

From the *Sag Harbor Express*

## **OUR SHADOW POPULATION**

### **What Do We Know About The Immigrants Who Live Here?**

Perhaps the most important chapter in the history of the United States is the story of immigration, how people from all over the world came to our shores seeking a better life, and in the process built our great nation. And so it seems strange, hundreds of years since the founding of the Republic that we are arguing with one another about immigrants and immigration policies. You've heard the accusations – they take our jobs, they commit crime, they use our schools and hospitals, and most of them are here illegally, having sneaked across our borders with only the shirts on their backs. At the same time, we hire them to take care of our lawns, care for our children, clean our homes, help build our houses, work in our restaurants, and do a dozen other jobs that make our lives easier.

And they aren't only in menial jobs. The Kauffman Foundation, devoted to fostering entrepreneurship, says that entrepreneurial activity is nearly 40 percent higher for immigrants than for native-born Americans. Immigrants were involved in founding such high-tech companies as Google, Yahoo, Sun Microsystems and eBay. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that 40 percent of PhD scientists working here were born abroad. The Pentagon counts some 29,000 foreign-born, non-citizens currently serving in the armed forces. In 2005, a New York Times article reported undocumented workers in the

U.S. provided the Social Security System with as much as \$7-billion a year, “but are ineligible for benefits.” According to an Adelphi University study in 2008, immigrants on Long Island contributed approximately \$2.13-billion in taxes and other payments while costing local governments about \$1.06-billion for K-12 education, health care and corrections, a net benefit for Long Island of over a billion dollars. The same study said that Hispanic tax contributions in Suffolk County in 2006 was estimated at \$314-million.

All this contradictory information led us to take a closer look at how immigration affects Long Island, Suffolk County and the East End. A common misconception is that most immigrants are illegal which is far from the truth. A Brookings Institute study estimates that between 75 and 85 percent of immigrants on Long Island are here legally. The Dept. of Homeland Security says almost half the undocumented immigrants in the country are considered illegal, not because they sneaked across the border, but because they overstayed their visas.

We learned much more from a study released in October last year by the Fiscal Policy Institute, “New Americans on Long Island: A Vital Sixth of the Economy” prepared under a grant from the Hagedorn Foundation. (The FPI is a “non-partisan research and education organization that focuses on factors that affect the quality of life and economic well-being of New York State residents.”) Lots of “studies” are rigged to achieve the answers the sponsor wants, but we were reassured to see FPI’s list of advisors included educators from half-a-dozen colleges and universities in NY State and on Long Island, as well as officials from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, the Service Employees International Union, the Brookings Foundation and a former Secretary of Labor.

David Kallick, Director of FPI's Immigration Research Initiative, remarks that we often assume we know all about immigrants by observing day laborers on the side of the road (such as off Route 27 in Southampton), but a few dozen men standing on street corners are a tiny fraction of immigrants. There are 20,395 foreign-born people on the East End, composing 14 percent of our population and 17 percent of our labor force. (In the study, the "East End" includes Southampton, East Hampton, Shelter Island, Southold and Riverhead.) Data confirm the importance of immigrants in our society -- East End immigrants make up a majority of "private household and personal service workers," including housekeepers, maids, hairdressers, child care workers and welfare service aids. They represent over half of farming and landscape workers, nearly half in construction trades, and a third of food preparation workers. Sixty-five percent of immigrants are in families that own their own homes. More than half are part of families earning over \$80,000 per year.

Even more surprising, the study reports that over half the immigrants hold white collar jobs. Nearly a quarter of small businesses on Long Island are owned by immigrants, including nearly half of individual-owned restaurants. An earlier FPI study based on census data said that "the expansion of the immigrant work force -- both legal and illegal -- has crowded out few American workers." A third of foreign-born adults living on the East End are U.S. citizens. A little more than half are Latino and two-thirds of Latinos are immigrants, the others were born in the U.S. Immigrants from Mexico have tripled in number since 2000, reaching 2,376 in 2009, while Colombian immigrants have grown 142 percent to a 2009 total of 3,278. Other numerous nationalities are Guatemalan, El Salvadorian, Filipino, Brazilian and Ecuadorian.

The 2010 census counted Long Island's immigrant population at 460,000, 18<sup>th</sup> largest in the country. East End immigration is similar to the rest of Long Island and the rest of the country. The Urban Institute reports that 28 of the 100 largest metro areas in the U.S. have over 40 percent minority populations, and in 14 metros, they are in the majority.

The title, North American Free Trade Agreement, sounds good. Yet NAFTA, implemented in 1994, so damaged employment in Mexico that it is cited as the main reason Mexican immigration to the U.S. has more than doubled since then. A fact sheet produced by Witness For Peace (a "politically independent, grassroots organization") says that subsidies enable U.S. agricultural producers to, for example, export and sell corn at prices 30 percent below Mexican production costs, resulting in the loss of millions of Mexico's farming jobs. WFP claims that renegotiation of NAFTA is essential to create economic opportunities in Mexico and to slow immigration to the U.S. The Trade Reform Accountability, Development and Employment (TRADE) Act in Congress was designed to correct these unintended consequences, but is caught in Washington gridlock.

A sad result of immigration is the disruption of family life on both sides of the border. Men who came to the U.S. without spouses and children find themselves alone and isolated in our society. They may find some solace in Spanish church services but according to Isabel Seplveda de Scanlon, president of a Southampton Latino organization, many of them only leave their homes to work. Language is a huge problem, and funding for English instruction is dwindling in the tight economy.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment established birthright citizenship for anyone born in the U.S. Yet Long Island Wins (an organization that “provides resources and insight to promote immigration solutions”) says that between 1998 and 2007, over 100,000 undocumented immigrants were deported resulting in thousands of American-born children, U.S. citizens, leaving with their parents for countries where they may no longer have social connections or legal rights.

Next week we’ll review how different factions and politicians see the situation and their suggested solutions for what often seems an intractable problem.

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## **CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE**

### **Immigrants Welcomed**

### **Or Turned Away**

By Jim Marquardt

Last week we talked about the role of immigrants in the U.S. and on the East End. This week we hear from government officials, and from groups that welcome immigrants, or want them all to go away.

Witness For Peace (“a politically independent, grassroots organization”) advocates immigration reform that guarantees equal rights for all families, clear and non-discriminatory pathways to citizenship, children’s rights to education regardless of immigration status, and an end to collaboration between police and immigration enforcers which erodes immigrant trust in the police. Some years ago, the NY Civil Liberties Union said that numerous towns in Suffolk County were selectively using housing codes and traffic enforcement to target immigrants.

In September 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), after a two-year investigation, advised Suffolk County officials to improve police relations with immigrants. The investigation was prompted in part by the 2008 fatal stabbing in

Patchogue of an Ecuadorian immigrant by local teenagers. The recommendations include outreach programs in Latino neighborhoods, investigation of possible hate crimes, and revision of procedures that discourage Latinos from interacting with police.

For every “progressive” organization supporting immigrants, there’s probably a “conservative” group taking the opposite viewpoint. In a 2007 statement, the Heritage Foundation whose avowed purpose is to “formulate and promote conservative public policies” said we should not grant “amnesty” to illegal aliens.

As reported by Voice of America News, Ira Mehlman of Federation for American Immigration Reform wants Republican Congressmen to challenge the President on his August announcement that the administration’s deportation efforts now would focus on illegal immigrants with criminal records, or who pose a threat to national security, while outlining ways for those with no criminal record to remain in the U.S. and even apply for a work permit.

Representative Lamar Smith of Texas this past spring introduced the “Keep Our Communities Safe Act of 2011” that according to the American Immigration Council (AIC) proposes a massive expansion of the immigrant lock-up system. The AIC says the bill reinforces the myth that immigrants are more likely to commit crime or pose a danger to society than native-born Americans, and stated further that the administration’s 2012 budget request for immigrant detention already totals over \$2-billion. Smith’s bill also requires businesses to screen for undocumented immigrants, but faces opposition from his own party and even Tea Party factions. Republican Dan Lungen of California said, “It would devastate agriculture” where an estimated 80 percent of workers are undocumented.

Here in our own backyard, we asked for comments from Congressman Tim Bishop and Randy Altschuler, his most likely challenger in 2012. Bishop says the status quo is unacceptable. He supports comprehensive immigration reform that will gain control of our borders, regulate the flow of workers into the U.S. to fill our work force, and deal in an enforceable manner with immigrants who are in our country illegally. Bishop also supports the Federal Dream Act that would open a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who “meet certain criteria” which are quite daunting.

Altschuler states on his website that “we must secure our borders and stop rewarding illegal immigration. We can’t continue to look the other way when companies hire illegal aliens at the expense of unemployed people living here legally and looking for work. Randy supports increasing the number of Customs and Border Control agents, giving states the flexibility to address out-of-control illegal immigration that adversely impacts crime rates and local economics, no bail for illegal migrants or in-state college tuition breaks for illegal migrants.”

Fred Thiele, our representative in the NY State Assembly, said he “co-sponsored legislation which would establish a NY Dream Act to provide qualified undocumented immigrants with certain benefits, including access to State financial aid programs.” The bill restricts beneficiaries to “undocumented young adults who entered into the country before the age of 16 and have demonstrated a commitment to education, public service and good moral character.” Many other requirements must be met.

In 2009, the Immigration Policy Center issued a special report “Breaking Down the Problems: What’s Wrong With Our Immigration System.” It states that our immigration system remains frozen in time, locked into legal limits set in 1990 and

restricted by laws passed in 1996. The report goes on to say that the problems are much larger than what to do about 11- to 12-million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S., listing such crucial issues as -- insufficient numbers of visas available to bring in high-skilled or less-skilled workers at levels needed to meet the changing needs of the U.S. economy and labor market, arbitrary visa caps that have created long backlogs of family members who must wait up to 20 years to be reunited with family living in the U.S., wage and workplace violations by unscrupulous employers who exploit immigrant workers and are undercutting honest businesses, and inadequate government infrastructure which delays integration of immigrants who want to become U.S. citizens.

The report further states that “the lack of a comprehensive Federal solution has created a range of lopsided, enforcement-only initiatives that have cost the country billions of dollars while doing little to impede the flow of unauthorized immigrants.” The idea that immigrants would be legal if they would just “get in line” is unrealistic. There is no “line” for unauthorized immigrants.

Into this already fraught mix comes data released by the Census Bureau at the end of December. As reported in the NY Times, in 2011 the population of the U.S. grew at the lowest rate since the 1940s. Immigration was the lowest in 20 years. Net immigration from Mexico was close to zero, not seen in 40 years, the bulk of the reduction due to fewer illegal immigrants. These latest statistics should affect how Congress sees the problem, when it finally gets around to it. As pointed out by organizations supporting immigration, people who come to the U.S. from foreign countries replenish our aging, diminishing work force and keep Social Security funds filled for retiring boomers.

The White House says regulating immigration is the job of the Federal Government, yet several states have passed their own laws, and the Supreme Court will review an Arizona statute. Immigration problems demand legislation that balances humane policies with the rule of law, and answers our nation's economic and national security concerns. Last week the Obama administration made it a little easier for illegal immigrants who have an American spouse or parent to become legal residents, but unfortunately, comprehensive Federal reform probably will be gridlocked until after the election.

*What's your opinion? Go to [sagharboronline](#), click on "Our Town" at right, and add your comment.*

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