Currently, there are around 11.9 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Gonzales 2009, 9). Although immigrants reach the United States from all over the world, the majority of undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States are from Latin America. In fact, 9.6 million undocumented immigrants are from Latin America; 7 million of which are from Mexico (Gonzales 2009, 9). Clearly, these high figures are causing a large number of mixed-status families in America. A mixed status family consists of family members with varying legal statuses. For example, a mixed-status family can consist of one or both parents as noncitizens and one or more children as citizens (Fix 2001, 397). In America, mixed-status families are often adversely affected by the country’s many immigration and citizenship policies. For this reason, it is important that U.S. citizens understand the challenges faced by mixed status parents and their young children in order to make and shape immigration policies that have a positive outcome for all. After all, it is not just a mixed-status family’s problem; it is our country’s problem since these young children, regardless of status, make up a growing portion of the United States and are an integral part of our country’s future.

The significant Latino population growth in the United States is related to both immigration and a high birth rate. According to authors, Kalina Brabeck and Qingwen Xu, in 2005, 80% of the children born in the US were born into immigrant families as citizens; however many of these children’s parents were not legal residents (Brabeck 2001, 344). Hirokazu Yoshikawa, a professor of education at Harvard University, states that 4 million of America’s children are citizen children of undocumented parents. Yoshikawa puts those numbers in an
everyday perspective by arguing that 4 million children living in a mixed-status family is the same as one student per classroom in every elementary school in the United States (Yoshikawa 2011, 2). Clearly, the prevalence of mixed-status families in America is an issue that should not be ignored.

An article written by Michael Fix and Wendy Zimmermann states that,

“The casual observer- and policymaker- might readily believe that the country is neatly divided into two kinds of families: those composed of citizens, who have strong claims to legal rights and social benefits, and those composed of noncitizens, whose claim to both are more contingent. American families, however, are far more complex: the number of families that contain a mix of both citizens and noncitizens is surprisingly large” (Fix 2001, 397).

As the authors indicate, the American family in the 21st century is more complicated than in the past and is not “neatly divided” into two cohesive groups. Yet, a lot of American citizens fail to acknowledge and question the implications of this growing group. After all, how are mixed-status families different? How does a mixed-status family affect the future of America? What does it mean to be a mixed-status family? These are some of the questions that have inspired me to dig deeper to better understand the many public policies and resulting challenges that confront mixed-status families.

**Immigration and Citizenship Policies**

In the article written by Fix and Zimmermann, the authors discuss the prevalence of mixed-status families in America and the immigration and citizenship policies that may be held responsible. The authors suggest that nativist immigration reforms are forcing families to divide. According to the article, mixed-status families in America are forced to make one of three
decisions: 1) leave the U.S. with citizen children; 2) have an undocumented parent leave the U.S. which would create a single-parent home; 3) remain in the United States, but at the risk of getting caught and deported (Fix 2001, 416). The authors argue that mixed-status families in America face a major obstacle; society views noncitizen parents as “outsiders” while their citizen children are viewed as “insiders” (Fix 2001, 398).

A significant reason why citizen children are seen as “insiders” is because of the 14th amendment. The 14th Amendment’s Citizenship Clause states that all persons born on U.S. soil regardless of their parents’ legal status will be legal citizens. It reads, “All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside” (Fix 2001, 403). This constitutional clause is known as birthright citizenship. In the United States, birthright citizenship explains the reason why 89% of children born into mixed-status families are citizens (Fix 2001, 403). The authors state that even though many people throughout history have tried to overturn the 14th amendment, it has never weakened. After all, birthright citizenship is a major part of U.S. immigration, civil rights and family law. Birthright citizenship also helps distinguish the United States from most other countries throughout the world. Fix and Zimmermann note that in most other parts of the world, citizenship derives from family heritage as opposed to the place of birth (Fix 2001, 403).

Although birthright citizenship at times complicates situations for families in America, there are many immigration and citizenship policies of the past that have actually harmed mixed-status families.

A controversial immigration law called the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act was passed in 1996 and led to many difficulties for mixed-status families. This legislation was especially anti-immigrant in that it made it difficult for undocumented immigrants to reenter
the country. Undocumented immigrants were banned from reentering the U.S. for a period of three years if they stayed more than 6 months illegally in America. Additionally, the act also stated that undocumented immigrants who stayed in the U.S. for longer than one year would be banned for ten years (Fix 2001, 412). That same year, another immigration policy went into effect requiring that legal immigrants make a certain amount of money in order to be eligible to sponsor a family member to come to the United States (Fix 2001, 412). Fix and Zimmermann argue that anti-immigrant immigration reforms “freeze” mixed-status families into different statuses which adversely affect their citizen children.

A proposed bill that attempted to bring dramatic changes to immigration law in America and freeze mixed-status families into different statuses was HR4437: Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. This bill proposal was explored in great detail in a documentary film titled *Immigration Nation! The Battle for the Dream*. This film explained the repercussions of HR4437 on the Latino community if passed. HR4437 was passed by the House of Representatives on December 16, 2005 although it never became law. Had HR4437 passed, this legislation would have increased border security as well as made illegal existence in the United States a felony (*Immigration Nation! 2010*). Prior to this proposal, presence in the United States of America without proper documentation only resulted in a civil violation. HR4437 would have made illegal presence a criminal act. In addition, HR4437 would have been harmful to the American citizen community as well. For example, if an American citizen knew of an undocumented immigrant and chose not to report it to authorities, the American citizen could be charged and sentenced with federal prison time. These rules were extended to social services organizations such as churches, refugee centers, and charities (*Immigration Nation! 2010*).
As one can imagine, even though the bill did not pass, it managed to create feelings of distrust and uncertainty within the American public toward immigrants. HR4437 encouraged the American public to be fearful of undocumented immigrants and to view them as potential terrorists (*Immigration Nation!* 2010). The scare tactics and anti-immigrant sentiments caused the United States in 2005 to declare code orange, the second highest terrorist threat level (*Immigration Nation!* 2010). Clearly, despite the bill’s failure, it created a lot of anxiety around the country. One of the speakers in the film argued that our country has historically turned against immigrants in times of economic hardship and war. This makes sense as security levels increased tremendously after the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks.

**Public Programs**

Ironically, children living in a mixed-status family have less access to the services they truly need to better their situation. Public benefits would help children improve their current circumstances and overall well-being; yet, children living in a mixed-status family rarely participate. An article written by Brabeck and Xu argues that public benefit policies are contributing to developmental challenges for children from mixed-status families as they are not being utilized like they should. For example, while noncitizen children are unable to claim public benefits, citizen children born into a mixed-status can. However, many mixed-status families are failing to claim public benefits for their citizen children due to their family’s legal status. Some of the public benefit programs mentioned in the article include Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, and Medicaid. The authors argue that many citizen children born into mixed-status families are being denied the same opportunities as legal citizens of the United States. For example, both citizen children and undocumented children living in a mixed-status family are less likely to have health insurance and participate in
public programs. Often times, the children’s lack of health insurance and public benefits is due to their parents’ failure to understand their child’s eligibility. The parents also fear that seeking help may put them at risk of being deported (Brabeck 2001, 342). After all, most mixed-status families do not want to draw attention to their selves as undocumented immigrants and are always in fear of potential separation. It is not uncommon for these family members to also believe that the use of services for their legal child may prevent them from achieving legal status in the future or being able to sponsor a relative for admission to the U.S. (Fix 2001, 405).

The parents’ decision to forgo public benefits results in citizen children born into mixed-status families having less access to preventative health care. In a mixed-status family one child may be a citizen which would allow the child to be eligible for Medicaid while the other child may be ineligible due to the child’s legal status. In 2002, 22% of citizen children living in a mixed-status family had no health insurance in comparison to 12% of children whose parents are citizens (Goyer 2004, 140). This means that both citizen children and noncitizen children have less access to preventive health care and are being treated as second class citizens (Fix 2001, 410).

In addition to a mixed-status family’s reluctance to obtain public benefits, in 1996 congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which specifically targeted undocumented immigrants, barring them from many social benefit programs. This act required public agencies to verify the legal status of applicants before offering services (Fix 2001, 410). Undocumented immigrants were barred from food stamps and Supplementary Security Income (SSI). In addition, undocumented immigrants were also barred from TANF, Medicaid, and the Child Health Insurance Program (CHIP) (Fix 2001, 410). Even though these new policies targeted undocumented immigrants, citizen children were
affected as well. For example, food stamps are distributed based on the number of eligible people in a household. Mixed-status families received less food stamps than they did prior to 1996 and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. Less food stamps allotted per family, meant more hungry citizen and noncitizen children at the dinner table. Obviously, immediately after PRWORA went into effect, citizen children in mixed-status families were less likely to be enrolled in programs although they were still eligible (Cherlin 2004, 587). From 1996-1998, applications by noncitizen-headed families for welfare and Medi-Cal dropped by 52% in Los Angeles County; yet, there was no decrease for citizen families (Fix 2001, 413). The use of TANF and SSI by noncitizen-headed families also decreased by 35% from 1994-1997. Fix and Zimmermann argue that it is important to remember that most of these noncitizen-headed households contain citizen children (Fix 2001, 414). Clearly, the drop in public benefit usage by mixed-status families adversely affects both their citizen and noncitizen children.

An article written by Andrew Cherlin and Paula Fomby describes a study which tested whether parents of citizen children living in a mixed-status family were likely to apply for public benefits. These public benefits include TANF, SSI, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women and Children (WIC). The data for the study was collected in the year 1999 from 2,400 randomly selected families. The families who were selected were from low income neighborhoods in the Boston, Chicago, and San Antonio areas (Cherlin 2004, 585). The data indicated that citizen children with low income non-citizen parents are less likely to receive social benefits than citizen children with low income citizen parents. The data showed that mixed-status families were less likely to receive benefits from TANF and Food Stamps, but more likely to receive Medicaid and WIC benefits (Cherlin 2004,
The authors explain that mixed-status families may be reluctant to collect TANF as the public charge doctrine looks at TANF and SSI dependence when evaluating applications for entry to the United States or when seeking permanent resident status (Cherlin 2004, 605). The authors’ conclude that citizen children living in mixed-status families are in fact denied a citizens access to public benefits. Based on the information collected, mixed-status families experience major obstacles in the access and utilization of public benefits.

**Poverty**

Poverty is another obstacle mixed-status families encounter in America. A family’s legal status seems to trap them in a never ending cycle of poverty which in turn creates a permanent underclass. Mixed-status families in America are much more likely to live in poverty than citizen families. In 1998, mixed-status families equated to 40% of low income families with children in California and 20% of low income families in New York (Fix 2001, 401). In 2002, Mark Greenberg and Hedieh Rahmanou discovered that 26% of the nation’s children were children of low-income immigrants; 51% of these low-income immigrant children lived in families that qualified as 200% below poverty level (Goyer 2004, 140). Greenberg and Rahmanou argue that poverty affecting mixed-status families in America does not stem from unemployment, but instead low-wages. In 2002, 48% of low-wage workers were foreign born. These high numbers are due to a lack of English proficiency and education. 62% of the foreign born low wage workers were limited English proficient and 45% had not completed high school (Goyer 2004, 140).

Leisy Abrego and Roberto Gonzales argue that mixed-status families frequently live in poverty stricken areas of the country due to the immigrant parents’ low-paying jobs and legal limitations (Abrego 2010, 147). These poor communities contain low budget public schools,
high crime rates, and few opportunities to better their situation. Abrego states, “Growing up in a poor neighborhood increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school; reduces the probability of attending college; lowers the likelihood of employment; reduces income earned as an adult; and increases the risk of teenage childbearing and unwed pregnancy” (Abrigo 2010, 148).

In addition to the many challenges of growing up poor in America, mixed-status families also face the problems associated with their legal status. For example, undocumented parents cannot get a job legally in the United States. For this reason, undocumented immigrant parents are often forced to work unstable low paying jobs. Unfortunately, these jobs often require the parents to work incredibly long hours far away from home (Abrigo 2010, 148). As you can imagine, the parent’s hectic work schedule often leads to more complications for the family as children are unsupervised and forced to care for themselves. Without supervision, these children face even many hardships such as drug abuse, gangs, and teenage pregnancy.

**Education**

Surprisingly, even with so many obstacles, 65,000 undocumented immigrant students manage to graduate from American high schools each year (Perez 2010, 36). Undocumented immigrant students first received access to a free public education in 1982. In 1982, the Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* declared that undocumented children are legally entitled to an elementary and secondary education according to the 14th Amendment. The Supreme Court felt that an education was essential for creating individuals who could function successfully in society as well as contribute to enhancing the United States of America (Perez 2010, 36). Roberto G. Gonzales made note in his article that, “In Justice Brennan’s majority opinion, he noted that while education is not a fundamental right, denying K-12 education to undocumented
children amounted to creating a lifetime of hardship and a permanent underclass of individuals” (Gonzales 2009, 11). These remarks by Justice Brennan mark a distinct connection between education and upward mobility. Ironically, an undocumented student’s access to education ends after high school graduation which in the 21st century is much too soon. In the last thirty years, a high school diploma alone has not been enough to achieve upward mobility; students now need at least a 4 year college degree to make a decent living in the United States. Gonzales stresses that although federal law does not specifically prohibit undocumented students from attending colleges and universities, it does little to help these students attend. In addition to the little assistance that colleges and universities provide these students, there have been questionable practices in the past that excluded undocumented students entirely from higher education.

While citizen children living in a mixed-status family are allowed to obtain a higher education without restrictions, noncitizen children face huge challenges in doing so. As previously mentioned, federal law cannot prohibit undocumented students from obtaining a higher education; yet, in 2008 all 58 community college campuses in North Carolina were told by the Office of the State Attorney General that “higher education is a public benefit to which illegal immigrants are not entitled under federal law” (Gonzales 2009, 20). On August 15, 2008 North Carolina Community Colleges voted to close its doors completely to undocumented students. Alabama also passed a law which denied undocumented students access to two-year colleges (Gonzales 2009, 20). The state of Alabama planned on requiring students to show an Alabama driver’s license or valid passport in order to prove legal status. Gonzales also explains that the University of Arkansas, the University of Connecticut, and some Virginia colleges have tried to deny undocumented students admission to their institutions based on one’s legal status (Gonzales 2009, 20). Lastly, in 2007, the states of Missouri and Virginia proposed laws that
would keep undocumented students from attending college classes; however, at the time Gonzales’ article was printed in 2009, the laws had not yet been passed.

If undocumented students are not denied the opportunity of achieving a higher education due to individual state laws, they are denied due to their limited financial resources (Perez 2001, 36). Undocumented students are deprived of financial aid, scholarships, and employment because of their legal status. This means that even if an undocumented student did receive admission to a university, they would most likely lack the financial assets needed to attend. Alejandra Rincon points out in her article that even if undocumented students were able to afford a college education; undocumented students are charged out-of-state tuition fees. This occurs despite the fact that they have graduated from in-state high schools (Rincon 2010, 13).

Fortunately, since 2001, ten states have passed laws allowing undocumented students who graduate from in-state high schools to qualify for in-state college tuition (Gonzales 2009, 4). These ten states include: Texas, California, Utah, New York, Washington, Illinois, Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico, and Nebraska (Gonzales 2009, 19). Still, without financial assistance even in-state tuition is very expensive. Gonzales notes that there are very few scholarships for undocumented students as most scholarships apply federal standards which means that undocumented students cannot apply. The majority of the scholarships available for undocumented students are offered through private universities. Unfortunately, even with a scholarship, private universities are normally much more expensive than public universities in the United States (Gonzales 2009, 21).

Additionally, a student’s legal status creates a huge amount of discomfort for them and their families as they are unsure of whom to ask for help and whom they should trust when applying for higher education institutions. Perez indicates that these feelings of discomfort cause
students not to reach out for help from student affairs personal and faculty members (Perez 2010, 39). Furthermore, there is also a huge sense of shame among undocumented students which in turn causes them not to talk about their status. Perez argues that the media is largely responsible for creating these negative stereotypes and it has triggered the American public to view these students as criminals, not as students hoping to better their future.

For these reasons, only 5-10% of undocumented high school graduates are able to go on to a university. In 2009, there were 2.5 million students enrolled in California higher education institutions; yet, undocumented students only accounted for 1,620 spots (Gonzales 2009, 23). These small numbers demonstrate that undocumented students are underrepresented in higher education settings and that perhaps in-state tuition legislation is not enough. There are, however, two states within the United States that now allow undocumented students to apply for financial aid. These two states are Texas and New Mexico. Hopefully, in the near future more states will follow the path of Texas and New Mexico and open their financial aid monies to undocumented students.

**Anxiety, Worry and Depression**

In addition to poverty and a limited access to education, mixed-status families experience a significant amount of anxiety, worry, and depression. Unfortunately, these negative feelings often plague a mixed-status family’s everyday existence. Margit Wiesner discusses acculturative stress among documented and undocumented Latino immigrants in America. Wiesner defines acculturative stress as the level of psychological strain experienced by immigrants due to the immigration-related challenges they experience in a new country (Wiesner 2010, 364). A study conducted by Wiesner in 1998-1999 indicates that immigrants in the United States concerned with deportation reported higher levels of acculturative stress. Wiesner’s study was conducted
with 420 Latino immigrants residing in two major cities in Texas. These participants were selected from churches, social services areas, and nearby clinics (Wiesner 2010, 367). The findings indicate that one third of the Latino immigrants interviewed reported a fear of being caught and deported. This fear caused many Latino immigrants to avoid activities such as walking in the street; requesting services from government agencies; reporting an infraction to the police; and waiting on the street corner for work (Wiesner 2010, 378). Wiesner’s results were consistent with a much more recent survey that was conducted in 2008. This national survey concluded that 57% of Latinos worry about themselves, family members, and friends being deported (Wiesner 2010, 366). Both of these studies are important as they demonstrate the fear of deportation that exists among Latinos in America; the threat of deportation is constantly on the minds of these undocumented immigrants.

Mixed-status families in America have every reason to harbor these feelings as many families are torn apart by detention and deportation. For example, in 2001 the USA Patriot Act was passed which made it very difficult for noncitizens to stay in the US if issued an order of deportation (Brabeck 2001, 344). This legislation also made it harder for noncitizens to reenter the United States. Since the passing of this act, the percentage of noncitizens ordered to be removed from the US increased from 78% in 2001 to 84% in 2005 (Brabeck 2001, 344). In 2008, Immigration Customs Enforcement apprehended 792,000 noncitizens, detained more than 397,000, and deported more than 359,000 (Brabeck 2001, 344). According to the authors, this was the sixth consecutive year with a record high number of deportations. The authors also state that Mexicans accounted for nearly 89% of those apprehended in 2008. Sadly, from 1997 – 2007, 88,000 US citizen children lost a legal permanent resident parent to deportation. Of the 88,000 US citizen children, 44,000 were less than the age of five (Brabeck 2001, 345).
Due to such high deportation figures, the authors conducted a study with the help of Post-Deportation Human Rights Project (PDHRP) to analyze the effects of detention and deportation on mixed-status families. The goal of the study was to explore the threat of deportation and detention on a noncitizen parent’s well-being, a child’s well-being, and the ability of a noncitizen parent to provide financially for their children (Brabeck 2001, 346). Participants for this study were recruited from Latino immigrant community organizations. These immigrant community organizations included ESL and adult education centers in large cities throughout the Northeast region of the US. In order for participants to have taken part in this study, a person needed to meet the following criteria: (1) immigrants from a Latin American country, (2) 18 years or older, (3) parent of at least one child below the age of 18 currently living in the United States.

The study took place from March to May, 2009. Among the 132 Latino participants, 70.5% were women and the mean age was 36.7 years old. Also, 73.5% of the participants had children who were born in the United States. The results of the study indicate that the majority of the participants have in fact directly experienced the negative effects of the deportation system in the United States (Brabeck 2001, 354). The data led the authors to believe that parents’ legal vulnerability is affecting them in regard to emotional well-being, financial capability, and relationships with children (Brabeck 2001, 354). The study concludes that when undocumented Latino parents suffer as a result of detention and deportation, so too do their US born children.

Unfortunately, negative labels such as “illegal immigrant” and “illegal alien” are further perpetuating feelings of anxiety, worry, and depression among undocumented immigrants and their mixed-status families. Carol Cleaveland argues that these labels imply criminal status which in turn causes the American public to be disinclined to engage with this population. An undocumented man from Puebla, Mexico states in Cleaveland’s article, “I would like for the
Americans to know that we come to work and to help this country grow, and all of it is for the benefit of them, not of Mexico. We do not come here for any other thing, only to work” (Cleaveland 2010, 77). In other words, undocumented immigrants are only coming to America for work; economic opportunities in Mexico have become so bad that many Mexicans feel forced to cross the border in order to make more income. In fact, most undocumented immigrants in the United States only plan on working and earning money in America for 1-3 years and then plan on returning home. Clearly, being considered “illegal” restricts their ability to obtain work opportunities. Limited work opportunities leads to financial stress which later manifests into feelings of worry, anxiety and depression. To emphasize, these negative labels harm undocumented immigrants and mixed-status families in that they contribute to racial prejudice and discrimination.

Solutions

Although I do not have the answer to resolve this growing problem in America, some scholars have suggested solutions to improving the lives of mixed-status families. Fix and Zimmermann mention two possible solutions to ending the challenges mixed-status families face. The first suggestion proposed by Fix and Zimmermann is to eliminate birthright citizenship. Eliminating birthright citizenship would end the confusion associated with being a mixed-status family in America. Although I agree with Fix and Zimmermann, I also believe that implementing this policy would be a sharp change from U.S. historical tradition; denying birthright citizenship to children born in the United States would reverse a long standing constitutional guarantee. The second solution proposed by Fix and Zimmermann is to provide undocumented citizens with federal benefits (Fix 2001, 418). Obviously, most Americans are unwilling to pursue this proposal as many feel that providing undocumented citizens with federal
benefits would be an economic burden for U.S. taxpayers. This suggestion would require new legislation by a reluctant congress.

Gonzales stresses the importance of passing the DREAM Act as a way of improving an immigrant’s access to education and solving the “underclass problem.” The DREAM Act: the Development, Relief, and Education for Aliens Minors Act, which was first introduced in 2001, was designed to allow undocumented immigrant youth who were brought to the United States as children to obtain legal permanent resident status if they remain in school through high school graduation and go on to college or military service (Gonzales 2009, 26). Although there are certain conditions that must be met, the DREAM Act would provide 360,000 undocumented students with a legal means to work and secure resources for college (Gonzales 2009, 26). Unfortunately the DREAM Act has not yet passed, but Gonzales is hopeful that it will pass sometime in the near future. Clearly, citizens and noncitizens who are aware of the DREAM act would agree that this legislation would benefit everyone. The United States as a whole would profit from more productive, educated, and US trained workers.

In my opinion, the best solution to ending the many obstacles of a mixed-status family is some form of amnesty. Although, many Americans feel that the United States should not reward illegal activity with any form of amnesty. An amnesty would forgive undocumented immigrants for immigrating to the United States illegally as well as other related illegal acts such as working without proper documentation (Fix 2001, 410). Personally, I do not believe it should be the policy of the United States to break up families or separate citizen children from their undocumented parents. In 1986, Congress enacted a legalization program called the 1986 Immigration Control and Reform Act. This legislation granted legal status to 2.8 million illegal immigrants. Most of the illegal immigrants granted legal status by this act had been in the
country for at least five years and had children born in the United States (Fix 2001, 410). This was the first time in U.S. history that amnesty was given to a large group of individuals rather than on an individual basis. It is time to enact another group pardon or some form of amnesty to give America’s undocumented immigrants some kind of legal status that would end the separation of families.

**Conclusion**

As demonstrated, both citizen and noncitizen children living in a mixed-status family in America are more likely to suffer significantly greater hardships than children born into a full citizen family. As a result, it is imperative that we, as America citizens, recognize, understand, and sympathize with this vulnerable population. After all, if we don’t understand it, how can we change it? We must learn to be more aware of the pain and suffering anti-immigration laws, policies, and attitudes are causing mixed-status families. Together we must focus our energy on standing up, speaking out, reaching out, and teaching the community of the obstacles and hardships that continue to plague mixed-status families in America. After all, an individual’s legal status should not be the most significant determinant of how one is treated in America; neither should an individual’s legal status be the instrument that determines one’s success in the future.
Works Cited


This article explains how many undocumented immigrant youth are suffering in America because of legal restrictions. For example, undocumented immigrants are allowed to obtain a public education through high school; yet, they are denied a higher education. Obviously, this is creating a permanent underclass as undocumented immigrants have no way of achieving upward mobility without a higher education. This article is wonderful in that it pays special attention to the strengths of immigrants and how we as a nation can benefit by learning to integrate bilingual and bicultural people into the community.


The authors, Kalina Brabeck and Xu Qingwen, argue that many laws, social structures and policies contribute to several specific developmental challenges for children from immigrant families and especially Latino children. For example, poverty and the lack of access to public benefits can greatly affects a child’s development. The authors also discuss how children of immigrants are more likely to experience slower cognitive and language development. Lastly, they end their article with a study which leads them to conclude that both undocumented Latino parents and their US born children suffer as a result of detention and deportation.

This article discusses how American born children of Latino immigrants are less likely to receive public assistance benefits. The authors investigate five different programs that Latino immigrants seem reluctant to use: Temporary Assistance of Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and WIC. Over 2,402 mother-child pairs were interviewed for this study. The mother-child pairs were asked if they ever received benefits from the five public assistance programs. The authors' data concludes that American born children of Latino immigrants are not receiving public benefits as frequently as other American born children.


This article discusses how the terms “illegal immigrant” and “illegal alien” are dehumanizing for undocumented immigrants in America. The author stresses that these terms are hindering the undocumented immigrant’s chance at bettering their situation as these terms indicate criminal status and therefore restrict future work opportunities. Cleaveland conducted a two year study in order to more accurately understand the undocumented immigrants view on their life in America. The study was conducted in two parts. Part one involved working with undocumented immigrants and part two included semi structured interviews. Cleaveland discovered that undocumented immigrants are especially sensitive to these terms as they are being looked upon by Americans as criminals.


In this article the authors, Michael Fix and Wendy Zimmermann, discuss the prevalence of mixed-status families in America and the immigration and citizenship policies that may be held responsible. The authors suggest that nativist immigration reforms are forcing families to divide. They also argue that many legal children born into mixed-status families are being denied the same opportunities as legal residents in the United States especially in the area of public benefits.

This article explains the problems associated with denying undocumented immigrants a higher education. Gonzales argues that if the United States continues on the same path, entire communities could suffer. In this article, the author examines the benefits of the DREAM Act for both undocumented students and America.


This article contains a series of four commentaries discussing the question, “How should policymakers, advocates, stakeholders, and practitioners respond strategically and proactively to demographic change and increasing diversity in order to promote the healthy development, productivity, and well-being of our nation’s children in the future?” (Goyer 2004, 138). The authors of the commentaries emphasize that the needs of immigrants and their children need to be met in order to reduce child-poverty and promote overall well-being in the United States.


This article contains a study that examined the differences between documented and undocumented Latino immigrants in America. The authors examined three immigration related challenges: separation from family, traditions, and language difficulties. Participants in the study included 416 documented and undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants living in two major cities in Texas. The study concluded that undocumented immigrants experience a higher level of challenges in the areas of family separation, maintaining traditions, and language development. The study also discovered that both documented and undocumented immigrants feared deportation.

This article discusses the challenges undocumented immigrants face academically, especially undocumented college students in America. The article stresses that undocumented immigrants are different from their American born peers and family members as undocumented immigrants must fund their own education as they do not qualify for financial aid. Guillermo, an undocumented student, describes his experience in college as both “cursed and blessed.” He is cursed because of his immigration status; yet, blessed in that he has found a way to get a higher education in America.


This article discusses the various movements and activities that have recently taken place in support of the Dream Act. Some examples of supportive activities include workshops, panels, sleep strikes, press conferences, etc. If passed, the Dream Act would allow undocumented students a pathway to citizenship in America. Rincon explains in the article that the arguments for and against undocumented students in college usually revolve around three certain categories: economics, cultural assimilation, and crime deterrence.


In this book, Yoshikawa argues that there is more to the immigration problem than just economic and labor concerns; there is a human dimension. This book explores the everyday experiences of undocumented parents and their young children in America. The author challenges the readers not to view undocumented immigrants as lawbreakers, but instead as the parents of citizens whose productivity will be essential to the future of the United States. The book draws on information collected over a three year study of 380 infants from various races and ethnicities including Dominican, Mexican, Chinese, and African American families.

This documentary is about the modern immigrant rights movement in response to HR4437. Although HR4437 was passed by the House of Representatives on December 16, 2005, this bill never became law. In addition to HR4437, the documentary features the story of Elvira Arellano, a woman who hid in a Chicago church to avoid being deported. In the end, however, she was forced to return to Mexico and leave her eight year old son alone in the United States. This documentary exemplifies the pain and suffering anti-immigration laws are causing mixed-status Latino families in America.