



Type: Journal Article

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## "Ye Are No More Strangers and Foreigners": Theological and Economic Perspectives on the LDS Church and Immigration

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Source: *BYU Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (2018), pp. 65–103

Published by: BYU Studies

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**Abstract:** Immigration policy is a controversial topic in 2018. In response to refugee crises and legal situations that can break up families, the LDS Church announced its "I Was a Stranger" relief effort and released a statement encouraging solutions that strengthens families, keeps them together, and extends compassion to those seeking a better life. This article seeks to shed light on a correct understanding of immigration and its effects. Walker Wright gives a brief scriptural overview of migration, explores the public's attitudes toward immigration, and reviews the empirical economic literature, which shows that (1) fears about immigration are often overblown or fueled by misinformation and (2) liberalizing immigration restrictions would have positive economic effects.



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# “Ye Are No More Strangers and Foreigners”

## Theological and Economic Perspectives on the LDS Church and Immigration

*Walker A. Wright*

While always a heated topic, immigration has once again taken center stage in political discourse across multiple countries in recent years. The controversial debate surrounding the Syrian refugee crisis was especially critical to the 2016 United States presidential election. In response to the crisis, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced its “I Was a Stranger” relief effort, encouraging members—and the women in particular—to seek out and assist refugees in their local communities. With this contentious political climate in mind, this paper will review the Church’s “I Was a Stranger” initiative as well as its position on immigration. Furthermore, it will provide a brief scriptural overview of migration and the covenant people’s responsibility toward the poor and “the stranger.” After exploring the general public’s attitudes toward immigration (including Mormons), the bulk of the paper will review the empirical economic literature on immigration, demonstrating that (1) fears about immigration are often overblown or fueled by misinformation and (2) liberalizing immigration restrictions would be an incredibly effective antipoverty program. By favoring policies that reflect the empirical evidence, Latter-day Saints can come closer to achieving the Church’s “divinely appointed responsibilit[y]” of “caring for the poor and needy.”<sup>1</sup>

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1. *Handbook 2: Administering the Church 2010* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2010), 9.

## “I WAS A STRANGER”

In October 2015, the First Presidency released a letter responding to the growing refugee crisis, encouraging members to “contribute to the Church Humanitarian Fund” and “to participate in local refugee relief projects, where practical.”<sup>2</sup> A couple of months later, Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump called “for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until [the] country’s representatives can figure out what is going on.”<sup>3</sup> The following day, the Church published two statements from the Prophet Joseph Smith on the importance of religious freedom, explaining that while the Church “is neutral in regard to party politics and election campaigns, . . . it is not neutral in relation to religious freedom.”<sup>4</sup> The statement appeared to be a direct counter to the proposed “shutdown” and the religious litmus test it seemed to advocate.<sup>5</sup> Both the timing of the Church’s statements and the choice of quotations seem to indicate that restricting the flow

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2. Sarah Jane Weaver, “October 2015 LDS First Presidency Letter on Refugees,” *Church News*, March 26, 2016, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865650963/LDS-First-Presidency-letter-on-refugees.html>.

3. Jeremy Diamond, “Donald Trump: Ban All Muslim Travel to U.S.,” *CNN*, December 8, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/07/politics/donald-trump-muslim-ban-immigration/>; Jenna Johnson, “Trump Calls for ‘Total and Complete Shutdown of Muslims Entering the United States,’” *Washington Post*, December 7, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2015/12/07/donald-trump-calls-for-total-and-complete-shutdown-of-muslims-entering-the-united-states/>.

4. “Church Points to Joseph Smith’s Statements on Religious Freedom, Pluralism,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, December 8, 2015, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-statement-religious-freedom-pluralism>.

5. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Mormon Church Backs Religious Liberty after Trump Comments,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 2015, <http://www.sltrib.com/home/3282686-155/mormon-church-backs-religious-liberty-after>; Tad Walch, “LDS Church Releases Statement on Religious Freedom as Donald Trump’s Muslim Controversy Swirls,” *Deseret News*, December 8, 2015, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865643265/LDS-Church-releases-statement-on-religious-freedom-as-Donald-Trumps-Muslim-controversy-swirls.html>. Trump’s inflammatory rhetoric had led the Church-owned *Deseret News* to offer some harsh criticisms of the candidate the month prior. See “In Our Opinion: Trump Unmatched as a Candidate in Blatant Contempt for Basic 1st Amendment Freedoms,” *Deseret News*, November 27, 2015, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865642538/In-our-opinion-Trump-unmatched-as-a-candidate-in-blatant-contempt-for-basic-1st-Amendment-freedoms.html?pg=all>.

of migration based on religious association is out of harmony with the Church’s current teachings.

In the spring of 2016, the “I Was a Stranger” initiative was announced by then Relief Society General President Linda K. Burton in the women’s session of general conference.<sup>6</sup> Sister Burton made the following remarks about the female-led effort: “It is our hope that you will prayerfully determine what you can do—according to your own time and circumstance—to serve the refugees living in your neighborhoods and communities. This is an opportunity to serve one on one, in families, and by organization to offer friendship, mentoring, and other Christlike service and is one of many ways sisters can serve. . . . Sisters, we know that reaching out to others with love matters to the Lord.”<sup>7</sup>

The following weekend, Elder Patrick Kearon of the Seventy devoted his general conference address to the plight of refugees. While “not intend[ing] in any way to form part of [the] heated discussion, nor to comment on immigration policy,” Elder Kearon nonetheless wanted to “focus on the *people* who have been driven from their homes and their countries by wars that they had no hand in starting.” Kearon invited members to remember their own history as refugees as well as Christ’s, particularly his family’s flight to Egypt to escape King Herod. He encouraged Latter-day Saints to “think in terms of doing something close to home, in your own community, where you will find people who need help in adapting to their new circumstances.”<sup>8</sup>

In a letter sent that same month to stake, ward, and branch councils worldwide, the First Presidency reminded members that “one of the fundamental principles of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is to ‘impart of your substance to the poor, every man according to that which he hath, . . . administering to their relief, both spiritually and temporally, according to their wants’ (Mosiah 4:26). In harmony with our letter of October 27, 2015, the general presidencies of the Relief Society, Young Women, and Primary invite women of all ages to join together to help refugees

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6. Tad Walch, “LDS Church Launches ‘I Was a Stranger’ Website for Mormon Women’s Refugee Relief Effort,” *Deseret News*, March 28, 2016, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865651006/LDS-Church-launches-I-Was-a-Stranger-website-for-Mormon-womens-refugee-relief-effort.html>.

7. Linda K. Burton, “I Was a Stranger,” *Ensign* 46 (May 2016): 14, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2016/05/general-womens-session/i-was-a-stranger?lang=eng>.

8. Patrick Kearon, “Refuge from the Storm,” *Ensign* 46 (May 2016): 111, 113, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2016/05/sunday-afternoon-session/refuge-from-the-storm?lang=eng>.

in their local communities.”<sup>9</sup> Elder Jeffrey R. Holland later expressed similar views in a 2016 conference on forced migration and religious freedom. In one of his addresses, he highlighted the sexual violence toward women that often occurs in the countries refugees are fleeing.<sup>10</sup> After reviewing the history of early Mormon refugees who fled to Utah to escape religious persecution, he stated that migrant beliefs and traditions “should be celebrated, not dismissed” and that refugees should be given “greater organizational participation” and welcomed into the “everyday lives” of local citizens.<sup>11</sup>

While these examples are largely confined to the recent refugee crisis (all refugees are migrants, but not all migrants are refugees), the underlying principle of the Church’s response is captured in its 2011 statement on immigration policy, quoted in part here:

The bedrock moral issue for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is how we treat each other as children of God.

The history of mass expulsion or mistreatment of individuals or families is cause for concern especially where race, culture, or religion are involved. This should give pause to any policy that contemplates targeting any one group, particularly if that group comes mostly from one heritage.

. . . The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is concerned that any state legislation that only contains enforcement provisions is likely to fall short of the high moral standard of treating each other as children of God.

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9. First Presidency to General Authorities and Others, March 26, 2016. The full letter can be downloaded at [iwasastranger.lds.org](http://iwasastranger.lds.org). It is worth noting that in this letter the plight of refugees is equated with the plight of the poor. This association is made all the more potent given the relatively recent addition of “care for the poor and needy” to the mission of the Church. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, “New LDS Emphasis: Care for the Needy,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 9, 2009, [http://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/lds/ci\\_13965607](http://archive.sltrib.com/story.php?ref=/lds/ci_13965607).

10. “Elder Holland Transcript: Religious Freedom and Preventing Sexual Violence,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, September 11, 2016, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/transcript-elder-holland-religious-persecution-forced-migration-conference>.

11. “Elder Holland Transcript: The Mormon Refugee Experience,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, September 12, 2016, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/elder-holland-transcript-mormon-refugee-experience>.

The Church supports an approach where undocumented immigrants are allowed to square themselves with the law and continue to work without this necessarily leading to citizenship.

In furtherance of needed immigration reform in the United States, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints supports a balanced and civil approach to a challenging problem, fully consistent with its tradition of compassion, its reverence for family, and its commitment to law.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, some would be quick to point out the opening paragraph of the statement: “Most Americans agree that the federal government of the United States should secure its borders and sharply reduce or eliminate the flow of undocumented immigrants. Unchecked and unregulated, such a flow may destabilize society and ultimately become unsustainable.” Furthermore, in a March 2011 announcement prior to the official statement above, the Church “acknowledge[d] that every nation has the right to enforce its laws and secure its borders. All persons subject to a nation’s laws are accountable for their acts in relation to them.”<sup>13</sup>

While pinning down a specific immigration policy based on the Church’s statements is nearly impossible, it is worth pointing out what they do *not* say, namely, that immigration should be discouraged. The official statement plainly states that most *Americans* support a reduction in *undocumented* immigrants. The Church also encourages its *members* to obey the law and refrain from “entering any country without legal documentation” or “deliberately overstaying legal travel visas” as a matter of Church policy.<sup>14</sup> This is in keeping with the twelfth Article of Faith: “We believe . . . in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.”<sup>15</sup> However, the flow of undocumented workers could technically be reduced or eliminated by making legalization more accessible (that is, making these illegal immigrants legal). In other words, the law could be changed

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12. “Immigration: Church Issues New Statement,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, June 10, 2011, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/immigration-church-issues-new-statement>.

13. “A Principle-Based Approach to Immigration,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, March 17, 2011, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/a-principle-based-approach-to-immigration>.

14. “Immigration: Church Issues New Statement.”

15. “The Articles of Faith of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Lds.org*, <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/a-of-f/1?lang=eng>.

and subsequently obeyed, honored, and sustained. The statement also says “unchecked and unregulated” illegal immigration “*may* destabilize society and ultimately become unsustainable.”<sup>16</sup> This is an arguably wise acknowledgement, but it is mainly a reflection of uncertainty, caution, and intellectual humility. Ultimately, the question about the impact of undocumented immigrants is an empirical one.

This more liberal position is a fairly recent development in the Church. In 2004, Utah passed a bill prohibiting undocumented workers from obtaining a driver’s license. The Church was reported as taking “no position” on the bill and “warned” others “not to imply otherwise.”<sup>17</sup> In 2006, journalist Lou Dobbs claimed that the LDS Church “has a vigorous enthusiasm for as many of Mexico’s citizens as they possibly could attract to the state of Utah, irrespective of the cost to taxpayers.”<sup>18</sup> In response, the Church issued a statement, saying that Dobbs’s assertions were “completely without foundation. . . . The Church, in fact, has made no comment so far on the immigration debate, recognizing that this complex question is now before Congress and is already being thoroughly aired in the public square.”<sup>19</sup> Yet, in 2008, Elder Marlin K. Jensen of the Seventy advocated for “a spirit of compassion” regarding immigration, reminding lawmakers, “Immigration questions are questions dealing with God’s children. . . . I believe a more thoughtful and factual, not to mention humane, approach is warranted, and urge those responsible for enactment of Utah’s immigration policy to measure twice before they cut.”<sup>20</sup>

According to a 2012 news report, “Latinos now make up the fastest growing segment within the Church” in the United States. “From 2000 to 2010 the number of Spanish language congregations more than

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16. “Immigration: Church Issues New Statement,” italics added.

17. Josh Loftin, “Immigrant Driver’s License Bill Expires,” *Deseret News*, March 4, 2004, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/595046525/Immigrant-drivers-license-bill-expires.html>.

18. Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees Transcript, aired May 23, 2006, <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/o605/23/acd.02.html>.

19. “Response to Lou Dobbs Comments on CNN,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, May 23, 2006, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/the-church-and-immigration>.

20. Deborah Bulkeley, “Have Compassion for Immigrants, Lawmakers Urged,” *Deseret News*, February 14, 2008, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/695253048/Have-compassion-for-immigrants-lawmakers-urged.html>.

doubled from 377 to 760.”<sup>21</sup> In 2009, BYU’s Ignacio Garcia estimated that 70 percent of all Latino converts in the United States over the previous decade or more had been undocumented immigrants.<sup>22</sup> It is likely that this growth in membership among undocumented immigrants was what drove the Church’s support of the Utah Compact, a statement of principles signed by political, business, religious, and law enforcement leaders. In the wake of Arizona’s 2010 enforcement bill on illegal immigration (which was authored by a member of the Church), Utah lawmakers sought to construct a similar bill. In response, Church leadership praised the Utah Compact, describing it as “a responsible approach to the urgent challenge of immigration reform.”<sup>23</sup> The state declaration highlighted law enforcement while opposing “policies that unnecessarily separate families.” The compact also “acknowledge[d] the economic role immigrants play as workers and taxpayers.” Finally, it said, “We must adopt a humane approach to [immigration], reflecting our unique culture, history and spirit of inclusion. The way we treat immigrants will say more about us as a free society and less about our immigrant neighbors. Utah should always be a place that welcomes people of goodwill.”<sup>24</sup> In 2011, the Church released its official statement on immigration.

During the next few years, the federal government failed to enact comprehensive immigration reform, and so it became a divisive political issue in the 2016 presidential campaign. In September 2017, President Trump announced that he would begin to phase out the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, which protected nearly 800,000 undocumented individuals who had entered the country as minors, by granting a two-year period of deferred action from

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21. Victoria M. DeFrancesco Soto, “Analysis: Latinos Are the Fastest Growing Group in the Mormon Church,” *NBC Latino*, February 13, 2012, <http://nbclatino.com/2012/02/13/17547041869/>.

22. Daniel Gonzalez, “LDS Members Conflicted on Church’s Illegal-Migrant Growth,” *USA Today*, April 3, 2009, [https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2009-04-03-mormon-immigrants\\_N.htm](https://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/religion/2009-04-03-mormon-immigrants_N.htm).

23. “Church Supports Principles of *Utah Compact* on Immigration,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, November 11, 2010, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/church-supports-principles-of-utah-compact-on-immigration>.

24. The Utah Compact: A Declaration of Five Principles to Guide Utah’s Immigration Discussion, November 11, 2010, <https://the-utah-compact.com/>.

deportation (subject to renewal) and eligibility for work authorization.<sup>25</sup> Following the government shutdown in January 2018, the Trump administration proposed an immigration plan that would grant legal status to young immigrants brought over illegally as children, allow them to work, and provide a possible path to citizenship over a ten-to-twelve-year period. “In exchange,” reports the *New York Times*, “Congress would have to create a \$25 billion trust fund to pay for a southern border wall, dramatically increase immigration arrests, speed up deportations, crack down on people who overstay their visas, prevent citizens from bringing their parents to the United States, and end a State Department program designed to encourage migration from underrepresented countries. White House officials said that the list of enhanced security measures . . . were nonnegotiable. They warned that if no deal is reached, DACA recipients will face deportation when the program fully expires on March 5.”<sup>26</sup> With the threat of expiration looming near, the Church released an official statement on DACA:

Immigration is a complex and sometimes divisive issue. . . . Each nation must determine and administer its policies related to immigration. The Church does not advocate any specific legislative or executive solution. Our hope is that, in whatever solution emerges, there is provision for strengthening families and keeping them together. We also acknowledge that every nation has the right to enforce its laws and secure its borders and that all persons subject to a nation’s laws are accountable for their acts in relation to them.

We welcome the sincere efforts of lawmakers and leaders to seek for solutions that honor these principles and extend compassion to those seeking a better life. Specifically, we call upon our national leaders to create policies that provide hope and opportunities for those, sometimes referred to as “Dreamers,” who grew up here from a young

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25. See Michael D. Shear and Julie Hirschfeld Davis, “Trump Moves to End DACA and Calls on Congress to Act,” *New York Times*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/05/us/politics/trump-daca-dreamers-immigration.html>; Tal Kopan, “Trump Ends DACA but Gives Congress Window to Save It,” *CNN*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/09/05/politics/daca-trump-congress/index.html>; “Memorandum on Rescission of Deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals (DACA),” September, 5, 2017; <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2017/09/05/memorandum-rescission-daca>.

26. Michael D. Shear and Sheryl Gay Stolberg, “Trump Immigration Plan Demands Tough Concessions from Democrats,” *New York Times*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/25/us/politics/trump-immigration-plan-white-house.html>.

age and for whom this country is their home. They have built lives, pursued educational opportunities and been employed for years based on the policies that were in place. These individuals have demonstrated a capacity to serve and contribute positively in our society, and we believe they should be granted the opportunity to continue to do so.<sup>27</sup>

The Church’s position on immigration has evolved over time in response to the polarized political climate surrounding the issue. When all the Church’s statements are considered, it becomes fairly clear that the Church’s position over the last several years has leaned (somewhat tentatively) in favor of more open and inclusive immigration policies. This is likely due to the Church’s own history, the narratives of its scriptural canon, and its theological and moral commitments.

### **MIGRATION IN SCRIPTURE AND SACRED HISTORY**

The story of migration is the story of humanity and consequently the story of scripture. Beginning with the exile of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden to the establishment of the Enochic Zion to modern times, God’s covenant people have always been migrants of one sort or another. God’s promise to make Abraham “a great nation” (Gen. 12:2)<sup>28</sup> is intertwined with the command to “get thee out of thy country . . . unto a land that I will shew thee” (Gen. 12:1; compare Abr. 2:3). As outlined by Donald Senior of Catholic Theological Union, “the deepest experiences of Israel are marked by migration.” These include “the tortured journey of Jacob and his sons to Egypt in search of food in a time of famine,” “the defining experience of the Exodus,” the “deportation of the northern tribes by Assyria in the seventh century,” “the Babylonian exile a century or more later,” and the “subsequent mass dispersions under the Greeks and Romans.” Senior further notes, “These markers in the biblical saga—the wanderings of the patriarchs, the Exodus, the exile, the dispersion, and the return—became embedded in the consciousness of the people of Israel and helped define their character as a people and the nature of their relationship to God.”<sup>29</sup>

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27. “Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Statement,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/daca-statement-january-2018>.

28. Unless noted otherwise, all Bible references herein are from the King James Version.

29. Donald Senior, “‘Beloved Aliens and Exiles’: New Testament Perspectives on Migration,” in *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological*

Migration also plays a role in the New Testament. The story of Christ's birth in both Luke and Matthew portray Jesus as being "born on the road, as it were," as Mary and Joseph returned "to their ancestral home for a census imposed by a world ruler (Luke 2:1–7)."<sup>30</sup> As mentioned by Elder Kearon, Matthew's Gospel features Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt to escape the genocide enacted by King Herod (Matt. 2:13–23) and eventually settling in Nazareth to avoid the cruelty of Herod's son Archelaus (Matt. 2:22–23). Persecution scattered the early Christian communities throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1–8) and later to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:19–21). In Acts 18, Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, who had been displaced from Rome due to Claudius's edict. Apostolic letters also mention the exiled status of the early Christians. The author of 1 Peter addresses the recipients as "foreigners and exiles" (1 Pet. 2:11, NET<sup>31</sup>), while James addresses his epistle to "the twelve tribes in the Dispersion" (James 1:1, NRSV<sup>32</sup>). Senior notes, "Some contemporary commentators . . . believe the designation as resident aliens and exiles is not simply used as a spiritual metaphor but is an indication of the social and ethnic status of these Christians as migrant workers who were socially and ethnically estranged to these regions as well as experiencing spiritual isolation and harassment because of their Christian allegiance."<sup>33</sup>

The Book of Mormon also contains stories of migration. The book opens with details of the departure of Lehi and his family from Jerusalem to the New World (1 Ne. 2, 7, 17–18), echoing the Exodus of ancient Israel.<sup>34</sup> The book of Ether details the migration of the Jaredites from Babel to the promised land (Ether 1–3, 6). One record of this people was discovered later by King Mosiah<sub>1</sub> among the people of Zarahemla (Omni 1:20–21), and another was discovered by the people of Limhi (Mosiah 8:6–17). The "people of Zarahemla" were themselves migrants,

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*Perspectives on Migration*, ed. Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 21–22.

30. Senior, "Beloved Aliens and Exiles," 23.

31. New English Translation.

32. New Revised Standard Version.

33. Senior, "Beloved Aliens and Exiles," 25.

34. See George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981); S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30, no. 3 (1990): 111–26.

tracing their lineage back to Zedekiah’s son Mulek, who escaped Jerusalem prior to the Babylonian exile (Omni 1:15–16; Hel. 6:10, 8:21). Other massive migrations are mentioned throughout the Book of Mormon, including:

- King Mosiah and his people’s inspired departure to the land of Zarahemla (Omni 1:12–13).
- Zeniff’s expedition to recolonize the land of Nephi (Omni 1:27–30).
- The integration of the people of Ammon into Nephite society (Alma 43:11–13).
- The thousands who “departed out of the land of Zarahemla into the land which was northward” (Alma 63:4).
- Hagoth and those that followed him (Alma 63:5–7).<sup>35</sup>
- The “exceedingly great many” that departed “out of the land of Zarahemla, and went forth unto the land northward to inherit the land” and “did spread forth into all parts of the land” (Hel. 3:3, 5).
- The free trade and mobility among the Nephites and Lamanites during and following the sixty-third year, from which both grew “exceedingly rich” (Hel. 6:6–9).

Early Mormon history and revelations were also in large part driven by migration, with the early Saints moving from place to place, seeking refuge from persecution. Their multiple interstate migrations are well known—from New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois to their eventual settlement in what was then Mexican territory (later Utah). “After the Mormon exodus to the Great Basin,” writes Nathan B. Oman, “Americans came to see Mormons—the majority of whom were either displaced Yankees or converts from Northern Europe—as a foreign race.”<sup>36</sup> This mounting distrust and suspicion toward Mormons and

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35. See Robert E. Parsons, “Hagoth and the Polynesians,” in *The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1992), 249–62.

36. Nathan B. Oman, “Natural Law and the Rhetoric of Empire: *Reynolds v. United States*, Polygamy, and Imperialism,” *Washington University Law Review* 88, no. 3 (2011): 681. See also W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); J. Spencer Fluhman, *“A Peculiar People”: Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

their “uncivilized”<sup>37</sup> practice of polygamy influenced American immigration debates of that time.

In a 2017 brief filed in the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit regarding President Trump’s barring of refugees and immigrants from various Muslim countries,<sup>38</sup> nineteen Mormon scholars outlined the history of governmental hostility toward Mormons, including the targeting of Mormon immigrants. “In 1879,” they write, “the Secretary of State sent a circular letter to all American diplomatic offices, calling on them to pressure European governments to prohibit Mormon emigration from their countries. The letter denounced Mormon converts as coming from among the ‘ignorant classes’ and insisted that Mormon missionary efforts were a ‘criminal enterprise.’ It called on European governments to make sure that the United States did not become ‘a resort or refuge for . . . crowds of misguided men and women.’”<sup>39</sup> The US government also attempted to turn away Mormon converts at ports of entry, even blocking Mormons emigrating from England to New York City.<sup>40</sup>

As this brief overview demonstrates, God’s covenant people were often migrants themselves, typically due to persecution, war, or disasters. In fact, it wasn’t until the presidency of David O. McKay in the latter half of the twentieth century that the expectation for non-American converts to emigrate to the Great Basin was officially reversed.<sup>41</sup> As recent events have revealed, it can be easy to assume the worst about

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37. Chief Justice Morrison Waite “situate[d] polygamists among the ‘uncivilized.’” “Polygamy has always been odious among the northern and western nations of Europe,” Waite opined, “and, until the establishment of the Mormon Church, was almost exclusively a feature of the life of Asiatic and of African people.” Fluhman, “*Peculiar People*,” 110.

38. Early Mormons were often compared to Muslims and Joseph Smith to Muhammad. See Fluhman, “‘Imposter’: The Mormon Prophet,” ch. 1 in “*Peculiar People*”; Reeves, “Oriental, White, and Mormon,” ch. 8 in *Religion of a Different Color*.

39. Amici Curiae Brief of Scholars of American Religious History and Law in Support of Neither Party, *State of Hawaii, et al. v. Donald J. Trump, et al.*, 15–16, [scholarship.law.wm.edu/briefs/6/](http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/briefs/6/).

40. Amici Curiae Brief of Scholars, 15–16.

41. See Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 363–67. Church leaders in the early twentieth century neither encouraged nor discouraged emigration.

migrants from a comfortable, settled position. However, the scriptures and Mormons’ own history should disturb any negative, simplistic ideas one might have about migrants.

### STRANGERS, THE SIN OF SODOM, AND ZION

One of the most prominent and consistent themes throughout the LDS canon is an obligation to care for the poor and needy.<sup>42</sup> Included among the list of the disadvantaged classes in need of provisions and protection—widows, orphans, and the poor—were “strangers” or “sojourners” (Deut. 24:17–21; Jer. 7:6; Zech. 7:10).<sup>43</sup> As stated in the *Dictionary of the*

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42. In Enoch’s time, “the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness; and there was no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). Modern revelation commanded the early Saints to “remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support that which thou hast to impart unto them, with a covenant and a deed which cannot be broken” (D&C 42:30). The Book of Mormon—and King Benjamin in particular—places special emphasis on the poor and needy: “administer of your substance unto him that standeth in need; and ye will not suffer that the beggar putteth up his petition to you in vain, and turn him out to perish” (Mosiah 4:16). The post-Christ Nephite Zion “had all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free” (4 Ne. 1:3). The law of Moses had rules in place to make sure the poor were provided for (Ex. 21:2–6; 22:25–27; 23:10–11; Lev. 19:9–10; 25:3–7, 25–27; Deut. 14:28–29; 15:12–15; 24:19–21; 26:12–13). The prophets consistently reminded Israel and its rulers of their obligations to the poor (Isa. 10:1–4; Amos 2:6–7; 4:1; Ezek. 18). Oppressors of the poor were considered wicked (Ps. 37:14; Prov. 14:31), and God himself would provide for and protect the poor (Isa. 41:17; Ps. 140:12). The prophetic concern for the economically disadvantaged continued with the ministry of Jesus, who declared his mission to involve “preach[ing] the gospel to the poor” (Luke 4:18). Christ taught that to feed the hungry and thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned, and host the stranger—“the least of these”—was to do so unto him (Matt. 25:35–40). In Jesus’s view, the one thing the rich man lacked was to “sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21). The Christian charge to care for the poor continued in the early Christian communities, with Paul seeking a collection for the poor of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:1–10; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; Rom. 15:25–27). See also David J. Cherrington, “Poverty, Attitudes Toward,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992); Michael D. Coogan, “Poor,” in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 604.

43. See Timothy M. Willis, “Alien,” in Metzger and Coogan, *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 120.

*Old Testament*, “The position of the ‘alien’ in ancient Near Eastern society was generally one of dependence, with a certain amount of cultural isolation.” Given Israel’s experiences listed above, the identity of the stranger was “foundational to Israelite self-understanding.”<sup>44</sup> Hence, the Lord commanded Israel, “Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Ex. 22:21). The alien resident among the Israelites was to “be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God” (Lev. 19:34). The stranger was therefore protected under Israelite law due to their vulnerable position (Deut. 1:16–17; 16:11, 14; 24:14, 17–18; 26:12–13; 27:19; Lev. 19:10; 23:22; 25:6).<sup>45</sup>

Mistreatment of the stranger seeking refuge was likely the reason for the destruction of Sodom. Hospitality was “one of the most highly praised virtues in antiquity. In nomadic societies, hospitality was an unwritten law, and the stranger was regarded as divinely protected.”<sup>46</sup> When the “men of Sodom” demanded that Lot give up his angelic/holy guests<sup>47</sup> so that they might “know” them (Gen. 19:4–5)—in contrast to Abraham’s reaction (Gen. 18)—they committed “a gross violation of the conventions of hospitality.”<sup>48</sup> As biblical scholar Gordon Wenham explains, “In the ancient Near East outside Israel (cf. Lev. 18:22) homosexual acts between consenting adults do not seem to have been banned, but homosexual rape was, except to humiliate prisoners of war. Everywhere it would have been regarded as abhorrent to treat guests this way; rather, there was a sacred duty to look after them.”<sup>49</sup> It becomes apparent that the sin of Sodom had to do with “social injustice—mistreatment of the powerless. Among the latter were strangers, and the story of Lot in Genesis 19 provides a vivid illustration of how strangers were

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44. R. J. D. Knauth, “Alien, Foreign Resident,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 26.

45. Knauth, “Alien, Foreign Resident,” 32–33.

46. Abraham J. Malherbe, “Hospitality,” in Metzger and Coogan, *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 292.

47. The King James text describes the men as “angels,” but the Joseph Smith Translation of Genesis 18:22 reads, “And the angels which were holy men . . .”

48. Jon Levenson, “Genesis,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 41.

49. Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 53.

mistreated in Sodom, by being subject to rape. Homoeroticism is only secondarily relevant.”<sup>50</sup> Or, as Ezekiel preached, “Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy” (Ezek. 16:49).<sup>51</sup>

The welcoming of the ethnically and culturally different is later encapsulated in Paul’s mission to the Gentiles: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The author of Ephesians echoes this communal embrace of Gentile converts: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19).

Interestingly enough, migration and refuge were also inherent in the early Mormon conception of Zion (see D&C 45:64–71; 115:5–6). Mark Ashurst-McGee, historian and editor for the Joseph Smith Papers Project, explains that “[Joseph] Smith’s eschatology . . . established another dynamic geopolitical relationship between Zion and the nations: Zion would be a refugee territory in the midst of a world of warring nations.” He continues:

As the plague of international conflict spread, Zion would serve as a neutral territory and safe harbor for any wishing to escape the destructions of war. . . . At this extreme moment of worldwide conflict, Smith declared, “every man that will not take his sword against his neighbor must needs flee unto Zion for safety & there shall be gathered unto it out of every nation under heaven” (D&C 45:68–69). . . . Smith’s prophecy of civil and global war traced the trajectory of destruction to its extremity—the “full end of all Nations” (D&C 87:6). . . . After the destruction of the United States and all other nations, Zion would be left standing as the sole sovereign in the Americas. . . . These revelations gave the Saints a view of the world as a place that was contentious and prone to violence, warfare, and destruction. . . . Zion would serve as a refuge only for the peaceful.<sup>52</sup>

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50. Michael Coogan, *God and Sex: What the Bible Really Says* (New York: Twelve, 2010), 130.

51. John J. Goldingay explains, “Given Ezekiel’s sexual imagery, it is noteworthy that Sodom’s sin lies in its combination of good living with social neglect (v. 49), in line with the implications of Genesis 18 itself, not in the sexual practices which have preoccupied the Christian postbiblical tradition.” Goldingay, “Ezekiel,” in Dunn and Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, 637.

52. Mark Ashurst-McGee, “Zion as a Refuge from the Wars of Nations,” in *War and Peace in Our Time: Mormon Perspectives*, ed. Patrick Q. Mason,

## PUBLIC OPINION ON IMMIGRATION

Given the scriptural, moral, and theological commitments to the stranger detailed above, it is important to establish what the average person thinks about immigration. According to a 2015 study, which surveyed 183,000 adults in more than 140 countries from 2012 to 2014, only 21 percent of the world population would like to see an increase in immigration.<sup>53</sup> More specifically, only 23 percent of North Americans support increasing immigration, while a mere 8 percent of Europeans do (52 percent want to *decrease* it). The number of Americans in favor of increased immigration has steadily risen from 7 percent in 1965 to 21 percent in 2016. Those wanting to decrease immigration has dropped from 65 percent in 1993 to 38 percent in 2016.<sup>54</sup> Worry over illegal immigration is split along party lines in the United States: 79 percent of Republicans worry “a great deal or fair amount” over illegal immigration, while 48 percent of Democrats and 57 percent of Independents do.<sup>55</sup> Despite this partisan difference, an increasing number in both major parties recognize that “immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents.”<sup>56</sup>

A particularly interesting aspect of public attitudes toward immigration is that of *political ignorance*. Multiple studies have shown that

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J. David Pulsipher, and Richard L. Bushman (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2012), 87–89.

53. Neli Esipova and others, *How the World Views Migration* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration, 2015), [https://publications.iom.int/system/files/how\\_the\\_world\\_gallup.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/how_the_world_gallup.pdf).

54. “Immigration,” *Gallup News*, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>. See also Lee Rainie and Anna Brown, “Americans Less Concerned Than a Decade Ago over Immigrants’ Impact on Workforce,” *Pew Research Center: Fact Tank*, October 7, 2016, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/10/07/americans-less-concerned-than-a-decade-ago-over-immigrants-impact-on-workforce/>.

55. Jeffrey M. Jones, “In US, Worry about Illegal Immigration Steady,” *Gallup*, March 20, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/206681/worry-illegal-immigration-steady.aspx>.

56. The portion of Republicans who express this view grew from 30 percent in 1994 to 42 percent in 2017, while the number of Democrats went from 32 percent to 84 percent. “More Say Immigrants Strengthen U.S. as the Partisan Divide Grows,” *Pew Research Center*, October 4, 2017, [http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/4-race-immigration-and-discrimination/4\\_9-3/](http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/4-race-immigration-and-discrimination/4_9-3/).

political ignorance is rampant among average voters,<sup>57</sup> and this holds true when it comes to immigration policy. As legal scholar Ilya Somin explains, “Immigration restriction . . . is one that has long-standing associations with political ignorance. In both the United States and Europe, survey data suggest that it is strongly correlated with overestimation of the proportion of immigrants in the population, lack of sophistication in making judgments about the economic costs and benefits of immigration, and general xenophobic attitudes toward foreigners. By contrast, studies show that there is little correlation between opposition to immigration and exposure to labor market competition from recent immigrants.”<sup>58</sup> One pair of economists found that those voting to leave the European Union in the Brexit referendum, who were motivated largely by a desire to restrict immigration, “were overwhelmingly more likely to live in areas with very low levels of migration.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly,

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57. See Ilya Somin, *Democracy and Political Ignorance: Why Smaller Government Is Smarter*, 2d ed. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2016); Bryan Caplan, *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Christopher H. Achen and Larry M. Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Jason Brennan, “Ignorant, Irrational, Misinformed Nationalists,” ch. 2 in *Against Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016). For an analysis of the public disdain for experts, see Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

58. Somin, *Democracy and Political Ignorance*, 23. See also Jens Hainmueller and Daniel J. Hopkins, “Public Attitudes towards Immigration,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 225–49. Somin makes clear that “political ignorance is not the result of stupidity or selfishness. . . . The insignificance of any one vote to electoral outcomes makes it rational for most citizens to devote little effort acquiring political knowledge. They also have little incentive to engage in unbiased evaluation of the information they do know.” Somin, *Democracy and Political Ignorance*, 3–4.

59. Chris Lawton and Robert Ackrill, “Hard Evidence: How Areas with Low Immigration Voted Mainly for Brexit,” *The Conversation*, July 8, 2016, <https://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-how-areas-with-low-immigration-voted-mainly-for-brexit-62138>. However, in these areas the foreign-born population had recently increased dramatically, even if the overall head count of immigrants was comparatively low. See “Britain’s Immigration Paradox,” *The Economist*, July 8, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/britain/21701950-areas-lots-migrants-voted-mainly-remain-or-did-they-britains-immigration-paradox>.

voters who supported Donald Trump during the US election were *more* likely to oppose liberalizing immigration laws (even compared to other Republicans), but *least* likely to live in racially diverse neighborhoods.<sup>60</sup> In short, both political ignorance and lack of interaction with foreigners tend to inflame anti-immigration sentiments. These sentiments are what George Mason University economist Bryan Caplan refers to as *antiforeign bias*: “a tendency to underestimate the economic benefits of interaction with foreigners.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, economists take nearly the opposite view from the general public on immigration.<sup>62</sup>

Where do most Mormons fall along the spectrum of immigration attitudes? According to political scientists David Campbell, Christopher Karpowitz, and J. Quin Monson, American Mormons “are more accepting of immigrants than most other Americans, particularly in contrast to evangelicals. The Faith Matters survey (2011) gave respondents the option of saying that immigration should be increased, decreased, or kept the same as it is.” According to one analysis of the survey, it turns out that

26 percent of Mormons would like to see more immigration. That may not seem like a lot until Mormons are compared with other religious traditions. Only Jews are more likely to favor greater immigration (29 percent). By contrast, only 12 percent of evangelicals favor more immigration. Likewise, Mormons are also on the low end of favoring less immigration—only Jews are likely to say that America should decrease the number of new arrivals in the country.

. . . The church’s own policy is to turn a blind eye toward people who are in the United States illegally—the church will baptize them, call them on missions, and even have them serve as church leaders. LDS leaders have consistently been a voice of compassion regarding immigration. A notable example is the message of emeritus church general authority Elder Marlin Jensen, who has urged lawmakers to consider illegal immigrants as “God’s children” and to “slow down, step back and carefully study and assess the implications and human costs involved” in legislation designed to curb illegal immigration. More recently, the church has taken a vocal stand for moderate immigration reforms that balance a law-and-order mentality against compassion for immigrants and a strong desire for policies that keep families together. These

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60. Jonathan T. Rothwell and Pablo Diego-Rosell, “Explaining Nationalist Political Views: The Case of Donald Trump,” November 2, 2016, 11–14; SSRN: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2822059](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2822059).

61. Caplan, *Myth of the Rational Voter*, 36.

62. Caplan, *Myth of the Rational Voter*, 58–59.

stances moved public opinion among conservative Utah Mormons in a more moderate direction.<sup>63</sup>

Thankfully, a 2016 study found that accurate information can actually shift people’s views on immigration.<sup>64</sup> The goal of the remainder of this paper is to present some of the most up-to-date scholarship on immigration economics in hopes of shifting the views of Latter-day Saints who are either on the fence or skeptical about immigration. By receiving accurate information and empirical evidence, Latter-day Saints can better engage the topic and improve the lives of their brothers and sisters around the world.

### THE ECONOMY AS A WHOLE

The positive economic impact of immigrants—past, present, and potential future—is often underappreciated in the debate over immigration. During America’s Age of Mass Migration (1850–1920), the United States witnessed its highest levels of immigration. In contrast to previous waves of mainly western-European immigrants, this period saw large numbers of immigrants from southern, northern, and eastern Europe. They brought with them both different languages and different religious practices. A working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) finds that US counties that experienced more immigrant settlement during this time period “now have higher incomes, less unemployment, less poverty, more education, and more urbanization.” The authors also found that “these economic benefits do not come at the cost of social outcomes.” Furthermore, “immigrants resulted in an immediate increase in industrialization. Immigrants first contributed to the establishment of more manufacturing facilities and then to the development of larger facilities.” Immigrants also had “large positive effects . . . on agricultural productivity and innovation as measured by patenting rates.”<sup>65</sup>

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63. David E. Campbell, Christopher F. Karpowitz, and J. Quin Monson, “A Politically Peculiar People: How Mormons Moved into and Then out of the Political Mainstream,” in *Mormonism and American Politics*, ed. Randall Balmer and Jana Riess (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 146–47.

64. Alexis Grigorieff, Christopher Roth, and Diego Ubfal, “Does Information Change Attitudes towards Immigrants? Representative Evidence from Survey Experiments,” IZA Discussion Paper No. 10419, December 2016, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10419.pdf>.

65. Sandra Sequeira, Nathan Nunn, and Nancy Qian, “Migrants and the Making of America: The Short and Long-Run Effects of Immigration during

This trend of positive economic impact from immigration continues today. In 2015, migrants made up 3.4 percent of the world population yet contributed about \$6.7 trillion to global output—9.4 percent of world gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>66</sup> Even those working illegally in the United States contribute about 3 percent of private-sector GDP annually—around five trillion dollars over a ten-year period. Granting these migrants legal status would increase the percentage to 3.6.<sup>67</sup> In France, an increase of foreign-born workers in a firm’s department increases the productivity of that department, especially for firms with virtually no previous foreign employment.<sup>68</sup> A 2016 International Monetary Fund (IMF) study estimates that—after controlling for multiple variables, including trade openness, technology, education level, and age structure—“a 1 percentage point increase in the share of migrants in the adult population (the average annual increase is 0.2 percentage point) can raise GDP per capita by up to 2 percent in the longer run.”<sup>69</sup> More

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the Age of Mass Migration,” NBER Working Paper No. 23289, 2017, 43–44, [https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/immigrants\\_in\\_america\\_manuscript.pdf](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/nunn/files/immigrants_in_america_manuscript.pdf).

66. Jonathan Woetzel and others, *People on the Move: Global Migration’s Impact and Opportunity* (McKinsey Global Institute, December 2016), 1, 8, 55, <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/global-migrations-impact-and-opportunity>. Gross domestic product is “a measure of the value of all of the goods and services produced in a country or equivalently as the total income, in the form of wages, rents, interest, and profits, earned in a country. GDP is thus also known as output or national income.” It works as “a rough-and-ready measure of standard of living.” David N. Weil, *Economic Growth*, 3d ed. (New York: Pearson Education, 2013), 3.

67. Ryan Edwards and Francesc Ortega, “The Economic Contribution of Unauthorized Workers: An Industry Analysis,” IZA Discussion Paper No. 10366, November 2016, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10366.pdf>. Legal authorization has also been shown to reduce unemployment and poverty among undocumented immigrants as well as increase the income for immigrants at the bottom of the income distribution. See Catalina Ameudo-Dorantes, “Can Authorization Reduce Poverty among Undocumented Immigrants? Evidence from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program,” *Economic Letters* 147 (2016): 1–4; Nolan G. Pope, “The Effects of DACAmentation: The Impact of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals on Unauthorized Immigrants,” *Journal of Public Economics* 143 (2016): 98–144.

68. Cristina Mitaritonna, Gianluca Orefice, and Giovanni Peri, “Immigrants and Firms’ Outcomes: Evidence from France,” *European Economic Review* 96 (2017): 62–82.

69. Florence Jaumotte, Ksenia Koloskova, and Sweta C. Saxena, “Impact of Migration on Income Levels in Advanced Economies,” IMF Spillover

importantly, it turns out that “migration increases income per capita for both the top 10 and bottom 90 percent earners, even though the gain is larger for the richest decile.”<sup>70</sup> Even the most pessimistic literature “estimates that immigration to the United States generates an annual efficiency gain for Americans of between \$5 billion and \$10 billion.”<sup>71</sup>

These data represent both past and present effects of immigration. But what if all current immigration restrictions around the world were dropped? What would the future economy potentially look like? In a 2011 meta-analysis, economist Michael Clemens asked this very question. He found that the estimated “gains from eliminating migration barriers dwarf—by an order of a magnitude or two—the gains from eliminating other types of barriers. For the elimination of trade policy barriers and capital flow barriers, the estimated gains amount to less than a few percent of world GDP. For labor mobility barriers, the estimated gains are often in *the range of 50–150 percent of world GDP*.”<sup>72</sup>

These economic gains are astronomical; a literal doubling of world product. But these gains assume the migration of over half the population of poor countries. However, even smaller movements (less than 5 percent of the population of poor countries) would result in “gains exceeding the gains from total elimination of all policy barriers to merchandise trade and all barriers to capital flows.”<sup>73</sup> A more recent analysis finds that lifting all migration restrictions would increase world output by 126 percent, while even partial liberalization (in which 10 percent of the world population moves) would yield a nearly 14 percent increase in world output.<sup>74</sup>

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Notes, no. 8 (October 2016): 2, 11, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Spillover-Notes/Issues/2016/12/31/Impact-of-Migration-on-Income-Levels-in-Advanced-Economies-44343>.

70. Jaumotte, Koloskova, and Saxena, “Impact of Migration on Income Levels,” 15.

71. Peter T. Leeson and Zachary Gochenour, “The Economic Effects of International Labor Mobility,” in *The Economics of Immigration: Market-Based Approaches, Social Science, and Public Policy*, ed. Benjamin Powell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 21.

72. Michael A. Clemens, “Economics and Emigration: Trillion-Dollar Bills on the Sidewalk?” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25 (Summer 2011): 84, emphasis added.

73. Clemens, “Economics and Emigration,” 84.

74. Klaus Desmet, David Krisztian Nagy, and Esteban Rossi-Hansberg, “The Geography of Development,” *Journal of Political Economy*, forthcoming, <https://doi.org/10.1086/697084>, see table 3.

Restrictions on immigration are essentially restrictions on the selling of labor. One pair of political philosophers describes closed borders as a “type of trade restriction in labor, akin to an import quota or restriction in cars, wheat, or other goods. Normally, such restrictions lead to inefficiencies and deadweight losses, as they prevent mutually beneficial trades from occurring, and cause people to turn to less productive providers.”<sup>75</sup> Hence, the best economic evidence available suggests that liberalized immigration would be a gigantic gain to the world economy, and a more prosperous economy often translates into greater well-being.<sup>76</sup> If one is concerned about potential problems of increased immigration, a cost-benefit analysis must be in order. It is difficult to imagine what problems could arise whose avoidance would be worth sacrificing a whole earth’s worth of economic output.

### GLOBAL POVERTY

Immigration restrictions tend to negatively affect the least well-off. As a case in point, annual legal immigration to the United States falls under one of the the following categories: family-based immigration, temporary work visas, permanent employment visas, refugee visas, and diversity visas.<sup>77</sup> The majority of US-bound immigrants are allowed into the country based on family connections or work visas. As a result, those without a college degree or a close family member in the country have effectively no legal way to come to the United States. This makes the common talking point “I’m in favor of immigration, just *legal* immigration” both tone deaf and misconstrued. The argument assumes the status quo is just and fair, ignoring the perverse incentives it creates among those desperate for a better life but lacking the necessary “qualifications.” As will be shown, immigration restrictions prevent the poor from seeking out better opportunities and instead force them—with the threat of governmental violence—to remain in their impoverished or chaotic homelands.

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75. Jason Brennan and Bas van der Vossen, *In Defense of Openness* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

76. Two useful sources for comparing wealth and other factors of well-being are <https://ourworldindata.org/> and <http://www.gapminder.org/>.

77. American Immigration Council, *How the United States Immigration System Works*, August 12, 2016, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/how-united-states-immigration-system-works>.

The massive gains that immigration brings to the poor and needy is captured in the work of Harvard’s Lant Pritchett, who compares the effectiveness of antipoverty programs to that of migration. Pritchett and colleagues compare the gains of migration to that of microcredit (made famous by Muhammad Yunus, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work),<sup>78</sup> antisweatshop activism, additional schooling, and even deworming. According to Pritchett, a low-skill Bangladeshi male “would have to work *four weeks* in the United States to have a gain in income equal to a *lifetime* of microcredit. . . . Obviously, one would have to add a few weeks to pay transportation costs and some for expenditures while in the United States, but a single seasonal access of three months to a job in the United States could provide savings more than equal to the total *lifetime* financial gain from microcredit.”<sup>79</sup> A marginal worker from Indonesia would have to work *thirty weeks* in the United States to achieve the gain of a *lifetime’s* worth of antisweatshop activism. A similar worker from Bolivia would need only *eleven weeks* of work in the United States to reach the *lifetime* benefit of an additional year of schooling at zero cost. Finally, a Kenyan worker would need only *0.3 weeks* in the US to achieve a *lifetime’s* earnings due to deworming.<sup>80</sup> As Pritchett asked elsewhere, “If I get 3,000 additional Bangladeshi workers into the US, do I get a Nobel Peace Prize?”<sup>81</sup>

Further research by Pritchett and Clemens found that 82 percent of native-born Haitians who are not now poor escaped poverty simply by moving to and working in the United States. The percentages were lower for Mexicans (43 percent) and Indians (27 percent) but are still hefty amounts.<sup>82</sup> This is even true for immigrants doing the *same job*

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78. Microcredit is the lending of small amounts of money to businesses in developing countries. See Muhammad Yunus, “Microlending: Toward a Poverty-Free World,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 2 (1999): 149–55; and “Muhammad Yunus—Nobel Lecture” (lecture, Oslo, December 10, 2006), [https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-lecture-en.html](https://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/2006/yunus-lecture-en.html).

79. Lant Pritchett, “The Cliff at the Border,” in *Equity and Growth in a Globalizing World*, ed. Ravi Kanbur and Michael Spence (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2010), 275.

80. Pritchett, “Cliff at the Border,” 275–76.

81. Lant Pritchett, “Is Migration Good for Development? How Could You Even Ask?” (PowerPoint presentation, Columbia University, New York City, February 13, 2009), [https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/lpritch/Presentations/Is%20Migration%20Good%20for%20Development\\_columbia.ppt](https://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/lpritch/Presentations/Is%20Migration%20Good%20for%20Development_columbia.ppt).

82. Michael A. Clemens and Lant Pritchett, “Income per Natural: Measuring Development for People Rather Than Places,” *Population and Development*

requiring the *same skill set* as what they were doing in their native countries. For example, an “identical prime-age urban formal-sector male Peruvian with nine years of Peruvian schooling earns about 2.6 times as much in the US as in Peru.”<sup>83</sup> For Filipinos, the estimated increase is 3.5, while it is a colossal 7.8 for Haitians. But even these figures underestimate the full impact of migration for the poor. Remittances, for instance, boost the income of families left behind in source countries. One analysis of remittances to Sri Lanka found that the majority of remittances go to families in the bottom quintiles and positively impact the health and education of recipient children.<sup>84</sup> Remittances make up a significant portion of GDP for several countries, including the Kyrgyz Republic (34.5 percent), Nepal (29.7 percent), Liberia (29.6 percent), Haiti (27.8 percent), and Tonga (27.8 percent).<sup>85</sup> In 2013, they accounted for nearly half of Tajikistan’s GDP.<sup>86</sup> A review of the empirical literature also finds that there is a robust, positive relationship between emigration and source-country wages, in part due to emigration’s reduction of the labor supply in source countries.<sup>87</sup> Even the status quo of skill-based immigration “has offsetting benefits for those left behind. Skilled immigrants often return with valuable skills, investment capital, and business connections. Furthermore, opportunities for high-skilled emigration spur skill acquisition. Empirically, such incentives look strong enough

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*Review* 34 (September 2008): 395–434.

83. Michael A. Clemens, Claudio E. Montenegro, and Lant Pritchett, “The Place Premium: Wage Differences for Identical Workers across the U.S. Border,” Center for Global Development Working Paper No. 148, December 2008, 4, [https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/16352\\_file\\_CMP\\_place\\_premium\\_148.pdf](https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/16352_file_CMP_place_premium_148.pdf).

84. Prabal K. De and Dilip Ratha, “Impact of Remittances on Household Income, Asset, and Human Capital: Evidence from Sri Lanka,” *Migration and Development* 1 (June 2012): 163–79.

85. The World Bank Group, “Migration and remittances,” *Migration and Development Brief* 27, April 2017, 3, <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/992371492706371662/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief27.pdf>.

86. The World Bank Group, “Migration and Remittances,” *Migration and Development Brief* 24, April 13, 2015, 5, <https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1288990760745/MigrationandDevelopmentBrief24.pdf>.

87. Prachi Mishra, “Emigration and Wages in Source Countries: A Survey of the Empirical Literature,” in *International Handbook on Migration and Economic Development*, ed. Robert E. B. Lucas (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar, 2014), 241–66.

to make the average *non*-migrant more skillful.”<sup>88</sup> Complementing Clemens’s work mentioned in the previous section, economist John Kennan finds that dropping all immigration restrictions would lead to an estimated net gain of “\$10,798 per worker (including nonmigrants), per year (in 2012 dollars, adjusted for purchasing power parity). This is a very large number: the average income per worker in these countries is \$8633, so the gain in (net) income is 125%.”<sup>89</sup> This is a literal doubling of income for the world’s most deprived.

When one reviews the vast improvements that immigration can bring to the lives of the world’s poor, it becomes increasingly clear that we have a moral obligation to echo the title of Lant Pritchett’s book: let their people come.<sup>90</sup>

## REFUGEES

It is plausible the forced migration of refugees would result in a different scenario than that of self-selected immigration, resulting in an economic burden rather than gain. However, the evidence is once again against this common assumption. A 2016 report estimating the economic impact of asylum seekers and refugees on the European Union found that investing in refugees can yield a number of economic dividends to host countries, including boosts in demand, contributions to the labor supply (including filling skill gaps), complementary labor skills (often leading to new job opportunities and higher wages for natives), more entrepreneurship (resulting in wealth creation, new jobs for locals, and expansion of international trade and investment), increased diversity and innovation, a younger workforce, and eventually fiscal contributions.<sup>91</sup> Based on IMF calculations, the report states, “Investing one euro in refugee assistance can yield nearly two euros in economic benefits within five years.” The report adds, “This is likely to be an underestimate of refugees’ economic

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88. Bryan Caplan and Vipul Naik, “A Radical Case for Open Borders,” in Powell, *Economics of Immigration*, 189.

89. John Kennan, “Open Borders,” *Review of Economic Dynamics* 16 (2013): L11.

90. Lant Pritchett, *Let Their People Come: Breaking the Gridlock on International Labor Mobility* (Washington, DC: Center for Global Development, 2006).

91. Philippe Legrain, *Refugees Work: A Humanitarian Investment That Yields Economic Dividends* (Tent Foundation and Open Political Economy Network, May 2016), 19–41, [http://www.opennetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Tent-Open-Refugees-Work\\_V13.pdf](http://www.opennetwork.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Tent-Open-Refugees-Work_V13.pdf).

contribution, since it does not include their dynamic contribution to enterprise and growth.”<sup>92</sup>

A 2016 study investigated three Congolese refugee camps in Rwanda, two of which provided cash aid while the other provided in-kind aid in the form of food. The researchers found that the two cash camps increased real income within a 10-km radius by an equivalent of 63 percent and 96 percent of the average host-country per capita income around the camps, exceeding “the value of per-refugee [World Food Program] assistance.” The in-kind camp, however, put “slight downward pressure on [food] prices. This adversely affects local producers, who compete with cheap food assistance.” Host-country households also experienced “a small negative spillover.”<sup>93</sup> This suggests that cash transfers would be preferable to in-kind assistance.

Using longitudinal data on Danish workers between 1991 and 2008, economists Mette Foged and Giovanni Peri examined the impact that the influx of refugees had on low-skilled natives. The two found that “less skilled native workers responded to refugee-country immigration, mainly composed of low-educated individuals in manual-intensive jobs, by increasing significantly their mobility towards more complex occupations and away from manual tasks. Immigration also increased native low skilled wages and made them more likely to move out of the municipality.”<sup>94</sup> The authors observed no increase in unemployment or decrease in employment for unskilled natives.

A 2014 study conducted by the Humanitarian Innovation Project and the Refugee Studies Center at Oxford University did extensive research on 1,593 refugees in two rural settlements in Uganda and the capital of Kampala, finding that refugees made positive contributions to the country’s economy. These contributions included the purchasing of goods and services from Ugandan businesses, job creation, and provision of human capital.<sup>95</sup> This led the authors to label the claim that refugees are an economic burden a “myth.”

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92. Legrain, *Refugees Work*, 22, see page 59 for calculations.

93. J. Edward Taylor and others, “Economic Impact of Refugees,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 113, no. 27 (2016): 7450.

94. Mette Foged and Giovanni Peri, “Immigrants’ Effects on Native Workers: New Analysis on Longitudinal Data,” IZA Discussion Paper No. 8961, March 2015, 29, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp8961.pdf>.

95. Alexander Betts and others, *Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions* (Oxford: Humanitarian Innovation Project and Refugee Studies

## COMMON OBJECTIONS TO IMMIGRATION

“In America,” writes historian David Gerber,

law and policy have been mobilized to structure and at times limit immigration. The ideological sources of this evolution have been complex. Persisting alongside the recognition of the need for immigrant labor has been nativism, which has manifested itself in the fear and dislike of foreigners and the perception that immigration destabilizes politics, society, and culture. Popular nativist feeling has always possessed an emotional, bigoted component that invites political leaders to seek gain in recognizing and exploiting the passions of the electorate. But nativism need not always be racist or mean-spirited; those who want the state to limit immigration and access to citizenship may have little against immigrants, and instead may be concerned about the welfare of the nation’s established residents.<sup>96</sup>

This nativist impulse in America can be traced back to colonial times and anxieties over non-British immigrants. These prejudices extended to Catholics (especially Irish), Chinese, Japanese, Mexicans, Jews, Slavs, Italians, Greeks, and so forth.<sup>97</sup> In turn, various restrictions followed. For example, a literacy test for immigrants “first came to a vote in Congress in 1897 and was overwhelmingly passed by the House and cleared a majority in the Senate.”<sup>98</sup> The literacy test eventually became law in 1917. This “literacy test was an overture to the Emergency Quota Act passed in 1921, the Immigration Act of 1924, and, eventually, the National Origins Act passed in 1929.”<sup>99</sup>

Attempts to restrict immigration seem to have stemmed from a fear that immigrants were hurting the economy. Harvard’s Claudia Goldin notes, “Almost all serious calls for the literacy test were preceded by economic downturns, some of major proportion, and few economic downturns of the era were not accompanied by a call for restriction in the halls

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Center, Oxford University, 2014), 16–20, <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/refugee-economies-2014.pdf>.

96. David A. Gerber, *American Immigration: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 15–16.

97. For a general, brief overview of this history, see Gerber, *American Immigration*, in full.

98. Claudia Goldin, “The Political Economy of Immigration Restriction in the United States, 1890 to 1921,” in *The Regulated Economy: A Historical Approach to Political Economy*, ed. Claudia Goldin and Gary D. Libecap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 227.

99. Goldin, “Political Economy of Immigration Restriction,” 237–38.

of Congress. Unemployment and labor unrest were clearly in the minds of legislators in the 1897 and 1898 votes, and economic conditions had worsened just as the 1915 literacy test came to a vote. The major recession just following World War I was a factor in the Emergency Quota Act.”<sup>100</sup> Many Progressive Era economists “defended exclusionary labor and immigration legislation on grounds that the labor force should be rid of unfit workers, whom they labeled parasites, the unemployable, low-wage races, and the industrial residuum. Removing the unfit, went the argument, would uplift superior, deserving workers.”<sup>101</sup>

One of the recommended reforms was a “tariff” on immigrant labor (a minimum wage). Princeton economist Thomas Leonard explains, “By pushing firms to hire only the most able immigrant workers, a mandated minimum wage for immigrants would reduce the quantity of immigrants and also select for higher quality immigrants. . . . Progressive labor reformers embraced the minimum wage for its power to exclude as well as to uplift. The minimum wage test would, more efficiently than the literacy test, target the inferior races of southern and eastern Europe by identifying inferiority not with illiteracy but with low labor productivity—the inability to command a minimum wage.”<sup>102</sup> Recent analyses also find that between 1910 and 1930, increased immigration within US cities created political backlash. Cities cut public spending and redistribution and favored more anti-immigrant politicians and legislation, despite the economic benefits brought about by immigrants.<sup>103</sup>

Today, for many rich-country natives, objections to immigration still hold considerable weight largely because they concern the immediate welfare of native workers. Of course, it is worth putting the economic well-being of these workers in perspective. For example, the US poverty threshold as of 2018 is \$12,140 for a one-person household and \$25,100 for a four-person household.<sup>104</sup> These households are still within the

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100. Goldin, “Political Economy of Immigration Restriction,” 239.

101. Thomas C. Leonard, “Retrospectives: Eugenics and Economics in the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 19, no. 4 (2005): 207–8.

102. Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 159.

103. Marco Tabellini, “Gifts of the Immigrants, Woes of the Natives: Lessons from the Age of Mass Migration,” Job Market Paper, January 12, 2018, <http://economics.mit.edu/files/13646>.

104. US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, *Poverty Guidelines*, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty-guidelines>.

richest 20 percent of the world’s population.<sup>105</sup> Nonetheless, it is worth addressing some of the most common objections to immigration, which include:

- Immigrants “steal” native jobs.
- Immigrants depress native wages.
- Immigrants undermine host country culture and institutions.
- Immigrants are a fiscal burden and increase the welfare state.
- Immigrants are criminals and terrorists.

### “Stealing” Jobs

“That immigrants ‘take our jobs’ is probably the most repeated and most economically ignorant objection to immigration,” writes economist Benjamin Powell.<sup>106</sup> Aside from the implicit and problematic assumption that jobs in host countries somehow belong to natives, the notion that there is a fixed amount of jobs is economically unsound. “In the market’s process of creative destruction,” Powell says, “jobs are created and destroyed all the time.” He continues, “Since 1950, there has been massive entry of women, baby boomers, and immigrants into the work force. . . . The civilian labor force grew from around 60 million workers in 1950 to more than 150 million workers today. Yet there has been no long-term increase in the unemployment rate. In 1950, the unemployment rate was 5.2 percent, and in 2007, the year before the current recession started, the unemployment rate was 4.6 percent. As more people enter the labor force, more people get jobs.”<sup>107</sup>

In a policy paper appropriately titled “Do Migrants Take the Jobs of Native Workers?” economist Amelie Constant found no correlation between unemployment and immigration rates in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.<sup>108</sup> Instead,

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105. See the calculations at “How Rich Am I?” Giving What We Can, <https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/get-involved/how-rich-am-i/>.

106. Benjamin Powell, “An Economic Case for Immigration,” June 7, 2010, *Library of Economics and Liberty*, <http://www.econlib.org/library/Columns/y2010/Powellimmigration.html>.

107. Powell, “Economic Case for Immigration.” The numbers for the civilian labor force are <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS11000000>.

108. Amelie F. Constant, “Do Migrants Take the Jobs of Native Workers?” *IZA World of Labor* 10 (May 2014): 7, <https://wol.iza.org/uploads/articles/10/pdfs/do-migrants-take-the-jobs-of-native-workers.pdf>. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is an intergovernmental

she concluded that “immigrants do not take native workers’ jobs in the long term,” but instead “stimulate job creation through increased production, self-employment, entrepreneurship, and innovation. They also provide opportunities for native workers to upgrade their occupation and specialize in higher-skill jobs.”<sup>109</sup> Relying on US Census data between 1980 to 2000, a 2016 working paper found that each immigrant generates about 1.2 jobs each within his or her new host cities.<sup>110</sup> A survey of the economic literature by Peter Leeson and Zachary Gochenour revealed “that native employment is largely unaffected by immigration” (with most influential studies showing zero or even positive effects).<sup>111</sup> Similarly, a 2017 literature review by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) found that immigration has little effect on native employment (although the work hours of native teens and employment of prior immigrants are slightly reduced).<sup>112</sup>

In summary, although some job loss may occur in the short run (as is common with *any* change to the economy), the long-run effect of immigration on employment is neutral to positive.

### Depressed Wages

A basic understanding of the laws of supply and demand would suggest that as the supply of labor increases (via immigration), wages fall. However, this perspective fails to take into account the idea that “immigrants who increase the supply of labor also demand goods and services, causing the demand for labor to increase. This means that the effect of immigration on wages shifts from being a theoretical question to being an empirical one.”<sup>113</sup> What does the empirical evidence suggest? One

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economic organization with thirty-five member countries. The mission of the OECD is to promote policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

109. Constant, “Do Migrants Take the Jobs of Native Workers?” 9.

110. Gihoon Hong and John McLaren, “Are Immigrants a Shot in the Arm for the Local Economy?” NBER Working Paper, June 22, 2016, 41, <http://www.people.virginia.edu/~jem6x/hong%20mclaren%200615%20shot%20in%20the%20arm.pdf>.

111. Leeson and Gochenour, “Economic Effects of International Labor Mobility,” 21.

112. Francine D. Blau and Christopher Mackie, eds., *The Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2017), 268.

113. Powell, “Economic Case for Immigration.”

study looked at the elimination of the *bracero* (“manual laborer”) program under John F. Kennedy, which had allowed for the importation of Mexican guest workers after the early days of World War II. Following the war, the program focused primarily on agricultural labor, bringing in about a half million Mexican seasonal laborers per year. Though the *bracero* program was ended to protect and improve wages for domestic workers, the authors found “that *bracero* exclusion failed to raise wages or substantially raise employment for domestic workers in the sector.”<sup>114</sup>

According to the 2017 NAS report, most empirical research shows that “the impact of immigration on wages of natives overall is very small.”<sup>115</sup> However, “native dropouts tend to be more negatively affected by immigration than better-educated natives. Some research also suggests that, among those with low skill levels, the negative effect on natives’ wages may be larger for disadvantaged minorities.” Yet, these negative effects “tend to be smaller (or even positive)” when periods of ten years or longer are considered.<sup>116</sup> In fact, research suggests “that immigration to the United States between 1990 and 2006 reduced the wages of natives without high-school degrees by only 0.7 percent in the short run and *increased* their wages by 0.6–1.7 percent in the long run.”<sup>117</sup>

Similar to the effects of employment, low-skill native wages may be depressed in the short run, but long-run effects tend to be zero to positive.

### Culture and Institutions

Another objection is what is known as the “epidemiological case,” which argues that immigrants may bring with them foreign values that undermine the culture and institutions of the host country. In essence, immigrants transmit to rich countries those elements that make their source

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114. Michael A. Clemens, Ethan G. Lewis, and Hannah M. Postel, “Immigration Restrictions as Active Labor Market Policy: Evidence from the Mexican *Bracero* Exclusion,” IZA Discussion Paper No. 10512, January 2017, 31, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10512.pdf>.

115. Blau and Mackie, *Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*, 267. See also Giovanni Peri, “Do Immigrant Workers Depress the Wages of Native Workers?” *IZA World of Labor* 42 (May 2014), <https://wol.iza.org/uploads/articles/42/pdfs/do-immigrant-workers-depress-the-wages-of-native-workers.pdf?v=1>.

116. Blau and Mackie, *Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*, 267.

117. Leeson and Gochenour, “Economic Effects of International Labor Mobility,” 19, emphasis in original.

countries poor. What makes this rather prejudiced argument all the more jarring is the fact that it has virtually no supporting evidence. Unfortunately, very little empirical research has been conducted exploring the impact of immigrants on cultural, political, and economic institutions *at all*. However, the research that is available should calm fears and actually provide reasons for optimism. For example, there is no association between growth of total-factor productivity (TFP) in rich countries and the ratio of migrants from low-income countries, indicating that migrants do not “contaminate” their new homes with the low productivity of their source countries.<sup>118</sup>

The Canada-based Fraser Institute publishes its oft-cited *Economic Freedom of the World* report annually. Its indicator—known as the Economic Freedom of the World (EFW) Index—defines economic freedom based on five major areas: (1) size of the government, (2) legal system and the security of property rights, (3) stability of the currency, (4) freedom to trade internationally, and (5) regulation of labor, credit, and business. According to the institute’s most recent report (which looks at data from 2015), countries with more economic freedom had considerably higher per-capita incomes and economic growth.<sup>119</sup> Relying on this index, a 2015 study found that a larger immigration population marginally increases the economic freedom of the host country’s institutions. No negative impacts on economic freedom were found.<sup>120</sup> Several authors from this study looked at Israel during the 1990s as a natural experiment in mass migration. During the 1990s, Israel’s population grew by 20 percent due to immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Yet, instead of experiencing decline, Israel shot up “from 15% below the global average [in economic freedom] to 12% above it and improv[ed] its

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118. Michael A. Clemens and Lant Pritchett, “The New Economic Case for Migration Restrictions: An Assessment,” IZA Discussion Paper No. 9730, February 2016, 31–34, <http://ftp.iza.org/dp9730.pdf>. While migrants from low-income countries may not be associated with TFP, a 2017 World Bank survey of the literature found that, “on balance, *total* immigrant effects on labor productivity are statistically insignificant to positive” with “statistically significant positive effects” for TFP. Sharmila Devadas, *Threat or Help? The Effects of Unskilled Immigrant Workers on National Productivity Growth*, World Bank Research and Policy Briefs, no. 6, March 2017, 2, emphasis added.

119. James Gwartney, Robert A. Lawson, and Joshua C. Hall, eds., *Economic Freedom of the World: 2017 Annual Report* (Fraser Institute, 2017), <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/studies/economic-freedom-of-the-world-2017-annual-report>.

120. J. R. Clark and others, “Does Immigration Impact Institutions?” *Public Choice* 163, no. 3 (June 2015): 321–35.

ranking among countries by 47 places.”<sup>121</sup> Similarly, a 2017 study found that higher diversity—measured by levels of ethnolinguistic and cultural fractionalization—predicts higher levels of economic freedom.<sup>122</sup> While this particular study mainly discusses development economics, the correlation between high diversity and high economic freedom is an important aspect of the immigration debate. Barring members of different ethnolinguistic groups from entering the country may actually be holding back economic development.

How well are immigrants integrating into their new home countries? According to a 2015 analysis by the National Academy of Sciences, “current immigrants and their descendants are integrating into U.S. society” in a variety of ways, including through educational attainment, employment and earnings, residential dispersion, and even English proficiency.<sup>123</sup> In fact, the NAS reports that language integration “is happening as rapidly or faster now than it did for the earlier waves of mainly European immigrants in the 20th century.”<sup>124</sup> Economist Jacob Vigdor argues that “newly arrived immigrants are better assimilated along multiple dimensions than their predecessors—even before accounting for the fact that immigrants are always least assimilated when they first arrive in the United States.”<sup>125</sup> A 2017 survey of around fifteen hundred Muslims throughout Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, and the UK also found that integration has been quite successful.<sup>126</sup> For

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121. Benjamin Powell, J. R. Clark, and Alex Nowrasteh, “Does Mass Immigration Destroy Institutions? 1990s Israel as a Natural Experiment,” *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 141 (2017): 88.

122. Indra de Soysa and Krishna Chaitanya Vadlamannati, “Does Social Diversity Impede Sound Economic Management? An Empirical Analysis, 1980–2012,” *Social Science Research* 62 (February 2017): 272–90. Cultural heterogeneity has also been found to have positive impacts on long-term economic growth. See Vincenzo Bove and Leandro Elia, “Migration, Diversity, and Economic Growth,” *World Development* 89 (January 2017): 227–39.

123. Mary C. Waters and Marisa Gerstein Pineau, eds., *The Integration of Immigrants into American Society* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2015), 3.

124. Waters and Pineau, *Integration of Immigrants into American Society*, 6.

125. Jacob Vigdor, “The Civic and Cultural Assimilation of Immigrants to the United States,” in Powell, *Economics of Immigration*, 71.

126. Yasemin El-Menouar, *Muslims in Europe: Integrated but Not Accepted?* (Gutersloh, Ger.: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2017), <https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/publications/publication/did/results-and-country-profiles-muslims-in-europe/>.

example, about 75 percent of German-born Muslims report German as their first language, even though only 20 percent of Muslim immigrants report similarly. “The trend that language skills improve with each successive generation is equally apparent in France, the United Kingdom, Austria and Switzerland.”<sup>127</sup> The survey also found that “a large majority of the Muslims living in the countries studied have (very) frequent contact with non-Muslims in their leisure time”: 87 percent of Swiss Muslims, 78 percent of German Muslims and French Muslims, 68 percent of those in the United Kingdom, and 62 percent of those in Austria.<sup>128</sup> Ironically, a 2015 OECD study found that challenges to integration “do not increase with the share of immigrants in the population. . . . If anything, countries that are home to high proportions of immigrants tend to have better integration outcomes.”<sup>129</sup>

In short, worries that foreigners will undermine the culture and institutions of host countries are misplaced. Immigrants tend to assimilate rather well and often improve the economic freedom within countries.

### Fiscal Burden and Welfare Cost

Many worry that an influx of low-skill, low-education workers would inflate the welfare state and drain the fiscal budget. Admittedly, accurately assessing the fiscal impact of immigration is difficult, since multiple factors have to be taken into account. “For instance,” according to policy analyst Alex Nowrasteh, “a low-skilled immigrant might not pay income tax, but his or her employer will likely make a higher profit and pay additional taxes as a result of hiring the worker. If those effects are not included, then the benefits will be underestimated.”<sup>130</sup> Or consider economist Jacob Vigdor’s estimate that each new immigrant adds 11.6 cents to the value of the average home in their community, “boosting the National US taxable housing value by an estimated \$3.7 trillion.”<sup>131</sup> There is also the issue of whether to measure the impact

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127. El-Menouar, *Muslims in Europe*, 5.

128. El-Menouar, *Muslims in Europe*, 6.

129. OECD/European Union, *Indicators of Immigrant Integration 2015: Settling In* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015), 11, <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/Indicators-of-Immigrant-Integration-2015.pdf>.

130. Alex Nowrasteh, citing Vigdor in “The Fiscal Impact of Immigration,” in Powell, *Economics of Immigration*, 42.

131. Nowrasteh, “Fiscal Impact of Immigration,” 43; Jacob Vigdor, *Immigration and the Revival of American Cities: From Preserving Manufacturing Jobs to*

of first-generation immigrants *only* or to include their descendants. As one study explains, “In forward-looking projections, the logic for including second generation effects is straightforward: Even if children of immigrants are native-born citizens, the costs and benefits that they generate would not have been realized without the initial addition to the population of the immigrant parent(s). . . . Costs associated with educating the children of immigrants that accrue during the analysis period are included in the fiscal estimate; however, a good case can be made for treating these expenditures as an investment, due to the strongly positive association between level of education and eventual contributions to tax revenues.”<sup>132</sup> After all these factors are considered, what does the literature show? A 2017 literature review by the National Academy of Sciences finds that the “fiscal impacts of immigrants are generally positive at the federal level and negative at the state and local levels” because state and local governments are the main providers of education benefits. The authors of the review are also quick to point out, “The net fiscal impact for *any* U.S. resident, *immigrant or native-born*, is negative. When fiscal sustainability is assumed to result in future spending cuts and tax increases, immigrants are more valuable than native-born Americans (that is, their net fiscal impact is greater in a positive direction).”<sup>133</sup>

These findings echo those of Nowrasteh’s review of the literature. According to Nowrasteh, between 1950 and 2000, “immigration grew the US economy and produced more net tax revenue. . . . The low-skilled first generation consumed more welfare than they paid in taxes, but their descendants more than compensated for that initial deficit by producing a more positive dependency ratio for entitlement programs, leading to a slightly positive contribution to the federal budget in the long run.”<sup>134</sup> While many economic models “find that immigrants slightly diminish net tax revenue for state and local governments,” they increase the federal net tax revenue by more than the state and local

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*Strengthening the Housing Market* (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy and Americas Society/Council of the Americas, 2013), 11–12.

132. Blau and Mackie, *Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*, 356–57.

133. Blau and Mackie, *Economic and Fiscal Consequences of Immigration*, 461, emphasis added.

134. Nowrasteh, “Fiscal Impact of Immigration,” 57.

decrease.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, “there is little evidence that migrants choose their state destination based on the generosity of the welfare system. . . . New immigrants are mainly choosing to reside in states with low levels of social welfare spending and growing economies and are moving away from states with high levels of social welfare spending and low economic growth.”<sup>136</sup> Nonetheless, even if welfare spending did increase due to immigration (evidence suggests quite the opposite),<sup>137</sup> this would be an argument for increasing restrictions on *welfare*, not immigration.<sup>138</sup>

Overall, as Nowrasteh concludes, “The economic benefits of immigration are unambiguous and large, but the fiscal effects are dependent upon the specifics of government policy over a long time period, which means that the net fiscal impact of immigration could be negative while the economic benefit is simultaneously positive. Looking at the results of all of these studies, the fiscal impacts of immigration are mostly positive, but they are all relatively small.”<sup>139</sup>

### Terrorism and Crime

In the post-9/11 world, concerns over terrorism have reshaped immigration policy and transformed it into a matter of national security.<sup>140</sup> Given the fact that all nineteen terrorists involved in the 9/11 attacks were foreign nationals who entered the country via legal means, fears of an equally devastating attack based on similar circumstances are

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135. Nowrasteh, “Fiscal Impact of Immigration,” 57.

136. Nowrasteh, “Fiscal Impact of Immigration,” 45.

137. See Alberto Alesina and Edward L. Glaeser, *Fighting Poverty in the US and Europe: A World of Difference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Maureen A. Eger, “Even in Sweden: The Effect of Immigration on Support for Welfare State Spending,” *European Sociological Review* 26, no. 2 (2010): 203–17; Stuart N. Soroka and others, “Migration and Welfare State Spending,” *European Political Science Review* 8, no. 2 (2016): 173–94; Clark and others, “Does Immigration Impact Institutions?”; and Marco Tabellini, “Gifts of the Immigrants, Woes of the Natives.”

138. Alex Nowrasteh and Sophie Cole, “Building a Wall around the Welfare State, Instead of the Country,” Cato Policy Analysis No. 732, July 25, 2013, [https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa732\\_web\\_1.pdf](https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa732_web_1.pdf).

139. Nowrasteh, “Fiscal Impact of Immigration,” 63.

140. See Muzaffar Chishti and Claire Bergeron, “Post-9/11 Policies Dramatically Alter the U.S. Immigration Landscape,” *Migration Policy Institute*, September 8, 2011, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/post-911-policies-dramatically-alter-us-immigration-landscape>.

wholly understandable. But what is the actual risk? How likely is it that an American citizen will be murdered by a foreign-born terrorist? Alex Nowrasteh has crunched the numbers and finds that between 1975 through the end of 2015, the chance of an American dying in a terrorist attack committed by a foreigner on US soil was 1 in 3,609,709 per year. This includes those who perished in the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The chance of an American dying in a terrorist attack perpetuated by a refugee was 1 in 3,638,587,094 per year, while dying in an attack by an illegal immigrant was 1 in 10,915,761,281 per year.<sup>141</sup> These chances are infinitesimally small. As others have cheekily pointed out, these data demonstrate that an American is more likely to meet her demise by a falling vending machine, a lightning strike, or her clothes melting or igniting.<sup>142</sup> Furthermore, a 2017 analysis of 20 OECD countries and 187 countries of origin between 1980 and 2010 found that while a larger number of foreigners in a country does increase the probability of a terrorist attack, it is no bigger than the effect a larger domestic population has on domestic terror. “Overall,” the authors write, “we thus conclude that migrants are not more likely to become terrorists compared to the nationals of the country they live in.”<sup>143</sup> The researchers also find that “introducing strict laws that regulate the integration and rights of migrants does not seem to be effective in preventing terror attacks from foreign-born residents. . . . To the contrary, repressions of migrants already living in the country alienate substantial shares of the population, which overall increases rather than reduces the risk of terror.”<sup>144</sup>

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141. Alex Nowrasteh, “Terrorism and Immigration: A Risk Analysis,” Cato Policy Analysis No. 798, September 13, 2016, 5, [https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa798\\_2.pdf](https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa798_2.pdf).

142. Lauren Leatherby, “Trump Clampdown: Four Charts on the US Refugee Program,” *Financial Times*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/a8798b58-e347-11e6-8405-9e5580d6e5fb>; Zack Beauchamp, “You’re More Likely to Be Killed by Your Own Clothes Than by an Immigrant Terrorist,” *Vox*, January 28, 2017, <https://www.vox.com/2016/9/13/12901950/terrorism-immigrants-clothes>. See also Micah Zenko, “America Is a Safe Place,” *Politics, Power, and Preventive Action* (blog), February 24, 2012, <http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2012/02/24/america-is-a-safe-place/>.

143. Axel Dreher, Martin Gassebner, and Paul Schaudt, “The Effect of Migration on Terror—Made at Home or Imported from Abroad?” CESifo Working Paper 6441, April 2017, 30, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2976273](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2976273).

144. Dreher, Gassebner, and Schaudt, “Effect of Migration on Terror,” 26.

What about crime rates? A 2015 literature review by the National Academy of Sciences divided the issue into two questions: (1) Are immigrants more likely to commit crimes than the native born? and (2) Do immigrants adversely affect the overall crime rate? The review found that immigrants in the United States “are in fact much *less likely* to commit crimes than natives, and the presence of large numbers of immigrants seems to *lower* the crimes rates.”<sup>145</sup> Multiple studies demonstrate that “young native-born men are much more likely to commit crimes than comparable foreign-born men.”<sup>146</sup> Unfortunately, this anticrime advantage tends to wane in subsequent generations. As the children of immigrants assimilate into American culture, their crime rates begin to catch up with their native-born peers. Numerous studies over the last twenty years have also found that there tends to be an inverse relationship between immigration and crime rates. In fact, “these studies . . . found that the crime drop observed between 1990 and 2000 can partially be explained by increases in immigration.”<sup>147</sup>

## CONCLUSION

“Literally *millions* of lives are affected in a serious and long-term manner by immigration restrictions,” writes philosopher Michael Huemer. “Were these restrictions lifted, millions of people would see greatly expanded opportunities and would take the chance to drastically alter their lives for the better. This makes immigration law a strong candidate for the most harmful body of law in America today. In view of this, it is particularly troubling that these restrictions appear to have so little justification.”<sup>148</sup> This overview of the economic literature demonstrates that liberalized immigration could be (and has been) one of the most

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145. Waters and Pineau, *Integration of Immigrants into American Society*, 327, emphasis in original.

146. Waters and Pineau, *Integration of Immigrants into American Society*, 328–29.

147. Waters and Pineau, *Integration of Immigrants into American Society*, 330. See also Ruben G. Rumbaut, “Appendix D: Undocumented Immigration and Rates of Crime and Imprisonment: Popular Myths and Empirical Realities,” in *The Role of Local Police: Striking a Balance between Immigration Enforcement and Civil Liberties*, ed. Mary Malina (Washington, DC: Police Foundation, 2009).

148. Michael Huemer, “Is There a Right to Immigrate?” *Social Theory and Practice* 26, no. 3 (2010): 461.

effective antipoverty programs around. Moreover, empirical analysis demonstrates that the fears surrounding immigration are often misplaced. Official statements from the LDS Church have made it clear that its leadership supports humane, inclusive immigration policies, reminding members and the world that “how we treat each other as children of God” is a “bedrock moral issue.”<sup>149</sup> This bedrock moral issue is further supported by the scriptural responsibility toward the poor and “the stranger.” Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints place special emphasis on sustaining our leaders and lifting up the poor and needy. In the case of immigration, we can seek to do both by welcoming migrants with open arms and advocating for far less restrictive immigration policies.

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149. “Immigration: Church Issues New Statement,” *Newsroom—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, June 10, 2011, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/immigration-church-issues-new-statement>.