

An Appeal to Immigration Common Sense

By D.M. HERDER

Thomas Paine lost the argument. He wanted to use *Plain Truth* as the title of the pamphlet Benjamin Rush asked him to write in 1775 Philadelphia, but Dr. Rush pressed him to use *Common Sense* instead. The rest is history. Paine lost the argument about his title, but we won our independence.

Historians say that Paine's 47 pages of common sense turned the tide in the *real* revolution: The revolution that took place in the minds of the colonists.

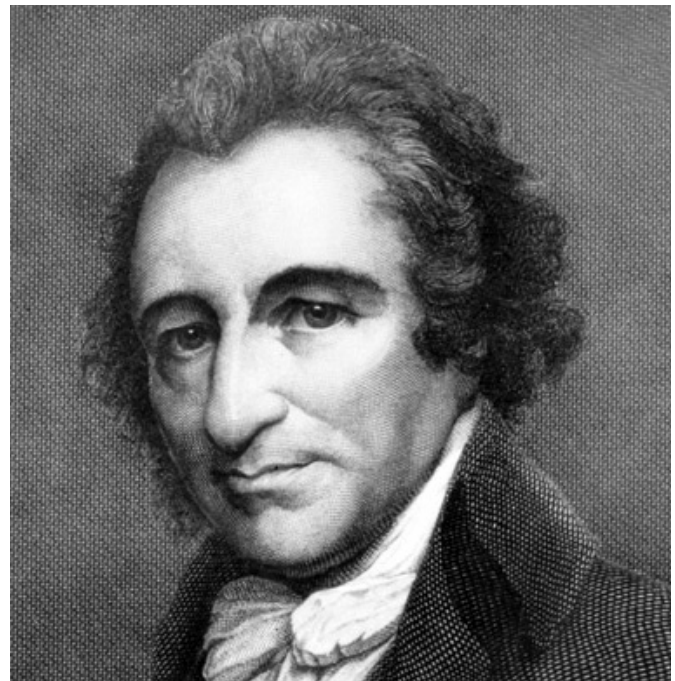
Isn't it time for us to seek again the *common* mind as we create a future that serves the *common* good? Thousands of words are written every year about U.S. immigration policy, and millions more are spoken, shouted, and whispered about "illegal aliens." What, in all of the wordblitz, makes common sense, and what, in the perpetual cacophony, is the plain truth?

Ponder these three assertions that reflect the common American mind today — and that can serve as springboards for progress in the immigration debate:

1. Our national character has been shaped powerfully by the immigrants who built our nation. We would be unwise to stop the arrival of a reasonable number of new legal immigrants — and unwise to weaken the core of our character. Who and what we are, in our exceptional land, is rooted in the Judeo-Christian Tradition; in the rationalism of the European Enlightenment; and in the open frontier that inspired the hope, courage, and "can-do" attitude of our Native Americans and immigrant Americans.
2. Our openness, optimism, hope, and indi-

vidual freedom, because we are a nation of laws, not a nation under the thumb of a dictator or king, have made America a magnet for immigrants. Ask any ten people in the Republic of Georgia or in ten other nations where hope is seen as a fantasy — an elixir that leads only to mental depression.

3. Our immigration policy must serve our *long-term national interest* so, as Lincoln intoned at Gettysburg, these United States "shall not perish from the earth."



Thomas Paine

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In response to the theme printed on the cover of this issue of this journal, what *should* America's immigration policy be?

Amnesty and citizenship for people who break our laws to sneak into our nation? (Reagan made an amnesty deal gone bad in 1986 for three million. Now another twelve million? How many next time?) More chain migration? More anchor babies? More votes for one political party? More cheap labor for certain employers? More American schools, hospitals, jails,

and prisons overwhelmed by non-citizens who not only cannot pay, but who now *demand* services to which they believe they are *entitled*?

Or should a new policy promise adherence to most of the recommendations in the 1997 Barbara Jordan Report, including regular review and revision of our immigration policy? <https://www.numbersusa.com/content/learn/illegal-immigration/us-commission-immigration-reform-barbara-jordan-commission.html>

Kind and often well-intended advocates for reunification of families of people who have sneaked into the United States say, “We need to take in all the ‘tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free.’ They have nothing, we have plenty, and we have a moral duty to help them.”

Other Americans, who at first blush might seem less kind-hearted, say, “We should, and we can, help many people. But the reality is that we can’t help them all.”

These latter folks, let us call them “pragmatists,” thanks to the term championed by William James, just might be as decent as the social justice people. But perhaps their skepticism has roots in the call to reality from the likes of the Rev. Thomas Malthus or bioethicist Garrett Hardin. In his *Promethean Ethics*, Hardin says,

One way to (allocate scarce resources) is by the system called ‘triage.’ If there are not enough medical officers to save all the wounded soldiers, whom shall we save first? If we don’t have enough food to save all the starving people of the world, to whom shall we give the food first?.... Sorting is sorting, whatever the word used, and the word ‘triage’ was used for the sorting of wools and coffee beans long before it was applied to the sorting of human casualties.

Let’s peel another layer from Hardin’s onion in order to more fully consider where the details hide the

devil. Does the rallying cry, “comprehensive immigration reform” (translation: another amnesty) unwittingly guarantee our nation’s collapse because our borders and regulations will remain porous until we are beyond the tipping point?

Here is what Hardin says that hopefully will be a clarion call to members of our Congress as we create a strategic immigration policy that can help save the life of our nation:

Some sensitive people may react adversely to the word ‘efficient’ applied to the saving of human lives, but I think it unlikely that such people will reject the ideal of saving the maximum number of lives possible. Though the military strategist may want to do this for strictly military reasons, the most compassionate pacifist reaches the same conclusion by another route... No close student of the problems of either military medicine or civilian medicine has ever proposed an alternative to triage.

Most of us select the best oranges at the grocery store, select the best schools and colleges for ourselves and our children, and select with *great care* our friends, mates, and brain surgeons.

Don’t we need to sort who we invite to come and join us as the sinew, bone, and brains of our future nation in the Electronic Information Age? Isn’t this just common sense?

If the three assertions at the top of this appeal ring true for Americans on the left and the right, let’s tell Congress to stick to them. And let’s balance compassion with pragmatism, using Barbara Jordan’s report (it earned unparalleled bipartisan approval) as we formulate what **MUST** become our new immigration policy.

What would Thomas Paine say? Plain Truth, or Common Sense? ■

The U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform — Bipartisan and ‘Comprehensive’

Those interested in or advocating “comprehensive immigration reform” should examine the thoroughly researched, well-documented findings of ... the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, created by Congress as part of the Immigration Act of 1990. It was generally known as the Jordan Commission, named for the late Barbara Jordan.... The detailed and thoughtful recommendations in the Commission’s 1997 final report, called for the nation to:

- Integrate the immigrants now in the United States more thoroughly;
- Reduce the total number of legal immigrants to about 550,000 a year;
- Rationalize the nonimmigrant visa programs and regulate them;
- Enforce the immigration law vigorously with no further amnesties; and
- Re-organize the management of the immigration processes within the government.

Most of the recommendations were unanimous.

—David North, Center for Immigration Studies

<http://cis.org/a-blueprint-for-immigration-reform-revisiting-jordan-commission>