Illegal Immigration Essay, Research Paper

Illegal Immigration

Immigration, legal or otherwise, is a huge issue right now. Debates rage

about how many immigrants should be allowed into the country and how zealously

we should guard out border from illegal intruders. To a point, these people are

correct, illegal immigration is something that should be stopped. People should

not cross the border illegally or overstay on visits. The important question is,

however, does illegal immigration deserve the massive amount of attention it

receives? No, it does not. By looking at the respected immigrants of the past

and thinking about the issues in a clear and objective way, it becomes apparent

that illegal immigration (and legal immigration, for that matter) is not as

vital an issue as many consider it to be.

A key point in this discussion is that many of those who are vehemently

opposed to illegal immigration are also opposed to large amounts of legal

immigration as well. These thinly hidden agendas mean that often the debate on

illegal immigration cannot be separated from the debate on legal immigration.

According to Negative Population Growth (which is a suspect source),

Americans are firmly believe in tough laws against illegal immigrants and that

70% of Americans want no more than 300,000 legal immigrants to enter the U.S.

per year. In fact, N.P.G. says that 20% of Americans want immigration

completely stopped. Taking these numbers as the truth, it is clear that America

thinks that we have too many immigrants.

Such a dislike of immigration is interesting considering the success of

past immigration. Many people would say that today’s immigrants are somehow

different than those of the past. However, the truth is that the

similarities between the immigrants of today and those of the past are numerous.

Their reasons for coming to this country are often similar. Many of the

immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were compelled to leave

their homes by the rapidly changing nature of their countries. In the Europe of

the 19th century, this meant quickly growing population and a rapidly

industrializing economy. In nations like Mexico and Vietnam, the same thing is

happening today, they “are undergoing the same convulsive demographic and

economic disruptions that made migrants out of so many nineteenth century

Europeans” (Kennedy p.64).

Those who are against the immigration of the 1990’s also say that the

European immigrants of the past were culturally similar to Americans, and that

they were more willing to assimilate and become “American.” Neither of these

things are true. Old immigrant groups like the Italians and may be seen as

generically “white” and “American” now, but when they first began moving to the

United States, they were as alien as the immigrants are today are. They were

seen as culturally (and even physically) inferior to native Americans. Old

immigrant groups had significant cultural differences that caused friction

between them and the natives. Those immigrants of the past also did not come to

America and instantly throw off all semblances of their and language and society.

On the contrary, according to David Kennedy, “many…exerted themselves to

sustain their religions, tongues and ways of life” (Kennedy p. 64). Current

opponents of mass immigration also point to the large numbers of crimes

committed by immigrants. They are forgetting that the immigrants of past had

similar problems.

When illegal immigration is not confused with legal immigration, debate can

take place in a sane matter. As George Borjas noted on page 77 of his article,

the economic consequences of illegal immigration are unclear. Convincing cases

can be made that illegals hurt and help the American economy. I have heard that

the United States needs the cheap and undiscriminating labor of illegal

immigrants to do the “dirty work,” and that illegals take jobs away from natives.

Until more convincing data is available, the approach to illegal immigration

should be sensible. Outlandish solutions like building a huge 2,000 mile-long

fence and gathering a virtual army to defend the border from Mexicans are not

the answer. Making legal immigration easier and more common is the best

solution that we have now.