



# CENTER FOR IMMIGRATION STUDIES

Center for Immigration Studies (CIS) was founded in 1985 as a project directly under the control of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). The Washington, D.C.-based think tank portrays itself as a mainstream organization that studies the impact of immigration in the United States.

More accurately, CIS is part of the John Tanton Network, a web of controversial anti-immigrant organizations orchestrated by John Tanton, the founder of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). An oral history by John Tanton describes how CIS came to be:

*"... (W)e were running our publication and research efforts out of FAIR. It seemed that ...outsiders might see these publications as just serving the interests of the organization, rather than fairly assessing the issues. So it was decided that we should set up an independent and more academic effort that would be removed from the daily fray...I wrote the first description of such an organization and listed fifteen or twenty projects that it could undertake. But there was a dispute on the FAIR board, not so much about whether this was needed, but about whether we could afford it. Where was the money going to come from? But we nevertheless did find some money. We actually donated several of our board members and donors to the Center for Immigration Studies, as it was called...CIS has gone on to be quite successful, and is completely independent of FAIR."*

With a network populated by individuals with ties to political extremists, including white nationalists, CIS was created to establish credibility for FAIR. Tanton himself described the objective of CIS as an attempt "(t)o expand our fund-raising machine... We need to get CIS fully-funded and entrenched as a major Washington think-tank, one that can venture into issues which FAIR is not yet ready to raise." A review of IRS Forms 990 shows that CIS operated on an income of over \$1.4 million in 2007, the latest year records are available.

However, like Tanton and FAIR, the Center for Immigration Studies is clearly driven by partisan ideas often dressed up in academic language rather than neutral research that serves the public interest. In a September 1985 memo obtained by Center for New

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Community, Tanton further clarified the role of CIS:

"The Immigration Reform Movement is losing (sic) ground in the Battle of Ideas," Tanton wrote. "We realized on starting FAIR in 1979 that the immigration reform battle would be won in the end by the side that had the best ideas...If we do not successfully meet this challenge, we'll surely lose (sic). After careful and prolonged study, the FAIR Board has concluded that a 'Think Tank' on the scale of Worldwatch Institute is needed. For credibility, it will need to be independent of FAIR, though the Center for Immigration Studies, as we're calling it, is starting off as a project of FAIR."

The CIS role in the John Tanton Network has been remarkably effective as a vehicle to attract research funding from sympathetic foundations. This has allowed CIS to sponsor dozens of panel discussions, publish a variety of reports, and regularly place op-ed pieces not only in conservative and right-wing periodicals, but also in major, mainstream daily newspapers. This has served to reinforce the Tanton Network's false mainstream image.

Rather than provide realistic solutions on immigration, CIS seeks to bury Congress, journalists, and the public under an avalanche of reports, backgrounders, position papers and panel outcomes in an effort to mainstream the John Tanton Network. According to the well-respected civil rights organization, the Southern Poverty Law Center, "CIS often manipulates data, relying on shaky statistics or faulty logic to come to the preordained conclusion that immigration is bad for this country."

The background of CIS should raise concern for all professional journalists who are seeking both informed facts and opinions on the subject of immigration. The Center for Immigration Studies has proven not to be a credible voice in the debate on immigration.

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