

## Republic of Fear

by James Moos

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Increasingly, the land of the brave is becoming the republic of fear. The list of people the Trump administration would have us fear is long and includes undocumented workers, the media, citizens from a list of Muslim majority countries, and refugees. President Trump has issued two executive orders of questionable legal validity that would, among other things, “pause” refugee entries into the United States for 120 days, call for “extreme vetting” and slash the number ultimately resettled in the U.S. during the current fiscal year from 110,000 to 50,000. The first executive order attempted to block Syrian refugees from entering our country altogether.

Behind these orders is the fear that terrorists will enter the U.S. as refugees. Candidate Trump repeatedly warned that Syrian refugees entering the U.S. were “a great Trojan horse” that would generate acts of terrorism.

The Refugee Act of 1980 instituted systematic procedures for accepting refugees into the U.S. We already have the most stringent vetting procedures of any nation on earth; it typically takes two years and sometimes longer to complete the necessary security checks. According to the libertarian Cato Institute, not a single American life has been lost since that time due to terrorist attacks carried out by resettled refugees—not one. This includes the more than 780,000 refugees resettled in the U.S. since 9/11.

At the same time, more than 30,000 Americans die from gun violence every single year; over half a million since 9/11. Even so, President Trump signed legislation nullifying regulations requiring background checks for people with severe mental illness who were “determined by a court or similar authority to be a danger to themselves or others.” The action is as incomprehensible as it is reprehensible.

While the current round of fear-mongering is not limited to refugees, they are among its most vulnerable targets. Sadly, this is not the first time we have turned

them away. In 1937 Captain Gustaf Schroder brought 937 German Jewish refugees across the Atlantic on the steamer MS St. Louis. Secretary of State Cordell Hull advised President Roosevelt not to accept the Jews; Roosevelt took his advice. Finding no sanctuary in the Americas, the refugees were returned to Europe where many died in Nazi death camps. Shall we again turn away from our shores refugees fleeing for their lives?

Recently I visited Greece and witnessed the work done among Syrian refugees by a Greek church body. A clergy person said that when he looks in the faces of refugees, he sees an icon of God. If we look and see only potential terrorists, then we exit the land of the brave and enter the republic of fear. And when fear overtakes us, we are in danger of losing our republic altogether.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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