

Immigration and America's Bad Karma

Written by Margaret Kimberley, Blackcommentator.com ID2506
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Lou Dobbs, Bill O'Reilly and other cable television blowhards have appointed themselves crusaders against illegal immigration to the United States. If tempted to succumb to their awful siren song, just think of the Wampanoag Indians.

In 1621 the Wampanoags watched as the Pilgrims landed at what is now known as Plymouth Rock. You know the rest of the story. The Indians were killed by warfare and disease. Treaties were broken and land was stolen. The horrific scenario played out across the rest of the nation for almost 300 years. The Iroquois, Seminoles, Choctaws, Lakotas, and Apaches all got the same treatment.

You reap what you sow. What goes around comes around. Payback is a bitch. All of those colorful expressions are apropos when the issue of immigration arises and especially when Dobbs, O'Reilly, and Congressional Neanderthals foam at the mouth.

The British, the French, the Spanish and the Dutch didn't get green cards when they showed up on Indian lands. O'Reilly's and Dobbs' ancestors didn't either. This nation was built by people who took what they wanted, land that belonged to someone else. The people who followed them accepted the terms of the original deal with the devil.

Before complaining about immigrants, compare yourself to a Wampanoag. Are Mexicans giving you small pox? Are they attacking your neighborhood and slitting your throat? Have they claimed your town as a colony for Mexico? Present day Americans are getting a much better deal from newcomers than the original Americans ever had.

Speaking of Mexico, a good chunk of the United States west of the Mississippi originally was part of Mexico. From 1846 to 1848 the United States government made its awful vision of Manifest Destiny a reality when it fought a war to steal half of Mexico's territory. Present day Texas, California, Utah, Nevada, parts of Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Wyoming were all Mexican territory.

New immigrants from Mexico to the American west are just going back to their old neighborhood. What goes around does quite literally come around. Of course, Mexico was

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Indian territory stolen originally by the Spanish. So much bad karma, so little time.

America cannot have an honest discussion about immigration without revisiting its sordid past. Indians must be laughing as the descendants of their oppressors stay in a snit because newcomers arrive without permission.

Like the Indians, African Americans have a singular experience and therefore a unique view on immigration. Poor, uneducated immigrants compete most directly with low wage Americans for jobs. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, European immigrants were directly recruited to take jobs that could have easily been given to black Americans. That history and our perpetually precarious economic condition create a justifiable wariness.

Yet the answer to black Americans economic oppression is not to join with the likes of right wing Republicans. These hypocrites act only to improve the economic well being of the haves and the have mores. If they truly cared about the American worker they wouldn't cut taxes for the wealthy, try to end Social Security, and create a Medicare drug plan that is nothing but a windfall for pharmaceutical companies.

Instead of whining that some illegal immigrants use Medicaid, they should advocate for national health insurance. If Americans had this and other benefits that citizens of the rest of the world have, resentment against immigrants would diminish.

Are immigrant day laborers in Home Depot parking lots causing the worst problems for American workers? The wholesale disappearance of high paying blue collar jobs is the real problem. Images of Mexicans sneaking across the border make for a great distraction when the plight of union workers at Delphi and GM ought to be addressed.

Once again the supposedly generous nation brings out the worst in its citizens because it isn't generous at all. Americans live a dog eat dog existence, watching as corporate interests plot to destroy what little is left of the safety net. Because there is never a serious discussion about the economic system in this country, phony debates are deliberately created to keep the public from thinking about the issues that really cause their problems.

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Of course, racism is at the heart of the anti-immigrant backlash and will be at the heart of any so-called solutions. Republican Congressperson Dana Rohrabacher (CA) had an answer to the argument that immigrants take jobs that Americans won't:

"We do not need more people from foreign countries coming in and taking American jobs - even jobs in the fields. I say, let prisoners pick the fruits. [Emphasis added] Let's not bid down the wages of American workers."

America has a greater percentage of its population under lock and key than any other country on earth. Now we have a new justification for mass incarceration. Prisoners can be used for free labor. The bad karma list is already too long.

As Republicans fight over whether they ought to be overtly racist or keep commerce and cheap labor flowing through the border, don't fall for the hype. Think about how life for American working people could be improved if cynical politicians weren't indulging in cheap theatrics. Then imagine being a Wampanoag in the 17th century.

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