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### Satire and Discrimination in U.S. Immigration and Customs

The issue of U.S. immigration and customs procedures has long been a controversial topic, especially for people of color who often face heightened scrutiny, discrimination, and frustration when attempting to enter the country. The U.S. border control system, designed to regulate and monitor who can enter and leave the country, has been heavily criticized for its complexity, inconsistency, and biases against people of color, especially against immigrants from foreign countries. For many people, this process is both overwhelming and especially degrading, as they pass through a system that is designed to keep them out of the nation instead of helping them enter; this is especially highlighted when they are pulled out of lines for additional questioning, but not others in line. In addressing these concerns, satire has been used to shed light on the absurdities of border control. Saturday Night Live's (SNL) "Welcome Video" serves as a prime example of using satirical devices, humor, and exaggeration to expose flaws in the immigration system and critique racial biases. Throughout "Welcome Video," SNL uses different rhetorical devices to satirize the absurdly complicated nature of U.S. immigration and customs procedures, mocking the discriminatory aspects of border control and highlighting the frustrations and confusion that many immigrants and travelers experience when trying to enter the U.S.

SNL used a variety of satirical devices to develop the theme of this video and used lots of devices to structure their ideas through sarcasm and irony. At 0:08, the video states, “Hello. Bonjour. Hola. Konichiwa. And welcome to the United States” (SNL). This multilingual greeting establishes an ironic tone by giving a false sense of inclusivity to arriving travelers, as if the U.S. is super inviting to all people, but the video soon reveals otherwise. It has the appearance of inclusivity but quickly reveals that the U.S. immigration process is anything but open and accessible. This is juxtaposition because it contrasts the welcoming greeting with rude, biased actions that follow, such as racial bias and exclusion. This contrast emphasizes the false promise of the U.S. being a place for equal opportunity for all. The video goes on to state, “We take our border very seriously. Be sure to pay attention and we’ll get you going as soon as possi- Portions of this video have been recently edited” (SNL 0:23). The pause is showing that this process won't be quick. It often takes a long time for immigrants or people of color to be let into the country. On a bigger scale, “we take our border very seriously” is delivered as though its a positive thing, but its quickly undermined by the fact that the entire process is frustrating and racially biased. It reveals a maze of unnecessary barriers, forms, and discriminatory practices. Also, the interruption of the video to mention this line is *reductio ad absurdum* and highlights the ridiculous nature of immigration procedures, hinting at the unnecessary changing of rules that often happens in U.S. immigration rules. At 0:44, the video states, “Our priority is to make this process easy for each and every one of you- Not you, not you, no way, nice try, not you- Oh wait, he’s good. Come on in, bud” (SNL). No people of color are let through security, only the white man is. The irony here is that the white man is holding a rifle, but he is still let through simply because of his skin color. Even though the people of color pose no threat and are not carrying any weapons, they are denied entrance. There is absurdity in the fact that the customs officers are

picking who can pass through based on outwards appearance. This highlights the fact that racial bias overrides actual security concerns, and how white people are often let through security and are not handled with as much precautions as people of color are. This is also reversal, and highlights how racial biases undermine actual security concerns, critiquing the immigration process by flipping the expected outcome. If a person of color makes a mistake, their consequence is much greater than that of a person of color.

In addition to these structural devices that helped develop the overall theme of the video, SNL also used a variety of specific devices for their style and the words they used to present their ideas. The video states, “With all your forms filled out, proceed ahead- Also form C-9, W-8, F-12, and D-9-B” (SNL 1:03). This is a hyperbole because the “endless” set of forms is an exaggeration of how complicated and endless the immigration paperwork can feel. The number of forms associated with this process help to amplify the situation and how frustrating it can be. Making fun of the extended paperwork simplifies and amplifies confusion of the immigration process, showing how exhausting it can be. It is later stated, “Effective immediately, all visitors will be subject to extreme vetting procedures, including a highlight detailed questionnaire” (SNL 1:13). The packet only has one question: “Are you Muslim?” This is *reductio ad absurdum* because it oversimplifies the discriminatory methods that can be used to keep immigrants out of the U.S. This exaggerated question, which addresses extreme anti-Muslim biases, is an absurd reduction of different cultures, religions, and experiences in a single question. A similar theme is later used, as the video states, “We also need fingerprints, blood sample, urine sample, stool sample, and you will be required to eat a hot dog in front of us” (SNL 1:21). This is an absurd exaggeration and hyperbole of the invasive nature of the immigration process, adding unnecessary and illogical requirements to the list. This is mocking the overwhelming and

sometimes degrading nature of immigration policies (some reduction), and further amplifies the absurdity of the situation. Further questioning of the traveler leads to some assumptions made by the officer: “I’m here to see my mother. She is a- terrorist” (SNL 1:46) and “I am a certified nurse- Drug dealer” (SNL 1:49). Everything about this lady is assumed based on her appearance. Nothing that she says is registered by the customs officer, as it is often assumed that people of color have malicious intentions. Both of these statements are also invective; the customs officer keeps on misidentifying people, and uses harsh language towards them. The video portrays the customs officer as a figure who doesn’t listen to or care about the traveler’s reason for visiting the U.S. The officer’s assumptions about people of color (Assuming a Muslim woman is a terrorist, or a nurse is a drug dealer) mocks how stereotypes heavily shape the immigration process. It also critiques how officials make assumptions based on race and appearance, instead of facts. At the end of the video, it states, “Congratulations and welcome to the United States, a land of opportunity from- Trump tower- sea to shining- Trump tower” (SNL 1:59). The use of the phrase “land of opportunity” followed by the unexpected “Trump tower” reveals an ironic contrast between the idealized vision of the U.S. as a welcoming country with the reality of the nation and all its racial policies associated with Trump politics. It juxtaposes the idea of a land of opportunity with the exclusive reality associated with Trump’s policies, suggesting that the U.S. is really not as welcoming as some believe. Also, the incongruity creates mental dissonance, as the audience is forced to recognize the gap between the idealized image of America and its discriminatory practices. Overall, it satirizes the idea that America could offer a fair shot to all people and critiques the fact that the American Dream is more associated with business and wealthy people now, rather than the ideas of equality and inclusivity.

Overall, the satirical devices used in SNL's "Welcome Video" are used to expose the contradictions, frustration, and discrimination that occurs in the U.S. immigration system and border control. Through the video's exaggerated perspective of racial bias, absurdity of overly complicated forms, racial profiling, and other issues, the video satirizes failures of U.S. immigration policies. They allow the video to effectively critique frustrations experienced by immigrants and people of color, and the systemic discrimination they often face.

#### Works Cited

SNL. "Welcome Video - SNL." YouTube, 5 Feb. 2017,

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