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Becoming a US Citizen

Ethics and Justice in the Immigration System

November 28, 2022

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Staff attorney at The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland
Richard Herman
Founder of Herman Legal Group
Girma Parris
Professor of Political Science, Case Western Reserve University

LEE: Hi everyone, thank you for taking your time to join us today! We hope you had a wonderful Thanksgiving break, and welcome to "Becoming a US Citizen: Ethics and Justice in the Immigration System." My name is Fred Lee, and I am the VP of Programming of the Global Ethical Leaders Society, or GELS, here at Case Western Reserve.

KUMAR: Hello everyone! My name is Sakthiram Kumar, and I am the VP of Membership of the Global Ethical Leaders Society. GELS is a student group here at CWRU that is affiliated with the Inamori International Center for Ethics and Excellence. We are a diverse group of student leaders who meet once a week to discuss various ethical issues from artificial intelligence and informed consent to military ethics and end-of-life care, as well as hosting events such as this centered around issues impacting our society today.

LEE: Before we begin our panel, we would also like to recognize the life and legacy of Dr. Paul Farmer, this year's Inamori Ethics Prize recipient. Dr. Farmer was a leader in Biomedical Ethics who dedicated his life to mitigating medical inequities and disparities in low-income communities.

KUMAR: Even with his untimely passing last spring, his authentic compassion for humanity and global improvement in combating medical inequity continues to prevail through the collective impact of his nonprofit, Partners in Health.

LEE: We would also like to recognize Dr. Kazuo Inamori, whose generous donation along with the Inamori Foundation made the creation of the Inamori International Center for Ethics and Excellence possible. Dr.

Inamori's dedication to ethical leadership is what made all of this possible tonight. In his words, "One should serve humankind through ethical deeds rather than actions based on self-interest and selfish desires." The Inamori Center for Ethics and Excellence asks you to join us in a moment of silence to honor Dr. Paul Farmer and Dr. Kazuo Inamori.

[*Silence*]

LEE: Thank you. Tonight we are excited to welcome you to our discussion on the US Immigration System. Sakthi and I will be moderating the discussion tonight and during the last fifteen to twenty minutes, we will take questions from the audience. Now we'd like to introduce you to our special guests.

KUMAR: Our first panelist, who I have the honor of introducing you all tonight, is Mr. Richard Herman. As the founder of the Herman Legal Group, Richard Herman has dedicated his life to advocating for immigrants and helping to change the conversation surrounding immigration. Founded in 1995, the Herman Legal Group has been recognized in the *U.S. World News and Report*'s "Best Law Firms in America" list and serves diverse clients in more than twelve languages through offices in Cleveland and beyond. Mr. Herman also regularly advises cities and counties on innovative ways to leverage existing immigration law to create jobs and attract direct investment. As one of the pioneers of the movement by Midwest cities to attract and welcome immigrants in a provocative tour for immigrant-friendly, pro-entrepreneur policies, Mr. Herman has appeared on a variety of television programs from *Fox News*, *ABC News 2020*, *National Public Radio*, and newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *USA Today*. He currently lives with his wife and his two children here in Cleveland.

LEE: And the next guest I have the honor to introduce to you is Ms. Corrylee Drozda. As a senior attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, Corrylee Drozda represents low-income and vulnerable immigrant survivors of violence and crime. Her practice focuses on removal defense, asylum, and other forms of humanitarian-based immigration. In addition to her direct representation of clients, Ms. Drozda is the co-chair of the Legal Aid's Language Equity committee, which is dedicated to ensuring that individuals with limited English proficiency have access to justice and community services regardless of the language they speak. She is also a member of the Legal Aid's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee. Prior to joining Legal Aid in 2018, Ms. Drozda completed a two-year term as an attorney advisor for the San Antonio Immigration Court through the Department of Justice Honors Program.

KUMAR: And last but not least, I introduce you all to Dr. Girma Parris. As an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at Case Western Reserve University, Dr. Parris splits his time as a researcher and an educator. His research focuses on race, ethnic relations, issues of race and immigration in education, and comparative immigrant integration. He completed his dissertation “Why the Turks Have it Better: A Comparative Historical Analysis of US Bilingual Education and Islamic Religious Instruction in Germany from 1965 to 2010” at Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Parris has presented papers at the 2015 and 2016 American Political Science Association annual meetings. He has also taught at the University of Mannheim in Germany and the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy at the University of Albany. Dr. Parris now teaches various classes right here at CWRU. Now please join me in giving all of our amazing panelists a warm welcome.

[*Applause*]

LEE: The question we have for all of you to get us started is: What was the spark that ignited your interest in immigration and advocacy for immigrants?

DROZDA: Thank you sir. I can start, sure. I don’t have a specific kind of light-bulb moment. It was sort of more gradual; I was just always interested in other languages growing up and learning about other cultures. In college, I majored in International Studies and Spanish and just really enjoyed the coursework and the experiences. I had the opportunity to study abroad, so I knew I wanted to do something that could continue that type of work. After college, I had the opportunity to do a year of service through the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, and I lived with other volunteers in New York City. Then, I was placed at a small immigration Legal Services nonprofit in Queens and got to do direct work with clients and in those communities on their immigration cases and just fell in love with that work. I decided to go to law school and just sort of continued on that path and have not regretted it since.

PARRIS: Well, my parents are from Barbados and because of that, I guess I have always been interested in immigration. I sort of look at the cross between immigration and race. My dad teaches at an HBCU, and he’s always speaking to me about the divide between African Americans and the Caribbean population. Since then, I've seen that there's all these divides, but also just how immigrants are racialized. So, I've always been very interested in that cross section from basically my personal background and just what I've seen.

HERMAN: Well first of all thanks for inviting me. I'm really proud to be a Case alum. I haven't been on campus for years, and I'm just so happy to see you guys out tonight at this beautiful university. When I was here in the '90s, it was great, but not as great as it is today, so you guys should be proud of that. I didn't choose immigration, and I'm not going to say it chose me, but it was kind of a confluence of events. I grew up in Cuyahoga County, in the cornfields out thirty to forty-five miles out of here.

I had a teacher come to me when I was in seventh grade, and he said, "You're a screwball."

He said, "Take my class."

I said, "What do you teach?"

He goes, "I'm from West Virginia, but I teach Russian."

And I said, "Okay that sounds like a good plan."

He said, "But you got to give me at least a year."

So I just gave him a year, and I studied all throughout high school. I took Russian. Then the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan at that time, and our school trip to Russia was canceled. Darn. I go to law school at Case, and my buddy sitting next to me in international business law was a lawyer from Minsk. He was getting his master's in law, so we became drinking buddies. I don't know if anyone drinks here.

He said, "Richard, the wall has fallen."

I said, "Really?"

He said, "Yes, and Russia is going to succeed. It's going to enter the new economy, and it's going to be democratic. We have natural resources. We're literate. We can't fail."

I said, "I'm in."

And so I got on a plane, and I moved to Russia for a couple of years. That's how I got involved in immigration law. I couldn't find a job in Moscow as a young lawyer despite my Case law degree, and I knocked on doors. I knocked on Russian law firms, Canadian law firms. They're like, "What are you doing here? You're an American. You guys think you can just fall from the sky and start performing." He says, "We practice law with guns." They weren't joking. I was almost out of money, and my buddy was a sportswriter from the *Moscow Times*.

He said, "Don't go home yet."

I said, "What's your solution?"

He said, "Put an ad in the newspaper. 'American lawyer looking for work.'"

I said, "That's one step above me holding a sign in the snow. I'll do it."

I get a call from an American lawyer saying, "Let's meet at Red Square." So we met at Red Square McDonald's, which is no longer McDonald's. He said, "I found a way to make a business, and my business is helping Russian entrepreneurs move to America." And that's how I started.

KUMAR: Thank you all for sharing those experiences with us. Obviously, the immigration process is a very complicated one, especially in the United States, and a lot of people don't really understand how difficult it can be to immigrate to this country. So my question to all of you is: What does the immigration process look like, and what's the usual timeline for people trying to get into this country?

DROZDA: We were just chatting a bit about that before we got started. We can all chime in, but it's a very long and complicated process, for sure. I think it depends on where the person is, whether they're already here in the United States or whether they're abroad. Typically, when I'm talking to folks about this, I always start with that kind of myth that you can just wait your turn in line, do it the right way. I think we've all heard of those, but the reality is that there are a very limited number of ways to have permanent legal status here in the United States, which is getting a green card. There are a variety of different temporary visas that can be very difficult to get that will allow you to stay here for a limited period of time that you have to renew and be eligible to renew them. In reality, there are just a few different ways to get that green card status, and the only way you can become a US citizen is if you first get the green card status and just get to that point. Then, if you are eligible to have some type of application, our immigration system is totally broken and underfunded. It takes years. We were talking about how a short wait time for a decision on your case is a year, two years. Many of my clients wait for five years or more, and meanwhile they're undocumented or stuck, separated from family members in another country. So, we could have a whole entire panel just on that, but just a brief intro. If everyone else wants to chime in on that.

PARRIS: Another thing is that you need to be sponsored, either by a family member or an employer, which makes it difficult. You can't just come from the outside and just walk in. You need some sort of sponsor there already, which makes it difficult for those that are undocumented because if you need an employer sponsor, generally that takes years and money. If you're a person without skills and are already working, there's really no incentive for the employer to go through that process where by the time they complete it, they may not need you anymore, especially for low-skilled jobs. So, it really does privilege those that are college educated who are applying for jobs at a well-established firm that has the money and sees you as a long-term investment, as opposed to those that are low skilled and coming maybe for seasonal, or maybe just a year because of how long it takes to actually process you. It's just not a lot of incentive to do that, and that then filters everyone towards going the illegal route, because the wait times are long and the bureaucracy is long. There's no incentive for these employers to go through all that.

HERMAN: For me, it's also a personal issue. My wife was undocumented when she was a kid and came here legally. Her parents are Chinese, Taiwanese and started an Italian restaurant in Central Florida. You can imagine how that went. They lost their money, their visa and became undocumented, and then Ronald Reagan came along and said, "You know what, if you have the heart to get here, and you're working hard and not a criminal, there should be a way to fix your papers." So they paid their seventy bucks, and they got green cards, and my wife's a doctor now. Actually, if you look at foreign-born professionals in healthcare it's like twenty-five, thirty percent of all of our doctors are foreign born, and thirty percent, forty percent of our medical researchers are foreign born. I used to work for Michael Bloomberg, and he said our immigration system is national suicide. You couldn't design a worse system than we have right now. It's not driven by sound policy or thinkers. It's driven by political bumper stickers. So, Professor, you mentioned the high skill immigration. Yes, that is a route, but actually that's broken too. We have nationality quotas for our employment-based immigration system, and if you're from China or from India, you could have PhDs, you can have patents, you can have all that kind of stuff, and you might be waiting five or ten years for a green card.

So, Canada is laughing at us and saying, "You guys don't know the new game, the new economy." Talent is the new oil. Drill baby, drill. So, if you're going to inherit someone's education from abroad, they're talented, they've already got their undergrad or masters, you're going to top it off with the PhD, and you're going to say, "Get the hell out of here." That's what we're doing. They go compete against us, go invent the new Google, which was invented by Sergey Brin who came as a refugee as a child from Russia. Go invent new Google, or go invent military technology to harm the United States because that's what we're doing. So, Canada actually comes on US soil to recruit our disgruntled high-skilled immigrants, and say, "Why do you suffer this humiliation?" This country is not valuing innovation and talent from around the world. Actually, Microsoft, when they opened up their R & D in Vancouver fifteen years ago, the press release said, "We're doing this, not because we love Canada. We're doing this because our country won't let us bring in the best of the brains around the world, and we need to be in the same room together." So, our Americans will go across the border to innovate with our international superstars.

On the undocumented side, the last law that we had to legalize the undocumented was 2001. It was called the Life Act, and from the 1980s, the '90s, and early 2000s, we've had a law that said you violated your papers. By the way, forty percent of the undocumented came here legally. They're Canadians, they're British, they're Irish, they're your next-door neighbor. I had a client who was a surgeon at one of the major hospitals in Cleveland, an undocumented immigrant performing on patients. You don't know who they are. Maybe there's somebody here in this room. Forty percent overstayed their visa, but we don't talk about that on the media. Anyway, the last law was the Life Act and it expired April 30, 2001. That law said, "We don't care how you came here, you overstayed, you jumped the wall. We don't care. If you have a sponsor, an employer, or a family member, you pay a thousand dollar fine for the civil violation of violating our precious immigration law, and we're gonna let you move on through. We're going to fingerprint you, make sure you're clean, but if you're going to contribute, you're going to be part of our family." George W. Bush loved that law. He was pushing it at sunset in April 2001. He was pushing for it to be renewed, then September 11 happened, and everything changed, and the war on immigrants began in earnest. "It's us versus them, and they're going to hurt us." So, we got close in 2007 to immigration reform, but then Senator Obama knew that immigration was that rail that you cannot touch if you want to be president of the United States. He backed out of the Senate deal to get immigration reform, and then he didn't make it a priority when he became a president. So, here we are twenty-one years since the Life Act expired, and we don't have a solution, and we don't even know how many people are here without papers. It could be ten million, it could be twenty million. And I posit to our policy makers: Is that a safe situation for America, to have twenty million people running around who are off the grid?

LEE: Thank you for that, thank you for sharing our experiences. I think that perfectly segues into our next question. So with current events such as the busing and flying of immigrants into other states and cities, what more can be done to protect the rights of immigrants and prevent them from being used as political props?

PARRIS: I'm not sure what can be done to prevent it. There are some silver linings—some of these immigrants have been moved from Florida to, say, New York, and many of them are asylum seekers. These court systems in these states are more friendly to their cases, so there is that positive aspect of it. It has highlighted how, because immigration is really a local event, it may be handled at the national level, but it's local institutions that have to integrate them at churches or schools or local ethnic associations. So, it's highlighted how these localities are strained because once they've been sent to New York or Chicago, they have seen how strained the system is. Yeah, they're being used as props for political purposes, and it's not necessarily because—I mean they are strained, you could argue that in Florida or Texas as well, but that's not why they really sent them there. It was election season, and they did that for that reason, but I'm not sure how you prevent it. Unless you can prosecute these states on kidnapping, or I can't remember the other law that I think California is trying to sue for, I think racketeering somehow, but I'm not sure how you prevent it.

But I think it highlights again the problems of dealing with it because we don't really have a formal integration policy. Everything is dealt with at the state level, so if you have a good local system with strong institutions, like good education systems that can handle bilingual students, for instance, or you are in a state that has strong ethnic associations for the population that is predominantly immigrants, then those states do better, but if you don't, then then you don't. So, a lot of new immigrants are coming to the South, for instance. In the South, it's pretty new to immigration because the wave of the early twentieth century skipped the South, and these areas have been really less able to deal with immigrants even though they're sort of the new destination south of the Midwest, but I think it's more highlighting the problems with the system. I'm not sure how you can protect the immigrants from this because there is really no way to protect them.

DROZDA: Yeah, unfortunately I agree with that. It's so upsetting to see what happened in those instances and to feel like there's really not a ton that that can be done, but I think that it's important to understand at least some reasons why the situation at the border is the way it is. The folks that are fleeing and coming to the southern border are painted in the media as if they're doing it illegally, they've snuck across the border, but that virtually doesn't happen anymore. Policies have evolved over the years to make it extremely difficult to sneak across the border. These folks are presenting themselves to border patrol, and they're claiming asylum because there's no incentive to do it any other way, or there's no way to do it a legal route. Asylum is the only option, and that is legal. Our laws say that if you flee your country, and you present yourself here—you can make that brutal journey and make it here—and you say that you fear for your life, by law, you have a right to be put through our immigration system and have an opportunity to request asylum. I think most of the people that are fleeing, just given what they're going through, really are fleeing grave harm and are fleeing for their lives and need protection in the United States. But there are many others that asylum wasn't designed really to address the harms that they have, the needs that they have, the needs that globally we're going to continue to have with climate change, and asylum isn't really designed for those types of needs.

So, you have all these people coming to the border because it's the only way to get here, and when you look at the folks that are there at the border too, talking about how immigration racializes us, they're mostly Black and brown immigrants. In part, because many of the people who are now undocumented, like Richard said, have overstayed their visas. They were able to get some sort of temporary tourist visa to get here. They're mostly white and wealthy immigrants who can prove that they have incentive to go back to their country. That's basically what you have to prove if you want to come here temporarily: look at my life and my country. I have family there, I have a job there, I have money in my bank account, I'm gonna go back. People from the global south, from Central South America, don't often have that to prove. Maybe they'd like to just be able to come temporarily to visit family members or to be able to work temporarily, but they can't get visas. They don't meet those requirements, and they don't have the money to do it. So, you have this huge disparity of folks who are at the border, and then you see the way that they're politicized to meet political gains. So the short answer to that long explanation is that we need reform to be able to protect the rights of immigrants because the situation there is just ripe to be used for political games. It doesn't seem that anyone actually wants to talk about why we have this problem into actually realistically work on solving it.

HERMAN: I'll just add real quick—I get calls almost every day from employers all over the country saying, "I can't find workers," and it's all kinds of jobs. A lot of the back-breaking work that Americans don't want to do, these jobs are just not being filled, and to me it just seems like a logical solution. So, that would help ameliorate some of the pressure if there were avenues like, for example, we have a H-2B visa program for seasonal workers, but it's like a lottery and it's 33,000 for six months, that go . . . like that. Then, all of a sudden, the shrimp boat industries need more, or the East Coast vacation spots need more, or the Trump Hotel needs more. This is not a way you should be designing a policy. I mean labor market analysis. Where are the holes? How do you fill it? It's not rocket science, so I think that would help ameliorate some of it, but the other part of it is the confusion of our immigration policy is exploited by a lot of different folks and entities, and the word gets out that you can come to the border and apply for asylum. The word should get out that asylum is not for every danger. You could prove that you were going to be killed tomorrow by the cartel if you go back, but that usually doesn't impress an immigration judge. You've got to prove you're likely to be persecuted on account of your political opinion, your ethnic background, your religion, sexual orientation, things like that.

A lot of the stuff that we see in these asylum cases doesn't fit that paradigm. Another thing I mentioned—I think the professor brought up, about the inequities, the disparities between immigration courts. So, here's a good example. I have clients that came in legally, they have a visa, they're at school, and they're like, "I can't go back home." I say, "Okay. Tell me why. Tell me what's going on, and let's figure it out." "Okay, I'm gonna apply for asylum." "Absolutely, you should apply for asylum. Don't do it here. Why? Because you're going to kill your case." It doesn't really matter where you apply at the US immigration level. We have these asylum offices, I think the approval rates are all about the same, if I'm not mistaken, twenty-five percent maybe, approval rates. So, three-quarters of those cases get denied, and if you're out of status at that point, they put you in Immigration Court. That's where you can win your case or lose it, and so in Cleveland—by the way I consider Cleveland to be not an immigrant-friendly city for a lot of different reasons, but the Cleveland Immigration Court is the court that is for all of Ohio. So, all of our immigration cases come here in Cleveland. The approval rate for asylum is probably below fifteen percent. Fifteen percent. If you go to New York City, there are judges that are approving over ninety percent, not just a few—eighty percent, seventy percent, sixty percent. If you are breathing, and you go into that court, you've got a very good chance of getting asylum.

So, why is it that I can go to McDonald's in New York City, and the hamburger will taste the same as LA, but it won't be a political asylum? Why does the law apply in such a disparate fashion? Because it's up to the judges. It's up to their personal politics, their own bias. So when I have people that are getting ready to apply for asylum, we strategically think about what city we can go to live because you can't just say, "I'm living in New York City, and here's my Bronx address." You've got to live there, and a lot of our clients don't have the resources to move to the Bronx. Their family's here, their support system is here, but for many of them, it could help win their case.

PARRIS: The court systems vary just because they're based on those states, so the politics will differ depending on the states, like all our politics differ here subnationally.

KUMAR: Absolutely. That's all very interesting, and I think it really relates to a lot of the conversation around the immigration system today in regard to how often immigrants are politicized and the popular view around immigrants. In general, one such view is that immigrants take away American jobs, take away American labor. We just had that discussion about how immigrants often take jobs that Americans usually don't want or don't take to begin with. Because they're working in these undesired positions from the aspect of US citizens, there are concerns regarding the labor rights of these immigrants, specifically undocumented immigrants. More than just safeguarding the labor rights of immigrants, there's also this question of how can we change this messaging that's very prevalent, this anti-immigrant rhetoric, and how can we push a more pro-immigrant immigration stance, especially when we see maybe more anti-immigrant rhetoric in the media, certain media outlets—I'll let you figure out which ones, but I'll let you take a stab.

PARRIS: I mean, we have a law, although we're known as an immigrant nation, we've hated every immigrant group that's come, every single one. From the Germans, to the Italians, and now the Mexicans, we hate everyone. We say they're going to ruin everything, and generally what has happened is that they become economically integrated or maybe intermarry, and then we move along and hate the next group that comes. So, if history is an example, I think the only way really that you get over the hatred is that you properly integrate them so that the immigrants are part of the economic and relative social mainstream. Like Italians, for instance they were thought of as the bottom of the immigrant barrel in the turn of the twentieth century, but by the time you hit the middle twentieth century, they weren't. I think one difference with the new immigrants post-1960 is that the immigrants from the turn of the twentieth century were from southern Eastern Europe, and originally they were not thought of as white. That was reserved for the northwestern Europeans, and then through intermarriage and economic integration, by the time you get to the middle twentieth century up, it's basically pan-ethnic whiteness. The immigrants from the post-'60s era have been mostly Asians, Africans, Caribbeans, and Latin Americans, and the question is whether or not they can integrate in the same way. I don't think racially—it's not going to be as easy to make them whatever—but they can be integrated economically, which is really about employment and the local economic system in which they're immigrating. That's, to me, the way that you can handle xenophobia, but I don't think there's some magic pill. I mean you can do education. I'm big about pop culture in various ways of softening, normalizing immigrant experiences, but I think if they're economically integrated, not seen as a drag, or stealing somebody's job or problems of crime or whatever, then that's one way that you can bring immigrants into the mainstream and shield them somewhat from integration. But the anti-Asian biases regardless of economic prospects does counter that, so I'm not really sure. Like I said, we've hated every immigrant group, and it's usually only through economic integration that we've sort of stopped hating them.

DROZDA: Yeah, I completely agree with that. I think that it's really at a sort of local, very community-oriented level, and in these times when we're so divided and segregated in our communities, that can be really difficult. So, I do think it's important for local governments, local communities, local organizations to take on that role, to have integration efforts. I love your use of *integration* instead of *assimilation*—notice that's a very important difference. I think that often we talk about how immigrants should assimilate. When I hear that, I think, "Drop all of your practices, your beliefs, and assimilate into whatever our culture is here in the US." Often the de facto is white, European culture, but we have so many cultures, and it's so different from community to community. Integration is much more about what are your backgrounds, your experiences, what do you bring to the community, and how can you work with other different groups in that community to improve the community overall. I think that I've seen a lot more, just in my work, different sort of national organizations that will do trainings on a variety of different things, but I've seen way more trainings than I have in the past on how folks like where I work at Cleveland Legal Aid or other community-based organizations can help to spearhead those integration efforts. So, I think that's a really positive development, that we're talking about more. I think storytelling is really important. We're working with immigrant communities to feel comfortable to tell their stories, and I think the power of storytelling can really help to bring people together. And we realize that we have a lot more in common than we do differences, which I know sounds cheesy, but it's very true. It really just takes those personal connections and maybe an organizing force to facilitate those.

HERMAN: I agree with both those comments. Real quick—I was working on a writing project with Robert Smith, who works here at Case now. He was a *Plain Dealer* reporter at the time, and he was the diversity affairs reporter, and his wife is the first violinist in the Cleveland Orchestra. She's from Korea, and my wife is from Taiwan, so Bob and I are these lazy white guys who would get together and say we can't keep up with our immigrant wives. They have another motor, you know, and they're raising our kids in a way that is different than we were raised. We became friends, and we decided we wanted to write a book together about the positive, because we're troubled that Cleveland was not welcoming immigrants. It welcomed the Eastern European assembly to some degree, although there's always that pushback. But this wave of color, particularly Africans, Asians, Latinos, Arabs—there was a strong, strong xenophobic stench in Cleveland, and I still think it's here today. So we said, "Listen, let's collect stories of immigrants creating jobs, and let's look at this. Let's pull together the recent data on economic contributions." We wanted to catalyze this discussion of post-industrial cities embracing immigration as an economic development strategy, and the data was mind-blowing. Immigrants are twice as likely to start a business than American-born, and that's true whether it's a little bodega or a landscaping company or Silicon Valley. Over half the companies in Silicon Valley were founded by immigrants. Forty percent of the Fortune 500 companies were founded by an immigrant or a child of an immigrant. So, if you look at all those jobs, immigrants are twice as likely to have a patent than an American-born.

I remember going to the City Council testifying to say, "Listen, let's get on the train, let's welcome this wave," because I had some Somali clients that were pushed out. They were trying to set up a taxi company here, and the leadership said no, we don't want them here, and a story that ran in *The New York Times* at that time, fifteen years ago was "Hopkins International Tickets Muslim Drivers for Praying Outside their Cabs." That was the message, and Cleveland wasn't troubled by that at all. It's actually—that's kind of good. So, I was testifying at the City Council, and I said, "Let me drive the bus to Toronto." If you don't believe that a cold industrial city can benefit from immigration, let me show you Toronto. Toronto looked a lot like Cleveland until fifty years ago. Something happened along the way to form it—the world came into Toronto, and Toronto welcomed them. Toronto is now fifty percent foreign born. They have a real estate problem too; they don't have empty houses. They have housing values going four, five, ten, twenty times what it was ten years ago, and the native Toronto folks are saying "not a bad deal." So, to me there's a story to be told, and we did this book. We went around the country interviewing the billionaires, the bodega owners, the immigrant chefs, the medical researchers—from Nigeria or wherever—and the stories were all the same: this is about self-sacrifice, parents investing in their kids, wanting to make their parents proud by working their asses off, and wanting to make something.

And I'll leave you with this: my daughter Isabel was probably three or four years old when Bob and I were working on this book. So, my wife and I were talking about immigration all the time in the house, probably to the point where it was a little bit weird, and our daughter says, "Daddy, Daddy, What's an immigrant?" and I thought , *Well how do you explain this to the Fox crowd at a three-year-old level?* I said, "Honey, immigrants are heroes, and it's like they're in an airplane, and they're gonna jump out, and they're going to try to build this parachute on the way down, and they're doing that for their kids." Now, she didn't understand that, but I'm not sure I do either. But the point was that the message is there. It's a story, if you look at the Congressional Record 1911, 1915, whatever it was—you're so right, Professor, that xenophobia is as American as apple pie and baseball. This is what we do—we hate the newcomers, and then we embrace them, and we wait for the next wave. But that congressional history—I researched it, I pulled it up—these signs of the community, of the business community, of the church communities: "These immigrants coming in, they're ruining this country. They don't speak English, they're criminals, they're bringing in crime, they're taking our jobs, and they're bringing disease." Lou Dobbs said the new wave is bringing leprosy and things like that. So, who is this, who are they talking about in 1915 and 1917? They're talking about the Jews, the Poles, the Italians, the Irish, you know, the Great American generation who fought World War II. So we're going to get through this. I may not be here when it gets right, but you guys will be.

PARRIS: One thing I want to add is it's not only whites that are xenophobic to immigrants coming in, it's actually also people of color or old immigrants who don't like new immigrants. So, it's like a much more complicated xenophobia than simply whites against the new immigrants coming in. It's like African Americans against the new Caribbeans, or Asians against Latinos—it's a multifaceted xenophobia. So in attacking it, I think it's important to acknowledge that. It seems like it's just one Boogeyman against all the masses; it's not like that at all.

HERMAN: Sometimes immigrant communities are very xenophobic themselves, right? So when they come in the boat, and they pull in the ladder after them and say, "Well, we did it the right way, right?" We have friends from Colombia saying, "We did it the right way." Well, what was the right way? "Well, we came here and got a tourist visa when we could get them. We overstayed, it became illegal, and we applied for asylum. We did it the right way." Okay.

LEE: Thank you, thank you for sharing those insights into the American immigration system as a whole, and as a broader picture. We were wondering about that in the media, and generally what we see is that we frequently talk about Latin American immigration into states like California and Texas, but what do you think are the common misconceptions about immigration within Cleveland, Ohio? And so, we kind of talked about this: How does this affect your work that you do, and how does your work in your respective field combat these inequities?

PARRIS: Well, my work focuses on bilingual education at the state level, and teaching immigrants English is probably one of the more important aspects of immigrant integration, but the capacity to do that, they're at the state level, so that's one of the things I was referring to before. This depends on where you go as an immigrant, what kind of services you're going to receive. And since we don't have a truly formal integration policy, it's really about what job you get. Does that job help you? Are there voluntary associations there to aid you in the process of naturalization? Then, is the school system you want to look at equipped? Do they have trained bilingual teachers? Do they fund these programs well enough that they can actually provide not just a two-year bilingual education program, but a five- to seven-year bilingual education program? And all these are really dependent on how invested that locality or state is in funding these things, or if there are voluntary associations that are well-equipped and organized that can do so.

So, with Cleveland—I don't really do work in Cleveland, but I know with the rejection of immigrants coming here was the African American Community saying, "We don't want immigrants here," even though immigrants would help revitalize the city by bringing in jobs and employment and entrepreneurship, and all this would benefit everybody. But to me it's about educating everybody that immigrants aren't going to steal from you, and I can see why. There's a long history of African Americans being threatened by immigration and some rightfully so. Like the turn-of-the-century immigrants were always preferred over African Americans when they were migrating North during The Great Migration, so there's a history for that resentment that is real, but rejecting them from here was probably horribly self-destructive, because the city is aging, and there's a depopulation in Cleveland, and the cities that are vibrant are the ones that have immigrants. So it's really understanding that people aren't coming to take, which, it's like you said, as American as apple pie, but they're coming to revitalize. I think that's a multi-form education effort to get people to understand that. You can't just tell people—you can't just yell at people—you kind of have to see where they're coming from and speak with them or get them to see things for what they are, instead of these kinds of strong-man stereotypes.

HERMAN: So, I used to love reading about what makes a city immigrant-friendly, and then I got so depressed reading these things. I had one billionaire in town, I won't tell you who, call me up and said, "Shut the f up. Stop talking about immigration in Cleveland. You're going to create a race war." So, I think he had visions of Hough on fire in the 1960s. Rather than saying, "Why don't we build those new relationships in a way that's not threatening because the data is not going to sell anybody—it's about building these relationships and trust," which I think is happening in other cities, but they're not willing to buy it here. But I think immigrant-friendly cities have a lot of common characteristics, and even Rust Belt cities now. I'm not talking about cities that have a huge percentage of immigrants; we're only 5 percent foreign-born in Cleveland. The national average is probably 12 or 13 percent. Cities that are economically popping are twenty, 25 percent or higher, so we're very low in the immigrant population, but I think a lot of them have things like an immigrant welcome center, a coalition, one place where you can go for your ESL, and you can get resource referrals and all this kind of stuff. By the way, most of those that are effective are in City Hall. In Boston, I don't know if it still is, but it was Mayor Menino when he was the mayor, I went to visit, he goes "I want that office in in city hall right next to me," and I was there for Christmas time, and he said "are you coming to the party for Christmas?" and I said, "What party?" and he said, "We're having a diversity party." I said, "That sounds like a great idea." So I think that once you start to say, "I want to become an immigrant-friendly city, you start to see all these different policies that can come out," for example IDs, a city ID. If the feds don't want to give us an ID or a driver's license, maybe the city can, and that could at least get us into the library, and I think it's a formal acknowledgment that you're part of us, we don't care about your papers, you're a member of our community.

Again, if you start digging, you start really seeing the layers of the onion, you could be in the Chamber of Commerce and you could say "I want Congress to push for immigrant-friendly destinations to reboot economically-deprived cities." What does that mean? Well we have an H-1B visa for professional workers, for those techies I was talking about in Silicon Valley that are leaving for Canada. We have this lottery system. There's only 85,000 of these visas per year, so Facebook, Microsoft, they're all vying for these. It's a lottery, and the visas go instantaneously. Hundreds of thousands of people apply within a week's span, then they're gone. So why don't we create a situation where if you move your company into Cleveland or Detroit, you can get relief from the lottery, you don't need the lottery to hire those folks if you co-locate those jobs here. Because right now, Microsoft and other companies are setting up those jobs over the border in Canada—it's called *near-shoring*. Do it in Cleveland. Create jobs and revenue here. We have investment green cards—if you invest money in economically deprived areas and create ten jobs, you get green cards. We don't really hear too much about that. I was advocating for that use in Hough in our inner-city areas. You don't hear about that. So again, I think if you ask the question, "Do you want to be an immigrant-friendly city?," you're going to see all these discussions roll out, and the problem with Cleveland is we haven't asked that question yet.

DROZDA: Can I just add, briefly in my work, misperceptions about immigration to Cleveland. Just sort of generally speaking, I see a lot of the same misperceptions that we see nationally, in terms of how our immigration system works and immigrants that are here, why they're here, and how they got here, and all those things that we've already covered. But another thing I've seen is that we don't have any immigrants here. We have talked about how Cleveland could definitely be more immigrant friendly. But I think a lot of people are surprised to learn that my clients are not just from Mexico and Central America, but from many, many different countries. What I see is the work that I do at Cleveland Legal Aid and my colleagues is working with our clients to bring stability and security to their lives so that they can integrate more into the community and dispel some of those misperceptions and contribute and thrive. The first step for me is, of course, they come and they have questions about their immigration status, and figuring out what they qualify for, what can we apply for, and we kind of go from there. Making referrals within Legal Aid, we assist with housing, employment issues, education issues—so it's never just the immigration cases, it's often troubleshooting many other problems to provide security for families that we serve. I think a great example of that is that we have, for the past six months or so, we received a grant to provide immigration legal services to Afghans who've been resettled here that fled Afghanistan in August 2021, after the US forces withdrew, and around a thousand Afghans have been resettled here in Cleveland. Legal Aid and Catholic Charities, together, we're handling the legal cases for all of those families. So that has just been a great example of connecting them with resources, and I just I've never worked with a population that has literally been just more new; everything is new. They know nothing here, and so it's been a really great experience to welcome them to Cleveland and try to step-by-step—it will take many, many years, but to integrate them into our community, and I think that will be a really positive contribution to Cleveland in years to come, hopefully.

KUMAR: Well, clearly we have a long way to go, but it is nice to hear that steps are being taken to address some of these issues, regardless of how impossible they may seem to address initially. So, moving on to our individual questions we're going to ask—if you guys don't mind, of course—each panelist, individually, a question. Of course any one of you can jump in if you'd like, but starting with Miss Drozda. Now, obviously many of the people coming to this country have very limited English competency. They're coming from all over the world, so obviously you can't always expect these people to understand or know English. My question is then how can the immigration process be changed so that those of limited English competency can be more adequately represented and supported throughout the immigration process?

DROZDA: That's a great question. Definitely a huge need. First of all, none of the immigration applications are in any languages other than English, which is crazy. How can you fill something out that's very complicated in English if you're an immigrant who has just arrived here? Just to illustrate, I think the best example of that is I occasionally represent folks who are in removal proceedings and are in detention, so they're in civil immigration detention and sometimes, for a variety of reasons, have to stay in detention during their entire removal proceedings. I don't always provide full-on representation, but try to help them through that process. They're extremely isolated, they don't have a lot of access to, or funds available to have people to help them do that. They don't have a very basic library with limited time to be able to do that. And it's like here's this fifteen-page asylum application form that requires like narrative answers. I mean how is someone supposed to do that? So, sometimes we've had cases that we've gotten because someone tried to represent themselves in Immigration Court and filled out the form as best they could in their native language, and the immigration judge is like, "No, you have to fill this out in English." The question is, How do I do that? "Like I don't know, figure it out!" So I guess step one would be, there should be forms available in languages, and the Immigration Court, the system, the other immigration agencies should accept those and use their resources to have those translated. It's all on the applicant to translate all their documents into English, to submit everything in English, and that's extremely difficult to do if you don't have an attorney. I will say, the immigration courts are pretty good at providing interpreters for people who are in immigration proceedings, so that's positive—a lot better than some of our local Cleveland and Ohio courts that are not immigration related—but I think that would be a huge benefit to be able to have those forms translated.

And just one other thing I'll mention is for people who are coming at the border and are being given all of these documents, saying "Okay now you're going to be put in removal proceedings, you're going to go here, if you don't show up at this report date, or if you don't show up at this hearing you're going to be ordered removed" And all this is in English! Sometimes the form will say, "Oh this was read to this person in Spanish" But I'm pretty confident it's never by a qualified interpreter. It's just whatever the border official—maybe they can speak Spanish, but if it's another language, they don't have officers who speak the many other languages of people or who are coming in. So much, much better language access, at the border would be a huge step in the right direction.

LEE: Awesome. Thank you, thank you. So another question that we had, and this one's for Professor Parris. So we mentioned immigrant integration. How does immigrant immigration balance preservation of unique cultures while encouraging and bringing immigrants into American society? How do we find that equilibrium? How do we find that balance where we can adequately support these immigrants? Thank you.

PARRIS: It's a good question. I think the fact that we don't have a formal integration process almost creates the balance. So we do push immigrants to learn English and then generally their integration happens through their job. But the other entity that plays a role in integration are usually ethnic associations. Generally immigrants integrate through their communities. Whether it's ethnic association or family, I think that creates a fairly decent balance. The real key is that, in terms of integrating economically, they're not segmented into these jobs that are low skilled and have only immigrants where they kind of stay there. If there's a way, maybe not that generation, but the next generation, through education, can then move on to higher types of employment that have a wider variety of persons. Because generally when immigrants come, they come to some sort of economic immigrant enclave through a job. But if in a generation you can move on, I think you can balance that because basically the immigrant community integrates you, and the sort of the economic aspect further integrates you into the American mainstream. I think you can score that balance that way. I don't think you have to really do anything, as long as there's not—as you were mentioning—the assimilation. So in the early twentieth century, we were forcing assimilation onto immigrants because they were seen as a danger. Right after World War I, it was backlash against immigrants, and they needed to be Americanized. But we've kind of moved away from that, and it's really much more on the ethnic communities. And so if you can balance the economic while still integrating through the ethnic community, I think you can score a nice balance.

KUMAR: So our last question is for you, Mr. Herman. And it relates to something that a lot of students, especially international students have to deal with, and that's the student visa process. So the question in particular is how does the student visa process compare with someone seeking employment in the United States?

HERMAN: I think most students don't have a problem getting the student visa, but that's not always true depending on what country you're coming from and what program you're coming to study at. For example, if you're coming from the Philippines to study at a community college in Cleveland, you probably have a high denial rate, as opposed to coming from China, depending on what university in China, coming for an advanced degree in the United States. So the student visas I don't think are the problem. I do a lot of counseling of international students getting ready to graduate and enter into the job market, and you've got to have a war plan. I mean, you've got to have multiple layers of strategy if this doesn't work. So, the first thing is when you graduate you get OPT (optional practical training). If you're a STEM grad, you can get several year extensions, and that's really cool because your employer doesn't have to file anything. But also, you've got to be careful because employers could be predatory if they don't have to pay prevailing market wage when you're on OPT. The biggest asset that a student can have in marrying with an employer—it's a marriage—is you want to pick the one that is likely to apply for your H-1B visa—that lottery that I talked about—and likely if they win the lottery, even if they don't, likely to apply for a green card for you. And these processes take years sometimes, so you also don't pick the first employer that's kind of cute and winks at you. You've got to do your due diligence and so, for example, there's a website called myvisajobs.com. It's a private website. You gotta pay a little money to get on, and I have no ownership interest in that. But it takes the data from the Department of Labor and aggregates it so you can do searches to see which employers have filed H-1Bs, which college degrees they're hiring, who signed the H-1B petition from the employer, what city they're in. You can also see which companies are filing for green cards, because they've got to file labor certification applications to prove they're not displacing an American worker. That data is extremely valuable because now you know this company is immigrant friendly, they're filing H-1Bs. They know what that is, they know about international human capital strategies, they're deploying them, the HR person is not scared when they hear the word immigration.

Secondly, they file green cards, some employers will say "We'll file H-1Bs, but we don't do the green cards." So you don't want to invest years of your life with an employer H-1B and find out they don't do the green cards, because that green card process can take years and years and years. For my Indian friends, it could take ten years. And we have all kinds of brainstorming sessions on how to play that strategy out, so the bottom line is develop a strategy early on in your college career about finding the right employer that's going to be immigrant friendly and sponsor you because it's going to be very, very valuable for you down the road.

KUMAR: Thank you, all three of you, for answering these questions. And going back to the topic of students, we're now going to open up the floor to any questions any of you might have. There's a microphone right over there if everyone can direct their attention to where I'm pointing.

AUDIENCE: Sorry, I had to write it down. So, speaking in the realm of political asylum today with the shifting of the migrant body to represent truth. I've heard about medical examiners refusing to do asylum evaluations or lawyers recommending their clients against using pornography to prove queerness. Is there a way to push back against these really violent expectations without disenfranchising current migrants in their processes that you've come across?

DROZDA: That's a really interesting question, and something I think about. Not necessarily that specific example, but I think about a lot how to really value your clients experiences and empower them in telling their story, but you also have to you want them to win, so you have to keep in mind who the audience is. So, it is a really difficult balance. I try my best to be mindful of that and think about *Am I phrasing this in this way for this reason* or *Why do I think about it like that*, but I think it is difficult because you also come across different grounds of inadmissibility, so different reasons why someone—and that's a little bit different in asylum—there are different types of bars to reasons why someone is just not eligible for what they're applying for. So, you have to be really careful and constantly be thinking, is saying this gonna lead us down the rabbit hole of all these questions. A government prosecutor, if it's in a removal proceedings situation, is going to ask all these horrible, terrible questions that are just really going to break your client down. You constantly have to be thinking of all of these different things, and it's really a conversation with your client, to be honest, but it can be like a fine line.

HERMAN: Just to add to that. I mean it's really important to develop that trust with the client because sometimes they don't know what question should be asked or what I'm asking really is. I'll give you a concrete example. So, I have one client I represented, a company, and they called me up, and they said, "We've got a young lady from El Salvador. She's being deported next week. She's been ordered, deported, she's been through the process, Immigration Court she's got this whole, she's done, and she's got to report to ICE next Wednesday." I said, "Okay, I don't know what I could do, but I'll be happy to talk with her." So, I talked to her and she was like, twenty-one years old, twenty-two years old. I just had a sense we should dig deeper, and so I said, "Why don't you talk to one of the lawyers in my office, someone else." The lawyer that I was thinking about was Charmaine. I said, "Why don't you talk to Charmaine in private," and it turns out that this young girl was living with her mom here. Her mom's undocumented too. The mom's boyfriend made the young girl quit high school to go work, and then he took her paychecks. She didn't think anything of it. I said that sounds like labor trafficking. So, we contacted the ICE officer. We said, "We're filing for the T-VISA for trafficking." Usually, you see the trafficking cases on sex trafficking and sometimes labor trafficking, and this is not really your traditional labor trafficking, but it meets the definition. So the ICE officer says, "Well let's meet at McDonald's—again that McDonald's, I don't know why everybody wants a Big Mac. So we meet at McDonald's, kind of a weird place to meet, and he's like, "Are you sure?" I said, "Yeah," the lawyers in me, but I said, "Yeah, we're sure. We're gonna file this." "Okay, okay, I'll give you some time to explore." We ended up winning that case.

So, you know, I have a lot of LGBT clients. They're applying for asylum, sexual orientation-based cases. I remember when Janet Reno was the attorney general and sexual orientation became grounds for asylum. It's really historic. We started doing cases, and it's just a matter of trying to develop trust and dialogue with your client because they may not even tell their lawyer what's really happening, and you got to really get it out, and then you make the judgment call. Is it going to help or hurt the case?

DROZDA: I'll just add really briefly as well. I think another thing too, is it's really important to educate the adjudicator. So, I'm thinking of a case now. It's a woman in removal proceedings. She identifies as lesbian, but we have a multi-faceted claim because people are complicated, not everyone fits into one hole and one little box. An immigration judge—and I know who this judge is, it's a white man—would very much like for it to fit into this one box, but we have a domestic violence-based claim. She was with a male partner that she has children with. So I'm already thinking this is going to be a tough case, but she needs to tell her story, so we're gonna just have to educate the judge and do the best that you can while valuing your clients experiences, and making sure she has the chance to request the relief that she deserves.

AUDIENCE: Sorry, one more quick, just, sub-part of that. Again, with research and evidence into nowadays, with necropolitics and violence and waiting, Do you think there's realistically a lot of value in, beyond just a research sense, in applying these experiential evidences in a system of doubt?

HERMAN: I'm not sure I understand your question.

AUDIENCE: Oh, just given that the whole political asylum system is all based on realistically doubting and trying to find flaws. Now, there's research saying, well, the system is bad for migrants, it puts them in these bad positions. Their existence is being taunted with this spot between life and death, but it's all really experiential, and I guess if they were not believing migrants already, is this experiential evidence really doing much?

DROZDA: Hmm, I don't know. I'm not sure how to answer that question. Yeah, I don't know. I mean I'll just add, I mean, the asylum process is definitely brutal. You know, you're really put through the wringer, and our entire immigration system is definitely does not have trauma in mind or really anything like that, and I think we're constantly fighting against that.

HERMAN: I think it comes down to storytelling. So, a good lawyer is a good storyteller, and you've got to know your audience—or like Sun Tzu, know your enemy. You've got to be able to give them the opportunity, to give them the hook, to say okay, now I see that the law meets the facts and I can approve it. So, the first thing you've got to do is get the story out of the client, and that's not always easy because they may have trauma, they may have language or cultural issues, trust issues, so getting the story out. Usually I ask them, I say write it down please, and don't worry about grammar. You don't have to be Dostoevsky, just give me the story. So, if you can't write it, get someone to help you write it, or maybe we can help you write it in your language, or want to translate it. Get the story. Once we have the story, then we can start seeing the case kind of materialize. For example, not a lot of clients have the resources for this, but I love to get expert witnesses, country experts. If we can find a PhD—we have another one here, a PhD who is an expert on this one issue—we'll go to him or her and say, "Hey, we've got somebody, can you evaluate the case and issue an expert opinion? In my humble opinion, based on my research and evaluation of this case, this person will suffer persecution." Persecution is a legal term, so that's what the judge looking for. Are we hitting the legal notes? If the person suffered trauma, have we documented the trauma? If it's physical injury, do we have medical reports? If it's psychological injury, can we afford a forensic psychologist report, or at least some other type of medical professional to evaluate trauma? Judges appreciate that. I think you mentioned people who are detained. Only ten percent of detainees have counsel, ten percent have lawyers. So, the judges by and large do appreciate when a lawyer is there and they're properly prepared.

The case is prepared; there's documents there. We have the country reports, but the bottom line of your question is if it's just your story that is going to be enough, and the law says, yes as long as the judge does not think there's other documents that you could have gotten. If you say this happened to me and there were witnesses and you don't explain why you don't have witness statements like my mom was right there, where's Mom's statement? Can she email it to you, can she fax it to you? You've got to give them something because a lot of people don't present that stuff. They just go there with their story, and the judge is like you know—there is a lot of fraud. I mean in the immigration system, there's marriage fraud, there's document fraud. It's real, so I don't want to just demonize the other side and say, you know—people do make stuff up. So, to the degree that they can, the client and their team has to document their claim.

AUDIENCE: One of my first questions is when you were talking about how the immigrants take the jobs that Americans don't want. My problem with that is because me and my mother are refugees, but my brother and sister were born here, and my mother's accepted the jobs that she works are the jobs that Americans don't really want, and those are where the places where there's a lot of hiring and stuff, but then there's also like a lot of dangers in those jobs and the payments. The salaries, they're not up to par with how hard those jobs are and—. It's like where's the ethics in that? How is someone that is just working on the computer all day making more than someone that's doing physical labor, and they work overtime. Sometimes, they don't get paid for that overtime, and they maybe they get like a salary increase every year, but it's cents, it's not really doing anything, and with the inflation rates every year, the salary and the inflation rates, well they never equal each other. Basically I'm just saying, Why are like the immigrants or the refugees or migrant workers here not getting paid like other Americans are getting paid? They're not really incentivized to unionize or join a union because unions take money out of your paychecks, and you have places for where your money should go because you don't have a foundation in this country, so you can't be throwing your money anywhere willy-nilly. We don't really take out loans or anything because we see what it does to other people. So we're not really incentivized to do what the government says—oh do this, apply for this—it's like no because we know that the American government will always find a way to get their money back. If you apply for welfare, then they'll just take that much money out of your next income taxes, and it's always somehow to get you trapped in this thing. So, why isn't there a good system for immigrants to just set a foundation in this country?

PARRIS: I would say that you need to unionize and that unionization shouldn't be seen as wasting money— that unionization and collectively organizing is the way that you can have collective leverage to raise your salaries because the industry does not want to pay you. Industries don't want to pay anybody if they can get away with it. I mean the idea with profit is that you produce something with the least cost that would be exploiting your labor as much as possible. Sounds Marxist, but, yeah, whatever. So, I would say that unionization is not a waste of money, that is actually a relatively—I mean not maybe long-term—but an investment in boosting your income because as an individual, especially as an immigrant, you don't have any leverage. You're seen as at the bottom, and the only way that you can get good wages is through unionization. That's the early—from the Franklin Delano Roosevelt era, those unions were all immigrants, but that was a focus of the Democratic Party at that time, of collectively organizing labor so that they could have leverage against what we're seeing as exploitive industry. So I would say unionization is the route to go. That's the only way, because you're not gonna incentivize the employers to pay because they just won't.

DROZDA: I think that's the problem with capitalism, yeah.

HERMAN: I would also add that keeping the status quo on undocumented immigration is a boon for a lot of employers. I have people calling me saying, "Well, I got injured at work. I don't want to make a workers' comp claim because I'm undocumented." She talked about doing dangerous jobs and things like that. So, we've got to bring people out of the shadows. For example, we have a system called E-Verify. Employers can now volunteer to go into the system and be registered with the federal government so we can verify every worker's ability to be here lawfully and work. It's so simple, but it's voluntary. Why is it voluntary? Because the politicians and the companies don't want to be required to sign up because right now if you go to apply for a job and you're undocumented, you may have a fake green card. It looks real, and under the law, all the employers have to do is look at it and go, "Looks real," and that's it. Are you kidding me? In this day of technology, we can't run that document through a system and verify? We don't want to know.

By the way, when ICE, Immigration Customs Enforcement, come in for a raid of an employer—which they usually don't do nowadays—the biggest fines that I see to the employers are for not having their I-9s filled out, that small form that everyone fills out including Americans when you get a job. The biggest fines are not for hiring undocumented immigrants. The biggest fines are for not filling out that crappy little piece of paper for Americans, big fines, thousands and thousands of dollars.

AUDIENCE: Also, I have a question about, I forget which one of you spoke on it, but about the translating issues that if it’s not Spanish or English, it’s over for you. But also I would like to add on how some languages that are spoken are not standardized language like they learned in school. What they’re speaking and writing and reading is not just purely that language. For instance, in my culture some of our languages are a mixture of other languages. I know that when my mother used to get translators, they would give her a translator that only knew the base language and everything in that language, but it wasn’t really culturally our language, and they never allowed me to translate for her because they said, “Oh she’s a child. She can’t translate for you.” It would just be difficult for her because the people didn’t really want to listen to her because they’d be like, “Oh we can’t understand you,” but she was responding to everything they were saying. They just were being ignorant because her accent was different, so they wanted to act like they did not understand what she was saying. But it was very clear what she was saying, and it was just taunting her because she wasn’t saying it in their accent. I was there, and they rejected to use me because they said I was a child. So, if you can’t use your relative or your kid to translate for you, then how are you going to get a translator that will perfectly try to tell the other person what you’re saying?

DROZDA: You bring up a really important problem. I think just in terms of using family members as interpreters, it is not best practice to do that because depending on the circumstance, an interpreter should be a neutral person who’s just there to be able to be basically take the place of the person who’s speaking the other language and convey that directly. There might be things, depending on the situations, that your mom might have not felt comfortable with you having to be able to interpret for her because we are close to our family members, you know? Sometimes, it’s much easier to say difficult things to someone that you don’t know that has no connection to you than the people that you care about the most. I’m someone who with clients or in other situations always discourages family members being used as interpreters, especially children for that reason. But I can say, at least in our work, if we know that there's a specific dialect of a language that's spoken in one part of the country—Spanish, for example, is very different between the Dominican Republic and in Mexico—we really try to find an interpreter that speaks that specific dialect. If I'm going to use this interpreter for an important interview, I often have my client talk with the interpreter ahead of time and practice to make sure that they understand each other. Sometimes we do change, but in a context where you're not working with your attorney or someone who's willing to search and find that perfect interpreter, it is a huge problem. I completely agree, and you are at a huge disadvantage, so that's really frustrating, really difficult for sure.

LEE: So, thank you again to our amazing panelists for taking the time to come out and talk with us about these issues. There are many different avenues to find solutions to improve our immigration system and to achieve a more equitable society that incorporates existing solutions that have been highlighted here as well as emerging policies.

KUMAR: I've been waiting to do that all night, so. All right, so with that, this panel discussion is now closed. The Global Ethical Leaders Society would like to give some thanks to our advisor Beth Trecasa for all that she's done—

[*Applause*]

KUMAR: —and Dr. French—I certainly didn't forget about you. So we would like to give a big round of applause to Dr. French.

[*Applause*]

KUMAR: In addition, we want to thank the Media Vision staff for assisting us with the setup and logistical support here in the Moot Courtroom as well as the various GELS members who helped with setting up this event, the planning committee. In particular—he wasn't expecting this—I would really like to thank Mr. Fred Lee here for doing all that he did to help set up this event. He really pulled through for us, and we're all very thankful. I would also like to give a massive round of applause—well not just me of course, I would hope you all join me—to our amazing panelists for joining us here and discussing all of these important issues with us tonight. So, thank you very much.

[*Applause*]