

Adlai Stevenson Center on Democracy Student Voices

When we talk about immigration, we should be talking about both principles and people. Who wants to immigrate and why? What do immigrants contribute to our society? What humanitarian obligations do we owe to them, especially as the world's leader?

Unfortunately, the current political climate makes that discussion impossible. The word "immigrant" has become a euphemism for "not white" or "not Christian." So, to talk about immigration now means to talk about racism. It is part of the discussion that includes our treatment of African-Americans, our native "immigrants," from Laquan McDonald to the water in Flint, Michigan.

I never used to think twice about the fact that I've held two passports from the day I was born. Now I appreciate what it means to be a citizen of both Mexico and the U.S., with an American father and a Mexican mother. Even though they sit right next to each other on the map, Mexico and the U.S. are very different. They are friends at the moment, but they haven't always been. They've even gone to war. I can't begin to imagine how I would feel if that happened again.

Impossible, you say? Tell that to 16-year-old Jose Rodriguez, gunned down in his hometown of Nogales, Mexico by U.S. law enforcement from across the border in Nogales, Arizona. They shot him ten times. Maybe the ones who need a wall for protection are the Mexicans, Mr. Trump.

Trump's and Cruz's angry comments against immigrants have inspired violence against them. They proudly proclaim themselves the champions of the politically incorrect, labelling all Mexican immigrants murderers, rapists and drug dealers, and all Syrians terrorists.

People who should know better get swept up, decreasing our chance for a responsible discussion about immigration. For example, Bernie Sanders plays into this with his comments against trade. The way he describes it, we are at war with Mexico for jobs. It's an easy jump to the idea that Mexican immigrants are taking our jobs here too.

The word “immigration” often seems too soft to describe the horrific journeys of those who leave their own countries to try to start life in another. Many seem to have no choice but to do so illegally, running from violence or starvation in order to survive. The more we can see them as people, with families, dreams and ambitions like ours, the more meaningful a discussion we will have. I know it’s my responsibility to try to make that happen. So, I will get involved in a presidential campaign for the first time this year. It’s time for me and everyone else to help elect a candidate who will lead a discussion of immigration.