



## Trump's immigrant 'wealth test' hurts the economy and undermines the American dream

María Teresa Kumar

January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

A good deal of the United States' most prominent and successful business leaders, politicians, artists and innovators would not have received a green card under the Trump administration's "public charge" rule, which, as of Monday, the Supreme Court has decided to allow.

For over 240 years, the United States has been a place where those who had nothing elsewhere could build a life for themselves and their families. That is, literally, the philosophy that underpins our hallowed American dream. And the country has thrived from an influx of people from all over the world throughout our history. In fact, the original immigrants, religious refugees, would probably have failed the Trump wealth test.

Simply put, Trump's new rules will make our country weaker. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, immigrants are incredibly important to the American economy, continuously powering the economy through entrepreneurship, ingenuity and innovation. In 2016, first-generation immigrants started close to 30 percent of U.S. companies, according to the Kauffman Foundation. Even the Cato Institute agrees, reporting that "...when low-income noncitizens receive public benefits, the average value of benefits per recipient is almost always lower than for those who are native-born." But facts are not the point for Trump's anti-immigration policies.

Throughout the Trump administration's war on the poor, the brown and the foreign, it's become almost rote to invoke the words of "The New Colossus," the poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty. But it should be noted that the president's own ancestors, as well as those of many of his sycophantic advisers, were once just nameless faces hoping America would provide them a better life than the one they left behind.

This latest decision by the Supreme Court, made along ideological lines, allows the Trump administration to deny green cards to people who may require even minimal public assistance. U.S. District Judge George Daniels in the Southern District of New York — who in 2019

imposed a temporary injunction on the policy — called it “repugnant to the American Dream” and a “policy of exclusion in search of a justification.”

This plan has accurately been referred to as a “wealth test” for immigrants. By expanding the definition of those considered dependent on government help, however, the policy will likely discourage immigrants from seeking out the kinds of temporary aid programs that can ultimately enable upward mobility. There is a tragic irony that the decision came down on Holocaust Remembrance Day, since the “public charge” condition was levied in the Immigration Act of 1924 and used to deny entry to Jewish refugees.

President Donald Trump has made no secret as to who he believes can and should become “American.” He began his campaign by accusing Mexicans of being drug smugglers and rapists. He’s only proposed plans for a wall along one of the country’s borders, specifically not the one adjacent to a majority-white country. He’s attacked the temporary protected status of citizens from multiple countries currently facing disastrous humanitarian conflicts. He’s referred to multiple (black and brown) nations as “shithole countries” and lamented low immigration from Norway.

The policy also sets a dangerous precedent regarding who is “deserving” of public assistance programs. Once Trump has ensured that immigrants are unable to easily access the social safety net, it seems pretty obvious he will work to dismantle it. Just last week, he suggested willingness to “look at” entitlement cuts. (He quickly walked that statement back.) This wealth test for immigrants should scare every single American who, unlike Trump, is not able to get “a small loan of a million dollars” during times of financial hardship. It should scare all Americans who believe in the spirit of the United States. And it should scare anyone who thinks “they’ll never come for me.”

At a time when nations are competing for the best talent, America is turning her back. And, unless we course-correct come November, our country, our values and our economic interests will be poorer for it.