

FOREWORD

By Mauro E. Mujica, Chairman and CEO, The U.S. ENGLISH Foundation

American Immigration

Content Introduction

The story of Americans is the story of immigrants. More than 75 percent of all people who ever moved from their homeland have settled in the United States, the country that has welcomed more immigrants than any other in the world.

In the following pages we trace the details of U.S. immigration through the centuries, from its roots to its current prognoses.

- ***The Preface*** introduces the project, provides information on the first settlers, outlines the prime reasons for and sources of immigration in the 16th through 19th centuries and discusses their goals, expectations and reception.
- ***Chapter I*** goes into detail on immigrant origin, the contribution made to American society and the obstacles to be overcome.
- ***Chapter II*** deals with immigration legislation. All the major acts are listed in chronological order, together with a study of the reasons for their adoption and ensuing results. The intent is to show the changing mood of Americans to immigration and its impact on immigrants.
- ***Chapter III*** outlines historic and current statistics on illegal immigration, including a chronology, countries of origin, amnesties and the U.S./Mexico border situation.
- ***Chapter IV*** focuses on the issues, myths and moods connected with immigration and immigrants.
- ***Chapter V*** discusses language and cultural issues, including the history of language legislation, the English versus German common language myth, the use of English as the Official Language, and the myths of language diversity in the U.S.
- ***Chapter VI*** pulls together the research data to draw conclusions on current immigration pressures, including the inferences that can be drawn from history and could be extended to the future.

It has been our intent here to illustrate without recourse to myth or bias the past and potential benefits and pitfalls in U.S. immigration, settlement and management policies. If we have only pointed to sensible ways of maximizing the former and avoiding the latter we will have achieved our goal.

PREFACE

The American Context

The history of America starts more than 20,000 years ago with the arrival of the first Native Americans. Hunters and their families following animal herds from Asia to America crossed a land bridge where the Bering Strait is today.

The Vikings' attempt to colonize the New World dates from around A.D. 1000.



Christopher Columbus and his search for the wealth of the Orient at the end of the 15th century led to both the discovery of America and to the fact that about 1.5 million Native Americans living on this territory were subsequently named “Indians.” They were thought to be of the East Indies.

Columbus was the first European to believe that he had succeeded in finding a faster way to the Far East by going west across the Atlantic Ocean. He did not realize, in three voyages, that he had discovered a “New World.” It was another Italian navigator, Amerigo Vespucci, who recognized that fact and in whose honor the land is named.

Over the course of the next 200 years numerous explorers from many European countries investigated both the islands and mainland of the Americas, setting up the trading posts and colonies that opened the New World for the first settlers.

THE FIRST SETTLERS

The Spanish, in their search for gold, explored and later settled in Florida, New Mexico and southern California. The Dutch and the English concentrated on the eastern seaboard, where they capitalized on the bounty of the sea and were engaged in foreign trade. The French explored the East, then struck out for the interior with the Indians and settled in pockets both north and south. The Swedish and later Norwegians went to the midwestern prairies and to the north central timberlands, which closely resembled Scandinavia. The Germans liked the Midwest, but also were drawn to the hills of Pennsylvania, as were the Scottish-Irish. They settled in the Deep South as far away from the English as they could get. Blacks were brought to the South as slave labor, where they became the mainstay of an agrarian economy.

The Spanish

St. Augustine, Florida, founded in 1565, was the first permanent settlement established by Spanish Europeans in the United States. In 1598, the first Spanish settlers arrived in New Mexico to begin missionary work among the Pueblo Indians. Santa Fe, the capital of New Mexico, was established circa 1610. Quickly lost, it was not retaken until 1692. The Spanish settlement of Texas began in 1682, when Franciscan friars built two missions. By 1731, missions had been established throughout central, east and southwest Texas; nevertheless, colonization proceeded slowly.

The English

In 1607, a group of merchants established a permanent English settlement in America at Jamestown, Virginia. The population of Virginia grew steadily to reach 15,000 by 1650 and 60,000 by 1685.

Yet another important English settlement was established in Massachusetts. In 1630 more than one thousand Puritans, fleeing religious persecution, came to the Massachusetts Bay area and built homes in and around Boston.

The Germans

The first Germans arrived in Jamestown in 1608, only a year after the English settlers. Being glassmakers and carpenters, they started manufacturing glass in America, establishing one of the nation's first industrial enterprises.

In 1683, the first permanent settlement of German immigrants was established in America. In 1708, the British government began to encourage Protestants from Germany to settle in the New World. During the next few years, about 13,500 Germans reached England; however, it took nearly six months to transport them to America.

The French

In 1608, French explorers founded the first permanent colony in Quebec. Sixty years later, the French began to expand south. In 1673, the central portion of the Mississippi River to the Gulf of Mexico was explored and the entire territory was named Louisiana in honor of King Louis XIV. In the 17th century, French immigration to Louisiana was restricted to Roman Catholics. Consequently, French Protestants (Huguenots) who wanted to live in America had to settle in the Protestant English colonies.

The Dutch

The first Dutch arrived in America in 1609, but it was not until 1624 that 30 families came from Holland to establish a settlement that became known as New Netherland. The Dutch government gave exclusive trading rights to the Dutch West India Company. During the next few years others arrived and a large colony was established on Manhattan Island. In 1664; however, the Dutch were forced to allow the English to take control of the territory and New Amsterdam became New York.

The Swedish

In 1638, the Swedish government established a colony at Christina in Delaware Bay. The Swedes became involved in the fur and tobacco trades that eventually brought them into conflict with the Dutch and English settlers. The era of New Sweden ended in 1655 when the colony was lost to the Dutch. The original settlers remained and kept up their language and culture for many years.

The Africans

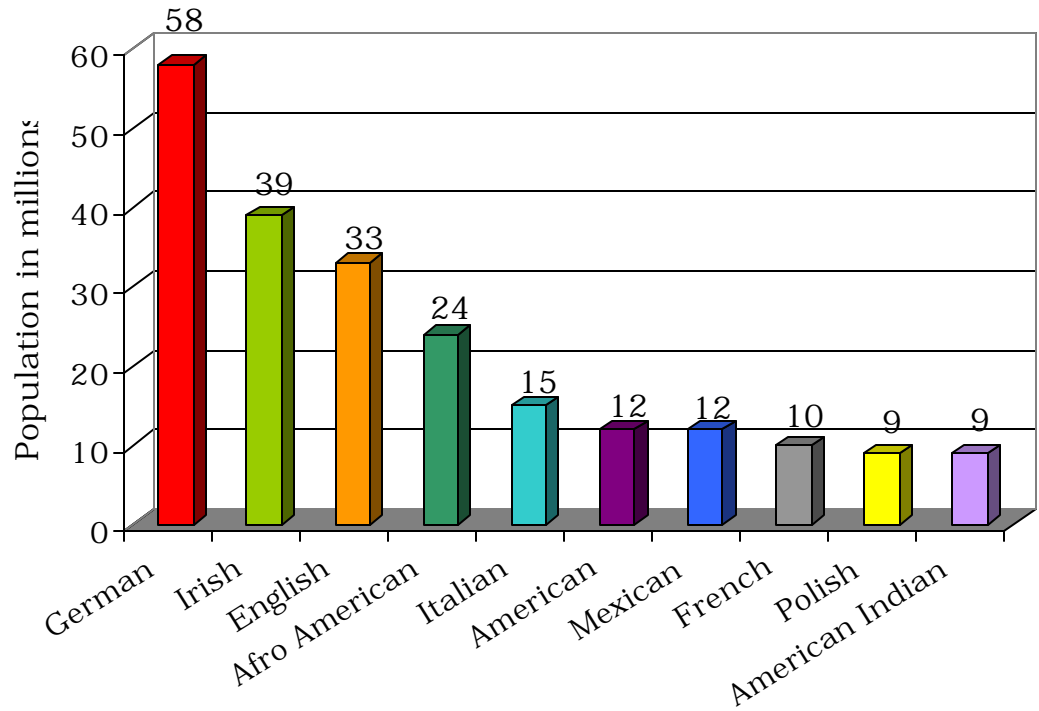
The arrival of African slaves in 1619 is significant in this context as the first and only directly forced immigration of people to North America. For the next 200 years (up until 1808) more than 390,000 Africans were brought into the country under the most inhuman conditions. The plantations in the South needed cheap labor to work in the sugar, tobacco, and cotton fields and African slaves fulfilled this demand.

The Jews

Starting with the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492, a period of intense Jewish migration began. Seeking to escape the clutches of the Holy Inquisition in the 16th century, some Jews settled in the Netherlands. A century later, hundreds of their descendants had crossed the Atlantic Ocean to establish a new Dutch colony in Brazil where Jewish communal life was possible.

In 1654, the first Jews from Brazil arrived at New Amsterdam, the present-day New York. In 1655, more Jews arrived from Holland. In colonial times, they settled along the Atlantic coast and in several southern states. During the 17th century; however, Rhode Island was the only New England colony that allowed a permanent Jewish community.

ANCESTRY GROUPS (As reported in U.S. Census, 1990. Numbers have been rounded to the nearest million.)



AMERICA BUILT BY IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants to America came from more than 160 nations and other ethnic groups. The term “immigrant” was first used in 1787.

Americans both welcomed and shunned the immigrants flowing across the borders. When jobs, land and opportunities were plentiful, newcomers were actively sought to help build a growing nation. The welcome began to fade at the end of the 19th century, for fear of job competition or bigotry against certain nationalities and religions. By the time of the first census in 1790, nearly one million African Americans and four million Europeans resided in the United States. The European population originated from three major groups: English and Welsh, Scottish-Irish and German.



While from 1815 to 1890 the majority of immigrants were from northwestern Europe, later (through to 1914) the new immigrant groups mostly came from eastern and southern Europe.

Some 47 million people entered the United States between 1820 and 1975:

- 8.3 million from various countries in the Western Hemisphere;
- 2.2 million from Asia;
- 35.9 million from Europe.

Only the Civil War, the panic of 1873-1877, the depression of the 1890s, and the Great Depression of the 1930s slowed the immigrants' arrival.

WHY PEOPLE IMMIGRATED TO AMERICA

People became immigrants for many different reasons. Some hoped to escape poverty or to obtain better jobs, while some simply wanted adventure. Some were fleeing starvation, disease or the ravages of war while others were escaping political or religious persecution. The two main reasons for migration over the centuries were population growth and industrial reform pressures on personal wealth and religion.

Economic Pressure

The promise of freedom in America has undoubtedly been a magnet attracting many immigrants; nevertheless, the hope of economic prosperity has had the strongest draw. Early Colonial settlers saw the new land as an immense, untapped source of wealth and set out to make use of its resources – gold, vast stands of timber and new farmland. The original purpose of colonizing was to create wealth for their homelands.

Immigrants looking for farmland came in several different waves. After the original colonies were settled, newcomers struck out for the western territories. During the 19th century, when the West opened up, the government designed several direct land giveaway programs to encourage settlement there.

In the 19th century, the population of Europe more than doubled, from some 200 million to more than 400 million, even after about 70 million people had left Europe (of which only half migrated to the United States). Midwestern states such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois and the Dakotas became home to thousands of German, Swedish, Norwegian and other northern European immigrants.

Immigration dropped during the Great Depression of the 1930s, and it was not until the late 1960s that immigrants again began to arrive in large numbers, seeking economic opportunity. This wave of immigrants, mostly from Asia and the West Indies, came about partly due to the 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Naturalization Act that ended quotas based on nationality.

Most of the countries now sending large numbers of immigrants to the United States are undergoing the same convulsive demographic and economic disruption as those that made migrants out of so many 19th century Europeans. Mexico epitomizes population growth and the relatively early stages of industrial revolution. Since World War II, the Mexican population has more than tripled and the economy has grown through industrialization accompanied by widespread commercialization.

Religion

Europeans discovered the New World at a time when their own societies were undergoing great social changes. One of the deepest and most complicated changes was the end of a single Christian faith.

From the earliest days, America attracted people of strong religious beliefs in search of a place where they could live in peace without compromising their faith. Among those first settlers were the English Pilgrims who founded the Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts in 1620. Ten years later, Puritans established the Massachusetts Bay colony near Boston.

These early English Protestants were joined by Dutch, French (Huguenot), Scottish-Irish, Scandinavian, and German Protestants during the 18th and early 19th centuries.

The Irish constituted the first major wave of Catholics to the U.S. and came to dominate the American Catholic Church. Italian, German, Polish, and Hispanic Catholics found Irish Catholicism rather unappealing and finally formed their own parishes. Religion was just one of many cultural differences that created tension between Americans and newcomers.

It is noteworthy that some early immigrant groups such as the Mennonites and the Amish have remained stubbornly attached to a religious identity that set them off from the mainstream. They also have persisted in their use of German, known as Pennsylvania Dutch (from *deutsch*).

Employment

The newcomers were the people who built America. They dug the canals, cut the timber, mined the ores, ran the factories, herded the cattle, dammed the rivers, laid the railroad tracks and plowed the uncut prairies of the western wilderness.

Building thousands of miles of track demanded the labor of men from poor villages in China, from famine-stricken Ireland, from England, France and Germany. Once the track was laid, the great gold and silver rushes in California and Colorado drew more immigrants - as well as citizens - chasing the dream of easy wealth.

In the 1870s, the United States suffered economic depression. The resulting loss of job opportunities not only lessened the flow of immigrants for a time, it also turned many Americans against newcomers whom they saw as direct competition for jobs. In 1875, the United States passed its first anti-immigration law, which banned "undesirable" people such as convicts.

After 1880, most immigrants headed for large industrial cities rather than settling in the countryside. Homesteading land was largely settled but cities offered factory jobs. The urban immigrants, especially Jews, Italians, and Slavs, tended to cluster together in neighborhoods along with their fellow countrymen, where they could be at ease with a familiar language and customs. By 1920, in New York, Jewish women were concentrated in the garment trade, and 93 percent of the females doing hand embroidery were Italians. Sixty-nine percent of Slovak males were coal miners.

The majority of immigrants to the United States at the turn of the century intended their stay to be only temporary until, after a few years of work, they

could save enough money to return home to an improved position for themselves and their families. Although the majority of new immigrants permanently settled in America, a significant number returned to their homeland (with a departure rate of 35 percent for Croatians, Poles, Serbs, and Slovenes; 40 percent for Greeks; and more than 50 percent for Hungarians, Slovaks, and Italians; the rate among Asian immigrants was higher than two-thirds).¹ The 20th century has shown a departure rate of 31 percent of immigrants to the United States leaving for their country of origin after a certain period of time.

After the 1965 legislative changes, the majority of immigrants came as relatives, usually poor and unskilled, and it was very difficult for them to compete in the job market. Only a limited number of these individuals had the strong educational background and skills that were in demand. Between 1965 and 1974, 75,000 foreign-born physicians entered the country in response to an increased demand for medical services.

After 1966, newcomers from Asia and Latin America quickly began to outnumber Europeans. Between 1951 and 1965, 53 percent of all immigrants came from Europe and only 6.6 percent from Asia. In the ensuing 12-year period up until 1978, Europeans represented only 24 percent of the total, while Asians accounted for 28.4 percent. The Philippines, for instance, sent 6,093 people in 1965 and 41,300 in 1979.

The pattern of immigrant adjustment is very mixed. Those with skills, education, and family connections do reasonably well. On the other hand, present unskilled immigrants may not contribute as weightily to the economy as did their European counterparts of a hundred years ago. Mexican-Americans, forced into unskilled jobs in the service sector, earn incomes well below those of Asians and Caucasians. By 1985, about a third of Haitian men in southern Florida were jobless. In order to survive they had to rely on female family members who could earn a minimal wage.

¹ *The Tyranny of Change: America in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920*, John Whiteclay Chambers, 1992.

THE 21ST CENTURY

All these changes within the United States have contributed to the shift from a predominantly white population based on Western culture to a society with a wide array of ethnic minorities. According to current predictions, by the middle of the 21st century, non-Hispanic whites will make up a slim and fading majority of Americans where Hispanics will account for nearly a quarter of the U.S. population.

There are two diametrically opposed opinions on immigration policy at the beginning of the 21st century: that of “no immigrants”; and that of “open borders.” Each has its own supporters. Some see the rapid growth of the population as a key to the revitalization of America and a logical continuation of the “melting pot” tradition, while others see it as an undesirable departure from America’s European heritage. According to current projections, the population will rise from 260 million to 400 million people over the next fifty years, and 70 percent of that growth will be due to post-1995 immigration.

Currently nearly 70,000 foreigners arrive in the United States every day. The majority of them are visitors (tourists, business people, students), not permanent settlers. Immigrants and refugees invited to the States to become permanent residents number 2,200 a day. In addition to these, about 5,000 foreigners, mainly from Mexico, make an unauthorized entry every day, however roughly 4,000 are immediately returned to their country of origin.

IS AMERICA A MELTING POT?

“Americans are not a narrow tribe. Our blood is as the flood of the Amazon, made up of a thousand noble currents all pouring into one.” (Herman Melville)

Some people think that America is a country whose uniqueness is defined by loyalty to a particular set of values and ideals, formulated and expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Conversely, some people believe in a racial and largely ethnic definition of the American identity. Since the majority of the earliest “Americans” came from the British Isles (60 percent English, 20 percent Scots and Scottish-Irish), American identity has been defined in terms of the Anglo-Protestant culture and language. Both the theories of “Anglo-conformity” and of “the melting pot” assume the rapid assimilation of the immigrant into a prevalent American culture shaped by English colonial settlement. The melting pot idea, viewing Anglo dominance as a transitory stage to a new American identity, combines all races, religions and nationalities. More recently, the image of the melting pot has given way to a concept resembling a salad bowl, patchwork quilt or stew. Rather than a single “flavor” made of many cultures melted together, unique peoples remain distinct but, ideally, contribute to the whole, like the pieces of a quilt.