

Immigration in america



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Immigration played a very important role in American history and is perhaps one of the greatest controversial issues of our present time. There are many sides to immigration, and no matter where you are from, most views on immigration are saddening. Most immigrants lead lives that the rest of us only read about in books.

Something that we must remember is that at one time in our history, American encouraged relatively open immigration to settle its empty lands before the era of rapid communications and transportation. Mexico's relationship to the United States has a long history. In 1835 Texas, then Mexican territory, declared its independence and ten years later was annexed to the United States. After that came the U. S.-Mexican War. When it was over, the U. S. had acquired half the land that once belonged to Mexico, including all or parts of Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, and Wyoming.

With the land, the United States of course got Mexicans, many of them. The California Gold Rush brought in more, and others came later, lured by the prospect of making a better living here. Sometimes the Mexicans were invited, as they were during World War II by a treaty that allowed an unlimited number of temporary workers to fill agricultural jobs here. By the end of the program in 1964, more than 4.5 million Mexicans had come to work temporarily in the United States, far exceeding the number of permanent legal immigrants.

Legal immigration, which had also increased steadily over the years, was eventually checked. But illegal immigrants, without having to cross an ocean

to get there as did immigrants from Europe and Asia, started pouring in at the rate of hundreds of thousands a year. By the early 1980s, some 55 percent of all undocumented immigrants in the U. S. came from Mexico, accounting for an estimated two-thirds of all Mexican immigration.

The U. S. government has cracked down over the years. It has erected barbed wire fences and high metal walls along the long border. It has raided businesses that purposely employ illegal workers in order to pay lower wages. Some of these businesses degrade the immigrant. They make them work endless hours and they do not pay overtime. They offer no insurance benefits and they allow them to live in very poor living conditions. Most of the immigrants do not know their rights. But still the immigrants come, sometimes risking their lives to cross the guarded borders, and when they do, most manage to keep their ties to their families in Mexico, something that few other immigrant groups can do.

Immigration has lasted for many decades and to this day it shows little sign of slowing down. Immigrants come into the United States from all over the world. They come in for reasons such as to gain a better or higher education. Some come in seeking their fortune. Most immigrants come in to the United States because they have nothing, and only want to be able to survive. This is especially true for Mexican immigrants because of their country's poverty. " The United States became a poor Mexican's protection, his escape hatch, his alternative to the submission expected of him in the Old World. This may jar Americans who see the rough lives many immigrants lead...To the man who departs pesoless yet returns with cash to spend, the United States affords dignity, respect, and sweet vindication." 1. Sam Quinones, Antonio's <https://assignbuster.com/immigration-in-america/>

Gun and Delfino's Dream. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 8.

Not every man that leaves their county to seek a better life in the United States of America is able to fulfill their dream. This may be because some U. S. companies may contribute unwittingly to the exploitation of foreign workers. According to an article written in Business Week by Steve Hamm and Moira Herbst, " In some cases companies target young men and women hungry to get well-paid tech jobs in the United States and charge them with exorbitant fees for visas, which is not allowed under American immigration laws. Even after paying, some workers never get a visa; those who do may find that the company they paid has no job for them." 2 Steve Hamm and Moira Herbst, Business Week: America's High-Tech Sweat Shops, (The McGraw-Hill Companies, October 12, 2009), p. 034.

Those immigrants that go back to Mexico to leave their families money and gifts are demonstrating to their people some of the American ways. Millions of money is transported from the U. S. into Mexico every year by illegal immigrants. Yet there are those times when law enforcers humiliate the immigrants by taking their belongings away from them. They take their hard earned money and the immigrants are deported, going home with nothing to show and penny-less as before. Then there are those that not only take their belongings, but also abuse them. The book Tangled Destinies: Latin America & The United States by Coerver and Hall, talks about many incidents dealing with immigration. Two particular incidents really caught my attention. This is what I read, " Two incidents in 1996 brought the tensions over illegal immigration, particularly from Mexico, into high relief. On 1 April 1996, <https://assignbuster.com/immigration-in-america/>

Riverside County sheriff's deputies in southern California were videotaped beating two unresisting illegal aliens, while others scattered, after an hour-long, high-speed chase. One was a woman, Alicia Sotero Vasquez, who was dragged by her hair out of the pickup in which the illegal's had been riding. Clearly ill and terrified, she appeared on television the next day with the Mexican consul to protest her treatment. Latino protests in Los Angeles accelerated through the week, culminating but not ending in a 6, 000-person protest march in downtown Los Angeles on April 7. He two aliens brought suit against the County, later settling for \$740, 000." 3 Don M. Coerver, Linda B. Hall, *Tangled Destinies: Latin America & The United States*, (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1999), p. 214. The second incident involved seven migrants that were killed in an accident. They were assumed planning to evade the Border Patrol and instead had a taste of bad luck and ended up in a ditch. In neither of these two cases were the victims immediately identified, when to begin with the victims in both cases were supposed to have been " smugglers" that the Border Patrol was searching for. Unfortunately the real smugglers got away while innocent people were brutalized and some even killed. The question is, " Could this have been prevented if handled differently by law officers?"

The Mexican migrant, also known as a " Wetback," who only violates the immigration law does not consider himself a criminal or lawbreaker. He is playing a game, trying to outwit the authorities, in hopes of bettering himself. To be sure the stakes are high (his survival), but there are few sanctions. If he stays clear of the drug traffic, stealing, drunkenness, fighting, etc., that is if he does not violate local, state, or other federal laws, the worst

that can happen to him when apprehended is a trip to the closest detention center. He is held there for a short period of time and then he is taken back to Mexico. This procedure seems a rather inconvenience because, more than likely, the immigrant heads for the United States once again, in hopes of returning to his job. Knowing the life in the U. S. as compared to the one in Mexico will keep him going back, regardless of the inconvenience. Becoming a wetback has been more the role of the male, since it entails long journeys, working with groups of men, hard labor, and a dangerous undertaking. A small percentage of the aliens who are apprehended are women and children. Unskilled women can work in a variety of jobs in agriculture, as dishwashers in restaurants, as hotel maids, as housemaids, or in custodial jobs. Nevertheless; they are most likely treated like the slaves of our history.

Why would any individual in Mexico want to play this game? Many times they learn of commuters and they hear the exaggerated stories about the wealth of the United States, the jobs available, the high wages and the ease of crossing the border. It is not difficult to comprehend the poverty-induced desperation which will compel a man to endure whatever hardship and humiliation in order to be able to obtain a few pesos for the sheer survival of his family and himself. Most wetbacks understand that they will not be successful. But when one is at the bottom of the social heap, there is no place or position below. This leaves people with hope. Hope that they can hold on to a job without official detection. Many wetbacks have high aspirations. Some talk of saving money to buy land back in Mexico. Others seek to buy a car and go into the taxi business.

Some wetbacks may allow themselves to be apprehended by border patrol agents because they feel that the United States prisons offer more than the poor rural areas in which they reside. Once they are apprehended though, they realize that they have to commit a crime or violate deportation regulations in order to actually be imprisoned. The results, they commit a crime and hope to get caught. Once in prison in the United States, they are provided with medical care, adult education classes, good clothes, warm and fairly comfortable living accommodations, and three meals per day. It is also possible for a prisoner to work in one of several occupations and send a check home to the family.

In his book, *Immigration: Opposing Viewpoints*, Marcus Eli Ravage writes that immigrants cannot easily become part of the American culture. He writes about living conditions that are degrading to immigrants and about the never ending hours of labor that immigrants work in sweatshops or on the streets. They pay high rent as if they were paying for extravagant apartments, yet this is not the case. 4 Marcus Eli Ravage, *Immigration: Opposing Viewpoints*. (San Diego: Greenhaven Press), 1992. This book has different viewpoints on immigration.

Let's look at illegal immigration in a different prospective. Yes, it is human to feel sadness for the migrant that is only trying to survive. Many of us Americans are doing the same thing. Some of us multitask with two and even three jobs. Some of us are lower-class American citizens, yet others are even classified below that, which is "poverty." Look at the many single-parent families in America. These families, when facing tragedy's such as divorce, fall from one class to another in a matter of days. What about the

many Americans being laid off? They are losing their homes, and have to completely change their lifestyles. Some are working jobs they never before thought they would. For the many families in crisis in America, life for them is similar to the lives that most migrants have to face. Sometimes the only difference is that we are American citizens, and they are not.

Another issue is that in which a migrant is hired for a job before an American because of the ability for the employer to pay lower wages, and be okay with it. Most migrants accept what is offered, as long as they are able to provide for their families. This causes ill feelings towards Americans that are also trying to provide for their own families. Sometimes people have immigrant women cleaning their houses for very low wages, and when those employees are no longer with them, they find it hard to pay higher wages to the U. S. citizen willing to do the job. Who is in the wrong? People have different opinions about issues such as these.

Many say that America is supposed to be the land for ALL people. What happens when there are more people than there are resources, such as in Africa where people are dying of starvation? There is not enough medicine for everyone so people are dying of many illnesses. This is not what America wants to happen. Yet there are millions of immigrants coming into the United States. Yes, some become legal immigrants in time. But do they abide by our laws? Do they make an effort to learn the English language? Or do they tell you they do not speak English. It seems that they want to be here so bad yet they do not care to learn the language. An article in the USA Today, July 30, 2010 issue talks about the problems that the state of Arizona is encountering as a consequence of illegal immigration. A retired Army sergeant says that <https://assignbuster.com/immigration-in-america/>

when he approaches Spanish-speaking grocery store clerks in his hometown of Buckeye, near Phoenix, they rarely help him. They reply, ' No Ingles.' 5 Alan Gomez and Kevin Johnson, USA Today, Friday, July 30, 2010. 3A.

Many states feel that the federal government is not controlling the illegal immigrants coming into the states. They feel that as a result our schools are overcrowded. There is much more violence in our cities, and states are facing economic and environmental problems. 6 USA, 3A. Is it time to put a stop to this ongoing situation that has worsened throughout the years? An Arizona Republican Governor, Jan Brewer definitely believes that the problem must be addressed.

Jan Brewer is taking the immigration crisis in Arizona into her own hands. A new immigration law, the Arizona SB 1070 law, requires police to check the immigration status of people they lawfully stop and suspect are in the country illegally. Other states have immigrant laws as well. Colorado restricts undocumented immigrants from receiving in-state tuition. Nebraska requires verification of immigration status to obtain public benefits. There are hundreds of immigration-related laws on the books across the United States that regulate employment, law enforcement, education, benefits and health care, but Arizona's strict new law has generated the most controversy. As a result many people have been arrested for protesting and causing chaos in Arizona. According to the El Paso Times, The U. S. Department of Justice filed a lawsuit to stop the Arizona law from taking effect on July 29, saying that immigration policy is a national responsibility and " a patchwork of state laws will only create more problems than it solves." 7 El Paso Times, June 18, 2010, 4A. But according to experts, that is precisely what exists. During the <https://assignbuster.com/immigration-in-america/>

first three months of 2010, lawmakers introduced more than 1, 000 bills and resolutions, though it is too early to tell how many will become law. Bills on topics such as employment verification and driver's license requirements are on the table in 45 states. " Legislators in five states-South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Rhode Island and Michigan-have introduced similar bills to Arizona's SB 1070." 8 El Paso Times, 4A.

Many believe that because of the federal government's negligence to face immigration responsibilities the states are scrambling. States have a long history of enacting immigration laws. In 1996, after Congress denied welfare to most legal immigrants, states stepped in with laws to provide safety-net services. After the September 11 attacks, state lawmakers passed bills aimed at protecting national security. People were concerned about dangerous immigrants in their midst and thought they should take matters into their own hands. The increase in state laws parallels the changing settlement patterns of undocumented immigrants. Between 1990 and 2008, illegal immigration slowed significantly in California but grew in Georgia, North Carolina and other states because those states are not the typical immigrant-receiving states and therefore are not accustomed to having large immigrant populations.

Because of this Arizona law, " undocumented immigrants who decide to leave the United States because of increasing enforcement and decreasing job prospects now face one more obstacle: the threat of arrest and deportation by border officers inspecting outbound traffic. When illegal immigrants are detected trying to leave the country, they are not just ushered across the line. Instead, their information is entered into a database

before they are allowed to return to Mexico.” 9 The Arizona Republic, Aug. 3, 2010. The objective is not to deter illegal immigrants who want to leave America but to catch those who have criminal records or are involved in smuggling. Round the clock screening of southbound traffic is being conducted by officials. The scrutiny is designed to catch smugglers delivering currency and firearms to Mexican cartels. Immigrants coming into the United States for the purpose of doing illegal activity will have to face consequences.

Arizona’s climate is scorching hot and almost unbearable in the summer. Temperatures may go up to the 120’s, especially in the desert. Whatever the temperature, people are still making the attempt to get into the United States, but more than ever, people are risking their lives to return home, regardless of the heat. Associated Press’s Amanda Lee Myers writes that “The number of deaths among undocumented immigrants crossing the Arizona desert from Mexico is soaring so high this month that the medical examiner’s office that handles the bodies is using a refrigerated truck to store some of them.” 10Associated Press, July 18, 2010. Myers writes that Dr. Bruce Parks, a medical examiner in Pima, Arizona has stated that his office, which handles immigrant bodies from three counties, is storing 250 immigrant bodies from July 1 to July 15. 11 Associated Press, 4A. Authorities believe the high number of deaths are likely due to above-average and unrelenting heat in southern Arizona this month and ongoing tighter border security that pushes immigrants to more remote, rugged and dangerous terrain. KOAT TV meteorologist Joe Diaz reported in mid July that Tucson’s

average nighttime lows in the first 15 days of July are the hottest for that period in recorded history.

What is our President doing about this new Arizona immigration law?

President Obama told the nation that he wants a “ nationwide” immigration law. He wants immigration reform and says that Arizona has taken a step in the wrong direction. President Obama gave a speech on immigration on July 1, laying out his case for bipartisan immigration reform and calling out Republicans for uniformly opposing an initiative some of them supported when it was proposed by President Bush. “ The only thing Arizona’s law will produce is chaos: Obama was right to take particular notice of the extremism of Arizona,” says The New York Times in an editorial. ¹² The New York Times, July 2, 2010. The Times goes on to state, “ Its ‘ deeply unjust’ immigration law isn’t just ‘ an invitation to racial profiling,’ but also a usurpation of federal authority and a prelude to the chaos that will ensue if different states have different immigration rules.” “ Obama’s right that illegal immigration can’t really be handled in a piecemeal fashion,” says The Denver Post in an editorial, but that doesn’t just apply to states taking the law into their own hands. Thanks in part to Arizona’s law, the already overworked federal courts that handle immigration law are about to drown in cases. For border enforcement to work, Obama needs to hire more judges. Hasty immigration politics leaves courts overwhelmed. ¹³ The Denver Post, July 2, 2010. Obama warned of a “ patchwork” of immigration laws arising as “ states and localities go their own ways. Barack Obama says he does not approve or oppose the boycotts that some cities and groups have called for in response to the Arizona law, which makes it a crime under state law to be in the

country illegally. He reaffirmed his opposition to the law, saying it's the wrong approach. He has asked the Justice Department to review the law to determine whether it violates civil liberties. Obama says he will continue to push lawmakers to work on a bipartisan approach to comprehensive immigration reform.

Immigration played a very important role in American history, and like I stated before, it is perhaps one of the greatest controversial issues of our present time. Yes, I will continue to feel saddened by the experiences that so many people live. My belief is that we are all created equal and we all come from the heavens above, but unfortunately the world is different for all of us, and not always are we all free to live our lives as we choose.

I do not care for the drug trafficking taking place, nor do I care for the violent crimes being committed by so many immigrants. I do believe that the federal government has allowed this to happen over the years. If America's lax immigration system would come to an end and instead enforce its immigration laws with not only consistency but also common sense, America would be a safer place for all of us. For the immigrants crossing the border, sufficient law enforcement is the only way to keep them from entering the United States. For those immigrants coming in by sea or air, we must have strict policies and we must make sure that the people working at entry points do their jobs in assessing the security needed to keep illegal migrants from entering the U. S. Airport inspectors, no matter what delays they may be encountering, must carefully examine visas before stamping their approval. They must request required documentation, regardless of the hassle it may involve.

As Americans, we do not want our country to become like Africa, with so many people that it cannot provide for them. We want to have plenty of resources, and we want to live freely, as our country is “ The Land of the Free.”

End Notes

Alan Gomez and Kevin Johnson, USA Today, Friday, July 30, 2010. 3A

Ibid., 3A.

Associated Press, July 18, 2010, 1A.

Ibid., 1A

Don M. Coerver and Linda B. Hall, Tangled Destinies: Latin America and the United States, (Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press), 1999.

Kevin Kiley, The Arizona Republic, August 3, 2010.

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Ramon Bracamontes, Immigration, El Paso Times, June 18, 2010, 4A.

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Sam Quinones, Antonio’s Gun and Delfino’s Dream, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 2007.

Steve Hamm and Moira Herbst, America’s High-Tech Sweatshops, Business Week. October 12, 2009, Pages 34-39.

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The Denver Post, July 2, 2010.

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