

## ISSUES & VIEWS

### Immigration and Racial, Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

Racial and cultural issues loom large in immigration. Anti-immigrant groups that purport to be “colorblind” because they focus on economic and environmental issues, actually exploit racial and ethnic stereotypes (about crime, fertility rates, wasteful consumption) to argue against immigration. Pro-assimilation groups argue that they are only advocating for immigrants to adapt to their new home. Yet they maintain a narrow definition of what it means to be “American” and require that immigrants quickly learn English and uncritically take on the values of a dominant culture. Both these types of groups discount that racism poses an obstacle for many immigrants. A smaller number of organizations argue that non-White immigrants pose a threat to the nation, which they explicitly define as White, Anglo-Saxon, and Christian.

Even though racism is a factor in most anti-immigrant sentiment, it is important to distinguish explicitly White supremacist arguments from assertions by groups that claim to be racially neutral. These groups do not create tension out of thin air; they depend on the embedded bigotry of a community as a whole. The community’s attitudes also must be addressed in a sensitive manner. Using terms like “hate group,” “racist,” or “fringe” to describe all anti-immigrant groups tends to polarize debates and alienate people who feel they have legitimate concerns about immigration. A more effective way to reach these people is by carefully dissecting the opposition’s analysis. This includes pointing out the misconceptions and resentments the opposition exploits *and* responding to the valid community concerns the opposition claims to address.

### MULTICULTURALISM AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

#### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Many anti-immigrant groups avoid discussing the racial composition of immigrants, but veil such references in the seemingly neutral concern over “ethnic conflict”:*

- *Immigrants are eroding the unifying values of the United States (such as individual rights, equality, rule of law, work ethic, morality and self-government).*
- *These values are connected to Anglo-Saxon roots. The 85 percent of current immigrants who are non-European do not understand these values.*
- *The United States should return to race-conscious immigration quotas. It was a mistake to end quotas favoring northern and western European immigrants.*
- *Multiculturalism is to blame for endorsing conflicting values and identities and diluting “American values.”*
- *U.S. society is increasingly “balkanized” or fragmented into competing ethnic enclaves.*

- *Competition between Whites, immigrants and nonimmigrant people of color living in the same communities will lead to violence. For example, there were such conflicts in the 1990s between Korean storeowners and African Americans in Los Angeles.*
- *The September 11 attacks were an example of a large-scale interethnic clash, perpetuated by an internal minority whose values opposed “American values.”*

Examples: Glaister A. Elmer and Evelyn E. Elmer. (1988). *Ethnic Conflict Abroad: Clues to America’s Future*. Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation; Lawrence Auster. (1990). *The Path to National Suicide: An Essay on Immigration and Multiculturalism*. Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation.

## Response

The United States is already (and has always been) a multicultural society. In fact this continent was made up of many different indigenous cultures even before the arrival of the Europeans. The first African Americans were forcibly brought to the colonies in 1619. Chinese immigrants came in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to work on the railroads. Large numbers of Mexicans were living on land annexed by the United States from Mexico in 1848. Today people of color are a majority in many large cities and in the state of California.

Even when most recent immigrants were of European descent there was interethnic tension and competition, stemming from real or perceived inequalities. For example, Irish immigrants were seen as not loyal to the country because of their Catholicism and were explicitly discriminated against in employment. The Right’s solution of restricting immigration does not deal with the present reality of diverse cultures in the United States. It also ignores racism experienced by all people of color, including Native Americans, as a significant factor in this problem.

When the Right blames multiculturalism for increased tensions between different communities, it reinforces people’s resentment of other ethnic groups and adds to these tensions. It also ignores the root causes of the tension, such as perceived and real injustices. Multiculturalism seeks to reduce tensions by teaching values that support diversity and acknowledge the contributions of all communities. Other programs, such as affirmative action and redistricting to create “majority-minority” districts, are created to counter institutional racism. The Right has consistently opposed these programs. Ultimately, the Right takes advantage of racist sentiments to drive wedges between various communities and to garner support for their goal of restricting immigration.

## ASSIMILATION

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Anti-immigrant groups claim that today’s immigrants are not assimilating in a timely manner like past immigrants did, because they are not like past immigrants:*

- *New immigrants are increasingly non-European and do not have the same education level or values as previous immigrant groups.*

- *Many immigrants come from Spanish-speaking countries and live in concentrated “ethnic ghettos” where they have little reason to learn English and little exposure to mainstream U.S. culture and traditions.*
- *Immigrants are maintaining stronger ties to their home countries through dual citizenship and so are not loyal to the United States.*

*These groups also say that immigrants are no longer assimilating because the United States has changed:*

- *The United States now provides new immigrants a whole range of social services that discourage immigrants from supporting themselves, learning English or becoming productive members of society.*
- *Multicultural school curricula encourage immigrant children to value minority cultures, while denigrating U.S. culture, and discouraging the adoption of “American values.”*
- *The focus has shifted away from “assimilation” and “Americanization” to “diversity” and “multiculturalism.”*

*Some of these groups express no concern about immigration levels and only focus on the issue of cultural assimilation. Others conclude that a moratorium on immigration is necessary to allow time for the United States to “digest” earlier immigrant waves before new immigrants arrive.*

Examples: Linda Chavez. (1991). *Out of the Barrio: Toward a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation*. USA: BasicBooks, HarperCollins; *American Enterprise*. (2000). See December issue generally, including following articles: “Does America Have an Assimilation Problem?” by Michael Barone and John Fonte, and “Our New Immigration Predicament,” by Steven Camarota (of the Center for Immigration Studies).

## Response

New immigrants have always had a dynamic relationship to U.S. society, adapting to its diverse cultures and values, just as the society adapts to the immigrants, their traditions and perspectives. Immigrants who live in ethnic enclaves do so as a result of a complex set of factors. Immigrants face discrimination and lack of opportunities outside these areas. Within these areas they have connections to a community and to jobs and housing (albeit often substandard). Immigrant communities who were eventually seen as White, such as the Irish or Jews, were able to leave these enclaves. Others continue to face racism that keeps them segregated. The Right exposes its racism by rarely criticizing Whites when they participate in self-segregation and live in all-White areas.

Many social services the Right attacks were created to ease immigrants’ difficult transitions into new surroundings and to relieve tensions between various communities. Multilingual services increase first generation immigrants’ independence and ability to advocate for themselves. Despite popular conceptions, most public benefits are not available to most recent immigrants. For immigrants who do qualify, these benefits provide a safety net for the most needy, helping to prevent abject poverty. Multiculturalism is intended to increase the understanding of the diversity already present in the United States by recognizing the positive contributions of different immigrant and non-immigrant communities.

“Assimilation” is a nebulous concept which different pro-assimilation advocates have attempted to define. One conservative commentator defines it as pride in “American identity,”

and adoption of a “Protestant ethic,” of being “self-reliant, hardworking, and morally upright.”<sup>1</sup> An immigrant advocacy group defines assimilation as accepting the values of equality under law, due process and economic opportunity, while maintaining one’s ethnic identity. In measuring assimilation, though, it looked at English language acquisition, home ownership, and citizenship rates.<sup>2</sup>

When standards are subjective, such as pride in “American identity,” people of color must subscribe uncritically to the dominant views and are under greater scrutiny. For example, after September 11 Arab- and Muslim-Americans were called on to prove their loyalty. Economic and linguistic indicators are more quantifiable. However, the focus on assimilation ignores how discrimination closes off opportunities to many immigrants, forcing them into segregated communities, denying them quality education, and keeping them economically disadvantaged. The dismantling or defunding of affirmative action, bilingual education and English language programs poses a significant obstacle to the economic and linguistic integration of new immigrants. It also impedes their access to equal opportunity and economic justice.

There have been many thoughtful critiques of the concept of assimilation and the “melting pot.” New metaphors have emerged that emphasize diversity along with harmony, such as the salad bowl or the mosaic. These new conceptions allows for the existence of ethnic groups like the Amish and Hassidic Jews, who have attempted to preserve their unique cultures by resisting assimilation, while living peacefully alongside other communities. Most anti-immigrant and pro-assimilation groups oppose these conceptions of the United States as a diverse and tolerant society, especially when those seeking to hold on to their cultures are people of color.

## OFFICIAL ENGLISH

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Many anti-immigrant groups advocate for federal and state laws declaring English the official language of the United States. They seek to outlaw multilingual ballots and drivers’ tests, and prevent government officials from providing services in languages other than English. They say that:*

- *Self-interested politicians and “professional” civil rights advocates are trying to keep immigrants vulnerable by preventing them from learning English.*
- *Groups promoting official English are the true immigrant advocates, helping immigrants learn English, the “language of opportunity.”*
- *It is important to defend English as the national linguistic heritage.*
- *Multilingualism will lead to fragmentation and conflict. English is what bound together past generations of immigrants and made them into “Americans.”*
- *Civil rights advocates are attempting to make refusal to speak English a “civil right,” which would force employers to fill “quotas” of non-English speakers.*
- *As a result of the multitude of languages immigrants speak, English speakers are beginning to feel like “strangers in their own country.”*

Example: U.S. English advertisements, available on their website, <http://www.us-english.org/inc/>. (Also on file at PRA.)

## Response

There is no danger of English losing dominance within the United States. Over 90 percent of the population speaks English exclusively or very well (based on 1990 Census figures and factoring in undocumented immigrants).<sup>3</sup> Immigrants to the United States are learning English as quickly today as they have in the past. 76 percent of first-generation immigrants speak English “well” or “very well” within ten years of arrival.<sup>4</sup> Almost all second-generation immigrants are fully fluent in English. By the third generation fluency in the language of origin is extremely rare.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, there is much more reason to be concerned about the rapid loss of immigrants’ languages of origin. Multilingualism is a valuable resources given the increasing economic and cultural ties between different nations. In fact, many native-born English speakers are seeking to learn second and third languages to assist them in their work and travel. Studies show that fluent bilinguals do better in all aspects of their academic performance. In many countries, such as India, Germany and Holland, children are taught multiple languages in school or at home and become highly fluent in more than one language.

Offering government services in multiple languages does not prevent immigrants from learning English. Multilingual services merely allow first generation immigrants to advocate for themselves by gaining access to the political system and services to which they are fully entitled. English language acquisition is still essential to holding many jobs and participating in many aspects of society. Indeed, the demand for English language classes outstrips the availability in many immigrant communities.

## BILINGUAL EDUCATION

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Some groups oppose bilingual education programs and have successfully dismantled such programs in various states. They say:*

- *Students in bilingual education are faring much worse than students in English immersion programs.*
- *Bilingual education programs prevent children from learning English and stifle children’s education in other subjects.*
- *Immigrant children are being denied the opportunity to learn English and integrate into U.S. society.*
- *Taxpayers are footing the bill and supporters of bilingual education (teachers, administrators and civil rights advocates) are profiting from this costly industry.*

Example: See website of English for the Children, headed by Ron Unz, at <http://www.onenation.org/>.

## Response

Bilingual education programs in fact facilitate English language acquisition. They do so by ensuring that the child has a solid foundation in her first language and subject-specific material while learning English. The child’s ability to read and write in her first language and her

subject-specific knowledge will make the transition to English classes easier. This knowledge, once acquired, is easily transferred from one language to another.

Studies have found that, all things being equal, bilingual education programs produce better results than English immersion programs. Reports from California, that after severe restrictions were placed on bilingual education test scores increased, proved to be false. Stephan Krashen points out that test scores increase each year after a new test is introduced, as was the case in California. Test scores increased in districts that kept bilingual education programs also. He also points to evidence of selective testing, where low-scoring children were excluded. Furthermore, the most publicized results were from a district that had abandoned a Spanish-only program, not a bilingual education program. In fact, in Arizona, students in bilingual education scored better on English reading tests for three years in a row than those in English immersion programs.<sup>6</sup>

Though critics of bilingual education claim to be advocating in the best interest of children, they are actually fueling anti-immigrant sentiment. They create the perception that immigrants and their advocates are seeking unnecessary and costly special programs that seek to prevent English language acquisition. They also help to dismantle programs and create a cultural climate that leads to immigrants losing their languages of origin. These languages are valuable resources for immigrants and the society at large.

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## Immigration as a Criminal Issue

The idea that immigrants are criminals is a recurring theme of the anti-immigrant Right. The press is often happy to present sensationalist pieces that play on this stereotype. While “illegal” immigrants’ criminality seems self-evident to these groups, legal permanent resident and non-White citizens also are suspect because of their potential allegiances to different countries, values or political ideologies.

Immigrants have been targeted and brutalized by the “war on drugs,” which has helped justify the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border. The portrayal of immigrants as both criminals and a threat to national security resulted in the passage of two laws in 1996: the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). Immediately after the Oklahoma City bombing, terrorism “experts” pointed the finger at Islamic “extremists.” Even after the bombing proved to be the work of a homegrown terrorist, Clinton signed the Anti-Terrorism law, which has had dramatic repercussions for Arab Americans and other immigrants. With the recent September 11 attacks, Congress and the administration put through severe “security” measures that further infringed on the civil liberties of all noncitizens.

## IMMIGRANTS AND CRIME

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Anti-immigrant organizations argue that immigrants are much more likely to be involved in criminal activity. They say:*

- *Some immigrants are dangerous career criminals. For example: Mexican and Colombian drug dealers, Chinese “snakeheads” smuggling in human cargo on the Golden Venture freighter, sex traffickers coercing undocumented women into prostitution, ethnic gang members, middle-class immigrants stealing trade secrets, and pregnant women sneaking across the border to have children and “leech” off public benefits.*
- *September 11 attacks are an example of the extremes that some noncitizens are willing to go to if they are not monitored closely.*
- *Undocumented workers and visa violators are examples of unprincipled immigrants. Since they would break laws to enter the country, they are more likely to continue criminal activity once here.*
- *INS detention centers are full of such law-breakers. Immigrants are one of the fastest growing prison populations.*
- *The INS needs to more effectively locate and deport both “illegal” immigrants and “criminal aliens,” regardless of their legal status.*
- *The most effective solution is to dramatically limit legal immigration and increase INS and Border Patrol funding.*

Example: James S. Robb. (1995). “Infamous Immigrants: Here’s Proof All Newcomers Aren’t Albert Einsteins.” *The Social Contract*, Fall, p. 5-15. (Examples include Giuseppe Esposito, Sirhan Sirhan, the “Marielitos Boatlift,” and Sheik Omar Abdel-Rahman.)

### Response

The Right presents a distorted picture of the situation by using anecdotal evidence and the power of isolated horrific events, such as the September 11 attacks, to argue its case. Criminal activity and violence are realities of our society, but immigrants are no more prone to criminal activity than citizens. In fact, a study by researchers from Boston College and Harvard University found that among men aged 18 to 40, native-born men were more likely to be incarcerated than immigrants.<sup>7</sup> In another study, the researcher found that recent immigrants had no significant effect on crime rates and youth born abroad were less likely than native-born youth to be criminally active.<sup>8</sup> In fact, immigrants have disproportionately been the victims of racial profiling, police brutality and crimes, including xenophobic or racist hate crimes.

The recent increase in immigrant incarceration rates is a result of the draconian 1996 laws. These laws increased the number of crimes for which immigrants could be detained and deported, even after they had served regular prison sentences. They also mandated that asylum seekers be placed in detention centers until they have established a credible fear of persecution, a process that can take years. By 2001, these laws led to the incarceration of 20,000 immigrants in INS detention, of whom 3000 were being held indefinitely.

Detention centers are known for their inhumane conditions including overcrowding, poor medical care, and physical and mental abuse.<sup>9</sup> Because detention is considered an administrative process, detainees have few of the legal rights of other prisoners—no family visitation rights, no right to legal counsel, and INS standards that were created to rectify the inhumane conditions are not legally binding. Immigrants can be tried and deported based on secret evidence they never see.

The 1996 laws that brought about this situation were a direct result of the Right’s portrayal of immigrants as dangerous criminals. Rather than increasing the safety of our communities, these laws have dramatically infringed on the civil liberties of all immigrants. In 2001 the Supreme Court curtailed some of the most retrograde aspects of the 1996 laws, including ending most indefinite detentions. However, the policy of deporting longtime lawful permanent residents for a range of crimes, including minor nonviolent offenses, remains. In addition, after the September 11 attacks, the USA PATRIOT Act again created the legal means to detain noncitizens indefinitely and gave the Attorney General extensive powers to infringe on the civil liberties of those suspected of being involved in terrorism without meaningful judicial review. (See “Repercussions of September 11, 2001,” p. 86.)

## “ILLEGAL ALIENS” AND THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*The Right describes undocumented immigrants as “illegal,” portraying their mere existence as a crime, and consistently refers to all immigrants with the dehumanizing term “alien.” They say:*

- *The United States is threatened by an “immigrant invasion” especially across the U.S.-Mexico border, which is a “border battleground.”*
- *There is a Mexican plot to reconquer “Aztlán,” the portion of southwestern United States taken from Mexico in the Mexican-American War of 1846.*
- *A smuggling industry has formed that is profiting from the exploitation of these “illegals.”*
- *Since the INS has failed to stop this “immigrant invasion,” local citizens’ groups or police departments must take on the responsibility to protect the nation.*

Example: See generally website of Voices of Citizens Together, [www.americanpatrol.com](http://www.americanpatrol.com), and specifically their video “Immigration Threatening the Bonds of the Union: Part III: Conquest of Aztlán.”

### Response

When right-wing groups call undocumented immigrants “illegal,” they suggest that migration is merely a personal choice of whether to break the law. They blame the migrant and the smugglers, ignoring the root causes of undocumented migration. The United States has helped create the conditions that lead people to migrate and benefits from the existence of undocumented immigrants. Poor migrants and those from certain countries, such as Mexico, have very little opportunity to immigrate to the United States legally.



Right-wing groups define the migrant by the violation of a law, though the “crime” has no victim. A person who has violated a traffic law is not called an “illegal driver.” In fact, crossing the border wasn’t considered a crime until the INS moved into the Justice Department in 1940.

The Right’s use of military metaphors furthers a sense of urgency, implying the country is under attack by Mexican border crossers. This type of rhetoric has helped to justify the use of military personnel and tactics on a civilian population, at times with deadly consequences. It also creates the cultural climate where the violation of immigrants’ human and civil rights is justified in pursuit of “national security.”

Such thinking has manifested itself in the policies of the U.S. government. In the last ten years the government has increased the funding and more than doubled the personnel of the Border Patrol (the law enforcement arm of the INS). In addition it has initiated programs designed to stem border crossings. In fact, these programs have merely forced migrants to move through remote, dangerous regions. As a result, many migrants have died from exposure and dehydration. In addition, the Border Patrol has received military training and technology. Military troops at times have been deployed on the border for drug and immigration enforcement purposes. Military tactics are focussed on annihilating a threat rather than protecting civil rights or ensuring due process. They are extremely dangerous and inappropriate when dealing with a civilian population. In the May 1997, for example, a U.S. Marine shot and killed a teenager (a U.S. citizen) who was herding goats in Redford, Texas. Amnesty International has documented other human rights violations by the Border Patrol against citizens, immigrants and indigenous peoples whose tribal lands span the border. These include denial of food, water and medical care during detention, wrongful deportations, physical and sexual abuse, and fatal shootings.<sup>10</sup>

Most scholars agree that these efforts have failed to stop undocumented immigration. Employers, largely unscrutinized by INS, have continued to benefit from the labor of this workforce. INS raids (or the threat of raids) have been used by employers to undermine workers’ efforts to gain fair wages and safe working conditions. These raids have also led to the violation of workers’ civil rights. When INS has worked with local police, the community’s trust in law enforcement has been undermined.

Despite the brutality of the government’s policies and actions, many anti-immigrant groups say that the INS is not doing enough. Some ranchers whose lands are crossed by undocumented immigrants have created armed vigilante groups that seek to ensnare border crossers to be delivered to the Border Patrol. There have been increased hate crimes against immigrants and people of color along the U.S.-Mexico border and in communities with growing immigrant populations.

## “AMNESTY”

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Anti-immigrant groups oppose any programs that provide “amnesty” or a means of changing the status of undocumented immigrants. They say:*

- *These programs tell immigrants that if they simply sneak into the United States and wait long enough they will gain legal status.*

- *The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) that provided legal status to 2.7 million undocumented immigrants actually increased unauthorized immigration. As a result, fifteen years later there are another 11 million undocumented immigrants.*

Examples: Mark Krikorian (of the Center for Immigration Studies). (2000). "Amnesties Beget More Illegal Immigration: Will somebody tell Congress?" *National Review Online*, October 16. <http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/comment101600c.shtml>; Federation for American Immigration Reform. (1997). "Why Amnesty for Illegal Aliens Was—and Remains—a Bad Idea." May. <http://www.fairus.org/html/04134705.htm>.

## Response

Proposed legalization programs come out of an understanding of the real contributions and situations of undocumented immigrants. They also provide a fair, orderly way to deal with the existence of undocumented populations, which are a result of global policies facilitated by the United States. The only way to protect the rights of undocumented immigrants in the workplace, in housing, and in all realms of life is to give them legal status. Fear keeps undocumented immigrants from reporting dangerous working or housing conditions, domestic violence, and environmental violations, among other community concerns. Undocumented immigrants pay taxes and contribute culturally and economically to the society at large. Some have lived in the United States for ten years or more, raising children (some of them citizens) here. Legalization is a way to provide them the means to protect their human and civil rights and to recognize the varied and important contributions of these populations.

When the Right blames legalization programs for the increase in undocumented immigration, they ignore the root causes of this situation, including the role of particular U.S. policies. For example, most Mexicans do not have the option of migrating legally given the current laws. Yet the United States supported NAFTA knowing that it would lead to harsher economic conditions in Mexico and the need for many Mexicans to seek employment elsewhere. Also U.S. refugee policies tend to not apply to people fleeing oppressive regimes the United States has supported, leading to increased undocumented immigration from those countries. Rather than seeking a just solution, the Right prefers to paint undocumented immigrants as inherently criminal and individually to blame for their situations.

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## Immigrants as a Threat to U.S. Workers

Much of the Right's rhetoric about the economic situation in the United States. uses anti-immigration sentiment to justify support for its conservative economic views. These arguments are confusing on the surface, because they can appear contradictory. Sometimes the Right presents arguments that blame immigrants directly for economic ills. Others appear protective of workers' rights, blaming corporations for exploiting immigrants and driving down wages for native-born Americans. Still others, like the libertarian Cato Institute, seem to support immigration but simultaneously support policies that are anti-immigrant, such as Welfare Reform or weakening workers' protections. These positions indicate the complexity of the Right as a whole and the presence of a number of sectors that have developed different "takes" on the effect of immigrants on the U.S. economy.

## THE ROLE OF BUSINESS AND IMMIGRANTS

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Some groups on the Right put forth surprisingly progressive arguments about the role of big business and immigration policy. They say:*

- *Big business benefits from cheap, immigrant labor which it exploits with low wages and poor working conditions.*
- *Lax immigration policies in general, and unenforced employer sanctions in particular, allow businesses like the garment and food service industries to recruit and hire undocumented workers.*
- *The low wages these businesses pay to immigrant labor contribute to driving down the wages for Americans.*

*They claim:*

- *Powerful business interests work with the immigrant rights movement to lobby for shared goals: amnesty for “illegal aliens,” improved access to jobs for all immigrants, and increased quotas for high-tech and essential worker visas.*

*The solution to these big business-generated problems is:*

- *Immediate, stricter restrictions on immigration, including rigorous enforcement of employer sanctions, to limit the power of big business and protect U.S. jobs for U.S. citizens.*

Example: David Simcox. (2001). “Needed: Abolitionists: Sweatshops in the Los Angeles Garment Industry Should be Target of Reform Advocates.” *The Social Contract*, vol. XI, no. 4, Summer, pp. 288-291; Dick Hafer. (1994). “Truth.” *Border Watch*, April, Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation.

### Response

When an organization on the Right takes a stand against big business, it does not necessarily mean that it is pro-immigrant, or even pro-labor. There is no question that big business often exploits immigrant labor. But critics on the Right that challenge big business practices are less interested in labeling corporate America as greedy than they are in scapegoating immigrants. When they say they seek to protect jobs for the “American worker,” which they contend have been lost to cheap immigrant labor, they are appealing to native-born workers who have suffered from economic changes, downsizing and a lowered standard of living. Such an argument scapegoats immigrants and plays on the resentments of those U.S.-born workers who have not benefited from the economic boom the 1990s. Their answer, to regulate immigration severely, will not limit the power of corporations and will certainly diminish immigrants’ human rights.

When the Right casually calls for stricter employer sanctions, it ignores the unintended consequences of having employer sanctions on the books since 1986. Employer sanctions were designed to limit undocumented immigration by requiring employers to enforce federal immigration laws. But their effect was to increase discrimination against foreign-looking applicants, rather than to deter undocumented workers. Further, employer sanctions are often fraught

with fraud, such as employers providing false documentation or using the threat of reporting as a way to prevent workplace organizing.<sup>11</sup>

Arguments that accuse the immigrant rights movement of collaborating with corporate interests are inaccurate and misrepresent both groups. Business interests depend on a ready pool of workers. They are more likely to be interested in bottom line business practices and in lobbying for legislation that protects their interests than in defending immigrants' rights. And multinational corporations wish to protect their interests through access to both immigrant labor in the United States and cheap labor abroad. Most immigrant rights groups advocate for economic justice, equal opportunity and protection under the law for immigrant workers, not for a system that merely allows immigrants to hold jobs

The economic picture is much more complicated than these anti-immigrant, anti-big business arguments suggest. Such appeals deflect thoughtful scrutiny away from examining factors like globalization on the U.S. economy. We can no longer protect businesses and jobs in this country from global influence. Many corporations in this country are no longer just U.S. companies; they have a transnational influence. Because many U.S. transnational corporations have opened markets for themselves in many parts of the world, and because world trade policy favors globalized economies, the U.S. economy is linked to more countries than ever.

Globalization has actually contributed to the flow of immigrants around the world by creating or sustaining much of the poverty in developing countries. Many immigrants come to the United States because they seek greater economic opportunities than currently exist in their home countries, and they are willing to take the risks even of being undocumented if they can better their own economic situations.

Trade policies created by the WTO, along with structural adjustment programs imposed by the World Bank and the IMF, have made it more difficult for developing nations to raise their standards of living.<sup>12</sup> This has resulted in major patterns of economic migration that affect the United States and many other countries. Restricting immigration or blaming immigrants does nothing to alter this system and actually detracts from addressing its shortcomings in a comprehensive way.

Both immigration and economic policies are set by the government but are highly influenced by business interest groups in the agricultural, service and manufacturing sectors. Immigrants do not create these policies, but they are regularly scapegoated for any shortcomings or trouble spots that result. Rather than accept a simplistic and incorrect explanation, we need to develop an understanding of the larger, more global, economic system, including the interests and conditions of sending countries, and insist on policies that serve the interests of everyone, both native-born and immigrant.

## IMMIGRANTS AND COMPETITION FOR JOBS

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*One of the most common anti-immigrant arguments is that immigrants, both “legal” and “illegal,” are costing “Americans” thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in lost wages every year.*

*They say:*

- *Immigrants take jobs that rightfully belong to U.S.-born workers, especially unskilled Americans who are left with no work options.*
- *Unskilled immigrants enter the United States poor and stay that way, worsening the poverty problem and placing burdens on our social services.*
- *The latest economic downturn has laid off many U.S.-born workers who cannot get even lower-paying jobs because immigrants have taken them.*

Examples: Roy Beck. (1996). *The Case Against Immigration*. “Jobs Americans Will Do.” ch. 6, p. 101-135. New York: W.W. Norton; Donald Huddle. “Give Me Your Huddled Masses” in Federation for American Immigration Reform. (1992). *Immigration 2000: The Century of the new American Sweatshop*. pp.53-57. Washington, DC: by the author; Philip Martin, “Network Recruitment and Labor Displacement,” pp.45-51 in *Immigration 2000*, op. cit.; John L. Martin. (1996). “What is the Relation Between Income Inequality and Immigration?” Washington, DC: Federation for American Immigration Reform.

### Response

The Right consistently misrepresents the economic contribution of immigrant labor to the U.S. economy. According to many studies, rather than acting as a drain on the U.S. economy, immigrants are actually contributing many assets to the economic system.<sup>13</sup> They bring human capital into the country. They are more likely than U.S.-born workers to be mobile geographically and occupationally, responding to regional tight labor markets. They are more willing to fill less desirable jobs.

Although immigrants on the whole earn less than their U.S.-born counterparts when they first arrive, they close the gap over a period of years. They start small businesses more often than the native population, and this generates new jobs. According to these studies, including a 1997 National Academy of Science’s publication, *The New Americans*, their overall effect on the labor market is positive.

Blaming immigrants for economic downturns or for lowered wages is inaccurate and misdirected. Corporations that relocate to sites with cheaper labor are the cause of the loss of unionized jobs, not the presence of immigrants in a particular location. And although immigrants often work in concentrated numbers in certain industries such as meatpacking or building maintenance, their presence has had only a small impact on native wages, and then only locally, not on a national level.<sup>14</sup> Other economic forces such as inflation, unemployment rates and job creation rates have more influence on wages and buying power of native workers than immigrants do.

An alternative response to these cost/benefit arguments is a human rights perspective. Scapegoating immigrants sends undocumented workers further underground and makes them more vulnerable to exploitation. When immigrant workers are attacked, all workers suffer.

Because everyone deserves a living wage and decent working conditions, we need to support policies that make such situations possible for all workers, immigrants and U.S.-born workers alike.

## GUEST WORKER PROGRAMS

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Most anti-immigrant groups are against guest worker programs, both for high-tech workers and for agricultural and low-skilled workers. They say these programs lock out U.S.-born workers and only benefit employers by lowering wages. According to this line of reasoning, the only logistical solution to the problems of immigrant labor exploitation and the decrease of job opportunities for native-born workers is a severe curb on the level of legal immigration and successful prevention of “illegal” immigration.*

Examples: FAIR (press release). (2000). “GAO Finds No Agricultural Labor Shortage: What About Other Industries?” <http://www.fairus.org/html/0748801.htm>. Mark Krikorian, Testimony before Congress. (2001). “An Examination of the Premises Underlying a Guestworker Program, June 19. [www.http://house.gov/judiciary/kirkorian\\_061901.htm](http://house.gov/judiciary/kirkorian_061901.htm).

### Response

Those on the Right who oppose guest worker programs because they lower wages and exploit immigrant labor are using these arguments to appeal to native workers and their supporters. While many who seek to protect immigrant workers’ rights also oppose guest worker programs, the Right uses these arguments to attempt to build opposition to any further immigration. The same is true for seemingly pro-union statements that attack immigrants as unionbusters. The results of such campaigns are intended to increase anti-immigrant sentiment among non-immigrant union members and other workers in the sectors affected by guest worker programs. Guest worker programs should be challenged for other reasons, including the lack of potential citizenship status and the restrictions on job choice and wage negotiations. (For a discussion of the role of guest worker proposals in the Bush administration, see Jean Hardisty’s article, “Corporate Desires Vs. Anti-Immigrant Fervor: The Bush Administration’s Dilemma,” on pp. 33 of this kit.

## IMMIGRANTS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Some anti-immigrant organizations present themselves as advocates for African American rights. They say:*

- *African Americans disproportionately suffer the negative consequences of immigration in employment, housing, education, and social services.*
- *Employers prefer to hire immigrants because immigrants are willing to take lower salaries and because employers are racist against African Americans.*
- *Immigrants tend to work within certain occupational niches and exclude African Americans from these jobs.*

■ *Immigration is to blame for the continued subjugation of African Americans.*

Examples: Center for Immigration Studies. (1996). “‘Cast Down Your Bucket Where You Are’: Black Americans on Immigration.” June. <http://www.cis.org/articles/1995/CastDown.html>; Frank Morris. (1996/1997) “Urban Labor Markets: Immigrants vs. African Americans.” *Immigration Review*, Fall/Winter, pp. 18-19 and at <http://www.cis.org/articles/1996/IR27/bookreview-urban.html>.

## Response

This argument is an example of anti-immigrant organizations opportunistically using a typically progressive concern to advance an anti-immigration position. The claim that African Americans have suffered as a result of immigration is designed to appeal to African-American resentment over economic injustice and to divert attention from the institutional racism that privileges U.S.-born Whites. These arguments attempt to drive a “wedge” between two marginalized groups that are systematically excluded from economic opportunity.

However, studies do not provide empirical evidence that immigration has a substantial negative effect on native African American wages.<sup>15</sup> As a National Research Council study found, “none of the available evidence suggests that [African Americans] have been particularly hard-hit on a national level [as result of immigration] . . . [For] the majority of blacks . . . their economic fortunes are tied largely to other factors.”<sup>16</sup> Actually, the group most affected economically by recent immigrants is older generations of immigrants, who are their closest competitors for jobs.<sup>17</sup> Also, scapegoating immigrants detracts attention from the problem that all labor experiences: business interests seek to expand profits in part by keeping wages down for all workers.

In fact, immigrants and African Americans could better function as allies than enemies. Both immigrants and U.S.-born people of color face similar patterns of economic opportunity because of education, housing and employment factors. Both groups also experience similar patterns of discrimination. Understanding these connections, Black Workers for Justice and a number of unions responded to increases in Latino immigration to North Carolina by initiating an African American/Latino Alliance in 2000. The group has done targeted outreach to areas where Latinos and African Americans work closely together. It has launched a campaign calling for legalization of undocumented immigrants and collective bargaining rights for public workers, both immigrant and nonimmigrant.

## IMMIGRANTS AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Most right-wing groups oppose affirmative action. However a few anti-immigrant groups have opportunistically taken up this issue as an example of how immigrants are unfairly benefiting at the expense of African Americans. They say:*

- *Affirmative action programs were meant to redress the historical injustice of slavery experienced by African Americans.*
- *It should only apply to African Americans and never to those born outside the United States.*

- *Employers are filling their affirmative action “quotas” without regard to the citizenship status of applicants.*
- *Immigrants “are getting off the plane and moving right to the head of the line.”*

Examples: James S. Robb. (1998). *Affirmative Action for Immigrants: The Entitlement Nobody Wanted*. Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation; Joseph L. Daleiden. (1998). “Immigration’s Impact on African-American Job Opportunities,” *Headway Magazine*, February, <http://www.immigrationreform.org/editorials.htm>.

## Response

This line of reasoning is another opportunistic use of a progressive argument to oppose immigration. It is also an attempt to pit African Americans against immigrants. The United States Supreme Court has ruled that affirmative action is a remedy for current, not past, discrimination and is not a “quota” system. Affirmative action is designed to give equal opportunities to those who are commonly discriminated against in hiring, promotion, public contracting, and public school enrollment. It applies to people of color and women. White women and people of color, both native-born and immigrant, are all discriminated against in employment, getting lower-paying jobs and suffering from higher unemployment rates than White men.

The Glass Ceiling Commission revealed in a 1995 report that 97 percent of top managers in Fortune 1000 industrial and Fortune 500 service companies are White and 95 percent are men.<sup>18</sup> African American men earn 23% less than White men, and Latino men earn 37% less. White women earn 72 cents for every dollar earned by White men, while African American women earn 64 cents, and Latinas 52 cents.<sup>19</sup> White high school graduates earn 26 percent more than Asian Pacific Americans with similar degrees.<sup>20</sup>

Discrimination decreases the employment and salary opportunities of not only African Americans, but also Latinos and Asian-Americans, many of whom are immigrants. It is appropriate that affirmative action be applied to all people of color. Affirmative action is designed to address this problem and open doors for people who otherwise would be shut out of job opportunities.

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## Immigration, Health and Welfare

The Right consistently opposes immigrants’ use of public benefits, including health care, welfare and education. Many of their arguments focus on the economic cost of providing these services, which they argue falls more heavily on specific communities. Anti-immigrant groups have created the climate in which education, welfare and health care are not seen as human rights, but as privileges of citizenship. Through the Proposition 187 campaign in California, the Right laid the groundwork for Welfare Reform, which took away many of these public benefits from noncitizens.

The Right similarly ignores that these benefits are public goods that benefit the community as a whole. If one segment of the population is denied these rights, the entire community suffers from the loss of human potential and other long-term repercussions. This is evident in the issue of public health. Rather than advocate for access to health care for all immigrants, the Right



pains immigrants as a diseased population that should be screened or kept out altogether.

## IMMIGRANTS AS “FREELOADERS”

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Anti-immigrant groups often claim that immigrants come to this country to take advantage of the “generous” public benefits and get a “free ride” at the taxpayers’ expense. They say:*

- *Undocumented pregnant women are sneaking across the border to have citizen children through whom they can collect welfare benefits.*
- *Studies report that immigrants use more in public services than they contribute in tax money.*
- *Increased poverty rates are a result of immigration. Immigrants tend to be poorer than the general population.*
- *Immigration should be curtailed and immigration policies should favor immigrants with skills or wealth.*

Examples: Dr. Donald Huddle. (1997). “Public Costs of Immigration: Recent Net National Public Service Costs and Projected 1997-2006 Costs.” Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation; Steven A. Camarota. (1999). “Importing Poverty: Immigration’s Impact on the Size and Growth of the Poor Population in the United States.” Washington, DC: Center for Immigration Studies. [http://www.cis.org/articles/poverty\\_study/index.html](http://www.cis.org/articles/poverty_study/index.html).

### Response

Over the last decade competing studies have argued about the exact usage of public benefits by immigrants. A 1994 Urban Institute report that looked at many of the studies “documenting” immigrants’ drain on the economy found consistent misrepresentation of the costs and contributions of immigrants. It concluded that parallel data on U.S.-born individuals drew the same conclusions: that U.S.-born individuals also cost the state in benefits. A 1999 Urban Institute study found that “among poor households with children, immigrants have lower use rates for welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid both before and after welfare reform.”<sup>21</sup> In another study, they found that immigrants “pay more in taxes than receive in public services.”<sup>22</sup>

In fact on a federal level most immigrants, especially recent immigrants, are no longer eligible for many of the benefits the Right claims they are “abusing.” Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for all federal benefits. Almost all documented immigrants arriving after August 1996 are ineligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Medicaid for at least five years. In general the eligibility of all noncitizens for SSI and Food Stamps is very limited, and states can choose to not offer TANF or Medicaid.

The fact that there has been no decrease in immigration since the passage of the 1996 laws shows that immigrants do not come to this country to access public benefits. Even in states where some benefits have been maintained, eligible immigrants tend not to enroll because of misconceptions and legitimate fears. For example, they fear being reported to INS, barred from citizenship or forced to pay back benefits they receive. The Right rarely mentions that immigrants pay taxes, just as citizens do, that help fund the programs from which they can be

barred. Also, they don't acknowledge that many recent immigrants work multiple jobs, pay out of pocket for health care costs and provide childcare within extended family structures. Policies like Welfare Reform make immigrants more vulnerable to exploitation and abject poverty, exactly the circumstances that public benefits are intended to prevent.

Immigrants today are being screened out on the basis of wealth, just as the Right has advocated. Sponsors must sign Affidavits of Support and meet certain income requirements when attempting to bring family members to the United States. Rich immigrants can pay to upgrade to a "priority" application. The result is a two-tiered system where immigrants with money can find legal routes for entering the country and poor immigrants must enter without authorization.

## IMMIGRANTS AS A HEALTH THREAT

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Many anti-immigrant groups argue that a disproportionate number of immigrants to the United States carry dangerous, communicable diseases and therefore "mass immigration" poses a grave public health threat. They say:*

- *Many "Third World" diseases are now entering the United States through immigrants. These include leprosy, dysentery, tapeworm, typhoid, malaria, river blindness and guinea worm.*
- *The increase in tuberculosis (TB) incidence in this country since the early 1980s is attributable to immigration. One-third of the world population is infected with TB, often carrying a dormant form that can become active later.*
- *HIV infection rate in many countries is much higher than in the United States.*
- *Because of language and cultural barriers and lack of health insurance, many immigrants won't seek treatment when they need it. This increases the public health threat.*
- *Since many immigrants lack health insurance, taxpayers must pay for their health care costs.*
- *The United States should screen out immigrants with these diseases and make sure immigrants admitted arrive with the resources to cover health care costs.*

Example: Brenda Walker. (2001). "Public Health Put at Risk: Illegal Immigration Brings Old Diseases, Now More Dangerous." *Limits to Growth*, May/June. San Francisco: Greater Bay Area Immigration Reform.

### Response

The anti-immigrant Right paints a frightening picture of immigrants bringing in strange and exotic diseases. But it fails to provide all the facts about the real causes or true threat of the examples it gives. In reality, studies have shown that immigrants as a whole tend to be healthier than the general U.S. population. This is probably because ill people are less likely to migrate. All international travelers, including U.S. citizens and military personnel, are at higher risk for certain diseases. Unless all international travel is ceased, the United States will always have

some incidence of the diseases listed above. Still the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) says that in the United States there is no or very low risk of contraction of almost all these diseases. In fact, in 1991 the Department of Health and Human Services recommended that infectious tuberculosis be the only communicable disease used to exclude foreign visitors. It said that leprosy and six sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV) are not communicable enough to warrant exclusion.<sup>23</sup>

While it is true that in the last twenty years there has been a significant increase in the incidence of TB in the United States, this is not primarily because of cases among immigrants. The CDC reports that other significant factors are 1) the HIV epidemic which has made many people more susceptible to the disease, 2) the increase in transmission in institutions (such as prisons and hospitals) where high-risk populations are concentrated, 3) the presence of new drug-resistant strains of TB, and 4) the deterioration of the public health infrastructure with respect to the diagnosis and treatment of TB.

Most public health officials agree that the best way to prevent the spread of disease is by educating the public and making sure that all populations have access to health care. Instead, the Right's policies have discouraged or prevented immigrants from seeking care. The 1996 Welfare Reform law barred from Medicaid all undocumented immigrants and, for five years, documented immigrants arriving after 1996. This law has also led immigrants to not seek any health care out of fear that they will later be denied a Green Card or citizenship. Another consequence of this law is increased health care costs because those who lack insurance can often only access medical treatment through more expensive emergency care. Many immigrants are uninsured because they tend to be concentrated in industries that do not provide health insurance. Rather than seeking to expand access to health care for all people, anti-immigrant groups choose to stigmatize immigrants as a group and put the public health of the entire community at risk.

## IMMIGRANTS DISPROPORTIONATELY USING THE RESOURCES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Many anti-immigrant advocates claim that current federal immigration policies place a disproportionate burden on states' and local communities' individual economies. They say:*

- *California, New York, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, and Florida account for 75 percent of the immigrant population but only 38 percent of the U.S. population. This results in a disproportionate drain on these states' coffers.*
- *The federal government should take responsibility for the repercussions of federal immigration policies and pay state and local governments for the costs incurred.*

Example: Roy Beck. (1996). "The High Cost of Cheap Labor." Ch. 10 of *The Case Against Immigration*. (New York: WW Norton & Company); Dr. Donald Huddle. "Mass Immigration Cost American Taxpayers \$69 Billion Net and 2 Million Jobs in 1997." <http://www.carryingcapacity.org/huddlenr.html>.

## Response

Some states and local municipalities do experience a disproportionate demand for certain services such as education and health care due to a large immigrant population. Nevertheless, it is unfair to blame immigrants for the problem of how resources are distributed on the federal, state and local levels. Inequalities in public benefits are a result of these services being funded at local and state levels. Wealthier communities benefit from this system, while poorer communities, where immigrants tend to be concentrated, cannot adequately cover the costs of such necessities.

Anti-immigrant groups are correct in demanding that funds be distributed more equitably. However they use this issue to recruit members and increase anti-immigrant sentiment within communities that have large immigrant populations. In general, the Right has opposed distributing resources from the federal level and has sought to dismantle such federal programs. The Right rarely mentions that immigrants also pay taxes towards these services and that they contribute significantly to the vitality of the community in other ways. The economies of cities such as New York, Miami, and Los Angeles would collapse without immigrant labor. Reports in 2001 found that undocumented immigrants filled many of the jobs created by the new economy, helping to fuel it. In fact, some communities with declining populations, such as Pittsburgh, Louisville, Albuquerque, and parts of Iowa, have worked to increase their attractiveness to new immigrants.

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## Immigrants and the Environment

The anti-immigrant Right has appealed to those who value the environment, blaming immigrants for problems of pollution, overcrowding, energy shortages and the very quality of life in the United States. Sometimes the arguments are subtle; sometimes groups make provocative claims. Well-funded anti-immigrant groups have produced slick, full-color publications filled with statistics and graphic images related to population and natural resources issues. They have appeared in the media as friends of the environment, broadening their base of appeal, but their message remains clear: we must do more to limit immigration or we will suffer serious environmental consequences. The Political Ecology Group called this approach, “The Greening of Hate.” In 1996 and 1998 members of the Sierra Club voted on a position linking immigration with environmental problems. Both times the measures were defeated.<sup>24</sup>

### POPULATION GROWTH

#### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Virtually all the anti-immigrant organizations and spokespeople use population growth in the United States as a keystone in their views about immigrants. They say:*

- *Paul Ehrlich was right (The Population Bomb, 1968) when he forecast an environmental crisis as a result of overpopulation.*

- *Rapid immigration growth is a main cause of the population problem in the United States.*
- *Overflow from developing countries, which have by far the fastest population growth rates in the world, contributes to the United States' "out of control" growth rate.*
- *We have far exceeded the optimum population size for the United States, and we are now too crowded.*
- *We can't solve the world's population problem by "being nice" and accepting more immigrants.*

Examples: Roy Beck. (1996). *The Case Against Immigration*. New York: W.W. Norton. ch. 1, "A Nation of (Too Many) Immigrants?"; "Why Excess Immigration Damages the Environment." (1992). *Balance DATA*, no. 27a, June. Washington, DC: Population-Environment Balance; Jason Din-Alt. (1997). "The Environmental Impact of Immigration into the United States." *Focus*, v. 4, n. 2. Washington, DC: Carrying Capacity Network.

## Response

Many different approaches to studying population issues exist, and economists, geographers, natural scientists, and demographers are all engaged in a lively debate about the best way to deal with population growth. Most anti-immigrant spokespeople tend to be influenced only by one perspective, that of environmentalists like Ehrlich who focus exclusively on population's effect on natural resource depletion.

Such groups discount other factors that influence population levels and their impact on the environment such as poverty, women's education levels, technology, human adaptability or even the idea that population growth is an influence, not a central cause, of environmental degradation. They distort the arguments that feminists, scientists and social scientists construct into a simple cause and effect formula that serves their purpose of blaming immigrants for complex, global phenomena.

Furthermore, most anti-immigrant groups focus only on the United States, and they do not examine global population trends thoughtfully. Immigration patterns are the result not just of receiving countries' policies, but of multiple factors including transnational business practices, social unrest and economic instability in other areas of the world. The United States influences or controls some of these factors itself, contributing to the influx of immigrants to this country.

Even if overpopulation were the single most important factor, it would need to be dealt with on a global level through broad reforms such as increasing women's rights and their access to education and family planning services all over the world. It will not be solved by simply decreasing immigration to the United States.

Finally, even if they say the issue is solely about numbers, groups that oppose the immigration of people of color are exploiting racial fears. Two examples of such techniques are using images in their publications that depict only people of color and highlighting statistics that show that most immigrants to the United States come from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

## DIMINISHING RESOURCES

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

Many anti-immigrant groups remind us that the United States currently suffers from environmental degradation and diminishing resources. They blame immigrants for virtually all of these problems. They say:

- *The United States has one of the highest rates of per capita resource utilization in the world, and immigrants adopt these consumerist habits when they arrive here.*
- *States with the highest numbers of immigrants, like Texas, Florida, New York and California, also experience the worst environmental problems, like rolling blackouts and high levels of air and water pollution.*
- *National parks and other public lands are overcrowded because of increased immigration.*
- *Illegal border crossers have no regard for the environment, trampling delicate desert areas and littering the landscape.*

Examples: David Simcox. (1992). "The Environmental Risks of Mass Immigration." *Immigration Review*, no. 12, Fall. Washington, DC: Center for Immigration Studies; John Cairns, Jr. (2001). "Topics for Public Debate: Immigration, Sustainability, and the Precautionary Principle," *The Social Contract*, vol. XI, no. 4, Summer, pp. 239-248.

### Response

The United States is a major cause of global environmental degradation, refusing to sign on to the Kyoto Agreement, having more lax environmental regulations than most other developed countries, and only weakly pursuing corporate polluters, while exempting its own military from environmental regulations.<sup>25</sup> These are all arguably more significant than any individual's behavior.

The problem of diminished resources is not restricted to the United States; it is global. Setting severe limits on immigration to this country will not improve the overall global environmental situation, which still has the same number of people living on the Earth worldwide. While it is true that people living in the United States consume far more resources than other countries, this is the result of consumer choices by all of us, not explicitly immigrant behavior. In fact, immigrants who are poor actually consume fewer resources in the United States than those of us who are not poor.

Immigrants are not the cause of the environmental problems we experience. In fact, many newly-arrived immigrants live in areas of the United States where they suffer disproportionately from environmental injustice. The greatest polluters of our cities are not urban dwellers but corporations that violate environmental regulations.<sup>26</sup> Blaming immigrants for our environmental problems is scapegoating and shifts the responsibility away from all of us to improve how we address environmental challenges. These arguments are designed to turn environmentalists against immigrants.

In addition, many immigrants are escaping human-caused environmental disasters at home. In a 1997 Natural Heritage Institute study, researchers found that Mexican dryland degradation resulted from overgrazing and overharvesting, lack of irrigation, and no access to technology,

resulting in migration to the United States.<sup>27</sup> The causes of these problems are related to pervasive poverty. In other parts of the world, shifts from subsistence farming to agribusiness have harmed the environment on a large scale. Immigrants have also been blamed for power shortages such as the rolling blackouts California and other states experienced in 2001. Such problems are clearly the result of high consumption rates across the board, and not any one group's use, nor are they the result of "overpopulation." Solving the problems of the electrical supply involves more than fingershaking and will take the combined efforts of careful utilities planning, adequate financial support and deliberate conservation campaigns.

## SPRAWL

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Several anti-immigrant groups on the Right focus on the phenomenon of urban, or more accurately, suburban sprawl, the effect of populations spreading out from cities to rural areas. They say:*

- *When immigrants come to this country, they often settle in urban areas, creating overcrowding and undesirable conditions, and forcing others to move to the suburbs.*
- *As a result, immigrants are to blame for sprawl and its annoyances: traffic, noise, pollution, litter and unsightly commercial areas.*
- *Some immigrants are now settling in suburbia as well, invading the lives of people who moved there to avoid urban blight.*
- *The only way to preserve our national heritage and open space is by limiting immigration.*

Example: Scipio Garling. (1999). *The Environmentalist's Guide to a Sensible Immigration Policy*. Washington, DC: Federation for American Immigration Reform.

### Response

While it is true that housing developers create sprawl by building on former farmland and open space, this environmental issue is not caused by immigrant population growth. Immigrants are not the ones who are encouraged to move in droves into suburban developments, although some communities are beginning to experience higher numbers of first generation immigrants. New suburbanites move away from cities for many reasons, including the desire for open space, home ownership or upward social mobility, as well as wanting to escape from some ills of urban life such as crime or under-resourced schools. In addition racism, not the mere presence of immigrants, results in "White flight."

Many less desirable aspects of city life are the result of poverty and the unequal distribution of wealth. In fact, immigrants are blamed and scapegoated for the actions of others by a deliberate attempt of some anti-immigrant groups to shift the blame for sprawl away from its actual causes.

Developers create suburban sprawl by capitalizing on former urban dwellers' desire to live away from the city. They also are lured by often more favorable construction costs and profit

potential in suburban than in urban environments. Much of the frustration suburban residents experience as a result of sprawl is the result of inadequate regional planning and unrealistic or snob-appeal expectations for their communities of choice.

Anti-sprawl campaigns are designed to play on the fears of suburban residents who value the environment and who wish to protect their own communities from problems they associate with urban areas. When they link increased immigrant population in cities to sprawl, these campaigns are also appealing directly to racial resentment.

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## Refugees and Asylum Seekers

When it opposes admitting most refugees and asylum seekers, the Right uses arguments that are similar to its general anti-immigrant stands. It claims that too many undeserving foreigners flood our country, sapping social services rightfully belonging to U.S. citizens and adding to the ranks of the U.S. poor. Although some anti-immigrant groups do acknowledge the United States' humanitarian obligation to accept some refugees, they harshly criticize what they call the "leniency" of refugee and asylum policies. They say that refugees are adding to our growing, and "troublesome," population of immigrants.

### REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

#### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

*Many on the Right argue that refugee and asylum categories are too "loosely defined":*

- *Individuals can petition for asylum by citing any number of vague grievances.*
- *Special interest groups (such as, feminist, gay rights and ethnic organizations) use the ambiguity of asylum standards to promote their cause.*
- *Many asylum seekers are merely too "Americanized" to accept their countries' cultural practices. For example, the U.S. government is wrongly accepting genital mutilation in North Africa and restrictive childbearing laws in China as grounds for asylum.*
- *Decisions like these set legal precedent that will only widen the "floodgates" to more refugees.*
- *Refugees should only be admitted on a case-by-case basis, ending asylum granted to whole classes of people.*

*They also say that U.S. policies allow refugees and others to benefit at the expense of taxpayers:*

- *Family reunification policies allow established refugees to bring members of their families to the United States. Because refugees and their families are allowed access*



*to public benefits, they become an economic burden on the U.S. government.*

- *The INS should create an admittance policy based on self-sufficiency.*
- *The total yearly cap should be decreased to 50,000 or less, or else refugees will bring the poverty of Third World countries to the United States.*
- *A self-serving refugee industry of lawyers, government and church bureaucrats, charities and lobbyists are seeking allocation of tax-payer money for their programs.*

Example: Don Barnett. (1997). "The Refugee Racket" Special Report Monterey, VA: American Immigration Control Foundation.

## Response

Contrary to the Right's exaggerations, refugees are not overrunning the United States. The vast majority of the world's refugees are in the developing world. Iran alone hosts almost three times as many refugees as the United States. The U.S. refugee population is actually only 4.6 percent of the total number of refugees worldwide. For every 427 U.S. citizens, there is 1 refugee.<sup>28</sup>

The U.S. refugee and asylum policies tend to reflect the interests of the U.S. government and are based on various political factors. These include maintaining U.S. control within certain regions, highlighting rights violations within enemy nations, and providing humanitarian assistance in order to meet domestic and international political demands. For example, U.S. refugee policy has often favored refugees from nations the United States considered adversaries. From the beginning of Castro's regime until 1994, the United States had an open-door policy to Cuban refugees. In contrast, the United States maintained strict restrictions on the numbers of refugees accepted from Haiti, in part because it supported the Haitian government.<sup>29</sup> In addition, U.S. foreign policy has played a role in the political and economic upheavals that have led to the creation of refugees in many nations, including Haiti, Nicaragua and Afghanistan.

Attaining asylum or refugee status is not as simple as the Right claims. Refugees and asylum seekers (refugees have their applications approved before coming to the United States, while asylum seekers make their application after arriving) must prove a "well-founded fear of persecution" on account of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. This last category has been interpreted to include sexual orientation- and gender-based persecutions, such as domestic violence. Applicants may spend many years dealing with complicated bureaucracy, without the benefit of legal representation. The approval rate for asylum applications in 1999 was only about 34 percent.<sup>30</sup>

In fact, many asylum seekers are never even given a chance to make their application. In the case of Cuban and Haitian migrants, the United States has interdicted boats in international waters and refused to allow them into the United States, effectively denying them a chance to seek asylum. Since 1996, asylum seekers who arrive to the United States are subject to expedited removal and a bar on returning to the country for five years, if they do not make their claim known to an officer. The result has been that 95 percent of immigrants are deported after speaking with low-level immigration officers. Language barriers, psychological trauma, socioeconomic status, country of origin, and gender have all been shown to affect migrants' chance of getting an asylum interview. For example, a Bosnian woman who has experienced a war-crime sexual assault might not feel able to speak about it with the first official she meets. If an asylum seeker is sentenced to expedited removal, there is only a 5 percent chance that he will have another opportunity to prove his case's validity.<sup>31</sup>

Asylum seekers who do have the opportunity to make their case often face years of detention, as they wait for their status to be determined. Detention of asylum seekers was made mandatory by the 1996 IIRIRA, which was a direct result of the Right's anti-immigrant organizing. Most detained asylum seekers are placed in prisons and jails and experience many of the same injustices as other inmates. These include physical abuse, substandard medical and dental care, and frequent transfers to regions far from family or friends.<sup>32</sup> They have few of the civil rights of other prisoners and often experience added difficulty due to language barriers and restricted communication with INS officers.

Work permits, public benefits and other social services provide much-needed assistance to refugees who often arrive penniless, speaking no English, with inapplicable professional degrees or skills, and without any community connections. These supports also help to ensure the protection of migrants' human rights, including safety, food and shelter. When the Right advocates denying these benefits, it seeks to add to the hardship that refugees have already suffered. Just as the United States recognizes its humanitarian obligation to provide aid to overseas victims of poverty and war, the United States also has a responsibility to aid those in the United States who have escaped these circumstances.

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## Repercussions of September 11, 2001

The September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon apparently by Arab nationals has had serious repercussions for people of Middle Eastern and South Asian descent and for immigrants in general. The anti-immigrant movement took full advantage of the events to argue that immigration restriction was necessary to prevent further attacks. Commentators and politicians immediately began speaking of the vulnerability of the United States as an "open society" saying that the country could only gain security by compromising freedoms. Many began to claim that increased surveillance and racial profiling were necessary security measures. The INS expanded its unique power to detain noncitizens without charging them and many people were held for days without access to their attorneys.

The USA PATRIOT Act, a 342-page law with sweeping impact, rushed through Congress in six weeks with no public debate. The act gives the Executive branch unparalleled powers of surveillance, detention and punishment over both citizens and noncitizens with virtually no checks and balances. Along with more diligent use of existing statutes such as ones concerning material witnesses and immigration control, this act will undoubtedly have negative effects on noncitizens and government critics. It will only serve to increase anti-immigration sentiment. In addition George W. Bush signed an executive order allowing for noncitizens to be tried in secret military tribunals, which need not meet constitutional standards. This furthers a two-tiered system of civil rights based on citizenship.

The attack also exacerbated the pre-existing economic downturn, which provided even more fuel for immigration restriction. The movement for legalization of undocumented immigrants was dealt a serious blow, as were proposals for guest worker programs.

## IMMIGRANTS AND THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACKS

### What the Anti-Immigrant Right Says

Many anti-immigrant groups and commentators were eager to proclaim that this attack could have been avoided if the U.S. immigration policy were not so lax:

- Dan Stein of FAIR said, “The nation’s defense against terrorism has been seriously eroded by the efforts of open-borders advocates, and the innocent victims of today’s terrorist attacks have paid the price.”
- The White nationalist group, the Council of Conservative Citizens, called for segregating “ourselves from the Arabs, Muslims, and/or all others who will do us harm.”
- Mainstream anti-immigrant groups cited polls showing that the public overwhelmingly approved of racial profiling, at least in some instances, of Arab and Muslim Americans.
- The Center for Immigration Studies pointed out that increasing surveillance of immigrants is broadly popular and does not infringe on the civil rights of U.S. citizens.

Anti-immigrant groups and commentators, along with many politicians, presented plans for stemming the threat of future attacks through measures that fell into three broad categories:

- preventing unauthorized entries on the borders and at other ports of entry.
- decreasing and strictly monitoring authorized entries of foreigners.
- increasing the federal government’s powers of surveillance, detention and deportation of all noncitizens.

Within this framework, groups have called for:

- armed military patrol and increased border patrol on the United States’ borders with Mexico and Canada,
- a nine month immigration moratorium,
- more in-depth background checks of visa applicants,
- tracking of foreign students and other visa-holders,
- a ban on foreign students from specific Middle-Eastern countries,
- a computerized identification verification system for all citizens and noncitizens,
- broad powers to detain and deport noncitizens with any connections to “terrorist” groups,
- interagency cooperation on issues related to immigration, law enforcement and intelligence gathering.

Examples: Federation for American Immigration Reform. (2001). “Immigration Control: A Handbook of Recommendations What Must Be Done in the Aftermath of the New Super-Terrorism,” September 20. <http://www.fairus.org/html/08318109.htm>; Steven A. Camarota (of the Center for Immigration Studies), “Immigration and Terrorism,” Testimony prepared for the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on technology, Terrorism, and Government Information, October 12, 2001. <http://www.cis.org/articles/2001/sactestimony1001.html>

## Response

In the face of a great tragedy, the anti-immigrant movement has chosen to opportunistically promote its cause. The failure of the FBI, CIA, federal government, and airport security to prevent this calamity has also provided the opportunity to assign blame. It is more palatable to these authorities to proclaim that they lack the necessary laws to do their job, than to admit any failure on their part. All these factors have contributed to a call for greater restrictions on the civil rights of immigrants and have led to abuses of power by the government. As part of an investigation into the attack, the INS has detained over 1000 people, the largest number of whom are of Saudi Arabian, Egyptian or Pakistani descent, mostly on immigration infractions or crimes unrelated to terrorism.<sup>33</sup> There have been complaints of mistreatment of detainees including instances of physical abuse while in INS custody.<sup>34</sup>

Even before September 11, immigrants could be prosecuted on the basis of evidence that they could not see and many were held in detention for years under such circumstances. The USA PATRIOT Act and military tribunals further infringe on noncitizens' civil rights, including rights to due process, judicial review, and a public trial. The constitutionality of these laws will not be tested in the courts for years. In the meantime many innocent immigrants will be unjustly detained, prosecuted, and deported without access to the rights citizens take for granted. Civil rights should not be a privilege of citizenship, but should cover citizens and noncitizens equally.

On the surface this kind of heavy-handed response is intended to make the public feel safer. However these strategies are not only ineffective, but also counterproductive. The vast majority of immigrants are not involved in criminal activity, let alone a plot to attack the U.S. government or its people. Innocent immigrants who rightly fear detention given their lack of rights in the face of broad INS powers will not be willing to come forward if they have any relevant information. The government needs their cooperation, but immigrants cannot trust a system that advocates the sharing of information between government agencies and racial profiling, and does not even have the appearance of treating all people equally. In this context the "S" visa, available to immigrants who provide information to the government in criminal prosecutions, is unlikely to encourage immigrants' cooperation with law enforcement.

Significantly, this kind of activity by government authorities legitimizes and reinforces people's fears that immigrants are disloyal. Also when law enforcement engages in racial profiling, it aggravates racial hostilities in communities. One result has been the dramatic increase in hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims, or those perceived to be, since September 11.<sup>35</sup> The government's policies need to coincide with its rhetoric on multiculturalism and tolerance because actions speak louder than words.

The government can take many steps that do not limit civil rights to prevent future attacks. The FBI and CIA already had the powers necessary to gather intelligence and track down those planning terrorist actions, even before the passage of the PATRIOT Act. The federal government can put into place an effective airport security system following the models of many other nations. The United States can share information and resources with other nations through a global commission to prevent terrorism. The government should work towards increasing security through these kinds of measures that do not infringe on people's civil liberties. Expanded detention, deportation, and surveillance powers do not increase safety. They do, however, make it easier for the government to scapegoat immigrants and to oppose individuals

and groups whose ideologies it finds objectionable. This attitude and misuse of power must be consistently and rigorously challenged.

## End Notes

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