Scholar, Author, Hoover Fellow Victor Davis Hanson Speaks on Immigration in ‘Provocative Perspectives’ Series at Cal Poly

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- The recent riots in France should serve as a warning to the United States about its social and immigration policies, scholar, author, syndicated columnist and Hoover Institute Fellow Victor Davis Hanson said during his appearance at Cal Poly.

"The riots of France can happen here," Hanson told the crowd during his speech Dec. 1, the second in the university’s 2005-06 “Provocative Perspectives” series. "Selma, in the San Joaquin Valley where I live, is no more integrated than the outskirts of Paris."

Hanson told the crowd that the factors that fueled the French riots -- a disconnected underclass of largely uneducated and unassimilated service workers facing high unemployment -- exist in the U.S. Hispanic workers here are also segregated by language, lack of education, high unemployment and access to mostly menial and service jobs, he stressed.

The solution to the unemployment and poverty issues faced by Latino immigrants in the American Southwest, according to Hanson: offer amnesty to illegal immigrants here now, ramp up security to close the border with Mexico, and enact harsh penalties for businesses that hire illegal immigrants.

"I think the president has it absolutely wrong," Hanson said -- something he told White House advisors last week. “His program is about guest workers and no amnesty. It should be about amnesty but no guest workers -- coupled with radical reform of enforcement.”

Illegal immigration, largely from Mexico, is currently benefiting U.S. business by supplying young laborers willing to do hard jobs for low wages, and benefiting Mexico by relieving pressure to reform that country’s economy, he said. But illegal immigration is in fact costing the U.S. government money when it comes to providing health care and education for the children of illegal workers -- and for those workers as they age. The issue needs to be discussed without the name-calling the topic usually invokes, he stressed.

Hanson spoke of how both his academic experience and his life experience influenced his views on immigration -- the topic of his current book, "Mexifornia." He started his career in higher education by launching the highly-regarded classics program at Fresno State University and went on to serve as a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellow at Stanford and the visiting Sifrin Chair of Military History at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis.

But he returned to the San Joaquin Valley where he grew up, to run the family farm. He still lives in Selma, a small farm town outside Fresno. Growing up, “My grandfather made all of us pick peaches and grapes alongside workers from Mexico,” Hanson noted. “You pick peaches for 10 hours a day with 50 pounds on your back, and you have an entirely different view of the minimum wage than you do if you come out of Harvard and prep schools and you’re sitting in an office on Wall Street and you think you have all the answers.”

His own answer on immigration, he said, is that education, assimilation and intermarriage are the keys to advancement for today’s immigrants -- just as they were the keys for earlier immigrant groups.

“Throughout history, a multicultural society doesn’t work; a multiracial society does. And the U.S. is one of the only successful multiracial societies of its size in history. It is the height of insanity to discard the melting pot and adopt the salad bowl...the melting pot of the United States, for all the caricatures of it, works well.”

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