

## Quotes from *Immigration and the Next America*

Immigration is about more than immigration. It always has been. The question of immigration is a question about America. About our national identity and destiny. What is America? What does it mean to be an American? Who are we as a people and where are we heading as a country? What will the "next America" look like? What *should* the next America look like?

We are talking about souls not statistics. We are talking about families. We're talking about fathers and husbands who, with no warning, won't be coming home for dinner tonight — and who may not see their families again for a decade at least. We're talking about women suddenly left as single mothers to raise their children in poverty. We're talking about a state policy that results in making many children virtual "orphans" to be raised on the streets or in foster care.

Catholic commitments to the immigrant ... form a part of our original identity as believers. Put simply, we care for the immigrant because Jesus commanded us to. Catholics must defend immigrants if we are going to be worthy of the name Christian.

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Most of the time, most of the arguments in our public debate are motivated by patriotic ideals and concern for the common good. But there is a persistent undertone that cannot be mistaken. It is driven by fear and, sadly, also by chauvinism. A lot of people — a lot of good Christian people — are saying things they know they shouldn't be saying about a category of men and women they have never talked to, only talked about. A category of people they have reduced to an abstract enemy they identify as "illegals."

Nearly all of us today are immigrants by blood. But ... our commitment to immigration is an obligation of our national spirit that must be renewed in each generation. America's self-identity, as well as our relationship with other nations, depends on our attitude toward immigration. If we turn our back on our history, if we abandon what he called our "old principles," then something in the American spirit will have died.

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[American] history is important in our current debates because it reminds us that before we were a nation of immigrants, we were a nation founded by missionaries. Two centuries before our founding documents were written down in English, there were immigrants here praying and preaching in Spanish. ... [W]hat we need to keep in mind in our immigration debate is that the Hispanic presence has deep roots in this soil. Long before America had a name, long before there was a Washington, D.C., or a Wall Street, this land was Spanish and Catholic. Two hundred years before any of the Founding Fathers were born, this land's people were being baptized in the name of Christ. The people of this land were called Christians before they were called Americans. And they were first called this name in the Spanish tongue.

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[Catholics'] status in American public life gives us a duty. We are called to renew the soul of our nation in the image of her founding beliefs. Our immigration crisis is a crisis of national identity and purpose. Our nation was founded by missionaries to be a "new world" that reflects God's benevolent plan for human history. The national motto chosen by America's founders reflects this same idea — America as a *novus ordo seclorum*, a new order of the ages. We need to help our neighbors see the immigrants in our midst in light of America's missionary and immigrant heritage.

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Jesus never distinguished between those who "deserve" our love and those who don't. He told us that God makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. So we can't choose to love some but not to love others. We can't justify showing less compassion for those who don't have the right documents. Jesus said, "I was a stranger." He did not distinguish between legal and illegal. In fact, he pushed us to find him in those who are the most distressing to us — including strangers and criminals in jail.

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By our political inaction we have allowed a vast underclass to grow at the margins of our society. We have created a situation where millions of men and women are living as perpetual servants — working for low wages in our restaurants and fields; our factories, gardens, homes, and hotels. These men and women have no security against sickness, disability, or old age. In many cases these people can't even open up a checking account or get a driver's license. They serve as our nannies and babysitters. But their own children can't get jobs or go to college because they were brought to this country illegally by their parents.

The dream of America was not meant to leave people living in limbo. There are hundreds of thousands being held without charges or representation in "detention centers." Millions more are living with the knowledge that if they make one wrong move they could be arrested, ripped from their families, and locked in those same immigration jails — or deported straight away.

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We need to work to make sure that immigration reform is part of an even more comprehensive reform — a project for American renewal aimed at forming a new national identity and civic culture dedicated to the universal values of promoting human dignity, freedom, and a community of the good. We need to take the next steps toward realizing the dream of America.