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The Social and Economic Costs of Immigration

Mr. Riley commendably lambastes those on the right who continue their anti-immigration fervor. I was immediately reminded of the moving story of [Jose Antonio Gutierrez](#) told on these same pages nearly a year ago. As I know you remember, Jose was one of the first U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq, granted citizenship only after his death. His life story, which ended all too soon, was that of the triumph of a young man seeking to better his life and achieving this goal. It reminded us all what makes this country great; that the American dream is more than a cliché. Most relevant to this letter, though, is that Jose was born in Guatemala and entered this country illegally.

Clearly Jose broke our laws. But is it truly wrong if his only crime was pursuing the freedom many of us were granted by birth? Immigration into a welfare state can be an unfair cost to the taxpayers, and it is here that the debate should take place. How can the costs imposed on taxpayers by immigrants be dealt with in a fair and just way? Letting charities, individuals already in the U.S. or immigrants themselves pay upfront for legal entry is one such proposal.

Moreover, what are the true costs? Immigrants largely come to this country not to leech off the government, but in search of freedom and opportunity.

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ORIGINAL:

Dear Editor,

Jason Riley's column "*GOP Nativists Tarnish Reagan's 'Shining City'*" (March 15th, 2004) commendably lambastes those on the right who continue their anti-immigration fervor. However, he cedes too much stating they make a "fair" and "legitimate" point that amnesty rewards lawbreakers.

I was immediately reminded of the moving story of Jose Antonio Gutierrez told on these same pages nearly a year ago. As I know you remember, Jose was one of the first U.S. soldiers killed in Iraq, granted citizenship only after his death. His life story, which ended all too soon, was that of the triumph of a young man seeking to better his life and achieving this goal. It reminded us all what makes this country great and that the American dream is more than a cliché. Most relevant to this letter though is that Jose was born in Guatemala and entered this country illegally.

Clearly Jose broke our country's laws. But is it truly wrong if his only crime was pursuing the freedom many of us were granted by birth? The fact is that while our laws *should* incorporate that which is ethical into our political system they *can* fall short of this noble ideal. One only needs to look at our long history of state sponsored slavery and segregation as a shameful reminder.

Immigration into a welfare state can be an unfair cost to the taxpayers of the country and it is here that the debate should take place. How can the costs imposed on taxpayers by immigrants be dealt with in a fair and just way? Letting charities, individuals already in the U.S. or immigrants themselves pay upfront for legal entry is one such proposal. Moreover, what are the true costs? Immigrants largely come to this country not to leech off the government, but in search of freedom and opportunity. Needless to say this benefits us all.

Ultimately, the purpose of our government should be to recognize the individual rights of anyone who can make it to this great land. To grant the nativists the moral high ground by not challenging the legitimacy of the law being broken is not only a disservice to Reagan's Shining City, but to Jose Antonio Gutierrez as well.

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