



The Universal Notebook: Immigrants are US

By Edgar Allen Beem

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The United States is a nation of immigrants. The majority of us welcome them, because we understand they are us.

According to a June Gallup poll, 57 percent of Americans oppose Trump's wall, 83 percent favor a path to citizenship for Dreamers and 84 percent believe immigration is a good thing for the country.

So why are we letting a minority of Trump supporters make our country look for all the world like a land of xenophobic racists and narrow-minded bigots?

In an attempt to understand how anyone could see greatness in such a petty man, I read a lot about Trump supporters. One of the best explanations I have found for their support of such an obviously corrupt man is a recent article by Peter Beinart on theatlantic.com. In "Why Trump Supporters Believe He is Not Corrupt," Beinart argues that Trump supporters can forgive his whoring and hush money because Trump is "upholding traditional gender and class hierarchies."

"Since time immemorial, powerful men have been cheating on their wives and using their power to evade the consequences," Beinart writes.

Trump people are primarily motivated by fear – fear of minorities, fear of immigrants, fear of crime, fear of poverty. So when an immigrant commits a horrendous crime, they go bananas, egged on by Trump's characterizations of Mexicans as rapists and blinded to the fact that the crime is atypical.

Beinart cites the murder of Iowa college student Mollie Tibbetts by a Mexican migrant worker named Cristhian Rivera as raw meat for Trumpsters.

"Throughout American history, few notions have been as sacrosanct as the belief that white women must be protected from nonwhite men," Beinart writes. "By allegedly murdering Tibbetts, Rivera did not merely violate the law. He did something more subversive: He violated America's traditional racial and sexual norms."

As horrific as the crime was, it should not be allowed to color one's perception of immigrants or to misinform the immigration debate in this country, as Mollie Tibbetts' own father said last

week when he begged politicians, “do not appropriate Mollie’s soul in advancing views she believed were profoundly racist.”

To begin with, Rivera had managed to pass federal screenings and was working for a Republican official. More importantly, illegal immigrants commit crimes at a much lower rate than native-born Americans.

A study by the libertarian Cato Institute, for example, found that in 2015 Texas police arrested nearly 816,000 native-born citizens, 38,000 legal immigrants and more than 20,000 illegal immigrants. The study found that the arrest rate for illegals was 40 percent below that of natives and illegals are 47 percent less likely to commit murder.

Trump folks also fear that immigrants will take their jobs and cost them a small fortune in tax dollars. Nonsense. A 2017 study of “The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration,” conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, concluded that “immigration has an overall positive impact on long-run economic growth in the U.S.”

The NASEM study reported that “the presence of immigrant workers (both authorized and unauthorized) in the labor market has expanded the U.S. economy by an estimated 11 percent, representing an increase equivalent to \$2 trillion of the GDP in 2016.”

And to the argument that immigrant workers suppress wages, the NASEM study found that the people most impacted by any decline in wages are fellow immigrants, not white or black workers.

Working hard, doing jobs no one else wants to do and keeping their noses clean to avoid attracting attention, immigrants make a hugely positive contribution to American life.

And, especially in a state like Maine with its aged population, immigrants are our future. The fact that future Mainers might not be as white as they are now is what seems to scare Trump supporters, just as Catholics from Ireland and Canada once scared Maine WASPs. Given how badly white folks have messed up though, it’s probably a good thing that the future will be a little more colorful.

You have to be proud of the way people in southern Maine have pushed back against the anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies of the Trump administration. People filled the streets and parks to protest Trump’s Muslim ban. Tri-lingual “No matter where you’re from, we’re glad you’re our neighbor” signs keep popping on local lawns. And the progressive city of Portland is seriously considering allowing non-citizens to vote in municipal elections, a move I support and applaud.

On CNN, newscaster Don Lemon last week asked, “Do you think people, when they are in the middle of it, know they are on the wrong side of history?” What I keep wondering is, “Does Donald Trump realize he is destined to be remembered as a hate-monger as infamous as Father Coughlin, Sen. Joe McCarthy or Gov. George Wallace?”