

# How Wealthy is Our Intellectual Estate, and Does It Really Matter?

## Assessing Economic Knowledge and Its Diffusion in the Immigration Debate

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*ABSTRACT.* This study assesses the extent to which the research of the economic intellectual community (*i.e.*, economists at universities and think tanks) affects the immigration debate in other sectors of American society (the government, the media and the public). Specifically, I analyze both the styles of thinking and the research findings present in recent economic studies, and evaluate whether they appear again in various public debates as a measure of the influence of economic thought in the larger society. A survey of recent publications of the intellectual community reveals that most immigration economists adopt a “neoclassical” and/or a “social democratic” framework in their research. Next, a survey of the immigration debate in the government, the media and public is presented; while the government seems heavily influenced by the works and findings of the intellectual community, the media and the public fail to fully incorporate the intellectual wealth developed by professional economists. These findings suggest that with respect to the immigration issue, economists at think tanks and universities need to make a better effort to extend their research to a larger audience if their works are to be considered in the larger debate.

### I. Introduction

In “The Fifth Estate,” Craufurd Goodwin (1995) asserts that think tanks provide valuable research to American society, allowing citizens to participate in a more informed debate on public policy issues. According to Goodwin, not only do they provide sophisticated data analyses to the greater public, they also ensure that a variety of viewpoints are voiced and presented. Essentially, Goodwin charges that we as a society have a greater wealth of knowledge thanks to this “fifth estate.” Considering that think tanks are merely one piece of the puzzle when assembling a picture of the knowledge system in a society (unquestionably, the professional literature also contributes to our understanding), we may conclude that our society is intellectually wealthy. Yet in boasting about our scholarly affluence and the variety of sources which contribute to it, we must continually ask ourselves one crucial question: what is the significance of our intellectual estate? That is, does it really matter how much knowledge we as a society discover? The obvious answer may be yes, but what if the larger society does not embrace the research results of the intellectual community? What if the government, the media and the public ignore or discredit the research findings of our think tanks and universities?

This essay assesses the extent to which economic knowledge (derived from think tanks and universities, which I designate as the “intellectual community”) diffuses into other major sectors of

American society (the government, media and the public), particularly in the case of the legal immigration debate. The emotional debate, which focuses on the issue of whether to increase or decrease the current legal immigration level, certainly has an economic component. Thus, we would expect research from the economic intellectual community to be cited frequently in all debates. At the same time, the nature of the issue (involving the separation of families and the transportation of vastly different cultures) suggests that the intellectual community of economists may not break into the decision-making or even conversations of the larger society. Additionally, several scholars (Nelson, 1987; Aaron, 1992; Peacock, 1992; Hoadley, 1996) have commented on the skepticism and limited usage of economists in government and in the private sector. Thus, we may be inclined to predict that the findings of the intellectual community of economics have little or no effect in conversations outside of academia and research organizations in the field of immigration policy. If such a case turns out to be true, our conclusion would then be that the wealth of the intellectual estate is inconsequential.

To analyze the effects of economic thinking on American society (with respect to the immigration debate), I provide a birds-eye view of the recent discussions that have taken place in five major sectors of society: academia, think tanks, the government, the media, and the public. The first two, as mentioned earlier, comprise our category of the intellectual community; it is the research programs in these two sectors that have significantly advanced our understanding of the economic impacts of immigration. The latter three represent the audience of the intellectual community; a major goal of the intellectual community is to influence the thinking of these three sectors of society, and whether or not they have succeeded in this endeavor remains in question. I begin by highlighting the most recent research of professional economists in the intellectual community, focusing not only on the results of their findings but also the general *economic styles and approaches* that have fueled their research. This survey will measure the amount of intellectual wealth that our society has; given our findings from the survey, we will then analyze how well the wealth is distributed in government, the media, and the public. Specifically, we will examine whether or not the styles of thinking employed by professional economists come to surface in their audience, and whether their findings are used in the larger debate. Our research leads us to the following conclusions: (1) the intellectual community employs both “neoclassical” and “social democratic” perspectives in its analysis (defined later in the text) (2) the perspectives and findings of the intellectual community seem to have made an impact in the government sector, but unfortunately the same cannot be said for the media and the public, and (3) economists in the immigration debate

need to make efforts to push their research results out into the larger society in order to ensure that our intellectual wealth is not going to waste.

## **II. Wealth from the Intellectual Community: The Economics Discipline**

We begin our discussion of the conversation in the intellectual community by looking at the economics discipline and its treatment of immigration policy. US immigration policy has varied considerably over time, based on the level of immigration allowed as well as the composition of immigrants entering the US. While immigration was mainly limited to western and northern Europeans for the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (due to the Immigration Act of 1924), the Hart-Celler Immigration Bill of 1965 placed family reunification at the heart of US immigration policy (Hanson, 2005). Worldwide numerical limits were placed on different categories of immigrants, and immediate relatives of US citizens were automatically accepted into the country. Current immigration policy reflects the precedents set by the Hart-Celler Bill; today, up to 480,000 entry slots are given to family-sponsored immigrants each year, 140,000 to employer-sponsored immigrants, and 55,000 slots to other categories (immediate relatives and certain refugee populations are still automatically admitted). Consequently, only a small proportion of the immigrants that enter the US are admitted for employment purposes; in 2003, only 12 percent of entrants were employment-based immigrants, whereas 70 percent were family members, 7 percent diversity-based immigrants, and 6 percent refugees (Office of Immigration Statistics, 2004).

Unlike the Canadian immigration program based primarily on matching immigrant skill with the economic needs of the country, the US system admits many immigrants who may not contribute to the economic efficiency and may in fact have negative consequences for US taxpayers as well as low-wage native workers. Immigration therefore bears potential costs to the US economy, and as a result, recent scholars in the field have asked the following questions in their research: what are the net effects of immigration, and should the current levels of immigration be increased or decreased? Considering the estimated 400,000 illegal immigrants that enter the country each year (Hanson, 2005), professional economists have also analyzed the effects of illegal immigration. While illegal immigration has drawn a considerable amount of attention in recent years, the legal immigration controversy is less complex and allows us to better evaluate the relationship between the economic intellectual community and other sectors of society. For these reasons, we have limited our analysis to the legal immigration debate.

In regards to the issue of legal immigration, it is expected that the professional literature will take on a neoclassical analysis, emphasizing utility maximization and cost-benefit analyses and focusing on the interests of the United States as a whole. While this approach is predominant among economists in academia, we find an interesting variant of the neoclassical approach that focuses not on the aggregate cost/benefit of US society from immigration, but rather the pros and cons of immigration from the perspectives of low-wage native workers in America. This reflects a very different norm for immigration policy, one that we call a *social democratic* style of thinking. To elaborate, rather than assuming that the goal of social policy is to bring the greatest level of utility to the maximum number of citizens, a social democratic style assumes that the goal of social policy should be to ameliorate the wage-distribution gap in our society (or at least prevent it from getting worse). Characteristic of this approach is a “level-up, level-down” philosophy (that is, the idea that we need to be concerned with the lot of the poor and the low-wage worker, at the expense of the rich and the powerful), and as expected, much of the criticism is focused on big businesses and the profiteering that exists. Though we expected most economic analyses to take on a purely neoclassical approach, we discovered that the social democratic voice is very prevalent in the professional literature and addressed by most scholars in this debate.

Within the immigration debate among professional economists, the social democratic approach tends to come in bundles with the neoclassical approach. During the 1980s and 1990s, a typical analysis of the economic impacts of immigration would begin by empirically highlighting the benefits of an increased level of immigration (financial returns to citizens of the United States through the added laborers). The costs to immigration were then weighed; the measure of this variable would be the difference between public benefits immigrants would receive (e.g. welfare, public education, transportation infrastructure, etc.) and the taxes they would pay each year. The benefits and costs analysis in the past would often both support the conclusions that immigration was beneficial to society, and that there were no costs at all. As Simon (1997) notes,

“There is agreement among economists that immigration has had, and has now, a positive effect upon the economic condition of the US...[this] is mostly in consonance with the economic literature, and the overwhelming consensus of the most respected American economists agrees” (p. 357, 337).

Simon makes this statement after conducting a survey of what he considers to be top economics scholars<sup>1</sup>. His survey revealed that 81 percent of these scholars felt that immigration had

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<sup>1</sup> According to Simon, one falls into this category by holding office as president of the American Economic Association or membership in the President’s Council of Economic Advisors at some point in time.

a “very favorable” impact on the nation’s economic growth, while 19 percent said “slightly favorable.” None of these economics scholars showed negative sentiments towards immigration, and on a second question, 56 percent of these top intellectuals favored “more” immigration, 33 percent said the “same number” of immigrants, and only 11 percent said, “don’t know” (apparently, not one scholar asked for less immigration in this question).

After a strict neoclassical analysis of immigration was presented (usually in favor of increasing immigration), a social democratic point of view was added to most research papers. Here, scholars would assess whether or not immigrant laborers were stealing jobs from hardworking American natives, or whether these immigrants were negatively affecting the wage-levels of native workers, thereby increasing the income inequality in the United States. The findings of these analyses tended to reject any negative effects of immigrants on low-wage native workers. For example, after looking at several empirical studies, Simon concluded that “general immigration causes little or no unemployment at large, even in the first year or two” (p. 251). Additionally, he boldly asserted that “those writers who oppose immigration in general on the ground that it injures low-skill workers (which is not generally true of legal immigration) call their credibility into question if they are not prepared to urge an increase in high-skill or general immigrants” (p. 265). Three other prominent researchers, Friedman and Hunt (1995) and Lerman (1999) also conducted similar analyses and arrived at the conclusion that immigration does not significantly alter the employment or wages of natives. Overall, it appears that this social democratic approach was incorporated into the neoclassical analysis in order to strengthen the argument that increased levels of immigration are positive and present no harm to our society.

Yet this association between a social democratic analysis and an argument for increased immigration would soon erode, and George Borjas, considered by many to be the leading scholar in the immigration debate, would contribute significantly to this process. While some of his earlier works (1994) appeared to follow suit with the aforementioned studies (in promoting immigration and refuting the idea that immigrants affect unemployment or wages in the US), Borjas recently published a book entitled “Heaven’s Door” (2001), which is highly critical of current US immigration policy. In it, Borjas, who is a Cuban immigrant, breaks down the same analyses mentioned earlier, and reveals several shocking findings: (1) immigration to the US is at record-levels (with illegal immigrants included in the calculation); (2) new waves of immigrants are less skilled and successful than earlier cohorts, due to the change in primary source countries of immigrants (from the industrialized nations to the developing ones); (3) immigrants do contribute to US society due to

efficiency gains from the increased amount of labor (\$10 billion), but this is small relative to the size of the country's GDP (\$8 trillion in 1998); and (4) immigrants cause severe redistribution of wealth – in fact, about \$152 billion – from native workers to the wealthy owners of production capital. Additionally, Borjas criticized previous studies on the effects of immigration on labor markets. Typically, researchers looked at the areas hit hardest by immigration, and in evaluating the change in wages of the local natives, found only a small spatial correlation between large immigration populations and decreased wages for natives. In response, Borjas argued that natives “vote with their feet,” leaving their homes in search of better economic opportunities, and spreading out the loss in low-wage native worker income by slightly increasing the labor supply (and subsequently decreasing the wages) of other locales (p. 73-78). At the conclusion of the book, Borjas argues that US immigration policy should focus on improving the well being of the native population, without increasing the income inequality that exists today. His solution: reduce the number of legal immigrants to roughly 550,000 per year (cutting the current levels by 1/3), and focus on attracting skilled workers over the many unskilled workers that we currently admit.

Whereas previous researchers introduced the benefits of immigration and demonstrated the triviality of immigration on native labor market outcomes, Borjas's recent book does the exact opposite, by trivializing the benefits of immigration and highlighting what he perceives to be the severe costs of the current immigration policy in the United States. This latest book appears to eliminate some of the clarity that we once had from previous research (which all pointed towards beneficial, non-consequential immigration). Yet it is important to note that Borjas and the other economists all agreed to some extent on one point; that there is an immigration surplus of \$10 billion a year due to increased labor efficiency from immigration. Borjas also cites the short run loss and the long run gain that the US government faces with an increase in immigrants (based on the research of the National Academy of Sciences in 1997); while the US is expected to lose tax dollars in public expenditures for first generation immigrants, Borjas mentions that in time, the third-generation of immigrants will lead to a net fiscal gain of \$80,000. Additionally, Borjas notes that immigrants might generate positive externalities that are hard to measure in the standard calculation of the immigration surplus: “diversity pays because it may make Americans more productive, and because it introduces new modes of thinking and more efficient ways of delivering goods and services. These positive externalities could substantially increase the benefits from immigration – well above the \$8 billion immigration surplus implied by the standard textbook model of the labor market, a model where all such externalities are assumed away” (p. 97). Thus, every study that we

have looked at professes some benefits to immigration at the aggregate level<sup>2</sup>. The confusion lies in whether or not immigrants harm the labor market outcomes of native workers, and perhaps research from think tanks will help to resolve this conflict.

### **III. Wealth from the Intellectual Community: Think Tanks**

Over the years, several think tanks have established research programs to study the effects of increased immigration on native workers. For this study, I have chosen to analyze the publications of the Urban Institute, the RAND institute, and the CATO Institute. These think tanks are among the most prominent in the immigration debate, and each has several scholars who are immigration policy experts for the group. The styles and approaches employed by these think tanks are similar to that which we have seen in the academic literature, yet there are some differences. As with the economists at universities, these think tank scholars highlight the costs/benefits of immigration to our society (employing a neoclassical framework), yet at the same time, they typically ignore research on the effects of immigrants on native workers (i.e. a social democratic style). Despite these differences, their conclusions, which will be discussed below, generally mirror what we have seen earlier in the world of academe – a pro-immigration standpoint based on the perceived aggregate benefits to our society.

The Urban Institute, which claims to be a nonpartisan research group, addresses the same neoclassical question that we have found in the professional literature: whether immigration is beneficial to the larger society. A decade ago, one highly publicized study by the Urban Institute claimed that immigrants were paying \$27 billion more than the costs of welfare and public education in these communities<sup>3</sup>. Borjas (2001) came to reject this figure, arguing that it made grossly inaccurate assumptions; the Urban Institute, for example, did not take into account the costs of maintaining public goods such as national parks and roads in the presence of immigrants<sup>4</sup>. Future immigration studies by the Urban Institute appeared to be more conservative in its analysis (perhaps as a consequence of the rejection of earlier studies). In one study (Fix and Passell, 2001), the Urban Institute co-authors spent a considerable amount of time highlighting the difficulties of measuring

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<sup>2</sup> While Borjas argues that immigrants in large-immigration states (such as California and New Jersey) tend to take more out of the welfare system than they put in with taxes, a simple calculation reveals that the loss per household due to immigrants (with welfare) is offset by a much larger \$10 billion labor market surplus (assuming that it holds).

<sup>3</sup> This study came in response to another well-publicized study from the Carrying Capacity Network (which we label as a special interest group), arguing that the cost of immigration surpassed \$40 billion each year.

<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the Carrying Capacity Network study was flawed (according to Borjas) in that it assumed that for every six immigrants who came into the country, one native worker was forced into the unemployment line and consequently forced to take welfare payments.

the costs and benefits of immigration. Yet after a review of studies from the past decade (including the same 1997 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study cited earlier by Borjas) the group did make several inferences about the fiscal costs and benefits of immigration. For example, Fix and Passell, co-presenters at a congressional subcommittee hearing, remarked that “immigrants (and immigrant households) pay a considerable amount in taxes to all levels of government.” The co-authors also interpreted the findings of the 1997 NAS study to suggest that “on average, an additional immigrant generated a positive net contribution to the country” and that “the balance of taxes versus costs tend to favor the federal government.” Immigrants, according to these researchers at the Urban Institute, are benefiting the larger society (confirming the earlier studies from academia). Still, a social democratic view (presented in most studies from academia) asking whether low-wage native workers are affected by immigration is never considered by the Urban Institute.

The RAND institute (which prides itself for its objective analysis) mirrors the professional literature more closely by taking on both a neoclassical and social democratic analysis (in a very interesting manner). In one study within its immigration research program, the think tank looked at economic data from California to assess the financial effects of immigration (the results of this study can be found in “Immigration in a Changing Economy” by Kevin McCarthy and George Vernez, 1998). To determine the net benefit of immigration, the co-authors computed the immigrant contribution to California’s economic growth, and compared that with the effects of immigration on native labor market outcomes as well as the demand for public services. After this calculation, the co-authors conclude in the final chapter that California is still benefiting from immigration at an aggregate level, and for that reason, it should be maintained or increased. It is interesting to note that McCarthy and Vernez found that immigration has adversely affected some low-skilled native workers. For example, the co-authors claim that “immigration was responsible for 7 and 10 percent of the employment decline for, respectively, white American and Hispanic American males without a high school diploma. For similarly educated African American males, it was responsible for 16 percent of the decline” (p. 37). Furthermore, the authors also found that “perhaps 130,000 to 200,000 California natives were not in the labor force or were unemployed in 1990 because of immigration” (p. 36). In the face of these large negative effects of immigration from a social democrat standpoint, the authors still promote an increased level of immigration, stating that “the goal of federal immigration policy should be...to *maximize the benefits* to everyone and *minimize adverse effects*.” At a basic level, these RAND researchers have found the same results as Borjas (that there



are benefits to increasing immigration but the costs to poor natives are significant), but where Borjas calls for a decrease in immigration to end wage-disparities, McCarthy and Vernez take the opposite track, and argue for an increase in immigration due to aggregate benefits.

Like RAND, the Urban Institute, and the profession literature, CATO indeed addressed the costs and benefits of immigration, as well as the impact of immigration on native workers. Yet like the Urban Institute, and Borjas's book, CATO's most recent handbook on immigration (Griswold, 2003) basically cites the well-respected National Academy of Sciences study to assert the benefits of immigration: "immigration delivers a *significant positive gain* to native Americans of as much as \$10 billion each year" (p. 632). What about the costs of immigration? Daniel Griswold, author of the handbook and the director of the group's Center for Trade Policy Studies, again refers to the study: "the typical immigrant and his or her offspring will pay a net \$80,000 more in taxes during their lifetimes than they collect in government services. For immigrants with college degrees, the net fiscal return is \$198,000." Essentially, where CATO searches for costs, it finds even more benefits. Finally, to bring the popular social democratic viewpoint into their document, Griswold simply dismisses the idea that immigration causes additional unemployment as a myth: "immigrants tend to fill jobs that Americans cannot or will not fill in sufficient numbers to meet demand, mostly at the high and lows of the skill spectrum." Because it uses the same source as several other researchers to determine the total costs and benefits of immigration, we find nothing new from the CATO institute other than another group's support for the research of the National Academy of Sciences and consequently, an increase in the level of immigration.

Given that CATO is noted for its determined advocacy of libertarianism, we also find that CATO deviates from the earlier think tanks and researchers in that it focuses on asserting the benefits of a free labor market as more and more immigrants enter our country. While other researchers that we mentioned earlier have calculated the marginal benefits/costs of immigration, CATO pushes the competitive benefits that America faces with increased immigration (perhaps what Borjas would call the positive externalities of immigration). Griswold points out the entrepreneurship and the foreign trade connections immigrants bring to America, and then states that "immigration gives America an economic edge in the global economy" (p. 632). For CATO, "enhancing our influence in the world" is the prime goal of social policies; to this think tank, global competition should be the driving force in our decisions, and the free market system should regulate our demand for immigrants.

Overall, our analysis of the styles and arguments made in three major think tanks mainly reinforce our findings for the research in the professional literature. That is, it appears that scholars (from academia and think tanks) rely primarily on the neoclassical style of thinking to run a cost-benefit analysis on the effects of immigration in order to determine whether it should be increased or decreased. It appears that, as Julian Simon noted, there is widespread agreement that immigrants have a positive effect on the aggregate economy, and many studies frequently cite the \$10 billion surplus reported by the National Academy of Science in 1997 due to immigration. Nevertheless, many scholars in the debate are not satisfied with just a neoclassical, aggregate utility analysis; oftentimes, they take a social democratic point of view, and question whether immigration policy adversely affects the poor natives of the country. With think tanks, less time and effort appears to be devoted to the social democratic voice, but nevertheless it was present (as in the professional literature). The two most recent studies of the impact of immigration on low-wage native workers cited adverse negative effects of immigration on the poor: one from George Borjas, and one from the RAND institute. Overall, it appears that the research of higher education and the private sector combined suggest two very different consequences of immigration, depending on the style of thinking that one employs. If one is interested in aggregate benefits of immigration – in other words, the maximum utility for society – then an increase in immigration would be considered the right policy. In contrast, if one has concern for low-wage native workers in the US, then based on the adverse effects of immigration found by Borjas, McCarthy and Vernez, a decrease in the level of immigration is probably wise. Given these consistent findings (and styles of thinking), the question then is “does the rest of society care?” To what extent are these findings and modes of argument brought to light and used in the government, media, and public sectors?

#### **IV. The Government’s Consumption of the Intellectual Estate**

Considering that the government is forced to make hard decisions about current immigration policy, we expect (and hope) that the government would incorporate the ideas and findings of the intellectual community (i.e. the intellectual estate) into their policy discussions. In the previous sections, we found that the intellectual community adopts two basic approaches: (1) a neoclassical cost-benefit framework, which yields the conclusion that immigration is beneficial to the society as a whole, and (2) a social democratic framework, which concludes that immigration severely alters the wage and employment outcomes of natives. Do we see these frameworks and research findings in government speeches, reports and meeting minutes? At first glance, the rhetoric

of government officials (in public speeches) would lead us to believe that this was not the case; recent speeches by our nation's decision-makers seem to completely ignore the work of the intellectual community, and claim philosophical/theological reasons for their stances on increasing immigration levels. By philosophical/theological reasons, we refer to an approach that stresses compassion, goodness and the value of human life in a manner similar to the writings of the late Pope John Paul II. While we find several prominent government figures employing this style of thinking, a closer look behind the scenes (at government reports and congressional hearings) suggests that the government has certainly put the framework and results of the intellectual community to good use. Particularly, we find that in its decision-making, our government takes a very balanced approach to the debate, assessing the many benefits to society while being sensitive to the costs of native workers (akin to the approach taken by economic scholars).

At face value, the speeches of major policymakers show little or no evidence of the intellectual community's fingerprints. Rather, recent speeches by these officials employ reasoning that is far different than what would be found in a scholarly journal or think tank publication; specifically, the government stresses the goodwill of the US over net benefits, the effects on poor natives, and other relevant concepts that intellectuals have identified. A speech made by Eduardo Aguirre Jr., the first director of the recently developed U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) exemplifies this approach. At a hearing on the immigration policy between the US and Mexico in 2003, Aguirre markets our policy as a humanitarian effort that brings great gains to these immigrants, and implies that benefits to poor foreigners should be a major goal of our social policy. At times, he comes across as somewhat melodramatic: "we will not declare victory...until *every* legal immigrant is greeted with open arms and not endless lines" (p. 2). Aguirre employs the war metaphor several times, and even goes as far as saying that "President Bush *courageously* confronted a broken system" (p. 2); the emphasis on war and courage gives the impression that the United States is "fighting intensely and relentlessly" for the sake of these immigrants-to-be. Next, Aguirre speaks of the education and money the worker will receive in the United States, and utilizes "service business" phrases such as "customers" to describe these immigrants and "user friendly" to describe the immigration process. The point is that Aguirre is keen on making statements suggesting that America is doing a *service* for immigrants by letting them into our country. He devotes his time to highlighting our charitable immigration policy, and mentions our economic benefit from Mexican immigration only once in the entire speech. Essentially, in Aguirre's speech, the norm for social

policy is to provide philanthropy to the world, not to maximize our utility functions, as many economic scholars would assert.

A more prominent example of the philosophical/theological norm in government lies in President Bush's speech last year on his new temporary worker program. Bush (2004) goes beyond merely stating that an "open" immigration policy brings numerous benefits to incoming workers; in his speech, he tries to convince his audience that these workers are worthy of our salvation and that it is immoral to allow the current system to remain intact. Much like Pope John Paul II in *Laborem Exercens* (1981), President Bush establishes the inherent goodness of the immigrant worker by referring frequently to the hardworking nature of our immigrants: they are "taking hard jobs and clocking long hours," and they "bring to America the values of faith in God, love of family, hard work and self reliance." And much like the Pope, President Bush refers to the natural responsibilities of these immigrants, which we can help to fulfill: "these jobs represent a tremendous opportunity for workers from abroad to want to work and fulfill their duties as a husband or a wife, a son or a daughter."

While establishing the goodness of our potential new workers, Bush contrasts the implied treatment that they should be getting with the treatment that they are actually receiving in our current system. He notes that they "walked mile after mile, through the heat of the day and cold of the night," and "risked their lives...entrusted their lives to the brutal rings of heartless human smugglers." Throughout his speech, Bush describes the constant fear and victimization of these good people; again, this strategy can be seen in the writing of Pope John Paul II (where he establishes the natural way of life and contrasts it with the workings of the capitalist system). Ultimately, Bush makes his opinion clear on this juxtaposition between good workers and bad conditions: "the situation I described is *wrong*" and "out of...*fairness*, our laws should allow willing workers to enter our country and fill jobs that Americans are not filling." While Bush does highlight on a couple of occasions the benefits of immigration to our economy (*e.g.*, the elimination of underemployment), he ends up taking a very similar approach to Aguirre by stressing the benefits to the world and these immigrant workers from our immigration policy. His speech, in the same vein as Eduardo Aguirre's, suggests that the government is most concerned with philanthropy and indifferent to the well being of American society (as well as the writings and reasoning styles of the intellectual community).

While these speeches alone would lead us to conclude that the studies of the intellectual community have no bearing in government decisions, other government materials claim otherwise

and perhaps reflect the true basis for the government's pro-immigration policy. For example, the writing of the President's economists suggests a very different picture: that like the intellectual community, the executive branch cares very deeply about the net benefit of immigration on our economy. In the Annual Report of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), Mankiw, Forbes and Rosen (2005) focus mainly on the labor market and fiscal impacts of immigration. Here, the authors argue that (1) because immigrants are not substitutes for natives, they do not have adverse effects on natives' wages (social democratic concerns), and (2) while each low-income immigrant puts us at a loss economically, in the end their American-born descendants will cause us to profit from the family's migration after 1-2 generations (neoclassical concerns). At the end of their chapter on immigration, they conclude that "summing up the economic benefits and costs of immigration shows that over time, the benefits of immigration exceed the costs" (p. 115). Granted that the co-authors of the annual report were renowned scholars in economics before they took positions in the CEA, this document reveals to us that the president (and perhaps other governments) does consider the neoclassical and social-democratic perspectives before making political decisions on the immigration issue. Considering that the annual report remarkably resembles the studies conducted by the intellectual community, we are led to believe that the research of the intellectual community is in circulation at the president's roundtable.

Another instance where the intellectual community may have made its mark is in the legislative branch, where some of the representatives on the house subcommittee for immigration made comments that reflected a balanced style of thinking (between neoclassical and social democratic) during a hearing on legal immigration levels (House, 2003). Since these officials acknowledged both the aggregate benefits of immigration as well as the potential loss in wages/employments for native workers (or at least a concern for it), we are again led to believe that these government officials are well-read on the writings and thoughts of the intellectual community. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, for example, wrote in one hearing statement that "immigrants are good for the American economy. They create new jobs by establishing new businesses, spending their incomes on American goods and services, paying taxes, and raising the productivity of United States businesses" (p. 68-69). Yet after this statement, in the fashion of the intellectual community, Jackson Lee mentions "the fact that [immigrant] workers lower wages for the American workforce" and that "this is true to some extent and is a legitimate concern" (p. 70). Congresswoman Linda T. Sanchez also demonstrates this balanced approach; in her statement, she mentions both that "immigrants contribute immeasurably to the advancement of our economy and

our communities” and that “we must make every rational effort to protect our workers and in particular those in low-income professions” (p. 73). Both congresswomen, after sharing their recognition of the complexity of the debate, conclude (in a very social democratic fashion) that immigrants are not the cause of problems for low-wage native workers. Rather, both argue that big businesses are the root of the problem, exploiting laborers by keeping wages excessively low. Despite the fact that these representatives came to different conclusions than the scholars in the immigration debate (in blaming businesses), they seem to have gotten the facts straight and addressed the same two questions that the intellectual community has posed all along. Again, as with the CEA analysis, we are led to believe that the intellectual community has currency in the legislative branch.

While the public statements made by some government officials do not suggest that the works of the intellectual community are considered at all, an analysis of government reports and statements reveals the potential influences of facts and styles of thinking from professional economists and think tanks. Although we cannot establish an exact line of causation between the findings of the intellectual community and the thinking / decision making of government, the similarities in the facts presented and the styles of thinking employed (affecting the questions asked) strongly suggests that the intellectual community has made inroads in the government debate on immigration policy. Our conclusion, then, is that the government appears to be an active consumer of the wealth of economic analysis and knowledge (*i.e.*, the intellectual estate) in the immigration debate.

## **V. The Media’s Consumption of the Intellectual Estate**

Can we generalize our findings of a well-integrated intellectual community in government to the media, specifically the popular press? Some critics would suggest that we should be less optimistic about the usage of economic knowledge in the media for this debate. Michael Jensen, for example, writes in “Toward a Theory of the Press” (1976) that “the mass media is best understood as producers of entertainment, not information, and that the theories and facts that people absorb from the media are a by-product of their consumption of the entertainment value of the ‘news.’” If Jensen is right, and facts and actual information are no longer the primary concerns for newspapers and magazines, then perhaps the intellectual wealth developed by economists may not be used or published at all by the media. Our research on the media’s treatment of the intellectual estate confirms this hypothesis. Despite the fact that the media does highlight some of the costs and

benefits associated with immigration, the information presented bears little resemblance to the findings from academic/think tank studies, and it appears that the media is not consuming the economic knowledge of the intellectual community.

To begin, although some neoclassical thinking can be found in the recent media, this media fails to present hard facts to its audience, facts that demonstrate the aggregate and precise benefits of immigration to society (as evidenced in the professional and think tank literature). For example, in the *Oregonian*, Stan Low (2004) remarks that “There is a need for [immigration]. Many U.S. businesses rely on immigrant labor to do jobs that would otherwise go unfilled.” Yet the need for immigration is never quantified, nor is the benefits that immigration would bring to the greater society (as a result of businesses increasing efficiency). Interestingly enough, this phenomenon even occurs when think tank scholars and fellows are recruited to write the pro-immigration opinion articles for major newspapers and magazines (a frequent occurrence). For example, Jack Kemp (2000), a distinguished fellow of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, writes in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* that “[immigration] is an important issue because high-tech is one area where we need as free-flowing a labor market as we can get.” Again, quantitative evidence to establish the extent of the need is missing from the printed analysis. Yet, even if these numbers were included, there remains a fundamental difference between the media’s presentation of the benefits of immigration and the intellectual community’s presentation: the neoclassical analysis, a staple to the scholarly works mentioned earlier, is entirely missing from the media’s account of immigration. Articles with a cost-benefit analysis were hard to find, and the pro-immigration findings from the intellectual community were generally not incorporated into the media’s version of the debate.

Similarly, while a social democratic style of thinking could be found in recent media, the authors of these articles do not frame the style in the same fashion that professional researchers have. The social democratic style in the works of the intellectual community typically involved an empirical assessment of the costs of immigration to native workers. By contrast, media stories typically lack the empirical research, and journalistically comment on the evils of big business rather than emphasizing the losses to native laborers. For example, Dave Gorak (2001), a *Chicago Sun-Times* writer, mentions in one article that “if we don’t act now to sharply reduce our current and unprecedented levels of immigration, then future generations of Americans, as well as immigrants, will pay dearly for the short-term benefits currently enjoyed by the very few.” The statement hints at the unequal distribution of wealth which results from immigration, but unlike the research from the intellectual community, simply does not focus on the costs to low-wage native workers.

Another example can be found in *Business Week*, where Robert Kuttner (2004) emphatically writes, “Wal-Mart stores inc. will enjoy even lower labor costs – at U.S. workers’ expense...this [temporary worker program] would make immigrant workers something close to indentured servants.” Here, at least the costs to US workers is raised as a concern, but Kuttner’s attention is still focused on the evils of big business (as greedy slave-owners), and the costs to US workers is no better than a footnote. Although the social democratic viewpoint is revived in the media, its usage is far different than what we have seen in scholarly journals, and it appears that the intellectual community is not finding its way into media from a social democratic standpoint either.

Rather than adopting (or citing) a neoclassical or social democratic analysis that reveals the facts, occasionally the media will publish a feature article, highlighting the emotional success story of one immigrant. A classical example of this can be seen in a recent *Washington Post* article; in it, writer Christina Ianzito (2005) portrays the incredible life of 32 year-old Vietnamese immigrant Hieu Stuart. Stuart and her poor family left her home country in 1993 after the Vietnamese government seized her father’s land and business; once arrived in the United States, Stuart and her family had to work their way out of severe poverty. By writing about Stuart’s hardships and her successes in spite of them (which ranged from sleeping on mattresses she found in a dumpster to financing her current pursuit of a degree in Psychology at Hollins University), Ianzito depicts Stuart as a true heroine, and simultaneously affirms the persevering, hard-working image of immigrants. Essentially, in writing this immigration story, Ianzito reminds us that such “good” people exist in the immigration lines, and that it would be *wrong* to deny them access to our country.

This angle seems commonplace in today’s media, and several critics have voiced their concerns over the prevalence of the “entertainment” news article. John O’Sullivan, for example, writes in the *Chicago-Sun Times*:

“Major media stories about immigrants are usually ‘feel good’ epics about individual immigrants who have made good against the odds. There are such inspiring examples, of course. But there are also horrific stories of criminal aliens such as the man who raped and murdered two nuns. And both sorts of individual story should be seen against the broad economic background that the very modest net benefits to native-born Americans from immigration are more than outweighed by the extra fiscal costs of providing them with public services.”

Sullivan suggests that the media is filled with these “feel good” stories, and that the economic analysis of the intellectual community, which should be primary in the opinion-formation of the public, is altogether missing. Joel Millman, a writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, adds a detailed analysis of “how the press paints a false picture of the effects of immigration” in a *Columbia*



*Journalism Review* article (1999). In it, Millman makes several criticisms of the media's current portrayal of the immigration debate: writers on major immigration stories (1) tend to be biased; (2) tend to distort data in order to support their arguments or angle, (3) have misleading, biased headlines (indicating that the editors are also biased), (4) and tend to be young and relatively inexperienced (stating that "most papers rely on metro-desk reports to cover the beat"). Judging by the comments of these critics, as well as the lack of the intellectual community's research and style of thinking in media publications, the media appears to have some major issues in serving as an information source. Unlike the government (and its extensive usage of economic thought and research), the media appears to ignore the intellectual estate in its work.

## **VI. The Public's Consumption of the Intellectual Estate**

Given that the media fails to incorporate much of the "broad economic background" (in O'Sullivan's words) in its publications, does the public end up oblivious to the research of the intellectual community? That is, do we see any trace of the neoclassical / social democratic perspectives or research findings in the public's opinion? As expected, an analysis of public opinion reveals that the public follows the media and generally fails to use the intellectual estate in its dialogue. Looking at opinion polls and letters to the editor from major news sources, the elegant cost-benefit analysis, or concern for the low-wage native worker, is rare in public discourse.

It is useful to begin our survey of public opinion on immigration by looking at various recent polls, in order to get an idea of where the aggregate public stands on increasing immigration levels. Judging from the data, it appears that the public is evenly split between opposing immigration and maintaining/encouraging it. The most recent Gallup Poll on immigration, conducted Jan 3-5 of this year, reveals that 52% of Americans want immigration decreased, 39% want immigration to remain the same, and 7% want an increase. Other professional polls conducted within the past year seem to confirm this finding with similar percentages of opponents and supporters (Gallup Poll 2004, CBS News, National Public Radio 2004). Perhaps a slight trend (7 percent increase) towards a more hostile view of immigration since last year can be inferred from the data; a recent Harris poll (2005) even found that 73% of Americans support (47% strongly support) making it more difficult for immigrants to enter and stay in the United States. But for the purposes of our analysis, we can say that America is essentially split between decreasing immigration and not decreasing it (which can be decomposed into those who support increasing immigration – a very small percentage –and those who want it maintained).

Other questions asked in these 2004 surveys (Gallup Poll 2004, CBS News, National Public Radio 2004) reveal more on how the public feels about immigration, and for the most part, Americans do not seem to have a very positive view on it. Most Americans seem to believe that immigrants are “hurting our economy,” and the percentage that share this feeling range from 41 to 65 percent. Interestingly enough, the percentage of Americans who feel that immigration is actually helping our economy tend to fall in the meager range of 5 to 22 percent. Additionally, a high number of Americans seem to believe that immigration increases taxes for the rest of society (ranging from 45 to 58 percent). Finally, on the question of whether or not immigrants are taking away jobs from Americans, a small majority seems to believe that immigrants do not take away unwanted jobs. Overall, Americans do not believe that immigrants are helpful to this country; the real question is whether they are hurtful, and generally, the public is divided in its opinion. These results seem to indicate that the intellectual community is not making its way into popular opinion. While numerous professional economists and think tank scholars have cited the net benefits of immigration to our economy, and the fact that immigrants actually pay a considerable amount of taxes, these findings do not appear to have a significant impact in these public opinion polls.

Another way that we can assess the diffusion of the intellectual estate is in the letters to the editor of major news sources; these cultural texts will certainly shed more light on why the public harbors the viewpoints that they have. To begin, such an analysis reveals that, as in the media, the neo-classical perspective and the cost-benefit approach is not employed by the public. Rather, the closest style of thinking evident in public writings is the classical approach (again, as seen in the media). For example, Jim Wade (2005), a reader of *The Baltimore Sun*, cites one statistic to defend immigration from a classical perspective: “with the pending retirement of the baby-boomers, the number of workers paying into Social Security relative to the number getting benefits may fall to a ratio of 2-to-1 if there is no increase in immigration.” The Reverend Joseph Fahy (2005), a reader of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, also highlights this need for immigration: “the US economy in the 1990s, including key Georgia industries, was overwhelmingly *dependent* upon male immigrant workers.” Market demands, according to both Wade and Fahy, should be the primary consideration in government policymaking. While in the same family of thought, this classical approach simply does not capture the neoclassical rhetoric and ideas employed by professional economists and think tanks in the immigration debate. Economists (by contrast) in this debate emphasize the net effects of immigration and the marginal utility to having each immigrant from the perspective of our society. Reverend Fahy gets fairly close when he mentions the many benefits of immigration to

Georgia: “immigrants contribute billions to Georgia’s economy through their buying power, paying taxes, purchasing homes and opening businesses.” However, whereas another reader could easily dismiss Fahy’s statements in saying that he fails to address the costs of immigration, the typical economist in this debate would have covered his bases and mentioned that the *net* effects of immigration are positive. Lacking citations to the major studies conducted in the past decade, along with any mentioning of a cost-benefit analysis, the public (as evidenced in letters to the editor) has not caught on to the neoclassical analysis of the intellectual estate.

However, the social democratic perspective does appear to have a following in the public discourse. Talk show host Terry Anderson (2003), a Californian who is self-described as “a person from the streets” who has his “finger on the pulse of Los Angeles and the rest of this country” provides us with a window to view this perspective in action. At a congressional hearing, Anderson repeatedly highlights the emotions that Californians have over immigration; “the people in this country are angry over this situation of these guest worker programs...people are angry about this” (p. 24). Later on, he adds that “the people that called my radio show, blacks, whites, American Hispanics, American Asians, are angry over [immigration], and you folks should understand, this is going to boil over. This is going to boil over. They are angry over this issue because nobody is listening to them.” According to Anderson, the American public is angry because of the economic consequences of immigration on native workers; he emphatically states, “legal immigration is killing the workforce. And the American worker is the guy that’s coming up short...they are being displaced in their homes, their neighborhoods. They are being displaced in the workforce and they’re angry about that.” The extent to which the intellectual community has affected Anderson’s viewpoints as well as the viewpoints of his audience is unclear, but what we do know is that academic and think tank studies (which were motivated by social-democratic concerns) do support this public sentiment.

Nevertheless, citizens in this debate do make a series of claims and arguments that are neglected by the intellectual community. For example, a very popular approach among the pro-immigration public is the philosophical/theological stance. As mentioned earlier, the tendency among many of these writers is to assert the human worth and goodness of these immigrants, and/or highlight the various inequalities they face in our society. In pointing out either the goodness of the immigrant or the badness of their treatment in the United States, these citizens make a moral case for being compassionate towards immigrants and an open immigration policy. Returning to our analysis of letters to the editor, Kip Howard (2005), a reader of *The Atlanta Journal-*

*Constitution*, exemplifies this style of thought: “many of these immigrants work hard and contribute significantly to Georgia’s economy. Recently, I watched them labor past sunset, roofing my neighbor’s house. They had been there since early morning.” After establishing the excellent work ethic of these immigrants (and essentially their worth), he goes on to ask “how are they different from the European immigrants who came looking for opportunity?” With this statement, Howard implies that immigrants today are not being treated in the same way that European immigrants of the past (other humans) have been treated, despite their admirable diligence. The Reverend John Kieran (2005) also questions (in the same newspaper) the fairness of the treatment these immigrants have received: “Have Christians forgotten that all people are created equal...the moral mantra of last November...compassionate conservatism...and do unto others as you would have them do to you?” Just as in the first example, a link is established between immigrants and the American population: the fact that we are all humans and deserve each other’s sympathy. Within the pro-immigration population, there seems to be a frequent voicing of the goodness/humanness of immigrants, and a fight for the good treatment they deserve both as hard workers and as children of god.

In some cases, the arguments made by citizens even go counter to the research presented by the intellectual community. One popular argument that has been rejected by academia, yet nevertheless mentioned by citizens, is the notion that immigrants do not pay their taxes. For example, Carleton Brown, in a recent letter from *The Baltimore Sun* (2005), writes the following:

“They will pay social security taxes when they work regularly, but such low-wage people do not pay income taxes.” Other citizens believe not only that immigrants are paying little or no income taxes, but that they are grossly benefiting at the expense of US taxpayers. As an example, Gary Rudnick (2005) comments in the *Los Angeles Times* that “the part of the equation that isn’t mentioned is the unfair matching of unwilling taxpayers with the huge burden of providing the equivalent of a better-than-middle-class lifestyle for these working poor immigrants and their issue, legal or otherwise.” The National Immigration Forum considers the idea that “immigrants don’t pay taxes” to be the #1 immigration myth, and states that “a range of studies find that immigrant pay between \$90 and \$140 billion a year in federal, state, and local taxes. Even undocumented immigrants pay income taxes, as evidenced by the Social Security Administration’s ‘suspense file,’ (taxes that cannot be matched to workers’ names and social security numbers), which grew to \$20 billion between 1990 and 1998” (National Immigration Forum, 2003). Furthermore, CATO and the Urban Institute have both provided evidence that immigrants pay more in taxes than they receive (usually citing the popular

National Academy of Sciences study). Even when Borjas reveals the estimated deficit in government income due to immigrants (from paying less taxes than the benefits they receive), his numbers are small relative to the accepted \$10 billion gains in efficiency from immigration. Furthermore, he refers to state and local governments, which cover a disproportionate amount of the costs of immigration in funding education and other public services while receiving less from national income taxes. Even if we come to accept Borjas's conclusions (that immigrants are a burden to slight taxpayers), we would not be able to make the exaggerated claims advanced by Brown and Rudnick, which suggest that there is a large discrepancy between immigrant taxes and benefits (in favor of immigrants).

Overall, the effects of the intellectual community on public opinion towards immigration appear small. While we did note that the social democratic approach is well ingrained in the public debate (according to Terry Anderson), it is unclear whether the public (particularly Californians) are reacting to the studies of professional economists and think tanks, or acting out of their own experiences with immigrants (Anderson seems to suggest the latter). Even less significant is the neoclassical approach so common to the scholars in this debate; the cost-benefit approach employed by professional researchers is not used by the public, nor are the results of the cost-benefit analysis by the intellectual community even cited. Occasionally, citizens would even make arguments that contradicted the findings by immigration scholars; immigrants certainly do pay their taxes according to the academic and think tank studies on this topic, yet some citizens clearly do not consume the intellectual estate (or are ignorant of it). In fact, as mentioned earlier in the public opinion polls, a high number of citizens (45 to 58 percent) conclude that immigrants increase taxes for the rest of society. As in our analysis of the media, the research on public opinion suggest that the intellectual estate developed by economics departments and think tanks is untapped by the greater society.

## **VII. Conclusions**

This research study provides an overview of the immigration debate in various sectors of society. Our goal was to assess the extent to which research findings and styles of thinking in our society's intellectual community (*i.e.*, university and think tank scholars) are imported to the government, the media and the public. While it is difficult to directly determine whether the scholarly community has made an impact in these other sectors of society (we would only know if the intellectual works were actually cited), we can more easily determine that the community has not made a difference (if neither their studies nor their approaches are considered). After analyzing the

immigration level discussion in these areas of society, we conclude that while the government appears to integrate economic knowledge into its decision-making process, the media and the public sector are not incorporating the intellectual community into its discussions.

Given these findings, we must ask why the media and public have not adopted these scholarly findings and approaches. For the media, one clear explanation comes to mind when compared to the government (an instance where we do find a significant amount of scholarly research and thinking): the media simply lacks a sufficient number of economists in its profession. While government groups such as the Council of Economic Advisers have several top economists on board, the media is not as fortunate structurally. Thus, while the government has within itself a group of scholars pushing the economic truth towards policymakers, the media does not have a similar group to ensure that it is properly and adequately using economic research. To some extent, the media already attempts to ensure that some economic perspectives are presented; we find that many major news sources have tried to bring in think tank scholars to write opinion articles on the immigration debate. However, the views presented in these articles (as well as most other articles that address the immigration level debate) are intellectually watered-down, and do not really reflect the discussion and research findings of the intellectual community.

Conceivably, in hopes of appealing to a wider populace, the American media has kept the neoclassical cost-benefit analysis and the social democratic calculations of native worker's well-being out of its articles. Interestingly enough, we find more support for this point by looking overseas: economically-literate publications such as *The Economist* and the *Financial Times* tend to be British based, not American based. Perhaps then, the problem lies truly in the American media culture, rather than in some inherent limitation of media services. Thus, one solution to this gap between the intellectual community and the media might be for professional economists to proactively push their research findings into the hands of American newspaper and magazine writers, and to demand more print-space and more accuracy from the editors of these publications.

The gap between the intellectual community and the public is more difficult to assess and solve. Several studies suggest that the public is influenced by a set of variables other than economic knowledge. For example, Julian Simon pessimistically notes in his book that immigration has always been seen negatively in the eyes of the public; he cites the Irish experience at the turn of the last century as evidence that this has always been the case. A recent Gallup Report by Lydia Saad (2004) suggests that immigration opinions are ultimately determined by the state of the economy. For example, in the early nineties, immigration was highly opposed, because immigrants were seen as a

real threat to the success of American workers. However, with the technological boom of the late 1990s, immigrants were welcomed by a small but visible majority of the population. The events of 9/11 in conjunction with the poor performance of the economy in recent times have consequently led the public to a more negative viewpoint of immigration. Finally, a study by Hood and Morris (1998) suggests that views encouraging more open borders and increased levels of immigration are inversely proportional to the number of illegal immigrants in a person's locale. Despite the fact that legal and illegal immigrants are two separate groups, the public has been found to confuse the two; as Rosalind Ellis (2005) wrote in *The Baltimore Sun*, "sadly, everyone involved with the immigration debate blurs the line between those lawfully in our country and those who are violating the law." If people naturally form opinions of immigration based on structural factors such as the state of the economy and illegal immigration, what can scholars do to ensure that their research is heard, and that we have a well-informed public? One recent research study implies a solution: Walstad (1997) reported that there is a significant relationship between economic knowledge and public opinion on economic issues. Therefore, there appears to be hope; as with the media sector, if economists find a way to push their research and styles of thinking into this larger audience (i.e. spread economic knowledge to the public), then the intellectual community may finally have an influence on public opinion. Fixing the media's coverage of the immigration debate may be a good start to this process. We have determined in this study that while there appears to be much intellectual wealth in the issue of immigration, it is not spreading to the media and (perhaps consequently) the public. While it is encouraging to find that the government is influenced (or appears to be influenced) by the works of professional economists, ultimately it is the people who decide who is placed in government positions, and in a democratic system, we must ensure that they are just as knowledgeable about the current research on immigration policy. The modern economist must therefore proactively spread his research findings out into the larger society, and ensure that economics extends beyond the walls of research foundations and universities. The intellectual estate is available for all to consume, and considering the importance of immigration policy in our economy over the long run, these scholars must ensure that their research has real currency in other sectors of society.

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