

## ***Two cheers for immigration***

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“There are real problems about permitting unrestricted immigration into a welfare state,” wrote Milton Friedman in the late 1970s. “It’s one thing when people come for jobs and are on their own, which is the case through most of American history. It’s another thing when a welfare system will support them come what may at the expense of other people.”

America is a nation built by immigrants and it continues to prosper on the talents and toils of newcomers. Yet it is also a source of great tension in society and a perpetual controversy in politics.

There is an inscription on the most famous American symbol, the Statue of Liberty. Holding a torch at the mouth of New York Harbor, she invites the world: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”

Five years ago the Cato Institute [published a paper by Daniel Griswold](#), associate director of the institute’s Center for Trade Policy Studies. It provided a thoughtful analysis of the fiscal impact of immigration, attempting to put a few myths to rest.

**Myth One:** Immigration leads to higher crime and incarceration rates.

The facts tell a different story. While the undocumented population was doubling around the turn of the century, violent crime rates dropped by a third and property crimes were down by more than a quarter. Immigrants are also less likely to break the law and end up in prison than American citizens with similar education and ethnic background.

**Myth Two:** Immigration is the cause of overcrowding at the public schools.

Wrong again. Enrollment in our public school system has decreased relative to the size of our population. Yes, there is overcrowding in certain school districts. But just as in the case of road congestion, the actual cause is internal migration to cities with more job opportunities rather than newly arrived immigrants.

Unfortunately, without publicizing all facts and having an honest discussion on all related issues, those myths will be impossible to kill. Before this year’s presidential debates reach a peak, it is worth reexamining those and other findings exposing the validity of budget concerns at local and state levels as well as the huge benefits that native-born Americans reap from a large immigrant workforce.

Next week I will look at one more myth concerning healthcare costs.