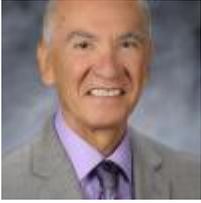


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by Mario T. García

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"We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in, we're stopping a lot of them, but we're taking people out of the country. You wouldn't believe how bad these people are. These aren't people, these are animals."

Can you believe that a president of the United States would say such a thing? Yet, Donald Trump [did say this](#) a few days ago and has no regrets about this. He didn't walk it back. He gave his core supporters what they want — red meat in the form of undocumented immigrants who are struggling to care for their families and escaping poverty and violence both in Mexico and Central America. Nativists such as Trump justify their anti-immigrant attitudes by dehumanizing the immigrants. Just lump them all into statistics and into the category of "animals" and avoid that they are human beings. Yet they are human in the eyes of God.

I have often said that undocumented immigration is also a moral issue and that we have to approach it not just economically and politically, but also morally. What is our human response to other humans in need — including women and children? Do we just turn away and pretend that we have no moral obligation toward them? I would hope not.

Yet this is what Trump and his nativist and racist followers are doing at the same time that they go off to Sunday religious services, including Catholic Masses. Undocumented immigrants are not animals and as long as we dismiss them as such we will never resolve the immigration issue. To deny someone else's humanity is to

deny our own humanity.

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By contrast, I want to recommend an excellent book I just finished reading that brings into play the humanity of undocumented Mexican immigrants along the U.S.-Mexico border. This is *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border* by Francisco Cantú, published in 2018. What is remarkable about this book is that it is written by a former member of the Border Patrol. Cantú writes about the human suffering and deaths that he witnessed in the Arizona desert as the migrants attempt to cross into the United States. He apprehends them but he is also moved by their suffering and their determination to secure a better future for themselves and their families. He reacts to them as humans in need. He humanizes them by giving their names and giving voice to their stories.

At the same time, Cantú also humanizes those in the Border Patrol, many of them Mexican Americans like himself. He writes about their stories and their hopes and dreams. Not all of these officials treat the immigrants inhumanely. Trump, his followers and all Americans should read Cantú's remarkable and beautifully written narrative, to understand the human and moral side of undocumented immigration. To be human is to serve other humans. We need to be humans.