

# Critical Thinking about Illegal Immigration: Media Analysis using ProCon.org

**I. THE ARGUMENTS** - Read the statements below in numerical order (1,2,3,4) and complete the evaluation after each statement. Keep your responses private for now. We'll get to share them later.

## Is illegal immigration an economic burden to America?

PRO (yes)	CON (no)
<p><b>1. The Center for Immigration Studies (CIS)</b>, in the section titled "Costs of Immigration" on its website (accessed Oct. 24, 2007), offered the following:</p> <p><i>"...the net fiscal cost of immigration ranges from \$11 billion to \$22 billion per year, with most government expenditures on immigrants coming from state and local coffers, while most taxes paid by immigrants go to the federal treasury. The net deficit is caused by a low level of tax payments by immigrants, because they are disproportionately low-skilled and thus earn low wages, and a higher rate of consumption of government services, both because of their relative poverty and their higher fertility. This is especially true of illegal immigration.</i></p> <p><i>Even though illegal aliens make little use of welfare, from which they are generally barred, the costs of illegal immigration in terms of government expenditures for education, criminal justice, and emergency medical care are significant. California has estimated that the net cost to the state of providing government services to illegal immigrants approached \$3 billion during a single fiscal year. The fact that states must bear the cost of federal failure turns illegal immigration, in effect, into one of the largest unfunded federal mandates. "</i></p>	<p><b>2. Francine J. Lipman, MBA, LLM</b>, Professor of Law, Business and Economics at Chapman University, in a Spring 2006 <i>Tax Lawyer</i> essay titled "Taxing Undocumented Immigrants: Separate, Unequal and Without Representation," wrote:</p> <p><i>"Americans believe that undocumented immigrants are exploiting the United States' economy. The widespread belief is that illegal aliens cost more in government services than they contribute to the economy. This belief is undeniably false... [E]very empirical study of illegals' economic impact demonstrates the opposite...: undocumented actually contribute more to public coffers in taxes than they cost in social services.</i></p> <p><i>Moreover, undocumented immigrants contribute to the U.S. economy through their investments and consumption of goods and services; filling of millions of essential worker positions resulting in subsidiary job creation, increased productivity and lower costs of goods and services; and unrequited contributions to Social Security, Medicare and unemployment insurance programs. Eighty-five percent of eminent economists surveyed [according to the Dec. 1995 study by Julian L. Simon, "Immigration, the Demographic &amp; Economic Facts," of the Cato Institute and the National Immigration Forum] have concluded that undocumented immigrants have had a positive (seventy-four percent) or neutral (eleven percent) impact on the U.S. economy."</i></p>
<p><b>3. Jim Gilchrist, MBA, CPA</b>, Founder and President of The Minuteman Project, in an Aug. 26, 2005 speech titled "The Crushing Economic Burden of Illegal Immigration" and delivered at an immigration conference in Beverly Hills, CA [transcript made available on Oct. 10, 2005 in FrontPageMagazine.com], said:</p> <p><i>"I've tried to figure out the costs since I have this tax background. What is the cost to each of us as taxpayers to support 30 million illegal aliens, many of whom are working in the underground economy and not contributing to the tax system? And yet they're using the system that bona fide taxpayers provide and pay for... I had to make my own estimate, since the government will not give me these numbers, nor does it care to calculate them... I've come up with my own numbers. And I will stand by these numbers.</i></p> <p><i>The annual gross cost to U.S. taxpayers to provide schooling, hospitalization, and whatever plethoric benefits are out there for the 30 million illegal aliens is approximately \$400 billion per year funded by bona fide U.S. taxpayers. That's \$400 billion per year and going up."</i></p>	<p><b>4. Raul Hinojosa, PhD</b>, Associate Professor of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California at Los Angeles, in a July 18, 2005 <i>BusinessWeek</i> interview titled "A Massive Economic Development Boom," said:</p> <p><i>"First and foremost, [illegal immigration] it's a source of value added. The total goods and services that they consume through their paycheck, plus all that they produce for their employers, is close to about \$800 billion. They're also producing at relatively lower costs because the undocumented population typically gets about 20% less in wages than if they were legalized. That leads to lower prices for us and higher profits to employers. In addition, they're obviously a huge consumer base. We've seen that 90% of the wages that the undocumented population gets are spent inside the U.S... [T]otal consumptive capacity remaining in the U.S. is \$400 billion to \$450 billion. If you took away the undocumented population, it would be the worst economic disaster in the history of the U.S."</i></p>

Question and responses from ProCon.org: <http://immigration.procon.org/viewanswers.asp?questionID=000788>

**II. SCORING THE ARGUMENTS: ONE METHOD OF FORCING CRITICAL THINKING: ROUND ONE**

*Score 1 - 5, 1 being worst and 5 being best*

	ARGUMENT 1 (pro)	ARGUMENT 2 (con)	ARGUMENT 3 (pro)	ARGUMENT 4 (con)
A <b>Clarity of Statement</b> Hard to follow? Well communicated? Clear as can be?				
B <b>Quality of Source</b> Poor source? Fairly qualified? Top expert?				
C <b>Age of Statement</b> Old news? Somewhat timely? Very recent?				
D <b>Visual perception</b> Length, use of ..., paragraph breaks (or lack of) Regardless of content how does the presentation look?				
E <b>Strength of Argument</b> Weak? Sloppy? Moving? Convincing?				

**TOTALS (25 is the max):** \_\_\_\_\_

*TOTAL PRO (1+3):* \_\_\_\_\_ *TOTAL CON (2+4):* \_\_\_\_\_

Now forget the score. Which side do you think won? The pro or the con side? \_\_\_\_\_

**III. 20 MINUTE STUDENT DISCUSSION** - Get into groups of five and discuss:

- your scores,
- which side you think won and why,
- what you think of the arguments made
- whether or not you think the presentation of information was neutral or biased
- what questions (if any) you still have about this issue before you can really make up your mind

**IV. GROUP DISCUSSION** - Talk about arguments 1 - 4 individually using scoring methods A - E. What questions remain?

**V. RESCORE AND REVOTE –**

**TOTALS (25 is the max):** \_\_\_\_\_

*TOTAL PRO (1+3):* \_\_\_\_\_ *TOTAL CON (2+4):* \_\_\_\_\_

Now forget the score. Which side do you think won? The pro or the con side? \_\_\_\_\_

**VI. WRAP UP – Time, Money, and Bias; Why Critical Thinking Is Important**

Media production usually has **time** constraints (deadlines, windows of opportunity, lack of time to reach sources or provide context, etc.), **money** constraints (lack of access to content, video footage, source that require payment, etc.), and **bias** (corporate bias = don't anger the sponsors, avoid certain stories, spin towards something favorable to the business, etc.; personal bias = play it safe and keep my job, cover more easy topics and fewer time-consuming ones to increase output, stay away from anything that may get the company in trouble, etc.).

With all the factors involved in producing media (time, money, bias) and reading media information (writing clarity, sources used, appearance, novelty, strength of information provided, etc.), the process of thinking critically on controversial issues can seem like a difficult mission. It is difficult. There's a reason why many people don't do it. That's no excuse.

Critical thinking is having a questioning attitude and the skills to know which questions to ask. We were able to sift through four contrary arguments from major players in the immigration debate and judge them and make up our own minds on the difficult question: Is illegal immigration an economic burden to America?

Some people in this room had no specific opinion on this topic prior to 7pm tonight, and now you might have a well reasoned and reasonably informed perspective about it. All you did was think about it, talk about it, and really question it. Apply your critical thinking skills with your newly gained perspectives on media production and you will not only become better citizens but you will improve your ability to make a career in this important and exciting industry.