The topic of illegal immigration has been part of a heated debate within the past few decades in the United States. Recently, with the passing of the immigration law in Arizona, known as the Arizona SB 1070 (Johnson, 2010), the issue has become a hot topic, and questions of how to deal with not only the influx of immigrants, but also with immigrants already in the U.S. and their children, has become a topic of dispute. While there are many arguments against the allowance of illegal immigrants into the U.S., through our research we have found the benefits far outweigh the costs, and for this reason border controls should be relaxed significantly, and immigrants that are currently in the U.S. should be granted citizenship. In our brief, we will address the main issues of dispute over illegal immigration, which include the perception of illegal immigrants as non-tax paying free-riders and, consequently, a drain on our economy, as well as stealing jobs that belong to Americans. However, through research we have discovered these allegations to be severely blown out of proportion, with the majority of illegal immigrants being tax-payers without receiving social security. Indeed, the contributions of both legal and illegal immigrants are one of the driving forces of our economy. Therefore, we offer the U.S. Congress our recommendation to relax border regulations, especially with our immediate neighbors such as Mexico, and no longer approach illegal immigration as entirely problematic in our economy. This is consistent with the idea of a free market economy, which the U.S. and world economic system claim to support. In order to have a true market economy, labor would be allowed to move freely, while calls for a relaxation in immigration policies for all countries, including the U.S.
How should the U.S. government address the issue of illegal immigration? Should the U.S. tighten borders and limit immigration, as well as persecute those currently living illegally in the country, or open borders and grant current illegals citizenship?

**BACKGROUND**

Through an examination of the United States' history, one quickly realizes that the country was founded on mass immigration. In 1840 through 1850, Germans migrated to the Midwest seeking land and wealth. They were later followed by the Irish, Russians, and Italians; in fact from 1860 to 1920, 300 million foreigners had migrated to the United States. This gave the United States the identity of a “melting pot”, due to the foreigners having a common heritage, integration was easily assimilated. Since 1950 the number of foreigners has increased each year by one million; and through immigration, 11 million were added to the population, 13% being first generation and 11% being second generation.

Today, the concept of a melting pot has deteriorated. Beginning in the mid-twentieth century, the points of immigration have shifted; the majority of immigrants currently come from Africa, Asia, South and Central America. Accompanying the shift in cultural backgrounds, unfamiliar languages, religions, and political backgrounds have made their presence in the U.S. and, consequently, have caused difficulties in integration.

Immigrants come to the U.S. for various reasons. Some flee their country due to civil wars, political persecution, and natural disasters; others are seeking to reunite with their families or gain economic stability. There are three paths for the newly-immigrated. With approximately thirty-five million immigrants, the most popular pathway is becoming a legal permanent resident and obtaining the “green card”. This is acquired through marriage (with a U.S citizen), family ties, or being a political refugee. The second way is to attain a temporary work or tourism visa, or a short-term visa for student and government exchange. This route, however, is less common with only 3% of immigrants migrating this way. Lastly, but most importantly, with a high increase of five million in 1996 to 8.4 million in 2000, it is estimated that 11.9 million have migrated illegally, without seeking proper documentation.

The increase of immigrants, and their diversity, in the U.S., has generated ethnocentrism within U.S.-born citizens, manifesting itself in distaste for anything different from them, and creating a fear that their American culture is losing its identity. Furthermore, native-born citizens believe that immigrants are competing for their jobs and receiving unnecessary government benefits. This fear has caused the political system to propose immigration policies aimed mainly at the illegal immigrants in order to resolve the conflicts.

Immigration is a sensitive topic for most native-born residents. As the economy worsens, many believe their wages are being depressed by the existence of new cheap laborers, while others believe immigrants are draining public resources. While these complaints should be addressed, reducing the amount of immigrants is not the solution; it is imperative to tackle illegal immigration through policies beneficial for all.

**IMPORTANCE OF ADDRESSING CURRENT IMMIGRATION POLICIES**

The most common discourse on immigration concerns the cost vs. the benefits it brings to the country. As mentioned above, citizens believe immigrants are stealing their jobs and taking advantage of the public resources. The Costs and
Benefits of Immigration written by Darrel M. West, counter-argues these believe. West starts of by noting that although “51 percent believe that immigrants take jobs away from native-born workers,. . .61 percent think immigrants create jobs and set up new business” (West 432). Furthermore, his research shows that since the recession, no differences were seen between the unemployment rate for both native-born and immigrants; the distinction was seen in the type of work. Unlike native-born, immigrants are pursuing poorly paid, entry-level, undesirable jobs. Nevertheless, a study showed that “immigrant–founded companies produced $52 billion in sales and employed 450,000 workers in 2005”. In fact, immigrants are the reason for the rise of high–tech and biotech industries, claiming 25.3 percent of the technology and engineering business launched in the Unites States from 1995 to 2005 (West 437).

As for the belief they are draining public resources, it is accurate that immigrants with children who require to be educated, and immigrants that draw from pensions or healthcare are costly to the government. However, adult immigrants ages 25-44, which pay taxes and do not draw public pensions, make up 52.9 percent of the immigrant population. Moreover, both legal and illegal immigrants do not benefit from food stamps, TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), and Medicaid; and illegal immigrants do no receive welfare, public health care, or retirement benefits. In fact, undocumented immigrants only constitute one percent out of the five percent of American households receiving cash assistance. Further critiquing this argument, reports estimate that $162 billion in federal, state, and local taxes are paid by immigrants and that the average immigrant pays up to $1,800 more in taxes than they cost in benefit. Also, dispelling the myth that illegal immigrants do not pay taxes, it was estimated that from one-half to three-quarters of undocumented immigrants pay federal and state taxes, but unlike native-born and documented immigrants, they are unentitled to collect social service benefits. Nevertheless, immigrants are the cause for the raise of $37 billions per year American GDP (West 433-435).

Secondly, education is an important subtopic within the main subject of immigration that should be addressed in order to benefit the immigrants and the United States. Although in “1982 the Supreme Court ruled that the children of illegal immigrants have a right to a free k-12 education”, the right was not extended to higher education (Horwedel and Asquith). The lack of information on higher learning has resulted in differently laws according to state. Consequently some states deny college enrollment of any undocumented student while the other states accepts them as international students. Regardless of the state, this has created a burden on the children and taken away their hope. As the undocumented students realize they will not be able to enroll in a college after graduation, they stop caring about their education. Enzo Ferreira, an undocumented immigrant, confessed that in the 10th grade school became unimportant and was expelled due to skipping school and disrespecting his teachers. In addition, The U.S Census Bureau and the U.S Department of Education reported that in comparison to the 7% of white and 12% of black under the age of 18 that did not attend school, Hispanics made up the substantial amount of 24% (Horwedel et al.).

Similarly, undocumented students who are given the opportunity to enroll in a college are still facing a huge obstacle. Due to only being able to enroll as international students, they are also expected to pay the costly tuition that corresponds to international students. Unfortunately, illegal immigrants are ineligible for any financial aid or student loans, which creates an impediment to attend college for those who do not have means. The national coordinator for the National Capital Immigration Coalition, Juan Carlos, says “Universities are important because we’re spending all this money on grade and high school and then they can’t afford to go to college. So it impedes their growth as an individual and the growth of the economy and the country” (Horwedel et al.). Similar to Juan Carlos, referring to the situation of the ones who are privileged enough to attend college despite the tuition and are denied the chance to start a career, Darrel M. West states “our universities invest millions in training foreign students, but then send them home without any
U.S. job opportunities that would take advantage of their new skills. This robs our country of the ability to reap the benefits of our economic investment in higher education” (West 436-437). The barriers to higher education are a disadvantage to the economy and could also lead to the increase of an uneducated population, and force these illegal student to work under the table.

Also, immigration, illegal immigration precisely, is placing an affliction on families. In his Article, Cain Oulahan, wrote that in the Unites States “family is the basic unity in human society, a very highly valued principle of law” which is a contradiction of the consequences the unlawful presence bars creates (Oulahan 1351). “This law prohibits immigrant visa applicants who have been unlawfully present in the United States for a certain period of time from obtaining an immigrant visa for up to ten years or more” (Oulahan 1351) causing the separation of the undocumented person and his/her spouse or immediate family. The requirement to return to the home country can cause the lost of a job and promote economic insecurities. At the same time, the possible ten years separation increases the quantity of single-parent households and economic complications such as foreclosures. Additionally, it could potentially increase the number of people needing food stamps and/or TANF. Nonetheless, it can produce fear of being separated within families and therefore discourage them from partaking in the legal immigration process (Oulahan 1355-1357).

PRE EXISTING POLICIES.

The United States is a nation created by immigrants, and until today, the amount of people migrating to the country persist. As a result, many laws regarding immigration have been passed to benefit the country. However, as laws continue to try to be passed today concerning the same subject, it is apparent that as good they each have their tribulations.

Going back to June 18, 1798, the Naturalization Act was passed by the Senate and House of representatives in order to control incoming migration and the acquiring of a citizenship. This act required the subject to

Declare his intention, to become a citizen of the United States, five years, at least, before his admission, and shall at the time of his application to be admitted declare and prove, to the satisfaction of the court having jurisdiction in the case, that he has resided within the United States fourteen years at least, and within the state or territory where, or for which such court is at the time held, five years, at least (Naturalization Act 1798).

The subject was also required to file an abstract of his declaration, along with name, age, nation, residence and occupation.

Although the act was passed in the 18th century its purpose is still highly significant today. This act demonstrates the willingness of the country to accept immigrants but at the same time reassuring they had wholesome and serious intentions to preserve the well-being of the nation. Moreover, it gave the government a chance to verify the applicant was ideal to become a “good citizen”. Nonetheless, the act also had its negatives. The extensive wait to be admitted into the country would not be tolerable today by many foreigners searching for the American dream. The wait would only encourage them to find a way to enter the country illegally.

Most commonly known prevention of illegal immigration done by the United States government is the Border Patrol. It originated in 1993 during Clinton’s administration. Four operations were implemented from 1993 through 1997, which
made up the ‘concentrated border enforcement strategy’. The purpose was to increase apprehension in the four traditional segments used by 70-80% of the illegal immigrants and consequently preventing the high numbers of immigrants pursuing to cross the borders (Cornelius 777-783).

The expenditures towards the government’s efforts quintupled from 1993 to 2004; going from a modest $750 million to $3.8 billion, however the merits have not been seen. Their first step was putting a 10-foot steel fence that could be cut with a simple saw. This led to the discovery of fourteen trans-border tunnels The U.S. also acquired the IDENT system as a database for photos, fingerprints, and identity information, in order to apprehend illegal immigrants. But the purpose was ineffective due to the apprehensions of only 4 percent due to cost of incarcerating the undocumented (Cornelius 777-783).

The fear tactic of apprehension backfired and instead of deterring the incoming illegal immigrants, the immigrants continued to migrate but decided to stay longer or permanently in the United States. This data was shown by the high increase of Mexicans living in the United States. Moreover, the tightening of border patrol forced the immigrants to depend on illegal smugglers with an increase of 26 percent. Lastly, the death of illegal immigrants, as a consequence of crossing the border, has increased and in 2004, Arizona’s Segment witnessed the high number of 175 deaths (Cornelius 777-783).

While these have been immigration policies of the past, the current immigration policies need to be analyzed in order to point out the problematic areas and offer a solution.

ARIZONA SB 1070

“If you live in Arizona, you live with SB1070. It colors people’s lives at home, in business, in government and in the church” (Hillman, 2011: 20). On April 23rd, 2010, the governor of Arizona Jan Brewer signed the Support Our Law Enforcement and Safe Neighborhoods Act, better known as simply Arizona SB 1070. The U.S. Federal Law requires that all the foreign citizens older than 14 years, who stay on the national soil for more than 30 consecutive days, have to carry their own documents any time. The Arizona Act, in addition, requires law enforcement officials to question the immigration status of individuals during every day police encounters. Police have to have ‘reasonable suspicion’ (Johnson, 2010: 2) when detaining. Furthermore, the SB 1070 is even harsher on people who harbor, hire, or transport illegal immigrants, following the attrition through enforcement doctrine. President Obama himself declared that this bill “undermines basic notions of fairness that we cherish as Americans, as well as the trust between police and their communities that is so crucial to keeping us safe” (Johnson, 2010: 2). Reactions stretched all over the country as soon as the bill was passed and signed. On April 30th Brewer signed a new bill that made changes on the controversial SB 1070. The governor declared that “These new amendments make it crystal clear and undeniable that racial profiling is illegal and will not be tolerated in Arizona” (Silverleib, 2010: 1).

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<th>PROS</th>
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<td>General feeling of more economic and personal security by Americans</td>
<td>Unconsciously legitimize racial profiling</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enforcing rule of law</td>
<td>May also target legal immigrants</td>
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The DREAM Act is an American legislative proposal introduced in the Senate in 2001. It is an acronym and its letters stand for Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors. The DREAM Act was re-introduced in the United States House of Representatives on March 26, 2009, but eventually it failed on December 18, 2010. This proposal would “permit States to determine State residency for higher education purposes and to authorize the cancellation of removal and adjustment of status of certain alien students who are long-term U.S. residents and who entered the U.S. as children” (DREAM Act Appendix, 2009: 80).

Considering pros and cons of the three major pre-existing policies we have analyzed, it comes up that the DREAM Act, though it has several cons and it has not been passed yet, it also has many positive outcomes. To a certain extent, it is not unfair to say that by enforcing the DREAM Act, we would make part of the American citizenry people (youth) who already are part of the American social texture. We do believe that there are some unauthorized immigrants who gained an amnesty and therefore deserve a path to citizenship because they already proved to be part of this Nation by integrating themselves into the community.

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<th>PROS</th>
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<td>Empowers immigrant children who had no choice about moving to the U.S.</td>
<td>By allowing immigrant children brought into the US illegally to obtain citizenship, it would indirectly reward illegal actions</td>
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<td>Immigrant children who spent several years in the U.S., may have developed a strong sense of belonging to the country, and therefore should not be forced out</td>
<td>Children benefited will be able to sponsor their parents and relatives, including the ones who originally broke the laws</td>
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<td>Provides more diversity in college campus and universities</td>
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<td>Decreases the dropout rates of immigrant students</td>
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<td>More high school/college graduates results in higher tax revenues and less government expenses</td>
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OBAMA’S ADMINISTRATION IMMIGRATION POLICIES

During his presidential campaign as well as in more recent times, very often Barack Obama has been accused by some of being an immigrant and therefore ineligible to be President of the United States. In such hostile environment is not hard to understand why reforming immigration law is so difficult. During his campaign speeches, Obama has vaguely
touched the immigration issue. His concerns were focused on “securing the border, increasing legal migration to unify families and satisfy employers, and providing a path to citizenship for unauthorized migrants in otherwise good standing” (Nevins, 2010: 33).

Once elected, the first African-American U.S. president “has increased the threat of arresting immigrants living and working in communities” all across the country by enlarging the highly criticized “ICE program called 287(g)which establishes formal cooperation between federal authorities and state and local police” (Nevins, 2010: 35). This program allowed the local police to enforce federal immigration laws. Therefore, this move caused a deep sense of insecurity among the “targeted communities, since many are loathed to contact the police, lest the authorities get involved in immigration matters” (Nevins, 2010: 36). The action of confusing the law enforcement on criminal issues and civil issues (like immigration) pushes the unauthorized immigrants even more in the shadows. It would seem that Obama’s administration is stuck into a “law-and-order mentality” in which illegal immigrants “simply deserve nothing” regardless of what they have done for the US or their ties in our country (Nevins, 2010: 36).

Obama was clear on the facts that even the immigrants who could be eligible for some kind of regularization, will have to meet several requirements. Among those requirements are: “registering, paying a fine , passing a criminal background check, fully paying all taxes and learning English” (Nevins, 2010: 36).

CONCLUSION

Immigration is one of the most controversial topics in U.S. politics today. However, this has been the case throughout history. This began with the Chinese, followed by the Irish and the Italians and then the Mexicans. As the decades slipped by, Americans chose and changed their scapegoat. Today many participants of the debate consider the large number of unauthorized immigrants as a threat to the integrity of their society, as well as their safety and daily routine. But is the United States not a country of immigrants? Whether they came with a boat from Cuba, a steamer from Ireland in 1900, or riding a mule from Mexico, the majority of immigrants have never led to the demise of the United States. Immigrants positively contributed in implementing its richness of values and strong work ethic, and will continue to do so.

Works Cited


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