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## WHERE WOULD AMERICA BE WITHOUT IMMIGRANTS?

Forget about what you think you know about immigration.

You don't even know who the immigrants to this country are. When you think of immigration, you think of illegal immigration, and the face you put on it is the Mexican guy (who may in fact be from Guatemala or Los Angeles) who works for your local landscaper.

Your ignorance on the subject is dangerous, because your representatives will be voting on the issue before this administration is gone. They are listening to you, who knows dangerously little and voice opinions based on myths, irrelevant facts and, yes, let's put this out there, racism.

Let's tackle racism first. I have heard the ignorant bigots that say "put them all on a train to Mexico." Who? Many of those people who are here illegally have American children. You want to send them to a foreign country? What about the Canadians, Swedes, Pakistanis and English that here illegally? They may balk at the idea of a forced - albeit free - train ride to Mexico.

Sadly, we like to think we can spot an illegal immigrant at 50 paces. Why? Because we have been forced to believe they are all called Juan and look like ... Mexicans. Just like there is no standard "American" there is no standard "Mexican" or anyone else. Your personification of an "illegal Mexican" covers Americans who have been here legally for generations, and people from a wide range of countries. If you walk past a person in the street speaking Dutch, you don't assume they are here illegally. Why? Because they have blonde hair, blue eyes and great legs? So accept it, your perception of immigration is racially charged from the moment you think about the problem.

What do Sun Microsystems, Google, eBay, Intel, Yahoo and PayPal all have in common? They were all founded by immigrants. Recently. Our own Procter & Gamble were immigrants as well, though long ago. Between 1995 and 2005, immigrants launched more than half (52.4 percent) of all Silicon Valley startups. Our own census found, in 2000, immigrants accounted for only 12 percent of our population but nearly half - half! - of all scientists and engineers with doctorate degrees.

In fact, immigrants with their own high tech companies started between 1995 and 2005 were employing 450,000 people and generating some \$52 billion in sales. Immigrants are a huge and vital asset to America in 2010.

So when you talk about immigration, most of you really mean illegal immigrants. Those people who do the jobs which we are not keen on doing: picking lettuce, cleaning toilets, maybe even working 12-hour shifts at McDonalds or the slaughterhouse. These people are here because there are jobs for them. It is the height of hypocrisy to disdain their presence, but enjoy the fruits of their labor. If you are so anti-illegal immigrant, try finding a lettuce that they did not pick, or a hotel room they did not clean. Put your money where your mouth is. Good luck with that.

Yes, there is a huge problem with illegal immigration. It creates problems for our tax base, it creates conditions for exploitation and is potentially a threat to our national security. It will not be solved by targeting one group over another, and if it is handled badly, our economy will collapse. We depend on immigrants to pick apples, care for us when we are sick and start new and exciting businesses that will give us jobs and pave the road to our future.

We need to get away from racism and look for a solution that will make those illegal immigrants that are honest and hard working and here today, the taxpayers and entrepreneurs of tomorrow. We need to encourage the best and the finest from around the globe to bring their skills to our shores. That is what made America great in the first place.

Bigotry and racism have only shamed us and held us back, and we have consistently (however belatedly) recognized that. We should begin our great immigration debate with our painful history of Civil Rights, Japanese internment camps and anti-Irish Catholic riots (or any number of similar struggles) always at the back of our minds. Anything less would be a disservice to our immigrant ancestors.