

## Immigration: Shaping and Reshaping America

by Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley

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*More than 1 million  
foreigners settle in the  
United States annually.*

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*There were more than  
30 million foreign-born  
Americans in 2002.*

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*Immigration waves have  
shaped the United States  
throughout its history.*

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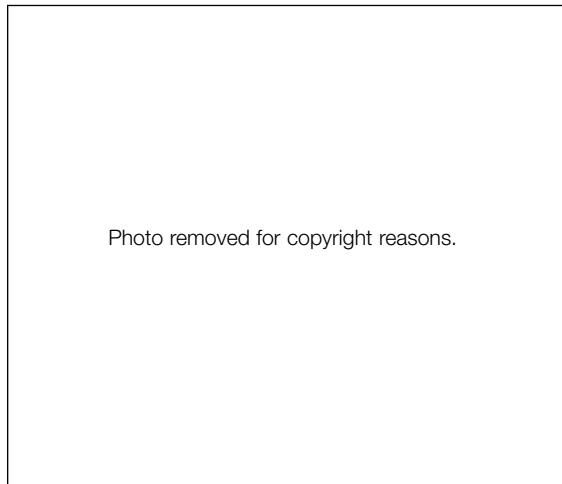
# Immigration: Shaping and Reshaping America

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About 95,000 foreigners a day arrive in the United States, but most do not intend to stay long. More than 90,000 are nonimmigrant tourists, business people, students, and workers who are welcomed at airports and border crossings. About 3,000 are immigrants or refugees who have been invited to become permanent residents of the United States, and more than 1,000 are unauthorized foreigners, usually Mexicans, who evade border controls, enter the United States, and settle.<sup>1</sup>

Is the arrival of so many foreigners to be welcomed or feared? There is no single answer, which helps to explain why Americans are ambivalent about immigration. The United States has always celebrated its immigrant heritage, and American leaders often recount the story of renewal and rebirth brought by newcomers from abroad. Yet Americans have worried since the days of the founders about potential economic, political, and cultural change caused by immigration.

Since Sept. 11, 2001, there is deepening concern about another aspect of immigration: that some foreigners may harm Americans. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, the U.S. government took steps to identify potential terrorists in the United States and prevent others from entering. Political leaders stated clearly that they did not want to shut the door to immigrants and legitimate visitors, but



*Our history and traditions suggest that, within a few decades, most of today's immigrants will be an integral part of the ever-changing American community.*

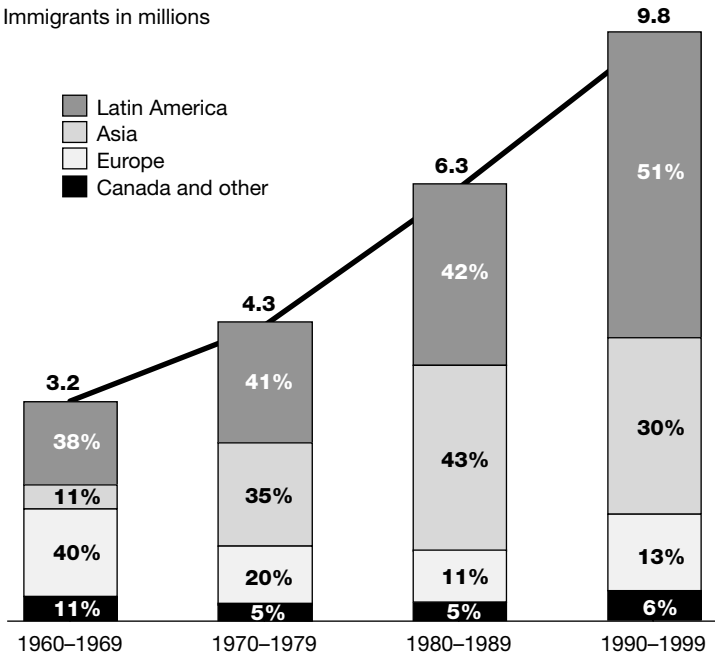
they did want to keep out terrorists and those who support them. Today, the United States is grappling with the right balance between welcoming foreigners and protecting Americans.

For the nation's first 100 years, the United States facilitated immigration, welcoming foreigners who could help to settle a vast country. Beginning in the 1880s, the United States began to bar certain types of foreigners—including prostitutes, low-skilled contract workers, and Chinese—ushering in the phase of qualitative restrictions on immigration. In the 1920s, the United States developed the current qualitative and quantitative restric-

Figure 1

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

Immigrants in millions



Note: The total for 1990 to 1999 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, *Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, 1970 to 2001, selected years.

tions on foreigners wishing to immigrate. A major policy change in 1965 switched priority for entry from people with particular national origins to those with relatives in the United States and foreigners whom U.S. employers wanted to hire. The result was a shift from mostly European to mostly Latin American and Asian immigrants.

There are few limits on nonimmigrant visitors, and their numbers grew rapidly in the 1990s, as more tourists and business visitors streamed into the country and as more foreign students and foreign workers arrived. Illegal immigration also rose in the 1990s, making immigration a contentious public policy issue in the 21st century.

Immigration and the integration of foreigners are much-debated issues; the debate is framed by the extreme views of those who advocate “no immigrants” and those who advocate

“no borders.” The Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), for example, charges that immigrants contribute to population growth and environmental degradation, displace low-skilled American workers, depress wages, and threaten the cultural bonds that hold Americans together. Consequently, FAIR calls for a sharp reduction in immigration—from 1 million a year to perhaps 300,000 a year—which FAIR feels would have the added benefit of allowing recent arrivals and Americans time to adjust to one another.

At the other extreme, *The Wall Street Journal*, the leading U.S. newspaper for the business world, advocated a five-word constitutional amendment—“There shall be open borders”—in a 1990 editorial. After the Sept. 11 attacks, the *Journal* still advocated high levels of immigration, chiefly for their economic benefits: More people mean more consumers and more workers, which helps the economy grow.<sup>2</sup> 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>3</sup> Other groups support continued immigration because they think it is a defining part of the American national identity.

The United States is a nation of immigrants. U.S. presidents frequently remind Americans that, except for American Indians, they or their forebears left other countries to begin anew in the United States, and that immigration permits individuals to better their lives while strengthening the United States. Yet immigration also brings many changes that raise 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. U.S. immigration policy will continue to change in response to immigration flows and their impacts on Americans. Resolving the fundamental economic, social, and political issues raised by immigration requires weighing the choices or trade-offs between widely shared but competing goals in American society.

## Immigration Patterns and Policies

More than 9 million foreigners were admitted as legal immigrants to the United States between 1991 and 2000, an average of 900,000 a year. The volume of immigration flows has been increasing since the 1950s. The average annual inflow was about 320,000 immigrants in the 1960s, 430,000 in the 1970s, and 630,000 in the 1980s. The origins of immigrants have also been changing. During the 1960s, 40 percent of legal immigrants were from Europe. In the 1990s, less than 13 percent of immigrants were from Europe, while 51 percent were from Latin America and another 30 percent were from Asia (see Figure 1).

More than half of the people “admitted” as legal permanent residents, or immigrants, each year are already living in the United States under a temporary visa or some other legal status or are undocumented aliens. Changes in immigration law can skew the immigration statistics for certain years. For example, more than 1.8 million people were granted immigrant status in 1991, although many had lived in the United States for years—1991 marked their change to legal immigrant status under legalization programs of 1987 and 1988.

Table 1

### Foreigners Entering and Exiting the United States, Fiscal Year 2001

Category	Number of people
<b>Immigrants</b>	<b>1,064,318</b>
Family-sponsored	675,178
<i>Immediate relatives of U.S. citizens</i>	443,035
<i>Other family-sponsored immigrants</i>	232,143
Employment-based	179,195
Refugees and asylees	108,506
Diversity immigrants	42,015
Other immigrants	59,424
<b>Emigrants (estimated)</b>	<b>-220,000</b>
<b>Nonimmigrants (legal admissions)</b>	<b>32,824,088</b>
Visitors for pleasure/business	29,419,601
Foreign students	688,970
Temporary foreign workers	990,708
<b>Illegal immigrants (estimated)</b>	<b>350,000 to 500,000</b>
Apprehensions	1,387,486
Deportations	-176,984
<i>Illegal immigrants living in United States, 2000 estimate</i>	<i>7 million to 9 million</i>

Note: The fiscal year runs from Oct. 1, 2000, to Sept. 30, 2001. Foreigners may be counted more than once in the same year under nonimmigrant admissions, apprehensions, and deportations.

Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *2001 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (2003); and J.S. Passel, “Projections of the U.S. Population and Labor Force by Generation and Educational Attainment: 2000–2050” (2003).

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2001, just over 1 million immigrants were admitted legally “through the front door,” and more than one-half were already living in the United States when they gained immigrant status. (The fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.) There are four types of front-door immigrants. The largest category consists of relatives of U.S. residents. In FY2001, 63 percent of immigrants were granted entry because family members residing in the United States 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, and 443,000 did so in FY2001. But noncitizens and U.S. citizens sponsoring their brothers and sisters for immigrant visas may wait a long time for their relatives. In fall 2002, Mexican permanent residents could expect to wait seven years for their spouses and chil-

dren to be granted immigrant visas, and U.S. citizens from the Philippines sponsoring brothers and sisters could expect to wait 21 years.<sup>4</sup>

The second-largest category comprises foreigners (and their family members) who were admitted for economic or employment reasons. Employment-based immigration includes multinational executives, workers holding professional or advanced degrees, clergy, and wealthy investors, as well as low-skilled and unskilled workers and priority workers with “extraordinary ability” in the arts or sciences. In 1990, some U.S. businesses and other groups feared a shortage of skilled labor. Congress, in the Immigration Act of 1990, raised the annual limit on the number of employment-preference immigrants from 54,000 to 140,000 a year; this limit may be exceeded if slots are left from a previous year. In FY2001,

nearly 180,000 employment-based immigrants were admitted.

There are several categories of employment-based visas, but the largest group (about 22 percent of the total) consists of foreigners with at least a bachelor’s degree and other skilled workers that U.S. employers request to fill jobs that they say cannot be filled with U.S. workers. About 85 percent of the “principals” who receive employment-based visas are already in the United States under temporary worker or other nonimmigrant status, and then adjust to resident immigrant status.<sup>5</sup> The process of testing the U.S. labor market for U.S. workers—labor certification—is not always closely supervised, however, and is subject to abuse.<sup>6</sup>

The third immigrant category is refugees and asylees: 10 percent of immigrants in 2001 were foreigners who were granted the right to live in

### *Box 1*

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

The laws of the United States define all people within its borders as either U.S. citizens or aliens. Aliens may be immigrants, refugees or asylees, nonimmigrants, or unauthorized foreigners.

Immigrants are citizens of other countries who have been granted visas that allow them to live and work permanently in the United States and, generally after five years, to become citizens. Immigrant visas used to be green, and immigrants are still often referred to as “green card holders.” In the past, most immigrant visas were issued to foreigners at U.S. consulates in their home countries. This changed in the 1990s, and today most immigrant visas are issued by the government inside the United States.

Refugees are citizens of other countries who seek admission to the United States because they fear persecution in their home countries based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The number admitted every year—80,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2001—

is determined annually by the president in consultation with Congress, but the number approved for admission varies.

Asylees arrive in the United States and then request safe haven. Like refugees, asylees request to stay out of fear of persecution in their home countries. There is no maximum number; in FY2001, 59,369 people requested asylum. There was a backlog of 304,000 asylum applications as of Sept. 30, 2002. Most asylum applications are rejected, but foreigners accepted for asylum or refugee status are allowed to live permanently in the United States.

Nonimmigrants are people who are granted temporary entry into the United States for a specific purpose, such as visiting, working, or studying. In FY2001, 32.8 million nonimmigrants were admitted; 90 percent were temporary visitors for pleasure (tourists) or business. Nonimmigrants who enter and leave the United States several times are counted each time, but Canadian visitors and Mexicans with border-crossing



the United States because of a well-founded fear of persecution in their home countries (see Box 1). About 26 percent of the refugees who arrived between FY1999 and FY2001 were from Ukraine and other countries of the former Soviet Union, 21 percent were from Cuba, and 18 percent were from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The fourth major immigrant group is the diversity category, which was created to introduce more variety into the stream of immigrants to the United States. Nationals of countries that sent fewer than 50,000 immigrants in the previous five years, and who meet specific educational and other criteria, may apply for one of 50,000 diversity visas. The applicants are chosen by lottery from between 9 million and 12 million applicants annually. Many applicants are found to be unqualified: Only 42,015 diversity immigrants were admitted in 2001.<sup>7</sup> Because many Asians and

Latin Americans are admitted in other categories, most diversity visas go to people from such African and European countries as Ghana, Nigeria, Poland, and Ukraine.

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 people who already had ties to U.S. residents. These laws strengthened existing networks and perpetuated this chain migration. Immigrants from countries that had not recently been sending immigrants, such as Ireland, found it difficult to establish the family and business networks needed to set chain migration in motion. During the first three years of the program, 40 percent of diversity visas were reserved for Irish immigrants. The “other immigrants” category also includes Cubans and Central Americans

*After 1965, U.S. immigration policy favored people with close relatives in the United States.*

cards that allow shopping visits are not included in these admissions data.

The United States has 25 types of nonimmigrant visas. These include A-1 visas for ambassadors, B-2 visas for tourists, J visas for students, P-1 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 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Some foreigners are able to visit the United States without a visa. The Visa Waiver Pilot Program permits visitors from 27 countries, mostly in Europe, to enter without visas if they have round-trip tickets.

Unauthorized, undocumented, or illegal immigrants are foreigners in the United States without valid visas. There were between 7 million and 9 million unauthorized foreigners in the United States in 2000, according to recent estimates. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimated there were about 3.5 million unauthorized foreigners in 1990, suggesting the

number at least doubled over the decade. About 70 percent of the unauthorized foreigners were Mexicans.

An additional 600,000 to 1.7 million foreigners were quasi-legal residents in 2000. Many of the quasi-legal foreigners are asylum-seekers waiting their asylum status to be determined; others hold temporary protected status while they wait for legal documentation or a hearing.

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Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), “Executive Summary: Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States 1990–2000” (January 2003), accessed online at [www.immigration.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/2000ExecSumm.pdf](http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/2000ExecSumm.pdf), on April 23, 2003; INS, *2001 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, DC: INS, 2003); and Jeffrey S. Passel, “Projections of the U.S. Population and Labor Force by Generation and Educational Attainment: 2000-2050” (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2003).

already in the United States who can petition for immigrant visas if they can demonstrate that they would suffer extreme hardship if they were sent back home.

Once they reach the United States, immigrants normally stay. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) estimated 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 Great 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>8</sup> The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 220,000 foreign-born residents emigrate each year.

Nonimmigrants 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, for example—so there are few quantitative limits on most categories of nonimmigrants. The number of nonimmigrants tripled in the past 20 years, primarily because of the growing number of tourists and business visitors.

Foreigners also arrive to work temporarily in the United States, and their presence is more controversial. The statistics are somewhat confusing: A foreign worker who enters more than once during a year is double-counted because the statistics record admissions rather than people. There were almost 1 million admissions of temporary foreign workers in FY2001; 40 percent were professionals coming to the United States with H-1B visas to fill jobs that require at least a bachelor's degree. Workers with H-1B visas are allowed to bring their families with them and to adjust to immigrant status if they can find a U.S. employer to sponsor them during the six years they can remain in the United States. In FY2001, nearly half of the H-1B workers were from India, and most were

employed in computer-related jobs. During the dot-com boom of the 1990s, the annual limit of 65,000 H-1B visas was reached well before the end of each year, and computer firms twice persuaded Congress to raise the annual limit to 195,000.<sup>9</sup>

The expanding H-1B program led to debates over U.S. employer preferences, foreign workers, and U.S. education. Those in favor of expanding H-1B admissions argued that U.S. employers needed easy access to the “best and brightest” of the world's workers and that the U.S. government should not erect barriers between U.S. employers and the foreign workers they need. Employers argued that foreign students dominate graduate school programs in math, science, and engineering and that it should be expected that U.S. employers would want to hire the best graduates of U.S. universities.

Critics countered that there is no shortage of U.S. workers interested in computer science and similar jobs, only a shortage of U.S. workers willing to work long hours for low wages and short careers in fast-changing industries. The critics point out that most students graduating from U.S. universities with bachelor's degrees in science and math are U.S. citizens, but most do not pursue advanced degrees because the extra earnings and opportunities seem insufficient to warrant the time, effort, and expense of graduate school. Critics of the H-1B program emphasize that high-tech firms interview and hire fewer than 2 percent of job applicants, suggesting no shortage of potential employees. A 1996 report on the H-1B program by the U.S. Department of Labor's inspector general concluded that the program should be abolished because most U.S. employers use it as a “probationary employment tryout program for illegal aliens, foreign students, and foreign visitors,” so that the program winds up legalizing foreigners whom the sponsoring employer has already hired.<sup>10</sup>

Foreign students make up another important category of nonimmigrants.

grants. Some 688,790 foreigners with student visas entered the United States in FY2001; some were counted more than once as they traveled abroad and back.

The Institute of International Education (IIE) reported that a record 582,996 foreign students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities during the 2001-2002 academic year. The largest number were from India, which sent 66,836 students, followed by China with 63,211. Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Canada were also leading sources of international students. Foreign students account for a larger share of the student body at costly private universities than at less expensive public ones. Most students pay their own expenses. The IIE reports that foreign students contribute about \$12 billion annually to the U.S. economy.<sup>11</sup>

Foreign students made up 23 percent of the students at Columbia University in 2001; 20 percent of students at the University of Southern California; and 15 percent of students at New York University. More than 16,000 foreign students were enrolled in these three private universities in 2001.

Foreign students became more controversial after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks: One of the alleged hijackers had entered the United States with a student visa to study English at a language school but never showed up for classes; two others attended a Florida flight training school. In an effort to track foreign students, the federal government launched the Student Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS) in 2002. Colleges must report data on foreign students so that the government is aware of foreigners who were admitted to the United States as students but did not enroll in classes.

Foreigners in the United States legally are immigrants or nonimmigrants. Unauthorized foreigners, also referred to as illegal aliens, deportable aliens, or undocumented workers, are persons in the United States in violation of U.S. immigration laws. An estimated 350,000 to 500,000 illegal aliens settle in the United States each

Photo removed for copyright reasons.

*The H-1B visa program has brought in thousands of foreigners for temporary jobs in high-tech industries; many of those workers find permanent employment and settle in the United States with their families.*

year; many more stay for a while and leave within the same year. The INS apprehended 1.4 million in FY2001, 95 percent of whom were Mexicans caught just inside the U.S. border. The same person may be caught several times, and each apprehension is counted separately.

In the mid-1990s, the INS shifted the focus of its border enforcement strategy from attempting to apprehend unauthorized aliens living in the United States to deterring their entry “through the back door” by adding agents, fences, lights, and cameras in the urban areas where most illegal entry attempts are made. In such areas as San Diego–Tijuana and El Paso–Juarez, apprehensions have fallen sharply. However, many migrants have turned to smugglers to help them enter illegally through the deserts and mountains of Arizona. The smugglers, known as *polleros* or *coyotes*, typically lead groups of 20 to 40 migrants across the border. They sometimes abandon those who cannot keep up or fail to provide water or make transportation arrangements for the migrants once they are in the United States. For the past several years, an average of one migrant a day has died attempting illegal entry.<sup>12</sup>

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Many foreigners enter the United States as tourists or students and then remain, or they may enter clandestinely and stay as unauthorized foreigners. Some of the unauthorized foreigners in the United States are waiting for immigrant visas. In October 2002, 1 million applications were pending for foreigners in the United States seeking to adjust their status to that of immigrant. A foreigner who is found to have been in the United States unlawfully for more than a year may be barred from legal re-entry for 10 years. Thus, unauthorized foreigners waiting for immigrant visas walk a tightrope, hoping to receive immigrant visas before they are detected, removed, and barred from legal re-entry for 10 years.

If unauthorized foreigners are apprehended inside the United States, the government attempts to remove them voluntarily or to deport them to their countries of origin. In 2001, some 176,984 foreigners were deported or “removed” formally from the United States; 80 percent of them were from Mexico. Mexicans apprehended inside the United States who choose to be returned “voluntarily” to Mexico are fingerprinted, photographed, and taken across the border, but usually they will not be prosecuted if they are apprehended again in the United States. An unauthorized foreigner who is removed or deported, however, must appear before an immigration judge who decides the foreigner’s fate after listening to the immigration service argue why the foreigner should be deported and the foreigner argue why he or she should be allowed to remain. Deported foreigners can be prosecuted if they re-enter the United States.

## **Public Opinion**

Many Americans worry that immigration is increasing the size and changing the characteristics of the population. Public opinion surveys conducted between 1965 and 1993 consistently showed that a majority of Americans

wanted both legal and illegal immigration reduced, and fewer than 10 percent of those surveyed favored increased immigration.<sup>13</sup>

But public opinion often changes with economic circumstances. During the late 1990s, when the economy expanded and unemployment rates were low, public opinion became more tolerant toward immigration. A 1997 poll, for example, found that fewer than 50 percent of Americans wanted immigration reduced or stopped, but 63 percent were concerned about immigrants taking jobs from Americans or causing racial conflict, and 79 percent were concerned that immigrants were overburdening the welfare system and pushing up taxes.<sup>14</sup>

A January 1999 poll conducted by the Public Policy Institute of California found that opinion shifted as the economy boomed: 52 percent of Californians considered Mexican immigrants a benefit to the state because of their hard work and job skills, while only 36 percent described them as a burden because of their use of public services and schools.<sup>15</sup>

Terrorism and a weakening economy made Americans more restrictionist at the start of the 21st century. A Fox News opinion poll in November 2001 found that 65 percent of Americans favored stopping all immigration during the war on terror, and a January 2002 Gallup poll reported that 58 percent of Americans thought immigration levels should be decreased, up from 45 percent in January 2001.<sup>16</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* article, however, pointed out that “the most significant development in the national immigration debate is what hasn’t happened [since Sept. 11]: No lawmaker of influence has moved to reverse the country’s generous immigration policy, which for more than three decades has facilitated the largest sustained wave of immigration in U.S. history.”<sup>17</sup> Most Americans seemed to agree with INS Commissioner James W. Ziglar, who said repeatedly: “These [hijackers] weren’t immigrants. They were terrorists.”

There is often a difference between elite and mass opinion: Support for immigration rises with income and education. In a 2002 poll, 55 percent of the public said legal immigration should be reduced, compared with 18 percent of opinion leaders.<sup>18</sup> Many politicians and researchers dismiss public concerns about 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 unfounded. Benjamin Franklin, for example, 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>19</sup> Less than two centuries later, a descendant of those 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 former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright (born in Prague) and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John M. Shalikashvili (born in Warsaw).

America continues to celebrate its immigrant heritage with mass naturalization ceremonies on July 4, ceremonies designed to associate immigration with the founding of the United States. Politicians remind Americans that they share an immigrant legacy. In light of this revered immigrant heritage, those who want to restrict immigration may be considered un-American. They often justify their position with the following arguments:

- Immigration adds to U.S. population growth and, therefore, to environmental problems related to population growth.
- Immigrants depress wages and working conditions in the labor markets where immigrants are concentrated, and they compete with native-born residents for some jobs.

- Immigrant workers are willing to work at low wages, which discourages businesses from modernizing and impedes U.S. competitiveness in the world economy.
- The large numbers of Hispanic and Asian immigrants are changing the ethnic composition of the U.S. population and raising difficult questions for Americans. Should public schools support retention of immigrants’ language and culture? Should minority immigrants be given preference in university admissions, job opportunities, and business contracts?

These concerns demonstrate the link between attitudes toward immigration and questions about the social and economic integration of immigrants. The fortunes of immigrants, and their effect on the economy, the political system, schools, and society affect attitudes toward additional immigration.

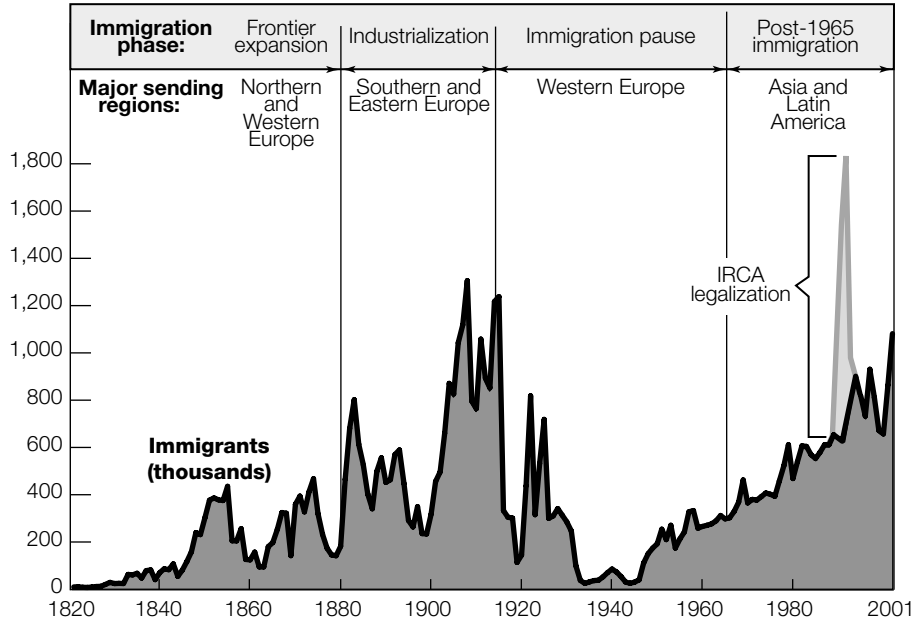
## Four Waves of Immigration

After the Europeans arrived in the New World, three processes—colonization, coercion, and immigration—superimposed a new population on the native people of North America. In the 17th and 18th centuries, English colonists established the framework of the society that became the United States. They built communities at Jamestown and Plymouth, seized control from the Dutch in New York, and overran various French and Spanish settlements. These colonists 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 importation of African slaves (who made up 19 percent of the U.S. population in 1790), and the incorporation of American Indian, Spanish, French, Mexican, and other populations through political deals, war settlements, or purchase of territory as the

Figure 2

## Immigration to the United States, 1820 to 2001



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

Sources: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *2001 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (2003); table 1.

United States expanded westward. The Louisiana Purchase of 1803 made Americans out of the French residents living in that territory. Mexicans in California, New Mexico, and Texas became Americans in 1848, as a result of the Mexican War. In 1898, the United States acquired Puerto Rico in the settlement of the Spanish-American War; Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens in 1917.

The third and largest source of Americans was immigration. In 1789, after the former British colonies had become one country, the word “immigrant” entered the language to denote a person who voluntarily moves from his or her own country to another established nation. Immigrants and their descendants, along with the colonials, the slaves, the 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 major waves of immigration.

### First Wave: Before 1820

The first wave of immigrants arrived before entries began to be 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 migrants 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 shipwreck probably killed more than one in 10 of those who set sail for America. While African slaves were transported to America under horrific conditions and considerable loss of life, historians estimate that immigrants died at an even higher rate than slaves en route to the New World. Slaves often had more food and protection than ordinary passengers because the death of a slave was a business loss for the owners who had arranged their passage.<sup>20</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 employers 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.

### **Second Wave: 1820 to 1860**

The second wave of immigrants, who arrived between 1820 and 1860, fit well with Americans' 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.

Between 1820 and 1840, more than 750,000 German, British, and Irish immigrants arrived; another 4.3 million came from those countries during the next 20 years (see Figure 2). About 40 percent of these second-wave immigrants were Irish escaping extreme poverty and famine in their home country. 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.

### **Third Wave: 1880 to 1914**

The third wave of immigration started in 1880, when almost 460,000 immigrants arrived, and ended with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, when 1.2 million immigrants entered. During the third wave, over 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 1882 and 1907, two peak immigration years. Of those arriving in 1882, 87 percent came from northern and Western Europe, and 13 percent came from southern and eastern Europe. Only 19 percent of immigrants arriving in 1907 were from northern and Western Europe, while 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 factory jobs in eastern and midwestern cities. More than 1 million immigrants arrived annually in six of the first 14 years of the 20th century. By 1910, foreign-born residents accounted for nearly 15 percent of the U.S. population and about 24 percent of the U.S. labor force; immigrants made up more than half of all operatives in mining, steel, and meatpacking. Foreign-born men made up more than half of the work force in New York, Chicago, and Detroit.<sup>21</sup>

### **Immigration Pause: 1915 to 1964**

Immigration ceased as World War I erupted in Europe. When immigrants began to arrive again after the war, in the 1920s, their entry was curtailed by the introduction of numerical limits, or "quotas." Then the severe economic depression of the 1930s discouraged foreigners moving to the United States. As Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime displaced and threatened Jews

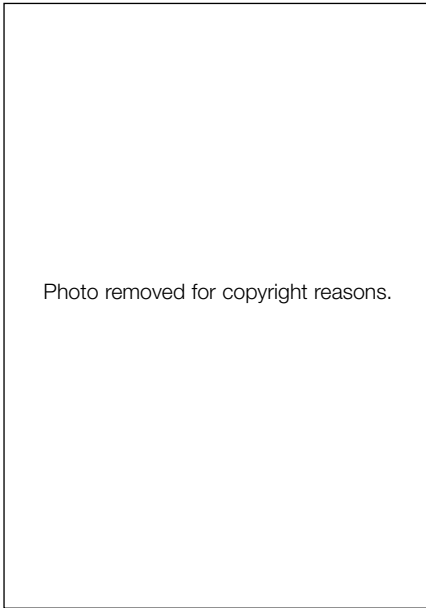


Photo removed for copyright reasons.

*While immigration from Europe has waned, the 1990s saw a surge of refugees from Russia and other former Soviet republics.*

and political opponents in Europe and precipitated another world war, many called on Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration to give more generous treatment to those fleeing Nazi-controlled areas. But the United States did not admit large numbers of refugees until after World War II. Including the refugee flows, an average of 250,000 immigrants entered each year through the 1950s.

During the 1940s and 1950s, immigration from Mexico and other Western Hemisphere nations became increasingly important. 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. Legal immigrant admissions did not reflect the volume of Western Hemisphere immigration, because many migrants were unauthorized. Between 1940 and 1960, for example, 360,000 legal Mexican immigrants were admitted but, in 1954 alone, more than 1 million Mexicans were apprehended and sent back as illegal entrants. Be-

cause relatively few of the unauthorized Mexicans became permanent settlers, the Mexican-origin population rose slowly.

#### **Fourth Wave: 1965 to Present**

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 system gave priority to people with U.S. relatives and to a small number of people with outstanding accomplishments or special skills. These changes, coupled with prosperity in Europe, altered the composition of U.S. immigrants. During the 1970s, the first decade the law was in effect, fewer than 20 percent of U.S. immigrants were Europeans.

There are many similarities between immigration at the beginning of the 20th century and at the start of the 21st. The number of immigrants arriving annually during the peak years—more than 1 million—is about the same, although the foreign-born accounted for more of the U.S. population in 1900 (15 percent) than in 2000 (11 percent). During both periods, the economy was undergoing fundamental restructuring, from agriculture to industry in the early years of the 20th century and from services to information at start of the 21st 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 to 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 and railroads; and churches were free to promote immigration to the United States. Some federal government policies 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 thus created a demand for more workers in American factories. The federal government relied on immigrants to staff the army: Immigrants made up about one-third of the regular soldiers in the 1840s, and an even higher proportion of many state militias.<sup>22</sup>

This need for labor, combined with the freedoms established in the United States, made the new nation a good place for newcomers. Fears that immigrants would alter the culture and customs of the United States were outweighed by the combination of people pushing out from an overcrowded Europe and the waiting opportunities of the New World.

The Naturalization Act of 1790 established the principle that an immigrant could acquire citizenship after several years of residence in the United States. 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 the United States.

The big influx of Roman Catholics from Ireland and Germany in the 1840s set off the “Know Nothing” movement—the first organized anti-foreign movement in the nation’s history, 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 reduced immigration from non-Anglo-Saxon countries. To maintain secrecy, members were instructed to answer

any inquiries about the Order with the words “I know nothing about it.” The American Party won 70 congressional seats in the federal election of 1854, but the majority of congressmen did not respond to the flurry of anti-immigrant feeling 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 to 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. Writing in 1901, Woodrow Wilson, who was later elected president, shared the popular antagonism to the immigrants:

“Immigrants poured in as before, but ... now there came multitudes of men of the 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>23</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. The 1882 act barred Chinese immigration for 10 years, and the ban was renewed every decade until 1943.

Beginning in 1897, Congress approved legislation stipulating that only people who could read and write would be admitted as immi-

*Immigration laws of the 1920s favored immigrants from northern and Western Europe.*

grants. The aim was to reduce the number of immigrants, particularly peasants from southern and eastern Europe, where literacy was low. Three presidents vetoed such literacy tests. President Wilson's third veto was overridden in 1917, and a law was passed requiring that future immigrants over age 16 know how to read in at least one language. The literacy test did not succeed in reducing immigration from eastern and southern Europe. In 1907, the U.S. House of Representatives commissioned a study that laid the foundation for using national origin as the chief criterion for selecting immigrants. The study concluded that immigrants from southern and eastern Europe had more "inborn socially inadequate qualities than northwestern Europeans."<sup>24</sup>

**Quantitative Restrictions Since 1921**

In 1921, Congress imposed restrictions on the number of immigrants allowed into the United States each year. 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—using the national origins formula—that aimed to ensure the predominance of northern and Western Europeans in the U.S. ethnic makeup. The Immigration Act of May 26, 1924, prescribed that, beginning in 1927, the maximum number of immigrants from any country 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>25</sup> Each country was guaranteed at least 100 visas; 154,477 visas were available annually.

The national-origins formula gave preference to immigrants from northern and Western Europe. During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, more than 80 percent of all immigrant visas went to people from northern and Western

European countries, 14 percent to eastern and southern Europeans, and 4 percent to people from other Eastern Hemisphere countries. The limits specified in the 1924 act did not apply to immigration from Western Hemisphere countries such as Mexico. The rise of political and racial persecution in fascist Europe in the 1930s brought no change in American immigration law. There was no special provision for refugees; all immigrant visa applicants were required to have a sponsor. Only about 250,000 of the Europeans attempting to escape persecution by the Nazis were admitted.<sup>26</sup> After the war, Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which allowed in more than 400,000 Europeans. Later, the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 permitted the admission of another 190,000.

Also after World War II, President Harry S. Truman and some congressional reformers sought—unsuccessfully—to abolish the discriminatory national origins system. 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 and giving priority to close relatives of U.S. citizens and foreigners 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 in 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 who could move to the United States if their U.S. relatives were citizens. 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 to 2002**

Until the 1980s, U.S. immigration law could be described as a complex system that changed once each generation. The accelerating pace of global change has affected migration patterns, however, and Congress responded with three major changes in immigration laws between 1980 and 1990, three more in 1996, and, since 2001, antiterrorism laws that affect immigration.

The first change during the 1980s was the definition of refugees. From the 1950s until 1980, the United States defined refugees as persons fleeing communist dictatorships or political violence in the Middle East, and the U.S. government offered those who escaped the chance to settle in the United States. The United Nations, in the 1951 Refugee Convention, had defined a refugee differently, as a person living outside his or her country of citizenship who was unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>27</sup> With the Refugee Act of 1980, the United States adopted the UN definition both to select refugees in refugee camps who wanted to resettle in the United States and to determine whether foreigners seeking asylum in the United States deserved refugee status.

The number of refugees allowed to settle in the United States is set each year by the president, in consultation with Congress. During the 1990s, the number of authorized admissions fell from about 120,000 to 90,000, and then to 70,000 in 2002 and 2003. Most refugees are resettled in the United States with the help of nongovernmental organizations such as the Immigration and Refugee Services of America, with the federal government reimbursing the organizations for the cash, medical assistance, and job and language training they provide to newly arrived refugees.<sup>28</sup>

The second major policy change involved illegal immigration. During the 1970s, Congress, federal commis-

sions, and the press reported on the increasing number of foreigners, mostly Mexicans, who were entering the United States and staying without permission. In 1976, President Gerald Ford appointed an interagency task force to recommend steps to reduce illegal immigration. In 1978, Congress established the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (SCIRP) to study the effects of illegal immigration on the U.S. economy and society. SCIRP concluded that illegal migrants 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>29</sup> The best way to deal with illegal immigrants who had put down roots, SCIRP 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 new workers without verifying their right to work in the United States. The legalization program succeeded in that most eligible aliens became legal immigrants. But legalization also proved to be an incentive for more illegal immigration, especially from Mexico, 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, but the program was riddled with fraud.<sup>30</sup> The employer sanctions part of IRCA also did not work as intended. The INS was slow to establish effective enforcement strategies, 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

Table 2

**Numerical Limits for Immigrants, Fiscal Year 2001**

Preference categories	Numerical limit
<b>Total</b>	<b>675,000</b>
<b>Family-sponsored immigrants—worldwide limit</b>	<b>480,000</b>
<b>Family-sponsored preferences</b>	<b>226,000</b>
First      Unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and their children	23,400
Second     Spouses, children, and unmarried sons and daughters of permanent resident aliens	114,200
Third      Married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens*	23,400
Fourth     Brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens (age 21 or older)*	65,000
<b>Immediate relatives of adult U.S. citizens (spouses, children, and parents) and children born abroad to alien residents</b>	<b>Unlimited</b>
<b>Employment-based preferences*</b>	<b>140,000</b>
First      Priority workers	40,040
Second     Professionals with advanced degrees or aliens of exceptional ability	40,040
Third      Skilled workers, professionals, needed unskilled workers	40,040
Fourth     Special immigrants (ministers, for example)	9,940
Fifth      Employment creation (“investors”)	9,940
<b>Diversity immigrants</b>	<b>55,000</b>

\*Includes spouses and children.

Notes: The fiscal year runs from Oct. 1, 2000, to Sept. 30, 2001. Immediate relatives may enter without limit, but the number is assumed to be no more than 254,000. With the 226,000 limit for preference categories, this produces a limit of 480,000 for family-sponsored immigrants. In some categories, visas not used in one year can be carried over to the next year(s).

Source: Immigration and Naturalization Service, *2001 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (2003): A.1-3.

of skilled workers was vital to American competitiveness in global markets, provided the basis for the Immigration Act of 1990. This law raised the annual ceiling on immigration and added new immigration slots, such as the diversity visas that increased immigration from Ireland and other countries that had sent few immigrants in recent times (see Table 2).

### **Immigration Changes in 1996**

In the early 1990s, there was much debate about immigration, but little significant new legislation. But pressure for reform intensified, and 1996 was a watershed year for immigration legislation, as Congress approved three major immigration-related laws: 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 the

role that asylum applicants had in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; the desire to find savings to balance the federal budget and to end perceived abuses of the U.S. welfare system by immigrants; and frustration with continued illegal immigration. The 1996 antiterrorism law changed criminal law concerning foreigners, making it easier to detain without bail those aliens convicted of crimes committed in the United States and to deport them when they have served their sentences. The same law made it easier for the INS to exclude foreigners who arrive at airports without proper documents and seek asylum in the United States. Such foreigners can be subject to “expedited removal” and barred from legal re-entry if they cannot make a credible case that they face persecution at home.

The new welfare law radically changed the way all low-income residents, especially new legal immigrants, receive benefits. Until 1997, when PRWORA came into force, legal

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 means-tested 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. In 1998, however, Congress restored welfare eligibility for many legal immigrants who had lived in the United States on Aug. 22, 1996. In 2000, Congress approved Food Stamp eligibility for immigrants who had lived in the United States at least five years.

The third 1996 law, IIRIRA, included three sets of measures to reduce illegal immigration and further 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, and making the INS one of the fastest-growing federal agencies. Second, IIRIRA introduced a pilot telephone verification program to enable employers to verify the status of newly hired workers and social service agencies to determine the legal status of applicants for benefits. Social service agencies must verify the legal status of those applying for benefits, but employer participation in the verification program is voluntary.

Third, in an attempt to make sure that future immigrants would 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 to support the immigrants they sponsor. Sponsors were required to have annual incomes at least 125 percent of the poverty-line income for their own family as well as the relatives they sponsor. Under these rules, a couple sponsoring two parents for

immigrant visas would have to show an income of at least \$22,625 in 2002.

During the late 1990s, Congress enacted legislation to regularize the status of hundreds of thousands of Central Americans who had come to the United States during the civil wars in their countries in the 1980s but had been refused asylum under existing laws. The Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act of 1997 (NACARA) allows Cubans and Central Americans already in the United States to petition for immigrant visas if they can demonstrate that they would suffer extreme hardship if they were sent back home. The Haitian Refugee Immigration Fairness Act of 1998 extended the same option to some Haitians in the United States.

### **Responses to Terrorism, 2001 to 2002**

On Sept. 11, 2001, 19 foreigners in the United States hijacked four commercial planes. Two of the hijacked planes were flown into the World Trade Center towers in New York City, a third slammed into the Pentagon, and the fourth crashed in Pennsylvania. More than 3,000 people were killed and thousands injured in the attacks, which also demolished the two World Trade Center towers. In the wake of these attacks, President George W. Bush declared war on terrorists and the countries that harbor them, and Congress enacted legislation to fight terrorism.

The ability of the hijackers to plan and carry out their attack while living rather normal lives in U.S. communities demonstrated that the United States did not have effective systems for checking applicants for visas overseas, checking persons seeking entry to the United States against criminal databases, or tracking foreigners inside the country. Several of the hijackers had been able to obtain driver's licenses and ID cards because states did not require proof that the applicant was in the United States legally. Although the hijackers entered the United States legally, they just as easily could have slipped into the

Table 3

**U.S.-Born and Foreign-Born Population, 1980 to 2000**

	U.S.-born	Foreign-born
	Number (millions)	
1980	212.4	14.1
1990	228.9	19.8
2000	250.3	31.1
	Percent change	
1980–1990	7.8	40.4
1990–2000	9.3	57.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2000* (2002): 45.

United States illegally across the Mexican or Canadian borders.

Congress approved antiterrorism legislation that affected immigrants, such as the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism (USA PATRIOT) Act of 2001, which expanded the government’s power to conduct electronic surveillance, detain foreigners without charges, and penetrate money-laundering banks. USA PATRIOT provided additional funds for border security and granted the U.S. Attorney General the power to detain any foreigner who the Attorney General certifies is a danger to national security. The federal government detained and held in secret some 1,200 foreigners in the aftermath of Sept. 11. None were found to have terrorist links, and most were deported for violating immigration laws.

The Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act (EBSVERA) of 2002 added 3,000 immigration inspectors and investigators, required universities to keep better track of foreign students, and enhanced the scrutiny of visa applications from applicants of countries deemed sponsors of terrorism. The Student Exchange and Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is designed to track students in the United States and to tighten requirements on the schools that admit foreign students for study in the United States. Visas to visit the United States are issued at U.S. consulates abroad,

but the information submitted by applicants from most Middle Eastern countries must be sent to Washington, D.C., to be checked against databases operated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Perhaps the most important change after Sept. 11 was the abolition of the INS. There had been many calls in the late 1990s to reorganize and restructure the agency, which enforced immigration laws and provided immigration benefits, such as work authorization and naturalization, but demands for sweeping change for the INS intensified after the Sept. 11 attacks. In 2003, the INS was divided into several pieces that were moved to different sections of the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Most immigration and naturalization services now fall under the newly created Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. The primary border control and enforcement functions were moved to a new Directorate of Border and Transportation Security within DHS.<sup>31</sup>

## 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 fallen to relatively low levels in the United States, immigration’s role in the growth of the national, state, and local populations has increased in recent decades. Immigration contributed one-third to one-half of the total population increase between 1990 and 2000; the foreign-born population increased by nearly 11 million during the 1990s, while the U.S.-born population grew by nearly 21 million (see Table 3). The increase in the number of foreign-born was unprecedented and somewhat unexpected. The 2000 Census count of U.S. residents was about 6 million higher than expected largely because net migration was greater than had been projected.

Because immigrants have characteristics different from those of native-born Americans, they are making the American populace more diverse (see Box 2). Until the 1990s, these effects

were confined largely to the major immigration states: California, Florida, Illinois, New York, and Texas were home to 75 percent of immigrants in 1990. But the foreign-born began

## Box 2

### The Foreign-Born Population

The United States has always had a significant foreign-born population, but the number of foreign born reached an all-time high of 32.5 million in 2002—equal to 11.5 percent of the U.S. population—according to the Current Population Survey (CPS).<sup>1</sup> During the peak years of immigration early in the 20th century, the number of foreign-born residents was lower, but they made up a larger share of U.S. residents. In 1910, for example, there were only 13.5 million foreign-born residents, but they represented 15 percent of all U.S. residents.

Most foreign-born residents are fairly recent arrivals: About one-half of the 2002 foreign-born residents arrived in 1990 or later. They are highly concentrated in a few states. Nearly 60 percent lived in one of four states in 2002: California (with 28 percent of the total), New York, Florida, or Texas. But the sharpest increases in foreign-born residents since 1990 were in other states, such as Nevada, where the foreign-born population rose from 105,000 to 386,000 between 1990 and 2002, and North Carolina, where it rose from 115,000 to 381,000.

Not all foreign-born residents are immigrants. Demographer Jeff Passel estimates that at least 3 percent are nonimmigrants, including foreign students, diplomats, and temporary workers, and some will return to their countries of origin. Between 7 million and 9 million are unauthorized foreigners, which means that only about 75 percent of all foreign-born residents are legal immigrants. One reason for the range in the estimate of unauthorized foreigners is that some demographers count foreigners with a quasi-legal status as unauthorized, and others treat them as authorized.

More than one-half of the 2002 foreign-born residents were born in Latin America—with 30 percent from Mexico alone. Twenty-six percent were born in Asia, 14 percent in Europe, and 8 percent from Africa and other regions.

Foreign-born residents age 18 or older are more likely than the U.S.-born to be in the U.S. work force, but they are younger, less educated, and have lower annual earnings. A recent analysis of the 2002 CPS showed that the average age of a U.S.-born worker who worked full-time at least part of 2001 was 41 years, and median earnings were \$31,200.<sup>2</sup> For foreign-born residents, the average age was 39 years, and median earnings were \$24,000. Foreign-

born residents who arrived in 1990 or later—half of the total—were much younger and had much lower incomes: Their average age was 32 and median earnings \$20,000. These low earnings reflect the fact that 34 percent of these recent arrivals were not high school graduates. By contrast, 16 percent of U.S.-born residents had not finished high school.

Foreign-born residents were 14.5 percent of the 121 million U.S. workers employed full-time for at least part of 2001. Immigrants were 44 percent of private household workers, 42 percent of those with nonmanagerial farming occupations, and 20 percent of operators, fabricators, and laborers.

About 16 percent of foreign-born residents, and 11 percent of U.S.-born residents, had incomes below the poverty line in 2002. By country of origin, about 26 percent of those born in the Dominican Republic were poor, as were 20 percent of those born in Mexico and Pakistan, and 20 percent of those born in Cuba and Honduras. About 24 percent of households headed by foreign-born residents obtained a means-tested federal benefit in 2001, versus 16 percent of households headed by a U.S.-born resident: The most common benefit used by both groups was Medicaid. Country of origin data for welfare use track poverty data—59 percent of households headed by a person born in the Dominican Republic obtained a means-tested federal benefit in 2001, as did 36 percent of those headed by a person born in Mexico, 35 percent of those headed by a person born in Cuba, and 33 percent of those headed by a person born in Haiti.

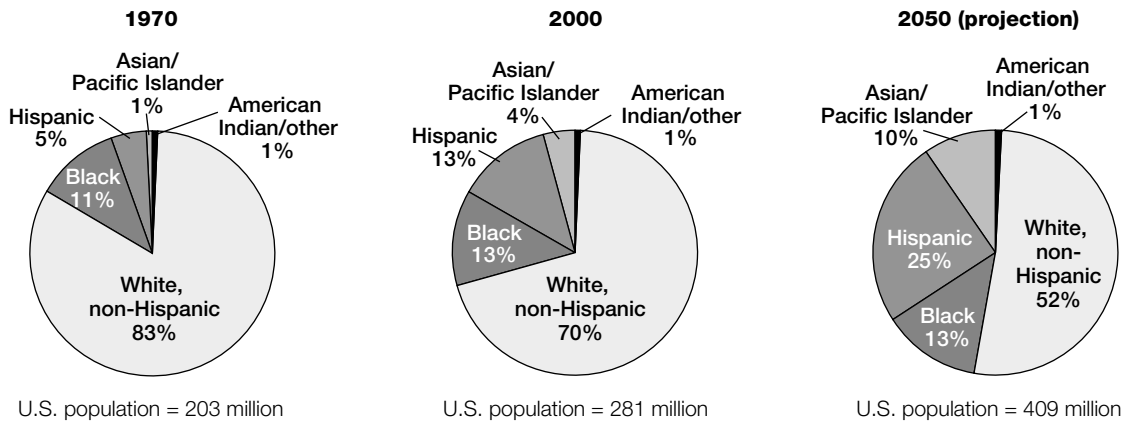
Many foreign-born residents are in their prime childbearing years, so the percentage of births to foreign-born women is higher than their share of U.S. residents. In 2001, 22.5 percent of the 4 million births in the United States were to foreign-born women; 63 percent of births to Hispanics were to mothers born outside the United States.<sup>3</sup>

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Figure 3

### U.S. Population by Race and Ethnic Group, 1970, 2000, and 2050



Note: Numbers may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 1: United States—Race and Hispanic Origin, 1790 to 1990 (Sept. 13, 2002; www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0056/tab01.xls, accessed May 5, 2003); and J. Passel, "Projections of the U.S. Population and Labor Force by Generation and Educational Attainment: 2000–2050" (2003).

moving into other states during the 1990s. By 2000, these five states had only about 66 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population. States such as Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah saw the number of immigrants more than double in the 1990s, adding the workers many employers sought but posing challenges to these states to provide services to immigrants and their children.<sup>32</sup>

The United States had 281 million residents in 2000. There were 197 million white non-Hispanic residents representing nearly 70 percent of the total U.S. population; 35 million Hispanics and 35 million black non-Hispanics, accounting for 13 percent each; and 10 million Asian and Pacific Islanders, making up 4 percent of the U.S. population. The 2.1 million non-Hispanic American Indian and Alaska Natives and miscellaneous other racial categories made up less than 1 percent of the total.

If current fertility, mortality, and immigration patterns continue, the U.S. population is projected to reach 349 million in 2025 and 409 million in 2050. Under those assumptions,

non-Hispanic whites will make up 52 percent of the population in 2050; non-Hispanic blacks will make up 13 percent; Hispanics, 25 percent; non-Hispanic Asians and Pacific Islanders, 10 percent; and American Indians, Alaska Natives, and others will account for less than 1 percent (see Figure 3). These projections assume an annual influx of about 1,250,000 immigrants and an exit of 330,000 foreign-born residents, for an annual net gain of 920,000 legal and illegal immigrants between 2000 and 2050.<sup>33</sup>

The number of foreign-born residents (first-generation Americans) is projected to rise from 31 million in 2000 to 48 million in 2025 and 60 million in 2050. The foreign-born share of the U.S. population is projected to rise from 11 percent to 15 percent between 2000 and 2050. While the foreign-born share will likely reach its highest level in 150 years, the projected figure is roughly comparable to the levels between 1870 and 1910.

The demographic effect of immigration reaches beyond the number of new foreign-born residents. As they have children, immigrants add further to population growth and change, so immigrants and their children, the



first- and second-generation Americans, are often combined to discuss the demographic impacts of immigration. In 2000, the foreign-born and their children made up 21 percent of the U.S. population. If net immigration averages 820,000 a year, first- and second-generation Americans are projected to represent one-third of the U.S. population by 2025. This is not particularly high by historical standards: Between 1900 and 1920, 33 percent to 35 percent of the population were first- or second-generation Americans.<sup>34</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>35</sup> Demographic analysis, however, reveals 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 working-age people relative to the number of children and elderly. The U.S. median age is projected to rise from 35.3 in 2000 to 39.0 in 2050, assuming net immigration of 920,000 people annually. If there were no net immigration after 2000, the U.S. median age would be 42.8, almost four years older.<sup>36</sup>

Because most immigrants are Asians and Hispanics, immigration will slow the aging of the U.S. Hispanic and Asian populations, but it will have little effect on the non-Hispanic white or black populations. The median age for Hispanics and Asians would be about three years older in 2025 with no net immigration after 2000 than with additional immigration. With no additional immigration, non-Hispanic whites would have a median age of 43.4 years, compared with 42.2 years with immigration.

How does immigration affect dependency, the degree to which working-age residents 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 both demography—the number of workers and retirees—and econom-

ics—the earnings and taxes collected from workers and employers.

Immigration increases the size of the U.S. labor force but has a relatively small effect on the dependency ratio. The U.S. labor force, which was 142 million in 2000, is projected to be 152 million in 2025 with no immigration after 2000, and 170 million with immigration. There were 4.1 workers for every person age 65 or older in 2000. This ratio would drop to 2.5 workers per elderly person by 2025 if net immigration ceased after 2000. Even with immigration, however, the ratio would drop substantially, to 2.8 by 2025.<sup>37</sup>

Immigrants are mostly young people who have children. Because immigrants have a higher fertility rate than the U.S.-born population, their presence decreases the ratio of workers to children under age 18. In 2000, there were 2.0 children per worker. Recent population projections show the ratio will be about the same in 2025, assuming current levels of immigration. With no further immigration, there would be more workers for each child, and the ratio would rise to 2.2 by 2025.<sup>38</sup>

The number of elderly in 2025 would be similar with or without further immigration: slightly more than 60 million. Consequently, immigration nudges the worker-elderly ratio a little higher, meaning that there are more people of working age per person age 65 or older. Immigration has a more dramatic effect on the younger ages. Immigration after 2000 is projected to add about 15 million more children under age 18 than there would be without any post-2000 immigration (84 million versus 69 million). Continued immigration will lower the worker-child ratio and increase the child component of the dependency ratio.

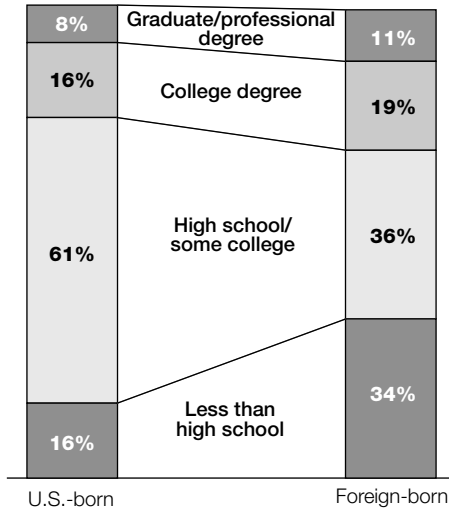
*Immigration has a small effect on the U.S. median age.*

## **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

*Figure 4*  
**2002 Educational Levels of U.S.-Born Americans and Foreign-Born Americans Who Arrived in or After 1990**

Percent of people ages 25+



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Foreign-Born Population of the United States, Current Population Survey—March 2002, Detailed Tables PPL-162* ([www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/97/ppLtab1.txt](http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/97/ppLtab1.txt), accessed March 10, 2003): table 2.5.

jobs, earn wages, pay taxes, and consume public services. In 1997, the National Research Council (NRC) concluded that legal and illegal immigration add between \$1 billion and \$10 billion per year to the U.S. gross domestic product, largely because immigration holds down U.S. wages and thus prices and increases the efficiency of the economy.<sup>39</sup> Immigration has a positive net economic effect, but it is a very small factor in an \$8 trillion economy that normally expands by \$300 billion a year.<sup>40</sup>

The NRC report emphasized that the most important economic issues are distributional. Who benefits and who suffers from immigration? In particular, how does the presence of new arrivals affect settled immigrants and Americans whose education and skills are similar to those of the new arrivals? How quickly do immigrants climb the American job ladder? The

NRC found that most of the economic benefits of immigration accrue to the immigrants themselves, to owners of capital, and to highly educated U.S. residents. The fact that highly educated U.S. residents benefit from immigration, and that immigrants, when ranked by years of education, are at the extremes of the distribution, means that immigration tends to increase inequality.

Among those who arrived in 1990 or later, 30 percent of the foreign-born population had an undergraduate degree or higher in 2002, compared with 24 percent of U.S.-born Americans ages 25 and older (see Figure 4). At the other end of the distribution, about 34 percent of the recently arrived foreign-born adults had not finished 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 foreign-born population.

## Labor Market Effects

Immigration changes U.S. labor markets (see Box 3). In 1986, the President's Council of Economic Advisers summarized the labor market effects of immigrants as follows: "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>41</sup>

Research interest and policy concerns focus on how immigrants affect those in the bottom half of the labor market. Governments have long protected vulnerable low-wage workers by establishing minimum wages and regulating hours of work; there are also education and training programs to help workers improve their job skills and thus their earnings. The 1960s War on Poverty and civil rights movement reinforced the U.S. commitment

## Immigration Trade-Offs

Immigration is often characterized as either good or bad for the country, but few public policy choices are contests between good and bad. They are instead arguments about which of two goods deserves higher priority. For example, adjusting interest rates upward can lead to lower inflation, which is a desirable result, but away from fuller employment, a competing good. Similarly, reducing trade barriers can stimulate exports, which can help some employers and workers, but increase imports, which can lead to the failure 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 come?
- How should the government enforce immigration rules?

Agriculture, a sector that has employed large numbers of Mexicans for the past 60 years, affords an example of the trade-offs. Americans want to pay low prices for food. They also want farm workers, like other U.S. workers, to have decent wages and working conditions. To achieve both goals, Congress permitted Mexican workers to enter the United States and provide low-cost labor on farms. Congress then tried to alleviate the poverty of farm workers and their children by providing special education, health, and housing programs. But these special programs have not prevented farm workers from being among the poorest American workers.<sup>1</sup> There are trade-offs between these competing goods—inexpensive food and decent farm wages.

If the United States wants both cheap food and decent farm wages—competing desirable goods—it is useful to determine precisely what the trade-offs are between them. According to the Consumer Expenditure Survey, there were 110 million “consumer units” in 2001, with an average of 2.5 people, 1.4 earners, and 1.9 vehicles. The average U.S. household had a pre-tax income of \$47,500 and spent \$39,500 in 2001.<sup>2</sup>

These household expenditures included \$5,200 for food (14 percent of total expenditures).<sup>3</sup> Expenditures on fresh fruits and vegetables, which are labor-intensive, totaled \$322 a year or \$6.20 a week. In contrast, the average household spent \$6.70 weekly on alcoholic beverages.

Farmers received about 18 percent of the retail price of fresh fruits and vegetables in 2001, so \$322 from the consumer means that the farmer received \$56. Less than one-third of the \$56 would go to farm worker wages and benefits. Consumers who pay \$1 for a pound of apples or a head of lettuce are giving about 18 cents to the farmer and 6 cents to the farm worker.

About two-thirds of the 2.5 million U.S. farm workers were born abroad. It is hard to determine how much wages would rise if foreign workers were not available, but in 1966, one year after the end of the *bracero* program, the then-fledgling United Farm Workers union won a 40 percent wage increase for grape harvesters.<sup>4</sup> Average earnings were \$7.56 an hour for U.S. field and livestock workers in 2000, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture survey of farm employers. A 40 percent increase would raise them to \$10.58 an hour. If this wage increase were passed fully to consumers, the 6-cent farm labor cost of a pound of apples or a head of lettuce would rise to between 7 and 9 cents, and the retail price would rise by 2 to 3 cents.<sup>5</sup>

For a typical household, a 40 percent increase in farm labor costs translates into a 2 percent to 3 percent increase in retail prices ( $0.175 \times 0.33 = 6$  percent, farm labor costs rise 40 percent, and  $0.4 \times 6 = 2.4$  percent), so total spending on fruits and vegetables would rise by \$8, from \$322 a year to \$330 a year. Earnings for a typical seasonal farm worker could rise from \$8,000 to \$11,200 a year.

Are the savings on fresh produce provided by low-cost immigrant labor worthwhile? The migrants are better off, earning 5 to 10 times more in the United States than they would at home. U.S. farmers and their bankers are also better off, enjoying higher profits and therefore higher land prices. U.S. and foreign consumers of U.S. commodities pay less for fresh produce. The critical question is whether these benefits are more valuable than having farm work performed and rewarded like other work in America. The way this question is answered is a major determinant of U.S. immigration policy, especially with respect to Mexico.

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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 groups that suffered 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**

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. The unionized workers were displaced in a competition between employers. The unionized harvesting association lost business to farm labor contractors (FLCs) who hired nonunion and often unauthorized workers. The harvesting association went out of business, and the union workers lost their jobs.<sup>42</sup>

Case studies have shown that immigration can displace established workers and depress wages by adding vulnerable workers to the labor supply. This scenario conforms to accepted labor market theory, but the actual effects on wages and employment are indirect and hard to measure.<sup>43</sup> 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 came to replace unionized U.S.-born black jan-

itors with immigrants hired by cleaning contractors.

### **Econometric Studies**

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 observed wage depression or job displacement will be. Econometric studies 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. In 1990, economist George Borjas summarized the research literature by saying that “modern econometrics cannot detect a single shred of evidence that immigrants have a sizable adverse impact on the earnings and employment opportunities of natives in the United States.”<sup>44</sup> One well-known econometric study concluded, for example, that the 1980 influx of Cuban immigrants to Miami in the Mariel boatlift had no measurable negative effect on the wages and employment of local workers. During the four months of the boatlift, Miami’s labor force increased by 7 percent, but there were no significant differences between wage and job opportunities for native-born workers in Miami and in other U.S. cities.<sup>45</sup> The evidence 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, which found that workers who had to compete with immigrants were moving away from the cities that were attracting the most immigrants, presumably to avoid competing with them in the labor market. The effects of immigration on wages and unemployment in Los Angeles or Houston were thus dispersed throughout the United States in a process that demographer William Frey called “the new white flight.”<sup>46</sup>

Econometric studies have also begun to acknowledge that the effects of immigration have been hard to measure because a large majority of workers are not vying for the types of unskilled jobs usually held by newly arrived immigrants. The wages of government employees, for example, are set at federal or state levels, and the earnings of many union workers are determined by national or regional collective bargaining agreements. Comparing the earnings of blacks and Hispanic immigrants may not be meaningful if a disproportionate share of the black workers are employed by the government or under union contracts. If workers who compete with unskilled immigrants move away and the workers who do not compete remain, the effect of immigrants may 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 but that they may be significant in particular industries and areas, such as the garment or meatpacking industries. 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 more than 1 million illegal farm workers in 1987 and 1988. Many who were legalized moved on to nonfarm jobs, which created a vacuum that drew in more unauthorized workers and helped keep wages and benefits for farm workers among the lowest in America.

## **Economic Mobility Studies**

Economic mobility, or integration, studies investigate how immigrants and their children are faring in the United States. The starting point for these studies 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>48</sup> The average educational level of immigrants has been rising, but the educational level of U.S.-born residents has risen faster, which explains the widening education gap and, by extension, the growing income inequality between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans and within the foreign-born population.

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 enabled the migrants to close the earnings gap after an average of 13 years in the United States and to earn 6 percent more than similar U.S.-born men after 23 years.<sup>49</sup> The immigrants’ motivation and ambition, it seemed, could expand the U.S. economy and raise average earnings.

Borjas, however, contended that Chiswick’s study captured a unique set of circumstances: the influx of highly skilled Asian immigrants after 1965 policy changes and a booming U.S. economy. In 1970, the average immigrant earned 1 percent more than the average U.S.-born worker. However, the earnings of Mexican and Central American immigrants, among others, did not catch up to the U.S.-born aver-

age. During the 1970s and 1980s, the proportion of Mexicans and Central Americans among immigrants rose, and so did the earnings gap. Mexican and Central American immigrant men had 25 percent to 40 percent lower earnings than similar U.S.-born men in 1970, and 50 percent lower earnings in 1990. Instead of catching up to Americans in earnings, Borjas concluded, immigrants could add to the low-income population.<sup>50</sup>

### **Entrepreneurship**

Economists tend to look at U.S. earnings to measure economic integration, but other social scientists may emphasize other factors, such as the success of immigrants in starting their own businesses. Immigrant-owned businesses are highly visible in many cities, where immigrants' restaurants, dry-cleaning and tailoring establishments, and small stores are patronized by immigrants and natives alike. Immigrant entrepreneurs exemplify the energy that newcomers add to the U.S. economy while helping to revitalize cities.<sup>51</sup>

Is self-employment a sign of immigrant success or does it reflect difficulties finding "regular" employment? In an industrial economy, moving from self-employment to a paid job usually brings better pay and benefits. Self-employed farmers may leave the land to seek employment in cities, for example. Self-employment is usually 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 self-employment. In the service economy, "self-employment rises during recessions when regular jobs may be harder to find and laid-off executives may enter self-employed 'consulting.'"<sup>52</sup>

Some social scientists who study immigrant communities, however, 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 fellow Cubans.<sup>53</sup> Instead of seeing self-employment as the failure to get a "real job," Portes and Bach argued that self-employment showed how immigrants could take advantage of business opportunities in their communities. In 2002, however, only about 10 percent of foreign-born people were self-employed, versus 11 percent of the U.S.-born.<sup>54</sup>

### **Fiscal Effects**

One of the most debated questions of the 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: Most immigrants are young and in their working and taxpaying years. They generally do not draw Social Security or health benefits. Furthermore, although immigrants are taxed like U.S. citizens, they are not eligible for all publicly provided services. Illegal immigrants, who also pay taxes, are excluded from almost all welfare benefits, as well as 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.

Several states, including California, Florida, and Texas, have sued the federal government to recover the cost of providing public services to unauthorized foreigners. Though 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. The NRC

*Do immigrants pay their way in the U.S. economy? The answer is complex.*

reviewed the fiscal impact studies prepared in support of these suits 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. In California, households headed by Latin American immigrants received, on average, almost \$5,000 more in federal, state, and local services than they paid in taxes in 1996, largely because they had below-average incomes and thus paid lower taxes, while they had more children attending public schools than households headed by U.S.-born Californians.<sup>55</sup>

California households headed by U.S.-born people paid, on average, \$2,700 more in federal taxes than they received in federal benefits in 1996, while immigrants had exactly the opposite fiscal balance: They received \$2,700 more in federal benefits than they paid in federal taxes. The average native-born household paid \$1,200 more in taxes to cover the deficit in California. Applying these state estimates to the total U.S. population, researchers calculated that the 89 million households headed by U.S.-born people paid an extra \$200 each in 1996 to cover the gap between taxes paid and services consumed by 9 million immigrant-headed households. The immigrant deficit amounted to \$15 billion to \$20 billion per year for the United States.<sup>56</sup>

Second, the NRC study 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 withheld by the federal government. These revenues pay for social security and health care benefits for older residents. Immigrants often pay a small amount in state and local taxes because they have low earnings. The services immigrants consume, however, such as education for their children, are mostly paid for by state and local governments. These and similar findings have prompted many states to request a revenue-shar-

ing arrangement with the federal government to deal with the fiscal impacts of immigrants.

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 providing education to immigrant children today could be regarded as an investment that will reward the country with higher-income workers tomorrow. The NRC analysis attempted to glean longer-term effects from these snapshots. The researchers projected future population, immigrant and native earnings, taxes, and use of government services. They also examined typical life-cycle trajectories for children who attend public schools, pay taxes during their working lives, and then rely on publicly supported health and social services after they retire.

The NRC concluded that the long-term economic value of an immigrant depends strongly on his or her age at arrival and his or her years of education. On average, adult immigrants arriving with less than a high school education impose a net fiscal cost on the United States of \$89,000 (in 1996 dollars) over their lifetimes; those with only a high school education cost \$31,000 over their lifetimes (see Figure 5, page 30). Adult immigrants with more than 12 years of schooling provided a \$105,000 lifetime gain for the United States—the value of the taxes they paid exceeded the value of benefits received by this amount.

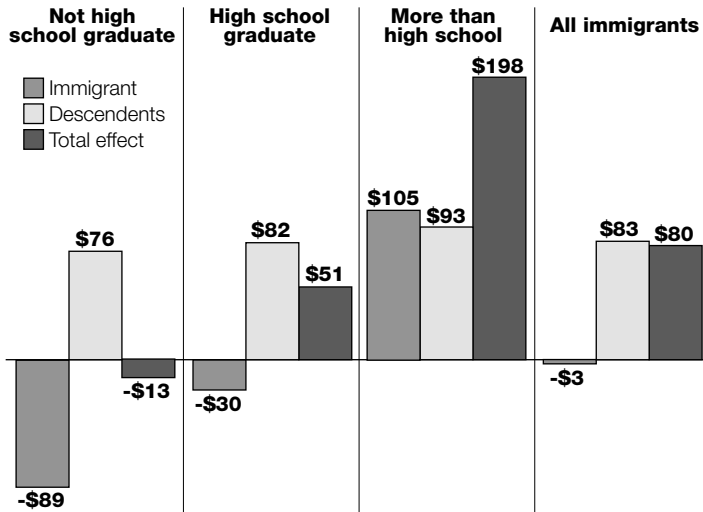
## Migration From Mexico and NAFTA

About 30 percent of the immigrants living in the United States today are from Mexico, but there was relatively little movement across the border until the early 20th century. In 1800, Mexico and the United States had roughly equal population size, about 6 million. In 1848, a large portion of northern Mexico was transferred to

Figure 5

## The Long-Term Fiscal Impact of One Immigrant: 1996

Amount in U.S. dollars (thousands)



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

the United States by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended a war that began when American settlers moved into Mexican territory and rebelled. The relatively few Mexican residents of what is now the southwestern United States became Americans, but there was little population growth until the early 20th century.

A permanent migration stream between Mexico and the United States was created in 1917, when the U.S. government approved the first of two *bracero* programs that allowed recruitment of Mexicans to work in the United States, primarily on farms. Both *bracero* programs were strongly opposed by U.S. unions and church groups concerned about U.S. workers, but farmers justified the program by arguing that the world wars had created an emergency situation. During the second *bracero* program, which lasted from 1942 to 1964, between 1 million and 2 million Mexicans gained work experience in the United States. Millions of others came illegally but eventually gained

legal status. Unauthorized Mexicans found inside the United States were taken to the border, issued work permits, and returned to the farms on which they were found.

Under the 1942 agreement with Mexico, U.S. employers had to pay the cost of transporting *braceros* from their place of recruitment in Mexico to U.S. farms. Mexicans soon learned that they could improve their chances of being selected by moving close to the U.S. border. When the *bracero* program was stopped in 1964 as a way to improve wages and opportunities for Mexican Americans, there were hundreds of thousands of *braceros* and their families living in Mexican-U.S. border cities. To provide the workers with jobs, Mexico and the United States modified their trade laws to allow the creation of *maquiladoras*, factories in Mexico that import components, assemble them into finished goods such as televisions, and then re-export the products to the United States. The *maquiladoras* never provided many jobs for ex-*bracero* workers—virtually all *braceros* were men, and the *maquiladoras* hired mostly women—but the new factories drew even more Mexicans to the border area.

There was relatively little illegal Mexico-U.S. migration during the 1960s and early 1970s, which was one reason why activist Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers union could win contracts with California farmers for better wages and benefits for farm workers. The flow quickened after 1976 because of higher U.S. wages and a devaluation of the Mexican peso. By 1980, an estimated 1 million undocumented Mexicans were living in the United States.<sup>57</sup> The Mexican economic crash of 1982 and the ensuing devaluation of the peso fueled more emigration. U.S. farmers and other employers turned to labor contractors to assemble crews of Mexican workers to harvest crops, clean buildings, and work in construction jobs for low wages. Employers who hired unauthorized workers faced few consequences,



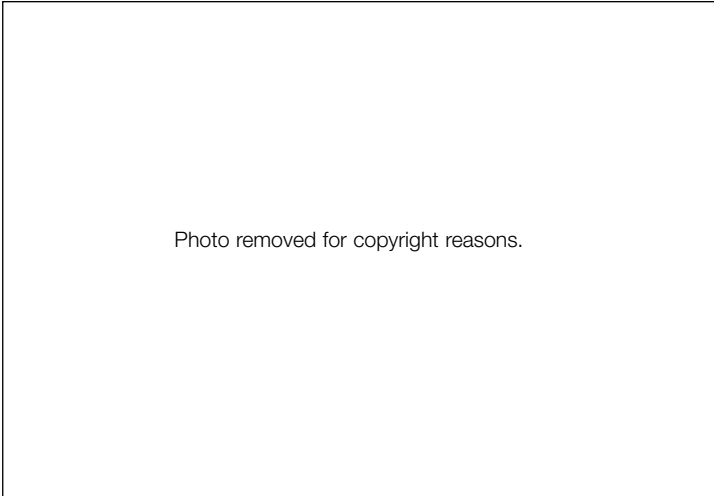
although their workers were subject to arrest and deportation in INS raids.

The rising number of unauthorized or illegal Mexican workers prompted Congress to enact the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), which prescribed penalties on U.S. employers who knowingly hired unauthorized workers. It also legalized the presence of 2.7 million unauthorized foreigners in the United States; 85 percent of the legalized workers were from Mexico.

But IRCA did little to discourage illegal immigration. Enforcement was underfunded and ineffective, and fraudulent documents were widely used by workers. Migration networks between the United States and Mexico were strengthened by the legalization of workers and family members. In effect, the United States put up a “keep out” sign at the border, but unauthorized foreigners inside the United States were free to respond to “help wanted” signs.

During the 1980s and 1990s, legal and illegal migration helped increase the number of Mexican-born U.S. residents from 2.2 million in 1980 to 4.5 million in 1990, 9.0 million in 2000, and almost 10 million in 2002. Mexico’s total population was 100 million in 2000—meaning that the equivalent of 9 percent of the Mexican population had moved to the United States. Hundreds of thousands more Mexicans are on waiting lists for immigrant visas. There have been two responses to this emigration pressure: the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and stepped-up border controls.

NAFTA is a trade and investment agreement between Canada, Mexico, and the United States that permanently lowered barriers to the flow of goods and money. It was designed to accelerate economic and job growth in all three countries, as the theory of comparative advantage predicts.<sup>58</sup> Mexico proposed NAFTA as a way to solve the country’s debt crisis and restore economic and job growth.



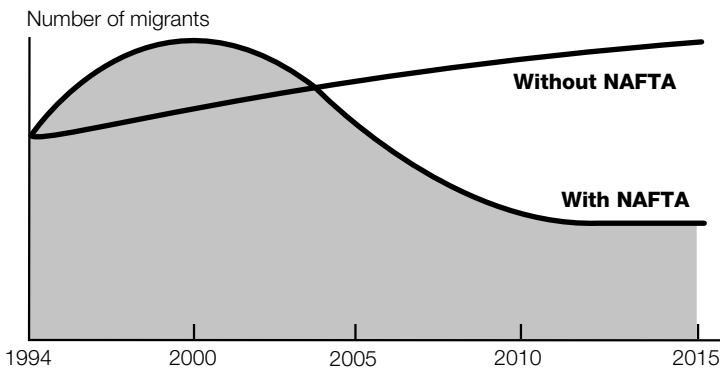
*The U.S. government has strengthened border patrols to curb illegal immigration and more recently to combat terrorism, yet immigrant smuggling continues to thrive.*

Mexico had borrowed heavily in the early 1980s in the expectation that the price for Mexican oil would remain high. When oil prices fell, Mexico suffered a recession and mounting debts. Many people in the United States opposed NAFTA, fearing a rush of U.S. jobs flowing to Mexico. With bipartisan support, Congress narrowly approved NAFTA. One of the hoped-for side effects was reduced Mexico-U.S. migration.

After NAFTA went into effect on Jan. 1, 1994, some Americans thought that migration from Mexico would quickly stop. Instead, it continued, and included so-called *banzai* runs in which Mexican smugglers massed groups of 50 to 80 migrants on the Mexican side of the port of entry at San Diego and directed them to run across the border through the south-bound lanes of traffic into the United States. California Governor Pete Wilson, who maintained that providing services to unauthorized foreigners accounted for 10 percent of state spending in the early 1990s, used footage of these *banzai* runs in TV ads to win re-election and build support for Proposition 187, the never-implemented state law meant to prevent

Figure 6

## Mexico-U.S. Migration With and Without NAFTA



unauthorized foreigners from obtaining state-funded services.

In 1995, Mexico suffered its worst-ever recession, losing about 10 percent of formal-sector jobs. The United States provided financial assistance to stabilize the Mexican economy and, as President Bill Clinton said, “to better protect our borders.” Mexico recovered from the crisis, but wages are still below 1993 levels. During the late 1990s, Mexico-U.S. migration continued—even accelerated—despite economic and job growth in Mexico. This continued migration gave rise to the theory that “cumulative causation” had established such strong networks linking Mexican villagers and U.S. jobs that neither U.S. border controls nor sanctions on U.S. employers who hired illegal workers would stop migrants.<sup>59</sup> Cumulative causation explains how a migration flow, once set in motion, can assume a life of its own, much as a snowball rolling down a hill gathers speed and size, so that migration can beget more migration if underlying demand and supply factors do not change.

In 1990, the U.S. Commission for the Study of International Migration and Cooperative Economic Development explained how freer trade and economic integration was the best long-term way to unwanted migration: “Expanded trade between the sending countries and the United States is

the single most important remedy” for such migration.<sup>60</sup> But the Commission also warned that the same policies that accelerate economic and job growth in Mexico may also temporarily increase Mexico-U.S. migration. That increase came to be known as the “migration hump,” as shown in Figure 6.

The Mexico-U.S. migration hump was anticipated by those familiar with Mexican and U.S. agriculture.<sup>61</sup> About 35 percent of Mexicans lived in rural areas and were dependent on agriculture for most of their earnings in the early 1990s; such farmers received subsidized water and other inputs and could sell their corn to the government for about twice the world price. Since Iowa produces about twice as much corn as Mexico at about half the price, NAFTA was expected to displace millions of Mexican corn farmers, who were expected to switch to growing tomatoes and other labor-intensive crops for export to the United States. But growing fruits and vegetables requires capital, skills, and access to markets that most independent Mexican farmers did not have. Instead of expanding in Mexico, labor-intensive agriculture expanded in California and elsewhere in the United States in the 1990s, creating a demand for Mexican workers north of the border.

North American agricultural integration produced a migration hump in the 1990s, but Mexico-U.S. migration should eventually fall as Mexico expands its exports, especially as Mexican farmers produce more labor-intensive crops. Mexico’s production of labor-intensive products might increase faster if the United States enforced laws that prevent U.S. employers from hiring unauthorized Mexican workers. And just as Mexican workers can produce food in Mexico for export to the United States, they can pack meat, process poultry, make shoes, and sew clothes for export rather than moving to the United States to do these things. Guacamole, for example, is increasingly made in Mexico and exported,

rather than made in restaurant kitchens in the United States.

Mexico-U.S. migration is now at a crossroads. For most of the 20th century, Mexico and the United States were “distant neighbors” whose major economic link was the migration of rural Mexicans to rural America. Mexico-U.S. relations changed in the mid-1980s, when Mexico sought to emulate the East Asian miracle economies by fostering export-oriented growth. During the 1990s, economic integration symbolized by NAFTA accelerated as Mexico-U.S. migration increased. Mexico experienced political as well as economic change, and in 2000 elected its first president from an opposition party in 70 years, Vicente Fox. Fox made improving conditions for Mexican migrants in the United States his government’s top foreign priority. President George W. Bush was sympathetic, and, during the summer of 2001, Mexico pushed hard for what it called a “whole enchilada” migration package—legalizing unauthorized Mexicans in the United States, a new guest-worker program, ending deaths and violence along the border, and exempting Mexicans from U.S. immigrant visa ceilings.

Just before the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Presidents Bush and Fox met in Washington, D.C., where Bush said, “Our desire is to make it easier for an employer looking for somebody who wants to work and somebody who wants to work to come together, but that in itself is a complex process.” Fox responded, “We must, and we can, reach an agreement on migration before the end of this very year [2001].”<sup>62</sup> After the terrorist attacks, however, U.S. attention shifted to security against terrorism and the priority of Mexico-U.S. migration receded.<sup>63</sup>

## 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 rules: slavery. These efforts have included antidiscrimination measures and preferences for minorities that apply to immigrants as well as the descendants of slaves.

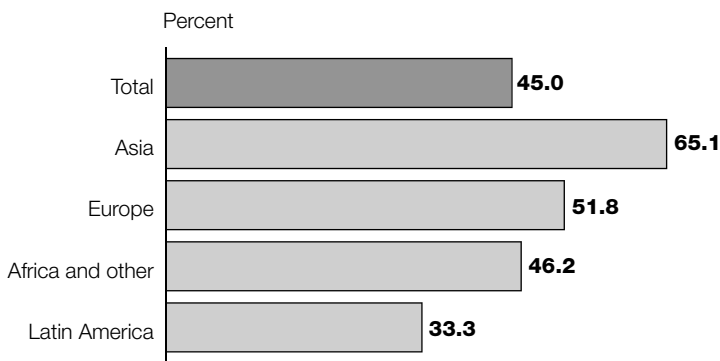
U.S. laws have always made few distinctions between citizens and noncitizens who are legal residents. Legal immigrants have been able to live where they please, seek any job (except for federal government jobs), and buy a house, land, or business without restriction. The basic constitutional rights, 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 legally 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.” Citizenship requirements are less stringent than in most Western European countries, but more stringent than in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

In the past, fewer than half of the immigrants to the United States became naturalized citizens, although the proportions vary substantially by country of origin. Most of the immigrants admitted between 1980 and 1989 were eligible to naturalize by 1994; by 2002, about 45 percent were citizens (see Figure 7, page 34). Nearly two-thirds of immigrants from Asia and just over one-half of immigrants from Europe had become citizens. Only one-third of

Figure 7

### Foreign-Born Entering Between 1980 and 1989 Who Became U.S. Citizens by 2002, by Region of Birth



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Foreign-Born Population of the United States Current Population Survey—March 2002*, Detailed Tables PPL-162 ([www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign/ppl-162.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/foreign/ppl-162.html), accessed March 11, 2003): table 2.6.

Latin American immigrants had become citizens by 2002.

Mexicans, like Canadians, have had low rates of naturalization, probably because many maintain close ties with and expect to return to their home countries. Before 1996 changes in Mexican law, Mexicans who became naturalized U.S. citizens were denied certain rights granted only to Mexican citizens, such as the right to own and inherit land in Mexico.

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.

In 1996, naturalization became a major political issue. Vice President Al Gore launched the “Citizenship USA” drive in April 1995 with the goal of eliminating the backlog of 600,000 immigrants who had applied for naturalization. Some of these applicants 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 in order to add Democratic voters before the next election.

Citizenship USA accelerated the naturalization process, producing a record 1 million naturalizations in FY1996, but not all the foreigners who naturalized had had the required FBI fingerprint checks to ascertain that they had not committed a crime in the United States. The INS tightened its procedures to ensure that all applicants were screened for criminal records, which lengthened the wait between application and naturalization. The number of immigrants electing to naturalize fell to about 600,000 a year in FY2001 and FY2002.

The mid-1990s surge in naturalizations has several causes, including:

- **Rising levels of immigration in the 1980s.** Many of the 2.7 million unauthorized foreigners who were legalized in 1987 and 1988 became eligible to naturalize in 1995.
- **The INS’ Green Card Replacement Program, launched in 1993.** Legal immigrants had to obtain new counterfeit-resistant immigration visas. For a few dollars more, they could also naturalize if they met the other requirements.
- **The 1996 laws that made many noncitizens ineligible for welfare benefits.** Some immigrants naturalized to preserve their access to benefits.
- **Citizenship USA, which streamlined the naturalization process and encouraged immigrants to become citizens.**
- **Widening approval of dual citizenship.** Many immigrant countries of origin permitted some version of dual nationality, so that immigrants who became U.S. citizens would not lose citizenship and rights in their countries of origin.

Many analysts expect naturalized immigrants to affect voting patterns. This has not yet happened on a national scale. Non-Hispanic whites cast 81 percent of the votes in the 2000 election, and a higher percentage of votes in 2002, when turnout was down. In 2000, the 35 million U.S. Hispanics included 13 million

adult U.S. citizens, 6 million of whom voted, accounting for about 5 percent of U.S. votes cast. Latinos cast about 14 percent of the vote in California in 1998 and 2000, but only 10 percent of the vote in 2002.

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>65</sup> Latinos are still a small part of the electorate and vote in much lower numbers than average. Education and age continue to be 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. Immigrants tend to have many of the characteristics associated with a low voter turnout: They have a young age profile and below-average incomes and education, and they are less likely to own homes and more likely to belong to racial or ethnic minorities. Even after accounting for these factors, however, naturalized citizens are less likely than U.S.-born citizens to register and vote.

## 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>66</sup> The hero of Israel Zangwill’s popular play of 1908, “The Melting Pot,” echoed this sentiment 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 have guided what is now called integration:

- **America was to be open to all kinds of immigrants.** As George Washington said, “The bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges.”<sup>67</sup>
- **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 American citizens act politically as individuals, not as members of officially defined ethnic groups, has discouraged such political parties.
- **No ethnic or national origin group would be required to give up its character and distinctive qualities.**

Each immigrant group was free to maintain what it could of its cultural heritage and institutions.

At no time in American history has the process of integration been easy or trouble-free (see Box 4, page 36). The open hostility that was expressed toward certain racial and ethnic groups in the past is surprising by today’s standards. For example, after publicly criticizing President Herbert Hoover, New York Congressman Fiorella La Guardia received a letter in 1930 saying that “the Italians are predominantly our murderers and bootleggers,” and inviting 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 toler-

*Latino and Asian immigrants affect local, but not national, elections.*

ates you.”<sup>68</sup> Today, Chinese-American Gary Locke, who was elected governor of Washington in 1996, is less likely to receive to such public abuse. Governor Locke, like La Guardia, is the son of immigrants.

Integration can be regarded as a glass half full or half empty. The Changing Relations study, which investigated immigrant communities in six cities in the 1980s, found that—despite segregation in jobs and housing and the lack of a common

#### Box 4

### ‘Melting Pot’ vs. ‘Salad Bowl,’ or Integration vs. Pluralism

Integration and pluralism are two prescriptions for the accommodation of immigrants in American society put forward over the last century that reflect the immigrants’ dilemma and still characterize the two sides in the ongoing debate about the accommodation of immigrants.

The integrationist (assimilationist) aims to eliminate ethnic boundaries while the pluralist (multiculturalist) aims to maintain them. For integrationists, American democracy is composed of equal individuals, symbolized by the “melting pot” metaphor. For pluralists, American society is an equality of groups much like a salad with distinct ingredients. For the integrationist, what counts is what the citizen thinks and believes; the pluralist wants to preserve the citizen’s awareness of where he or she came from.

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

The pluralists’ insistence on group identity, on the other hand, limits the freedom of individuals to choose their loyalties for themselves. It assumes that ethnic boundaries remain fixed and overlooks the 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 dorms, should students be placed with others of the same race or ethnicity, or should they be mixed with students from unfamiliar backgrounds? Should school children be grouped for instruction according to their home languages, or should they be brought together in English-language classes from the start? How much instruction in public schools should be carried on in languages other than English? 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 U.S. culture to which all individuals have access, but it also supports the efforts of minorities to preserve and enhance their own cultural integrity. In practice, this means that public funds should not be used 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, Lawrence Fuchs, used the term “kaleidoscope” to emphasize the dynamics of change: Immigrants adapt and change, and so does American society.<sup>2</sup>

#### References

1. John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984): 244. See also “Multiculturalism and Universalism: A History and Critique,” *American Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (1993): 195-219.
2. Lawrence H. Fuchs, *The American Kaleidoscope: Race, Ethnicity, and the Civic Culture* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1991).

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>69</sup> The report also noted that, in cities with large immigrant populations, immigrants were not integrating into the broader community. Economic restructuring had created fears in many communities that immigrants threatened the jobs of longer-term residents. Integrating immigrants is likely to be different in the early 21st century than it was in the early 20th century. In the early 1900s, many U.S.-born Americans first interacted with immigrants when the U.S.-born left their farms for jobs in the cities, where both they and the immigrants were newcomers.<sup>70</sup> Now, immigrants, are moving into and sometimes transforming established communities.

In 1997, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform (CIR) recommended that the federal government do more to “Americanize immigrants” to help them integrate into U.S. society. The CIR emphasized that Americanization is a two-way street. 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.” The CIR recommended that federal grants be given to communities with large numbers of immigrants to create resource centers in which immigrants and the native-born could interact. The CIR also urged U.S. businesses to do more to help integrate immigrants: “Those business groups in particular who lobby for high levels of immigration must make a far greater effort not only to support immigration, but also to support immigrants, through English classes, naturalization and civic education.”<sup>71</sup>

## Language and Education

The 2000 U.S. Census reported that

Table 4

### Language Spoken at Home, 2000

Language spoken at home	Population age 5 or older (thousands)
<b>Total</b>	<b>262,375</b>
Speak only English	215,424
Speak a language other than English	46,952
Spanish or Spanish Creole	28,101
Chinese	2,022
French (incl. Patois, Cajun)	1,644
German	1,383
Tagalog	1,224
Vietnamese	1,010
Italian	1,008
Korean	894

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Summary Tables on Language Use and English Ability: 2000*, PHC-T-20 (Feb. 23, 2003): table 5.

47 million residents older than age 5 spoke a language other than English at home, 15 million more than in 1990. Spanish was the most common non-English language, spoken by 28.1 million, while 2.0 million spoke Chinese, 1.6 million spoke French, 1.4 million spoke German, 1.2 million spoke Tagalog, and 1.0 million each spoke Italian and Vietnamese (see Table 4).

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, using their parents’ language at home and English at school. English often became dominant as the children of immigrants entered the workplace. The grandchildren of immigrants—the third generation—typically speak only English.<sup>72</sup>

The shift to English may be accelerating among recent immigrants and may occur within just two generations.<sup>73</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 English for their everyday communication.<sup>74</sup> Another

Photo removed for copyright reasons.

*Learning English can help immigrants improve their wages and job prospects, although many foreigners find it difficult to take classes while holding full-time jobs.*

survey found that even though most Mexican-born U.S. residents spoke Spanish at home, almost two-thirds of U.S.-born people of Mexican ancestry used English at home.<sup>75</sup>

Immigrants and their children would benefit from acquiring English language ability even more rapidly. Poor English skills are associated with lower earnings in a high-tech society. Earlier immigrants could farm or work in factories or build railroads without speaking English. But in today's service-dominated economy, the ability to speak English is required for nearly all but the lowest-paying jobs. One study found that among immigrant men who did not speak English at home, those who were not fluent in English earned only about half as much as those who were.<sup>76</sup> Another study concluded that those in the United States "who speak English 'well' or 'very well' have 17 percent higher earnings than those with less fluency."<sup>77</sup>

Most immigrants want to learn English. A survey of residents of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican origins found that more than 90 percent agreed that all U.S. citizens and residents should learn English.<sup>78</sup> But acquiring a new language is a difficult

undertaking for adults, particularly those who work long hours. There are frequently long waiting lists for English classes for adults. 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 whose definition varies from state to state and between federal agencies. These students are referred to as English-language learners.

In the 2000-2001 school year, there were 3.4 million students in primary and secondary schools receiving LEP services, including 1.5 million in California and 570,000 in Texas.<sup>79</sup> There are two major approaches to teaching English to students fluent in another language: English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction for rapid acquisition of English, and bilingual education, which includes instruction in a limited-English student's native language. Each approach has its own philosophy and assumptions about what is appropriate for students with different linguistic backgrounds. With the ESL approach, children of various language backgrounds receive instruction in English for all subjects, but the English is modified by specially trained teachers so English-learners can more easily understand it. Teachers provide an appropriate context for the students to help them with the new language.

With bilingual education, 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 method is best. A report on limited-English students by the NRC concluded that the most successful school programs have three similar characteristics: some native language instruction initially for most students; relatively early phasing-in of English instruction; and teachers specially trained in instructing English-language learners.<sup>80</sup>

These three characteristics are lacking in many school programs. Schools with bilingual programs—most are Spanish—may continue instruction in a non-English language for as long as seven years. In other schools, limited-English children are taught in English by teachers who have had no special 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 report 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 about bilingual education is especially vociferous in California, which has about 45 percent of the nation's limited-English school children. In June 1998, California voters approved Proposition 227, the English for the Children initiative, 61 percent to 39 percent, ending bilingual education and requiring most non-English-speaking children to be placed in special English classes for one year and then shifted to regular classes. Since then, students in English immersion classes have scored higher on math and reading than students in bilingual programs. In 2002, 32 percent of the LEP students in the immersion program passed the California English proficiency test, compared with just 9 percent the previous year. Students in

bilingual programs showed less dramatic improvement, from 3 percent to 16 percent.<sup>81</sup> Arizona and Massachusetts also ended bilingual education by voter initiative, but Colorado voted to continue teaching LEP children in their native language.<sup>82</sup>

The debate about bilingual education involves much broader issues than the best way to teach non-English-speaking children. One issue is 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 English-language learning, does that show concern for immigrants' future success in the United States, or is it "Anglo cultural imperialism"? Is bilingual education a form of minority patronage that creates public employment for members of particular ethnic groups? Should U.S. immigration policy be changed to favor people who already know English, as it does in Australia and New Zealand?

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 government's use of other languages be a beneficial affirmation that English is the common language of the United 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.

## An Unfinished Nation

Past immigration flows to the United States resemble waves, with the num-

*English-immersion programs have helped immigrant children academically.*

ber of immigrants increasing to peak levels and then falling into troughs. The fourth wave of U.S. immigration, which began in 1965, has been climbing since the early 1980s. Now, in the early 21st century, 1 million immigrants a year are being admitted, with no end in sight. Many Americans want the federal government to take steps to reduce immigration. If the flow were reduced, the current period would be the peak of the fourth wave. Other Americans are comfortable with current levels of immigration, so the fourth wave might continue.

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 with an annual ceiling. Immigrants and refugees continue to arrive through America's front door, which was opened wider in 1990 to accommodate more relatives of U.S. residents and more workers desired by U.S. employers. But the fastest growth in entries in the 1990s was through side and back doors, as nonimmigrant tourists, foreign workers and students, and unauthorized foreigners arrived in larger numbers.

Research on the economic, social, and political effects of immigration does not provide clear guidelines for policy. Overall, 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 skills and find it hard to advance to better jobs in the American labor market. 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 the immigrants.

Most immigrants to the United States do not become naturalized citizens. Instead, they live as permanent residents and keep their original nationality. Laws enacted in 1996 made noncitizens ineligible for some welfare benefits, which prompted a record 1 million foreigners to naturalize. The U.S. constitution makes U.S.-born children of immigrants citizens at birth, whether their parents are naturalized citizens, legal immigrants, or illegal 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, as well as signs that immigrant children may be acquiring English faster than did previous immigrants.

For the foreseeable future, America seems 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 ever-changing American community. But past success does not guarantee that history will repeat itself. There are concerns about the size and nature of today's immigrant population. As the nation searches for an immigration policy for the 21st century, the United States, and the

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