

Quick Verdict on Obama's Speech: B+

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 1, 2010 | Distinctly Catholic

You can't do better than quoting Emma Lazarus' powerful words inscribed on Statue of Liberty. Actually, you can. The President's speech on immigration reform was comprehensive, like the policy he is promoting, but he did not convey any particular reason why the broken system must be fixed now. I do not see how this speech will move any votes in either the House or the Senate. Nothing he said is going to get Anderson Cooper to abandon the Gulf of Mexico, nor convince an unemployed worker in Ohio that immigration reform is the thing to do now. Still, the mere fact of the speech may be enough to change the debate, and debates take on a life of their own. The President gets a B for the speech and an A for the effort.

As [Politico noted](#) [1]today, evangelicals represent an opening for the advocates of immigration reform. The current laws are not just broken and unenforceable, as the president said, they are immoral. He mentioned that it is wrong to penalize children for the deeds of their parents, but, President Obama needed to play up the moral rationale for reform. And, he might have announced that his administration is going to cease arbitrary immigration raids that target people who are just going about their business.

The strongest part of the speech was where the President pointed out that we already have more law enforcement officials on the border than ever before, but they have not stemmed the tide. Many, perhaps most, undocumented workers enter the country legally and simply overstay their visas. Building a wall, no matter how high, is not going to achieve anything because it has not achieved anything.

The other morning, on one of those miserably hot and humid days where the temperature reaches 90 degrees by 9 a.m., I saw a group of Latino workers mowing the lawn of a nearby business. Their clothes were drenched with sweat and it was not yet 10 a.m. They could not, as I did, retire to the comforts of an air-conditioned archives to pursue their work. The sweat of their brows was the source of the food on their kitchen tables, the roof over their children's heads. I do not know if they had their papers but I do know that their hard work put me in mind of my Polish grandparents. They, too, undertook back-breaking work so that their children could succeed in life and one of their grandchildren could sit in that air-conditioned archives. Their story is my story, which makes the story of those Latino groundskeepers my story too. It is the American story. The President needs to keep re-telling it if immigration reform is going to stand a prayer of a chance.

Check back tomorrow for more on the politics of immigration reform.

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[1] <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0710/39271.html>