

ELITE DAILY

The Three Worst Myths About Immigration That I Hear As An Immigration Attorney

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At the start of 2017, I decided to start an immigration law firm in Washington D.C. with my best friend, Victoria Slatton, to combat the anti-immigration policies that our new president ran his campaign on. Considering that just eleven days after his inauguration, President Donald Trump issued the notorious travel ban, which barred the entry of legal immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries, our timing could not have been better. Currently, the travel ban is only in effect with limited implementation pending a Supreme Court decision, but due to the nature of the ban and air of hostility in Trump's message, many immigrants are living in a state of fear and uncertainty over what the future will hold.

We had very little experience in starting a business, but we saw a need in our community and truly believed that helping immigrants fight to stay in this country through our firm, Stilwell & Slatton Immigration, was a worthy cause and the right thing to do. After months of laying the groundwork, we began officially accepting clients in early April.

Maintaining a startup is difficult, and although much of our process has been challenging, our clients have made everything worthwhile. We are working with truly amazing individuals who add value, skills, expertise, and cultural diversity to our country. We work with all types of clients and have seen everyone from victims of human trafficking to people fleeing persecution in their home country who are seeking asylum. These people have been through hell to get here and make a better life, and we are honored to be in a profession that allows us to help them navigate through the complexities of the immigration system.

We have received so much support and affirmation from people all over the world who agree with our mission and want to contribute their resources and skills. However, my partner and I have also received a number of angry emails attacking the nature of our profession and the people we aim to help. In an effort to respond to those who don't understand why we have chosen this field and to dispel some of the misunderstandings about our clients, I wanted to take this opportunity to address three of the most common myths surrounding immigrants.

Myth 1: Immigrants Put The United States At a Heightened Risk of a Terrorist Attack

This is probably the most common myth I hear, and this rhetoric has only grown in popularity with our new president. Trump instituted the travel ban as a way to protect the country from “radical Islamic terrorism” because he believes that if you limit the amount of immigrants

coming into the country, then America can prevent terrorist attacks. The problem with this logic is that there is no evidence to support it.

Since September 11, 2001, the United States has made its vetting procedures for incoming immigrants more extensive and effective. In a report done by New America, it was found that since 2001, thirteen individuals were responsible for lethal jihadist attacks, resulting in the death of at least one individual. Of those thirteen individuals, eight were born in the United States. So how many were born in one of the seven countries targeted by Trump's Muslim ban? None. No national of any of the countries targeted by Trump's executive orders have committed a lethal terrorist attack since 2001.

A risk analysis called "Terrorism and Immigration" found that the odds that an American would be murdered by a foreign-born refugee terrorist is 1 in 3.64 billion per year, an undocumented immigrant terrorist is 1 in 10.9 billion per year, and a terrorist on a typical tourist visa was 1 in 3.9 million.

The U.S. has the most sophisticated immigrant vetting system in the world, leading any rational person to believe these odds are not a coincidence. While I fully stand by efforts to protect the United States from harm, we, as Americans, should take a stand against blind and expensive policy implementations fueled by fear instead of efficiency.

Myth 2: Immigrants Are Criminals Who Increase The Crime Rate In Our Country

This was one of Trump's first campaign platforms. When he announced his presidential run, he stated that Mexican immigrants are "rapists" who bring "drugs" and "crime." This is a blatantly false assertion. Just from a logistics point of view, it is extremely difficult for immigrants to get into the country if they have a criminal record. The United States does not issue visas to individuals who have committed a felony — or even, in most cases, a misdemeanor. This means immigrants with a criminal past cannot legally enter the U.S.

What about immigrants with criminal records entering illegally or without documentation? And what about immigrants that enter legally and then commit crimes within the United States? There have been a number of studies done on the crime rates of immigrant populations. The Cato Institute, a conservative nonprofit organization dedicated to free enterprise and limited accountable government, found that immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born citizens: "Even illegal immigrants are less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans."

It went on to find that "[e]mpirical studies of immigrant criminality generally find that immigrants do not increase local crime rates and are less likely to cause crime than their native-born peers." The study also found that sanctuary cities do not have any impact on the crime rate. These statistics directly contradict President Trump's statements that sanctuary cities "breed crime."

"Immigration and Public Safety," a report from the Sentencing Project, found that crime rates are significantly lower among immigrant populations than non-immigrant populations. The report found that foreign-born individuals are less likely than native-born citizens to "have engaged in violent or non-violent antisocial behaviors in their lifetimes, including harassment, assault, and acquiring multiple traffic violations." They are also less likely to commit "non-violent delinquent acts such as stealing, damaging property, or selling drugs." The report goes on to find that the

increase in immigration has directly coincided with the decrease in crime rates over the last two decades.

So not only are both documented and undocumented immigrants less likely to commit crimes, but they arguably have actually had a positive impact on the decrease of crime rates in the country.

Myth 3: Immigration Policy Can Be Easily Solved With a “One-Size-Fits-All” Approach

One of the most fascinating ongoing myths I've observed is that I, as an immigration attorney, am helping “illegal immigrants” enter our country. The very nature of an immigration law firm is that we actually help individuals obtain legal status so they don't have to live undocumented.

Each case has to be individually evaluated, researched, and argued because every immigrant has a different history. Although we hear the same narrative over and over about immigration policy, the immigrant community is strikingly diverse and filled with individuals from every corner of the world, each bringing a very unique set of experiences.

So while it's tempting to see immigration as a cold set of policy implementations, it's important to remember that there are human beings affected by political decisions. One of the best parts of this profession is that we get to see these faces everyday and are constantly reminded of the incredible privilege we have to help others live legally in this amazing country.