

May 2019

TANDARA

Business & People

The Monthly Bulletin of Multicultural Solutions LLC



**#UNAPOLOGETICALLY
RADICAL**

• Immigrant Entrepreneurs
& Local Governments

Photo by Arthur Brognoli from Pexels

IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS

By Clara Matonhodze Strode

Welcome to the Tribe of Radicals! People who are #UnapologeticallyRadical about what they do and why they do it.

You can say most immigrants belong in this tribe.

In this issue, I try to make sense of what is driving the current political climate (xenophobia) and how local governments can get past these sentiments and support immigrant entrepreneurs. Not only do immigrant entrepreneurs bring new solutions to common problems (think Airbnb and the sharing economy), but studies have shown that supporting immigrant populations fosters economic growth. According to Cincinnati Compass, "In 2014, Ohio's immigrant entrepreneurs generated nearly \$532 million in business income. Our state's immigrants make up a marginal 4.2 percent of our total population. And yet they account for 7 percent of our state's entrepreneurs". That's a number that can grow significantly. There is something inherently resilient with most immigrants, something we can harness for collective good.



THERE'S NO STOPPING HUMAN NATURE

It explains the current political climate.

Since the beginning of time, humans are continually searching for the next big thing. The next faster mode of transportation. The next fun game. The next delicious meal. The next whatever thing. Curiosity is in us, and we go to great lengths to achieve it. How else would you explain the great explorers of our time and their relentless quest for the next frontier to ensure survival of the species.



Which leads me to an observation about the current political climate and a harsh truth we have to confront if we are to deal with the immigration problem effectively, - "talk about a white minority as early as 2044, when white Americans are projected to fall below half the population and lose their majority status", is unsettling to most white families.

That Whites might soon be a minority in America is an existential problem to some white families. Not until the current President, was a politician bold enough to tackle this threat by stopping immigration. 4 or 8 years of low migration goes a long way towards the down payment of a future securing a white majority. IMHO, this is what's on the hearts and minds of families.

Rather than act like no one heard the news about an impending white minority, it might serve us all to tackle it head on and educate our communities and families about what this means to them.

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Proactive leadership by local government and school districts might make a massive difference in what this demographic change means for families.

The success or failure of integration can reverberate for many years, influencing whether immigrants become fully participating citizens who reach their full productive potential or remain in a poverty trap thereby becoming the strain to social services that everyone dreads.

Civic participation to understand these demographics should be a priority to both immigrants and anyone who feels threatened by the shift.



3 WAYS WE CAN DO BETTER

While fear, anger, and misinformation dominate the national headlines, some communities are making great strides towards integrating immigrants, refugees and asylees. A solution that satisfies all is untenable, but that's not to say we passively participate; we make sure everyone in our community is thriving. Perhaps what we need most is PATIENCE with our immigrants.

Cincinnati has made great strides towards integrating refugees and other migrants, but more must be done. As a City, we must move from a social services approach to an economic development strategy approach. As I do my work within this sector, here are a few observations on where we can do better:

Local Business Incubators

When refugees and immigrants are excluded from various business incubators around the City because of a rigid standard of "professionalism" we need to figure out how to train them and get them ready for business incubation.

Micro Lending

Sure it's risky to give credit without a credit history, but can we lend a sum that's easy to pay off even in the face of a business loss? \$500 can provide access to capital for someone who needs to buy a sewing machine for a tailoring business that ends up employing locals and creating multiple revenue streams for those it touches.

Easy Access to Programs

Most business programs available to assist immigrants and refugees are available during business hours. Since most immigrants work hourly jobs, this is a challenge. Classes are few and far between leaving many behind who would otherwise utilize them.

Today's immigrants come from all over the world, with very different experiences of political participation and government capacity. Many immigrant groups, especially those from war-torn or dysfunctional states, are reluctant to engage local government institutions. They may be unaware of the government services that exist and how to access them; at the same time they may not know how they can participate in local governance from joining a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to advocating for basic rights.

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