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Scaremongering over child refugees is unacceptable

By ALVARO HUERTA

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The summer is almost over, and with it, I hope, is the hysteria over unaccompanied child migrants to this country.

I was born here in the United States. I was taught that America welcomes immigrants and refugees.

But when I saw the ugly protests and heard the racist rants about brown immigrants, I barely recognized this country or some of the people in it.

I've always taken for granted that we, as Americans, are a generous people, and that we've all learned the basic lessons of common decency. These include, for instance, treating others with respect, telling the truth and having compassion for the less fortunate.

But then I saw some of my fellow Americans targeting defenseless children.

Instead of treating them like human beings or welcoming them as refugees fleeing abject poverty, crime and violence, these Americans recklessly portrayed child migrants as drug smugglers, terrorists, disease-infected individuals and, overall, threats to national security.

This dishonored America's reputation as a country that prides itself on spreading freedom around the world and providing humanitarian aid when called upon.

It also revealed contempt for the essential American belief that you're innocent until proven guilty.

In our country, you're not supposed to call someone a drug smuggler without providing proof.

You're not supposed to link child migrants to terrorist networks without evidence. Someone please show Texas Gov. Rick Perry a map to locate Islamic State terrorists, since he now claims that they could be crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

You're not supposed to assert that child migrants carry diseases without providing hard data of medical examinations and results. Some elected officials, like Rep. Phil Gingrey, R-Ga., have irresponsibly linked child migrants to the Ebola virus. In fact, there are no reported cases of Ebola in either Mexico or Central America; it's currently plaguing individuals in West Africa.

Instead of helping vulnerable individuals when they're down on their luck or in desperate need of relief, these Americans behaved like schoolyard bullies. They picked on weaker individuals who can't defend themselves.

This, at the very least, is bad manners.

Just as we expect better from our kids, who are going back to school, we should be able to expect more from grown-ups and politicians, too.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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