

# Essay on ambivalence and racism in america

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America has always adapted to new immigrants entering its borders by attempting to create some kind of homogenous nation that recognises all racial minorities. Immigrants have had to achieve recognition through force or by adopting the attitudes of 'Americans' in order to fit into the American way of life. Various colonies from Europe such as the Spanish, Portuguese and French adopted a new way of life in the exploration of America in early American history. Some colonies failed and some assimilated unlike Native Americans and African Americans who experienced long periods of subjugation and racism. In many ways America is still responding to the immigration issue through an attitude of 'Ambivalence and Racism'. The Changing Face of America by author Otto Friedrich explores the relationship that America has with immigration and the confused attitudes that still range from ambivalence to racism. This depends on the individual and the type of immigration that is occurring in America at one time. Such attitudes are an inevitable part of the immigrant's and America's history and future. This paper will analyse the immigrant's experience and the way that America responds to the immigrant's experience.

Immigrants are also part of America's future, not only creating jobs and businesses but adding to the intellectual and cultural psyche of the country because of their rich and diverse skills, knowledge and history. While Lee (2013) are more concerned about making money and becoming an American citizen believing that "Chinese heritage probably doesn't play a big part in their futures". They are still part of the rich tapestry of multiculturalism in America and part of its history and future.

The recognition of the positive aspects of multiculturalism is in contrast to

the larger societal changes that happen as a result of illegal immigration in America. Immigrants are now entering America from many different parts of the world. The last wave that arrived from Asia and Latin America has allowed immigrants to be seen in a negative way. Many American's have raised questions about how all American's can adapt within American society. The INS statistics puts the total of illegals at 2 million to 4 million. It raises questions like how many immigrants can the country absorb and at what rate? Do illegal immigrants drain the economy or enrich it? . Some American's fear that the number of illegals will take jobs away from Americans with citizenship and although Xenophobia may not be directed at individuals themselves there are still divisive attitudes about how to integrate some immigrants.

It has created a confused attitude for the American population. They are caught between recognising the inherent difficulties in policing illegal immigration with the economic and social problems that occur because of illegal immigration. This is in contrast to the positive attitudes about what immigration can bring to the country. This attitude of ' Ambivalence and Racism' is prevalent when American's are asked about their view on immigration. A TIME poll revealed that 27% agreed " America should keep its doors open to people who wish to immigrate to the U. S. because that is what our heritage is all about. 56% said the number of legal immigrants was too big, and 75% wanted illegal immigrants to be tracked down. This is in contrast with 66% who approved of America taking in people that have been persecuted in their countries. . Such ambivalence is shown in individual's attitudes in schools and the work place and often translates into outright

racism.

Firoozeh Dumas in his paper *The F Word* shows how context is very important in the usage of either her Iranian name or western name. Apart from the normal banter from school children that would make fun of Iranian names. For example her cousin's name was 'Farbod' meaning 'Greatness' in Iranian; she was called 'Farthead' at school. Despite seeing the funny side of the name calling he also describes the attitudes of American's depending on what name she used. When she used her normal name 'Firoozeh' she said the children would call her 'Ferocious' and felt that because her name was difficult to pronounce that many people would not even talk to her. It also implied that she had to talk about where she was from and her upbringing. She also describes changing her name to Julie meaning. People remembered her name and assumed she was American however at the same time the Iranian revolution was happening. She states " This meant that I was often Privy to their real feelings about those ' damn Iranians'" and believed that people would not have invited her to her house had they known her as Firoozeh. (Firoozeh) While the ambivalent attitudes may not mean to be Xenophobic, it does show that such attitudes to racism exist for the individual immigrant in their daily lives.

Otto Friedrich's assertion that Americans' attitudes toward immigrants and the diversity they bring have been " ambivalent at best, racist at worst" is a part of the continuing story of immigration; of its past and future in America. This paper has demonstrated that this idea exists throughout American society particularly when citizens are interviewed about illegal immigration. For immigrants these attitudes are a daily occurrence when interacting with

other Americans. This may be unintentional by others but shows itself in attitudes towards language, names and the perception that the media and society has about a minority at the time. These attitudes must be recognised in creating a country that is realistic about the changes that national diversity brings to American society.

## **Works Cited**

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