

We Are All Immigrants



Statue of Liberty

All four of my grandparents were immigrants. One, my maternal grandfather, entered the US “illegally.” Both my first and present wives are immigrants. My first wife left the Philippines during the final years of the Marcos dictatorship, at a time when conditions in that country were rapidly deteriorating.

The decree Pre*ident trump issued this past Friday, blocking all Muslims of seven nations from entering America, deeply and personally offends me.

As I think about what trump’s decree means to us as a nation, my insides burn. We are all immigrants from other countries. Our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, or maybe even further back, packed up everything they could carry and took a chance on traveling to a distant land in the desperate hope they could build a better life for their children. Those people, every one of them, demonstrated more courage than our current pre*ident will ever display or even understand.

I remember Winnie entering America for the first time in Los Angeles International Airport. [After a 20 month struggle](#), she finally obtained her visa on her first try at the US Consulate in Guangzhou and purchased her ticket here the very next day.

Her point of entry was Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), the International terminal. I flew to Los Angeles the day before her arrival and stayed with my brother and family. The next evening we all went down to LAX, arriving about two hours before Winnie's scheduled arrival. Then we waited.

I knew when Winnie's plane had landed and people were clearing customs because of the many Chinese people coming out. So many of them were young women with a baggage cart loaded with cloth bags stuffed full. These were all women like Winnie coming to America to be with their new husbands, seeking a better life, and carrying everything they now owned.

Our identity as Americans are bound up as a nation of immigrants, a nation that welcomes in the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breath free. The people of past generations and the people trying to come here today are what our country stands for. This is who we are.

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.*

*"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Emma Lazarus, 1883

No person, even if they happen to temporarily occupy our White House, has the right to deny what America is all about. We as Americans are now facing a test; do we continue to stand for freedom and liberty for all who have the courage to ask? Or do we throw up a wall and hide behind it, quivering in the fear that new immigrants might bring new ideas and new customs and new ways of thinking.

I know on which side I stand.