

America is Immigration: Five Immigration Myths Explained (Source: American Immigration Lawyers Assoc. Backgrounder)

Anti-immigration groups, in their efforts to further restrict immigration and oppose any positive reforms to our immigration system, often propagate myths to support their agenda. Several of these myths are addressed below—together with facts to set the record straight.

Myth Number 1: Immigrants take jobs away from Americans.

It is not true that immigrants take jobs away from Americans. Here's why:

- **Immigrants do not increase unemployment among natives.** A study by economists Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore found that states with relatively high immigration actually experience low unemployment. The economists believed that it is likely immigration opens up many job opportunities for natives. They wrote, "First, immigrants may expand the demand for goods and services through their consumption. Second, immigrants may contribute to output through the investment of savings they bring with them. Third, immigrants have high rates of entrepreneurship, which may lead to the creation of new jobs for U.S. workers. Fourth, immigrants may fill vital niches in the low and high skilled ends of the labor market, thus creating subsidiary job opportunities for Americans. Fifth, immigrants may contribute to economies of scale in production and growth markets." (1)
- **Research on immigration's labor market consequences on minorities has also yielded information that suggests little negative impact.** In her study on immigration's impact on the wages and employment of black men, the Urban Institute's Maria E. Enchautegui concluded, "The results show that in the 1980s black men were not doing worse in areas of high immigration than in other areas and that their economic status in high-immigration areas did not deteriorated during that decade." (2)
- **There is no such thing as a fixed number of jobs.** Contrary to the belief that an increasing number of people compete for a static number of jobs, in fact, the number of jobs in America has increased by *15 million* between 1990 and 2003, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor). (6) Between 2000 and 2010, *more than 33 million new job openings* will be created in the United States that require only little or moderate training, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This will represent 58 percent of all new job openings. (7)

Myth Number 2: Most immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy or treasury.

Here's the truth about immigrants, taxes and the economy:

- **Significant total taxes are paid by immigrants.** Immigrant households paid and estimated \$133 billion in direct taxes to federal, state, and local governments in 1997, according to a study by Cato Institute economist Steve Moore. (8)
- **The level of state tax payments approximates that of Americans.** Immigrants in New York State pay over \$18 billion in taxes, over 15 percent of the total, and roughly proportional to their size in the state's population, according to a study by the Urban Institute. Average annual tax payments by immigrants are approximately the same as for natives--\$6,300 for immigrants versus \$6,500 for natives. (9)
- **States come out ahead.** In Congressional testimony, University of California, Berkeley economist Ronald Lee, the principal author of the fiscal analysis in the National Academy of Sciences study, concluded that a dynamic analysis, with the appropriate assumptions, would likely show that 49 of the 50 states come out ahead fiscally from immigration, with California a close call. (10)
- **Long-run benefit.** The National Academy of Sciences concluded that "Over the long run an additional immigrant and all descendants would actually save the taxpayers \$80,000." (10)
- **Overall economic benefits of immigration.** The report by the National Academy of Sciences also found that immigrants benefit the U.S. economy overall, have little negative effect on the income and job opportunities of most native-born Americans, and may add as much as \$10 billion to the economy each year. As a result, the report concluded, most Americans enjoy a healthier economy because of the increased supply of labor and lower prices resulting from immigration. (13)

Myth Number 3: America is being overrun by immigrants.

Here are the facts on immigration statistics:

- **The number of immigrants living in the United States remains relatively small as a percentage of the total population.** While the percentage of U.S. residents who are foreign-born is higher today than it was in 1970 (currently about 11 percent), it is still less than the 14.7 percent who were foreign born in 1910. (16)
- **The annual rate of legal immigration is low by historical measures.** Only 3 legal immigrants per 1,000 U.S. residents enter the United States each year, compared to 13 immigrants per 1,000 in 1913. (17)
- **The 2000 Census found that 22 percent of U.S. counties lost population between 1990 and 2000.** Rather than “overrunning” America, immigrants tend to help revitalize demographically declining areas of the country, most notably urban centers. (18)

Myth Number 4: Immigrants aren’t really interested in becoming part of American society.

Here’s information about immigrants’ feelings about the country and the future:

- **Immigrants are more optimistic about the nation’s future.** “A poll of Hispanics finds they are far more optimistic about life in the United States and their children’s prospects than are non-Latinos,” according to an August 2003 New York Times/CBS News poll. (19)
- **Immigrants want to become proficient in English.** Reports from throughout the United States indicate that the demand for classes in English as a second language far outstrips supply. Data from fiscal year 2000 indicate that 65 percent of immigrants over the age of five who speak a language other than English at home speak English “very well” or “well.” (24) The children of immigrants, although bilingual, prefer English to their native tongue at astounding rates. In fact, the grandparents and parents of immigrant children have expressed some concern that their youngsters are assimilating too quickly.

Myth Number 5: Immigrants contribute little to American society.

The facts show that immigrants contribute significantly to America:

- **Immigrants show positive characteristics.** A Manhattan Institute report showed that immigrants are more likely than are native born to have intact families and a college degree and be employed, and they are no more likely to commit crimes. (26)
- **Immigrants help with the retirement of the baby boom generation.** While countries in Europe and elsewhere will experience a shrinking pool of available workers, the United States, due to its openness to immigration, will continue healthy growth in its labor force and will reap the benefits of that growth. [Former] Federal Reserve Board Chairman Alan Greenspan has stated that “Immigration, if we choose to expand it, could prove an even more potent antidote for slowing growth in the working-age population.” (28)
- **Immigrants contribute to entrepreneurship.** *Inc.* Magazine reported in 1995 that 12 percent of the Inc. 500—the fastest growing corporations in America—were companies started by immigrants.

Conclusion

In sum, who are these people we call immigrants? They could be your parents, your grandparents, your teachers, your friends, your doctors, your policemen, your grocer, your waiter, your cook, your babysitter, your gardener, your lawyer, your favorite actor, actress, or sports hero, your shop keeper. Immigrants permeate the fabric of America. They are an integral part of our society, its goals and its values. The backbone that helps make this country great, they set us apart from every nation in this world. In short, they are us.

Footnotes

1. Richard Vedder, Lowell Gallaway, and Stephen Moore, *Immigration and Unemployment: New Evidence*, Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, Arlington, VA (Mar. 1994) at p. 13.
2. Maria E. Enchautegui, “The Effect of Immigration on the Wages and Employment of Black Males,” Urban Institute, Washington D.C. (May 1993) at p.17.
6. Council of Economic Advisers. *Economic Report of the President 2003*, Table B-37.
7. Daniel E. Hecker, “Occupational Employment Projections to 2010,” *Monthly Labor Review* (Nov. 2001).
8. http://www.immigrationforum.org/about/articles/tax_study.htm
9. <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=900094>
10. Testimony of Ronald D. Lee, Member, National Academy of Sciences Panel on the Demographic and Economic Impacts of Immigration. Before the Senate Immigration Subcommittee, “Economic and Fiscal Impact on Immigration,” (Sept. 9, 1997).
13. *The New Americans*, National Research Council, 1997, supra note 3.
16. Griswold, Daniel T., “Immigrants Have Enriched American Culture and Enhanced Our Influence in the World,” *Insight on the News* (Feb. 18, 2002).
17. *The New Americans*, supra note 3.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Simon Romero and Janet Elder, “Hispanics in the U.S. Report Optimism,” *New York Times* (Aug. 6, 2003).
24. Elizabeth Grieco, “English Abilities of the U.S. Foreign-Born Population,” *Migration Policy Institute* (Jan 1, 2003).
26. <http://www.cato.org/pubs/handbook/hb105-29.htm>
28. Testimony of Alan Greenspan before the Special Committee on Aging, U.S. Senate (Feb. 27, 2003).