



Facts To Refute All Those Myths And Misconceptions Regarding Immigration

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“They should just come here legally—the way my ancestors did.”

“They’re lazy and are a drain on the U.S. economy.”

“They don’t pay taxes.”

“They are violent criminals and terrorists.”

“They should learn English if they want to live here.”

“They take jobs away from U.S. citizens.”

Have you heard these common phrases about immigrants—maybe from your ignorant Uncle Joe on Thanksgiving or your elderly neighbor Mary Louise who watches Fox News all day? Yeah, me too. So how do we help them understand? Let’s start by breaking down these inaccurate and harmful stereotypes, with facts. Then, maybe we can all help the Uncle Joes and Mary Louises of the world be better educated about immigration—especially as we enter another election year.

Here are 5 common myths you might hear about this topic, and some facts you can use to refute them.

Myth #1: Most immigrants enter the U.S. illegally. They should do it “the right way.”

The perception that most immigrants (particularly those with browner skin) come here illegally is wrong. Here’s why: First of all, anyone seeking asylum is not breaking the law, since asylum “is a **legal process** by which people fleeing persecution in their home country may seek to live in safety in the United States.” Asylum-seekers are fleeing persecution “on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion,” and, therefore, aren’t breaking any laws. Refugees are also fleeing persecution as they try to enter the U.S., but they make their application before entering.

NEITHER OF THESE METHODS IS ILLEGAL.

Also, hundreds of years ago when so many of our ancestors immigrated here, guess what? We had an open immigration policy. So yeah, it was a hell of a lot easier to get across our borders. **Immigration historian David Reimers** explains that back then, the U.S.'s open immigration system "allowed any able-bodied immigrant in." Back then, the biggest obstacle that would-be immigrants faced was getting here, not being stuck in a cage or separated from their families once they arrived.

Furthermore, Teaching Tolerance reports that, as of 2017, "44 percent of U.S. immigrants were **naturalized U.S. citizens**. Those who were not naturalized were either lawful permanent residents, also known as green-card holders (**27 percent** of all foreign-born people)."

And, here's another fun fact: Did you know that the nation with the most visitors who do not leave at the end of their authorized stays is—get this—**Canada**. Ha! See what your racist uncle has to say about that one at the next holiday dinner!

Myth #2: Immigrants don't pay taxes and are a drain on our economy.

The truth is, they actually pay millions of dollars in taxes every year. In fact, **The Atlantic** reports that in 2010, undocumented immigrants paid \$13 billion into the United States' retirement trust fund, and only got about \$1 billion in benefits. Here's how that works. Employers file taxes and make social security payments on their workers' behalf (i.e. take money out of their paychecks to pay the government). But if these employees aren't American citizens, they'll never reap the benefits of social security in their later years.

The **Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy** reports that undocumented immigrants paid about \$10.6 billion in state and local taxes in 2010. And, they also help fund public schools and local government services by paying sales and property taxes like any other resident.

Do some undocumented immigrants still work for cash? Sure. Guess who else does that all over the country? American citizens. And, many of those immigrants who do work for cash *still* file their taxes, using an Individual Tax ID Number (ITIN), in the hopes that a paper trail will help them eventually gain permanent residency. "In 2010, about 3 million people paid over \$870 million in income taxes using an ITIN, and according to the IRS, ITIN filers pay \$9 billion in payroll taxes annually," **The Atlantic** reports.

But yes, by all means, please keep perpetuating the false stereotype that immigrants take advantage of the system and aren't trying to become citizens "the right way."

Myth #3: Immigrants are violent criminals and terrorists.

This misconception is particularly heart-wrenching, as so many immigrants are refugees or asylum-seekers who are fleeing violence and terrorism—just as you or I would do for our own families. They are moms and dads like you and me, trying to find work, reunite with families, and raise their kids in a safe environment. The truth is, immigrants are statistically *less* likely to commit serious crimes or be incarcerated than native-born people are. And high rates of immigration are associated with lower rates of violent crime and property crime. For instance, according to Teaching Tolerance, "**sanctuary counties'** average **35.5 fewer** crimes per 10,000 people compared to non-sanctuary counties."

And if you're worried that refugees are bringing terrorism into our country, again, this is false. Refugees endure a very rigorous screening process that includes "multiple background checks;

fingerprint tests; interviews; health screenings; and applications with multiple intelligence, law enforcement and security agencies,” **Teaching Tolerance** reports. And it’s not a quick process. The average length of time it takes for the United Nations and the United States government to approve refugee status is 18 – 24 months.

Still worried that immigrants increase the likelihood of terrorism? Well, you should be more worried about your regular old American citizen neighbors, because, according to Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration expert at the Cato Institute, “[Between 1975 and 2015], the annual chance of being murdered by somebody other than a foreign-born terrorist was **252.9 times greater** than the chance of dying in a terrorist attack committed by a foreign-born terrorist.”

America does have a problem with violence, but it’s not refugees from war-torn nations who are doing it.

Myth #4: Immigrants don’t try to learn English.

First of all, the United States doesn’t have a national language—never has. So no immigrant is legally obligated to learn English. But do most of them try as fucking hell to do so they’ll have a better chance at getting a job and providing for their families and most of all, be able to complete their applications and be granted citizenship so they can’t be deported? Of course they do. Just because you hear someone speaking another language to a family member at Target doesn’t mean they don’t know English or aren’t trying to learn English. If you travel to France, are you naturally going to speak French the minute you step foot on the ground? No, you’re going to try to get by with as much English as possible until you learn some French. (And good luck with that if you do try. **Learning another language** as an adult is no small feat.)

Also, immigrants have always held on to their cultures fiercely, even after moving to the U.S. Generations ago, Italian immigrants still spoke Italian at home, as did Germans, Swedish, etc. Were they chastised for it back then too? Yep. Does that make it right? Nope.

And guess what else? It’s actually incredibly beneficial for children to grow up in bilingual households. So if your neighbor from India speaks Hindi at home or even out in public, it might be to maintain a sense of pride in their culture. It also might be to ensure their children know more than one language, which is seen as an asset in nations all over the world—nations that are passing the U.S. by in education, FYI.

Myth #5: Immigrants take jobs away from U.S. citizens.

Also, false. **The American Immigration Council**, a nonpartisan group, reports that there is “little connection between immigrant labor and unemployment rates of native-born workers. Two trends—better education and an aging population—have resulted in a decrease in the number of workers born in the United States who are willing or available to take low-paying jobs.”

So yes, there’s a shortage of American workers that immigrants may be willing to fill, but are they to blame when employers will so willingly hire them to do the job? Who is really at fault when **dishonest employers** “exploit this labor source, paying immigrants less, refuse to provide benefits and ignore worker-safety laws”? Especially when the people who reap the benefits the most from the labor immigrants provide are you and me, since we can get our food and other goods at cheaper prices as a result?

So who's the real "bad guy" here? The **hard-working labor worker** who works the fields in 100-degree heat all day so he can feed his family, pays taxes, and is trying like hell to do everything right so he doesn't get deported and never see his family again? No.

Is there a need for immigration reform in the U.S.? Yes—most would agree to that. But **locking up children in cages** or insulting someone in public for speaking another language or accusing them of stealing U.S. jobs and taking advantage of government assistance—these are not ways to do it. These ignorant mindsets about U.S. immigrants need to go because they're racist, discriminatory, and frankly, not based on actual facts.