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10 immigration myths debunked

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Bashing undocumented immigrants or sanctuary cities sure-fire applause line for GOP presidential candidates. But much of what's being said has little basis in fact. Here are 10 of the most popular myths:

Undocumented immigrants are thugs and criminals.

Between 1990 and 2013, the number of undocumented immigrants rose from 3.5 million to 11.2 million, but figures from the FBI show violent crime declined by 48 percent in that period. This includes aggravated assault, rape, robbery and murder. The property crime rate also declined 41 percent, according to a report by the American Immigration Council. Undocumented immigrants did not bring a crime wave.

Kathryn Steinle died because San Francisco is a sanctuary city.

Mexican national Juan Francisco Lopez-Sanchez, who is charged in Steinle's murder, was in federal prison for re-entering the country after his fifth deportation. Instead of being handed over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement, he was sent to the San Francisco Sheriff's Department on a decade-old marijuana possession charge, according to Los Angeles Times. The district attorney declined to prosecute, and he was released, despite a request from ICE to hold him. But San Francisco's sanctuary policy has exemptions that could have kept Lopez-Sanchez in custody if ICE had sought a court order to hold him, which the San Francisco authorities say ICE did not do.

A better wall will stop illegal immigration.

The United States spent more than \$130 billion on border surveillance and security in the past two decades. But a 2011 study by the National Research Council says the dramatic reduction in the number of illegal border crossings in recent years has more to do with the recession, which chilled demand for migrant labor. What's more, about 40 percent of illegal immigrants in the country entered legally and overstayed their visas.

Immigrants don't share our values.

The vast majority of immigrants come here to work. Their labor is in demand because they arrive with a strong work ethic. Sixty-eight percent are Christian, according to Pew Research Center. But increasing numbers report no religious affiliation, which mirrors trends in the United States. They value family, home ownership and have strong community ties. In 2012, 62 percent of the undocumented population had been in the United States a decade or more.

They don't assimilate or learn English.

Surveys have long found that immigrants understand the value of learning English, what's more analysis of Census Bureau data shows that the adult-born children of immigrants earn more than their parents, attain higher levels of education and have a better standards of living. They speak English and identify as "typical American," according to Pew. That's how it's been since those European immigrants arrived on the Mayflower.

Mexico is reclaiming the Southwest through illegal immigration.

In 2014, there were more non-Mexicans apprehended trying to cross the border illegally than Mexicans, according to Pew. There have been steady increases in apprehensions of undocumented border-crossers from Central America, where violence, poverty and corruption are widespread. But the real surprise is that immigrants from China and India have overtaken Mexicans as the largest groups coming into the U.S., according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Many arrive with student or work visas.

We have to end birthright citizenship or they'll take over.

There were about 295,000 babies born to undocumented mothers in the United States in 2013, according to the Pew Research Center. Those babies are citizens at birth under the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. These tiny Americans made up a tiny 8 percent of the total births in this country. Their births represent a decline from the peak year of 2007, when 370,000 babies of undocumented mothers claimed birthright citizenship.

Undocumented immigrants suck up welfare.

A recent study by the Center for Immigration Studies claimed undocumented immigrants use welfare programs at higher rates than the native-born population. But an analysis by the Cato Institute found the CIS study omitted key information and compared "apples to elephants." Among the many flaws: CIS excluded Social Security and Medicare. A previous analysis showed the contributions by immigrants to those systems from 2007 to 2009 "vastly outweigh their net-consumption of means-tested welfare," Cato's Alex Nowrasteh wrote.

They take American jobs.

Agriculture has long sought migrant laborers because no Americans apply. New Mexican chile growers recently put out a plea for an expanded guest worker program, saying they face a labor shortage and that young Americans don't want to do the work. The Associated General Contractors of America say construction firms can't find workers, and that few American students see this as a career path. Among their solutions: comprehensive immigration reform to increase the number of migrant workers.

They hurt the economy.

The Congressional Budget Office said in 2007 that “Over the past two decades, most efforts to estimate the fiscal impact of immigration in the United States have concluded that, in aggregate and over the long term, tax revenues of all types generated by immigrants — both legal and unauthorized — exceed the cost of the services they use.” The White House issued a paper in 2013 showing immigration reform would lead to greater economic growth.