

Immigration Boils Over

A few days after Thanksgiving, I asked Mike Huckabee what had surprised him about voters over the past six months of campaigning. “The intensity of the immigration issue,” he said immediately, and then added, “I honestly don’t know why it’s gotten so hot.” Huckabee gets points for candor: most of the presidential candidates I’ve spoken with in recent months feel the same way but aren’t about to say so. It is difficult to spend a day on the trail and not see the anger explode.

This is especially true in the Republican Party, but there are signs of festering intolerance even among Democratic audiences, noticeably in Iowa, which has seen a surge of Latino immigration in recent years. The Democratic candidates are uniformly in favor of comprehensive immigration reform, including a path to citizenship for those who have entered the country illegally. But they receive sharp—pointed—applause when they say illegals should “have to speak English” before becoming citizens. When I asked Hillary Clinton about that, she said she’d noticed it too and added, “During the 1990s, I cannot remember being asked about immigration ... Why? Because the economy was working ... And average Americans didn’t have to go around looking for someone to blame.”

Huckabee, who is making gains among working-class conservatives, came to the same conclusion. “There’s a lot of underlying [economic] anxiety,” he told me. “People are working harder and not getting ahead. There is a disconnect between the insider establishment in the country—and in my party—and the middle class about this. There’s a greater divide between the top and bottom than ever before. And worse, people on the bottom are not sure they can get out of the bottom. That’s a recipe for real trouble. That’s the stuff out of which revolutions are born.”

The theme was soon picked up by Mitt Romney, who seems incapable of finding an issue where integrity trumps expediency. Romney has made illegal immigration the target of recent campaign ads.

Earlier in the year, I asked Romney if he thought illegal immigration was a net plus for the economy. He said, “I’m not sure.” To which one can only say, Ha ha ha. A recent study of Arkansas, conducted by the nonpartisan Urban Institute, estimated that immigrants there pay more in Social Security

and sales taxes than they cost in social services like health care and education. That doesn’t begin to take into account the economic impact of the hard work and entrepreneurial energy that illegal immigrants bring to the society. [...]

Time, 29 Nov 2007.

WORKSHEET

I. Questions on the text

Read all the questions first, then answer them in the given order, using your own words as far as is appropriate.

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| 1 | Explain the headline and how it is echoed in the first paragraph. | 10 |
| 2 | Why has the atmosphere become more difficult for immigrants? Give evidence from the text. | 20 |
| 3 | The author obviously finds Mitt Romney’s reply in the last paragraph ridiculous. Analyse the reasons for the author’s view, and comment on his tone in that passage. | 20 |

II. Translation

Translate the following text into idiomatic German. Remember: Don’t provide any alternative solutions, but decide on one translation.

A prominent American once said, about immigrants, “Few of their children in the country learn English... The signs in our streets have inscriptions in both languages ... Unless the stream of their importation could be turned they will soon so outnumber us that all the advantages we have will not be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious.”

This sentiment did not emerge from the rancorous debate over the immigration bill defeated last week in the Senate. It was not the lament of some Republican candidate intent on wooing bedrock conservative votes. Guess again.

Voicing this grievance was Benjamin Franklin. And the language so vexing to him was the German spoken by new arrivals to Pennsylvania in the 1750s, a wave of immigrants whom Franklin viewed as the “most stupid of their nation.”

These German masses yearning to breathe free were not the only targets of colonial fear and loathing. Echoing the opinions of colonial editors and legislators, Ben Franklin was also troubled by the British practice of dumping its felons on America. With typical Franklin wit, he proposed sending rattlesnakes to Britain in return.

Kenneth C. Davis, “The Founding Immigrants”, *The New York Times* (4 July 2007).

maximum number of points attainable

50

total: 100

Model Answers**Immigration Boils Over****I. Questions on the text**

- 1 The headline “Immigration Boils Over” at once conjures up the image of a pot whose contents are spilling out, and so the reader takes “immigration” to stand for the immigrants themselves. Thus the first impression is that there is so much immigration that it cannot be controlled any more. But in the context of the first paragraph one finds out that, in the author’s view, not the actual immigration is the problem, it is the amount of emotion and confusion about the topic of immigration among the US population. Huckabee is quoted as calling the issue “hot” (l. 5), and the author writes about crowds along the campaign trail whose emotions “explode” (l. 8). So these two words take up the image of the headline and change its meaning.
- 2 The text from *Time* magazine deals extensively with the worsening conditions for immigrants. The atmosphere has become increasingly hostile not only among members of the Republican Party, but also, though less drastically, among the traditionally more liberal Democrats (cf. ll. 9-11). The reason for this development is mainly economical. Huckabee is quoted as stating that the difference between rich and poor has never been as wide as today, and what was even worse than that was the absence of hope for improvement, even if people really tried: “People are working harder and not getting ahead” (l. 22; cf. ll. 22-27).
The immigrants are therefore seen as unwanted competition – and they are assigned the role of the scapegoat. This is a change from what it was like around fifteen years ago, Hillary Clinton remembers. Because the average standard of living was comfortable for everybody, people had no reason to look “for someone to blame” (l. 19).
In the given situation, even Democratic candidates speak out in favour of erecting certain barriers, e.g. requiring immigrants to be able to speak English before they can become US citizens.
- 3 The author’s question to Mitt Romney was whether he thought that the US economy profited from illegal immigrants after all. Romney’s uncertain reply “I’m not sure” is ridiculed by the author; he even goes as far as to use the imitation of scornful laughter, “Ha ha ha” (l.33), to make it quite clear that he does not even think Romney’s statement is worth a proper reply because it is so stupid. This emotional outburst is followed by an explanation of his reasons. The *Time* author refers to a study by a nonpartisan organization which came to the

conclusion that the immigrants’ contributions to Social Security and taxes far outweighs what the state spends on their health care and education (cf. ll. 33-35). Another emotional wording introduces the additional information on how valuable the illegal immigrants’ energy and willingness to apply themselves are for the society as a whole; the expression “That doesn’t begin to take into account ...” (l. 36) underlines very strongly that the first argument – more payments than costs – is already enough to prove Romney wrong, and that there are even more arguments to follow the first one.

This tone of emotional involvement and contempt towards Romney already starts in the preceding paragraph where the author turns to this Republican candidate and presents him as a morally deficient politician. Romney is accused of always picking topics for his campaign not because he is sincerely interested in them, but because they promise to be useful for gathering more voter support (“seems incapable of finding an issue where integrity trumps expediency”, ll. 28 f.).

II. Translation

Ein bedeutender Amerikaner sagte einmal über Immigranten: „Nur wenige ihrer Kinder im Lande lernen Englisch. Die Schilder auf unseren Straße tragen Beschriftungen in beiden Sprachen ... Falls der Strom dieser Einwanderer nicht abgewendet werden kann, werden sie uns bald zahlenmäßig so überlegen sein, dass nicht einmal all die Vorteile, die wir haben, unsere Sprache erhalten können werden, und sogar unsere Regierung wird in Gefahr geraten.“

Diese Meinung kam nicht aus der hitzigen Debatte über die Gesetzesvorlage zur Einwanderung, die letzte Woche im Senat abgelehnt wurde. Es war auch nicht die Klage irgendeines republikanischen Kandidaten, der darauf aus war, eingefleischte konservative Wähler zu umwerben. Raten Sie noch einmal.

Wer hier seinem Herzen Luft machte, war Benjamin Franklin. Und die Sprache, die ihm so zu schaffen machte, war das Deutsche, das die Neuankömmlinge in Pennsylvania in den Jahren nach 1750 sprachen, eine Welle von Einwanderern, die Franklin für die „Dümmsten ihrer Nation“ hielt.

Diese deutschen Massen, die sich nach der Freiheit sehnten, waren nicht die einzigen Ziele von Angst und Hass in den Kolonien. Ben Franklin äußerte die gleichen Bedenken wie die Zeitungsverleger und die Abgeordneten in den Kolonien, als er wie sie die Praxis der Briten beklagte, ihre Schwerverbrecher in Amerika abzuladen. Mit typisch Franklinschem Witz schlug er vor, im Gegenzug Klapperschlangen nach Großbritannien zu schicken.