



Center for Immigration Studies

[Home](#) [Publications](#) [Blog](#) [E-mail Updates](#) [Events](#) [Donate](#) [About CIS](#) [Contact](#)

Search


Topics

[Current Numbers](#)
[Immigration History](#)
[Attrition/Enforcement](#)
[Costs of Immigration](#)
[Illegal Immigration](#)
[Legal Immigration](#)
[Government/Politics](#)
[National Security](#)
[State/Local Policy](#)
[Black Americans](#)
[Assimilation/Citizenship](#)
[Population/Environment](#)
[Education](#)
[Refugees/Asylum](#)
[Guestworkers](#)
[Wages/Poverty](#)

Publications

[Backgrounders/Reports](#)
[Testimony](#)
[Op-eds/Articles](#)
[Announcements](#)
[Videos](#)
[Panel Transcripts](#)
[Books](#)

Subscribe

 [Email Updates](#)
 [Blogs](#)
 [Publications](#)
 [All Content](#)
 [Stumble It](#)
 [Facebook Us](#)
 [Youtube Profile](#)

Most Read Publications

1. RI E-Verify Bill
2. Marriage Fraud
3. Cheap Labor
4. Population Profile
5. Staffers on TV
6. Mexican Birth Rates
7. PASS ID Act
8. Unemployment
9. Immigrant Gangs
10. Debate Semantics

Orchowski addresses PFIR on new book, immigration politics

By CIS, June 15, 2009

Written by [Matt Graham](#)

Nobody disputes that almost all Americans can trace their ancestry to immigrants, but in public debates on immigration, the agreement often stops there. Even catchphrases like "nation of immigrants" are problematic – how should America balance its proud history as the land of opportunity against our nation's security and economic priorities?

Peggy Orchowski wrote *Immigration and the American Dream: Battling the Political Hype and Hysteria* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008) to help citizens sort through the political concerns that burden contemporary dialogue on the issue. On June 11, she led a discussion on her book and current policy questions at an event hosted by [Progressives For Immigration Reform \(PFIR\)](#).

Orchowski led off by discussing the history of American immigration, which gives interesting context to many assumptions commonly found in immigration dialogue. One of the more illuminating points she made was that although America does have a tradition of uniting families through its immigration policy, that tradition only goes back to the immigration reforms of 1965. Before that time, immigration policy was determined by economics. Families had tough decisions to make at Ellis Island when it was determined that one of their own could not enter the country.

This point was not made in an effort to contend that America should return to such a policy. Rather, it helped Orchowski make her main point: that although substantive debate on immigration often gets eaten up by politicians playing politics, it is neither a liberal nor conservative issue. It cleaves where it will, irrespective of our incessant compulsion to split issues clearly across party lines. Orchowski made a point of stating that she herself is a proud Democrat. She doesn't seek to play politics with observations like the one about family ties. Instead, she wants Americans to confront historical truths honestly, even in the face of political hysteria.

As Orchowski sees it, economic nationalist democrats (namely the Blue Dog Caucus) should have no problem opposing "comprehensive immigration reform," which she translates as immigration reform that includes amnesty. Nor should free-trade Republicans have any problem with cheap foreign labor, so long as there actually is a demand. Orchowski reminded the audience that President Bush was lauded by many as the "first Latino president" after he declared his support for any immigrant who can find a job in America.

Orchowski believes that both major parties have such a tough time dealing with this issue precisely because it does not cut neatly along partisan lines. Democrats and Republicans alike have difficulty balancing moderates' national economic concerns against open-border leanings found on the extreme end of both parties' ideological spectra. Democrats who are motivated by globalist and human rights concerns find themselves agreeing with libertarian free-traders on the other side of the aisle. This is why, for example, fiscal conservatives at the Cato Institute are just as opposed to limits on immigration as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Political discourse generally treats issues as being a bit more cut and dry.

One of Orchowski's anecdotes about the complexity of the immigration issue concerned the nursing shortage in the United States. Some believe that the U.S. should give more visas to nurses, but others contend that our nurse education programs would easily produce 50,000 more nurses if they were adequately funded. Further, Orchowski noted a severe shortage of doctors in Filipino hospitals because so many were leaving their country to become nurses in ours. Are those doctors doing a better job than an American fresh out of college would do? And what about the wellbeing of the people dying in overseas hospitals? This complex problem, Orchowski pointed out, tests people's views on education, health care, human rights, and immigration.

Orchowski never believed that the 2007 amnesty attempt would succeed, and in her opinion, the prognosis for 2009 is not much better. The lack of immigration dialogue in the recent election was seen by many as a product of the presidential candidates' similar immigration views, but Orchowski notes that the Democratic Party as a whole made a particular point of avoiding the issue during the latest election cycle. Even as immigration has made its way onto the agenda in recent weeks, she has observed our legislators and president acting distinctly disinterested in the issue. She believes that this round of immigration reform will turn out much like the last one: the House and Senate will be given an unreasonably short amount of time to come up with a bill and large-scale reforms will once again fail. She also noted a lack of enthusiasm for the issue on the part of White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel, who she and others believe to be extraordinarily influential in the Obama Administration.

With *Immigration and the American Dream*, Orchowski aims to help people see through the politics of

immigration and understand the real issues. Americans who are more interested in what is best for our country than over-politicized public discourse would do well to pick up her book.

Bookmark/Search this post with:

[Delicious](#) [Digg](#) [StumbleUpon](#) [Reddit](#)

» [CIS's blog](#)

The Center for Immigration Studies is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit research organization founded in 1985. It is the nation's only think tank devoted exclusively to research and policy analysis of the economic, social, demographic, fiscal, and other impacts of immigration on the United States.