



## **Brett Stephens of the NYT: No True American Would Challenge the Elite Consensus on Immigration Policy**

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In the June 16 edition of *The New York Times*, opinion columnist Bret Stephens, formerly of *The Wall Street Journal*, penned a piece in which his dissimulation is only surpassed by his intentional, seemingly gleeful, offensiveness to tens of millions of Americans. Some have claimed that Stephens' article is satire, an overly generous characterization. The only thing Stephens isn't serious about is his call to deport Americans en masse, and his contempt for the average American is well-established. It's no joke.

### **Immigration and Crime**

Stephens makes several arguments in support of his thesis that “So-called real Americans are screwing up America.” None of these arguments are credible. Case in point, he cites a Cato report that “nonimmigrants are incarcerated at nearly twice the rate of illegal immigrants, and at more than three times the rate of legal ones.”

Anyone who follows immigration issues closely is used to hearing Cato cited by immigration expansionists, and objective observers know that Cato (specifically Alex Nowrasteh) routinely manipulate data to fit their narrative – to the point where Cato has lost credibility on the issue outside of writers for major media outlets like *The New York Times*, who will never fact-check those with whom they are in ideological agreement.

On the issue of crime and immigrants, Cato, and Stephens, point to incarceration rates because doing so fits their narrative. Aside from the fact that there are no reliable data on the legal status of foreign-born inmates, looking only at incarceration rates ignores some important facts.

First, non-natives who are prosecuted for crimes are much more likely to be removed from the country, especially illegal aliens, rather than being housed in correctional facilities in the United States. Those foreign-born who are jailed long-term in the United States are most often those who have committed violent crimes, and who will generally be removed from the United States after they serve their sentence.

Second, most prisoners are repeat offenders. The National Institute of Justice, an agency within the Department of Justice, found that nationally the rate of recidivism for released prisoners

within the first three years is approaching 70 percent. Given that the foreign-born who are arrested are much less likely to be recidivists, as many are removed after their first arrest, it is not surprising those who are incarcerated in the United States tend to be born in this country.

Third, legal immigrants undergo a criminal background check before being admitted to the United States, and the threat of deportation for committing a serious crime is a powerful disincentive for most legal immigrants not to commit such crimes. Arguing that the foreign-born are incarcerated at a somewhat lesser rate is not a credible argument when the whole point of the vetting process is to select immigrants who will be unlikely to commit criminal acts; not to admit immigrants who will commit crimes at the same or similar rate as natives

Cato's reliance only on incarceration statistics ignores, no doubt intentionally, that illegal immigration itself is a crime, whether prosecuted or not, and most illegal aliens routinely commit a variety of felonies in order to live and work in the United States, including stealing the Social Security numbers of legal U.S. residents. That most illegal aliens are not being housed in correctional facilities in the United States does not negate their criminal acts.

### **Immigrants and Entrepreneurship**

Stephens also claims that immigrants are much more likely to start their own businesses, and that non-natives are responsible for more than half of all Silicon Valley start-ups between 1995 and 2005. Just a few minutes investigating these claims would have revealed that the first claim is misleading, and the second one utterly deceitful. Stephens linked to an article which linked to another article on Inc.com, but he cited no study supporting these claims.

It is true that immigrants are much more likely to start a business if one counts illegal aliens who work as independent contractors. This makes it easier to circumvent immigration laws, since independent contractors are responsible for verifying themselves, or not, and most of these contractors employ only themselves. The foreign-born are *slightly*, not much more, likely (10.5% to 9.3% in the most authoritative study) than the native-born to *own* a business that employs others, though they hire fewer employees and tend to hire other immigrants.

The claim that the foreign-born start most of the companies in Silicon Valley is pure drivel. Keep in mind, as above, that it is one thing to start a company and another to own a company that continues to operate and employ others. Ninety percent of Silicon Valley start-ups fail in any case. One could argue, as Stephens might, this is the “creative destruction” inherent to capitalism. Even so, it is false that immigrants are responsible for most start-ups, failures or not. A few years ago there was the claim, modest in light of Stephens' embellishment, that 36 percent of U.S. tech companies had foreign-born founders. It was soon revealed this figure was arrived at by counting any company that had an immigrant founder, even if only one founder among others was an immigrant, *or had a parent born abroad*. If the same methodology were used in reverse, the result would have been that 92 percent of tech companies were founded by Americans (though they would likely be only “so-called real Americans” according to Stephens).

### **Immigration and Demographics**

The race for the future is ultimately a race for people — healthy, working-age, fertile people — and our nonimmigrants fail us here, too.

Stephens is explicitly saying here that the choices Americans have made about the number of children they have, on average, is unacceptable to him, and he supports government policy that mandates the U.S. population grow in a “race for people,” even if the American people do not wish it so. He cites Pew Research correctly in writing that all population growth since 1970 is due to immigration, but does not cite Pew numbers that project the U.S. population at 441 million in 2065, an increase of 117 million from 2015; and that 88 percent, or 103 million, of that increase will be due to post-2015 immigration.

We need hundreds of millions of more immigrants, so says Stephens, to avoid the “death-spiral that now confronts Japan.” This argument isn’t unique to Stephens, but it ignores that the Japanese have consciously made decisions about their demographic future (in a country consisting of islands with high population densities and very little open space), and despite a lack of immigration, have maintained one of the highest standards of living in the world. Japan is wrestling with how to govern a modern post-industrial welfare state in the wake of a baby boom following World War II. This is what a healthy society should be doing.

### **Immigration Then and Now**

I speak of Americans whose families have been in this country for a few generations. Complacent, entitled and often shockingly ignorant on basic points of American law and history, they are the stagnant pool in which our national prospects risk drowning.

Reading his piece in its entirety, it seems Stephens’ hatred for his fellow Americans is concentrated on those who came to the United States before 1920. He pretends to separate out the more distant immigrants who became bad Americans from more recent immigrants, to whom the country “belongs first.” However, his use of statistics to prove that point includes more recent immigrants and their descendants, which he fails to note.

To return to an earlier point, Stephens doesn’t recognize that that second- and third-generation immigrants commit crimes at higher rates than first-generation immigrants. Pew Research Center has asked the question: “Why does the crime rate soar among second-generation immigrants?” Steven Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies points out that the U.S. Census Bureau found in 2013 that the incarceration rate for U.S.-born men of Mexican ancestry is the highest of any group in the United States.

When Stephens cites incarceration rates, lack of educational attainment, or out-of-wedlock birth rates (divorce rates, too), he is including more recent immigrants and their children and grandchildren, while strongly implying he is only counting those awful “so-called real Americans” who came before the actual “real Americans” showed up. One of the reasons recent immigrants struggle to get a foothold in America is that they are competing against a constant new wave of workers. A thoughtful person might be concerned about this. A thoughtful person, Bret Stephens is not.

## **Immigration and Black Americans**

What Stephens does not mention at all, a glaring omission considering the sort of statistics he is using to make his arguments, is the situation many Black Americans are facing. This is a group “whose families have been in this country for a few generations” and, therefore, disqualified by Stephens as having merit. These are the Americans who are incarcerated at rates higher than the general population; who are much more likely to be in failing public schools; and, for young black men, facing a second generation of systematic unemployment. Some argue quite convincingly that our country is failing these young men, and federal immigration policy plays a large role in that failing. Stephens ignores these Americans, and it isn't mere oversight. He made it clear he doesn't give a damn about the plight of Black Americans.

In large part, Stephens argument is that the descendants of former slaves, and those who had to endure a century of segregation after the Civil War “are the stagnant pool in which our national prospects risk drowning,” and “need to return whence they came.”

Stephens article is execrable.