

April 7, 2017

Immigration Questions: Myths vs. Facts. Talk to others to learn about the following immigration questions. Match the number of each question with the facts described below.

1. Are most immigrants here illegally?
2. Why don't people just get in line to come to the US?
3. Is anyone who enters the country illegally a "criminal"?
4. Are undocumented immigrants having "anchor babies" to stay in the US?
5. Do undocumented immigrants get benefits without paying taxes?
6. Are most undocumented people from Mexico?
7. Is it as easy to enter the country legally now as it was when our ancestors arrived?
8. Are recent immigrants learning English?
9. Do recent immigrants want to blend in and become "Americanized?"
10. Do immigrants take good jobs away from Americans?
11. Are undocumented immigrants increasing crime rates in the US?
12. Is the number of undocumented immigrants skyrocketing?

The myths and facts discussed today have been adapted from the Southern Poverty Law Center. If you hear similar myths about immigration, ask "***Where does that information come from?***" These facts on immigration can help dispel myths. Encourage others to find reliable sources and share facts with others rather than myths.

___ Many rules determine who may enter the country and stay legally. Under current policy, many immigrants who arrived between 1790 and 1924 would not be allowed entry. When your ancestors immigrated, what were the entry requirements? For about the first 100 years, the United States allowed any able-bodied immigrant to enter. The main obstacle was getting here—some sold themselves into indentured servitude. Today many rules determine who may enter the country and stay legally. Under current policy, many students' immigrant ancestors who arrived between 1790 and 1924 would not be allowed entry.

___ Undocumented immigrants can receive schooling and emergency medical care, but not welfare or food stamps. Undocumented immigrants pay taxes every time they buy something (gas, clothes, etc.). They also contribute to property taxes—a main source of school funding—when they buy or rent a house, or rent an apartment. The US Social Security Administration estimated that in 2013 undocumented immigrants—and their employers—paid \$13 billion in payroll taxes alone for benefits they will never get. Ask students what are some ways Americans pay taxes, as in income tax and sales tax.

___ The historic high actually came in 1890, when the foreign-born constituted nearly 15 percent of the population. By 2012, about 13 percent of the population was foreign-born. At the start of the recession in 2008, the number of undocumented immigrants coming into the country actually dropped. After stabilizing briefly, the number has been decreasing again.

___ Violent crime has declined 45% over 20 years, while property crime fell 42%, and foreign-born people—whether naturalized citizens, permanent residents or undocumented—are incarcerated at much lower rates than native-born Americans (see National Institute of Corrections) even as the number of undocumented immigrants tripled. The conservative Americas Majority Foundation found that crime rates from 1999-2006 were lowest in states with the highest immigration growth rates. During that period, the total crime rate fell 14% in the 19 top immigration states, compared to only 7% in the other 31 states.

___ About 48% of the undocumented people in the United States are not Hispanic, although Mexican immigrants make up the largest group of undocumented people. But undocumented immigrants come from all over the world, from Australia, Canada, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

___ Federal immigration law says that unlawful presence in the country is a civil offense and is, therefore, not a crime. The punishment is deportation. Is someone who jaywalks or who doesn't feed a parking meter a criminal? Only serious misbehavior is considered "criminal" in our legal system. Violations of less serious laws are usually "civil" matters tried in civil courts. People accused of crimes are tried in criminal courts and can be imprisoned. Note that Arizona has criminalized an immigrant's mere presence.

___ There is no such thing as an "anchor baby." Immigration judges will not keep immigrant parents in the US just because their children are US citizens. In 2013, the federal government deported about 72,410 foreign-born parents whose children had been born here. These children must wait until they are 21 before they can petition to allow their parents to join them in the US. The process is long and difficult.

___ Do you know the rules for entering and working in our country legally? The simple answer is that there is no "line" to stand in to gain permanent US residency for average people with few skills. Permission to live and work in the US is generally limited to those (1) highly trained in a skill in short supply and offered a job by a US employer, (2) escaping political persecution, (3) reuniting with close family, or (4) winners of the green-card lottery.

___ Assimilation is faster now than in the past, because of public education and mass media. What does it mean to blend in to US society? Nearly 655,000 people became naturalized citizens in the 2014. They overcame obstacles like getting here, finding a job, tackling language barriers, paying naturalization fees, dealing with the slow immigration bureaucracy and taking a citizenship test. These people do not take becoming American lightly.

___ About 40% of our undocumented population entered the country legally, but let their visas expire. Most foreign-born people have permission to be in the US. Of more than 41 million foreign-born people in the US in 2013, about 30 million were naturalized citizens, permanent residents and legal residents; 11 million were unauthorized immigrants.

___ There is very little connection between immigrant labor and "native worker" unemployment. Close to 26 million foreign-born people (17 % of the country's labor force) worked in the US in 2014. At what kind of jobs? A nonpartisan research group (Immigration Policy Center) finds little connection between immigrant labor and unemployment rates of "locals". Better education and an aging population have resulted in a decrease in the number of Americans willing or available to take low-paying jobs. Newcomers are more likely to be employed by the service industry, while native-born workers are more likely to hold jobs in management, professional, sales and office occupations. To fill the void employers often hire immigrant workers. It is easier for unscrupulous employers to exploit this labor source and pay immigrants less, not provide benefits, and ignore worker-safety laws. Americans benefit from lower prices on food and other goods produced by undocumented immigrant labor.

___ Children who come here learn English quickly, while adults may struggle, but most study English to function in our society. Usually the first generation struggles with English, the second becomes bilingual and the third can't speak their grandparents' language (see the independent, nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute). How long did it take for your ancestors to stop using their first language? "Earlier immigrant groups held onto their cultures," notes Reimers. "When the US entered the WWI [1917], there were over 700 German-language newspapers, though German immigration had peaked in the 1870s." The demand for adult ESL instruction in the US far outstrips availability.