

Liberty and Justice for All? Addressing Issues of Poverty and Immigration Reform in the United States

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Liberty and Justice for All? Social Change and Campus Action for 70 Years and Beyond is the theme for the 2011-2012 Common Experience. As indicated, this theme, and the activities and readings that accompany it, center on issues of social justice and civic engagement. Through selected texts, films, and speakers, campus community members will engage in and promote a University-wide conversation about what it means to live in a society defined by justice, fairness, and true liberty for all human beings. Such a dialogue will include a critical examination of social issues from various perspectives on topics such as poverty, racism, sexism, citizenship, and immigration reform. In the year 2011-2012, IU Southeast will also celebrate its 70th birthday, and in recognition of the institution's progress, service through history, and its hope for the future, campus citizens will focus on how current political issues and social justice initiatives affect our University environment and the community at large.

As a part of the Common Experience, the University selects texts to use as common reads. These books, read in a variety of academic departments and as a part of many first-year seminar courses, combine with the Common Experience programs and initiatives available to all community members to complete the University-wide living-learning experience. For this year, two books have been selected for the campus to read: *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* by David K. Shipler (2005) and *A Country for All: An Immigrant Manifesto* by Jorge Ramos (2010). Shipler's examination of poverty in America and Ramos's arguments about immigration reform both provide thought-provoking viewpoints on social justice issues. An overview of both books, along with correlating discussion materials, is presented in two sections in the following pages.

SECTION I:

Issues of Poverty in America: A Brief Introduction with Discussion Questions, Vocabulary, and Essay Topics

by Maria T. Accardi, MA, MLIS

based on

Shipler, D. K. (2005). *The working poor: Invisible in America*. New York: Knopf.

In *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, journalist David K. Shipler (2005) investigates poverty among working Americans, noting that the term “working poor” is paradoxical: “Nobody who works hard should be poor in America” (p. xi). And yet, the working people Shipler profiles in his book are exactly that: working and earning a wage, but still struggling to get by, let alone get ahead. Shipler’s goal was to look closely at people’s lives to understand the complex underpinnings that contributed to their individual situations. Shipler (2005) “tried to see with clear eyes” the real lives of people in poverty, and sought to “challenge and undermine longstanding assumptions at both ends of the [political] spectrum (p. x).” From this perspective, Shipler’s (2005) profiles of low-wage workers challenge the myths of the American Dream and the notion that working hard will bring success. As Shipler (2005) details through interviews with individuals from all over the United States, poverty is a complicated, multifaceted problem: “working poverty is a constellations of difficulties that magnify one another: not just low wages but also low education, not just dead-end jobs but also limited abilities, not just insufficient savings but also unwise spending, not just poor housing but also poor parenting, not just the lack of health insurance but the lack of healthy households” (p. 285). Shipler concludes the book by highlighting remedies to assist the working poor and what roles the government might play in these solutions.

Shipler’s (2005) examination of poverty in America occurs in the aftermath of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, a welfare reform act signed into law by President Clinton. The bill shifted the welfare system into one that requires recipients to seek and secure employment in order to receive government assistance. A dramatic paradigm shift in how the nation conceived of public assistance, this act provided incentives for states to move welfare recipients into jobs, as well funding child care assistance, providing child support enforcement and medical coverage. While some states took advantage of this law to create innovative welfare-to-work employment assistance programs, many available jobs, according to Shipler (2005), “had three unhappy traits: They paid low wages, offered no benefits, and led nowhere” (p. 40). Shipler (2005) presents poverty as a systemic problem caused by multiple interconnected factors, yet the title of this welfare reform act “left no doubt about what Congress and the White House saw as poverty’s cause and solution” (p. 40). It is through this holistic lens that Shipler (2005) investigates poverty, profiles individuals living and working in poverty, and proposes solutions to alleviate and end poverty in America.

Chapter Summaries for *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*

Chapter 1: Money and Its Opposite

In this chapter, Shipler (2005) detailed the financial challenges and disadvantages faced by the poor: The Earned Income Tax Credit, the difficulties poor people face in understanding the tax code, tax preparers marketing themselves to low-wage workers with “refund anticipation loans,” payday loans, predatory lending, loan sharks, workplace scams that target and exploit low wage immigrant workers, subprime loans and credit cards, and unsafe and unhealthy housing. Shipler (2005) also described the judgment poor people face from anti-poverty workers who question the way poor people spend what little money they have. The poor, according to Shipler (2005), spend a lot of time thinking about money and how to make the most of it.

Chapter 2: Work Doesn't Work

Shipler (2005) described the consequences of 1996 welfare reform legislation. While many welfare recipients found work, the work offered low pay, no benefits, and no future. The individuals profiled in this chapter exemplify the difficulties faced by those who struggle to get by on low wage jobs and diminishing government assistance. Poor women facing sexism in low-wage work places find it especially hard to get ahead, as do people of color that face racial discrimination. Tumultuous domestic lives also make it difficult for those living in poverty to escape their circumstances.

Chapter 3: Importing the Third World

In this chapter, Shipler (2005) profiled immigrant workers in the United States who work for low wages. Highlighting the garment industry in particular, as well as drawing attention to other low paid work, Shipler (2005) described workers who perform essential jobs in the American economy but are underpaid and poorly treated.

Chapter 4: Harvest of Shame

Migrant workers were the focus of this chapter. Most of these workers are undocumented laborers working in dangerous conditions for low pay and no benefits. These workers are essential to American agriculture, but they are rendered invisible and unprotected by their immigration status.

Chapter 5: The Daunting Workplace

Shipler (2005) detailed the problems and obstacles poor people face in the workplace such as a fear of rejection, a lack of self-esteem, difficulty escaping the isolation of housing projects, racism and sexism, mental illness, and a lack of the “soft skills” that are so crucial to success in the workplace: interpersonal communication skills, dependability, punctuality, good hygiene, and work ethic.

Chapter 6: Sins of the Fathers

The trauma of sexual abuse and its devastating impact, especially for girls and women, can lead to emotional difficulties in adulthood, and, in turn, this leads to difficulties in holding jobs and achieving economic success. Shipler (2005) stated, “Among low-income families, then, sexual abuse emerges as one mechanism of transmitting poverty to the next generation” (p. 145). Without the educational and financial resources to seek to psychological assistance, the cycle of abuse continues, adding stress to an already stressed household. Parenting classes for low-income families help adults who were emotionally deprived as children not pass on that same deprivation to their own children.

Chapter 7: Kinship

Shipler (2005) profiled a family that suffered many losses and economic hardships, but remained connected and loving despite these obstacles, and a woman who remained poor while sacrificing to provide the best opportunities for her children. As Shipler (2005) observed, “Kinship can blunt the edge of economic adversity” (p. 179).

Chapter 8: Body and Mind

Shipler (2005) highlighted the problem of malnourished children in this chapter, noting that “food is one of the few flexible parts of a tight budget” (p. 201). Because food dollars are flexible, they can often get used for other expenses of living, such as housing or electricity, and as a result, children are going hungry. Profiling the efforts of a doctor who specializes in treating malnourished children, this chapter portrayed the interconnected web of social, economic, and psychological issues that poor families face.

Chapter 9: Dreams

Children who are socioeconomically disadvantaged suffer in the educational system. Shipler (2005) noted that low income parents are often less able to participate in or advocate for their childrens’ educational experiences, and that for some parents in poverty, a defensive and adversarial approach to school negatively affects their children’s perception of school. Schools and teachers are challenged by inadequate time and resources to help students succeed academically.

Chapter 10: Work Works

Shipler (2005) described a job-training program that teaches people workplace skills: “Many were so ruined that they had to learn the basics of arriving on time, speaking to people, answering the phone, accomplishing a task, and believing in themselves” (p. 255). Trainees learn social skills as well as practical skills, such as how to write a resume and prepare for an interview. Programs such as the one described here have helped propel former welfare recipients into the job market.

Chapter 11: Skill and Will

This chapter summarized the issues described in the text and proposed solutions to alleviate and end poverty in America. Poverty is a complex issue and a systemic problem, with multiple interconnecting layers, and any solution must take holistic approaches. The government has a responsibility to help protect its citizens in the form of a safety net, according to Shipler (2005), and it has an obligation to “blend its power in creative interaction with the profit and nonprofit worlds, with private industry and private charity” (p. 290). Increasing wages, providing vocational training, improving school funding, and providing universal health care are all possible solutions Shipler (2005) addresses.

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Key Terms and Concepts:

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC): the Earned Income Tax Credit is a tax credit that reduces the amount of taxes owed and is designed for low income earners.

Food Security: access to healthy, nutritious food for all people at all times.

Malnutrition: a condition caused when an individual does not get sufficient nutrients in the form of food.

National School Lunch Program (NLSP): a federal program that funds free or low-cost nutritious meals to school children from low-income families.

Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (PRWORA): a welfare reform act signed into law by President Clinton in 1996. The bill shifted the welfare system into one that requires welfare recipients to seek employment in order to receive assistance. The bill provided incentives for states to move welfare recipients into jobs, as well as offer child care assistance, child support enforcement, and medical coverage.

Predatory Lending: a lending practice that targets low income and otherwise vulnerable people, in which naïve borrowers are usually exploited and not informed about the true cost of the loan.

Refund Anticipation Loans (RAL): money borrowed by a taxpayer in anticipation of a tax refund. This financial product is not associated with the Internal Revenue Service and is often targeted and marketed to low-income individuals.

Soft Skills: interpersonal skills necessary for job readiness. Punctuality, dependability, conscientiousness, and the ability to communicate clearly and effectively are all considered soft skills. Persons living in poverty and moving off of welfare assistance sometime need extra help learning these skills in order to be successful in the job market.

Subprime Lending: financial products for those with imperfect credit, these loans carry higher interest rates and are disproportionately marketed toward minorities and lower income borrowers.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): formerly known as the Food Stamps Program, this federal program provides food assistance for individuals and families who meet certain income requirements.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): formerly known as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), this federal program, initiated through the welfare reform law of 1996, provides states with block grants to fund benefits and services for needy families.

Welfare: government benefits provided to those in need. These benefits can take the form of housing, financial, and/or nutritional assistance.

Welfare-to-Work: programs designed to assist welfare recipients prepare for employment.

Women, Infant, Children (WIC) Program: A federal program for supplemental foods, nutritional assistance, and health care referrals for low income pregnant women and/or women with children.

Discussion Questions:

Chapter 1

1. In the introduction to *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*, Shipler (2005) discussed the American Myth and Anti-Myth as frameworks for understanding the causes of poverty (p. 5-6). What do you think he means when he says, “But the American Myth also provides a means of laying blame” (p. 5)? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
2. The subtitle to Shipler’s (2005) text is *Invisible in America*. In the introduction to the book, he noted: “The first step is to see the problems, and the first problem is the failure to see the people” (p. 11). In what ways are people living in poverty invisible?
3. Shipler (2005) critiques the business practices of tax preparers, specifically the services targeted at the working poor. According to Shipler (2005), “With cunning creativity, the preparers have devised schemes to separate low-wage workers from much of their refunds and Earned Income Credits as feasible” (p. 15). Do you agree with this characterization? Why or why not?

Chapter 2

4. Consider the stories of Wendy, Ann, and Lisa (p. 25-27). Compare and contrast their approaches to living in poverty.
5. Consider the story of Christie and her struggles as a low wage worker (p. 39-46). Shipler (2005) observed, “By itself, hard work alone would not pay off. But unless employers can and will pay a good deal more for society’s essential labor, those working hard at the edge of poverty will stay there. And America’s rapturous hymn to work will sound a sour note” (p. 45-46). What do you think Shipler (2005) means by this statement? How does this relate to the American Myth discussed in pages 5-6?
6. Shipler (2005) presented the story of Caroline and her daughter Amber in chapter two. He stated, “Money may not always cure, but it can often insulate one problem from

another. Parents of means could have addressed Amber's difficulties without uprooting themselves and discarding their assets. [...] In the house of the poor, however, the walls are thin and fragile, and troubles seep into one another" (p. 76). According to Shipler's (2005) profiles, how does a lack of financial resources make working Americans more vulnerable?

Chapter 3

7. Shipler (2005) observed in chapter three: "The American ideal embraces an equality of opportunity for every person but not an equality of result" (p. 88). What do you think he means by this? Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not?

Chapter 4

8. Shipler (2005) described in grim detail the housing provided for migrant workers in chapter four: "It looked as if nothing had ever been cleaned or repaired. There was no privacy, no comfort, not even the quiet sense of simplicity that could be found in a primitive village. There, at least, human beings live. Here, they were kept, warehoused, stored like seed and fertilizer" (p. 99). What do you think about the working conditions many migrant workers face? Do they deserve more dignified and humane conditions, or does their status as undocumented immigrants mean that they deserve a more austere environment? Does it matter that they are working in the country without proper authorization?

Chapter 5

9. Shipler (2005) profiled Camellia Woodruff and her efforts to begin a job at Macy's. Despite encouragement from her case worker, Camellia did not complete the employee orientation process. As Shipler (2005) noted, "She could not find her way through the thicket of tangled anxieties and excuses" (p. 125). Why do you think Camellia came up with so many reasons to not appear at her orientation? And what do you think of her social worker Glenda's response to how to keep helping Camellia: "Keep hugging her" (p. 125)?
10. Shipler (2005) noted, "If employers had to choose, many would prefer low-wage workers with 'soft skills' rather than the 'hard skills' of reading, writing, and math. A lot of menial jobs don't need writing or math, but they all require people to show up on time" (p. 126). What does the author mean by "soft skills?" How do people learn "soft skills?"

Chapter 6

11. Shipler (2005) stated that "A surprising number of women at the edge of poverty turn out to be survivors of sexual abuse" (p. 143). Indeed, according to the U.S. Bureau of Justice National Crime Victimization Survey in 2005, victimization rates for rape and sexual assault are highest in households earning less than \$7,500 per year. Given what you have learned about the impact of poverty so far, what do you think is the connection between sexual abuse and poverty?
12. In chapter six, Shipler (2005) claims that "neglectful parenting can have more damaging results in poverty" (p. 161). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Consider the case studies in chapter six when formulating your response.

Chapter 7

13. How do you think Kara King's life might have turned out if she had financial resources for better medical care?
14. Shipler (2005) claims that of all of the factors that "make an economic life successful," "kinship stands prominently among them" (p. 180). What is meant by this? In what way do family and friendships influence the lives of those living in poverty?

Chapter 8

15. Shipler (2005) writes that "The clinics that treat malnutrition stand at a devastating collision of problems, most of which cannot be solved by physicians" (p. 202). What are these problems, and why can doctors not solve them? What other kinds of professionals can assist with the complex problem of malnutrition in children?
16. What is the relationship between poor housing and poor health, especially in children? Why does Dr. Zuckerman, described on page 225, hire a lawyer?

Chapter 9

17. What does Shipler (2005) mean when he states, "For many a parent in poverty, love for a child is akin to anxiety?" Use examples from this chapter and previous chapters to explain your answer.
18. Based on the information Shipler (2005) provides in this chapter, in what way do you think financial resources provide a safety net for families with children who have learning disabilities?
19. Shipler (2005) states, "I have often thought that the best way to learn about a country is to visit its prisons, hospitals, and schools" (p. 252). What do you think he means by this?

Chapter 10

20. Shipler (2005) describes a job training program that grew out of a soup kitchen project in Washington, D.C. (p. 255-256). This same soup kitchen also spawned a drug treatment program and a housing program for the homeless. What do you think of this multi-layered approach to helping people out of poverty? Do you think this is effective? Why or why not?
21. Welfare-to-work programs provide training so that ex-welfare recipients can find employment. The Xerox Corporation made use of one of these programs, and it found graduates of the welfare-to-work program "more reliable than walk-in applicants" (p. 261). Why do you think that is?

Chapter 11

22. Shipler (2005) claimed that "working poverty is a constellation of difficulties that magnify one another" (p. 285). Do you believe this to be true? What evidence does he provide to support this claim?
23. Shipler (2005) observed that when it comes to addressing the problem of working poverty, "We understand that holistic remedies are vital" (p. 286). What does he mean by this? What examples of holistic remedies are described throughout the book?
24. Shipler (2005) argued: "Government can be neither absent nor all all-encompassing. It cannot fail to maintain a safety net, cannot avoid direct grants to the needy, cannot be

blind to its role as the community's resource" (p. 290). Do you agree with this position? Why or why not?

25. Why does Shipler (2005) claim that "It is time to be ashamed" (p. 300)?

Reflection & Essay Questions:

1. Reflect upon the portraits of poverty provided in his text. What solutions do you propose for ending poverty in America?
2. How has *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* enhanced or changed your perspectives on social justice issues?
3. Consider the community in which you live. Do you agree that the working poor is indeed "invisible" in your area as Shipler (2005) claims?
4. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America* was published in 2005. Does the title still hold relevance today? Why or why not? What current issues can you think of that relate to the representation of poverty presented? How do current national conversations about health care reform, or immigration reform play into this topic?

SECTION II:

Issues in Immigration Reform: A Brief Introduction with Discussion Questions, Vocabulary, and Essay Topics

by Joshua J. DeWar, Ph. D.

based on

Ramos, J. (2010). *A country for all: An immigrant manifesto*. New York: Random House.

Throughout *A country for all: An immigrant manifesto*, Ramos (2010) lobbies for sweeping immigration reform in the U.S. He shares facts and statistics about current immigration practices that have economic and humanitarian implications that he feels need to be addressed in the near future to repair a system that is dated, broken, and inefficient. In order to understand some of the issues presented by Ramos (2010), it is important to have a cursory understanding of where immigration policy currently stands in the U.S. and how it evolved into what it is today.

Discussion on immigration and immigration reform have become common over the course of the last decade, with major media outlets airing programs on concerns about its economic and cultural impact on U.S. and global societies (Cohen, 2001; Huntington, 2004; Ramos, 2010; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001). In the United States, citizens have often perceived that the country is experiencing an immigration crisis (Massey, 2007). A study by Kohut, Keeter, Doherty, Suro & Escobar (2006) noted that three-quarters of all Americans felt current immigration policy was a "moderately big or a very big national problem," and more than half of all surveyed (54%) stated a belief that the U.S. needed to be "protected against foreign influence." In addition to this, 48% of the population polled felt that "newcomers from other countries threaten[ed] traditional American values and customs" (Kohut et. al, 2006). Given the emotional reactions of some

Americans to this topic, it is not surprising that the number of immigrants living in the United States is often overestimated. Though the actual percentage of immigrants residing in the U.S. stands at approximately 12%, more than half of all Americans polled in the PEW Center report (Kohut et. al, 2006) believed it was greater than 25%.

The composition and backgrounds of immigrants in the U.S. today is diverse. Individuals from a variety of countries come to seek a better life for themselves and their families. The largest populations of immigrants come from Latin American and east Asian countries (Ramos, 2010). Of immigrants currently living in the U.S., approximately one third are from Mexico. Taking into account individuals residing in the country from Mexico in undocumented statuses brings this figure closer to 60% (Passel, 2006). After Mexico, the next largest population of undocumented immigrants has background ties to El Salvador, though these individuals account for just 7% of the total immigrant population residing in the U.S. (Massey, 2007).

Political debate over immigration often cites the large undocumented immigrant population in the U.S. as a visible symptom of the nation's broken immigration system (Ewing, 2010) while noting that effective immigration reform may require both granting legal status to undocumented individuals and creating new systems of accountability that establish appropriate and viable numbers of immigrants allowed to nationalize in the future. Myriad citizens' action groups and politicians site the need for the restructuring of temporary-worker programs, better enforcement of immigration laws in the workplace, and a reexamination of general wage and labor laws (Ewing, 2010). Each of these, as options for immigration reform, will be discussed in order to understand the multifaceted approach that may be needed to reform U.S. immigration policy.

Given the above, the question arises: how did the current state of immigration politic come to be? An exact answer to such a question is hard to achieve as issues facing the U.S. immigration system are deeply entrenched and broadly based. Meissner, Meyers, Papademetriou, & Fix (2006) stated that legal limits on both types of immigration in the U.S., employment and family-based, have often been determined by domestic political compromises that rarely hold ties to the labor needs of the economy or the social needs of the country. Rather than embrace growing trends in globalization that have encouraged the movement of knowledge, workers, capital, goods, and services across borders, the U.S. immigration system continues to be bound by numerical quotas that were devised in the 1960s (Ewing, 2005). Such quotas, and the immigration-enforcement mechanisms which the U.S. government has created to enforce them, have often had less than positive effects on the U.S. economy, have hindered family reunifications, and have fueled the growth of an undocumented population that numbers roughly 12 million (Immigration Policy Center, 2009).

Debates about immigration publicized in popular media outlets suggest that the interests, values, or individual lifestyles of legal citizens are or can easily be threatened by immigration. Media rhetoric also tends to emphasize adverse consequences for jobs, taxes, crime, schools, cultural norms, or social harmony as immigrant numbers grow (Simon & Alexander, 1993). Given such media coverage, it is not surprising that opponents of immigration always outnumber supporters (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008). But would increasing immigrant numbers threaten these things in actuality? Many observers believe that support for immigration or immigration reform depends on who the immigrants are while others claim that decisions are, at least in the arena of

public perception, being based on the actual consequences of immigration, not the identity of the immigrant groups being discussed. What is known is that news about immigration increases anxiety and provokes greater opposition among White Americans when it highlights low-skilled Latino migrants and emphasizes the negative consequences of immigration (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008). Given this, it is hard to understand whether both public perception and current political practice are being informed by actual fact or by xenophobia.

To best understand current immigration practice in the U.S., one must begin with an assumption about the essential nature of immigration as a political issue. As King (2000) noted, immigration inevitably generates conflict between groups: citizens versus noncitizens, English speakers versus foreign language speakers, Whites versus non-Whites. For better or worse, popular discourse on immigration is most often “group centric” (Nelson & Kinder, 1996), and attitudes around the topic are often rooted in group identity and prejudice more than they are in fact, with a large part of this due to the information conveyed in mass media (Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997; Kinder, 2003).

Immigration Issues in the Mass Media

Scheve and Slaughter (2001) stated that Americans tend to be poorly informed and uncertain about immigration and noted that general opinions about immigration depend, at least in part, on what individuals read or hear in the news. Scholars (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008) have confirmed this, finding that media outlets play a large role in shaping public opinion on this topic and that news outlets stimulate greater opposition toward immigrants when they highlight the costs rather than benefits of immigration. Brader, Valentino, & Suhay (2008) concluded that Americans’ reactions to the topic of immigration as a whole are tied to the immigrant groups prevalently discussed in the media. As an example of this, highlighting Latinos in discussions on immigration led White citizens to believe that immigrants posed an even greater problem to American stability than when White Europeans were featured. As such, public opinion on the topic of immigration can often depend on the immigrant group made salient and that the effects of highlighting these groups as related to political thought and behavior are often mediated by anxiety. Thus, the question arises: are public policies made on the basis of fact or fear when it comes to issues of immigration?

Major media stories from 1995 to 2005 were twice as likely to stress the costs of immigration over its known benefits. Given this, is not surprising that public opinion about immigration often runs heavily toward opposition (Simon & Lynch, 1999), with a plurality of Americans preferring to reduce the number of immigrants or hold the numbers of new, entering citizens constant. Similarly, the number of Americans who favor increasing the number of migrants is consistently small, usually around only 10% of the population. Past studies revealed that opposition to immigration is tied to both “realistic” economic worries and “symbolic” cultural anxieties, but more so the latter (Citrin, Green, Muste, & Wong, 1997; Kinder, 2003; Scheve & Slaughter, 2001; Sniderman, Pierangelo, Rui, & Piazza, 2000).

Though immigration’s status on the U.S. media agenda has waxed and waned throughout history (Tichenor, 2002), there have been striking similarities in the central issues and character of the debates presented and published across time. Though rising numbers of immigrants carry both

costs and benefits, the emphasis of public discourse represented through news outlets tends to be on the former (Simon & Alexander, 1993). Politicians and activists have always voiced concerns about the economic and cultural threat immigration poses to Americans (Cohen, 2001), and such discussion has led to a sharing of misinformation with the American public. Because of this, it is often hard for U.S. citizens to make informed decisions about this topic.

Border Control

The Brookings-Duke report stated the presence of 12 million unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. is symptomatic of a failure “to devise and implement effective immigration policies” (Brookings-Duke Immigration Policy Roundtable, 2009, p. 9). Perhaps more concisely, many politicians argue that such a number is evidence that the “get them before they get here” enforcement approach pursued by the federal government for the past two decades has been unsuccessful at addressing the issues associated with immigration.

As noted by Ewing (2010), the number of unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. has grown exponentially since 1990. This has occurred despite substantial increases in the amount of money and staffing devoted to immigration policy and border enforcement. To illustrate this, it is important to note that the annual budget of the U.S. Border Patrol has increased by 714% since 1992, having gone from \$326.2 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 1992 to \$2.7 billion in FY 2009. In addition to increased dollars, the U.S. has significantly increased the number of Border Patrol agents during this time as well, having grown staffing by 390% - from 3,555 agents in FY 1992 to 17,415 in FY 2009 (Ewing, 2010). Due to these funding increases, the U.S. Border Patrol went from being a small agency with a budget equivalent to those of most small, metropolitan police departments to a large and powerful organization with more personnel authorized to carry firearms than any other branch of the federal government outside of the U.S. military in a span of ten years (Massey, 2007).

The U.S. Border Patrol is not the only government group that has seen an increase in funding relative to undocumented immigrant control. Massey (2007) noted that, as of 2002, the total Immigration and Naturalization Service budget was thirteen times its 1986 level. The budget of other agencies, such as the Customs and Border Protection agency, the parent group of the Border Patrol within the Department of Homeland Security, has increased by 92% since 2003 (Ewing, 2010). During this same time, the budget of Immigration and Customs Enforcement has increased by 82% (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2005). Despite these dramatic budgetary increases, the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has not gone down; it has, rather nearly tripled in size over the past two decades, from an estimated 3.5 million in 1990 to 11.9 million in 2008 (Passel & Cohn, 2009).

Given this, it appears that even as the U.S. has embraced a consolidation of markets for capital, goods, commodities, services, and information under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), it has fought to maintain separate labor markets (Massey, 2007). The above figures demonstrate that the U.S. government continues to increase financial and human resources to demonstrate that the U.S.-Mexico border can and should be firm with respect to migrant workers, even as it becomes more permeable with respect to flows in other areas. Such a mindset has contributed to the current state of U.S. immigration policy (Ramos, 2010) – and has

prompted the recent cries for reform. Increases in spending have not lead to a decreased number of documented immigrants in the U.S. and have rather caused further complications for the national budget.

Lastly, scholars (Ewing, 2010; Ramos, 2010) have noted that stronger immigration enforcement along the U.S.-Mexico border has had an unanticipated consequence: it has encouraged more undocumented immigrants to stay in the United States. Given the high risks and costs of continually crossing and re-crossing the border, many migrants now have a greater incentive to extend their time in the U.S., something that increases the likelihood that they will remain (Ewing, 2010). Intensified border enforcement has all but ended traditional patterns of circular migration and caused more undocumented immigrants to settle in the U.S. on a much more permanent basis (Massey, 2007). Thus, data shows that tighter immigration policies and stricter border enforcement has served to accelerate, rather than reduce, the number of undocumented Mexicans entering and residing in the U.S. each year (Massey, 2007).

Border Crossing Deaths

Though it is clear from the above that, though the U.S. government has invested significant time and monies into securing the nation's borders, such efforts have had little impact on lowering the number of undocumented immigrants who enter the country each year. In addition to this, the results of such efforts have had an unforeseen impact that troubles most humanitarians. The reinforcing of traditional points of border crossing, beginning in 1995, has led to a channeling of unauthorized migrants through hazardous mountain and desert areas as these individuals, along with their guides, seek other, more dangerous routes to enter the US. Such a movement through uncharted and dangerous terrain has not surprisingly contributed to an increase in fatalities. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) estimated that the number of border-crossing deaths doubled in the ten years following the onset of enhanced border-enforcement operations (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2006). An October 2009 report from the American Civil Liberties Union of San Diego and Imperial Counties and Mexico's National Commission of Human Rights approximated that 5,607 immigrants died while attempting to cross the border between 1994 and 2008 (Jimenez, 2009).

While the threat of possible death or serious harm may hold some migrants back from making the trip to cross the U.S. border, for others this is not the case. A long-term study of unauthorized migration conducted at the University of California, San Diego in 2008 found that well over 90% of unauthorized immigrants continue to try to cross the U.S. border until they make it (Cornelius, Borger, Sawyer, Keyes, Appleby, Parks, Lozada, & Hicken, 2008). Additionally, instead of deterring individuals from crossing, tighter border enforcement has led more immigrants to rely upon people smugglers or "coyote guides" to make successful trips into the U.S. (Cornelius et al., 2008). Thus, while the risks of border crossing have risen, so, too, have the black market financial costs associated with such an endeavor. Coyotes, knowing their services are more in demand than ever, have increased the range of products and services they offer as well as their price. As an example, the cost of border-crossing guide services remained constant at approximately \$400 from 1980 through 1992. With increased border patrol operations starting in 1995, however, the cost of hiring a coyote had increased to \$1,200 by 2000 (Massey, 2007).

Improving Immigration Practices: Proposed Plans

The Brookings-Duke Immigration Policy Roundtable (2009) report noted that creating policies or proposals to expel all undocumented immigrants from the U.S. “would be a catastrophic choice—enormously expensive, diplomatically disastrous, and hugely costly in human terms” (p. 9). Though this is something advocated by certain politicians and select political factions, other interventions have also been proposed that could have less costly implications.

Ramos (2010), Ewing (2010), and Massey (2007) offer three other possible strategies for reforming immigration practices. The most discussed of these strategies calls for the creation of a program under which unauthorized immigrants could apply for legal status—an approach advocated by a wide array of groups on pragmatic, economic, and humanitarian grounds (Ewing, 2010). As part of such a program, an undocumented immigrant currently residing in the U.S. could apply for citizenship, pay a fine for having entered the country illegally, and would be sent to the “back of the current citizenship application line” to await his or her turn for legalization. Such a practice offers the chance to admit wrong-doing and make amends to move forward while serving to provide decent living and working conditions for all currently residing in the U.S. (Ramos, 2010). Given the current state of the U.S. economy, working to incorporate undocumented immigrants into the strategy for economic recovery could also have beneficial financial implications. First, it would mean a larger tax base from which to draw income, and it would allow immigrants to have more money to spend within U.S. markets. It also offers a savings over programs that propose spending significant dollars to force immigrants to leave the country (Ramos, 2010).

The second immigration reform strategy discussed examines integrating immigrants more holistically into the U.S. and reexamining the number of visas issued to Mexican citizens. As Massey (2007) noted:

“The number of numerically restricted visas allocated to Mexico (20,000), which has a population of 106 million, is the same as that for the Dominican Republic, whose population is only 8.2 million. As a result, the latter is actually permitted a higher rate of legal emigration (2.5 per thousand in 1998) than the former (1.4 per thousand in the same year), even though as a partner in NAFTA, Mexico is far more closely linked to the United States and more vital to its interests” (p. 324).

Given this, it is important that the U.S. look to examine Mexico’s current visa quota of 20,000 immigrants and, if needed, adjust this number to a figure that could still yield an annual rate of emigration that is modest by historical standard.

Many Mexican citizens come to the U.S. as undocumented immigrants or to seek permanent resident visas because it is the only door left open to them. If another option were available, such as a temporary work visa, many citizens would opt for it. Contrary to media reports, many Mexican citizens would love to return home to family and friends if it were easier to do so (Massey, 2007). Rather than making it more difficult for migrants to come and go, an enlightened policy might call for creating a visa to permit Mexicans to enter, live, and work in the United States without restriction for a structured amount of time. Proposals offer that such a temporary work visa could be renewed once in the lifetime of the migrant, but only after he or

she returned home for at least a year. Said visas could be distributed by a bi-national agency managed by both the U.S. and Mexican government (Massey, 2007).

Ramos (2010) noted that, the last issue to be tackled related to immigration reform is to prevent immigrants from wanting to come to the U.S. in the first place. The U.S. and other developed countries could do so by contributing to a plan to create better paying jobs and educational opportunities for individuals in developing countries. In so doing, many immigrants would not have a need to leave their homelands to sustain themselves and their families. Though such an initiative may not be feasible in the U.S. under current economic conditions, looking toward something of this nature in the future will remain important (Ramos, 2010).

Financial Impacts of Immigration & Employer Obligations

Throughout his work, Ramos (2010) argues that legalizing currently undocumented immigrants could have significant economic benefits. Studies by other authors corroborate this view point. The Perryman Group (2008) estimated that if all unauthorized workers and consumers were expelled, the U.S. would suffer a financial loss of at least \$551.6 billion in annual spending, \$245 billion in annual economic output, and more than 2.8 million jobs. In addition to this, many federal and state treasury departments would lose tax monies. While many U.S. citizens assume that undocumented immigrants do not pay in to any government agency, between half and three-quarters of undocumented migrants pay taxes to both the federal and a state government (White House, 2005).

As was noted earlier, there are currently more undocumented immigrants residing in the U.S. than at any point in American history (Massey, 2007). This growing population, with few resources at hand, is both vulnerable and exploitable to unscrupulous employers as long as they are forced to stay in an undocumented status (Ramos, 2010). To some extent, the plight of the undocumented worker was made worse by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) that imposed penalties on employers who knowingly hired undocumented migrants. In order to determine who was hiring undocumented laborers, the act created the I-9 form. This document is required of all employers taking on a new hire post 1986, and serves as proof that an employer has inspected and confirmed (via legal document) a worker's identity and right to work in the U.S. Such an initiative may seem easy to accomplish at first review. In certain sectors of the labor market, however, where employee turnover is constant, the need to complete and retain an I-9 form for each employee offers a challenge that has increased hiring costs (Massey, 2007).

To assure continued access to undocumented labor, many firms requiring seasonal or part time help have found other methods of procuring employees after passage of the ICRA. Such practices often include relying on methods of indirect hiring through the use of labor subcontractors (Massey, 2007). As part of a subcontracting arrangement, a firm contractually agrees to provide a specific number of workers for a certain period of time to work a defined task at a fixed wage. The workers, often undocumented immigrants, are employees not of the company but of the subcontractor, leaving the company without the need to comply with IRCA's paperwork requirements. In return for providing such a buffer, the "middleman" subcontractor keeps a portion of the worker's wages as a service fee. Such an arrangement evolved into standard practice in the fields of agriculture, construction, housekeeping services within months

of the IRCA's implementation (Massey, 2007). This has resulted in a total hiring system overhaul in sectors of the economy that heavily employ immigrants.

The use of subcontractors has become standard practice in many fields today. This means that many individuals, both legal residents and undocumented workers, must work through a subcontractor and forfeit a portion of their wages in order to secure employment. Thus, the threat of sanctions issued against U.S. employers who hire undocumented immigrants has done nothing to reduce undocumented hiring, but has instead served to drive down wages of all citizens (immigrant and legal U.S. resident) and further erode working conditions in the United States (Massey, 2007). While efforts to expand criminal sanctions against employers led to massive protests starting in 2006 (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008), many political groups, including conservative Republicans, have become increasingly outraged by congressional attempts to pass reform legislation that would balance border control with pathways to legal status for illegal immigrants (Brader, Valentino, & Suhay, 2008).

Concluding Thoughts

The aging of the Baby Boom generation (the 75.8 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964) (Sincavage, 2004) and the upcoming retirements of individuals in this population will pose a demographic challenge to the U.S. Many, including Ramos (2010), propose that finding ways to better support and legalize larger number of immigrants will become increasingly important if the nation is to fill jobs vacated by retiring Baby Boom generation individuals. The Bureau of Labor Statistics concurs with such a thought, projecting that occupations requiring little or no postsecondary training will account for about half of all job openings in the forthcoming 10-15 year period (Dohm & Shniper, 2007). As noted by Myers (2008, p. 1), the "ratio of seniors (age 65 and older) to working-age adults (25 to 64) will soar by 67 percent between 2010 and 2030," leading to "not only fiscal crises in the Social Security and Medicare systems, but workforce losses due to mass retirements that will drive labor-force growth perilously low. Immigrants and their children will help to fill these jobs and support the rising number of seniors economically."

Immigration scholars (Massey, 2007; Ramos, 2010) noted that the United States designed exceptionally dysfunctional immigration policies between 1986 and 1996 that continue to cost U.S. taxpayers millions of dollars annually for less than efficient border enforcement tactics and naturalization processes that can take immigrants over ten years to complete. The post-IRCA enforcement initiatives have had no detectable effect in deterring undocumented migrants from entering the country or in raising the probability of their apprehension. Instead, the number of deaths associated with border crossings has risen and wages for both native and immigrants alike in certain industries have declined. Because of this, Ramos (2010) argues that immigration policies, and the quotas and practices associated with them, need to be reexamined and reimagined to better meet the needs of the current U.S. economy, NAFTA practices, to address humanitarian concerns, and to fill jobs that will be vacated by Baby-Boom retirements in the decades ahead.

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Key Terms and Concepts:

Affidavit of Support: form used by an immigrant applying for a green card. All immigrants seeking citizenship must have a sponsor complete this form to show that s/he is not likely to need welfare or other public assistance. A sponsor signing an Affidavit of Support (U.S. form I-864) must repay all support benefits received by the immigrant for up to 10 years. A change in marital status, such as divorce, does not negate the repayment responsibility.

Apartheid: systems, policies, or practices that sort or separate individual members of a population according to race, ethnicity, or caste.

Beneficiary: the individual who will benefit from an immigrant's petition. An employer is considered the beneficiary in employment related immigration cases. Relatives are most often beneficiaries in family cases.

Deportation: (n) hearings held to determine if an undocumented immigrant should be expelled from the U. S. under the provisions of the Immigration and Naturalization Act. (v) the carrying out of an order of expulsion. Due to recent federal legislation changes, deportation processes are now called removal proceedings.

Entry Without Inspection (EWI): coming into the U.S. without authorization. Examples of EWI can include crossing a U.S. border outside of an inspection point, without inspection, or crossing with falsified documents (such as by using another individual's passport to get past an inspection point).

Green Card: the informal name for the document issued as proof of registry as a legal permanent resident. Officially known as U.S. BCIS Form I-551, it is called a green card as earlier versions of the card (prior to 1978) were green in color. Most legal permanent residents today hold documents that are actually white or salmon/pink in color.

Immigrant: an individual who migrates to another country for an indefinite period of time or who intends to make the new country his/her permanent home of residence. In the U.S., a person who hopes to become a permanent legal resident is often called an intending immigrant.

Immigrant Visa: visa given to an applicant by a U.S. consul after qualifying for permanent residence. After arrival in the U.S., an individual bearing an immigrant visa receives a green card and can establish permanent residency.

Immigration: the movement of non-native individuals into a country for the purpose of establishing residence.

Labor Certificate: a certificate issued by the U.S. labor department when no qualified U.S. worker can be found for a sponsored job. This document shows that the company/individual giving the job to a non-U.S. worker will do so in a way that does not harm the labor market. A labor certificate can offer a sponsored employee the chance to apply for permanent residence

under certain other criteria.

Miscegenation: the mixing of two or more races or ethnicities through marriage and/or child birth.

Multiple Entry Visa: a visa that allows the bearer to apply to be admitted to the U.S. several times (or an unlimited number of times) without having to seek visa reapplication with a consul. A single entry visa only allows admission to the U.S. once.

Nativism: the practice of guarding the interests of native inhabitants over and against those of immigrants.

Naturalization: the conferring of rights and privileges associated with citizenship on an individual not born within the country.

Permanent Resident: the status offered a person who has qualified for citizenship and is registered by U.S. Immigration Services. Such a status allows an individual to permanently reside in the U.S., to travel in and out of the country without a visa, to work a job of his/her choosing, and to accumulate time toward full U.S. citizenship. This status is indicated by possession of a green card.

Political Asylum: the status assigned by the U.S. government to an individual who has applied and shown that it is likely that s/he would be persecuted in his or her home country for membership in a political or religious group that differs from that of the home country's government.

Priority Date: the date assigned to an approved immigrant's petition for citizenship. Priority date determines a beneficiary's place in the waiting list for the immigrant preference category.

Quota: the percentage or number of individuals of a specified background (country of origin, ethnic group, job classification, etc.) permitted to immigrate to a country.

Removal Proceedings: a hearing held to determine if an individual in the U.S. should be expelled or if someone seeking to be admitted to the country should be allowed entry. Under former U.S. policy, these sessions were also known as deportation proceedings.

Unskilled Job: term used to refer to jobs that require two years or less training to learn. Jobs commonly classified as unskilled include domestic work, food service or custodial jobs, or childcare positions.

Visa: An authorization issued by a consul that allows an individual to come to a U.S. point of entry to apply to be admitted. There are numerous types of visas (tourist, student, etc.). A visa does not guarantee or grant access to enter the country, but rather only the right to apply to be admitted at an inspection point.

Xenophobia: An irrational fear of things or persons which are foreign or different from a

individual's known culture.

Discussion Questions:

1. Ramos (2010) dedicates *A country for all: An immigrant manifesto* to undocumented immigrants. Given the many individuals to whom he shows appreciation in the acknowledgements section of the book, why would he chose to dedicate this to work to this group?
2. Five quotations are presented before the opening of the text. Why did Ramos (2010) select these quotes? What is their significance? If you were the author of this text and had to add additional quotes, which would you add? Why?
3. Ramos (2010) noted that, as of May 2010, there exist more punitive immigration laws, and repercussions for violating said laws, at local, state, and national levels than have ever existed before. All of these laws are aimed at preventing immigrants from assimilating into society. Why would this be? Why do more anti-immigration-related laws exist now than have existed at any other time in the history of the United States? (p. xix)
4. Ramos (2010) stated, "the United States draws its unrivaled strength from the diversity of its people, its tolerance for those who are different, and its talent for finding innovative routes to future success" (p. xix). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
5. Ramos (2010) presented six points about which he believes all U.S. citizen should agree with regard to immigration policy reform. These points are found on p. xx. Do you agree with Ramos' statements? Would you change, remove, or add any points to his list?
6. Ramos (2010) stated that, without invisible, undocumented immigrants, "our lives would be far less comfortable" (p. 5). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
7. Ramos (2010) noted that the preamble to the U.S. Constitution guarantees justice, tranquility, protection, welfare, and liberty to all individuals within U.S. borders and that the Constitution does not specify that these rights apply only to citizens or individuals with green cards. Do you think the founding members of the United States of America would indicate this is indeed what they meant when this document was written (i.e. that this statement applied to all individuals v. just being intended to apply to documented citizens?) Why do you feel this way? What are the benefits or the pitfalls of the open-endedness of such interpretation of the preamble?
8. Ramos (2010) offered ten reasons for immigration reform in chapter three. If you had to devise your top five reasons for immigration reform, what would they be? Would you have others outside of those he provided? Why or why not?
9. Ramos (2010) noted that many individuals accuse undocumented immigrants of breaking the law for coming to the U.S. without proper processing. However, he notes that there are very few repercussions for employers who hire them (at often lower than minimum wages and/or to work in less than safe workplaces). Should higher standards of accountability/sterner punishments be created for companies that knowingly hire undocumented immigrants? Why or why not?
10. Many arguments are often made that U.S. needs taller, longer, and stronger fencing on the borders to prevent individuals from entering the country without proper documentation. Ramos (2010) noted that such an investment could be considered futile as

60% of undocumented immigrants enter the U.S. by airplane (p. 53). Given this statistic, why do you feel there is such an emphasis on the part of many citizens and politicians to continue to develop and construct “super fences” along U.S. borderlines?

11. Ramos (2010) offered the following quote. Discuss your reactions to it. Do you think immigrants must possess courage and ambition to be successful? Why or why not?

It’s easy to overlook the fact that immigration is an act of enormous courage and ambition. It takes an incredible amount of bravery to leave your home, your family, and your friends to risk your life in an unknown land. Very few people become immigrants because it’s their preference. The vast majority of those who turn to immigration do so as a last resort. In the process, they must make immense sacrifices (p. 64).

12. As of mid-2009, the Immigration Policy Center stated that 8% of active duty military personnel are foreign born (Ramos, 2010). Does this number surprise you? Would you expect it to be higher or lower? Explain why you think as you do.
13. Ramos (2010) noted that “there may well be more Spanish speakers in the United States today than are in Argentina, Colombia, or Spain. And if it’s not the case yet, it will be soon” (p. 93). Describe your response to this quote. Would you have thought this number would be higher? Lower? Why do you feel as you do?
14. Though it is not official, is the United States a bilingual nation?
15. Ramos (2010) stated, “being anti-immigration is essentially taking a stance against the future” (p. 117). Do you agree or disagree? What are your reasons for feeling as you do?
16. Ramos (2010) asks the question, “When was the last time you heard an undocumented immigrant being interviewed on the nightly news?” (p. 123). Given that it is very rare to hear from individuals in this population directly, how can citizens and political leaders make choices that are good for people in this population without their direct input?
17. Ramos (2010) offered the following quote. Discuss your reactions to it. Do you think monetary penalties are appropriate, just, or effective? Why or why not?

Any reform should include a monetary penalty for undocumented immigrants. A fine will show there are negative consequences for those who enter or stay in the country illegally, while at the same time allowing an opportunity for undocumented immigrants to make amends and move forward. The process of admitting fault and paying a price ensures that this immigration reform is not criticized as being a form of amnesty, and the funds collected could be used to offset a large portion of the budgetary expense in legalizing workers (p. 128).

Reflection & Essay Questions:

1. Throughout *A country for all: An immigrant manifesto* Ramos (2010) argues for the legalization of undocumented immigrants and supports immigration policy reform in the United States. Write an essay defending the opposite point of view, citing scholarly works that demonstrate why Ramos’ ideas may not work if executed.

2. Ramos (2010) noted throughout *A country for all: An immigrant manifesto* that the United States is currently the only industrialized nation that does not require at least one parent to be born in the country legally before a child becomes a citizen. Write an essay that details (with support from current scholarly work) why such a policy is effective and should remain in place –or—why such a practice should be eliminated, detailing its flaws.
3. The Immigration Act of 1965 was the first major piece of immigration legislation passed in the twentieth century. Explain how this act changed the nationalities of individuals settling in the United States and how, from that point on, it has served to define the demographics of the nation.
4. Ramos (2010) stated that “legalizing undocumented immigrants would be the single most effective anti-terrorist measure the U.S. government could take” (p. 81). Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Support your answer with information found in *A country for all: An immigrant manifesto* and current scholarly research.
5. Ramos (2010) stated that, through the use of new technology, the U.S. can create a more organized and efficient method of controlling the border at ports of entry, companies, and offices. What types of technologies do you see as being effective in this effort? What would they look like in design? How would they work?
6. It has been over one year since *A country for all: An immigrant manifesto* was published. What has changed politically for immigrants since the book’s distribution?
7. Ramos (2010) offered the quote below. Discuss, in your own words, what the process of “Americanizing” undocumented workers could/should look like and what the positives and negatives of such practices might be.

If we want all immigrants to speak English, learn American customs, and otherwise assimilate into American society, we must provide them with the ability to come out of the shadows legally, become visible, and live without fear. Legalization is simply a way of Americanizing undocumented workers (p. 144).