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## **‘The Statue of Liberty Must Be Crying With Shame’**

AS anti-refugee hysteria sweeps many of our political leaders, particularly Republicans, I wonder what they would have told a desperate refugee family fleeing the Middle East. You’ve heard of this family: a carpenter named Joseph, his wife, Mary, and their baby son, Jesus.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, after Jesus’ birth they fled to save Jesus from murderous King Herod (perhaps the 2,000-year-ago equivalent of Bashar al-Assad of Syria?). Fortunately Joseph, Mary and Jesus found de facto asylum in Egypt — thank goodness House Republicans weren’t in charge when Jesus was a refugee!

Migrants and refugees show their identification papers to police near Gevegelija, Macedonia, on Friday. Credit Georgi Licovski/European Pressphoto Agency

The vote by the House of Representatives effectively to slam the door on Syrian refugees was the crassest kind of political grandstanding, scapegoating some of the world’s most vulnerable people to score political points. As a woman named Maria Radford tweeted me after the vote, “the Statue of Liberty must be crying with shame.”

Yes, security is a legitimate concern. And, yes, we can’t rule out the possibility that a terrorist will slip in with the refugees. Among refugees admitted to the U.S. since 9/11, there has been about one arrest for terrorism offenses for every 250,000 refugees, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

Then again, by my back-of-the-envelope calculations there's maybe a 100-times greater likelihood that, say, a Floridian will turn out to be a murderer over a 10-year period than that a refugee will attempt terrorism. So if we're willing to allow Floridians free entry into other states, allowing Syrian refugees shouldn't be a problem.

Let's be real: Refugee admission is the most deeply vetted pathway into the United States. Even for Iraqis who worked as translators for our military, risking their lives to keep Americans alive and enjoying strong support of American officers, vetting can take a couple of years.

That's why the 9/11 attackers didn't enter the U.S. as refugees, but as students and tourists. If a terrorist group wants to attack America, it won't wait two years to try to infiltrate as refugees. It'll send people in as students or tourists, use fake or stolen U.S. or European passports, or just pay a human smuggler to take their terrorists across the border from Mexico or Canada.

In any case, the Paris attackers identified so far were of French and Belgian nationality, not Syrian. One was carrying a Syrian passport, true, but it apparently wasn't his own and was perhaps meant to create an anti-Syrian backlash.

The Islamic State's strategy is to create a wedge in the West between Muslims and non-Muslims. Whether that strategy succeeds depends on us: Will we clamp down with the harsh reaction the Islamic State sought?

When we're fearful we make bad decisions. That was true around World War II, when we denied refuge to European Jews and interned Japanese-Americans. That was true after 9/11, when we invaded Iraq and engaged in torture.

As George Takei, the Japanese-American actor who was interned for four years as a child, wrote in a Facebook post after the Paris attacks: "There no doubt will be those who look upon immigrants and refugees as the enemy as a result of these attacks, because they look like those who perpetrated these attacks, just as peaceful Japanese-Americans were viewed as the enemy after Pearl Harbor. But we must resist the urge to categorize and dehumanize, for it is that very impulse that fueled the insanity and violence perpetrated this evening."

A Japanese-American boy outside the barracks of the Heart Mountain internment camp north of Cody, Wyoming, during World War II. Credit George And Frank C. Hirahara/Washington State University, via Associated Press

The demagoguery about refugees leaves me with an ache in the gut because, as I noted in my last column, I am the son of a refugee. Some 65 years ago, my Armenian/Polish/Romanian father was wandering Europe just as the Syrian refugees are today. Because Americans took a chance on him, I'm in a position to write this appeal for similar empathy today.

Sure, some Syrians are terrorists, but some of the people I most admire in the world are Syrian doctors and "White Helmets" who help the victims of violence. House Republicans would block these heroes, would bar even the Yazidi and Christian victims of terrorists.

Republican leaders say they simply want to tighten security to keep America safe. That's an echo of what American officials claimed in the late 1930s and early 1940s as they blocked the entry of Jewish refugees.

Breckinridge Long, then a senior State Department official in charge of visas, warned that Nazi spies were trying to enter the U.S. as refugees. In the name of security, he established vetting rules so strict that few Jews could pass.

"We can delay and effectively stop for a temporary period of indefinite length the number of immigrants," Long boasted in a 1940 memo. His callous security requirements led to the deaths of many tens of thousands of Jews.

Yes, security was a legitimate concern then, as it is now, but security must be leavened with common sense and a bit of heart.

To seek to help desperate refugees in a secure way is not naïveté. It's not sentimentality. It's humanity.

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