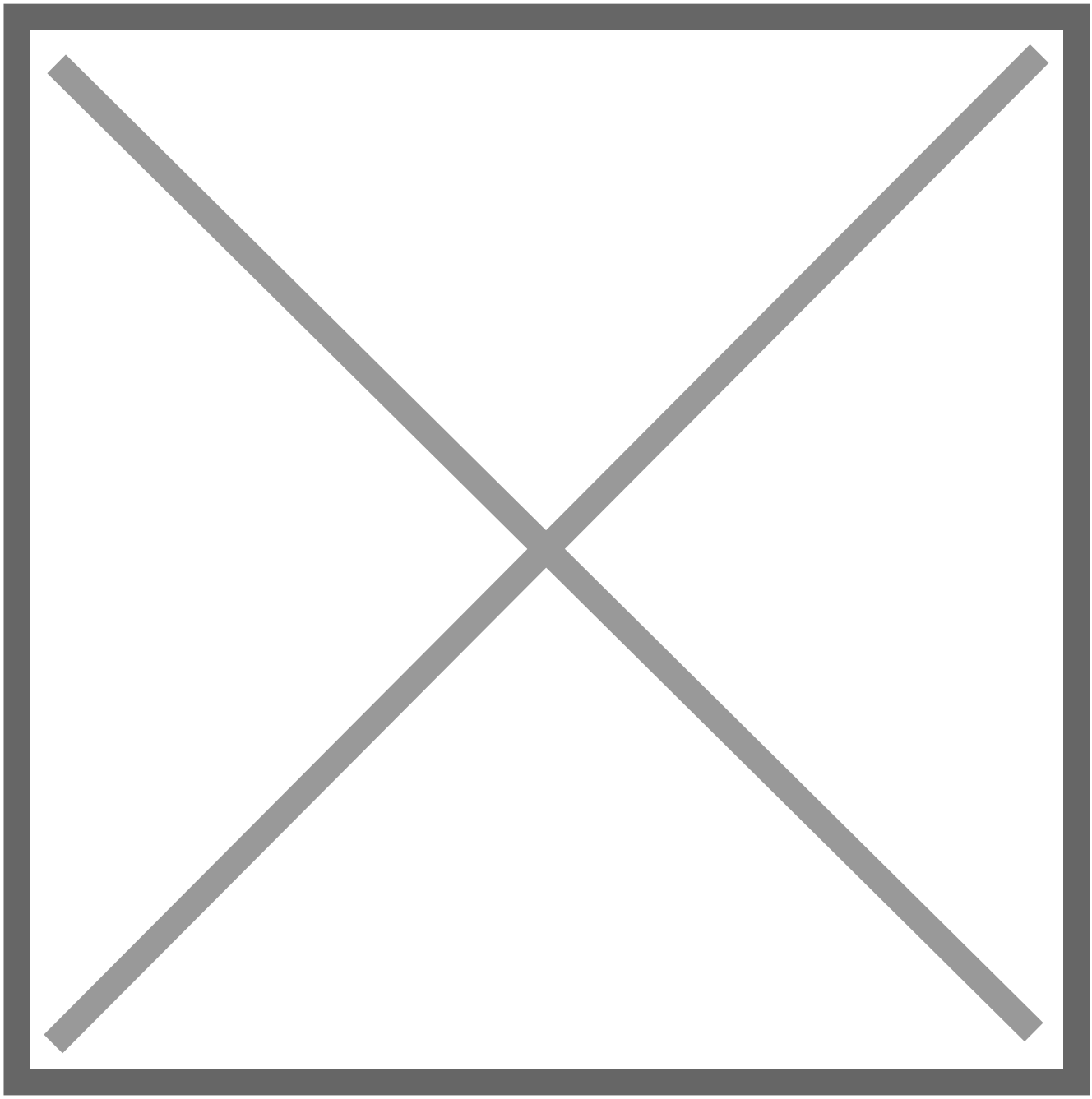
Opinion
Guest Voices



Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies detain a woman during a standoff by protesters and law enforcement, following multiple detentions by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in Compton, Calif., June 7, 2025. (OSV News photo/Barbara Davidson, Reuters)



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How a person reacts to the sight of armed, masked men assaulting immigrants in the United States defines a person's character. Increasingly, the priority put on detaining people is defining the character of the government, if not the entire country. The U.S. is beginning to look like a dictatorship seeking to divest itself of anyone who is poor and speaks Spanish.

U.S. racism is not new. In the 17th century, Northern Europeans arrived, claimed Native American lands and imported enslaved African Blacks. As the United States grew, its leaders insisted on its white character, even as it swallowed more and more territory inhabited by brown-skinned people. What is now the diverse metropolis of Los Angeles, we must recall, was founded by Mexican settlers in 1781.

Throughout the 1800s, but especially following the Civil War, cities grew increasingly crowded with poor people distinguished from the ruling aristocracy by their darker skin. Immigrants increasingly faced both racism and nativism, which guarded the interests of persons born within U.S. territories (except members of the more than 500 Indian tribes already in residence). Anti-immigration laws appeared, excluding Asians (1875) and Chinese (1882). The concept was to keep the country lily white.

By 1900, the U.S. had welcomed more than 10 million immigrants. The then-24-year-old Statue of Liberty greeted the tired and poor arriving at Ellis Island in New York Harbor. Soon, law after law sought to stem the tide. There was a literacy requirement (1917) and country quotas appeared. Even so, Southern Europe supplied increasing numbers of Jews and Catholics, to the point that Catholicism became the largest denomination in the otherwise predominantly Protestant country.

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A lot of good the United States' Judeo-Christian heritage does these days. A nominal Christian and defender against antisemitism, the U.S. president oversees brutal treatment and disregard for the personal dignity of thousands of individuals. Many came escaping drug cartels, violence and poverty. Old and young, male and female, they may not speak English. Most happen to be brown. In the name of ridding the country of criminals, agents of the Department of Homeland Security violently arrest even those who accepted the strictures of the previous administration and are in the process of naturalization.

Is the behavior the president is trumpeting moral? Is it ethical? Is it worthy of the government with the largest economy in the world, one that oversees thousands of empty acres within its borders, the government that recently counted 7.8 million open jobs? Immigrants are not restricted to cities, although they would happily settle in any of the abandoned neighborhoods from coast to coast. And they want to work.

The behavior of the president's Cabinet and his minions demonstrates extraordinary character deficiencies. Whether you want to counter them on ethical or moral grounds, you are right to shake your head and wonder how and why the United States has become a pariah to people of good character.

Church leaders are speaking out, and books are starting to appear. Are you interested in ethics? Read General Stanley McChrystal's "On Character." Are you interested in morality? Read "Facing Race" by the Rev. Roger Haight, a Jesuit priest. This year's summer reading assignment is about restoring the country's good character.

The U.S. president's mother was an immigrant — English was her second language — and he is married to an immigrant. What is the nature of his character?