

ERA OF OPPORTUNITY: IMMIGRANTS EXCEL

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When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.

Leviticus 19:33-34

No Contracting State shall expel or return a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

The 2024 U.S. presidential election has been the most xenophobic campaign season in U.S. history. Across the country, politicians either wildly mischaracterized incidents in the news or, in some cases, invented stories from whole cloth to smear migrants.

What's worse is that, when confronted with evidence of lies about migrants, demagogues in American public life have dismissed the truth as irrelevant. What matters to them, apparently, is that the slander of migrants like the Haitians in Springfield, Ohio serves their broader political interests.

In America today, xenophobia has become political currency.

In the wake of this national disgrace, I've been reflecting on the biblical commandment to love the stranger, repeated in different iterations no less than thirty-six times in the Torah.

Yet, apparently, thirty-six times is not enough.

The other Abrahamic faiths — Christianity and Islam — also reiterate this teaching over and over again. This commandment to love the stranger is

repeated *ad nauseam* in our holy books for a reason — not because it is the most important of the commandments, but because it is the easiest to forget. Scapegoating others has always been easier than working together to solve challenging problems that affect all of us.

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Our faith traditions are clear on the duty to combat xenophobia. So is the body of international law that arose from the ashes of the Holocaust and World War II, to ensure that people who fled persecution would not be returned to their persecutors. Yet politicians, parties, and platforms today openly embrace xenophobia as if it were its own religion.

The 2024 U.S. Republican Party platform promised to “stop the open-border policies that have opened the floodgates to a tidal wave of illegal Aliens, deadly drugs, and Migrant Crime” and, as President-elect Trump has repeatedly vowed, “carry out the largest deportation in American history.” The 2024 Democratic Party platform, while including more inclusive language about immigrants and refugees, also played into the politics of fear with an intense focus on the border and rolling back asylum protections.

Xenophobia, however, is not unique to the U.S. It is a global phenomenon.

In the U.K. and Israel, elected officials have blamed asylum seekers for social ailments and threatened them with deportation to countries they have never even been to.

Across Europe, anti-immigrant political parties are on the rise. For the first time since World War II, in nearly every European country, parties with

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xenophobic platforms are either the ruling party or the biggest threat to the ruling party.

And while South Africa once inspired us in its struggle against racism, today it is over-run with xenophobia. Recently, a South African candidate for Miss Universe was publicly bullied and left the contest because, although born and raised in South Africa, she had Nigerian and Mozambican heritage.

Combating this global trend won't be easy, but it must be done. Treating the foreign-born as ourselves isn't just a moral imperative. It also happens to serve national interests.

What we need is for people to come together in search of solutions that will make life better for all of us.

Xenophobia is not the answer. There's a reason that our holy texts, in use for thousands of years, remind us of that time and again.



"History has repeatedly shown that immigrants and refugees are net contributors to society."

History has repeatedly shown that immigrants and refugees are net contributors to society. Take, for example, the study commissioned by the Trump administration to calculate the burden of refugee resettlement to the American taxpayer. The study found that refugees, over a decade, actually *contributed* \$63 billion more in federal, state and local services than they took in services. Rather than trumpet these results, the Trump administration killed the study. But the findings are no anomaly. The Biden administration updated the study and reported that, over a 15-year period, the net contribution of resettled refugees had climbed to almost \$124 billion.

The Haitian migrants to Springfield are a good example. While U.S. Vice-President-elect Vance characterized their impact as catastrophic, many people actually living in Springfield tell a different story. Business owners in the city have said that Haitians are hardworking, honest, and responsible. And according to Governor Mike DeWine, a Republican born in Springfield, many businesses in the city would have closed after the pandemic had it not been for Haitian workers.

I'm sympathetic to those who feel anxiety about the future, whether from political instability, economic ups and downs, or the threat of climate change.



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