

Making Connections

7. Locate several of the proposals for economic migration policies to which Clemens refers in paragraph 8. Choose one proposal to summarize and explain; then argue whether you think this proposal should be implemented or not. Support your argument with textual evidence from the proposal, Clemens's piece, or other readings from this chapter or elsewhere.
8. Do some research on the global economy and the status of international migration. Using your research, extend, support, or challenge Clemens's ideas. Shaun Raviv's "If People Could Immigrate Anywhere, Would Poverty Be Eliminated?" (p. 309) provides a good starting place for your research.

If People Could Immigrate Anywhere, Would Poverty Be Eliminated?

Shaun Raviv

An American journalist based in Ghana, Shaun Raviv moved to Swaziland in 2010 on a Fulbright Fellowship for playwriting. During his time there, he began sending stories on Swaziland, Africa, and migration to the *Atlantic* magazine, which now frequently publishes his work. He has also written articles for *Foreign Policy*, *Mosaic*, and *The Big Roundtable*,

including his narrative nonfiction piece "The Killers of Swaziland," which tells the story of serial killer David Simelane.

The following essay first appeared in the *Atlantic* in 2013, and as the title suggests, it considers the socioeconomic consequences of reimagining a world without borders. As you read, think carefully about the implications of this reconfiguration, and note the advantages and drawbacks of completely eliminating border restrictions.

What if there was a program that would cost nothing, improve the lives of millions of people from poorer nations, and double world GDP? At least one economist says that increased mobility of people is by far the biggest missed opportunity in development. And an informally aligned group of advocates is doing its best to make the world aware of the "open borders" movement, which suggests that individuals should be able to move between countries at will.

Vipul Naik is the face, or at least the voice, of open borders on the Internet. In March 2012, he launched Open Borders: The Case, a website dedicated to the idea. Naik, a Ph.D. candidate in mathematics at the University of Chicago, is striving for "a world where there is a strong presumption in favor of allowing people to migrate and where this presumption can be overridden or curtailed only under exceptional circumstances." Naik and his two primary co-writers, Nathan Smith and John Lee, parse research into immigration impacts, answering claims by those they call "restrictionists"—people who argue against open borders—and deconstructing writings on migration by economists, politicians, journalists, and philosophers.

The theory they espouse is that border restrictions of almost any kind are wrong, that they are antithetical to the fundamental human right of self-determination. To see their point, imagine an American in rural Mississippi being told she cannot move to New York City to seek a better

career. That is exactly what the U.S. and other developed nations are telling the millions of foreigners who are denied access to their rich labor markets.

"What if there was a program that would cost nothing, improve the lives of millions of people from poorer nations, and double world GDP?"

The moral case for open borders has perhaps been most eloquently described by Michael Huemer, a philosopher at the University of Colorado. In a blog post, he recounts the story of the young boy Starvin' Marvin, named after the skeletal *South Park* character. Speaking over the phone, Huemer told me Starvin' Marvin's hypothetical tale of woe:

[Marvin] is very hungry and is trying to travel to the marketplace to buy some food. Another person, Sam (Sam has a large number of nephews and nieces, so we'll call him Uncle Sam), decides to stop Marvin from going to the marketplace using coercion. He goes down there with his M16 and blocks the road. As a result, Marvin can't trade for food and, as a result, he starves. So then the question is, did Sam kill Marvin? Did he violate his rights? Almost anyone would say yes, Sam acted wrongly. In fact, if Marvin died as a result, then Sam killed him. It wouldn't be that Sam failed to help Marvin. No, he actively intervened. . . . This is analogous to the U.S. government's immigration policy. There are people who want to trade in our marketplace, in this case the labor market, and the government effectively prevents them from doing that, through use of force.

Marvin's story leaves open many questions that writers on the Open Borders site spend hours deliberating on the site's blog. If Uncle Sam doesn't prevent Marvin from coming to the market, won't Marvin take jobs from Sam's nieces and nephews? What if Marvin is a criminal or a terrorist? Will Marvin learn English and assimilate culturally? Won't Marvin just take advantage of the marketplace's welfare system? Can the marketplace even sustain more Marvins?

George Mason economist Bryan Caplan, whose writing at EconLog⁵ inspired Naik's interest in open borders, has offered "keyhole" solutions as a substitute for black and white, yes-or-no questions on immigration. "If immigrants hurt American workers, we can charge immigrants higher taxes or admission fees, and use the revenue to compensate the losers," Caplan wrote last year. "If immigrants burden American taxpayers, we can make immigrants ineligible for benefits. If immigrants hurt American culture, we can impose tests of English fluency and cultural literacy. If immigrants hurt American liberty, we can refuse to give them the right to vote. Whatever your complaint happens to be, immigration restrictions are a needlessly draconian remedy."

While Caplan advocates for keyhole solutions over the status quo, he would pull the trigger immediately on open borders if given the chance: "My conscience wouldn't allow anything else." If people are so afraid of what might happen with open borders, says Caplan, then we should just implement it gradually. "But it's very easy for you to say that when you're in the first world living a comfortable life," he told me. "If you are living in abject poverty in Haiti, on the other hand, this go-slow attitude seems rather callous."

Though he generally disagrees with the standard arguments against increased immigration (that immigrants take jobs from native workers, increase crime, take more out of the system in welfare than they put back in taxes, and hurt their countries of origin due to so-called "brain drain"), Caplan understands that some developed-world workers could see a minor decrease in real pay. But whatever downsides there may be, he wrote in a 2011 post, "the upside of open borders would be the rapid elimination of absolute poverty on earth."

To prove the economic power of open borders, supporters often turn to the work of Michael Clemens, a development economist and one of the strongest voices for loosening border restrictions. Clemens is not an open borders advocate, but his research and writings make it very clear that movement of people across international borders should be a much higher priority than it is now. He is, he told me, "in favor of a vastly more sensible way of regulating movement," if not "a utopia of completely free movement." Based out of the Center for Global Development, a think tank in D.C., he has spent much of the past half-decade compiling international labor mobility statistics that are, as he says, "gasp-inducing."

Barriers to emigration may—according to Clemens's paper—"place one of the fattest of all wedges between humankind's current welfare and its potential welfare." Though he affirms that the research on migration's effects is far from complete, what Clemens has found "suggests that the gains from reducing emigration restrictions are likely to be enormous, measured in tens of trillions of dollars." Remove all remaining barriers to trade, says Clemens, and all remaining barriers to capital flow, and it still wouldn't compensate for the inefficiencies created by current global labor mobility restrictions. His research indicates that allowing free movement of all people across international borders could double world GDP.

According to Clemens, we are all victims of an epic intuition fail. "Development is about people, not places," he has said many times over, and often the best way to make a person richer is by allowing them to move to another place. We don't really care about helping poverty-stricken Liberia, we care about helping poverty-stricken Liberians. It sounds almost too simple at first: A very large percentage of people who have gone

from extreme poverty to relative financial stability have done so by moving across borders. So why don't we just let more people move?

In 2008, Clemens and his frequent co-writer, Harvard economist Lant Pritchett, came up with a new statistic called "income per natural." Their goal was to show "the mean annual income of persons born in a given country, regardless of where that person now resides." They found that large percentages of people from Haiti, Mexico, and India who live above international poverty lines don't actually reside in their home countries. "For example, among Haitians who live either in the United States or Haiti and live on more than \$10 per day—about a third of the U.S. "poverty" line—four out of five live in the United States," Clemens wrote. "Emigration from Haiti, as a force for Haitians' poverty reduction, may be at least as important as any economic change that has occurred within Haiti."

The trillions of dollars are lost by not maximizing human potential. Workers in the developing world can be much more productive when they are not locked in places with crumbled infrastructure, poor academic institutions, and mass corruption. "It's the biggest arbitrage opportunity in the world," Clemens told me. "It's hard to find a cell phone or pair of jeans that sells for a thousand percent price difference in two different countries, and yet the labor of a McDonald's worker, the labor of a child care worker, the labor of a construction worker, does sell for thousand percent differences between Haiti and the United States."

If wealthy nations open their borders, won't native workers lose their jobs or see their pay shrink? Not so, according to Clemens. He and his co-authors, through study of all the available economic literature, have found that decades of immigration of tens of millions of people to the United States has reduced real wages for the average American worker by fractions of a percent, if at all. Meanwhile, immigrants to the U.S. from developing countries can increase their income by 100 percent, or 1,000 percent. "Immigration is very, very far from being a zero-sum game of 'their poverty or ours,'" Clemens wrote in 2010. "Within ranges that even slightly resemble current migration levels, it is rather simply 'their poverty or their prosperity,' while we remain prosperous."

Clemens's research also challenges the notion that immigrants take away jobs from Americans. In agriculture, for example, he has estimated that for every three seasonal workers who are brought in, one American job is created across all sectors. Directly, workers need managers, and more often than not those managers are Americans. Indirectly, workers buy things, which means more Americans are needed to sell and produce those things. And yet, Clemens told me, "when a bus of 60 Mexicans is

coming up from the border, nobody looks at it and says 'Ah, there's 20 American jobs.'"

But some immigration restrictionists have far bigger worries than 15 workers losing small percentages of their salaries. There are many possible negative consequences of open borders. Naik points out that "political externalities" may be a major drawback of allowing anyone who wants to move to stable, wealthy nations to do so. Gallup polls have found that 700 million people would like to permanently move to another country, many of them from developing nations with failed political systems. If the U.S. or another wealthy nation were to see a sudden large increase in immigrants from these countries, it's possible that the new populace will vote for bad policies in their new home. As Naik puts it, some people believe that "if you're coming from a place that has a problem, you are probably part of the problem, and if you move to a new place you might bring the problem with you."

But if loosening border restrictions really is the key to a much richer world, what does anyone do about it? I asked John Lee, a regular contributor to the Open Borders site, what someone with unlimited money should do if they want to convince people to support open borders. Mark Zuckerberg,^o for example.

"The four words, 'I favor open borders,'" Lee told me. "That would be the biggest thing he can do. You really need to de-radicalize the idea." When I spoke to Lee, it was several weeks before the leaked announcement that Zuckerberg, along with other Silicon Valley leaders, would be forming a political action group, officially called Fwd.us. The group will focus much of their attention and \$50 million on immigration reform, particularly high-skill immigration, a fairly uncontroversial issue that Zuckerberg has spoken out on in the past.

But the goals of the group are still small in scope compared to the changes championed by Clemens or the open borders advocates. The first principle stated on the Fwd.us site is "comprehensive immigration reform that allows for the hiring of the best and brightest." That "best and brightest" qualification makes this goal the opposite of comprehensive. It is not the type of Earth-altering change that Zuckerberg is known for. If the group makes the U.S. an easier destination for the world's best programmers, designers, and thinkers, it will certainly be very helpful to those who need help the least. But it won't drastically change the direction in which the world is headed. It won't, as Zuckerberg says in his *Washington*

Mark Zuckerberg: cofounder, chairman, and chief executive of Facebook.

Post op-ed, “ensure that all members of our society gain from the rewards of the modern knowledge economy.” And as Nathan Smith of Open Borders writes, “If it’s the common good of mankind he’s after . . . he ought to try to open the world’s borders generally, not to help America win some competition for talent.”

Lobbying his unparalleled audience, the largest online community the world has ever known, to create an army of open borders supporters—that is the kind of connect-the-world change that Zuckerberg has already created with Facebook. Perhaps not this year, or even five years down the line, but Zuckerberg might eventually use his clout to start a global debate about the borders that keep Marvin from the marketplace. The lure of trillions of dollars for all, the potential elimination of world poverty, and a solid moral footing preached by Naik and Clemens probably won’t convince a majority without backing from major business leaders.

“Open borders will become a reality when the public stops believing that immigrants are a threat,” sociologist Fabio Rojas recently wrote, comparing the open borders movement to the gay rights movement. “Even if a pro-immigration referendum fails to pass, it will still serve the function of forcing the issue onto the public stage. These actions won’t change the minds of those strongly committed to anti-immigration policy. Instead, they will make immigration seem ‘normal’ to a later generation of people.”

Understanding the Text

1. Define and explain the following terms: *open borders*, *self-determination*, and *keyhole solution*.
2. Raviv presents what he identifies as the moral case for open borders. Fully explain the arguments and reasons that support this position.
3. Identify and explain the keyhole solutions proposed by Bryan Caplan, whom Raviv quotes. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of these solutions (pars. 5–7).
4. In paragraph 10, Raviv quotes Michael Clemens, who insists that “[d]evelopment is about people, not places.” Explain what Clemens means and how Raviv develops this idea.

Reflection and Response

5. Raviv presents ample and varied evidence to support the claims regarding the need for open borders. He also appeals to readers by using elements of classical argument. Whether or not you agree with his position, what evidence, examples, and rhetorical elements do you find the most persuasive? Explain why.

6. When asked how to go about “loosening border restrictions,” John Lee stressed the “need to de-radicalize the idea” (pars. 16–17). What does de-radicalizing involve? Do you see it occurring today? If so, offer an example and explain where and how. If not, explain why.
7. Choose one of the arguments regarding open borders that Raviv presents about which you feel most strongly, and critically respond to it. In your response, clearly identify the issue and the terms of the debate.

Making Connections

8. What is your position on open borders? Write a fully developed essay staking out your position, using sound reasoning, evidence, additional research, and examples to support and develop your claims and explanations.
9. Read John Eger’s “Art as a Universal Language” (p. 218) and Ann Marie Leimer’s “Cruel Beauty, Precarious Breath” (p. 222). Explain how these authors’ ideas extend or support the arguments that Raviv presents.