

# [The visitor by tom mccarthy history essay](https://assignbuster.com/the-visitor-by-tom-mccarthy-history-essay/)

In a melting pot society, there are diversities of cultures and ethnicities. New York City is one of the biggest cities in the United States of which has the most amounts of immigrants residing at. Many people love it here so much that they are willing to sacrifice everything they have back at home and move to the United States just so they can experience and live the “ American Dream.” Some actually achieve it and live the dream, while others get caught and go through a long and arduous deportation process. At the same time, the people that risk it all and stay, are here illegally and must live cautiously in order not to get caught.

In the movie “ The Visitor” by Tom McCarthy, we meet Walter Vale (Richard Jenkins), in a state of emotional apathy. He has been miserable and somewhat depressed since the death of his wife. He seems not to feel much, locking in his emotions and feelings by keeping to himself. Walter listens to classical music as a closure to his wife, and he drinks a glass of red wine almost every night as if it was his anesthetic that relieves his aches and pains.

Walter is a Professor of Economics at Connecticut College, where he teaches only one class a semester, so he can focus on writing his fourth book. He limits communication with his students, his colleagues and practically all of the outside world. To fill the void of his wife, Walter takes piano lessons in classical music from numerous piano teachers, each of whom told him that he has no talent for music.

The dean of the college asked Walter to present a paper in a conference in New York City, he leaves his Connecticut home to stay in his vacated New York City apartment. Upon arriving to what is supposed to be his vacant apartment, Walter is surprised to discover that it is not vacant. His apartment is occupied by an illegal couple Tarek (Haaz Sleiman) a Syrian musician and his Senegalese girlfriend, Zainab (Danai Gurira). The couple rented the apartment from a crook that made them believe that the apartment could be theirs for a small fee. After the misunderstanding is cleared up, the couple prepares to leave, not knowing where they’re going to stay. Walter felt some remorse and sorrow towards them and decided to let them stay at his apartment until they can find another place of their own.

In the following days, Walter becomes accustomed to Tarek’s beating on the drum. Tarek teaches Walter to play the drum, and then he purchases his own drum. “ Walter finds himself attracted to the energy and rhythm of drumming, not only in Tarek’s playing but in that of strangers he sees in Washington Square Park, black men ferociously playing, using plastic cans as drums: creativity transcends circumstances” (Daniel Garrett, page 3). After a few lessons from Tarek, Walter joined Tarek to play at Washington Square Park in a circle of djembe’s and other instruments. He looked relaxed, calm and open, he looked as if he forgot his loss for a moment. Music talks to people in many different ways, each and every one understands it in their own way. It helped Walter find himself, it showed him the world in a different point of view. Music helped him transform into a musician and into a participant in other people’s lives. “ One of the most captivating scenes in the film, involves a prison visit…in which Tarek plays a beat against his chest and Walter drums on a table, an inventive intimacy and unpredictable beauty” says Daniel Garrett of the scene.

Later in the movie, Tarek gets arrested for jumping the turnstile on the way home from a drum session. The cops were cold and suspicious. When Walter finally tracks Tarek down he assures him that he will get a lawyer for his case, which he does right away. It’s only after Tarek is arrested, Walter is really forced to come out of his shell and interact with other people. Watching him warm up is really a joy and the relationship between Walter and Tarek and later Walter and Mouna are perfect in tone. Shortly thereafter, Tarek’s mom, Mouna (Hiam Abbass), arrives from Detroit, because she did not hear from Tarek for couple of days. Walter invites her to stay in the apartment, since Tarek is not there and Zainab moved out, she accepts his offer. He tries to provide her with some level of comfort. Walter and Mouna open up to each other in touching ways. When Walter changes his eyeglasses to something more modern, she notices it right away and compliments him on them. When Mouna tells Walter that she always dreamed to see the play “ Phantom of the Opera”, he surprises her with tickets to the show, where they go together and have a great time. He shows his emotions and affection to Mouna. Tarek and his mother soften Walter and his reactions to the world.

When Walter goes to visit Tarek at the detention center in Queens, he finds out that Tarek was deported out of the country. In this scene we get to see Walter come out of his shell, he bursts out and yells at the security guard that he couldn’t take it anymore. The guard was acting cold and gave him only straightforward answers. He couldn’t believe the way he is being treated and started yelling at the guard and saying “ you cannot just take people away like that. Do you hear me?

He was a good man, a good person. It’s not fair! We are not just helpless children! He had a life! Do you hear me? I mean, do YOU hear ME? What’s the matter with you?” Walter was devastated by Tarek’s deportation.

For all those people that said they could not do something, at the end they can do it, but it all depends on what beat or instrument they play. At the end of the movie, we see Walter at the subway station by himself, playing the djembe. This scenario signifies Walter’s rebellion against the government and cruelty against immigrants in the US. It seems that he felt unfamiliar with the place he lived all his life, as if his country betrayed him.

Losing Tarek and Mouna is like losing a part of himself. Tarek and Mouna made Walter find some warmth, friendship and affection in the most unexpected of places, which was his own forgotten apartment. Despite his losses Walter gained everlasting friendship and learned to love again. Additionally Walter learned to open up to people in ways he never did before.

With every passing day our lives bring forth many surprises. Some of the surprises are negative, while others are positive. Walter had two major surprises; the first was the loss of his wife and the second was the addition of two new friends. This is a perfect example of you never knowing what life has in store for you until you take a chance and experience it.

Almost everyone in America came from another place in this world. No matter if it’s our current generation or generations of the past, we are all immigrants in some way or another. How can we treat ourselves the way we do? Without any respect or humanity for each other. All of us started out somewhere and each and every person that comes to America wants their lives to go somewhere. Some spend all their lives in a single place and never relocate or experience another continent, while others try to obtain a better life for themselves or their families. However, trying to do so can be dangerous if one doesn’t have the proper legal documentation.

Those people that do not have the proper legal documentation are also known as illegal immigrants. In the Visitor, Tarek was deported from the United States due to being an illegal immigrant. Throughout history, many of the Japanese and Mexican illegal immigrants were also treated like Tarek.

## Reference:

1. Garrett, Daniel. “ Offscreen. com :: Strangers and Friends, Immigration and Power, in the Film The Visitor – Volume 12, Issue 6.” Offscreen. com :: Volume 14, Issue 9 (Film Festival Big Boys) :: September 2010. 30 June 2008. Web. http://www. offscreen. com/index. php/pages/essays/strangers\_and\_friends/

2. Bell, James. “ Strangers in a Strange Land.” Sight Sound July 2008, 18th ed., sec. 17. Web.

## Immigration in America

In the United States of America, the government deals with illegal immigration on a daily basis. If you do not have the right documentation you risk getting detained and deported.

Like Tarek, many immigrants get treated in cruel ways.  He got deported because the policeman that arrested him thought that he did something illegal. Once an undocumented immigrant gets caught, they are immediately deported out of the country. In some rare situations, illegal immigrants get a chance to go to court, and fight for their right to stay in this country. Going through this process can be both emotionally and financially devastating.

After the September 11, 2001 attacks, the US has tightened its post regarding immigration and it became much tougher with its security around the country. The initial focus of attention, reflecting the ethnicity of the 9/11 attackers, actually affected a much wider diversity of people in the US or hoping to enter the U. S. Only now that the people of this country are seeing the consequences. (John Tirman, borderbattles. ssrc. org) The Mexicans suffer the most with the new laws. Which makes it harder for them to come to the United States. (John Triman, borderbattles. ssrc. org)

For many generations Mexicans have illegally crossed the border into the United States. They have been crossing the boarders due to the noticeable difference in the quality of life between the two countries. Many individuals come from poverty towns in Mexico with a desire to come to the United States to achieve the “ American dream” or at the very least have a better life (usimmigrationsupport. org). The first significant wave of Mexicans coming into the United States began in the twentieth century, followed by Japanese immigration in 1907. (harvardmagazine. com)

Throughout the years illegal Mexicans were considered to be poor, non-English speakers who had only a few years of education. American’s feared that this might impact and affect their society and treated them like they did not belong here.

Mexican workers, including many legal residents were gathered and deported all together by the federal authorities. As Douglas Massey points out in “ Beyond Smoke and Mirrors”, “ Mexicans were accused, of both “ taking away jobs from Americans, and “ living off public relief.”

Mexicans were considered as strong and efficient workers and are willing to work for low wages, in difficult working conditions where documented Americans prefer not to work. Nonetheless, they were taking away jobs from citizens of this country. This caused the reduction of the wage rate and an increase in unemployment among American citizens.

It seems that throughout years, whenever the United States found a reason to close its doors on Mexican immigrants, then a historic event would force them to reopen its doors. Such an event occurred when the United States entered World War II (WWII) and did not have enough people on the labor force. However, at the end of WWII, serviceman that came back from the war, forced Mexican workers out, again, from their jobs.

The treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, extended US control over a wide range of territory that was once held by Mexico. This territory included Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and California. Many former citizens of Mexico lost their lands and their homes, forcing them to find new land.

Throughout the years, illegal Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the Southwest where lynched. Historians estimate that hundreds, maybe even thousands were killed. The majority of lynching victims were denied access to a fair trial while others were convicted in unfair trials. This violence resulted by Mexicans being displaced from their lands and denied access to some resources.

During the Great Depression, the US government sponsored a Mexican repatriation program which was intended to encourage people to voluntarily move to Mexico, but thousands were deported against their will. At the end of the 20th century, all border lines between Mexico and the US were torn apart by political and social instability.

After September 11, 2001, the government believed that terrorists would be using the Mexican borders to cross into the United Stated in order to attack the country and had restricted the entrance of Mexicans to the states with border patrol next to Mexico and US border.

Like the Mexicans, Japanese came to the United States in search of peace and prosperity, leaving their unstable county, for a chance to provide a better future for their children.

The first large group of Japanese immigrants reached Hawaii, a US territory, faced much racial discrimination. US limited the rights of Asian immigrants to own land and to become citizens. As successful workers, they had the ability to survive with little resources and had the ability to overcome objects of envy by the white community. Anti-Japanese views grew throughout communities in the US. The Anti-Japanese campaigns began with racial stereotypes and propaganda, and became institutionalized into laws that denied the Japanese citizenship and prohibited them from owning property (Jennifer Locke Jones, Smithsonian Institution, ). Although, the Japanese were prohibited from becoming citizens and owning property, many owned homes, farms and businesses that were held in the names of their children that were born in the US, who automatically became US citizens.

The attacks on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, astounded the United States, and began challenging the loyalty of all Japanese people that were living in the US. In 1942, President Roosevelt ordered military authorities to remove all Japanese people from the country as it seemed necessary for national defense. They were placed under armed guards for four years. Those that were removed from their lands, were allowed to take only what they could carry, only the necessary items. Memories of the old neighborhoods were left behind as well as pets and other belongings. (americanhistory. si. edu)

Many Japanese had to move to temporary assembly centers, the conditions of the centers were unsanitary. Some centers were previously used for horses and now they occupied people. Some had to stay in the centers for months before they were moved to a permanent camp where they were deeply isolated from the rest of America. Most of the Japanese that were held in the camps were US citizens and they had to spend up to four years imprisoned trying to rebuild their lives.

Life did continue in the camps, they had created different programs, such as civic associations, religious observances, Boy Scout troops, dances and athletic competitions, which helped ease the burdens of life in the barbed wired camps. They had also opened schools, even though they did not have all the right supplies, they still managed to teach and learn.

At the end of WWII, many of the Japanese immigrants were sent back to Japan from the camps. After Pearl Harbor, citizens of Japanese ancestry were classified as enemy aliens (Jennifer Locke Jones, Smithsonian Institution). In 1943, some Japanese citizens were allowed to leave the camps and go back to their lives as US citizens.

For years both the Mexicans and the Japanese were treated here as if they were not welcomed. It took many generations for people to overcome the fear of immigrants ruining their lives, by taking their jobs, lands and homes. Although, this land is considered to be an American land, it had started from migrations from all around the globe. That of which helped build America.

In our melting pot society, we embrace all sorts of people. Immigrants come to America from all around the world, starting centuries ago. Being an illegal immigrant in the US can be a difficult process to go through. You can either go a lifetime without being noticed by the officials or you can get caught and deported immediately. Both ways can be dangerous and unpleasant. In some situations like the Mexicans or the Japanese, you can eventually defeat the system and live the “ American Dream”.

This country was developed due to the immigrants that came here many centuries ago. Without them, who knows if we would have the America that we know and love today? Thanks to them we have great work values, business values and ethnic foods. It was not easy to establish their lives, especially when they were not wanted here, but they overcame that.