Border Visions and Immigration Reform

ENDNOTES


3 The Senate bill considers high-risk border sectors as those “where apprehensions are above 10,000 individuals per year.”

4 Of the nine Border Patrol sectors along the 1,954 mile U.S./Mexico border, three are considered high-risk based on fiscal year 2012 data: Tucson (112,010, approximately); Rio Grande Valley (97,762), and Laredo (44,872). In 2011 Tucson had an effectiveness rate of 80.9 percent, Rio Grande Valley had an effectiveness rate of 10.8 percent, and Laredo had an effectiveness rate of 94 percent. Illegal entry data will include only the immigrants detected by Border Patrol, and not those who cross without notice. See Ian Gordon, “The Machinery,” Migration Policy Institute, January, 2013, available at www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/enforcementpillars.pdf.

5 Doris Meissner, Donald M. Kerwin, Muzaffar Chishti, and Claire Bergeron, Border Crossings: 2012 annual report. The Institute is a collaboration of Loyola University New Orleans and the Center on Immigration and Social Development, 2013.


10 Exceptions here are for children who entered the U.S. as children (DREAMers) and people granted agricultural work status.


JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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The MISSION of the JESUIT SOCIAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Jesuit Social Research Institute works to transform the Gulf South through action research, analysis, education, and advocacy on the core issues of poverty, race, and migration. The Institute is a collaboration of Loyola University New Orleans and the Society of Jesus rooted in the faith that does justice.

A major criticism leveled against recent newcomers to the United States is that they are “takers” creating an economic drain on the nation. Not only are they takers, critics lament, but also categorically “illegal,” rendering past racist associations of criminality with African-Americans and many other people of color.

These criticisms of newcomers are old in U.S. history. Various strains of economic utilitarianism and racism have reared their ugly heads throughout U.S. history to render the latest newcomer less than human and unworthy of citizenship.

Recognizing these historical parallels in the current immigration debate is critical for two reasons: so we do not repeat the conflicts that have pitted Americans against one another in the past and so we achieve a truly common good today.

In the 2013 debate over immigration reform, critics have focused on the economic burden of new immigrants to the near exclusion of the benefits they provide to society. The Heritage Foundation released a report on May 6, 2013, “The Fiscal Cost of Unlawful Immigrants and Amnesty to the U.S. Taxpayer,” that epitomizes this specious argument.

The Heritage Foundation report contends that immigrants always will be dependant on government supports. The “bottom line” of the Heritage Foundation’s study “Even if all the children of unlawful immigrants graduated from college, they would be hard-pressed to pay back $6.3 trillion in costs over their lifetime.” In other words, so-called “unlawful immigrants” over the next fifty years will only be an economic burden on the nation with no hope for becoming an economic benefit.

The American Conservative Union, the libertarian Cato Institute, and the progressive Applied Research Center immediately criticized the method and content of the Heritage Foundation Study. A major flaw of the Heritage Foundation study is that the economic benefit immigrants bring up well beyond how much any household receives in benefits minus how much it pays in taxes. Numerous longitudinal studies examining the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) demonstrate that not only does...
In Praise of Newcomers

As Noel Ignatiev explains in How the Irish Became White, when the newly arrived Irish were considered a threat to American society, they were told that they and blacks "need not apply." The Irish learned that by joining in anti-black racism they could become white and gain economic ascendency.

We devalue human life when we reduce human persons to units of economic production and categorize an entire group of people as "unlawful." The danger is not only in how we treat newcomers in our midst. A greater danger is how racism and economic utilizationism tear apart human community and human, moral, practical, and spiritual commitments that bind us together as sacred and social beings.

In their now classic examination of American individualism, Habits of the Heart, Robert Bellah and colleagues warned us of the threat the economic utilizationism poses to a good society. Habits of the Heart invited Americans to reflect on two contradictory good societies. Every group has contributed to the good society. Every group has contributed to the bad society. Every group has contributed to the bad society.

In Praise of Newcomers

No group of newcomers has ever created any kind of loss for American society. Every group has contributed to the growth and development of society in many ways that go well beyond cost-benefit analysis.

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Cutting SNAP Food Benefits

SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly food stamps) truly is the nation’s last “safety net,” providing food to people whose incomes are below certain levels and providing nutrition assistance at levels depending on income and family size. The majority in the U.S. House of Representatives continues to try to cut SNAP benefits, now arguing that the program is “broken” and must be “reformed” because the SNAP budget has continued to rise even after 2009 when “official” unemployment started its downward trend. But, as defenders say quite accurately, SNAP is doing precisely what it was designed to do, which is to meet basic food needs of a population that continues to suffer “unusually high unemployment, reduced incomes and limited job opportunities…”

Throwing Away Jobs

Our Gulf South governors and legislatures, with very high levels of unemployment, unemployable, and underutilized workers, this year are adding the most shortsighted and cynical burden to their states’ most needy workers by refusing the expansion of Medicaid offered under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). Because of their opposition to “Obamacare,” they are turning away the enormous federal infusion of health coverage provided under PPACA and, in so doing, losing, not just health coverage for hundreds of thousands of citizens, but a great opportunity to improve the jobs picture in their states.

In the Gulf South states, some estimates for job creation under PPACA include approximately 9,000 new jobs in Mississippi, 13,680 new jobs in Louisiana, and 231,000 or 307,000 new jobs in Texas.

It is bad enough when millions of people are unemployed, or underemployed, or underutilized. Reducing unemployment benefits to the longterm unemployed, cutting food aid, reducing health coverage, and throwing away jobs, however, vividly embodies the old adage about “kicking a person when he is down.”

ENDNOTES


3 Ibid., No. 3, emphasis in original.

4 Pope Francis, Address to the New Nuncios Ambassadors to the Holy See, Kingdom, Antigua and Barbuda, Luxembourg and Beninca, May 16, 2013.


7 Ibid.


9 Center for Mississippi Health Policy, Medicaid Expansion: An Overview of Recent Impacts in Mississippi, November 2012, p. 4.

10 Families USA and Louisiana Community Health Advocates, Facing Our Future Now: Expanding Medicaid, February 2013, p. 13.