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### This Land Is Your Land

On April 3rd, 2017, Maribel Trujillo Diaz went to her local Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) building in Fairfield, Ohio for a standard appointment. Trujillo is a Mexican immigrant who came to the U.S. in 2002. She has four children with American citizenship and does not have a criminal record. After living here for 10 years, she filed for asylum but was denied. Nevertheless, ICE officials decided against deporting Trujillo if she agreed to attend standard check-ins with them (Stillman).

On April 5th 2017, Trujillo walked to visit a nearby relative. On her way there, ICE agents followed her in a truck then arrested her. The arrest quickly became public news. Her lawyer, Kathleen Kersh, appealed for an emergency stay but was rejected. Kersh said, “We hope that the government will see how their policies are tearing this family apart” (Graves).

Many community members also advocated for her release. Father Michael Pucke, Trujillo’s priest, prayed for her safe return and promised to watch over her children. With Trujillo’s case gaining more traction, both Ohio senators became concerned as well. Both Democratic Senator Brown and Republican Senator Portman demanded that ICE show compassion towards Trujillo (Graves).

Trujillo’s case incited fear in the lives of many people similar to her. In 2014, Ohio had around 95,000 undocumented immigrants, approximately 0.8% of the 8 million undocumented immigrants in the U. S. (Mitchell). The Obama administration granted Trujillo reprieve and a temporary working permit. In contrast, incoming President Trump spewed anti-immigration

rhetoric that resonated with many Americans (Winders). President Trump fueled existing tensions in America by criminalizing immigrant identities and harboring fear.

As a nation of immigrants, the U.S. frequently faces the question of immigration, revealing division in many spheres of life. Nativists argue with immigration advocates over who has the right to U.S. citizenship and its resources. Furthermore, economists have conflicting opinions about whether or not immigrants benefit the U.S. economy. Under the Trump administration especially, Democrats and Republicans have been polarized on this issue. Siddhartha's teachings offer a Buddhist perspective and solutions to these conflicts. After examining President Trump's immigration policies from various perspectives, I believe we should enact more comprehensive immigration reforms.

Society is one of the most important places this issue takes place. Immigration advocates such as the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) value immigration and fight to protect the rights of immigrants. On a Friday morning in March 2017, Alejandro kissed his wife and two daughters goodbye as he left to go to work. Barely four blocks away from his home, undercover ICE agents pulled him over and arrested him on the spot, despite his clean record. However, in 2006, Alejandro had overstayed his visa.

NILC strives to defend the rights of people like Alejandro. The organizers believe that "all people who live in the U.S. should have the opportunity to achieve their full potential" ([www.nilc.org](http://www.nilc.org)). Luis Zayas, dean of the Steve Hicks School of Social Work at the University of Texas, argues that under the Trump administration "everyone's a target, no one is safe...the arrests feel arbitrary" (Edwards). Because of the various instances of immigrants being arrested

doing mundane activities, Zayas thinks that this enforcement is instilling fear in immigrants and scaring them away from seeking out legal immigration methods (Edwards).

On the other hand, proponents of Trump's immigration policies like ICE view immigrants as a threat to American society and strive to restrict it. They argue that undocumented immigrants are criminals who are benefiting off of American resources. ICE promises "to protect America from the cross-border crime and illegal immigration that threaten national security and public safety" ([www.ice.gov](http://www.ice.gov)). And under the Trump administration, ICE has gained more authority as they began to detain undocumented immigrants who didn't have criminal records, like Alejandro. ICE arrests have increased by 30% from 2016 to 2017 (Edwards).

Other supporters of immigration reduction take personal offense to cases of illegal immigration. J.C. Hernandez started the grassroots organization Texans for Immigration Reduction and Enforcement (TFIRE) in support of stricter immigration laws. He claims that people like Alejandro who overstayed their visa are a part of the "unnecessary flow of illegal aliens into the United States" (<http://www.tfire.org>). Hernandez immigrated to the U.S., and became an American citizen by difficult but legal means, so he believes that allowing illegal immigrants to reside in the U.S. is simply unfair.

So why are these Americans' views so different? A 2015 study conducted by the independent research group Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found that 68% of young adults said immigrants strengthened the U.S., whereas only 36% of seniors agreed with that statement. There is a similar disparity based on race, where the majority of Asian-Pacific Islanders (70%), Hispanic Americans (67%), and black Americans (56%) support immigration.

In contrast, 45% of white Americans support immigration (Cox). Americans' diverse backgrounds shape the way they view immigration in relation to society.

The Six Directions offers a Buddhist solution on how to amend the social relationships we have. Siddhartha argues that social relationships are sacred, and we have a responsibility to be charitable and hospitable to one another (Rahula). So, as Americans, we must be respectful and welcoming of our neighbors who seek refuge and safety. Immigrants fleeing crime and dangerous circumstances are entitled to kind and pleasant treatment when they enter America. We shouldn't be instilling fear and making it difficult for immigrants to enter legally. Our responsibility to help those around us means that we must kindly accept immigrants into our society and help them seek legal means.

Furthermore, the immigration issue relates to the U.S. economy. Economists disagree about how the influx of immigrants affects the economy. President Trump promises to raise the U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) by at least 4 percent annually, but "most economists think even his 4 percent boast is unrealistic, and any hopes for economic growth will be undercut by his deportation plans" (Schwartz). Economic growth relies on a large workforce. And especially because the American workforce is aging, the demand for younger workers is higher, which is why deporting millions of immigrants will decrease production (Schwartz).

Currently, immigrant workers contribute to many American industries. The U.S. attributes most of its recent growth in "service occupations like retail, hospitality, home care, and health care" to immigrants (Schwartz). Undocumented immigrants make up over 40 percent of home health care aides (Schwartz). In the next decade, the Labor Department estimates the demand for this occupation to rise by 40 percent (Schwartz). Critics of the Trump

administration's immigration policies like American University Law professor Herman Schwartz believe that the American economy has historically relied on the immigrant workforce, and deporting them will hurt the economy.

In contrast, nativists argue that immigrants flood the job market and steal Americans' jobs. Economics professor George Borjas explains that some Americans do indeed compete with immigrants in the job market, and these workers are "primarily, but by no means exclusively, at the bottom end of the skill distribution, doing low-wage jobs that require modest levels of education" (Borjas, IAW). American workers and immigrants compete in the actual workplace as well. Wage trends show that "even after the economy has fully adjusted, those skill groups that received the most immigrants will still offer lower pay relative to those that received fewer immigrants" (Borjas, IAW). Borjas believes that immigrants not only make it harder for some Americans to get and keep jobs; they also negatively affect their pay.

American workers aren't the only ones impacted by immigration's effect on the economy. On average, "immigrants receive government assistance at a higher rate than natives" (Borjas, YIHAW). With the large amounts of assistance they receive coupled with the lower taxes they pay, immigrants benefit from the U.S. economy. This implies that "on a year-to-year basis immigration creates a fiscal hole of at least \$50 billion—a burden that falls on the native population" (Borjas, YIHAW).

The economic debate surrounding immigration is largely fueled by the question of who wins and who loses. Supporters of stricter immigration policies say that restricting immigration favors the livelihood of American workers. Opponents of stricter policies say that the American economy thrives off the immigrant workforce and depends on it for its future. Both sides reveal

partial truths. Borjas concludes that business owners who employ immigrants and immigrants themselves are the winners, and low-skilled and poorer American workers are the losers (Borjas, IAW).

In the Buddhist tradition, Siddhartha says that *tanha*, or thirst, is the root cause of economic conflicts, and the Four Virtues highlight how to improve these conditions. As Buddhist scholar Walpola Rahula notes, “hoarding wealth with desire and attachment” was contrary to the Siddhartha’s beliefs (Rahula). While I agree with Siddhartha about the selfishness we practice concerning issues about our economy, I still acknowledge that supporting immigration and opening up our workforce to immigrants happens at the expense of some people. However, the Four Virtues also argues that when more opportunities are available to people, they are content, therefore they don’t commit crime (Rahula). Thus, Siddhartha would welcome immigrants but also argue that we can support the economies of the countries they’re fleeing from so they wouldn’t be forced to leave the comforts of their homes in the first place.

The issue of immigration remains a conflict in society, economy and makes its way up to the political arena as well. During the 2016 Presidential elections and the 2018 midterms, immigration was a controversial topic amongst Democrats and Republicans. New York Democratic Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez started the #AbolishICE campaign in response to the growing number of arrests and deportations under the Trump administration. Minnesota Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar supported the #AbolishICE movement, saying that ICE has “grown to be an agency whose mission is to tear families apart and put fear into immigrant, refugee and undocumented communities. ICE has only become increasingly

militarized, brutal and unaccountable” (McElwee). Democratic leaders believe that President Trump has allowed immigration enforcement to become inhumane.

Hillary Clinton, the Democratic frontrunner in the 2016 elections, campaigned on immigration policies based on family values. She described undocumented immigrants as “an integral part of America’s social fabric,” and stricter immigration enforcement would separate “hardworking, law-abiding immigrant families” (Winders). Because of this, Clinton vowed to fight for more comprehensive immigration policies that protected families while still being firm on national security. This meant getting rid of family detention centers and enforcing immigration laws more humanely. Clinton valued immigrant contributions to America and believed immigrants also deserved protection under the law.

Republicans, however, adopted an America first policy on the immigration issue. In his 2016 Presidential campaign, Trump constructed the immigrant identity as opposite to an American. He pledged to address the needs of working Americans first and foremost, which he believed required mass deportations. To make America great again, Trump promised to return to “a time of less job competition, safer neighborhoods, and less ethnic and racial diversity” by restricting immigrant access into the country (Winders). Furthermore, by limiting immigration, Trump believes he is also ensuring safety by getting rid of “bad hombres” and criminals.

Now that President Trump is in the White House, his isolationist beliefs reflect themselves in the White House’s agenda. The White House’s official stance on immigration is supposed serve the “national interest”. It emphasizes strict laws and borders that will ensure American safety. President Trump “supports ending chain migration, eliminating the Visa Lottery, and moving the country to a merit-based entry system” ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)). He

believes deporting millions of undocumented immigrants and building a wall at the Mexican border will protect national security and restrict crime.

The immigration debate in the government has further divided the two parties. Democrats criticize the Trump administration for being inhumane in their deportation efforts. Republicans and the Trump administration firmly believe that the recent stream of immigration is a threat to American society and security. The two parties disagree on the severity of the immigration problem, therefore they both propose different solutions.

In his teachings, Siddhartha explains that one of the main duties of a king or government is to rule in harmony with its people. A ruler must be moral and just so they can look after the welfare of the nation. The immigrants entering the U.S. are leaving their countries for better opportunities, and some are entering the country illegally. Siddhartha says that a ruler should not persecute innocent people, and even if some may not be completely innocent; a ruler “can bear no grudge against anyone” (Rahula). Just like its people, a government must be just, welcoming and hospitable.

Because of its strict immigration policies, the Trump administration fueled public debate in American society, economy, and politics. Both pro-immigration and anti-immigration activist groups have further instigated dissent in society. Additionally, Americans disagree on the impact immigration has on the U.S. economy. Even within our government, this disagreement has caused division between party lines. Immigration continues to be a source of controversy in the U.S.

A 2018 Pew Research Center survey highlighted these divisions. Based on a group of 2,002 U.S. adults, “about twice as many Republicans (33%) as Democrats (16%) support cutting



legal immigration into the U.S.” (Dunn). Although in comparison to a 2006 Pew Research Center survey, the share of people identifying as conservatives who supporting cutting legal immigration have decreased and the liberal share has increased. So, Democrats and Republicans are beginning to achieve more common ground. However, the parties are still heavily polarized.

Liberal social organizations like Advocates for Basic Legal Inequality (ABLE) provide legal support to the individuals affected by these proposed immigration cuts. In 2016, ABLE helped 3,500 people in the Ohio region by providing workshops that explained the current state of U.S. immigration laws and policies. And in 2017, they focused their efforts on aiding immigrants who were targets of President Trump’s policies. For the past few years, one of their lawyers, Kathleen Kersh, has been working relentlessly on the prominent case of Maribel Trujillo Diaz. ([www.ablelaw.org](http://www.ablelaw.org)).

Despite Kersh’s efforts, Trujillo was deported on April 11, 2017 (Graves). Trujillo was forced to return to Mexico, but immigration supporters in the United States continued to advocate for her safe return. Judge John K. Bush fought to reopen Trujillo’s case and successfully did on January 17, 2018. He argued that if Trujillo were to remain in Mexico, she was in danger of being individually targeted by Knights Templar, a distinguished cartel. With this new evidence, the United States Courts of Appeal decided to “GRANT the petition and REMAND to the BIA [Board of Immigration Appeals] for reconsideration consistent with this opinion” (Maribel Trujillo Diaz v. Jefferson B. Sessions).

Trujillo was a victim of President Trump’s immigration policy. But with the reopening of her case, she was allowed to return to Ohio. Her lawyer, Ms. Kersh, explained that “[s]he’s not here permanently. She has a pending asylum case” (Curnutte). Even though her stay is not

guaranteed, after seventeen months apart from her family, she is overjoyed to see them again. On September 12, 2018, Trujillo reunited with her family back in their Fairfield home.