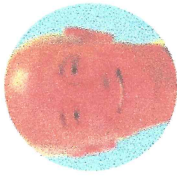


What does it look like to be American?

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You can be shot for how you look! Last week, we saw the increasing hate talk and threats can move to deadly violence.

In Olathe, Kansas, a town near Kansas City, a man was shot and killed because he didn't look "American." Sriniwas Kuchibhotla, an engineer from India, was having a drink after work, when an attacker shouted "Get out of my country," shot and killed him.

The suspect was apprehended 80 miles away after entering a restaurant and telling the bartender that he needed a place to hide since he'd just killed two Middle Eastern men.

Responses from the Hindu American Foundation, from officials in India and from family members of the victims, were swift. The father of one of the victims told the *Hindustan Times*, "I appeal to all the parents in India not to send their children to the U.S. in the present circumstances."

What is happening when America is not seen as welcoming to legal immigrants who wish to come here to find a better life and to contribute to our country?

My mind went back to my graduate school days, when my wife and I became friends with another graduate student and his wife from India who came here to study.

They were so kind and certainly appreciated the opportunity to come to America to study for the Ph.D. While here, they had a baby and we gave them a silver child's cup that they took back to India, and which their son used while young.

Many years later, the son returned to America in a technology field, and eventually, became the CEO of a startup company. He called us one day from California to tell us that he still had that cup, and remembered his parents telling him about us and about the gift we had given him as a baby.

Stories like these about immigrants coming to America and starting new companies and contributing are not unusual. In fact, the rate of startup companies created by immigrants is double those started by native born.

The reason is clear when one considers characteristics of a successful entrepreneur, including being dissatisfied with the status quo, being willing to take risks and being committed to working hard. These are also the characteristics of an immigrant. They are willing to leave their familiar setting and take the risk of moving to a new country and working hard to become successful.

These are the kind of people we need to encourage, not drive away because they do not "look like Americans."

Threats against Jewish centers and facilities have exceeded 70 the past two months. Last week, we also read about the desecration of a Jewish cemetery near St. Louis when nearly 200 tombstones were damaged. While these despicable acts continue, it is encouraging to know that there is also an increase in reaction against them.

People are coming together to promote a different view of what it means to be American. A campaign was started soon after the desecration incident called "Muslims Unite to Repair Jewish Cemetery" with the goal of raising \$20,000. At latest report it raised over \$130,000. On their website, they state: "Through this campaign, we hope to send a united message from the Jewish and Muslim communities that there is no place for this type of hate, desecration, and violence in America."

They found inspiration from an agreement for "unity, tolerance, and mutual protection" between the Muslim and Jewish communities of Medina, where Muhammad lived while in exile from Mecca.

They also cite as inspiration "the example of our Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, who stood up to pay respects for a passing Jewish funeral procession. When questioned on why he stood for a Jewish funeral, he responded, 'Is it not a human soul?'"

May we all find inspiration from these words and learn to treat each person not as an enemy or a threat, but as "a human soul."

As the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, Jonathan Sacks, wrote: "The supreme religious challenge is to see God's image in one who is not in our image."

Can we affirm the person who does not look like me, dress like me or worship like me as being in God's image? Can we see that same person as a true American or potential American as well?

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