

IMMIGRANTS: DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

By Deborah Macmillan

Diversity

“The cauldron does not burn off immigrant character, creating American sameness, but intensifies its many tastes. Ladle after ladle of ethnic infusions go into the pot.”¹

The United States is often called a nation of immigrants. And it is. The quotation above expresses the diversity of immigrants and those of immigrant stock, and the vitality this diversity contributes to America.

Certainly, new arrivals have a different perspective of immigration from those who have been here a while and those whose roots in America go a long way back.

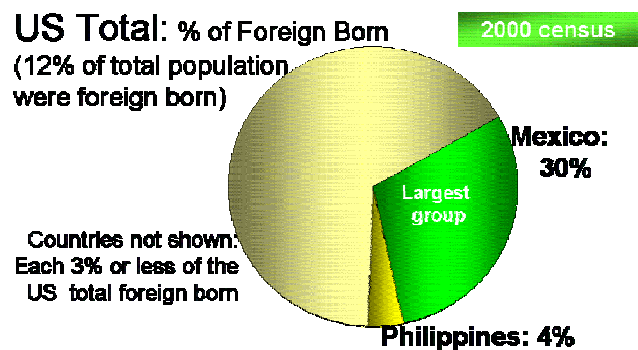
- For recent arrivals, the immigration experience is immediate and still in process.
- For Native Americans, the impact of immigration goes back a long way and frequently continues to have a personal resonance.
- For those whose immigrant status dates back as recently as their parents’ or grandparents’ arrival in this country or more than 400 years when their ancestors arrived, immigration is a more distant event.

Nevertheless, for all of us the diversity of our backgrounds is part of what has made us who we are, and our country what it is.

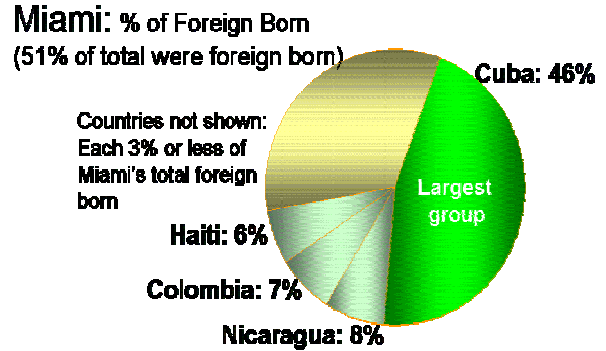
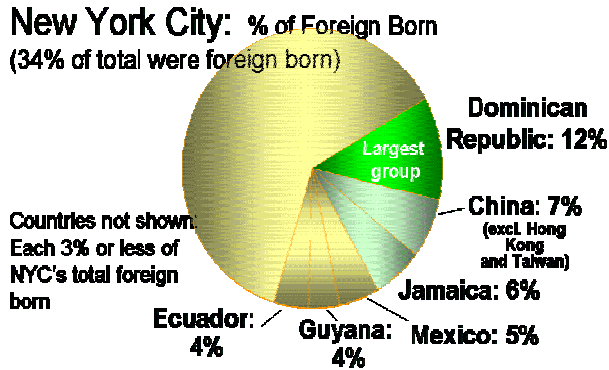
Where do we come from? Immigration policies have favored diversity of country of birth since 1965. The policies have both capped the number of immigrants from a given country and allowed for a “diversity lottery” to ensure at least some possibility of entry from all countries.

Despite these policies, Mexican-born immigrants were the predominant segment among the U.S. foreign-born population as a whole in 2000, and are predominant to an even greater degree today.

The Philippines accounted for 4 percent or more of all foreign-born immigrants, and 72 other countries each accounted for one-tenth of 1 percent to 3 percent.



Diversity is more evident in some regions of the country than others; hence, the picture may look quite different for the U.S. as a whole. Cuban émigrés were predominant to a greater degree



among Miami's foreign-born population in 2000 than those from Mexico were in the U.S. as a whole. No single country was predominant to the same degree in New York City where Mexico ranked fourth behind Dominican Republic, China and Jamaica.

Languages: Languages spoken by immigrants generally reflect the country of birth, which might not necessarily be the country of emigration. "Spanish-speaking immigrants" dominate Miami's foreign-born population, but some of those Cuban immigrants originally emigrated to Cuba from other countries and speak the language of their original homeland, e.g., Chinese rather than Spanish.

Today, the number and variety of immigrant languages exceeds that of a hundred years ago during an earlier surge in immigration. However, language has always been an issue with immigration. Ellis Island, which welcomed or at least processed so many of the immigrants from the earlier surge, preserves, among its artifacts, New York and Minnesota sample ballots printed in ten different languages in addition to English.

NYC (1905):

English
Hungarian
Italian
Yiddish

Minnesota (1928-36):

English
Bohemian
Finnish
French
German
Norwegian
Polish
Swedish

These sample ballots show that adjustments in response to language issues are not new.²

In terms of language learning, the younger one is when exposed to a language, the easier it is to learn it. Also, formal language training can make it easier to learn a new language. Thus, young children coming to this country and children born here will pick up English quickly, and additional language training, if readily available, can help their parents.

Fluency in English generally increases with each generation in this country today just as it did for immigrant families who came here in the late 1800s and the early 1900s. Fluency may remain incomplete for the second generation (when their fluency is incomplete in both the home

and the community language, children are sometimes said to be semi-lingual rather than bilingual). By the third generation, the children are generally fluent in the community language.

Differences in fluency in the community language from one ethnic group to another, or one century to another, appear to be related more to age of exposure, education and ability to attend language classes than to any differences in the desire to speak English.

It is noteworthy that American English, having no formal academy to enforce national requirements, does incorporate bits and pieces of other languages as readily as any language in the world. American English today retains traces of the languages of past immigrants. Tomorrow's English will retain traces of the languages of today's immigrants.

Pluses and Minuses: Recent research has demonstrated some interesting advantages deriving from a diverse population.

- More diverse companies have more business success, whether large or small (not tested with businesses with 10 or fewer employees).
- More diverse juries take more issues into consideration as a group.
- Individuals participating in a diverse group take more issues into consideration as individuals, regardless of group considerations.³

These positive findings come from research on ethnic and racial diversity, not specifically diversity following recent immigration. Ethnic diversity, however, follows directly from the diversity of immigrants.

On the other hand, diversity can be viewed by some as a barrier to community cohesion.⁴ The feeling is that the cultural and financial costs of having a diverse population are too high. Language and crime are two examples that are often cited in reference to cost:

- Language is necessary to communicate in schools, for emergency services, at the ballot box and in all parts of our lives. Research indicates that costs associated with language problems of today's immigrants are no higher than in the past, and immigrants are learning English as quickly as they did in previous times.
- Crime may go up with immigration, but the data linking these issues are not at all straightforward.⁵ For instance, research confirms that individuals in the immigrant generation who can be deported or whose families can be deported will avoid interactions that could lead to deportation or incarceration. Crime does seem to increase in the second generation. To the degree that we fail to discriminate between immigrant and native-born (first and second generation), however, or between immigrant and other non-immigrant groups, or to the degree that we overgeneralize from a highly publicized crime perpetrated by an immigrant to immigrants generally, we may see a greater association between crime and immigration than is warranted.

Change can be difficult to manage, particularly sudden change such as many communities have experienced with respect to immigration and diversity. Generally, and over time, change, immigration and diversity have been embraced in this country's communities more frequently than they have been rejected.

Inclusion

The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) identified the top migration issue for 2006 as the global shift from multiculturalism to assimilation, whether generally or in governmental emphasis.⁶ The MPI cites recent issues including language, e.g., English-language legislation in numerous U.S. state and local governments, and issues of dress and appearance, e.g., regulations issued in several European countries concerning Muslim headscarves, veils and *burqas*.

Factors in degree of assimilation/ethnic identity: Two California sociologists⁷ posit that while much immigrant assimilation is complete by the third generation, both historically and currently, the fourth generation is still not free of concerns. In all cases, reasons for assimilation and ethnic identification vary with socioeconomic status and are, to some extent, opportunistic and even contradictory:

- On the one hand, ethnic identification is less likely if associated with an economic or social penalty.
- On the other hand, ethnic identification frequently increases in reaction to economic or social discrimination.

In addition, although naturalization might be considered a major act of assimilation, issues of ethnic identification and assimilation will continue for the immigrant generation with many of the same factors as for their native-born descendants.

Transience and permanence: Immigration is generally permanent. Most U.S. immigrants who are neither citizens nor temporary workers are called permanent residents. In fact, however, immigration has always included at least some transience.

In the early 1900s up to 60 percent of Croatian, Slovenian and southern Italian immigrants returned home.⁸ This figure is somewhat higher than the 47 percent rate estimated by Douglas Massey for the return rate of undocumented Mexican migrants in 1979-84. Increased focus on enforcement along the Mexican border has made migration back and forth more difficult, however, even while entry has continued. Apparently, the result is that the return percentage of undocumented migrants crossing that border dropped precipitously to 27 percent in 1997-2003, and is thought to be decreasing still so that what was once a round trip has become a one-way trip.⁹

Katherine Fennelly estimates the return rate today for immigrants overall at 20 to 25 percent.¹⁰ Obviously this rate will be substantially lower for refugees, but even for this group there will be some relocation to places other than their native countries.

Today as in the past, transience is higher when families have stayed behind in the country of origin. Similarly remittances (money immigrant workers in the United States send to family members in home countries) are higher today, and were probably higher in the past as well.

Community groups: The research that has been done on immigrant participation in community organizations shows that, in general, derivative organizations are a minor variant of the parent organizations. The community groups may be immigrant, mainline or hybrid groups, e.g., a Filipino Kiwanis group in Glendale, CA. Language can sometimes be an issue as can feeling welcome, but this is less true for the second generation, those born here, than for the first (immigrant) generation. Existing groups or derivative groups formed with major immigrant participation serve the community as a whole, including the immigrant generation and their native-born descendants.¹¹

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¹ W. T. Lhamon, Jr., back cover review of *Immigration and American Popular Culture: An Introduction* (Nation of Newcomers Series), by Rachel Rubin and Jeffrey Melnick

² Inclusion of the historical example of ballot languages is not an endorsement of bilingual/multilingual ballots or education. Both the international and the national literature suggest that language of education can be important, but that the choice of educational model is more often, and perhaps more properly, a political choice than a pedagogical one. No single model seems to apply well in all instances.

³ Shankar Vedantam, "In Boardrooms and in Courtrooms, Diversity Makes a Difference," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 2007. www.washingtonpost.com

⁴ Compare chapter 23 of *Bowling Alone*, Robert D. Putnam, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

⁵ Rubén G. Rumbaut, Roberto G. Gonzales, Golnaz Komaie, and Charlie V. Morgan, "Debunking the myth of immigrant criminality: imprisonment among first- and second generation young men." *Migration Information Source*, June 1, 2006. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?id=403>

⁶ Top 10 Migration Issues of 2006: Issue #1 "Good-bye Multiculturalism — Hello Assimilation?" *Migration Information Source*, December 1, 2006. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?id=540>

⁷ Susan K. Brown and Frank D. Bean, "Assimilation Models, Old and New: Explaining a Long-Term Process," *Migration Information Source*, October 1, 2006. <http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?id=442>

⁸ Donna Przech, http://www.genealogy.com/96_donna.html

⁹ Mireya Navarro, "Traditional Round trip for workers is becoming a one-way migration north." *The New York Times*, 12/21/06. See also Douglas S. Massey, "Beyond the Border Buildup: Towards a new approach to Mexico-U.S. Migration," *Immigration Policy in Focus*, September 2003.

¹⁰ Katherine Fennelly is a professor at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs and the Fesler-Lampert chair in Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Minnesota. She is a member of the LWV of Minneapolis and serves on the LWVUS Immigration Study Committee.

¹¹ "Immigrants and Community Organizations in California," *Research Brief, Public Policy Institute of California*, July 2006. http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/rb/rb_706krb.pdf