

April 3, 2006 The recent immigration protests in Los Angeles have brought the issue to the forefront, provoking strong reactions from millions of Americans. The protesters' cause of open borders is not well served when they drape themselves in Mexican flags and chant slogans in Spanish. If anything, their protests underscore the Balkanization of America caused by widespread illegal immigration. How much longer can we maintain huge unassimilated subgroups within America, filled with millions of people who don't speak English or participate fully in American life? Americans finally have decided the status quo is unacceptable, and immigration may be the issue that decides the 2008 presidential election. We're often reminded that America is a nation of immigrants, implying that we're coldhearted to restrict immigration in any way. But the new Americans reaching our shores in the late 1800s and early 1900s were legal immigrants. In many cases they had no chance of returning home again. They maintained their various ethnic and cultural identities, but they also learned English and embraced their new nationality. Today, the overwhelming majority of Americans- including immigrants- want immigration reduced, not expanded. The economic, cultural, and political situation was very different 100 years ago. We're often told that immigrants do the jobs Americans won't do, and sometimes this is true. But in many instances illegal immigrants simply increase the supply of labor in a community, which lowers wages. And while cheap labor certainly benefits the economy as a whole, when calculating the true cost of illegal immigration we must include the cost of social services that many new immigrants consume- especially medical care. We must reject amnesty for illegal immigrants in any form. We cannot continue to reward lawbreakers and expect things to get better. If we reward millions who came here illegally, surely millions more will follow suit. Ten years from now we will be in the same position, with a whole new generation of lawbreakers seeking amnesty. Amnesty also insults legal immigrants, who face years of paperwork and long waits to earn precious American citizenship. Birthright citizenship similarly rewards lawbreaking, and must be stopped. As long as illegal immigrants know their children born here will be citizens, the perverse incentive to sneak into this country remains strong. Citizenship involves more than the mere location of one's birth. True citizenship requires cultural connections and an allegiance to the United States. Americans are happy to welcome those who wish to come here and build a better life for themselves, but we rightfully expect immigrants to show loyalty and attempt to assimilate themselves culturally. Birthright citizenship sometimes confers the benefits of being American on people who do not truly embrace America. We need to allocate far more resources, both in terms of money and manpower, to securing our borders and coastlines here at home. This is the most critical task before us, both in terms of immigration problems and the threat of foreign terrorists. Unless and until we secure our borders, illegal immigration and the problems associated with it will only increase.