

- No, Immigrants Aren't 'Poisoning the Blood of Our Country'

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Does Donald Trump ever visit Queens, the land of his youth? If he did, he would presumably be horrified. According to the census, Queens is the most racially and ethnically diverse county in the continental United States; it's hard to think of a nationality or culture that isn't represented there. Immigrants are almost half the borough's population and more than half its work force.

And I think that's great. When I, say, take a stroll around Jackson Heights I see the essence of America as it was supposed to be, a magnet for people around the world seeking freedom and opportunity — people like my own grandparents.

And no, Queens isn't an urban hellscape. It may not be leafy and green, but it has less serious crime per capita than the rest of New York City, and New York, although nobody will believe it, is one of the safest places in America. It's also relatively healthy, with life expectancy around three years higher than that of the United States as a whole.

But Trump has declared that migrants are "poisoning the blood of our country" — a phrase that, to steal from the late, great Molly Ivins, might sound better in the original German. Look, I know there's a debate over whether the MAGA movement fully meets the classic criteria for fascism, but can we at least agree that its language is increasingly fascist-adjacent?

And so are its policies.

On Saturday *The Times* reported that Trump, if returned to office, intends to pursue drastic anti-immigration policies — scouring the country for undocumented immigrants and building huge camps to, um, concentrate them before deporting them by the millions. Suspected members of drug cartels and gangs would be expelled without due process. Suspected by whom, on what grounds? Good question. (...)

Given all this anti-democratic rhetoric, it seems almost crass to point out that a Trumpian war on immigrants would also be an economic disaster. But it would.

That's apparently not what the Trumpists believe. That *Times* article quotes Stephen Miller, who headed anti-immigrant operations when Trump was in the White House, as claiming that mass deportations will be "celebrated by American workers, who will now be offered higher wages with better benefits to fill these jobs."

Very few economists would agree. (...)

It seems to be the view that America has a limited number of jobs to offer and that immigrants take those jobs away from the native-born. In reality, however, except during recessions, the number of jobs, and hence the economy's growth, is limited by the available work force rather than the other way around.

And the contribution of immigrants to America's long-term growth is startlingly large. Since 2007, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the U.S. labor force has increased by 14.6 million. Of these additional workers, 7.8 million — more than half — were foreign born.

Oh, and if these immigrants are taking away American jobs, how can the unemployment rate be near a 50-year low? In fact, we desperately need these workers, among other things because they will help us cope with the needs of an aging population. (...)

And let's not forget that Trump officials tried to choke off the supply of skilled foreign workers to the U.S. technology sector, apparently believing that this would reserve good jobs for Americans — when in reality it would simply undermine our technological edge.

None of this is to deny that sudden surges of migrants can place a burden on local communities and that we need policies to mitigate these impacts. But that's very different from a sweeping rejection of immigration, which is as American as apple pie, not to mention pizza and bagels — foods brought by earlier immigrants who were, in their day, the targets of just as much prejudice and hatred as the immigrants of today.

America doesn't need to be made great again, because it's already great. But if you wanted to destroy that greatness, the two most important things you would do would be to reject its commitment to freedom and close its doors to people seeking a better life. Unfortunately, if Trump returns to office, he seems determined to do both of these things.

(695 words)