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Media Distorts Cuccinelli Comments on Statue of Liberty

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Earlier this week, the Trump administration announced that it intended to deny green cards to aliens entering the United States if they make an attempt to obtain public assistance in the form of Medicaid, food stamps, and housing vouchers. In defending the policy, Ken Cuccinelli (shown), the acting director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), noted on Tuesday night that historically speaking, immigrants were not supposed to become a “public charge” — receiving welfare benefits paid for by U.S. taxpayers.



This led to another opportunity for the mainstream media, predominantly liberal and virulently anti-Trump, to distort Cuccinelli’s remarks to make them sound racist.

For example, the headline of the *New York Daily News* was typical of the false reporting of the media on this matter: “Statue of Liberty poem was only supposed to welcome white immigrants ‘from Europe,’ Cuccinelli Says.” The opening line of the story read, “The hardline White House official who slammed the famed poem inscribed on the Statue of Liberty now claims the verse was only supposed to welcome white immigrants.”

The problem is that Cuccinelli did *not* use the words “white immigrants.”

What Cuccinelli actually said was quite different, and his remarks were instead related to the policy of denying public assistance to immigrants by noting what U.S. policy toward immigrants was at the time the Statue of Liberty was erected and Emma Lazarus’ famous poem “The New Colossus” was placed at the foot of the statue. In an interview with CNN on Tuesday night, Cuccinelli said that the poem’s words, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” were a reference to immigrants from Europe who were coming from class-oriented societies with little liberty.

“People [were] coming from Europe where they had class-based societies, where people were considered wretched if they weren’t in the right class.”

Of course, Cuccinelli is quite correct, historically speaking. The millions of immigrants who entered New York Harbor in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty *were* almost all from Europe. At that time, hardly any immigrants entered the United States via New York Harbor from any other continent. Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian immigrants usually arrived in San Francisco or some other location on the west coast of America.



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Cuccinelli agreed with a National Public Radio interviewer that the words “give me your tired, your poor” were part of the American ethos: “They certainly are. Give me your tired and your poor who can stand on their own two feet and who will not become a public charge.” Cuccinelli later told Fox News that “yearning to breathe free” was never intended to provide the peoples of the world “free stuff.” Rather, Cuccinelli insisted, “It’s freedom to have opportunity.”

Not surprisingly, Democrats running for president were quick to level the same accusations of racism as their allies in the media. Beto O’Rourke, for example, tweeted, “This administration finally admitted what we’ve known all along. They think the Statue of Liberty only applies to white people.”

President Trump defended Cuccinelli’s actual remarks (which said nothing about “white people”) on Wednesday: “I don’t think it’s fair to have the American taxpayer paying for people to come into the United States.”

This is the actual issue — should immigrants be entitled to a cornucopia of welfare benefits upon entry into the country, all financed by taxpayers? Perhaps that is why Democrats and their media allies have attempted to shift the focus to their old reliable attack of racism.

Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) also condemned Cuccinelli’s position. “Our values are etched in stone on the Statue of Liberty. They will not be replaced,” she tweeted. “And I will fight for those values and for our immigrant communities.”

Warren was not specific in explaining what she believes are the values “etched in stone on the Statue of Liberty,” but no doubt they are typical of what the prevailing liberal culture claims they are — open borders and generous welfare benefits. But the Statue of Liberty was not intended to promote open borders or generous welfare benefits. It was not the Statue of Open Borders or the Statue of Welfare Benefits, it was the Statue of *Liberty*.

And liberty does not seem to be a value held very high by Warren, O’Rourke, or most of the mainstream media. None are telling the truth on this matter. No wonder President Trump calls the mainstream media “fake news.” In their reporting of Cuccinelli’s defense of denying welfare benefits to immigrants so they will not become a “public charge,” they have resorted to a falsehood — that Cuccinelli said “white” immigrants, so as to imply that he is a racist, just like his boss Donald Trump is also a supposed racist, and just like the millions of Americans of all races who voted for Trump in 2016.

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Steve Byas is a university history instructor and author of the book, History’s Greatest Libels. The book examines many of the lies that have been told about great historical figures. He may be contacted at byassteve@yahoo.com



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