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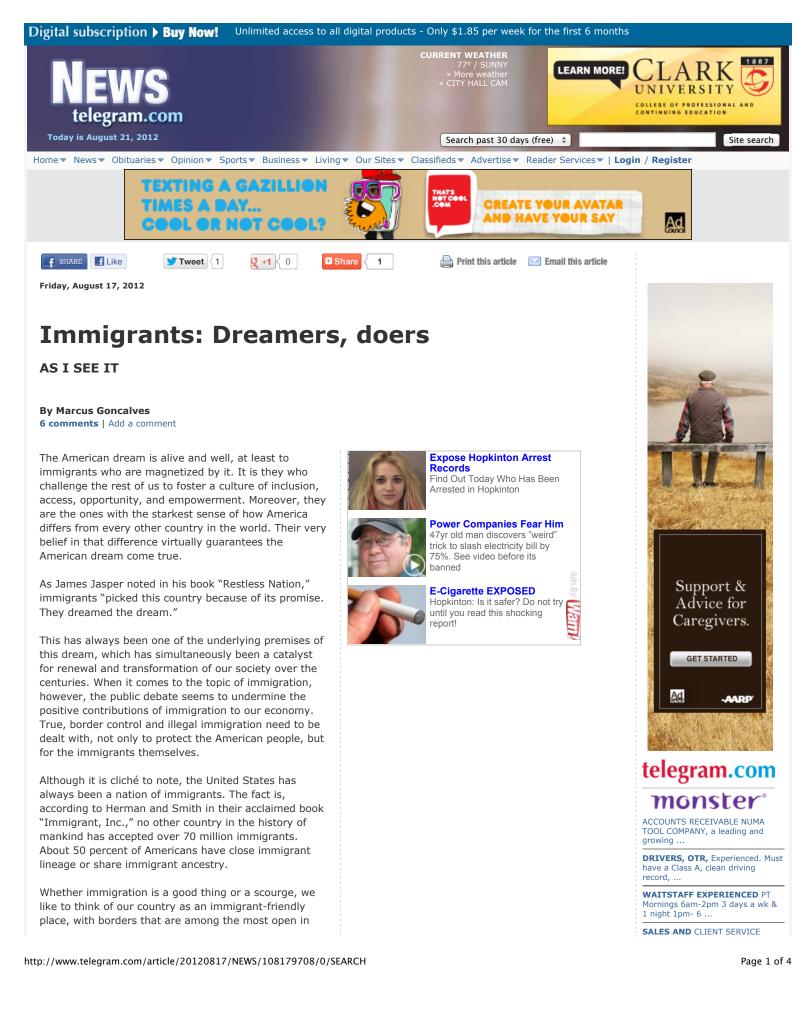
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Immigrants: dreamers, doers

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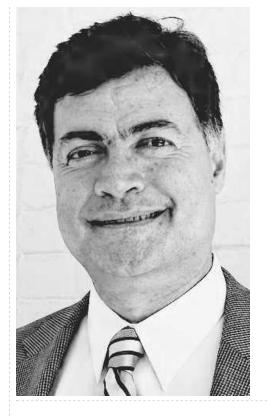
the world, which is not the case. But according to the Migration Integration Policy Index, which rates the EU nations, Norway, Switzerland, Canada, and the U.S. in efforts to integrate immigrants, the U.S. ranks ninth. Sweden, Portugal, and Canada are the three leading countries, respectively. Nonetheless, for John Gartner, a psychologist at Johns Hopkins University, immigrant traits are built into an American's DNA.

As an immigrant, I have the privilege to appreciate the argument from both sides of the spectrum. According to a new Gallup poll, American attitudes toward immigration are hardening. Half of all Americans say immigration should be "decreased" — up 11 points from 39 percent last year.

Although the U.S. is a nation of immigrants, it has rarely understood the vital role immigrants have played in building our country and its economy. The U.S. experienced a great inflow of talented scientists, entrepreneurs, artists, and musicians during the Great Depression which helped bolster its position at the frontiers of science, technology, entrepreneurship, and the arts during the long and prosperous post-war era.

Too often, we tend to view immigration from the alleged costs it bears to society and the American people, especially in times of economic recession, without realizing their significant economic contributions, in particular the entrepreneurs, which tend to be the vast majority.

According to a recent report by the International Migration Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, immigrants are more often than not entrepreneurs and always have been. Who but a restless dreamer and entrepreneur would be willing to leave everything to start a new life in a strange country? Answer: optimistic risk-takers who believe in the American dream.



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A college-educated immigrant, according to Herman and Smith, is twice as likely to obtain a U.S. patent as a nonimmigrant. Nearly all of these patents, including my very own (U.S. Patent #2002/0111972) now owned by Symantec, were in science, technology, engineering and math, the so-called STEM fields that are a crucial driver of U.S. job growth.

Crises in the economy always bring about change seasons where talent flows are often reset causing nations to rise or decline. If growing anti-immigrant sentiment persists it can have a negative effect for American technology, entrepreneurship, and the economy in general. As argued by Richard Florida, professor and researcher at Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, "the future belongs to those countries and regions that can attract the best and brightest across the entire world." The most prosperous states in the U.S. are the ones with large number of immigrants.

America is at a dangerous moment, facing global competition as it has never seen before. To maintain its competitive advantage the U.S. must concentrate on its core strengths which include innovation, entrepreneurship, and immigration, which, in my view, are inextricably linked.

I'm afraid that, with the economic downturn, xenophobia is rising and political clouds of nativism and protectionism are swirling across the country. Immigrants play a compelling and powerful role in our economy, reminding us that new people, ideas, and entrepreneurial spirit is at the core of the American dream story. In the words of J.F. Kennedy, "every aspect of the American economy has profited from the contributions of immigrants."

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