

## INTRODUCTION

Ralph Raico, Guest Editor\*

The question of immigration has become acute in virtually all Western nations, including the United States. Here, as elsewhere, leaders of movements to limit immigration, especially from the “Third World,” often combine this with uninformed attacks on the free market, particularly on international free trade. But there is no necessary connection between battling to curb immigration and rejecting such key elements of the free market as free trade. This is shown, for instance, by Peter Brimelow, who is at the same time a gifted advocate of private property and the market economy, and is the author of *Alien Nation: Common Sense About America’s Immigration Disaster*.

Some libertarians automatically assume that there is no use arguing the subject. “Open borders,” they believe, is unconditionally mandated by free-market principles. Occasionally they go so far as to suggest that any opposition to unrestricted entry must be motivated by “racism.” They would do well to ponder the reply of Milton Friedman when asked in an interview how the *Wall Street Journal* could support fixed exchange rates. The Nobel Laureate in economics replied:

You got me! My God, how the hell can they stick with that? They’ve just got an *idée fixe* about it. Like they’ve got on immigration. It’s just obvious that you can’t have free immigration and a welfare state.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it appears that the immigration question is more complicated than some suppose.

In order to advance the debate, the *Journal of Libertarian Studies* invited contributions from a number of distinguished libertarian and libertarian-leaning scholars with varying points of view. Among them was Julian Simon, a thinker respected on all sides. No one contributed more to bringing the issue of immigration to the public’s notice than did he, through his characteristically vigorous books and articles. The world of free-market scholarship and advocacy suffered a great loss with his sudden passing.

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<sup>1</sup>*Forbes* (December 29, 1997).

Professor Simon and the other contributors to this symposium raise questions that demand the attention of all who value the survival and flourishing of a free society. What does a “pure libertarian theory of immigration” imply? How is such a theory to be applied in the current political and social circumstances? In the case of the United States, is massive immigration conducive or perhaps even necessary to a prosperous and highly innovative economy? What qualifications of libertarian theory, if any, result from the system of racial and ethnic privilege that is today enshrined in law and actively promoted by the federal bureaucracy and judiciary? Even aside from the prevailing regime of privilege, civil rights laws prohibit Americans from “discriminating” against anyone on the basis of race, ethnicity, etc., in housing, employment, and many other areas of life. Should this fact be addressed in formulating libertarian answers to the problem? Would the increasing “balkanization” of American society be fostered by “free immigration,” or is this even a factor that libertarians should take into account? And what of the point raised by Professor Friedman—the continued existence, for the foreseeable future, of a vast welfare state that, like civil rights laws and racial preferences, was not present in earlier phases of large-scale immigration?

Finally, there is the general problem of democratic electoral politics, which places the lives, liberties, and property of all Americans at the disposal of whoever is able to control the political process. Would unlimited immigration work to further the erosion of individual rights as traditionally understood in the United States? Or are consequences of this kind too problematical to be considered by libertarian theory?

The editors of the *Journal of Libertarian Studies* hope that this symposium will help readers understand just how significant this subject is. This is no mere debate over more or fewer farm subsidies, or tariffs, or welfare programs. Even massive immigration, let alone “open borders,” will affect, for good or evil, the fundamental character of America and all of the Western world.