

The Delray Democrat

Keep the Immigrants, Deport the Racists¹

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America has always been a beacon for those fleeing poverty and persecution, as memorably described in Emma Lazarus's poem, "The New Colossus," with its iconic, aspirational closing lines:

Give me your tired, your poor
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

As every schoolchild knows or should know, the entire poem is engraved on the Statute of Liberty, welcoming tens of millions of immigrants who made the hard journey from the Old to the New World. Too often (and most of all today) their descendants have forgotten and/or dishonored the pledge made to their forebears. There is a special place in hell for those who pull up the ladder after themselves.

It takes courage, drive, and spirit to leave the nation and community of your birth for a land where often you do not even speak the language. Immigrants have enriched America with their determination and vitality while the racists who attack them have both debased themselves and diminished our country with their prejudice and ignorance.

A Brief History

This article addresses those who came to our shores of their own volition. It does not address those who were kidnapped and brought in chains to be sold as chattel or the unsurpassed contributions they and their descendants made to this country.

The treatment of immigrants has varied over time. Until the 1890s, the vast majority of immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe and were largely Protestant. Of the 25 million immigrants who landed at Ellis Island before World War I, a mere 1% were denied entry, mostly for health reasons.

In the late 1890s and early 1900s, the nationality and religion of the immigrants changed. The new arrivals, from Southern and Eastern Europe, were largely Catholic and Jewish and were subject to the same lies spewed about Latin Americans today.

In the forefront of the opposition was the Ku Klux Klan, which had reinvented itself as a [mainstream movement](#) and successfully lobbied Congress to pass the Immigration Act of 1924:

¹ *The Delray Democrat*, April 2022, page 1.

It included farmers, bankers, railroad workers, suffragists, ministers, mayors, and governors . . . They dressed their anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, antisemitic message in patriotism and Christian righteousness . . . For many white Protestant Americans, the Ku Klux Klan was a respectable pastime for the whole family.

The Act imposed severe quotas on immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Unlike today, however, there was virtually no enforcement infrastructure and those who came illegally faced little threat of removal.

Statutes of limitations protected those who entered illegally before the 1940s and tens of thousands of unauthorized immigrants were given amnesty in the 1930s. Public benefits were available to immigrants until the 1970s, and it was not until 1986 that it became illegal to hire an undocumented immigrant:

In sum, from the early 1900s through the 1960s, millions of predominantly white immigrants entered the country unlawfully, but faced virtually no threat of apprehension or deportation. Businesses lawfully employed these immigrants, who were eligible for public benefits when they fell on hard times.

See Charles Kamasaki, “US immigration policy: A classic, unappreciated example of structural racism.”

Like their spiritual antecedents in the Klan, Donald Trump and his minions have mainstreamed racism and xenophobia despite the fact that some of them literally owe their lives to America’s tradition of welcoming immigrants. Had the 1924 Act been in force when Stephen Miller’s great-grandfather emigrated from Antopol (Belarus) in 1906, Miller might have never existed. All but 7 of the 2,000 Jews living in Antopol were murdered by the Nazis. See David S. Glosser, “Stephen Miller is an Immigration Hypocrite.” *Politico*, August 13, 2018.

Debunking the Lies

Crime: Immigrants actually pose less of a threat to our communities than U.S. born citizens. Legal immigrants commit *fewer* crimes than U.S.-born citizens, and undocumented immigrants commit *far fewer* crimes. US-born citizens are more than twice as likely to be arrested for violent crimes, 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug crimes, and over 4 times more likely to be arrested for property crimes.

Taxes: Immigrants paid more than \$492 billion in taxes in 2019, including more than \$30 billion paid by undocumented immigrants. Trump pays less taxes (and does more harm) than the average immigrant.

Government Services: Immigrants pay far more in taxes than they receive in benefits. Immigrants use government services at a **far lower rate** than native-born Americans despite paying taxes that support those services. Lawful permanent residents are not eligible for Medicaid, food stamps, or other “means-tested welfare benefits” until they have resided in the United States for five years, and they are ineligible for Social Security or Medicare until they have paid payroll taxes for 10 years. *Undocumented immigrants are never eligible for any of these programs.*

Jobs: Immigrants create more jobs than they take. They start businesses at much higher rates than

native-born Americans and pay higher wages. And they often take those jobs few Americans would want—two of Trump’s three wives were immigrants.

“Illegal” Immigration is no more common today than between 1900 and 1960. The difference is that the millions of predominantly white immigrants who entered illegally during that period faced no threat of being apprehended or deported.

Number of Immigrants. We are not being overrun by immigrants. Today. immigrants constitute 13.7% of the U.S. population, slightly below their historical rate between 1870 and 1930.

The Takeaway

Today’s immigrants differ from those who preceded them in the color of their skin, not the content of their character. Those who judge them on the former have no place in this great land.