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Q & A: Appleby on Obama

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 20, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

We close out our week looking at the contributions children of immigrants have made to the nation by examining the most prominent child of an immigrant in America today, President Barack Obama.

As Kevin Appleby, Director of Migration Policy and Public Affairs of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, makes clear in his post that follows, immigration tells us about who we are as a people. Our capacity to admire the achievements of immigrants speaks volumes about the freedom we all enjoy in America, even if we disagree with some or all of those achievements!

Kevin Appleby:
The most prominent child of an immigrant in the news these days is President Barack Obama. Whatever you think of his politics---and I have my own points of agreement and disagreement---the election of a son of an immigrant father was an important milestone in American history.

What is important in this immigrant story, as well as inspirational, is that President Obama, using his God-given talents, rose from modest means against formidable societal barriers (son of an immigrant, African-American) to occupy the highest office in the United States, arguably the most powerful position in the world. This provides hope to all young children who are born in this country that they, too, have an opportunity to reach their dreams, whatever they may be.

It also demonstrates that our nation?s tradition as a welcoming country and a nation of immigrants serves us well, because it provides us with a wealth of human talent to help our country move forward. Immigrants from all over the world?our ancestors---have helped build this country and make it great.

This is why the current national immigration debate is so important. Some would prefer that we turn our back on our immigrant heritage by severely restricting, if not eliminating, future immigration. They have even suggested that birthright citizenship, which confers citizenship on anyone born in the United States, be curtailed.

Taking these steps would, in fact, harm the long-term interests of our nation. The twenty-first century will be marked by global competitiveness in many areas?economically, militarily, and culturally---and America will need the talents that immigrants bring to our country. Our nation is second to none in integrating immigrants into our society and making them great Americans, and must continue to do so in the decades ahead.

President Obama, the son of an immigrant father and our first African-American president, knows well the importance of welcoming immigrants to our land. Hopefully, he will use that knowledge to help reform our nation?s immigration laws, so that we remain the world?s foremost leader in the twenty-first century.

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