

BY THE FRESNO BEE EDITORIAL BOARD

# Here's what immigrant 'merit' looks like

**A**nna Ocegueda graduated from UC Merced on Sunday. The 22-year-old received her degree in psychology while enjoying an unexpected moment of national fame.

On May 6, Ocegueda honored her parents in a Twitter post. In the photo, she wears her graduation gown and mortarboard. Her parents, clad in heavy aprons, stand on either side of her. Together, they stand in one of the orange groves where her parents have worked as fruit pickers for the past 20 years.

She captioned the photo, in Spanish: "Because of you, and for you."

The photo went viral, receiving thousands of reactions and coverage in national news outlets. It resonated with people because it illustrated an important truth about the American experience. Ocegueda's parents came to this country from Mexico as undocumented immigrants. They picked oranges, grapes and blueberries to raise their five children.

This week, their hard work paid off. Anna walked across the stage and became the first person in her family to graduate with a four-year degree. She plans to use her bachelor's de-



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY ANNA OCEGUEDA

UC Merced student Anna Ocegueda tweeted this picture with her parents where they work. The tweet went viral, collecting over 16,000 likes.

gree in psychology and minor in Spanish "to work with kids who have autism, or other psychological disorders," according to a story in the Merced Sun-Star.

"My parents came here for a better future and a better life for their children," Ocegueda said. "My parents encouraged me to better my education so I

wouldn't have to work in the fields like them."

As Anna's story touched hearts across the nation, President Trump unveiled his new immigration "proposal." In reality, it was little more than a publicity stunt. Republicans in Congress panned it. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called it "dead on arrival."

The president's assertion that immigration should be based on "merit." Yet he appears to define immigrants with merit as only those with advanced college degrees.

The Oxford Dictionary defines merit as "the quality of being particularly good or worthy, especially so as to deserve praise or reward."

Surely, the term applies to the Ocegueda family.

Without immigrants working like them, our nation's agricultural economy would collapse. Their labor puts food on our tables and fuels a multibillion-dollar economy.

If immigrants disappeared tomorrow, it would also dev-

tate the restaurant industry. That's because immigrant workers have long staffed our kitchens, making everything from burritos to sushi.

Construction workers. Gardeners. Manicurists. Housekeepers. Nannies. Drivers. Name an industry and, chances are, immigrant workers are carrying the load. They bring necessary skills to every job, contribute to the quality of our lives and strengthen our economy.

Immigrants help build our future. One generation works in the fields or the kitchens so the next generation can go to college. Today's fruit pickers, maids and taxi drivers bring tomorrow's teachers, entrepreneurs and doctors into the world.

In a state with an aging population and troubling demographic trends like a declining birth rate, the truth is California needs immigrants more than one may think.

So, congratulations — and gracias — to the Ocegueda family. Families like yours keep the American Dream alive and truly make this nation great.

And to those who have trouble recognizing "merit," here's a hint: Anna Ocegueda.