

Dr. Frank Morris is Dean of Graduate Studies and Urban Research at Morgan State University, Baltimore, and a member of the Board of Directors at the Center for Immigration Studies in Washington, DC. Citing the need of black Americans for places in the nation's labor force, he presented this view on legal immigration reform to the House Sub-committee on Immigration, Refugees and International Law on March 13, 1990.

Re: LEGAL IMMIGRATION REFORM

By Frank Morris

I welcome this opportunity to comment on the legal immigration reform proposals now before the House of Representatives, which have potentially far-reaching consequences for current and future African-American workers. As a former Executive Director of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, and currently responsible for the work of the Center for Urban Research at Morgan State, I have reviewed considerable data on the effects of our current liberal immigration policies on the conditions of black Americans and on inter-ethnic relations. This statement, however, does not necessarily represent the views of Morgan State University or the Center for Urban Research.

My first concern is that the black community, in looking at the slow rate of growth of our numbers in the labor force and our increasing need for higher skills, may find that any encouraging assumptions we had about opportunities for young black workers and prospective workers have been sidetracked by hasty immigration policies.

We had been encouraged by recent studies, such as the Hudson Institute's *Workforce 2000* and the Department of Labor's *Opportunity 2000*, which underscore a vital national need to develop urgently the human capital of our minority citizens. We had hoped that this need to utilize all our citizens in the work force could, for once, convince America, in its own best interest, to commit itself to the development of the talents of even its most neglected citizens.

But when I examine these legislative proposals to again expand the admission of skilled and unskilled workers, I fear that these comforting assumptions about developing our own home grown human capital are no longer an important part of the equation. It is particularly troubling that no studies have been made to determine what impact the proposed expansion of foreign worker intake would have on the incentives of employers, the government and the schools to develop the needed skills of those already here.

The nation's immigration policies and practices of the past decade—legal immigration, non-immigrant admissions and tolerated illegal immigration—have permitted the foreign-born population to grow by about 750,000 yearly. This

rate of growth, 4 percent a year, is nearly six times the natural growth rate of the domestic population. As a result, the foreign born population, which was 6.2 percent of the total in the 1980 census, will approach 9 percent in the 1990 census.

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This remarkable growth of the immigrant population is most intense in areas where African-Americans have a major presence and have important interests. Much of the increase in the foreign-born population is concentrated in relatively few major metropolitan areas where sizable African-American populations now reside. A quarter of the growth of the nation's labor force now comes from immigration, while immigrants' share of the public school population has increased even more rapidly.

It is clear that America's black population is bearing a disproportionate share of immigrants' competition for jobs, housing and social services. While each year's immigrant cohort brings the nation some needed technical and professional skills, illegal immigration and the system's heavy reliance on family reunification yields a sizeable and growing segment of immigrants whose educational deficiencies and low skills parallel those of many black Americans who are struggling to rise out of poverty.

About half of last year's nearly 900,000 legal and illegal immigrants, refugees, asylees and parolees can be expected to enter the labor market. Some 40 to 45 percent of them will settle in six major metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs): New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, Houston and San Francisco-Oakland. Some 5.6 million black Americans, nearly one-fifth of the nation's black population, now live and work in those six MSAs. Perhaps millions more would consider migrating to those cities from high unemployment areas if the job prospects for black Americans were brighter.

Many of the 1989 immigrants, like those in earlier years of the decade, will be forced by their

limited skills to seek employment in occupations in which African-Americans are already over-represented: building services and maintenance, construction, apparel- and other light manufacturing, non-professional health care jobs, and hotel and restaurant work. African-Americans in these occupations understandably would be particularly skeptical about claims of "labor shortages." These fields of work are among those where the stagnation of real wages for the less skilled is greatest, where unemployment is significantly higher than the national average, and where the period of unemployment after displacement or layoff tends to be longer than normal.

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There is little basis for repeated assurances that African-Americans have not been harmed by heavy immigration of the less-skilled during the past two decades. Many of the immigrants compete directly with blacks in the same labor markets and occupations, and have become substitutes for black workers more often than they have become complements.

Studies claiming to show insignificant change in rates of African-American unemployment or labor force participation fail to take into account employment opportunities closed to black Americans who might otherwise migrate to metropolitan labor markets increasingly impacted by immigration. The pervasive effects of ethnic-network recruiting and the spread of non-English languages in the workplace has, in effect, locked many blacks out of occupations where they once predominated. Heavy immigration is affecting the mobility of black workers and altering migration patterns within the United States. The rate of African-American migration to Los Angeles and other major urban areas in California has slowed markedly in the past two decades. Professor Vernon Briggs of Cornell University finds that a major factor in the rising percentage of African-Americans resettling in the south since the 1960s is the resumption of mass immigration into eastern, mid-western and western cities.

African-Americans also pay a higher price for mass immigration than other Americans in terms of its consequences for the quality of public education in major American cities. Department of Education data show the following major urban school districts most impacted by limited English proficiency (LEP)

students and other foreign-born persons requiring special programs to assist their adjustment to US society: Los Angeles Unified, Dade County (Florida), Chicago, San Francisco Unified, New York City, and the Houston Independent School District. Black children, many of whom have severe unmet educational needs, have a major presence in all of these school districts. Shrinking federal and state resources, rising numbers of foreign-born children with special needs, and lack of commitment to quality public education for all in our cities, have ill-served black children, even in well-intentioned school districts.

Unfortunately, I can only conclude that the various bills under consideration in the House will, in varying degrees, worsen all of these problems. Provisions in the Berman, Morrison and Fish bills to allow unlimited immigration of spouses and minor children of permanent resident aliens are likely to double the total legal immigration over the next few years as the current second-preference backlog is absorbed and immediate relatives of nearly 3 million amnestied aliens are admitted. Much of the intake will enter the labor force as low-skilled workers, more likely to compete with black workers than complement them. Since much of this heavy flow is to reunify families, we can reasonably expect an even greater concentration of those admitted in the early 1990s in the five or six top immigrant-receiving MSAs, with further dilution of public education resources in those cities and increased distress for the low-cost housing market.

The Schumer and Morrison bills in the House, like S.358 in the Senate, increase the intake of temporary foreign workers to varying degrees—the Morrison bill significantly. Black Americans reject the assumption of labor shortages underlying all these proposals and would see them as attempts to use immigration policy to loosen a tight labor market that is just now beginning to stimulate employers to offer American minorities, including earlier immigrants, a rare opportunity to gain training, improve their bargaining power, and better their wages, conditions and employment prospects.

I recognize that the bills include presumed safeguards for the competitive position of American workers, such as labor certification in some cases, limits on recruitment of foreign workers, a 9 percent tax on employers, and employer liability for repatriation. But I am convinced that disadvantaged American workers, with their limited political clout, either cannot count on such measures to survive the legislative pruning now underway (indeed, the proposed tax on employers has already dropped from 15 to 9 percent) or to be allowed to function as intended if enacted. The history of the implementation of the migrant labor (Bracero) agreement, the H-2 program, and the other non-immigrant temporary labor

provisions of current law such as H-1 and L-1 suggest that employer concerns can be expected to override workers' interests in the implementation.

I urge members of the Judiciary and Labor committees to resist impulses to rush toward sharp increases in the nation's already high level of immigration, or to use immigration policy to impede or delay the working of natural labor market forces that are highly promising for disadvantaged US workers. Thank you. ■