# A Revised Look at a Persistent Problem

*An Expanded Edition of Carol Swain's* Debating Immigration

**MARTIN WITKERK**

The first edition of *Debating Immigration* was published in 2007, late in the Presidency of George W. Bush, and was reviewed by Steve Sailer in the Spring 2008 edition of *TSC*. A lot has happened in eleven years: eight years of Obama administration enthusiasm for any and all immigrants (except white South Africans), followed by Donald Trump's surprise victory due mainly to his restrictionist rhetoric.

In this new edition, half a dozen essays have been dropped and ten new ones added, including four by the editor herself. Many of the essays held over from the first edition have been updated, and the book as a whole is significantly larger. Carol Swain's new contributions include a review of legislative changes in immigration law since 1965, an essay on Obama's attempted amnesty by executive order, a list of fifteen specific policy recommendations, and a new conclusion.

John D. Skrentny reports that, decades of nondiscrimination legislation notwithstanding, pattern recognition is alive and well among America's employers. Many speak with surprising freedom to sociologists about the relative desirability of different ethnic groups as employees. Specifically, many prefer Asians and Latinos to whites or (especially) blacks. The manager of an Atlanta construction company says of his Mexican employees: "I love the little fuckers. They get into their work and shimmy up and down those frames of a house and jump back and forth. And the whole time they smile and say 'Need anything else done?'" A factory manager (race unspecified) states matter-of-factly: "The white factory worker is a whining piece of shit. They never make enough money, they always work too hard, they never want to work over eight hours a day, and they feel that, as soon as you hire them, you owe them."

Of course, these are not necessarily innate racial differences: if they were, we would expect Mexico to be more prosperous than the United States. Instead, as Skrentny writes:

> Migrants typically bring an entirely different attitude to the workplace, accepting temporary conditions that are substandard for the host nation's context because the wage differentials with their homeland make acceptance worth it—and the migrants may perceive the conditions as only temporary anyway.

This may help explain why, for instance, "the workers who helped rebuild New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina were about 50 percent Latino, though the city was only 3 percent Latino."

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Peter Skerry laments the "religious zeal and moral certainty" which predominate in the popular debate on immigration. His undergraduate students casually dismiss fellow citizens with reservations about mass immigration as "racists and bigots." They are also "extremely reluctant to view immigrants as risk-takers making rational choices," preferring to see them as "victims of global forces beyond their control." Skerry struggles to make students understand that many immigrants "exploit themselves"—perceiving their situation as temporary, they are willing to "put up with unpleasant, even dangerous working conditions, and to crowd into substandard living quarters to maximize their savings."

This short-term mindset also explains some of the traits Americans dislike about immigrants. The tendency of immigrant neighborhoods to become run down leaves Americans with a bad impression of the inhabitants, but may result from an understandable reluctance to invest heavily in residences viewed as temporary.

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*Martin Witkerk writes from the mid-Atlantic region and has a Ph.D. in philosophy from Tulane University.*

Skerry believes that public interest organizations such as MALDEF are responsible for much of the crusading zeal which makes rational debate of immigration policy difficult. Created by the Ford Foundation in 1968, MALDEF remains heavily dependent upon it for financing. They are, therefore, under pressure to demonstrate to donors that their contributions are "making a difference." This can most easily be done by militant posturing which generates publicity, even though the result is a stalemate which does nothing to benefit ordinary Mexican Americans.
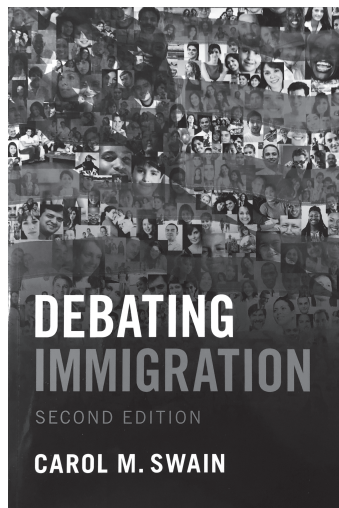
Skerry also laments the over-emphasis on the legal/illegal distinction. If the only objection to illegal immigration were its illegality, the problem could be solved with an amnesty. In fact, most of the harm done by illegal immigration also results from mass legal immigration. When asked by pollsters, Americans greatly exaggerate the undocumented as a proportion of all immigrants. Skerry believes this is because elites have focused on illegal immigration "as a useful way to simplify a tricky issue."

But the best new addition to *Debating Immigration* is Philip Cafaro's essay "The Progressive Argument for Reducing Immigration into the United States." Like Skerry, he expresses distaste for the sanctimony of the pro-immigration crowd, which he has frequently experienced personally from his progressive friends. "Acknowledging trade-offs," he writes, "is the beginning of wisdom on the topic of immigration." He makes the need for painful trade-offs clear with anecdotes about two hardworking men he knows.

Javier was trained as an electrician in his native Mexico, but found he would have to pay corrupt officials the equivalent of two years' wages up front just to start a job. When Cafaro suggests Mexico might need more people like Javier to stay and fight corruption, he laughs at the idea that Mexico could ever change. So he entered the U.S. illegally in 1989, working in food preparation and construction. One of the things he likes about the United States, ironically, is that rules here are better and more fairly enforced than back home. He pays his taxes, gives his employers value for money, and despises fellow immigrants who steal or leach off the system. Now he has a wife (also illegal) and two children; were they deported to Mexico, he fears he might not be able to support them.

Tom sprays custom finishes on drywall; since 1989 he has operated his own small company. In the 1980s, almost all workers in this business were Americans; today, 50 to 70 percent are immigrants. Tom must bid on individual jobs, competing against guys who hire illegals and therefore don't have to pay insurance, workmen's compensation, or taxes, which add 40 percent to his payroll budget. When immigrants are hurt or worn out on the job, his competitors simply discard and replace them: the bosses higher up the food chain keep the profits. So Tom must drive ever farther to find work, "fighting for scraps." He scoffs at the idea of "jobs Americans won't do," pointing out that working on drywall is dirty and messy, which is precisely why he used to be able to make good money doing it.

Moral: there may not be any possible immigration policy that would guarantee fairness to both Javier and Tom. Other difficult trade-offs that must be faced by any honest policymaker include:

> Cheaper prices for new houses vs. good wages for construction workers.

> Accommodating more people in the US vs. preserving wildlife habitat and vital environmental resources.

> More opportunities for foreigners to work in the U.S. vs. greater pressure on foreign elites to share wealth and opportunities with their fellow citizens.

"The most ethically justifiable approaches to immigration," he writes, "will make such trade-offs explicit, minimize them where possible, and choose fairly between them when necessary."

Cafaro then turns to a demonstration that current immigration patterns lower working-class wages by increasing competition for unskilled jobs. One striking example: wages in the meatpacking industry, which has become heavily dependent on immigrant labor, have declined by *44 percent* since 1970.

The wealth that is lost to the native working class is transferred to bosses and stockholders, greatly exacerbating class inequality. Yet America's "party of equality," the Democrats, failed to field a single candidate for President in 2016 who did not support large increases in our already high levels of immigration.

> Well-off professionals whose work is intrinsically rewarding should be grateful to people like meat cutters, garbage men, and cleaning ladies, who do society's tough, dangerous, or monotonous work. We know this work needs to be done. We know that our less-educated fellow-citizens wind up doing it and need to do it, to earn a living and to secure their own self-respect. So, we should do all we can to

improve wages and working conditions in these jobs.

Cafaro acknowledges that this argument may not be persuasive to globalists, who might correctly point out that the gains to our own workers would correspond to losses for deserving foreigners like Javier. To these critics he says:

> There is something morally obtuse in a view that says let's spread *your* (native working-class workers') wealth around to poor immigrants, while *I* (successful, well-educated professional) reap the benefits of cheaper gardeners, nannies, lawn-care service, and restaurant meals—all while enjoying a profound feeling of moral superiority for my enlightened views.

> American is a relatively wealthy nation. Arguably, Americans should look for ways to share our wealth so that it benefits poor people overseas. *But we shouldn't do it on the backs of those least able to afford it here in our own country.*

Amen to that. Cafaro's essay should be mandatory reading for those students of Skerry's who feel so certain all immigration opponents are "racists and bigots."

I do not agree with Cafaro's assumption (now commonplace) that environmental protection is a specifically "progressive" cause. But this does not invalidate his demonstration that continued mass immigration could have disastrous consequences for the natural environment. He does not consider the possibility that Mexicans may have insufficient respect for the environment, a thought which forces itself on North American visitors to Mexico, who find roadsides strewn with litter as soon as they cross the border. But his point regarding sheer numbers is valid:

> Whether we look at air pollution or wildlife habitat losses, greenhouse gas emissions or excessive water withdrawals from western

rivers, Americans are falling far short of creating an ecologically sustainable society—and our large and growing numbers appear top be a big part of the problem.

Americans have, in fact, made many improvements in efficiency since the 1970s, but we have not gotten to enjoy the benefits since they have been counterbalanced by population growth.

> Reading news stories about the drought, you might never learn that per capita water use declined by 50 percent in California over the last 40 years, due to extensive conservation efforts. That's because total water use is as high as ever, due to an immigration fueled doubling of the state's population over the same period.

A recent study found that "70 percent of recent sprawl in the U.S. can be attributed to immigration populations growth." Efficiency without control of immigration merely "locks in a belief in the possibility and goodness of perpetual growth."

Each additional half million annual immigrants we admit today will snowball to a total population increase of 70 million people by century's end. Cafaro projects future American population growth under three different scenarios: retaining our current immigration levels of 1.25 million per year, letting in an extra million per year, and cutting one million for an annual total of 250,000. Under the restrictionist scenario, U.S. population will stabilize during this century, rising little thereafter. Currently we are on track to rise to 524 million by 2100. By opening the floodgates, as advocated by many of Cafaro's fellow progressives, America would reach 669 million in 2100, swelling to the size of India after another hundred years.

Don't think it can't happen. As I write, every Democrat in the U.S. Senate has signed onto a proposal to abolish border enforcement, ban the arrest of illegal aliens, and permit uncontrolled travel to and from the United States. ∎

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We should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of his creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American…. There can be no divided allegiance here.

—President Theodore Roosevelt, 1919
(*Debating Immigration*, epigraph, page 140)