

- new jobs." Suppose it were also true that this immigration was responsible for 78,000 other Mexican immigrants who joined criminal gangs or were otherwise not legally employed. How might Cole respond?
6. Cole admits (para. 12) that in California, the large population of undocumented immigrants imposes "substantial costs" on taxpayers. Does Cole offer any remedy for this problem? Should the federal government bear some or all of these extra costs that fall on California?
7. Cole thinks that "cultural separatism" among immigrants "rarely survives a generation" (para. 15). His evidence? Look at the Irish Catholics. But suppose someone argued that this is weak evidence: Because today's immigrants are not Europeans, but are Asian and Hispanic, they will never assimilate to the degree that European immigrants did—their race, culture, religion, language, and the trend toward "multiculturalism" all block the way. How might Cole reply?
8. Do you think that immigrants who are not citizens and not applying for citizenship ought to be allowed to vote in state and local elections (the Constitution forbids them to vote in federal elections, as Cole points out in para. 16)? Why, or why not? How about illegal immigrants?

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The Worker Next Door

It is often said that the American economy needs low-skilled foreign workers to do the jobs that American workers will not do. These foreign workers might be new immigrants, illegal aliens, or, in the current debate, temporary or guest workers. But if low-skilled foreign workers were not here, would lettuce not be picked, groceries not bagged, hotel sheets not changed, and lawns not mowed? Would restaurants use disposable plates and utensils?

On the face of it, this assertion seems implausible. Immigrants and low-skilled foreign workers in general are highly concentrated in a few states. The "big six" are California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. Even within those states, immigrants and low-skilled foreign workers are concentrated in a few metropolitan areas—while there are many in New York City and Chicago, relatively few are in upstate New York or downstate Illinois.

Yet even in areas with few immigrants, grass is cut, groceries are bagged, and hotel sheets are changed. Indeed, a large majority of low-skilled workers are native to the United States. A look at the 2000 census

is instructive: among males age twenty-five to sixty-four years employed that year, of those with less than a high school diploma, 64 percent were born in the United States and 36 percent were foreign born.

Other Americans nominally graduated from high school but did not learn a trade or acquire the literacy, numeracy, or decision-making skills needed for higher earnings. Still others suffer from a physical or emotional ailment that limits their labor productivity. And some low-skilled jobs are performed by high school or college students, housewives, or the retired who wish to work part time. Put simply, there are no low-skilled jobs that American workers would not and do not do.

Over the past two decades the number of low-skilled workers in the United States has increased because of immigration, both legal and illegal. This increase in low-skilled workers has contributed to the stagnation of wages for all such workers. The proposed "earned legalization" (amnesty) and guest worker programs would allow still more low-skilled workers into the country, further lowering their collective wages.

True, the prices of the goods and services that these new immigrants produce are reduced for the rich and poor alike. But the net effect of this dynamic is a decline in the purchasing power of low-skilled families and a rise in the purchasing power of high-income families—a significant factor behind the increase in income inequality that has been of considerable public concern over the past two decades.

In short, the continued increase in the flow of unskilled workers into the United States is the economic and moral equivalent of a regressive tax.

If the number of low-skilled foreign workers were to fall, wages would increase. Low-skilled American workers and their families would benefit, and society as a whole would gain from a reduction in income inequality.

Employers facing higher labor costs for low-skilled workers would raise their prices, and to some extent they would change the way they operate their businesses. A farmer who grows winter iceberg lettuce in Yuma County, Arizona, was asked on the ABC program *Nightline* in April what he would do if it were more difficult to find the low-skilled hand harvesters who work on his farm, many of whom are undocumented workers. He replied that he would mechanize the harvest. Such technology exists, but it is not used because of the abundance of low-wage laborers. In their absence, mechanical harvesters—and the higher-skilled (and higher wage) workers to operate them—would replace low-skilled low-wage workers.

But, you might ask, who would mow the lawns in suburbia? The higher wages would attract more lower-skilled American workers (including teenagers) to these jobs. Facing higher costs, some homeowners would switch to grass species that grow more slowly, to alternative ground cover, or to flagstones. Others would simply mow every other week, or every ten days, instead of weekly. And some would combine one or more of these strategies to offset rising labor costs.

Few of us change our sheets and towels at home every day. Hotels and motels could reduce the frequency of changing sheets and towels from every day to, say, every third day for continuing guests, perhaps offering a price discount to guests who accept this arrangement.

Less frequent lawn mowing and washing of hotel sheets and towels would reduce air, noise, and water pollution in the bargain.

With the higher cost of low-skilled labor, we would import more of some goods, in particular table-quality fruits and vegetables for home consumption (as distinct from industrial use) and lower-priced off-the-rack clothing. But it makes no sense to import people to produce goods in the United States for which we lack a comparative advantage—that is, goods that other countries can produce more efficiently.

The point is that with a decline in low-skilled foreign workers, life would go on. The genius of the American people is their ingenuity, and the genius of the American economy is its flexibility. And throughout our nation's history, this flexibility, the finding of alternative ways of doing things, has been a prime engine of economic growth and change.

TOPICS FOR CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

1. Reread Chiswick's first paragraph, and try to remember the effect it had on you when you first read it. Did you think, "Hey, he is right; of course the lettuce would get picked, the groceries would be bagged, and the hotel sheets would be changed"? Or did you think, "Where is this guy going?" Or what? Evaluate Chiswick's first paragraph as the opening of an argument.
2. What is the program known as "earned legalization" (para. 5)?
3. In paragraph 6 Chiswick says that although cheap labor reduces the price of goods and services for the poor as well as for the rich, "the net effect . . . is a decline in the purchasing power of low-skilled families." Are you convinced? Why, or why not?
4. What is a "regressive tax" (para. 7)?
5. Why does Chiswick think (para. 8) wages would increase if the number of low-skilled foreign workers declined? Are you convinced by his argument? Why, or why not?
6. Suppose someone replied to Chiswick, saying, in effect, "You are right, but the fact is this. We have some 12 million Mexicans living here who entered illegally. America is big enough, and rich enough, and great-spirited enough to welcome them, and in fact America will probably be the gainer." What would you say?
7. Analyze and evaluate Chiswick's essay as an example of persuasive writing. What devices does he use, and how effectively does he use them?