

COMMON IMMIGRANT MYTHS

Myth: Immigrants come to this country and take American jobs.

Response: Statistical analysis of the ten largest U.S. cities reveals no correlation between the share of new immigrants and: 1) the change in median family income; 2) The change in the poverty rate; or 3) the unemployment rate [Fiscal Policy Institute report, *Learning from the 90's*, 2002]

Myth: Immigrants just come to this country to milk us and live off of Welfare.

Response: Federal welfare laws restrict non-citizen eligibility for a wide range of public programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), food stamps, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Medicaid, and it gave states broad new authority to set social welfare policy for immigrants.

Myth: Immigrants come to this country and live off of social programs.

Response: It is estimated that an immigrant family, through the years, pays between \$20,000-\$80,000 more in taxes than is received in government services.

Myth: Immigrants just mooch off of the economy, and make no contributions in return.

Response: A study done by UCLA estimated that immigrants contribute more than \$400 billion to the U.S. economy each year.

Myth: Immigrants get away with not paying taxes, bringing our economy down.

Response: The IRS has just released figures that undocumented immigrants pay more than \$300 million in federal taxes last year through use of a special form. (Tucson local TV coverage, April 21, 2003). This does not include state and local taxes, sales tax and taxes filed under false social security numbers. It must be noted that most will not receive any of this money back, as most undocumented workers rarely file or claim taxes., Many experts believe that these contributions are keeping the current Social Security system afloat.

Myth: Immigrants are lazy and dumb, and contribute nothing to our economy.

Response: Consider this excerpt from a testimony by Stephen Moore, Senior Fellow in Economics from the Cato Institute, before the Senate Judiciary Committee: "Even though Mexican immigrants tend to be less skilled and less educated than American workers and immigrants from other regions of the world, these migrant workers fill niches in our workforce that help our economy perform at a high level of efficiency... In fact, many of our competitors from other industrial nations have begun to grudgingly concede that U.S. immigration policy has allowed the U.S. to attract many of the top minds and talents from around the world."

Myth: Immigrants are sucking our resources dry.

Response: Consider this excerpt from an article on the Fannie Mae Foundation: “The effect of immigration is to bring new residents to large cities, concentrating them in older gateway neighborhoods where they take root and invest their energies. The housing and retail markets at the heart of many of our large cities are sustained by these new arrivals. And the ready supply of willing workers encourages new job creation.”

[<http://www.fanniemaefoundation.org/programs/hff/v1i4-immigration.shtml>]

Myth: Immigrants coming to this country are drug dealers and criminals.

Response: By an admission of David Aguilar, head of the U.S. Border Patrol, drug smugglers make up only 1% of the number of immigrants coming to the U.S. each year. This means that 99% of immigrants coming into the U.S. are only looking for a better life. It also means that the billions of dollars spent in deterring immigration for the purposes of stopping drug trafficking is only aimed at the tiniest of numbers in respect to total immigration.

Myth: NAFTA helped create jobs in México – why are immigrants still coming?

Response: As labor is exploited at every front, NAFTA has created unemployment and wages have plummeted in the United States and México. Consider these facts:

- Over one million manufacturing jobs have been lost since NAFTA began in 1994.
- Over one million more Mexicano workers earn less than the minimum wage of \$5/day since 1994.
- One million Mexicano workers have been forced out of farming and into manufacturing jobs on the border or in the U.S. since 1994.

Myth: Immigrants destroy the environment as they attempt to cross the border.

Response: U.S. Border Patrol common practice upon apprehension of undocumented immigrants is that all items are left behind. Individuals are forced to drop all belongings before being loaded onto Border Patrol vehicles. It is Border Patrol policy not to concern themselves with these left-behind items, and they take no responsibility for the litter.

It must also be noted that the devastation to the environment because of Border Patrol vehicle tires, drag roads, and all terrain vehicles have wreaked havoc on the desert environment. Border walls and fences stop animals from crossing and destroy natural habitats and plant life.

Corporate interests, which result in the construction of *maquilas*, or large factories, also have a great impact on the environment. Chemical use and waste not only cause detrimental damage to animal and plant life, but they are attributed to an increase in cases of asthma, cancer, and other health problems in border communities.