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Stephens: Only mass deportation can save America

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In the matter of immigration, mark this conservative columnist down as strongly pro-deportation. The United States has too many people who don't work hard, don't believe in God, don't contribute much to society and don't appreciate the greatness of the American system.

They need to return whence they came.

I speak of Americans whose families have been in this country for a few generations. Complacent, entitled and often shockingly ignorant on basic points of American law and history, they are the stagnant pool in which our national prospects risk drowning.

On point after point, America's nonimmigrants are failing our country. Crime? A study by the Cato Institute notes that nonimmigrants are incarcerated at nearly twice the rate of illegal immigrants, and at more than three times the rate of legal ones.

Educational achievement? Just 17 percent of the finalists in the 2016 Intel Science Talent Search — often called the “Junior Nobel Prize” — were the children of U.S.-born parents. At the Rochester Institute of Technology, just 9.5 percent of graduate students in electrical engineering were nonimmigrants.

Religious piety — especially of the Christian variety? More illegal immigrants identify as Christian (83 percent) than do Americans (70.6 percent), a fact right-wing immigration restrictionists might ponder as they bemoan declines in church attendance.

Business creation? Nonimmigrants start businesses at half the rate of immigrants, and accounted for fewer than half the companies started in Silicon Valley between 1995 and 2005. Overall, the share of nonimmigrant entrepreneurs fell by more than 10 percentage points between 1995 and 2008, according to a Harvard Business Review study.

Nor does the case against nonimmigrants end there. The rate of out-of-wedlock births for U.S.-born mothers exceeds the rate for foreign-born moms, 42 percent to 33 percent. The rate of delinquency and criminality among nonimmigrant teens considerably exceeds that of their immigrant peers. A recent report by the Sentencing Project also finds evidence that the fewer immigrants there are in a neighborhood, the likelier it is to be unsafe.

And then there's the all-important issue of demographics. The race for the future is ultimately a race for people — healthy, working-age, fertile people — and our nonimmigrants fail us here, too. “The increase in the overall number of U.S. births, from 3.74 million in 1970 to 4.0 million in 2014, is due entirely to births to foreign-born mothers,” reports the Pew Research Center.

Without these immigrant moms, the United States would be faced with the same demographic death spiral that now confronts Japan.

Bottom line: So-called real Americans are screwing up America. Maybe they should leave, so that we can replace them with new and better ones: newcomers who are more appreciative of what the United States has to offer, more ambitious for themselves and their children, and more willing to sacrifice for the future. In other words, just the kind of people we used to be — when “we” had just come off the boat.

OK, so I’m jesting about deporting “real Americans” en masse. (Who would take them in, anyway?) But then the threat of mass deportations has been no joke with this administration.

On Thursday, the Department of Homeland Security seemed prepared to extend an Obama administration program known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, which allows the children of illegal immigrants — some 800,000 people in all — to continue to study and work in the United States. The decision would have reversed one of Donald Trump’s ugly campaign threats to deport these kids, whose only crime was to have been brought to the United States by their parents.

Yet the administration is still committed to deporting their parents, and on Friday the DHS announced that even DACA remains under review — another cruel twist for young immigrants wondering if they’ll be sent back to “home” countries they hardly ever knew, and whose language they might barely even speak.

Beyond the inhumanity of toying with people’s lives this way, there’s also the shortsightedness of it. We do not usually find happiness by driving away those who would love us. Businesses do not often prosper by firing their better employees and discouraging job applications. So how does America become great again by berating and evicting its most energetic, enterprising, law-abiding, job-creating, idea-generating, self-multiplying and God-fearing people?

Because I’m the child of immigrants and grew up abroad, I have always thought of the United States as a country that belongs first to its newcomers — the people who strain hardest to become a part of it because they realize that it’s precious; and who do the most to remake it so that our ideas, and our appeal, may stay fresh.

That used to be a cliché, but in the Age of Trump it needs to be explained all over again. We’re a country of immigrants — by and for them, too. Americans who don’t get it should get out.