



## Immigrants aren't a problem for Syracuse; they are part of the solution (Commentary)

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I read Paul Strail's letter ("Syracuse is falling apart, and Mayor Walsh's priority is refugees?", Oct. 10, 2019) with great interest. Strail does a good job summarizing the many challenges facing cities like Syracuse. He then makes a connection between these problems and immigration. I would like to offer some additional food for thought on this.

First, no evidence exists of a connection between immigrants and crime, or immigrants and poor school performance, or immigrants and homeless veterans, or immigrants and drug use, or immigrants and lower wages. According to the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, immigrants (whether here legally or illegally) have a lower incarceration rate than native-born Americans, and their neighborhoods have lower crime rates. "Since 1911, large nationwide federal immigration commissions have asked whether immigrants are more crime-prone than native-born Americans and each one of them answered no" ("Illegal Immigrants and Crime – Assessing the Evidence." Cato Institute, March 2019). Crime rates in sanctuary cities are the same as, or lower than, non-sanctuary cities ("Criminal Immigrants: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin." Cato Institute, March 2017). In fact, studies have consistently shown that immigrants are a net *gain* for the economy – that is, they contribute more in taxes than they take out in public benefits. According to a 2017 study by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, children of immigrants contribute \$1,700 per person per year to the U.S. economy, compared to \$1,300 per year for native-born Americans. The Cato Institute also found no correlation between immigration and lower wages ("Does Immigration Reduce Wages?", Cato Institute, March 2019).

Strail says that, with all these issues, "[the mayor's] real concern is lies in preventing Trump from restricting the flow of foreign refugees into his city." But this is not an "either-or." It's possible to both work on improving conditions in the city, and also care about/welcome our fellow human beings who are fleeing violence. In fact, we *should* be doing both. Population in cities across New York has been dropping and their economies suffering -- isn't a person who has the guts and initiative to uproot themselves and travel thousands of miles in order to better support their family exactly the sort of person we need and want? According to the Small Business Administration (2012), immigrants as a group start and own small businesses at a far higher rate than native-born Americans. More new businesses means more jobs ( and more tax-paying residents!). Those who don't start their own business are not taking jobs away from Americans – more often they do work that complements jobs held by Americans. For example, immigrants often take jobs in seasonal crop harvesting, home-building or child/elder care; this enables American-owned farms and construction firms to turn a profit, and American parents to continue working. (And of course, once an immigrant becomes a citizen, he or she is as much an American as Strail.)

Strail says that “The suggestion that Trump hates refugees because he is an extraordinary bigot” is a lie intended to “feed red meat ... to Trump-haters.” In fact, Trump’s bigotry towards immigrants and minorities is supported by his own words and actions going back more than 30 years. You can read a lengthy and well-documented list [here](#). How else can this history be interpreted? Trump’s bigotry is not a suggestion; it’s documented fact.

It’s tempting in difficult times to want to “bar the gates,” but in truth there is no better way to be a good American than to honor the promise and possibility that America has always stood for. Instead of seeing immigrants as the problem, the evidence clearly shows that it is more useful (and more accurate) to see them as part of the solution.