

# Open To Thinking: Immigration: Facts and Fictions

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November 5, 2014

We actually know how to reform our immigration policy. We have known what to do for some time. Even George Bush the 2nd knew what to do. But, 9/11 ruined whatever deals then-president Vicente Fox of Mexico and Bush were contemplating before that evil attack on our homeland.

The poison of 9/11 has ruined many things in our Republic—comprehensive immigration reform near the top of the list. Sometimes it feels as if Osama bin Laden actually won his war against U.S.

As is the sad case with all of the really important policy issues essential for the health and prospering of our U.S. economy and civil society, we have the information, the knowledge, the skill and the means to do what is necessary. What we lack is the political will to enact the appropriate laws and regulations to fix things.

Bullies, that's right, let's call them by their proper names, bullies in our civil society have panicked and buffaloed the electorate ( us ) and made cowards of many of our elected officials with their money, their attack ads and their ability to marshal the voices and votes of a very small minority. It is not the tail wagging the dog; it is the warts in the unmentionable hind quarters controlling the thinking and actions of our body politic.

**FICTION:** Immigrants injure our economy and our native-born workers.

**FACT:** Economists Gianmarco Ottaviano and Giovanni Peri estimate that immigration, legal and illegal, reduces the wages of U.S. workers without a high school diploma by 1 to 2 percent, while positively affecting the wages of the more than 90 percent of U.S. workers with a high school or GED equivalent by 0.7 percent in the short run and 1.8 percent in the long run. Their statistical analysis published in 2006 covered the years from 1990 through 2004. Saint Louis University economist Jack Strauss determined through an analysis of 2012 census data that U.S. cities with the largest Latin immigration populations have lower unemployment and poverty rates and higher average wages, especially among Black Americans who are often seen as competitors to Latin American migrants.

But, let us hear what conservative think-tanks think. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce in its 2013 update of its own statement on immigration and economics said this: "Nor is there any correlation between immigration and high unemployment among minorities. Immigrants go where the jobs are, or they create jobs on their own." Daniel Griswold of the Cato Institute:

"There is simply no evidence that immigration drives up the U.S. unemployment rate or that it drives down wages for the American worker."

FICTION: Undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes.

FACT: Unauthorized migrants pay sales taxes, property taxes, whether they rent or own, 'use' taxes, and, in some cases, even income taxes, whether state, local, or federal, including social security and medicare taxes. In July 2013, the non-partisan Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy ( ITEP ) issued a report that statistically demonstrated the tax contributions 'illegal' migrants make to state and local governments alone as around \$11 billion per annum. Though when they can, undocumented migrants use our schools, social services, and medical services, a cost benefit analysis shows a huge profit to our economy.

Let me quote Davidson, New York Times, Feb. 12, 2013: "Stephen Goss, chief actuary for the Social Security Administration, told me that undocumented workers contribute about \$15 billion a year to Social Security through payroll taxes. They only take out \$1 billion ( very few undocumented workers are eligible to receive benefits ). Over the years, undocumented workers have contributed up to \$300 billion, or nearly 10 percent, of the \$2.7 trillion Social Security Trust Fund."

MORE FACTS: Around 50% of immigrants own their own homes; over 15% of unauthorized immigrants and 28% of legal immigrants have college degrees; 18% of all new businesses are created by immigrants; and immigrant communities have lower crime rates than native-born population groups. ( See: Immigration Policy Center reports. )

But, of course, the argument against comprehensive immigration reform is not one of facts and figures; it is one of values and passions.

We want to blame migrants for the serious troubles we face as a society, for our economic injustices, for crime, for our insane lust for drugs, for the poor quality of our schools, even for the evils of terrorism. We should be demanding leadership from our elected officials. And results.

Immigrants, legal and illegal, have always made us stronger, wealthier, and more competitive in the global market place. Current immigration regulations and practices injure us all.

We are a nation of immigrants. Let's celebrate our history and embrace our best future—through comprehensive immigration reform.

On Nov. 13, 2014, Loyola University hosts a free event, The Child Migrant: Children Crossing Borders, an interdisciplinary daylong teachin. Starts 10 a.m. at Coffey Hall. Speakers include: Pulitzer Prize author, Sonia Nazario, immigration attorneys and advocates from the Young Center for Immigrant Children's Rights and the National Immigrant Justice Center, Catholic activists working at the border, child trauma experts, human rights scholars, political scientists, and subject matter experts