**America Is Still Great, and Immigration Is Still Why**

**By**

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Of all the falsehoods fouling the public discourse these days, one of the worst is that immigrants are a threat and a burden to the United States.

It’s odd that many Americans seem to feel so badly about their own ancestors. But there’s no denying the nativist mood that has lifted Donald Trump to the top of the Republican presidential race. He slanders Mexican immigrants as drug dealers and rapists, calls America “a dumping ground” for foreigners and promises to make the country “great again” by getting rid of 11 million of them.

Mr. Trump’s rivals, far from rejecting his hatred, have joined the chorus. Ben Carson, echoing the anti-Catholic bigotry once directed at John F. Kennedy, says Muslims should not be president, because they would owe their allegiance to the Koran, not the Constitution. Jeb Bush, who married a Mexican woman and speaks fluent Spanish, denounced “multiculturalism.” Marco Rubio, son of Cuban immigrants, [rules out](http://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2015-09-22/marco-rubio-rules-out-path-to-citizenship-during-his-presidency) a path to green cards and citizenship for unauthorized immigrants during his hypothetical presidency.

“Immigration without assimilation is invasion,” says Bobby Jindal, repeatedly.

On and on, the fever rages. But this week, a cool blast of reason blew in from outside the fray.

A team of scholars presented exhaustive evidence that anti-immigrant bigotry is baseless and that the truism about America as a melting pot is – no kidding – still true.

A 443-page study published on Monday by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine is the most sweeping survey of immigrant integration in nearly 20 years. You can read it [here](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/21746/the-integration-of-immigrants-into-american-society), or take the highlights from Julia Preston’s [article](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/22/us/newest-immigrants-assimilating-as-well-as-past-ones-report-says.html) in The Times.

The basic conclusion is that the machinery of American assimilation is working pretty well after nearly two and a half centuries.

The scholars looked “across all measurable outcomes,” like education, wages and mastery of English, and found that recent immigrants were assimilating at least as quickly as their 20th-century European predecessors. They want to learn English, and their children and grandchildren invariably do. They commit fewer crimes than the native-born, and are generally healthier.

“Immigrants’ education levels, the diversity of their jobs, their wages and their mastery of English improved as they lived for more time in the United States, and the gains were even greater for their American-born children,” Ms. Preston wrote.

While Americans have always been afraid that new immigrants increase crime, “it has never been true,” said Mary C. Waters, a Harvard sociologist who led the panel.

I have long wondered why Republican politicians who revel in the trappings of patriotism — flags and eagles and chants of “U.S.A.” — fail to see how unpatriotic their words can be. What is more un-American than hopelessness about our future, and a generalized hatred of the people who made — and make — this country great? Why do Republicans think there’s a place in American ideology and iconography for pickup trucks, cowboy hats and guns — but not the Statue of Liberty and what she explicitly represents?

Actually, I shouldn’t say all Republicans.

Check this out, from Ronald Reagan, a powerful rebuttal to the whole G.O.P. field.