

Warshal: Let's welcome immigrants to our shores

Bruce Warshal

November 20, 2017

This is a very personal column for me. It is from my *kishkes* (liberally translated, from my gut, from my inner being). I am the grandson of an immigrant. My *zayde* (grandfather) arrived at Ellis Island in 1898 at age 18, alone, broke, speaking no English, with no formal education beyond grade school. He worked in the sweatshops of the Lower East Side until he escaped to Scranton, Pennsylvania.

He and my *bubbie* (grandmother) raised eight children by working seven days a week in their small grocery store, over which they lived. They prospered economically, but they worked for more than money; they worked for their children's future in this great country. Two of their children went to Ivy League schools, and another obtained a Ph.D from the University of Chicago. And I believe that I am one of the least successful of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This is the story of America, as it should be.

But the American dream has been distorted into a xenophobic frenzy, abetted by an immoral president who understands "good people" who are palling around with neo-Nazis more than he understands the aspirations of immigrants today who follow in the footsteps of my *zayde*. Immigrants are by nature risk-takers and strivers. That's why they enrich our country. There are many studies that prove this statement. Here I rely on two outstanding *New York Times* columnists, Frank Bruni (liberal) and Bret Stephens (conservative). Here are their bipartisan statistics:

Business – Over half of the companies started in Silicon Valley between 1995 and 2005 were founded by immigrants. A quote from the *Atlantic*: "Immigrants or the children of immigrants have founded or co-founded nearly every legendary American technology company, including Google, Intel, Facebook, and of course Apple (you knew that Steve Jobs's father was named Abdulfattah Jandali, right?)."

Education – In 2016, 87% of the finalists in the Intel Science Talent Search ("Junior Nobel Prize") were children of immigrants. In the same year, 91% of the graduate students in electrical engineering at the Rochester Institute of Technology were immigrants. Asian immigrants, once excluded from this country by law, are disproportionately dominating our elite universities.

Crime – Although President Trump has highlighted the "fact" that immigrants are a danger to our physical well-being ("some are rapists"), the real data prove otherwise. The conservative Cato Institute (not exactly wide-eyed liberals) reports that long-time Americans are incarcerated at nearly twice the rate of illegal immigrants, and at more than three times the rate of legal ones.

Demographics – The Pew Research Center reports: "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." Without these immigrant moms, our country would be faced with the same demographic death spiral that plagues Japan.

Maybe because I was so close to my *zayde*, I have always thought of myself as an immigrant. Coupled with that, I was the only Jew in my class from grades 1- 12. From these early childhood experiences I have felt like an outsider, even though I was fully integrated into the American experience. Whatever success I have had in life, I attribute to this ability to be in the establishment, but not really a part of it. I always remember where I came from. This mirrors the immigrant experience.

An-My Lê is an artist and an immigrant from Vietnam. She is also a recipient of the MacArthur genius grant. She said, "Most of us feel very lucky to be here, so we work very hard... Having different perspectives, having different life experiences, makes you see things differently." Stephens comments, "Fresh ideas and great art are often born that way."

The same could be said in business, in education, and in all aspects of American life. We need the fresh ideas of immigrants. We need their perspective on life. We should want their presence here as much as they want to be here with us. Bruni has written, "Embracing their genius is the genius of America." I hope that the current wave of xenophobia does not alter that embrace. Today, under the Trump regime, my *zayde* and others like him would be barred from entry – no education, doesn't speak English, no technical skills, etc. Our country would be diminished without their presence.