



Trump's Plan for a Massive Deportation Is Cruel, Unjust, and Economic Suicide

Douglas Massey

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is difficult to know what actions President Donald Trump will take on immigration given his contradictory statements on the issue — but it likely won't be pretty. Shortly after the election, he said he planned immediately to deport 2 to 3 million undocumented immigrants, but on the day of his inauguration he told Illinois Sen. Richard Durbin that “we don't want to hurt those kids,” referring to the beneficiaries of former President Barack Obama's executive order deferring deportation for DREAMers, easily the most readily deportable group. The Republican Party platform on which Trump ran states that “the executive amnesties of 2012 and 2014 are a direct violation of federal law and usurp the powers of Congress ... [and] must be immediately rescinded by a Republican president.” Although the 2014 executive order was blocked in federal court and never implemented, the 2012 order was carried out. Known by the acronym DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), it provides relief from deportation for some 1.3 million undocumented immigrants who entered the country as minors.

DACA recipients are a small subset of the total undocumented population. Consider the requirements: They entered the United States before their 16th birthday, were under the age of 31 as of June 15, 2012, physically present in the country on that date, and present also at the time of their application. Under the terms of the executive order, they are all high school graduates, GED holders, or persons honorably discharged from the U.S. Armed Forces. They have lived continuously in the United States since June 15, 2007, and none has ever been convicted of a felony or even a significant misdemeanor. At the time of their receipt of temporary legal status, all were judged to pose no threat to national security or public safety by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Like other children who grew up in the United States at the same time, DACA recipients made their way through U.S. schools, earned a high school degree or equivalent, and stayed out of trouble with the law. Their primary language is English; most are either in college or employed. The only thing that distinguishes these young people from U.S. citizens of the same age is that — for some part of their childhood — DACA recipients were undocumented, which of course constitutes a civil infraction and not a criminal offense.

Moreover, by definition all DACA recipients entered into undocumented status as a result of actions taken by their parents or adult guardians. They did not make the decision to violate U.S. immigration law themselves, and by any reasonable standard of justice they are not to blame for ending up in undocumented status.

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It is a basic principle of law and ethics that children should not be punished for the transgressions of their elders. Unfortunately, this is exactly what will happen if President Trump rescinds Obama's DACA order upon assuming office, as he has promised. If he follows through on that pledge, it will instantly render 1.3 million innocent people deportable from the country in which they grew up.

With the loss of deferred action status, DACA recipients revert to being unlawful aliens, a category of persons that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is legally obliged to remove from the United States. Unlike most undocumented immigrants, however, ICE knows exactly who these people are and where they live, making a massive roundup and removal easy. In the process, however, it will unleash a humanitarian tragedy and let loose an unprecedented violation of human rights. Innocent young people and their families will be torn apart, and communities rendered asunder, all to placate a xenophobic fringe of the U.S. population. According to a 2015 national survey fielded by the Pew Research Center, 72 percent of all Americans believe that undocumented immigrants who meet certain requirements should be allowed to stay in the country legally, a figure that stands at 56 percent even among Republicans. The mass deportation of so many eager and blameless young people will seem cruel and heartless to many in the United States and throughout the world.

In addition to immiserating millions of young people and their families, the U.S. economy will be undermined as productive people are removed from jobs, colleges, and universities, making it impossible for U.S. taxpayers to capitalize on the public investments they have made in their health and education. According to estimates by the Cato Institute, the fiscal cost of deporting DACA recipients would exceed \$60 billion, and their departure would reduce economic growth by \$280 billion over the next decade.

Among those approved for DACA, 96 percent are from Latin America, with 78 percent coming from Mexico alone. South of the border, the arrival of 1.3 million English-speaking people raised in the United States will create widespread disorder. The deportees will arrive with U.S. educations, limited fluency in Spanish, a hazy knowledge of their nations' history and culture, and a lack of necessary documents — clogging labor markets, straining social services, and leaving few possibilities for integration and advancement in their countries of birth.

In his 10-point plan on immigration reform, Trump promised to “immediately terminate President Obama's two illegal executive amnesties. All immigration laws will be enforced — we will triple the number of ICE agents.”

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If Trump follows through on this promise, great damage will be done to the fabric of American society and its standing in the world, and an ominous step will be taken toward an intolerant, xenophobic future. The launching of a mass deportation campaign directed at otherwise productive, law-abiding young men and women who grew up as Americans but ended up in violation of civil statutes through no fault of their own portends a new darkness descending upon the land. If we can summarily castigate more than 1 million young people who have never committed a criminal act and who have been judged by the Department of Homeland Security to constitute no threat to public safety or national security, what else are we capable of doing to those around us?