

# CARNEGIE COUNCIL *for Ethics in International Affairs*

## Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them

Public Affairs

Philippe Legrain, Joanne J. Myers

### Transcript

#### Introduction

**JOANNE MYERS:** Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you all for joining us this afternoon.

Today our guest is Philippe Legrain. We are very happy to have him with us. He will be discussing *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them*.

It seems as if every day there is a new item about the threat posed by illegal immigrants, many who are literally dying as they cross borders to enter either Europe or America, and our anxiety about them is on the rise. Managing this problem is now one of the greatest challenges facing both the United States and Europe. It is also becoming one of the most heated, polarizing political issues on both continents.

President **Bush** made immigration reform a priority in his second term, backing bipartisan legislation that aimed to strengthen border security while offering a path to citizenship for the estimated 12 million, mostly unskilled, illegal immigrants who are already in the United States. The bill collapsed in June amid fierce opposition from grassroots Republicans who accused Mr. Bush of offering amnesty to those who had entered the United States illegally.

In Europe, as well, there is a similar sense that immigrants from the third world are massing on the borders, taking jobs, abusing the welfare system, and posing severe security challenges.

Because of rapid economic globalization in the past 30 years, along with the weakening of border controls following the collapse of the communist bloc, there has been an unprecedented wave of immigrants moving across the European Union. There are now thought to be between 5 and 8 million illegal immigrants.

But is immigration the problem that so many claim it is? In *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them*, our guest this afternoon makes the case that immigrants are needed. Unlike others, who contend that illegal immigrants are taking low-paying jobs away from individuals who need them, he believes that on balance these new foreigners will enrich both the country that they left as well as the new country that receives them.

He writes that "illegal immigration is part of the vital lubricant of our societies. Businesses benefit because they can employ cheap labor. Middle-class households benefit because they can afford

more help with child care and cleaning. Farmers benefit because their crops can be picked in a timely way. So why are governments, and the populations they represent, so opposed? Why are so many people against the free movement of labor?"

Mr. Legrain is a British journalist and writer. As a trade and economics correspondent for *The Economist*, his writings often reflected his own personal fascination with how the world is coming together through globalization. He was Special Advisor to the Director General of the World Trade Organization.

In addition to *Immigrants*, he is the author of *Open World: The Truth About Globalization*. His articles have also appeared in *The Financial Times*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Policy*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, Europe. He is a frequent commentator on BBC TV and radio, where he addresses issues on globalization and migration. In 1999 he was commended as Young Financial Journalist of the Year in the Herold Wincott Press Awards. Today he is a contributing editor to *Prospect* and a Visiting Fellow at the European Institute of the London School of Economics.

Please join me in welcoming our guest today, Philippe Legrain. Thank you for joining us.

## Remarks

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** Thank you, Joanne, for that very kind introduction, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. Thank you very much, all, for turning up. I hope that you find it worthwhile.

When I told my friends I was planning to write a book about migration, several of them looked bemused. Some of them said to me, "What on earth do you know about birds?" The thing is that, like birds, people have been on the move since time immemorial—in fact, since human beings originated in Africa.

Everyone in the United States, including the Native Americans, actually come from somewhere else. So someone like [Pat Buchanan](#), who thinks of himself as an American thoroughbred, is actually a mere upstart.

People tend to think of the colonization of the Americas by white Europeans as the biggest wave of migration in history, but it is actually dwarfed by what is happening nowadays. Every year, over 10 million people move from the Chinese countryside to Chinese cities; that's 300 million people in the past thirty years. Across the world people are moving from rural areas to urban years. This year, for the first time ever, half of humanity lives in a city.

Migration is inevitable. It is both a consequence of development and a driver of it. And, compared with the vast movement of people within national borders, the numbers crossing them seem relatively few. In fact, the United Nations counts a mere 200 million international migrants worldwide. That is less than 3 percent of the global population.

It is only when you look at the pattern of international migration that you realize why it is so controversial. Migrants, mostly from poor countries, are flocking to a handful of rich countries, which have low birth rates, and so they therefore account for a rising share both of the population and an even greater share of the population growth. One in eight Americans, nearly as many Europeans, one in five Canadians, and one in four Australians was born abroad.

So if your mental image of globalization is of a Nike factory in China, of rich countries putting their stamp on poor countries, in the case of migration the shoe is on the other foot. It is people from poor countries making their mark on rich countries.

Therein lies the rub.

Now, those of us who are fortunate enough to have been born in a rich country tend to forget how lucky we are. Of course, life in the United States or Britain, where I am from, is not perfect—far from it—but the freedom, the security, and the prosperity that we take for granted are nonetheless enviable and unprecedented.

I came face to face with how lucky I am back in 1991. I had just left school. I went to work as a journalist in Estonia, only days after it had declared independence from the Soviet Union. I was going in search of my roots, because my grandparents had fled Estonia when the Red Army arrived in 1944. My mother was born in a refugee camp. She was lucky enough to grow up in the West, and so was I. But in Estonia I met some of my cousins. They were less fortunate. They were just like me, except that they were desperately poor, they had never traveled, and they had grown up in fear rather than in freedom. I looked at myself in the mirror, I thanked my lucky stars, and I resolved never to forget that, however much I achieve in my own life, a large part of it is because I am lucky enough to have been born in a country which offered me the opportunities that it did.

But in the grand scheme of things my personal history is irrelevant. The line of argument that goes "I am the son (or daughter) of immigrants, so of course immigration is a good thing" is emotionally understandable. It is certainly laudable. But I do not think it is a clincher, because the implicit assumption, which may not be shared by others, is that you are a good or valuable person. The obvious rebuttal is to say, "Well, even if you happen to be a good person, other immigrants may not be."

So a better starting point, I think, is one of principle.

One of the most basic human rights is the right to move freely. If you read Article 13 of [the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), it says: "Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country."

But what is the right to leave a country if one cannot enter another? Now, we in rich countries take it for granted that we are free to move around the world more or less as we please. We go on holiday in Mexico or the Caribbean, go on safari in Africa, go on trips around the world. Increasingly, we work abroad for periods of time. Some of us end up settling elsewhere, like many of the Americans in London or many of the Londoners here in New York. Why, then, do we seek to deny this right to others?

That approach puts opponents of immigration on the wrong foot, because their presumption is that border controls are normal, reasonable, necessary—so much so that they rarely question, or are forced to defend, the assumptions that lie behind them.

One response is to say: "Well, actually Americans are not free to go where they choose. You need to get a visa to go to many countries, and the Chinese government, say, may very well deny you one." That is true. But, in practice, most Westerners are able to go to China if they want to. My brother, for

instance, has been working in Shanghai for the past year.

In any case, why should we be basing our policies on what the Chinese government does? Should we deny people freedom of speech because the Chinese government does so? The point of our universal human rights is not that they are necessarily universally applied, but that they ought to be. That others fail to apply them is not a reason why we should fail to do so too.

An alternative response is to say: "Well yes, but if we let in foreigners X, Y, Z, terrible things would happen." Already, then, you have won an important victory. The critics have implicitly conceded that immigration controls are unfair, but are now trying to justify that injustice in terms of avoiding some hypothetical greater harm than the free movement of people would cause.

But are the potential costs of allowing people to move freely really so great that they justify such a huge injustice? Might there not be big benefits to opening up our borders too? And, even if you think immigration is a threat, are the costs of immigration controls not even greater?

Every year thousands of people die trying to reach North America, Europe, and Australia. More people have died trying to cross the border from Mexico to the United States in the past decade than were killed on 9/11.

Now, critics respond: "We are not responsible for these deaths. After all, migrants know the risks of trying to cross borders illegally."

But if a law is unjust and harmful, we cannot simply wash our hands of the consequences. By denying people fleeing poverty and persecution the opportunity to cross borders legally, we are, in effect, driving them to risk death trying to avoid our border controls.

Voters and government officials do not mean for migrants to die—of course not; they would rather they didn't—but, implicitly, they consider it a price worth paying for protecting our borders. Now, that sounds shocking, and it is, but how else can we explain the general public indifference at the deaths that our immigration controls cause? Why is there not an outcry each time a migrant dies? Why is the official response always that "we must remain tough in enforcing our border controls," rather than questioning whether the system makes any sense?

Now, if one is to justify these deaths in any rational way, one has to argue that somehow the benefits of border controls outweigh their costs, including the deaths they cause.

Some people say: "Well, opening our borders would destroy our societies." Yet, migrants are not an invading army. They are people like you and me whose only crime is wanting a better life for themselves and their children. They are just like someone who moves from New Mexico to New York, or from Texas to Washington, D.C., except that a line on the map stands in their way.

Immigration controls do not only cause a humanitarian crisis. There is also the soaring cost of border controls and bureaucracy. There is a criminalized people-smuggling industry. There is an expanding shadow economy, where illegal migrants are vulnerable to exploitation, where labor laws are broken, and where taxes go unpaid. Faith in government is undermined because politicians cannot deliver on their promises to halt immigration. And attitudes towards immigrants are corroded because they are perceived as lawbreakers rather than as hardworking and enterprising people.

At the same time, there are increasing limitations on everyone's freedom as governments impose new controls to try to clamp down on illegal immigration. If we continue along this road, we will end up in a police state. By trying to protect society from the perceived threat of immigration, we are actually harming ourselves—curtailing freedom, fostering injustice, and undermining law and order.

We ought to see migration not as a threat, but as an opportunity.

From a global perspective, freer migration could bring huge economic gains. When workers from poor countries move to rich ones, they too can make use of advanced economies' superior capital and technology. That makes them much more productive. That makes them—and the world—better off.

Now, economists calculate—and it's a back-of-the-envelope calculation—that removing all immigration controls would double the size of the world economy, and even a small relaxation of immigration controls would lead to disproportionately big gains.

From an ethical point of view, it is hard to argue against a policy that would do so much to help people who are much poorer than ourselves. The famous Rand Study reckons that the typical immigrant who arrives in the United States ends up \$20,000 a year better off.

And it is not just the migrants themselves who gain. It's the countries that they come from. Already, the migrants from poor countries working in rich countries send home around \$200 billion a year through formal channels, and perhaps twice that through informal channels. That compares to the mere \$100 billion that Western governments give in aid. And those remittances are not wasted on weapons; they are not siphoned off into Swiss bank accounts. They go straight into the pockets of local people. They pay for food, they pay for clean water, they pay for medicines, they help keep kids in school, they help start up new businesses.

When migrants return home, as many do, they come back with new skills, new ideas, and the capital to start up their own business. The first Internet cafes in Africa, for instance, were started by migrants returning from Europe.

Overall, the World Bank calculates that in countries that receive a large share of remittances they cut the poverty rate by a third. In countries that receive rather less, they cut it by a fifth.

By keeping kids in school, by providing better health care, by allowing businesses to expand, they increase economic growth too.

Now, many people believe that, while the rest of the world may gain from freer migration, that the rich countries, such as the United States, would lose out. In fact, critics argue that immigration from developing countries is harmful because the newcomers are poorer and less educated than Americans. But that is precisely why they are willing to do the low-paid, low-skilled jobs that Americans increasingly shun.

In 1960 over half of American workers aged over 25 were high-school dropouts. Now only one in ten is. Understandably, high school graduates aspire to better things, while even those with no qualifications do not want to do certain dirty, difficult, and dangerous jobs.

But without low-skilled immigrants America would grind to a halt. Who would do construction work,

clean dishes, hospitals, and hotel rooms, and look after Americans' young kids and elderly parents? Jobs like that cannot be mechanized. They cannot be imported. You can't care for an old person by using a robot or from abroad. And as people get richer, they increasingly pay others to do arduous tasks, like doing up their home, that they once did themselves, freeing up time for more productive work and for more enjoyable leisure.

Economic theory suggests that the gains from trade are greatest when countries are different. While the United States has an aging, increasingly well-educated population, as the Baby Boomers retire, the work force is set to shrink, putting a strain on businesses and public finances. In contrast, developing countries' baby-boom generation is just entering the labor force. And not only are they generally less well educated than their American counterparts, the wages they can earn at home are much lower. In effect, the work forces of America and Mexico complement each other.

Now, allowing Mexicans to do the jobs that Americans don't ever want to do is a win/win. It increases opportunity for people in developing countries. It does not generally undercut wages because Americans do not want to do these jobs in any case. It does not undermine social standards because if there is abuse, legal migrants have recourse to unions and the law.

In fact, the only way in which we can reconcile our aspirations to "opportunity for all" with the reality of "drudgery for some" is through immigration.

This does not entail creating a permanent underclass, because if migrants are temporary, as most aspire to be, then their point of reference is their home country, and, thanks to their work in the United States, they return home relatively well off.

Where migrants do end up settling, their children born in the United States ought to have access to the same opportunities as other American children. If it turns out that some children, be they those of poor immigrants or of poor white Americans, do not, it is surely a reason to redouble our efforts to ensure equality of opportunity, not to keep out immigrants. In that way, immigration can widen opportunity not only within the United States, but also internationally.

It is widely thought that immigrants take local workers' jobs. It is a fallacy based on the notion that there is only a fixed number of jobs to go around. But this is nonsense. We heard similar scare stories back in the 1960s, and beforehand, when women started to enter the labor force. Many men said, "Well, if women start working, there will be no jobs for us men." Of course, now most women work, as do most men.

That is because people do not just take jobs, they also create them. They create them when they spend their wages, which increases the demand for the people who produce the things they consume. And also because one person's labor stimulates demand for labor in complementary lines of work. So Mexican construction workers stimulate demand for people who are selling construction materials as well as for interior designers.

The question is: Do some American workers lose out? Hardly any, actually. Most actually gain. Why? Because, as critics of immigration are the first to agree, immigrants are different from Americans, so they actually rarely compete directly with them in the labor market. Often, in fact, they complement their efforts. If you think about it, a foreign child minder may enable an American nurse to go back to work, where her productivity is enhanced through having hardworking foreign doctors and foreign cleaners working together with her. At the same time, it stimulates extra capital investment.

Study after study fails to find evidence that actually immigrants harm the prospects of American workers. Harvard's [George Borjas](#) disagrees, but his approach is flawed because it neglects those complementarities between immigrant labor, native labor, and capital.

A recent [NBER](#) [National Bureau of Economic Research] study finds that actually nearly every American worker has gained as a result of immigration since 1990. Only one in ten high school dropouts have lost, and then by only 1 percent. And if you remember that, as a result of this, the much poorer migrant workers are a hell of a lot better off, it seems like that small 1 percent can be corrected by public policy, leaving everyone better off.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of immigration comes from the diversity and dynamism that foreigners bring. If you think about it, it is astonishing how often the exceptional individuals who come up with brilliant new ideas happen to be immigrants. In the case of Britain, 21 of Britain's Nobel Prize winners arrived in the country as refugees. Britain hasn't won that many Nobel Prizes.

Perhaps it is because immigrants tend to see things differently rather than following the conventional wisdom. Perhaps because, as outsiders, they are more determined to succeed.

But innovation doesn't just come from brilliant individuals. It, increasingly, comes from talented people sparking off each other. Foreigners with different ideas, different perspectives, different experiences, add something extra to the mix. So if there are ten people sitting around a table trying to come up with a solution to a problem, even if they are geniuses, if they all think alike, then they are no better than one. But if they all think differently, then, by bouncing ideas off each other, they can help solve problems faster and better.

That is not just an assertion; there is an increasing volume of research which backs that up. That is vital, because if you think about it, an ever-increasing share of our prosperity comes from companies that solve problems—companies that develop new drugs, companies that develop new video games, companies that develop new technologies to reduce pollution, or provide management advice.

You just have to look at Silicon Valley. Whether it's Yahoo!, Google, or eBay, they were all co-founded by immigrants—and not highly skilled immigrants, which the point system would seek to attract, but actually people who arrived here in the United States as children. Who would have guessed when [Sergey Brin](#) arrived as a child from Soviet Russia that he would end up founding Google? Who would have guessed that the son of a Kenyan goatherd could be the next United States president? The only certainty is that without a green card their chances of shining would have been dim.

At the same time, diversity acts as a magnet for talent. If you think about why talented people are drawn to cities like New York and London, in large part it is because they are exciting, cosmopolitan places. And we are not talking about just the ethnic restaurants and the culture experience. It is the opportunity to lead a richer life by living with people from all different backgrounds and all different countries—friends, colleagues, even a life partner.

This meeting of cultures leads to continuous innovation—whether it is fusion food, whether it is R&B music, whether it is new holistic therapies that blend East and West, whether it is writers of mixed heritage like [Salman Rushdie](#).

As [John Stuart Mill](#) rightly said: "It is hardly possible to overrate the value for the improvement of human beings of things which bring them into contact with persons dissimilar to themselves and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar. It is indispensable to be perpetually comparing one's own notions and customs with the experience and example of persons in different circumstances. There is no nation which does not need to borrow from others."

Now, part of the opposition to opening our borders stems from the belief that migration is an inexorable, once-and-for-all movement of permanent settlement. In a sense, our idea of migration is trapped in the 19th century. But now that travel and life does not stop at national borders, migration is increasingly temporary when people are allowed to move freely. That is true for globetrotting businessmen, and it is increasingly true for poorer migrants too.

Here there is a huge experiment going on in Europe at the moment. Since Poland and the other ex-communist countries joined the European Union in 2004, Britain and a few other countries have opened their borders to those countries entirely. Now, if you believe the scare mongers, they said all 75 million people in those East European countries could conceivably have moved to Britain. In fact, actually only a small fraction have, and most of those have already left again. And many are, in effect, international commuters who split their time between Britain and Poland.

Of course, some people will end up settling. But most will not, because most people do not actually want to leave home forever. They want to go work abroad for a while to earn enough money to buy a house or to start up a business back home.

Studies show that most Mexican migrants have similar aspirations. If they could come and go freely, most would move only temporarily. But, perversely, U.S. border controls end up making many stay for good because crossing the border is so risky and so costly, that once you get across, you tend to stay.

[John Kenneth Galbraith](#) said: "Migration is the oldest weapon against poverty. It selects those who most want help. It is good for the country to which they go. It helps break the equilibrium of poverty in the country from which they come. What is the perversity in the human soul that causes people to resist so obvious a good?"

Part of the answer is that people tend to focus their fears about economic change on foreigners. Other fears are cultural. Most recently, they have gotten mixed up with worries about terrorism. For the most part this is illogical. For example, Christian Latinos are scarcely likely to be a fifth column of al Qaeda operatives, as Pat Buchanan has suggested.

Logic, though, scarcely comes into it. Psychological studies confirm that opposition to immigration tends to stem from an emotional dislike of foreigners. Intelligent critics then construct an elaborate set of seemingly rational arguments to justify their prejudice.

My favorite example is Samuel Huntington's book *Who Are We?* He says, "It's terrible, Latino immigrants are poor and a drain on American society." Then he says that in Miami, though, they are rich, and "It's terrible because they are prospering at America's expense." When he wrote his first book about the clash of civilizations, he lumped Americans and Latinos together in a single civilization. Now, though, he says that "Latinos in America threaten a domestic clash of civilizations." In the beginning of his book, he said, "It's terrible, Latinos are all clustering in a few cities and states"; then, later on, he says "It's terrible, they are starting to spread out." In effect, immigrants

cannot win. They are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

So, while it is important to address people's fears and to consider people's arguments, it is also important to see them for what they often are, a rationalization of xenophobia. Indeed, anti-immigrant rhetoric is one of the last forms of racism that is deemed acceptable. Seemingly respectable politicians and pundits get away with expressing the most vile prejudice about people who are dehumanized by the epithet "immigrants," opinions they would never dare voice openly about a particular race.

We roam our newly opened world more freely than ever before, yet we cling tenaciously to some boundaries—mental boundaries of "them and us," rich and poor, black and white; as well as physical boundaries of barbed-wire fencing, fortified walls, gunships on patrol.

Our new mobility, coming out of products, money, and information, jars with our efforts to hold people in poor countries in place. We sun ourselves on their beaches, we peddle them aspirations to a better life through a soft drink or a baseball cap, we broadcast alluring images of our munificent El Dorado, and then we expect them to stay put.

In effect, our efforts to keep poor people out while the rich and educated circulate freely are a form of global apartheid. And, like apartheid, they are economically stupid, politically unsustainable, and morally wrong.

I believe that our borders should be open. If that is not politically acceptable for now, they should at least be more open. We could start by opening up a legal route for people from developing countries to come work in rich ones. Over time, we can push for ever more open borders.

Now, I am sure persuading skeptics will not be easy. That's why I think you need to make the argument at several levels:

- A principled case. It increases freedom and reduces injustice.
- A humanitarian case. It helps people in developing countries.
- An economic case. It makes us richer.
- A pragmatic case. It is inevitable, so it is in everyone's interest to make the best of it.

Allowing people to move freely may seem unrealistic. But then, so too once, did abolishing slavery or giving women the vote. Campaigning for open borders is a noble cause for our time.

Thank you.

**JOANNE MYERS:** You made a very strong and convincing case. But I'm sure we must have a few

skeptics in the room, so I'd like to open the floor to discussion.

## Questions and Answers

**QUESTION:** Thank you for bringing up many interesting ideas. If you accept most of them and you allow open borders, what is to stop 100 million people from coming? So many people are living in such dire poverty, I can understand why they would want to come here. I think, to a certain degree, all your arguments are true. But how do you put some boundaries on it? To what extent would you accept it?

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** The first thing, obviously, is that the United States has the experience of almost open borders. Until 1924, Europeans and others could come to the United States almost freely. Until the 1960s, the U.S. border with Mexico was as good as open; there was scarcely any control whatsoever. Likewise, Spain's border with Morocco was open until it joined the European Union in 1980.

More recently, as we have seen, Britain has opened up its borders to many of the countries in Eastern Europe. We tend to think of these countries, places like Poland, as they're almost developed, but actually, in terms of their level of income, it is broadly similar to that in Mexico. So actually we are talking about an experiment going on just now. The reality that we are observing is not that everyone in Poland is moving, but that only some are; and that, as I said, most people actually are staying either for a short period of time, or else are moving back and forth, in effect commuting. Therefore, I think a lot of the worry that somehow if we open our borders that everyone would come is a deep-rooted fear but a mistaken one.

There were some really interesting interviews done with African traders who have made it to Italy illegally. They come from countries that are really desperately poor. To a man, they all say, "Actually I just want to earn enough money and then go home again." Most people do not actually want to settle.

Now, of course there are exceptions. And, of course, when people move, some people say, "I'm only coming temporarily," and they end up staying. But most people don't aspire to.

As I said, one of the most perverse effects of our border controls, to the extent that they are supposed to try and deter people from moving, is that they actually give people who have already gotten in an incentive to stay. If you got into the country once and you have then overstayed your visa, you then become an illegal immigrant. If you leave, you know you cannot come back again legally. Therefore, you end up staying. Whereas if you could come and go freely, you wouldn't become a permanent settler by default.

**QUESTIONER:** There is a part of this equation that I feel is missing here. I am the granddaughter of Russian immigrants. My son is a doctor in California. We are, in California and all across the country, having tremendous problems dealing with all of the immigrants that come to the hospitals, that flood the emergency rooms for the slightest problem that they have. They do not have medical care. Nor do many Americans.

When you talk about people coming here and earning a living and then going back, what about the interim, when they are here and they get sick and their children are sick? And their children need to be educated. Our education system is so flooded with immigrants.

There is not enough money to take care of it. Where is this all going to come from?

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** The first thing is that most immigrants who arrive are net contributors to public finances, for the simple reason that they have been schooled abroad. So American taxpayers have not had to pay for their education. One of the biggest costs to the public purse is education. So Americans do not have to pay for their education, but at the same time they benefit from their working here in the United States.

In the second case, to the extent that they are illegal migrants, as many are, they make hardly any draw on either federal or state budgets for two reasons: one, because they are afraid to present themselves; second, because actually they are entitled to hardly anything. If you look at even the [1996 Welfare Reform Act](#), it denied to even legal migrants almost all federal benefits.

Thirdly, most migrants who arrive tend to be young and healthy. That is not surprising. Why? Because if you move to a country, the people who move tend to be the people who have the most to gain from it, who are young, hardworking, able-bodied people.

Does that mean that in some cases immigrants are a burden on public funds? Yes, in some cases, as are some Americans. I would say the root cause of the problem that you are identifying is actually America's failure to have a universal and comprehensive health insurance system. Blaming immigrants for that is wide of the mark.

**QUESTION:** You have mentioned a great deal about immigration but very little about assimilation. Many groups attempt to prevent full assimilation, and thereby help to fragment society and keep people away from participating fully in the society that they have come to. What kind of assimilation would you recommend for a country, whether it is ours or European countries?

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** "Assimilation" is one of those words. The question is: assimilation into what? Every member of a society is above all an individual. Every member of society has multiple and overlapping identities—i.e., you can be an American, a Christian, of Irish origin, a resident of New York, a doctor, an environmentalist, a husband, a father. All those elements are part of your identity.

Often, when people talk about assimilation the assumption is that there is one single thing, one form of value and behavior, to which foreigners should conform. I think that is not true as a description of reality. And it is certainly not good in a prescriptive sense, to the extent that why should we expect immigrants to conform to a uniform pattern that does not apply to others?

I would say actually, in terms of the specific fears which are generally made about the recent wave of Hispanic immigration, that they are mostly misconceived. There is a big fear that Mexican immigrants are not learning English. The fact is that half the Mexicans in Mexico are trying to learn English, as is half of the rest of the world. The Census figures show that the Mexican immigrants here are too. Their children and their grandchildren are too. In fact, only one in 200 of those born in the United States speak Spanish at home. They know English.

Likewise, if you talk about cultural assimilation, there is this big hooaha about "Isn't it terrible that Mexicans are celebrating their national holiday on the fifth of May?" But, at the same time, Irish-Americans celebrate St. Patrick's Day. In fact, U.S. presidents who are not even of Irish origin officially celebrate St. Patrick's Day. So I don't see what the problem is.

Sam Huntington makes the argument that somehow Mexican-Americans have different values and don't identify as Americans. But, yet again, if you look at the Census figures, you see that actually 85 percent of Latino immigrants born in the United States identify primarily as American and 97 percent of the grandchildren identify as American.

The fears about intermarriage—again, like most immigrant communities, those who have just arrived tend to marry from a similar ethnic background. But if you look at their children and their grandchildren, actually there is intermarriage.

A lot of these fears I think are misplaced. A lot of the understanding about assimilation is based on an incorrect model, or an incorrect belief, that there is a single and uniform and monolithic form of national identity to which all must conform.

**JOANNE MYERS:** Actually, I think, there is another side of that that I should bring up. People are criticizing immigrants because they come here—it's not so much that they want to celebrate their holidays, but they don't want to become Americans. They stay in their own communities. And often they go back; they don't stay here and contribute to society. Whereas at the turn of the century when immigrants were coming here, they wanted more than anything else to be an American, today you don't see that. I think that is one of the things people are talking about more.

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** I think you are certainly right, in a sense. But I think that is just part of what I said about our concept of immigration being trapped in the 19th century. In the 21st century, people are increasingly on the move.

When American bankers go to live in Tokyo, they are not expected to become Japanese. Likewise, if you are moving to a country to work for a couple of years, why on earth should you have to either aspire to be, or in reality become as if you were, a citizen of that country? Americans in London do not become British; they do not become Japanese in Tokyo. There is a double standard here.

The question, which is an empirical question, is: Do the people who end up settling tend to want to become American? I have been through several things. Yes, they do.

I think, again, if you look back at many of the things that were written in the 19th century about the immigrants who arrived 120 years ago, many of the same arguments were made. They were proved to be wrong then, and proved to be wrong with the current generation of immigrants too.

**QUESTION:** Is there a problem in your view about Muslim integration? I am always struck, in Europe particularly, that there are now large areas that have been "Muslimized," in France, in England, and in other countries—in Italy now I saw it. The people there do not seem to want to integrate at all. I mean they are certainly not doing it now. They appear to have no desire to do so. They just look different from everybody else.

It seems to me that it is a reasonable thing to raise the issue of whether you want people to look the same or different.

**PIERRE LEGRAIN:** It depends on what you mean by "look different." At one level, we all look different. Secondly, if you are going to say that black people are different to white people, should black people have to look like white people? I mean what actually do you mean by "looking

different?"

In terms of a head scarf, I don't think a head scarf is any different than the habit that Catholic nuns wear. In terms of the full *burqa*, first of all, it is actually worn by vanishingly small numbers of people. In the United Kingdom it is about 1,000. So we are not talking about every Muslim person in the United Kingdom wearing the full *hijab*.

Do I find it regrettable that you are not able to see someone's face in order to communicate with them? Yes. Do I think that in a liberal society one can go about with one's face covered and that others accept or tolerate that? Yes.

Idea of the day: I think the problem only arises when people are extremist and then act on their extreme beliefs to cause terrorism. That is a vanishingly small number of people. Those people, clearly, should be targeted by the authorities through effective, proportionate means.

But the notion that somehow integration and terrorism are synonymous I think is simply false. If you take the case of the United States, in the case of homegrown terrorists, such as the [Oklahoma City bombers](#), clearly there is nothing that immigration controls could do to prevent it. In the case of foreigners who are already in the United States, likewise immigration controls cannot do anything.

In terms of foreigners who might want to come into the United States in order to cause terrorist attacks, that is clearly a matter for border controls involving screening, intelligence, surveillance. But even if no one was allowed to come into the United States as an immigrant, you could still come on a tourist visa, on a student visa, on a short-term business visa. Therefore, the issues actually are separate.

You could quite easily envisage opening up the borders in terms of allowing people to come work, as well as vetting their credentials to make sure they are not a threat, and thus combine the benefits of opening our borders with targeted, proportionate, and effective measures to combat terrorism.

As I said, to a large extent the two issues are separate. In the United States, the vast majority of your illegal immigrants are Catholic Latinos, and they are certainly not likely to be al Qaeda operatives.

**QUESTION:** Would you comment on what you see as the long-term developments? To some extent, I think of migration as similar to the flow of capital and the flow of goods in a globalized world. I am wondering if you see that. Or do you see eventually the cross-fertilization of rich and poor, so that enough migrants would go back to their own countries and help to develop those countries, so that in the long run there would be less migration?

I think it is largely an economic issue. Migrants from Central and South America come to the United States, migrants from Zimbabwe and other southern African countries go to South Africa, migrants go from East Asia to the Persian Gulf, and so forth.

I guess my question is: Do you see this as a kind of permanent condition? Let's say we adopted your view of this. Would this be a permanent condition, or do you see an evolution in which there would be enough economic development in poorer countries that there would be a kind of leveling-out and there would be a diminution of migration because of that greater equality?

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** There are migrations driven by different phenomena. To the extent that it is

driven by differences in the wages available in different countries, and to the extent that migrants coming to work in rich countries and then going home helps to stimulate development at home, or simply because some developing countries now are, on average, catching up with rich countries, as one's country reaches a certain standard of living, given that most people don't want to leave home at all, that kind of migration tails off.

You can see that in the case of Spain. In the 1950s, there were lots of Spanish workers working around Europe. When Spain joined the European Union in 1986, there were lots of fears "we're going to be flooded with Spanish people." There was actually a movement in the opposite direction. Why? Because Spanish people had gotten rich enough that they didn't want to leave home anymore. So to that extent, yes.

On the other hand, as the economy becomes ever more globalized, there is an increasing movement of people around the world, because as business becomes globalized, so does the work force. That is why there are Americans working for multinationals all around the world. That is why there are clusters of bankers from around the world both in New York and London. That is why in a whole range of areas as the economy becomes globalized, so does the work force.

So I would say once developing countries reach a certain standard of living, there will be less migration out of economic necessity, the same as, inescapably, the 21st century is going to see far more movement of people across borders, just as there is far more movement of tourism or goods and services, or capital, as you say.

**QUESTION:** The question I have is: Where do African-Americans fit in your view of all this?

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** What do you mean in particular?

**QUESTIONER:** I think so much of American history has had an adverse impact on that group, and continues to. If we open our borders, as you are speaking about, and we have free movement of peoples, do we continue to have a permanent underclass in this country of African-Americans? I live in Richmond, Virginia, where the majority of the population is African-American. The majority of that population is uneducated, is poor, and crime is extremely heavy in that community and adversely impacts all surrounding communities. I have never seen such hopelessness. No one is addressing it. As more and more Mexicans and Guatemalans arrive in Richmond, these people are more and more marginalized and less and less is being done for them.

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** If you are talking about the public policy failures following on from the long history of slavery and segregation, I would say that yes, in the U.S. government and in the U.S. society, a society that I generally admire, that is probably its biggest weakness.

On the other hand, I don't think that immigrants are responsible for the problems of African-Americans, and I don't think that all the issues you identify would be remedied by keeping Mexicans out. If someone has not had a good level of education, if someone has economic opportunities denied to them, if someone is the victim of crime, then that is an issue irrespective of whether there are immigrants next door or not.

I don't think that the association that you make between the Mexicans arriving and the continuing problems of some, but not all, black people in this country is a correct one. Speaking in purely intellectual terms, it is actually incorrect. I would say the bigger problem in the United States is with

poor people, of whichever race, who are not getting ahead, rather than a particular race, some of whom now are middle class and doing just fine, others of whom are struggling—and struggling not because of immigrants, but primarily due to failures of public policy.

**QUESTION:** Mad as we are in this country in our policies on immigration, we are a nation of immigrants, so at least we have some background in this. I notice in Europe—Germany is an example, with the Turkish immigration, which they asked to come at one time. There is still very little intermarriage. They are definitely an underclass in Germany still today, three generations later. I worry more about Europeans being so unused to immigration that they really will not do well with it because they just simply don't think in terms of immigration as much as we would.

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** I think you are absolutely right in pointing out that integration is a two-way street. It's not just a question of immigrants wanting to belong to society; it is also a question of society being open enough to allow them in.

Clearly, in German society, in terms of the fact that the migrants were explicitly brought in as guest workers, no effort was made to integrate them into society. In fact, they were deliberately kept apart. It was impossible to legally become a German citizen, even if you had been born there or were the grandchild of an immigrant, until recently. Therefore, it is not surprising that there have been the problems that you point to.

As I said, I think it points to the necessity for integration being a two-way street. In that respect, I think the United States has a long history of integrating people from all over the world on the basis of the opportunities that this country offers, on the basis of the civic values on which it is founded.

I was not in any way criticizing the United States as being a bad place, as you seem to suggest, or that Europe was a good place, which I certainly wasn't suggesting. I was simply saying that I think that our borders ought to be open. The United States has a proud history of that if we look to the not-too-distant past.

**QUESTION:** I don't know if you mentioned it and I missed it, but I think a huge problem in the developed world is the aging population, in terms of who is going to pay to take care of this aging population. With medical advances, hopefully people will live longer. I think that would really support the idea very much that it is essential to shift the age dynamics in these countries.

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** I think you are right to point to why an aging society makes youthful migration a good thing. Clearly, immigrants cannot prevent population aging, to the extent that immigrants get old too, but they can help cushion the blow of adjusting to the demographic transition.

Secondly, they can contribute more directly. In every rich country, the fastest-growing area of employment growth is not in IT, it's actually in care for the elderly. Young Europeans and young Americans, for good or ill, do not generally want to work caring for the elderly. If there are Filipinos or Mexicans who are happy to do that job, then again it is a win/win. It's a win/win for the people who are looked after; it's a win/win for the people who get the opportunity to earn a better living by so doing; and it is a win for young Americans who can do jobs that they want to do. So I think that there is a very strong case in that respect.

**JOANNE MYERS:** There is no question that this topic has a potential for being very polarizing and raises many interesting questions. I thank you very much for presenting your side of the argument. I

invite you all to continue the discussion or debate.

**PHILIPPE LEGRAIN:** Thank you.

### **Audio**

It's inevitable that more and more people will move across borders, says Philippe Legrain, and rather than put obstacles in their way, we should welcome them. They do the jobs we can't or won't do, and their diversity enriches us all.

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