

An excerpt from the PBS Website:



<http://www.pbs.org/kcet/newamericans/4.0/4.03misconceptions.html>

MISCONCEPTIONS

Myth Number 1: Immigrants steal American jobs.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Studies have shown that quite the opposite is true: Immigrants create jobs. Specifically various recent studies have shown that:

- Immigrants are more likely to be self-employed and start new businesses. Small businesses, 18 percent of which are started by immigrants, account for up to 80 percent of the new jobs available in the United States each year.
- Slightly more than 10 percent of the U.S. industrial workforce, or roughly 2.2 million Americans, are employed by foreign companies doing business in the United States. Additionally, the top 105 multinational corporations doing business here have U.S. affiliates that are so large they would qualify for the Fortune 500 list solely on the basis of their stateside operations.

Myth Number 2: America is being overrun by immigrants.

This, unfortunately, is another case where perception is out of sync with reality. To be sure, the number of immigrants living in the United States is larger than ever before, but these numbers form relatively small percentage of the population. In fact, the percentage of immigrants in the total population has decreased. So far, no single decade has topped 1901-1910 for immigration admissions. Further, even though the United States has one of the world's most generous refugee resettlement programs, less than 1.5 percent of the world's refugee population finds its way to the United States.

Perhaps the misperception regarding the volume of immigrants rests in the fact that during the 1980s, three-quarters of all immigrants entering the United States settled in just six states: California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois.

Xenophobia may also contribute to this misperception. Whereas from 1901-1910, immigrants were comprised mostly of white Europeans, immigrants of more recent decades have tended to be more ethnically and racially diverse. Also, increasingly high concentrations of immigrants in urban areas may have created the illusion of a growing, disproportionate number of immigrants settling in the entire country. In 1990, 93 percent of foreign-born Americans lived in metropolitan areas, compared with 73 percent of native-born Americans.

Myth Number 3: Immigrants are a burden on the U.S. economy.

Once again, nothing could be further from the truth:

- Immigrants collectively earn \$240 billion a year, pay \$90 billion a year in taxes, and receive \$5 billion in welfare.
- New immigrants must prove that they won't be a burden before they are allowed to enter the United States. Compared to the native-born population, immigrants are more likely to be employed, save more of their earnings, and are more likely to start new businesses.
- Immigrants have a slightly higher per capita income than natives and a slightly lower household income. But, their income levels rise over time: Among those entering before 1980, median household income in 1989 was \$35,733 (vs. \$30,176 for natives) and per capita income was \$19,423 (vs. \$14,367 for natives).
- Non-refugee immigrants of working age are less prone to welfare than natives.

Myth Number 4: Immigrants aren't really interested in becoming part of American society.

Evidence points to the contrary. Immigrants are very interested in being part of our society. First and second generation immigrants are assimilating so quickly that their parents and grandparents fear a total loss of their native culture.

- Immigrants want to learn and speak English. Reports from throughout the United States indicate that the demand for classes in English as a Second Language far outstrips supply. After 15 years in America, 75 percent of Spanish-speaking immigrants speak English on a regular basis. The children of immigrants, although bilingual, prefer English to their native tongue at astounding rates.
- Immigrants and refugees intermarry outside their group at a rate of 1 in 3. The rate is even higher, 1 out of 2, for their children.

Myth Number 5: Immigrants contribute little to American society.

Baloney. Besides their significant economic contributions, immigrants have helped spin and weave the fabric of American culture throughout the history of the U.S.

- Immigrants, for the most part, have incredibly strong family values. They are more likely than natives to live in families: 76 percent vs. 70 percent. They also tend to have more children: 2.25 vs 1.93. Immigrants are more likely to be married: 60 percent vs. 55 percent. Only 8 percent of immigrants are divorced or separated compared to 11 percent of natives.
- Immigrants recognize the value of an education. While many lack a high school education, they are just as likely as natives to hold a college degree: 20 percent. That rate rose during the 1980s: Among those admitted in 1987-1990, 29 percent held a college degree. Immigrants are also twice as likely as natives to hold Ph.D.'s.
- Immigrants respect the law as much, if not more, than native born Americans. They are less likely than natives to be confined to a state prison. Among the five states with the most immigrants—California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Texas—only New York has a greater share of immigrants in its prisons than in its general population.

So, who are these people we call immigrants? They could be your parents, your grandparents, your teachers, your friends, your doctors, your policemen, your grocer, your waiter, your cook, your babysitter, your gardener, your lawyer, your favorite actor, actress, or sports hero, your mayor, your congressman or senator, your shopkeeper. Immigrants permeate the fabric of America. They are an integral and important part of our society, its goals and its values. They are the backbone that helps make this country great. They are what sets us apart from every nation in this world. In short, they are us.