

America: The Open Door

“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,” wrote Emma Lazarus as the inscription on the base of the Statue of Liberty. Ever since the founding of America, immigrants from many foreign countries fled to our country, looking for an escape from war, poverty, famine, religious persecution, and a way to begin a new life in a new land. With time, however, the population of America grew and the government began considering ways to control immigration. As more legal and illegal immigrants enter the country, Americans, not realizing the economical benefits these people bring, have come to believe how immigrants overwhelm America. Because immigrants, both legal and illegal, play key roles in maintaining the competitive economic system of America, society must allow immigrants to maintain their position in our economy.

Annually the United States accepts between 700,000 and 900,000 legal immigrants (Camarota). In addition to this annual immigration rate approximately another 225,000 to 300,000 illegal aliens enter the US per year (Edmonson). While many Americans question the changes foreigners bring to the culture of America, the greatest debate among Americans remains: How do immigrants benefit or negatively impact the US economy?

Many Americans argue that immigrants (in particular, illegal immigrants) take low-skilled, low-end jobs away from American citizens. Those in support of immigrants, however, believe immigrants actually contribute to the American economy through diligent work and undergoing low-wage job positions that many Americans find undesirable (U.S.). According to an extensive study completed by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas and Atlanta in August 2004, immigration has little to no impact on wages for service-related and professional workers. For manual labor immigrants play no significant role in a negative impact on wages. For low-

skilled jobs American workers wages are only 2.4% below where they would be without immigrants (Anrig). Overall, economists agree that although immigrants reduce the wages of American workers with little to no education, the overall impact on the US workforce has not been significant.

Another common debate surrounding immigrants is whether immigrants cost the government more than they contribute in taxes; hence, possibly hurting the US economy. The cost of providing education to the children of illegal immigrants results in approximately 3.1 billion dollars according to the Urban Institute (Edmonson). The cost to imprison illegal immigrants is \$471 million a year. Illegal immigrants consume \$445 million in Medicaid funds (Edmonson). Though these numbers seem extremely high, most Americans do not realize the billions of dollars given by the immigrants through taxes and consumer spending, offsetting these costs. As noted by Brent Wilkes, Executive Director of the League of United Latin American Citizens: “Immigrants, legal and illegal pay property taxes, spend their money here and are helping to revitalize communities that were depressed twenty years ago” (Simmons). Many researches performed surrounding this subject exhibit that through time immigrants, along with their families, actually provide more money to the federal government in taxes than they receive in benefits. A report by the National Academy of Sciences discovered a standard immigrant family will pay an estimated \$80,000 more in taxes than they will obtain in combined local, state, and federal benefits over their lifetimes (Anrig). Therefore, generally, immigrants pay significantly more money than they gain from all levels of the government combined.

Recently, the economic growth of America significantly increased. Without immigration, this growth would not have happened. Millions of immigrants contribute knowledge and skills to America’s economic growth. According to a report compiled by the Federal Reserve Bank of

Dallas, immigrants supplied American job growth three main ways: filling an increasing share of overall jobs; accepting jobs in labor-scarce regions; and filling jobs most American workers often refuse to do (Anrig). Many critics believe immigrants help the American economy in the sense that goods and services remain at low prices due to the cheap labor of these immigrants. In the opinion of Microsoft's Bill Gates, imposing restrictions and regulations on immigrants and companies would "prevent companies like ours from doing business in the United States" (U.S.). Many Americans believe the government should deport illegal immigrants so native citizens can fill some of the low-paying jobs immigrants occupy. However, others feel that by forcing out immigrants, America ignores the focus of creating new, better-paying jobs for natives of the country; hence, possibly hurting instead of helping the U.S. economy.

For years Congress as well as state legislatures tried to develop ways to slow down the illegal immigrants entering our country. Restrictions include making all illegal immigrants ineligible for federal and state benefits except for emergency medical care, immunization programs, and disaster relief. Although a majority of Americans believe illegal immigration is a problem to some extent, many oppose denying social services to undocumented immigrants.

Another proposed bill wants to make English the official language of the country. This bill requires all issued matters to be written in the English language (Holman). Critics argue, however, such laws and restrictions will not discourage illegal immigrants from entering the country because most foreigners come to the US to work, not to collect benefits. Overall, like most crimes, illegal immigration can be controlled but not eliminated. The damage these immigrants cause to our country, however, is minor when compared to the damage done by real problems. The government should change the immigration policy to make an easier system for

immigrants to become legal—thereby not only pleasing citizens of America but also maintaining the growing economy of America.

Because immigrants, both legal and illegal, play key roles in maintaining the competitive economic system of America, society must allow immigrants to maintain their position in our economy. Though many believe illegal immigrants harm the country, immigrants actually contribute to the American economy a great deal. From covering low-paying jobs to bringing diversity to big name companies, these immigrants help maintain America's economy. America has a long-standing, historic commitment to immigration. Ever since the founding of our country, immigrants have kept our nation strong and culturally rich. As former president Franklin D. Roosevelt once noted: "Remember, remember always, that all of us are descended from immigrants."