

Is the American Dream Truly for Everyone? The Stereotypes Shaping Immigrants' Reality

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Recibido: 25/5/2020

Aprobado: 30/7/2020

Abstract

Throughout history, we can infer that media is the Fourth Estate due to its influence within politics. Such statement has become even clearer during the last years, especially in the United States due to the stereotypes framing immigrants depending on the current agenda. The aim of this paper is to observe the discourse (racism, American dream) of articles against the DREAM Act through the theoretical framework provided by Van Dijk and López to determine the influence within politics of a stereotypical portrayal of immigrants.

Key words: American Dream, immigrants, media, DREAM Act, discourse, press, racism, stereotypes.

Resumen

A lo largo de historia podemos ver como los medios forman El Cuarto Poder debido a su influencia en la política. Esta frase se volvió aún más clara durante los últimos años especialmente en los Estados Unidos debido a los estereotipos que encuadran a los inmigrantes conforme a los fines actuales. El objetivo del presente ensayo es observar el discurso (racismo, sueño americano) de los artículos contra la Ley DREAM mediante el marco teórico de Van Dijk y López para determinar la influencia en la política de una representación estereotípica de los inmigrantes.

Palabras clave: sueño americano, inmigrantes, medios, Ley DREAM, discurso, prensa, racismo, estereotipos.

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Introduction

The American Dream is allegedly a universal dream. However, there is a debate on whether such dream should be available for everyone or only for those who meet certain requirements. Even American citizens struggle to achieve it due to socio-economic factors. Yet, the debate on whomever should access them is focused on one group: undocumented immigrants.

Such debate is framed by the media due to its influence within socio-political affairs. It can be the trump card that establishes the final result. In the case of immigration, stereotypes act as an argument against immigration. Thus, such racist discourse encourages further racism since readers believe that immigrants act the way stereotypes portray them. This can be inferred from the debate on the DREAM Act.

The aim of the following paper is to provide an observation on how the ones opposing the DREAM Act use discourse in the media to shape public opinion in their favour and the consequences of such use by following the theory provided by Teun Van Dijk on discourse, racism and press.

Section 1: Can Immigrants DREAM on? An Overview on Federal, State and New York's Legislation on Undocumented Immigrants' Education.

This section will commence by establishing the difference between naturalized citizens, permanent residents, refugees or asylees, and unauthorized immigrants. After highlighting the difference between federal and state legislation, a special focus on New York legislation will be developed to reflect the difficulties undocumented students have to face, particularly, because in order to be eligible for the (State) assistance program they need to fulfil certain requirements. Sources such as The New York Senate, National Conference of States Legislatures, New York Assembly Speaker, among others will be considered to examine the information needed to accomplish the aim of this section.

According to Bolter (2019), *Explainer: Who Is An Immigrant?*, issued by Immigration Policy Institute, a naturalized citizen is a person who after a certain period as a permanent resident can apply to naturalize and acquire benefits and responsibilities as a legal citizen.

Whereas a permanent resident acquires the status of legal resident through employment, family relationships despite not being a legal citizen. Moreover, refugee or asylee is the term used to describe people that had to flee their homes due to economic, political, ethnic, race, or religious reasons among other push factors, but not every migrant is considered to be a refugee or an asylee. Finally, unauthorized also called illegal or undocumented immigrants are those that are present in a country illegally regardless of whether they have entered unlawfully or by extending their visa. Furthermore, sometimes undocumented immigrants can settle in a country for a short period or permanently. After this brief comparison, as defined in the U.S Immigration Glossary (2019), an immigrant is a person who has to leave their country to relocate in a different one for the reasons stated above.

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was introduced in 2001 (American Immigration Council, 2019). Throughout eighteen years, approximately, ten versions of the DREAM Act have been introduced in Congress (American Immigration Council, 2019). According to the American Immigration Council, prior versions of the act dealt with the treatment of potential beneficiaries and the duration of the "Dreamer" status. Nevertheless, the goal remains unchanged which is to "provide a pathway to legal status for undocumented youth who came to this country as children" (American Immigration Council, 2019, p. 1). Despite the support they received, none of these bills became law.

Its most recent version (American Immigration Council, 2019) would provide to undocumented high-school graduates and GED recipients a pathway to U.S. citizenship through college, work, or armed services.

Likewise, the potential "Dreamer" would have to meet requirements such as entering the U.S. while underage and with no criminal record. Then, the "Dreamer" or anyone who has Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) would be granted a Conditional Permanent Resident (CPR) status for 10 years authorizing them to work.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), announced by President Obama in 2012, provides temporary comfort from deportation and work authorization for certain undocumented children and adult immigrants in the United States; this immigration

policy helps to provide opportunities for those that have been in the country until 2017 when the Secretary of Homeland Security, Elaine Duke rescinded it. However, it does not provide a legal permanent status, or a U.S. citizenship and it must be renewed every two years (American Immigration Council, 2019).

Afterwards, those who obtained the CPR status would be able to obtain the Lawful Permanent Residence (LPR or a "green card") through higher education, military service or work. If they cannot meet such requirements, they may be eligible for a "hardship waiver" due to disabilities, working as a caregiver for a minor or possible hardship to a lawful permanent resident of the U.S (World Relief, 2017). After maintaining such status for 5 years, the "Dreamer" or whoever has the DACA may apply to become a U.S. citizen through the normal process (Jefferson County Public Schools, n.d.).

Besides, in the United States the educational system is not controlled by federal laws; each state controls their own institutions. These institutions are funded by the state, and this funding comes from the taxes of the residents of that individual state. Thus, residents of a specific state can attend these institutions by paying a lower price than people that live in another state. This system is known as In-state tuition and out-of-state tuition (George Washington University, 2017).

The out-of-state and in-state tuition vary depending on each state; each one has specific requirements to qualify for it. Regarding undocumented students, state and federal governments have two options: "(1) Increasing access to higher education for these students by charging them in-state tuition, which is substantially lower than out-of-state tuition in most states (...) or (2) Making state financial aid programs accessible to undocumented students" (Radha Roy Biswas, 2015, p. 2). Even though federal laws do not govern the educational system, they do prohibit undocumented students from applying for federal financial assistance. Federal law also limits states regarding tuition and financial support for undocumented students. According to the article *Access to Community College for Undocumented Immigrants: A Guide for State Policymakers*, many are against the availability of in-state tuition and financial aid for undocumented students, arguing that it is unfair to taxpayers and that this will lower the opportunities for U.S "legal" citizens.

As stated by the National Conference of the State Legislature on September 19, 2019, currently, at least nineteen states allow in-state tuition for undocumented students, at least seven states allow undocumented students to receive state financial aid, at least three states prohibit in-state tuition rates for undocumented students and two states prohibit undocumented students from enrolling at any postsecondary tuition.

New York is one of the states that allows in-state tuition to undocumented students, but in addition to that, it was the only state that passed the José Peralta New York State DREAM Act in 2019. According to the New York State Senate, this act allows undocumented children, who are already students in that state, to qualify for state aid, and it will also create a DREAM fund for college scholarship opportunities (Sepúlveda, 2019). The aim of the New York Dream Act is to provide educational opportunities to children of immigrants by providing scholarships to college-bound students, to eliminate financial obstacles, to obtaining financial aids and to extending the opportunities for those undocumented students to attend higher education. (Sepúlveda, 2019) Undocumented students would be eligible for general awards, performance-based awards, or New York State Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) funds if they fulfil the requirements.

In conclusion, through this section, it may be inferred that the funding of education comes from residents' taxes allowing them to access a lower tuition whereas non-residents must pay a higher amount. In the case of undocumented students, state and federal governments can either increase access to higher education by charging them in-state tuition, or by creating state financial aid programs aimed at them. Furthermore, federal legislation prohibits the application of undocumented students to federal financial assistance, limits tuition, and financial support for them.

Tuition is part of the struggles that must be faced to achieve the American Dream. That struggle reaches all nationalities, social classes, colours, and age. It has been discussed for years and the discussion still goes on. Yet, that struggle is even greater for undocumented students. Nevertheless, José Peralta's DREAM Act in 2019 will pave the path to tuition aid for undocumented students. Therefore, there is a chance that the other states will follow New York's example.

Section 2: Equality or Protection of the Status Quo? A Review of the Claims of Anti-Immigration Sources

The “American Dream” is shared among citizens regardless of social condition, ethnicity, nationality, or any other factor. Thus, the idea of achieving their long-term goals through hard work is universally known. The goal is universal; however, the path to achieving it is subject to socioeconomic factors such as ethnicity, nationality, and others. In other words, several authors resort to racist arguments against immigrants who want to access higher education in the United States despite being aware of the extra hardships immigrants go through. Such claims shall be examined throughout the section to establish whether they are valid or not.

One of the most used arguments against educational aid for undocumented immigrants is that it will encourage further illegal immigration. Regarding the topics of the previous section “Can Immigrants DREAM on?”, the DACA and the DREAM Act, Eschbach (2015, p.4) states that the undocumented population would increase expecting to qualify for these programs. According to Rep. Lamar Smith, “history would repeat itself” since the “1986 amnesty legislation encouraged illegal immigration” (2016, p.5). As it can be inferred from the previous part, the DACA and the DREAM Act are linked to tuition aid because if they were effective, undocumented immigrants would access in-state tuition. Furthermore, these aids, on a state level, are funded by the taxes residents pay (George Washington University, 2017) raising the “concern” of paying taxes for someone else’s education.

The abovementioned concern is related to the claim that the DACA and DREAM Act “would give amnesty to law-breakers” (Benkof, 2019). Organizations such as The Center for Immigration Studies (Procon, 2020) associate the DREAM Act with vandalism through selected numbers that favour their anti-immigration views. That organization resorts to repetition highlighting their view on Dreamers "Dreamer gang-bangers, Dreamer identity thieves, Dreamer sexual predators, Dreamers who have not paid income taxes, and Dreamers committing a wide range of other crimes all qualify for DACA status as long as they haven't been convicted of their crimes" (Procon, 2020). Consequently,

undocumented immigrants would be unemployable. Furthermore, it is stated that they would be unemployable if they remain undocumented even if they had not committed crimes.

Opponents also claim that aiding undocumented immigrants would put U.S. citizens and legal immigrants at a disadvantage whereas undocumented immigrants would be rewarded “for breaking the law” (National Conference of the State Legislature, 2019). These arguments shall be observed through the lens provided by Van Dijk (1991) to reflect on their racism.

Although the main topic of these arguments is a pathway to achieve the American Dream, postsecondary education, those who oppose tuition aid for undocumented immigrants aim to assert their dominance through their “complex societal system” to protect their economic, social, cultural and even political hegemony (Van Dijk, 1991, p.25).

History is bound to repeat itself, the dominant social group resorts to highlight a characteristic of a minority to assert their alleged superiority (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 25-26). The main characteristic of the allegedly superior group is their legal citizenship which is the core of the aforementioned arguments. It derives into further negative labels such as “criminals” causing a link between undocumented immigrants and vandalism to use their alleged moral superiority as a shield. Thus, these arguments are used to promote the exclusion (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 25-26) of undocumented immigrants from postsecondary education, since opposition fights against the implementation of the principle of equal rights (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 29) disregarding that opposition favours the exclusion of immigrants from public benefits (National Conference of the State Legislature, 2019). In other words, the racism seen in said arguments is not the discrimination usually tied to it (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 25), but a protection of the status quo “to maintain equality” (Van Dijk, 1991, p. 29).

After examining the racism of the arguments, their validity shall be observed. While there is a possibility of an increase in illegal immigration. It is vital to consider that the argument is merely a possibility. Furthermore, opponents merely resort to a historical example that fits within their narrative. That narrative arises from their own experience,

but not from the experience of these immigrants as in the famous quote: “History is always written by the winners”.

Tax concerns are a staple to American politics. Yet, opponents rather than focusing on the actual cost of taxes emphasize that undocumented immigrants should not be entitled to public benefits (National Conference of the State Legislature, 2019). Besides, allowing undocumented immigrants to access postsecondary education would improve the economy of the country, since they would have an incentive to participate in the economy (National Conference of the State Legislature, 2019). On the other hand, drop-out and juvenile delinquency rates would decrease due to such incentives (National Conference of the State Legislature, 2019).

As it can be seen from previous paragraphs many of these arguments are merely possibilities, historical examples selected to fit within the anti-immigration narrative or use of stereotypes.

In conclusion, although it is vital to consider all perspectives in matters such as education. The validity of such arguments should also be considered as well. In this case, anti-immigration sources not only were racist to maintain the status quo disguised as equality but also resort to hypothetical scenarios while disregarding the perspective of undocumented immigrants. Thus, these arguments turn into widely known racial stereotypes.

Section 3: The One-sided Fight “Us vs Them” Perpetuated by the Press

To understand the role of the press in the perpetuation of racism, it is vital to understand the relation between discourse and racism. As it has been examined throughout the previous section, Van Dijk (2012) defines racism as a "systematic power abuse of a dominant group against ethnic minorities, immigrants, and refugees" that causes social inequality. Thus, two dimensions manifest: social and cognitive (Van Dijk, 2012). The social dimension comprises common discriminatory practices such as "exclusion or unequal distribution of social resources or human rights" (Van Dijk, 2012). Whereas, the cognitive dimension involves "ethnic beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices and ideologies" as grounds for such discriminatory acts (Van Dijk, 2012).

Discourse is one of the main factors within racism since both racist dimensions interact with each other. In other words, discourse may function as a discriminatory social practice, or it may spread negative social representations (Van Dijk, 2012). Furthermore, it is key to establish the concept of “us vs them” that prevents minorities from (Van Dijk, 2012). Van Dijk (2012) explains the “semantic macrostructures” of discourse that “organize the local meaning of words and sentences at higher levels of paragraphs and whole discourse”. Such information is highlighted and shapes the representation of ethnic events. It also demonstrates the newspaper or news program view on the topic. Besides, the topics involving minorities are usually problematic news to strengthen stereotypes. For instance, the prejudices against immigrants in the U.S. observed throughout the previous section. Not only they create problems labelled exclusively to minorities, but also establish possibilities as facts for their audience. Due to the lack of representation in media, ethnic news is seen as a general problem instead of an everyday situation. Thus, positive news related to minorities are seldom seen in the press (Van Dijk, 2012).

Van Dijk (2012) states that racist discourse uses devices for “positive self-presentation” and “negative other-presentation” to highlight the “us vs them” main idea of racist discourse. Among these devices, there is the use of the alleged previous knowledge of the readers and audience to reinforce prejudices through implication. Such prejudices may also be strengthened through emphasis of the negative characteristics of the “others”, whereas the description of the dominant group tends to be vague to favour “positive self-presentation”. Van Dijk details that if people lack concrete knowledge about minorities, such biased news production shall develop prejudices even further.

The main influential discourse, public discourse, is controlled by symbolic elites who spread dominant knowledge and ideologies in society (Van Dijk, 2012). The abovementioned negative preconceptions are socially acquired (Van Dijk, 2012). Although popular racism arises from personal experiences and interpersonal conversations (Van Dijk, 2012), the concepts within racism stem from public discourses. Therefore, the media elites determine the dominant ideology and knowledge, since they determine which symbolic elites shall bear more influence (Van Dijk, 2012). The press

can be segmented according to “education, social position, status, and ethnic beliefs” of “editors, owners, and reporters” and their audience (Van Dijk, 2012).

The press relies on outside sources bound to public discourse from public elites. Such discourse is produced and organized by journalists unless owners control journalists and are liable for such discourse (Van Dijk, 2012). Despite the intervention of press owners in media, the sources are sought for, reviewed, and researched by journalists (Van Dijk, 2012). The origin of such sources can be non-elite organizations such as non-governmental organizations, agencies, and others. So, journalists, in order to produce articles and reports resort to a process of selection and reduction according to the influence of such knowledge and ideologies (Van Dijk, 2012). Van Dijk mentions that ethnic sources are deemed as “biased”, whereas sources without ethnic perspective are labelled as “reliable”. In other words, news-production becomes an “in-group” production, since sources without ethnic perspective are preferred instead of ethnic sources.

Thus, Van Dijk (2012) explains that minority journalists seldom become part of the news-production process due to such criteria to fit in the hivemind within news production. Besides, their views may hinder their possibilities to work on news production due to the predominant ideology. Due to social structure, news production is subject to the dominant discourse thus reproducing further racist ideologies. Such social structure is subject to prejudices towards minorities since the disregard towards ethnic journalists comes from racist “knowledge” as well.

López (2020) in her paper “Discursive De/Humanizing: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Television News Representations of Undocumented Youth” examines the consequences of the news-production process about undocumented students that have been the main topic on previous sections. López (2020) demonstrates that undocumented students were often modified by dehumanizing terms such as “alien”, or the emphasis on negative adjectives as “illegal”. Therefore, López mentions several cases where television outlets such as CNN focuses on the fact that these immigrants are undocumented instead of the DACA and DREAM Act debate. López (2020) also highlights that the use of abstract discourse reinforces the abovementioned notion of “us vs them” because it

encourages the lack of concrete knowledge about immigrants while asserting prejudices towards them.

In conclusion, it can be seen throughout the previous sections regarding the DACA and DREAM Act the press resorts to a racist discourse not only formed by negative labels towards undocumented students, but also by ambiguity to encourage positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation among other resources to encourage prejudice (Van Dijk, 2012). Such racial prejudices are present within news-production from its selection of journalists to its reduction of sources to produce news that fit the bias of the press. In other words, racist discourse from public elites acts as an umbrella for news-production, cognitive and social dimensions of racism (Van Dijk, 2012).

Section 4: Analysis of a Newspaper Article: Rep. Smith Decides which Immigrants can DREAM on

Throughout the sections, the American Dream has been observed from a different angle. An angle showing the sources and growth of racism within such ideal considered “as American as apple pie” (Smith, 2016). Yet, the abovementioned sections examined matters such as legislation (Section 1), racist arguments, their sources and validity (Section 2), and the cycle linking racism and the press (Section 3). Therefore, this section shall examine the application of the aforementioned elements in the discourse used by Representative Lamar Smith for The Hill.

Apart from intertwining the statements made throughout previous sections, this section shall examine the statements by Smith through the lens provided by Van Dijk. Thus, this section shall demonstrate the racism behind such allegedly objective statements. The article itself titled “DREAM Act rewards illegal immigrants for law-breaking” (see Appendix) was published on May 20th, 2011 by the print newspaper “The Hill” founded in 1994 that claims being “non-partisan” (Perks, 2020). Furthermore, this article was written by the Republican representative, Lamar Smith from Texas 21st congressional district (Govtrack, 2018) representing the interests of the wealthy-class of San Antonio and Austin, and infamous for denying climate change during his term (Timmer, 2017).

Previously, part of the article has been reviewed in Section 2 to examine the validity of one of the arguments made against the DREAM Act (as seen in Section 1), which states that its approval would encourage further illegal migration. Thus, the article attempts to dehumanize undocumented students while emphasizing positivity towards Republicans even though the newspaper claims to be nonpartisan (Perks, 2020).

Firstly, Van Dijk (2012) states that headlines are the first thing readers remember from newspaper articles and provides an overview of the newspaper's opinion on a certain topic. This headline is not the exception due to its choice of words. For starters, Smith (2011) uses the verb "reward", the racist term "illegal immigrant" and the negative term "law-breaking" to highlight the allegedly negative qualities of undocumented immigrants (Van Dijk, 2012) while dehumanizing them through the association with the term "illegal" (López, 2020) and encouraging a positive self-image through the verb "reward" (Van Dijk, 2012).

Furthermore, The Hill resorts to disclaimers (Van Dijk, 2012, p. 25-26) to "avoid negative reception from readers" and achieving a positive presentation since The Hill relies on its image based on "objectivity" (Perks, 2020). That disclaimer is achieved by denying that the newspaper shares the views presented by Smith (2011). Nevertheless, Section 3 demonstrated that the selection of sources, journalists, contributors, and other factors are a reflection of the newspaper's predominant ideologies and knowledge. Such ideologies and knowledge shall be examined in the following paragraphs.

The article starts with a reference to the values that encompass the American dream mentioned in Section 1. However, the enumeration by Smith contains negative implications towards immigrants through the emphasis on common good despite affirming that "America is a nation that values and promotes freedom and the inherent rights of all people" (Smith, 2011). By emphasizing the common good, and the importance of laws and regulations Smith portrays undocumented immigrants as delinquents that harm society (Van Dijk, 2012, p. 25), and dehumanizes them further through such portrayal by personalizing America (López, 2020).

As mentioned throughout the previous sections, racist arguments rely on a notion of "us vs them". Smith encourages said idea through implication. The overlapping implication

throughout this article is “The good vs the bad” by reducing undocumented immigrants to “those” that disobey the law. Notice that Smith uses the relative pronoun “who” for the persons who supposedly respect the law, whereas undocumented immigrants are merely labelled as “lawbreakers” (Smith, 2011). Smith resorts to a positive portrayal of Republicans by stating that the American Dream should be accessed “legally”. This positive portrayal of Republicans is vital towards the interests of Smith and the Republican Party since Barack Obama of the Democratic Party was President of the United States at that time. Furthermore, the White House presented a project to modify the immigration system highlighting that immigrants are pivotal to the economy of the United States (Barnes, 2011).

Once again, Smith resorts to disclaimers by stating that he is “sympathetic towards the children of illegal immigrants” (Smith, 2011) to avoid negative responses from undocumented students (Van Dijk, 2012). Yet, he implicitly puts them on the bad side by stating that these undocumented immigrants would be part of a “massive fraud” (Smith, 2011).

Smith claims that if Congress passes the DREAM Act, undocumented immigrants will claim that they came to the country during their childhood (Smith, 2011). Although right-wing media tends to claim to be “non-partisan” or based on “facts, not opinion”, Smith states a mere possibility that can be discarded due to the requirements to apply to DREAM seen in Section 1.

Furthermore, Smith merely resorts to a historical example that fits within his narrative. That narrative arises from his own experience, but not from the experience of these immigrants as in the famous quote: “History is always written by the winners.”

Despite his negative statements towards undocumented immigrants, Smith has a favourite group: Republican immigrants. It can be inferred by the terms used to describe them since they are labelled as “Hispanic immigrants” instead of “illegal immigrants”. However, his aim to favour the number of votes for the Republican party can be inferred by his focus on the Hispanic vote and the Members of Congress (Smith, 2011). Also, Smith omitted the fact that in the 2008 Presidential Elections, Hispanic voters were vital for Obama’s victory since approximately 11 million Latinos voted for Barack Obama back in 2008

(Lulac, 2010). This voting tendency repeated itself afterwards in 2012 Presidential Elections (St. George et Dennis, 2012) with 72% of the Latino vote.

Finally, there are two types of immigrants according to Smith: undocumented immigrants or as he calls them: illegal immigrants and Hispanic Republicans who earn his favouritism for sharing his ideas. Thus, as Van Dijk (1991, p. 39) stated that racism is no longer explicit, but implicit. Such racism was seen through Smith's choice of words, sources, and his use of grammar since his dehumanization of immigrants could even be inferred from his use of the relative pronoun "who". In other words, this analysis demonstrates that racism is subject to the interests of the dominant group and that it can be seen through vocabulary and use of grammar.

Conclusion

Considering the aforementioned information, the American Dream certainly goes beyond just living in the country. Furthermore, it can be manipulated since it is merely an ideal. Thus, it becomes part of discourse either against or in favour of immigrants aiming towards a better future. Nevertheless, the issue of immigration in the United States is more complex than it seems.

The ideal of the American Dream has not only been used as an argument against tuition aid for undocumented immigrants, but also for political interests as it can be seen throughout the above sections since it outlines the ideal immigrant according to the public elites.

This paper managed to reveal not only the role of media as the Fourth Estate, but also the importance of the selection of information due to its capacity to modify a narrative through resources such as newspaper articles, academic articles and the theory provided by Van Dijk. In this case, the racist narrative of "us vs them" is still present in the world. Thus, the application of Van Dijk's theory demonstrates how media shapes reality.

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Appendix

DREAM Act Rewards Illegal Immigrants for Law-breaking

BY REP. LAMAR SMITH (R-TEXAS) — 05/20/11 03:26 PM EDT 203
THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS ARE THEIR OWN AND NOT THE VIEW OF THE HILL

America is a nation that values and promotes freedom and the inherent rights of all people. However, America also is a nation that has established laws and rules to promote the common good of our society.

In other words, we are a nation that distinguishes right from wrong. Part of the role of government is to promote policies that reward those who follow the law, rather than reward lawbreakers.

Republicans believe that immigrants who want to come to the United States and pursue the American dream should do so legally. That's why America admits more than one million legal immigrants each year, far more than any other country in the world. But there is a right way and a wrong way to come into the country.

I am sympathetic to the young illegal immigrant children who were brought to the United States by their parents. Because their parents chose to disregard our immigration laws, they are in a difficult position. But the DREAM Act rewards the very illegal immigrant parents who knowingly violated our laws and opens the door to massive fraud.

Under past and present DREAM Act proposals, illegal immigrants under the age of 30 are able to receive amnesty. Many illegal immigrants will fraudulently claim they came here as children or are under 30. And the federal government has no way to check whether their claims are true or not.

The DREAM Act will only encourage more illegal immigration. One only needs to look at history to see how amnesty has played out in the past. The 1986 amnesty legislation legalized about three million illegal immigrants. But rather than put an end to illegal immigration, the amnesty only encouraged more. There are at least 11 million illegal immigrants in the U.S.

Mr. Sosa claims that opposing amnesty will alienate Hispanic voters. But the facts tell a different story.

During the November 2010 midterm elections, the Republican Party had historic levels of Hispanic support. In fact, exit polls showed that 38% of Hispanic voters cast ballots for House Republican candidates. This is more than in 2008 or 2006.

Many Hispanic voters support efforts to enforce our immigration laws. Republican Latino candidates in Florida, New Mexico and Nevada – all of which have large Hispanic populations – won statewide races while calling for enhanced border security and enforcement of immigration laws. And all five newly elected Hispanic Members of Congress are Republicans. This is a good trend for the GOP.

The pro-enforcement movement is not Republican, it is American. And it is not anti-Hispanic, it is pro-rule-of-law.

To attract more Hispanic voters in the future, Republicans should continue to emphasize our shared desire for economic growth, better schools, and strong national security.

Mr. Sosa, you are entitled to your own views. But the rule of law is as American as apple pie – not amnesty.

Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas) is Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee.