

Solving america's immigration problem through integration

[Sociology](#), [Immigration](#)



The need for low skilled and cheap labor exists in America and so do the millions of legal and illegal workers needed to fill this demand. The problem then is not one of numbers, skill, legality, national origin or labor needs but rather one of integration. The current problem with America's immigration-policy is that it is outdated and nonfunctional in the face of such a distinct influx of immigrants from one bordering state to the other. If there is to be any solution to America's immigration problem it is necessary to address the fears associated with immigration and the threat they pose to integration.

It is imperative to recognize that economical, social and cultural integration of this section of our population are crucial to the future well being of the American society. Economic integration is an issue that largely pertains to low skilled illegal immigrants. Currently over 11 million illegal immigrants reside in the United States of America, and " labor-force participation for illegal immigrant men is the highest of any group at 94 percent. " (Jacoby p. 53) This easily underlines the importance of these illegal immigrants in small and big businesses, and thus their crucial role in the American economy.

Yet instead of focusing on integrating foreign legal and illegal workers who, as quoted above, are working in various fields such as hospitality services or agricultural sectors, the immigration policy has made it its priority to find ways to punish businesses and immigrants by organizing military like raids. These raids not only destabilize and lead businesses to considerable losses, but they also further aid the branding of illegal immigrants as second-class citizens by leaving them at the mercy of employers who threaten to ruin the dreams of the workers, by cutting the latter's wages.

The fear of many citizens that immigrants are “ taking jobs that Americans could take” (Judis p. 2) has put a dent in economic integration, only this belief doesn't appear to be true according to Borjas who writes “ Economists have found it surprisingly difficult to document that immigration does, in fact, lower the wage of competing workers” (p1). The need for labor is a phenomenon that will regulate itself and a reform of the American immigration policy should mainly focus on integrating the 11 million immigrants that are currently here into the economy so that the US reaps the maximum benefits.

By legalizing the workers already in place, the US can significantly increase the taxmoneyit receives from such workers. Solving this issue goes hand to hand with providing immigrants with a better economic status in the community. They will not be seen as criminals who leech on the American economy but rather as workers who are the foundations of significant economic sectors. When this happens two studied theories are likely to occur in succession.

A better economic status of immigrant parents has “ by far the largest impact on high school completion” of their kids (Lutz p. 334), and when a section of an immigrant population has a higher level of educationanother phenomenon, assimilation, is accelerated. “ However long a tree trunk might stay in the water it will never become a crocodile. ” writes Pie Tshibanda, a famous French artist who immigrated from Congo. Both native-born Americans and immigrants currently echo the words of Tshibanda.

Many in the American society fear and strongly believe that their culture is in danger of extinction because of an immigrant population that is largely Mexican and refuses to assimilate. Some "patriotic" citizens under the Minuteman Project (Judis p. 1) have even grabbed weapons and started patrolling the Southern border. Yet this fear is not something that is solely relative to the current immigrant influx. The current fear of "Mexicanization" was preceded by other large population migration such as the one that brought Irish Catholics to America.

Many Protestants then feared that their values and morals would be challenged, yet in less than two centuries both and even more religions coexist in a nation that is known for its acceptance. This fear of culture and heritage loss goes both ways. Immigrants also fear that their sons and daughters risk losing their culture and because of this some remain skeptical to assimilation. The importance of social and cultural integration as a challenge to immigration-policy reform surpasses that of economic integration.

A skewed view that is held by many, that immigrants are here just to work, should be re-examined. It is true that a majority of immigrants arrive to the US for economical reasons. What follows though is an appreciation of the other opportunities America holds for its citizens. Immigrants are exposed to better educational and political systems and much more. The fear of losing the economic benefits coupled with a parent's fixation to provide only the best for its offspring leads many to remain in the US. These are the same beliefs that constitute American values.

In working toward integration it is logical that social services such as hospitals and schools should remain available to all immigrants and it should be known that denying anyone "public benefits" even "to people who can't prove their citizenship" (Judis p. 1) is unconstitutional. Integration is a matter of reciprocity. Language is currently the main issue of integration. It is beneficial for both parties that English become the official language of the United States, and if it is to be the case, the government should provide learning centers where it deems them necessary.

This does not mean that multilingualism among immigrants and natives should not be encouraged, as studies have shown that the academic success rate is positively linked positively to a student's proficiency in a second language (Lutz). Which would in turn accelerate cultural assimilation. The situation of the 11 million illegal immigrants is also an issue that needs to be addressed. If there is to be any kind of integration it is necessary to address the question of legality. Many of these are parents of citizens and integrating their descendants into the American society requires that the first generation be integrated as well.

This might mean creating a legal route that would allow them to become citizens over a period of time and "they will have to wait in line behind those who played by the rules and followed the law" (Bush address) or simply providing them with permanent/temporary residency; those who have remained in the country for fear of not being able to come back will eventually travel across borders, minimizing the unnecessary amount of illegal immigrants that remain in the country, since as Jacoby put it "better

to be unemployed at home [elsewhere] than in New York or Chicago. (p. 53). It would be interesting to see the correlation between legalizing illegal immigrants and their desire to assimilate but it would not be irresponsible to assume that such a decision would raise a feeling of belonging among the latter. The biggest challenge for American immigration-policy is indeed integration. This does not mean that other factors such as legality or labor needs etc. do not pose a challenge, in fact integration is comprised of these factors.

Effective integration will be a result of proper reform in legality and border control among others. Some practical recommendations for a successful integration would include the legalization of current illegal immigrants residing in the country. This would not only help these immigrants abandon their status as second-class citizens but it would also encourage many to embrace the mosaic of cultures that is the US. Another problem with the current policy of integration is that it is "skeletal, ad hoc, and under-funded" (Abraham and Hamilton p.). The government should take integration seriously. English learning centers, job search centers, hiring stations, multicultural schools and other socioeconomic oriented programs will not come at a small cost. America is a nation built around cultures. Immigration should not bring forth questions as to the dangers posed by immigrants but rather the integration and the contributions such a group would bring to the land of opportunities.