

ALIENnation

The future of immigration in the United States

America should remain the land of opportunity



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America is the country of immigrants. It started allowing people to go to a new land and settle down on it. The country of liberty and equal opportunities was open to anyone.

But that was a long time ago. Since then the situation has changed. Now there are strict laws regulating immigration. The door to the country of opportunities is closed.

The explanation is the political situation of the United States. America needed a certain number of people to get started as a nation, as a new country.

"But why on earth," you may ask me, "do we need immigrants now?"

For some reason Americans forget that their own ancestors were the same immigrants on this foreign land, the same strangers in the New World; they are not tolerant and show no sympathy to the immigrants.

This country should renew its population, since immigrants contribute to population growth. I'm talking about a "fresh flood" that flows from abroad. America succeeded partially because new, talented people were coming here who wanted to change this place of living to a better one.

Of course, not every alien who comes to this country is talented and makes valuable contributions to its development. So is this a reason to close the doors of immigration, just because not everyone can succeed here?

The country must give opportunities of living to the citizens of other countries. The other question will be, should this opportunity be given to all of them? To me, if the laws of immigration allow just anyone to find asylum here, it will be nonsensical.

So who should be allowed to enter? People who can contribute something (their knowledge and themselves) into this society. I would prefer immigrants who received good education and are able to bring new ideas rather than those who just left schools and all of a sudden decided that they certainly should live in America.

The power of the United States is in its people. A multicultural society can't exist without new people from other cultures joining it. People come here legally and illegally. The most painful is the procedure of getting a visa.

There are a great variety of visas. Two main types of visas are nonimmigrant and immigrant. The latter is usually known as a "green card." People who have it are given financial aid in the very beginning to help start a new life in this country.

This country helps immigrants, people who come and stay here, receive American citizenship and stay in America for the rest of their lives. Some educational programs, which are different, sponsor international students. Students who come here from other countries are not necessarily staying here for the rest of their lives.

Why should America care about people from different countries while forgetting about its own nation? There are a lot of complaints recently that Malaysian students in our university receive financial aid. America is helping them because of the economic crisis in Malaysia. The university pays for their education here.

American students feel this is not fair that some Malaysians are paid by the American government. But is it so bad that the United States should extend this helping hand to

other nations?

I am another example. It's not a secret to anyone that I'm an alien here. I'm an exchange student for one year. My program is sponsored by the Information Agency of the United States. I was sent here to experience life in a different society, with different rules, people and, of course, a different educational system.

The American government decided to spend money on my cultural exchange program, because the participants of it - developing in American society - want to bring changes into their societies when they return home. As they see the advantages of American education, they find things that can be applied to other countries. This way the United States contributes money to international relations.

The only problem with educational programs, according to statistics, is that 25 to 30 percent of legal residents in the United States, who are already in the country, tend to adjust or change status from a temporary visa to a permanent visa. A student visa is changed to a green card.

There are so many debates about immigration and its effects these days. Many people believe that the number of immigrants influences the number of job opportunities in America. The availability of jobs decreases with every immigrant coming to the country; the labor market is already overloaded with immigrants, some say. Americans are deprived of work, others say.

But that's not true. Most immigrants have few working skills, especially those who came recently. Do Americans need the same jobs immigrants do? Hard work for almost nothing - that's what they do.

For example, nearly all workers in dining rooms on our campus are international students. In part, this is because we, aliens, are not allowed to work off campus. But mostly it's because this work is low-paying and "dirty" and there's no way American students will do it.

Still, the number of legal immigrants is reduced by the government each year. Next year only 27,000 green cards will be issued annually, instead of 55,000 per year as it is now.

We can only guess at the consequences of this reduction. It will definitely change both the economic and political standing of the United States.

Illegal aliens threaten rights of legal citizens



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You have no idea how much it pains me to introduce a column with a President Clinton quote. But I think that the president wasn't too far off the mark when he said, during his 1995 State of the Union address, "We are a nation of immigrants. But we are also a nation of laws."

"It is wrong and ultimately self-defeating for a nation of immigrants to permit the kind of abuse of our migration laws we have seen in recent years, and we must do more to stop it."

We are undeniably a nation of immigrants. Many of us are the descendants of those tired, poor and huddled masses that came here to find the life they couldn't live in their native homelands. They came from every continent, every country and every land in search of a more fulfilling life.

Many came here relatively recently. Many of our ancestors, my own included, arrived in this country just a few generations ago.

With that said, it would be ridiculous for me to blame anyone for wanting to come here and start a new life today. It would be hypocritical of me to claim that the country that welcomed my great-grandparents years ago should today close its borders and disallow any influx of people wishing to better their lives.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that our country does have a problem with immigration today. The problem is not with immigration itself. Legal immigration can create benefits for its participants and for the country as a whole.

It is illegal immigration that causes problems and builds stereotypes. Disregard of U.S. migration law only causes problems for American citizens, especially those who immigrated here legally.

In order to deal with any

problem, we must first know the extent of it. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, there were about 5 million undocumented immigrants residing in the United States as of October 1996. The population of undocumented immigrants was estimated to be growing by at least 275,000 each year. The two states with the largest number of illegal aliens were California, with an estimated 2 million, and Texas, with 700,000.

In Texas, the state most directly in contact with the problems of illegal immigration, the general sentiment of citizens confirm the fact that illegal immigration has become a major problem and that more needs to be done about it.

A poll taken by the Austin American-Statesman in November 1997 showed that 82 percent of the 1,000 people surveyed considered illegal immigration a serious or very serious problem, and 61 percent said the federal government isn't doing enough to correct the problem.

Even when sorted by ethnic groups, the respondents who believed that illegal immigration is a serious problem in the state and in the rest of the country remained in the majority.

Eighty-six percent of non-Hispanic whites, 72 percent of blacks and 69 percent of Hispanics surveyed thought that illegal immigration had become a serious problem.

Now it isn't that the Texans surveyed believe that all immigration is a problem. The poll goes on to find that 71 percent of the respondents agreed that "there are positive benefits from legal or authorized immigration."

What the Texans seem to realize, as should the rest of the nation, is that legal and illegal immigration are completely separate entities, and they should be viewed as such.

Immigration, when authorized and executed legally, can be a positive and beneficial experience for the immigrant and for all of America. The United States offers legal immigrants the land of opportunity, and legal immigrants offer the United States additional resources to the labor market. Immigrants often provide labor in jobs that many Americans refuse to take. Their help in these areas is necessary to keep many industries alive.

Illegal immigration, on the other hand, can lead to many negatives in society. One of the biggest of these is the formation of prejudices and stereotypes toward a dominant migrant group, like Hispanics in the United States. These stereotypes often carry over to negatively affect those immigrants who arrived in the country legally.

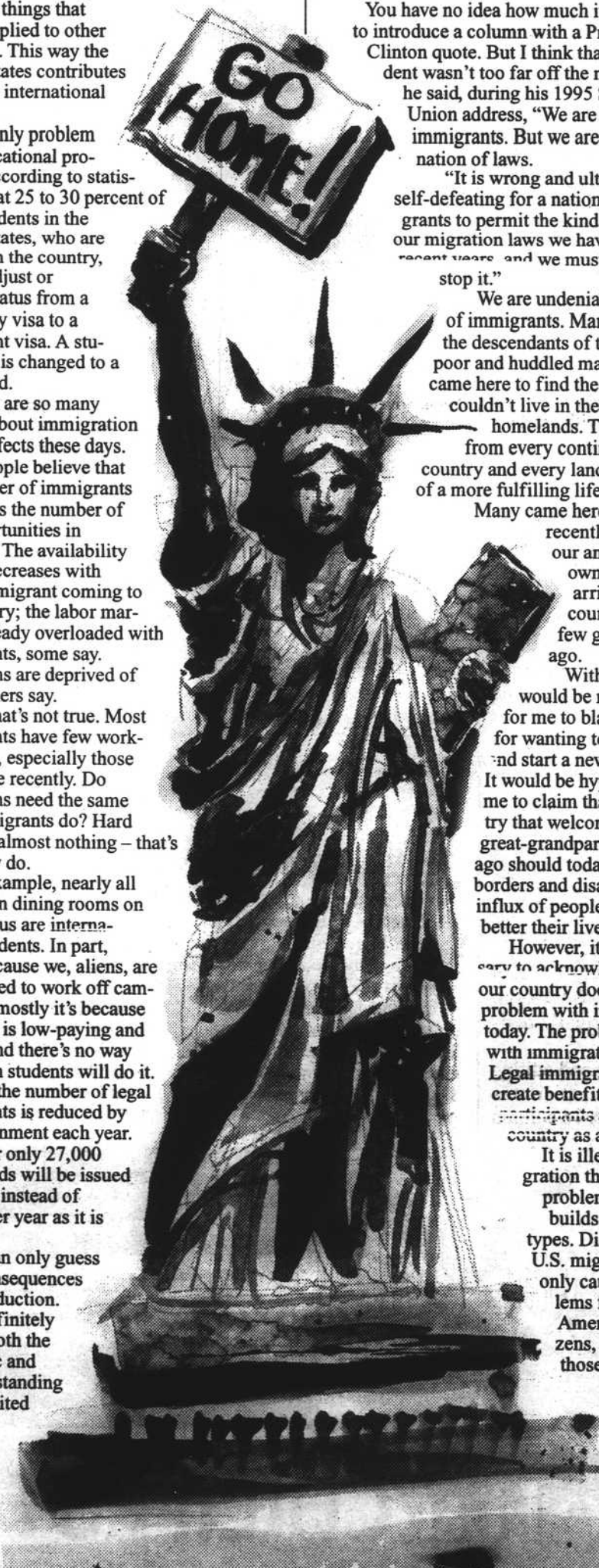
Illegal immigrants, simply by their residence in this country, show disregard for American laws. This disrespect for the law leads to another problem with illegal immigration, and that is the crimes that illegal aliens often commit while they reside here.

Overcrowded prisons are often a complaint in areas with a high level of illegal immigration. In addition, narcotics often find their way to this country across the border, smuggled in by aliens.

These problems, along with many others, were a major reason that the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act passed in 1996. This act was designed to tighten controls on illegal immigration. It allows for significant additions to the border patrol, greater work-site enforcement and verification, increases in resources to combat alien smuggling and aids in the removal of deportable aliens.

It is a step in the right direction for effectively curbing illegal immigration in the future.

As the president said, we are undoubtedly a nation of immigrants. And it should be our responsibility, as a nation of immigrants, to ensure the right of others to legally migrate here in the future by successfully terminating the problem of illegal immigration today.



MELANIE FALK/DN