The New Challenges of American Immigration:
What Should We Do?
his National Issues Forums book is a guide for communities to discuss immigration and the challenges and opportunities it presents. The guide can be a companion to viewing “The New Americans,” a seven-hour PBS mini-series produced by Kartemquin Educational Films. The book is a tool for community organizations, public television stations, and other institutions that convene public forums to deliberate on the perplexing issues raised in “The New Americans” series.

“The New Americans” connects viewers with the real-life stories of immigrant newcomers and shows America’s responses to them. Filmed abroad and across this nation for more than three years, the series explores immigration, a visible yet often misunderstood aspect of life for everyday Americans. It helps us understand the profound changes under way in the ethnic makeup of the United States.

“The New Americans” tells the stories of five very different immigrant and refugee groups, as seen through their own eyes. The series puts a human face on immigration. It looks, not only at why immigrants come to America, but what they leave behind, and who they were before they came to wear the defining label of “immigrant.” Their experiences illustrate themes of identity, adaptation, and assimilation so familiar in America’s long history of immigration.

The immigrants and refugees in “The New Americans” come to America from Nigeria, India, the Dominican Republic, the Israeli-occupied West Bank, and Mexico. They come for a variety of reasons, but mostly they want what all Americans want — a chance to live in peace and pursue their dreams.

“The New Americans” airs on public television stations in spring 2004. We recommend viewing this program, and using this companion resource to discuss its implications with your friends and neighbors at National Issues Forums in your community.

NATIONAL PARTNERS
Community activities, events, forums, school programs, and special resources to accompany “The New Americans” mini-series have been made possible across the country with leadership from these organizations:

ACTIVE VOICE
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# The New Challenges of American Immigration: What Should We Do?

**Introduction**

The U.S. has traditionally defined itself as a land of opportunity, a refuge from persecution, and a nation of immigrants. Today, more people than ever are trying to enter this country. While most Americans believe that, historically, immigration has strengthened the U.S., many people now question whether immigration is good for America. Is it time, once again, to change our immigration policies? If so, how?

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<th>Approach 1</th>
<th>America’s Changing Face: Is There Too Much Difference?</th>
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<td>This approach sees immigration as a looming identity crisis. At the present rate of immigration, increasing diversity threatens to break the bonds of unity—the common ideals of language and democracy—that define our political institutions. Immigration should be slowed to allow time for immigrants to assimilate into American culture.</td>
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<td>In this view, open immigration has been the backbone of America’s strength. Combining diverse cultures yields a uniquely strong and rich society and, overall, immigrants offer far more to American society than they take from it. America must continue to welcome newcomers despite the costs.</td>
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<td>Approach Three argues that immigrants strain the public purse, compete for jobs, and exceed our carrying capacity. In this view, the nation would benefit economically by restricting the number of newcomers, and by looking more closely at how their arrival affects the well-being of those who are already here.</td>
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**Comparing Approaches**

**Post-Forum Questionnaire**

**What Are National Issues Forums?**
A

mericans have proudly defined this nation as a refuge for people fleeing persecution. Our country offers new beginnings. We see our dynamism as coming from hybrid vigor. Mirroring these values, Congress enacted the Immigration and Nationality Act amend-
ments of 1965 to end national quotas and introduce, for the first time, the principle of family-sponsored immigration. This is now our nation’s main policy for legal immigration. Under the law, immigrants must have a sponsor — usually a close family member, employer, or resettlement organization — to get a visa and come to America.

In 1965, proponents believed the new law would not dramatically increase immigration or significantly change the ethnic makeup of the country. Today, however, as Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Jack Miles notes, “both changes are accomplished fact.” This is especially true not only in traditional immigrant-receiving states like Texas, California, Florida, and New York, but also in countless other states whose populations are generally seen as more homogeneous and isolated.

Most, for example, think of Minnesota as Lutheran, liberal, and lily-white, yet thousands of Hmong, Somali, and Latino immigrants have also settled there in recent years. The accompanying demographic shift has transformed not just larger cities, but also many smaller communities as well. Alongside traditional English classes, many public schools in the state are now also holding classes in English as a Second Language (ESL). In Worthington, a town of just over 10,000, the schools’ ESL program is teaching students from more than 50 different languages. In Pelican Rapids, a tourist town of just 1,900, students with more than 24 different language backgrounds are now studying in the public schools.

These changes have left some towns feeling overwhelmed. For others, however, these newcomers are a welcome addition — actively recruited by local factories and farmers, keeping local population numbers stable as longtime residents, and their children, increasingly move elsewhere. Their
numbers are significant. Today, nearly 28.5 million immigrants live in America, nearly 10 percent of the population. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that nearly 900,000 new immigrants settle in the country every year. Nearly 300,000 more are in the country illegally — entering without proper papers or overstaying a temporary visa.

Their economic impact is large. Over the past decade, immigrants — many low skilled — have accounted for more than half the growth in our nation’s labor force. And while some, business groups and government agencies included, see them as an essential part of our economy, others worry that increasing numbers of low-skilled workers will prove to be an economic drain. At current growth rates, in 10 to 15 years when the 70 million, mostly high-skilled baby boomers are reaching retirement age, the ranks of recent immigrants and their children will have grown to a much more significant proportion of our country’s working population.

“Change is on the way,” explains journalist Ray Suarez, a PBS senior correspondent. “It’s a time of flux, even in Iowa.” You see it in faces on your street, among your coworkers, and in shopping centers. You hear it across the country as the number of Spanish-speaking television networks and radio stations increases.

About recent immigration, Suarez asks his audiences: “Are you afraid of it? Are you welcoming it? Or, are you just waiting to see what happens? What change, if any, is there in your thinking about immigration since September 11, 2001?” Our answers reveal our values and our preferences, our prejudices and fears. That’s why fundamental questions about immigration are peculiarly difficult and rarely addressed directly.

Recent Changes in Immigration Policy

After September 11, 2001, the question that dominated our policy conversations — and stalled all others — was, “Can America be safe again?” New homeland security legislation divided the work of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) into two separate bureaus, one for controlling borders and another for welcoming and processing new citizens. Its name has changed as well. Now part of the Department of Homeland Security, the INS today is known as the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. Proenforcement advocates praise the new law. The U.S. Attorney General described the appointee as someone who will “lead tough enforcement of our immigration laws to protect Americans from terrorism and protect our homeland.”

Proimmigrant groups worry that the new law’s emphasis on border enforcement will end in “the tainting of all people who come to this country as suspected terrorists,” and in fewer civil rights for immigrants — workers, students, and family members alike. Daniel Griswold of the Cato Institute agrees, “Immigrants come here to realize the American Dream; terrorists come to destroy it. We should not allow America’s tradition of welcoming immigrants to become yet another casualty of September 11.”

The Need for Deliberation

Today, immigration poses new challenges. How many immigrants should we admit? In what categories? What are the political and social impacts of immigration? How can communities welcome and accommodate newcomers? What is the extent and what are the costs of illegal immigration? Do immigrants help America compete in a global economy?

Behind these abstract views on the immigration issue lie “human faces” struggling with personal and practical problems. Among those supporting immigrants are those who want to help or employ newcomers. Those worried about increasing numbers, want to curb the costs — both social and economic — of assimilating and aiding new residents. Newcomers themselves, on the other hand, typically want little more than a better life. Whose interest should be served? Can these often-conflicting interests be balanced?

At a time of growing public concern about immigration, Americans need public discussion about those seeking admission and their impact on us. How much population growth is desirable? Does immigration have long-term benefits? What are we willing to pay in the short-run to achieve these benefits?
Should We Change Our Laws Again?

Concerns about immigration are not new. Benjamin Franklin worried about the levels of immigration in colonial America, fearing that too many Germans would swamp a predominantly British culture. Irish immigrants were scorned in the mid-1800s as lazy drunks. A few decades later, Poles, Italians, and Russian Jews were believed to be too different to ever assimilate into American life. By the late 1800s after Congress had passed the first immigration exclusion laws (barring entry at first to convicts and prostitutes, and later Japanese, Chinese, and other Asian immigrants as well) there were approximately 400,000 immigrants arriving in the United States each year. In spite of these restrictions, however, immigration continued to grow — reaching a record high of 1.3 million in 1907.

Whether driven by the pull of freedom, jobs, and opportunity or by the push of poverty, persecution, or the threat of war, immigrants became a powerful economic force, laying track for railroads, mining iron and coal, harvesting crops, and operating America’s farms, factories, and mills. Ironically, as Jack Beatty of The Atlantic Monthly suggests, “Americans are proud of the role immigration has played in their past but seem to fear its role in the present.”

Today, most immigrants to the United States are Asian or Latino. Yet while they work in almost every facet of the economy, working as everything from factory hands to computer programmers, their increasing numbers make many uneasy — much as earlier waves of German, Irish, and Italian immigrants did a century or more ago. Whether current immigration rates are too high or too low, however — they are carefully controlled.

Current laws award immigrant visas for one of three reasons: family-sponsored immigration, humanitarian refuge, and preferential job skills. Nearly three-quarters of all legal immigrants are family members of current residents and citizens. But while immigration laws require sponsoring families to earn at least 125 percent of the federal poverty level, that is often not enough to support these newest arrivals — and some of the burden typically goes to taxpayers. While immigrants are excluded from receiving federal benefits for the first ten years after their arrival, they can receive many state and local benefits — education, for example, as well as medical and social services — but the amount of help varies widely. Some states provide health care for the children of needy families. Others do not. Although most immigrants work and pay taxes, many communities worry that they lack the resources to help those who are ill-equipped to compete in an increasingly high-skilled economy.

Yet many coming to our shores are fleeing persecution. The number of political refugees around the world is growing. In 1976, the United States estimated nearly three million refugees in the world. Twenty-five years later, the number had grown to 12 million. The U.S. took in almost 120,000 refugees in 1992. Meanwhile, after September 11, 2001, the United States reduced the number of refugees it would accept. For 2002, increased security checks meant that fewer than 35,000 were actually admitted.

A third purpose of immigration is to meet the needs of the labor force. Amendments to federal immigration law in 1990 doubled the number of skill-based visas. Today, more than 140,000 especially skilled workers enter the U.S. each year. Many would like to see that number increased. Our policies, they say, are often at odds with economic reality. Businesses need skilled workers, and immigrants are a good resource. Others in agriculture and manufacturing insist that our need for unskilled workers is no less great. How do we go about meeting those demands? Are they real?

Finally, another purpose of our immigration law is to control illegal entry by individuals lacking
proper documentation, and to find and deport those who break the law or overstay a visa. Along the border and across the country, however, enforcing the law has often created other problems that some find no less troubling. Ranchers in the Southwest, for example, often bear the brunt of the problem. Many are forced to cope with migrants crossing the border illegally who not only trespass on their land, but also damage property. Others worry about the dangers faced by illegal immigrants. Many depend on smugglers to ferry them across the border, often under dangerous conditions — hidden away in trucks and freight cars or traveling across the desert on foot. Human Rights advocates contend that U.S. immigration policies and practices cause about one death every day-and-a-half as Mexican migrants attempt to evade capture at the border.

**Talks with Mexico**

On September 6, 2001, Mexican President Vicente Fox came to the United States to discuss America’s relationship with his country. Fox sought an immediate, blanket amnesty for undocumented Mexican workers living in the United States, similar to the amnesty signed by President Reagan in 1986. CNN reported that President Bush opposed the idea, but was considering expansion of a temporary worker program that would allow Mexicans living illegally in the United States to gain permanent legal residency, over time.

Mark Krikorian of the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington, D.C., an organization favoring tighter immigration policies, adamantly opposed temporary worker programs. In testimony before a congressional subcommittee, he argued that illegal immigrants compete for jobs with American citizens who lack a high school education. This “illegal competition” depresses wages and benefits for American workers, and adds to the costs we all pay in taxes, he argued.

On the other hand, as publications like *U.S. News & World Report* have observed, “It’s increasingly clear, the U.S. economy cannot operate at full tempo without the workers our immigration laws now define as illegal.” By 2008, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that America will have 5 million more jobs than people to fill them — with a large portion of those jobs requiring only a high school education and basic training. Without continued immigration, where will the workers come from?

When the Capitol building was evacuated the morning of September 11, 2001, the House of Representatives was scheduled to consider a bill making it easier for some illegal residents to apply for green cards in the United States, rather than in their home countries. Since that day, two national polls suggest that 80 percent of Americans think it is “too easy” for foreigners to enter the country. Another poll showed that 77 percent felt the government was not doing enough “to control the border and screen people.”

“America, an immigrant nation,” conclude Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster in their book *In Search of America*, “has an abiding problem with immigration.”

**An Invitation to Deliberate**

This issue book examines three different approaches to the dilemma of immigration. The approaches differ in their diagnosis of what’s wrong and the solutions they propose. They share a concern about immigration, but differ about goals and priorities. Each proposes a list of actions for government and communities to take and names other steps we should refrain from taking. America’s citizens must decide the direction of our immigration policy.
Approach One: America’s Changing Face — Is There Too Much Difference?

This approach calls for restricting immigration, but it is more concerned with cultural issues than economic impacts. In this view, long-term security should be a high priority. America should not emphasize diversity to the point that it breaks the bonds of unity — the common ideals of language and democracy that define our communities and political institutions.

Approach Two: A Nation of Immigrants — Remembering America’s Heritage

This approach insists that U.S. immigration policy must reflect humanitarian concern and commitment to the plight of refugees worldwide. Focusing on the needs and interests of immigrants, this approach argues America must welcome newcomers despite the costs. This approach opposes limits to legal immigration and supports better ways to find and assimilate illegal immigrants.

Approach Three: A Matter of Priorities — Putting Economics First

This approach focuses on concerns about the economic costs of immigration, the impact on wages, the job market, and public services. In this view, the nation would benefit by restricting the number of newcomers and by looking more closely at how their arrival affects the well-being of those who are already here.

Summing Up

Here is the immigration dilemma in a nutshell: How can we reconcile conflicts between our history as a nation of immigrants, our current economic realities, and the need to protect the interests of American citizens? Which of these ideals should take priority and why?

For Further Reading / The New Challenges of American Immigration

- Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster, In Search of America (New York: Hyperion, 2002).
The Somalis see Lewiston as a place where they can establish a tightly knit community and more easily maintain their Muslim faith and culture, reports the Maine Sunday Telegram. They hope to shelter their children from the lure of hip-hop music, clothes, and attitudes, popular among urban American teens. They have also heard Lewiston provides better access to social services, job training, housing, and education, and that Maine resettlement workers are more accessible.

Lewiston, Maine, a mill town of 36,000 citizens of largely French descent, recently became home to 1,000 Somali refugees, victims of Somalia’s lengthy civil war. The local newspaper predicts another 1,000 Somalis will arrive soon.

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Lewiston’s reputation as “a Somali boom town” has spread quickly. Not since the late 1970s,
when the Hmong refugees from the mountains of Laos resettled in the United States, has a small city like Lewiston “dealt with such a large, rapid, and unexpected influx of newcomers as culturally dissimilar as Somalis,” says the Maine Sunday Telegram.

“The problem is they come too fast,” Lewiston’s general assistance director said to the Portland Press Herald. “We welcome you and we want you, but you can’t come all at once.” The city mayor wrote a letter urging Somalis to “exercise some discipline” and stop moving so quickly into Maine’s second-largest city. “This large number of new arrivals cannot continue without negative results for all,” the mayor wrote.

The question posed by Approach One is this: Do we have the resources to absorb and maintain a long-range commitment to resettling these refugees?

A participant in a recent forum suggested that successful immigration programs must include “assimilation,” a process he likened to an hourglass. Recent immigrants enter at the top, learn to speak English and understand American democracy in the narrow middle, and exit at the bottom as naturalized citizens. He explained that there are purposeful limitations on the flow of sand in an hourglass, and on immigrants who cross our borders. “We are limited in our resources, and the length of time it naturally takes for anyone to learn something new presents its own limitations.”

The problem we face as a result of high levels of immigration, according to Approach One, is not so much a fiscal crisis as an identity crisis — a growing uncertainty about who we are as a nation and what we should expect of newcomers. Columnist Jack Miles asks, “If the nation can no longer assimilate new groups because it has itself become no more than a group of unassimilated, contending cultures, how will the state survive a continuous heavy influx [of new immigrants]?"

How Can This Become a Problem?

Wausau, Wisconsin, has a longer history of immigration than Lewiston. As Roy Beck, editor of The Social Contract magazine, explains, “It all began simply enough when a few churches and individuals decided to resettle some Southeast Asian refugees during the late 1970s.” Encouraged by the watershed Immigration Act amendments of 1965 that promoted family reunification, the refugees invited to come to Wausau soon began sponsoring relatives.

From a few dozen refugees in 1978, Wausau’s immigrant population has reached roughly 4,200 in a town of 37,000. By 1994, the public schools were struggling to handle an increase of more than 1,500 students in less than a decade, nearly all of them children of immigrants. The influx of immigrants to Wausau has caused considerable concern about higher taxes, crowded schools and buses, crime and gang-related activities, welfare costs for immigrants, and a lack of jobs. Beck writes,

“A deputy sheriff stands guard outside the Islamic Institute of Knowledge in Dearborn, Michigan, in March 2003 to ease worries that the war in Iraq would spark backlash against the state’s large Arab-American community.

AP/Wide World Photos

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social and economic threshold. Many sensed that their way of life is slipping away, overwhelmed by outside forces they are helpless to stop."

Historically, the United States has been an extension of European civilization. Even today, a majority of Americans are of European descent. However, in recent decades the vast majority of immigrants have come from non-European countries, particularly Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In this view, the cultural fragmentation that has begun to take place in many communities is a direct consequence of changes in the immigration laws.

Approach One endorses the goal of increasing the diversity of immigrants. But, it insists on realism about the impact of more and more immigrants from regions that previously supplied relatively few. The crux of the problem, according to Approach One, is that the assimilation process isn’t working as well for this new cadre of immigrants as it did for the immigrants from European cultures. "In the past," writes historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "the United States had a brilliant solution for the inherent fragility of a multietnic society." Immigrants, he says, "were expected to become Americans."

Throughout the world we see evidence that ethnic, racial, and religious differences can tear societies apart. No nation has an unlimited capacity to absorb cultural foreigners without irrevocably altering its own character. Approach One represents concerns that heavy immigration has a Balkanizing effect on the United States. People like magazine editor Roy Beck who favor limiting immigration, fear that the country is breaking down "into competing ethnic groups and nationalities that may even resort to warfare, as has long been the history among the Balkan nations in Southeast Europe."

For this reason, Approach One says, the question of assimilation is at the heart of the immigration debate. "The real fight," says Francis Fukuyama of the RAND Corporation, "ought to be over whether we believe that there is enough to our Western, rational, egalitarian, democratic civilization to force those coming to the country to absorb its language and rules."

The alternative, he says, is that "we carry respect for other cultures to the point that Americans no longer have a common voice with which to speak to one another."

Schlesinger believes the success of the “American experiment” comes from the notion of the melting pot. "Unless a common purpose binds groups together, tribal hostilities will drive them apart," he observes. Approach One wonders: Do we still believe in the “American experiment”? Are we still a melting pot? Are we willing to let America change and, if so, how much?"
What Is Assimilation?

The United States stands for something more than the toleration of differences. We take pride in fundamental and distinctive values, among them individualism and participation in the political process. Many immigrants come from countries where these values are not taught or practiced. We have every right to teach distinctively American values and traditions in schools, not as one tradition among many, but as the central tradition that defines American culture, says Approach One.

Teddy Roosevelt would have agreed. He warned the nation that becoming a “tangle of squabbling nationalities” was the certain way to ruin. Woodrow Wilson cautioned a group of newly naturalized Americans in 1915, “A man who thinks of himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has yet to become an American.”

In a 1997 report to Congress, the Commission on Immigration Reform included a “Declaration of Principles and Values” comprised of “truths” that constitute the distinctive characteristics of the American nationality. Newcomers do not become Americans until they give allegiance to the principles and values embodied in the U.S. Constitution. They must absorb the ideas that ethnic and religious diversity are based on personal freedom and compatibility with national unity. Immigrants must accept that effective communication in English is imperative, even as they retain or acquire the ability to communicate in other languages.

As long as we live by these principles and help newcomers learn and practice them, the commission contended, we will continue to be a nation that benefits from substantial but well-regulated immigration. In this way, we will continue to realize the lofty goal of our national motto E Pluribus Unum (from many, one).

Approach One expresses the worry that powerful centrifugal forces that arise from excessive immigration may destroy national unity. A large influx of newcomers from a great variety of different cultures, if not tempered by an “Americanizing” process, could fundamentally alter the very essence of the American way of life.

Learning English, Making It the Law

At the local Catholic Church in Morgantown, North Carolina, masses are said in English, Spanish, and Hmong, the language spoken in the growing Laotian community. In Postville, Iowa, a local radio station broadcasts in Russian, Hebrew, Spanish, and English. Is this a welcome sign of the times? Or, as Approach One suggests, is it further evidence of a breakdown in the cohesion of the nation?

People are particularly concerned about the threat of language segregation at a time when more than half of all recent newcomers to the United States, legal and illegal, speak a single language: Spanish. In previous waves of immigration, no single group predominated. During the 1880s, one-quarter of all immigrants spoke German. Between 1900 and 1910, roughly the same proportion spoke Italian. In both periods, the immigrant pool represented a broad range of language groups.

The recent experience of Canada’s French-speaking province, Quebec, indicates a group speaking a separate language may maintain itself as a separate culture. What if a separatist trend like the one in Quebec emerges here? “It is entirely possible,” says Henry E. Catto, Jr., former director of the United States Information Agency, “that the United States will once again confront the fateful choice it faced in 1860: schism or civil war. This time the cause will be language, and the crisis will have resulted in no small measure from government policy.”
As writer Robert D. King explains in *The Atlantic Monthly*, “It has always been taken for granted that English is the national language, and that one must learn English in order to make it in America.” Nationwide, 82 percent of those age five or older speak only English in their homes. Nevertheless, a number of states, fearful of the “schism” that Catto predicts, have decided to institutionalize the tradition by passing “Official English” laws of their own. California was the first in 1986, Iowa the latest in 2002.

Approach One sees learning English as one of the principal ways in which newcomers adapt to their new culture. It opposes bilingual education because, in this view, ethnic minorities who continue to speak their own language do not assimilate. Supreme Court decisions have affirmed the right of students to be taught in their own language because they learn material more effectively. Some studies have even suggested that these students in bilingual education are more rapidly assimilated as well. But Approach One says that these precedents are ill considered. These requirements have, they argue, resulted in an expensive commitment to bilingual and bicultural programs. Under current laws, school districts with 20 or more students speaking the same foreign language must offer these programs.

Concern about such bilingual education motivated businessman Ron Unz to begin English for the Children, an organization that initiated and helped pass Proposition 227, an anti-bilingual education initiative in California. Since then, Unz has contributed to successful campaigns in Arizona and Massachusetts. A similar campaign failed in Colorado. These initiatives typically attempt to replace bilingual education programs with yearlong English-immersion programs.

**Even Tougher Laws Needed for National Security**

When it became commonly understood that the September 11, 2001, terrorists were foreign-born, had entered the country legally as tourists or students, but were undetected as terrorists, Americans’ concerns about their own security increased. President Bush in a message to Congress addressed the issue of foreign-born evildoers: “They and those like them should be kept out of this country, and far-reaching provisions should be made for the punishment of those who stay.”

Approach One asks Americans not to forget that threats posed by terrorists are ever-present. Failure to find answers to questions of national security may cost more than money. Failure can have dire consequences that could even threaten the very existence of our democracy.

In testimony prepared for Congress, Steven Camarota of the Center for Immigration Studies said, “The current terrorist threat to the United States comes almost exclusively from individuals who arrive from abroad.” Camarota outlined a number of provisions his organization supports for achieving greater security at our nation’s borders. First among these would be to create a separate “Visa Corps” that would manage the issuance of nonimmigrant visas. Visas like these have tripled from 30 years ago when most visas went to Western Europeans and Japanese who now no longer need visas for short visits.

Camarota also recommends a computerized system to track foreign students and workers through the duration of their stay. This would include monitoring of land-border crossings, entries and exits at airports, changes in school or work situations, arrests, and applications for government benefits. This information would be accessible to law enforcement and linked to the databases of the FBI, IRS, Social Security, Selective Service, and other federal agencies.
Reflecting on This Approach

Some people take quite a different view of recent immigration, both about the desirability of increased ethnic diversity and about whether there is even a problem at all. Rather than a drain on the economy, they see immigrants as a vital part of it. As for national security, while September 11 made immigrants suspect in many minds, as the Oklahoma City bombing proved, terrorist threats can be homegrown as well. Most immigrants actively embrace American life and culture. Some say that there is little evidence that recent immigrants are assimilating any differently than earlier immigrants. Assimilation has never been a seamless process and the first generation of newcomers never fully assimilates. Today, these first-generation immigrants can more readily maintain ties to their native lands using modern amenities like interstate highways, air travel, media, and widespread communication tools. The children of these newcomers continue to take pride in their parents’ heritage, but just as in earlier times, these children become Americans.

Henry Cisneros, the first Mexican-American mayor of San Antonio, and former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, says, “It is easy for Americans to fail to appreciate the strength of American culture. All of the things that shape the American way of life are indomitable.”

Little reason exists to expect that divisions along linguistic lines will develop even in regions heavily populated by recent immigrants. While many first-generation immigrants don’t speak English proficiently, studies indicate that the second generation is fluent and that many U.S.-born children of immigrants prefer English to their parents’ native language. For all the concern expressed about language segregation, recent immigrants are taking the same path as earlier generations of newcomers — including today’s Mexican and Latino immigrants who make up the bulk of recent arrivals.

Approach One also dismisses the argument that a racial “tipping point” looms in the near future. Actually, the United States has always been a nation of minorities. While the melting pot describes what is supposed to happen when new
America’s Changing Face: Is There Too Much Difference?

Approach One

Repeatedly, says Ellis Cose, author of *A Nation of Strangers*, “Americans have worried about whether the nation can absorb so many who are so different from those who ‘made America great.’ Always, those fears have been ultimately judged not only groundless but a diversion from the larger task of allowing America to become even greater.”

For Further Reading/America’s Changing Face


What Immigrants Say about Learning English —

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The U.S. should expect all immigrants to learn English</th>
<th>68%</th>
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<tr>
<td>All public school classes should be taught in English</td>
<td>67%</td>
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Source: Public Agenda 11/02.

...
A Nation of Immigrants: Remembering America’s Heritage

Author Mary Pipher recounts a trip from Manhattan to Ellis Island, where at one time nearly 7,000 people were admitted to America every day. At its peak, the island’s population was bigger than many towns in Europe, and some immigrants thought it was New York City. She learned from her tour guide that about 40 percent of all Americans can trace their roots to ancestors who passed through this one gateway.

On her way back to Manhattan, Pipher’s ferry passed the Statue of Liberty. It’s not difficult to think of the statue in much the same way as did 17-year-old Emma Goldman. Arriving in New York harbor in 1885, the immigrant wrote in her journal that Lady Liberty was “the symbol of hope, of freedom, of opportunity! She held her torch high to light the way to the free country, an asylum for the oppressed of all lands.”

Approach Two sees the statue as a compelling reminder of America’s distinctive heritage and continuing obligation as a nation of immigrants. They insist America’s immigration policy in the twenty-first century must continue to reflect our characteristic values, our humanitarian concern, and our acknowledgment that diversity is one of the fundamental sources of our nation’s strength.
Some people talk about the immigration system as if virtually anyone who wants to come to America is welcome. In fact, the majority of those applying for visas either are forced to wait or turned away. Before making current laws more restrictive, Approach Two says we need to recognize the wisdom of the existing policy.

**Seeking Refuge**

The United States recognized the right to asylum in 1951 when it signed the United Nations’ Convention on Refugees. Since then, the United States has accepted more than three million refugees fleeing persecution. The 1965 Immigration Act amendments reserved for refugees 6 percent of all visas, or about 17,400 at the time, but by 1978, Vietnamese refugees alone numbered nearly 90,000. In 1992, the number approved for admission reached 142,000, although the quota has since been cut in half.

Pipher’s book *The Middle of Everywhere* outlines reasons refugees want to come to America. She describes the desperate circumstances of Mohamed and his wife Bintu, a young couple from Sierra Leone, a tiny country on the west coast of Africa where civil war has torn everything apart. Mohamed and Bintu each escaped the country and its unspeakable horrors to reunite in a refugee camp in Ghana and, eventually, resettle in Lincoln, Nebraska. Now, as Pipher tells the story, “They speak of their hopes for college educations, good jobs, and a reunited family here in America.”

In this view, such stories make it essential to remember what America stands for, and what we represent to the world’s oppressed. They help us recall that individuals fleeing persecution founded the United States. That heritage imposes a special obligation to offer safe harbor, they argue.

According to the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), an American resettlement organization, “The beleaguered U.S. Refugee Program, already in decline in recent years, has suffered a body blow in the aftermath of September 11. And so have the prospects for new hope and new life for tens of thousands of refugees around the world. Now, it seems likely that only a fraction of those will actually be admitted. With hostility toward migrants increasing around the world, the future for those fleeing persecution is looking grim. Most will simply have to wait in limbo — vulnerable strangers in often unfriendly lands — until it is safe to return.”

People worry that a cornerstone of international law is eroding. They fear that the United States has abandoned the principle that endangered refugees seeking asylum should not be turned back to the danger from which they’ve fled. At U.S. airports and other ports of entry today, some would-be refugees are now being immediately turned away. An asylum seeker with false documents or without any documents must establish a “fear of persecution” in an on-the-spot interview before an immigration officer, or face immediate deportation. Today, more than 99 percent of people who go through these interviews are not allowed to enter the country.
Reuniting Families, Recruiting Workers

Three-quarters of regular, legal immigration to the U.S. is family-sponsored. The United States uses a system of priorities to grant entry visas to family members. There is no limit on the number of visas for spouses, small children, and parents of U.S. citizens. The National Immigration Forum says between 250,000 and 300,000 of these visas are issued each year.

Another 226,000 visas are issued on a quota basis. First preference goes to unmarried adult children of U.S. citizens, second preference to spouses and small children of legal permanent residents, next preference to adult children of legal permanent residents, next to adult married children of U.S. citizens and last to brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens.

Despite recent increases in the flow of immigrants, the percentage of the U.S. population that is foreign-born — now more than 10 percent — is still less than it was in 1910. From this perspective, paring down immigration quotas, as some suggest, would seriously undermine the values on which the current laws are based, particularly the goal of family reunification. Eliminating the kinship preference is “nonsensical,” says UCLA urban affairs specialist Leo Estrada, because it encourages individuals, rather than families, to immigrate. “When there is a family network to build on,” says Estrada, “it helps to set the stage for adaptation. Breaking down family unification would encourage more isolated individuals to immigrate. All of our studies have shown that this is the least desirable immigration.”

For example, not one of the 206 illegal Haitian immigrants who jumped overboard as their 50-foot wooden freighter ran aground near Miami in 2002 received political asylum. All were sent back to their homeland. Local immigration attorneys charged that their fate stems from a government policy that is “racially biased” against Haitians and in favor of Cubans — who, in light of the ongoing tensions between the United States and Cuba have been given preferential treatment. That is nothing new. Throughout the Cold War, the United States offered asylum most often to people who suffered political persecution from communist regimes. Now that the Cold War is over, this approach calls for recognizing that people who suffer from other kinds of persecution deserve protection as refugees, too.

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Approach Two acknowledges that something more than generosity impels us to maintain fairly high levels of immigration. “This nation needs the rejuvenation that waves of new Americans bring. We must guard against the self-satisfied view that
we are good enough as is,” a Wall Street Journal editorial advises.

It is not just private companies that seek out immigrants, but the government as well. Active recruiting by the armed services has brought more than 30,000 recent immigrants into the military, promising a fast track to citizenship in exchange for enlistment. Many served in both Afghanistan and the recent war in Iraq, risking and, in some cases, giving their lives for a country in which they were not yet citizens.

In Schenectady, New York, an old factory town 150 miles north of New York City, Mayor Al Jurczynski makes sure that immigrants know they are welcome. In fact, he travels to a Guyanese neighborhood in New York City to sell Schenectady to the locals. He offers a deal — a quid pro quo: You get to live in a less- hectic city with fire-sale real estate prices; we get a much-needed infusion of people after decades of attrition. Among Schenectady’s 62,000, local officials estimate the Guyanese population to be about 3,000 and growing.

Each year, the United States grants immigration visas to 140,000 people who have skills and talents needed here, including professors, researchers, people with advanced degrees or other exceptional abilities, skilled professionals and other workers who want to get at least two years of training here, ministers and religious workers, and investors who plan to open business-

### What Should Be Done

- America’s refugee admissions are less than half the number of ten years ago, yet the number of refugees worldwide is growing. America needs to do more to assist those fleeing persecution.
- A potential refugee should receive a better chance to prove his case.
- Family-sponsored immigration should not be limited to immediate nuclear family members.
- Existing levels of immigration should be expanded, especially the numbers allocated to skilled workers.
- The special relationship between Mexico and the United States should be acknowledged, and the two countries should cooperate on immigration issues.

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Conception Arcos, 30, holds her seven-month-old baby as her daughters Mariela, 11, and Cinthia, 11, work together during English class at Thomas Edison Elementary school in Anaheim, CA. Arcos participates in a pilot program aimed at helping newly arrived immigrants learn English and adjust to American culture.
Across the state, a number of citizens waved red flags, signed petitions, and questioned the wisdom, the costs, and even the philosophy of bringing newcomers and adding more ethnic diversity to the state. National groups opposing immigration weighed in. One representative said, “In a free-market system that’s as large as ours, there’s no such thing as a labor shortage. There is a shortage of employers who are willing to pay a decent wage to attract workers.” Two years later, both anti- and pro-immigration placards were visible at a stop in the governor’s re-election campaign.

Anyone who thinks each additional newcomer is an economic drain, Approach Two says, doesn’t understand how the economy works or how the United States achieved a uniquely successful blend of diversity and prosperity. With each new wave of immigration, energetic newcomers increase the supply of goods and services with their labor. By spending their wages, they accelerate economic growth — and the demand for a multitude of products ranging from housing to groceries. Responding to increased demand, employers invest their expanding earnings in new jobs and machinery. “It is called competitive capitalism,” says Tony Carnevale, of the American Society for Training and Development, “and it works.”

Illegal Entry

Approach Two also seeks a reasonable and humane solution to the problem of illegal entry, especially from Mexico, our nation’s second-largest trading partner. Such an approach must be humanitarian, but it must also avoid allowing illegal aliens to take places that should be open to people who have already lined up for legal entry. In this view, our nation has sent “mixed messages” on the issue of illegal entry:

- In 1942, Congress sought temporary agricultural workers, mainly from Mexico, to ease the nation’s labor shortages during World War II. The end of the program in 1964 began the illegal entry as many formerly legal but “undocumented” workers easily returned to the areas where they had worked.
- In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act granted amnesty to approximately three million undocumented residents and, for the first time, set punishment for employers who hire people who are here illegally.
- In 1996, Congress toughened border enforcement, closed opportunities for undocumented immigrants to adjust their status, and made it more difficult to gain asylum.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) eliminated duties in Mexico on heavily subsidized American grain, meat, and dairy products. This allows importation of these products to Mexico at much cheaper prices for local consumers. Mexican officials warn that ending the tariffs may crush the ability of millions of Mexican farmers to survive. This may increase illegal immigration as these farmers come north across the border seeking jobs to feed their families.
Migrant rights advocates believe our laws and investment in border patrols have not eased the problem. It is a “false premise,” says Mexican-American journalist Jorge Ramos, “that undocumented immigration is a problem of the law and its enforcement. It doesn’t matter how many officers the United States puts on its borders or how many fences they build; as long as there are jobs in the north for workers from the south, there will continue to be undocumented immigration.”

Human rights advocate Joseph Nevins minces no words when linking U.S. border policy to the alarming number of deaths of people trying to cross the southern border illegally. The 70 deaths in June 2002, he says, “are the predictable outcome of a lethal charade, one in which Washington provides ever-increasing amounts of boundary-enforcement resources in full knowledge that they will do little to diminish unauthorized immigration, but will instead have increasingly deadly consequences.”

After the events of September 11, 2001, President Bush reminded Americans that the vast majority of people who enter the United States illegally are simply looking to improve their lives. They are not terrorists to kill Americans. Congress has drafted — but not acted on — policies that would help thousands of undocumented families “regularize” their status in the United States and put them on a path to legal residency. Other proposals would grant legal status to undocumented youth who complete their high school education. Speaking in late 2002 before the American Chamber of Commerce in Mexico City, Secretary of State Colin Powell said of the migration problem, “I hope that in the year ahead we will see some progress. It is a priority and we will push forward.”

**Difference Is America’s Cultural and Economic Strength**

From the theater to politics, from sports to art, and from business to science, immigrants contribute to America. Immigrants include artists, engineers, educators, scientists, doctors, musicians, authors, newspaper editors, and thousands on thousands of ordinary people whose contributions are less heralded, but every bit as valuable.

Former U.S. Secretaries of State Madeleine Albright (Czechoslovakia) and Henry Kissinger (Germany) are immigrants. So are many sports stars: baseball’s Sammy Sosa (Dominican Republic) and Rafael Palmiero (Cuba) or basketball’s Hakeem Olajuwon (Nigeria). Jerry Yang (Taiwan) is cofounder of Yahoo! Inc., Tobias Taurel (Morocco) is president and CEO of Eli Lilly and Company. Actors Arnold Schwarzenegger (Austria) and Michael J. Fox (Canada) are immigrants, as are newsman Peter Jennings (Canada) and Ted Koppel (England).

Approach Two says these folks are shining examples of why America needs to continue to welcome immigrants.

**Reflecting on This Approach**

Most agree in principle that immigration laws should reflect America’s tradition as a nation of immigrants and a refuge for the oppressed. But many argue that U.S. admissions policies must also reflect our national interests and take into account how newcomers affect us and how many of them we can afford to invite. Approach Two makes the point that, in the past, immigrants moved up the economic ladder fairly quickly. What they overlook, however, is evidence from studies that show recent immigrants are less educated and less skilled.

A report from the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), an organization opposed to large-scale immigration, says, “Today,
the United States does not have an immigration policy that is based on a sound consideration of our national interests and goals. Instead, we have a hodgepodge of laws that are the result of sentimental misconceptions about American history, special interest pressures, and the lack of open national debate.” Professor Norman Matloff of the University of California at Davis agrees. The laws are “treated in a very shallow, simplistic manner in the press, leaving the public vulnerable to advocacy group ‘spin doctors’ and emotional claims which are at odds with the facts,” he says.

Consider, for example, the idea of family reunification. On closer inspection, it has become so broad that it seems hard to defend. Roughly three-quarters of all legal immigrants enter under this provision. Once admitted, they are permitted to bring in their relatives who then can bring in their relatives. Few questions are asked about whether family reunification serves our national interests, and whether it attracts individuals who are likely to contribute to American society.

Former presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan likens the flow of immigrants to a flood. “Like the Mississippi,” says Buchanan, “with its endless flow of life-giving water, immigration has enriched America throughout history. But when the Mississippi floods its banks, the devastation can be enormous. What will become of our country if the levees do not hold?”

Some fear America’s “levees” could break. They point to the number of illegal entrants as evidence. Furthermore, the United Nations projects that the world’s population will approach 9.3 billion by mid-century. Since most of the world’s people live in starkly impoverished conditions, the potential for immigration to all Western countries is mind-boggling. The million or so who immigrate to the United States each year is a small portion of the humanitarian need, and a small part of those who actually want to come. In the words of Peter Brimelow, once a senior editor at Forbes, “Just because a danger has been averted in the past does not mean it cannot happen in the future. Many passengers might have climbed aboard the lifeboat safely. One more may still capsize it.”

While the number of potential immigrants in the future appears staggering, and the prospect for increased immigration grows more likely, many Americans nevertheless believe that America is enriched culturally by welcoming the world’s many different peoples and that the nation is the primary beneficiary of the financial might immigrants bring to bear on America’s global economy. Approach Two says that current levels of immigration are right for family-based preferences, though admittedly our policies provide few good answers to the questions and problems posed by illegal entry.

Some Americans, on the other hand, worry about the economic costs and consequences to the country of such a large and diverse number of newcomers. We will explore these concerns — and possible approaches — in the next section of this book.

For Further Reading/A Nation of Immigrants

- Pamela Reeves, Ellis Island: Gateway to the American Dream (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2002).
Approach Three reflects concerns that competition with low-skilled immigrants results in an adverse economic effect on low-skilled native-born American workers.

When the Statue of Liberty was erected in New York harbor in 1885, the population of the United States was slightly more than 60 million people. Today, there are more than 280 million Americans. A century ago, much of the West was unsettled frontier. There was sufficient land and water to support a large number of newcomers, and the country was entering an industrial era that required a large number of unskilled laborers. Since then, times have changed and new circumstances may require us to rethink our historical generosity.

Today’s workplace requires smart workers with well-developed skills. Semiskilled and unskilled workers face increasing difficulty in the labor market of the twenty-first century. A more prudent immigration policy, Approach Three says, begins by recognizing the nation is far different from what it was a century ago. It is not antihuman or antisocial to think that too many unskilled people can be a problem. It is simply realistic to acknowledge the fact.
Today, the sheer number of immigrants puts the United States in the midst of another great debate over immigration. As George Borjas, a professor of economics at Harvard, puts it, “Immigration policy must resolve two distinct issues: how many immigrants the country should admit, and what kinds of people they should be.”

According to Approach Three, the answers to these questions are simple: “Fewer and more skilled.” Excessive immigration, they believe, is a drain on public resources and a drag on the economy, and unrestricted immigration can be a threat to our security.

Immigration must be restricted for reasons of the nation’s economy, and we should put the interests of citizens, both native-born and naturalized, first. The cost of providing welfare and social services to a large number of newcomers — particularly education and medical services — is an increasing burden. Recent population growth, as occasioned by legal immigrants and undocumented migrants, stresses our natural resources and leaves us vulnerable, Approach Three argues.

This perspective on immigration is based on a simple but rarely acknowledged principle: charity begins at home. In the words of the well-known columnist Cal Thomas, “Our immigration policy must not only consider the needs of those who wish to come here. It must put first the needs of those who are already here.”

### The Effects of Immigration

In 1997, a bipartisan Commission on Immigration Reform reported on the effects of immigration on the economic prospects of native-born residents. The report included estimates of population growth and the ability of immigrants to assimilate. It found that Americans without high school diplomas are the most adversely affected by low-skilled immigrant workers. The report estimated that competition with immigrants reduces the wages of high school dropouts by 5 percent nationwide.

The financial effect of immigration on the federal government is minimal, but immigrants can put major monetary demands on state and local governments. At the federal level, the foreign-born pay more in taxes than they receive in services. Illegal workers contribute to the Social Security fund, but they generally work with forged identification cards. This means they do not collect Social Security benefits at retirement age.

However, at the state and local levels, immigrants, as a group, often represent substantial fiscal costs. In California, immigrants create a sizable tax burden (estimated at almost $1,200 per immigrant family per year), while New Jersey immigrants represent a more modest tax burden (estimated to be $232 per family per year) according to a study by the National Research Council.

Many Americans believe the costs of immigration will rise even higher in years to come. FAIR,
A Matter of Priorities: Putting Economics First

Approach Three

As the demand for low-skilled workers declines, the continuing influx of low-skilled immigrants has widened income disparity among the state’s workers by holding down both the earnings and the job opportunities of the low-skilled labor force.

Population Pressures

This approach cites the Golden State as a preview of what is in store for the nation as a whole. The nation’s immigration policy should be based on a realistic assessment of our natural resources and the demands placed on them by a growing population.

The National Research Council (NRC) found that without the addition of immigrants between 1950 and 1995, the U.S. population would have

an organization opposed to large-scale immigration, predicts that the cost of immigration for 2006 will be $108 billion, 66 percent higher than the cost in 1996. Proimmigrant groups call this prediction “preposterous.” Organizations like the National Immigration Forum, in fact, suggest that immigrants contribute more than $10 billion per year to the U.S. economy. Although needs might outstrip their resources during their first years in the country, they argue that immigrants, on average, pay $80,000 more in taxes over the course of their lifetime than they receive in benefits.

Trend-Setting California

California’s transformation through immigration into a diverse racial and ethnic society has attracted the attention of the rest of the country and other parts of the world. Some see California as a trendsetter for the rest of the nation and are looking closely for clues about how such changes can best be managed. But many others are less optimistic and see a trend the rest of the nation should avoid.

A RAND study reports that immigration into California, both legal and illegal, has increased at unprecedented rates. In the 1970s, more immigrants — 1.8 million — entered the state than in all prior decades combined. That number doubled in the 1980s. In the 1990s, at the time of the study, immigrants constituted more than one-fourth of California’s population and were responsible for more than half of the growth in the state’s labor force.

Nearly half of California’s recent immigrants come from Mexico and Central America and another third come from Asia. These groups are less educated, younger, and have more children than immigrants coming from other places. They also are more likely to be refugees or undocumented. For these reasons, RAND suggests, immigration is affecting California more substantially than any other state in the nation.

Its principal findings:

- California’s employers continue to benefit from the presence of immigrants, who are paid less than native workers at all skill levels but are equally productive employees.
- The size of the immigration flow, with a disproportionate share of poorly educated, low-income immigrants and refugees, has increased the costs of immigration to state and local government, most significantly in public education, and has had a negative fiscal effect on the state.

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What Should Be Done

- Lower the level of annual immigration into the country and focus on skilled workers.
- Ensure that immigrants who are admitted complement, not compete with, our native labor force.
- Recruit high-skilled immigrant workers, and require employers of low-skilled immigrants to help provide the social services these newcomers need.
- Cut back immigration to a more manageable number. A good target is 550,000, the number recommended by the Commission on Immigration Reform (1997). This is about half of America’s current annual total number for both legal and illegal immigrants.
- Review immigration quotas and entry criteria often to maintain small numbers and emphasize a higher level of education requirement.
- Provide financial relief to states and communities bearing a disproportionate share of the costs associated with immigration.
- Control levels of illegal immigration.

been 14 percent smaller than its 1995 size of 263 million. When the NRC projected the population to the year 2050, it found the U.S. population would increase to 387 million people, with immigration responsible for two-thirds (82 million) of that increase, a figure quite alarming to many people.

Approach Three calls for curbing immigration to prevent both serious overcrowding and further environmental stress. It is particularly concerned about the public costs associated with newcomers. The Commission on Immigration Reform recommended that total legal immigration be reduced to 550,000 per year, a recommendation that Congress has yet to embrace. Congress did take the commission’s suggestion to reinforce our borders to reduce illegal entry, but these measures have brought mixed success.

FAIR concurs with a lower admission quota and says, “If immigration were restructured, newcomers could be admitted on the basis of their being able to contribute to the high-skills, high-wage economy that we want for the 21st century.” FAIR goes a step farther by proposing a temporary freeze on all immigration except immediate family members of U.S. citizens. A moratorium, it says, would permit the nation a “much-needed pause to an unprecedented wave of immigration” and permit public debate to shape an admissions policy that reflects our national interests.

The Practical Effects of Immigration

Economist George Borjas, an expert on immigration impacts, clarifies what he calls the “practical economics” of immigration policy when he writes, “Immigration entails both gains and losses for the native population.… The winners and losers are typically different groups.” In a recent forum, a homeowner told of his dilemma over the “practical economics” of immigration. As he explained it, the roof of his large family home needed to be replaced. He received two bids, each from reputable companies and both offering the same quality materials and workmanship. He was surprised that there was such a sizable difference between the bids, enough to make him stop and think.

The homeowner said his brother told him the companies paid differing wages. One provided benefits and retirement, and employed local workers, who worked regularly, if not full-time. The lower bid came from a company that paid only the required benefits and hired temporary workers who were capable and efficient roofers, but who were recent immigrants. The homeowner asked his fellow deliberators, “Whom should I employ?”

Approach Three points out that current immigration moves income from unskilled workers, whose wages are lowered by immigrants, to skilled workers and owners of companies. The same thing happens between taxpayers, who bear the burden...
A Matter of Priorities: Putting Economics First

Approach Three

THE NEW CHALLENGES OF AMERICAN IMMIGRATION

I NATIONAL ISSUES FORUMS

of paying for the social services used by immigrants, and consumers. Consumers benefit from cheaper products when business owners are able to pay lower wages, but there is still an economic cost. When low-skilled immigrants displace U.S. workers, this drives down wages, and increases costs of social services like welfare and Medicaid.

FAIR says that immigration harms the entire American workforce when established workers lose jobs to new immigrants who will work for substandard wages. FAIR says this has happened across the nation in agriculture, furniture making, meatpacking, food processing, and in hotels. For example, unionized janitors in Los Angeles hotels making $12 an hour with benefits were displaced en masse by immigrants earning the minimum wage.

A Utah state legislator, who is a dairy farmer employing immigrant workers, contends that “American society is built on a belief in cheap food. It is central to our notion of abundance, and to keep that food cheap, American dairy farmers cannot afford to pay higher wages [to attract native-born workers]. We would be drummed out of business.”

Borjas believes that the strength in the tug-of-war between those like this dairy farmer who gain from immigration and those who lose from it may be shifting to the restrictionists’ side. Economic groups that gain from immigration “seem indifferent to the costs that immigration imposes on other segments of society,” he says.

Groups like FAIR, however, dismiss the claim that American business needs to import low-skilled workers to compete in the global marketplace. Mass importation of low-skilled workers, FAIR contends, damages the job market for Americans, depresses wages for low-skilled natives, and costs taxpayers — all for the benefit of businesses that have become dependent on cheap, foreign labor.

Security at Our Borders

Before September 11, 2001, economic issues dominated immigration policy-making. After September 11, security issues overwhelmed the debate. Critics of the nation’s immigration laws pointed to the fact that 3 of the 19 hijackers were in the U.S. with expired visas. Others found it equally disturbing that the remaining 16 hijackers had roamed the country at will, even though some of them should have raised suspicions. At least two of the hijackers were on a U.S. government “watch list” of people suspected of

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For Further Reading/A Matter of Priorities


United States has done little in recent years to stop or prevent illegal immigration and in many ways has subtly encouraged it. America must take steps to seal the borders, they say.

Reflecting on This Approach

Many who disagree with this view of the immigration problem sympathize with the communities that bear the burden of receiving large numbers of newcomers. The problem, as they see it, is that taxpayers in a small number of communities pay a disproportionate share of the costs incurred by newcomers, particularly the expenses of schooling and medical care.

A number of people remain convinced that, for the country as a whole, the economic benefits of newcomers are indisputable. Similarly, they say, those who favor restrictions often misrepresent the economic effects of immigration. They argue that immigrants do not compete with native workers for low-wage jobs. In most cases, they fill positions native citizens would not accept. Some newcomers even start their own businesses.

Economists like Borjas argue that immigration has little impact on America’s low-skilled workers: “The earnings of the typical native are barely affected by the entry of immigrants into the local labor market,” he said.

What we should fear, some say, is not the short-term costs associated with a new generation of immigrants but the tendency to scapegoat them. Alarm about the number of immigrant households receiving welfare represents a case of fear overwhelming facts, they say. Even assuming that immigrants are more likely to go on welfare today than in the past, research suggests that immigrants are only slightly more likely than natives to receive welfare. That finding is not surprising since Congress limits welfare for immigrants and most are ineligible for benefits. Legal immigrants, in fact, are ineligible for federal aid of any kind for the first ten years of their residence, even when they are working and paying taxes, or even when they are a spouse or family member of a U.S. citizen. Beyond such precautions, other public services for illegal residents — such as education for children and some forms of medical care — should be available to everyone, regardless of status, some people argue.
Comparing Approaches

Unless our heritage is purely Native American, all Americans are immigrants. The first came from Spain, Britain, and France. Some were free. Others came as slaves from Africa. By the nineteenth century that original stream of immigrants had expanded to include people from across Europe, and Asia — Russia, Greece, and Italy, as well as China and Japan. Today, people come from around the world. They flee persecution, seek better jobs, or simply want to reunite with their families. When they get here, they contribute to the definition of American culture, but they can be expensive for taxpayers. They need jobs, language classes, and education for their children. By accepting low wages, they can take work away from citizens. And, sadly, some who come to our shores are not seeking a place in America. Instead, like the hijackers of September 11, 2001, they seek to destroy our freedoms and us. Immigration made America, but what do we do about the threats it poses today?

Approach One: America’s Changing Face — Is There Too Much Difference?

Limit the number of newcomers. Otherwise, America risks losing its soul, its definition of itself. When people live in tight little ethnic communities, when they speak only a foreign language and call home often, they don’t assimilate. English is the common language of our culture. If we lose our language, we lose all our other bonds — including our shared definition of democracy. Besides, September 11, 2001, proves that some immigrants wish ill upon America.

What Should Be Done?
- Admit fewer immigrants.
- Warn local communities of impending immigration, so they can plan.
- Subsidize local governments who aid large numbers of immigrants.
- Make immigrants, adults and children, learn to speak English.

Dangers, Drawbacks, Tradeoffs
- We may lose our tradition of tolerance.
- English-only initiatives can create prejudice against immigrants.
- Immigrants always cling to the home country, but their children continue to adopt America’s culture.
- Immigrants keep our country vibrant and adaptable.
Approach Two:
A Nation of Immigrants — Remembering America’s Heritage

Immigration built America. Yes, there are short-term costs, but over the long run immigration will keep us great. We cannot abandon refugees, who like our forefathers, seek freedom. We must welcome newcomers, but find better ways to support them and help them grow into Americans.

What Should Be Done?
- Admit more refugees.
- Give refugees a better chance to prove persecution.
- Expand family-sponsored immigration.
- Allow more skilled workers into the country.
- Negotiate a new immigration policy with Mexico.

Dangers, Drawbacks, Tradeoffs
- Without limits, the lifeboat, which is America, could capsize drowning us all.
- Caring for and educating all of these newcomers costs American taxpayers.
- Americans in low-wage jobs suffer.
- Citizens’ wages don’t go up because immigrants will work for less.
- Americans even lose jobs to immigrant competitors.

Approach Three:
A Matter of Priorities — Putting Economics First

Limit the number of newcomers. Their arrival impacts those who are already here. Immigration costs American citizens. Competition from immigrants keeps wages down and even takes jobs away from Americans. We pay higher taxes to support education and social services for newcomers.

What Should Be Done?
- Admit fewer immigrants.
- Keep out immigrants who would take jobs from Americans.
- Focus immigration on skilled workers.
- Help out taxpayers in communities where immigrants settle.
- Stop illegal immigration.

Dangers, Drawbacks, Tradeoffs
- Immigrants get blamed for problems they do not cause.
- People will have no safe haven from tyranny.
- There will be no workers to do the unskilled jobs Americans refuse to accept.
- Immigrants are a critical part of the U.S. economy.
The New Challenges of American Immigration:
What Should We Do?

Now that you’ve had a chance to participate in a forum on this issue, we’d like to know what you are thinking. Your opinions, along with those of thousands of others who participated in these forums, will be reflected in a summary report that will be available to all citizens, including those who took part in the forums, as well as officeholders, members of the news media, and others in your community.

1. Do you agree or disagree with the statements below?
   a. Emphasizing cultural differences is more likely to drive Americans apart than to bring them together.
   b. The main terrorist threat to the U.S. comes from persons who arrive here from abroad.
   c. The country’s racial and ethnic diversity is a main source of its strength.
   d. Immigrants have a positive economic impact on this country.
   e. Current levels of immigration strain already oversburdened social services such as education and health care.
   f. By working for lower pay, low-skilled immigrants displace U.S. workers.

2. Do you favor or oppose each of these actions?
   a. The government should maintain a computerized system to carefully track all foreign students and workers.
   b. All immigrants should be required to learn English so they will be more quickly assimilated.
   c. We should admit more refugees fleeing from religious and political persecution.
   d. We should admit more skilled workers to fill critical occupational shortages in fields like nursing.
   e. The U.S. should drastically reduce the number of immigrants it admits now.
   f. We should provide financial relief to states like California and Texas that have especially large numbers of immigrants.
3. Do you favor or oppose the statements listed below?
   a. We should discontinue bilingual language programs in schools,
      EVEN IF this makes it harder for immigrant children to do
      well in school at first.
      □ Strongly favor □ Somewhat favor □ Somewhat oppose □ Strongly oppose □ Not sure
   b. We should keep immigration at present levels, EVEN IF this
      means accepting more unskilled workers who will need
      social services.
      □ Strongly favor □ Somewhat favor □ Somewhat oppose □ Strongly oppose □ Not sure
   c. We should reduce the numbers of immigrants allowed
      into this country, EVEN IF this means keeping families
      apart and turning away refugees from persecution.
      □ Strongly favor □ Somewhat favor □ Somewhat oppose □ Strongly oppose □ Not sure

4. Are you thinking differently about this issue now that you have participated in the forum?
   □ Yes □ No
   If YES, how?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

5. In your forum, did you talk about aspects of the issue you hadn’t considered before?
   □ Yes □ No

6. What, if anything, might citizens in your community do differently as a result of this forum?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

7. How many National Issues Forums have you attended, including this one?
   □ 1–3 □ 4–6 □ 7 or more □ Not sure

8. Are you male or female? □ Male □ Female

9. Are you:
   □ African American □ Asian American □ Hispanic □ Native American □ White/Caucasian
   □ Other (please specify) ____________________

10. How old are you?
    □ 17 or younger □ 18–30 □ 31–45 □ 46–64 □ 65 or older

11. What is your ZIP code? ____________________

Please give this form to the forum leader, or mail it to National Issues Forums, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio, 45459-2777.
What Are National Issues Forums?

National Issues Forums bring together citizens to deliberate over the difficult choices they have to make about challenging social and political issues of the day. These forums have addressed such timely issues as the economy, education, health care, foreign affairs, poverty, and crime.

Choice Work
Public deliberation is often called “choice work” because citizens have to weigh the costs and benefits of various courses of action against the things they hold most dear. As they do this work, forum participants can deepen their own understanding of difficult tradeoffs and gain insights into the points of view of others, even those who have opposing positions. Personal reactions and first opinions can evolve into more shared and reflective public judgment.

What to expect
Throughout the nation, thousands of civic, service, education, and religious organizations convene forums. These sponsoring organizations select topics based on citizens’ concerns, then design and coordinate their own forum programs.

There is no typical forum in length, number of participants, or frequency. They range from small study circles to large gatherings modeled after town meetings, but all are different from everyday conversations or adversarial debate.

Forum organizers distribute issue guides such as this one, featuring a nonpartisan overview of an issue and a choice of several possible responses. A neutral moderator describes the nature of the issue for deliberation and the options for action, but the power of deliberation comes from the participants engaging one another.

What are the results?
In addition to promoting sound public judgment, deliberation gives citizens a more powerful voice. This “public voice” synthesizes different concerns and perspectives into a coherent message that often reveals a view different from the official take on an issue and brings to light the things that are most important to people as they consider different options for action. A public voice is not the same as the aggregation of responses of individuals who have been polled as a group but have not necessarily exchanged views. A public voice is also different from focus group findings. In deliberation, people respond to questions from one another, not from a leader.

In a democracy, citizens must come together to find answers they can all live with — while acknowledging that individuals have differing opinions. A public voice is certainly not a unanimous voice but it does reveal what citizens will and won’t do on a problem. It can give direction to governments and help organize civic action in a community.
A Note about This Issue Guide and NIF

Each guide in this series for National Issues Forums outlines a public issue and several ways of addressing that issue. Each approach reflects widely held concerns and principles, rather than conforming to any single public proposal. Panels of experts review manuscripts to make sure the approaches are presented accurately and fairly. By intention, issue guides do not identify individuals or organizations with partisan labels such as Democrat, Republican, conservative, or liberal. The goal is to present ideas in a way that encourages readers to judge them on their merit. Issue guides include quotations from experts and public officials when their views appear consistent with the principles of a given approach. But these quoted individuals might not endorse every aspect of the approach as it is described here.

National Issues Forums or the “NIF network” is a nonpartisan, informal association of educational and community organizations that convene forums for citizens to deliberate about public issues. The network includes libraries, churches, schools, community and neighborhood associations, as well as chapters of national organizations and associations of community groups. The associations and organizations select topics based on citizens’ concerns, then design and coordinate their own forum programs, using NIF guides such as this one or issue guides they create themselves.

Public deliberation or choice work is a way for a diverse group of people to make decisions together about the common problems they face. Deliberation is a form of talk that is different from everyday conversation or adversarial debate. The deliberative process helps people who use choice work to weigh the costs and benefits of various options for action — to see issues from other points of view. Deliberation seldom ends in complete agreement but it can identify common directions and shared purposes. As first reactions mature into more reflective and shared judgments, deliberation may enable the citizens to speak in a public voice.

About NIFI

Encouraging public deliberation is the objective of the National Issues Forums Institute (NIFI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, and independent organization. For more information on forums, log on to the NIFI Web site: www.nifi.org.

About the Kettering Foundation

Studies of public deliberation are undertaken by the Kettering Foundation (KF), a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute with offices in Dayton, Ohio, Washington, D.C. and New York City. Founded in 1927, it provides its research on deliberation to members of the NIF network through guides for public deliberation and through reports on findings of interest to NIF participants. KF also compiles and reports on the outcomes of National Issues Forums. For information about the Kettering Foundation or public deliberation, contact the foundation at 200 Commons Road, Dayton, OH 45459-2799 (Phone 800-221-3657) or log on to its Web site: www.kettering.org.
This issue guide was prepared by the Kettering Foundation for the National Issues Forums network.

Ordering Information

To place an order for this guide, write to the National Issues Forums Institute, P.O. Box 41626, call 1-800-600-4060, FAX 1-937-435-7367, or order electronically at www.nifi.org. Other recent topics in this series include terrorism, violent kids, campaign spending, public schools, urban sprawl, privacy and free speech on the Internet, gambling, jobs, alcohol, physician-assisted suicide, Social Security, and Medicare. These may be ordered from Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 4050 Westmark Drive, Dubuque, Iowa 52002. Phone 800-228-0810.

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