

## Immigration to the United States

*by Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley*

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*Nearly 1 million  
foreigners come to  
the United States  
each year.*

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*Immigration accounts  
for about one-third of  
U.S. population  
growth.*

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*Economics and politics  
favor a continued flow  
of immigrants in the  
next century.*

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The suggested citation, if you quote from this publication, is: Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley, "Immigration to the United States," *Population Bulletin* vol. 54, no. 2 (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, June 1999).

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ISSN 0032-468X

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The authors thank Frank Bean and Susan Martin for their helpful comments and suggestions.

# Immigration to the United States

*by Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley*

Nearly 70,000 foreigners arrive in the United States every day. Most of these travelers are visitors, not settlers. More than 60,000 are tourists, business people, students, or foreign workers who are welcomed at airports and border crossings. About 2,200 daily arrivals are immigrants or refugees who have been invited to become permanent residents of the United States. Finally, about 5,000 foreigners make unauthorized entries each day. About 4,000 of them are apprehended just after they cross the U.S.-Mexico border. But nearly 1,000 elude detection, or slip from legal to illegal status by violating the terms of their visas. Many will remain, while others will return to their home countries.

Is the arrival of so many people in the United States to be welcomed or feared? There is no single answer, which helps explain why Americans are ambivalent about immigration. The United States has always celebrated its immigrant heritage. Americans tell and retell stories of courageous and energetic settlers from abroad. But Americans also have worried since the country's founding about potential economic, political, and cultural disruption caused by immigrant communities.

In the 1880s, as immigration numbers surged, public concern that too many "undesirable" people were entering the country led the U.S.

Photo removed for copyright reasons.

*Immigrants are transforming the U.S. population at the century's end just as they did at the century's beginning.*

Congress to place limits on who could immigrate. Prostitutes, low-skilled contract workers, and Chinese—among others—were barred from entry. At the turn of the century, more than 1 million immigrants entered each year, primarily from southern and eastern Europe. The American populace, which came primarily from northern and western European stock, felt that there were too many immigrants and that they were coming from the "wrong" countries.

These concerns led to quantitative as well as qualitative restrictions on immigration in the 1920s to try to preserve and perpetuate the northern and western European majority.

In 1965, at the height of the U.S. civil rights movement, Congress passed a law that transformed the basis for selecting immigrants. The new law abolished national quotas and replaced them with a complex system that grants priority to three categories of foreigners: those with relatives living in the United States, people needed to fill vacant U.S. jobs, and refugees. The 1965 law had unexpected consequences. The main countries of origin for U.S. immigrants shifted from Europe to Latin America and Asia. In addition, changes in the U.S. economy and society in the 1970s and 1980s and growing emigration pressures in Mexico and Central America made controlling unauthorized migration a major political issue.

At the end of the 20th century, immigration is as contentious an issue as it was at the century's beginning. Opinions about immigration generally lie between two extreme views: "no immigrants" and "open borders." The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), for example, favors severely reducing U.S. immigration. FAIR charges that immigration contributes to excessive population growth and environmental degradation, displaces low-skilled American workers, depresses average wage levels, and threatens the cultural bonds that hold Americans together. FAIR calls for a stop to most immigration for several years to allow recent arrivals and Americans time to adjust to one another. Minimal immigration of 200,000 to 300,000 a year would be allowed during the adjustment period.

*The Wall Street Journal*, the leading U.S. newspaper for the business world, exemplifies the other side of the immigration debate. *The Journal* advocated a five-word constitutional amendment: "there shall be open borders"—in a 1990 editorial.<sup>1</sup> *Wall Street Journal* editorials often cite the benefits of immigration for the U.S. economy and

labor force—more people mean more consumers and more workers, which helps the economy grow.

Groups such as the Organization of Chinese Americans and the Emerald Isle Immigration Center favor immigration from particular countries or regions. The Catholic Church and some other religious organizations oppose immigration controls because they believe that national borders artificially divide humanity.<sup>2</sup> Other people and groups support continued immigration as a defining part of the American national identity.

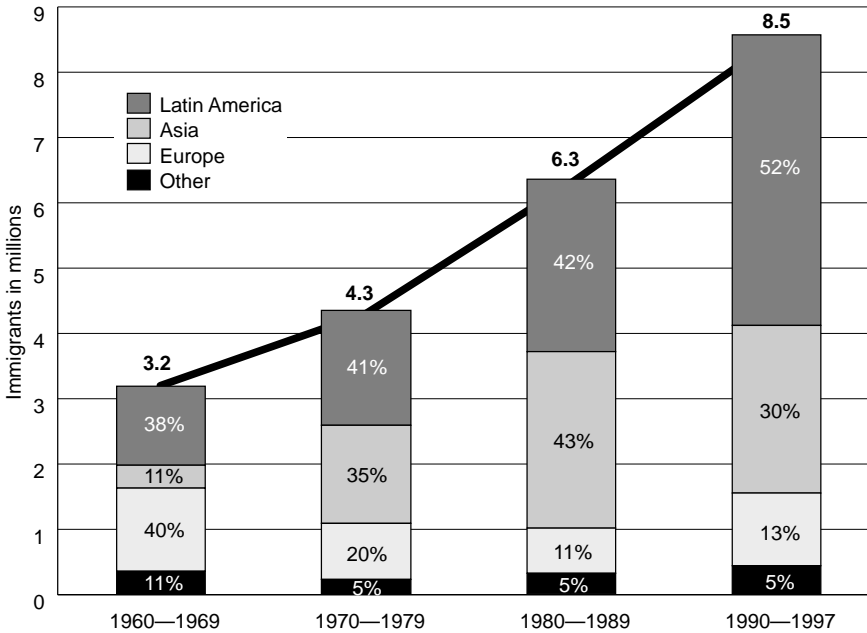
The United States is a nation of immigrants, as reflected in its motto *e pluribus unum*—"from many, one." U.S. presidents frequently remind native-born Americans that their forebears left another country to begin anew in the United States. Immigration permits individuals to better themselves financially. Many believe that it also strengthens the United States. The Commission on Immigration Reform, established by Congress, reflected a widely shared American opinion when it asserted in 1997 that "a properly regulated system of legal immigration is in the national interest of the United States."<sup>3</sup>

Yet immigration changes society, and it raises fundamental questions for Americans. Who are we? What kind of a society have we built, and whom shall we welcome to it? What should we do to encourage the integration of newcomers? How should we deal with those who arrive uninvited?

This *Population Bulletin* examines current immigration patterns and policies in the United States, reviews the peaks and troughs of immigration flows, and provides a historical perspective on contemporary trends. The nation's approach to controlling the number and characteristics of newcomers has seen many changes throughout its history. In the past, as in the present, immigration laws have often produced dramatic consequences, some of which were unintended. Resolving the fundamental economic, social, and political issues raised by immigration requires weigh-

Figure 1

## U.S. Immigrants by Region of Birth, 1960s to 1990s



Note: The total for 1990 to 1997 includes 2.2 million immigrants who were legalized in 1987 and 1988 and granted immigrant status in the early 1990s. The sum of the percentages may exceed 100 because of rounding.

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Annual Report*, no. 1 (January 1999), and *Statistical Yearbooks* from 1970.

ing the choices or trade-offs between widely shared but competing goals in American society.

## Patterns and Policies

More than 8 million immigrants were admitted to the United States between 1990 and 1997—an average of about 1 million a year. The volume of immigration flows has been increasing since the 1950s. The average annual inflow brought about 330,000 people in the 1960s, 450,000 people in the 1970s, and 600,000 people in the 1980s. The origins of immigrants have changed. During the 1960s, most immigrants were from Europe; now they are mostly from Latin America and Asia (see Figure 1).

At least half of the people who become immigrants each year are al-

ready living in the United States under a temporary visa or under some other legal status, or as undocumented aliens. Changes in legislation sometimes skew immigration statistics for certain years. More than 1.8 million foreigners were granted immigrant status in one year, 1991, although many of these people had lived in the United States for years. The year 1991 marked their change to legal immigrant status under legalization programs in 1987 and 1988.

Under U.S. law, **immigrants** are foreigners who are entitled to live and work permanently in the United States and, after five years, to become naturalized U.S. citizens. Legal immigration is sometimes described as “entering the United States through the front door.” There are four types of front-door entrants. The largest category by far is relatives of U.S. residents. In 1997, two-thirds of immigrants were granted entry because

**Table 1**  
**Persons Entering the United States, FY1997**

| Category                                       | Number of persons<br>FY1997 |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <b>Immigrants</b>                              | 798,378                     |
| Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens           | 322,440                     |
| Other family-sponsored immigrants              | 213,331                     |
| Refugees and asylees                           | 112,158                     |
| Employment-based                               | 90,607                      |
| Diversity immigrants                           | 49,374                      |
| Other immigrants                               | 10,468                      |
| <b>Estimated emigration</b>                    | -220,000                    |
| <b>Nonimmigrants</b>                           | 26,318,858                  |
| Tourists                                       | 21,713,003                  |
| Business visitors                              | 4,283,425                   |
| Foreign students and dependents                | 514,215                     |
| Temporary workers/trainees                     | 378,085                     |
| <b>Illegal immigration</b>                     |                             |
| Apprehensions                                  | 1,536,520                   |
| Deportations                                   | -114,060                    |
| Alien smugglers                                | 1,262                       |
| Estimated illegal population                   | 5,275,000                   |
| Additional illegal settlers per year (1992-96) | 275,000                     |

Note: Estimates of emigration and illegal immigration are not official.

Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Annual Report*, no. 1 (January 1999); and unpublished data.

family members who already lived in the United States formally petitioned the U.S. government to admit them (see Table 1).

Spouses, children, and parents of U.S. citizens may enter the United States without limit—322,000 entered in FY1997. Immediate relatives of noncitizens face longer waits. In early 1999, Mexican immigrants who were not citizens could expect to wait five years for their spouses and children to join them in the United States. Other family members of U.S. citizens, such as adult sisters and brothers, have annual limits and long waiting lists to obtain immigrant visas. U.S. citizens from the Philippines can expect a 20-year wait for their brothers and sisters to gain immigrant visas.

The second-largest category of immigrants is that of refugees and asylees: 14 percent of all immigrants in 1997 were foreigners who had been granted safe haven (see Box 1, page 8). In FY1996 (the latest year for which we have data), about 40 percent

of the refugees who arrived were from the former Soviet Union, followed by 16 percent from Bosnia. Refugees and asylees may become immigrants after one year of residence.

The third-largest group consists of immigrants and their family members who were admitted for economic or employment reasons. Employment-based immigration includes priority workers with “extraordinary ability” in the arts or sciences, multinational executives, workers holding professional or advanced degrees, clergy, wealthy investors, and low-skilled and unskilled workers.

In 1990, some U.S. businesses and other groups feared a shortage of skilled labor, especially of scientists and engineers. This prompted the United States to raise the annual limit on the number of immigrants with advanced degrees who could be admitted under this category. Most of the 91,000 economic immigrants and their family members recorded in FY1997 immigration statistics were already living in the United States; the 1990 law enabled them to change their status from nonimmigrant or unauthorized migrant to immigrant.

The remaining miscellaneous categories of immigrants are dominated by the diversity category. Some 49,000 diversity immigrants arrived in FY1997. Since 1990, the diversity program has permitted the entry of up to 55,000 immigrants a year from countries that sent fewer than 50,000 immigrants in the previous five years. Applicants are selected through a lottery. Because many immigrants from Asia and Latin America are admitted under other categories, most diversity visas go to nationals of European and African countries.

The diversity program addressed an unintended consequence of the 1965 amendments to U.S. immigration law. Giving priority to family unification meant that, after 1965, U.S. immigration policy favored the relatives of those who had recently immigrated. The visas reserved for economic immigrants favored those who already had with ties to U.S. employers.



These laws perpetuated immigration from Latin America and Asia and made it difficult for new immigrant streams to emerge from Europe or Africa that would diversify the national and ethnic origins of U.S. immigrants. In the first three years of the program, 40 percent of diversity visas were reserved for Irish immigrants.<sup>4</sup>

Once they reach the United States, immigrants normally stay. The INS estimates that between 1901 and 1990, the number of people emigrating from the United States was equivalent to about 31 percent of the number immigrating. Emigration peaked during the depression of the 1930s, when more people moved out of the United States than moved in. Emigration during the 1980s was estimated to be 1.6 million, equivalent to about 22 percent of immigration.<sup>5</sup> An estimated 220,000 U.S. residents emigrate each year in the 1990s. Many are believed to be foreign residents returning to their home countries.

**Nonimmigrant visa holders** are people who come to the United States to visit, work, or study. The United States is eager to attract most types of nonimmigrants—airlines and hotels advertise for foreign tourists—so there are no limits on most categories of nonimmigrants. Some people make several visits each year. The number of nonimmigrant admissions has more than doubled in the past 15 years, primarily because of the growing number of tourists.

Foreigners also arrive to work temporarily in the United States—378,000 temporary foreign workers arrived in FY1997. They included such diverse people as Canadian hockey players, Mexicans who harvested tobacco in North Carolina and Virginia, Indian computer programmers, and European artists and entertainers.

Two categories of nonimmigrants—temporary workers and foreign students—are of special importance for tracking population trends because they often lead to more immigration. The number of temporary foreign workers has increased five-fold since 1980, led by the

H-1B visa category for professionals in specialty occupations. The H-1B program was revised in 1990 to permit up to 65,000 foreigners with a bachelor's degree or higher to work in the United States for six years. A large share of H-1B workers are employed by U.S. computer and software companies. Some American professionals assert that the H-1B visa holders depress wages and take jobs away from U.S.-born workers. U.S. employers counter by saying there are not enough qualified U.S.-born applicants for the jobs they must fill and that they need the foreign professionals.

In April 1996, an audit of the H-1B program by the U.S. Department of Labor's inspector general concluded the program should be abolished. Instead of getting from abroad "highly skilled, unique individuals who are not available" in the United States, according to the inspector general, most employers use the H-1B program as a "probationary employment tryout program for illegal aliens, foreign students, and foreign visitors." The report said that the program legalizes foreigners whom the sponsoring employer has already hired.<sup>6</sup>

The controversy surrounding the H-1B program prompted its revision in 1998. The number of H-1B visas available was increased by 142,500 over the next three years, but U.S. employers were required to pay a \$500 fee to renew an H-1B visa. These fees are to be spent on scholarships and training for Americans to learn programming skills, thus reducing the need for H-1B workers in the future.<sup>7</sup> Nearly 40 percent of the nonimmigrants entering the United States with H-1B visas between 1993 and 1996 were from Asia; India was the origin of 17 percent. Europe contributed about 38 percent of H-1B workers, led by the United Kingdom.

Foreign students make up another important category of nonimmigrants. The Institute of International Education reported that there were more than 480,000 foreign students in the United States during the 1997–1998 academic year. Many students also

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bring their spouses and children—some 514,000 foreign students and their family members were admitted to the United States in FY1997. More than one-half of the foreign students in the United States are from Asian countries, led by the Japanese and Chinese, with about 47,000 students each, and Koreans, with nearly 43,000 students. New York University, Boston University, Columbia University, and the University of Southern California enroll the most foreign students—between 4,000 and 5,000 each in the 1997–1998 academic year.<sup>8</sup>

Foreign students seek entry to the United States by applying for admission to one of the 22,300 U.S. educa-

tional institutions that have been approved to admit foreign students. After the student is admitted, designated school officials in these institutions provide the foreign student with an I-20 Form, which the student takes to a U.S. consulate in his or her country. To get a student visa, the individual must convince the consular officer that he or she has sufficient English language ability and funds to attend school in the United States.

The U.S. government encourages the enrollment of foreign students in U.S. colleges and universities for several reasons. It believes that American students benefit from interacting with foreign students and that scientific

### *Box 1*

## **Immigrants, Refugees, Nonimmigrants, and Unauthorized Aliens**

All persons in the United States are defined by law as being either citizens or aliens. Aliens are persons who are citizens of another country. Under U.S. law, aliens may stay in the United States legally as immigrants, refugees or asylees, or as nonimmigrants (such as tourists or foreign students). If they do not fall into one of these legal categories, they are considered unauthorized, or undocumented.

**Immigrants** are citizens of other countries who have been granted a visa that allows them to live and work permanently in the United States and to become naturalized U.S. citizens. Immigrant visas are normally issued to foreigners at U.S. consulates in their home countries. The visa entitles them to enter the United States if they hold a valid passport from their home country. Once here, immigrants receive a card from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) indicating they are permanent residents. This card used to be green, so immigrants are still referred to frequently as “greencard” holders.

**Refugees** are persons outside their country of citizenship who fear persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion if

they return. Every year, refugees are resettled in the United States. The number to be admitted is determined annually by the president in consultation with Congress. In FY1996 (October 1995 to September 1996), the refugee ceiling was set at 118,500. Asylum applicants arrive in the United States first and then request safe haven. In FY1996, 128,200 people applied for asylum. Most asylum applications are rejected. In FY1996, 22 percent of the applications considered were recognized as refugees and permitted to resettle in the United States.

**Nonimmigrant** visa holders are persons who are granted temporary entry into the United States for a specific purpose, such as visiting, working, or studying. In FY1996, 25 million nonimmigrants were admitted—80 percent were tourists (visitors for pleasure) and 15 percent were business visitors. Nonimmigrants who enter and leave the United States several times are counted each time. Many Mexicans and Canadians are not included in these admissions statistics, however. Mexicans with border-crossing cards can enter U.S. border areas and stay for up to three days without being counted as a nonimmigrant admission, and Canadians can enter the

progress in the United States is enhanced when especially able foreign students study and conduct research in American institutions. The reputation of the United States abroad is advanced by allowing foreign students and academics to study and work in the country. Also, some colleges derive significant income from the tuition paid by foreign students.

Some foreigners use their educational experience in the United States as a route to employment or immigration. Foreign students are required to have enough money to study without working in the United States, but many seek permission to work while they study, and some look for U.S. em-

ployers who will sponsor them for immigration. A three-year Pilot Foreign Student Employment Program was abandoned in 1995 after the U.S. Department of Labor found that foreign students were using it to obtain full-time jobs.<sup>9</sup> The National Science Foundation reported that 63 percent of the 55,000 foreign-born students who earned doctorates in science and engineering from U.S. institutions between 1988 and 1996 planned to remain in the United States. The percentage of Chinese and Indian students planning to stay was especially high—more than 80 percent. The percentage of Korean and Taiwanese students intending to stay in the

United States and stay for up to six months without a visa.

The United States has 25 types of nonimmigrant visas. These include A1 visas for ambassadors, B2 visas for tourists, P1 visas for foreign sports stars who play on U.S. teams, and TN visas for Canadians and Mexicans entering the United States to work under the provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Some foreigners are able to visit the United States legally without a visa. The Visa Waiver Pilot Program permits visitors from 26 countries, mostly in Europe, to enter without visas for up to 90 days if they have round-trip tickets.

**Unauthorized or undocumented migrants** are foreigners in the United States with no valid visa. About 60 percent of the unauthorized migrants in the United States are believed to have slipped across the Mexico-U.S. border without inspection by immigration control personnel. The other 40 percent entered the United States legally, often as tourists, and then violated the terms of their entry by staying too long or by taking paid work.

The INS estimated that there were 5 million foreigners living without authorization in the United States in October 1996, up from 3.9 million in

October 1992. This suggests an increase of 275,000 a year. About 80 percent of unauthorized foreigners are from Latin America, Canada, and the Caribbean. The INS estimates there are about 2.7 million unauthorized Mexicans in the United States, followed by 335,000 Guatemalans, and 120,000 Canadians. There were also an estimated 70,000 Polish and 30,000 Irish undocumented foreigners.

Some 2 million (or 40 percent) of all unauthorized immigrants lived in California in 1996, followed by 700,000 in Texas (14 percent), 540,000 in New York (11 percent), 350,000 in Florida (7 percent), 290,000 in Illinois (6 percent), and 135,000 in New Jersey (3 percent). Unauthorized migrants account for about 2 percent of all U.S. residents, but the percentage is much higher in the large immigration states. An estimated 6 percent of California residents and 4 percent of Texas residents may be undocumented aliens.

#### Reference

Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1996* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997).

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*Tighter enforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border entry points appears to have encouraged illegal border crossings in more remote areas.*

United States after graduation was much lower—around 25 percent.<sup>10</sup>

People of foreign nationality who are legally present in the United States are defined as “immigrants” or “nonimmigrants” by the U.S. government. **Unauthorized foreigners**—also referred to as illegal aliens, deportable aliens, and undocumented workers—are persons living in the United States in violation of U.S. immigration laws. No one knows exactly how many unauthorized foreigners live in the United States, but the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimated the number at 5 million in 1996.

Many of these unauthorized residents entered the country legally—primarily as students, temporary workers, or tourists—but did not leave when their visas expired (“overstayers”). Others hold valid nonimmigrant visas but are unauthorized because they violated the terms of their visas. If a foreign tourist takes a paying job, for example, he or she may become an illegal alien. Slightly more than one-half of the unauthorized immigrants entered the country illegally (“without inspection”). In recent years, the INS shifted its border enforcement strategy from apprehending unauthorized aliens after they had entered the United States to

detering their entry by closely spacing lights and agents along certain stretches of the international border. This strategy does not seem to have deterred foreigners from trying to enter illegally, but it has caused them to attempt entry in more remote areas. The U.S.-Mexican Binational Study on Migration reported in 1997 that most Mexicans attempting illegal entry pay guides—called *polleros* or *coyotes*—\$500 to \$1,000 to help them cross the border. On each attempt, a foreigner has about a 70 percent chance of eluding the INS and entering the United States.<sup>11</sup>

The INS removes unauthorized foreigners primarily by imposing “voluntary” return or by deportation. Most Mexicans apprehended by the INS agree to voluntary return, which means that they admit they are in the United States illegally and agree to leave without a hearing by an immigration judge. The INS also deports or removes foreigners when INS officials can prove that the foreigners are not entitled to be in the country and should be removed. Once deported, it is difficult for a foreigner to return legally to the United States. Nearly 115,000 foreigners were deported in FY1997; most had been convicted of committing crimes in the United States.

## Public Opinion

Americans worry that immigration is increasing the size and changing the characteristics of the population. Polls conducted between 1965 and 1993 consistently showed that only about 7 percent of Americans favored more immigration and that a majority wanted immigration reduced.<sup>12</sup> A 1997 public opinion poll found a slightly lower percentage, 46 percent, wanted immigration reduced or stopped.<sup>13</sup> But 79 percent of respondents were concerned that immigrants were overburdening the welfare system and pushing up taxes. Sixty-three percent were concerned about immigrants taking jobs from Americans or causing racial conflict.

The debate about whether to stop or discourage immigration became more heated in the 1990s, especially in California, which is the destination of one-third of all immigrants. Several economic and social factors contributed to the increased attention to immigration, including the recession of 1990–1991, which was especially severe in California; the debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); and the desire to balance the federal budget. Several well-publicized crimes involving foreigners, such as the 1993 bombing of New York’s World Trade Center and shooting outside U.S. CIA headquarters in Virginia, led many Americans to support tighter control of foreigners in the United States.

Recent polls reveal continued ambivalence toward immigration among Americans. In a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll conducted in December 1998, 72 percent of respondents agreed that the United States “should not increase immigration because it will cost U.S. jobs and increase unemployment.” Twenty percent of respondents agreed that the United States “should increase immigration to fill jobs companies have trouble filling.” The poll showed that, despite the booming U.S. economy, most Americans were generally opposed to reducing restrictions on trade and to allowing more immigration. Fifty percent of respondents were against more immigration and freer trade, while 10 percent were pro-immigration and pro-free trade.<sup>14</sup>

Public opinion poll results often shift to reflect economic conditions—opinions toward immigrants tend to be more favorable when the economy is strong and more negative when the economy is weak. A poll conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California in January 1999 (a period of robust economic growth) found that 52 percent of Californians considered Mexican immigrants a benefit to the state because of their hard work and job skills. About one-third (36 percent) described them as a burden because of their use of public

services and schools. Seventy percent of Latinos considered Mexican immigrants a benefit, and 20 percent thought they were a burden. Among other racial/ethnic groups, 45 percent considered Mexican immigrants a benefit and 42 percent considered them a burden.<sup>15</sup>

Many politicians and researchers dismiss the public concern about the negative consequences of immigration by pointing out that, throughout U.S. history, fears that the United States was accepting too many and the wrong kinds of immigrants proved to be unfounded. Benjamin Franklin worried that German immigrants arriving in the late 1700s could not be assimilated. Why, he asked, should “Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us, instead of our Anglifying them?”<sup>16</sup> Less than two centuries later, a descendent of these immigrants, Dwight Eisenhower, was elected president of the United States. At the end of the 20th century, some immigrants who adopted U.S. citizenship have been entrusted with high-level public office, including U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (born in Czechoslovakia) and General John M. Shalikashvili (born in Poland), chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1993 to 1997.

America continues to celebrate its immigrant heritage—as evidenced by mass naturalization ceremonies held every year on July 4. Those who want to restrict immigration often sound “un-American.” Those who favor reducing immigration often justify their position with the following arguments:

1. Immigration adds to U.S. population growth and, therefore, to environmental problems related to population growth.
2. Immigrants depress wages and working conditions in the labor markets where they are concentrated, and they compete with native-born residents for some jobs.
3. Immigrant workers are willing to work at low wages, which discourages businesses from modernizing

***Opinion poll results often shift to reflect economic conditions.***

and impedes U.S. competitiveness in the world economy.

4. The large number of Hispanic and Asian immigrants are changing the ethnic composition of the U.S. population and raising a number of difficult questions for Americans: Should public schools support retention of their language and culture? Should they be given preference in university admissions, job opportunities, and business contracts if they are members of disadvantaged minority groups?

These concerns demonstrate that the financial fortunes of immigrants, and their effects on the economy, the political system, schools, and society, affect attitudes toward additional immigration.

## Mexico-U.S. Migration and NAFTA

About one-fourth of the immigrants arriving in the United States today are from Mexico, the country that shares a long land border and a close relationship with the United States. Parts of Mexico were annexed to the United States during the 19th century, and Mexican residents of what is now the southwestern United States became Americans. But their ties with Mexico remained strong, and there has always been considerable movement between the two countries. A more defined migration stream from rural Mexico to the United States was created when the United States recruited Mexican temporary workers during World War II. U.S. farmers argued that they faced a labor shortage because of the war and the Mexican government agreed to send farm workers to the United States to contribute to the war effort. The U.S. and Mexican governments established the Bracero program, which brought more than 4.5 million Mexican farm workers to the United States between 1942 and 1964. The higher wages available in the United States made Mexicans eager to move there. They continued to come north for jobs after the program was terminated in 1964. What began as a government-

authorized recruitment of Mexican workers evolved into a complex migration relationship, moving rural Mexicans into farm jobs and eventually into new industries, occupations, and areas of the United States.

The U.S. recruitment of braceros between the 1940s and the 1960s created an extensive network of Mexican nationals who had lived and worked in the United States. These networks are the socioeconomic ties that link U.S. jobs and cities with Mexican workers and villages. A Mexican worker who entered the United States illegally and found a job gains the confidence to make the trip again and to advise others who were contemplating similar trips. A recent study estimated that 95 percent of Mexicans' first trips to the United States are unauthorized, but many subsequently obtain legal status.<sup>17</sup> The networks of relatives, friends, and labor brokers led to a "Go north for opportunity" mentality in many areas of Mexico, much as "Go west, young man" was a 19th-century American slogan that reflected the belief that westward migration enhanced a person's opportunities.

As Mexico-U.S. migration continued, a process termed "cumulative causation" began to make migration an integral part of the economy in both Mexico and the United States.<sup>18</sup> In the southwestern United States, business decisions were made on the assumption that Mexican workers would be available at minimum wage when they were needed.<sup>19</sup> The Mexican government did little to create employment in the west-central states that most seasonal workers came from.

Migration from poorer to richer areas can diminish over time if migration reduces the wage gap between the areas. Under this scenario, wages in Mexico would rise because of labor shortages created by outmigration, and wage increases would slow in the United States because of the excess labor brought by Mexican immigration. But the wage gap between Mexico and the United States has been widening, not narrowing. In 1994 and 1995,

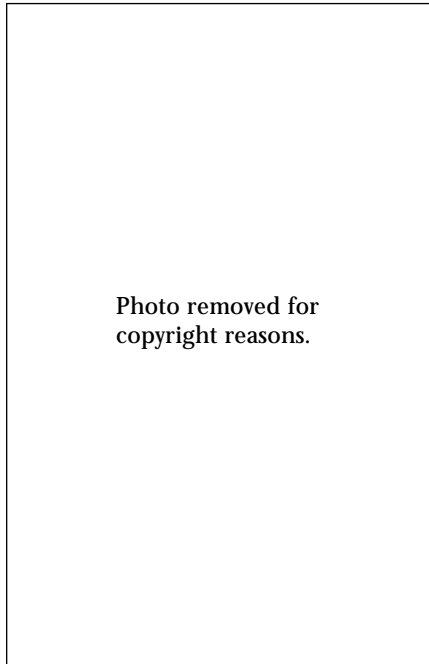
the Mexican peso was devalued and the economy went into a severe recession, which fostered more migration.

The recession in Mexico reinforced long-term processes that encourage migration. In some parts of Mexico, so many young adults emigrate that Mexican employers view hiring and training them as a waste of time and money. Mexican employers are also reluctant to expand or invest in new businesses because of the perceived shortage of labor.

The flow of migrants to the United States was a disincentive for U.S. farmers to invest in equipment to mechanize their operations. Farmers remain dependent on the supply of low-cost immigrant labor to harvest apples, oranges, and other crops, even though they could harvest these crops with machines. When the migration of farm workers from Mexico was curtailed at the end of the Bracero program in 1964, U.S. farmers adapted by investing in machinery to harvest the crops. The large supply of low-wage labor from Mexico in succeeding decades has reestablished farmers' dependence on Mexican labor.

As many as 7.3 million Mexican-born people lived in the United States in 1996, including about 4.9 million legal residents and up to 2.4 million unauthorized aliens.<sup>20</sup> The number of legal and unauthorized Mexican-born residents in the United States in the mid-1990s was increasing by 277,000 to 340,000 per year.<sup>21</sup> Finally, between 4 million and 5 million Mexican-born people were employed in the United States in the mid-1990s.<sup>22</sup>

Are there ways to break the migration networks between Mexico and the United States that will benefit both countries? The U.S. Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development examined this question in 1990. It concluded, "expanded trade between the sending countries and the United States is the single most important remedy" for unauthorized migration from Mexico and elsewhere. The commission's advice was put into place on Jan. 1, 1994,

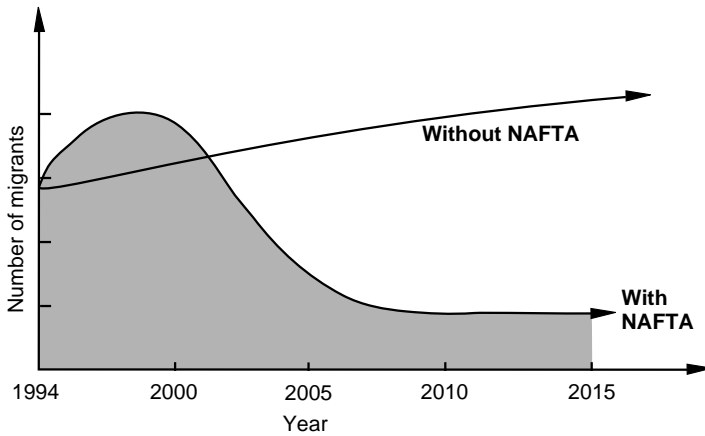


*A well-established network brings Mexican farm workers to U.S. jobs year after year. Some eventually bring their families and settle in the United States.*

when NAFTA went into effect. The purpose of NAFTA is to reduce trade and investment barriers, thereby stimulating economic and job growth in Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Trade theory predicts that, because of more competition and economies of scale, NAFTA member countries should have faster-growing economies, more jobs, and higher wages, which should reduce migration. Eventually, in the words of former Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, "more jobs will mean higher wages in Mexico, and this in turn will mean fewer migrants to the United States and Canada. We want to export goods, not people."<sup>23</sup>

The commission report also warned "the economic development process itself tends in the short to medium term to stimulate migration." Policies that accelerate economic and job growth in Mexico, including the privatization of government-owned industries and land reform in agriculture, tend to increase migration tem-

Figure 2  
Mexico-U.S. Migration With and Without NAFTA



porarily before reducing it (see Figure 2). The additional migration in the short term may be a reasonable price to pay for encouraging the same kinds of economic and trade policies that turned emigration countries such as Italy, Spain, and Korea into immigration destinations. A sudden surge in migration, however, can undermine support for the economic reforms in the sending and receiving countries. If this migration hump is anticipated, policymakers can work to avoid a backlash against immigration.

## Four Waves of Immigration

Three processes—colonization, coercion, and immigration—superimposed a new population on the native Indian peoples of North America. In the 16th and 17th centuries, English colonists created the framework of the society that became the United States. The colonists built communities at Jamestown, Va., and Plymouth, Mass. They later seized control of New York from the Dutch and overran various French and Spanish settlements, and they established English as the public language and England’s common law as the model for the U.S. legal system.

Two types of coercion also contributed to the peopling of America. The first was the importation of African slaves, which occurred until the early 1800s. African slaves were 19 percent of the U.S. population in 1790. The second type of coercion was the incorporation of American Indian, Spanish, and French populations as the United States’ boundaries expanded westward as a result of political deals, war settlements, or purchase of territory. When the United States concluded the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the French residents of this vast territory automatically became Americans. Mexicans in California, New Mexico, and Texas became American at the end of the Mexican War in 1848. In 1898, the United States acquired Puerto Rico in the settlement of the Spanish-American War, and Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens in 1917.

The third and most important source of Americans was immigration. In 1789, after the former British colonies had become the United States of America, the word “immigrant” entered the language. The word was coined to describe the voluntary process of an alien coming to an established nation. Immigrants and their descendants, along with the colonials, the slaves, American Indians, and their descendants, are the American people of today.

The flow of immigrants has fluctuated with economic conditions in the United States and abroad and with U.S. immigration policies. For these reasons, the tally of annual arrivals has peaks and troughs. The four major peaks are referred to as the four waves of immigration.

The **first wave** of immigrants arrived before entries were recorded in 1820. The English made up 60 percent of the population in 1790, but there were also Scots, Scots-Irish, Germans, and people from the Netherlands, France, and Spain. These migrations were motivated by a mixture of religious, political, and economic factors. German sectarians sought religious freedom in



Pennsylvania; Spaniards looked for Christian converts in Florida and the southwest; and the Puritans in Massachusetts sought to establish a community restricted to members of their faith. Religious freedom was made possible by political and economic freedom—the absence of coercion by overlords and the chance to prosper in a new land.

These early immigrants took big risks. Starvation, disease, and shipwrecks probably killed more than one in 10 of those who set sail for America. Historians estimate that more immigrants than slaves died en route to the New World. Africans sold as slaves were transported under deplorable conditions, but there is some evidence that slaves received more food and protection than immigrants during the voyage because the death of a slave was a business loss for the slave owners.<sup>24</sup>

The cost of travel was equivalent to four to six months of a laborer's wages in England, and many potential immigrants indentured themselves to an employer in the United States who would pay for their passage. Indentured workers were legally bound to work for as long as five years for the employer who paid their passage. One-third of immigrants arriving in 1776 had become indentured to secure passage.

The **second wave** of immigrants, who arrived between 1820 and 1860, fit well with America's eagerness for people to help push back the frontier. Peasants displaced from agriculture and artisans made jobless by the Industrial Revolution were desperate to escape from Europe. New arrivals sent what came to be called "American letters" back to Europe, encouraging friends and relatives to join them. Steamship and railroad companies sent agents around Europe recruiting customers to fill their ships and trains.

Between 1820 and 1840, over 750,000 German, British, and Irish immigrants arrived, and during the next 20 years, 4.3 million people came from those countries (see Figure 3, page 16). About 40 percent of these second-wave immigrants were from

Ireland, where poverty and famine encouraged emigration. Roman Catholics predominated in the second wave, and by 1850 the Roman Catholic Church was the largest denomination in the United States, though Protestants of various denominations outnumbered Catholics.

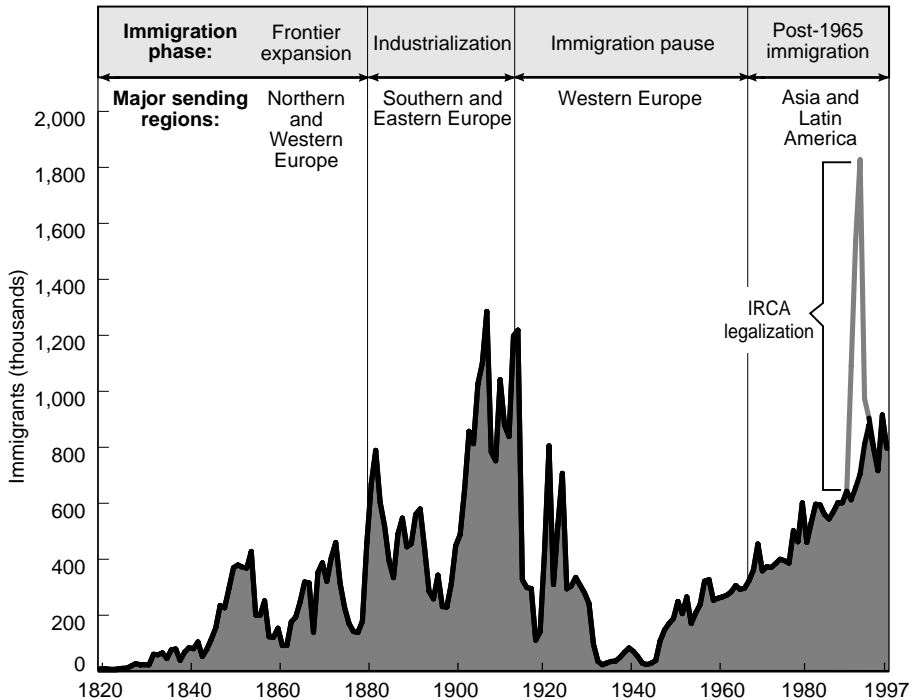
The **third wave** of immigrants began to arrive in 1880, when almost 460,000 entered the country, and ended with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, when 1.2 million immigrants entered. During the third wave, more than 20 million southern and eastern Europeans came, mostly to the eastern and midwestern states. Several hundred thousand Chinese, Japanese, and other Asian laborers settled in the western states.

The shift in national origins can be seen by comparing the homelands of the immigrants who entered during two peak immigration years: 1882 and 1907. Of those arriving in 1882, 87 percent came from northern and western Europe, and 13 percent came from southern and eastern Europe. In 1907, only 19 percent of immigrants were from northern and western Europe and 81 percent were from southern and eastern Europe. The immigrants who arrived in 1907 also included the first large numbers of people of Jewish and Eastern Orthodox religions.

By the early 1900s, the frontier was closed, and most newcomers found jobs in factories or other urban enterprises in the eastern and midwestern cities. More than 1 million immigrants arrived annually in six of the first 14 years of the 20th century. By the time of the 1910 census, foreign-born residents accounted for nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population and about 24 percent of the U.S. labor force. In 1910, immigrants made up more than one-half of all operatives in mining, steel, and meatpacking. Foreign-born men made up more than one-half of the work force in New York, Chicago, and Detroit.<sup>25</sup>

An **immigration pause** occurred between 1915 and 1964. Immigration ceased as World War I erupted in

**Figure 3**  
**Immigration to the United States, 1820 to 1997**



Note: IRCA refers to the amnesty provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, under which 2.7 million unauthorized foreign residents were transferred to legal immigrant status.

Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook, 1996* (1997): Table 1; and *Annual Report*, no. 1 (January 1999).

Europe. When the war ended and immigrants began to arrive again in the 1920s, their entry was curtailed by the introduction of numerical limits, or “quotas.” Then the severe economic depression of the 1930s discouraged more foreigners from moving to the United States. As another war threatened to break out in Europe, some people called on the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration to grant generous treatment to those fleeing Nazi Germany. But the United States did not admit large numbers of refugees until after World War II, when the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 led to the entry of more than 400,000 Europeans. The Refugee Relief Act of 1953 permitted the admission of another 190,000 refugees, primarily from Europe. Including the refugee flows, an average of 250,000 immigrants entered per year through the 1950s.

During the 1940s and 1950s, immigration from Mexico and other Western Hemisphere nations increased substantially. In the 1940s, about one-third of the 1 million immigrants whose arrivals were recorded were from the Western Hemisphere. The Western Hemisphere share climbed to 40 percent in the 1950s. The data on legal admissions did not reflect the total volume of Western Hemisphere immigration because the long land border was difficult to monitor closely and illegal crossings were frequent. Between 1940 and 1960, for example, 360,000 legal Mexican immigrants were admitted, but many more entered illegally. In 1954, more than 1 million Mexicans were apprehended and sent back as illegal entrants.

**Fourth-wave immigrants** began arriving in the United States after 1965, when the preference system changed.

Instead of giving priority to immigrants based on their national origins, with preference to those from northern and western Europe, the new preference system gave priority to people with U.S. relatives and to a small number of people with outstanding accomplishments or skills. These changes, coupled with prosperity in Europe, altered the composition of the immigrant population. During the 1970s, the first decade that the law was in effect, less than 20 percent of U.S. immigrants were Europeans.

There are many similarities between immigration at the beginning and at the end of the 20th century. The number of immigrants arriving annually during the peak years—over 1 million—is about the same, although the foreign-born accounted for more of the U.S. population in 1900 (15 percent) than in 1998 (10 percent). During both time periods, the national economy was undergoing fundamental restructuring—from agriculture to industry at the beginning of the century and from services to information at the end of the century. Both waves brought people from countries that had not previously sent large numbers of immigrants, raising questions about language, religion, and culture.

## U.S. Immigration Policies

Immigration policies aim to determine how many, from where, and under what status immigrants arrive. These policies have gone through three major phases: *laissez-faire*, qualitative restrictions, and quantitative restrictions.

### Laissez-Faire: 1780–1875

During its first hundred years, the United States had a *laissez-faire* policy toward immigration. Federal, state, and local governments, private employers, shipping companies, railroads, and churches were free to

promote immigration to the United States. Some policies of the federal government indirectly encouraged immigration. Subsidizing railroad construction, for example, led to the recruitment of immigrant workers by private railroad companies. High tariffs kept out European goods and created a demand for more workers in American factories. The federal government relied on immigrants to staff the army; immigrants were about one-third of the regular soldiers in the 1840s and an even higher proportion of many state militias.<sup>26</sup>

The hunger for workers and the libertarian principles of the new nation brought immigrants a generally favorable reception. Although there were fears that immigrants would alter the culture and customs of the United States, the neat match between Europeans seeking opportunity and an America in need of people overcame such fears, and the immigration door remained wide open.

The Naturalization Act of 1790 established the principle that an immigrant could become a citizen after a minimum number of years of residence in the United States.<sup>27</sup> No fees or admissions tests were imposed on immigrants, but after 1819, the federal government required ship captains to collect and report data on the immigrants they brought to U.S. ports.

The influx of Roman Catholics from Ireland and Germany in the 1840s set off the first organized anti-foreign political movement in the nation's history, the "Know-Nothing" movement, which was embodied in the American party. Groups of Protestant clergymen, journalists, and other opinion leaders formed the Order of the Star Spangled Banner within the party to urge the reduction of immigration from non-Anglo-Saxon countries. To maintain secrecy and avoid confrontation, members were instructed to answer any inquiries about the Order with the words "I know nothing about it." The American party was represented in several northeastern state legislatures and won 70 congressional seats in the

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*The influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in the late 1800s prompted controls on who and how many could enter the United States.*

federal election of 1854. But the majority of congressmen did not respond to the flurry of anti-immigrant sentiments and no restrictions were imposed. Immigration slowed before the Civil War and slavery replaced immigration as the major political issue of the day.

### **Qualitative Restrictions: 1875–1920**

After the Civil War, public attention turned again to immigration. The growing numbers of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe aroused concerns and fears among the overwhelmingly Protestant and rural American populace. Woodrow Wilson, who was later elected president, expressed the popular antagonism toward the immigrants in 1901: “Immigrants poured in as before, but ... now there came multitudes of men of lowest class from the south of Italy and men of the meanest sort out of Hungary and Poland, men out of the ranks where there was neither skill nor energy nor any initiative of quick intelligence; and they came in numbers which increased from year to year, as if the countries of the south of Europe were disburdening themselves of the more sordid and hapless elements of their population.”<sup>28</sup>

The fear of foreigners led to the imposition of qualitative restrictions aimed at barring certain types of immigrants. In 1875, convicts and prostitutes were barred. The Immigration Act of 1882 added paupers and “mental defectives” to those who could not immigrate to the United States. And for the first time, it barred immigration from a particular country—China. Chinese workers were recruited by railroad companies to help build the transcontinental railroad in the mid-1800s. When the railroad was completed in 1869, many Chinese workers sought work in cities, especially in the western United States. Many whites blamed these “coolie workers” for holding down wages. An anti-Chinese movement surfaced in San Francisco to protest what whites considered to be unfair competition. The union label on clothing was introduced by these protesters to distinguish clothing sewn by non-Chinese. Many Chinese left the city to become migrant farm workers. Farmers wanted Chinese immigration to continue, but unions and anti-Chinese groups persuaded Congress to ban Chinese immigration in 1882. This ban continued until 1943.<sup>29</sup>

With the aim of reducing the stream of immigrants, especially from southern and eastern Europe, Congress tried to require that all prospective immigrants were literate. In 1897, and several succeeding years, Congress approved legislation that would have required immigrants to be able to read and write. Three U.S. presidents vetoed literacy tests. President Wilson vetoed the literacy test twice, but his veto was overridden in 1917 and a law was passed that required immigrants over age 16 to be able to read in one language. The literacy test did not achieve its purpose, which was to ensure that most immigrants came from northern and western Europe. In 1907, however, Congress commissioned a study that laid the foundation for the use of national origin as the chief criterion for selecting immigrants. It concluded that immigrants from southern and

eastern Europe had more “inborn socially inadequate qualities than northwestern Europeans.”<sup>30</sup>

## **Quantitative Restrictions Since 1920**

In 1921, Congress imposed restrictions on the annual number of immigrants allowed into the United States. In 1924, it set an annual limit of 150,000 immigrants, plus accompanying wives and children. The immigration legislation of the 1920s also established a quota system for immigrants that aimed to maintain the current ethnic and racial make-up of the United States; that is, people of northern and western European heritage. The Immigration Act of May 26, 1924, prescribed that the maximum number of immigrants from any country in the Eastern Hemisphere would be “a number which bears the same ratio to 150,000 as the number of inhabitants in the United States in 1920 having that national origin bears to the number of white inhabitants of the United States.”<sup>31</sup>

During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, over 80 percent of all immigrant visas went to people from northern and western Europe, 14 percent to eastern and southern Europeans, and 4 percent to people from Eastern Hemisphere countries. The limits specified in the 1924 law did not apply to immigration from Western Hemisphere countries such as Mexico.

American immigration law made no special provision for refugees. In the 1930s, there was some support for making exceptions for people fleeing persecution in Nazi Germany. U.S. immigration law was not changed, however, and only about 250,000 such immigrants were admitted to the United States during the decade. Many of those who were turned away died in labor and death camps.<sup>32</sup>

After World War II, President Harry S. Truman and some congressional reformers sought to abolish the discriminatory national origins system, but their efforts failed. Congress passed the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act

(INA) of 1952 over Truman’s veto and left the quota system intact. In the early 1960s, President John F. Kennedy also proposed eliminating preferences for immigrants from specific regions or countries. His proposed legislation also gave priority to close relatives of U.S. citizens and people with special skills and abilities that would benefit the United States. Kennedy did not live to see his bill considered, but by 1965, the momentum of the civil rights movement provided enough force to eliminate racial and ethnic discrimination from American immigration law. Under the 1965 amendments to the INA, about 80 percent of the immigration slots were given to immigrants joining family members or relatives in the United States. No limit was placed on the number of immediate relatives of U.S. citizens who could move to the United States. For the first time, Asians were treated like other immigrants, and also for the first time, limits were placed on immigration from the Western Hemisphere.

## **Immigration Reforms: 1980–1996**

Until the 1980s, U.S. immigration law could accurately be described as a complex system that changed once each generation. The accelerating pace of global change affected migration patterns, however, and Congress responded with three major changes in immigration laws between 1980 and 1990, and then three more in 1996.

The first change during the 1980s was an expansion of the definition of refugees. From the 1950s until 1980, the United States defined as refugees persons fleeing a communist government or political violence in the Middle East, and offered these refugees the chance to settle in the United States. The UN defined a refugee as a person living outside his or her country of citizenship who was unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or

***The year  
1996 proved  
to be a  
watershed for  
immigration  
legislation.***

political opinion. With the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States adopted the UN definition both for certain foreigners outside their countries of citizenship who hope to resettle and for foreigners seeking asylum in the United States.

The number of refugees allowed to settle in the United States was to be set each year by the president in consultation with Congress. In another new policy, the federal government agreed to provide cash, medical assistance, and job and language training to newly arrived refugees.

The second major policy change involved illegal immigration. During the 1970s, Congress, federal commissions, and the press reported on the increasing number of foreigners, mostly Mexicans, who were entering the United States and remaining here illegally. Presidents Ford and Carter appointed commissions to study the effects of illegal immigration. These commissions concluded that illegal immigrants adversely affected unskilled American workers and undermined the rule of law, and that the federal government should undertake new efforts to reduce such migration.<sup>33</sup> The best way to deal with illegal immigrants who had put down roots, they said, was to legalize their status by granting them amnesty. The best way to discourage future illegal immigration was to impose penalties, or “employer sanctions,” on U.S. employers who hired illegal immigrants.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) embodied this historic bargain. It legalized 2.7 million unauthorized aliens and for the first time made it unlawful for U.S. employers to knowingly hire foreign workers who do not have legal documentation. The legalization program succeeded in that most eligible aliens became legal immigrants. Legalization also proved to be an incentive for more illegal immigration, however, primarily because of the Special Agricultural Worker (SAW) program. The SAW program, through which 40 percent of the legalizations occurred, offered legalization to people who

could prove they had worked for at least 90 days in agricultural jobs in the United States. Applicants were not required to produce valid documentation of their employment, and the investigators accepted applications that were clearly fraudulent.<sup>34</sup> The employer sanctions’ part of the law also did not work as intended. The INS was slow to establish effective strategies to enforce it, and unauthorized workers found ways to buy false documents to present to employers.

By the late 1980s, the hope that illegal immigration had been reduced by IRCA, and the belief that immigration of skilled workers was vital to American competitiveness in global markets, provided the basis for the Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMACT). The 1990 law raised the previous annual ceiling on immigration from 270,000 plus immediate relatives of U.S. citizens to 675,000 including relatives plus refugees. IMMACT also added new immigration slots—“diversity” visas—to increase immigration from Ireland and other countries that had sent few immigrants in recent times. In addition to these immigrants, 300,000 immediate relatives of U.S. citizens were admitted as immigrants, as were 128,000 refugees and asylees (see Table 2).

### **Immigration Changes, 1996**

In the early 1990s, there was much debate about immigration, but little significant new legislation.<sup>35</sup> But pressure for reform intensified and 1996 proved to be a watershed year for immigration legislation. Congress approved three major immigration-related laws in 1996: The Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA).

These laws were motivated by concern about terrorism, especially because of the role of asylum applicants in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; the desire to balance the

federal budget and to end perceived abuses of U.S. welfare by immigrants; and frustration with continued illegal immigration. The 1996 antiterrorism law makes it easier to detain without bail foreigners convicted of committing crimes in the United States and to deport these foreigners after they had served their sentences. The same law makes it easier for the INS to exclude foreigners who arrive at airports without proper documents and then seek asylum in the United States: They can be subject to “expedited removal” and barred from legal re-entry.

The new welfare law radically changed the way all low-income residents, especially new legal immigrants, receive benefits. Until fall 1997, when PRWORA came into force, immigrants generally received the same benefits from the federal government as did citizens. PRWORA made most legal immigrants who entered the United States after Aug. 22, 1996, ineligible for federal welfare benefits unless they were refugees, veterans of the U.S. Armed Services, or had worked at least 10 years in the United States. PRWORA was expected to save about \$54 billion in its first six years, with 45 percent of the savings coming from denying welfare benefits to legal immigrants. About 1.5 million legal immigrants were receiving federal welfare benefits at the time the new welfare law was passed. Most lost these benefits, but amendments in 1997 and 1998 permitted most people who lived in the United States on Aug. 22, 1996, to remain eligible for two welfare programs, Supplemental Security Income and food stamps. The budget savings from the new law are much less than originally expected.

The third 1996 law, IIRIRA, included three sets of measures to reduce illegal immigration and tighten the access of legal immigrants to welfare. First, it called for 1,000 more border patrol agents each year for five years, bringing the total from 5,175 in 1996 to almost 10,000 by 2000. Second, IIRIRA introduced a pilot telephone verification program to enable employers to verify the status of newly

**Table 2**  
**Immigration Limits, FY1996**

| Preference   | Description   | Limit                |
|--|---|----------------------|
| <b>Family-sponsored preferences</b>                                    |   | 311,819              |
| First  | Unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and their children.   | 23,400 <sup>1</sup>  |
| Second   | Spouses, children, and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent resident aliens.<br>(Spouses and children receive 77 percent of visas. Remaining visas are issued to unmarried sons and daughters ages 21 or older.) | 200,019 <sup>2</sup> |
| Third  | Married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and their spouses and children.   | 23,400 <sup>2</sup>  |
| Fourth   | Brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens and their spouses and children.   | 65,000 <sup>2</sup>  |
| <b>Employment-based preferences</b>                                    |   | 140,000              |
| First  | Priority workers and their spouses and children.<br>(Priority workers are (1) persons of extraordinary ability, (2) outstanding professors and researchers, and (3) certain multinational executives and managers.)   | 40,040 <sup>3</sup>  |
| Second   | Professionals with advanced degrees or aliens of exceptional ability and their spouses and children.  | 40,040 <sup>2</sup>  |
| Third  | Skilled workers, professionals (without advanced degrees), needed unskilled workers, and their spouses and children.<br>(The number of unskilled workers is limited to 10,000.)                                       | 40,040 <sup>2</sup>  |
| Fourth   | Special categories of immigrants and their spouses and children.  | 9,940                |
| Fifth  | Employment creators (investors) and their spouses and children.   | 9,940                |
| <b>Other numerical limits specified in the Immigration Act of 1990</b> |   |                      |
|  | Diversity immigrants. <sup>4</sup>  | 55,000               |

<sup>1</sup>Plus unused family fourth preference visas.

<sup>2</sup>Visas not used in higher preferences may be used in these categories.

<sup>3</sup>Plus unused employment fourth and fifth preference visas.

<sup>4</sup>Natives of countries that have sent relatively few immigrants in the previous five years.

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook, 1996 (1997)*: A2-3.

hired workers, and for social service agencies to determine the legal status of applicants for benefits. Social service agencies must verify applicants' legal status, but employer participation in the verification program is voluntary.

Third, in an attempt to make sure that future immigrants will not need public assistance, IIRIRA required U.S. residents who sponsor immigrants for admission to have higher incomes than were previously required, and to sign legally binding pledges that they would support the immigrants they sponsor. Sponsors must have annual

incomes that are at least 125 percent of the poverty level.

Congress continued to enact immigration legislation in 1997 and 1998. In 1997, for example, Congress approved the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act, which permitted up to 240,000 Salvadorans and Guatemalans living in the United States since 1990 to petition the INS to remain here on the basis that returning home would be an “extreme hardship” for them or their families. Many of these immigrants arrived in the United States during the 1980s when political violence and civil wars were raging in some Central American countries. But most of their applications for asylum were rejected. The Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act of 1998 permitted Haitians who had lived in the United States since 1995 to apply for legal residence if returning to Haiti would impose a hardship on the foreigner or his or her family.

## Immigration and U.S. Population

Immigration has a major effect on the size, distribution, and composition of the U.S. population. Because fertility and mortality have reached relatively low levels in the United States, migration’s role in the growth of national, state, and local populations has increased in recent decades.

Immigration contributed about 30 percent of the total population increase between 1990 and 1998. The foreign-born population (which includes resident nonimmigrants) has increased accordingly, from 19.8 million in 1990 to 26.3 million in 1998.

Because immigrants have different characteristics than native-born Americans, they are making the American populace more diverse (see Box 2, page 24). The effects are most visible in the major migration states—California, New York, Texas, and Florida—but they are seen in local communities throughout the country.

In 2000, the United States will have an estimated 275 million residents. About 72 percent of the population will be non-Hispanic white, 12 percent African American, 11 percent Hispanic, 4 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian, Aleut, and Eskimo. The U.S. Census Bureau projects the U.S. population will reach 394 million in 2050, and will be 53 percent non-Hispanic white, 14 percent African American, 24 percent Hispanic, 8 percent Asian and Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian (see Figure 4). The U.S. Census Bureau’s projections assumed a net influx of 820,000 legal and illegal immigrants annually and continuation of recent trends in fertility and mortality.<sup>36</sup>

Assuming 820,000 newcomers per year, the number of foreign-born persons (the first generation) is projected to rise from 26 million in 1998 to 42 million in 2025, and the foreign-born share of the U.S. population is projected to increase from 10 percent to about 14 percent. The demographic impacts of immigration include immigrants’ U.S.-born children, who are in the United States because their parents immigrated. In 1995, first- and second-generation Americans were about 20 percent of the U.S. population. If net legal and illegal immigration averages 820,000 per year, first- and second-generation Americans are projected to be about one-third of the U.S. population in 2025.<sup>37</sup>

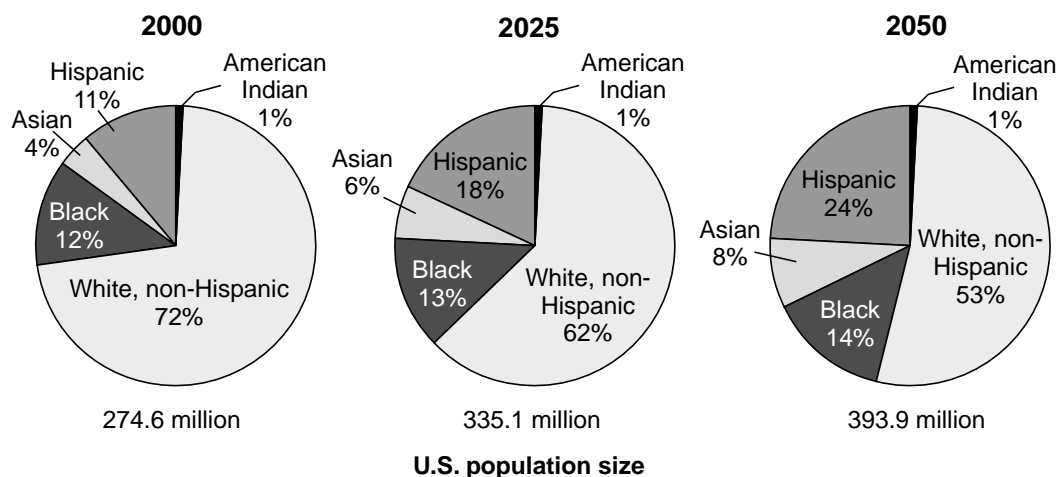
Some analysts contend that immigration can “keep America young” or “save Social Security” by improving the ratio of contributors of tax dollars to recipients of public benefits.<sup>38</sup> Demographic analysis reveals, however, that current levels of immigration have a small effect on the median age of U.S. residents and on the dependency ratio—the number of people of working-age in relation to the number of children and elderly.

The Census Bureau projected that the U.S. median age will rise from 34.3 years in 1995 to 38.1 years by 2050, assuming immigration of 820,000 people per year. Even under



Figure 4

## U.S. Population by Race and Ethnic Group, 2000, 2025, and 2050



Note: This medium series projection assumes annual net immigration of 820,000.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Current Population Reports* P25-1130 (1996).

the Census Bureau's high immigration scenario of 1.4 million a year, the median age would reach 37.6 years by 2050. If immigration had ceased after 1995, the U.S. median age would be only a few years lower in 2050—40.4 years.

Because most immigrants are Asians and Hispanics, immigration will slow the aging of the U.S. Hispanic and Asian populations but will have little effect on the non-Hispanic white or black population. In 1995, the median age was 37 years for non-Hispanic whites, 29 years for blacks, 26 years for Hispanics, and 31 years for Asians. With no further immigration, Hispanics would have a median age of 31 in 2025; with immigration, the median age would be 28 years. The median age of Asians would be 39 years without and 36 years with immigration. The median age of non-Hispanic whites is projected to rise to 43 years under either immigration scenario.

How does immigration affect dependency, or the need of working-age residents to support children and the elderly? The U.S. social security system transfers funds from current workers to retired workers. Its ability

to pay benefits depends on demography—the number of workers in relation to the number of retirees—and economics—the earnings and taxes collected from workers and employers.

Immigrants are mostly young people who have children, and they tend to have higher fertility than U.S.-born Americans. Thus, immigration expands both the working-age and child populations. The projected child dependency ratio, population under age 18 per 100 persons ages 18 to 64) would be slightly lower in 2050 without immigration, 42 compared with 44 with immigration. But neither scenario shows much change from the 1995 child dependency ratio of 43.

The ratio of elderly to working-age Americans is expected to rise markedly, primarily because of the low U.S. fertility rate and the aging of the baby-boom generation. Immigration has little effect. Between 1995 and 2050, the ratio of the population ages 65 and older per 100 people ages 18 to 64 is projected to rise from 64 to 80 assuming 820,000 annual net immigration, and to 83 assuming zero immigration. Immigration can slow but cannot prevent the aging of the U.S. population.

## Economic Effects

Most immigrants come to the United States for higher wages and more opportunities, and their work has significant effects on the U.S. economy and labor market. Like U.S. citizens, most working-age immigrants seek jobs, earn wages, pay taxes, and consume public services. Recent research shows a small but positive net economic benefit for the United States. In 1997, the National Research Council (NRC) concluded that legal

and illegal immigration add \$1 billion to \$10 billion per year to the U.S. gross domestic product, largely because immigration holds down wages for some jobs, and thus prices, and increases the efficiency of the economy.<sup>39</sup> Immigration has a positive net contribution, but it is a small factor in an \$8 trillion economy that is expanding by almost \$400 billion a year.

The NRC report emphasized that the most important economic issues are distributional. Who benefits and who suffers from immigration? In par-

### *Box 2*

## The U.S. Foreign-Born Population

The United States is a “nation of immigrants” and has always had a large foreign-born population, but this population total has reached an all-time high. In 1998, an estimated 26.3 million U.S. residents had been born abroad. Even during the peak immigration years of the early 20th century, the number of foreign-born residents was about one-half of what it is today. Foreign-born Americans formed a much larger share of the total in the early 1900s than in the 1990s, however. In 1910, 15 percent of Americans were born abroad, compared with just less than 10 percent in 1998.

Some of the foreigners in the United States today have lived in the United States since before World War II, but nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the U.S. foreign-born population entered the country since 1980, and 82 percent entered since 1970.<sup>1</sup>

Americans often refer to all foreign-born persons living here as immigrants, although about 4 percent officially are nonimmigrants who will return to their home countries.

Nearly three-fourths (72 percent) of the U.S. foreign-born population are immigrants or refugees expected to remain here. More than one-fifth are undocumented aliens—many of whom will also eventually settle in the United States. About one-third of the foreign-born are U.S. citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Just over one-half of the 1998 foreign-born population came from Latin America—more than one-

fourth came from Mexico. More than one-quarter of the foreign-born population is from Asia, nearly one-fifth is from Europe or Canada, and the remainder is from Africa.

Foreign-born Americans live throughout the United States, but the largest numbers of foreign-born residents are found in six states: California, Florida, New York, Texas, Illinois, and New Jersey. These states accounted for 71 percent of the 1998 foreign-born population, while they housed about 40 percent of the total U.S. population.

Immigrants are more likely than native-born Americans to be working, but they tend to hold lower-paying jobs and have higher poverty rates. More recently arrived immigrants have the lowest incomes and highest poverty rates, which are associated with lower levels of educational attainment. Immigrants tend to earn low salaries when they first arrive, but their earnings increase as they gain U.S. work experience and English language skills.

More than one-third (35 percent) of immigrants ages 16 and older who entered the United States between 1990 and 1998 had not finished high school, compared with 29 percent of those who entered in the 1970s and 19 percent of those who entered before 1970. Only 9 percent of the native-born population ages 16 and older had not finished high school in 1998. Average earnings figures tell a similar story. The 1997 median annu-

ticular, how does the presence of new arrivals affect settled immigrants and Americans who have similar education and skill levels to the new arrivals? How quickly do immigrants advance to higher-paying jobs? The NRC's major finding was that most of the economic benefits of immigration accrue to the immigrants themselves, to owners of capital, and to highly educated U.S. residents.

Immigrants tend to be grouped in the top and bottom educational levels. Among recent arrivals, 30 percent of

the foreign-born adults over age 24 had an undergraduate, professional, or graduate degree in 1997, compared with 24 percent of U.S.-born Americans of the same age (see Figure 5, page 26). At the other end of the distribution, about 34 percent of the immigrants did not finish high school, versus 16 percent of the U.S.-born. Because education is the best predictor of a person's earnings, these percentages help explain the growing inequality between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans and within the

al earnings of the U.S. foreign-born population were \$18,700, compared with \$25,000 for native-born persons ages 16 and older. The median earnings were only \$13,000 annually for those who entered the country after 1989. Almost 20 percent of the foreign-born population was in poverty in March 1998, compared with 13 percent of native-born Americans.<sup>3</sup>

The foreign-born are concentrated in the prime working ages, which are the ages when most people move. In 1997, 56 percent of the foreign-born were ages 18 to 44, compared with 39 percent of the total population. Children under age 18 make up just 10 percent of the foreign-born, compared with 26 percent of the total U.S. population. The elderly share of immigrants is about same as that of the total U.S. population (around 12 percent). Two-thirds of the elderly immigrants entered the United States before 1970, in one of the previous immigration waves.<sup>4</sup>

The prime working ages are also optimum ages for having children, and many immigrants have children after they move to the United States. Foreign-born women tend to have higher birth rates than do U.S.-born women, which is an important way that immigration contributes to U.S. population growth. In 1996, about 20 percent of all U.S. births were to foreign-born mothers, according to the National Center for Health Statistics. The percentage of births to foreign-born mothers is much higher in ma-

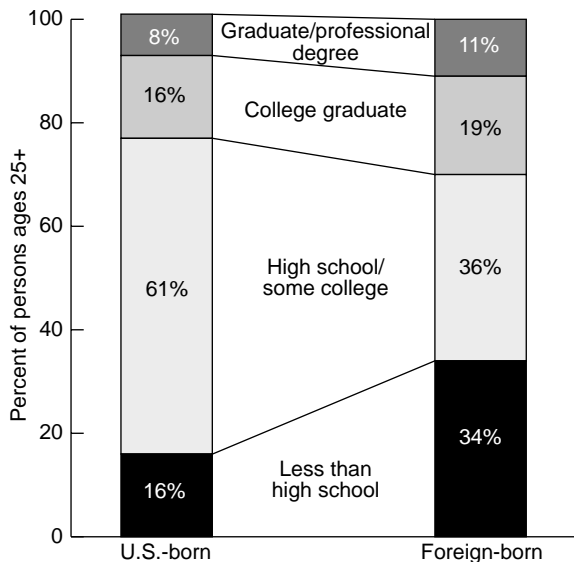
al earnings of the U.S. foreign-born population were \$18,700, compared with \$25,000 for native-born persons ages 16 and older. The median earnings were only \$13,000 annually for those who entered the country after 1989. Almost 20 percent of the foreign-born population was in poverty in March 1998, compared with 13 percent of native-born Americans.<sup>3</sup>

major immigration states such as California and New York. About 45 percent of the births in California and 32 percent of the births in New York in 1996 were to foreign-born women.<sup>5</sup> These figures are reflected in state public school systems. In 1998, children of foreign-born mothers made up about 43 percent of the school-age population in California and 27 percent of the school-age children in New York.

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5. National Center for Health Statistics, unpublished tables; and California Department of Health Services, unpublished data.

*Figure 5*  
**Educational Levels of U.S.-Born Americans and Foreign-Born Americans Who Arrived Between 1990 and 1997**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, PPL-92, Tables 1 and 2. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/97/ppLtab1.txt>, on Feb. 4, 1999.

foreign-born population. Immigration is contributing to this inequality.

### Labor Market Effects

Immigration changes U.S. labor markets (see Box 3, page 28). In 1986, the President’s Council of Economic Advisors summarized this labor market effect of immigrants: “Although immigrant workers increase output, their addition to the supply of labor ... [causes] wage rates in the immediately affected market [to be] bid down. ... Thus, native-born workers who compete with immigrants for jobs may experience reduced earnings or reduced employment.”<sup>40</sup>

Research interest and policy concern is focused on how immigrants affect those in the bottom half of the labor market. Governments have long protected vulnerable low-wage workers by regulating wages and hours of work and by helping some workers improve their job opportunities through education and training programs. The 1960s “war on poverty”

and civil rights movement reinforced the U.S. commitment to improving conditions at the bottom of the labor market through employment and training programs for less-skilled workers and affirmative action for workers from population groups that suffered social or economic discrimination in the past.

Economists and other social scientists have used three kinds of studies to examine the labor market effects of immigrants in detail: case studies, econometric studies, and economic mobility or integration studies.

**Case studies** examine a particular industry or occupation. Many of the first immigration studies were case studies that were undertaken after U.S. workers went on strike and were replaced by immigrants. When farm workers in southern California went on strike for a wage increase in 1982, for example, many lost their jobs. They were replaced by employees of farm labor contractors (FLCs) who hired nonunion and often unauthorized workers.<sup>41</sup>

Case studies show that immigration can displace established workers and depress wages by adding vulnerable workers to the labor supply.<sup>42</sup> This scenario conforms to accepted labor market theory, but the actual effects on wages and employment are indirect and hard to measure. Once employers begin hiring newly arrived workers through FLCs, for example, hiring and supervision can change. Local workers may not learn about job vacancies if the FLCs find additional workers by asking current employees to bring in their friends and relatives. Such network hiring helps explain why many garment shops in New York or Los Angeles have Mexican, Chinese, or Thai seamstresses, but not a mixture of the three. Network hiring also explains how the owners of office buildings in Los Angeles in the 1980s, for example, came to replace unionized U.S.-born black janitors with immigrants hired by cleaning contractors.<sup>43</sup>

**Econometric studies** consider how immigration, wages, and employment

interact in a city labor market, or they compare labor markets among cities. They begin with the assumption that if immigrants depress wages or displace workers, then the more immigrants there are in a city, the greater the wage depression or job displacement will be. Econometric studies look for patterns within and across cities. They might study the influence of immigration on the wages and unemployment rates of blacks, Hispanics, and women in Los Angeles by comparing them with similar groups in Atlanta, which has a relatively small immigrant population. In the 1980s, to the surprise of economists, such studies found few wage or labor market effects related to immigration.<sup>44</sup>

One well-known econometric study concluded, for example, that the influx of Cuban immigrants to Miami in 1980, known as the Mariel boatlift, did not affect local wages and employment.<sup>45</sup> These findings suggested that the immigrants generated enough economic activity to offset any negative effects their presence might have on the wages or job prospects of local workers.

As more data became available in the 1990s, however, researchers were able to measure some of the labor market and wage effects of immigration that economic theory predicted. The most important new evidence involved studies of migration patterns within the United States. Some studies found that workers who must compete with immigrants were moving away from the cities that attracted the most immigrants—presumably to avoid direct competition for jobs. Demographer William Frey dubbed the migration of non-Hispanic whites away from cities with large immigrant populations as “the new white flight.”<sup>46</sup>

Econometric studies also acknowledged that the effects of immigration are hard to measure because most workers do not compete for the types of unskilled jobs usually held by immigrants. The wages of government employees are set at federal or state levels, and the earnings of many union workers are determined by national or regional collective bargain-

ing agreements. If workers who compete with unskilled immigrants in a city move away and the workers who do not compete remain, the effect of immigrants will not be detected in the city’s labor market.<sup>47</sup>

Econometric studies have found that the labor-market effects of unskilled immigrants are probably small nationally, but that they may be significant in particular industries and areas like agriculture, the garment industry, or the meatpacking industry.

Agriculture is probably the U.S. industry most dependent on unauthorized workers. In the late 1990s, almost 50 percent of the 2.5 million U.S. farm workers were unauthorized foreigners, despite the legalization of over 1 million illegal farm workers in 1987 and 1988. Farm workers who were legalized moved on to nonfarm jobs, which created a vacuum that drew in more unauthorized workers and helped keep farm worker wages and benefits among the lowest in America.<sup>48</sup>

**Economic mobility** (or integration) studies investigate how immigrants and their children are faring in the United States. Their starting point is the fact that “immigrants on average earn less than native workers [and] this gap ... has widened recently ... [as] the skills [years of education] of immigrants have declined relative to those of the native-born.”<sup>49</sup> The average educational levels of immigrants have been rising, but the educational levels of U.S.-born residents have risen faster, which explains the widening education gap. One of the most important issues for society and the economy is whether those who immigrate to the United States are so energetic and ambitious that their earnings will quickly catch up to and even surpass those of their native-born counterparts.

Economist Barry Chiswick conducted research in the 1970s that found just such a catch-up pattern for immigrants who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s. The immigrant men Chiswick studied initially earned 10 percent less than did similar U.S.-born men. But

the drive and ambition that prompted them to migrate also enabled them to close the earnings gap after an average of 13 years in the United States, and to earn 6 percent more than U.S.-born men after 23 years in the United States.<sup>50</sup>

Migration expert George Borjas contends, however, that Chiswick's study captured a unique set of circumstances: the influx of highly skilled

Asian immigrants and a booming U.S. economy. Borjas noted that in 1970 the average immigrant earned 1 percent more than the average U.S.-born worker. The earnings gap between immigrants and U.S.-born workers has widened since the 1970s, especially for Mexican and Central American immigrants, who tend to have fewer years of education. The average earnings of immigrants from Mexico and

### *Box 3*

## **Immigration Trade-Offs**

Immigration is often characterized as being either good or bad for the country. Few public policy choices are contests between good and bad, however. Adjusting interest rates upward, for example, can lead to lower inflation, which is a desirable result. But higher interest rates can undermine low unemployment, which is a competing good. Similarly, reducing trade barriers can stimulate exports, which helps some employers and workers, but lower trade barriers can also increase imports and lead to the closure of other businesses and the loss of jobs. There is no easy way to balance the trade-offs between competing outcomes.

Decisions on the three basic immigration questions entail making such trade-offs:

- How many immigrants should be allowed to enter?
- From which countries should they be admitted?
- How should the government enforce immigration rules?

Agriculture presents a good example of immigration trade-offs because large numbers of Mexican immigrants have worked in U.S. agriculture for 60 years.<sup>1</sup> Americans want to pay low prices for food. They also want farm workers, like any employees, to have decent wages and working conditions. To achieve both these goals, Congress and several presidential administrations have permitted foreign farm workers to enter the United States and provide low-cost labor to U.S. farmers, and then tried to alleviate the poverty of farm workers and their

children with special education, health, and housing programs. There are trade-offs between these competing goods—inexpensive food and decent farm wages.

Farmers got about 21 percent of each dollar consumers spent on fresh fruit and vegetables in 1997. Wages and benefits paid to farm workers are about one-third of the farmer's costs. Thus, farmers get about 21 cents for a \$1 head of lettuce, and about 7 cents of that goes to farm workers' wages and benefits.

About two-thirds of the 2.5 million U.S. farm workers were born abroad. It is difficult to estimate how much U.S. wages would rise if foreign workers were not available, and how much this would increase prices to consumers. The Bracero program offers one example. Mexicans came to the United States to work in agriculture for more than 20 years under this program. In 1966, one year after the Bracero program ended, the United Farm Workers Union won a 40 percent wage increase for grape harvesters. If the flow of foreign farm workers halted in 1998 and long-term residents won a similar wage increase, the average hourly earnings for a farm worker would rise from \$7 to \$10. The price of a head of lettuce would rise from \$1 to \$1.03. The amount that each "consumer unit" (or household) spent on fresh fruits and vegetables in 1997 would have increased by \$9.

Do the benefits of lower consumer costs and higher profits outweigh the inequity and other problems associat-

Central America were, for example, 25 percent to 40 percent lower than earnings of U.S.-born workers in 1970 and 50 percent lower in 1990.

Instead of catching up to the U.S.-born in earnings, Borjas concluded, many immigrants will never earn as much as U.S.-born workers with similar qualifications. Immigration is expanding the low-income population.<sup>51</sup> Chiswick's ambition-and-drive expla-

nation does seem to hold true for some immigrants, however. Immigrant men from China, Japan, and Korea increased their earnings relative to U.S.-born men between 1970 and 1990. In 1970, the immigrants had average earnings that were 88 percent of those of U.S.-born men with the same amount of education, but these immigrants earned 10 percent more than similar U.S.-born men did in 1990.

ed with paying below-average wages for farm workers? The way this question is answered is a major determinant of U.S. immigration policy, especially with respect to Mexico.

A second set of immigration trade-offs occurs in American towns and cities. Prosperous cities with energetic and enterprising residents are assets to any country. Immigrants often bring these qualities to a city—but they also speak a different language and practice different cultural traditions, which can disrupt the prevailing social order. Are the potential prosperity and dynamism infused by immigrants worth the threat to social cohesion? Leaders such as Mayor Rudolph Guiliani of New York appear to say yes—and advocate more immigration to spur an urban revival.

In contrast, the mayor of Georgetown, Del., where some 2,000 Guatemalans arrived in a city of 5,000 in the 1990s, complains that there is no money to provide immigrants the services they need. Georgetown residents do not want their taxes raised to pay for services for immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

The language skills of newcomers involve other trade-offs. Immigrants who learn English quickly yet maintain their native language are a benefit for the United States because they can provide links to markets in foreign countries. The trade-offs appear when immigrants cannot speak English well, especially when they live in monolingual enclaves. The lack of English skills fosters residential segregation and mistrust between immigrants and established residents.<sup>3</sup>

There is one striking example of economic gain that resulted from a concentration of Spanish-speakers in an American city. The arrival of large numbers of Cuban exiles to Miami after the Cuban revolution of 1959—and a second wave after the failed U.S. invasion of Cuba in 1961—brought highly educated, ambitious people to the U.S. mainland. They created a vibrant enclave economy and community. Miami became a financial center of Latin America and a link to the Spanish-speaking world. But for Miami, the economic asset of a Spanish-speaking population with business links to lucrative Latin American markets is counterbalanced by strained relations with African American and non-Hispanic white residents who speak only English.

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copyright reasons.

*A Vietnamese immigrant works in a hair salon in a fashionable section of Washington, D.C. Immigrants often work longer hours but receive less pay than U.S.-born workers in comparable jobs.*

## Entrepreneurship

Immigrant entrepreneurs are highly visible in many cities, where their restaurants, dry-cleaning and tailoring establishments, and small stores are patronized by immigrants and natives alike. These self-employed immigrants exemplify the energy that immigrants add to the U.S. economy, and immigrant entrepreneurship is often credited with helping to revitalize cities.<sup>52</sup>

Yet immigrants are only slightly more likely to be self-employed than the U.S.-born. In 1990, about 8 percent of employed foreign-born women ages 25 to 64 were self-employed, compared with 7 percent of native-born women. The percentages were the same (13 percent) for similar men regardless of whether they were U.S.-born or foreign-born.

Is self-employment a sign of ambition and success for immigrants or does it reflect immigrants' difficulties finding a steady job? In an industrial economy, moving from self-employment to a paid job usually brings bet-

ter pay and benefits. Self-employed farmers leave the land to seek employment in cities, for example. Self-employment is countercyclical: It increases during recessions and declines when the economy is booming. When rural migrants lose their jobs in the city, for example, they may return to the land and to self-employment. In a service economy, "Self-employment rises during recessions when regular jobs may be harder to find."<sup>53</sup>

Many social scientists who study immigrant communities regard immigrant self-employment as a sign of success and upward mobility. In an influential 1985 book, Alejandro Portes and Robert Bach described how Cuban immigrants formed an ethnic enclave in Miami that enabled them to start businesses that created jobs for themselves and for fellow Cubans.<sup>54</sup> Portes and Bach argued that self-employment allowed immigrants to take advantage of opportunities in their communities.

Immigrant entrepreneurship also has some negative aspects. Many of the worst abuses of U.S. labor laws are uncovered in immigrant communities. In 1995, Los Angeles authorities discovered a group of Thai women who had been confined in a sewing sweatshop under inhumane conditions. In 1997, authorities uncovered a case of deaf Mexican immigrants who had been coerced into selling trinkets on New York subways and handing over their income to Mexican smugglers.<sup>55</sup> Immigrant entrepreneurs may be unfamiliar with U.S. labor laws and their immigrant employees are unlikely to complain. Because aggressive enforcement of labor laws might threaten the viability of immigrant businesses, some analysts argue that governments should not interfere with wages and working conditions in immigrant-owned businesses. Some claim that the "enforcement capacity of the community" can prevent exploitation.<sup>56</sup> But evidence suggests that there may be a trade-off between encouraging immigrant businesses and preventing workplace abuse by enforcing labor laws.



## Fiscal Effects

One of the most debated questions of the early 1990s was whether immigrants “pay their way” in the United States. Do the taxes immigrants pay cover the cost of the public services they use, including schools, welfare, health care, and transportation systems? The answers are complex and depend in part on how well we can measure both the short-term and long-term fiscal effects of immigrants. The answers may also depend on the point of view of the investigator.

Analysts inclined to look at the positive effects of immigration have argued that immigrants generally provide a fiscal surplus because most immigrants are young. They work, pay taxes, and do not draw social security or health benefits.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, immigrants are not eligible for all public services. Illegal immigrants, who also pay taxes, are excluded from almost all welfare benefits, unemployment insurance, and nonemergency health care services. (Children living in the United States illegally, however, may attend public schools on the same basis as any citizen or legal resident.)

State and local governments have not been reassured by this reasoning. Facing budget shortfalls in the early 1990s, California and Florida sued the federal government to recover the cost of providing public services to unauthorized foreigners. They and other states also complained about the economic burden of legal immigrants and refugees. Although the legal suits were rejected by the courts, they stimulated research about the amount of taxes paid by immigrants and the costs of providing services to immigrants. California argued in 1993, for example, that the state was spending more than \$5 billion per year—10 percent of the state’s budget—to provide services to illegal immigrants and their U.S.-born children. Almost 40 percent of these funds went to provide education through high school to an estimated 350,000 unauthorized pupils. The state demanded \$2.3 billion in reimbursement from the federal government.<sup>58</sup>

Many analysts discounted studies done by cities and states seeking federal reimbursement because the studies tended to overstate the costs of immigrants and to understate taxes immigrants paid. The NRC reviewed fiscal impact studies and reached two major conclusions. First, an immigrant’s fiscal balance—the taxes paid minus the cost of services consumed—depends primarily on the immigrant’s earnings. High-income immigrants provided a possible net fiscal balance, while low-income immigrants produced a negative net balance.

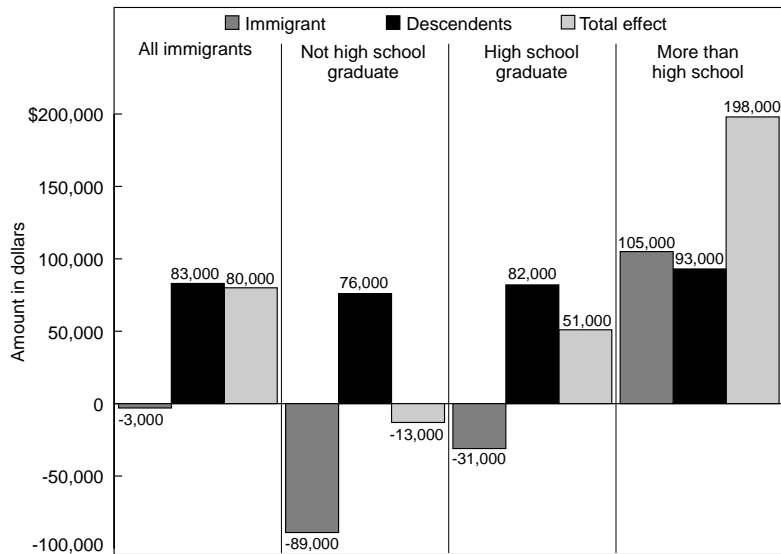
In California, households headed by U.S.-born persons paid, on average, \$2,700 more in federal taxes than they received in federal benefits in 1996. Immigrant households, in contrast, received \$2,700 more in federal benefits than they paid in federal taxes. This deficit accrued largely because immigrant households had below-average incomes and thus paid lower taxes than the average household, but they had more children attending public schools than households headed by U.S.-born Californians. The average native-born household paid \$1,200 more in taxes to cover the deficit in California.<sup>59</sup>

The “immigrant deficit” is less in states where immigrants make up a smaller proportion of the population. In New Jersey, households headed by U.S.-born residents paid about \$200 more annually in 1996 to cover the extra costs of immigrant households. Researchers applied these state estimates to the total U.S. population and calculated that the 89 million households headed by a U.S.-born person paid an extra \$200 each in 1996 to cover the gap between taxes paid and services used by 9 million immigrant-headed households. The 1996 national immigrant deficit was \$15 billion to \$20 billion.

The NRC study also confirmed the imbalance among the federal, state, and local government taxes paid by immigrants and the expenditures made for their benefit. The taxes immigrants pay are mostly income taxes

***Self-employed immigrants exemplify the energy that immigrants add to the U.S. economy.***

**Figure 6**  
**The Long-Term Fiscal Effect of One Immigrant, by Education Level, 1996 Dollars**



Source: James P. Smith and Barry Edmonston, eds., *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration* (1997): Table 7-5.

withheld by the federal government. The services consumed by immigrants, however, such as education for their children, are mostly paid by state and local governments. Such findings have prompted many states to request a revenue-sharing arrangement with the federal government to deal with the fiscal impacts of immigrants.

These fiscal studies are snapshots of taxes paid and the cost of services provided at a point in time. If immigrants' earnings rise over time, so will their tax contributions, and the fiscal deficit may decrease. Similarly, the cost of educating immigrant children today could be regarded as an investment that will reward the country with higher-income workers tomorrow. The NRC analysis attempted to measure these long-term effects. It projected future population, immigrant and native earnings, taxes, and use of government services. It also examined typical life-cycle trajectories for children who attend public schools, pay taxes during their working lives, and rely on public health services and social security after they retire.

The NRC concluded that the long-term economic value of an immigrant is strongly influenced by his or her age at arrival and years of education.<sup>60</sup> On average, adult immigrants arriving with less than a high school education impose a net fiscal cost on the United States of \$89,000 over their lifetimes, and high school graduates cost \$31,000 (see Figure 6). Immigrants with more than 12 years of schooling provide a \$105,000 lifetime gain for the United States—the taxes they pay will exceed the value of benefits received by this amount, in 1996 dollars.

## Naturalization and Politics

At its founding, the United States established two important principles: All persons in the United States are to have full and equal rights, and all persons born in the United States are automatically citizens of the United States. The United States is still striving to undo the effects of the major

exception to these principles—slavery. The efforts to compensate African Americans for disadvantages and discrimination that originated with slavery have included anti-discrimination measures and preferences for minorities that extend to immigrants as well as to the descendants of slaves.

U.S. laws have always made few distinctions between citizens and noncitizens who are legal residents. Legal immigrants have been able to live where they please; seek any job (except for government jobs); and buy a house, land, or business without restriction. The basic constitutional rights, including the right of free speech and the free exercise of religion, are extended to both legal and unauthorized immigrants. Citizens of other countries cannot vote in public elections, but they can vote and hold office in U.S. labor unions and in private organizations such as churches, foundations, and fraternal groups.

To become a naturalized citizen, an immigrant must be at least 18 years old, have been a legal resident at least five years (three years for spouses of U.S. citizens), and pass a test of English and civics. Typical questions asked on these tests include “Where is the White House located?” and “Name one right guaranteed by the First Amendment.”

Australia, Canada, and New Zealand have more relaxed requirements for citizenship than the United States: Residence requirements are shorter, the tests are simpler, and the fees lower. Most Western European countries, however, have more restrictive naturalization rules. A child born in Germany to foreign parents is not automatically a German citizen, for example.

Historically, less than one-half of the immigrants to the United States have naturalized, although the proportions vary substantially by country of origin. Most of the immigrants admitted in 1977 became eligible to naturalize in 1982; by 1995, about 46 percent were citizens (see Figure 7, page 34). Most immigrants admitted in 1982 became eligible for citizen-

ship in 1987, and just 42 percent had naturalized by 1995.<sup>61</sup>

Among the leading countries of origin, immigrants from China, the former Soviet Union, and the Philippines were most likely to become citizens, while those from Mexico and Canada were least likely.

One reason naturalization rates have been low is the large share of U.S. immigrants from Mexico. Many Mexicans in the United States expect to return to Mexico someday. Before recent changes in Mexican law, these returnees would be denied certain rights granted only to Mexican citizens—such as the right to own and inherit land in Mexico—if they became citizens of the United States. In general, the probability that an immigrant in the United States will naturalize increases with age, education, income, and English-language ability. The fact that Mexican immigrants are younger, poorer, and less likely to speak English than are immigrants from some other countries also helps explain why relatively few Mexicans naturalize.

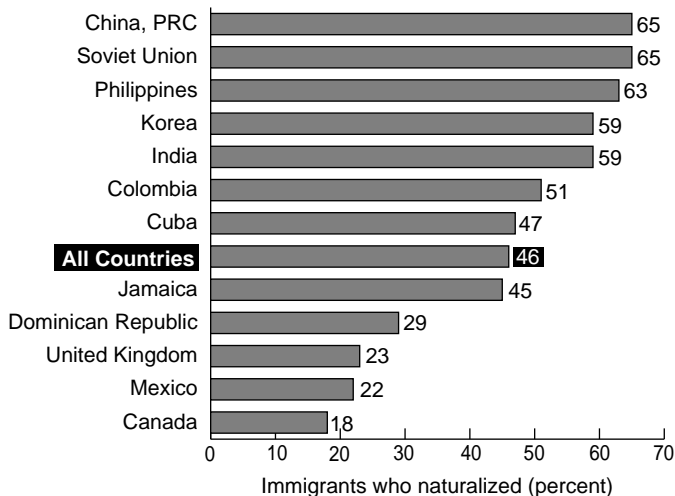
Some observers complain that the United States has granted too many rights to foreign residents and that foreigners see no need to become U.S. citizens. The United States has, in this view, “devalued” citizenship.<sup>62</sup> Others believe that all U.S. residents should be able to participate in the U.S. political process regardless of their citizenship status. They consider denying that right to be “taxation without representation.”<sup>63</sup> Before World War I, more than 20 U.S. states permitted noncitizens to vote in federal, state, and local elections. Many Americans favor the United States’ historic laissez-faire attitude toward citizenship. This approach expects foreigners to change their national allegiance when they elect to do so, and to assume the rights and obligations of citizenship at that time.

In 1996, naturalization became a major political issue. The year before, Vice President Al Gore had launched a “Citizenship USA” drive to eliminate the backlog of 600,000 applications for naturalization. Some immigrants

***All persons  
in the United  
States are  
to have full  
and equal  
rights.***

Figure 7

### 1995 Citizenship Status of Immigrants From Selected Countries Admitted in 1977



Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Statistical Yearbook, 1996* (1997).

had been waiting for two years for their applications to be processed. Under “Citizenship USA,” new applicants were promised naturalization within six months.<sup>64</sup> Republicans accused the Clinton administration of expediting naturalization to add Democratic voters before the next election.

“Citizenship USA” accelerated the naturalization process, but congressional investigations found that the FBI had not carried out the required fingerprint checks on about one-fifth of the people naturalized between August 1995 and September 1996. FBI checks ascertain whether applicants have committed a crime in the United States. Republican campaign ads charged that “aliens with criminal records—rapists, murderers, armed felons—have been granted U.S. citizenship so they can vote.” In response, the INS tightened its procedures to insure that all applicants are screened for criminal records. The added steps lengthened the wait between application and naturalization, which was more than 18 months in 1997.<sup>65</sup> Despite the delays, the number of immigrants electing to naturalize has increased sharply, from 280,600 in FY1986 to 1 million in FY1996.

The surge in naturalizations that began in the mid-1990s has many causes, including:

- **The INS’ Green Card Replacement Program, launched in 1993.** Legal immigrants, who generally are eligible to apply for citizenship, had to pay the INS \$75 for a new, more fraud-proof immigrant visa. For \$20 more, they could apply for U.S. citizenship at the same time.
- **The approval of Proposition 187 in California in November 1994.** Proposition 187 would have established a state-run screening system to prevent unauthorized immigrants from receiving state-funded services, including public education. The law was never fully implemented because of a court ruling that Proposition 187 was unlawful state interference with federal immigration policy. But it stands as a symbol of mid-1990s anti-immigrant attitudes that encouraged some immigrants to naturalize so they could clearly establish their legal rights in the United States.
- **Rising levels of immigration in the 1980s.** Many of the 2.7 million unauthorized foreigners who were legalized in 1987–1988 became eligible to naturalize after 1994.
- **Enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.** This reform legislation makes some legal immigrants ineligible for federal welfare programs if they are not citizens. This law created an incentive for immigrants to become citizens to preserve or gain eligibility for benefits.
- **Mexico’s approval of dual nationality in 1996, which removed a legal disincentive for Mexicans to seek U.S. citizenship.** Mexican nationals who become citizens of another country now may retain their Mexican passports and enjoy many of the rights of Mexican citizens.

The votes cast by newly naturalized citizens in the November 1996 elections were scrutinized closely to determine whether their growing number and their concentration in bellwether

states such as California will affect national voting patterns. Hispanics and Asians together were about 14 percent of the population in 1996, but they were only about 6 percent of those eligible to vote. Most newly naturalized Hispanics who registered to vote are Democrats. In the November 1996 election, some 70 percent of Hispanics across the United States voted for Clinton. In only one state—Arizona—did the Latinos' preference for Clinton tip the state to the Democrats, according to some analysts. Cuban Americans, who are concentrated in Florida, have long been staunch Republicans, although many voted for Clinton in the 1996 election.<sup>66</sup> Asian voters are more politically diverse; a small majority supported Bob Dole in the 1996 election.<sup>67</sup>

It may be decades before rising numbers of naturalized Latino and Asian voters significantly affect national elections, although they already make a difference in local elections.<sup>68</sup> Latinos are still a small part of the electorate and they vote in much lower numbers than the average. In the November 1996 election in California, for example, non-Hispanic whites were 53 percent of California's 32 million residents, but they cast 77 percent of the votes, down only slightly from 79 percent in 1992. Hispanics were 30 percent of the electorate, but they cast only 10 percent of votes in 1992 and 11 percent in 1996.

Education and age are more reliable predictors of whether and how citizens will vote than whether they are U.S.-born or foreign-born. Numerous studies show that citizens with more education are more likely to vote and that, regardless of education, young people are less likely to vote than are older people. A number of related characteristics have also been linked to the probability of voting, including income, homeownership, and minority status. Immigrants tend to have many of the characteristics associated with a low voter turnout—they are generally younger, have below-average incomes and educational levels, are less likely to own a

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*A new citizen pledges allegiance to the United States. Historically, less than one-half of immigrants become citizens, but that may be changing.*

home, and are more likely to be a racial or ethnic minority. Even after accounting for these factors, however, naturalized citizens are less likely than U.S.-born citizens to register and vote.<sup>69</sup>

## Immigrants in American Society

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the leading metaphor for the incorporation of newcomers to America was a fusion of peoples in a “smelting pot” (Ralph Waldo Emerson); “cauldron” (Henry James); or “crucible,” in which, historian Frederick Jackson Turner noted, “immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics.”<sup>70</sup> The hero of a popular play of 1908, “The Melting Pot,” echoed this metaphor when he cried out: “Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American!”

Reality was more complex. There is always a tension between the newcomers' desires to keep alive the culture and language of the community they

left behind, and their need and wish to adapt to new surroundings and a different society. The balance between these competing forces changed over time, but three principles guided what is now called integration:

- **America was generally open to all kinds of immigrants.**
- **No ethnic group should establish a formally recognized political identity.** Nothing bars the formation of a Mexican-American political party, but the two-party tradition and the belief that Americans act politically as individuals, not as members of ethnic groups, has discouraged such political parties.
- **No ethnic or national origin group would be required to give up its character and distinctive qualities.**

At no time in American history has the process of integration been easy or trouble-free (see Box 4, page 38). The open hostility that was expressed toward certain racial and ethnic groups in the past is surprising by today's standards. In 1930, for example, President Herbert Hoover rebuked New York Congressman Fiorella La Guardia by saying that "the Italians are predominantly our murderers and bootleggers," and invited La Guardia and his Italian American supporters to "go back to where you belong" because "like a lot of other foreign spawn, you do not appreciate this country which supports you and tolerates you."<sup>71</sup> Today, no public official is likely to offer such advice to Chinese American Gary Locke, who was elected governor of Washington in 1996. Governor Locke, like La Guardia, is the son of immigrants.

In the 1990s, the integration of newcomers is still problematic. The Changing Relations study, which investigated immigrant communities in six cities in the 1980s, found that, despite segregation in jobs and housing, and communication impeded by lack of a common language, newcomers and natives in a number of U.S. cities were cooperating to achieve local goals, such as obtaining government benefits or improving their neighborhoods.<sup>72</sup> The report also noted that

immigrants in these cities were not integrating into the broader community. And, economic restructuring had created fears in many communities that the immigrants are a threat to jobs of longer-term residents.

The U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform (CIR) recommended in its final report, issued in September 1997, that the federal government do more to "Americanize immigrants" to help them integrate into U.S. society. The CIR emphasized that the United States expects "immigrants to obey our laws, pay our taxes, respect other cultures and ethnic groups. At the same time, we ... also incur obligations—to provide an environment in which newcomers can become fully participating members of our society."

To accelerate integration, the CIR recommended federal grants to communities with large numbers of immigrants to create resource centers in which immigrants and the native-born could interact. The CIR noted that integration is the responsibility of immigrants and the communities in which they settle and emphasized that "Those business groups ... who lobby for high levels of immigration must make a far greater effort ... also to support immigrants, through English classes, naturalization and civic education."

## Language and Education

The 1990 census reported that 32 million residents older than age 5 spoke a language other than English at home. About 15 million foreign-born Americans—nearly 80 percent—speak a language other than English at home (see Table 3). Spanish is the most common non-English language spoken by immigrants, followed by Chinese, Tagalog (the primary language of the Philippines), German, French (not shown), and Korean. Many of those who do not speak English at home do not know English well or do not speak it at all.

In the United States, the shift from speaking another language to speaking English has usually occurred over

three generations. Adult immigrants commonly did not learn English well. Their children were usually bilingual. They used their parents' language at home and English at school. English often became dominant as they entered the workplace. Immigrants' grandchildren—the third generation—typically speak only English.<sup>73</sup>

The shift to English may be accelerating among recent immigrants and may occur within two generations rather than three generations.<sup>74</sup> Most immigrants settle in U.S. cities, where they are more likely to be exposed to English than were workers in farms and factories earlier in the century. A recent study found that the children of immigrants in Miami, for example, preferred to speak English in everyday communications.<sup>75</sup> Another survey found that even though most Mexican-born U.S. residents spoke Spanish at home, almost two-thirds of all U.S.-born persons of Mexican ancestry used English at home.<sup>76</sup>

Immigrants and their children would benefit from acquiring English language ability even more rapidly. Poor English skills exact a “penalty” of lower earnings for immigrants. Immigrants in earlier times could farm, work in factories, or build railroads without speaking English. But in today’s service-dominated economy, English-speaking ability is required for nearly all but the lowest-paying jobs. A study reported in the early 1990s that “among immigrant men who spoke a language other than English at home, those who were not fluent in English earned only about half as much as those who were.”<sup>77</sup> A study by immigration experts Barry Chiswick and Paul Miller concluded that Americans “who speak English ‘well’ or ‘very well’ have 17 percent higher earnings than those with less fluency.”<sup>78</sup>

Most immigrants want to learn English. A survey of residents of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican origins found over 90 percent agreed that “all U.S. citizens and residents should learn English.”<sup>79</sup> But acquiring a new language is a difficult undertaking for an adult, particularly for an

**Table 3**  
**Language Spoken at Home by Foreign-Born Americans, 1990**

| Category                   | Foreign-born |         |
|----------------------------|--------------|---------|
|                            | Thousands    | Percent |
| Total, age 5+              | 19,506       | 100.0   |
| English only               | 4,076        | 20.9    |
| Spanish                    | 7,351        | 37.7    |
| Asian/Pacific              | 3,637        | 18.6    |
| Chinese                    | 1,088        | 5.6     |
| Tagalog <sup>a</sup>       | 746          | 3.8     |
| Korean                     | 531          | 2.7     |
| Vietnamese                 | 435          | 2.2     |
| Japanese                   | 245          | 1.3     |
| Indo-European <sup>b</sup> | 3,846        | 18.6    |
| German                     | 530          | 2.7     |
| Indic <sup>c</sup>         | 480          | 2.5     |
| Polish                     | 287          | 1.5     |
| Arabic                     | 251          | 1.3     |

<sup>a</sup> Tagalog is the primary language spoken in the Philippines.

<sup>b</sup> Other than Spanish.

<sup>c</sup> Indic languages (spoken on the Indian subcontinent) include Bengali, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, and Panjabi.

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Technical Paper 29 (March 1999): Table 5. Accessed online at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab05.html>, on March 5, 1999.

adult who works long hours. There are frequently long waiting lists for English classes. There is no federally financed program to teach English to adult speakers of other languages, although states use federal adult education grants along with their own funds to provide English instruction.

## Public Education

Lack of English language skills is also a major issue for the nation’s schools. Students who have difficulty understanding an all-English curriculum are often referred to as limited-English proficient (LEP), a term with a definition that varies from state to state and between federal agencies. These students can also be referred to as English-language learners.<sup>80</sup>

In the 1996–1997 school year, there were an estimated 2.8 million students with limited English ability in primary and secondary schools in the United States—twice as many as in the 1980s. These students made up about 6 percent of the 47 million children enrolled in school. There are two

## 'Melting Pot' vs. 'Salad Bowl' or Integration vs. Pluralism

Integration and pluralism are two extreme views in the ongoing debate about how immigrants should be accommodated into U.S. society. The integrationist (assimilationist) aims to eliminate ethnic boundaries and represents the traditional “melting pot” image of America. The pluralist (multiculturalist) aims to preserve the ethnic heritage of immigrant groups. This approach has been described as a “salad” with distinct ingredients. For integrationists, American democracy is composed of equal individuals from many origins; for pluralists, it is an equality of groups.

Taken to their logical extremes, both positions are absurd and neither has been realized in the United States. The melting pot ignores the importance and persistence of memories of the “home” countries. An exclusive emphasis on integration overlooks the fact that ethnic affiliation persists for many generations—long after the language and knowledge of the “old country” has faded.

The pluralists’ insistence on group identity, on the other hand, limits the freedom of individuals to mold their own identity. It assumes that ethnic boundaries remain fixed and often overlooks divisions within ethnic groups. It also ignores the evidence that in an open, heterogeneous society like that of the United States, people work, make friends, and marry outside their ancestral communities.

The integration versus pluralism debate is played out in many venues. In college dormitories, for example, should students be placed with others of the same race or ethnicity, or should they be grouped with students from different backgrounds? Should school children be grouped for instruction according to their home languages, or should they be brought together in English-language classes? In the workplace, may employees converse among themselves in languages other than English?

In 1984, historian John Higham proposed a system of “pluralistic integration.” Pluralistic integration asserts that there is a common United States culture to which all individuals have access. It respects the efforts by foreign national or ethnic groups to preserve and enhance their own group identity, but it does not support the use of public funds to promote differences between racial and ethnic groups. “No ethnic group under these terms may have the support of the general community in strengthening its boundaries, [but] ethnic nuclei are respected as enduring centers of social action.”<sup>1</sup> Another scholar of immigration, Larry Fuchs, used the term “kaleidoscope” to emphasize the dynamics of change as immigrants and immigrant groups interact with the broader U.S. culture.<sup>2</sup> Immigrants adapt and change, and so does American society.

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major approaches to teaching English to students fluent in another language. Each approach has its own philosophy and assumptions about what is appropriate for students with different linguistic backgrounds. In English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction, priority is given to the rapid acquisition of English. Children of various language backgrounds receive instruction in English for all subjects, but the English is modified by specially trained teachers so it can be easily understood by English-learners. Teachers provide an appropriate context for the students to help them understand the new language.

The other approach is bilingual education, under which children are taught to read and write in their home languages before shifting their language of instruction gradually to English. Older children who are new to English are taught such core subjects as math, science, and history in their home languages while they are learning English. The aim of bilingual education is to ensure that limited-English students are taught material with the same intellectual content as other students while these students gain competence in English.

Educators do not agree on which teaching method is best. The NRC recently concluded that the most successful programs have three similar characteristics: some native language instruction, especially initially; a relatively early phasing-in of English instruction; and teachers specially trained in instructing English-language learners.<sup>81</sup> These three characteristics are not present in many school programs. In schools with bilingual programs, instruction in a non-English language, mostly Spanish, may continue for five, six, or seven years. In other schools, many children starting school without speaking English are taught in English by teachers who have had no training in teaching children in a language that is not their own.

Most non-English-speaking students come from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, which



presents other handicaps for excelling in school. The NRC found that 77 percent of English-language learners in a sample of schools were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, compared with 38 percent of all students in the sample.

The debate over bilingual education is especially vociferous in California, which is home to about one-half of the nation's limited-English school children. California classified about 1.3 million students as LEP in 1996, and LEP children represented almost all of the growth in public school enrollment in the 1990s. In June 1998, California voters approved the "English for the Children" initiative by a 61 percent margin. The law ended bilingual education and required most non-English-speaking children to be placed in special English classes for only one year and then shifted to regular classes.

The debate about bilingual education involves much broader issues than the best way to teach non-English-speaking children. One debate concerns whether newcomers should quickly be integrated into mainstream America, or whether newcomers should be encouraged to retain their distinctive cultural attributes and their native languages—and whether the public schools should help immigrants maintain their language and culture. If schools give priority to rapid English-language learning, does that show concern for their future success in the United States, or is it Anglo cultural imperialism? Is bilingual education a form of minority patronage that creates jobs for members of particular ethnic groups? Should immigration policy be changed to favor people who already know English?

Strong feelings about the role of English often overwhelm educational considerations in the debate over bilingual education. Should the United States establish English as its official language? Would a prohibition against the use of other languages be simply an affirmation that English is the common language of the United

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*Immigrants can offset the "penalty" of lower wages incurred by limited English skills by enrolling in language classes, but they often face long waiting lists.*

States? Or, would establishing English as the official language be a rebuff to speakers of other languages and a handicap to the work of government? Such questions involve the public education system in much broader issues and feelings about immigrants, integration, and national character.

## Journey to an Unfinished Nation

Past immigration flows to the United States resemble waves, with the number of immigrants increasing to peaks, and then falling into troughs. The fourth wave of U.S. immigration, which began in 1965, has been climbing since the early 1980s. Many Americans want the government to reduce immigration, which would make the present immigration levels the peak of the fourth wave. Others are comfortable with current immigration levels.

People migrate because demand, or pull factors—such as job opportu-

nities—draw them into destination areas. Supply, or push forces—such as high unemployment—encourage them to leave home. Intervening variables or networks turn potential into actual migration. All three variables have been evolving in ways that suggest immigration will increase rather than decrease in the near future.

The United States is a nation of immigrants that first welcomed all newcomers, later excluded certain types, and since the 1920s has limited the number of immigrants through an annual ceiling. Immigrants and refugees arrive through America's front door, which opened wider in 1990 to accommodate more relatives of U.S. residents and more professionals. But the fastest growth in entries over the past decade has been through side and back doors—including, for example, greater numbers of asylum applicants whose requests for refugee status have been denied but who nonetheless remain.

Research on the economic, social, and political effects of immigration does not provide clear guidelines for policy. Immigrants have minor effects—for better or worse—on the huge American economy and labor market. Most immigrants are better off financially in America than they were at home, but many arrive with minimal education and skill levels and find it hard to advance to better jobs. State and local governments, meanwhile, point out that the taxes paid by immigrants go mostly to the federal government, while state and local governments bear the brunt of the costs of providing services to them.

Now, as in the past, most U.S. immigrants do not become naturalized citizens. In 1996, the U.S. Congress penalized that tendency by taking away some benefits previously avail-

able to permanent residents who were not citizens. The naturalization rate has increased for this and other reasons. And, the U.S.-born children of immigrants are citizens at birth regardless of whether their parents were naturalized citizens or even legal immigrants.

U.S. immigrants are often isolated from native-born Americans, as they were in previous periods of mass immigration. Their isolation is reinforced by housing and job segregation and language barriers. There are many examples of cooperation between natives and immigrants, however, and some signs that immigrant children may be acquiring English faster than did previous immigrants.

The United States is not alone in its concern about immigration. As the world economy integrates, tourists and business visitors flock from one industrial country to another—from Japan to the United States, for example. Immigrants make more permanent moves, usually from poorer to richer countries—from Mexico to the United States, for example.

For the foreseeable future, the United States is likely to remain the world's major destination for immigrants. Our history and traditions suggest that, within a few decades, most of today's immigrants will be an integral part of the American community, albeit a changed community. But there is no guarantee that history will repeat itself. There are concerns about the size and nature of today's immigrant population, especially about arrivals through the side and back doors. As the nation searches for an immigration policy for the 21st century, the United States—and the immigrants who are on their way here—has embarked on a journey to an uncertain destination.

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