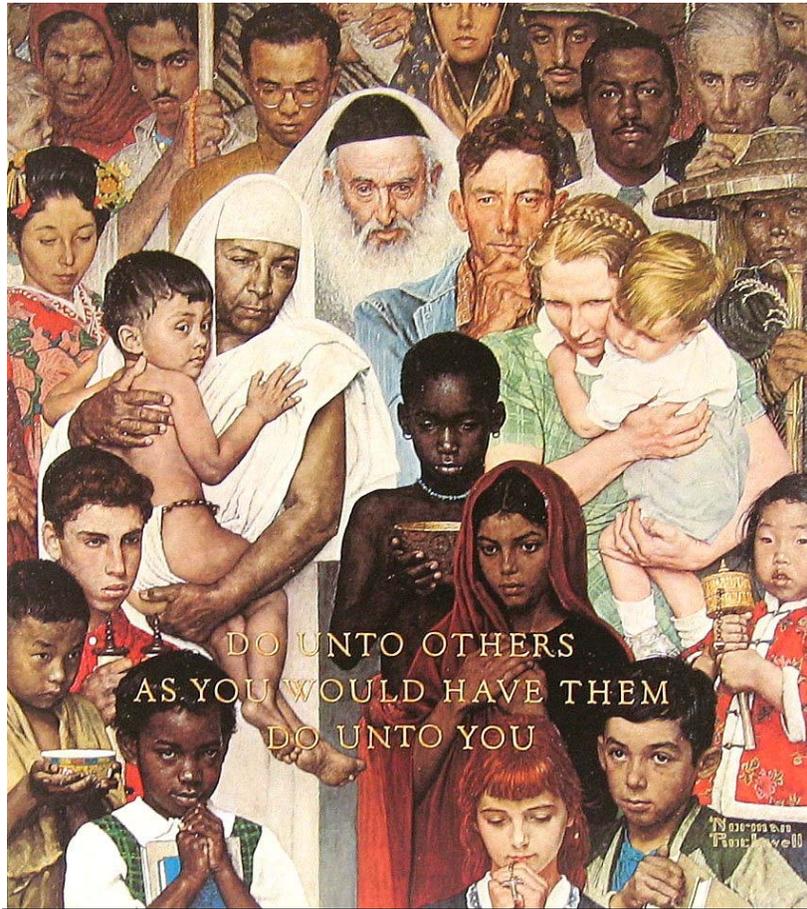


Immigration and the Golden Rule



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Part 1: Introduction

“Illegal is an epithet. Actions can be illegal and one’s status can be illegal, [but] people themselves are not illegal.”¹

I have worked with the Latin American community for the past four years, with both documented and undocumented immigrants. As I have worked with this community, I have helped these individuals to learn English, I have listened to everything from stories about their families to recipes for their favorite dishes, I have lived in their homes and shared meals with them (just as with my own family), I have watched them wake up much too early to compete for jobs that do not pay enough, and I have heard their testimonies of fighting for basic human rights and dignities in their jobs and their communities.

With each moment that I have spent within this community, I have learned a few things. I have learned that a person’s situation, which may be out of their control, should not be used to create their identity. I have learned that ignorance results in fierce stereotypes and prejudices. And I have learned that our immigration system is flawed.

As you may have gathered, I will be talking about immigration, primarily undocumented, Hispanic immigrants. First, I will present three, brief “Imagine” stories, where you will have the chance to put yourself in the shoes of three different undocumented immigrants. Next, I will address five common misconceptions about illegal immigration, giving the facts and showing how these immigrants are also a benefit to the United States. Finally, I will discuss the Golden Rule (which many of you are likely familiar with) to discuss a unique approach to our perceptions about immigration.

Part 2: Imagine Stories

Now, I simply want you to listen as I tell you three stories. As I tell you these stories, I want you to imagine that you are the person in each situation.

2.1 RITA

Imagine that you are a woman named Rita. You are 43 years old, a mother of three, and have come to the United States illegally from Honduras. Five years ago you dangerously crossed over the Mexican-American border, known as “La Frontera,” using the hired services of a *coyote* (a paid human smuggler). You feel fortunate to have found a good coyote after all of the horror stories you have heard from your neighbors. You hear of coyotes who take your money and then rape you, or some that steal all that you have and then beat you, leaving you for dead near the border. Your coyote is, fortunately, not like those you have heard about. Over the course of several days, you travel along a hidden route, bypassing the police, and crossing the border into Mexico. Once in Mexico, you cross through a rat-filled sewer to enter into the United States unnoticed. Once officially on United States soil, you breathe a sigh of relief, the grueling trek is finally over. You pay the coyote the remainder of his fee and before leaving he sets you up in a motel, where the owners help out his clients until they get on their feet. Exhausted, you collapse onto the stained bed and dream about the many benefits this journey will bring you. You are not aware of the many challenges that you are about to face.

¹ Brackley 5 (for this and all footnotes, see the bibliography for full reference)

You had to leave all three of your children behind in Honduras with family members because you cannot afford to bring them with you and it is too dangerous to have them cross the border with you. You have two daughters, Maria who was 13, Paula who was 10, and a son, Pedro, was only 3 when you left. Leaving your children was the hardest thing that you have ever done. You love your family more than anything and you are all incredibly close. You believe in *familia*, the idea that family is not just your nuclear family, but family are all of those who are close to you. But you *had* to leave, because of the extreme poverty you were confronted with on a daily basis, a poverty that prevents your children from having enough to eat, and prevents your children from continuing on in school (because you need them to work so you could all survive).

You are scared and alone in the United States. With barely any English skills, you lack the ability for basic communication with those around you. It is only by speaking with other immigrants in the motel that you were able to learn what your next step needs to be. Soon, you are able to find employment as a live-in housekeeper for a wealthy, white American family. Their home is like you have seen in pictures, a large house with a neat lawn, a fence, and a docile neighborhood; it all seems white and clean unlike your rural home in Honduras with dirt floors and dry patches of ground among the grass. The family seems to be nice. You have a small room to yourself, and the family provides linens for your room and food for you to eat. You, however, are not allowed to use the phone, and work long hours every day cleaning the house and helping with various other needs of the family. The family does not communicate with you much, you do your work and they keep to their own lives. You are given one day off a week, Sundays.

Your job is not bad, you are paid minimum wage and are able to start sending some money home to your children so that they can afford to go to school. (In Honduras, uniforms and school supplies need to be provided by the families, and this often prevents children from attending if they do not have the means to provide these articles). But you are quickly learning that the American Dream is a mixed message, there is a cost to pay in exchange for being able to better provide for your family. You horribly miss your children. In five years you have barely been able to communicate with your children, and you fear that they will become a distant dream. You especially worry about your youngest, Pedro, who is now eight years old and may have no memory of you. Communication is difficult. Since you cannot use the phone in your household, you must wait until your day off to use the payphone by the local drugstore. However, to use that you must first buy a phone card, which is expensive. Even then, there is no phone in your relative's house in Honduras, where your children are staying. In order to call them, you must call the public phone in the bar of the pueblo, ask them to relay a message to your relatives, telling them when to be by the phone so that they can receive your call. It may take a month or longer to coordinate phone calls that can only last a brief amount of time.

But communication with your family is not the only obstacle that you face. Over the years, you have learned decent English, which has finally made it easier to communicate with those in your surrounding communities. However, your new language skills also make you aware of things that you were oblivious to before. You hear those around you talk about "all them Mexicans" or "the illegals." You feel a sting whenever you hear these words and phrases, as though you are not welcome in this country. You become fearful; which brings up another concern; will you be deported? The news talks about new immigration laws and stricter enforcement. You do not have immigration papers, you are one of the

“illegals” that everyone is so keen to kick out of the country. You become more reserved and work even harder at your job, hoping to avoid attention. If you lose your job and are deported, you will be able to be with your children, who you miss terribly. But then how can you provide for your family?

2.2 ALEJANDRO

Now, imagine that you are Alejandro. You are a 24-year-old young man from Guatemala in Central America. You are a migrant farmworker and are working in Immokalee, Florida, one of the largest areas for the production of oranges and tomatoes. Because you have been a migrant farmworker for the past 2 years, you understand a considerable amount of English. This does not necessarily help you out though. Although you can communicate with your employers, you can rarely communicate with your coworkers – many of them speak an indigenous language, they are struggling just to learn Spanish.

Your living conditions are abhorrent. You live in a trailer with 14 other men, a trailer designed for about 4 people at the most. Your living conditions are inhumane. You know that there are health codes, but they are never enforced; it is impossible to keep the trailer clean with so many people and the landlords never listen when you say that something needs to be repaired. You and the 14 other men together pay about \$1600 weekly in rent. You know that you are being ripped off, but if you complain your landlords threaten you with deportation. So you keep your mouth shut, even though you are being treated worse than an animal. In addition to your insane rent, you have incredible debt, from hospital bills (you do not have insurance). And when you get your paychecks, you sigh at how much money is lost to taxes. It seems impossible to keep up, yet this is the only way to make a living, as there are no opportunities in your hometown.

2.3 ELENA

Finally, imagine that you are Elena. You are thirteen years old, from Mexico City, Mexico, and your parents brought you with them, illegally, to the United States when you were only 10 months old. Your parents have worked hard to raise you as an “American”; they do their best to provide you with American clothes and toys, they send you to the local public school, and they speak about this country with great pride. You do not know Spanish (this was one way that your parents tried to make you more American) and you know nothing about Mexico. You are content with your life in the United States and do not even realize that anything is wrong.

But today, immigration services found out about your family and will be deporting all of you back to Mexico. You are about to return to a country that you have no recollection of, have never talked about, where you have no friends, do not speak the language, and know nothing about a home or relatives there. Although you are Mexican by birth, you are not Mexican in heart, spirit, or culture. To you, you are American, because that is all you have known. You are terrified, angry, and confused. You do not know what to expect in Mexico, and you hope that your parents can guide you. You hate that you are leaving the place you have called home, and you are furious at your parents for putting you in this situation and for your country to turn against you. You want to know why you have to be punished when you did not make the choice to come here?

Part 3: Why You Need to Get the Facts Straight: 5 Common Misconceptions about Undocumented Immigrants

Consider the stereotypes we have towards illegal immigration, whether or nor they are beliefs you personally hold. Do they include any of the following beliefs: They are all Mexicans, they are all criminals, they are all stealing our jobs, they don't pay taxes, they get our benefits while we have to pay, they are lazy?

As the three previous stories demonstrate, these stereotypes are not necessarily true and it is essential to get the facts straight. When we have the facts straight, we see the situation differently and can figure out the best way to tackle the problems and try to create a solution that is best for everyone. But, what are the facts? Although there are many stereotypes and misconceptions associated with illegal immigration, these I have mentioned are the most common, and are the ones I would like to address.

3.1 THEY ARE ALL MEXICANS

Mexico is “the single largest source of U.S. migrants” according to the Pew Research Hispanic Center. However, the numbers show that Mexicans are not the only group of immigrants. There are approximately 11.1-11.5 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States. This approximation is taken from two different organizations’ studies: The Department of Homeland Security’s Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) and the Pew Hispanic Center (PHC). According to the OIS, unauthorized migrants are from a variety of locations: 8.9 million are from North America (this consists of Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and Canada), 1.3 million are from Asia, 0.8 million are from South America, and 0.3 million are from Europe. As these numbers show, not all unauthorized immigrants are Hispanic, and those that are, are from a variety of Latin American countries; the top three are Mexico (59%), El Salvador (6%), and Guatemala (5%).²

There are also cultural differences that separate these individuals based on their respective countries. I once had a professor inform me that you cannot talk about a Hispanic or Latino culture, instead you must speak about cultures within the larger group. For example, Cinco de Mayo, a holiday that we frequently use as an excuse to party here in the United States, is actually a Mexican holiday, and is restricted to that specific country. In Central America, there is a common dish called *pupusas*. These are corn flour patties filled with either meat, cheese, or beans, and then cooked on a skillet, much like a pancake. However, this dish is not found in Mexico or South America. Even the demographics are varied. If you took a sample of say 1,000 Hispanic immigrants, you would see that, just like us, they have a range of skin colors. This is the result of different racial backgrounds over the lifetimes of the countries. Hispanics can be very Black (as in the Dominican Republic), more Indian (as in Mexico and parts of Central America), or more European (as in Argentina). Skin color does not define these individuals, but proves that they all come from different backgrounds.

There are also linguistic differences among each culture, which is something that we can relate to our own Anglo culture. Just as how the English language varies in accent and vocabulary from New England, the Southern United States, England, and Australia, so it is the same in Spanish – speaking countries. Certain words may change meaning from Mexico to Spain, and a person from Cuba can be harder to understand than someone from Peru.

² Batalova

My own personal experience with Hispanic immigrants, both documented and undocumented, has allowed me to confront a variety of cultures. For example, in Immokalee, Florida, many of the migrant workers are indigenous Guatemalans, who do not even speak Spanish; and during my time teaching English as a Second Language in a Parish community, I met individuals from Mexico, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico (who, of course, are not counted among the undocumented immigrants).

3.2 THEY ARE ALL CRIMINALS

Briefly, I want to define three terms: criminal, felony, and misdemeanor. Having a proper understanding of these terms will help us to understand why an undocumented immigrant is or is not a criminal. Dictionary.com describes a criminal as one “guilty of a crime,” with a crime being “an action or an instance of negligence that is deemed injurious to the public welfare or morals or to the interests of the state that is legally prohibited.” A felony is “an offense, [such] as murder or burglary, of graver character than those called misdemeanor, especially those commonly punished in the U.S. by imprisonment for more than a year.” A misdemeanor, simply, is “a crime that is not very serious; a crime that is less serious than a felony.”

Dean Brackley, an American Jesuit who taught theology at the Universidad Centroamericana in El Salvador, states that “unauthorized border crossers are not criminals. They have not committed a felony. Our judicial system categorizes them more like traffic violators.”³ This statement contradicts the common belief that undocumented immigrants are all criminals. Yes, undocumented immigrants are breaking a law, but the breaking of a law does not make someone a criminal, and it is important to differentiate between a criminal and a lawbreaker because with the first the implications are more severe. Felonies and misdemeanors are not the only forms of breaking the law, but they are the two associated with illegal immigration. Generally, crossing the border illegally constitutes a misdemeanor. The only way it can be a felony is for a repeated offense. For example, if an individual, after being deported, crosses over the border again as an unauthorized immigrant, they risk being jailed for periods of time over one year, which would constitute a felony, however this is unusual.

Now, there are concerns that undocumented immigrants are violent and/or drug dealers. If you gather together a large population of people, there will be a small number of criminals among those people. It is no different with undocumented immigrants. Yes, there are a portion of undocumented immigrants who are actually violent criminals or drug smugglers, but this is a minority and in no way defines an entire group. In a February 2013 edition of *USA Today*⁴, there was an article discussing deportation quotas of the past years. Of the many points that the article raised, it stated that “President Obama’s administration has made deporting convicted criminals a central feature of its immigration policy, while saying it would halt some efforts to remove low – priority immigrants who pose little risk to public safety.” According to the Center for Immigration Studies, in discussing Obama’s administration plan for illegal immigration, the administration . . .

. . . is committed to *not* deporting all other illegal immigrants who have taken up residence in the United States despite the fact that their presence is

³ Brackley

⁴ see bibliography

contrary to existing law. All crimes incidental to living and working illegally in the United States, such as identity theft, using false documentation, and driving without a license or insurance, are not considered serious enough to qualify for deportation.⁵

The Center for Immigration Studies states that in 2011 there were 188,382 deportations. Of this number, 23% committed drug-related offenses, 23% committed criminal traffic offenses (mainly DUIs), 20% committed immigration offenses such as illegal reentry, 12% committed violent crimes, and 7% committed non-violent crimes. Undocumented immigrants, while they are breaking a law, are seldom criminals or dangerous threats to our national safety.

3.3 THEY ARE ALL STEALING OUR JOBS

Undocumented workers are not actually taking our jobs. To a large extent, these hardworking individuals fill the job sectors in areas that United States' citizens tend not to gravitate towards; in an era where college degrees are becoming more common, blue collar jobs, despite their necessity, are lacking labor sources. These include such jobs as construction, maintenance, housekeeping, and especially agriculture. The Pew Hispanic Center⁶ states, "unauthorized immigrants make up 25% of farmworkers (not including temporary workers)." Agriculture is one job sector that is popularly filled by unauthorized immigrants, yet they still do not fill up the majority of positions; there are 75% that are filled by United States Citizens.

In a 2004 film, *A Day Without a Mexican*⁷, this issue is briefly touched on. The film itself is a parody, but it provides a commentary on common issues relating to illegal immigration. In one scene, a Californian farm owner, after having all of his employees (who were immigrants) mysteriously disappear, becomes desperate to harvest his crops. He states that there is no one to work the fields and he can barely find a person willing to help. This poses a threat to his crops and livelihood, and to our food, and directly shows how reliant we are on immigrant individuals, even those who are not documented. This is a reality of our farming industry; without the 25% filled by undocumented immigrants, our farms are in serious trouble.

According to *The Huffington Post*,

the United Farm Workers (UFW) began a campaign not long ago that it aptly calls *Take Our Jobs*. "Farm workers are ready to welcome citizens and legal residents who wish to replace them in the field," the UFW says. "We will use our knowledge and staff to help connect the unemployed with farm employers. Just fill out the form to the right and continue on to the request for job application." Arturo Rodriguez, president of the UFW, told comedian Stephen Colbert that only three people signed up. "Americans do not want to work in the fields," he explained. "It's difficult, it requires expertise, and the conditions are horrid."⁸

⁵ Schulkin

⁶ "A Nation of Immigrants"

⁷ see bibliography

⁸ Feffer

Similarly, a February 12, 2013 article in the *New York Times Magazine* titled, “Do Illegal Immigrants Actually Hurt the U.S. Economy?”⁹ shows how undocumented immigrants actually benefit our jobs and boost the economy. The article states “undocumented workers do not compete with skilled laborers—instead, they complement them. Economies, as Adam Smith argued in *Wealth of Nations*, work best when workers become specialized and divide up tasks among themselves.”¹⁰ And, this is one way that unauthorized immigrants are not taking our jobs, but helping make our workforce more effective. Since undocumented workers work as less-specialized workers, specialized workers (who are paid more) can do a job, and then quickly move on to another job, while the less-specialized worker (for a lower pay) finishes the smaller details that do not require a high skill level. As a result, a higher number of jobs can be done and the overall cost of the job decreases.

3.4 THEY DON'T PAY TAXES/ THEY GET BENEFITS BUT WE HAVE TO PAY

From an economic perspective, undocumented immigrants are actually a huge asset to the United States. In an overview of a 2007 Council Special Report, Professor Gordon Hanson, through the Council on Foreign Relations discusses his findings on the economic advantages of illegal immigration. “Professor Hanson concludes that stemming illegal immigration would likely lead to a net drain on the U.S. economy.”¹¹ This statement is further supported by a recent article from the *New York Times*¹², which provides, not only supporting information to Hanson’s claim, but also advocate the idea that, although there are some apparent drawbacks, in the larger picture illegal immigration is economically beneficial to the United States.

The *New York Times* article, written this past February, points out that immigrants generally spend the money that they make, thus providing a constant stream of funds being pumped into the economy. Stephen Goss, chief actuary for the Social Security Administration, states “undocumented workers contribute about \$15 billion a year to Social Security through payroll taxes” but “they only take out \$1 billion (very few undocumented workers are eligible to receive benefits).” Immigrants, through a Taxpayer ID pay money to the IRS and, as Gross also mentions, “undocumented workers have contributed up to \$300 billion, or nearly 10 percent, of the \$2.7 trillion Social Security Trust Fund.” If we take these numbers into consideration with Professor Hanson’s earlier comment, we can see that illegal immigration is a boost to our economy.

Yes, undocumented immigrants do receive some aid from our nation, but as the numbers show, the belief that they are stealing our money or taking advantage of benefits that they do not merit is greatly inaccurate. Undocumented immigrants are helping to boost our economy, which, during this recession, is an important asset.

3.5 THEY ARE LAZY

Some critics of illegal immigration claim that undocumented immigrants are lazy individuals who sap the resources of the United States without making much of a contribution. But consider what we have already learned: undocumented immigrants are

⁹ Davidson

¹⁰ Davidson

¹¹ Hanson

¹² Davidson

not eligible for benefits from the government. Because of this, they have even more of a reason to work hard, so that they can have enough money to cover their needs and expenses. There are also the types of jobs that undocumented workers fill. While undocumented workers can fill a variety of minimum – wage positions, typical jobs consist of blue – collar jobs. These jobs, as we know, are not easy labor. The difficulty of these jobs can be expressed with our earlier example, of the farm owners who posed a challenge to United States citizens to fill the agricultural jobs of immigrants. As we learned, no one stepped forward, because the jobs were so demanding. From the Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers, an organization that works with the immigrant farmers in Immokalee, Florida (who make up the majority of the workforce in this area) for better wages and working conditions, we can obtain a sense of what a typical workday may look like:

- 4:30 AM: Wake up. Prepare lunch in your trailer.
- 5:00 AM: Walk to the parking lot or pick – up site to look for work.
- 6:30 AM: With luck, a contractor will choose you to work for him for the day (there are not always consistent job positions, a farmer may use a variety of workers each day). The job may be 10 miles to 100 miles away. Board the contractor’s converted school bus to go to the fields.
- 7:30 AM: Arrive at fields and begin weeding or simply waiting while the dew evaporates from the tomatoes. You are usually not paid for this time.
- 9:00 AM: Begin picking tomatoes – filling buckets (that weigh aprox. 40 lbs), hoisting them on your shoulder, running them 100 feet or more to the truck and throwing the bucket up into the truck – all for a token worth, on average, 50 cents. Work fast because you must pick nearly 2.5 tons of tomatoes in order to earn minimum wage today. This may or may not be possible depending on the time of year and quantity of tomatoes on the plants.
- 12:00 PM: Eat lunch as fast as you can, often with your hands soaked in pesticides. Return to work under the smoldering Florida sun.
- 5:00 PM (sometimes much later, depending on the season): Board bus to return to Immokalee.
- Between 5:30 and 8:00 PM: Arrive in Immokalee and walk home¹³

Now, this workday is unique to Immokalee, and although some of the problems may vary depending on the farm and the area, the strenuous, physical workday is typical.

Part 4: Immigration Law

U.S. immigration law is very complex, and there is much confusion as to how it works. The Immigration and Naturalization Act (INA), the body of law governing current immigration policy, provides for an annual worldwide limit of 675,000 permanent immigrants, with certain exceptions for close family members. Congress and the President determine a separate number for refugee admissions. Historically, immigration to the United States has been based upon three principles: the reunification of families, admitting

¹³ Coalition of Immokalee Farmworkers

immigrants with skills that are valuable to the U.S. economy, and protecting refugees.¹⁴

After hearing this summary of immigration policy, you may wonder where the policy goes wrong. Once again, this is where getting the facts is crucial. First, consider the numbers. Approximately 675,000 permanent immigrants are allowed in the United States, but we currently have roughly 11 million undocumented immigrants. Clearly, the quotas permitted by the Immigration and Naturalization Act are not realistic in regards to the United States economy's need for immigrants.

Critics of illegal immigration may say, "Why don't they just get in line?" While legally getting in line to immigrate would be ideal, this is, unfortunately, a rarely attainable reality. Undocumented workers do not strive to take an illegal route, in fact, opinion surveys from a variety of sources (i.e. CNN, TIME Magazine, Associated Press, etc.) "indicate that 98 percent [of undocumented workers] would prefer to live and work legally in the United States and would do so if they could."¹⁵ So what prevents immigrants from pursuing a legal route of entry into the United States? It is the result of an inadequate immigration policy that ignores the realities of immigration demands today. "The total number of green cards available for all lower-skilled workers is limited to 5,000 per year for the entire United States."¹⁶ Undocumented immigrants typically fill the lower-skilled workers end of the spectrum and there is a demand for workers in the service sectors within the United States. Those workers, whose labor we need for the United States economy, are the same workers we are constantly trying to deport, because they are here illegally. However, despite our need for their labor, our country does not ensure them a safe route into the United States. This is the biggest flaw and hypocrisy with our current immigration policies, that we need immigrant workers yet make their presence illegal.

Part 5: The Golden Rule and Morality

You are most likely familiar with the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto yourself." You may be asking yourself, "What relevance does the Golden Rule have in regards to immigration?" Before I answer that, it is important that you have an accurate understanding of the Golden Rule.

The Golden Rule is much more than a simple axiom, it is also an ethical framework that helps us, in a logical method, to treat others well and to demand fair treatment of ourselves. Even more fascinating is the universality of the Golden Rule. The majority of world religions and cultures accept the Golden Rule. This not only provides a unifying characteristic, but also provides evidence that the Golden Rule is not the biased opinion of one specific group. Let me begin with an example, the story of the Wooden Bowl, a Mexican example of the Golden Rule:

5.1 The Wooden Bowl

Once there was a young boy, about 6 years old, who lived with his mom, dad, and elderly grandfather. Because of his advanced age, the boy's grandfather was having a harder

¹⁴ "How the United States Immigration System Works: A Fact Sheet."

¹⁵ "Why Don't They Just Get in Line"

¹⁶ "Why Don't They Just Get in Line"

time with simple motor skills. At dinner, his hand shook as he tried to feed himself. This caused his food to spill, making a mess that resembled that of an infant just learning how to feed itself. Disgusted by this mess that they had to look at during every meal, the boy's parents moved his elderly grandfather to a small table in the corner of the kitchen, out of eyesight of the dining room table. The parents were content, they didn't have to look at that disgusting mess while they were eating anymore. The young boy felt bad for his grandfather, who not had to eat alone, isolated from everyone else because of a mess he couldn't help that he made.

But, as time passed and the grandfather's shaking hands got worse, he began to drop dishes, eventually breaking them. These accidents aggravated the young boy's parents, and understandably so (it is never fun to watch your dishes being broken). Eventually, the boy's parents made another decision. They gave the grandfather a plain, scratched up, wooden bowl to eat from, and nothing else. In the wooden bowl all of his food mixed together, making a lumpy, mushy mixture, much like when you scrape all of the after-dinner scraps into a bowl for your pet dog. The grandfather became even sadder when he had to eat out of this bowl, alone from everyone else, but the parents didn't seem to notice.

After a few days of observing this, the young boy started on a project. When his mom and dad saw him they asked him what he was making. The boy told them, "I am making wooden bowls for you so that when you are as old as grandpa and make a mess when eating and break things, you can eat from the bowl too." (The young boy learned from his parents' example, just as any young child would.) Well, when the boy's parents heard this, they immediately felt very sorry; they realized that they had been treating the grandfather unfairly, and did not think about how they would feel if they were in his situation, struggling to feed themselves. From that point on, the mom and dad allowed the grandfather to join them at the dining room table and to eat on regular dishes. Never again did they complain if he broke a dish or made a mess that they had to clean up because they understood how he felt, and they would want to be treated in the same way if it was them.

This folktale is a popular example of the Golden Rule and the reasoning behind it. In this story, the parents not only did not practice the Golden Rule, but it was not until their son pointed out their fault that they were able to understand their ignorance.

The Golden Rule is a test of consistency that requires impartiality ("making similar evaluations about similar actions, regardless of the individuals involved"¹⁷) and conscientiousness ("living in harmony with our moral beliefs"¹⁸). Simply put, the Golden Rule is not a literal "rule," but instead functions as a framework that is reliant on our own understanding, helping to shape out decisions to make just choices. The heart of the Golden Rule is role reversal, asking yourself, "am I willing that I be treated in the same way [that I am treating this person] if I was in the same situation [as that person]?"

We may not typically be led to think about the Golden Rule in this way, which is why I want to quickly touch on two different Golden Rule fallacies. These fallacies, or mistakes, are ways that people regularly misinterpret the Golden Rule, often resulting in why the Golden Rule seems absent in the world today. Each of these fallacies does not make something wrong with the Golden Rule, nor does it make us bad people, instead they

¹⁷ Gensler 8

¹⁸ Gensler 8

demonstrate something wrong with how the Golden Rule is being understood or interpreted.

5.2 The Literal Golden Rule Fallacy

The Literal Golden Rule Fallacy assumes that everyone has the same likes, dislikes, and needs that we do. Most of you would probably disagree with this assumption, saying that the person down the street from you does not like the same things that you do. And you would be correct to say this. In regards to immigration, the literal golden rule fallacy comes up a lot. With every immigrant that comes into our country, we may be quick to say that they need to focus on X, Y, and Z. However, what we fail to realize is that immigrants, especially those who are undocumented, have their own special needs and concerns that contrast with our own, just as we have our own special needs that contrast with those of the immigrant.

Before we can decide what is best for an undocumented immigrant, or before we can appropriately apply the Golden Rule, we must educate ourselves on their situation, at least a little bit, so that we can accurately judge what the appropriate response would be. The most prominent concerns of the undocumented immigrant are language, money, transportation, and keeping touch with family back at home.

5.2a Language

Hispanic immigrants that come to the United States generally do not come here knowing English. Since they come to our country, I do agree that they should be making an effort to learn English and be able to communicate. However, this is not an easy task. For many immigrants, since they do not know English, they are unable to maneuver well in the United States without eventual help. If they are unable to communicate then how can they find the resources that they would need, such as English as a Second Language courses? Secondly, English is a much harder language to learn than Spanish. Because of this immigrants will need time to master the language. Lastly, there is a conflict of culture. For many Hispanic immigrants (and this would hold true for any immigrant), their Spanish is the last connecting string to their native culture, but they are often discouraged from using it when in our country, creating a constant struggle between an old and a new culture, and creating feelings of confusion and resentment towards both cultures.

5.2b Money

This is a concern that probably hits home for many of us, especially with the current state of the economy. But, we have to understand that the majority of immigrants do not come to our country to get rich. As the story about Rita showed us, immigrants generally come to the United States because of poverty or difficult economic conditions in their home country; even low wages here often amount to more money than they would make back home. However, the cost of living is higher in the United States. So, although these immigrants have the intention of saving money or sending money home to their families they are constantly unable to do so because they have to provide for themselves basic necessities, such as food, clothing, medicine, bills, and a place to live.

5.2c Transportation

Transportation is something that many of us may take for granted. All of you most likely own a car or have access to a car in your family. If you don't, then there may be buses or other forms of public transportation that you can use. However, transportation can become a tricky situation for the majority of undocumented immigrants. First, there is the problem of even getting a car. Even a simple car costs a decent amount of money, especially when funds are tight. In addition to purchasing a car, there is the issue of paying for gas and for the general maintenance of your vehicle. Next, there is the issue of a driver's license. Undocumented workers are currently unable to apply for a driver's license, a dilemma that forces undocumented immigrants to make one of two choices when it comes to transportation: either they can avoid a car altogether and look for alternative means of transportation (that may or may not exist for them) or they can drive a car illegally, without a license.

While additional illegal activity would not be ideal, an immigrant may have no other way to get to their job that they so desperately need. Yes, there are buses and other forms of public transportation, but depending on where you live these modes of transportation may not be readily available or may not be able to get you where you need to go. Finally, as an added fear, those undocumented workers who decide to drive without a license must be incredibly careful. If they ever get pulled over, even for a minor traffic violation, they risk being deported.

5.2d Communication with Distant Family

If you remember from Rita's story, the process of staying in touch with family members in an immigrant's home country can be incredibly difficult and may not occur as frequently as they would like. Of course, each situation is different, and some immigrants are fortunate and are able to stay in touch with their family easily and regularly, but this is often not the case. There are three main deterrents to staying in regular contact with family: time, money, convenience, and opportunity.

The first, time, is one that is partially the fault of the immigrant, depending on the situation. In this scenario, the immigrant does not have the opportunity to make a phone call or write a letter (a common issue of laziness that many Americans suffer from in this age of technology as well). However, this may not always be an issue of laziness. If you remember the day in the life of an Immokalee farmworker, it is easy to see that those immigrants do not have a legitimate opportunity to contact anyone. The little time that they have that is not spent working, is really used to sleep and shower.

Second on our list is money. Regardless of whether immigrants have regular access to phones there is the issue of paying for long-distance phone calls. If an immigrant is focusing on their other basic needs, such as food and shelter, they need to seriously weigh out if they can afford to pay for along distance call or a phone card. It is not an easy trade-off, but a realistic one nonetheless.

Third there is convenience. This issue is two-fold. First, there is the problem of whether an immigrant has access to a phone. Do they have a cell phone, a house phone, or do they need to rely on the phone of an employer or a pay phone? Secondly, what is the situation of their family in their home country? When I visited Nicaragua, the poorer population that lived in the rural mountains did not have phones in their homes, they did not even have electricity. In many cases, the immigrant's family may be in a situation very

similar to that described in Rita's story, where there is only a town phone, and many arrangements must be made to coordinate a phone call.

Lastly there is what I refer to as opportunity. Many undocumented immigrants would love to visit their family back at home, but they are unable to do so for a variety of reasons. The first is money; it may be too expensive to travel out of the country. Secondly, there is the issue of their status. If an immigrant is on the path to citizenship they cannot leave the country during this process without huge setbacks to their progress. If an individual is an undocumented immigrant, the risks are even greater. If an undocumented immigrant goes out of the country they risk not being able to enter back into the United States, which they need to do in order to make a living. There is also the issue of repeatedly entering the country illegally. If an undocumented immigrant enters into the country (whether after deportation or another cause) repeatedly, they will be categorized as committing a felony as opposed to a misdemeanor.

This issue of communication is difficult. Many of you likely are in regular contact with your family, or know that you could reach them in a moment. For these immigrants, family can be just as important to them, but they have to sacrifice communication to better provide for them, a decision that is not easy in the least.

5.3 Third-Parties Golden Rule Fallacy

The third-party Golden Rule fallacy assumes that we should only consider ourselves and the other person (but not other people involved). This fallacy occurs whenever we do not take into consideration everyone who will be impacted by the action we do. We would commit this fallacy if we discussed immigration policy (and its potential reform) as to why we should promote the good of citizens (but not of undocumented immigrants) or to promote the good of undocumented immigrants (but not of citizens).

5.4 KITA

At this point you may be asking yourself a few different questions: "how can these fallacies be avoided, how can we make sure that we apply the Golden Rule correctly so that we can treat others fairly?," or "what about the citizens? We keep talking about the immigrants, but aren't the citizens affected at all, what about the needs and concerns of the citizens?" The answer to these questions can be found in the acronym KITA, invented by Fr. Harry Gensler, SJ. KITA stands for Know, Imagine, Test, and Act. This acronym is a useful and simple tool to help us understand the Golden Rule, apply it correctly while avoiding fallacies, and making sure that all parties are considered when assessing a situation. In breaking down KITA, I am going to use the very relevant example of "we should send all undocumented immigrants home" to both explain this tool and to bring together all of the information that we have learned so far.

5.4a KNOW

In this initial stage, our goal is to gain knowledge, knowledge about the situation and knowledge about those involved. We first should be asking ourselves, "how would my action affect others?" In this case, it would be, "how would deporting all undocumented immigrants affect all parties involved?" This includes both the citizens as well as the immigrants themselves. This knowledge would be gained by asking questions, talking to

individuals involved, and researching, just like I did to set the fact straight earlier in this discussion.

5.4b IMAGINE

Now we need to IMAGINE. This stage is perhaps the most challenging because it requires more effort on our part, but it allows us to gain an accurate understanding of the situation. Here, we gain an understanding of the Golden Rule at its core: role reversal. By imagining, we can add a sense of reality to our knowledge and question, determining how the outcome would truly be. With our current example, you would imagine yourself in the shoes of the undocumented immigrant and then you would imagine yourself in the shoes of the citizen. This avoids the third-party fallacy I spoke of earlier and also helps us to see all perspectives of the scenario.

In considering the outcome of sending all undocumented immigrants home, let us first consider ourselves in the role of the immigrant. Imagine that all undocumented immigrants are deported. What happens to them? Many people think that these individuals are simply sent back to their homes in their native countries, but after some of your research, you wonder if that is the reality of the situation. Through your imagining, you realize that the results do not seem to be positive, the results include: forgotten children/ broken families, poverty, homelessness/ displacement, and increased problems in other countries.

Many undocumented immigrants have children born in the United States. This presents a unique dilemma because, while the parents are not legal residents, their children are citizens of the United States. When their parents are deported, the children are taken from them and placed in United States foster care; “kids can come home from school, only to find their mothers and fathers gone.”¹⁹ Currently, “at least 5,000 children of immigrants live in U.S. foster care because their parents were detained or deported.”²⁰ Imagine if these were your own children, coming home one day from school to find that you are missing, never being told where you are, and possibly never being able to talk to you or find you. This is a heart-breaking and disturbing aspect of our current immigration system. You then think about how many children this would include if all 11 million undocumented immigrants were deported and you imagine how badly broken these families become, how tragic this is for any family to undergo. You wonder about human rights, and whether (even if an immigrant is undocumented) this is going too far.

You then imagine what these individuals, if deported, have waiting for them back home. You know that they came here illegally to escape extreme poverty. If they are sent back to their home countries, they would be returning to the same poverty. Many of these immigrants no longer have homes to go back to. Either they do not have family to live with, they sold their homes when they left, or they never had a physical home to begin with. These issues of broken families, poverty, homelessness and displacement add to the problems of the home countries; how can the countries of these immigrants handle a return of 11 million people at once who bring all of these social and economic problems with them?

¹⁹ Bass, Karen and Lucille Roybal-Allard

²⁰ Bass, Karen and Lucille Roybal-Allard

Now, you imagine the impact that this action would have on the citizen of the United States. You think about what you have learned so far, and you realize that the results seem to be negative for the citizens as well. If all of these individuals were deported, this would take away a huge labor force from our agricultural sector, a labor force that research has found is hard to fill because of the demands of the job. With all of these workers gone, farmers would have to contend with crops that rot because they cannot be harvested quickly enough; there is a threat to the livelihood of the farmer, our nation's food source, and the overall cost of food would likely rise as a result. In addition to the harm it would cause to our food source, higher skilled workers would likely earn less. Undocumented workers provide low-skilled work that allows higher skilled workers to be paid more and efficiency to increase, providing faster services for customers. Also, if all 11 million undocumented immigrants were deported we would lose \$300 billion from our economy, the money that was being contributed by the undocumented immigrants. And this money was in our favor because undocumented immigrants are not eligible for government aid, yet they still contribute to our economy and government aid such as Social Security.

5.4c TEST

We have educated ourselves, gaining knowledge about the situation, and we have imagined ourselves in each role, creating a reality of the outcomes of the action. Now, is where we put our personal thoughts and actions to the test, and see if we are being consistent with our beliefs and with the Golden Rule, asking ourselves the question "am I willing that I'd be treated this way if I were in the place of the affected individuals?" Let us remind ourselves of the initial statement, "we should send all undocumented immigrants home." Do you agree with this statement in the role of the undocumented immigrant? Do you agree with this statement in the role of the citizen? If your answer is "no" then your actions are not consistent with your beliefs, and you are not properly following the Golden Rule.

5.4d ACT

This brings us to the final step of KITA, action. If we recall, the Golden Rule is to "treat others only as you consent to being treated in the same situation."²¹ If we are not consistent in our actions and our beliefs, then we need to figure out how to reconcile the two. In regards to immigration, if we do not agree that all undocumented immigrants should be deported, then we need to figure out how to act so that we are not only consistent with the Golden Rule, but so that we can create an appropriate action that benefits everyone involved.

There are two main options that can be taken in regards to the current problem with immigration: keep the present immigration system, or reform and humanize the present immigration system. If we need to apply KITA just like above, we determine that surely we need to reform and humanize the current immigration system and path to citizenship, for the benefit of both the citizens and for the undocumented immigrants.

²¹ Gensler, 7

Recent statistics and data show that the benefits only increase with a reform of the present immigration system. According to the *Center for American Progress*²²:

- Permitting undocumented immigrants to earn citizenship would significantly expand economic growth.²³
- Granting legal status and citizenship to undocumented immigrants would create jobs and increase tax revenues.²⁴
- Legalization and naturalization of undocumented immigrants would bolster wages.²⁵
- Immigration reform that includes legalizing the undocumented population would yield huge gains in gross domestic product.²⁶

As we reform the system, we need to keep in mind the negative effects of the present system on people, imagining ourselves in their place (so that we suffer these negative effects ourselves and are able to better understand them), and treat others only as we're willing to be treated in the same situation.

Part 6: Conclusion

The problems with our present immigration system are not simple, nor are they new. We are a nation of immigrants. The United States was shaped by the comings of several different ethnic groups as they traveled to these lands, often to be able to better provide for themselves. Unless our ancestors are Native Americans we are the descendents of immigrants, and our nation would not be what it is today if it were not for immigration. In this regard, it would be hypocritical of us to say that these 11 million immigrants should not be here, for are we not simply continuing on the tradition of our nation? But, of course, it is much more complex than that. As we have learned, there are many pros and cons to our current immigration situation that affect both immigrants and citizens.

And from a religious perspective, we are called to be kind to the foreigner in a Golden Rule manner. Exodus 23:9 states "do not oppress a foreigner, for you well know

²² Garcia

²³ "If the currently undocumented population were granted legal status in 2013 and citizenship five years later, the 10-year cumulative increase in U.S. GDP would be \$1.1 trillion."

²⁴ "If undocumented immigrants acquired legal status in 2013 and citizenship five years later, they would create an average of 159,000 jobs per year, and they would pay an additional \$144 billion in federal, state, and local taxes over a 10-year period."

²⁵ "The annual income of the unauthorized would be 15.1 percent higher within five years if they were granted legal status starting in 2013. If undocumented immigrants earned their citizenship five years after receiving legal status, their wages would be an additional 10 percent higher. This means that by 2022 the wages of today's undocumented population could be 25.1 percent higher than they are today."

²⁶ "Immigration reform that would legalize the approximately 11 million individuals who currently lack papers in the United States would add a cumulative \$1.5 trillion to U.S. gross domestic product, or GDP, over 10 years."

how it feels to be a foreigner, since you were foreigners yourselves in the land of Egypt.”²⁷
“Deuteronomy (10:19 & 24:14 – 22) says we are to love foreigners, be open to hiring them, [and] give them just wages.”²⁸

In my discussion about the Golden Rule, I am not trying to provide a solution to the current problem. What I have tried to do is show that, through the Golden Rule, we can set ourselves on a path, as a nation, to work with both citizens and immigrants, to create a cohesive and just solution. Without the Golden Rule, we are ignorant and may make claims that end up being false or unfair. By using the Golden Rule we can be humane, and attempt to make everyone happy, as far as is possible.

²⁷ Gensler 38

²⁸ Gensler 38

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