



Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders

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A conservative columnist makes an eye-opening case for why immigration improves the lives of Americans and is important for the future of the country.

Separating fact from myth in today's heated immigration debate, a member of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board contends that foreign workers play a vital role in keeping America prosperous; that maintaining an open-border policy is consistent with free-market economic principals; and that the arguments put forward by opponents of immigration ultimately don't hold up to scrutiny.

In the course of his fourteen years at the *Journal*, Riley has covered immigration's impact on our economy, our culture and our politics. He is an outspoken advocate of free and flexible labor markets, and in this timely book he argues that our open-immigration policy goes a long way toward explaining the difference between robust economic growth in the United States and stagnation in places like Europe.

In lucid, jargon-free prose, Riley takes on the most common anti-immigrant complaints, including claims that today's immigrants overpopulate the United States, steal jobs, depress wages, don't assimilate, and pose an undue threat to homeland security. As the 2008 presidential election approaches with immigration reform on the front burner, *Let Them In* is essential reading for liberals and conservatives alike who want to bring an informed perspective to the discussion.

Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders Details

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Author : Jason L. Riley

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From Reader Review Let Them In: The Case for Open Borders for online ebook

Joe says

A great exposition of ways in which immigration has helped, and not hindered, progress in America.

Kirstin says

I picked up this book because I was intrigued by a conservative making a case for open borders. I have read and respected other books by Jason Riley and was curious what this would hold. I found it to be reasoned and challenging, which is refreshing, given that "discussion" on this topic tends to be ruled by emotional one-liners intended to shut down debate. I would recommend it to anyone interested in thinking rationally about our immigration policies and problems.

Elizabeth says

I thought this was excellent. The author is a WSJ reporter. He went through each of the most common arguments against immigration and refuted them. The facts presented were exhaustive, and I learned much more than I ever expected to. In fact, he sold me on the idea. :-)

Michelle says

Well. This is a much-needed book. The author, a journalist (it shows, unfortunately) on the WSJ editorial board, does a reasonably good job of presenting the facts, but tends to have a rather cutesy, my-isn't-that-a-clever-turn-of-phrase tone that I did not love. I just wanted good, solid reasoning with the facts to back it up; there was some of this, but it could have been tighter, and annotated. Still, a good effort. Unfortunately nowhere near a strong enough book to sway the position of the immigrants-are-evil crowd. Of course, I'm unsure a thunderbolt from God would do that . . .

Anyway, the book tackles six common arguments against immigration, from both left-wing and right-wing sides.

1. Immigration leads to too much population growth and this damages the environment;
2. Immigrants take jobs needed by Americans;
3. Immigrants use up disproportionate amounts of welfare resources;
4. The current crop of Latino immigrants are very different from previous immigrant groups and are unlikely to assimilate into American culture;
5. Anti-immigrant rhetoric is a terrific way for Republicans to get votes;
6. More open borders would result in serious national security risks.

I'd give Riley an A- for his arguments against 2, 3, and 4; and perhaps a B for 5 and 6, C+ for effort for argument 1.

Anyway. The economic arguments FOR open borders are so overwhelmingly strong, it would be hard to overstate them. Riley does not come close to this, in fact he does not really make the results sound as vivid as they really are--probably because he is a journalist and not an economist. And I could think of a lot of other

examples and studies he could have used, both for his economics arguments and especially his assimilation arguments. But still, a badly-needed book. Unfortunately, the copy I read is the ONLY copy in the ILL system in the state of Iowa, and many in my state desperately need to hear these arguments; the knee-jerk anti-immigration strain runs deep here.

Steev Hise says

First of all I should note that the author is a Wall Street Journal reporter and editorialist.

Riley starts out talking about how many weird alliances have formed amongst the anti-immigrant crowd, but it seems to me after starting this book that there's equally weird alliances on the other side. I myself am pro-immigration on a humanitarian basis. Riley's position comes from an economic basis, as one would expect from the WSJ. Everything is seen through the lens of benefit or harm to the free-market economy, with a "free market" assumed as a given to be an innate good.

The first chapter is about population and the environment, and he spends a lot of time mentioning statistics that seem to show that environmentally, the world has been getting better in the last 40 years or so, especially the U.S., even as its population has been shooting up. However, his main source of statistics is a study by the Pacific Research Institute, which is in bed and funded by people like oil companies, tobacco companies, pharmaceutical companies, etc, and their director writes and speaks prolifically about how bad single-payer healthcare is and would be.

Later chapters discuss other common arguments around immigration, including national security, labor, "non-assimilation", politics, etc. Like in the above-mentioned first chapter, if you're a progressive humanitarian like myself, you'll find lots of things to question or even disagree with outright regarding the back-handed complaints he makes about liberals and the motivations for the author's entire project. Nevertheless, the book is chock-full of great statistics and cited studies as well as a historical perspective, all of which will be very useful ammunition in discussions with nativists and xenophobes and other ignorant types that you might happen across.

Frank says

I am pro open borders on a fairness basis, I would like to see how well some of the people who rail against immigrants would do without their advantageous accident of birth! But even from a chauvinistic pro-USA viewpoint it is hard to argue with the economic value that all immigrants provide. Firstly they self-select as risk takers, that by itself is a powerful argument as risk takers create value for all of us. Secondly, value they create for us is value they do not create for "not us" thereby improving our chances in the global zero sum game. Thirdly, they inspire us to try harder so as not to be embarrassed by the achievement of folks that often come handicapped with poverty, language and cultural deficiencies, and suffer from blatant discrimination.

This book presents arguments against a lot of the objections to more open immigration policies and shows them to be biased and often racist. Nice to see from a conservative source.

Just to take one argument on: it is often said that immigrants steal "real americans" jobs, this books argues convincingly that at both ends of the economic scale immigrants actually create jobs.

I think the policy should be wide open but at the very least if an immigrant can earn a degree from one of our Universities they should be handed a free green card with their diplomas.

Seth says

I read this book probably a year later than I should have. I heard a podcast from Riley at a CATO event and loved it. His hour podcast was energetic and full of potent historical examples of immigration stories demonstrating that Hispanic immigrants face the same criticism that many other immigrants have faced since our nation's founding. Riley uses mainly History and Economics to make a case for a free market approach to immigration.

He makes six arguments. They are: Population, Economics, Welfare, Assimilation, Political expediency, and Homeland Security. Although, his last two are the least objectionable arguments he makes, he seems to fall asleep while writing them. They were dispassionate and twice as long as they needed to be to convince.

His strongest points were Economics and Assimilation. I liked his welfare argument but felt he cherry picked statistics. Even though he persuasively demonstrates that Hispanic immigrants are the least likely to seek medical care, he fails to address the famous "hospitals are closing" panic blamed on Hispanics in California.

Here are some gems that revealed from the research:

"In his subtly titled book *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*, Buchanan argues that Latin American newcomers harm the job prospects of working-class natives. Not especially known for his empathy towards the black underclass, Buchanan nevertheless posits that less immigration is a key to black economic advancement. I'm sure the NAACP appreciates his concern."

"The only reason our textile industry still exists is because textile mills in places like North Carolina and Georgia have access to immigrant labor. The same holds true for meatpacking plants in the Midwest"

"This isn't about immigrants displacing Americans in the labor force. It's about foreign workers coming here to fill jobs the natives don't want because they've got better opportunities."

"A study by the economists Rachel Friedberg and Jennifer Hunt states flatly, "The popular belief that immigrants have a large adverse impact on the wages and employment opportunities of the native-born population of the receiving country is not supported by empirical evidence"

"Before blaming the diminished job prospects of Jamal on Jorge, blacks would do better to address the anti-intellectualism that permeates the culture of the black underclass"

"It seems utterly cruel, from a public policy standpoint, for the United States to invite foreigners to participate in welfare and then hold it against them when they take us up on the offer. If welfare use among immigrants is deemed too high, then the better course of action is to limit benefits, not the immigrants who are otherwise enhancing the nation's economic vigor."

I could go on and on. The writing is forceful and energetic in the first four arguments and wanes with fifth and sixth. Riley treats his material with more scholarship than talk radio and television commentators, however, he could have fattened his examples on the welfare section. Great book for immigration free marketers. Everyone else might find it too Libertarian.

Helene says

This is what I learned.. Notes are for my benefit as much as anyone. I agree that the first chapter was a disaster, but I hung in there and learned a lot.

Ben Franklin was among the first in a long line of immigrant-bashers to claim they were a drag on the economy, brought disease and crime and were depleting the core values of the nation. They said this about Germans, Irish, Eastern Europeans, Italians, Asians and now Latinos. They were/are all wrong.

Immigrants, including illegal immigrants are a net plus to the nation. They pay more in taxes and Social security than the benefits they use. They are underrepresented on the welfare rolls since they come here to work. They are underrepresented in our jails. Illegal immigration tends to coincide with periods of higher prosperity. The illegals contribute to that prosperity by doing jobs that citizens do not want to do, and doing it at a lower salary which both keeps production costs low and allows for a more efficient use of the US work force. On the whole, immigrants stimulate the economy to support more jobs for American citizens than take jobs from American citizens.

Rather than deport illegal immigrants, the US should allow for more legal immigration to provide the domestic, farm and construction workers that the nation needs. This will free border patrol agents to concentrate on terrorists rather than be distracted by picking up construction workers and farm hands.

Joe Robles says

This book seeks to dispel the myths that many on the right are perpetuating about immigration. What gives this author some credibility is that he's fairly conservative himself. He's anti-union, anti-government regulations, anti-tax, etc. but he makes a great case for why his belief that the arguments against immigrants, especially illegal ones, aren't based on anything other than belief.

Immigrants don't take jobs from Americans, in fact, Americans probably shouldn't be doing those jobs anyway. For example, is it a good use of resources to have someone with a college degree picking fruit?

Immigrants don't use more government aid, in fact they use less. The problem is that most critics want to conflate those born in the U.S. with those that are here illegally. Just because someone has a Spanish surname doesn't mean they're here illegally.

They don't commit more crimes. Further, and this I didn't know, being here illegally is a civil crime handled by civil courts not criminal courts. It's the equivalent of a traffic violation. Even Rudy Giuliani argued against Glenn Beck about the "criminality" of being here "illegally". (It has an excerpt of their exchange in the book.)

The book has some interesting points about the history of immigration in our country (blaming foreigners is old hat for the U.S.) and about Mexico specifically. The only true critique I would give of this book is that while it's well argued, it not well notated. There are no foot- or end notes, only a selected bibliography. You're given stats and research but no where to look it up. I'll admit, I don't always look up every footnote (and as Al Franken noted, sometimes pundits put footnotes to make their books seem more legitimate, but don't actually give real support) but with an issue like this I would have liked to have a couple articles I could have linked to in my own blogs.

Mr. Riley makes a convincing argument for more open borders and how it would actually help our economy,

but considering I found this book in a bargain store, I'm guessing it's not being widely read, though it definitely should be.

Bojan Tunguz says

The thinking on the immigration, both in the US and even more so in other countries, is dominated by emotional arguments. In the light of that it is truly refreshing to come across a book like "Let Them In" where a principled free-market conservative ideas are promoted. In an era when there is an increasing interconnection and interdependence of world economies on each other, it becomes ever more untenable to insist on free exchange of goods and services, while preventing the free flow of people. This is particularly true in the light of the fact that it is precisely the human capital that drives most of the advanced economies forward.

Reilly is a journalist for Wall Street Journal, and this is reflected in his accessible and engaging writing style. The book is an easy read, well researched, and clear in its arguments. It is quite possible that there are flaws in those arguments, but if there are any they should be dealt on the intellectual and not personal level. The issues dealt in this book are already rife with passions on both sides of the debate and it is not helpful if they are only dealt in the lowest-common-denominator manner. Hopefully this book will help create a way for this debate to be elevated to a higher level of discourse.

Drick says

Rarely have I agreed with a book's conclusion (a more open immigration policy), while so strongly disagreeing with the author's reasons for that conclusion. Jason Riley takes a very strong business position for advocating for a more open immigration policy. He argues that immigrants not only provide low skilled labor that is needed in certain sectors, and seeks to show how immigrants are not taking away jobs or causing a drain on the nation's social sector. In the process he argues against unions of any kind as well as multiculturalism, taking a very strong assimilation stance. His arguments seems to be (1) cheap labor is good for business (ignoring the fact that in part is due to the fact that many immigrants will accept lower than minimum wage) and (2) that like other immigrant groups by the 2nd generation they will begin to be very "American" (and aren't we the greatest country in the world when it comes to accepting people(?) ignoring our history of racism and exploitation of immigrant peoples. The most interesting part of the book for me was the intra-conservative debate on this issue, and the acknowledgement that many of the conservative media pundits like Beck, Limbaugh and Hannity really don't know what they are talking about most of the time. While I can't really recommend the book, for non-conservatives it is an interesting read.

SB says

This is well written and thought provoking. Although it deals primarily with Latin American immigrants, it does not address the drug cartels. I plan to read the opposing viewpoint of Brian Krevorkian.

The author states (loosely quoted):

Each immigrant creates the need for 3 jobs as he uses goods and services.

Illegal immigrants pay taxes and into SS which funds SS for current retirees.

Illegal immigrants avoid using our welfare programs.

The obvious: immigrants do the jobs that "Americans don't want".

Immigrants from Latin America are usually less educated and more willing to work. The U.S. population is increasingly better educated and most have a high school diploma and are increasingly less willing to do jobs considered menial.

Using immigrants increases our workforce efficiency and allows others to work at their own skill level.

94% of illegal immigrants are participants in the U.S. work force.

Cindy says

The data he shared was interesting and I agreed with some of the things he said, but some of his personal commentary turned me off. However, this book would provide some good ammunition next time you're talking to a so-called fiscal conservative who claims that immigration is ruining our economy.

Atul says

I picked up this book at the library because I wanted to see the author's argument for why we should have open borders (I personally do not support open borders). In general, the book powerfully argues that immigration represents a net gain for America, and that it contributes greatly to America's economic growth. However, I had quite a few problems with it.

First, the author does not cite sources for much of the statistics he mentions in the book. He includes a small bibliography at the end of his book, but nothing else. It would be nice to see some footnotes and sources that we can examine to understand his points better.

Second, the book claims that Ronald Reagan endorsed open borders, based loosely on a speech where he said that those with the desire to come to America are welcome here. Same thing with Reagan's support of amnesty for illegal immigrants in 1986.

While it does seem like Reagan wanted a much more open immigration system, I fail to see how the author connects this to supporting open borders. I have read 3 books about Reagan (The Age of Reagan: 1980-1989 by Steven Hayward, Ronald Reagan by Jacob Weisberg, and Ronald Reagan: How an Ordinary Man Became an Extraordinary Leader by Dinesh D'Souza), and nowhere in these fantastically written books does it talk about Reagan's supposed support for open borders. There is a large difference between supporting a more open immigration system and supporting fully open borders. I am not sure where the author is getting his information that Reagan supported open borders — there is no citation for that point.

Also, the title seems like clickbait — in other words, the rest of the book (besides the mention of Reagan) doesn't actually support open borders; it merely supports a much more open immigration system.

In fact, on the final page of the book, the author says that "The United States needs to better regulate cross-border labor flows, not end them". So while the book does a fantastic job of defending immigration and its economic benefits, it doesn't really argue for truly open borders.

John Anderson says

Looking at other reviews, I was happy to see recent one's by Erin F. B. and Drick Boyd that pretty much summarize my thoughts on this book. But to expand on their comments, one of the most difficult things to stomach while reading this, was Riley's casual acceptance of conservative ideology, particularly, since at least on my copy, no where on the cover or in the book's description or blurbs does it mention this conservative stance (although it becomes quickly apparent in the first chapter).

Here's an example taken from chapter 2. It regards US dependence on foreign professionals such as college graduates majoring in technical professions such as engineering and computer science:

"It's a tragedy that America's public school system is geared more toward appeasing teacher's unions than educating kids. And until that changes, the trends will be difficult to reverse."

And that's it, that's his complete summary of what's wrong with our education system and just like that, he moves on, as if this simple statement is an accepted given.

All things considered, pushing through the rest of the book, though painful, did yield some worthwhile information and if it hadn't been for the first chapter, I may have ranked this at 2 stars instead. Even so, I wouldn't recommend this book to anyone. You'd be better off cutting out the middle man and going online to look up specific stances and arguments from different political perspectives.
