

Fixing America's Immigration Crisis: Recognize and Reform

Immigration stands as one of America's most prominent and controversial issues. No matter one's political stance towards the matter, American citizens must recognize the humanitarian crisis that has been spurred by our egregiously insufficient immigration policies. Currently, at the United States' southern border with Mexico, "waves of immigrants and asylum far beyond capacity, with some individuals enduring weeks or more without basic necessities like access to showers or changes of clothes" (Hudak par. 1). To any rational observer, the United States' immigration system—solely from the perspective of its Southern border—is broken, much like the discourse surrounding immigration as an issue itself. Those who support legal immigration.

The beauty of an optimized immigration system is that if the United successfully channel immigration through a functional, regulatory system, and funding could then be spent on preventing individuals from entering the

Texas Proviso—a prime example is the “bracero program.” Beginning in 1942 and ending in 1964, the program “permitted roughly 5 million Mexican agricultural workers to enter as part of the bracero” (Jawetz). A consequence of this mass migration was that southwest farmers could rehire their undocumented workers, presenting them as “braceros” through shady means. However, at the same time, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) began increasing enforcement efforts seeking to crack down on undocumented workers. These efforts led to many large-scale raids on farms which included “a series of enforcement actions under the name Operation Wetback, which began in 1954 and saw more than a million people deported in slightly more than a year” (Jawetz). These INS efforts were praised for their commitment to cracking down on illegal immigration practices, but serve as a blatant example of America’s long history of exploiting migrant workers.

Lastly, former President Donald Trump’s staunch anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies have not only reversed substantial progress on the issue but also deeply undermined the sanctity of our immigration system. Just some of the unconstitutional and criminal consequences of Trump-era immigration policies include separating families at the border, gutting asylum laws, ending DACA, and ignoring Temporary Protected Status (TPS) (Jawetz). However, one of the

in the U.S. since Sept. 11, 2001, have been perpetrated by U.S. citizens and permanent residents” (“Psychological”). The travel ban exists as a grim reminder that Islamophobia and anti-immigrant ideologies still run rampant in even our highest levels of government institutions. Trump-era immigration policies underscore just how prominent these ideologies are and how they continue discrimination against minorities in America. The Washington Post wrote an eye-opening article detailing specific examples of just a handful of families affected by the travel ban; one example was the following:

Think about Rand Mubarak, an Iraqi refugee whose father worked as a translator for the U.S. military in Iraq. Their family had fled their homeland to Egypt following death threats and believed they were in line to relocate to the United States given her father's service. But by 2017, their hopes took a severe blow after Trump announced his ()-10 (m-4 (a)6)4 (ait)-h

tolerance immigration policy, have led to the current border crisis at a magnitude unseen in prior administrations” (“States”). Moreover, despite the massive flux of immigrants in holding facilities, there exists zero regulation or accountability amongst the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) or the Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR)’s treatment of immigrants. In recent studies and inspections of these facilities, experts “documented incidents such as violent assaults, sexual assaults, and suicides” (Hudak). In order to change these deplorable conditions and prevent such incidents, reform must be enacted; however, the solution to these problems does not exist on the federal level, but rather at the state level.

unpredictable, and inconsistent outcomes will proliferate, and public confidence in that system will dissipate” (Jawetz). Lastly, the nation must revert the Trump administration's handling of refugee admissions in order “to restore its commitment to protecting refugees who arrive at its doorstep to request asylum” (Jawetz). Refugees and asylum seekers exist as one of the most vulnerable global communities and deserve protection and opportunity from a nation built upon “liberty and justice for all.”

People who oppose immigration and enacting legislative reform typically maintain one or both of the following positions: increased immigration will hurt the American economy and immigrants are detrimental to “American culture.” Both mindsets are not only blatantly false but are a result of America's deeply racist history. To refute the first point, immigrants are extremely beneficial to American economic growth and actually increase the incomes of native citizens. According to the George W. Bush Institute, “It's a phenomenon dubbed the “immigration surplus,” and while a small share of additional GDP accrues to natives — typically 0.2 to 0.4 percent—it still amounts to \$36 to \$72 billion per year” (Orrenius). Historically, immigrants occupy industries with a shortage of laborers and positions in which native citizens are not readily willing to fill. In addition, immigrants are also much more willing to move than natives, further filling the need for workers. This phenomenon essentially fuels the labor market and promotes economic growth while decreasing economic slack. Scholar Pia Orrenius notes the following historical evidence of this phenomenon: “During and after World War II, Mexican immigrants were instrumental in alleviating shortages arising from the war effort. During the oil boom of the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was record migration to Texas” (“Benefits”). In addition to filling the low-skill labor market, the rise of high-skilled immigrants directly benefits

scientists are foreign born... as are 42 percent of computer software developers. Immigrant workers are also overrepresented among college professors, engineers, [and] mathematicians” (“Benefits”). The main downside is lower wages of competing workers in some of these industries. This downside is essentially nullified by the fact that native citizens are not readily willing to fill the majority of these positions and economic growth and innovation will yield a net positive despite these lower wages.

Moreover, the vast contributions of immigrants to American culture and society since its inception are masked by how deeply intertwined racism is with America. Foremost, although exploitative in nature, the recruitment of foreign athletes in American sports is one of the most prominent examples of immigrant contributions to American culture. Scholar Charles Hirschman asserts, “Sports fans want winning teams, and large audiences increase revenues. The owners and management of sports teams respond to market pressures by recruiting talented players from other countries” (“Contributions”). Some of the most famous and dominant athletes on American teams originate from countries thousands of miles from where they played. David Beckham, British soccer superstar; Yao Ming, Chinese basketball phenomenon; and Hines Ward, Korean-born NFL star are just a few examples of immigrants furthering American sports culture. Hirschman also states, “Similar processes are at work in universities and scientific organizations. More talented researchers generate more grants, more patents, and more commercial applications

Eastern origin (Hirschman). Immigrant culture has been so deeply embedded in the American way of life since America's inception. The racist ideologies that plague our nation blind so many from seeing how important immigration is and has been to America's rich and diverse culture.

Sustainable changes to our immigration system are far from being made, while the United States continues to fail to protect some of the most vulnerable and underserved individuals. One of the most recent proposed policies by House Democrats is a "big innovation bill now moving through Congress to make it easier for foreign-born scientists and engineers to study and work in the United States" (Mervis). Writer Jeffrey Mervis states that this legislation "would not only authorize spending hundreds of billions of additional dollars on research but also set out new policies on the government's approach to supporting science" ("High-tech"). Democrats, who are typically heralded as "pro-immigrant" and reform-oriented, are only furthering our broken system with this proposal. The nature of this legislation is highly exploitive, only promoting immigration for American economic growth. Moreover, the reform is yet another temporary solution that fails to recognize the most urgent crises in our immigration system. The reformation of the United States immigration system will forever be restricted by partisan, exploitive, and classist American political institutions. Immigration is a human rights issue and should forever be separated from the political interests of the bureaucratic elite. Sadly, this has almost never been the case. Recognizing our system's failures, promoting common-sense reforms, and moving forward from outdated ideologies is only the beginning of a longstanding effort to fix one of our nation's most pressing issues.

Orrenius, Pia. "Benefits of Immigration Outweigh the Costs." *Benefits of Immigration Outweigh the Costs*, Spring 2016, <https://www.bushcenter.org/catalyst/north-american-century/benefits-of-immigration-outweigh-costs.html>.

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