

Karayof: The Case Against Scapegoating Immigrants

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Last Tuesday, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the Obama-era executive order titled “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals”, DACA, would be rescinded in six months’ time.

Although DACA did not grant citizenship, it allowed children who were brought to the US to receive a renewable two-year period of deferred action from deportation as well as eligibility to apply for a work permit if they met certain age, background, residency and education standards.

The decision to rescind this program is consistent with the xenophobic hostility that has been a cornerstone of Donald Trump’s platform since he initially declared his candidacy back in 2015.

Over the past few years, members of the GOP have scapegoated undocumented immigrants by constructing a narrative that characterizes “illegals” as criminals and rapists. Republican leaders and conservative media alike claim that these people are an economic burden and a financial drain on our social services, caused due to “weak enforcement of immigration laws” by former President Barack Obama

None of this is true. During his administration, Obama deported more illegal immigrants than any president in US history. According to research by Cato Institute, a right wing organization which promotes public policies that are “consistent with the traditional American principles of limited government, individual liberty, and peace,” DACA recipients have lower incarceration rates than native-born Americans of the same age and education level; undocumented immigrants who are ineligible for DACA have even *lower* crime rates than that.

This illustrates a fantastic example of propaganda- if you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it.

If you listened to Jeff Sessions’s statements last Tuesday, he argued that this decision was made to “protect taxpayers,” a platitude that has been repeated *ad nauseam*. Study after study shows that our economy benefits from these individuals. According to the National Academy of Sciences, first generation immigrants who enter the US as children actually pay *more* in taxes over their lifetimes than they receive back in benefits. This includes DACA recipients, who are ineligible for any federal benefits, including food stamps, social security or even FASFA.

In the US, we issue what are known as “Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers.” ITIN issued by the IRS to provide a method for anyone ineligible for a social security number to still pay an income tax. As of 2012, the ITIN program allowed millions of people to pay into the system; a total of \$9 billion in payroll taxes and another \$11.8 billion in state taxes.

Sessions also mentioned this administration's dedication to the "rule of law" as a means of justifying DACA. This is hard to believe considering the bold executive pardon of former Arizona Sheriff Joe Arpaio back in August.

Arpaio, who, among other things, is notorious for expanding the Maricopa County Jail to include an outdoor "tent city" (which he favorably referred to as a "concentration camp") was convicted of criminal contempt. The judge ruled that, for 18 months, Arpaio had refused to abide by a federal court order to cease his illegal detainment of immigrants.

The level of hypocrisy from an administration which justifies their aggressive stances as "law and order" while consistently attacking the judiciary and now, pardoning a man that *refused to comply with a federal court order*, is stunning. There can be zero nuance in the debate on immigration, but it's wholly justified for the president to abuse his executive privilege in a direct attack on the system of checks and balances? Trump does not have the constitutional authority to strip the judiciary of their power. Nevertheless, this sends a clear message that outrageous violations against the rights of Americans will be excused if it is to further the current administration's agenda.

There is no merit to the inflammatory comments that have been made about illegal immigrants. Through the use of propaganda, conservatives have been convinced that we should focus on punishment, not amnesty. By fanning the flames of intolerance and laying blame on the "them," the GOP have convinced their voters to disregard reason, ethics and morality in exchange for regressive policy and tribal impulse. If congress is unable to pass legislation by March, thousands will lose their DACA status each week. Are we really going to deny amnesty for those who've been alongside us pledging allegiance to the same flag since primary schools? Is being American really only about the papers you have?