

10 Myths About Immigrants

Myth: Immigrants don't pay taxes. Immigrants pay taxes, in the form of income tax, property tax, sales tax, and other taxes at the federal and state level. Even undocumented immigrants pay income taxes, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and Social Security numbers), which grew by \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998.

Myth: Immigrants come here to take welfare. The ratio between immigrant use of public benefits and the amount of taxes they pay is consistently favorable to the U.S. In one estimate, immigrant tax payments total \$20 to \$30 billion more than the amount of government services they use.

Myth: Immigrants send all their money back to their home countries. In addition to the consumer spending of immigrant households, immigrants and their businesses contribute \$162 billion in tax revenue to federal, state, and local governments in the United States.

Myth: Immigrants take jobs and opportunity away from Americans. The largest wave of immigration to the U.S. since the early 1900s coincided with the lowest national unemployment rate and fastest economic growth.

Myth: Immigrants are a drain on the U.S. economy. The net benefit of immigration to the U.S. is nearly \$10 billion annually.

Myth: Immigrants don't want to learn English or become Americans. Within 10 years of arrival, more than 75 percent of immigrants speak English well; moreover, demand for English classes at the adult level far exceeds supply.

Myth: There are many more immigrants today than there were 100 years ago. The portion of the U.S. population that is foreign born now stands at 11.5 percent; in the early 20th century, it was approximately 15 percent.

Myth: Most immigrants cross the border illegally. Around 75 percent of today's immigrants have legal permanent (immigrant) visas; of the 25 percent that are undocumented, 40 percent overstayed temporary (non-immigrant) visas.

Myth: Weak U.S. border enforcement has led to high undocumented immigration. From 1986 to 1998, the Border Patrol's budget increased six-fold, and the number of agents stationed on our southwest border doubled to 8,500. The undocumented immigrant population doubled in that period, to 8 million. An insufficient number of legal avenues for immigrants to enter the U.S., compared with the number of jobs in need of workers, has significantly contributed to the current situation.

Myth: The war on terrorism can be won through immigration restrictions. Since Sept. 11, the many measures targeting immigrants in the name of national security have netted no terrorism prosecutions. In fact, several of these measures could have the opposite effect and actually make us less safe, since targeted communities of immigrants are afraid to come forward with information.

This material is adapted from "Myths" at the Justice for Immigrants Web site (www.justiceforimmigrants.org) of the Catholic Campaign for Immigration Reform, which also lists sources for the information.

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