Intractable Immigration:

Why Americans Cannot Reach Consensus

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Abstract

In the 1920s, the United States began to restrict immigration by national origin. Immigration criteria have changed since then, though the U.S. has never returned to its former policy of open borders. However, recent waves of undocumented immigrants challenge the enforcement of these restrictions. American discourse on immigration issues indicates that the U.S. implicitly continues to struggle with the question of whether immigration should be limited at all. Key to making an appropriate decision is an understanding both of the net impact of immigrants on the American economy and of the way Americans ought to treat immigrants. This study breaks down society into a collection of segments and analyzes the economic styles which each segment uses to address such uncertainties. These segments illustrate a tension between the neoclassical emphasis on efficiency and the philosophical considerations of equity and human dignity. American society's inability to reconcile these conflicting demands bodes ill for future attempts at immigration policy reform.

I. Introduction

Immigration reform is once again on the horizon. President Obama recently announced that he will soon begin reform talks and possibly push a bill this year (Preston 2009, April 8). Because immigration was a rising issue even before his term began, it is fortunate that his administration plans to address it promptly, notwithstanding the risks in the current economy and political climate. Obama's efforts would represent the most recent of many historical legislative efforts to reform the American immigration system to reflect contemporary circumstances.

The perennial American immigration discussion is rooted in a fundamental question: should the United States limit immigration? At face value, this question was answered long ago. Policymakers in the 1920s restricted immigration for the first time in American history due to an immigrant influx and a corresponding change in national sentiment. Today, few Americans would even consider a return to unlimited immigration. Recent reform proposals instead take restrictions of one type or another for granted. However, the U.S. now faces a new manifestation of the immigration question. Despite formal immigration restrictions, an estimated twelve million undocumented immigrants currently live in the U.S., and more flood in every day. The high rate at which immigrants enter the country illegally, particularly by crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, indicates that the U.S. still faces a *de facto* decision on whether to limit immigration, though this time a legislative precedent exists. Americans and their lawmakers may choose between assertive new measures to address the undocumented population and the comfortable status quo option of spotty, selective enforcement of current statutes. The former would represent a decision to limit this latest type of immigration, while the latter would represent a decision against immigration restrictions, since grand-scale undocumented immigration will likely continue.

In addition to this primary, implicit question, future legislative reform efforts more directly face several major uncertainties underlying immigration restrictions. First, do immigrants constitute a net asset or liability to the U.S. economy? By continuing to limit but not prohibit immigration, U.S. society recognizes, perhaps unconsciously, that a certain number and/or type of immigrants are a net asset. Yet, despite this implicit belief, much of the American immigration discourse continues to delineate between positive and negative aspects of immigration, and a surprising number of sources doubt the net result. Thus, even disregarding the flow of undocumented immigrants, Americans continue to discuss immigration as if it were not yet restricted by law.

A second related uncertainty is how American society should treat immigrants. With undocumented immigrants now at the epicenter of the immigration debate, some people argue that these detrimental lawbreakers should be sent home while others insist that these hardworking, honest laborers are critical to the American economy. Clearly, this argument is an extension of the discussion on assets and liabilities. Americans face the threat of allowing a balance-sheet calculation of net impact to determine how they treat people. For Americans concerned with equity, this represents a problem, though for those more concerned with efficiency, it does not.

This paper examines the economic styles used by societal segments in recent discourse on immigration. Representative samples of these segments use the styles to discuss both the relative benefits of immigration and the way immigrants should be treated. As a starting point, the professional economic literature employs the neoclassical style almost exclusively, reaching mixed conclusions on the relative benefits of immigrants. The professionals characterize immigrants as labor supply which an unfettered labor market will allocate efficiently between

their home and destination countries. On the other hand, samples of popular culture rely mainly on philosophical and institutionalist styles and focus more heavily on understanding the needs of immigrants. The philosophical style emphasizes norms alternative to those of the neoclassical style, including equity and human dignity, while the institutionalist style bases conclusions on an analysis of human nature. Indeed, pop culture suggests that the efficiency criterion of the economics discipline inadequately describes the way Americans perceive that they ought to treat immigrants. This segment instead portrays immigrants as hopeful, hardworking contributors to society, just as worthy of respect and fair treatment as American citizens.

These two segments' economic styles represent extremes in the societal immigration discourse. Members of the government, the public, mainstream think tanks, prominent media outlets, and special interest groups contribute other valuable styles as these segments also attempt to answer questions associated with immigration. However, the discourse within these segments all reflects some combination of the neoclassical style developed by the professional literature and the philosophical and institutionalist styles employed by popular culture. This study will progress from the professional literature through the other segments, illustrating their mix of neoclassical, philosophical/institutionalist, and other styles, and culminating with the popular culture. As evidenced throughout, tension between value systems at either stylistic extreme suggests why immigration reform remains an intractable political issue today.

II. Legislative Background

Throughout the twentieth century, immigration reform rose and fell on the political agenda according to national and Congressional interests coupled with immigration trends. The U.S. first addressed the issue in response to a massive influx of immigrants, approximately 25.8

million, between 1881 and 1924 (Borjas 1994, p. 1668). By mid-World War I, the negative economic impacts of immigrant labor and, to a lesser extent, growing nativist impulses, had convinced policymakers of the need to begin restricting immigration (Goldin 1994, p. 223-5; Jones 1992, p. 230-1, 236-7). These stimuli and associated constituent pressure prompted passage of the Immigration Law of 1917, introducing literacy tests, and the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, introducing immigration quotas based on national origin.

Immigration promptly tapered off after the 1920s legislation, though it again began to rise steadily post-World War II from approximately one million annually during the 1940s to 4.5 million in the 1980s (Borjas 1994, p. 1668-9). In the meantime, the U.S. implemented the Bracero Program in 1942 to bring in temporary Mexican farmworkers to accommodate for labor shortages during World War II (Navarro 2009, p. 71-2). This program certainly benefitted American growers, but it also perpetuated a variety of abuses against the workers, such as poor working and housing conditions and poor wages (2009, p. 74-5). By 1965, political will had again accumulated in favor of a major immigration reform, this time to rectify the national-origins quota system's "discriminatory provisions [which were inherently]...contrary to American ideals" (Jones 1992, p. 266). The Immigration and Nationality Act changed the criteria for admission to the U.S. to include "either family unification, the possession of needed skills, or refugee status," but attempted to preserve the status quo level of immigration (Jones 1992, p. 266-7; Navarro 2009, p. 90-1).

The current immigration debate is linked most closely with immigration legislation in 1986 and 1990. In response to a large increase in undocumented immigration in the 1980s, and the growing realization of the negative economic impacts, the U.S. attempted to curb the problem with the Immigration and Control Act of 1986 (Jones 1992, p. 287-8). The results were

disappointing. Only about half of eligible undocumented immigrants claimed the permanent residency which the Act offered, and both the increased enforcement measures and the "penalties on employers who knowingly hired illegal aliens" did little to prevent more undocumented immigration (1992, p. 288-9). A subsequent Immigration Act of 1990 increased the legal immigration quota to 700,000 per year (Navarro 2009, p. 119; Jones 1992, p. 289-90).

Both 9/11 and some of the previously-mentioned economic and nativist factors have prompted the immigration debate in this decade. As in earlier decades, undocumented immigration was rampant, judging by the more than 1.5 million such immigrants caught in both 1999 and 2000 (Navarro 2009, p. 282). According to political scientist Armando Navarro, after 9/11, "the Bush administration seized the moment to create a 'policy nexus' between immigration reform and the war on terrorism," sweeping up nativist politicians into the cause (2009, p. 280-1). The government segment of this paper begins with President Bush's 2004 proposal of a Temporary Worker Program which would not receive legislative approval. From 2005 through 2007, immigration was among the most critical legislative issues in Congress. A series of promising bills were derailed by conflicts between those supporting legalization of undocumented immigrants and those advocating a border fence and harsh enforcement against undocumented immigrants (Navarro 2009, p. 296-311). As President Obama prepares to take up the issue, he would be wise to keep the recent Congressional stalemate in mind.

III. Professional Economics Literature

The professional economics literature frames its portion of the immigration discussion in the context of the modern discipline, reflecting the economics discipline's policy orientation, thematic structure, and methodological concerns. From there, professional economists use

primarily the neoclassical style to make comparisons between the current immigration situation and the neoclassical ideal of open borders. George Borjas, Professor of Economics and Social Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, leads scholars in analyzing immigration from the perspective of the neoclassical labor market. Borjas's fifty-page literature survey article in the *Journal of Economic Literature* (JEL) addresses the questions associated with immigration using concepts such as efficiency, market failure, and rationality. Other economists elaborate using these styles and employ at least one other, the institutionalist style, in analyzing immigration. However, the sharp neoclassical response to this stylistic dissidence is one indicator that the professional economics literature has been unable to reach full consensus on its conclusions. Meanwhile, the social discourse on immigration continues with less than coherent guidance from economists.

Borjas's JEL article is one example of the value of situating immigration research within the neat structure of the modern economics discipline. First among relevant characteristics of academic economics, the modern discipline is sensitive to policy developments, attempting both to guide them and respond to them. For example, Borjas attests to the "explosion in research on...the economics of immigration" at the time of his publication in 1994, reflecting the political need created by major legislation in 1986 and 1990 (Borjas 1994, p. 1668-9). Second, the articles to which Borjas and other survey authors, such as Gordon Hanson, refer indicate the tendency, or perhaps even pressure, to position the immigration issue within a specific economic field. Borjas's sources come in large part from such field journals as the *Journal of Labor Economics* and *Industrial Labor Relations Review*, in addition to the core journals like the *American Economic Review*, highlighting his research focus on the labor market. Third, Borjas's work suggests the discipline's critical reliance on methodology, to the point of scholarly

disagreement. In several instances, Borjas presents the findings of other authors' "cross-section" studies which he then refutes with divergent findings from his own work grouping immigrants by chronological "cohorts" (1994, p. 1672). In summary, the professional literature examines immigration within a heavily-structured, peer-reviewed discipline encouraging answers to relevant policy questions.

Although disciplinary characteristics frame the approach to the immigration question, the professional economics literature actually pursues the answer via the neoclassical style. Immigrants are suppliers of labor who pursue better wages by moving from their home labor market to that of another country, demonstrating the concept of labor mobility. As an illustration, Borjas contends that, in order to determine the relative merits of immigration, it is necessary to evaluate immigrants' performance in the host country labor market (Borjas 1994, p. 1667). The author implies that his answer to the immigration question would depend on whether immigrants make a net positive "contribution to the economy's skill endowment and productivity" (1994, p. 1671). The labor market concept thus offers a workable model with which the modern professional literature explores the consequences of immigration for the host economy.

Furthermore, the labor markets into which immigrants enter will, if uninhibited, allocate their labor efficiently. Efficiency is a neoclassical concept signifying the elimination of waste at the market equilibrium (Mas-Colell, Winston, & Green 1995, p. 307). Like Borjas, Gordon Hanson, an economics professor at the University of California, San Diego, has also published a survey article in JEL. Hanson's article reflects the policy debates of 2006 which focused specifically on undocumented immigration across the U.S.-Mexico border. The author appropriates the efficiency concept to the most recent immigration debate when he alleges that

open immigration would permit "countries to use fixed factors more productively" (Hanson 2006, p. 915). By implication, if foreign laborers were freely permitted to enter a country's labor market, then land, labor, and capital resources could theoretically be used in optimal proportions to yield the best societal outcome. Although Hanson's statement assumes sufficient flexibility of land and capital use, it nevertheless accords with neoclassical economics' optimism for market outcomes.

Despite such optimism, neoclassical economics does recognize that the idealistic vision of the labor market can be spoiled by market failure. One type of market failure results from externalities, cases in which "the actions of one agent directly affect the utility functions…of other agents in the economy" (Mas-Colell et al. 1995, p. 308). If, as Borjas indicates, a larger proportion of immigrants use their new country's welfare program than do the country's natives (Borjas 1994, p. 1701), then the natives receive less utility than they would without immigrants. Indeed, Hanson agrees that some types of social insurance programs are one justification for the restrictions on open immigration (Hanson 2006, p. 915).

In addition to market failure, the professional literature recognizes that certain rational actors might have incentives such that immigration restriction is desirable (see Borjas 1994, p. 1693; Hanson 2006, p. 915). The rationality property of neoclassical economics maintains that the typical person acts in his or her self-interest to maximize personal utility. In the immigration context, Claudia Goldin studies voting records of members of Congress from the early twentieth century to determine whether the proportion of immigrants in their constituency affected their vote on immigration restrictions. She finds that members from districts with higher proportions of immigrants voted almost unanimously against immigration restrictions (Goldin 1994, p. 253). According to market theory, the self-interested activity of each member of society, including

those in Congress, should result in maximum societal utility. In this instance, both members of Congress seeking re-election support and their immigrant constituents seem to gain from the anti-restriction vote. However, there is no guarantee that this restriction maximizes the total utility of the nation, including natives. In conclusion, some causes for immigration restriction, as identified by the mostly-neoclassical professional literature, may satisfy one neoclassical principle but negate another.

Despite the professional literature's clear emphasis on the neoclassical style, the institutionalist style does make a brief appearance as well. Barry Chiswick finds that an immigrant's earnings begin lower than those of a native with comparable characteristics but that eventually the former catch up and surpass the latter (Chiswick 1978, p. 920). The author concludes that this wage eclipse can best be explained by immigrants' "self-selection." That is, the type of people which typically chooses to immigrate is precisely the type with the necessary motivation and ability to eventually surpass native earnings (1978, p. 912, 919-20). Chiswick's high appraisal of motivation represents a short-term adaptation of the human evolutionary theory presented by institutionalist pioneer, Thorstein Veblen. Veblen claims that it is only through "a proclivity to…achievement" that man as a species has been able to surpass the species with which he competes and to become "lord of creation" (Veblen 1898, p. 189). Chiswick likewise argues that immigrants' success hinges on a certain characteristic motivation which they possess and their competition does not. Therefore, although most of his study is in lockstep with the neoclassical style, Chiswick's concept of self-selection indicates that other styles may make helpful contributions to immigration research as well.

What, then, is the professional economics literature's stance on the immigration question? Borjas and Hanson both acknowledge the practical need to limit immigration for

several reasons. Borjas indicates that recent immigrants likely burden the U.S. welfare system and, since they have relatively lower skill levels, they negatively affect employment opportunities and wages of similarly-skilled natives (Borjas 1994, p. 1699, 1713). As discussed previously, Hanson admits that restrictions may be appropriate due to the market failure of social insurance (Hanson 2006, p. 915). However, the literature is not unanimous. Chiswick, for one, seems to indicate that immigrants could enhance the host economy, and other research in Borjas's review indicates that immigrants do not adversely impact the economic opportunities of natives (see Borjas 1994, p. 1672, 1698-9). Yet, Borjas responds in each of these cases by discrediting the research on methodological grounds. These studies consider local labor markets to be "closed economies," but in reality, labor mobility ensures that the unequal labor distribution between local markets will eventually even out on a national level, representing wage and employment effects which are invisible to the short-sighted research on local markets (1994, p. 1699). To summarize, the professional literature offers a conflicting picture of the economic effects of immigration, preventing a unified recommendation to society and its policymakers.

In conclusion, the professional economics literature chronicles great efforts to answer the immigration question and related uncertainties. The modern discipline provides a strong framework for addressing the uncertainty of immigrants' net impact, and the neoclassical style offers a well-developed set of tools to pursue the answer. However, the professional literature is unable to use these tools to reach a conclusive answer. This is not a problem if academic economists have no influence outside their ivory tower. Yet, examination of the other societal segments will soon reveal that, at least in the immigration field, this assumption is downright

incorrect. In fact, the discipline's failure to reach consensus threatens legitimate research efforts within other segments, since these do look to the professionals for guidance.

As for the second uncertainty about the treatment of immigrants, Chiswick, at least, demonstrates some interest in respect for these hardworking people. The theoretical implication of his institutionalist analysis is one of a welcome reception to immigrants. However, Borjas and Hanson, and probably most of the profession, are only concerned with immigrants' impact on the economy, considering immigrants solely as labor inputs and potential sources of competition for jobs, wages, and welfare. Herein lay the beginnings of the conflict between personal and impersonal treatment of immigrants.

IV. Government

From 2004 through 2006, the Bush Administration and Congress debated the appropriate response to high levels of undocumented immigration and public opposition to it. First, policymakers had to address the question of whether immigration should be limited at all, since de facto American policy welcomed the inexpensive labor which undocumented immigrants could provide. President Bush relied on professional economists from the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) for the neoclassical basis to his administration's response. From there, the president, the CEA, and members of Congress shaped the immigration debate by relying on a variety of other economic styles. President Bush's Temporary Worker Program in 2004 and Congress's Secure Fence Act of 2006 are among the policy focal points which illuminate the use of economics in that immigration debate. These plans indicate that most of the government believes in the net benefits of immigration, though it ought to be better restricted by addressing the glut of undocumented arrivals.

The government's economic analysis of the immigration debate revolves around a simplified version of the neoclassical style. The neoclassical basis is hardly surprising, for the professional economists behind government policy, especially at the CEA, have the same training and come from the same universities as their (largely neoclassical) academic colleagues. As for the debate, the CEA summarizes the complexities of undocumented immigration by claiming that it is "overwhelmingly driven by supply and demand: immigrants want to work in the United States, and many American employers want to hire them" (Council of Economic Advisers [CEA] 2005, p. 110). Although even this simple description is faithful to the neoclassical labor market, and the CEA does later go into more detail, such laymen's terms reflect the pressure on government economists to offer explanations based on policymakers' "Economics 101" level of knowledge (Hamilton 1992, p. 61-2; Nelson 1987, p. 84).

As in the professional economic literature, Bush Administration economists frame immigration as a labor mobility issue dependent on the skill levels of immigrants. The CEA favorably depicts high-skilled immigrants as contributors to the country's capacity for innovation and thus its global competition (CEA 2006, p. 57). However, President Bush and his CEA professionals also emphasize the positive labor market implications of the typical, low-skilled immigrants, indicating that they can "fill jobs that Americans are not filling" (Bush 2004, p. 26; CEA 2005, p. 94, 114). The CEA nevertheless indicates some adverse effects of low-skilled immigrants in the form of a net drain on public assistance programs and a small wage decrease among those low-skilled U.S. natives who do compete with immigrants (CEA 2005, p. 105-8). In the context of the rising debate in 2004, the administration thus attempts to posit immigration as a positive economic force while admitting that there may be some adverse effects.

Just as the government employs a neoclassical frame for the discussion, so too do its members use several neoclassical concepts to propose remedies to undocumented immigration. To begin with, the CEA approves immigration in general based on cost-benefit calculations, indicative of the utilitarian foundations of neoclassical economics (CEA 2005, p. 93, 104, 108, 115). Nevertheless, the CEA mitigates its praise by carefully noting the economic, security, and humanitarian concerns about undocumented immigration which necessitate President Bush's new Temporary Worker Program (TWP) (2005, p. 114-5). Several years later, the disagreement between the two chambers of Congress and the pressures of political expediency morphed the debate from the president's TWP to his fencing proposal. Here, Senators Kennedy and Bingaman are among those arguing that hundreds of miles of costly fencing violate efficiency, since there are far more "cost-effective" ways to attack the problem, including through the network of "virtual fence" proposed by the Department of Homeland Security (Bingaman 2006, Kennedy 2006). It is significant to note that both these cost-benefit and cost-efficiency arguments are modern manifestations of the Progressive Era emphasis on "scientific" analysis, which attempted to reach objective answers to questions of administrative best practice (Nelson 1987, p. 71-2). In conclusion, the common neoclassical foundation does not imply government consensus on responses to the immigration question.

Although the economic foundations of the immigration debate are neoclassical and academic in origin, many of the government's policy proposals reflect other, more politically-palatable styles, such as the managerial approach. To illustrate, Bush proposes the TWP as a straightforward plan which assigns certain tasks to the American government, foreign governments, employers, and temporary immigrant workers in order to resolve security and economic concerns associated with current undocumented immigration (Bush 2004, p. 26-7).

This command-and-control response to a crisis acknowledges the importance of the labor market while insisting that the natural market outcome, a multitude of undocumented, low-wage, immigrant workers, needs alteration. Bush's proposals for corrective legislative action mirror managerial planning ideas in the nineteenth century. In that era, reformers believed that "it was necessary to push, to pull, and to reconstruct the existing structure so that the private sector units within it would be led naturally to achieve the desired goals" (Goodwin 1976, p. 6). Indeed, Bush's plan includes high expectations for private employers' cooperation (Bush 2004, p. 27). But perhaps the most critical managerial feature of Bush's plan is his set of policies for the American and foreign governments to facilitate the eventual return of temporary immigrant workers (Bush 2004, p. 27). This part of his proposal inhibits the labor market demand discussed by the CEA, focusing instead on the political problems of undocumented immigration. Thus, Bush substitutes some political considerations associated with immigration for the neoclassical emphasis on efficiency and unrestricted mobility in the international labor market.

The immigration proposals also involve some assumptions about human nature which indicate an institutionalist influence. Echoing the immigrant "self-selection" proposed by professional economist Barry Chiswick (Chiswick 1978, p. 912, 919-20), the CEA attributes to immigrants a certain "work ethic" which makes them desirable contributors to the U.S. economy (CEA 2005, p. 115). Nevertheless, CEA recommendations also assume humans' natural deceitfulness, suggesting that the TWP will reduce the incentives or opportunities for "[w]orkers…to lie about their immigration status, rely on false documentation, or work under assumed names" (2005, p. 115). In a final human nature critique, Bush and Senator Robert Byrd argue against amnesty, maintaining that undocumented immigrants are lawbreakers who should not be entitled to the benefits of those who pursued citizenship through legal channels (Byrd

2006; Bush 2004, p. 27). In summary, the institutionalist approach draws on immigrants' characteristics to create a profile of their impact on the economy and society.

Beyond the neoclassical foundations and managerial or institutionalist policy analyses, government discourse on immigration reflects a moral critical approach to the distasteful current situation. The moral critical style can generally be observed in narrative-type discourse, and the reality which such "stories" present is often contradictory to the impersonal theory favored by other styles, especially the neoclassical. In this context, Bush begins his proposal for the TWP by expressing his desire that the program "make America a more compassionate and more humane…country" (Bush 2004, p. 25). By implication, the country was not compassionate or humane enough when he spoke. Thus, Bush passes light judgment on a diffuse, nationwide culprit instead of accepting the government's blame for a government policy. In addition to this subtle critique, Bush and the CEA evoke public sympathy or even empathy for undocumented immigrants by describing the "fear of deportation" which prevents "abused and exploited" immigrant victims from reporting such crimes (CEA 2005, p. 110; Bush 2004, p. 26). Finally, in statements expressing a rather philosophical belief in equity, Senator Byrd joins Bush in labeling amnesty an unfair policy because it breaks "the great and egalitarian American promise that the rules will be applied equally and fairly to everyone" (Byrd 2006; Bush 2004, p. 27). With these arguments, government officials attack the moral foundations of the current immigration system, preparing constituencies for the other economic styles which constitute the bulk of the debate.

Finally, mercantilist economics alters the government debate over immigration because elected officials often adopt their constituents' perspective. The mercantilist style can be traced back to at least the British colonial trading companies. Company representatives sought to justify their business on the grounds that it benefitted the nation, though surely personal gain was

the companies' main motive (for example, see Munn 1664, especially ch. 1-2). In the contemporary immigration debate, Representative Rubén Hinojosa is one of the few members of Congress whose floor speech transparently indicates his bias in the debate over best overall policy, though of course constituent interests guide many of his colleagues too. Hinojosa decries a fence since it would "destroy the economic gains" in his area, and the immigrants would keep coming to meet employer demand anyway (Hinojosa 2006). Presumably, the members of the McAllen Chamber of Commerce, to which he refers several times in his speech, would stand to gain from the cheap labor which undocumented immigrants provide. Despite elected officials' purpose of representing their constituencies, the sum of mercantilist, client-oriented arguments might not be in the nation's best interest.

In conclusion, the government employs a variety of economic styles to build its response to undocumented immigration and thus to the immigration question in general. By establishing a neoclassical framework which reflects the modern economics discipline, the CEA provides President Bush with a positive overall picture of immigration with some minor setbacks. The government makes largely managerial and institutionalist proposals to remedy the undesirable effects of undocumented immigration while preserving most, but not all, of the benefits. Policymakers build support for their actions through moral critical appeals. Finally, at least one mercantilist Congressional argument indicates that not all agree on measures against undocumented immigration. By implication, American government in general does not unanimously advocate restrictions on this latest type of immigration.

The government responds to the first uncertainty behind the immigration question by indicating that immigrants create some national liabilities but constitute a net asset due to their important economic contributions. However, it is difficult to discern whether the government is

sincere. Hinojosa's mercantilist perspective is probably not the only one motivated by campaign or partisan pressures, given Claudia Goldin's aforementioned research on voting patterns. Furthermore, the Bush Administration was well-known for its support of business interests, and the CEA economists were hand selected to support the Bush agenda. Although the possibility of distortion by these pressures does not delegitimize the government's contribution to the study, the government's perspective may not accurately represent a significant portion of the populace.

Finally, the government responds to the second uncertainty by introducing compassion, empathy, and equity as important considerations in addition to the neoclassical emphasis on cost-benefit analysis and the efficient distribution of labor. These emotional appeals occur in speeches which drum up support for politicians' policy positions, be they Bush's TWP program or Byrd's virulent opposition to amnesty. Because pathos is designed to emotionally move an audience, the public to whom these politicians address their speeches is likely quite sympathetic to such "noneconomic" concepts as well.

V. Public Opinion

The professional economics literature and the government approach the immigration question using the neoclassical style, with exceptions and extensions. Debate within these segments of society hinges on the labor market model and emphasizes the high levels of U.S. labor demand and foreign labor supply. In turn, various indicators of public opinion, such as polls and weblogs, reflect this foundation and indicate that the labor market is the starting point for the discussion. Of the previous two segments, government discourse most closely resembles public discourse, since indicators of public opinion reflect both the government's positive neoclassical slant and its frequent resistance to the neoclassical value system. The public agrees

with its representatives that notions of equity, hard work, and human dignity should largely displace efficiency. Taken together, the public's personal experiences test whether other, more detached segments make realistic analyses of the immigration question. As a result, public opinion makes significant contributions to society's immigration discourse, particularly on the uncertainty about immigrant treatment.

The public enters the immigration discussion with a neoclassical frame of reference. William B. Walstad suggests that "economic knowledge," an important source of which are college courses in neoclassical economics, "may be the most critical factor determining public opinion on economic issues" (Walstad 1997, p. 203). The public must have developed its economic understanding of immigration somewhere, because the neoclassical emphasis is reflected in Gallup Polls conducted during this decade. Americans appreciate the historical benefits of immigration and "overwhelmingly" recognize the prudence of keeping undocumented immigrants around for "jobs that American workers would not want," though limiting immigration is desirable (Gallup 2009, March 5). Interestingly, this view is in lockstep with the position which the Council of Economic Advisers supplied President Bush in 2004, which in itself is a departure from the dour predictions of academic professionals like George Borjas. Millions of Americans have not gone to college, thus they cannot be expected to adopt neoclassical positions promoted by university economists. Furthermore, the government has likely had a greater impact on public opinion simply due to its greater visibility in the public eye. Even for those who did attend college, the government is more likely to influence their understanding of immigration in particular, since the introductory college courses do not move much beyond basic principles. In summary, the source of economic knowledge, in this case the

government, seems to significantly impact the slant of the neoclassical framework governing public discourse on immigration.

Despite general agreement with neoclassical foundations, some members of the public contradict the efficiency criterion in favor of other philosophical standards of distribution. This is not an isolated phenomenon. With regard to many issues, social scientists usually "take values…as given" and spend most of their time modeling "behavioral responses to incentives," while the public considers value pluralism to be a central part of the debate (Aaron 1994, p. 4-5). Utility based on want satisfaction is the value of choice for neoclassical economists, and efficiency is the standard for the distribution of societal resources. As for the public, blog respondent Buddy Hamilton says that he is willing to pay more for goods and services, if only the nation would expel undocumented immigrants whose labor keeps costs down (Hamilton 2007, April 12). Hamilton clearly disputes the importance of efficiency, while another blog respondent goes a step further to place equity in its stead. Respondent "Rule of Law" disagrees with the neoclassical suggestion that Americans have left low-wage jobs to immigrants, for they indeed perform such jobs in parts of the country without immigrants. He or she argues instead that "Americans will do whatever work needs doing, for two things—*fair wages*, and respect" (Rule of Law 2008, October 18; emphasis added). Another blog respondent, named Ryan, says that there are "very few equitable solutions" to the undocumented immigration problem, since the fair solution in one circumstance, such as amnesty during economic expansion, might have unfair consequences later, such as for Americans who cannot find jobs in a recession (Ryan 2007, May 22). In short, the most efficient, neoclassical responses to the immigration question are not the most satisfying to some members of the public, who instead choose some conception of a "fair" distribution of wages and jobs.

Other members of the public join the institutionalist discussion on human nature in which Barry Chiswick, President Bush, and some members of Congress participate. As mentioned at the outset of the paper, the immigration debate frequently turns on the question of whether undocumented immigrants are net contributors to or detractors from the U.S. economy. The neoclassical response is to wait on the numbers, but the public answer is a rapid evaluation of personal experience. On the one hand, blog respondent Alejandro Loret de Mola, the son of an immigrant, decries the notion that all immigrants seek a 'free ride' and insists that at least some are hard workers who "could teach all of us about work ethic" (de Mola 2007, April 12). On the other hand, blog respondent Bryan Moore recites a litany of bad experiences with undocumented immigrants but mentions that he himself works with a number of immigrants, all legal. In drawing a contrast between the two types of immigrants, Moore implies that the sort of people who immigrate illegally are responsible for the car accidents, poor property values, etc. he has witnessed, while immigrants in general are fine (Moore 2007, April 12). Thus, when the public considers immigrants' characteristics, its answer to the immigration question extrapolates isolated cases into conflicting stereotypes, preventing consensus.

Other public commentary reflects a philosophical or theological approach which uniformly treats people with higher regard than do the neoclassical or institutionalist styles. In an encyclical on the human relationship to labor, Pope John Paul II criticizes the contemporary (neoclassical) "error of economism" in which "labor [is considered] solely according to its economic purpose" without any consideration for the dignity of the human person (Pope John Paul II 1981, para. 60). This dignity should not be conditioned by the political economy. Likewise, blog respondent Julia Gordon insists that people should not be valued differently based on which side of the border they come from (Gordon 2007, April 12). She would probably

disagree with Buddy Hamilton, the aforementioned consumer whose higher willingness to pay permits him to discriminate against undocumented immigrant workers.

Finally, some Americans are fed up with this sort of debate among values and instead take a managerial approach, offering policymakers prompt and effective solutions. Blog respondent Kevin lists four necessary steps to resolving the undocumented immigration crisis, beginning with, "Secure the borders!!! Plug them up! Immediately!" (Kevin 2007, May 22). After his sensational beginning, he continues with more substantive policy recommendations that are slightly longer though similarly unequivocal. Kevin's proposal is reminiscent of Ross Perot's sentiment: "Our political system….seems designed to avoid solving problems" (Perot 1992, p. 21). In his book, *United We Stand*, Perot sets out to convince the reader that the government faces unfathomable debt; that this problem must be resolved rapidly, lest calamities ensue; and that his plan addresses the problem by balancing the budget (Perot 1992, p. 5-9, 37). Such managerial responses bring clear policy alternatives to the discussion, but the forcefulness with which they are often presented might prematurely suppress open dialogue and preclude discussion of other viable alternatives.

In conclusion, public opinion in the immigration discussion demonstrates a variety of economic styles. The public outlook in aggregate form confirms the government's positive neoclassical analysis. This segment as a whole therefore responds to the first uncertainty behind the immigration question by considering immigrants a net asset to the U.S. economy. However, in response to the second uncertainty, many individuals suggest that they value immigrants differently than does the economists' impersonal efficiency criterion. Depending on the commentator's perspective, immigrants deserve either equal respect or every bit of the criticism they receive.

The public opinion segment is the first to clearly demonstrate the deadlock between neoclassical and philosophical value systems, between the economists' professional training and the public's natural inclinations. In retrospect, the government appears to be a mediator between the economists from whom it receives formal guidance and the public to which it owes its allegiance. Later in this paper, popular culture will strengthen and expand upon the philosophical style of public opinion, representing an even more significant counterbalance to the professional literature. In the meantime, perhaps think tanks, which are designed to be independent, can help resolve this stylistic conflict through their impartiality.

VI. Think Tanks

Non-governmental research institutions, better known as think tanks, occupy a unique position between the above three segments of society which permits them to reflect on the others' arguments while offering distinct contributions. The Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) are among the most prominent mainstream think tanks, representing the left and the right of the political spectrum, respectively. Considering their academic training, scholars at these think tanks quite predictably refer to the neoclassical framework on which other societal segments predicate their arguments. However, these institutions are the first segment in this study to also heavily utilize the institutionalist approach. The reason for the prominence of this style, and for the respective level of attention paid to the neoclassical style, appears to be a combination of the authors' positions within their institutions and their institutions' position in society.

Scholars at mainstream think tanks on both ends of the political spectrum build on the neoclassical framework for immigration analysis. Brookings's Audrey Singer references the

(now familiar) labor market model when she explains that immigrant settlement patterns are determined in part by differences in job availability by location (Singer 2007, p. 2-3). Yet, she also indicates the role of "social networks of information about jobs and housing" in facilitating changes in these settlement patterns (2007, p. 3). This conceptual addition expands the bread-and-butter neoclassical framework examined thus far and implies that without such a network, the labor market would fail due to imperfect information. Indeed, this is but one contribution to immigration understanding that might not otherwise have been made without the "distinctly policy-oriented" stimuli facing think tanks (Goodwin 1995, p. 21). Among other neoclassical manifestations, Brookings's Ron Haskins explains immigrants' educational characteristics by level of schooling, region of origin, and generation in the U.S (Haskins 2007, p. 1-3). His emphasis on education, "one of the most important determinants of wages and income in the United States" (2007, p. 6), reflects the neoclassical concept of marginal returns (here in the form of wage) based on productivity. Finally, in a further conceptual innovation, AEI's Lawrence B. Lindsey notes that the current U.S. policy "ration[s] [green cards] by queue" rather than by price (Lindsey 2006), undermining the efficiency of a sort of market for legal residency opportunities. Thus, these think tank scholars continue the trend of using neoclassical analysis as a jumping-off point, while broadening the application of the market models typically employed.

Think tanks contribute even more to the immigration debate by making the broadest use yet of the institutionalist style, stretching far beyond the limited human nature characterizations in other segments. In general, the institutionalist style views the economy as an organic whole involving institutions and systems which might be working well or poorly. Descriptions of human nature simply explain why the economy functions in a given manner. When the economy functions poorly, the institutionalist style prescribes a governmental planning process to rectify

identifiable economic imbalances. Brookings's Audrey Singer takes this style a step further by including both the economy and its societal context in the organism to which the government must tend. She supports a "New Americans Initiative," which, as its name implies, is concerned with the difference between future citizens and aloof laborers working in a foreign land. In other words, Singer envisions "immigrant integration [which] fosters social inclusiveness *and* economic mobility as immigrants and their offspring become full members of US communities" (Singer 2007, p. 5, emphasis added). Whereas her colleague Ron Haskins focuses exclusively on economic mobility, Singer treats the nation and economy as a unified body composed of people who live *and* work in a given environment. As a more concrete example of this unified approach to nation and economy, Singer stresses that learning English is prerequisite to immigrants' total integration into American society (2007, p. 7). Such a stipulation starkly contrasts with the reasoning of academic economists such as George Borjas, for whom English is simply the ticket to the best jobs. In summary, the integration concerns of this broader institutionalist analysis suggest that immigration issues should be approached not only from the perspective of the economy but also from that of society.

The federal-state government relationship is also an institutionalist consideration which lacks neoclassical attention. Singer diagnoses a systemic error in the cooperation of these two layers of government. She argues that immigration first has local impacts, which vary from place to place, despite the typical obsession with the national consequences (Singer 2007, p. 5-6). Officials at federal level are not recognizing this reality. Indeed, Singer notes that "[t]he current 'system' of integration involves little formal aid or guidance from the federal government," and she instead credits local institutions of civil society with providing services appropriate for immigrants' needs (2007, p. 6). In her New Americans Initiative, Singer recommends that the

government act on these realities, with states implementing initiatives unique to their circumstances and the federal government monitoring the process (2007, p. 7-8). Singer's institutionalist diagnosis thus suggests that the nation, as a unified body, must recognize that different parts, or layers of government, have different roles in facilitating successful integration.

Lest it appear that Singer monopolizes this broader institutionalist analysis, or that Brookings alone is responsible, AEI's Lindsey contributes by critiquing not the division of labor between layers of government but rather the immigration process itself. He lambasts the idea of immigration reforms which would allow undocumented immigrants to achieve U.S. citizenship even faster than those who have gone the legal route, waiting patiently for years in the long lines at American consulates back home (Lindsey 2006). Such a policy, Lindsey insists, would create even greater incentives to immigrate illegally, further undermining any trace of a viable immigration system. In keeping with the institutionalist conception of the economy as a body, the patient is ill, but the remedy should not kill her. Although this "institutionalist" example involves systems not explicitly economic, Lindsey's analysis of the waiting line has an aforementioned basis on market allocation. Furthermore, his disagreement with the current system and its recommended alternative parallels economist Paul Krugman's critique of the political economic system which facilitated the Enron scandal. Although the government's laissez faire rationale for energy deregulation met neoclassical approval, Enron's subsequent corruption and demise confirms that regulation is necessary to temper free markets in the modern world (Krugman 2001). Likewise, Lindsey anticipates the collapse of the immigration system in the presence of a proposal which ignores current institutionalist realities.

What can explain think tanks' use of both this broad new institutionalist development as well as the common neoclassical style? One possible explanation for a given style is the

scholars' position within their organization. Ron Haskins, a Senior Fellow in the Brookings Economic Studies Program, writes as part of the ongoing Economic Mobility Project, perhaps proof enough of the attention he might pay to academic (neoclassical) economists. Even more telling, in the author's acknowledgements, Haskins thanks the "helpful comments" of neoclassical economist George Borjas himself, whose work Haskins has also featured prominently in his essay (Haskins 2007, p. 10). On the other hand, Audrey Singer, a Senior Fellow in the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, works within a program whose objectives include "*Advancing State and Local Reform*" (The Brookings Institution n.d.). Predictably, Singer's New Americans Initiative focuses heavily on the institutionalist project of reforming state and local immigration policies.

The style employed by these scholars might alternatively be a function of think tanks' unique relationship with other segments of society. For example, policymakers within the federal, state, and local governments would have difficulty performing an objective evaluation of their collaboration in response to immigration issues. As part of her role at an independent think tank with more objectivity, Singer can identify institutionalist flaws in the way the layers of government collaborate, and her Congressional testimony is the perfect window of opportunity to share her best remedies for the problem. No other segment of society is in quite as strong a position to voice such institutionalist arguments which might otherwise go unspoken.

In conclusion, neoclassical and institutionalist styles, while not the only ones which think tanks employ, best represent think tanks' unique role in immigration discourse. Like academic economists, think tank scholars faithfully present the widely-accepted neoclassical analysis of immigration, plus some enlightening additions. Yet, the work of Singer and Lindsey represents an especially unique contribution to immigration discourse. Their institutionalist policy

recommendations present a more complete picture of one unit, both nation and economy, and the systems of which it is composed.

Nevertheless, think tanks have a mixed record in helping to resolve the uncertainties underlying the immigration question. Of immigrant-native competition, an important balance-sheet question, Ron Haskins says,

> When economists who are greatly respected by their colleagues disagree sharply over an issue like the impact of immigration on employment and wages, it seems wise for outsiders to resist forming a strong conclusion and simply say, instead, that the jury is still out. (2007, p. 5)

While this may be an appropriate show of restraint, it certainly does not help resolve the first uncertainty. As far as the second, Singer makes more constructive contributions. Her institutionalist analysis stresses important values, such as social inclusiveness (Singer 2007, p. 5), which are not appreciated by the neoclassical style. This analysis maintains that immigrants should not be treated simply as labor but instead as new participants in the American society and economy. Singer takes one step away from the economists' detached view of labor supply and towards the respect for individuals which is evidenced by some of the public.

VII. Mass Media

The mass media's attempts to answer the immigration question more strongly reflect the stylistic divide between the professional literature and public opinion. The neoclassical style is dominant among mainstream media sources such as the *New York Times*, *National Journal*, and *National Public Radio* (NPR). Yet, this style contends with an undeniable strand of philosophical analysis which gives priority to values other than efficiency. One common thread between analyses using these two styles is rational choice theory. Michael C. Jensen's

descriptions of a rational media in the 1970s can successfully explain some of the controversial uses of neoclassical and philosophical styles in the immigration discussion. Although it is not proven that this rational interpretation of the media *causes* the media's use of certain styles in the immigration discussion, Jensen's model nevertheless helps identify the economic styles present in the discussion and suggests their sources.

As with other segments of society, immigration analyses conducted by the mass media involve such neoclassical concepts as the labor market, market failure, and the importance of skills for economic mobility. For example, eastern Tennessee is among areas where immigration is currently a hot issue despite little previous experience with immigrants. Julia Preston of the *New York Times* attributes this development to the movement of immigrants "beyond traditional destinations" in the Southwest to take "the lowest-paying elbow-grease jobs" in places like Morristown, TN (Preston 2009, March 22). Since these jobs certainly aren't lucrative, the implication is that the movement was driven either by some noneconomic factor, or more likely, the saturation of job markets across the border from Mexico. Either way, immigrants provide supply to a national labor market with uneven employment opportunities. Furthermore, Preston indicates that a "word-of-mouth network" within civic organizations such as churches makes matches between immigrants and open jobs (Preston 2009, March 22). As indicated in the think tank analysis, Brookings's Audrey Singer also understood this informal network mechanism which corrects the labor market's imperfect information problem. Finally, several articles recognize that education in general, and English proficiency in particular, is a key skill for successful participation in the workforce. Ginger Thompson of the *New York Times* quotes a high school administrator who recognizes the importance of education to help immigrant youth 'make something of themselves' whether they remain in the U.S. or must eventually return home

(Thompson 2009). In summary, the media presents the economics of immigration in a neoclassical framework, although the segment rarely uses such terminology outright.

The mass media's neoclassical interpretations are not unanimous, however. Several segments of society, most notably the economics profession, wrestle with the question of competition between immigrants and low-skilled American workers. In the media, on the one hand, Preston sidesteps this debate in her profile of Morristown, TN. She claims that lower-class American workers responded to job loss due to outsourcing by taking jobs requiring more complex skill sets (Preston 2009, March 22). In turn, immigrants who arrived later could take newly-emerging jobs below the level of the skilled Americans, resulting in "little competition" between these groups. On the other hand, *National Journal*'s Neil Munro addresses the question by citing the conflicting academic conclusions of George Borjas and David Card, economists who believe that this competition is significant and insignificant, respectively (Munro 2008). Harkening back to other segments of society, Brookings's Ron Haskins cited the Borjas-Card tiff, and Borjas himself noted disagreement among professional economists, though he of course believed the facts were clear. How can one journalist basically deny competition while another admits the verdict is out?

Rational choice theory applied to media offers a strong explanation for the difference between the Preston and Munro approaches to competition. According to Michael C. Jensen's formulation of the theory, the media understands that the public wants "entertainment" and not "information about the political sector" which the media's investigative reporting and careful analysis could provide (Jensen 1979, p. 5-6). Due to this preference for entertainment, the public demonstrates a high "*intolerance of ambiguity*," which requires the journalism industry, if it wants to make any money, to produce clear-cut answers to complex issues (1979, p. 6). A quick

look at the audiences whom Preston and Munro address bears out these conclusions. While the *New York Times* caters to fairly well-educated people nationwide, the consumers of the *National Journal* are, according to its website, specifically "decision makers and policy influencers across the nation" (National Journal Group n.d.). For her rather general audience, Preston wastes no space on academic debates but instead offers clean, satisfying answers to public questions, such as that of competition, with anecdotal evidence from one community. The public, as demanders in the market for news, do not ask Preston to reach the most comprehensive conclusion, but rather to simply provide some sort of answer. In contrast, Munro must provide all sides of the issue to his policymaking readership, since their profession has a greater rational need to know all sides of the debate. To conclude, Jensen's theory suggests that journalists might reply differently to different audiences based on the latter's level of desire for political information and tolerance of ambiguity.

The media also employs the philosophical style as an outlet for values other than efficiency. Although the immigrant population as a whole may strive for economic mobility, there is some indication that individual immigrants are driven by more than just cash or elevated status. Indeed, hope for the future propels many an immigrant child to do their best in school, as evidenced by several children who are crestfallen when they must give up their dreams due to economic and educational realities (Thompson 2009). In addition, despite the current economic crisis, some laid-off immigrants are making decisions based on familial ties instead of financial needs. Immigrants are often choosing to stay in the US when their families are here (Preston 2009, March 22), or to head home, probably to worse economic situations, when their families are there (Ludden 2009). The late Pope John Paul II would applaud these responses to the crisis, for they indicate a triumph over the popular "materialism," which incorrectly assigns a higher

value to goods than people by "plac[ing] the spiritual and the personal...in a position of subordination to material reality" (Pope John Paul II 1981, para. 60). The Catholic Church and these immigrants, and likely many American natives as well, evidently share a value system which places people in the family above the goods to be gained through a job. Thus, the media captures some of the values which people hold dearly but which may not always have a voice through other styles or in other segments.

Interestingly, Jensen's theory can also explain the media's use of the philosophical style. First, Ludden considers immigrants' decision to head home due to familial ties to be "a silver lining" to the economic crisis (Ludden 2009). The classic diagnosis of a silver lining represents one way in which Ludden provides clean and simple reporting to an audience which dislikes ambiguity. What's more, a silver lining is one version of a happy ending, a critical component of stories which provide entertainment. Thus, on both the ambiguity and entertainment counts, Ludden appears to fulfill Jensen's expectations for her profession. In addition, Jensen suggests that people are instinctively unreceptive to markets because of the value systems which they inherited from their upbringing (Jensen 1979, p.10). These values include certain "duties and obligations to other members of the family" and hopefully result in "unselfish, loving people" (1979, p. 10-1). When Preston and Ludden indicate that many immigrants make decisions based on familial ties, they confirm Jensen's hypothesis that people are inculcated with noneconomic bonds to their families which outweigh economic interests. Therefore, Jensen's theory is as versatile in explaining the media's philosophical expression as it is for the neoclassical style.

In conclusion, the mass media discusses the economics of immigration largely through neoclassical and philosophical styles. Furthermore, rational choice theory does a remarkably good job of explaining the reasons the media have resorted to these styles. One potential

implication is that the media's audiences might be able to determine both the content of the news *and* the economic style which the media employs to provide that content. Because neoclassical and philosophical value systems can suggest very different conclusions, these audiences may also predetermine their news sources' answers to the immigration question.

The consequences of rational choice, such as simplified and entertaining news, have prevented the media from providing a coherent answer to the immigration question. Regarding the first uncertainty of net impact, media sources paint a favorable view of immigrant contributions to the economy, though there are lingering doubts such as immigrant-native competition. As for the second uncertainty of immigrant treatment, the media's neoclassical analysis continues to treat immigrants as labor market inputs, though references such as "lowest-paying elbow-grease jobs" (Preston 2009, March 22) indicate that reporters do attribute them more of a human nature than do previous neoclassical manifestations. The media's use of the philosophical style, describing the hopes, family bonds, and character development of immigrants, focuses more strongly on immigrants' humanity and better resonates with the public opinion.

VIII. Special Interests

Although the immigration discussion within other segments of society revolves around a host of economic styles, economic special interest groups are the first to privilege mercantilism. This style may seem distasteful to "objective" participants in other segments, but special interests quite naturally engage in self-interested, client-oriented mercantilism because their very role is to advocate for their constituencies. Indeed, mercantilism can explain the divergence between the neoclassical arguments of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, with its small business membership,

and the philosophical and Marxian arguments of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), with its union membership. These organizations have radically different constituencies which require different approaches to satisfy their needs. Yet, these styles could also be explained by the feminist concept of “situated knowledge,” in which people reach conclusions which are implicitly influenced by their own backgrounds (Strassmann 1996, p. 15). The leaders of the Chamber and the AFL-CIO perform policy analysis which is probably guided both by the need to satisfy constituencies, as the mercantilist style suggests, *and* less consciously by leaders’ education and career. Thus, for several possible reasons, business and labor interests are divided on the most appropriate styles to analyze immigration, though mercantilism is certainly a common thread.

These organizations expose their mercantilist motives as they indicate that the best policies for the nation are those which protect their own interests. The Chamber acknowledges that security concerns post-9/11 are an important reason to strengthen border control but warns against policies which would cause “serious disruptions to border commerce” (*Border Security* n.d., para. 1, 3). Indeed, for the Chamber’s small business constituency, such disruptions could prove fatal. Although the Chamber would probably not admit it, a further reason to oppose certain policies is that undocumented immigrants provide businesses with a source of cheap labor. The Chamber would not take lightly any attempt to reduce access to this labor source, demonstrating how, for all their rhetoric, mercantilists still place personal interests above national interests.

The AFL-CIO makes similar use of the mercantilist style on behalf of its constituency. The organization supports its argument for the legalization of undocumented immigrants with two claims: their undocumented status permits corporations to treat immigrants unjustly; and one

necessary remedy is to facilitate their participation in unions (*Building Understanding* n.d., p. 1-2). This argument should come as no surprise from a federation of labor unions whose first official goal is to "organiz[e] workers into unions" including by "creat[ing] a broad understanding of the need to organize" (*This is the AFL-CIO* n.d., para. 1; *What We Stand for* n.d., para. 2). Like the Chamber, the AFL-CIO probably also has a more hidden motive, since immigrants willing to work for a low wage represent a threat to the jobs of unionized workers.

The arguments of both the Chamber and the AFL-CIO echo those of acclaimed mercantilist, Bill Gates. Gates argues against regulations on competition within the software industry because these would stifle the very innovation which has propelled U.S. economic growth (Gates 1998). However, it is quite apparent that Gates's real, or at least primary, goal is to prevent harm to his company, Microsoft. In summary, special interests fulfill their function as policy advocates by conflating their own aims with the welfare of the nation.

Yet, mercantilism manifests itself in more than just the convergence of national and personal aims, as is a standard description of the style. Interestingly, special interests' choice and use of *other* economic styles in the immigration discussion can also be attributed to mercantilism. To begin with, the neoclassical question of competition between immigrant and native workers and the repercussions for native wages have been a lightening rod in several segments. However, the Chamber approaches the issues quite calmly. First, the organization states that "[i]mmigrants do not tend to compete with comparably educated natives" because these groups possess generally different skill sets, with immigrants "at the very high and at the very low end of the spectrum" (*Immigration Myths* n.d., p. 3). Second, while acknowledging some academic disagreement, the Chamber relies on the findings of "most economic studies" which "have found...that immigrants either have a positive effect on wages or a near negligible

effect" due to the lack of competition and the fact that greater labor supply translates to higher productivity (*Immigration Myths* n.d., p. 3-4). These conclusions ignore the work of George Borjas and other academics who claim that competition is a real detriment to native wages. In fact, this report even references a recent Borjas article which reiterates the economist's dire claims about competition (see Borjas 2003). How could the Chamber so blatantly dismiss one of the standard bearers of the academic profession? Small businesses like cheap immigrant workers, so their mercantilist representative finds no fault with them either.

Mercantilism can also explain the economic styles employed by the AFL-CIO, likewise reflecting a "client-oriented" approach. Philosophically, the organization respects the value of the human person, opposing 'open borders' which would permit "corporations...to treat workers as commodities" (*Q&As* n.d., p. 4). The AFL-CIO implies that the best border policy for market success, presumably one of uninhibited labor movement, could hurt the laborers involved, who are of real value. Furthermore, the organization argues that corporations have infringed on unenforced labor rights to create a "class" of exploited immigrant workers (n.d., p. 2). These arguments are manifestations of the ancient philosophical emphasis on human dignity, though they are also quite Marxian. In *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels explain the process by which the bourgeois capital owners created "the modern working class—the proletarians" and the latter's role as a "commodity" subject to market transactions (Marx & Engels 1848). They continue on to argue that the formation of unions is one of the proletariat's natural steps towards capturing rights. In the same spirit, the AFL-CIO champions the importance of union membership for the protection of rights in the workplace (*Building Understanding* n.d., p.1-2). Thus, the philosophical and Marxian styles play into the

organization's goal of rallying more workers to its ranks and expanding awareness of unions' vital function.

Despite the good grounds for a mercantilist reading of special interest groups, it seems neither generous nor accurate to portray them as the entirely manipulative "rent-seekers" which this study has done so far. Feminist Diana Strassmann presents one other viable method for describing special interests' recourse to certain styles. In an essay on feminist economic theory, Strassmann discredits the "neutral" assumptions of neoclassical economics, instead asserting that this style is infused with "the values of economists, reflecting their personal, social, and political situation" (Strassmann 1996, p. 14). She later discusses how the economist is simply one among many storytellers, none of whom are "objective," but one who strives to create an indisputable narrative nonetheless (1996, p. 16-8). In the case of special interest groups, members come from certain backgrounds, such as business or labor, which have created their worldview and thus prevent them too from being *neutral* immigration analysts. As Strassmann would say, the Chamber and the AFL-CIO offer stylistic "stories" which are meant to be irrefutable but are equally infused with subjective assumptions. Therefore, the Chamber's neoclassical style and the AFL-CIO's philosophical/Marxian style are perhaps a natural result of the educational and professional background of their members.

At this point, mercantilism and/or Strassmann's "situated knowledge" could be responsible for the styles which economic special interests employ. It is difficult in practice to determine which of these factors motivates a given argument. For example, in the introduction to the Chamber's "Immigration Myths and the Facts Behind the Fallacies," one of the organization's vice presidents states the need to present "fact-based, clear logic" to a misguided policy discussion (*Immigration Myths* n.d., p. 2). A mercantilist reading suggests that the VP

simply presents his self-interested version of the facts, possibly ignoring evidence to the contrary, as his report did regarding competition. In contrast, Strassmann's feminist reading suggests that this statement reflects the authoritative story the Chamber has created to describe immigration, as informed by its own members' background. To distinguish between the two possibilities, the VP's statement eerily echoes Bill Gates's attempt to "set out some of the facts" in the previously cited article in which he proceeds to blatant mercantilist arguments (Gates 1998). Thus, mercantilism is likely a critical factor in describing special interests' style choices, though situated knowledge probably plays a role as well.

To conclude, economic special interest groups do not contribute a deeper understanding of the uncertainties underlying the immigration question, though they do provide clarification to the discussion. These groups mostly reiterate the standard asset-liability and immigrant treatment conclusions of the neoclassical and philosophical styles. Nevertheless, the Chamber and AFL-CIO elucidate the desires of their constituencies with mercantilist arguments and situated knowledge, illustrating the stylistic divide between the two constituencies. As a result, policymakers ought to more easily discern the impacts of their immigration decisions on certain sectors of the economy. Policymakers can hopefully leverage this clarity to find room for compromise on immigration reforms which will mutually benefit both business and labor.

IX. Popular Culture

As in other segments, samples of popular culture relating to immigration reflect standard neoclassical concepts, such as immigrant-native competition, economic mobility, and marketable skills, as well as common philosophical and institutionalist notions, such as equal treatment and immigrants' honest, hard work. Yet, in a number of ways, pop culture identifies serious

deficiencies in the neoclassical model which threaten its legitimacy for providing an accurate response to the immigration question. This sample of visual art, narrative, and other cultural expression, although not representative of all pop culture, gives the Latino community a coherent voice unheard elsewhere in societal segments. The Latino perspective emphasizes the values and life stories of immigrant individuals which suggest that neoclassical analysis insufficiently describes the matters of true importance to humanity. Pop culture's deep philosophical analysis also creates a dichotomy for policymakers, who must balance the neoclassical economic benefits of immigration with the protection of shared philosophical values of dignity and respect.

Some neoclassical themes in pop culture echo the discussion within other societal segments, though with a typically more positive interpretation of immigrants. For example, the comic strip "Baldo" chronicles the lives of a Latino teen named Baldo and his family. One day, as Baldo interviews protesters at an immigration demonstration, a Latina girl exclaims that her immigrant father works as a landscaper and has "helped make this city beautiful!" (Cantu & Castellanos 2006). This girl implicitly chooses the positive side of the debate over whether immigrants constitute a net asset or liability to American society. Furthermore, young author Ted Conover writes of his travels among undocumented immigrants in *Coyotes*. He finds that his new friends are extremely eager to learn English, and that, to them, proficiency is "as good as a diploma" (Conover 1987, p. 48, 93). In the words of one diligent young immigrant, translated from Spanish, 'Now I know enough for business, so now I know enough' (1987, p. 93). This sentiment reinforces the neoclassical importance of English to access the job market, though it may also undermine prospects for long-term economic mobility by rejecting deeper education. In addition, pop culture comments on that contentious issue of immigrant-native competition. Despite his friendship with immigrants, Conover complains that a construction contractor refuses

to employ him simply because he is not an immigrant and thus might pose problems (1987, p. 28). Although Conover wants to work simply to gain more material for his book, he comments that "[f]or the first time I began to understand the frustration of a blue-collar American who really needs work." In other words, competition is a real possibility for immigrants and natives of equal skill sets and employment opportunities. These examples from pop culture help clarify the neoclassical role of immigrants from a mostly pro-immigrant perspective.

Pop culture on immigration likewise includes philosophical and institutionalist themes common to the discussion within other societal segments and equally favorable towards immigrants. In the most typical case, immigrants are portrayed as honest, hard-working folks along the lines of an institutionalist human nature analysis. The girl whom Baldo interviews asserts that her father "didn't come here to break the law" but rather "to work so [she] could have a greener [more prosperous] future" (Cantu & Castellanos 2006). Similarly, Conover portrays the business-minded young immigrant he meets as a role model "with the work habits of America's first immigrants" (Conover 1987, p. 93). The Baldo comic strip juxtaposes the bold girl with a young American sporting a "Made in the USA" shirt who, purportedly from a patriotic defense of his country, shouts, "These people are breaking the law! They should all go back to where they came from!" (Cantu & Castellanos 2006). This fellow makes a sweeping institutionalist condemnation of immigrants as the bad guys to be reviled. The Latino author and artist of the comic strip condemn this perspective, as evidenced when the American immediately recants the breadth of his statement, making exceptions for certain immigrants who "make awesome burgers" or are just "real nice." Finally, pop culture also includes the philosophical cries for equal treatment often vehemently expressed in other segments. Baldo interviews a boy who shouts "that's not fair!" when he notices the discrepancy between the criticism for his own

immigrant status and the overlooked fact that "[t]his is a country of immigrants!" (Cantu & Castellanos 2006). In summary, the "hard work," "equal treatment" themes are nothing new to the immigration discussion, though they certainly stress a form of immigrant treatment which diverges from most neoclassical analysis.

Nevertheless, pop culture moves beyond the "sound bite" nature of the philosophical/ institutionalist contributions it shares with most other segments. Pop culture expands the breadth of the philosophical style in the immigration debate just as think tank scholars Audrey Singer and Lawrence B. Lindsey did for the institutionalist style. While the government or media might trumpet fairness or the immigrant's hard-working nature merely in passing, pop culture draws from people's lives to create a full-bodied philosophical analysis in its own right. In several ways, the arts and letters critique neoclassical analysis on its own terms, casting doubt on this style's ability to capture the full human experience.

First, pop culture indicates that the common neoclassical analysis describes economic aspects inaccurately. Conover discovers that, contrary to popular belief, picking fruit *is* skilled labor, because it requires a variety of skills to perform the job quickly, efficiently, and without getting hurt (Conover 1987, p. 42). Every other segment classifies the people performing these tasks as unskilled labor, with the inference that if they were skilled, they could advance in the workforce. However, Conover's finding challenges the neoclassical notion that skills enable mobility, for even if this type of skill were developed to the fullest, it seems likely that fruit pickers with such meager pay would still barely survive and would not have improved opportunities in the workforce.

Second among criticisms, neoclassical analysis ignores important costs because it often evaluates only quantitative variables and overlooks crucial aspects of human experience.

Hispanic Magazine's Victor Cruz-Lugo reviews a book and art exhibition entitled, *The Migrant Project: Contemporary California Farmworkers*. He concludes that its photos of "fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, friends and activists,...people dreaming and yearning" introduce "the enormous physical and emotional cost of what we may have come to take for granted" (Cruz-Lugo 2008, p. 59). These photos of immigrant workers make their issues a reality for the viewer, regardless of whether he or she personally knows an immigrant, and highlight the incomplete neoclassical understanding of the toll which work has on the laborer. From a philosophical/theological perspective, the late Pope John Paul II characterizes work as both a dignified means to provide for oneself and a source of "unceasing...human toil and suffering" (Pope John Paul II 1981, para. 3). While "suffering" may seem a rather strong term to describe most Americans' everyday labors, these photos indicate that immigrant farmworkers certainly experience this aspect of work. Furthermore, the "dreaming and yearning" represent part of this wider philosophical analysis which considers immigrants' present and future prospects in contrast to the neoclassical analysis of static, unfeeling labor suppliers.

Third, the neoclassical style permits government and perhaps others to selectively interpret the economy by misconstruing some factors and intentionally omitting others. Artist Malaquias Montoya depicts undocumented immigrants on the run from helicopters, accompanied by a quote from the Human Rights Immigrant Community Action Network: '...immigrants are now the almost exclusive scapegoat for the faltering economy, the threat of terrorism,...and the social problems afflicting the United States' (as cited in Montoya and Salkowitz-Montoya 2008, p. 18-9). More of Montoya's art and an accompanying Network quote allege that the government ignores the true causes of immigration problems which stretch back to NAFTA and other "economic restructuring" as part of globalization (2008, p. 22-3). Although beyond the

scope of argument here to explore the validity of such critiques, the artist and the Network do broach important concerns with the neoclassical style as commonly used. In the process, these depictions offer more of the immigrant's perspective and help create the full philosophical analysis evading other segments.

Last among critiques of this style, popular culture indicates that neoclassical analysis carried to its logical conclusion can be simply inhumane. As a prime example, a short satirical film entitled "Why Cybraceros?" identifies the problems associated with the Bracero Program of the 1940s and 1950s, including social unrest and a financial burden on American taxpayers (Lopez and Rivera 1997). The film next introduces a fictional government plan to replace immigrant laborers with "robotic farmworkers," called "cybraceros," which Mexican workers will control via internet access from home in Mexico. The goal of the program is to provide the U.S. with "all the labor without the worker." Lopez and Rivera seem to target American xenophobia or prejudice towards Mexican workers, though their work also illustrates a neoclassical absurdity. Neoclassical analysis emphasizing the labor market, shifts in labor supply, etc. is not concerned with the immigrant workers themselves, but rather only with the labor which the immigrants can provide. In the hypothetical extreme illustrated by this film, neoclassical economics would be best satisfied by labor flows alone, without the associated costs which immigrants impose on American society. Although this short film presents a farce, it highlights the insensitivity behind a style which focuses on a balance-sheet calculation of immigrants' positive and negative impacts on society. The Bush proposal for a Temporary Worker Program is a true instance in which the neoclassical goal of taking labor but not laborer took precedence over concern for the laborer him/herself.

In conclusion, the popular culture brings alive the economic styles of the immigration discussion through stories, artwork, and other media. Of course, some of this segment's examples of the neoclassical and philosophical styles are little more than iterations of discussion in other segments. However, pop culture makes an important contribution to the discussion by strongly criticizing a number of aspects of the neoclassical style. As an alternative to this style, Latino voices, and the arts and letters which provide up-close testimony to their lives, use the breadth of the philosophical style to point out hidden costs and other factors impacting the immigrant experience. While some economists might object to "the activist orientation" demonstrated by the frequently "liberal" literature and other pop culture (Watts and Smith 1989, p. 292), it is ultimately up to society and its policymakers to arbitrate between values dictated by the two styles. Americans face the need to balance between the pursuit of efficiency and its economic fruits, on the one hand, and the pursuit of equity and its human welfare dividends, on the other.

X. Conclusion

Recent discourse on immigration struggles to resolve the question of whether immigration should be restricted. High levels of undocumented immigrants, sporadically prosecuted and potentially to be legalized under President Obama, indicate that the nation still faces a restriction question which was technically resolved in the 1920s. This study of the discourse within seven segments of society indicates that there are two major obstacles to resolving the immigration question, along with the underlying, perpetual uncertainties about immigrants' net impact and their appropriate treatment.

First, the professional discipline fails to provide scholastic leadership to the other segments of society. Academic economists prove unable to reach consensus on the positive and negative effects of immigrants on the American economy. As a result, sources in such segments as think tanks, mass media, public opinion, and special interest groups either genuinely do not know what to conclude, or they take the opportunity to devise self-interested solutions. To recap, on the issue of immigrant-native competition for wages and jobs, Brookings's Ron Haskins cites academic inconclusiveness as a reason to refrain from a ruling. Brookings's reputation for impartiality and the lack of a readily-apparent self-interest on Haskins's part indicate that Haskins probably uses his best judgment. Neil Munro of the *National Journal* also cites academic conflict as a reason not to make a judgment on this issue, though his decision can likely be explained by the rational interest model applied to the media. Public opinion as indicated by the Gallup poll seemed to accept the lack of competition cited by the government, while the Chamber of Commerce probably denied the presence of competition for mercantilist reasons. Thus, the professional economics literature's failure to adequately perform a task which no other segment is qualified to perform means that much of society is left uninformed or misguided on important balance-sheet consequences of immigration.

The second and more important obstacle to resolving the immigration question is the intractable conflict between neoclassical and philosophical/institutionalist value systems. As portrayed in the immigration discourse, the neoclassical style focuses on efficiency, utility, self-interested rationality, and the market failures which can occur in inefficient circumstances. The philosophical style, in contrast, favors a variety of norms and values including equity, compassion, inclusiveness, hope, familial bonds, human dignity, and suffering. A closely-linked

institutionalist analysis of human nature maintains that immigrants are honest, hardworking, law-abiding people.

By ignoring the dichotomy between these styles, U.S. immigration policy remains hypocritical. A nation which needs and implicitly welcomes the labor of undocumented immigrants on efficiency grounds fails to treat undocumented immigrants as dignified human beings. These immigrants are not simply labor supply, and the “Why Cybraceros?” film rightly satirizes such a notion. Instead, undocumented immigrants are people with their own hopes and needs whose poverty is frequently the reason they decide to breech American immigration law. As a matter of principle, lawbreaking should not be encouraged, of course, but that is precisely what U.S. policy implicitly continues to do by turning a blind eye to most of the undocumented immigrants who successfully score coveted American jobs. The Obama Administration and members of the 111th Congress should reflect on this fundamental contradiction before their first attempt to reform immigration policy yet again.

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