CHAPTER 1

The Four Phases of U.S-Bound Immigration

In mid-May 2021, about ten thousand Moroccans swam to the Spanish African enclave of Ceuta after Morocco deliberately lifted border controls. All that Morocco needed to do was remove the border guards for a mass of young people from a presumably mid-income country to try to swim their way into the rich world. The Spanish government promptly flew two ministers to parley with the Moroccan government and sent military reinforcements to stem the tide and repatriate thousands of migrants. For weeks, life in Ceuta would not be back to normal.[1]

Thousands of miles away in Tapachula, southern Mexico, a caravan of would-be asylum seekers from Central America set out to walk the length of Mexico in a desperate bid to reach the border of the United States and request asylum. Even though the U.S. government at that time (September 2021) was sending back asylum seekers or forcing them to wait indefinitely in Mexico, Central American families, single women with a baby or a small child on their back or held by the hand, and unaccompanied children still kept leaving their countries by the thousands hoping that, somehow, they would be let into America.

What was already an untenable situation on the U.S. southern border came to a head a year later when, following word of a more humane approach by the new Biden administration, thousands of Haitians—including many who had already obtained asylum in other countries like Brazil and Chile—trekked to the American border to request humanitarian visas. They converged in the Texas border city of Del Rio

where they proceeded to pitch a huge camp under a bridge. The situation "became surreal," in the words of the Del Rio mayor; mounted Border Patrol agents sought to block Haitians from reaching the camp; and Department of Homeland Security personnel swiftly moved to take the would-be asylees to other locations from which they could be flown back to Haiti.[2]

Similar stories along multiple locations could be told. They would range from the tens of thousands of Syrian and Afghan refugees arriving in Germany in 2015 to the makeshift camp dubbed "the jungle" built by African migrants near Calais, France, as they sought entry into Great Britain. All these episodes feature a single-minded quest by people from what is generically termed "the Global South" to somehow gain entry into "the North." They come to escape civil wars, terrorism from gangs, political persecution, imploding governments, generalized poverty, and lack of economic opportunity.

What marks these episodes as an inflection point at present are two factors. First, new communication technologies make possible the diffusion of information—including the diffusion of opportunities and lifestyles in the wealthier countries—to the most remote corners of the world. Everyone now has a mobile phone, enabling contact with relatives who already have gained entry into rich nations and information about the best opportunities to do so oneself. Second, there is the perception among an increasing mass of people in impoverished countries that it is now possible to breach the barriers of the developed world due to a combination of human rights legal protections, nongovernmental compassionate organizations, and the emergence in the target nations of coethnic communities made up of earlier migrants and their descendants.

People in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and Central and South America are no longer willing to put up with the interminable process of obtaining a legal visa, permanent or temporary. They now march on, moved by the conviction that it is their right, as human beings, to escape intolerable conditions in their countries of origin and gain access, at least, to some of the benefits enjoyed by a minority of the world's population. This is the sentiment impelling young Africans to risk their lives aboard fragile rafts in the Atlantic or the Mediterranean; Honduran and Guatemalan families to trek their way across hundreds of kilometers in a foreign country; and, of late, tens of thousands of Haitians huddling under a border bridge in the hope of working their way in.

The current situation also marks a fourth moment in the history of U.S.-bound migration since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Unlike earlier waves of migration that were, in one way or another, regulated by labor demand in the receiving country's economy, the current flow of asylum seekers is not "functional" in the sense of fulfilling a niche in the American labor market. Their only claim to entry is their humanity and the terrible conditions that they have left behind. With a few notable exceptions, boat people and caravan marchers are met with great hostility by the native population of the receiving countries, as their governments scramble to prevent these flows or to send back those who have managed to make it in. Solutions so far range from attempts to buy off the cooperation of sending country governments so as to prevent out-migration in the first place to massive deportation campaigns and attempts to build fences and even "a Great Wall" separating the poor countries of the Global South from the North.

Unraveling these and other riddles of the complex relationship between migration and the successive stages in the development of the American economy and society is the goal of this book. We begin the story with the great waves of migration that accompanied the American Industrial Revolution. As noted in the preface to this 5th edition, it is not the case that immigration to the United States started in the 1880s or 1890s. On the contrary, migration from other countries, primarily England, Germany, and Ireland, accompanied the birth of the American Republic and was a permanent feature of its history during the nineteenth century. Historians have written reams of pages on immigration during this period, including its crucial role in the American Civil War. We chose to begin our story a few decades later because this was the period in which the United States transitioned from being just another country to becoming the center of the global system. The transition owed a great deal to the immigrant waves crossing the Atlantic and the Pacific at that time.

THE GREAT EUROPEAN WAVE, 1880–1930

Political Economy

As shown in table 1, over 23 million Europeans crossed the Atlantic to the United States during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first two of the twentieth. Certainly, not all of them stayed; many eventually returned home or even engaged in a back-and-forth movement depending on the ups and downs of labor demand on both sides of the ocean. As many as half of certain peasant-origin groups, such as the southern Italian *contadini*, went back at some point, while

TABLE 1 DECENNIAL IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES, 1880–1919

TOTAL	1880–1889	Percentage	1890–1899	Percentage	1900–1909	Percentage	1910–1919	Percentage
Northwestern Europe								
United Kingdom[a]	810,900	15.5	328,759	8.9	469,578	5.7	371,878	5.8
Ireland	674,061	12.8	405,710	11	344,940	4.2	166,445	2.6
Scandinavia[b]	671,783	12.7	390,729	10.5	488,208	5.9	238,275	3.8
France	48,193	0.9	35,616	1.0	67,735	0.4	60,335	1.0
German Empire	1,445,181	27.5	579,072	15.7	328,722	4.0	174,227	2.7
Other[c]	152,604	2.9	86,011	2.3	112,433	1.4	101,478	1.6
Central Europe								
Poland	42,910	0.8	107,793	2.9	Not returned separately		Not returned separately	
Austria-Hungary	314,787	6.0	534,059	14.5	2,001,376	24.4	1,154,727	18.2
Other[d]	—	—	52	[f]	34,651	0.4	27,180	0.4
Eastern Europe								
Russia[e]	182,698	3.5	450,101	12.7	1,501,301	18.3	1,106,998	17.4
Romania	5,842	0.1	6,808	0.2	57,322	0.7	13,566	0.2
Turkey in Europe	1,380	[f]	3,547	0.1	61,856	0.8	71,179	1.1
Southern Europe								
Greece	1,807	[f]	12,732	0.3	145,402	1.8	198,108	3.1
Italy	267,660	5.1	603,761	16.3	1,930,475	23.5	1,229,916	19.4
Spain	3,995	0.1	9,189	0.2	24,818	0.3	53,262	0.8
Portugal	15,186	0.3	25,874	0.7	65,154	0.8	82,489	1.3
Asia								
Turkey in Asia	1,098	[f]	23,963	0.6	66,143	0.8	89,568	1.4
Other	68,673	1.3	33,775	0.9	171,837	2.1	109,019	1.7
America								
British North America[h]	492,865	9.4	3,098[g]	0.1	123,650	1.5	708,715	11.2
Mexico	2,405	[f]	734[g]	[f]	31,188	0.4	185,334	2.9
West Indies[i]	27,323	0.5	31,480	0.9	100,960	1.2	120,860	1.9
Central & South America	2,233	[f]	2,038	0.1	22,011	0.3	55,630	0.9
Other Countries								
Australia[j]	7,271	0.1	11,191	0.1			11,280	0.2
Other	6,643	0.1	40,943	0.5			10,414	0.2
		100.0[k]		100.0		100.0		100.0

SOURCE: Carpenter, "Immigrants and Their Children," 324–25; cited in Kraut, *The Huddled Masses*, 21.

[a] England, Scotland, Wales
[b] Norway, Sweden, Denmark
[c] Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland
[d] Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro
[e] Includes Finland and boundaries prior to 1919
[f] Less than one-tenth of one present
[g] Immigrants from British North America and Mexico not reported from 1886 to 1893
[h] Including Canada
[i] Including Jamaica
[j] Including Tasmania and New Zealand
[k] Totals are rounded to nearest percent as in census report.

over 90 percent of Eastern European Jews left their places of origin never to return.[3] Be that as it may, the sediment that these human waves left over time was substantial enough to cause significant changes in the demography of the receiving nation. By 1910, the foreign born accounted for 14.7 percent of the American population and for 22 percent of those living in urban places.

As Simon Kuznets and Brinley Thomas showed in detail, the great waves of European immigration were, by and large, the product of the transatlantic political economy. If conceived as a single unit, this economy generated enormous synergy between its complementary parts. Beginning in England at the start of the nineteenth century, the advance of European industrialization continuously uprooted peasant masses whose economic livelihood was rendered precarious by advances in capital-intensive agriculture and whose only alternative was migration, either to industrializing cities or abroad. As Kuznets states:

> The shift from Great Britain and Ireland to Germany and the Scandinavian countries, and then to Italy and Eastern Europe, follows the trail of the industrial revolution in Europe. It at least suggests that immigration to the United States provided a welcome alternative to population groups displaced by revolutionary changes in agriculture and industry; and thus facilitated, in no small measure, the course of industrialization in the European countries. This migration may thus be viewed as an adjustment of population to resources, that in its magnitude and the extent to which it adapted itself to purely economic needs has few parallels in history.[4]

On the other side of the Atlantic, the European waves were not well received by everyone but were welcomed by a politically decisive class, namely, capitalists bent on breaking the hold of independent craftsmen and skilled workers so as to meet the demand of a vast market for cheap manufactures. This was no easy feat. Gerald Rosenblum notes that Tocquevillian democracy in America was grounded on independent small producers whose determination to avoid lifelong wage slavery led to a proliferation of enterprises whose craftsmen-owners freely and personally interacted with their journeymen. These, in turn, planned to establish their own enterprises in due time.[5]

This tradition went hand in hand with the settlement of a vast frontier by independent farmers whose demand for agricultural implements and manufactured goods created a comfortable synergy with the products of small-scale industrial shops. The challenge for the rising class of capitalist manufacturers was how to break this synergy so that markets

could be expanded at home and abroad. As Brinley Thomas demonstrated, immigration prior to the 1870s *preceded* indicators of economic development such as railway construction and demand for bituminous coal.

> That was the pioneering phase when a comparatively small nation was engaged in subduing a continent and the rate of expansion was conditioned by the arrival of new labor. . . . Moreover, the railways could not have been built without the gangs of laborers, many of them Irish, recruited in the East and transported to the construction camps.[6]

After 1870, however, the causal correlation reversed itself and indicators of economic development started to precede mass migration. This is the moment when the "pull" of American wages, advertised by paid recruiters sent to Europe, began to make its mark among Italian and Eastern European peasants whose economic existence was rendered increasingly precarious by industrialization in their own countries. As table 1 also shows, Southern and Central Europeans progressively displaced migrants from the British Isles, Germany, and Scandinavia as major sources of U.S-bound migration. Their massive arrival led to a radical transformation in the composition of the American working class, from independent and quasi-independent craftsmen and journeymen to unskilled workers.

Naturally, the native working class vigorously and often violently resisted the changes engineered by industrial capitalists. Better than any other movement, the Knights of Labor exemplified this resistance. The phenomenal rise in the membership of this order and the bitter struggles that ensued coincided with a rise in factory production that became generalized by the 1880s. The Knights grew in membership from about 104,000 in July 1885 to over 702,000 one year later. As John R. Commons writes:

> The idea of solidarity of labor ceased to be merely verbal, and took on flesh and life; general strikes, nation-wide boycotts, and nation-wide political movements were the order of the day. Although the upheaval came with the depression, it was the product of permanent and far-reaching changes which had taken place during the seventies and the early eighties.[7]

The Knights were, in the end, unsuccessful. The master-journeyman relation was gone forever and, with it, the social basis for democratic equality and self-reliant individualism that were founding elements of the American Republic. European migration did not change the

fundamental pillars of American society—its elites, its class structure, or its constitutional order; what it accomplished was to alter the demographic composition of the population and, along with it, the character of the American working class. Henceforth, workers became dependent on trade unions rather than independent ownership as their sole basis for "voice" in their nation's political process.[8]

European migration accelerated to such an extent that it made the causal order between capitalist development and population displacement uncertain. While originally promoted by capitalist firms through deliberate recruitment to staff the incipient factory system, the movement produced such an abundance of cheap unskilled labor as to trigger new waves of technological innovation to take advantage of it, in the process forever burying the independent artisan class. Thomas concluded:

> The massive inflow into the United States of cheap labour from Southern and Eastern Europe coincided with technical innovations calling for a "widening" of the capital structure. The changing technique in the expanding industries entailed minute subdivision of operations and a wide adoption of automatic machines worked by unskilled, often illiterate men, women, and children. After 1900, the new supply of manpower was so abundant that firms using the new techniques must have driven out of the market many old firms committed to processes depending on human skill.[9]

As shown in table 2, male immigrants around 1910 were overwhelmingly concentrated in the bottom rungs of the occupational ladder. While illiterate or poorly educated first-generation migrants were pretty much stuck at the bottom of that ladder, prospects for the better educated and, especially, for the children born in America were much brighter. As it kept growing, the new industrial economy generated multiple economic opportunities accessible to those with a modicum of education. A universal public education system opened the doors for such positions to second-generation youths. Naturally, it was the children of earlier immigrant waves—primarily the British, German, Scandinavian, and Irish—who benefited most from such circumstances. They needed a continuous supply of unskilled Italians, Poles, and other Eastern European workers to keep fueling a mass industrial economy that was propelling them to positions of ever greater wealth and prosperity.[10] This is a fundamental reason that nativist reactions against the Southern and Eastern European waves and the consequent identity politics were kept in abeyance until the third decade of the twentieth century.

TABLE 2 PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN BORN AMONG WHITE MALE GAINFUL WORKERS, 10 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER, 1910

Occupation	Percentage
Total	24.7
Professional, technical, and kindred workers	15.6
Farmers and farm managers	12.8
Managers, officials, and proprietors, except farm	26.4
Clerical and kindred workers	10.9
Sales workers	18.0
Craftsmen, foremen, and kindred workers	29.6
Operatives and kindred workers	38.0
Service workers, including private household	36.8
Farm laborers and foremen	8.4
Laborers, except farm and mine	45.0

SOURCE: Hutchinson, *Immigrants and Their Children: 1850–1950*, table 38, p. 202; cited in Rosenblum, *Immigrant Workers*, 77.

Identity Politics

Despite the extraordinary synergies in the transatlantic political economy between Europe and North America, the mass of peasant immigration from Catholic countries of the European periphery could not but awaken sentiments of rejection and hostility among the native born. Such sentiments and the resulting anti-immigrant mobilizations cumulated over time as the mass of foreigners extended throughout the national territory and as the economic "mobility machine" fueled by their labor slowed down in the wake of World War I. Throughout this book, we will encounter multiple instances of anti-immigrant discrimination. The main point here is that the interplay between the economic basis of immigration and the cultural reaction to it was definitely evident in this earlier period.

Anti-immigrant sentiment was fueled by a conjunction of groups that saw the relentless flow of foreigners as a direct threat. First, skilled native workers and their organizations were pushed aside by the onslaught of unskilled migrant labor. While the Knights of Labor put forward an ideology of universal brotherhood among all workers and radical transformation of the capitalist factory system, realities on the ground continuously undermined that ideology and put the confrontation between skilled natives and illiterate foreign peasants into stark evidence.[11] Second, there was a general malaise among the native population at being

surrounded by a sea of foreign faces, accents, and religious practices and finding itself increasingly as "outsiders in their own land." Nativist reactions took multiple forms, from violent attacks and lynching of foreigners to organized campaigns to Americanize them as quickly as possible.

In March 1911, the White League, a New Orleans organization akin to the Ku Klux Klan, lynched eleven Italian immigrants accused of conspiring to murder the city's police chief. Six were about to be released after being found not guilty. Their dark Mediterranean features undoubtedly contributed to their instant indictment by the mob. Commenting on the incident, the Harvard intellectual Henry Cabot Lodge characterized it not as a mere riot but as a form of revenge "which is a kind of wild justice." He characterized the earlier acquittals as "gross miscarriages of justice" since the Italians were undoubtedly active in the Mafia.[12]

Cabot Lodge's stance reflected the third set of forces in favor of nativist radicalism: the concern among American intellectuals that so many foreigners would dilute the moral fiber of the nation and the integrity of its institutions. In an academic environment dominated by the Social Darwinist evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer and the "science" of eugenics, the intellectual and moral inferiority of Southern and Eastern Europeans was taken for granted and their capacity for eventual assimilation into American culture widely questioned. The statistician Richard Mayo Smith warned that "the thing we have to fear most is the political danger of the infusion of so much alien blood into our social body that we shall lose the capacity and power of self-government."[13] Similarly, in his 1926 volume, *Intelligence and Immigration*, the psychologist Clifford Kirkpatrick argued against expecting much progress among immigrants through the reform of school programs because "definite limits are set by heredity, and immigrants of low innate ability cannot by any amount of Americanization be made into intelligent American citizens capable of appropriating and advancing a complex culture."[14]

Under the intellectual zeitgeist of the time and the leadership of such public thinkers, the restrictionist movement gathered momentum. The movement was reinforced by three major forces in the economic infrastructure. First, as noted by Thomas, the progressive closure of the frontier and the slowing down of the industrialization process began to limit the "economic engine" propelling native workers and members of the second generation on the backs of foreign labor. The mass of newcomers progressively ceased to be the backbone of a segmented labor market to become a source of direct competition for natives.[15] Second, the minority of educated immigrants with union and party experience in Europe

and the Americanized second generation mobilized against capitalist exploitation, becoming, in many regions, the backbone of the union movement. The enthusiasm of industrialists for foreign labor cooled significantly when confronted with such unexpected resistance. Immigrants with industrial background were those who contributed primarily to the first radical cohorts in America: "The spirit of a disciplined, intelligent, and aggressive socialist army was typified by the organized working-class movement of Germany. The leaders of this mighty force were deeply respected at home and abroad. It was men trained in such a movement who tried to build up a duplicate in the United States."[16]

Events back home also contributed to the radicalization of certain immigrant nationalities, such as Russian Jews and Slavic immigrants. As Fine noted, "Almost two-thirds of the members of the Workers' (Communist) Party were born in countries which were either part of the old Russian empire or inhabited by Slavs."[17] The horrors of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire in New York stimulated labor militance in the needle trades. As a result, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union and the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, each of which had a largely Jewish, Italian, and Polish membership, developed into two of the strongest labor unions in the United States.[18] Thus, the fundamental function of immigrant labor to American industrialists, which included not only supplementing a scarce domestic labor force, but disciplining it through strikebreaking and the acceptance of poor working conditions, gradually weakened. The stage was set for the search by capitalist firms of a new source of pliable labor to replace increasingly organized and militant immigrants and their descendants.

The identification of this alternative labor source represented the third economic force buttressing the restrictionist movement that finally triumphed in the mid-1920s. As will be seen in the next chapter, the activation of the massive Black labor reserves in the American South provided the impulse for the emergence of a split labor market in industry, marked by major differences in pay and work conditions between white and Black workers. Descendants of former slaves, previously confined to a semisubsistence agricultural life in the South, were actively recruited by the likes of the Ford Motor Company as early as 1916. The recruitment process was similar to that previously used among southern Italian and Eastern European peasants, and the purpose was the same: to supply large manufacturing industry in the American Northeast and Midwest with an abundant, cheap, and unorganized labor source. Because this source was also unskilled, the policy of encouraging southern Black

migration was accompanied by the acceleration of capital-intensive techniques in manufacturing. With this strategy, capitalist firms attempted, and largely succeeded, in breaking the power of trade unions. From 1920 to 1929, union membership dropped by almost 2 million. In 1933, it stood at less than 3 million, a precipitous decline from the peak years before World War I.[19]

The final victory of radical nativism with the enactment of restrictive legislation by the U.S. Congress in 1924 was, to a large extent, the outcome of the withdrawal of support for immigration by forces in the American economy that had previously supported it. First, natives and members of the second generation shifted attitudes, regarding further immigration as an obstacle and not as a propeller of their own upward mobility. Second, the pivotal capitalist class lost enthusiasm for the foreign labor supply as it became progressively organized. This withdrawal of supports accelerated when firms found in southern Black peasants a new major source to replace and, if necessary, discipline an increasingly restless white labor force.

Political Economy and Identity in the West

The size of European immigration after 1890 and the attention bestowed on it by politicians, academics, and the public at large commonly blocked from view what was happening at the other end of the land. Under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, Mexico ceded to its northern neighbor almost half of its territory after its defeat in the Mexican-American War. The physical size of the new acquisition was enormous, comprising the current states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming. The need to integrate these territories into the economy of the nation and the opportunities it created generated a strong demand for new labor, to be sourced from west and south.

Gold came first. The California Gold Rush of 1848–55 saw adventurers of every stripe attempt the difficult journey west, going as far as the Magellan Strait at the tip of South America to reach the new promised land. The need for labor in the mines led to the first cross-Pacific recruitment system, with paid contractors sent to southern China, in particular, the greater Pearl River delta region around present-day Jiangmen, in search of contract workers. The system was largely responsible for the first appearance of Chinese migrants in American shores.[20] The great difficulties of reaching the Pacific Coast and the need to integrate the vast new territories gave the necessary impetus for transcontinental railroad construction in the subsequent decades. Two great railroad companies—the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific—stood in need of massive supplies of labor that could not be sourced east, especially after the tracks left Iowa and Nebraska to start climbing the Rocky Mountains. Labor for this enormous enterprise came primarily from southern China through a massive expansion of the recruitment system. The two railroad companies, racing from Sacramento, California, to the east and from Omaha, Nebraska, to the west finally met in Promontory, Utah, in 1869.[21]

Chinese workers whose hands had built mile after mile of track suddenly became redundant. A few returned home, but most stayed as they had not accumulated enough money to pay the costs of the return passage and buy land. They first turned to California agriculture, but their appearance in the fields triggered a furious reaction among natives who regarded the Chinese as semihuman. Chinese immigration was described as "a more abominable traffic than the African slave trade," and the immigrants themselves were portrayed as "half civilized beings who spread filth, depravity, and epidemic."[22]

The weak Qing imperial dynasty could do little for its nationals abroad, and the rising xenophobia in California and elsewhere culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that effectively ended this labor flow. Chinese laborers were pushed out of California farms and ranches and forced to find refuge in tightly knit urban communities that formed the precursors of today's Chinatowns. Hand laundries and cheap restaurants became the means of survival for this confined "bachelors society" where the ratio of men to women reached a remarkable 26 to 1 in the 1930s.[23]

With Chinese laborers out of the land and California agriculture in full bloom, a new source of field labor had to be found. For some time after the mid-eighties, the Hawaii sugar industry had sourced its demand for cane cutters in Japan. The flow now reached the mainland, where the renowned discipline and frugality of Japanese workers made them welcome by California ranchers and farmers, at least for a while. Trouble started to brew when landowners realized that the Japanese coupled these virtues with a strong desire to buy land and farm on their own. In 1900, forty Japanese farmers owned less than 5,000 acres of California's land. By 1909, however, about six thousand Japanese were farming under all sorts of tenancy, controlling more than 210,000 acres.[24] As Ivan Light explains:

> So long as the Japanese remained willing to perform agricultural labor at low wages, they remained popular with California ranchers. But even before 1910, the Japanese farmhands began to demand higher wages. . . . [W]orse, many Japanese began to lease and buy agricultural land for farming on their own account. This enterprise had the two-fold result of creating Japanese competition in the produce field and decreasing the number of Japanese farmlands available.[25]

Faced with such "unfair" competition, ranchers turned to the ever sympathetic state legislature. In 1913, the first Alien Land Law was passed restricting the free acquisition of land by the Japanese. This legal instrument was perfected in 1920 when Japanese nationals were forbidden to lease agricultural land or to act as guardians of native-born minors in matters of property. Driven from the land, the Japanese had no choice but to move into cities, just as the Chinese had done before. They did not huddle, however, in the same restricted areas but fanned out in diverse forms of self-employment. By 1919, almost half of the hotels in Seattle and 25 percent of the grocery stores were owned by Japanese migrants. Forty percent of Japanese men in Los Angeles were self-employed, operating dry-cleaning establishments, fisheries, and lunch counters. A large percentage of Japanese urban businesses were produce stands that marketed the production of the remaining Japanese farms.[26]

The anti-immigrant rhetoric and xenophobic measures pushed by nativists in the West thus ended up depriving its farms and other businesses of any source of Asian labor while turning those migrants who stayed into urban entrepreneurs. Farms, ranches, and cities kept growing, however, and the question was what new labor flow could be engineered to replace the departed Chinese and Japanese. Western businessmen borrowed a page from their Eastern counterparts by turning south. While Northeastern industrialists tapped the large Black labor reserves in the former Confederacy, California and Texas ranchers went to Mexico. In both cases, the method was the same: deliberate recruitment through economic incentives. By 1916, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that five or six weekly trains full of Mexican workers hired by the agents were being run from Laredo. According to Mario García, the competition in El Paso became so aggressive that recruiting agencies stationed their Mexican employees at the Santa Fe Bridge where they literally pounced on the immigrants as they crossed the border.[27]

As seen in table 3, Mexican immigration surged after 1910 as a consequence of these developments—a flow that was intensified by the turmoil of the decade-long Mexican Revolution. Free access to Mexican

TABLE 3 MEXICAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES, 1881–1950

Decade	Number (000s)	As Percent of Total Immigration
1881–90	2	.04
1891–1900	1	.02
1901–10	50	.6
1911–20	219	3.8
1921–30	459	11.2
1931–40	22	4.2
1941–50	61	5.9

SOURCE: Portes and Bach, *Latin Journey*, 79. Table compiled from annual reports of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

labor conflicted, however, with the increasing exclusionary mood back East. The history of immigrant regulation from the end of World War I to the Great Depression is a case study of governmental efforts to reconcile seemingly incompatible demands through legislative compromise and administrative regulation. Direct attempts by Western ranchers and growers to beat back restrictionism at the federal level were defeated. However, in 1918, an exception to the ban on illiterates was granted by Congress in favor of immigrants from Mexico and Canada. The 1924 National Origins Act again exempted Mexico and other Western Hemisphere countries from the quota imposed on the Europeans. In 1929, a Supreme Court decision upheld an earlier administrative decree declaring workers who commuted between residences in Mexico and jobs in the United States legal immigrants.[28]

In effect, through various loopholes and administrative devices, the federal government endeavored to keep the "back door" of immigration open to Western capital while closing the "front door" to new Southern and Eastern European migrants. For reasons seen previously, Europeans had ceased to be a preferred source of unskilled industrial labor, but while their replacements could be sourced from domestic labor reserves, the same was not the case in the West. There, foreign workers, this time from south of the border, continued to be in high demand for many years as the human instruments to fuel an expanding economy.

Mexican migration possessed another convenient feature, namely, its cyclical character. Because the border and their home communities were

relatively close, Mexican migrants found reverse migration a much easier enterprise than Europeans or Asians. Indeed, the normative behavior among Mexican male workers was to go home after the harvest or after their contract with railroad companies had expired. This feature, added to the predominantly nonurban destinations of the Mexican labor flow, reduced its visibility, making it less of a target for nativist movements of the time than the Italian and Poles. That honeymoon period was short-lived, however, as will be seen shortly.

While the history of U.S- bound immigration before the 1930s had few parallels between the East and the West, a decisive feature was common to both. This was the conflicting interplay between political economy and identity politics. Growing industrial and agricultural economies consistently demanded and received immigrant labor flows, while the presence of many foreigners inevitably triggered a nativist backlash. That reaction was prompted by the perception of immigrants as labor market competitors and as sources of social and cultural fragmentation and by the behavior of some foreign groups that sought to assert their labor rights and their rights to self-employment in America. When that happened, the protective hand of the employer class quickly withdrew, leaving the newcomers to their own fate.

Early Twentieth-Century Migration and Social Change

The literature on international migration generally makes a great deal of the changes that such flows wreak in the host societies, often proclaiming that they "transform the mainstream."[29] These assertions often confuse impressions at the surface of social life with actual changes in the core culture and social structure of the receiving society. While major immigration movements, such as the great transatlantic and transpacific waves before and at the start of the twentieth century, had a great impact on the demographic composition of the population, it is an open question whether such changes also led to transformations in more fundamental elements of the host societies.

In the case of the United States, it is clear that, despite much hand-wringing by nativists of the time, the value system, the constitutional order, and the power structure of American society remained largely intact. Native white elites kept firm control on the levers of economic and political power and existing institutions, such as the court system and the schools, and proved resilient enough to withstand the foreign onslaught and gradually integrate newcomers into the citizenry. It is a

commonplace to affirm that assimilation is a two-way street, with both the host society and foreign groups influencing each other. In the American case, however, the process was definitely one-sided, as existing institutions of the receiving society held the upper hand. Eventually, children and grandchildren of immigrants began scaling the ladder of the American economy and class system, but, in order to do so, they had first to become thoroughly acculturated, learning fluent English and accepting the existing value system and normative order.

It is important to distinguish between the *structural significance* and the *change potential* of migrant flows. There is no question that the great early twentieth-century migrations had enormous structural importance for the American economy. They were the sine qua non for the Industrial Revolution of the time, and this was, from the point of view of white American elites, almost their sole raison d'être. That effect did not so much alter American society as reinforce its existing structures of wealth and power. The actual social transformations wrought in the fabric of American society by these flows came largely as consequences of the basic economic forces that engineered them.

First, as seen previously, the masses of largely unschooled and unskilled labor arriving on American shores did change the character of the class structure in favor of the rising capitalist elites. It did so by weakening the power of skilled workers and their organizations as well as doing away with the class of small independent producers. The American Industrial Revolution consisted basically in replacing artisanal production by autonomous workers with mass production by machinery, operated largely by unskilled labor. The demise of the Knights of Labor, described previously, was but one episode in the end of the social basis of Tocquevillian democracy and its replacement by a capitalist-controlled social and political order.

Second, as shown in table 4, places of destination of Europeans were overwhelmingly urban. Foreigners lived in cities at far higher rates than natives, triggering a veritable urban explosion. The overall effect was to shift the political center of gravity of the nation from the countryside to the cities, especially those in the Northeast and Midwest.[30] Thanks to the great European waves, the United States became an overwhelmingly urban nation. Aside from its social and cultural ramifications, this transformation had an important political consequence. Seats in the U.S. House of Representatives are apportioned on the basis of number of *persons* in each district and state rather than the number of citizens. As Tienda puts it:

TABLE 4 PROPORTION URBAN: WHITE, NATIVE WHITE, AND FOREIGN-BORN WHITE

Year	White (%)	Native White (%)	Foreign-Born White (%)
1940	57.5	55.1	80.0
1930	57.6	54.5	79.2
1920	53.4	49.6	75.5
1910	48.2	43.6	71.4
1900	42.4	38.1	66.0
1890	37.5	32.9	60.7
1870	28.0	23.1	53.4

SOURCE: Rosenblum, *Immigrant Workers*, table 6.2.

> The 14th Amendment of the U.S Constitution states that: "Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole numbers of persons in each state." . . . That all persons residing in the United States are counted, but only citizens are permitted to vote in national elections presumes that the right to representation is more fundamental than the right to exercise the franchise.[31]

The six major immigrant-receiving states gained sixteen seats in the House between 1900 and 1910, signaling a significant shift in political influence that directly threatened mostly rural states. Not surprisingly, representatives of those states strongly supported a restrictionist stance, adding their voices to the chorus of those endorsing the conclusions of the 1911 Dillingham Commission Report to Congress to the effect that "immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe are intellectually inferior and unworthy of naturalization." Nevertheless, the shift in political power toward cities in the Northeast and Midwest became a fait accompli by the 1920s. Such a shift corresponded well with the consolidation of the power of capitalist elites located, for the most part, in these cities.[32]

The final major effect of immigration was the transformation of the cultural landscape through the massive arrival of believers in other creeds. Over time, European immigrants and their descendants were willing to give up their languages and many elements of their culture but not their religions. As a consequence, an overwhelmingly Protestant nation was forced to accommodate the institutionalization of the Catholic faith, brought by Irish immigrants and consolidated with the arrival of millions of Italians and Poles, and, subsequently, the proliferation of synagogues in the wake of massive Eastern European Jewish immigration. Thus, it came to be that a predominant Protestant culture became

first "Christian" and then "Judeo-Christian," signaling the institutionalization of these immigrant faiths.

In chapter 8, we will examine the manifold effects of religion on the social and economic adaptation of newcomers. At present, the important point is that this transformation both demonstrated and reinforced the strength of the country's institutional framework while leading to significant changes in its culture. In effect, the arrival of millions of Irish and Italian Catholics first and Eastern European Jews later pitted the strong desire of the Protestant majority to keep the nation culturally and religiously homogeneous against the separation of church and state and the right to religious freedom enshrined in the American Constitution. The legal framework prevailed, and the result was a vast transformation in the American cultural landscape as the influence of Catholic churches and Jewish synagogues went well beyond their weekly services. For Jews, in particular, accustomed to systematic persecution in Russia and elsewhere in Europe, the American constitutional order was a priceless gift: "For the orthodox, the good life consisted of being able to live and worship in a manner consistent with Mosaic Law and religious traditions. Not all east-European Jews were equally religious, but most were imbued with the Jewish cultural respect for intellectual pursuits."[33]

It is a matter of debate whether the consolidation of other faiths altered, in a fundamental way, the American value system. While Protestant hegemony certainly suffered, it can be argued that, at a deeper level, the system was strengthened. The victory of the legal framework over provincial fears of cultural disintegration reinforced the basic institutional pillars of the nation. In reciprocity, Catholics and Jews responded by "Americanizing" their religious practices, making them increasingly compatible with core American values. On balance, the Industrial Revolution and the masses of foreign labor that fueled it did change important elements of the host society, but the value system, constitutional order, and power structure inherited from the country's history remained largely in place.

RETRENCHMENT, 1930–1970

The historical replacement of Europeans by southern Black migrants in the East and of Asians by Mexicans in the West continued during the 1920s, although some Italians, Poles, and others kept coming since the 1924 National Origins Act took time to be implemented. The delays were due to endless wrangling in Congress about the census year on

which to base the quota of 2 to 3 percent of the resident immigrant nationality already in the country, to be admitted yearly. Pushing back the census year to 1890 or even 1880 facilitated future admissions from Northern Europe and concomitantly limited those from the South. In the end, the annual quota of immigrants who could be admitted from any country was set at 2 percent and the selected census year was 1920, which would have allowed a greater number of Italians and other Southeastern Europeans to come had it not been for the intervention of a major economic downturn.[34]

In 1929, the American gross national product had come close to $90 billion; by 1932, it was cut to $42 billion and by the following year, to a miserable $39 billion. Residential construction fell by 95 percent, eighty-five thousand businesses failed, and the national volume of salaries dwindled by 40 percent. The nation lay prostrate.[35] Worse, the government had no clue as what to do at a time when "Hoovervilles" of impoverished families rapidly dotted the land. The Great Depression proved to be the greatest immigrant control measure of all time since, no matter what the quota was, foreigners had no incentive to come and join the masses of unemployed Americans. As shown in table 5, while immigrant arrivals, ages sixteen to forty-four, surpassed one million and reached 4 percent of the adult labor force in 1907, by 1932, only twenty-two thousand newcomers arrived, not even reaching 0.1 percent of the domestic labor force.

One of the most telling features of this period was the attempt by the federal government to reduce unemployment by deporting foreign workers. Most European immigrants were legally in the country and could not be sent back. The repatriation and deportation campaign thus focused on Mexicans, of whom close to half million were deported. As Leo Grebler put it, "Only a few years earlier, many of those now ejected had been actively recruited by American enterprises."[36] In Texas, the Mexican-born population dropped nearly 40 percent between 1930 and 1940. A distinct feature of this campaign was that many U.S -born Mexican Americans were sent back along with the immigrants.[37] Being brown-skinned and mestizo-looking was sufficient reason for federal officials to put you aboard a bus bound for Mexico.

Needless to say, this campaign made no dent in the country's economic situation, which continued to worsen. It was only after massive deficit spending and a deliberate program of job creation by the Roosevelt administration that things started to take a turn for the better. World War II represented a quantum leap in this policy as federal spending reached a then-monumental $103 billion per year, while unemployment dropped down to near zero.[38] By the early 1940s, American agriculture found itself again short of hands, a situation that led the U.S. government to reverse itself and tap the ever available Mexican labor reserve. In 1942, an agreement was signed by both governments leading to the initiation of the Bracero Program under which tens of thousands of Mexican contract workers went to work for American farms and ranches, reproducing the pre-Depression labor scene. From the viewpoint of their employees, braceros proved so pliable and productive that they insisted on the continuation of the program after the war's end. As seen in table 6, from a modest start in the post–World War II years, the program reached close to half a million workers over the next decade.

TABLE 5 IMMIGRATION AND THE AMERICAN LABOR FORCE, 1900–1935

Year	Immigrant Arrivals Age 16–44 (000s)	Immigrants as Percent of the Labor Force
1900	370	1.3
1901	396	1.4
1902	539	1.9
1903	714	2.6
1904	657	2.4
1905	855	3.1
1906	914	3.3
1907	1,101	4.0
1908	631	2.3
1909	625	2.3
1910	868	2.6
1911	715	2.1
1912	678	2.0
1913	986	2.9
1914	982	2.9
1928	231	0.6
1929	208	0.5
1930	177	0.4
1931	67	0.1
1932	22	0.0
1933	15	0.0
1934	19	0.0
1935	22	0.0

SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 55–73.

TABLE 6 THE BRACERO PROGRAM AND CLANDESTINE MIGRANT APPREHENSIONS, 1946–1972

Year	Braceros (000s)	Apprehensions (Deported Aliens) (000s)
1946	32	
1947	20	
1948	35	
1949	107	
1950	68	
1951	192	
1952	234	
1953	179	
1954	214	
1955	338	
1956	417	
1957	450	
1958	419	
1959	448	
1960	427	71
1961	294	89
1962	283	93
1963	195	89
1964	182	87
1965	104	110
1966	9	139
1967	8	162
1968	6	212
1969	—	284
1970	—	345
1971	—	420
1972	—	506

SOURCE: Grebler, Moore, and Guzman, *The Mexican-American People*, 68; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Annual Reports*.

By the time it ended in 1964, some twenty-eight states had received several million braceros—one of the largest state-managed labor migrations in history. Tellingly, during the twenty-two years of the Bracero Program, no farm labor union ever succeeded in organizing or carrying out a strike.[39]

The period of immigration retrenchment, marked by the Great Depression and World War II, had a series of important and unanticipated consequences. The suffering of the 1930s was shared by the children of natives and immigrants alike, forging new social and cultural bonds out of common adversity. These bonds were much strengthened when youths of all ethnic origins found themselves in the trenches. Fighting platoons had no time for discrimination, so that men whose parents had been at each other's throats because of racial or ethnic differences came into close and prolonged contact. As an outgrowth of the war, prejudice and hostility against the children of Europeans largely became a thing of the past. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, better known as the GI Bill, completed the process by giving these newly empowered Americans a leg up to the middle class.[40] The effects on individual mobility facilitated by the GI Bill were most notably experienced by white veterans, although not by Blacks in the South.

As so often happens in retrospective narratives, necessities were built out of historical contingencies, with later authors speaking of an "inevitable" process of assimilation under which natives and immigrants melted into a single body. Others would portray a "designer" nation forged by the far-seeing policies of its leaders. In fact, nothing of the sort happened. The process by which the great European and, to a lesser extent, Asian migrations of the turn of the twentieth century became part of the American mainstream was due to a series of unforeseen and, with the wisdom of retrospect, rather fortunate accidents. World War II represented not only a massive Keynesian stimulus program for the American economy but also a giant melting machine out of which the *pluribus* finally turned into the *unum*.

There were important exceptions to this pattern. While Mexican Americans had enlisted by the thousands and fought and died in the war, they were not beneficiaries of the melting machine, at least not to the extent of other ethnic minorities. Upon return from the front, they still found themselves confined to the barrios and being continuing objects of white discrimination and prejudice. Their collective position in the American hierarchies of status and wealth barely budged, despite their enormous sacrifice. Part of the reason for this outcome was the minority's role as the backbone of the unskilled labor market in western states. This position in the social order, shared with southern Blacks back east, was too entrenched to be changed even by a global war.[41]

A second, and decisive, reason was that the Bracero Program ensured the continuity of the migration from south of the border, thus renewing and strengthening the bonds of the Mexican American population with its country of origin. This did not happen to the children of Europeans and Asians for whom the cutoff of migration in the 1920s inexorably

weakened cultural and linguistic ties, forcing them to become American in one form or another. From the "longtime Californ," as Chinese Americans branded themselves, to the newly minted Italian American and Jewish American ward politicians in the East, the process of adapting to and pushing ahead within the American institutional system was well advanced by the late 1930s. The war gave it the final impetus. Blacks and Mexicans were left behind as "unmeltable," the latter further handicapped by their inability to shed their foreignness in the face of a ceaseless migrant flow.[42]

REBOUND: 1970–2010

The 1960s were a period of prosperity and atonement in America. The failure of the post–World War II years to integrate African Americans and Mexican Americans into the social and economic mainstream finally came back with a vengeance. In the midst of economic prosperity and global hegemony, the relegation of one-fifth of the American population to a caste-like status could no longer continue. The urban riots and the parallel Civil Rights Movement wrought significant changes in the nation's institutional framework. Predictably, the Black mobilizations in the Southeast and the riots in cities everywhere were accompanied by parallel protests in the Southwest by its large Mexican American population. Both groups reacted to the patent injustice of being used as the backbone of the low-wage labor market and as foot soldiers in the nation's wars without ever being granted access to its opportunities.

Fortunately, the nation's political leaders at the time recognized this and took a series of measures to remedy the situation. Civil rights legislation and the War on Poverty, launched by President Lyndon Johnson, followed in short order. Embedded in the new national mood to atone for past racial injustices was the initiative to eliminate the last vestiges of the racist provisions of the 1924 National Origins Act. Thereafter, access to the United States would be based on two basic criteria: family reunification and occupational merit. National origin would not enter the picture, except for a per-country limit set on a universalistic basis. In 1952, provisions to exclude Asians had been repealed in a bill passed over President Harry Truman's veto. The 1965 amendments completed the task. It opened the door to immigration from all countries, setting a cap of 20,000 per country and a global limit of 290,000.[43] Children under twenty-one, spouses, and parents of U.S. citizens were exempt from those numerical limits.

In the floor debates over the new legislation, its cosponsor, Emanuel Celler (D-New York), argued that few Asians and Africans would actually come since they had no families to reunite with. President Johnson reassured critics of the bill's benign consequences. "This bill that we sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions," he declared. Secretary of State Dean Rusk anticipated only eight thousand immigrants from India over five years and few thereafter. Senator Edward Kennedy argued that the ethnic mix of the country would not be altered.[44] Subsequent history was to prove these predictions deeply wrong.

A year before this legislation was passed and in the same mood of atonement, the Bracero agreement with Mexico was repealed. Opponents argued that the program subjected Mexican workers to systematic exploitation by unscrupulous American employers and corrupt Mexican officials. Its elimination would also create new employment opportunities for native workers.[45] The lofty spirit in which these pieces of legislation were crafted did not envision what their actual consequences would be. Denied access to braceros, U.S. ranchers and farmers did not hire native workers but turned to the same Mexican workers now rebaptized as clandestine migrants. As also shown in table 6, apprehensions of "illegal aliens" at the border shot up with the end of the Bracero Program, rising year by year and reaching over half a million by 1972.

A second unexpected consequence of the 1965 act was that it provided a new avenue for unauthorized migrants to legalize their situation. Clandestine Mexican workers who wanted to stay on this side of the border could now make use of various legal means, paramount among which was marriage to a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. A study of Mexican migration conducted in the early 1970s found that by 1973, 70 percent of legal Mexican migrants had already lived in the United States for one year or more: "Clearly, most of the men in this sample did not face legal entry into the United States as strangers or newcomers. Instead, the vast majority were 'return immigrants' coming back to places and people that had long before become established parts of their lives."[46]

A third consequence of the 1965 act was to open the professional labor market to foreigners. As Representative Celler would have it, few Africans and Asians had families to reunite with, but they had occupational qualifications, and Asians, in particular, took full advantage of the meritocratic provisions of the new system. As will be seen next, a major consequence was to bifurcate the immigration stream into flows targeting different segments of the American labor market. Thereafter, both the composition of the foreign population in America and its

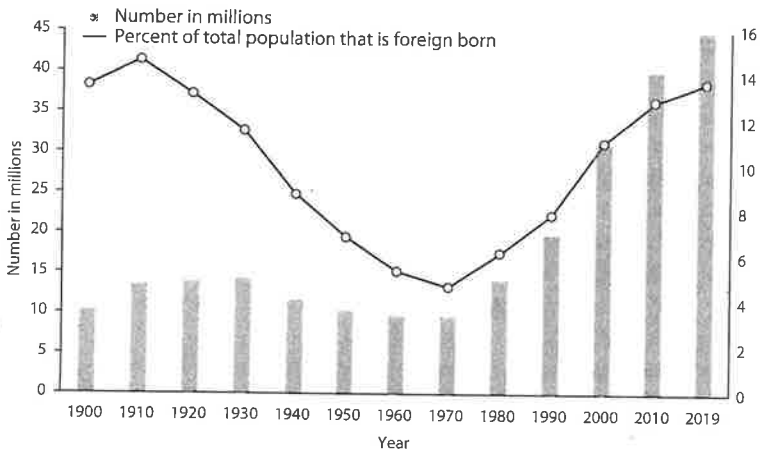


FIGURE 1A. The Evolution of the Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 1900–2019. *Sources*: Decennial Censuses, 1900–2010; 2019 American Community Survey.

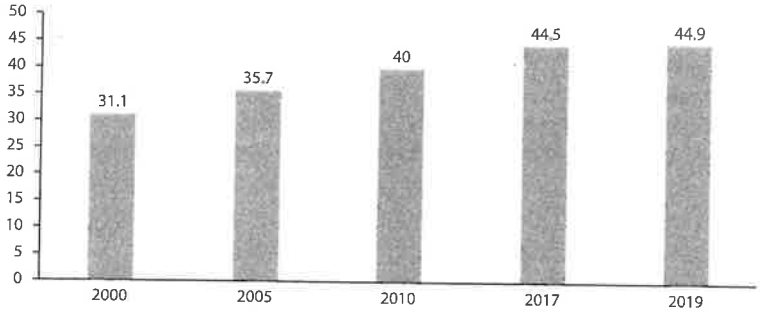


FIGURE 1B. Total Immigrant Population, 2000–2019 (millions). *Source*: Frey, "Analysis of Decennial Censuses and 2000–2019 American Community Surveys."

impact on the receiving society and economy would become far more nuanced and complex.

Industrial Restructuring and the Hourglass

As in the 1920s, it took time for the new immigration act to be implemented. Immigration continued at low levels during the 1960s so that, as shown in figure 1, the foreign-born population reached its lowest

absolute and relative numbers in 1970. It was only after that year that the momentous effect of the reform was to be felt. Framers of the 1965 amendments could not possibly have foreseen it, but the new system paved the way for a segmentation of future immigration flows reflecting the bifurcation of the American economy and labor markets in the decades to come.

As seen previously, the United States generated a vast demand for industrial labor during the late nineteenth century and the first three decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, this was the reason that European immigrants, first, and southern Black migrants, second, were recruited and came in such vast numbers to northern American cities. The availability of industrial jobs and the existence of a ladder of occupations within industrial employment created the possibility of gradual mobility for the European second generation *without need* for an advanced education. This continued labor demand was behind the rise of stable working-class communities where supervisory and other preferred industrial jobs afforded a reasonable living standard for European ethnics. As has also been seen, their gradual mobility into the higher tiers of blue-collar employment and then into the white-collar middle class furnished the empirical basis for subsequent theories of assimilation.

Beginning in the 1970s and accelerating thereafter, the structure of the American labor market started to change under the twin influences of technological innovation and foreign competition in industrial goods. The advent of Japan as a major industrial competitor took American companies by surprise, accustomed as they were to lacking any real foreign rivals in the post–World War II era. As two prominent students of American deindustrialization concluded:

> What caused the profit squeeze was mainly the sudden emergence of heightened international competition; a competition to which U.S business leaders were initially blind. In the manufacturing sector a trickle of imports turned into a torrent. The value of manufactured imports relative to domestic production skyrocketed—from less than 14 percent in 1969 to nearly triple that, 38 percent, only ten years later.[47]

Caught in this bind, many companies resorted to the "spatial fix" of moving production facilities abroad in order to reduce labor costs. Technological innovations made the process easier by lowering transportation barriers and making possible instant communication between corporate headquarters and production plants located abroad.

The garment industry represents a prime example of this process of restructuring. While fashion design and marketing strategies remained centralized in the companies' American headquarters, actual production migrated, for the most part, to industrial zones in the less developed world.[48]

Industrial restructuring and corporate downsizing brought about the gradual disappearance of the jobs that had provided the basis for the economic ascent of the European second generation. Between 1950 and 1996, American manufacturing employment plummeted, from over one-third of the labor force to less than 15 percent. The slack was taken up by service employment that skyrocketed from 12 percent to close to one-third of all workers. Service employment is, however, bifurcated between menial and casual low-wage jobs commonly associated with personal services and the rapid growth of occupations requiring advanced technical and professional skills. The highly paid service jobs are generated by knowledge-based industries linked to new information technologies and those associated with the command and control functions of a restructured capitalist economy.[49]

The growth of employment in these two polar service sectors is one of the factors that stalled the gradual trend toward economic equality in the United States and then reversed it during the following decades. Between 1960 and 1990, the income of the top decile of American families increased in constant (1986) dollars from $40,789 to $60,996. In contrast, the income of the bottom decile barely budged, from $6,309 to $8,637. The income of the bottom half of families, which in 1960 represented about 50 percent of the income of those in the top decile, declined by almost 10 percent relative to this wealthiest group in the following thirty years. By 2000, the median net worth of American households had climbed to about $80,000. However, almost half of households (44%) did not reach $25,000 and exactly a third had annual incomes below this figure. More than half of American families (57%) did not own any equities at all, falling further behind in terms of economic power.[50] The trend continued during the first decade of the twenty-first century, with gaps in household wealth (net worth) becoming wider still. By 2009, the net worth of Black and Hispanic households (which among home owners is largely based on their home equity) was largely wiped out in the wake of the collapse of housing prices and a deep recession. Net worth among Hispanics dropped to a minuscule $6,300, and the wealth gap between whites and Hispanics rose to 20 to 1, the widest in twenty-five years. Economic inequality—as measured by the Gini index and related indicators—reached Third World levels by 2010.[51]

In this changed market, high demand exists at the low end for unskilled and menial service workers and at the high end for professionals and technicians, with diminishing opportunities for well-paid employment in between. Figure 2 portrays this changed situation. Contemporary immigration has responded to this new "hourglass" economy by bifurcating, in turn, into major occupational categories. As seen before, the end of the Bracero Program rechanneled the low-skill agricultural flow from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean into the category "illegal aliens." Simultaneously, the occupational preference provisions of the 1965 Immigration Act paved the way for major professional and technical flows originating primarily in Asia. Subsequent legislation added flexibility and volume to this form of immigration. The increasing heterogeneity of the contemporary foreign-born population in the wake of these legal and labor market changes requires additional emphasis as a counterpart of the common popular description of immigration as a homogeneous phenomenon.

Reaction:2010–

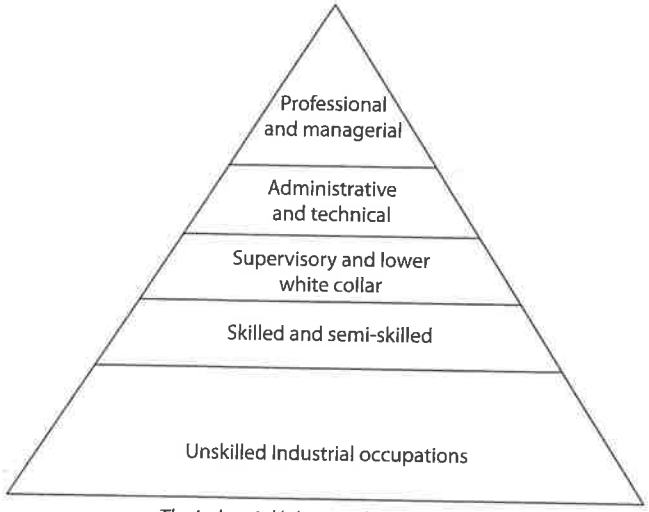
The fourth moment in the history of U.S.-bound migration features the continuation of processes rooted in prior legislation and history, along with the qualitative and quantitative diversification of foreign-born flows. The massive American economy that, in 2021, reached a GDP of $23 trillion continued to demand immigrant labor at all levels but with the notable twist that an increasing proportion of these workers now came under temporary contracts rather than permanently. The mass implementation of the new entry regime led to three simultaneous splits:

—Between legal-permanent and temporary migrants.

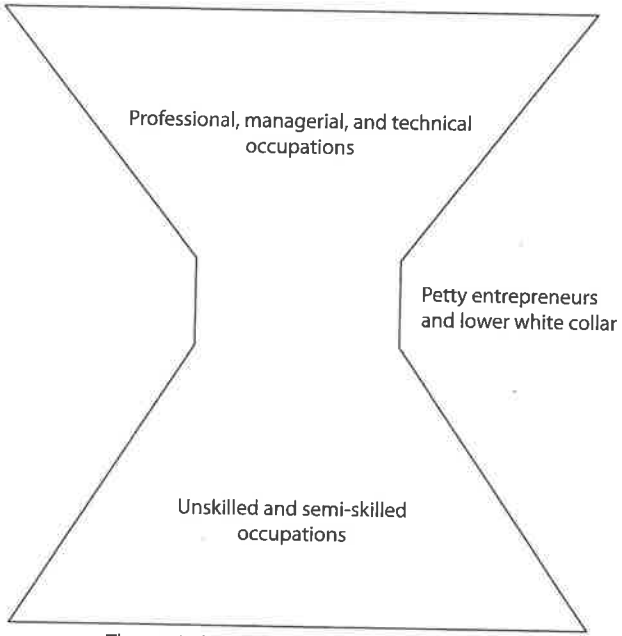
—Between highly educated professionals and manual labor workers.

—Between migrant flows sourced in the Americas and those coming predominantly from Asia.

While temporary migrants come from everywhere, the last two splits map onto each other, as highly trained migrants come primarily from Asia and manual labor flows are sourced predominantly in the Americas.[52]



The industrial labor market, 1900–1960



The postindustrial labor market, 1970–2010

FIGURE 2. Changing Labor Markets.

Complexities of the present situation do not end here, for the evolution of contemporary migration flows has been newly affected by two other momentous forces—those stemming from the politics of postindustrialism in the United States and those that reflect the increasing fracturing of the global system. Let us consider each of them in turn.

The Rise of National Populism

The decision of the corporate world to deindustrialize America in order to meet foreign competition in automobiles and other durable goods, as well as neutralize the power of trade unions, led not only to the hourglass labor market portrayed in figure 2, but to a mass of suddenly redundant workers. This mass, composed largely of native whites with limited education, became not only unemployed, but unemployable.[53] Forced to eke out a living in insecure and semiformal jobs in the middle of the hourglass, this displaced and frustrated mass became fertile ground for populist politicians ready to profit from its anger.[54]

The industrial U-turn in the American economy led relentlessly to a political U-turn in which the relatively well-mannered interaction between liberals and conservatives of the past was replaced by an increasingly strident war fanned by a militant right wing bent on usurping political power at any cost. Spearheaded by the so-called Tea Party and selected radio commentators and media, the movement played on the fears of a marginalized white working class and asserted its rightful ownership of the nation.[55] In the "makers" versus "takers" terminology that became popular on the extreme right, the latter category was populated exclusively by nonwhites—native Blacks and brown-skinned Latin immigrants—whose ascent had to be blocked by any means possible.

Neither African Americans nor Mexicans nor other immigrants were responsible for the deindustrialization of America, a deed more properly attributed to white corporate elites, but they became suitable targets for marginalized whites. This task was relentlessly conducted by politicians and media pundits who transformed white anger into congressional votes, blockage of pro-immigrant legislation, and the eventual election of a far-right nativist as president.[56]

The transformation of white working-class economic redundancy into populist nationalism had two major consequences for U.S.-bound migration. First was the blockage of any comprehensive reform bill in Congress that would open a path for legalization of the undocumented population already in the country. As noted by Douglas Massey, Rubén

Hernández-León, and others, the bulk of the undocumented crossed the southern border surreptitiously in search of jobs in agriculture and other low-skilled sectors because there was not, until recently, a legal way to do so. They filled such jobs, commonly disdained by native workers, and stayed in the United States because there was no legal way to commute to their countries of origin.[57]

With time, this immigrant population grew in numbers to comprise at its peak an estimated 12 million by 2007, decreasing to about 10.5 million by the end of the second decade of this century. It included hundreds of thousands of youths who were brought by their parents as children through no fault of their own. By and large, undocumented immigrants fill needed low-skill niches in the American economy and focus on rebuilding their lives and educating their children. The latter grew up attending American schools, speaking English, and forgetting their native languages. In all but legal status, they became Americans. Recognizing the functionality of this population for the labor market, their increasing rootedness in local communities, and the patently unjust situation in which these children found themselves, both Democratic and Republican politicians attempted to normalize the situation by passing a comprehensive immigration reform bill. Four such attempts were made under the Bush and Obama administrations. All four failed.

As Kennedy tells the story, Comprehensive Immigration Reform (CIR) that would create a path for legalization of undocumented migrants and their children was attempted twice during the two Bush presidencies and twice during Obama's. The last attempt, sponsored by the "Gang of Eight" in the Senate handily won approval in that body. However, the level of opposition in the House of Representatives brought about by mobilization of nativists by the Tea Party and Numbers USA was such as to block the reform. Tea Party "patriots" claimed to have set in motion 900,000 automated phone calls in ninety Republican districts connecting tens of thousands of anti-immigration voters with their congressional representatives.

As one lobbyist closely involved with CIR recalled, "There were a lot of members of Congress who wanted to get to yes on immigration reform, including within the Republican Caucus but based on the building pressure, couldn't get there."[58] In the end, House Speaker John Boehner conceded that it was impossible to pass the bill in 2012. The situation had numerous precedents. In 2009, when debate on a similar bill was about to end, the Capitol Hill switchboard was forced to shut down due to the avalanche of calls from anti-immigration activists.

Republican senator John Ensign noted, "The intensity and the passion on this bill, we've never seen anything like it. Not even close."[59]

The determined opposition by the far right to any attempt at immigration reform, spearheaded by slogans such as "What part of illegal don't you understand?" and "Whose country is this anyway?," resulted in the permanent blockage of any path to regularization for the undocumented population. As this population established roots in local communities and their children grew up American, the situation became ever more absurd and inhumane. On the one hand, the country shifted to temporary programs that brought in, legally, migrants to do the labor that the undocumented were doing already. In parallel fashion, as we shall see, other programs imported thousands of temporary professionals to do work that the children of the undocumented, educated in American schools and colleges, could have performed equally well.[60]

The second consequence of national populism was a drastic decline in refugee admissions. Refugees and would-be asylees became targets of nationalist anger under the slogan "America First." For decades prior to 2016, the American immigration system had included a humanitarian component that allowed the entry of persecuted peoples from countries as diverse as Cuba, Vietnam, Somalia, and Burma. For illustration, table 7 presents the ten largest refugee nationalities arriving in 2015. This diversity makes clear that the policy governing refugee admissions was not determined by narrow geopolitical interests but by a humanitarian stance toward persecuted minorities all over the world.

Things started to change with the election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016. One of his first acts was to bar refugee admissions from Syria and other Muslim countries. As his administration progressed, the annual ceiling for refugee entries was drastically reduced. As seen in table 8, by 2020, the last year of Trump's presidency, refugee admissions dropped to just 11,800, less than 20 percent of what they had been in 2015 and about 10 percent of the 100,000-plus refugees admitted to the country in successive years during the early 1990s.[61] The Trump policy toward refugees was naturally applauded by the nationalist far right, which also egged him on to complete his massive wall along the southern border.

The rise of national populism marked the end of the compassionate stance that had characterized U.S. refugee policy in the past and, with it, the disappearance of the moral authority of America in the world. This happened at a particularly critical time in the evolution of the global system and in the forces impelling mass out-migration.

TABLE 7 REFUGEE ARRIVALS BY SELECTED COUNTRIES OF NATIONALITY, 2013–2015

	2013	2014	2015
Total	69,909	69,975	69,920
Afghanistan	661	753	910
Bhutan	9,134	8,434	5,775
Burma	16,299	14,958	18,386
Congo	2,563	4,540	7,875
Cuba	1,829	1,488	1,596
Ethiopia	765	726	626
Iran	2,579	2,846	3,109
Iraq	19,487	19,769	12,676
Somalia	7,608	9,000	8,858
Sudan	2,160	1,315	1,578

SOURCE: U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, *2015 Yearbook*, table 14.

TABLE 8 REFUGEE ARRIVALS AND ADMITTED ASYLEES IN THE UNITED STATES, 2015–2019

	Refugees	Asylees
2015	69,909	26,124
2016	84,989	20,455
2017	53,691	26,568
2018	22,405	38,687
2019	29,916	38,687
2020	11,800	—

SOURCE: U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, *2015–19 Yearbooks*; Monin, Batalova, and Tianjian Lai, "Refugees and Asylees in the United States."

A Broken World

Table 8 also shows an interesting trend: the number of asylees in recent years has *not* declined but, at least until 2019, actually rose. In contrast to refugees that are processed by U.S. diplomatic personnel abroad before coming to the United States, asylees show up at points of entry, generally at the southern border, and request entry into the country for humanitarian reasons. The pressure of these human waves in recent years has been such as to compel agencies of the U.S. government to let in thousands of these claimants despite the avowed intention of the Trump administration to prevent their entry.

Forces behind the "caravans" of would-be asylees marching toward the border are of two kinds, both reflecting the growing fracture of the global system between stable and rich countries and those left behind in the "Global South." The first is the rise in relative deprivation among the populations of these countries, triggered by the mass spread of communication technologies. As noted at the start of this chapter, most people today have mobile phones and, with them, ready knowledge of the living standards in wealthy nations in contrast to those they endure at home.[62] Relative deprivation underlies what the economist Michael Piore termed "inexhaustible supplies of labor." Countries in the Global North only need to signal that some entry avenues exist for those avenues to instantly fill up with applicants. The process underlies, among other things, the ease with which the United States is able to recruit foreign workers at both ends of the labor market—from low-skill agricultural workers to software engineers and technicians.[63]

Yet people marching in caravans toward the U.S. border are impelled by more than relative deprivation. The second force motivating them is the implosion of the state in sending countries, generating situations of widespread violence, fear, and immiseration. State implosion has become increasingly common in the Global South, leading to desperate escapes by large segments of its populations. Syrians, Afghans, and Somalis risking their lives in the Mediterranean and then in immensely long treks toward Western Europe exemplify this trend. So does the one-fourth of the Venezuelan population that has abandoned its country seeking refuge in nearby Andean nations.[64] The instantly created wave of Moroccans seeking entry into Spain, mentioned at the start of this chapter, provides another vivid illustration.

In comparison with the Syrian and Venezuelan mass flights, the caravans crossing Mexico are relatively small. They come from smaller countries in the Northern Triangle of Central America—El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras—plus Haiti. Notice that they do not come from Mexico itself because, although often seen as teetering on the brink, the Mexican state has not imploded.[65]

Despite the relatively modest populations of source countries, caravans of Central American and Haitians have been sizable enough to put considerable pressure on U.S. government agencies and the country's judicial system. While the Trump administration deported many and forced tens of thousands to await processing on the Mexican side of the border, many others found their way in. The reluctance of the subsequent Biden administration to send back mothers and unaccompanied

minors was seen in sending countries as a welcome opportunity: in no time at all, families and children flooded the border, begging to be allowed in.

The fourth moment in the history of migration to the United States thus features a series of contradictory trends and unresolved dilemmas. The size of the American economy and labor market is such as to continue to demand large numbers of foreign workers, increasingly brought under temporary contracts. The regular immigration system continues in place and is still the major vehicle for the arrival of hundreds of thousands of relatives of U.S. citizens and permanent residents every year.[66] Simultaneously, the rise of nationalist populism in American politics has prevented the resolution of the plight of millions of undocumented migrants and their children, many of whom could fill labor market needs now met by temporary migrants under contract. The same political forces have led to a fierce offensive against refugees, significantly reducing their number. Yet, at the same time, the pressure of imploding nations in the vicinity of the United States has produced hundreds of thousands of asylum claimants, at least some of whom manage to gain entry.

Refugees and asylees have no ready role in the American labor market, but, once they regularize their situation, somehow they find their way into it. In time, they will become able to claim their relatives, triggering further family reunifications. It is difficult to envision where all of these contradictory and overlapping trends will lead. What seems clear is that the unresolved situation of millions of undocumented migrants and their children, the chaotic scenes at the border, and the resolve of white nativists to keep others out of legal existence and out of the country altogether make for an explosive situation. The nation is living on borrowed time that only a decisive political solution can bring to an end. The question is which side of the political spectrum will succeed and implement its vision for the future of Immigrant America.

Immigrants and Their Types

There are two main dimensions along which contemporary immigrants to the United States differ: the first is their personal resources, in terms of material and human capital, and the second is their classification by the government. The first dimension ranges from foreigners who arrive with investment capital or are endowed with high educational credentials to those who have only their labor to sell. The second dimension

TABLE 9 A TYPOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES

	Human Capital		
Legal Status	Unskilled/Semiskilled Laborers	Skilled Workers and Professionals	Entrepreneurs
Unauthorized	Mexican, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, and Haitian laborers	Chinese, Dominican, and Indian physicians and dentists practicing without legal permits	Chinese, Indian, and Mexican operators of informal businesses in ethnic enclaves and neighborhoods
Legal, Temporary	Mexican and Central American laborers admitted with H-2A and H-2B visas	Chinese, Indian, and Korean software engineers and technicians admitted with H-1B visas	
Legal, Permanent	Mexican and Central American legalized laborers through marriage to a U.S. citizen or permanent resident	Argentine, Chinese, Filipino, and Indian physicians, engineers, and nurses admitted under occupational preferences of the 1965 and 1990 Immigration Acts	Chinese, Dominican, and Korean owners of legal firms in ethnic enclaves and low- income urban areas
Refugees, Asylees	Ukrainian, Syrian, and Somali refugees and Guatemalan and Honduran asylees	Pre-1980 Cuban; post-1990 Russian, Ukrainian, Iranian, and Iraqi professional refugees	Cuban, Israeli, and Chinese owners of legal firms in ethnic enclaves and in the general market

ranges from migrants who arrive legally and receive governmental resettlement assistance to those who are categorized as illegals and are persecuted accordingly. At present, only persons granted refugee status or admitted as legal asylees receive any form of official resettlement assistance in the United States. Most legal immigrants are admitted into the country but receive no help. Since 1996, they have also been barred from welfare programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid to which citizens are entitled. Cross-classifying these dimensions produces the typology presented in table 9. Representative nationalities are included in each cell, with the caution that migrants from a particular country may be represented in more than one. The following description follows the vertical axis, based on human capital skills, noting the relative legal standing of each distinct type. A final section discusses the special case of refugees and asylees.

Labor Migrants

The movement of foreign workers in search of manual and generally low-paid jobs has represented the bulk of immigration, both legal and undocumented, in recent years. These workers are destined to occupy jobs at the bottom of the labor market "hourglass." The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 was aimed primarily at discouraging the surreptitious component of this flow while compensating employers by liberalizing access to legal temporary workers. We note the principal ways through which manual labor immigration has materialized in recent years.

First, migrants can cross the border on foot or with the help of a smuggler or overstay a U.S. tourist visa. In official parlance, illegal border crossers have been labeled "EWIs" (entries without inspection); those who stay longer than permitted are labeled visa abusers or overstayers. In 2019, the Department of Homeland Security apprehended 1,013,539 foreigners, of which the large majority were EWIs caught at the southern border. The principal countries of origin comprising this figure are Mexico (254,595), Guatemala (285,069), Honduras (268,992), and El Salvador (99,750). Of late, however, there has been a significant rise in the number of visa overstayers from other countries to the point that Mexicans have ceased to represent the absolute majority of the unauthorized population.[67]

A second channel of entry is to come legally by using one of the family reunification preferences of the immigration law (left untouched, for

the most part, by the 1986 reform and reaffirmed by the Immigration Act of 1990). This avenue is open primarily to immigrants who have first entered the United States without legal papers or for temporary periods and who have subsequently married a U.S. citizen or legal resident. As seen previously, one of the principal consequences of the 1965 immigration reforms was to provide this avenue of legalization to unauthorized migrants. Spouses of U.S. citizens are given priority because they are exempted from global quota limits. Year after year, the vast majority of legal Mexican migrants have arrived under family reunification preferences. In 2002, for example, of a total of 219,380 Mexicans admitted for legal residence, 58,602 (26.7%) came under the worldwide quota as family-sponsored entries and an additional 150,963 (68.8%) arrived outside quota limits as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. By 2019, total legal Mexican migration had dropped to 168,980, but, of these, 19.6 percent arrived under the quota as family preferences and 65.4 percent as quota-exempt immediate relatives.[68] As noted previously, there are mostly returnees with prior lengthy residences in the United States.

The last avenue for labor migrants is to come as a contract laborer. There was a provision in the 1965 Immigration Act for the importation of temporary foreign laborers when a supply of "willing and able" domestic workers could not be found. This provision was maintained and actually liberalized by the 1986 reform. In both cases, the secretary of labor had to certify that a labor shortage existed before foreign workers were granted a visa. Because the procedure was cumbersome, few employers sought labor in this manner in the past. An exception was the sugar industry of Florida, for which "H-2" workers, as they were labeled, were the mainstay of its cane cutting labor force for many years. Most of these contract workers came from the West Indies.[69]

The 1990 Immigration Act placed a cap of sixty-six thousand temporary H-2 workers per year. However, the demand for farmworkers increased to such an extent as to encourage many employers to dispense with the difficult petitioning procedure and hire unauthorized workers instead. In recent years, however, the supply of Mexican workers willing to cross the border clandestinely diminished significantly due to the rising costs and perils of the journey and the drop in construction and urban employment opportunities in the wake of the 2007–10 Great Recession. Demand for agricultural workers remained steady, however, and, in response, the federal government was compelled to expand the H-2 program. The number of seasonal agricultural workers (H2-A

visas) thus grew from 46,433 in 2006 to three times that figure just three years later. In 2019, the total number of temporary agricultural workers legally allowed in the United States reached almost half a million (442,822), of which 94 to 96 percent came from Mexico.[70] In effect, the United States has reinstated, in a quiet way, the old Bracero Program in response to the labor needs and political influence of farmers and ranchers for whom laborers from south of the border continue to be essential.

The demand for manual labor in the bottom tier of the labor market originates not only in agriculture, but in a number of other labor-intensive industries, including construction, restaurants, hotels, landscaping, and other services. As target earners, migrants continue to be ideally suited for jobs that native workers do not want. Employers additionally favor this source of labor because they do not have to pay fringe benefits or assume responsibility for the risks of the journey, which are assumed by the migrants themselves. In 2019, in addition to agricultural H-2A workers, the United States admitted 129,162 H-2B/H-2R manual nonagricultural laborers. Again, over 90 percent came from Mexico.[71]

In response to a wave of nativist agitation for "securing the Border," the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agency of the Department of Homeland Security—established in 2003—launched a nationwide campaign of deportation against unauthorized workers. ICE proceeded to imprison and deport tens of thousands of migrant workers, regardless of whether or not they had committed any crimes or whether they had families and U.S.-born children. As a result, and as seen in figure 3, the rate of deportation shot up to nearly 400,000 in 2009, 2010, and 2011 and exceeded 400,000 in 2012, 2013, and 2014, peaking at 432,212 in 2013. In 2016, the total number of aliens removed was 331,570, and in 2019, it reached 348,468, of which 60 percent came from Mexico and the rest from Central America.[72]

In effect, the U.S. government erected a revolving door at the border where the same type of migrant removed by one agency (ICE) is given temporary visas for agricultural and manual employment by another (U.S Citizenship and Immigration Services, or USCIS). The H-2 program resurrected by the Obama administration, maintained and expanded during the Trump presidency, represents, in effect, an expanded Bracero Program favoring the interests of farmers, ranchers, and other employers of low-wage labor.

Not surprisingly, manual labor immigrants are found at the bottom echelons of the economic hierarchy. They earn the lowest wages, many live below the poverty line, and they are commonly uninsured. Census

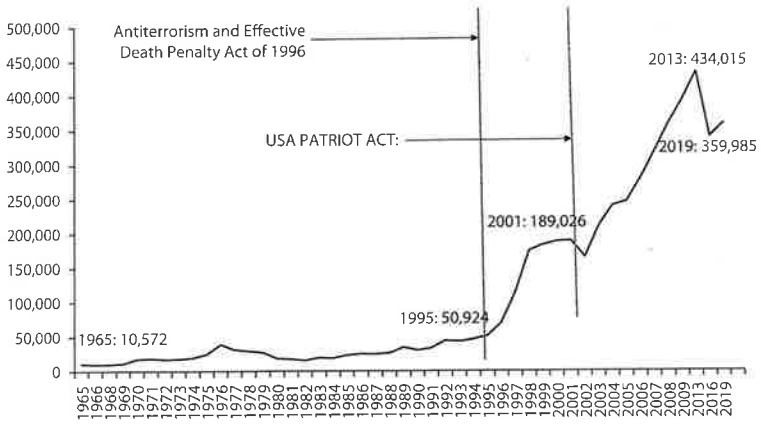


FIGURE 3. Deportations from the United States, 1965–2019. *Sources*: Massey, "Creating the Exclusionist Society"; U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, 2020.

statistics show that immigrant nationalities that are composed primarily of this type of migrant are in a much inferior economic situation relative to the native born. Thus, for example, the poverty rate among the U.S. native-born population in 2020 was 11.4 percent, a figure nearly doubled among Hispanics most of whom are immigrants or children of immigrants.[73]

Willingness to work for low wages and with few benefits, together with diligence and motivation, is what makes these workers so desirable to American employers in various sectors of the economy. This flow does not represent an "alien invasion," because an invasion implies moving into someone else's territory against their will. In this instance, the movement is very much welcomed, if not by everyone, at least by a very influential group—namely, the small, medium, and large enterprises in agriculture, services, and industry that have come to rely on this source of labor. The match between the goals and the economic aspirations of migrant workers and the needs and interests of the firms that hire them are the key factors sustaining the flow year after year.

Professional Immigrants

A preference category of the U.S. visa allocation system is reserved for "priority workers; professionals with advanced degrees, or aliens of exceptional ability." Prior to 1990, this category provided the main

entry channel for the second type of immigration. Unlike the first, the vast majority of its members come legally and are not destined to the bottom rungs of the American labor market. Labeled "brain drain" in the countries of origin, this flow has represented a significant gain of highly trained personnel for the United States. In 2002, 34,452 "persons of extraordinary ability," "outstanding researchers," and "executives" and their kin plus an additional 44,468 professionals holding advanced degrees and their families were admitted for permanent residence.[74]

By 2010, and despite the economic recession, the numbers actually increased to 41,055 "aliens of extraordinary ability" and other priority workers and 53,946 professionals with advanced degrees and their families. By 2019, the number of immigrant workers "of extraordinary ability" reached 39,506 plus 39,471 "priority workers." India and China were the main sources.[75] Although, in relative terms, employment-related immigration has only represented about 13 percent of the legal total since 2000, it has been the main conduit for the addition of permanent highly trained personnel to the American labor force. These immigrants' entry contributes to explaining why more than a quarter of the foreign-born population are college graduates or higher and why about 25 percent of immigrant workers are in managerial and professional specialty occupations.

Foreign professionals seldom migrate because of lack of employment back home. They not only come from higher educational strata, but they are probably among the best in their respective professions, as they have passed difficult entrance tests, such as the qualifying examinations for foreign physicians. The gap that makes the difference in their decision to migrate is generally not the invidious comparison between prospective U.S salaries and what they earn at home. Instead, it is the relative gap between available salaries and work conditions *in their own countries* and those that are normatively regarded as acceptable for people with their level of education.

Professionals who earn enough at home to sustain a middle-class standard of living and who are reasonably satisfied about their chances for advancement seldom migrate. Those threatened with early obsolescence or who cannot make ends meet with their home country salaries start looking for opportunities abroad. A fertile ground for this type of migration is countries in which university students are trained in advanced Western-style professional practices but then find the prospects and means to implement their training blocked because of poor employment opportunities or lack of suitable technological facilities.[76]

Because they do not come to escape poverty but to improve their careers and life chances, immigrant professionals seldom accept menial jobs in the United States. However, they tend to enter at the bottom of their respective occupational ladders and to progress from there according to individual skills. This is why, for example, foreign-born doctors and nurses are so often found in public hospitals throughout the country. An important feature of this type of immigration is its inconspicuousness. We seldom hear reference to a Filipino or an Indian immigration "problem," although there are about 4 million Filipinos and 4.5 million Indians now living in the United States. The reason is that professionals and technicians, heavily represented among these nationalities, seldom cluster in highly visible ethnic communities. Instead, they tend to disperse across the land following their respective careers.[77]

Professional immigrants are among the most rapidly assimilated linguistically and culturally. Reasons are, first, their educational and occupational success and, second, the absence of large ethnic communities to support the cultures of origin. Yet "assimilation" does not mean severing relations with the home country. On the contrary, because successful professional immigrants have the means to do so, they frequently attempt to bridge the gap between past and present through periodic visits back home and the maintenance of active ties with family, friends, and colleagues there. During the first generation at least, these "transnational" activities allow immigrant professionals to juggle two social worlds and often make a significant contribution to the development of their respective fields in their own countries.[78] As we will see in the next chapter, these activities also bypass the dilemma between ethnic resilience and assimilation, creating a viable path between both adaptation alternatives.

During the past decade, several important exceptions emerged in this general pattern. First, some refugee groups—such as Iranians, Iraqis, and those arriving from the former Soviet Union—include high proportions of educated, professional individuals. They must be added to the numbers coming under regular occupational preferences since they also contribute to the pool of highly skilled talent in the American labor market. Unlike regular immigrants, however, refugees and asylees are politically opposed to the regime back home and commonly barred from returning. Hence, their capacity to engage in transnational activities and their potential contributions to home country development are far more restricted. In this case, their departure amounts to a true brain drain for the countries they left behind.

At the opposite end, in terms of temporality of migration, we find professional and technical- specialty workers arriving under the new H-1B program. This category, created by the 1990 Immigration Act and expanded subsequently, has become the principal conduit for the arrival of tens of thousands of foreign engineers, computer programmers, and medical personnel in recent years. Under the H-1B program, U.S. employers can sponsor professional immigrants for a three-year period that can be extended to a maximum of six years. In regional terms, Asia and, to a lesser extent, Eastern Europe and South America have been the principal sources of this new high-skilled inflow. The numerical ceiling for petitions for this type of visa was originally set at 65,000 in 1990; it was increased to 115,000 in 1998 and then to 195,000 under the American Competitiveness in the Twenty-First Century Act (AC 21) in 2002. The actual number of beneficiaries in 2002 was 197,357. In the same year, the total number of "temporary workers and trainees" reached 582,250.[79]

Although the cap on H-1B visas reverted to 65,000 in 2004, actual admissions under the program continued to be much higher because beneficiaries going to work for nonprofit colleges and universities or government agencies and renewals do not count against the cap. Thus, in 2006, just prior to the onset of the Great Recession, 270,981 H-1B petitions were approved by the USCIS. Reflecting the subsequent decline in economic activity, the number of approved petitions was 214,271 in 2009, a 20 percent drop. This was the first year during the decade in which H-1B admissions numbered less than a quarter of a million.[80] In 2019, the number of H-1B admissions jumped again, to 601,594.[81]

This high figure reflects the hunger for trained labor in the high-tech and other expanding sectors of the American economy. Increasingly, this demand is being channeled through the new temporary entry program rather than through the more traditional occupational preference categories. As shown in table 9, 88,691, or 42 percent, of all H-1B workers in 2009 were in computer-related fields, with an additional 25,578 (12%) in architecture, engineering, and surveying. Ninety-nine percent had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 59 percent held a professional or postgraduate degree. As also shown in table 9, India has pride of place as a source of this type of labor. This is because graduates of Indian technical and engineering schools couple rigorous academic training with fluency in English. Over half of H-1B workers have come from India in recent years, with an additional 15 percent from China, the Philippines, and Korea. Of the top five sending countries, only one

is not in Asia. By 2019, the H-IB program had become even more tech-focused. Fifty-seven percent of all visa recipients were in computer-related fields—from software development to system analysis. Recipients continued to come overwhelmingly from India (278,942) and China (50,609). Google, Amazon, and TCS were the top sponsoring companies.[82]

One of the major advantages for firms hiring H-1B workers is the contribution that they make to keeping salaries down for professional/technical occupations in high demand. The other major advantage is the temporary character of foreign workers' visas that translates into greater vulnerability vis-à-vis their employers. Paralleling the situation of temporary agricultural laborers, H-1B visa holders are tied, at least initially, to the firm that brought them to the United States and, hence, at the mercy of its decision to continue to employ them.

Finally, as shown in table 9, there are some foreign professionals who are in the country illegally or who have not managed to meet the accreditation requirements of their respective fields. Doctors, dentists, and other professionals in this situation may choose, as an alternative to unskilled manual work, to practice without a license. Their clients are, almost always, other immigrants, mostly from the same country, who trust these professionals and find them a preferable, low-cost option to regular health care. Unauthorized medical, dental, and other professional practices are thus localized in immigrant enclaves and other areas of high ethnic concentration.[83]

Despite these different situations, foreign professionals have generally done very well occupationally and economically in the United States. India and China have been prime sources of this type of migrant under both permanent and temporary legal entry programs. In 2019, the mean annual family income of Indian immigrants had reached $ 120, 484 and for Chinese $86,786 while the corresponding figures for the native white population was $ 79,720.[84]

Immigrant Entrepreneurs

Near downtown Los Angeles, there is an area approximately a mile long where all commercial signs suddenly change from English to strange pictorial characters. Koreatown, as the area is known, contains the predictable number of ethnic restaurants and grocery shops; it also contains a number of banks, import-export houses, industries, and real estate offices. Signs reading "English spoken here" assure visitors that their

TABLE 10 THE H-1B PROGRAM, 2008–2009

A. Petitions Approved by Country of Birth

	2008		2009	
	#	%	#	%
India	149,629	54.2	109,059	48.1
China	24,174	8.8	20,855	9.7
Canada	10,681	3.9	9,605	4.5
Philippines	9,606	3.5	8,682	4.1
Korea	6,988	2.5	6,968	3.3
United Kingdom	4,494	1.6	4,180	2.0
Japan	4,321	1.6	3,825	1.8
All others	66,024	23.9	56,782	26.5

B. Petitions Approved by Level of Education

	%	%
– Less than bachelor's degree	1	1
– Bachelor's degree	43	40
– Master's degree	41	40
– Doctoral degree	11	13
– Professional degree	4	6

C. Petitions Approved by Occupation and Income

	2009			
	#	%	Mean Salary ($1,000s)	Median Salary ($1,000s)
Computer-related occupations	88,961	41.6	67	60
Architecture, Engineering, Surveying	25,578	11.8	71	67
Education-related occupations	24,711	11.6	53	45
Administrative occupations	21,192	9.9	58	50
Medicine and Health	17,621	8.2	76	54
All other	36,112	16.9	66	55

SOURCE: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Characteristics of H-1B Specialty Occupation Workers, 2009 Annual Report."

links with the outside world have not been totally severed. In Los Angeles, the propensity for self-employment is three times greater among Koreans than among the population as a whole. Grocery stores, restaurants, gas stations, liquor stores, and real estate offices are typical Korean businesses. They also tend to remain within the community because the more successful immigrants sell their earlier businesses to new arrivals.[85]

A similar urban landscape is found near downtown Miami. Little Havana extends in a narrow strip for about five miles, eventually merging with the southwest suburbs of the city. Cuban-owned firms in the Miami metropolitan area increased from 919 in 1967 to 8,000 in 1976 and approximately 28,000 in 1990. By 2007, they had reached over a quarter of a million nationwide, with the principal concentration in metropolitan Miami/Ft. Lauderdale. Most were small, averaging 7.7 employees at the latest count, but they also included factories employing hundreds of workers. Cuban firms are found in light and heavy manufacturing, construction, commerce, finance, and insurance. An estimated 60 percent of all residential construction in the metropolitan area is done by these firms.[86]

Areas of concentrated immigrant entrepreneurship are known as ethnic enclaves. Their emergence has depended on three conditions. First, the presence of a number of immigrants with substantial business expertise acquired in their home countries; second, access to sources of capital; and third, access to labor. The requisite labor is not too difficult to obtain because it can be initially drawn from family members and, subsequently, from more recent immigrant arrivals. Sources of capital are often not a major obstacle either because the sums required initially are small. When immigrants do not bring them from abroad, they can accumulate them through individual savings or obtain them from pooled resources in the community. In some instances, would-be entrepreneurs have access to financial institutions owned or managed by conationals. Thus, the first requisite is the critical one. The presence of a number of immigrants skilled in what the sociologist Franklin Fraizer called "the art of buying and selling" can usually overcome other obstacles to entrepreneurship.[87] Conversely, their absence tends to confine an immigrant group to wage or salaried work, even when enough capital and labor are available.

Entrepreneurial minorities have been common in both twentieth-century and contemporary immigrations. Their significance lies in that they create an avenue for economic mobility unavailable to other groups. This avenue is open not only to the original entrepreneurs but to later arrivals as well. The reason is that relations between immigrant employers and their coethnic employees tend to go beyond a purely contractual bond. When immigrant enterprises expand, they tend to hire their own for supervisory positions. Thus Koreans hire and promote Koreans in New York and Los Angeles, and Cubans do the same for other Cubans in Miami, just as previously the Russian Jews of Manhattan's Lower East Side and the Japanese of San Francisco and Los Angeles hired and supported those from their own communities.[88]

Immigrant entrepreneurship is not homogeneous. Indeed, it ranges from informal and manual labor as a means of economic subsistence to high-tech enterprises with a large number of employees and sales volume in the millions. The recent research literature shows that a high proportion of successful migrant firms depend for their operation on transnational ties, primarily with the owners' home countries. They commonly import goods for sale in the immigrant community or the open market, export high-tech goods to the home nation, and draw on contacts there for sources of capital and labor.[89]

The research literature also shows that immigrant entrepreneurs are consistently more successful economically than wage and salary workers of the same national background. However, major differences in return to self-employment exist among immigrant nationalities, depending on their human capital and their ability to build firms in the more remunerative sectors, generally linked to high-tech sectors and transnational networks.

Whether entrepreneurship is concentrated in ethnic enclaves or operates as free-ranging businesspeople, it has become abundantly clear that it offers an economic adaptation path for new immigrants that matches and often exceeds the opportunities available through salaried employment.[90] We will examine these alternatives in greater detail in chapter 4.

Refugees and Asylees

The Refugee Act of 1980, signed into law by President Jimmy Carter, aimed at eliminating the former practice of granting asylum only to escapees from Communist-controlled nations. Instead, it sought to bring U.S. policy into line with international practice, which defines as a refugee anyone with a well-founded fear of persecution or physical harm, regardless of the political bent of their country's regime. In practice, however, the United States during the two Reagan administrations continued to grant refugee status to escapees from communism, primarily from Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe, while making it difficult for others fleeing right-wing regimes, such as those of Guatemala and El Salvador. Being granted asylum or refugee status has significant advantages over other immigration channels. The central difference is that while refugees have legal standing, the right to work, and can benefit from the welfare provisions of the 1980 act, those denied asylum have none of these privileges and, if they stay, are classified as illegals.[91]

Being a refugee is, therefore, not a matter of personal choice but a governmental decision based on a combination of legal guidelines and

political expediency. Depending on the relationship between the United States and the country of origin and the geopolitical context of the time, a particular flow of people may be classified as a political exodus or as an illegal group of economically motivated immigrants. Given past policy, it is not surprising that there are few refugees from rightist regimes, no matter how repressive, living legally in the country. Major refugee groups have arrived, instead, after the Soviet army occupation of Eastern Europe, after the rise to power of Fidel Castro in Cuba, and after the takeover by Communist insurgents of three Southeast Asian countries.

The end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union brought about a more diversified and less ideological orientation to U.S. refugee policy. While it was still driven by geopolitical interests and expediency, there was room for broader humanitarian considerations. Thus the national origins of subsequent refugee flow became more diversified and included countries that were not necessarily adversarial to the United States. Still the number of refugees pales by comparison to that of regular immigrants and, especially, to the growing category of temporary workers. In 2001, 68,925 refugees arrived in the United States, as compared to 1,064,318 admitted for legal permanent residence (of which 411,059 were new arrivals). In 2002, reflecting the impact of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the number of refugee petitions approved and actual refugee arrivals plunged: refugee admissions in 2002 numbered only 26,785, a 61 percent decline from the prior year.[92] The numbers trended upward in subsequent years, reaching 73,293 in 2010. The complex geopolitical realities of the post-Soviet era are reflected in the very diverse origins of the contemporary refugee population.[93] (See table 7.)

As noted above, the legal difference between a refugee and an asylee hinges on the physical location of the person. Both types are recognized by the government as having a well-founded fear of persecution, but while the first still lives abroad and must be transported to the United States, the second is already within U.S territory. This difference is important because it makes refugee flows conform more closely to the government's overall foreign policy, while would-be asylees confront authorities with a fait accompli to be handled on the spot. In 1990, refugees were mostly opponents and victims of communism in the Soviet Union and its allies, including Cuba and Vietnam. By the late 1990s, the refugee flow had diversified to include significant numbers from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Somalia, Iran, and Iraq.

As we saw previously, the present moment in the history of U.S.-bound immigration is marked by a collapse of the refugee flow

following highly restrictive policies by the Trump administration together with strong pressure at the southern border by escapees from the imploding states of Central America and Haiti. The situation marks an inflection point in the history of refugee flows signaled by the end of the compassionate stance characterizing U.S. policy in the past and the attempt by American authorities to stop the caravans of would-be asylees crossing Mexico The Biden administration has sought to restore refugee policy to what it was prior to the Trump years while seeking more humane ways to deal with the thousands of asylee petitions at the southern border. The continuation of these flows creates a major dilemma for a Democratic administration seeking to recover the moral high ground for American immigration policy while preventing chaos at the border.

As shown in table 9, refugees and asylees vary greatly in terms of their human capital endowments. Some, like the pre-1980 waves of Cuban exiles and recent Iranian, Iraqi, and Russian refugees, are well educated, and many possess professional and entrepreneurial skills. At the other end, there are groups like Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Somali refugees or would-be Guatemalans and Salvadoran asylees composed primarily of small farmers and rural laborers with little formal education. In every case, the distinct advantages conferred by refugees or asylee status include not only the right to stay and work, but a package of generous resettlement and welfare assistance, health benefits, and the right to adjust to permanent legal residence in one year. None of these benefits is available to regular immigrants, much less to those in irregular status.

Refugee professionals and entrepreneurs have generally made good use of these privileges to reestablish themselves and prosper in their respective lines of work. Refugee and asylee groups arriving with little or no human capital have at least managed to survive under the welfare provisions of the resettlement program. Although, as we shall see, the acculturation and entry into the labor market of some of these groups may have been delayed by access to these benefits, they gave them the opportunity to rebuild their families and communities. This created, in turn, a key resource for themselves and their children to cope with the challenges of their new environment.

OVERVIEW

In 2020, over two hundred foreign countries and possessions sent immigrants to the United States. Aside from basic statistical data supplied by

the Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Census Bureau, little is known about most of these groups. Tracing their individual evolution and patterns of adaptation is well beyond the scope of this book. Instead, we delineate the basic contours of contemporary immigration by focusing on major aspects of the adaptation experience. The emphasis throughout is on diversity, both in the immigrants' origins and in their modes of incorporation into American society. The typology outlined in this chapter serves as our basic organizing tool as we follow immigrants through their locations in space, their strategies for economic mobility, their efforts at learning a new language and culture, their decision to acquire U.S. citizenship, and their struggles to raise their children successfully in the new land.

The counterpoint between the widespread demand for immigrant labor by different sectors of the American economy and the activities of anti-immigrant nativists along the four successive phases of U.S.-bound immigration will also be a leit motif of the following analysis. Similarly, the progressive bifurcation of the economy and increasing inequality within the immigrant population in the postindustrial era will provide a necessary lens for understanding its diverse patterns of adaptation today.

We reserve the analysis of immigration policies and reform for the final chapter but can anticipate that it will be framed by a vision of immigration as positive, as a whole, for the nation. There are exceptions to be sure, but a persuasive case can be made that the United States would not be the strong, diverse, and vibrant nation that it is without the talent and the labor of millions of its immigrants. At present, they fill the diverse labor needs of a vast economy, rejuvenate the population, and add energy and diversity to American culture. Without this continuing flow, the United States would come to resemble the situation of other rich but demographically stagnant nations whose growing old-age population alongside decreasing fertility looms as a major threat for the future. To the extent that working-age immigrants continue to replenish the creative energies and capacity for innovation of the country, the United States will be able to avoid this fate. As we pen these lines, a rising chorus of restrictionists and opponents of immigration threaten to push the country in the opposite direction. The importance of these alternative outcomes can be scarcely exaggerated. They will largely determine the extent to which the nation will be able to maintain its economic viability and moral leadership in a rapidly complex and changing global system.