

Immigration & the Economy

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Immigration is an important part of American life. America is, after all, a nation of immigrants. It was immigrants who founded the towns, developed the land, and established the ideals that would pave the way for the next generation, the first American generation, to set in place the most powerful government known to man. Without immigration there would be no United States. Back then there were no policies on immigration. Anyone could have a piece of the American Dream, until the Immigration Act of 1924, which limited to number of immigrants who could legally enter America every year. Since then many laws have been passed specifying the qualifications and quotas on immigration, such as the Immigration and Nationality Act.

The recent increase in the number of illegal aliens residing in the United State and talk of expanding border patrol has made immigration a hot topic for today's politicians. Some Americans believe that immigration is productive to American society, while others believe that it cause problems for our economy. In truth, most people probably don't give much thought to the issue, and if they do, it's usually more about the legalities than economic impact. Who should be allowed to apply for citizenship, how many should be approved each year, and various questions about the legalization process are the matters most usually discussed, but the question that should be asked has a more economic standpoint. Does the United States benefit from immigration? Does the good outweigh the bad?

Immigration can be beneficial to American society. Differences in race and creed creates diversity in culture. In any given city, you can find Mexican, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Thai and French restaurants within a block of each other, and where else in the

world do people who celebrate Christmas, Kwanza and Hanukah all live in the same neighborhood. Can you imagine what life would be like if we were all brought up the same way, with exactly the same beliefs and no challenges to stimulate thought? Difference in beliefs creates variety in thought process, which leads to a greater number and diversity in ideas and more chances of cooperation in solving problems. Immigration also leads to an increase in technology. Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish-born emigrant, helped to build the American steel industry. One of the co-founders of Intel Corp. was an emigrant, as was the inventor of the nuclear powered submarine.

Legal emigrants who become productive members of society increase both the work force and economic growth. They have jobs, support their families, and earn money, which they put back into the economy by purchasing American goods and paying taxes to the United States government, the same way a natural born citizen does. Often immigrants will work for less income than natural citizens, increasing the profits for businesses, which can be used on product development and customer service, making life a little bit easier for those who use their products. Cheap labor keeps the cost of the product down, which prevents inflation and a higher cost of living. Cheap labor within the U.S. also decreases the number of businesses exporting work, which would cut back the number of jobs available to Americans.

Although immigration adds to the culture and development of the United States, it also has certain negative aspects, and some of the benefits can even have problems within themselves. Again, the work force is a prime example. Many citizens believe that foreign born workers are taking jobs away from the American people specifically because of the cheap labor. Employers hire immigrants because they work harder for less money, often in jobs that Americans find unfavorable. This wouldn't be much of a problem, in fact it might even motivate

Americans to put forth more effort, until you take into consideration all of the illegal immigrants being hired instead of legal emigrants or United States citizens. This isn't a total loss, because chances are if they live and work in America, they'll spend their money in America; however, illegal aliens do not pay taxes. They also receive no employee benefits such as health insurance, which means that any time they go to the hospital the American taxpayers foot the bill. In some hospitals, as much as $\frac{2}{3}$ of total operating costs are for uncompensated care for illegal aliens, which in some cases leads to cutbacks in hospital staff. ¹

Other problems with immigration include education, poverty, and unemployment. In 2003, 20% of legal emigrants had less than a 9th grade education. 12% attended high school, and only 22% actually graduated. ² 16.5% of legal emigrants lived below the poverty level, and 7.7% were unemployed, ³ which further depletes tax dollars to pay for their welfare and unemployment checks. Then again, think of how many natural citizens are living off welfare as well. Racism is another problem. Countless hate crimes occur every year because of differences in race, color, and religion. Groups like the KKK and the Neo-Nazis encourage these crimes against non-whites, which includes most of America's foreign-born population. But you have to ask yourself, would such people stop committing crimes if we were all white and shared the same beliefs, or would they find something else to lash out against.

Now we come to the legalization process. Think of all the illegal immigrants in America. Why do they come to the U.S.? They come because they want a better life for themselves and their families. They come because they want a piece of the "American Dream," but the only way to truly receive all the benefits of that dream is to become a legal citizen. Why don't they? Why would they go through all the trouble to get here, leaving behind families, friends and everything they possess, and then not obtain legal residency status? The simple

answer would be that there is a problem in the process. Perhaps it is too complicated, and we should simplify it by doing away with some of the forms and background checks, but then how would you know that a person would be a productive, law-abiding member of society. Maybe the quotas are the problem, but if every person who applied for citizenship were granted it, there would be a huge overpopulation problem. The Land of Opportunity would soon have too many people and not enough opportunity to go around.

Another problem could simply be that immigrants don't have enough information. They don't know what the laws and regulations are, how to apply, where to go, or even who to ask for help. Some people could argue that this is their own fault; if they want to come to America they should study up. Is this fair? How many immigrants have the material available to them? Most Americans don't even know what our immigration policies are. Perhaps if we made the legalization process more available, and possibly a little easier and quicker to complete, more illegal aliens would seek legal citizenship, which would lessen some of the economic strains caused by immigration.

All in all, legal immigration is an integral and valuable part of American society. The government benefits from more tax dollars, businesses benefit by having harder workers for less money and society benefits from cultural diversity and technological development. Most problems posed by immigration would still exist even without the immigrant, or would be replaced by another even greater dilemma. As long as it is kept under control, the benefits of immigration will more than compensate for any complications created by this issue.