

Hornberger, J. G. (2002, January). Keep the border open. *World & I*, vol. 17, p. 44.

In times of crisis, it is sometimes wise and constructive for people to return to first principles and to reexamine where we started as a nation, the road we've traveled, where we are today, and the direction in which we're headed. Such a reevaluation can help determine whether a nation has deviated from its original principles and, if so, whether a restoration of those principles would be in order.

It is impossible to overstate the unusual nature of American society from the time of its founding to the early part of the twentieth century. Imagine: no Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, income tax, welfare, systems of public (i.e., government) schooling, occupational licensure, standing-armies, foreign aid, foreign interventions, or foreign wars. Perhaps most unusual of all, there were virtually no federal controls on immigration into the United States.

With the tragic and costly exception of slavery, the bedrock principle underlying American society was that people should be free to live their lives any way they chose, as long as their conduct was peaceful. That is what it once meant to be free. That is what it once meant to be an American. That was the freedom that our ancestors celebrated each Fourth of July.

Beginning in the early part of the twentieth century, however, our founders' concept of freedom was gradually abandoned in favor of a totally different concept—one that defined freedom in terms of the government's taking care of people, both domestically and internationally, together with the unlimited power to tax the citizenry to pay for that service.

Whatever might be said about the relative merits of the welfare state and the regulated society, their adoption effected a revolutionary transformation in the way that the American people viewed their freedom and the role of government in their lives. Moreover, the welfare-state revolution has had enormous consequences on the daily lives of the American people.

Open and Free Immigration

Let's examine the issue of immigration, which provides a good model for comparing our ancestors' vision of freedom with what guides the American people today.

In economic terms, the concept of freedom to which the founders subscribed entailed the right to sustain one's life through labor by pursuing any occupation or business without government permission or interference. It also meant freely entering into mutually beneficial exchanges with others anywhere in the world, accumulating unlimited amounts of wealth arising from those endeavors, and freely deciding the disposition of that wealth.

The moral question is: Why shouldn't a person be free to cross a border, whether in search of work to sustain his life, to open a business, to tour, or simply because he wants to? Or to put it another way, under what moral authority does any government interfere with the exercise of these rights?

We Americans often take for granted the idea of open borders within the United States, but it is such an important gift from our founders that it deserves thoughtful reflection. Think about it: Hundreds of millions of people are free to travel on the highways through all states without ever being stopped by a border guard. It is a way of life that would have shocked most people throughout history and that still surprises many foreigners who experience it for the first time.

Most Americans like the concept of open borders within the United States, but what distinguished our ancestors is that they believed that the principles of freedom were applicable not just domestically but universally. That implied open borders not only for people traveling inside the United States but also for people traveling or moving to the United States.

One important result of this highly unusual philosophy of freedom was that through most of the nineteenth century, people all over the world, especially those who were suffering political tyranny or economic privation, always knew that there was a place they could go if they could succeed in escaping their circumstances.

Immoral Results of Restrictions

The American abandonment of open immigration in the twentieth century has had negative consequences, both morally and economically. Let's consider some examples.

Prior to and during World War II, U.S. government officials intentionally used immigration controls to prevent German Jews from escaping the horrors of Nazi Germany by coming to America. Many of us are familiar with the infamous "voyage of the damned," in which a German ship was prohibited from landing in Miami because it carried Jewish refugees.

But how many people know that U.S. officials used immigration controls to keep German Jews and eastern European Jews from coming to the United States even after the existence of the concentration camps became well known? Indeed, how many Americans know about the one million anti-communist Russians whom U.S. and British officials forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, knowing that death or the gulag awaited them?

Ancient history, you say? Consider one of the most morally reprehensible policies in the history of our nation: the forcible repatriation of Cuban refugees into communist tyranny, a practice that has been going on for many years and continues to this day.

Let me restate this for emphasis: Under the pretext of enforcing immigration laws, our government—the U.S. government—the same government that sent tens of thousands of American GIs to their deaths in foreign wars supposedly to resist communism, is now forcibly returning people to communism. That's the reason that U.S. officials attacked Cuban refugees in rafts with water cannons a few hundred yards from American shores—they wanted to capture and forcibly return these defenseless people to communist tyranny. How can this conduct be reconciled with the fundamental principles of freedom and morality on which our nation was founded?

It's also important to note that immigration controls affect not only foreigners but also the freedom of the American people, especially such fundamental rights as freedom of association, freedom of contract, and privacy. We should keep in mind Ludwig von Mises' observation that one government intervention inevitably produces perverse consequences that then lead to an ever-increasing array of new interventions. The government began with immigration quotas. Over time, we have seen the growth of an enormous government bureaucracy (the Immigration and Naturalization Service and Border Patrol) that harasses, abuses, and terrorizes large segments of the population,

We have seen the establishment of Border Patrol passport checkpoints on highways and airports inside the United States (north of the border), which inevitably discriminate against people on the basis of skin color. We have seen the criminalization of such things as transporting, housing, and hiring undocumented workers, followed by arbitrary detentions on highways as well as raids on American farms and restaurants.

We have seen the construction of a fortified wall in California. This wall, built soon after the fall of the ugliest wall in history, has resulted in the deaths of immigrants entering the country through the harsh Arizona desert.

Objections and Answers

Would George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, or James Madison have constructed such a wall? We have come a long way from the vision of freedom set forth by our Founding Fathers.

Let's consider some of the common objections to open immigration.

1. *Open immigration will pollute America's culture.* Which culture is that? Boston? New York? Savannah? New Orleans? Denver? Los Angeles? I grew up on the Mexican border (on the Texas side). My culture was eating enchiladas and tacos, listening to both Mexican and American music, and speaking Tex-Mex (a combination of English and Spanish). America's culture has always been one of liberty—one in which people are free to pursue any culture they want.

2. *Immigrants will take jobs away from Americans.* Immigrants displace workers in certain sectors, but the displaced workers benefit through the acquisition of higher-paying jobs in other sectors that expand because of the influx of immigrants. It is not a coincidence that, historically, our

standard of living has soared when borders have been open. Keep in mind also that traditionally immigrants are among the hardest working and most energetic people in a society, which brings positive vitality and energy.

3. *Immigrants will go on -welfare.* Maybe we ought to reexamine whether it was a good idea to abandon the principles of our ancestors in that respect as well. What would be wrong with abolishing welfare for everyone, including Americans, along with the enormous taxation required to fund it? But if Americans are addicted to the government dole, there is no reason that the same thing has to happen to immigrants. Therefore, the answer to the welfare issue is not to control immigration but rather to deny immigrants the right to go on the government dole. In such a case, however, wouldn't it be fair to exempt them from the taxes used to fund the U.S. welfare state?

4. *Immigrants will bring in drugs.* Lots of people bring in drugs, including Americans returning from overseas trips. Not even the harshest police state would ever alter that fact. Why not legalize drugs and make the state leave drug users alone?

5. *There will be too many people.* Who decides the ideal number? A government board of central planners, just like in China? Wouldn't reliance on the free market to make such a determination be more consistent with our founding principles? Immigrants go where the opportunities abound and avoid areas where they don't, just as Americans do.

6. *Open immigration will permit terrorists to enter our country.* The only permanent solution to terrorism against the United States is to address the flaws in U.S. foreign policy, which is the breeding ground for terrorism against our country. No immigration controls in the world, not even a rebuilt Berlin Wall around the United States, will succeed in preventing the entry of people who are bound and determined to kill Americans.

Reexamining Principles of Freedom

More than 200 years ago, ordinary people brought into existence the most unusual society in history. It was a society based on the fundamental moral principle that people everywhere are endowed with certain inherent rights that no government can legitimately take away.

Somewhere along the way, Americans abandoned that concept of freedom, especially in their attachment to such programs and policies as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, income taxation, economic regulation, public schooling, the war on drugs, the war on poverty, the war on wealth, immigration controls, foreign aid, foreign intervention, and foreign wars—none of which our founders had ever dreamed of.

The current crisis provides us with an opportunity to re-examine our founding principles, why succeeding generations of Americans abandoned them, the consequences of that abandonment, and whether it would be wise to restore the founders' moral and philosophical principles of freedom. A good place to start such a reexamination would be immigration.