

Mass Immigration vs. Black America

Statement of T. Willard Fair
President and CEO, Urban League of Greater Miami

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Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address this panel.

I have devoted much of my adult life to one of the most important challenges facing our country: How to help young black men build constructive lives as fathers and breadwinners. The size of the problem was outlined in a recent book published by the National Urban League entitled *The State of Black America 2007: Portrait of the Black Male* – black men are much more likely to be unemployed than white men, more likely to be dropouts, in prison, in poverty, or dead.

There are many reasons for grim statistics like this, including the continuing effects of slavery and Jim Crow; the shift in the economy away from manufacturing; broken schools in our big cities; the glorification of self-destructive behavior by popular culture.

But one factor is too often ignored – mass immigration.

There was little immigration when the struggle for civil rights began to achieve success in the 1950s and ‘60s. In fact, the 1965 immigration law that started today’s mass immigration was itself seen as a civil rights measure, intended to clean out rules that favored immigrants from some countries over others. Sen. Edward Kennedy, then, as now, chairman of the Senate immigration subcommittee, said “The bill will not flood our cities with immigrants. ... It will not cause American workers to lose their jobs.”

So much for predictions.

Since 1965, nearly 30 million legal immigrants have come here, plus millions of illegal aliens. The results have been devastating for those Americans – black or white – who compete for jobs with this immigrant tide. George Borjas of Harvard has shown that immigration has cut the wages of American men without a high school degree by \$1,800 a year. Economists at Northeastern University have found that businesses are substituting immigrants for young American workers, especially for young black men. In fact, scholars estimate that immigration is the reason for one-third of the drop in employment among black men, and even some of the increase in incarceration.

Of course, none of that means that individual immigrants – or particular immigrant groups – can be blamed for the difficulties facing black men. Being pro-Me should never make me anti-You. Nor can we use immigration as a crutch, blaming it for all our problems. The reality is that less-educated black men in America today have a variety of problems – high rates of crime and drug use, for example, and poor performance at work and school – that are caused by factors unrelated to level of immigration.

But if cutting immigration and enforcing the law wouldn't be a cure-all, it sure would make my job easier. Take employment – immigration isn't the whole reason for the drop in employment of black men; it's not even half the reason. But it *is* the largest single reason, and it's something we can fix relatively easily.

Think about it this way: If there's a young black man in Liberty City, where I live, who's good with his hands and wants to become a carpenter, which is more likely to help him achieve that goal – amnesty and more immigration, or enforcement and less immigration?

Which is more likely to help an ex-convict or recovering addict get hired at an entry-level job and start the climb back to a decent life – amnesty and more immigration, or enforcement and less immigration?

Which is more likely to persuade a teenager in the inner city to reject the lure of gang life and instead stick with honest employment – amnesty and more immigration, or enforcement and less immigration?

And it's not just a matter of jobs. Whatever your views on government social programs, everyone can agree that resources are not infinite – there's only so much social spending to go around. And since immigrants have relatively low skills and low incomes, they use a lot of social services and pay little in taxes, cutting into the spending on America's own poor. The Center for Immigration Studies estimates that illegal aliens alone cost federal taxpayers \$10 billion more a year in services than they pay in taxes – that's \$10 billion that's not being spent on disadvantaged Americans, not counting the much larger deficits at the state and local level, where most social services are provided.

Likewise with the schools. This is an issue close to my heart, since I co-founded Florida's first charter school and was recently confirmed as chairman of the statewide Board of Education. We must offer the best education possible to all our children, for their own good and for the good of our country. But as budgets have tightened, school enrollment has surged, and all of the growth in the nation's school-age population – 100 percent – comes from immigrant families. This surge in enrolment has led to school overcrowding and has diverted resources that would otherwise have been devoted to at-risk students.

Solutions to the challenges facing black Americans have to come from both private efforts and government initiative – but regardless of the specific approach, flooding the job market and overwhelming the public schools and other government services undermines all our efforts. The interests of black Americans are clear: No amnesty, no guestworkers, enforce the immigration law.

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