



## **Guest opinion: Scapegoating immigrants hurts America**

Drew Callaghan

August 28, 2017

When President Trump spoke recently at a gathering of law enforcement officers, his encouragement to rough up suspected criminals generated strong rebukes from many police departments and the public. While the controversy over those remarks was deserved, it overshadowed a less garish, but no less disturbing, portion of his speech: smearing the integrity of immigrants and promoting the kind of scapegoating that fuels hate groups.

“What happened to the old days where people came into this country, they worked and they worked and they worked, and they had families, and they paid taxes, and they did all sorts of things, and their families got stronger, and they were closely knit,” Trump asked. Then he declared, “We don’t see that.”

If Trump truly can’t see the hard work being done by immigrants all around him, he could just consider the data. The Harvard Business Review found immigrants represent just 15 percent of the U.S. population, but they create about 25 percent of new businesses. And these aren’t just bodegas and family businesses. The Kauffman Foundation reports “more than 40 percent of the Fortune 500 companies in 2010 were founded by an immigrant or the child of an immigrant.”

In addition to contributing positively to our national economy, immigrants play a crucial role in stabilizing and revitalizing struggling communities. For decades rural areas and post-industrial cities have grappled with debilitating out-migration. Many of the communities effectively weathering these upheavals have an influx of immigrants to thank.

Immigrants are pumping new life into communities like Akron, Ohio, and Storm Lake, Iowa, which (unlike nearby towns) recovered from successive economic shocks by embracing immigrants who fill essential jobs, buy homes, and do the things elemental to a thriving economy. They start businesses and create jobs.

Job creation depends largely on new business formation, and immigrant-founded businesses create new jobs that generate \$20 billion annually in local and federal taxes. Embracing and welcoming these individuals isn’t just the humane thing to do; it’s also smart economic development strategy.

Trump and other immigration hawks have proposed a new merit-based system that would invite only the “best and brightest” to America. Humanitarian concerns aside, reducing the number of immigrants with low skills and education may seem like smart economic policy. Again, the data disagree. Immigrants with fewer skills and less education actually create new businesses at a higher rate. Counterintuitive, sure, but some observers suggest the characteristics this population embodies – namely risk-tolerance, perseverance and problem-solving skills – ideally suit them for entrepreneurship.

Even immigrants who don’t start businesses have, at worst, a neutral effect on earnings. An analysis by the libertarian Cato Institute found immigration had no significant impact on the wages of American workers. And although poor immigrants may tap into social services initially, Cato found they use public benefits at a lower rate than poor, native-born citizens over the long term.

The idea that immigrants – particularly refugees – lead to more crime is a myth.

FBI statistics for cities resettling the most refugees per capita indicate both violent and property crime rates fell in nine of 10 cities. In some cases, dramatically. In West Springfield, Massachusetts, the one city that saw crime increase, there was “a well-documented opioid epidemic during this same period.”

So if Trump really is wondering what happened to the days when immigrants came to the United States, worked hard, paid taxes, created jobs and made communities stronger, he just needs to open his eyes. These are those days. To suggest otherwise fuels the kind of resentment and hate that took three lives in Charlottesville.