



New York City had fallen on some hard times back in the 1960's and '70s. The specters of urban decay and crime overshadowed the attraction of the Empire State Building and Broadway. People were staying away. That was bad news for a metropolitan area that depended on lively commerce, entertainment, and tourism.

In 1977 the marketing firm of Wells, Rich, Greene created the "I Love NY" slogan and logo for the New York State Department of Economic Development and this phrase has since been the official slogan of New York State. Whether because of this marketing campaign or, more likely, the strenuous efforts by city leaders to curb crime, clean the streets and take other measures to renew the city, New York City turned itself around and again became a destination.

Just last month, the city has begun a new marketing campaign. "Please consider another city as you make your decision about where to settle in the U.S.," reads a flyer distributed and posted at the southern border of the United States. "Housing in New York is very expensive," warns another. Bottom line is, "Do Not Love NY."

If you want to take in a Broadway show, come to New York! If you want to attend a professional sporting event, come to New York! If you want to work on Wall Street, come to New York! If you want to ride in a carriage around Central Park, come to New York! If you want to take in all the famous sites and dine in a fine restaurant, come to New York! But if you snuck across the southern border, do not come; New York cannot accommodate you.

Truth be told, New York City is overwhelmed with displaced persons, asylum-seekers who traveled to NYC on their own or via DeSantis or Abbott Tours. Over 100,000 arrivals in the last year, sixty percent of whom remain in the care of the city. New York City does not have the resources to absorb so many migrants.

The influx of asylum-seekers is not mainly due to the actions of Governors Abbott and DeSantis. Their transporting migrants to northern cities accounts for only a small percentage of the numbers of undocumented people who have found their way into major cities. Regardless of how these people got to their destinations, "Welcome to our world," is the reaction of towns and cities along the southern border who, for the past few years, have been experiencing the same strain on resources that New York and other big cities in the north are now. For the instances of border states sending migrants north, the cruel lesson those states wanted to teach has been delivered. "Cruel" because extremely vulnerable human beings have been used as pawns in a political game, bit actors in a national three-act immigration play that is stuck in Act I and has been for decades.

Immigration as a political issue has a much longer history than other hot-button issues such as abortion and gun control and, like these other issues, will not be resolved any time soon because the political and economic players in the United States really do not want it to be resolved. National immigration policy and practice can be traced into the first half of the nineteenth century and is interwoven with the threads of economic development, race, ethnicity, and prejudice in American history. Under the banner of the Statue of Liberty's "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free ..." Americans take pride in being a "nation of immigrants" and relish pointing out that the United States is a "melting pot" of people from around the world. These claims bear some truth, and the United States, even with its continuing divides along racial and ethnic lines, has a record of integration that no nation can match. But how immigration has been lived over the past two centuries has certainly not been a product of altruism or high ideals. Rather, the forces that have shaped how people are allowed into the country and who those arriving might be are more mundane.

For the most part, immigrants have been received into the United States to fuel economic development. It has been so for the railroads, the textile mills, agriculture, construction, jewelry, and especially in times of labor shortages. Through most of the country's history, waves of immigrants accompanied times of expansion: plenty of space, great numbers of jobs that required few skills and facility in English, meeting needs in the cities and vast farmlands. With the waves of immigrants came waves of prejudice. Each succeeding nationality met with pushback from those who were already here as everyone scrambled for a foothold in America for themselves and their descendants. On the perimeters of the economic engines that created American and immigrant prosperity, were Black Americans who faced a whole different brand of prejudice and many more obstacles to sharing the American Dream even though they were critical in creating it.

While the history of immigration is useful to study and its lessons helpful to learn, the reasons for accepting immigrants into the country are changing, and the United States of limitless possibility for new Americans is no more. The experience of New York, the other cities targeted by border state governors, and the border states themselves is crying out for policy makers and public officials to abandon how the country is accustomed to thinking about immigration and to pay attention to the reality of hundreds of thousands of new people arriving in a land that is unprepared to handle this influx.

Politicians from the two major political parties have been of little use in addressing the challenges of modern-day immigration. They use the issue as fuel for political posturing and appealing to their bases. Not to make excuses for them, but the fact is that there are not many easy fixes to the problem. No one knows what to do. The first step in finding new ways to cope with large numbers of people entering the country outside of the normal boundaries of immigration law and practice is to place what is happening in the United States in the context of the migration of peoples across the globe. The phenomenon of populations on the move is happening everywhere and in great numbers. The United Nations High Commission on Refugees estimates that there are over 100 million displaced persons around the world, people displaced by

war, violence, natural disasters, and societal chaos. These people are escaping; they are fleeing to safer more stable countries in order to survive and to give themselves and their families a chance. The causes of the conditions that exist in their home countries are often complex, a possible mixture of elements such as the inequities baked into the global economy, corrupt governments that endanger their own citizens or the lack of any functioning government, aftershocks from colonialism, First World support of Third World authoritarian systems, natural disasters, and the irrationality of armed conflicts. Coping with the hundreds of thousands of people migrating to the United States, therefore, requires a multi-faceted response, a response that cannot be accomplished by the Department of Justice or the Border Patrol.

Framing the arrival of people from many other countries without authorization as a legal or law enforcement problem is misdirected and the responses to this phenomenon suggested by that understanding will be inadequate. Investigating possible and more effective measures can take up many more articles, but there are three first steps on which to build. First, the federal government must devote the resources necessary to review and process immigration cases in a timely way, particularly petitions for asylum and applications for work authorization. People who meet the requirements should not have to live for years in limbo while they await adjudication of their requests for asylum. Following on that, all those with immigration statuses that allow them to apply for work authorization deserve a speedy processing of those applications so that they can contribute to the economy and support themselves and their families.

Second, states, counties, and municipalities must assess and improve their capacities to receive newly arrived people so that these populations can be successful as new Americans. This is a painstaking process, but the attitude of “my ancestors made it without much help, these people can too” will not work now. We see young people whose families have been Americans for at least a few generations struggling to establish themselves in a society and economy that are more complex and problematic than ever before experienced. How can we expect newcomers to survive when they are thrown into the deep end of American life? Building capacity to assimilate newly arriving populations is key to reaping the benefits of people making it their choice to be American.

Third, borders cannot be porous. Swifter processing of asylum seekers will help, but admitting people into the country cannot be automatic or rest on turning a blind eye to people who have been released into the country with a promise of a court hearing years in the future. Formal immigration admissions should concentrate efforts on both family reunification and allowing people with language and work skills that will facilitate their establishment of a new life in the United States.

In the relatively short life of the United States of America, the country has demonstrated a remarkable malleability in absorbing all kinds of people. The cultures and languages that have found a home in this country creates an American culture that is always shifting and learning. This national maturation is not without trials and pain and conflict, but it has succeeded for the

most part and with enough honest conversation about the new challenges of immigration the country will see similar success in the future.