

February 1, 1984

NINE MYTHS ABOUT IMMIGRATION

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INTRODUCTION

Immigration is one of the most complicated topics of our times. Society and Congress are struggling with the problem in the form of the Simpson-Mazzoli bill, which is now before the Senate and House (S. 529 and H.R. 1510). The issue of immigration seems to pit two fundamental values--lending a helping hand to strangers and ensuring the economic self-interest of family and community--against one another. Also involved are values that may not appeal to all but which are in no way irrational, such as maintaining some degree of cultural or racial homogeneity in the country (Margaret Thatcher has spoken for that in the case of Great Britain) and keeping a particular political balance.

Wherever it may lead, a debate on U.S. immigration policy ought to be based on facts. Regrettably, a number of myths about immigration work against a reasoned debate. The sum of these myths is that immigrants lower the standard of living of U.S. natives. This simply is not supported by the evidence. In the interests of an informed debate on immigration, these myths must be examined.

MYTH #1: IMMIGRANTS ARE WELFARE ABUSERS

It is frequently alleged that immigrants no sooner arrive in the U.S. than they become public charges, draining welfare money from the U.S. taxpayers and paying no taxes. Solid evidence gives the lie to this charge.¹

¹ Julian Simon, "Immigrants, Taxes, and Welfare in the U.S.," forthcoming in Population and Development Review. The following information is an analysis in this article of the Census Bureau survey described in Myth #1.

In 1976 the Census Bureau interviewed 156,000 households (including about 15,000 immigrant families) to learn about 1975 family income and welfare services patterns. From this sample was constructed a picture of lifetime economic behavior by assuming that the information on immigrants who had been here, say, two years, or ten years, as of 1975 described the representative immigrant family after two years, or after ten years, and so on.

The services that most often catch the public eye are welfare and supplemental security, unemployment compensation, aid to dependent children, and food stamps. The average native-born U.S. family received \$498 from these programs in 1975 (calculations include families getting no assistance). The average for immigrant families that arrived between 1950 and 1974 was \$548. Not much difference. For immigrant and native families of similar education and age, there is no difference.

Of course there may be some systematic abuses of the welfare system by immigrants. But the U.S. legislative system surely can devise adequate remedies. Senator Charles Percy (R-Ill.), for example, sponsored a bill strengthening the requirement that sponsors of immigrants stand behind them financially to prevent their entering in order to go onto welfare. Nor would it be un-American to require immigrants to provide the American public some service in return for the benefits they receive. In the past, serving in the Army was such an example; it also had the side effect of quickly Americanizing the immigrants who served.

Providing school for immigrant children during an immigrant family's first five years in the U.S. costs slightly less than \$859 for the average native family, because immigrants tend to come before they have children or while the children are still young. After that, school expenditures for immigrant families are higher than for native families, rising from \$1,068 to \$1,237 during the next 15 years. (The difference is not that immigrants have many children, but that the average native family is older with fewer children still in school.)

When public retirement programs are included--such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid--immigrant families on average are seen to receive much less in welfare payments and services than do average native families. Immigrants in fact lessen the Social Security burden upon native workers by contributing to the fund while not drawing from it. And if there is any single factor that cramps government economic policies right now, it is payments through Social Security, other pension plans, and other assistance to the elderly.

Immigrants typically arrive young and strong. Native U.S. families received in 1975 on average \$735 for Social Security, \$167 for Medicare and \$20 for Medicaid, a total of \$922. Immigrant families received a total of \$92 during the first five years in the U.S., \$227 in the second five years, \$435 in the third five years, and \$520 the fourth and fifth five-year periods. The

difference in favor of natives is large. Immigrants thereby benefit natives.

But what about Social Security when immigrants reach retirement age? The answer depends not on entitlements or legal obligations, but on the flow of real resources from workers to retirees. In this way, the children of retired immigrants support their parents with their taxes, as in the case of natives. Hence the immigrant retirees do not increase the burden on natives.

In summing the figures for all the transfers and services, the average immigrant family is found to receive \$1,404 in welfare services in years 1 to 5, \$1,941 in years 6 to 10, \$2,247 in years 11 to 15, and \$2,279 in years 16 to 25. Native families overall average the same, \$2,279, considerably more than the immigrants receive during their early years in the U.S. Figures for these early years are more relevant because in making rational policy decisions the distant future is weighted less heavily than the near future.

MYTH #2: ILLEGALS MAKE ESPECIALLY HEAVY USE OF WELFARE SERVICES

Contrary to common belief, illegal immigrants from Mexico and elsewhere receive little in welfare services because of their illegal status. Labor researchers David North and Marion Houston of the New Trans Century Foundation found the following proportions of illegals using services: Free medical, 5 percent; unemployment insurance, 4 percent; food stamps, 1 percent; welfare payments, 1 percent; child schooling, 4 percent.² Practically no illegals receive the costliest service of all--Social Security. But 77 percent of illegal workers paid Social Security taxes, and 73 percent had federal income tax withheld. Several other studies using a variety of research methods reveal similar results. The low use of social services is largely because the illegals are afraid of being apprehended. And among the illegal Mexicans, more than 80 percent are male, half are single (most of the married men leave their wives and children in Mexico), and most are youthful (less 10 percent of the workers are over 35) and need few services.

MYTH #3: IMMIGRANTS PAY LESS THAN THEIR SHARE OF TAXES

If immigrants paid relatively little in taxes, it could be argued that they still burden natives, even with fewer welfare services for immigrants than for natives. While there is no direct information on taxes paid, data on family earnings allow a reliable estimate.

² David S. North and Marian F. Houston, The Characteristics and Role of Illegal Aliens in the U.S. Labor Market: An Exploratory Study (Washington: Linton and Company, March 1976).

Within three to five years after entry, immigrant family earnings reach and pass those of the average native family, because of the variance in age composition of native and immigrant families. The average native family paid \$3,008 in taxes in 1975. In comparison, immigrant families here 10 years paid \$3,359, those here 11 to 15 years paid \$3,564, and those here 16 to 25 years paid \$3,592. Such substantial differences benefit natives.

Assuming 20 percent of taxes finance activities that are little affected by population size (for example, maintaining the armed forces and the Statue of Liberty), the data on services used and taxes paid, taken together, show substantial differences that benefit natives: an average of \$1,354 yearly for years 1 to 5, and \$1,329, \$1,535 and \$1,353 for years 6 to 10, 11 to 15, and 16 to 25 respectively. These are the amounts by which each additional immigrant family enriches U.S. public coffers. Evaluating the future stream of differences as one would a dam or harbor, the present value of an immigrant family discounted at 3 percent (inflation adjusted) was \$20,600 in 1975 dollars, almost two years average earnings for a native family: at 6 percent the present value is \$15,800, and \$12,400 at 9 percent.

MYTH #4: IMMIGRANTS CAUSE NATIVES TO LOSE JOBS

The most politically powerful argument against admitting immigrants has been that they take jobs held by natives and thereby increase native unemployment. The logic is simple: If the number of jobs is fixed, and immigrants occupy some jobs, then there are fewer jobs available for natives.

In the immediate present, the demand for any particular sort of worker is indeed inflexible. And, therefore, additional immigrants in a given occupation, in theory, must have some negative impact on wages and/or employment among people in that occupation. For example, the large recent influx of foreign physicians means additional competition for U.S. physicians. There is good reason to believe that U.S. physicians will earn less because of immigrant physicians. Such negative effects upon particular occupations could be avoided only if immigrants were to come into all occupations in proportion to the size of those occupations. Workers whose occupations immigrants enter disproportionately can therefore be expected to complain.

Theory says that there must be some unemployment in some sectors. But theory does not say whether the effect will be huge or trivial. For this, empirical research is needed. The effect is difficult to measure, because natives move away from areas with high unemployment to areas where it is lower, and immigrants move there, too, thereby obscuring the impact of immigration. Nevertheless, if immigrants were to cause large amounts of unemployment in particular industries, the phenomenon would surely be noticeable. Yet no empirical study has found such unemployment in noticeable amounts.

Even in the few sectors, such as the restaurant and hotel industries, where immigrants concentrate, there tends not to be a deleterious effect on natives because natives do not want these jobs. Evidence comes from experiments conducted by the Immigration and Naturalization Service together with San Diego County. In one case, 2,154 illegal aliens were removed from jobs, and the California State Human Resources Agency tried without success to fill the jobs with U.S. citizens. The County of San Diego Human Resources Agency reported: .

Some of the reasons for the failure were: (1) most employers paid less than the minimum wage rate, (2) the job categories were not appealing to the local resident (a matter of prestige), and (3) applicants were discouraged by not only the low wages but also the difficulty of some jobs, and the long hours demanded by the employers.³

Research also does not show across-the-board unemployment caused by immigrants, either in the U.S. as a whole or in particular areas of relatively high immigration. Heretofore such studies have been rather casual. Therefore, research asistant Stephen Moore and the author recently mounted a systematic attempt to detect whether such immigrant-caused unemployment exists in significant amount. Still no such effect is observable. It seems fair to conclude therefore that, while in theory immigration ought to produce some unemployment in the short run, the amount is in fact negligible. And in the long run, when there is not even a theoretical reason to believe that immigration causes unemployment, there is no reason at all to think that it does.

One reason that unemployment is not caused is that potential immigrants have considerable awareness of labor-market conditions in the U.S. and tend not to come if there is little demand for their skills. Also, immigrants tend to be varied in their skills and therefore do not have a disproportionate impact on a few industries. At the same time--this point is crucial, but too little understood--immigrants increase demand for labor across the range of occupations, because immigrants consume goods as well as produce them.

Another reason, then, for the absence of unemployment caused by immigrants is that they not only take jobs, they make jobs. Immigrants not only create new jobs indirectly with their spending, they create new jobs directly with new businesses, which they are more likely than natives to start. A Canadian government survey, which should be similar to U.S. experience, finds that almost five percent of the 2,037 immigrants surveyed had started

³ M. Vic. Villalpondo, et al., "A Study of the Socio-Economic Impact of Illegal Aliens, County of San Diego" (San Diego: Human Resources Agency, January 1977).

their own businesses within the first three years in Canada. Not only did they employ themselves, they employed others, "creating" a total of 606 jobs. Expressed as a proportion of the 2,037 total immigrants, roughly 30 percent as many jobs were created from scratch as total jobs were held by immigrants. Furthermore, these numbers rose rapidly after the three-year study period; after one year there were 71 self-employed immigrants creating 264 jobs, compared with the 91 and 606 respectively after three years.

The businesses immigrants start are small at first, but small businesses are the most important source of new jobs, according to a recent MIT study.

Historically, migrants have tended to enter in good times and leave during bad, thus buffering unemployment for citizens, another positive effect of immigrants upon the labor market. Furthermore, a much lower proportion of immigrants work for government than do natives (perhaps 8 percent compared to 16 percent). This indicates a relatively low burden on the government to help supply jobs even after they have been in the U.S. many years. This should have a beneficial effect upon overall native chances for employment. It also benefits natives because a disproportionately small number of immigrants are making use of public productive capital.

MYTH #5: IMMIGRANTS PUSH WAGES WAY DOWN

The impact of immigration is likely to be greater on wages than on unemployment rates, because potential immigrants with skills that are in low demand choose not to migrate, and those with saleable skills gravitate to industries where there are jobs. This will have some downward pressure on wages. For example, immigrant physicians are more likely to reduce a native physician's yearly income than to throw him or her out of work.

Economists Barton Smith and Robert Newman of the University of Houston found that adjusted wages are just 8 percent lower in the Texas border cities,⁴ where the proportion of Mexicans is relatively high, compared to Texas cities away from the border where the proportion of Mexicans is much lower, a considerably smaller difference than they had expected to find. Much of the apparent difference is accounted for by a lower cost of living in the border cities.

⁴ Barton Smith and Robert Newman, "Depressed Wages Along the U.S.-Mexican Border: An Empirical Analysis," Economic Inquiry, January 1977, pp. 56-66.

MYTH #6: IMMIGRANTS ARE "HUDDLED MASSES"--UNEDUCATED, UNSKILLED, AND "TIRED"

The belief that immigrants arrive now, as they did in the past, with little or no education, few marketable skills, and in a generally tired and depressed condition is one of the most powerful, least accurate, and most persevering myths about immigration. This description is found in many books and articles including Oscar Handlin's famous, The Uprooted.⁵

The central fact about immigrants now, as throughout U.S. history and in almost all places at almost all times, is that immigrants are just entering into the prime of work life. This is the very best time to make a maximum contribution in all ways to the country receiving them. In contrast, the U.S. resident population is rapidly aging. But the immigrants are concentrated in their twenties and thirties, when they are flexible about job and geographical location, and therefore contribute importantly to the constant adjustment of the economy to changing conditions. They are of the age of greatest physical and mental vigor. And in this age bracket they contribute heavily to old-age support while requiring relatively little welfare service from the public coffers. See Table 1 for the age distributions of the U.S. public at large of and recent immigrants.

TABLE 1

DISTRIBUTIONS BY AGE OF LEGAL IMMIGRANTS AND U.S. POPULATION

Age	U.S. Population, 1970*	Legal Immigrants to U.S. 1967-1973**
0-19	38.8	34.5
20-39	25.7	46.4
40-59	22.2	13.9
60+	14.2	4.3

* Department of Commerce, Social Indicators (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), p. 32.

** Charles B. Keely and Ellen P. Kraly, "Recent Net Alien Immigration to the U.S.: Its Impact on Population Growth and Native Fertility," talk to the Population Association of America, 1978.

⁵ Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1951).

Even more surprising is that immigrants on average have as much education as do natives. Contemporary cohorts of immigrants include somewhat larger proportions of persons of low skill and low education than does the native labor force, but they contain a much larger proportion of those of high skill and high education--physicians, engineers, scientific researchers, and the like--than does the native population. And recent research by economist P. J. Hill of Montana State University and others shows that even before the turn of the century, cohorts of immigrants compared favorably with the native populations with respect to education and skill.⁶ This makes sense. A person with little education and skill is not necessarily stupid, and understands that life without saleable human capital is particularly tough in a new and strange environment, and therefore that it is wiser to stay at home. On the other hand, it is sensible for a person with a good amount of saleable human capital to take the chance and immigrate, because such a person has a good chance to improve his or her lot by moving to a new and richer country.

Along with youth and skill, immigrants tend to bring an unusually high degree of self-reliance, initiative, and innovative flair. Again, it makes sense that it is such people, rather than the dull and frightened, who have the courage and the belief in themselves necessary to the commitment to the awesome change that international migration represents.

MYTH #7: IMMIGRANTS INCREASE PRESSURE UPON RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

Still another unfounded charge is that immigrants create a squeeze in natural resources for natives. For example, Zero Population Growth's honorary president, Paul R. Ehrlich, talks about the effect of additional people on the "perilously shrinking water supply in this country. And our food supply. Think of the competition they'll cause for housing and jobs." The basis is the assertion that "The United States in less than 50 years will be more crowded, more polluted, more ecologically unstable, more prone to political unrest, more burdened with social stress, and far, far more precarious than we can possibly imagine."⁷

These predictions are without foundation. The water and food supplies consumed in the U.S. have been improving in past decades by every reasonable measure of quantity and purity, though this appears to be little known. The air, moreover, is

⁶ Peter J. Hill, "Relative Skill and Income Levels of Native and Foreign-Born Workers in the United States," Explorations in Economic History, 12, 1975, pp. 47-60.

⁷ Paul R. Ehrlich in a fund-raising letter for Zero Population Growth, no date.

becoming less polluted, according to the official Pollutant Standard Index prepared by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.⁸ And over the long run, natural resources are becoming less scarce rather than more scarce, as indicated by the fundamental economic measure of cost.

But not all such propositions about the effects of immigrants upon resources can be rebutted so easily. For example, consider this statement in a 1981-1982 article called "Immigration and the American Conscience" by The Environmental Fund: "Had the United States stabilized its population in 1970, we could have the same level of energy consumption and standard of living as we do today without any Iranian oil or a single nuclear power plant." The statement probably is true. But even more probably, and much more important, the statement also is terribly misleading.

One important flaw in the statement is that the eleven years it encompasses is much too short a time for the most important effects of population change to have their effects. Babies take a quarter century to mature into producers of goods and ideas; even immigrants may require several years to reach their full productivity.

It takes even longer for a crucial historical cycle to take place: (a) an immigrant swelled population leads to greater use of natural resources; (b) prices of raw materials then rise; (c) the price rise and the resultant fear about scarcity impel individuals to seek new sources of raw materials, new production technologies, and new substitutes for the resource, and (d) eventually the price of the service provided by the resource in question--for example, the price of energy whether produced from wood, coal, oil, or nuclear power--falls lower than it was before the temporary scarcity began. This process takes time and is quite indirect. Yet it has been the mainspring of economic advance for 5,000 years. It is, however, obscured by the above quotation, which makes it seem as if the main effect of the additional people is bad. In fact, after a relatively short time, the main effect is that people are better off than if the whole cycle beginning with more people had not taken place.

A stationary population in the long run would have a lower economic level than a growing population. Imagine the results 100 or 500 years later, or today, of stabilizing world population in 1000 B.C., 1 A.D., 1000 A.D., 1750 A.D., or 1900 A.D. A key characteristic of a high level of economic civilization is that it contains the capacity to resolve newly arising problems more quickly than did lower economic civilizations. For example, the incidence of famine has declined sharply in the past century because of modern roads and other transportation systems. Food

⁸ For a discussion of these EPA findings, see Julian Simon, The Ultimate Resource (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).

scarcity as a result of rapid population growth took much longer to remedy in 1300 A.D. or 1600 A.D. than now, because of today's systematic ways of finding and applying new knowledge that will meliorate the scarcity.

Much of The Ultimate Resource shows that natural resources (including energy) are, with passing decades, less rather than more of a constraint to U.S. and world growth. To cite such "limits" in discussions of national policy is unsound geology and biology, incorrect history, and terrible economics. The progressive improvement that has occurred in the world's resource availability would not have taken place if population density had remained at the lower levels of earlier centuries and millennia.

MYTH #8: IMMIGRANTS CAUSE DIMINISHING RETURNS

The heart of the Malthusian objection to immigration is "capital dilution." This means that because of the theory of "diminishing returns" output per worker will fall. This argument is so marvelously simple, direct, and common-sensical that it has great seductive power, especially to academics. The Malthusian notion therefore is grist for any family newspaper. The arguments that demonstrate the inapplicability of Malthusian capital dilution in the context of immigration are relatively complex and indirect. As a consequence, editors who fear that such arguments will tax the attention and thought of their readers and listeners protect their audiences from such a terrible fate. And the field is therefore left to simple--though incorrect--Malthusianism.

Nowadays the most important capital is human capital--education and the skills that adults own and carry with them--rather than the "capitalist" supplying all the capital. Still, there is some harm to natives caused by the presence of more workers but the same capital.

If the private sector of the economy were like the government sector--where workers' pay is assumed equal to the full value of what they produce, with nothing left for the owner of the capital--then capital dilution would indeed lower average native income. But in the private sector, additional workers imply higher earnings for owners about equal to the loss of earnings by other workers. This trade-off leaves overall native per capita income roughly unchanged.

Yet "workers" suffer as "capitalists" gain. That is, to the extent that the classes are separate, there is a transfer from workers' pockets to owners' pockets. But in fact much of America's private capital is owned directly by "workers" through pension funds and by way of the taxes paid on interest and dividends. Hence the loss to the "worker" class is unclear.

As to special groups of workers, especially low-income earners, the negative effect is probably less than commonly

thought and may be nonexistent. Because legal immigrants arrive with considerable education and skills and enter a wide variety of occupations, they hurt no occupation or income level much, even in the short run. (And to repeat, in the long run, occupations on average benefit from additional jobs created by the purchases made by immigrants to about the same extent that immigrants take existing jobs within the occupations. In short, immigrants make jobs as well as take jobs.)

Regarding the public capital used by immigrants, there should be concern about the additional capital outlays needed to equip immigrants--the extra schoolrooms, hospital beds, firehouses, and the like. Not relevant is the use of public goods not affecting natives' use or pocketbooks--looking at the Washington Monument or riding on a lightly used interstate highway. And to a considerable extent, the U.S. is on a pay-as-you-go basis with respect to capital expenditures: The debt service on past public borrowings covers much of the outlay on new capital. Therefore, through their taxes, immigrants pay "rent" on public facilities. This is an important additional reason why Malthusian capital dilution is not a crucial problem.

MYTH #9: THE U.S. IS FLOODED BY MEXICAN ILLEGALS

The number of aliens illegally residing and working in the United States is an issue that enters into the discussion of immigration in many ways. It is the main focus of the writings of those who oppose immigration, and it is used to generate strong feelings on the grounds that it causes a breakdown in the law and order of the country and corrupts attitudes toward the law. The issue also is used to suggest that the United States is rendered vulnerable to invasion or other unnamed dangers because it has "lost control of its borders." The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and The Environmental Fund (TEF), the two organizations most active in fighting against immigration, dwell upon the word "control." This plays upon a fear of chaos and social breakdown. And the supposed large-scale loss of jobs by natives due to illegals is a major objection to immigration generally, including that by labor unions.

Are such arguments justified by the data? Clearly not. The evidence for the largest and most frightening estimates of illegals is flimsy or nonexistent. In general there is a strong negative relationship between the quality of the research and the size of the estimate.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service frightened many with its 1970s estimates that there were 4 to 12 million illegals in the U.S. But a study by the Bureau of the Census staff at the request of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee

Policy⁹ noted that this estimate was based on nothing more than an impression derived from the data on the number of apprehensions of illegals either crossing the border or on the job. The INS gave no evidence in support of its estimate. And apprehension records are obviously a fallacious basis for any such estimate. For example, the same person might be apprehended several times during a single week.

Later the INS shifted its estimate to 8.2 million persons, as of mid-1975, deriving the figure from a Lesko Associates study it commissioned.¹⁰ The basis for the estimate was the "Delphi technique." This technique may be appropriate for such tasks as forecasting technological developments. But it is an absolutely unreliable and inappropriate estimation method for a subject such as the number of illegals in the U.S. Even Lesko called the estimate "not analytically defensible."¹¹ Yet for a long time these figures were the basis for much of the political debate on the subject.

The INS then offered an estimate of 6 million illegals as of 1976. This was derived by asking INS District Directors to estimate the number of illegals residing in their districts. According to the Bureau of the Census description

The district officers were asked to provide, in addition to estimates of illegals for their districts, a description of the methodology used to generate the estimates. None gave specific procedures. Rather, all but one referred to the 'experience' of officials as the basis for the estimate; the other claimed no 'scientific' basis at all for his estimate. Thus, the overall estimate may be characterized as 'synthetic speculation.'¹²

Ingenious statisticians have recently tackled the problem in a variety of interesting ways, including analysis of alien deaths in the United States,¹³ changes in Mexico's population,¹⁴ com-

⁹ Jacob S. Siegal, Jeffrey S. Passel, and J. Gregory Robinson, "Preliminary Review of Existing Studies of the Number of Illegal Residents in the United States," in U.S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest, Appendix E to the Staff Report of the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy Papers on Illegal Migration to the United States, April 1981.

¹⁰ Lesko Associates, 1975. Final Report: Basic Data and Guidance Required to Implement a Major Illegal Alien Study During Fiscal Year 1976, prepared for Office of Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, Washington, D.C., October 1975.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Siegal, et al., op. cit., p. 17.

¹³ J. Gregory Robinson, "Estimating the Approximate Size of the Illegal Alien Population in the United States by the Comparative Trend Analysis of Age-Specific Death Rates," unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 26-28, 1979.

¹⁴ Howard Goldberg, "Estimates of Emigration from Mexico and Illegal Entry into the United States, 1960-1970, by the Residual Method," unpublished graduate research paper, Center for Population Research, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 1974.

parisons of data (such as Social Security and income tax records) in which illegal aliens are fairly sure to be counted,¹⁵ analysis of changes in the Mexican-origin population reported by the Current Population Survey,¹⁶ and surveys of persons returning to Mexico, and of Mexican families, concerning their migration histories.¹⁷

The harvest of findings from this body of work is as follows:

- (1) The careful survey of these and other studies by Siegal et al. concludes that "The total number of illegal residents in the United States for some recent year, such as 1978, is almost certainly below 6.0 million, and may be substantially less, possibly only 3.5 to 5.0 million."¹⁸
- (2) A considerable proportion of the illegals are not Mexican. "The available evidence indicates that the size of the Mexican population living illegally in the United States is smaller than popular estimates suggest. The Mexican component of the illegally resident population is almost certainly less than 3.0 million, and may be substantially less, possibly only 1.5 to 2.5 million."
- (3) Of the Mexicans illegally in the United States at any given time, a very large proportion are here for a matter of months and then return voluntarily. "The gross movement into the United States of Mexican illegals is considerable, as is reflected in the large numbers of apprehensions made by INS, but this 'immigration' is largely offset by a considerable movement in the opposite direction.... Apparently most of the Mexican nationals who enter the United States illegally in any year return to Mexico...."¹⁹

¹⁵ Clarice Lancaster and Frederick J. Scheuren, "Counting the Uncountable Illegals: Some Initial Statistical Speculations Employing Capture-Recapture Techniques," 1977 Proceedings of the Social Statistics Section, Part I, American Statistical Association, 1978, pp. 530-535; Alexander Korns, "Cyclical Fluctuations in the Difference Between the Payroll and Household Measures of Employment," Survey of Current Business, May 1979, pp. 14-44, 55.

¹⁶ David M. Heer, "What is the Annual Net Flow of Undocumented Mexican Immigrants to the United States?" Demography, August 1979, pp. 417-423.

¹⁷ Mexico, Centro Nacional de Información y Estadísticas del Trabajo, En Volumen de la Migración de Mexicanos no Documentos a los Estados Unidos: Nuevas Hipótesis, by Manuel Garcia y Griego, December 1979; and Mexico, Centro Nacional de Información y Estadísticas del Trabajo, Los Trabajadores Mexicanos en los Estados Unidos: Primeros Resultados de la Encuesta Nacional de Emigración, by Carlos H. Zazueta and Rodolfo Corona, December 1979.

¹⁸ Siegal, et al., op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁹ Siegal, et al., op. cit., pp. 33-34.

- (4) Korn's study of illegal-alien employment even suggests that there has been no increase in the total number of illegals since an expansion that occurred between 1964 and 1969. The Census Bureau's Associate Director for Demographic Fields, George E. Hall, commented that "To date, the Census Bureau has not been able to detect explosive growth in the illegal population in any of its data collection systems."²⁰ It is because most immigrants who enter illegally leave when their jobs end or when they have earned what they came to earn, usually after a half-year or less, that there can be a constant inflow and yet little or no increase in the total number of immigrant residents.
- (5) In contrast to the Mexicans, the non-Mexican illegals--who typically either overstay their visa periods or enter with fraudulent documents, rather than by crossing the border clandestinely without documents--are much less likely to return to the home countries. "Hence, non-Mexican illegal immigration may add to the permanent resident population to a far greater extent than the Mexican migration flows," conclude Siegel et al., on the basis of the studies surveyed. This last point suggests that expensive efforts to reduce clandestine border crossing may be a waste.

CONCLUSION

Just about all the individual economic objections to immigrants are without factual foundation. No mention has been made, moreover, of the benefits from immigration. And there are very large benefits. Improved productivity, as a result of the increased production volume that flows from immigrant purchasing power as well as from the additional supply of ingenious inventive minds that immigrants bring, is one of the most important such benefits. It quickly dominates all the short-run costs.

Exactly how beneficial immigrants are to the U.S. society and economy may be debated. What is certain, however, is that many of the alleged costs of immigrants are simply unfounded, hollow myths.

²⁰ George E. Hall, testimony before the House Subcommittee on Census and Population, April 27, 1981, p. 8.