

# CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

## Conversations with Bill Kristol

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### **I: Immigration and American Identity (0:15 – 43:36)**

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol, Welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm joined today by my good friend Linda Chavez, a long-time friend. We served together, you at a higher level of course, in the Reagan Administration, and in various political fights over the years; and you've been involved in the immigration fight, our topic for today, for a long, long time. I think your first book was, what, 1991?

CHAVEZ: Correct.

KRISTOL: And it was called – what was it called?

CHAVEZ: *Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation*. Very controversial title at the time.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

CHAVEZ: Yes.

KRISTOL: People were against Hispanic assimilation?

CHAVEZ: Liberals were against Hispanic assimilation. Conservatives were heartened by the data that I presented that showed that Hispanics were assimilating. Now, of course, conservatives believe they never will assimilate.

KRISTOL: Yeah, so let's talk about that. I mean, you've been in this fight a long time. It's become one of the nastiest fights in Washington or in American politics, really, right?

CHAVEZ: It is. It's a very strange phenomenon, because my position has been absolutely steady since the 1970s. I was always pro-legal immigration; I always believed that we should have a balance of immigrants coming in from different places, with different skills levels; but that once they got here, everybody had to learn English. And the goal was that they could become U.S. citizens eventually and certainly that their children would embrace America and the American ideal.

And a lot of my early work and early research, was to show that if that indeed was happening. That it was happening with this generation of Hispanics just as it had with Italians, Jews, Poles, and others in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Germans and Irish in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, going back really to the founding of our nation.

KRISTOL: And that holds up?

CHAVEZ: It does hold up. You know, it's interesting –

KRISTOL: But we're so alarmed about, you know, the country splitting apart into all these ethnic and cultural groups and so forth.

CHAVEZ: And I think that what's remarkable to me is that for a time in the '70s, '80s, and even into the '90s, liberals were very focused on making America multi-cultural. We weren't going to have an American culture; we didn't need a single language; everybody could come here, stay in their own little enclaves, speak their own language, continue their own cultural practices. And that was the liberal ideal.

In fact, it doesn't work; it has never worked in the United States, even when people have tried to maintain their language.

The Germans when they came, in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century for example, they wanted their own state and in fact they petitioned Congress. It didn't ever really work out, that they wanted the state of – I think it was Wisconsin – to be a German language state. That was going to be their own little enclave here. They had German language schools, public schools funded with public money, such as it was, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that taught German as the first language.

And yet, today, German Americans are probably still our largest ethnic group. But what German Americans of the second, third, fourth or fifth generation speak German today? None.

KRISTOL: Right. Intermarriage turns out to be a pretty powerful solvent.

CHAVEZ: That's right.

KRISTOL: Anyway, so the conservative – well let's just pick up with the different concerns perhaps of today. I mean, the cultural – I mean, how seriously – are we going to look like Europe, with minority communities that just don't assimilate, and are sources of crime at best and terror at worst and so forth? Don't you think that's been a fairly large part of the European – the photos –

CHAVEZ: The fear.

KRISTOL: The fear.

CHAVEZ: Right. And certainly that's been true as Europe has had a flood of refugees going in, many of them from non-Western countries, many of them from the Middle East and from Africa. And so there is that sense. But actually Europe is not very good at assimilating people, but the United States is.

And the real question today, in a lot of conservative's minds, they go into stores and they have to push the button for, you know, or they go into the bank, you know, English or Spanish or other languages – that irritates people.

They see Spanish language signs, they see or hear people speaking Spanish, and so they assume, "Well, they're never going to assimilate. They're not going to become Americans. My grandparents came from Italy, and they became Americans, but these newcomers from Mexico or Guatemala or El Salvador, they're never going to become Americans."

Well, it turns out that that's just simply not right. And I've done a lot of research, some original research back in the early 1990s that showed the progression. And lots of other people have followed, doing extensive research about assimilation.

And it turns out, Hispanics are actually integrating, assimilating, at a faster rate than some of the immigrants of earlier generations. And part of that is we have a mass popular culture. We have television, films, music, that gets people quickly speaking English.

And, because the Left has sort of backed off some of its multi-cultural fascination from the earlier era. They've finally realized that people are not going to be enthusiastic about welcoming newcomers if they don't think they're going to become Americans. So the Left has backed off a little and we no longer hear calls for, you know, a bi-lingual America. I can remember in previous times when people would point to Canada. "Well, it works in Canada." Not really. It doesn't work all that well there, either.

But it doesn't work here. And while people will retain Spanish in the first generation, what we see with Hispanics is that by the second generation it's something like 97 percent of second generation Hispanics are perfectly fluent in English. For the younger population they're not only fluent in English, that's their preferred language. They get their news in English. And they're moving up the economic ladder and into the middle-class mainstream as quickly as any generation before them.

KRISTOL: So it's not – the concern that seems a little more sophisticated that we sometime hear is, "We're not against immigrants, but so many from one place, from a neighboring country, in certain parts of the country that are close to that neighboring country, it's a different dynamic than people coming 3,000 miles from Germany or Italy." And some truth to that probably. "And therefore it's harder to assimilate them, they stay more in their own communities, it's more divisive for the country, et cetera."

CHAVEZ: Well, actually there is a little bit of merit in that argument. But what people don't know is that when the Italians came here a third of them went back to Italy. So it may have been hard to get here, but those who did not in fact do well ended up going home. And we used to have that kind of back and forth flow in the United States as well, with Mexico and Latin America.

Certainly for illegal immigrants it used to be common in the '50s, '60s, '70s, and on up until fairly recently, that people would cross illegally, come here, do seasonal work, their families would stay at home – it was men – and then they would go back home and spend the winter months or whatever with their families in Latin America.

What happened though is, because of fears of terrorism and the clampdown on border security, we've been actually very successful at keeping people out. We have less than a third of the illegal immigrants trying to come into the United States today as we had even twenty years ago.

KRISTOL: Is that right?

CHAVEZ: Yeah. We are at historic lows. We are back at the levels of illegal immigration that we saw in the 1970s. It's almost a fifty year low.

KRISTOL: So we have, what – 10, 11 million? You always hear these numbers.

CHAVEZ: It's about 11 – a little over 11 million people who are here illegally. That number has remained pretty constant for ten, fifteen years now.

KRISTOL: And they're mostly the same people, year to year?

CHAVEZ: Mostly the same people from year to year. Some people go home and some people come in. Interestingly, Mexican immigration, Mexico was always our leading source of immigration in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the numbers there are actually declining, both legal and illegal.

There are actually more Mexicans either leaving or dying in the United States than there are newcomers coming in to replace them. So, we've seen a very slight decline in the Mexican-born population. But the numbers are relatively low.

KRISTOL: So, let's look at the illegals since that's so much of the debate. We'll get to legal, which is actually very important, too.

So, what is the illegal immigration problem there? One problem is there's just 11 million people who are here illegally, which is problematic in all kinds of, I guess obvious ways, but the actual number coming in is not that great.

CHAVEZ: It's not that great. So it's about 300,000. It hovers around 300,000 and it has for the last few years.

KRISTOL: And some are leaving, too.

CHAVEZ: And some are leaving, that's right.

KRISTOL: And in a country of 330 million, presumably this is not –

CHAVEZ: Yeah, it's not a huge problem. There are –

KRISTOL: So, what to do about that problem?

CHAVEZ: Well, I do think that we need to do something about that problem. I have a quick fix. We could fix the illegal immigration tomorrow if we would pass sensible legal immigration reform that allowed people that are having to come illegally, to come legally. And who are those people? They are largely low-skilled. They're coming to do jobs that most Americans shun.

We're talking about picking fruits and vegetables. We're talking about working on poultry and other meat processing lines, cleaning commercial buildings, making beds in hotels. These tend to be low wage, low skill jobs. And for most Americans, who have much more education than Americans used to, these are not jobs they want. They don't want them for themselves, they certainly don't want them for their children.

So, we can mechanize some of those jobs. That's not necessarily going to help Americans who think that Mexicans are stealing their jobs. A machine replacing them is no better than a Mexican replacing them, but some of the jobs can't be replaced. The only thing that could happen is you could see the industry move elsewhere. And we've seen that, even in the meat processing area.

I used to be on the board of the largest chicken processing company in the country. And when we had raids, as we did, even though we followed all the rules, we were one of the first companies to have E-Verify, which required that you have a very close check on people's credentials.

Even with that, we were raided. We lost 400 workers. When that happened, the company had tremendous problems. They couldn't find Americans to replace them and even when they were able to, people didn't stay on the jobs.

So, what do you do in that situation? Well, in this case the company went bankrupt. It got bought by a Brazilian operation and some of those jobs get shipped overseas. You can raise chickens on one side of the border or the other. It's just as easy to raise them in Mexico as in Texas.

And so the idea that we can stop people from coming, and we don't need these jobs filled, those people do provide some benefit here. They do live in communities, pay taxes in those communities. Everybody pays sales tax; everybody pays property tax, whether through rent or through owning. And so, we can

see communities hollowed out because those workers aren't there anymore. But I don't know who that benefits.

KRISTOL: And their kids are – because of birthright citizenship, will tend to be American. If they're here when they're of childbearing age, which I guess not all of them are, and some of them are just men, and so forth.

CHAVEZ: Yeah. No, they will – we do –

KRISTOL: So those are the DACA kids, right?

CHAVEZ: Yeah. Well, and we do have the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, which says that anyone born in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof is a citizen of the United States. And that was a very hard fought battle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for that 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

We see assaults on that now. We see some people suggesting that the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment doesn't mean what it says in plain English. That the historical debates that took place don't mean what they said. And they're basically trying to push the current administration to take away that birthright citizenship. There are even proposals that they'd like to see it done by Executive Order. I think that would be challenged, and I think it would fail in the Supreme Court.

But, yeah, people come here illegally, set down roots. The average illegal immigrant to the United States has lived here well over a decade. There are about 4.5 million children born to illegal immigrants in the United States. And as you say, they are U.S. citizens. But the real question is, how are they doing? How is the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation doing?

KRISTOL: Yeah, okay, but how are they doing here? And these are different from the so-called DACA kids.

CHAVEZ: Yeah. The DACA kids came as children, illegally.

KRISTOL: So they're not citizens.

CHAVEZ: They're not citizens.

KRISTOL: They were brought by their parents.

CHAVEZ: That's exactly right. Although they're doing very well. They're employed, they're –

KRISTOL: Okay, well let's go through each of these categories.

CHAVEZ: So, first we'll go through the kids, the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants, whether born to parents who came illegally or legally. Second generation Hispanics are moving up the economic ladder. They actually do better than Hispanics in the United States who trace their heritage back more generations.

That's sort of true of most second generation immigrants. The parents struggle very hard, make it, and then the kids do really well. But it's as true of Hispanics as well as anyone else. I mean, there was a recent study by the CATO Institute that showed Central American second generation actually slightly exceed U.S. born Americans in college graduation rates. That's stunning.

KRISTOL: These are kids both legal and illegal?

CHAVEZ: And illegal, right.

KRISTOL: Is there much difference between the legal and illegal?

CHAVEZ: You know, I don't think they broke it down. I think that's hard to figure out. But I would expect that you're a little more likely to do well if your parents are legal because you're going to have access to – they're going to have access to better jobs.

KRISTOL: So no crisis of illegal immigration in your view.

CHAVEZ: There is no crisis, in my view. It is a problem that needs fixing. We do need secure borders.

KRISTOL: People are jumping the line which is not fair in some way.

CHAVEZ: Well, except this myth of the line. There really is no line. If you're from a country like Mexico and you want to immigrate to the United States legally, unless you're an astrophysicist or somebody with very exceptional background, it's going to take you twenty years.

So you start at the age of 20, 21, 22. You're a middle aged person before you're actually, your number comes up. That's part of the problem. While we don't have quotas anymore for countries, we do have ceilings, caps, on the number of people that can be admitted and given a green card from any one country. And for countries like India, China, Mexico, those lines are very, very long.

KRISTOL: And I guess one argument also is that if you let, if you keep normalizing different ways of illegal immigrants, you're just inviting more, it's sort of the '86 Act, allegedly at least. The conservative narrative is that it was a failure because we gave amnesty once and then it just sends a signal that we're going to give amnesty the next time.

CHAVEZ: Well, I think it was a failure, but for a different reason. I think the whole idea of trying to make employers adjuncts to the border patrol is a crazy idea. What people thought in '86 was if we could simply cut off the spigot of jobs, that then illegal immigration would dry up.

But you know, it's very difficult when you're, as I say, I was on the board of a chicken company. When Americans aren't applying for those jobs, you have a company that you want to keep in business. And even if you follow the steps that the government put in place, chances are people are going to come up with phony IDs and get those jobs.

And in fact, that's what the '86 law did. It created a new industry of making phony Social Security cards, documentation so that you could go and produce it for a perspective employer. And so the whole identity theft area really was an outcome, I believe, of the 1986 law, and I just think there are better ways.

I do think we need a way to let workers come on a not necessarily permanent basis, on a temporary basis. And a lot of the people who are coming illegally would choose to do that if they could. If they could come and work nine, ten months a year and go home, be with their families, not start families here. So you would not have the situation that causes people so much concern, birthright citizenship, that would be one way of fixing it.

And yet the people who are most opposed to illegal immigration are also the people most opposed to legal immigration. They simply want to cut the size of the U.S. population. The whole anti-immigration movement of the late 20<sup>th</sup>, early 21<sup>st</sup> century, has been started by people who were interested in population control. That's their main concern. They want an America that's smaller. They'd like to see an America that is culturally more similar to the America of the 18<sup>th</sup> century than of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And that's their aim in coming up with their proposals.

KRISTOL: I guess the more reasonable versions of that, or at least the reasonable arguments some of them have used is that, "Well, we're not for fundamentally getting rid of, or stopping it. Maybe a pause. We have a lot – is it true, we do have a lot of foreign born people in the United States.

CHAVEZ: Yes, about 60 million.

KRISTOL: So 20 percent of the population.

CHAVEZ: And that is an historic high – that's pretty high, yeah.

KRISTOL: Is that a problem? I mean, should people, should we have a slowdown and a pause so that gradually goes down to, 20 percent to 15 percent or something? I don't know.

CHAVEZ: I don't know. In the beginning of the country, 18<sup>th</sup> century, we probably had even higher number of people coming in. So you know, the idea that there is some magical number. The real question is, do we assimilate people, do they learn English, do they move into the mainstream, do they contribute and do they make America great? I think they do.

And so I'm not sure the government is very good at setting numbers of how many people should come. And frankly, as I say, Mexico is slowing down. Much of the push that's coming from places like Mexico in the past was born out of very high population growth, high birth rates there, little opportunity. So if there's more opportunity in the home country, if birth rates decline, we're likely to see less anyway.

I think the free market actually does a pretty good job of giving us the immigration we need.

KRISTOL: Let's just talk about the economics then for a minute. There is a reasonable argument that you let in an awful lot more of lower skilled people, it will put downward pressure on wages. And so we are disadvantaging less well educated Americans just because we're creating a greater supply of labor for employers, like the company you were on the board of. Is there truth in that?

CHAVEZ: A little bit of truth in that. George Borjas at Harvard has done a lot of work on that. There is some downward pressure on wages. But interesting, the group that it affects most are older immigrants, people who came in an earlier wave, not necessarily U.S. born workers.

And the downward mobility or the downward pressure, rather, on wages is pretty minimal. It's not significant. What studies of the impact of immigrants in terms of the overall economy shows is that they're actually a net positive, and certainly their children are a net positive.

And so in every generation, whether you're talking about the Irish of the 19<sup>th</sup> century or the Jews of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mexicans of today, it was not the first generation that succeeded; it was their kids. And every indication is these kids are succeeding, too.

KRISTOL: I guess that is one problem with these economic studies – I'm struck by that. If you take a snapshot, of course, by definition almost you're going to have muddy – you may not have great results about the people who have just been here three months.

CHAVEZ: Just got here, right. They just got here.

KRISTOL: – some of them who don't make it go back, but they are still here, so – I guess they can't be on welfare if they're illegal, but they're on, whatever they're on. They're not contributing to the economy. But you're saying that that doesn't last. I mean, the traditional American view that at the end of the day, whatever, the second, third generations, we see no evidence that this has changed.

CHAVEZ: Right. Second generation always does better. Third generation, there's usually a little falloff. And that's because the kids of immigrants saw how much their parents sacrificed and they want to really succeed. And then they get a little complacent in the third.

KRISTOL: Now one argument is, earlier there was no welfare state, so my grandparents, they had to work extremely hard and my parents had to work very hard. And now they can – it's so easy, once you get here, especially once you get legalized, you got this cushy American welfare state. And so the same dynamic doesn't hold that used to hold.

CHAVEZ: Well, again I think there's a little truth in that. I think the welfare state – welfare, at least permanent welfare, is not good for anybody. It doesn't matter where you were born or what color you are, it's a downer.

However, again, there are a lot of studies about welfare participation by legal immigrants – because you're right, illegal immigrants cannot participate – shows that while they are poor, they are much less likely to be on welfare than comparably poor native born.

If they get help, they tend to get that help for shorter periods of time. They get in, maybe somebody was working at one of these processing plants, loses their job so they end up getting some benefits, maybe food stamps for the kids or whatever. But then they go back and they find another job. So they're in and out of the system. They tend not to be long-term recipients.

But I still think that there are reasons to be concerned about welfare use. I think the way to attack that is to reform the welfare system, and we've done that partially. We do now have work requirements and other things. But I don't think that cutting off immigration is going to be the problem because the real larger problem of welfare is from native born Americans.

KRISTOL: And young immigrants who work, and whose kids work, help in terms of the welfare state.

CHAVEZ: Right. Well, they're contributing taxes. And this is – you know, people think illegal immigrants don't pay taxes but as I said, they do. They also pay, a lot of them, particularly if they're working on Social Security numbers that are not their own, they're having taxes taken out.

And by the way, those taxes that are taken out for Social Security and Medicare, they're actually helping prop up the system for the over 65 crowd who are beneficiaries of that. And without their contributions, you would see both Social Security and Medicare reaching the problem of bankruptcy even sooner than it is likely to now.

KRISTOL: Yeah, Ron Brownstein makes this point. Very diverse young people are supporting un-diverse older people right now. I mean, just empirically that is true. These programs there are not really savings; it's really pay as you go.

CHAVEZ: Right, that is exactly right.

KRISTOL: So you need a lot of people to be working. What other – crime?

CHAVEZ: This is one of the biggest canards out there, that somehow immigrants are leading to a crime wave. First of all, crime, like illegal immigration, is down, it's not up. We are relatively more safe today than we have been in generations, at least a generation. Violent crime rate is way down, property crime rates are down.

And when you look at crime committed by those who are foreign born, the foreign born, including Mexicans, are much less likely to commit crimes than native born Americans. They have a lower crime



rate. And in fact, there was a very interesting study out of the University of Chicago that looked at neighborhoods.

And what the basic finding was, if you're poor, find a neighborhood with lots and lots of immigrants and you're going to find a safer neighborhood than with lots of comparably poor American born. Because immigrants are self-selected, they come here to work, they have families and are much more likely to live in two parent households with children and not be out on the streets committing mayhem.

KRISTOL: So why all the concern? I guess honestly, I agree with you, so I'm not – but why are people so – if everything is basically a happy ending. In a way what you're saying is yeah, immigration is a little higher than it's been legally, historically. We have a certain amount of illegal immigration, sort of steady.

They're assimilating pretty well, they're working pretty hard, they're not committing crimes disproportionately, they're contributing to the economy. But that's not the mood in the country.

CHAVEZ: Well, I think that's largely true. But you know, what people – people have historical amnesia. We are, we love to think of ourselves as an immigrant nation with the Statue of Liberty is one of our prime symbols.

But the fact is, we've always had a love/hate relationship with immigrants, going back to the founding. I mean, Ben Franklin, the way he talked about Germans, nobody in public life today – well, maybe Donald Trump would – but very few people.

KRISTOL: Not of Germans, however.

CHAVEZ: Not about Germans, but about Mexicans. But you know, there were very, very strong anti-German sentiments during the founding. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, you had this influx of people from Germany and Ireland.

And a lot of people don't realize that the whole temperance movement, even Prohibition, was sort of an anti-immigrant movement. They were concerned about the beer halls the Germans were operating. The Irish were considered to be drunkards and basically not productive members of society and so you had this whole temperance movement. And then you had Prohibition which was largely driven by people who wanted to keep Germans from being able to have their beer halls.

KRISTOL: So it's not rational.

CHAVEZ: It's not rational. You know, look, human nature, I think that we're almost genetically programmed to look for people like ourselves. I mean, going back to our earliest memories as humans when we lived in clans or tribes, the outsider was a threat.

And so I think there is this kind of tendency of people to want to be around people who look like them, talk like them, have similar experiences. It's not evil, it's not wrong to feel that way. What we don't tend to realize, at least initially when you're coming in contact with people who are different, is that as humans, we actually have much more in common and people are adaptable. People change. People learn a new language. They learn a new way of life.

And the thing about America is that we are such a strong idea. I mean, it is true that in Europe they don't assimilate people very well, but we do here. And people not only assimilate by language and economically, intermarriage is very high. For U.S. born Hispanics, more than half marry outside the group.

That took a long time for many previous immigrant groups to reach that level of out-marriage. So you know, then what do you do? People like me, my mother's maiden name is McKenna. The only

immigrants in my family came from Ireland, the Dolans and the McKennas came across in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

She married Rudy Chavez in New Mexico. His family went back to the early 1600s in New Mexico. I then married a Jew. My children, my two married children, one married someone whose mother was from Ecuador and father was from Cuba, but my other son married a girl who is mostly Scots-Irish.

This is the story of America. We all sort of blend together. The melting pot is still working. And I think it always will because I think the idea of America is so strong and people come here for opportunity and they enjoy the freedoms that our nation provides. And I just have great confidence. I think America is an exceptional country and will continue to be, no matter how many immigrants we have.

KRISTOL: And I guess the sort of person who would sympathize with some of what you're saying, but want to be skeptical, would say it's one thing to assimilate Germans and Irish, they're all Europeans. The language aren't that different. The skin color is the same, which I guess is important in human history.

But when you have a country that goes from, I don't know, 90 percent white to 73, 74 percent, at least in the electorate. And I think among young people, closer to 50 or 60 – or 50 percent, even, school aged kids and so forth. That's putting more strain. That's too much strain and maybe the intermarriage won't be so great if there are ethnic and racial differences.

And maybe the cultural barriers are greater. Mexicans isn't that great, but certainly Somalis and you know, others from other parts of the world, and that really is a stretch. I don't know, what's your answer? There's data on this, I suppose?

CHAVEZ: There is data, but also we have to, again, you know, with this myopia we have about the past, all of those Italians and Jews and Southern and Eastern Europeans that were coming, they were not embraced as fellow Europeans.

KRISTOL: They didn't seem white.

CHAVEZ: They didn't seem quite as white.

KRISTOL: It is funny is when people say today, you know, well, it's amazing to come from 90 percent [this in the] political context, the electoral was 90 percent white in, I don't know, 1980, maybe when Reagan won or something like that, or '88, and now it's like, I think it's 73, 74 percent. And that's an amazing pace of change.

But I'm sure if one just substitutes WASP or Protestant, English and German for the first number, then starts adding in the Italians, the Jews, Russians, et cetera, it's hard to know that the pace of change wouldn't have been this great. Probably was this great, actually, for a lot of American history.

CHAVEZ: You know, this whole counting by race and ethnicity – this is driven, I think in large part, by the whole push for affirmative action. Again, it goes back to the multicultural attitude that the left had at one point. They wanted to keep people separate. So they would count my grandchildren with their red hair and green eyes and very fair skin, can't be in the sun at all, as Hispanic because it would boost the numbers and make for a more viable political movement that they could call their own.

But in fact, because of intermarriage and because of the assimilative process, I don't think that really is relevant. And again, this whole notion of white. White is a very amorphous concept. And while it's true Mexico, the population there, is a hybrid. It is indigenous, it's African and it's European.

So you know, it's not – in some ways, I mean, people objected to the concept of La Raza because it sounded – oh, "the race," this sounds very sort of racist. Well, in fact, La Raza was this hybrid combination.

And whether Mexicans will – they do seem to be inter-marrying and they probably are. Whether they're becoming lighter or the Scotch-Irish and Germans are becoming darker, I don't know. We're all sort of getting more – we are sort of blending.

KRISTOL: I guess when you think about it, was there a race that was more distinct and to which more hostility was demonstrated – apart from the African Americans, black Americans – than the Japanese and the Chinese?

CHAVEZ: Absolutely.

KRISTOL: Both in terms of – war with the Japanese and the internment camps. Of course, the Chinese – real discrimination and real immigration caps. And now look. Does anyone think there's a big problem of Chinese –

CHAVEZ: Well actually, yes. Harvard University thinks there's a problem with too many Asians because they're too successful. But you're right.

KRISTOL: Also a very high intermarriage, which I think one wouldn't have said at one point because they seem – talk about different cultures.

CHAVEZ: Racially, right.

KRISTOL: Racially they're different, culturally. They're not Christian and they're not –

CHAVEZ: Languages have no – I mean, Spanish is a lot closer to English than Chinese or Japanese is. No, but you're absolutely right. And the first immigration restriction laws were passed to keep the Asians out, to keep the Chinese out, primarily.

That was the beginning of the idea of restricting immigration to America. Prior to that, you know, you got here any way by hook or crook. Crossed over, put your foot on American land and you began the process to becoming an American. We've had different – different eras had different lengths that you had to be in the United States or residing here to become a citizen.

KRISTOL: Is that right? So really before, whatever that –

CHAVEZ: 1882.

KRISTOL: You just showed up.

CHAVEZ: You showed up.

KRISTOL: You would register? I guess you did.

CHAVEZ: Actually, it depended. By and large what happened is when the law was five years for naturalization, you'd go to, it could be a justice of the peace, but some officer of the court. You'd bring a couple of your buddies to attest that you were of good moral character. And you'd swear your allegiance and become a U.S. citizen. It was a pretty easy process.

KRISTOL: I guess Ellis Island, in that respect, is already a later –

CHAVEZ: It was later, Ellis Island came after that.

KRISTOL: Showed that you weren't going to be –

CHAVEZ: Right, you were not a pauper, you didn't have a communicable disease. You weren't an anarchist or whatever.

KRISTOL: Right. You know, that's interesting about the Chinese and Japanese. People really forget about that. And it also does suggest that just the pure – I mean, whatever the foolishness of different government policies, bilingual education or excessive focus on ethnicity in schools, and various forms of multi-culturalism – the pure power, I suppose, of the popular culture, combined with, towards assimilation, combined really with just intermarriage.

CHAVEZ: Right.

KRISTOL: Swamps – is that your sense?

CHAVEZ: It is my sense. And you know, it's interesting you mention bilingual education because everybody thinks of the court decisions and other things that led to this massive move towards teaching kids in their native language, [that it] came because of Hispanics.

No, it came because of a Chinese boy in San Francisco. And it was the Lau decision [Lau v. Nichols, 414 U.S. 563 (1974)] that prompted the federal government to begin saying well, we have to teach these kids in their native language, give them a period of time to adjust.

I think by the time, I think his name was Kenny Lao, his case got to the Supreme Court, my guess is he was perfectly fluent in English, probably had forgotten all the Chinese that they were trying to teach him. Because that's what happens.

And people don't want to hold onto the past. Young people want to be part of the future. They want to belong, they want to fit in. They're not going to be trying to behave as they would in San Salvador or in Mexico City. They want to behave like they are in Los Angeles or New York or wherever, Chicago.

KRISTOL: Yeah, when I was at the Education Department, and we worked on some of these issues together, or at least in parallel, I'd say. We fought anything the federal – at that time it was only federal funding for bilingual education, not for ESL, English as a Second Language or assimilation. We worked, actually, with liberal Democrat Claiborne Pell to try to make different programs equally eligible for these funds as long as they taught kids in adequate ways.

My sense is, I haven't looked at this, though, in a long time, that there's actually less strict bilingual education now in the schools and more English as a Second Language.

CHAVEZ: Right.

KRISTOL: I mean, even the multicultural left, the diversity left, understands that you got to teach these kids English if they're going to have –

CHAVEZ: Absolutely. You know, I was head of the Commission on Migrant Education back in the 1990s, I guess it was, late 1990s. And we went out and held field hearings around the country, hearing from parents, immigrant parents, who wanted their kids to learn English.

And at the time, California really pushed to teach kids in their native language. And one of our most dramatic hearings was of a woman from Mexico who was an indigenous person and she spoke a language related to Mayan, came and testified before us. We had to have a translator for her.

And she was complaining because the schools in California were doing something that the Mexican government had tried for 500 years to do, and that is to force the Mayans to speak Spanish. And they had not succeeded, but the California, Los Angeles School District was, in fact, insisting that her child be taught Spanish before he could learn English, which was insane. If your ultimate goal is English, why would you force the child to learn yet another second language before English?

But most of that has gone by the wayside in part, I think, because of the push from immigrant parents. They've been unwilling to have their kids stuck in these segregated programs where they're going to be taught a language that's not going to help them move up the economic ladder.

The parents may be cleaning bathrooms at night – they don't want their kids to be doing that job. They want their kids to be working in the front office. And they know that they have to learn English if they're going to do that.

KRISTOL: I want to come back and ask you about actual immigration reform, I mean, what we should be doing. But I guess two more questions. When you hear 'diversity,' I mean, how much is that the old multiculturalism repackaged, how much of it is legitimate? Do you worry that there is so much talk, it has become such a sort of talking point and –

CHAVEZ: It has. And the whole idea of diversity came out of the Bakke Decision in the 1970s on affirmative action. It was decided that you couldn't give preference to certain groups in order to overcome the effects of past discrimination which frankly had more appeal, to me, than the idea of promoting diversity. That whole thing is, to me, so fundamentally racist. Again, it sort of assumes that because of the color of your skin, or where you parents came from, or what language they came speaking, that you're somehow different. And I just think that's a wrongheaded notion.

And you're right, I think the term 'diversity' has replaced multiculturalism or bilingualism or some of the other words from the past. But it's every bit, I think, as problematic as those previous movements.

KRISTOL: But you don't think in the real world of America in 2018 it's doing too much to slow down what you've described as the normal kind of assimilation and Americanization?

CHAVEZ: I don't think it really is. I think that its proponents would like it. And, because I spent some time in corporate America, there's a lot of push for diversity in corporate America. I'd rather have the notion of equal opportunity. Come in, prove yourself, it doesn't matter where you came from, it doesn't matter what your background is, what your gender is, what your color is. Just come in and do the job and do a good job and succeed. And make sure that the door is not closed to people because of those kinds of extraneous factors.

That to me is better than saying, well, we want a certain number of this, and a certain number of that, and we want to have balance. Again, that kind of social planning has never worked. The market works. That kind of social engineering doesn't.

KRISTOL: Yeah. And what about, I guess, the Muslims, as Trump talked about it. I mean, that was the Muslim ban. Muslim Americans or Muslim immigrants or refugees, or people seeking – what's the word I'm looking for?

CHAVEZ: Refugee status.

KRISTOL: Refugee status here. And –

CHAVEZ: Right, Asylum.

KRISTOL: Asylum, I guess, yeah. I mean, are there a ton of them? Is it a big problem? Are they doing okay? Is this something more Europe is – it seems a little more, a little scarier, and more European-like than –

CHAVEZ: Right. Well, and because of 9/11. People are more worried about the idea that people may be coming here to do us harm and they may be taking advantage of our very liberal notions of, you know, welcoming people to get here and do bad things.

So, the one thing about assimilation is, assimilation works pretty well along racial and ethnic lines. It's not as successful along religious lines. I mean, you still have the Amish, who don't speak English in their communities. You still have Hassidic Jews, who don't speak English in their communities. Though they may know English, that's not their preferred language.

And you now have Muslims who may not integrate as well either. And so religion is more tenacious. But overall, if you look again at the statistics, overall the Muslim population is doing well. They're doing very well in education, they're doing well economically.

Whether or not there is cause for concern about a kind of Islamic fundamentalism, people who have an Islamist orientation, I think that's – that bears watching. But it does not – it should not in my view, be the controlling factor in our asylum or refugee policy.

I was not happy with the Muslim ban. I think there are good reasons for the United States to continue to accept refugees and asylees. Yes, they have to be properly vetted. Yes, we should try to promote assimilation once they're here. But to close our doors when you have one of the world's worst refugee crisis going on – it's the worst refugee crisis going on in the world right now since World War II. And for America to shut our doors, it's just not American to me.

## **II: Immigration Reform (43:36 – 1:02:54)**

KRISTOL: Yeah. So what should our actual policy be? I mean, the system – everyone seems to agree it's kind of broken. Legal immigration takes a long time for people. Some people you'd want to stay here can't be, or aren't allowed to stay here. People are here illegally. Kids who – people who came as kids are now 23 years old and uncertain about their status. It does seem like it's not a reasonable – it's not optimum. We can kind of muddle through with the current system, but – so what kind of reforms should we be looking at?

CHAVEZ: Well, first of all, with respect to the DACA kids, we ought to legalize their status. And they ought to be able to be set on the path to citizenship. I think that, to me, is non-negotiable.

KRISTOL: Just do it, non-problematic.

CHAVEZ: Yeah, just do it. Just get it done. Just do it.

KRISTOL: They've lived here, they're – the data shows that they are –

CHAVEZ: Right. They're as American as you or I.

KRISTOL: And they're doing fine.

CHAVEZ: And they're doing fine. They're working, they're going to school, they are serving in the military. We ought to do that. In terms of what our legal immigration policies ought to be, I think we ought to have a mix. The current system is almost entirely based on family reunification.

If you have a close order relative who is already here, you've got a leg up in terms of coming. Because that person can sponsor you if they're a resident, a permanent resident, or if they're a citizen, they can sponsor you. And we interpret family very broadly. It includes adult parents, adult children, brothers and sisters. There's declining preference the farther you get out in terms of the family.

But that's been virtually our whole system. We have very few number of visas that we give for skills. I think there ought to be more balance. I think we still need family reunification because a lot of the people who come here have skills, too. But I also think we ought to have a more skills-based system. That skills ought to be our first priority.

And we need two kinds of people, in terms of skills. We need people with scientific, engineering, computer, math, the whole sort of STEM background. We're not producing enough of those of our own, so we need people at the top level. But we also need the people to work on the poultry processing line, to pick our fruits and vegetables, etcetera.

Now, whether those people come permanently, or whether they come on long-term work visas and have to go back at a certain period, that I think is perfectly debatable. I think we ought to have that argument, we ought to have that debate. But I don't think we want a system where we have the government deciding how many people we need in a year. Government is not good at doing that. Employers are pretty good; they know how many people they need.

So it ought to be something that is flexible. When we have high unemployment, when wages are stagnant, maybe you let in fewer. But when the economy is booming, you let in more. I mean, I think it has to be the free market has to weigh in, you have to come up with a system that allows flexibility. And that if we were to do that, I think we could largely eliminate the push factor in terms of illegal immigration.

KRISTOL: And overall numbers, you'd be okay with the current numbers?

CHAVEZ: You know, when the economy was booming, you know, around 2000 when we had the most number of people trying to sneak in illegally, there were about a million and a half people apprehended trying to sneak in. That was probably the market number that was right then. When you've got an economy that's been sluggish for the last eight years, you know, it's picking up, but now you've got 300,000 or 400,000 coming in. Let the economy –.

KRISTOL: We have like a – about one and a half million?

CHAVEZ: Right. We have about one million coming in legally, and – yeah. And yeah we probably need a little bit more I would say. I think if you took the legal number and the illegal number and combined them and gave a way for people to come legally who are now coming, forced to come illegally because they have no alternative, you'd probably hit the right number.

KRISTOL: And would you do country quotas, or ceilings, or just do it more in terms of qualifications?

CHAVEZ: Well, we do have country quotas now. I think qualifications are the most important. We have about half of all immigrants now are from Latin America. A little over a quarter are from Asia and then the rest of the world takes up the rest. So it is dominated by Latin Americans. I don't know that that will continue to be the case. If you see what's happening in places like Nicaragua and Venezuela, there's going to be a lot of push for people to leave those countries.

It would be great to have more middle class Venezuelans coming, you know, who have no opportunity there, and the same in Nicaragua. I wouldn't see any problems. I don't know that we want to have country limitations. Again, I've got some libertarian streak that says government is just not good at deciding these things – let the market do it.

KRISTOL: That seems a little weird. I guess it's historically been the case that we've had country caps and quotas, really.

CHAVEZ: Right.

KRISTOL: But it does seem a little odd to sit around in Washington deciding who – this country gets 5,000, this country gets – or even Congress. I mean then it becomes –

CHAVEZ: Yeah. Then it becomes a political issue if it's in Congress. Right.

KRISTOL: Right, right. But you would have more skill –

CHAVEZ: I would have more. I – look, I'd love to have –

KRISTOL: You agree that the expelling the PhDs, which is crazy –

CHAVEZ: Yeah. I mean, people – right. We educate these people and then we send them home. Why not – and even if they've gone to private institutions, there's a lot of public money that goes into education. And so we're helping to pay for their education even if they're paying their tuition.

So why not take the benefit of that? I see no reason why we shouldn't be giving green cards. You get a degree in computer engineering from Stanford? Get a green card with that diploma.

KRISTOL: And you would then want to let them have a path to citizenship?

CHAVEZ: I absolutely would.

KRISTOL: You don't want us to have permanent –

CHAVEZ: No. I don't want to turn into the old Germany where, or the old Russia, where you could have lived for generations. The Turks who lived in Germany could be there multi generations never to become German citizens. The Germans in Russia couldn't become citizens. No. I think the whole idea of America is we want people to become American. We do not want people to be kept outside the fold. I think that's a recipe for disaster.

KRISTOL: I did a conversation like this with Ed Conard, who made very strongly the – What could you do for the economy? And of course, there are a lot of things that one could do, from tax policy to regulation to education. But he was very strong, and people can listen to the Conversation or read the transcript and see the nuances of his argument on immigration.

I mean, they are actually, if you just want a wealthier country, more productive country, a more innovative country, to keep our edge in certain areas on the rest of the world, immigration, especially the right kind of immigration – he's thinking a little more high skill though not entirely of course, because a lot of the kids of unskilled immigrants become highly skilled graduates of MIT. But nonetheless, he said that's just one of the key things.

But it's striking, isn't it, how people regard it, even on the sort of more liberal, let's call it, side of the debate: it's sort of a burden that we should – or we owe it to people. We shouldn't be cruel or mean, so let's let in X number or let's defend, let's, I don't know, normalize the status of DACA kids. But it's funny how little it seems to be people see it as an opportunity and as a part of really, as you said, American greatness.



CHAVEZ: Right, absolutely. And in fact, I've always made the case that it's fine that this is good for immigrants, but that's not why I'm pushing it. I'm pushing it because it's good for America. Because it's in our interest. It's in our economic interest.

I do think being that beacon, being the place where people who are up and comers want to come and make their fortunes is good. You know, I look back of the economy of the last decade or so, look back to the housing crisis. We could have solved the housing crisis overnight when we had that glut of overpriced real estate.

If we had allowed people to come who would guarantee to buy a house and hold it for X number of years, you would have had a lot of wealthy Asians coming who would have bought up those houses. We could have had the economy propped up by that. And yet, we never think of those things. We never think of using our magnet as an immigrant country as something that we can use to benefit us economically.

KRISTOL: I guess we think of the magnet as drawing in a lot of questionable or disreputable challenges to our –

CHAVEZ: That's what we like to think.

KRISTOL: As opposed to a real opportunity for us. What prospects do you think that we'll have a healthier discussion and debate on immigration?

CHAVEZ: I think a lot of it depends on what happens in the 2018 elections. I think the Trump Administration is doing its level best to limit legal immigration, to cut back on the number of people who are allowed in permanently. To even take people who have visas and limit their ability to use those visas. We have some recent incidents where people had their visas pulled at an entry point because they were deemed as possibly not wanting to leave.

We've got people who have become naturalized citizens. The administration is going through and checking to make sure that they didn't misrepresent why they came to the United States, so they're losing their right to be citizens. It used to be ex-Nazis that we would hunt down. Now we're hunting down people who have not committed heinous crimes against humanity, but may have had a DUI or may have smoked pot when they were in college or whatever, and denaturalize them.

So you know, I think the prospects in the near-term are not good for any kind of immigration reform. But I think that – I think we will see a shift. I mean, the pendulum does seem to go back and forth on the immigration issue. And I think that as people realize that the people who are here are becoming Americans, as their kids start doing well, I think you'll start to see that pendulum shift back towards the middle.

KRISTOL: Why did it shift so much the other way, do you think? Is it just the accidents of certain political fights or –

CHAVEZ: I think there was so much anxiety about the economy, particularly among lower class whites, and anxiety about the culture. I mean, they are the people who get most irritated at the "press 1 for English."

I recently saw a friend of mine in Boulder who is a working class guy and he was talking down at the VFW the night before. And he was talking about a friend of his who used to be a drywall hanger complaining about the Mexicans who came in and stole his job. And I said, "But wait a second, why didn't he put together a crew of those Mexicans?" And he becomes the person who is out there contracting for the jobs? And there was no answer to that.

In fact, having these low wage workers can actually lift – and again, the economic data shows that, they can actually lift whites who may have lost their jobs hanging drywall, but can start their own drywall company now with the advantage of this lower priced laborers.

But it is, if you're in that position, if you don't have the initiative, the wherewithal. If you've got other kinds of problems, the opioid crisis that's inflicting many of these communities, it's – you want to blame somebody and so it's easy to blame somebody who stole your job.

KRISTOL: I suppose you were most affected, perhaps, by certain – the less pleasant or more difficult aspects of immigration don't affect upper middle class people on the coasts that much.

CHAVEZ: That's right.

KRISTOL: On the other hand, I've seen some of the studies that show that the people who are most vociferous about immigration and illegal immigration don't actually live near –

CHAVEZ: Right, they don't know any immigrants, so it's very easy. Look – and mass media. You know, if you watch Fox News 24 hours a day and you see all of these pictures of people climbing over the walls that exist, or crossing the river and sneaking in, and they look sort of shady and it's dark. They look like they've been on the road for a while and they look scary and different. You know, if that's your view. If that's where you're getting your information from, you're not going to have a very friendly attitude.

And you're absolutely right – it's states with low immigration levels that seem to be most anti-immigrant. Not the Texas or California or New York, but places where there aren't a whole lot of people that people get to know first-hand.

KRISTOL: I do think, don't you think in 2015 especially with the Trump campaign picking up steam, I think the European crisis really had a big effect.

CHAVEZ: Probably.

KRISTOL: People who watch Fox without seeing – they were terrible, it was a terrible problem. Hundreds of thousands of them and Angela Merkel probably foolishly perhaps in retrospect, maybe at the time it was obvious that it was a mistake, seemed to want to welcome them all. And then the crisis of who in Europe would take all these migrants. And then a couple of terror attacks in Nice and then here, San Bernadino, and it all did seem like a perfect storm to whip up –

CHAVEZ: It did, and Trump played into that. But you know, there is a big difference between a refugee and an immigrant. Immigrants are people who basically have put aside some money. I mean, now if they are coming in illegally, they have to pay thousands of dollars to a coyote, a smuggler, to bring them across the border. So there are people who have planning.

I mean, that's one of the things about immigrants is that they are self-selected. These are entrepreneurial, people with initiative, people who are willing to take risks.

Refugees, on the other hand, are people who get pushed out of their country, as in Syria. When your city is being bombed, when women are being raped and people are having their heads chopped off, you have to get out of there quickly. And it's a very different population than immigrants who, as I say, are more forward looking, have planned. They tend to be not the poorest of the poor, but at least one level, sometimes two or three levels up.

KRISTOL: And that's interesting. That distinction is – I'm sure it's made in the professional, among professional immigration lawyers and experts, but in the public, it's all, that's sort of all –

CHAVEZ: Yeah, everybody thinks it's all one big mass group.

KRISTOL: And Trump, don't you think, really does – lumps them together.

CHAVEZ: Well, Trump really does. And there's such – I mean, I watched as our First Lady's parents got naturalized and became American citizens. Trump, who rails against chain migration, we shouldn't be allowing people to bring their adult parents – oh, except for my in-laws.

KRISTOL: Well, you wrote an eloquent piece, I think, I quoted this somewhere, in defense of, I don't know if you called it exactly this, but in defense of chain migration. Which has become such a bogeyman, sort of bogeyman. And even where maybe we should have more merit-based immigration, but do we really not want, are their parents going to really be public, burdens on the public, your typical immigrant who was legalized in their 30s, 40s, 50s? It is probably pretty harmless, at least, to bring the parents over.

CHAVEZ: Yes, absolutely.

KRISTOL: And brothers and sisters probably do pretty well, I would guess. I'm just guessing. The brothers and sisters of current legal immigrants probably end up doing okay.

CHAVEZ: Doing well. And that is the way it has always been. I mean, when my Irish immigrant ancestors came, it was usually a male who came first and then he sent for his brothers and sisters, and sometimes his parents. And then they all came and did pretty well. In my case, they ended up in Iowa, you know, farmers. The next generation, my great-uncle ended up being a professor at Marquette University. And these were from dirt farmers who were –

KRISTOL: And some went back.

CHAVEZ: Some went back, right. But this is the history. I mean, when you look at Jews in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, my husband's grandparents, I mean, they came and then they sent for others. They came and got established, got a job, started saving and sent for others. That's the way it has always been.

KRISTOL: It makes sense to limit it in certain ways, obviously.

CHAVEZ: It doesn't have to be 100 percent, right.

KRISTOL: But I don't think it is, really, as much as people think.

CHAVEZ: No, it isn't. It is – it's really children and parents, brothers and sisters come farther down the line. And again, because there are those country quotas, et cetera, it's not all that easy to bring your whole family.

KRISTOL: Right, I know people who are waiting, actually, a long time – legal, totally legal, waiting in line, from Europe or something and try to get someone else in, it takes them –

CHAVEZ: I mean, Europe you have less long of a wait.

KRISTOL: Mrs. Trump – honestly, if you think about, she's been here a long time and I assume she might have tried to –

CHAVEZ: But Europe, the waits are less long because there are less Europeans that want to come here than there are Chinese, Indians and Mexicans.

KRISTOL: So you're not pessimistic about this, either immigration itself doing great damage to the country? Or the issue of immigration doing damage, great damage to our civic discourse and politics.

CHAVEZ: Well, I think the whole backlash against the children who were taken from their parents, I think that sort of was a wake-up call for people. When you have the Trump Administration with a zero tolerance policy – and by the way, some of those families were legitimate asylees, they were looking for asylum. And to see them separated, to see the incompetence of government unable to even match parents with their children. I think that was a wake-up call for people who were not viscerally anti-immigrant and thought – well, maybe this isn't the right thing.

So I think, I think the administration overplayed its hand there, as I think they will if they try to push a ban on birthright citizenship. I think that that will be a bridge too far for most Americans. And so again, this country has always been a kind of moderate country. We never swing too far to the right or too far to the left.

Trump has taken us farther than I would have ever have imagined on this issue, but I still have faith in the American people. And when you look at polling data, most Americans are happy to give the DACA kids citizenship. Most Americans think that if you're born here, you're an American. So I think it will level out when you no longer have a demagogue out there pushing it.

KRISTOL: That's a good note to end on. We'll see how soon that is, but hopefully sooner rather than later. I'll say speaking for myself, not for you there, not to politicize these conversations. Linda Chavez, thanks so much for joining me today and thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]