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I Lift My Sword above the Bolted Door **by Samuel Bostaph**

Emma Lazarus had better stay in her grave if she knows what's good for her. Why do I say that? Well, the blackhearted villainess deliberately contributed to what is now known as “the immigrant problem.” When she wrote her sonnet “The New Colossus,” and donated it to be auctioned off as part of the fundraising to build a pedestal for “Liberty Enlightening the World,” she openly beckoned the homeless “huddled masses” and “wretched refuse” to emigrate to the United States. In so doing, she became a prominent voice in the movement to swell the U.S. population — thus creating mass unemployment, the draining of social-service resources, and the impoverishment of U.S. taxpayers.

Or at least that's what some current U.S. politicians and public-policy pundits must believe. Why else would they be calling for the expulsion of anyone they deem an “illegal,” as well as the erection of an insurmountable wall on the border with Mexico?

What! Immigration over the past 120 years didn't create mass unemployment, drain social-service resources, or impoverish U.S. taxpayers? There must be something wrong with this picture of the evils of immigration.

There is something wrong with it. It's a picture that is bereft of any knowledge of the most basic of economic principles. That's the principle that in any free exchange between two traders, both gain more value than they give up in the trade. Free exchange is a positive-sum game and total value always increases as a result of such exchanges.

If I trade my labor services to you in exchange for a paycheck, I must believe that my paycheck is a better return on providing my labor services to you than whatever else I may do with them. If you sell your goods to a customer in return for a sum of money, you must believe that the money you receive more than covers the cost of producing that good. If it doesn't, you won't be in business very long. If a customer pays you an amount of money for his purchase, he must believe that the value of the good received is greater than that which he could obtain by using his money in some other way.

Immigration and prosperity

A free economy is an economy of individual traders, each of whom values what he receives over what he gives up and the net actions of which constantly increase the wealth of all of those in that economy. This is not a historical accident; it is an inevitable result of the nature of free exchange. Of course, the creation of value through production and trade and the amassing of the greatest accumulation of wealth in the history of the world is the economic story of the past 230 years of the history of the United States. And it has almost all been done by immigrants or their descendants.

This means that any employed immigrant, legal or illegal, is adding wealth to the total produced within the U.S. economy. Instead of a mouth that needs food, every immigrant is a brain and pair of arms that can create more wealth than he consumes. Immigrants are not “taking jobs that no one else wants;” there is no such thing as a fixed quantity of something called “jobs.” A “job” is something that a human being does. It is created when the wealth that a person can produce exceeds the pay he receives. This means that every employer who hires an immigrant — legal or illegal — is producing more wealth than the immigrant is being paid. Whether an immigrant starts in a low-skilled, low-income job or in a high-skilled, high-income job is not relevant to the principle involved.

It also has to be said that immigrants are not “displacing U.S. citizens from jobs.” U.S. citizens are free to compete for employment with legal or illegal immigrants. If they do not, it could be because they choose to seek a better paying, more attractive job elsewhere, perhaps even in sectors that are responding to increased economic demand from immigrants. Of course, it may also mean that they prefer something else to employment. That something else could be welfare payments that burden the taxpayer. This is not the fault of the immigrant (who is paying taxes, by the way); it’s a problem caused by the politicians who create such programs, subsidize unemployment, and displace private charity.

Instead of curbing immigration and expelling “illegal” immigrants from the United States, public policy should be directed to dropping barriers to immigration and eliminating the artificial distinction between “legal” and “illegal” immigrants that past politicians have created in law. This would very likely create pressure to cut back or eliminate social-service programs that subsidize unemployment and burden taxpayers, but that would be only a side benefit. The main result of a return to the open immigration of 19th-century America would be an accumulation of wealth at a faster rate than at present, if theory and history are any guides to action.

After all, if the arguments against open immigration were valid, then depopulation of the United States would be the correct public policy.

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