

THE OPPENHEIMER REPORT

## CONSIDER THE REAL COSTS OF IMMIGRATION CRACKDOWN

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OK, you anti-immigration isolationist flag-wavers out there, let's assume for a minute that we do things your way and deny 12 million undocumented workers a reasonable path to U.S. citizenship. Let me tell you why that would not only be unfair, but also would affect your own interests.

First, forget the 1968 riots in Los Angeles, or the 1980 violence in Miami's Liberty City. You would be creating an underclass of alienated aliens like the Muslim youths that carried out the "French Intifada" in the suburbs of Paris in 2005 -- only much worse. You would have 12 million second-class citizens -- mostly Hispanics -- who would not only be disenfranchised from mainstream society, but who would be legally barred from aspiring to join it. That would be a recipe for frustration, anger and rebellion.

Second, closing the doors to citizenship -- or demanding a typical family of five to pay more than \$64,000 and wait 25 years before they could apply for citizenship, as the Coalition for Comprehensive Immigration Reform estimates would require under a recently circulated White House immigration proposal -- may discourage future would-be immigrants from moving North, but would not begin to address the problem of those already here. Few of them would voluntarily return to their native countries.

Third, massive deportations of hard-working people would not only be morally questionable, but socially and economically insane.

There are an estimated 3.1 million children born in the United States whose parents do not have legal immigration papers, according to the Pew Research Center. These children are U.S. citizens. Their parents -- who came here in hopes of a better future -- would not take them back to a life of poverty in their home countries. Are you proposing giant government-paid orphanages? Massive and expensive foster care?

And how would this country pay for deporting the undocumented? According to the Center for American Progress, deportation would conservatively cost \$206 billion over the next five years. That's more than six times the \$34.2 billion Department of Homeland Security budget for last year.

Fourth, undocumented workers nowadays fill about 1.4 million jobs in the construction industry, 1.2 million jobs in the leisure and hospitality industries, and hundreds of thousands of jobs in the agriculture industry. If they are deported, who will take their place?

If there were enough U.S. citizens willing to take up those jobs for higher wages -- the favorite argument of hyperventilating fearmongers on cable television -- American consumers would have to pay much more for housing, eating out at a restaurant, or buying food at a supermarket.

Soon, U.S. agricultural firms would move their farms to Mexico and other countries. The United States would not only be dependent on foreign oil, but increasingly dependent on foreign food.

Fifth, deporting the undocumented or putting unrealistic hurdles in the path to citizenship, as the White House is considering, would create political havoc in Mexico, and worsen social tensions throughout Latin America.

Deportees returning to their home countries would dramatically drive up unemployment, and deprive some of the region's poorest communities of the \$60 billion a year that Latin Americans living in the United States send home in family remittances every year. In several countries, that's by far the biggest source of foreign income.

An unstable Mexico would not only hurt the U.S. economy, but could make it much easier for Islamic terrorists to use the U.S. border as a springboard for terrorist attacks on United States.

There are several other major reasons for not closing the doors to citizenship, which you can find on my blog, [www.andresoppenheimer.blogspot.com](http://www.andresoppenheimer.blogspot.com).

My conclusion: Granted, we need immigration reform. And I have no problem with plans to demand that immigrants be required to pass a tougher English language test, or be asked to pay reasonable penalties for having come here without proper documents.

But closing the door to citizenship, or making it an unrealistically expensive and long process, would not only hurt the U.S. economy but would create the seeds of a Hispanic intifada at home -- and chaos on our borders.

We should do exactly the opposite: reward hard-working, tax-paying people with a way to fulfill the American dream, the way it has always been.