

THREE TYPES OF IMMIGRANTS

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[Assignment: Using your own knowledge and experience, write an essay in which you classify people according to some meaningful criteria, leading to or supporting a clear thesis. Be sure to avoid stereotyping as much as possible.]

(1) As an American, born and raised in the States, do you ever wonder why people immigrate to the United States and leave their loved ones behind? Why do Laotian people or any other foreigners abandon their homeland and families to settle in a place with a totally different culture? It is hard to learn a new language, to live without one's customary diet, and to try to hold onto the customs of one's homeland. So, why move at all? In the 1800's, people migrated to America mostly because of religious persecution or dissatisfaction with the government. But now, in the 1990's, I find that there are three types of immigrants: those who want education for their children; those who want to be rich and enjoy an affluent lifestyle; and those who want freedom.

(2) Those who want education for their children arrive at the new land ready to sacrifice everything to achieve this goal. Once they arrive, they will get more than one job, send their children to school (usually private) and almost drive themselves to an early grave in their effort to provide this education. They retain as many of their native customs as they can and instill these into their children as well. The hardships that they endure are all in the name of love. These parents are to be admired for their devotion but the children for whose sake the parents are sacrificing themselves often find the situation very difficult. The pressure put on them to strive for perfection, the fear and guilt they feel because they might let their parents down, and the responsibility on their young shoulders--all these make them mature beyond their years.

(3) My parents can be described as immigrants who want an education for their children. They both have jobs, but basically little social life. They still hold onto the old traditions--shoes off when entering a house, head bowed when walking past elders and polite responses given to parents even when inwardly feeling depressed or angry. My parents stress education above all else. My brothers and I have attended private schools all of our lives. We have never lacked for anything materially, nor do we lack love from them. They have made great sacrifices. They gave up their social life, a life of comfort and relaxation, to concentrate on saving up money for educating their children. They ask of us one thing in return: to do well in school. It's not asking much, but the pressure is very great.

(4) On the other hand, the immigrants who want to be rich and have an affluent lifestyle have another pressure of their own. These people believe that money is everything. They think about immediate material satisfaction rather than long term goals. They sometimes neglect their responsibilities as parents toward their children because of being too busy trying to make money. They usually have more than one job and their family life has no stability. They drift to where job opportunities

are the greatest. Their children have no purpose in life; they don't care about school. All they care about is making money.

(5) I've witnessed a lot of immigrants in this situation. Out of about 50 Laotian families living in Fort Wayne, Indiana, all but maybe five families are those looking for quick wealth and immediate gratification. The children drop out of high school and follow job opportunities to Massachusetts or California. The money they earn goes toward materialistic pleasures. If people visit Ft. Wayne, their first impression will be that Laotians, especially teenagers, own up-to-date sports cars. They own every modern technology that is being offered on the market. The girls drop out of school, get married or just run away with a guy. It's not a pretty picture to show of one's own race, but it happens.

(6) People like these make me sad because they have no values, no purpose, and no love of life. Nor do they appreciate the true opportunities a free country provides. But those immigrants who have come seeking freedom have a special pride in rebuilding their lives. They have escaped from a country with a repressive regime, a country where people are not treated as people, but as things. They have escaped from a life that for some felt like being in a prison and for others was actually a prison. Despite the hardships they have suffered in their country of origin, they still love it, even as they are developing new pride and love for this new land--America. But America will never truly be their home. They are always looking out for a change in their country. They will seize the first opportunity to return to their homeland. They keep waiting for news that their country is changing for the better, that there is no more communism or that the dictatorship has been replaced by a democratic government; then they are ready to return home. For awhile, America was their haven, their land of freedom and it will always be that, but it's not home. It is a place of sanctuary where one can remain in safety.

(7) My parents combine the attributes of immigrants who want education for their children and those who want freedom. They are escaping from communism and have sought shelter in the United States. They are awaiting the news that will allow their return home. We're not citizens yet because my parents hope one day to go back to Laos. It has been 12 years now and they encourage us children to become citizens but they are not thinking of becoming citizens with us. They value the freedom here and the opportunity but they miss the respect and the social belonging they would have in Laos. They will always be grateful to St. Peter's Church that brought us here, but they will never feel fully at peace here nor have the sense that they have achieved equality with the rest of the American people.

(8) For these three types of immigrants, life in America is a new beginning. They are being given a second chance to choose the right path for them. Their various motivations become a powerful force shaping their lives and their future.