

Family Values: a Valid Criterion for Immigrants?

by Joseph Daleiden

In the debate on immigration we often hear the curious justification that we should be happy to take in so many immigrants because they have the right sort of family values. I'm not certain what sort of "family values" the proponents have in mind, but international crime statistics do make me question what sort of "family values" we are importing.

The largest number of legal and illegal immigrants come from Mexico. While it is true that America is a violent country compared to other Western industrialized nations, our homicide rate pales in comparison with that of Mexico [See accompanying chart]. According to World Health Organization data, *the homicide rate of Mexican males was 31.5 per 1,000 inhabitants — over twice the 15.9 rate of the U.S.* In fact one reason for the increase in the U.S. crime rate in all categories in recent years has been the huge influx of Mexican immigrants.

Since the majority of immigrants from Mexico come from the lowest socio-economic group, which has the highest crime rate, it is not surprising that they have higher crime rates than even the average for Mexico. The result is higher crime in the U.S. For example, 25 percent of the inmates of federal prisons are foreign-born — the vast majority of these Hispanic.

Of course, to draw attention to the correlation between crime and America's immigration policy is politically incorrect and is thus scrupulously omitted by the media. A Public Radio broadcast dealt with the topic of the sudden rise in crime and gang violence in small towns throughout America. In the course of their interviews of officials in several small

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Male Homicide Rates, Selected Countries per 1,000 inhabitants

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35

Source: World Health Organization, 1994

towns, every gang mentioned had a Hispanic name. But it would have been politically incorrect for PBS to note the obvious correlation between immigration and increased crime, so the interviewers concluded that the increase in crime was due to as yet undetermined social factors.

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The link between massive immigration and higher crime rates is not limited to Mexicans or Hispanics in general. The last wave of immigration at the turn of the century was also accompanied by a rapid increase in crime rates. The murder rate in the United States in 1900 was only 1.2 per 100,000. By 1917, when prohibition was enacted, the murder rate had increased almost six-fold to 6.9 per 100,000. (During Prohibition the homicide rate rose further to 9.7, about the same rate as today.)

Obviously immigration is not the only factor that causes increases in crime. However, it should not be surprising that when we allow the immigration of large numbers of poor, uneducated and unskilled persons the crime rates increase. Nor should it be surprising that the rates of crime by immigrants closely approximate those of the country of their national origin.

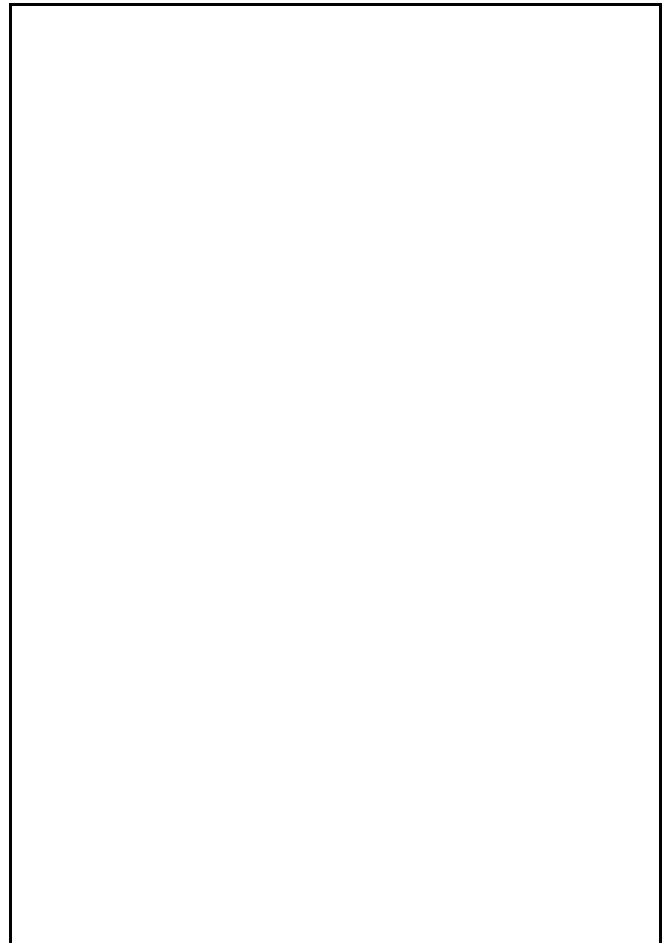
If we used family values as the sole criterion, we would only permit immigration from European and Asian countries where homicide rates (and crime rates in general) are extremely low. But this too would be simplistic. The issue of who we allow in and how many depends on a host of factors including:

- immigration's impact on wage rates,
- job displacement,
- taxes,
- schooling,

- the environment,
- interethnic conflict,
- cultural values, and
- the consequences for future generations.

While beyond the scope of this present article, when these factors are examined, the answer becomes obvious to anyone who examines the issue in depth. First, immigration must be significantly reduced to long-term, sustainable levels — somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000 annually from all sources. And second, the mix of immigrants should be based primarily on the skills America needs rather than being heavily skewed toward the poor and unskilled. With 36 million Americans under the poverty line there is no reason to import more.

There are far more effective ways to alleviate poverty in the rest of the world than by inviting the poor to the United States. **TSC**



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