

We should not overlook the ethical muddle of Frank's call for coercive redistribution. He disapproves of individuals' spending money they have peacefully acquired in ways that give them satisfaction, but insists that the government forcibly take money away from the wealthy so that egalitarians can pat themselves on the back. Frédéric Bastiat called that legal plunder.

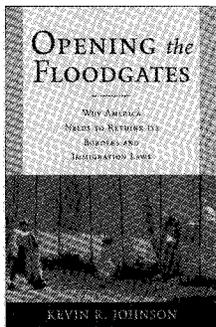
Frank has spent many years writing books and devising phrases to remind us that he disapproves of status symbols (*Luxury Fever*, 1999), overpaid superstars (*The Winner Take All Economy*, 1995), and people who try to keep up with the Joneses (*Choosing the Right Pond*, 1985). This slim volume repeats those egalitarian themes in a condensed way. Minimizing the surplus verbiage starkly reveals that the author's strong opinions remain based on remarkably weak evidence. **FEE**

Alan Reynolds (areynolds@cato.org) is a senior fellow with the Cato Institute and the author of *Income and Wealth*.

Opening the Floodgates: Why America Needs to Rethink its Borders and Immigration Law

by Kevin R. Johnson
New York University Press • 2007 • 304 pages • \$35.00

Reviewed by George C. Leef



In recent years there have been numerous highly publicized federal raids against companies that had violated the law by employing illegal aliens. The hapless people were deported and the companies slapped with stiff penalties. Generally, the reaction has been, “Well, it’s about time the government got tough!”

For the most part, the strident voices of the anti-immigration crowd have drowned out and intimidated those who do not believe that illegal immigration is a threat to the nation. There are, however, some people willing to stand up for the right of people to move across international borders freely. One of them is Philippe Legrain, whose book *Immigrants: Your Country Needs Them* was reviewed in the May 2007 issue of *The Freeman*. Another is Kevin Johnson, a law professor at

the University of California – Davis. His book *Opening the Floodgates* makes an impassioned case for an open-borders policy. Although the book has some serious flaws, it makes a worthwhile contribution to the debate over this key issue.

Johnson writes, “To the extent that the idea of open borders is even mentioned in public discussions, it is immediately brushed off as hopelessly impractical and not worthy of in-depth analysis and consideration as a possible policy option.” He wants to change that by showing the numerous, frequently tragic consequences of our current, highly restrictive immigration policy and emphasizing the benefits of scrapping it in favor of openness.

The most visible harm resulting from the status quo is that many people die every year in the effort to move to the United States. It’s strange that Americans who used to be appalled when East German border guards killed people trying to leave are mostly indifferent when Haitians drown or Mexicans die of heat and dehydration trying to leave those countries. Johnson shows that the death toll from our immigration laws is very high, but largely ignored.

Another harm is that illegal immigrants are outside the protection of the legal system. Unscrupulous employers can and do cheat them. Sometimes the immigrants are hardly more than slaves. Anti-immigrationists retort that those unfortunate people have only themselves to blame for having had the temerity to disobey our laws. Johnson finds this morally chilling. It is.

Johnson aptly compares our efforts to stop immigration to Prohibition. The latter didn’t prevent people from drinking alcoholic beverages but instead led to unsafe products sold by criminal syndicates, violence, and a gigantic waste of resources. Our prohibition of immigration has similar consequences. The parallels are strong and Americans ought to ponder them.

What about the impact immigrants have on our culture? Writers like Samuel Huntington wring their hands over the “damage” that dark-skinned and non-English-speaking immigrants (legal and illegal) inflict on “America’s” culture. Johnson says: Relax. Similar attacks were made in the past against the Irish, Italians, Chinese, and other groups. But more to the point, there

is no reason to believe that any harm comes to us when different peoples settle here. Besides, he says, recent immigrants seem to be “assimilating” just fine.

I think Johnson would have made a stronger case if he had, apropos of that last point, challenged the notion that “assimilation” is really important. What does it matter if a group lives in the United States and chooses to keep to itself, speaking some language other than English, adhering to traditional customs, and ignoring American political institutions? The Amish are a very much unassimilated people, but there is no reason to complain about them. Live and let live—as long as an individual abides by that rule, there is no moral ground for interfering with him.

That point is something of a quibble, but there are more serious problems with the book.

First, Johnson’s grasp of economics is weak. For example, he takes seriously the notion of “the multiplier effect,” long ago shredded for its errors. And he repeatedly extols labor unions as if they have the power to transform low-paid jobs into “decently” paid jobs. The impact of unions is greatly exaggerated, and they have little or no impact at the bottom of the labor scale.

More important, Johnson thinks it would be good policy to allow free immigration, but then attempt through taxation to “even things out.” If we had open borders, he says that “business” would gain but low-paid workers would lose because of added competition in the labor market. Therefore he advocates taxation to compel the supposed winners to pay the supposed losers.

That’s where he really loses me. Increasing freedom to migrate should not be offset by decreasing freedom elsewhere.

FEE

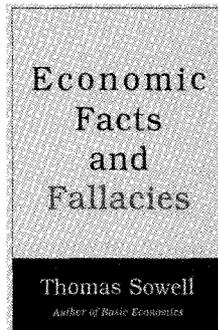
George Leef (georgeleef@aol.com) is book review editor of The Freeman.

Economic Facts and Fallacies

by Thomas Sowell

Basic Books • 2007 • 221 pages • \$26.00

Reviewed by Gary M. Galles



You don’t have to read far to find the focus of Thomas Sowell’s latest book, *Economic Facts and Fallacies*. It begins by quoting John Adams—“Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence”—then immediately argues for the importance of debunking economic errors because so many policies are based on false beliefs and fallacious thinking.

Economic Facts and Fallacies exposes an array of widely held beliefs to careful logical scrutiny and evidence—evidence that is usually ignored by those who favor interventionist government policies. Time and again, readers are shown that support for expanding government control arises from mistaken reasoning and interpretation of data.

First is Sowell’s discussion of four core fallacies we frequently encounter in public-policy discussions: the zero-sum fallacy (ignoring that voluntary economic arrangements are positive-sum); the fallacy of composition (particularly that robbing Peter to pay Paul benefits society simply because it benefits Paul); the chess-piece fallacy (assuming that some authority can achieve desired results as though he were moving chessmen on a board, ignoring people’s desires and incentives); and the open-ended fallacy (that commitments to ever-more health care, safety, open space, and so on, are sensible in a world of scarcity). Even if people read only that section, they would greatly benefit from Sowell’s logic.

The bulk of the book consists of six chapters dealing with subjects where economic misunderstanding abounds: the urban economy, male-female comparisons, academia, income, race, and the Third World. In each of those sections Sowell rebuts a group of beliefs that are widely accepted despite their fallaciousness and incompatibility with the evidence.