

America "Overpopulated" Since 1797

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The frequent charge that "dirty foreigners" are depriving American workers of their jobs stems from the fallacy that capital provides employment, and that the limited amount of capital available for employment limits the number of jobs available. The most popular argument, used effectively by organized labor, for the immigration restriction laws established in this country since the World War, upsetting our traditional "haven" policy, can be traced directly to the discredited wages-fund theory. The doctrine is of ancient vintage, although it is emphasized in our time not only by our own restrictive immigration laws but by the isolationism which is characterizing national economies throughout the world.

As far back as June 26, 1797 Representative Harrison G. Otis of Massachusetts, warned Congress: "When the country was new it might have been good policy to admit all. But it is so no longer."

And in the Niles Register for 1817, we find the following: "The immigrants should press into the interior. In the present state of the times, we seem too thick on the maritime frontier already." Nevertheless immigrants continued to settle on the Atlantic seaboard as well as inland. No great disaster followed.

However, it would seem that the country was really overcrowded by 1835! A pamphlet published that year, "Imminent Dangers to the Institutions of the United States through Foreign Immigration," predicted dire effects because of increasing immigration. The prediction of tragedy seems to have been somewhat premature in the light of the prosperity that followed.

Today we hear it said: "Immigration was all right when we had wilderness to conquer. But we no longer have a frontier. We have no room for these people." Actually, the United States is far from the limits of population which our resources can support. Our density of population is very much less than that of many European countries, as is shown by the following figures taken from the World Almanac for 1938:

Country	Population Density Per Square Mile
United States	41.0
England	742.0
Belgium	698.8
Holland	667.7
France	196.7
Germany	368.8

The population of the state of Texas is approximately 6,000,000, and the density of population is 22.2 to the square mile. If the remaining 124,000,000 persons in the United States moved to Texas, the density of population would be only about 482 to the square mile, or less than two-thirds of the present population density of England. Obviously, the argument that our country is overpopulated has no greater validity today than it did at the time of Congressman Otis.

The Census of Manufacturers shows that from 1899 to 1909 approximately 7,700,000 immigrants came to our country. The number of wage-paying jobs increased by 40.4%. From 1909 to 1919 the immigration total was lower by about 1,000,000, i. e., approximately 6,600,000 people entered these United States. The number of wage-paying jobs increased by 35.9%. The decade from 1919 to 1929 saw the passage of legislation restricting immigration. Subtracting the emigration totals, the net immigration to the United States in this period sunk to 3,207,037; the employment totals dropped by about 1.6%. In the years from 1929 to 1935, emigration was greater than immigration by 64,905. The decrease in the total number of jobs reached a new high of approximately 17%.

As Felix Cohen points out in his study of immigration and its effects on American life, "**** The earliest industrial development in the United States followed in the train of high immigration, and our present unparalleled period of unemployment followed the cessation of immigration."

Consider the housing industry. Most immigrant families (like the rest of us) live in houses. Therefore, they must either have built new houses or moved into houses or

apartments, the former tenants of which moved into other new houses. That is one reason, though not the most important one, why when immigration practically ceased our construction and allied trades declined. Unemployment in the many occupations directly or indirectly connected with house building is a major factor of our social problem.

It may be argued that "the immigrant lives in slums"—therefore he does not demand new housing. According to the National Resources Committee the immigrant has actually spent more per capita for housing than has the native-born citizen. We quote from that Committee's report, the Problems of a Changing Population (1938):

"In 1930 it was found that the median monthly rentals of urban non-farm homes was slightly higher for foreign-born white (\$35.13) than for all native white (\$34.11). When

the native white classification is further subdivided according to parentage, an even greater difference is seen. The figure for those of native parentage is \$23.26, and for those of foreign or mixed parentage \$37.74."

The truth is that the great wealth of our nation has been made possible because of our diverse and increasing population, both native and foreign born. These people with their varying backgrounds have developed new specializations and more markets, creating our present high standard of living. Thus are jobs created; for the more people there are, the more needs must be met, and employment is merely the production and exchange of goods and services for goods and services.