



Immigration into the United States

Helped Build our Nation's Strength

What would America's population have been without immigrants? Zero. But even allowing for immigration only until 1800 would have had a dramatic impact on our population. The 5.3 million people in America in 1800 would (if they grew at the unrealistically high rate of 4% annually), have reached 36 million by 1930. Instead, the US population at that time was 123 million. This would have been in comparison with the population of Germany and Japan (in both nations it was about 65 million). Our oil and steel output dwarfed theirs, as did our production of ships, tanks, and planes. Finally, our large population and economy positioned us to fight the Cold War against the USSR.

Immigrants Helped Expand the Economy & Didn't Lower Wages

Did immigrants bring down wages? From 1890 to 1919, when the US saw 15 million immigrants come to our shores (our 1914 population was only about 100 million), real wages increased by 43 percent. It is hard to look at all the immigration we have enjoyed throughout our nation's history, and see any economic downside. Clearly Americans are much wealthier than they were in 1900, or 1800, for that matter.

Immigrants can help wages stay high, because more people working means more people creating wealth for the business that employs them, as well as more people with paychecks who buy food, clothing, cars, housing, and entertainment. Additionally, immigrants are more likely to start businesses than natives. Immigrants started 28% of the new businesses in the US in 2011, even though they were only 13% of the overall population.

Assimilated despite concerns that they wouldn't

The thing I find most ironic about the immigration debate is the historical cycles of immigration. People in the heights of the Irish immigration in the 1840s, or the Italian immigration in the 1890s, weren't sure at all that those immigrants would assimilate. But within a few generations (if not before), of course that is exactly what happened. By the turn of the century, immigration opponent Senator Henry Cabot Lodge explained the assimilation of Irish immigrants from earlier decades, because they spoke English, the language of the US. Surely today's descendants of the Italian and Slavic immigrants from Lodge's era would insist they are Americans.