

IMMIGRATION:

Recasting The Debate



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Public Ideologies and Economic Realities of Contemporary Immigration

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September 2007

There can be no fifty-fifty
Americanism in this country.
There is room here only for
100 percent Americanism, only
for those who are American
and nothing else.

Theodore Roosevelt (1918)

Apart from Indian tribes which could be killed off or pushed westward, no society was there, and the 17th and 18th century settlers came in order to create societies that embodied and would reinforce the culture and values that they brought with them...the Old European immigrants were absorbed into the core. But the new immigration from Asia and Latin America – above all that from Mexico – is challenging that identity, that core.

Samuel Huntington (2004)

This cycle of negative and positive stereotyping only skims the surface of the phenomenon of immigration. This is because these successive images emerge in the realm of public opinion where serious understanding of the dynamics underlying the process, including the role of public opinion itself, is lacking.

The U.S. economy faces a demographic challenge to its future growth. Among the native-born population, fertility rates are falling, workers are growing older and better educated, and labor force participation rates are flattening. However, the economy continues to create a large number of less-skilled jobs that favor younger and less educated workers.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects that between 2002 and 2012 the number of U.S. jobs will increase by 21 million and that there will be a total of 56 million job openings after accounting for worker turnover. Many of these jobs will favor workers with age and educational profiles for which the native-born labor force is not well-matched.

The first migrants who leave for a new destination have no social ties to draw upon, and for them migration is costly...After the first migrants have left, however, the potential costs of migration are substantially lowered for the friends and relatives left behind. Because of the nature of kinship and friendship structures, each new migrant expands the set of people with social ties to the destination area...

The policies of restrictionism and repressive border enforcement thus can produce what they fear – the continuation of major ethnic and racial inequalities and the reproduction of a marginalized population at the bottom of society.

The Immigration Policy Disconnect

Public Opinion

Ideologies :

Intransigent Nativism
(Keep immigrants out)

Forced Assimilationism
(Turn immigrants into
monolingual Americans
as fast as possible)

The “Disconnect”

Reality

Economic :

- Hourglass labor market
- Structural need for foreign labor at both ends of the market

Social :

- Networks between immigrants and their communities of origin
- Networks between immigrants and their employers

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