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OPINION

How Can I Forget Those Frightened Faces

Families torn apart by a broken immigration system

BY THE REV. M. LINDA JARAMILLO



I can't get them out of my mind. Even when I'm not watching the news, I still see those frightened faces of children with tears streaming down their cheeks. How can I forget? Their skin and their eyes are the same color as mine. We speak the same language and share a common understanding of family.

We know family that extends far beyond a mom and dad, or a sister and brother. We know family to be grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and some who live near-by who may not even be related by blood. Even if our skin and eyes did

not match, I still consider these children my family.

These past few weeks have presented but a glimpse at the cruel truth that we must take personally. Families are being torn apart by our broken immigration system. I have to take it personally because just like most of you, I am an immigrant.

You see my grandfather, many generations removed, was born in 1601 in the New Mexico Territory. Yes, before the Plymouth Rock landing. Yes before 1776. It was further back than many American History books account for. It was more than 400 years ago when the land inhabited by our Native American ancestors, was part of Mexico be-

fore being claimed by the United States.

The truth is that my grandparents and many of my family did not cross the border. The border crossed us. Even with my family's history on this land, like most of you, I am an immigrant.

I am proud to claim my ancestry and refuse to be accused of being a problem to American society. Mass deportations have not created public safety. On the contrary, they have created terror and fear of law enforcement officials.

When local police are forced to serve as immigration authorities, people are afraid to report crime, more people are victimized, and public safety is sacrificed. As families are torn apart, neighborhoods suffer.

The separation of families must stop. Every day that the Administration and Congress delay, another 1,100 aspiring Americans are deported.

As a person of faith, I am outraged that record levels of deportations continue. As a religious leader, I am deeply saddened by the family separations that deportations create across our country. I respect the law of the land; however, I respond to a higher moral law. Our faith traditions must hold us to a greater calling where we put God's law to love our neighbor above and beyond any unjust human law.

For these reasons, I stood with my brothers and sisters on the grounds of the White House and was arrested, to call on President Obama to stop the deportations that are

breaking our families apart.

Most Americans acknowledge that our immigration system is broken and over 70 percent of us agree that the unaccompanied minor children should be treated as refugees. Our elected leaders must stop deporting kids, moms, dads, grandparents, workers, and the members of our congregations. It defies human dignity and denies our rich history as a nation of immigrants.

President Obama and Congress not only have the authority to fix this problem now, they have the moral obligation to do so. They must take it personally, because like us, most of them are immigrants, too.

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Our Education System's Racially-Charged Crisis

When children are afraid of learning

BY JEANINE RUSSAW

"Why are you [reading] so much?" "Why are you speaking so properly?"



At a recent town hall in Washington D.C., President Obama illuminated these questions -- questions he often hears from youth in predominantly black neighborhoods where some children are afraid to learn. Yes, afraid. This fear is brought on by the taunting many well-educated black individuals receive because their peers believe that being well read and articulate constitutes "acting white."

Covertly racist corporate media and hegemonic Caucasian opinion make dangerous implications that suggest minorities are both incapable and unwilling to learn and our education system reflects these untruths. These implications only create

innumerable obstacles and widen the achievement gap between whites and people of color in America.

Knowledge is power, and our own ignorance of socially constructed racial characteristics and the ludicrous expectations we make based on those characteristics must stop. Only then will we create a society where everyone has equal access to this nation's highest right: The freedom to learn.

What does "acting white" look like? In mainstream America, this is going to a quality school, actually paying attention and being able to provide a well thought-out answer when questioned by the teacher in class.

What does "acting black" look like? On the other end of the spectrum, there is blackness: Cutting classes whenever possible, looking like a fool when called on by the teacher, consequently serving—and cutting—detention, blowing off all homework assignments and failing and repeating your current grade.

These low expectations lead to a fear of succeeding, because it will go against the "status quo,"

and to the misallocation of resources in black communities that neglects education.

In his 2005 book, "Shame of the Nation," author and journalist Jonathan Kozol calls our education system "apartheid schooling." In his more recent book, "Fire in the Ashes," published in 2012, he recalled many children of color with whom he worked often had their education consistently interrupted. When they were able to go to school, their underserved public schools "resembled those of Mississippi 50 or 100 years before." Why is nothing done about this? Cruel reality check: Nothing is done because the expectation of achievement for these students is low. For mainstream white America, they're not worth the effort.

Is it any wonder why little Billy feels that, as a young black boy, he's neither capable of, nor supposed to demonstrate, intelligence? It's not entirely his fault. He's simply conforming to what American society expects. His parents experienced this as well. Maybe he has no one to tell him to dream bigger—to look beyond what this society is handing

out and reach for what his true intelligence and abilities may allow him to achieve. This includes reaching his full potential with access to quality education, encouragement to learn, and a belief in the efficacy of doing so.

So, how do we interrupt this pervasive and damaging racial divide in our education system? We should discard the notion that "acting black" means being more interested in hip hop culture than literature. Let's renounce the misconception that "acting white" means growing up in suburbia and speaking properly. We ought to refuse to pander to the discriminatory foundations on which this society was founded—the society that hated dark skin and ethnic features so much that a person with only "one drop" of African blood was forever labeled as a second-class citizen — or three-fifths of a person — in her own country.

Understanding the social construction of "race" would help as well. We are all human beings; the idea of "race" in this country is little more than a socio-political structure to

delineate between the "haves" and the "have-nots." The United States' capitalistic system thrives on that. Coming to grips with this truth will speed up our inevitable rejection of this outdated, harmful notion.

My dream is that we as Americans will one day move into an actual post-racial era where content of character is not socially predicted by "race." That people of color won't be afraid to learn, and highly educated "minorities" will be the norm.

My dream is to see a world in which black youth do not purposely dumb themselves down in an effort to keep pace with what is expected of them, and educators won't expect them to lack intelligence. We need a cultural shift of our understanding of race. All children have a natural capacity to learn. Our educational system — our teachers, administrators and policies — needs to reflect this. The future of America depends on it.

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