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OPINION



Stoking Anti-Immigrant Sentiment: Lies should end with his presidency

BY JILL RICHARDSON



As Donald Trump finally prepares to be evicted from the White House, it's worth remembering how he first launched his campaign: by calling immigrants "murderers" and "rapists."

This was outrageous then. And there's more evidence now that it was, of course, patently false.

A new study finds that "undocumented immigrants have considerably lower crime rates than native-born citizens and legal immigrants across a range of criminal offenses, including violent, property, drug, and traffic crimes."

The study concludes that there's "no evidence that undocumented criminality has become more prevalent in recent years across any crime category." Previous studies found no evidence to support Trump's claim, but now we have better data than ever before.

Put another way, Trump was telling a dangerous lie.

Sociologists Michael Light, Jingying He and Jason Robey used crime and immigration data from Texas from 2012 to 2018 to find that "relative to undocumented immigrants, U.S.-born citizens are over 2 times more likely to be arrested for violent crimes, 2.5 times more likely to be arrested for drug crimes, and over 4 times more likely to be arrested for property crimes."

Unfounded accusations of criminality are a longstanding tool of racism and other forms of bigotry across a range of social

categories.

When anti-LGBTQ activist Anita Bryant wanted to discriminate against gays and lesbians in the 1970s, she claimed we molest children. More recently, when transphobic people wanted to ban trans women from women's bathrooms, they falsely claimed that trans women would rape cisgender women in bathrooms.

Consider how much anti-Black racists justified their actions in the name of "protecting white women" from Black men. In 1955, a white woman, Carolyn Bryant Donham, wrongly claimed that a 14-year-old Black boy, Emmett Till, grabbed her and threatened her. White men lynched Till in retaliation. More than half a century later, Donham revealed that her accusations were false.

In 1989, the Central Park Five — five Black and Latino boys between the ages of 14 and 16 — were wrongly convicted and imprisoned for raping a white woman. They didn't do it. In 2002, someone else confessed and DNA evidence confirmed it. (Trump, who took out full-page ads calling for their execution then, never apologized.)

Racism and bigotry are about power and status. Yet instead of openly admitting that they want to punish other people simply for existing, most bigots find reasons that sound plausible to the uninformed — even if the reasons are completely untrue. Bigotry is much easier to market if it can masquerade as fighting crime.

It wasn't just Trump himself. During the Trump administration, officials like the U.S. solicitor general argued before

the Supreme Court that undocumented immigrants are disproportionately likely to commit crime. Data: None. Claims: False.

As Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously said, "You are entitled to your opinion. But you are not entitled to your own facts."

So when you hear a claim that a particular group of marginalized people are criminals, question it. What is the evidence for the claim? What is the evidence against the claim, and how will they benefit if people believe them?

If someone cites research, who performed the research, and who funded it? Do the funders have a financial stake in the research findings? Was it published in a peer-reviewed journal? Is the data publicly available for others to replicate the findings?

In this case, the research debunking this racist lie was government-funded, peer-reviewed in a major journal, and the data is available to the public.

Hearing that particular group of people poses a threat to your safety can be frightening. But because such claims have been used throughout history to spread bigotry against marginalized groups, they should always be fact-checked.

In this case, the evidence is clear. Trump stoked anti-immigrant sentiment in the name of fighting crime, and his claims were baseless and false. The lie should end with his presidency.

Jill Richardson is a columnist *OtherWords.org*, the distributor of this opinion piece.

Letter to the Editor

Grant Murals Decision

Thank you for mentioning the Grant Alumni Association's fundraising efforts to restore the Fletcher Memorial Murals (**Relics of Past Coming Down, Dec. 9 issue**). With permission, encouragement and support from Grants' former principal and from the Portland Public School district the Alumni Association undertook a successful campaign to match a \$100,000 donation from the Leo Lester Browne Fund in less than six months. The donations came from alumni and community members in amounts ranging from \$5 to \$10,000. Once the restoration was completed, an estimated \$30,000 to \$100,000 was to be used to support Grant's music education department.

The murals were paid for by Grant students and were dedicated in 1932 to honor William Fletcher, Grant's first principal. Carl Hoeckner, the artist who designed and painted the murals titled "Ideals of Education", was an advocate of social justice. He did not intend for his work to be historically accurate, but used symbolism to portray ideals. It is ironic that his paintings showing students striving toward knowledge and wisdom, Susan B. Anthony Ulysses S. Grant speaking of empowering women and ending slavery, and Native Americans coming together with pioneers in peace, would be thought to be repugnant. Even the title proclaims Ideals which means excellence not yet achieved. Similar depictions of Native Americans in war bonnets can be found in other district schools.

The Alumni Association is sensitive to the concerns of Grant's Native American students and has tried to present several options to address these concerns. One of the options is a masking treatment created by Nina Olsson, art conservator. However, the Association's requests to meet with the Superintendent and with each member of the school board was met with silence from all but three school board members.

The financial consequences to the taxpayers are considerable. Not only is the \$200,000 gift of the restoration and the money for the music education department lost, but the cost of removal is estimated to be \$215,000 which does not include such factors as an environmental study, scaffolding, lead paint containment, protective facing, storage containers. The size of the murals (20X25) makes finding a space for their display difficult and at best they will be stored somewhere and never seen again - a form of destruction.

The Grant Alumni Association has always advocated for a decision-making process that included all voices working together to find common ground that would serve as a model for other schools.

Bob Stayton, president of the U.S. Grant High School Alumni Association