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US IMMIGRATION & NATIONALITY LAW

SOPHIE CRUZ AND POPE FRANCIS: SHATTERING MYTHS ABOUT IMMIGRANTS

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How are immigrants currently combating labels and stigmas and what can we do more to promote immigrant pride?

I am participating in #MoreThanALabel: Immigrant Stories, Simmons College's online MSW Program's campaign to promote transcending labels. By participating in this campaign, I will be sharing my thoughts and how I believe we can shatter the stigmas often attributed to immigrant communities.



As Pope Francis arrived in the United States on September 23, 2015 and was cheered by thousands in Washington DC, Sophie Cruz, a 5 year old US citizen whose parents are undocumented, came forward and handed him a t-shirt and a letter. The t-shirt read, "Pope: rescue DAPA, so the legalization would be your

blessing."

Sophie then said this later in the day:

"I believe I have the right to live with my parents. I have the right to be happy. My dad works very hard in a factory galvanizing pieces of metal. All immigrants just like my dad feed this country. They deserve to live with dignity. They deserve to live with respect."



President Obama's executive action announced last November 2014 would have allowed Sophie's parents to defer their deportations and apply for temporary authorization to remain in the United States so that they could contribute more meaningfully to America. While millions of immigrants and their supporters cheered after Obama's announcement, not everyone was pleased. Texas, along with 24 more states and governors, sued to block the Deferred Action for Parent Accountability (DAPA) program. Judge Andrew Hanen in a Texas federal district court readily agreed with the plaintiffs that DAPA was not issued in accordance with law and blocked the program. Also blocked was the expansion of another program that was announced in 2012 to allow those who came before 16 and who fell out of status for no fault of their own to defer their deportation. The expansion would have granted work permits for 3 years instead of 2 years, and would have also lifted the age limit of 31. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals is about to decide whether to reverse the lower court or not. It is anticipated that the Fifth Circuit will affirm Judge Hanen's decision, and the battle will move up to the Supreme Court.

Young Sophie's actions and her interaction with Pope Francis today are powerful and poignant, and perhaps more effective than the current legal team defending the lawsuit. She has shown how mean spirited the efforts have been

to block DAPA. Immigrants work very hard and like her dad they "feed this country." Pope Francis in turn wants to highlight the lack of access for migrants as one of the most pressing issues of our time. Sophie and Pope Francis have further shown how wrong Donald Trump has been in falsely claiming that undocumented immigrants from Mexico are criminals and rapists. While Trump and others wish to abolish birthright citizenship protected by the Fourteenth Amendment, Sophie and the Pope have demonstrated that repeal of birthright citizenship will result in absurd and disastrous results. Birthright citizenship renders all born in this country to be treated equally as Americans no matter who their parents are or where they came from, and it also prevents a permanent underclass from taking root that will continue for generations. The demonization of immigrants reached another nadir recently when Trump did not dissuade anti-Muslim comments in his rally and Dr. Carson categorically stated that he would never support a Muslim to be President of the United States.

In their serendipitous encounter today, Sophie and Pope Francis courageously shattered the false labels and stigmas that are associated with immigrants. It is not that people want to remain undocumented. They are forced to remain undocumented because our immigration system is terribly broken and does not afford meaningful pathways to legally come to America to work like Sophie's dad or to unite with families. Congressional inaction in not expanding these pathways has contributed to the buildup of 12 million plus undocumented people, who work hard and contribute to the well being of America, and who now according to Trump, should all be deported. We hope that Sophie and Pope Francis reverse this deplorable trend and shine the way towards repairing America's broken immigration system. America will only be made great again when Sophie can live without fear and succeed!