

Both Sides of the Issue

The Immigration Debate Revisited

stosselintheclassroom.org

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Objectives

Students will be able to:

- recall the central claims each video makes about the costs and benefits of immigration to the United States.
- illustrate the differences in how Victor Davis Hanson and Yaron Brook describe assimilation and the integration of immigrants into American culture.
- investigate the evidence each side uses to support its conclusions about migrant crime, employment, and welfare.
- recommend an immigration policy that responds to the strongest concerns raised in both videos and explain the trade-offs.

Concepts & Key Terms

The following terms appear across both videos in this pairing. Understanding them will help students follow the arguments and engage in discussion.

Assimilation: the process by which people from different cultural backgrounds adopt the language, customs, and values of their new country. Both videos treat assimilation as essential to the long-term success of immigration.

Citizenship: the legal status of belonging to a particular country, which carries specific rights, duties, and protections.

Constitutional Government: a system of government in which the powers of officials are limited by a written constitution that protects individual rights.

Deportation: the formal removal of a non-citizen from a country, usually because the person is in the country unlawfully or has violated immigration law.

Entrepreneur: a person who starts and operates a business, taking on financial risk to develop a product, service, or company. Yaron Brook notes that immigrants founded roughly half of successful Silicon Valley startups.

Illegal Immigration: the act of entering a country without legal permission, or remaining in a country after permission has expired.

Legal Immigration: the act of entering a country and obtaining lawful permission to live or work there through visas, green cards, asylum, or naturalization.

Migrant Crime: a term used in current political debate to describe crimes committed by recent immigrants. In the second video, Yaron Brook cites Texas data showing illegal immigrants are convicted of crimes at a lower rate per capita than native-born Americans.

Native-Born: a person who was born in the country in which he or she lives, as opposed to a person who immigrated from another country.

Open Borders: a policy in which a country places few or no restrictions on the movement of people across its national borders. Both videos use this phrase, though they characterize the position differently.

Welfare State: a system in which the government provides taxpayer-funded benefits, such as cash assistance, food aid, public education, and medical care, to people who meet certain conditions. Yaron Brook argues that the right response to public concern about immigrant use of public benefits is to restrict the benefits themselves rather than restrict immigration.

Discussion Questions

The questions below will help students achieve a better understanding of the arguments made on either side of a contentious topic. Because these questions often touch upon statements made briefly in the videos, we recommend reading the questions before watching each video. Students are encouraged to take notes during the videos, and it may be helpful for students to break into groups, each taking responsibility for only a few questions, before coming together for discussion.

1. What are the opposing ideas in these two videos?
2. The Stossel video showed that legal and illegal immigrants commit fewer crimes per capita than native-born Americans. Why do some politicians focus on "migrant crime" if migrants commit fewer crimes? Is it justified? Why/Why not?
3. Victor Davis Hanson said that America, at its founding, had the idea that "you could become an American if you crossed the borders and you accepted the American idea." What did he mean by "the American idea"?
4. In the Stossel video, Yaron Brook said "there is a real basis for people resenting that fact" that immigrants are sometimes given assistance by the government. What solution did he propose?
5. Victor Davis Hanson said that when immigrants came to America in the past, "they had skills, they spoke English." Should immigrants be required to have certain skills and speak English before they're allowed into the United States? Why/Why not?
6. John Stossel showed that illegal immigrants pay billions of dollars in taxes. Were you aware of that before watching this video? Does it change how you view illegal immigration? Why/Why not?
7. Victor Davis Hanson said that the United States has "lost confidence in its traditions and customs." What did he mean by this? Is he right? Why/Why not?

8. Yaron Brook said: "Every serious economic study has shown [immigrants] create more jobs than they destroy." Why do some politicians and media figures focus on the jobs that are lost, rather than the jobs that are created?
9. Victor Davis Hanson said that "the corporate establishment has been a big advocate of open borders." What reason did he give for this?
10. Yaron Brook said that restricting immigration is like saying "I have a right to stagnate and to force all of you to stagnate with me." What did he mean by this?
11. Victor Davis Hanson said: "[W]e look at the border and it is a construct, it doesn't exist in reality." What did he mean by this?
12. Yaron Brook proposed making immigration limited to people who have job offers in the United States. What are the pros and cons of such a system?
13. Both videos talked about "assimilation." What does assimilation mean in the context of immigration?
14. Did these two videos share any common ground? Were there any points on which they agreed? If so, what were they?
15. Should one of the arguments we heard carry more weight than the other? If so, which one? Why?
16. Did you have an opinion on this topic before watching these videos? If so, what was it? Has your opinion changed? If so, how? What did you learn from these videos that affects your views on this topic?
17. What else would you like to learn about this topic?
18. For more on this topic, see these previous editions of *Both Sides of the Issue*: "[Is Immigration a Human Right?](#)," "[The Immigration Debate](#)," and "[Does Immigration Hurt the Economy?](#)"

References

Three statistics in these videos tend to draw the most pushback, so the primary sources are gathered here in case a student, a parent, or a colleague asks for them. Each is paired with the original research and, where possible, independent confirmation from a source with a different point of view. Sharing these openly models the same habit the Real-World Connection activity asks of students: follow a claim back to its source, and notice who did the counting.

Migrant crime: Yaron Brook and John Stossel's claim that legal and illegal immigrants are convicted of crimes at lower per capita rates than native-born Americans traces to Cato Institute analyses of Texas Department of Public Safety

data by Alex Nowrasteh. Cato's 2019 brief found that illegal immigrants were 37.1 percent less likely to be convicted of a crime than native-born Americans, and its 2013–2022 study found a homicide conviction rate of 2.2 per 100,000 for illegal immigrants versus 3.0 for native-born Americans. Cato is a libertarian organization, so it is worth noting that a peer-reviewed study in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (Light, He, and Robey, 2020) reached the same conclusion using the same Texas records, as did a summary from the U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice. Not everyone agrees: the Center for Immigration Studies argues the Texas figures undercount illegal immigrants because their status is sometimes recorded only after conviction. Sources: [cato.org](https://www.cato.org), [pnas.org](https://www.pnas.org), and [nij.ojp.gov](https://www.nij.ojp.gov).

<https://www.cato.org/immigration-research-policy-brief/criminal-immigrants-texas-2019>

<https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/illegal-immigrant-murderers-texas-2013-2022>

<https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2014704117>

<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/undocumented-immigrant-offending-rate-lower-us-born-citizen-rate>

<https://cis.org/Report/Misuse-Texas-Data-Understates-Illegal-Immigrant-Criminality>

Immigrant founders: Yaron Brook's figure that immigrants founded roughly half of successful Silicon Valley startups comes from a Duke University and University of California, Berkeley study funded by the Kauffman Foundation, "America's New Immigrant Entrepreneurs" (Wadhwa and Saxenian, 2007), which found that 52 percent of Silicon Valley engineering and technology startups launched between 1995 and 2005 had at least one immigrant founder. A later National Foundation for American Policy study reported a similar pattern nationally: 55 percent of America's billion-dollar startups, 50 of 91, had at least one immigrant founder. Sources: [kauffman.org](https://www.kauffman.org) and [nfap.com](https://www.nfap.com).

<https://www.kauffman.org/reports/immigration-and-the-american-economy/americas-new-immigrant-entrepreneurs/>

<https://nfap.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2018-BILLION-DOLLAR-STARTUPS.NFAP-Policy-Brief.2018.pdf>

Taxes paid: John Stossel's claim that illegal immigrants pay billions of dollars in taxes is well supported. The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimated that undocumented immigrants paid \$96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in 2022. The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy is a left-leaning organization, but the broad conclusion is shared across the spectrum: the libertarian Cato Institute likewise finds immigrants to be net contributors to government revenue, and the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projected in

2024 that the recent rise in immigration would add roughly \$1.2 trillion in federal revenue from 2024 to 2034. Sources: itep.org, cato.org, and cbo.gov.

<https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>

<https://www.cato.org/blog/immigrants-pay-more-taxes-average-person>

<https://www.cbo.gov/publication/60569>

Activities

Activity 1: Common Ground Finder

It's easy to assume that two speakers on opposite sides of an issue agree on nothing. Despite their disagreements, Victor Davis Hanson and Yaron Brook actually share several premises. Both treat traditional legal immigration as a benefit to the country, both express concern about the interaction between immigration and welfare, both believe assimilation matters, and both speak as defenders of constitutional government and individual liberty.

Distribute the Common Ground Finder worksheet (next page). Students re-watch key portions of each video and identify three to five points of agreement between Hanson and Brook, citing specific quotations or claims. After the chart is complete, lead a class discussion: Why does media coverage of immigration rarely highlight points of agreement? How might focusing on common ground change the way the public discusses this issue?

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Common Ground Finder: The Immigration Debate Revisited

List three to five points of agreement between Victor Davis Hanson and Yaron Brook. For each, cite a specific quotation or claim from each video. In the final column, briefly explain why this shared ground matters for the larger immigration debate.

Point of Agreement	Hanson Says (quote / claim)	Brook Says (quote / claim)	Why It Matters

Reflection: In one or two sentences, identify the most surprising point of agreement you found, and explain why it surprised you.

Activity 2: Socratic Seminar Prep

A productive Socratic seminar depends on students arriving with questions that probe the strongest arguments of each side rather than the weakest. This preparation activity ensures every student has done the analytical work before the discussion begins.

Distribute the Socratic Seminar Prep worksheet (next page). Each student writes nine questions before the seminar: three for Victor Davis Hanson, three for Yaron Brook, and three for the class. On seminar day, collect the worksheets, redistribute them randomly so students ask questions written by classmates, and run a 25-minute student-led discussion. Reserve the final five minutes for students to identify which question generated the most productive disagreement and why.

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Socratic Seminar Prep: The Immigration Debate Revisited

Write nine questions to bring to the seminar. Each question must be open-ended (not yes/no) and must require evidence from the videos to answer well.

Three questions for Victor Davis Hanson: (probe his strongest claims, not his weakest)

1.

2.

3.

Three questions for Yaron Brook: (probe his strongest claims, not his weakest)

1.

2.

3.

Three questions for the class: (questions that ask classmates to weigh evidence from BOTH videos)

1.

2.

3.

Reflection (Write your response on the back of the page.): Which of your nine questions do you think will generate the strongest disagreement, and why?

Activity 3: Cost-Benefit Analysis

Both videos make implicit cost-benefit arguments. Victor Davis Hanson argues that today's immigration imposes cultural, civic, and security costs that outweigh its benefits. Yaron Brook argues that immigrants — legal and illegal — produce net economic and entrepreneurial benefits that outweigh the costs of any taxpayer-funded services they use.

Distribute the Cost-Benefit Analysis worksheet (next page). Students list at least two costs and two benefits for each position, drawing on specific evidence from the videos. After completing the chart, students write a two- to three-sentence conclusion identifying which position carries the better balance of costs and benefits and why.

Name _____

Date _____

Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Cost-Benefit Analysis: The Immigration Debate Revisited

For each position, list at least two costs and two benefits drawn from the videos. Costs may include cultural change, taxpayer-funded services, lost jobs, or weakened citizenship. Benefits may include entrepreneurship, tax revenue, filled jobs, economic growth, or expanded liberty.

Position	Costs (with source)	Benefits (with source)
Victor Davis Hanson: the United States should restrict immigration and reassert its traditional standards.		
Yaron Brook: the United States should welcome immigrants — even illegal ones — and reform welfare and visa law instead.		

Conclusion (2–3 sentences): Which position carries the better balance of costs and benefits, and why?

Activity 4: Strongest Argument Challenge

Students often dismiss the side they disagree with by responding only to its weakest points. This activity forces them to identify and grapple with the strongest claim from each video.

Have students work individually for fifteen minutes. Each student must identify the single strongest claim made by Victor Davis Hanson and the single strongest claim made by Yaron Brook, quote or paraphrase each claim accurately, and explain in writing why each one is the strongest claim that side made. After the writing time, lead a class discussion: Did students agree on which claims are strongest? What made those claims stand out? How does the strongest claim from each side change how a thoughtful citizen should approach immigration policy?

Activity 5: Real-World Connection

The immigration debate is not abstract. Federal, state, and local governments make decisions every week that test the arguments raised in these two videos.

Student directions:

1. Find a news article published within the last six months about U.S. immigration policy, a deportation case, the southern border, work authorization, or a related topic. Use a reputable source such as the Associated Press, Reuters, the BBC, or a major U.S. newspaper.
2. Summarize the situation in three to four sentences.
3. Identify which arguments from Victor Davis Hanson's side appear in the article (such as cultural assimilation, the rule of law, taxpayer-funded services, or border enforcement).
4. Identify which arguments from Yaron Brook's side appear in the article (such as economic contribution, entrepreneurship, taxes paid by undocumented workers, or restricting public benefits rather than restricting people).
5. In a closing paragraph, explain how the disagreement between these two videos applies to the current situation. Whose framework better explains what is happening, and why?
6. Submit the article (or a link to it) along with your written analysis.