolitano and a cesspool of legislators have triumphed in reducing the influence of E-Verify, Real ID Act and police enforcement and detainment law (287(g) to arrest illegal aliens and criminals.

Senator Sessions and in addition Rep.Shuler, the author of E-Verify and the revised Save Act have a unceasing battle ahead. If we want to fight for what's left of our rights under the Constitution, join NUMBERSUSA JUDICIALWATCH to stop 2nd AMNESTY? STOP FUNDING TO SANCTUARY STATES! NO MORE RAISED TAXES TO PAY ILLEGAL ALIENS & FAMILIES! IMMIGRATION LAWS ARE NOT BROKEN---JUST NOT ENFORCED!

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