

Immigration Policy As If People Mattered

by Joseph Daleiden

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Few public policies are as emotionally charged as that of immigration. While working in Washington, D.C. as a consultant to the Office of Management and the Budget, I also had responsibility for implementing an Executive Order requiring an urban and community impact analysis for any new law, agency policy, or major budget initiative. When I indicated that I believed immigration policies should be reviewed to determine their impact on America's cities I was branded by one young lawyer as a racist. For someone who was active during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and worked in support of Cesar Chavez's efforts to organize migrant farmworkers, this came as quite a shock.

In my defense I explained that Canada had virtually shut down the immigration of U.S. citizens in the 1970s to protect job opportunities for Canadians, yet no one claimed that their policy was racially motivated or unfair. "That's different," was the retort, "they were only excluding whites." This person also had no complaint against Mexico's strict prohibition of immigration from Guatemala, I guess because Hispanics can't be construed as racists for prohibiting immigration of other Hispanics.

Those with an ounce of common sense will realize that it is not racist to try to improve job opportunities for America's own poor. There are better ways to help the poor of other nations than by permitting unsustainable rates of immigration. Japan demonstrates a more pragmatic practice with regard to immigration which is,

at the same time, more just. Instead of permitting immigration, which would not be feasible in a country as small as Japan, they export jobs by investing abroad. This not only benefits the Japanese culture and economy but has the advantage of improving the lives of other societies while avoiding the necessity of indigenous populations leaving their families and societies to migrate to Japan.

Investing in industries abroad and lowering trade barriers also allows poor nations to increase their exports to the United States while at the same time allowing U.S. citizens to buy more goods at lower prices. The problem is that lowering trade barriers too quickly also threatens the jobs of employees in the U.S. industries that are affected by the lower cost of imports.

The best and least costly action the United States can take to aid the world's poor would be to provide family planning assistance to help reduce their population growth. A \$10 billion dollar investment toward international family planning would go far in providing the contraception necessary so women of the LDCs can control their birth rates. It is tragically irresponsible, therefore, when the Republican party caves in to the religious right and continues to oppose aid to the United Nation's international family planning programs.

The *Wall Street Journal* is not concerned about American wages or jobs, only about maximizing return on investments. It is not surprising, therefore, that the paper recommends that the United States adopt a constitutional amendment to eliminate our borders. An unlimited supply of cheap labor is the dream of many business people. But let's see how it works out for labor. At present there are about 1.3 billion people in the world, -who earn less than \$0.13 an hour; another 1.6 billion earn between \$0.13 and \$0.37 an hour.¹ At the other end of the spectrum, the average wage in the private economy for Americans was \$12.26 an hour in 1997.² What would happen if we scrapped the borders? America would be flooded by immigrants until the average wage differential between the less-developed countries and the United States would

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reach an equilibrium level - an average of perhaps \$2.00 an hour. In short, open borders would result in the population of America increasing several fold with a commensurate devastation of our environment and the impoverishment of the American laborer.

There is no doubt an inexorable long term trend to a global economy, but it is a *non sequitur* to assume that this must be accompanied by eliminating borders. Every city in America is part of our national economy, yet cities

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have enacted zoning legislation to determine the density, and to some extent the living conditions, of the population they will house. In a sense, borders are a way for a nation to control its density and living conditions.

Someday, when there is greater economic equality among nations, an open policy of migration might be feasible, but that day is a long way off. Today an open border policy is a prescription for disaster. The United States is the only nation in the world that doesn't appear to recognize that fact. We continue to take in more immigrants than the other nations combined.³ Our policy cannot be justified in terms of either economics or justice.

Charges of xenophobia or racism are a smoke screen to hide the lack of substantive arguments against controlling immigration. The proponents of today's immigration policies often like to truncate the debate by charging that any one who seeks to implement sustainable immigration policies is a racist or xenophobe. Name calling is often an effective ploy to stifle discussion in the absence of logic and facts.

Let's put the demands of the immigration lobbies in perspective. Suppose I decide I'm fed up with America and want to emigrate to France. Although they are under no obligation to do so, suppose the French people generously agree to let me immigrate and offer me the opportunity of becoming a citizen. Rather than being grateful, a few weeks later I go to the appropriate ministries and present a list of my demands:

- I want the right to put my wife, parents, children (both underage and adults), brothers, and sisters all at the head of the list of future immigration

applicants.

- I object to the French requirement that I be able to show that I have the means to support these relatives.
- I want my children educated in French schools at taxpayers expense and I insist that they have special English-speaking teachers and courses in English for an unlimited transition period while they learn to speak French.
- I want the French people to pick up any emergency medical costs, such as my wife having a baby.
- I demand that I and my American relatives be given priority in job hiring over French people, because as a former American I am part of a minority group in France.
- I want the relatives I bring over to be eligible for welfare if they can't find jobs, and my parents to be eligible for social security benefits. (These two last requirements are denied and I grumble that it is typical of the mean-spirited French people.)

It's time for the majority of Americans to say “enough” to the absurd charges of xenophobia leveled at the most generous nation in the world and take control of our nation's future. TSC

NOTES

¹ E. O. Wilson, *Consilience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), p.282.

² *Economic Report of the President Transmitted to Congress, February, 1998*, table B-47, p.336.

³ Garrett Hardin, “There Is No Global Population Problem,” *The Humanist*, (July/August 1989). See also, Don Feder, “Grandad and the New Tribe,” *The Social Contract*, (Summer 1993), p.287.