

# DIRECTORS' PERSPECTIVES (CONT.)

## FEAR OF THE FOREIGNER

BY: STEVE SKYLAR

"They're taking our jobs."

"And look who they let in..."

I've overheard these words often enough during the 26 years I've been practicing immigration law. My ears are especially attuned to them, representing as they do a potential threat to the fate of my clients. But phrases like these are not hard to come by. They can be heard from liberals as well as conservatives, from the children of immigrants as well as from those whose ancestors came over on the Mayflower.

Even recent immigrants themselves are not immune to xenophobia. I once heard a man who started his journey toward lawful permanent U.S. residence by working without authorization, thereby violating his student visa status, declare that what's needed is for us to crack down on illegal immigration. The irony was lost on him.

The fact is, this country has long been deeply ambivalent about being a "nation of immigrants." Sure, we cherish our welcoming national persona. We take pride in the words adorning the base of the Statue of Liberty. "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free...." And Emma Lazarus's stirring sonnet reflects our dominant national attitude during the first 60 years of this country's existence. As Roger Daniels reports in his history of U.S. immigration policy, *Guarding The Golden Door*, back then, as a matter of policy, we mostly wanted people from other lands to settle here.

But, from the outset, we have also hosted another national attitude. Consider this assessment of German immigration, written in 1751:

"Why should the Palatine boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of us Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion."

So wrote Benjamin Franklin, co-author and co-signer of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Although Franklin came to moderate his views on European immigration later in life, the attitude he expressed in 1751 toward German immigrants -- the attitude Daniels dubs "they are not like us" -- has pervaded the persecution of successive waves of

immigrants here. In the late 19th century, the Chinese were the target of our first restrictive Federal immigration legislation, the Chinese Exclusion Act. Around 1900, Japanese-owned shops were attacked and their owners assaulted up and down the West Coast. Filipinos, Irish people, Italians, Catholics in general, Jews and Mexicans are among those who have been reviled here, sometimes violently. To those of us who appreciate the cultural, literary, culinary, technological and aspirational gifts immigration brings us, such perennial hostility toward people with whom we share a common humanity is mystifying. Where does it come from? **(Cont. Page 10)**



## CARBON, CLIMATE, AND COVID-19

BY: KRIS FEDER

In today's world, it seems that the only constant is change. From the COVID pandemic to environmental and social injustices, the thing we can agree on is that more change is needed -- positive change. RSF Board Member Kris Feder penned a three-part series that delves into the impact of hydrocarbons on our economy; the risks and cost of the Coronavirus; and the connection between energy and the food system.

*The world experienced pandemics long before air travel and Big Oil. It is too early to say whether, despite medical advances, the risks and costs of epidemics will rise during the twenty-first century. As we observe future trends, we might ponder a further question that history has yet to answer: How would humanity manage a public health crisis in a world of justice and equality?*

Read Kris' full series by visiting:

[www.schalkenbach.org/carbon-climate-and-covid-19](http://www.schalkenbach.org/carbon-climate-and-covid-19)

## RIGHTS (CONT.)

Henry George argued that no titles should exist for any property not made by human hands or minds. Such ownership should be in usufruct only, a claim not unique to Western thought. Jefferson and other early colonial settlers understood this. Here, because it's not often referenced on the subject, I quote Benjamin Franklin:

All Property indeed, except the Savage's temporary Cabin, his Bow, his Matchcoat, and other little Acquisitions absolutely necessary for his Subsistence, seems to me to be the Creature of public Convention. Hence the Public has the Right of Regulating Descents & all other Conveyances of Property, and even of limiting the Quantity & the Uses of it. All the Property that is necessary to a Man for the Conservation of the Individual & the Propagation of the

Species, is his natural Right which none can justly deprive him of: But all Property superfluous to such purposes is the Property of the Publick, who by their Laws have created it, and who may therefore by other Laws dispose of it, whenever the Welfare of the Publick shall demand such Disposition. He that does not like civil Society on these Terms, let him retire & live among Savages.— He can have no right to the Benefits of Society who will not pay his Club towards the Support of it.

Secretary Pompeo and his fellow Board members of the Commission on Unalienable Rights would do well to heed this observation. Together with the writings of Henry George, we have principles and practical answers for a sounder approach.

## FEAR OF THE FOREIGNER (CONT.)

I believe that its primary source is economic. The refrain “They’re taking our jobs” makes that clear enough. (It’s true that many people also fear the stranger simply for being different, whether on religious, political, cultural or racial grounds. Such identity-based xenophobia, I believe, is secondary. Certainly, it is exacerbated by economic fear.)

The economic fear at play here is the fear of losing jobs to the foreigner. What is this, essentially, but a belief that the amount of employment in our country is at any given time fixed in extent; that the addition of more people to the labor pool must make the search for employment more competitive; and, where the rate of employment is low, must throw people already in the pool out of work? This worldview effectively espouses the theory that is known to economists, if not to the public at large, as the Wages Fund Theory. That theory posits that the ultimate source of wages is a fixed fund of capital set aside for their payment.

I have read the writings of the 19th century thinker and reformer Henry George. Because of this, I understand that the economics-based fear of immigration is unfounded. The evolution of George’s own thinking on the subject is instructive.

Early in his writing career, in an op-ed published in the New York Tribune in 1869, George railed against Chinese immigration. In the first half of that piece his argument was mainly economic, and grounded in the Wages Fund Theory. After observing that Chinese laborers were willing to work and live more cheaply than Americans, he wrote: “It is obvious that Chinese competition must reduce wages, and it would seem just as obvious that, to the extent which it does this, its introduction is to the interest of capital and opposed to the interests of labor.”

A year or so after George wrote those words, however, he had the great central insight that changed his life and made him a household name around the world. That insight, which lies at the heart of his writing and public speaking, and is

li inherently global, is that it is the monopolization of land through private land ownership that is the injustice that forces the base level of wages down to the starvation point – even as civilizations advance in their ability to produce wealth. But a spin-off of that insight was that George realized that the Wages Fund Theory, popular as it then was (and continues to be), is erroneous.

At the beginning of *Progress and Poverty*, his seminal work, George shows that the way that wealth is produced and the roles that land, labor and capital play in its production debunk the Wages Fund Theory. And in an essay he published in May of 1888 he put it this way:

“If it seems that there are too many people here already; if it seems that new comers must swell the ranks of those who cannot find employment, and increase the intensity of that competition of mere laborer with mere laborer, which in all occupations produces a constant tendency to the lowering of wages, the fault lies in something which produces its effect on those already here and would continue to affect them if immigration were to cease -- in our giving to some men the absolute ownership and control of the natural element on which and from which we all must live. The restriction of immigration would do nothing to right this fundamental wrong. Its agitation would have but the effect (and, in large part, this is the conscious intention of those who advocate it) of diverting the popular mind from the only path by which the emancipation of labor can be reached.”

I think that is exactly right. The writer Toni Morrison said in a different, albeit related, context that “the function, the very serious function of racism ... is distraction.” In requiring you constantly to validate your existence, she explained, it “keeps you from doing your work.” So, too, for xenophobia. In focusing our fears on the foreigner, we are diverted. We would do better to attend to the real threat to our wages and employment, one that is impervious to border control.