

## The Ugly Side of Open Borders

By [Mickey Kaus](#) On 2:16 AM 08/26/2013

**Atlas Sneered:** I've been struggling to unearth what I think is the **obnoxious inegalitarian scorn** that lies at the end of the devotion to seemingly free and equal open borders (on the part of the *Wall Street Journal*, the Cato Institute and some on the left [like](#) [Matt Yglesias](#)). A recent Twitter exchange with Cato's immigration expert Alex Nowrasteh revealed ... well, I thought it revealed a lot.

*Context:* In a videotaped [Buzzfeed debate](#), Nowrasteh had defended against the charge that unfettered ("market-driven") immigration would drive down the wages of lower skilled American workers:

*"The data show that over the decades of immigration ... the most pessimistic data out there in an academic journal by a reputable economist, George Borjas, show that about 30 million immigrants over the last 20 plus years have at most driven down the wages for people with less than a high school degree by 4.7 percent. If we're really, really worried about people ... Americans who are adults who have less than a high school degree having their wages driven down **there are much cheaper and easier ways to help those individuals** than distorting international labor markets with socialistic regulations that stop the flow of labor. [E.A.]" \*\**

I immediately [assumed](#) Nowrasteh was talking about various forms of compensatory aid, on the order of Trade Adjustment Assistance, designed to share the surplus produced by a social change with those who lose out in the process. I was so wrong! Here's the relevant Twitter thread from last week—I've edited it as best I can to eliminate multiple avenues of argument and capture the flow. The complete feed, parallel disputes and other parties included, is available on Twitter itself—try [this link](#). The emphasis is added—if reading a Twitter exchange drives you crazy you can just read the boldface parts and get the gist.

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ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: Why guess my opinion about immigrant welfare usage when Cato published this paper less than a month ago?[http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa732\\_web\\_1.pdf](http://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa732_web_1.pdf)

[Note: The link goes to a paper about preventing non-citizens from getting welfare]

MICKEY KAUS: It's Americans-not non-cit.-who'll end up on welfare when unskilled labor market's flooded under your open borders policy

MICKEY KAUS: **When you said there were "cheaper ... ways" to help Americans hurt by inevitable wage loss what did U mean (if not \$\$ aid)?**

ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: **Private charity or shaming them for making horrible life decisions.** Why didn't u just ask instead of assuming I meant welfare?

ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: Too hard to google my writing on the issue, tweet me, email, or call me? Easier to fill in what you wanted than actually ask?

DAVID PINSEN: 1 out of 5 working age American men is unemployed – lots of bad decisions?

ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: **We're talking about American adults w/o a high school degree.** But nice try.

DAVID PINSEN: What do you propose for those with HS diplomas and few prospects given slack labor market? Add more job seekers?

ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: Increase economic growth, size of economy, business creation, & aggregate demand by increasing size of population.

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ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: Imms triple wages coming here, raise wages of Americans, but due to measuring it looks like evrybdy poorer [#statistics](#)

ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: But actually, virtually everybody is better off with some (possible) exceptions.

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MICKEY KAUS: I would say approximately 0 percent of people in the room thought that's what U meant. Why not make it clear? A: No support

MICKEY KAUS: **No high school degree? Well fuck em then.**

MICKEY KAUS: Shame 2 do what? What if they're not smart? The life decision they shld make is go 2 work-but that's route you've closed off!

ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: 1. Audience was libertarian, they knew. 2. I argue for eliminating welfare whenever it comes up. 3. <http://bit.ly/1dXphiw>

*[He's right about audience being libertarian. But link is to same paper on cutting off welfare for the immigrants, not Americans ]*

ALEXANDER NOWRASTEH: Just googling my name and "welfare" should have made it pretty clear what my answer would be. Instead you just made it up.

KAUS: Now U R fighting Ur own admission (that unskilled workers wages cut). Anyway it's the "exceptions" we're talking abt.

KAUS: The "exceptions" happen to be those at bottom of mkt who work everyday. If were at top or middle not such a concern

NOWRASTEH: Yes, as I state, "most negative finding in literature." Does not mean probable, but I honestly represent opposition

KAUS: So unskilled Americans who work every day get wages cut + a lecture (and "shaming"! ) about "life decisions." Helluva program

NOWRASTEH: If you ignore 99.5% of everything I've written on this, then you could interpret my opinion that way.

NOWRASTEH: Here's something a Daily Caller journalist wrote about Cato's position on immigration & welfare <http://bit.ly/16fm1Mq>

[*Link is again to discussion of cutting off immigrants, not Americans, from welfare.*]

KAUS: Am responding to what you wrote just now on Twitter. Should I ignore that?

RICHARD RILEY: Thought Nowrasteh was joking about charity/"shaming" but no. Will "libertarian populist" crowd focus on this?

NOWRASTEH: Numerous policy papers+~100 opeds+dozens of blog posts > 140 character tweets.

NOWRASTEH: Couldn't tell you, not a libertarian populist

KAUS: If I'd googled where would I have found you advocating shaming unskilled working Americans 4 their "horrible life decisions"?

NOWRASTEH: When you amend your blog post to take account of my writing on the issue of welfare & immigration, I will respond. Goodnight

KAUS: I already updated it an hour ago.

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Okay. Maybe I don't come off *quite* as well in this exchange as I remembered. But the point is how CATO comes out! We now know Nowrasteh's position on Americans who work full time but can't make it when low-skilled immigrants swarm into their lines of employment: They don't get trade-adjustment style "transfer payments." They don't get welfare.\*\*\* They don't get any government aid. They get private charity and (what so often accompanies private charity) scorn-social "shaming" for their "horrible life decisions."

Now, it's one thing to do that for paradigmatic welfare recipients who don't work- I've promoted something similar myself. It's another to do it for Americans (and lots of immigrants) who get up and work every day. In the ideal version of America that's been dominant in my lifetime, at least until now, these stubborn working people may not get rich, but they get something as valuable, namely respect and the minimal wherewithal needed to participate in mainstream life.

In Nowrasteh's America they get pretty much the opposite of respect (which is what shaming is). There's just no place for them in the global labor market of the future! Serves them right. They should be smarter.

That's the broader, more insidious implication of open bordersism—**it takes the economic forces that are pulling America apart—giving us a Herrnsteinian society stratified top to bottom by (in large part) intellectual abilities—and both embraces and accelerates them.** If the American middle class now going to busy itself "shaming" workers at the bottom (who now *deserve* to earn the wages of Bangladeshis) what's the upper class going to think of those stuck in the middle class? Do they want to find out?

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\*\*–Of course, Borjas was measuring the depressive wage effect in the existing system, which at least attempts to limit immigration, if often unsuccessfully. The depressive effect would be much bigger in an actual open-borders system where any foreign national who could find an employer willing to pay low wages –not hard to do!–were free to come here. The result would be hundreds of millions of immigrants, not 30 million over a couple of decades.

\*\*\* –Although, in reality, they will.