



Written by [Thomas Sowell](#) on April 17, 2013

Immigration Sophistry

Most laws are meant to stop people from doing something, and to penalize those who disregard those laws. More generally, laws are meant to protect the society from the law breakers.

But our immigration laws are different. Here the whole focus is on the “plight” of those who have broken the laws, and on what can be done to lift the stigma and ease the pressures they feel, so that they can “come out of the shadows” and “normalize” their lives.



Merely using the word “illegal” to describe their breaking the law is considered to be a sign of mean-spiritedness, if not racism. The Associated Press refuses to let their reporters refer to people who sneaked across the border into this country, in violation of American immigration laws, as “illegal immigrants.”

On the other hand, if an ordinary American citizen breaks a law, no one cares if he has to live in fear for years — “in the shadows,” as it were — worrying that his illegal act will be discovered and punished. No one bothers to come up with euphemisms to keep from calling what he did illegal.

No cities announce that they will provide “sanctuary,” so that American shoplifters, or even jay-walkers, will be protected from the law. But, in some places, illegal immigrants are treated almost as if they were in a witness protection program.

What is even more remarkable about this special treatment is that you are not supposed to think about it as special treatment. When a new immigration law is proposed that simply overlooks violations of the old law, that is not supposed to be called “amnesty” — even though the word “amnesty” has the same root as “amnesia.” It is all about forgetting.

Why is it not supposed to be called “amnesty”? Because illegal immigrants must “earn” their citizenship. But if an ordinary American citizen gets a traffic ticket, the law is not going to just forget about it, no matter what good deeds he does afterwards.

People who come here perfectly legally have to earn their citizenship. Why is earning citizenship some special reason for ignoring the illegality of others?

Impressive feats of sophistry have become the norm in discussions of illegal immigration.

For example, we are told that there is no way that the government can find all the people who are in the country illegally and deport them. Does anyone imagine that the government can find all the embezzlers, drunk drivers or bank robbers in the country? And does anyone think that this is a reason why the government should stop trying to enforce laws against embezzlement, drunk driving or bank robbery? Or let embezzlers, drunk drivers and bank robbers “come out of the shadows” and “normalize” their lives?

Even if the government does not lift a finger to find illegal immigrants, many will come to the attention



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of law enforcement officials because of their violations of other laws. But, even then, there is no assurance that they will be deported — and certainly not in “sanctuary” cities.

Why are there immigration laws in the first place? For the benefit of the American people — not for the benefit of people in other countries who want to come here.

But political and media elites treat the American people as if they are the problem — a problem to be circumvented with sophistry and pious promises about border security that have not been kept in all these years since the last amnesty, decades ago.

Making an irreversible decision to add millions of people — and their dissimilar cultures — permanently to the American body politic is something that should take months of careful examination and discussion, both inside and outside of Congress. But it is likely to get less time than you would take to decide whether to buy a house, or perhaps even a car.

What should American immigration policy be? It doesn't matter what any of us think that policy should be if the borders are not secure, because whoever wants to come across that border will come across anyway, in defiance of whatever the policy might be.

If legal benefits are conferred on illegal immigrants before the border is secured, we may as well give up any pretense that we have an immigration policy, because benefits conferred are never going to be taken back, no matter how porous the border remains.

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