

Myth: Amnesty benefits only illegal immigrants.

by Barbara Reid

Amnesty (or, as proponents conceive it, an earned pathway to legalization) is a major issue in comprehensive immigration reform. Both sides of the immigration reform debate recognize that it is impractical to think that all ten to twelve million undocumented workers can be deported. Both sides also recognize that current immigration policy is ineffective and patchwork in terms of national security, the economy, and humanitarian considerations. Are there benefits to all of us if legalization is extended to undocumented persons?

Let us start with national security. Legalization would result in the immediate addition of the identities of the ten to twelve million undocumented immigrants to government data bases, thereby enhancing both national and local security. The current lack of complete records of names, addresses, and other identifying information of undocumented immigrants is an obvious detriment to law enforcement and national security.

As to the economy, both labor (e.g., AFL/CIO¹ and SEIU²) and management (e.g., U.S. Chamber of Congress³), by their support of a pathway to legalization for undocumented workers, underscore the recognition that immigrant workers are a necessary part of our economy. The legalization of this group would lead to their inclusion in the tax rolls, resulting in payment into Social Security as well as payment of federal, state, and local taxes. Undocumented immigrants, because they supply youthful labor, help to ensure that Social Security and Medicare will be secure for a number of years to come, offsetting some of the pressure of the retiring baby-boomer population.⁴

Legalization would go far toward eliminating workplace abuses. Currently, given the fact that undocumented workers are rightfully fearful of deportation, unprincipled employers can and do exploit their vulnerabilities. This exploitation can take the form of substandard wages, abusive working conditions, and failure to pay time-and-a-half for overtime. (Minimum wage, safe working conditions, and time-and-a-half for overtime are guaranteed to all workers by law, regardless of immigration status.) These conditions also affect American workers in the lowest sector of the economy, who are let go if they balk at conditions that others with no choice accept. A third benefit to the economy would be the equalization of the playing field among businesses. Currently unscrupulous companies benefit by hiring undocumented workers and paying them substandard wages, thus leaving companies that comply with hiring regulations at a marked disadvantage. If undocumented workers are legalized, they will choose to enter the formal sector of employment, thus closing down the informal sector.

¹ www.aflcio.org/aboutus/thisistheafclcio/ecouncil/

² www.seiu.org/political/issues/immigration/

³ www.uschamber.com/issues/immigration/

⁴ www.tcf.org/list.asp?type=PB&pubid=491#8

Historically, the U.S. has prided itself in its humanitarian values such as those exemplified by the words on the Statue of Liberty: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses... .” There is a “Catch 22” in our immigration policy that denies these values. On the one hand, the U.S. economy’s need for these workers⁵ results in a tacit invitation for their illegal entry. On the other hand, our immigration policy denies these workers open participation in our society, relegating them to an underclass existence. Legalization of undocumented immigrants would reaffirm our nation’s commitment to humanitarian responses.

⁵ Id.

Myth: Immigration Takes Jobs from American Workers

By Bob Hayman

One of the main arguments against immigration is the claim that immigrants take jobs from Americans. Certainly, there are examples where this is true: foreign athletes such as Ichiro Suzuki, Yao Ming, and Felix Hernandez all occupy major league roster spots that could be filled (although not necessarily as well) by Americans. But these are high-end, highly specialized positions, and no one will argue that a less qualified American should replace Ichiro. The displaced Americans referred to in this claim tend to be average wage earners. To what extent is this claim true for them?

An ad aired in Arizona depicted white-collar workers cleaning out their desks and taking a one-way elevator ride to unemployment, because of immigrants. The recently-formed Reclaim American Jobs Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives has created an advertisement that says that there are 15 million unemployed Americans, and 8 million undocumented immigrants with jobs, so we could cut unemployment in half simply by booting the undocumented immigrants out of the country⁶. The math is certainly simple, but it carries the assumption that the number of jobs would remain constant if we were to boot out 8 million workers, and that Americans would then flock to fill those jobs. The truth is more complex.

While economics is not an exact science, there is an emerging consensus on how immigration affects the employment rates of Americans. A recent study⁷ compared employment rates in states with relatively high numbers of immigrants to those in states with low immigration levels, and found that immigration was associated with increased overall productivity and income levels. This was because immigrants filled less-desirable low-skill jobs, while increasing the demand for goods and services that created higher paying jobs. This study also found that immigration caused no discernible difference in employment rates for native-born Americans, and concluded that there is no evidence that immigration occurs at the expense of jobs for native-born Americans.

This illustrates a flaw in the reasoning of the Reclaim American Jobs Caucus. It ignores the fact that those 8 million undocumented workers are also 8 million consumers, and their families add even more. Thus, a number of studies have concluded that, while immigration slightly decreases wages for the lowest-skilled workers (e.g., those who didn't finish high school), its overall

⁶ V. Novak, "Does immigration cost jobs?," FactCheck.org, Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2010, www.factcheck.org/2010/05/does-immigration-cost-jobs/.

⁷ G. Peri, "The effect of immigrants on U.S. employment and productivity," Federal Reserve Bank San Francisco Economic Letter 2010-26, August 30, 2010. www.fsbfsf.org/publications/economics/letter/2010/el2010-26.html.

impact on job levels and on the economy is positive.^{8,9,10} One study, which found that immigration expands the economy, calculated that a 29% increase in immigration would add \$180 billion to household incomes.¹¹ A second study concluded that, because immigrants consume goods and services, they create more jobs and have a small but positive impact on overall wages.¹² This finding applies also to undocumented immigrants — studies indicate that undocumented immigrants and native-born workers tend to concentrate on different types of jobs (undocumented immigrants generally work in hospitality and service jobs), so illegal immigration has little effect on employment among native-born Americans.¹³

This means that those white-collar workers in the elevator ad are actually not being replaced by undocumented immigrants. To emphasize that point, the United Farm Workers recently organized a “Come on, take our jobs” campaign, in which they challenged unemployed Americans to apply for the agriculture jobs that many undocumented immigrants fill.¹⁴ There has been little response (only 7 applicants this year), and a similar challenge in 1998 netted only 3 applicants. This does not surprise economists, whose near consensus is that immigrants, both legal and illegal, contribute to economic growth and create as many jobs as they occupy.¹⁵

Consequently, if the Reclaim American Jobs Caucus is successful in booting 8 million undocumented immigrants out of the country, they will likely also be booting out 8 million jobs. Net job gain to 15 million unemployed Americans? Zip.

Thus, this myth, while it has intuitive appeal, is not supported by research. In fact, because immigration increases economic growth, deporting working immigrants under current economic conditions is exactly what we should *not* do.

⁸ W. Somerville and M. Sumption, “Immigration and the labour market: theory, evidence, and policy,” Migration Policy Institute, 2009. www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/immigration-and-the-labour-market.pdf.

⁹ D. Griswold, “Higher immigration, lower crime,” *Commentary Magazine*, 2009. www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/higher-immigration-lower-crime-15297.

¹⁰ H. Shierholz, “Immigration and wages – methodological advancements confirm modest gains for native workers,” Economic Policy Institute Briefing Paper #255, 2009. www.cpi.org/publications/entry/bp255.

¹¹ Griswold, *supra*.

¹² Shierholz, *supra*.

¹³ C. Silva, “Rick Scott says 700,000 illegal immigrants take jobs,” *Politifact.com*, Aug 18, 2010. www.politifact.com/florida/statements/2010/aug/18/rick-scott/rick-scott-says-illegal-immigrants-taking-jobs/.

¹⁴ J. Barbassa, “Be a farmworker, immigrants challenge American critics,” *Seattle Times*, June 25, 2010.

¹⁵ Silva, *supra*.

Myth: Immigrants Don't Pay Taxes.

by Barbara Yasui

Most people who believe that immigrants don't pay taxes probably have in mind a stereotyped "illegal alien" who snuck across the U.S. border from Mexico, hangs around outside Home Depot soliciting handyman jobs that are paid under the table and doesn't pay income taxes.

In fact, immigrants pay over \$133 billion in federal, state, and local taxes every year.¹⁶ Immigrants, both documented and undocumented, who receive pay checks are subject to automatic payroll deductions just like other workers. The Social Security Administration estimates that 75% of undocumented immigrants pay payroll taxes¹⁷ and contribute at least \$7 billion per year¹⁸ to federal programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

Immigration helps keep both Social Security and Medicare afloat. A 2007 study by the White House Council of Economic Advisors reported that immigrants and their families contribute an average of \$80,000 more over their lifetime than they use in benefits.¹⁹ Their contributions help support the system and allow others to receive benefits that they themselves most likely will never receive.

At the state and local level, immigrants pay state income, sales, property, public utilities, gasoline and "sin" taxes. They also contribute to the local economy through their earnings. A 2002 study by the University of Illinois found that undocumented immigrants in the Chicago metro area spent almost \$3 billion of their earnings every year. These expenditures, in turn, generated an additional \$2.5 billion in spending, as the money originally spent by the undocumented immigrants rippled through the local economy.²⁰

In 2007, Washington state immigrants contributed almost \$1.5 million in taxes to the state economy.²¹ In fact, foreign born residents of Washington pay slightly more than their share of

¹⁶ OneAmerica, Feb. 2010, "Immigrants & Immigration: Answering the Tough Questions." <http://www.weareoneamerica.org/sites/default/files/ToughQuestionsonImmigration-OneAmerica.pdf>.

¹⁷ ACLU, April 2008, "Immigration Myths & Facts". <http://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/immigration-myths-and-facts>.

¹⁸ OneAmerica, *supra*.

¹⁹ American Immigration Lawyers Assoc, Feb. 2009, "Myth: Immigrants Hurt the Economy Because They Don't Pay Taxes." <http://www.aila.org/content/default.aspx?docid=27931>.

²⁰ Center for Urban Economic Development, University of Illinois at Chicago, Feb. 2002, "Chicago's Undocumented Immigrants: An Analysis of Wages, Working Conditions, and Economic Contributions." http://www.urbanecconomy.org/sites/default/files/undoc_wages_working_64.pdf.

²¹ OneAmerica, April 2009, "Building Washington's Future: Immigrant Workers' Contributions to Our State's Economy." http://www.weareoneamerica.org/sites/default/files/Immigrant_Contributions_to_Our_State_Economy.pdf.

state taxes, paying more than 13% of the total taxes, while they represent only 12.5% of the population.²²

Although low income households made up of foreign born residents pay less in total taxes than high income foreign born households, they pay a proportionally higher share of their income in taxes—about 14%.²³ In 2006, this amount was estimated to be \$50 million for households earning less than \$20,000.²⁴

In other words, the myth that immigrants do not pay taxes is just that: a myth. In many cases, what immigrants pay in taxes is far greater than what they receive in services.

²² Id.

²³ Id.

²⁴ Id.

Myth: Undocumented Immigrants Are Not Entitled to Protection under the Constitution

By Kati Ortiz

Many people believe that undocumented immigrants are not entitled to the protections given by the Constitution. This belief is widespread, as shown in a recent op-ed article in an Oklahoma newspaper, "Illegal aliens lack constitutional rights."²⁵ However, the Supreme Court has held for more than a century that aliens within the United States are persons entitled to constitutional protection. That includes aliens who are unlawfully present. While undocumented immigrants do not benefit from all of the rights granted to citizens, in particular the right to vote, they are entitled to most other fundamental rights that citizens enjoy.

Our nation's history is full of legal precedent confirming that those present in the United States, even those with no defined immigration status, can rely on the Constitution for protection. For example, undocumented immigrants are entitled to due process: the idea that laws and legal proceedings must be fair. In 1886, the Supreme Court ruled on one such important case involving the rights of Chinese immigrants. The Court held that undocumented immigrants shall not be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, as laid out in the 14th Amendment.²⁶

Undocumented immigrants are also entitled to equal treatment under the law and protection against unreasonable searches and seizures. In 1982, the Supreme Court pronounced that undocumented immigrants were covered by the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution when it struck down a Texas law that denied public education to the children of undocumented aliens.²⁷ In 2008, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that in a case in which immigration agents entered a home and arrested aliens without obtaining a warrant, and could not demonstrate special circumstances or proof of consent, the officers' entry constituted an unlawful search and seizure.²⁸

²⁵ <http://newsok.com/illegal-aliens-lack-constitutional-rights/article/3530334>.

²⁶ *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, 118 U.S. 356 (1886). The Court held specifically that the statement, "nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws," applied to all persons "without regard to any differences of race, of color, or of nationality," and to "an alien, who has entered the country, and has become subject in all respects to its jurisdiction, and a part of its population, although alleged to be illegally here."

²⁷ *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982). In its decision, the Court held, "The illegal aliens who are plaintiffs in these cases challenging the statute may claim the benefit of the Equal Protection Clause, which provides that no State shall 'deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.' Whatever his status under the immigration laws, an alien is a 'person' in any ordinary sense of that term. . . . The undocumented status of these children *vel non* does not establish a sufficient rational basis for denying them benefits that the State affords other residents."

²⁸ *Lopez-Rodriguez v. Mukasey*, 536 F.3d 1012 (2008). The plain language of the Fourth Amendment states "the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated; and no Warrants shall issue but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

Additionally, the Supreme Court has held that undocumented immigrants are entitled to competent legal representation at the government's expense in criminal cases, as laid out in the 6th Amendment.²⁹ Immigrants also have rights in immigration hearings, a type of civil proceeding, such as the right to a deportation hearing with an immigration judge. They also have the right to an interpreter, if necessary, and the right to examine the evidence being presented against them.³⁰

While it is true that undocumented immigrants do not share in all the rights enumerated under the Constitution, it is also true that citizens are not always entitled to all of those rights. Convicted felons, for example, cannot own firearms or vote. Citizens not born in the United States may not run for president. However, the law makes clear that undocumented immigrants are entitled to protection under the Constitution while they are within the boundaries of the United States.

Justice is one of the most basic values of the United States. To have true meaning, justice needs to be applied to *all* persons within the jurisdiction of the U.S., not only to U.S. citizens. Through the broad definition of "all" we acknowledge as a country the humanity of all people, and apply to all equal treatment under the law. Precedent established through the cases cited above reminds us that justice is, and should continue to be, applied to undocumented immigrants.

²⁹ 130 S. Ct. 1473 (2010). The ruling requires defense counsel to provide affirmative, competent advice to a noncitizen defendant regarding the immigration consequences of a guilty plea. In the absence of such advice, a noncitizen may raise a claim of ineffective assistance of counsel.

³⁰ The Rights of Immigrants – ALCU Position Paper, <http://www.aclu.org/immigrants-rights/rights-immigrants-aclu-position-paper>.

Myth: Immigrants are not integrating into American society as quickly as they did in the past.

by Beatrice Crane

Since 1990, the foreign-born population of the United States has doubled, reaching 12.5% of the total population in 2008. The last time period that experienced a comparable wave of immigration was the early part of the twentieth century. A pervasive myth is that immigrants are not integrating into American society as quickly as they did during previous times of high immigration. What is responsible for this perception, and does it contain any truth?

Any comparison made by the casual observer is likely to be subjective and unfair, since such an observer will be comparing isolated individuals at different points in the assimilation process, and will not have access to all the relevant data. Because of the current boom in immigration, coupled with the fact that many immigrants are settling in places which had not previously had high immigrant populations, people are likely to encounter more recently-arrived immigrants than they might have twenty or thirty years ago. They may hear unfamiliar languages, observe different styles of dress or encounter foreign customs. But newly-arrived immigrants are by definition not integrated into American society, because integration is a process that takes place over time. Moreover, the most readily-observed aspect of integration —language acquisition—is the one which tends to take the longest for adult immigrants.

There are studies which use census data to analyze assimilation rates of immigrants over time.^{31,32} They identify various components of assimilation: cultural adaptations such as language acquisition, economic factors such as employment and home ownership, and civic aspects such as citizenship. These studies reveal various unsurprising trends: that the longer immigrants are in this country, the more they integrate, regardless of their country of origin; that economic measures of integration, particularly homeownership, increase more rapidly than cultural aspects such as language acquisition; that younger immigrants achieve English proficiency more quickly than do adults.

One such study compares the current wave of immigration with that of a century ago.³³ It defines an index of assimilation, made up of economic, cultural and civic components. The study concludes that, upon arrival, today's immigrants are indeed less assimilated than those of the early 1900s, when many more immigrants came from countries in Western and Northern Europe, which have languages and cultures similar to those of the United States, but that their rate of assimilation is actually higher.

³¹ Dowell Myers and John Pitkin, "Assimilation Today," Center for American Progress, September 2010.

³² Jacob L. Vigdor, "Measuring Immigration Assimilation in the United States," Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Civic Report No. 53, May 2008.

³³ Ibid.

However, these studies do not tell the whole story. They focus on assimilation – the process of becoming similar to native-born members of society. But integration is more complex than that; it implies adaptations on both sides as society absorbs its newcomers. The traditional concept of the “melting pot” is somewhat flawed, in that it suggests the distinctive characteristics of each new group will eventually disappear. Actually, every new group adds recognizable elements to American culture. But however one characterizes the process, immigrants are adapting to an evolving norm.

According to the Migration Policy Institute, “integration is a two-way process in which both the newcomers and the host societies are changed.”³⁴ At a time of high immigration, both the immigrants and the residents are just beginning that process; as the newcomers find their place in American society and interact increasingly with others, Americans move from suspicion and fear to acceptance.

A recent event in Seattle marked and symbolically negated the expulsion of its Chinese immigrants in 1886. After experiencing years of discrimination, the Chinese were forced to leave Seattle in a time of economic downturn because of perceived competition for jobs. On Saturday, February 12, a group including many Chinese Americans marched from the docks up through the “welcome gate” into the International District, reversing the path of the expulsion. According to a *Seattle Times* article, the remembrance organizers “hope the events of the past will never be repeated with a new generation of immigrants.”³⁵

The journey from rejection to acceptance is not always so clear. But what is clear is that integration is not a one-way street. When we question whether immigrants are integrating into American society, we must also examine to what extent society is supporting and adapting to its new members.

³⁴ Migration Policy Institute, “Immigration Settlement and Integration.”; www.migrationpolicy.org/research/.

³⁵ Nancy Bartley, “‘Shameful Moment’ in Seattle History,” *Seattle Times*, 13 Feb 2011, B1.

Myth: Cracking down on illegal border crossings will help win the war on terror.

By Kati Ortiz

Latinos are the target of more discrimination in today's society than any other major racial or ethnic group, according to a study by the Pew Hispanic Center.³⁶ When asked the cause of the discrimination, most respondents to the study cited immigration status, which many presume to be "illegal."³⁷ Interestingly, statistics show that roughly 81 percent of Latinos are either citizens or documented immigrants.³⁸ It makes one wonder if border policies are targeting Latinos rather than terrorists. Are we cracking down on hikers "illegally" crossing the northern border while enjoying the beauty of the Pacific Crest Trail?³⁹ And why can an undocumented laborer work undetected in Anytown, USA? Because he's not an undocumented Latino, but an undocumented Canadian?⁴⁰ America cannot keep itself safe from terrorists by imposing harsh border policies which disproportionately target one group, especially when that group has not been associated with terrorist activity or attacks in the United States.⁴¹

Measures to tighten border security are not effective in fighting terrorism or in decreasing illegal border crossings. Since 9/11, the myriad of measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security (limiting access to hospitals, schools, and driver's licenses; increasing the military presence at the border; attempting to restrict automatic citizenship; constructing a fence along the border) have netted no terrorism prosecutions.⁴² In fact, several of these measures could have the opposite effect and actually make us less safe by making targeted communities of immigrants afraid to come forward with information. Increased border security and the construction of border fences have done little to curb the flow of immigrants across the United

³⁶ Pew Hispanic Center, *Hispanics and Arizona's New Immigration Law*, available at <http://pewhispanic.org/factsheets/factsheet.php?FactsheetID=68>.

³⁷ Pew Hispanic Center, *Illegal Immigration Backlash Worries, Divides Latinos*, Oct. 28, 2010.

³⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, *Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2009*, available at <http://www.census.gov/popest/national/asrh/NC-EST2009-srh.html>.

³⁹ The Pacific Crest Trail begins in Canada, crosses into the United States and continues for about 9 miles before crossing back into Canada. The trail later crosses back into the United States and continues for 2,600 miles, all the way to Mexico.

⁴⁰ Beth Slovic, "He's an illegal Eh-lien," *Willamette Week*, Feb. 20, 2008, available at http://www.wweek.com/portland/article-8470-herss_an_illegal_eh_lien.html.

⁴¹ No terrorist has ever been arrested crossing the Mexican border into the US. *See* statement of Agnes Gereben Schaefer, a political scientist with the Rand Corporation, available at <http://www.hsoutlook.com/features/features/144-are-mexican-narco-gangs-keeping-terrorists-away-from-the-border-.html>.

⁴² Daniel Griswold, Cato Institute, "Don't Blame Immigrants for Terrorism," available at <http://www.cato.org/dailys/10-23-01.html>.

States border.⁴³ Instead, these policies have only succeeded in pushing border crossers into dangerous and less-patrolled regions. They have also created an incentive for immigrants to remain in the US for longer periods in order to recoup the increased costs of crossing the border.⁴⁴

The “crisis” at the southern border is more a law enforcement challenge than a front line in the war on terrorism. The idea of terrorists entering the US through an illegal border crossing is not implausible, but neither is it probable. No security expert has said that more restrictive immigration measures would have prevented the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. So why are we spending so much money and so many resources on protecting one land border from those crossing illegally? The 9/11 hijackers were all issued visas. They did not cross through a land border and they were not from Mexico and they were not undocumented. They all utilized a legal process to enter this country.⁴⁵

The US Border Patrol does apprehend aliens from nations other than Mexico who attempt to cross our southern border without proper documentation. Some of these individuals are from countries such as Somalia that may have ties to terrorism.⁴⁶ However, these individuals are not terrorists, but are often fleeing their home countries and entering the US to seek asylum.⁴⁷ The truth is that 'terrorism' in the US is just as likely to be committed by a former member of the US Military as it is by a 'foreigner' (Oklahoma City, DC Sniper, Atlanta Olympics, etc.). Antiterrorism measures rely heavily on intelligence gathering and clandestine efforts that are unrelated to border enforcement. The most powerful weapon in the struggle to dismantle terrorist networks and prevent attacks is information gathering, not military might or increased border security.⁴⁸

⁴³ The intelligence failures leading to 9/11 led to the massive influx of border patrol agents to the Mexico border and a congressional mandate to construct hundreds of miles of new fencing. A report from the Government Accountability Office, released in 2008, estimates that the US will have spent some \$6.5 billion over the next twenty years maintaining that fence. The 600 miles of new fence have been breached more than 3,000 times since GAO started tracking in 2005.

⁴⁴ Douglas Massey, Cato Institute, “Backfire at the Border: Why Enforcement Without Legalization Cannot Stop Illegal Immigration,” June 2005, (“Compared to 1990 and before, by the year 2000 it cost undocumented migrants three times as much to gain entry to the United States. If the first order of business on any trip to the United States is to recover that cost, then holding constant the rate of remuneration and hours worked per week, the stay would have to be three times as long.”) available at <http://www.freetrade.org/pubs/pas/tpa-029.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Prepared Statement of Vice Chair Lee Hamilton and Commissioner Slade Gorton, *National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary, August 19, 2004.

⁴⁶ Special Interest Alien Handbook, available at <http://publicintelligence.info/AlienHandbook.pdf>.

⁴⁷ *The Washington Times*, “Somali asylum seekers attempt illegal entry via Mexico,” Jan. 26, 2010, available at <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jan/26/somali-asylum-seekers-attempt-illegal-entry-via-me/>.

⁴⁸ Sara Daly, Rand Corporation, “Fight Terrorism with Intelligence, Not Might,” Dec. 26, 2003, available at <http://www.rand.org/commentary/2003/12/26/CSM.html>.

Myth: Immigrants are responsible for a disproportionate percentage of crime in relation to the overall population

by Jeanette Corkery

I saw my neighbor coming and accurately predicted the words that would come tumbling out of his mouth. After all, I'd already read the morning headlines and was prepared for the invective he seems to reserve for those of us who work with immigrants and refugees. "Bet you're glad you weren't the lady walking behind the market that got attacked last night," he said. "The attacker was an illegal alien, you know."

I sighed. I've become accustomed to such remarks by my neighbor, who never misses an opportunity to let me know the latest atrocity committed by "illegal aliens." But in fact, statistics show quite the opposite to be true: where there are large clusters of immigrants, particularly those from Mexico or Central America, there is a marked reduction in crime rate. This phenomenon, referred to as the "Latino Paradox" by Harvard sociologist, Robert Sampson, asserts that, in fact, violence among Latino immigrants is significantly lower than that of blacks and whites.⁴⁹

A recent study by the Immigration Policy Center reaches similar conclusions.⁵⁰ A comparison of the incarceration rate for the native-born and for immigrants shows the incarceration rate for native-born men aged 18-39 to be more than 11 times the rate for immigrants in the same age range. The study further concludes that immigrants from nations that account for most of the undocumented workers—such as Mexico, El Salvador and Guatemala—have an incarceration rate considerably lower than that of native-born Americans.

Even more convincing is new FBI data showing that violent crime rates in Arizona along the southwest border region have been falling.⁵¹ In the entire state, violent crimes such as murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault are down by 15 percent since 2006. Similarly, Arizona's property crime rate has dropped more than twice the national average. A recent article in *Newsweek* compares violent crime statistics between San Antonio, a border city with a high immigrant population, and Detroit, a city with a low immigrant population.⁵² This study indicates that whereas San Antonio saw an 11% **decrease** in violent crime since 2006, Detroit saw a 5.5% **increase**. While it may be too simplistic to assume that the difference in immigration rates is solely responsible for the difference in crime rates, it does seem clear that an increase in the immigrant population does not cause a surge in violence.

⁴⁹ *LiveScience* Staff, "Immigration Reduces Crime Rates," *LiveScience* (March 17, 2008).

⁵⁰ "New FBI Data Confirms Falling Crime Rates in Arizona," Immigration Policy Center, June 17, 2010, available at www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/fbi-data-confirms.

⁵¹ Department of Public Safety of Arizona.

⁵² Christopher Dickey, *Newsweek* (May 27, 2010).

The question can reasonably be asked then, what are the reasons that the level of crime among immigrant groups appears to be lower than that for native-born Americans. A plausible explanation, according to Robert Sampson, appears to be that those electing to come to the United States have certain characteristics that make crime a low probability.⁵³ These attributes include ambition, hard work and the drive to succeed, coupled with the realistic fear of being apprehended and deported.

Many citizens, like my neighbor, are all too quick to make false generalizations about crimes perpetrated by illegal immigrants. A careful study of recently published data, however, gives the lie to the myth that immigrants are responsible for a disproportionate percentage of crime committed in relation to the overall population.

⁵³ LiveScience Staff, *op.cit.*