

# The New York Times

## Worst of the Trumps

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When a presidential campaign often inhabits the gutter it's not easy to establish its low point.

We've seen Donald Trump vilify Muslims, Mexicans and women. We've seen him indulge airy suggestions that rifle-bearing Americans might like to shoot Hillary Clinton. We've seen him belabor the lie that President Obama was not born in the United States — until he recanted. For Trump, the low road to the White House is paved with boorishness. But perhaps his son Donald Trump Jr. set the nadir this week when he compared Syrian refugees to a bowl of Skittles.

A caption accompanying a photograph of the candy said: "If I had a bowl of skittles and I told you just three would kill you. Would you take a handful? That's our Syrian refugee problem." Trump Jr. tweeted, "This image says it all."

Where to begin? With the fact that human beings are not Skittles? With the fact that after more than five years of war 4.8 million Syrians are refugees and 6.1 million are internally displaced and Trump Jr., even with his coddled New York existence, can surely make the calculation that this amounts to almost 2.5 million more human beings than live in the five boroughs?

With the fact that you do not flee your home because you have a choice (like choosing between Skittles and M&Ms after a Manhattan dinner party) but because you no longer have one? With the fact that, according to a Cato Institute study of refugees admitted to the United States between 1975 and 2015, the chance of an American being killed in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee is 1 in 3.64 billion? With the fact that Syrians want to work, make a living, put their kids in decent schools, and recover their dignity, just like the rest of us?

Or perhaps with the fact that comparing Syrians to Skittles carries echoes of the Nazi propagandist Julius Streicher comparing Jews to mushrooms in a popular children's book that posited the ticklish dilemma of how to distinguish poisonous toadstools from edible fungus; and has a mother saying to her son Franz:

"Yes, my child! Just as a single poisonous mushroom can kill a whole family, so a solitary Jew can destroy a whole village, a whole city, even an entire Volk."

We all know, even the Trumps know, that the door into the United States was closed to desperate European Jews trying to escape the Holocaust.

If I may be pardoned for extending an awful analogy, I'd suggest to the Trumps that a better caption would read: "If I had a bowl of Skittles and I told you just three of them would turn out to be Sergey Brin, Elon Musk and Pierre Omidyar, would you take a handful?"

The co-founder of Google, co-founder of Tesla, and founder of eBay were all immigrants. Steve Jobs' biological father was a Syrian immigrant. In fact, earlier this year, the National Foundation for American Policy found that 51 percent of the country's start-up companies valued at over \$1 billion had at least one immigrant founder. A study by the Partnership for a New American Economy, a coalition of governors and business leaders, found that in 2013 more than 40 percent of Fortune 500 companies, including seven of the world's 10 most valuable brands, were started by immigrants or their children.

The strength of the United States is its creative churn. In contrast to European states, it is hard-wired to reinvention through immigration. When Trump traffics in fear about immigrants, whether Muslim or Mexican, he guts America of its greatness and turns his back on its singular idea.

The American response to the Syrian crisis has been paltry — almost 12,000 refugees admitted since the war began, or 0.25 percent of the total. Part of the slowness has come from the rigor of the vetting process. But what do the Trumps care? They are concerned with just one message: Muslim equals danger.

Let's see now. Trump's grandfather, Friedrich Trump, was a German immigrant. He arrived in the United States in October 1885. For decades, the family lied: They said he hailed from Sweden. In his book, "The Art of the Deal," Trump says his grandfather "came here from Sweden as a child." The family historian, John Walter, explained that Trump's father, Fred, "had a lot of Jewish tenants and it wasn't a good thing to be German in those days."

Make up stories: It's the Trump way. So here was a German-American posing as a Swedish-American opting not to rent to African-Americans.

Friedrich Trump, the immigrant, was young. He was penniless. He came not from Sweden but from Bismarck's recently formed nation state in the middle of a turbulent Europe. A U.S. immigration officer allowed him into the United States in 1885 — not a decision without risk.

But an American decision taken in the spirit the Trumps now trample with cavalier untruth and vile innuendo