

Conference on Democracy
Perspectives on Immigration Policy
Friday, 10/13/06, B-Block (9:50 – 11:10)

Presenters:

JuanCarlos Arauz – Youth Programs Director, Canal Community Alliance

Dr. Irene Bloemraad - Assistant Professor of Sociology, UC Berkeley. Author of the forthcoming book “Becoming a Citizen,” which compares immigrants’ acquisition of citizenship and political participation in the US and Canada.

Mariana Bustamante – Public Education Coordinator of the national ACLU Immigrants’ Rights Project

Ray Haynes (R) – California Assemblyman, District 66

Framing Questions:

1. As a prompt for a 5-minute opening statement from each of the panelists: Why is the issue of immigration policy important to you? Can you briefly summarize your work regarding this issue?
2. What are the pros and cons of closing the border to illegal and legal immigration? What are some alternatives to closing the border that may work for today’s economy?
3. What may be some of the pros and cons of deporting all illegal immigrants in the US?
4. In 1986, the US granted citizenship to illegal aliens, do you think something like the IRCA (Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986) could work today? Why or why not?
5. So what are our options now? Given the large population of illegal immigrants in the US, what do we do? Where do we start?
6. If a people in the audience want to find out more and/or take action on the issue of immigration policy, who should they contact?

A Summary of the Main Issues that the Panel will Most Likely Address:

"The Current Debate over U.S. Immigration Law." DISCovering Multicultural America. Online Edition. Gale, 2003. Student Resource Center. Thomson Gale. 19 September 2006
<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/SRC>

The high level of illegal immigration from Mexico and other Latin American countries has fueled continuing debate about U.S. immigration policies. Beginning in the early 1970s, Congress, along with Presidents Nixon and Ford, assembled high-level commissions to study the problem, with no tangible results.

President Jimmy Carter appointed the bipartisan Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy to forge a consensus in Congress and to propose solutions. The commission went through hundreds of reports on trends in immigration and their effects on the nation and held a long series of hearings throughout the country.

The commission's final report was issued in 1981 and is entitled U.S. Immigration Policy in the National Interest. The report states, "The United States is disturbed by immigration. The very fact that so many come outside of the law or abuse their nonimmigrant visas is troubling in a nation which prides itself on respect for law generally, and for its legal immigration system specifically."

Once separated from the fear and deception of racist sentiments, the current immigration policy debate involves three key issues: control of U.S. borders, economic interests of the United States, and enforcement of U.S. immigration law. There is genuine concern over the nation's ability to humanely control immigration at its borders. As the number of undocumented immigrants apprehended at the U.S.-Mexican border rises, so does concern over regaining control of the rate of immigration. There is also illegal immigration from the north, but the numbers are smaller, and there is a higher proportion of native English-speakers who look American in appearance.

If the United States is to maintain an immigration policy consistent with the American notion of an open society, while at the same time limiting immigration to serve the national interest, most national policymakers believe that immigration must be controlled. But border enforcement must also be equitable and must maintain an open society. Limits imposed because of color, race, nationality, or religion are not fair. Moreover, those who are admitted must be allowed the full rights of participation in U.S. society.

The U.S. economy is a key force behind illegal immigration as well as a major cause for American concern about it. In much of Mexico, especially in rural areas, finding employment is extremely difficult, and a job pays only a small fraction of the minimum wage in the United States. Similar economic pressures encourage immigration from other countries, but illegal immigration is most practical for Mexicans and Central Americans, who can reach the United States by land. In southwestern states, certain U.S. industries depend on undocumented laborers, who work hard for very low pay and who seldom complain. Thus, illegal immigration is welcomed by many employers. As history demonstrates, the United States typically welcomes immigrants in times of economic growth and labor shortages, and repels them during economic hard times.

The economic effects of illegal immigration are intensely argued today. Some argue that undocumented laborers steal jobs from American workers and that undocumented aliens abuse the welfare and social services system. However, others argue and several studies demonstrate that undocumented laborers actually create jobs and thereby bolster the national economy. Furthermore, the data show that undocumented aliens rarely use any form of public assistance and, for the most part, are ineligible for government assistance because of their immigration status. Immigration policy should take into account the economic impact on the national economy, but it must first carefully examine labor needs and the actual effects of illegal immigration.

Enforcement of U.S. immigration law is a key issue in the immigration debate. Once policy is set and law is enacted, it should be enforced fairly. Our immigration laws should reestablish and maintain a consistent, practicable and humane rule of law.

Hispanic Immigration

"Hispanic Immigration." DISCovering Multicultural America. Online Edition. Gale, 2003. Student Resource Center. Thomson Gale. 19 September 2006
<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/SRC>

Since the late 1960s, two major factors affecting immigration to the United States have become clear: an increase in the rate of undocumented immigration and a shift from Europe to Asia as the predominant source of immigration. Despite annual fluctuations, Latin America, dominated by Mexico, has maintained its proportionate contribution, while it has increased its total contribution of immigrants to the United States substantially, both in legal and undocumented immigration.

In the period from 1955 to 1964, 50.2 percent of all legal immigrants to the United States were from Europe, with rates declining to 10.1 percent in 1988. Immigration from Asia, meanwhile, increased from 7.7 percent during 1955-64 to 41.1 percent in 1988. Immigration from the Americas during this period increased from 41.1 percent to 44.3 percent. In 1989, immigration from the Americas rose to 61.4 percent. Of the major countries, Mexico accounted for 37.1 percent of total documented immigration to the United States, the next highest number of immigrants being from El Salvador, 5.3 percent, the Philippines, 5.2 percent, Vietnam, 3.5 percent, Korea, 3.1 percent, and China, 3.0 percent. Between 1985 and 1989, immigration accounted for 2.7 percent of the nation's net population growth, with rates varying from 1.8 percent of whites, 2.1 percent of blacks, 15.5 percent of Hispanics, and 29.7 percent of the increase for other races.

Several formal and informal programs have been established to encourage immigration of workers to the United States. The best-known forms of organized labor recruitment have involved agricultural workers from Mexico and Puerto Rico. These include the mechanisms in the Bracero Program and Operation Bootstrap. Labor recruitment by the U.S. Farm Placement Service to encourage labor migration for temporary seasonal employment has also influenced permanent settlement patterns. The H-2 Program within the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, as amended by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), continues to guide immigration patterns to the United States.

Immigration from Mexico, Central and South America, and the Caribbean has also been encouraged by labor recruiters and by informal networks that link individual families and communities in Latin America and the United States together.

Links to Biographic Information and the Written Work of Panel Members:

1. Assembly Member Ray Haynes
 - a. www.assembly.ca.gov/acs/makebio.asp?district=66&assoc=1
 - b. Projects Ray Haynes is responsible for
 - i. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/California_Border_Police_Initiative
2. Mariana Bustamante
 - a. www.aclu.org/immigrants/gen/11810res20041110.html
 - b. Mariana is the Education Coordinator for California
 - i. <http://www.aclu.org/immigrants/gen/11663res20040806.html>

3. Irene Bloemraad
 - a. <http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/bloemraad/>
 - b. Projects Irene has worked on
 - i. http://sociology.berkeley.edu/faculty/bloemraad/Immigrant_Internet_Resources.htm
4. Juan Carlos Arauz
 - a. Youth Programs Director at the Canal Alliance in San Rafael
 - b. www.canalalliance.org/AU_P_Staff.shtml#EP