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Refugees aren't criminals and freeloaders. I know. I was one.

Max Boot

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President Trump has run a disgraceful and hysterical campaign vilifying illegal immigrants and refugees — two categories that appear indistinguishable to him. He doesn't have a positive word to say about *any* immigrants, even the legal ones. Most of his vitriol has focused on a caravan of a few thousand refugees fleeing Central American crime and poverty, which he calls an "invasion" of "criminals and gang members," necessitating a response from up to 15,000 U.S. troops. Even Fox News has rejected his notorious commercial falsely accusing Democrats of letting a criminal into the country. His son Donald Trump Jr. echoes the language of white supremacists in accusing Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) of wanting to "repopulate Maine with Syrian and Somalian refugees."

Democrats are appalled but also largely silent, reluctant to change their focus from health care, which they view as an election-winning issue. They may be right in their political calculation, but the silence may validate Trump's charges in the minds of some voters. Since so few others are speaking up for refugees, I'd like to lend my voice.

Admittedly, I'm biased, having come to the United States in 1976 as a refugee myself, along with my mother and grandmother. We were helped on our journey from Moscow, via Vienna and Rome, by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, or HIAS, the same organization against which the alleged Pittsburgh synagogue gunman developed a homicidal antipathy. Eventually my mother became a professor at UCLA, teaching generations of students Russian (a language deemed critical to U.S. security), and I became a writer and historian whose books have appeared on many military reading lists.

I hear from a lot of Trump supporters who would like to deport me either to Russia or Israel. But even they would have to concede that, while I may be guilty of thought crimes, my family has not turned into gang bangers who prey on God-fearing, hard-working, native-born Americans. At the very least, we pay our fair share of taxes — which is probably more than Trump can say.

Other refugees have contributed much more to America — and to the world — than we have. Their ranks include Henry Kissinger, Madeleine Albright, George Soros, Gloria Estefan, Yasiel Puig, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Sergey Brin, Stephanie Murphy — and many members of the armed forces. But perhaps it's unfair to cherry-pick anecdotes of successful refugees as the counterpoint to Trump's anecdotes about cop killers. So let's look at the data.

Trump's own Department of Health and Human Services concluded that refugees brought in \$63 billion more in tax revenues over the past decade than they cost. The findings were confirmed in

a 2017 study from the National Bureau of Economic Research, which reported that, while refugees initially have “low employment, high welfare use and low earnings,” the trend reverses after six years. By that point, “refugees work at higher rates than natives.” The study estimated that in their first 20 years in this country, refugees pay on average “\$21,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits.”

Trump scaremongers about crimes committed by illegal immigrants, but a study published in the journal *Criminology* found that “states with larger shares of undocumented immigrants tended to have lower crime rates than states with smaller shares in the years 1990 through 2014.” A study conducted by the Cato Institute found that, in Texas, immigrants, both legal and illegal, commit crime at lower rates than the native-born: “In 2015, homicide conviction rates for illegal and legal immigrants were 16 percent and 67 percent below those of natives, respectively.” Trump claims that “crime in Germany is way up” because that country admitted roughly a million, mostly Muslim, refugees. In fact, crime in Germany declined in 2017 to a 25-year low.

Trump is also being deceptive in saying that “nearly 3 in 4 individuals convicted of terrorism-related charges are foreign-born.” That’s true only of *international* terrorism in the United States, but most terrorism is homegrown. The Government Accountability Office found that from Sept. 12, 2001, to Dec. 31, 2016, there were 85 violent extremist attacks resulting in deaths in the United States. Seventy-three percent of those attacks were committed by right-wing groups and only 27 percent by violent Islamists — and even many of the Islamists, such as the Orlando nightclub killer and the Fort Hood shooter, were native-born. The Cato Institute calculates that the chance of being murdered by a foreign-born terrorist between 2002 and 2017 was about 1 in 145 million per year.

The scandal isn’t that refugees want to come to the United States. It’s that Trump is abusing these aspiring Americans and closing our doors to them. He has cut refugee admissions to the lowest level since 1980. As the country prepares to celebrate Thanksgiving — commemorating the journey of an earlier group of refugees — let’s open our hearts and our admissions process to today’s asylum-seekers. That doesn’t mean letting in everyone who wants to come here, but it also doesn’t mean turning away almost everyone or calumniating them as an invading army of terrorists, criminals and freeloaders.