



Yearning to Be Free

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We once heralded our “New Colossus,” that great Statue of Liberty as a beacon of hope for the world’s “refuse,” a glance at contemporary policy shows we are straying from an identity set in stone at that statue long ago.

To be American is to believe in a set of principles; to be American is to hold allegiance to this country, and to stand for the ideas embodied in the Constitution and even more so in the Declaration of Independence. You can’t just move to Japan’s closed culture and ‘become one of them.’ Their society is not geared that way.

But America is held together by an idea and not by blood. Our Statue of Liberty has inscribed on its base, near the lady’s broken chains, a poem about immigration. “Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!’ cries she.” The poem turns its nose to the hubris of those other lands. “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” for they are not beneath us, and we are not better.

Yes, the logistics of immigration are often complicated. That is okay! The current pushback against immigration seems to be largely unwarranted. There are logistics and numbers to figure out, for sure. If all immigrants committed crimes, there would be cause for concern. But immigration numbers are of the same proportion relative to our population as has been for the past 100 years. As a study by the Cato Institute found, immigrants are statistically significantly less likely to commit crime than those born here.

To quote the study: “As a percentage of their respective populations, there were 56 percent fewer criminal convictions of illegal immigrants than of native-born Americans in Texas in 2015. The criminal conviction rate for legal immigrants was about 85 percent below the native-born rate.”

The growing anti-immigration sentiment sweeping the nation is not “conservative.” To conserve our history would be to honor our legacy as a “nation of immigrants.” Earlier this year, United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) removed the phrase “nation of immigrants” from its mission statement.

I am not advocating for an open border, nor am I advocating for any specific policy. Policy is complicated. But our attitude toward immigrants should not be baselessly hostile or unwelcoming. When government leaders say that immigrants are bringing violence and terror despite statistics showing otherwise, the deeper motives present there should be assessed.

Is it wise for us to be so restrictive on the number of immigrants that we accept both from a moral perspective and for our self-interest? We have millions of jobs sitting unfilled at present. While America is no longer a place that is willing to absorb masses of needy from foreign shores, perhaps there is a middle ground. Are we wise to tighten immigration, even as jobs exceed the jobless? Many are concerned that immigrants might be a 'strain' on our social programs. If we have jobs for them, this need not be the case.

I was in Guatemala a month or so ago, and although I had been told of the horrific conditions there, it was shocking to hear from the full-time missionary that many of the men sit around without work because the work simply doesn't exist. Their families go hungry, they cannot find work to feed their families. America is at present a place with jobs abounding; it is no wonder so many want to come. Before I think about any policy, I remember that many of those immigrants clawing at the door are fellow human beings in great pain. That could be any of us.