AMERICAN IMMIGRATION: THE CONTINUING TRADITION

A Historical Perspective

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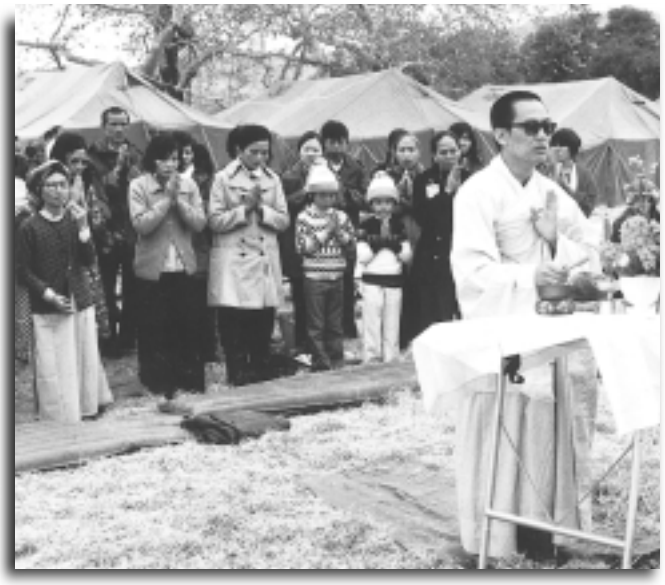

Americans All® **A National Education Program**

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Chapter 1

The Continuing Tradition

[She] gathers the chosen of her seed
from the hundred of every crown and creed.

* * *

Fused in her candid light
to one strong race all races here unite.

Bayard Taylor, "Centennial Ode"

Immigration arouses deep emotion and cuts across social, political and economic interests in the United States. It speaks directly to the question of what kind of a society Americans have built and want for the future.

The United States has always been of two minds about new immigrants. On the one hand, the country has been a refuge, a place of new beginnings, accepting and even recruiting new residents to build the nation and its economy. On the other hand, protectionists have doubted the capacity of the culture and economy to absorb newcomers, wanted to limit labor-market competition and even espoused nativist and racist theories. The history of immigration is a dialectic of these two themes of acceptance and protection.

The ambivalence, as important as it has been in the American story, was seen to be of mere historical importance after World War II. The age of mass migration was over, it was thought. Immigration had ceased to be a major force in American society because of the cumulative effect of the limits put on immigration beginning in 1921, the laws favoring immigrants from northern and western Europe (supposedly people "like us," the dominant majority) and the negligible Depression-era migration. The reduction in migration between the world wars provided a breathing space, it was felt, in which the immigrants and their children of the golden age of mass migration could be absorbed into American society. The nation felt it had succeeded in absorbing the newcomers. Americans of all origins fought shoulder to shoulder in World War II. Suburbanization and the education provided through the GI Bill of Rights led to further assimilation. In the 1950s the "man in the grey flannel suit," the image of sameness, of over-homogenization, prompted social comment—not the teeming ethnic ghettos that had concerned earlier social commentators.

Moreover, there was no groundswell to return to an era of mass migration. In fact, in 1952 the United States reconfirmed a commitment to relatively low levels of immigration and to continued preference for northern and western European immigrants.

This 1950s view of America seems somewhat naive today. The country's fighting forces were segregated in World War II; African Americans were hardly the beneficiaries of suburbanization or of recruitment into companies' executive offices. The situation was no better for Native Americans, Mexican Americans, Puerto Rican Americans and other Americans with a Spanish cultural background. Asian Americans were also segregated, and they hardly fit the stereotype of upward mobility to the middle-class status of groups of European ethnicity.

Reality was immensely more complicated than the stereotype that emerged from the experience of the majority. Anyone whose history did not fit the generalization was supposed to be deviant: "If we could do it, why can't they?" Not only was this a misleading description of ethnic progression to become a middle-class "organization man" (the word "man" is used deliberately in this context), but also it deflected attention away from actual immigration trends.

The United States continues to be a country of mass migration. The initiation of the *bracero* program of importing temporary agricultural workers in 1942 as a wartime measure signaled the reemergence of immigration. To be sure, temporary workers were not supposed to become residents. Many, however, dropped out of the migrant stream and settled down.

In 1953–54 Operation Wetback, a mass deportation effort, resulted in approximately 2 million expulsions. This number was greater than the total legal immigration from the beginning of the *bracero* program to the

end of Operation Wetback. Even those who returned to Mexico every year had profound effects on American agriculture, commodity prices and social and economic life in the areas where they lived in the United States. With more than 400,000 temporary workers annually in the peak years of the late 1950s, it could hardly have been otherwise.

Immigration may be viewed broadly rather than being confined to the legal category of "permanent resident aliens" (the official term for people with immigrant visas authorizing residence, work and, after five years, the right to apply for citizenship). Seen in this way, the *bracero* program reopened large-scale migration.

During the Depression, immigrants did not even fill the quotas; however, permanent resident alien migration rose to authorized levels after World War II. Adding to the flow were laws in 1948 and 1953 to admit European refugees displaced by World War II, programs for Hungarians in 1956 and programs for Cubans beginning in 1959, shortly after Fidel Castro's victory.

In 1965 the United States initiated several policy changes, including scrapping the National Origins Quota System that had favored immigration by northern and western Europeans. The year before this, Congress had ended the *bracero* program. These two actions resulted in an increase in legal immigration, a change in the nationality composition of immigrants and a surge in illegal or undocumented migration. While the United States worried about over-conformity and presumed that our demographic future was to be shaped simply by Americans' fertility and mortality, large-scale immigration had resumed.

The era of mass migration had not ended; it had merely subsided for about a decade and a half between the late 1920s and 1942 before resuming under different legal categories. In the early 1970s, perceptions started to catch up with immigration realities. In 1972 the National Commission on Population Growth and the American Future noted that net legal immigration accounted for about 30 percent of the nation's population growth in 1970. In the first half of the 1970s, some people were agitating for ecological awareness through such events as Earth Day and calling for zero population growth. To demographers, it was becoming apparent that the fertility of American-born women was declining below replacement level and that, without a change, it would only be a matter of time before immigrants accounted for a larger and larger proportion of population growth.

United States Coast Guard patrol turning back Haitian boat people

Illegal migration also began to catch the attention of the media and the public in the early 1970s. The conventional wisdom was that "illegal aliens" were coming in waves, taking Americans' jobs, lowering wages and worsening working conditions. A great deal of rhetoric and misperception swirled around such issues as the "birth dearth" or "baby bust" (as lowered fertility was referred to) and the size and impact of undocumented or illegal migration.

Whatever the facts were, the nation was becoming aware that mass migration was not just history; it is a current event.

This book gives an overview of immigration as a part of American history and of contemporary life.

Chapter 2 discusses some of the social forces that have encouraged or discouraged immigration over the years.

Chapter 3 chronicles federal laws governing migration and documents the periods of growth and decline. Immigration's relation to other events, such as additions of territory, must be taken into account to understand the transformation of waves of immigrants into Americans. The chapter also gives details of United States policy on refugees.

Chapter 4 reviews the statistical history on the ebbs and flows of American immigration. It also looks at the characteristics of today's immigrants.

Chapter 5 focuses on attitudes and behaviors as the United States accommodates pluralism and multiculturalism on the one hand and promotes national unity on the other hand.

Chapter 6 summarizes the roles played by several federal departments (State, Labor, Justice and Health and Human Services) in the implementation of immigration and refugee policy.

Chapter 7 highlights the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, which made major changes in employment, federal reimbursements to states, civil rights and immigration policy and authorized the legalization of more than 3 million undocumented alien applicants. It also discusses more recent legislation, such as the Immigration Act of 1990 and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act of 1996.

Chapter 8 poses questions about the implications of migration since World War II on the United States' social, economic and political life.

The aim of this review is to provide teachers using the Americans All® program with an overview of, and a framework for, immigration in American life. It presents not only information on the history, legislation and implementation of policy, but also an interpretation of the relationship of immigration to ethnicity and to other political, economic and social events and forces that shaped and, in turn, were shaped by immigration.

Europeans up to the late 1880s, to domination by southern and eastern Europeans through the 1920s and, since the 1965 Immigration Act, to domination by Asian, Latin American and Caribbean migrants. The large spike in the early 1990s is due to undocumented aliens being given amnesty ("legalized") by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. (See Chapter 7) Many counted as "immigrants" in these years had been in the United States, typically for a decade or more, but were counted in the year they qualified for immigrant status under the amnesty program.

How long contemporary patterns will continue is unclear. The cumulative effect of sources of immigration also remains cloudy, but will change as time passes.

Characteristics of Recent Immigrants

The last group of immigrants for whom data on characteristics and place of permanent residence are available is the 1997 cohort. This group follows the patterns of other recent immigrants.

The total number of females and males in 1997 differed by almost 70,000 immigrants. While 45.8 percent of the almost 800,000 immigrants were males, 54.2 percent were females. Figure 3, an age-sex pyramid of the 1997 group (see page 26), shows that men slightly outnumbered women among adolescents and women outnumbered men in the adult groups.

The most notable aspect, however, is that young adults through age 40 greatly outnumbered those below age 20. For most populations, an age-sex pyramid would show a higher proportion of children than of young adults.

Figure 3 also indicates that the immigrant population was relatively young. The median age (that at which half are older and half are younger) was 29 for women and 28 for men. For the American population, the median age was 36.1 for women and 33.8 for men.

Of the adult immigrant population (ages 20 and older), 72 percent of the men and 76 percent of the women were married. Those rates were higher than among the general population; the Census Bureau reported that 58 percent of men and 61 percent of women above age 18 were married. The higher marriage rate among immigrants is not surprising, because immigration policy emphasizes family reunion, especially of spouses and children of citizens and of prior immigrants.

Immigrants' Occupations

Emma Lazarus' "The New Colossus," the sonnet engraved on a tablet on the base of the Statue of Liberty, refers to "huddled masses" and "wretched refuse." Today's legal immigrants are quite different from those images.

TABLE 8: Immigration for Selected Countries, 1981–1990 and 1991–1997

Country	1981–1990 *	1991–1997 *
Mexico	1,653,250 [1]	1,798,297 [1]
Philippines	495,300 [2]	397,600 [2]
China-Taiwan	388,700 [4]	393,300 [3]
U.S.S.R. (Russia)	84,100 [19]	389,000 [4]
Vietnam	401,400 [3]	356,300 [5]
Dominican Republic	251,800 [7]	285,200 [6]
India	261,800 [6]	274,500 [7]
El Salvador	214,600 [8]	165,600 [8]
Poland	97,400 [16]	142,200 [9]
Haiti	140,200 [13]	129,400 [10]
Cuba	159,300 [10]	128,500 [11]
Korea	338,900 [5]	128,300 [12]
Jamaica	213,805 [9]	127,700 [13]
United Kingdom	142,100 [12]	105,700 [14]
Canada	119,200 [15]	102,300 [15]
Colombia	124,400 [14]	94,700 [16]
Iran	154,900 [11]	89,000 [17]
Guatemala	88,000 [18]	78,100 [18]
Peru	64,400 [21]	77,500 [19]
Guyana	95,400 [17]	60,900 [20]
Hong Kong	63,000 [22]	58,400 [21]
Ireland	32,800 [30]	55,900 [22]
Ecuador	56,000 [23]	53,000 [23]
Honduras	49,500 [24]	49,600 [24]
Germany	68,500 [20]	49,400 [25]
Japan	43,248 [25]	45,000 [26]
Nigeria	35,400 [28]	45,000 [26]
Ethiopia	27,214 [32]	36,757 [28]
Egypt	31,600 [31]	33,000 [29]
Israel	36,400 [27]	25,300 [30]
Ghana	14,876 [35]	23,122 [31]
France	23,100 [33]	19,500 [32]
Portugal	40,000 [26]	18,800 [33]
Turkey	20,843 [34]	18,800 [34]
Italy	32,900 [29]	16,700 [35]
Sweden	10,200 [36]	8,300 [36]

Note: * Ranked by the number of immigrants entering the United States during each period.

Source: Developed from data available from the Statistical Analysis Branch, United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, Washington, DC.

In 1997 approximately 35 percent of the 798,378 new permanent resident aliens reported an occupation. Of the rest, approximately 31 percent were students or below age 16; 15.6 percent listed themselves as homemakers; 13.1 percent were unemployed; and 4.7 percent did not specify an employment status.

Table 9, page 26, provides a summary of the occupations of the 280,544 who reported them. More than 62,000 (22.3 percent) worked in professional and technical occupations. More than 9 percent of the immigrants were in

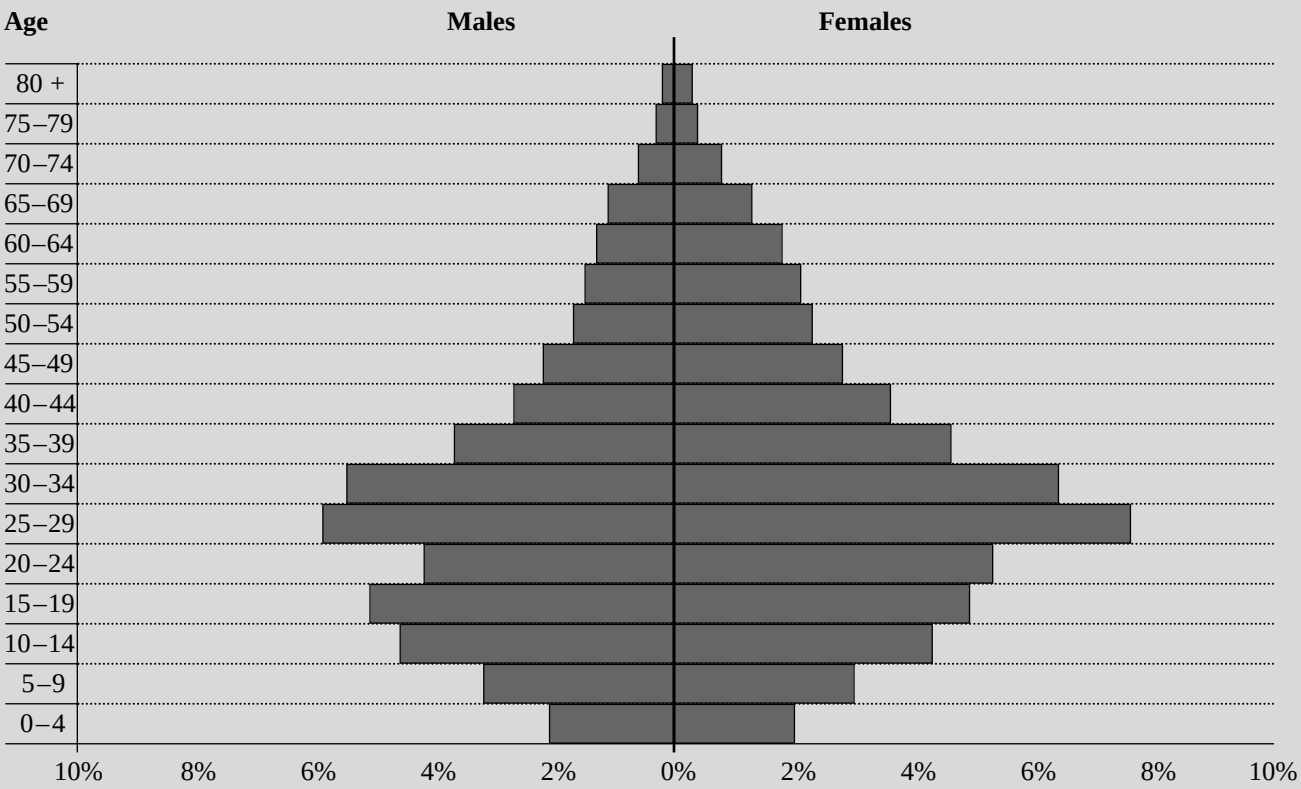
TABLE 9: Occupational Distribution of Immigrants with Reported Occupations, 1997, and Comparable United States Workforce Categories, 1998

Occupation	Immigrants		United States
	Number	Percent	Percent
Professional and Technical	62,674	22.3	18.4
Executive, Administrative and Managerial	26,353	9.4	15.1
Sales	14,291	5.1	12.1
Administrative Support, including Clerical	18,345	6.5	14.0
Precision Production, Craft and Repair	20,460	7.3	11.0
Operator, Fabricator and Laborer	71,718	25.6	13.9
Farming, Forestry and Fishing	13,402	4.8	2.7
Service	53,301	19.0	13.6
Total	**280,544**	**100.0**	**100.0***

Note: * Slight difference due to rounding.

Sources: Derived from *1997 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1999, Table 21, p. 68; and Bureau of Labor Statistics Web site, <www.bls.gov/cpsaatab.htm#.charemp,no.9PDFfile>.

FIGURE 3: Age-Sex Pyramid, Immigrants, 1997



United States Immigration, 1997
Total Immigrant Population: 798,378

Source: Developed from data in *1997 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1999, Table 12, p. 52.

TABLE 10: Immigrants' State of Intended Residence, 1997

State of Intended Residence	Number
Total	**798,378**
Alabama	1,613
Alaska	1,060
Arizona	8,632
Arkansas	1,428
California	203,305
Colorado	7,506
Connecticut	9,528
Delaware	1,148
District of Columbia	3,373
Florida	82,318
Georgia	12,623
Hawaii	6,867
Idaho	1,447
Illinois	38,128
Indiana	3,892
Iowa	2,766
Kansas	2,829
Kentucky	1,939
Louisiana	3,319
Maine	817
Maryland	19,090
Massachusetts	17,317
Michigan	14,727
Minnesota	8,233
Mississippi	1,118
Missouri	4,190
Montana	375
Nebraska	2,270
Nevada	6,541
New Hampshire	1,143
New Jersey	41,184
New Mexico	2,610
New York	123,716
North Carolina	5,935
North Dakota	535
Ohio	8,189
Oklahoma	3,157
Oregon	7,699
Pennsylvania	14,553
Rhode Island	2,543
South Carolina	2,446
South Dakota	490
Tennessee	4,357
Texas	57,897
Utah	2,840
Vermont	627
Virginia	19,277
Washington	18,656
West Virginia	418
Wisconsin	3,175
Wyoming	252
United States Territories and Possessions	
Guam	2,083
Northern Mariana Islands	103
Puerto Rico	4,884
Virgin Islands	1,110
Armed Services Posts	93
Other or unknown	7

Source: *1997 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1999, Table 17, p. 60.