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# Immigration and Integration: The US Experience and Lessons for Europe

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## Summary

The US had 39 million foreign-born residents in 2009; they were almost 13 percent of US residents. The US has the most foreign-born residents of any country, three times more than number-two Russia. The US also has more unauthorized residents, about 11 million, than any other country.

Public opinion polls find widespread dissatisfaction with the „broken” US immigration system. The problems include almost 30 percent unauthorized foreigners among foreign-born residents despite 20,000 Border Patrol agents and expensive fencing along a third of the 2,000 mile long Mexico-US border, long waits for legal family unification, and a proliferation of „mixed families” that often include US-born and thus US-citizen children and unauthorized parents and siblings. However, the immigration system „works” for most migrant workers and their employers—most migrant workers get the higher wages they seek and roots in the US, and most employers get work done at lower wages because migrants are available.

In the US, immigrant integration is primarily a private affair via the labor market. Integration-via-work has several advantages:

- It gives migrants what most seek—jobs at higher wages.
- It enlists employers as allies of migrants and proponents of labor migration.
- It reduces opposition to labor migration („the US welcomes those who seek a hand up the economic ladder, but not those who want a hand out from the government”).
- It shows children of migrants the importance of work, and often inspires them to get the education needed to move up the US job ladder.

The US gets most migrants into jobs, but many wind up „working poor,” with low wages and little access to health and pension benefits. In many European countries, by contrast, migrants have low labor force participation rates and high unemployment rates, but those with regular jobs have above-poverty level incomes and benefits. In short, the US has an issue with working-poor immigrants, while many European countries have more of an issue with non-working immigrants.

## Introduction: US Immigration Patterns

Recent immigration patterns in the US exhibit continuity and change. Continuity is reflected in the arrival of 104,000 foreigners a day in the US, including 3,100 who have received immigrant visas that allow them to settle and become naturalized US citizens after five years and 99,200 tourist, business, and student visitors known as nonimmigrants; most will stay only a few weeks, but some stay for several years and find ways to become immigrants. About 2,000 unauthorized foreigners a day were settling in the US until the recession of 2008-09 reduced entries. Over half eluded apprehension on the Mexico-US border; the others entered legally, say as tourists, but violated the terms of their visitor visas by going to work or not departing.<sup>1</sup>

The US had 39 million foreign-born residents in 2009, including 11 million, almost 30 percent, who were illegally present. The US has the most foreign-born residents of any country, three times more than the 12 million in number-two Russia, and more unauthorized residents than any other country. About 10 percent of the residents of OECD industrial countries were born outside the country in which they now live. The US, with 13 percent foreign-born residents, has a higher share of immigrants among residents than most European countries, but a lower share than Australia and Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Public opinion polls find widespread dissatisfaction with the „broken” US immigration system. Congress has debated comprehensive immigration reform for a decade. The House approved a reform bill in 2005 and the Senate in 2006, but Congress has been unable to agree on a three-pronged package that would toughen enforcement against unauthorized migration, legalize most unauthorized foreigners, and create new and expand current guest worker programs.

Two recent changes rekindled the immigration reform debate in the United States. The 2008-09 recession, the worst in 50 years, doubled the unemployment rate and reduced the entry of unauthorized foreigners. However, most unauthorized foreigners did not go home even if they lost their US jobs, since there were also few jobs in their home countries.<sup>3</sup> The second stimulus for a renewed debate is states and cities enacting laws to deal with unauthorized migration, including an April 2010 Arizona law that makes unauthorized presence in the state a crime. Arizona and a dozen other states require

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<sup>1</sup> DHS reported 1.1 million immigrants 36.2 million nonimmigrants in FY09, excluding Canadian and Mexican border crossers. There were 724,000 apprehensions in FY08, almost all along the Mexico-US border.

<sup>2</sup> According to the UN, France had 11 percent migrants and the UK 10 percent, while Canada had 21 percent migrants and Australia 22 percent.

<sup>3</sup> The 2008-09 recession resulted in the loss of eight million jobs; civilian employment fell from 146 million at the end of 2007 to 138 million at the end of 2009. Job growth resumed in 2010 (<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/surveymost?bls>). There was also stepped-up enforcement of immigration laws, especially after the failure of the US Senate to approve a comprehensive immigration reform bill in 2007, including a proposal to require employers to fire employees whose names and social security data do not match ([http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=3315\\_0\\_2\\_0](http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=3315_0_2_0)).

There is agreement that the stock of unauthorized foreigners fell in 2008-09 for the first time in two decades, but disagreement over why it fell. Some studies stress the US recession, suggesting that the stock of unauthorized foreigners will increase with economic recovery and job growth. Others stress the effects of federal and state enforcement efforts to keep unauthorized workers out of US jobs. For a review of the debate, see [http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=3433\\_0\\_2\\_0](http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=3433_0_2_0).

employers to use the federal government’s voluntary electronic E-Verify system to check the legal status of new hires or risk losing the business licenses they need to operate; private employers with federal contracts must also use E-Verify to check newly hired workers.

**The Effects of Immigrants: Population**

Immigration has a major effect on the size, distribution, and composition of the population. As US fertility fell from a peak of 3.7 children per woman in the late 1950s to the replacement level of 2.1 today, the contribution of immigration to US population growth increased. Between 1990 and 2010, the number of foreign-born US residents almost doubled from 20 million to 40 million, while the US population rose from almost 250 million to 310 million. Thus, immigration contributed a third to US population growth directly and, if the US-born children and grandchildren of immigrants are included, immigration contributed over half of US population growth.

In recent decades, immigrants have been mostly Asian and Hispanic, so they have changed the composition of the population. The US has four major race/ethnic categories: white non-Hispanic, Black, Hispanic, and Asian. In 1970, about 83 percent of the 203 million US residents were non-Hispanic whites and six percent were Hispanic or Asian. In 2010, when the US had 308 million residents, two-thirds were non-Hispanic white and 20 percent were Hispanic or Asian. If current trends continue,<sup>4</sup> by 2050 the non-Hispanic white share of US residents will decline to 52 percent while the share of Hispanics and Asians taken together will rise to a third.

**Table 1. US Population by Race and Ethnic Group, 1970, 2010, 2050**

US Population by Race/Ethnicity	1970	2010	2050
White non-Hispanic	83	66	52
Black	11	13	13
Hispanic	5	16	29
Asian	1	4	6
Other	1	2	2
Totals (may not add to 100 because of rounding)	101	101	102
Population	203.3	307.9	398.5
Source: US Census Projections with Constant Net International Migration <a href="http://www.census.gov/population/www/projections/2009cnmsSumTabs.html">www.census.gov/population/www/projections/2009cnmsSumTabs.html</a>			

**The Effects of Immigrants: Labor and Economy**

Most immigrants come to the United States for economic opportunity; about 100,000 a year, less than 10 percent, arrive as refugees and asylum seekers fleeing persecution in their own countries. About half of immigrants and US-born persons are in the US labor force—a slightly higher share of foreign-

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<sup>4</sup> These projections assume that net international migration will be 975,000 a year between 2010 and 2050 ([www.census.gov/population/www/projections/2009cnmsSumTabs.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/projections/2009cnmsSumTabs.html)).

born than US-born men are in the labor force, and a slightly lower share of foreign-born women. In 2009, about 15 percent of US workers were born outside the US.

The effects of foreign-born workers on US labor markets are hotly debated. Economic theory predicts that adding foreign workers to the labor force should lower wages and increase economic output, or at least lower the rate of increase in wages. This theory was confirmed by a National Research Council study that estimated immigration depressed average US wages three percent and raised US GDP, the value of all goods and services produced, by one-tenth of one percent in 1996, adding up to \$8 billion to the then \$8 trillion GDP (Smith and Edmonston, 1997).<sup>5</sup>

However, comparisons of cities with more and fewer immigrants have not yielded evidence of wage depression linked to immigration. In 1980, over 125,000 Cubans left the port of Mariel in small boats for the US. Many settled in Miami, increasing the city's labor force by eight percent in a few months. However, instead of finding US Blacks hurt by this immigrant influx, the unemployment rate of African Americans in Miami in 1981 was lower than in cities such as Atlanta, which did not receive Cuban immigrants (Card, 1990). One reason may be that US-born Black workers who competed with Marielitos moved away from Miami, or did not move to Miami.

Because of such internal migration, most economists look for the impacts of immigrants throughout the US labor market rather than in particular cities. Immigrants and US-born workers are often grouped by their age and education in order to determine, for example, how 20- to 25-year old immigrants with less than a high school education affect similar US-born workers. Economist George Borjas assumed that foreign-born and US-born workers of the same age and with the same levels of education are substitutes, meaning that an employer considers foreign- and US-born workers with the same schooling and of the same age interchangeable, and found that more immigrants mean lower wages for similar US-born workers (Borjas, 2003).

However, if this assumption is changed so that similar foreign-born and US-born workers are complements, meaning that a 30-year old US-born carpenter with a high-school education is more productive because he has a high-school educated foreign-born helper, immigrants can raise the wages of similar US-born workers (Peri, 2010). As a result, the estimated impacts of immigrants on US workers depend largely on the assumptions used to estimate their impacts, and economic studies have not reached definitive conclusions (Lowenstein, 2006).

Immigrants do more than work—they also pay taxes and consume tax-supported services. Almost half of the 12 million US workers without a high-school diploma are immigrants, and most have low earnings. The major taxes paid by low earners are deducted from earnings and flow to the federal government's Social Security and Medicare programs that support the elderly,<sup>6</sup> but the major tax-

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<sup>5</sup> US GDP was \$15 trillion in 2010, suggesting that immigration contributed up to \$15 billion.

<sup>6</sup> However, immigrants cannot „save” Social Security unless their number rises each year. Social Security is a pay-as-you-go system, meaning that taxes paid by current workers support retirees. Immigrants earn benefits as they age, increasing the number of retirees who will receive Social Security benefits in the future.

supported services used by immigrants are provided by state and local governments, such as education and transportation services, and funded by state income and sales taxes.

Most low earners, both native-born and immigrant, pay less in state and local taxes than they consume in state-and local-supported services. For this reason, some state and local governments call the immigration of low earners an unfunded federal mandate, and some sued the federal government to recover the cost of providing services to immigrants. However, with immigration an exclusive federal responsibility, courts have rejected these suits. Instead, the federal government provides some support to states to cover the cost of incarcerating unauthorized foreigners convicted of US crimes.

## **Integrating Immigrants**

### **Naturalization**

Many immigrants become naturalized US citizens, such as California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, and vote and hold political office. The US government encourages legal immigrants who are at least 18, in the US at least five years, and who pass an English and civics test to become naturalized citizens; there are often naturalization ceremonies on July 4 and other national holidays in which hundreds of thousands of immigrants are naturalized.

Naturalization rates vary by country of origin. Immigrants from countries to which they do not expect to return are far more likely to become naturalized US citizens than immigrants from countries to which they expect to return. For example, naturalization rates are far higher for Cubans and Vietnamese than for Canadians and Mexicans.

More Mexicans and Latin Americans are naturalizing in part because their governments have changed their policies from discouraging to encouraging their citizens abroad to naturalize and become dual nationals. For example, the governments of Mexico, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic encourage their citizens in the US to become naturalized US citizens and to retain their Mexican, Salvadoran, and Dominican nationality as well in order to maintain links to their Diasporas and bolster remittances and trade links. Many presidents of Latin American countries symbolically welcome some returning migrants at Christmas, when many return for the holidays.

The naturalization of Mexicans and other Hispanics has not yet affected US elections significantly. There are more Latinos than African Americans in the US, but during the 2008 elections, African Americans cast almost twice as many votes as Latinos.<sup>7</sup> Latinos are often called the sleeping giant in the US electorate because they could tilt the balance toward Democrats as their share of the vote increases. Two-thirds of the Latinos who voted in the 2008 elections supported President Obama.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Pew, non-Hispanic whites cast 76.3 percent of the 2008 vote, Blacks 12.1 percent, Latinos 7.4 percent, and Asians 2.5 percent (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1209/racial-ethnic-voters-presidential-election>).

## Melting Pot versus Salad Bowl

Immigration means change—immigrants adapt to the societies to which they move and natives adjust to the newcomers. A century ago, the US was considered a „melting pot” for the diverse European immigrants arriving. The hero of Israel Zangwill’s popular 1908 play, „The Melting Pot,” cried out: „Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians - into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American!”

Becoming American has never been so simple. Many newcomers want to retain their culture and language even as they integrate into American society. Immigrant integration in the US has been guided by three principles:

- First, the US is open to all. George Washington said: „The bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions.”
- Second, immigrants should not form country-of-origin political parties; as American citizens, they are expected to act politically as individuals rather than members of an ethnic group. Nothing prevents the formation of an Irish-American or a Mexican-American political party, but the two-party tradition of Democrats and Republicans, combined with the idea that American citizens act politically as individuals, has discouraged nationality-based or ethnic-based political parties.
- Third, immigrants may maintain their language and cultural heritage with private resources.

There have been two extremes along the spectrum of how to integrate immigrants: integration and pluralism. The integrationist (assimilationist) aims to eliminate ethnic boundaries, turning diverse foreigners into Americans, while the pluralist (multiculturalist) wants to maintain home country language and culture; those who believe in assimilation favor melting-pot models of integration. For integrationists, American democracy is composed of equal individuals; for pluralists, it is an equality of groups. For the integrationist, what counts is what the citizen thinks and believes, while the pluralist wants to maintain an individual’s awareness of where he came from; pluralists are sometimes described as imagining society to be a salad bowl with distinct ingredients.

Neither extreme describes the realities for immigrants in the United States. The melting pot ignores the persistence of memory and the importance of the home culture. Ethnic affiliation persists among many Americans into the second and third generation, long after the language and knowledge of the „old country” has been lost. The pluralists’ insistence on group identity, on the other hand, limits the freedom of individuals to choose their loyalties. Pluralists assume that ethnic boundaries remain fixed, ignoring the fact that in the open US society, people work, make friends and marry outside their ancestral communities and religions.

The integration versus pluralism debate is played out in many venues. In college dorms, should students be placed with others of the same race and/or ethnicity, or should students be encouraged to mix with those from different backgrounds? Should school children be grouped in classes according to their home languages, or should they be brought together in English-language classes? In the

workplace, can employers require their employees to converse only in English, even if it is not their first language?

Historian John Higham proposed „pluralistic integration” to accommodate immigrants. Higham began from the premise that there is a common US culture shared by Americans; pluralistic integration would allow minorities to preserve and enhance their culture and identity with private resources. Higham said: „No ethnic group under these terms may have the support of the general community in strengthening its boundaries, [but] ethnic nuclei are respected as enduring centers of social action.” (Higham, 1984, p244) Historian Larry Fuchs, used the term „kaleidoscope“ to emphasize the dynamics of immigrant integration: immigrants adapt and change, and so does American society (Fuchs 1991).

## **Language and Education**

Using public resources to maintain language and cultural heritage is controversial, especially in education, the most expensive service provided by state and local governments (half of California’s general fund spending supports K-12 schools). About two-thirds of US immigrants speak Spanish. Many children of immigrants do not speak English well, and are classified as limited-English proficient (LEP) or English language learners (ELLs), terms whose definition varies from state to state and between federal agencies.

On May 25, 1970, the federal Education Department’s Office for Civil Rights issued a memo requiring school districts with more than five percent national-origin minority students to take steps to help them learn: if „inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin-minority group children from effective participation in the educational program... the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students.”<sup>8</sup>

Schools vary in how they try to rectify English-language deficiencies among students. About 10 percent of the 50 million K-12 pupils in public schools in Fall 2010 are classified as LEP/ELL.<sup>9</sup> A third of these five million LEP pupils are in California, and almost 60 percent are in the five major immigrant states of California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois.<sup>10</sup> About 80 percent of the LEP/ELL pupils speak Spanish, followed by two percent or less who speak Asian languages such as Vietnamese, Hmong, and Chinese.

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<sup>8</sup> The memo is on line at: [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/lau1970.html](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/lau1970.html). More detail on its requirements are at: [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/ellresources.html)

<sup>9</sup> About 12 million K-12 pupils had at least one foreign-born parent in 2007; about 2.6 million were born outside the US, that is, over 80 percent of K-12 pupils with at least one foreign-born parent were born in the US. US Statistical Abstract 2010. Table 223.

<sup>10</sup> [www.ncela.gwu.edu/expert/faq/01leps.htm](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/expert/faq/01leps.htm). In Los Angeles, almost half of the 750,000 K-12 pupils in 2004-05 were considered LEP/ELL; the highest percentage was in Santa Ana, CA, where 62 percent of the almost 60,000 students were LEP/ELL. [www.ncela.gwu.edu/expert/faq/02districts.htm](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/expert/faq/02districts.htm).

There are two major approaches to teaching LEP/ELL pupils. The first, English-as-a-second language (ESL) instruction, stresses rapid acquisition of English, while the second, bilingual education, teaches math and other subjects in the child's native language. Each approach has its own philosophy and assumptions about what is appropriate for LEP/ELL pupils. ESL brings together children with various native languages in English-language classrooms, using specially trained teachers and a simplified vocabulary so that LEP/ELL pupils can learn new materials as well as English. Bilingual education teaches children to read and write in their native language and gradually make the transition to English-language instruction.

Educators do not agree whether ESL or bilingual education is best for LEP/ELL pupils. A National Research Council study concluded that the most successful programs for LEP/ELL pupils have three characteristics: „some native language instruction, especially initially, for most students; a relatively early phasing-in of English instruction; and teachers specially trained in instructing English-language learners.” (August and Hakuta 1997: 157). However, ESL programs often do not have specially trained teachers, and schools with bilingual programs often offer instruction in Spanish for five, six, or seven years. The fact that most non-English-speaking students have poor parents presents additional handicaps for learning. The NRC found that 77 percent of English-language learners in a sample of schools were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, suggesting their families had low incomes, compared with 38 percent of all students in the sample.

California during the 1980s and 1990s mostly used bilingual education to teach LEP/ELL pupils. Dissatisfaction with the slow pace of these students' shift to English<sup>11</sup> among LEP/ELL pupils led California voters to approve Proposition 227, the English for the Children initiative, on a 61-39 percent vote in 1998 despite opposition from President Clinton, teachers' unions, school administrators, and most media. Proposition 227 calls for non-English speaking students to receive intensive English lessons for a period „not normally intended to exceed“ one year and then move into regular English-speaking classrooms after they have a „good working knowledge“ of English. Assessments suggest that the reading and math scores of students in English-immersion classes were higher than the test scores of students in bilingual programs,<sup>12</sup> encouraging Arizona (2000) and Massachusetts (2002) to approve initiatives ending bilingual education. However, Colorado (2002) voted to continue teaching LEP children in their native language.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Surveys before the vote pointed out that only a third of the California LEP/ELL pupils were in fact in either bilingual or English-immersion programs, that is, two-thirds got no special help. The surveys also pointed out that school districts had little incentive to reclassify LEP/ELL pupils as English proficient, since they received extra funds for students classified LEP and suffer no penalties if they did not reclassify children English proficient. Ken Ellingwood, „Bilingual Classes a Knotty Issue,“ Los Angeles Times, May 18, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> The former head of the California Association of Bilingual Educators, who predicted disaster with Prop 227, said he changed his mind about English immersion: „The kids began to learn -- not pick up, but learn -- formal English, oral and written, far more quickly than I ever thought they would. You read the research and they tell you it takes seven years. Here are kids, within nine months in the first year, and they literally learned to read.“ Jacques Steinberg, „Increase in Test Scores Counters Dire Forecasts for Bilingual Ban,“ New York Times, August 20, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> [www.proenglish.org/issues/education/bestatus.html](http://www.proenglish.org/issues/education/bestatus.html).

The debate about bilingual education involves much broader issues than the best way to teach non-English-speaking children, including whether newcomers should quickly be integrated into mainstream America or encouraged to retain their native languages. If schools give priority to rapid English-language learning, are they trying to ensure the success of immigrant children in the US labor market, where knowledge of English is essential to higher earnings, or are they engaged in „Anglo cultural imperialism“? Is bilingual education a patronage system that creates jobs for members of particular ethnic groups, usually immigrants who have retained their native language? Should immigration policy be changed to favor the admission of immigrants who already know English, as under the point systems of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand?

Strong feelings about the role of English in education are reflected in the movement to establish English as the official or national language; 30 US states have made English their official language ([www.proenglish.org](http://www.proenglish.org)). Would a prohibition against the use of languages other than English in government be an affirmation that English is the common language of the United States, or would establishing English as the official language be a rebuff to speakers of other languages and a handicap to the work of government? Such questions involve broader issues and feelings about immigrants, integration, and national character.

Two presidential acts almost a century apart reflect the tensions over English. President Theodore Roosevelt in 1919 wrote: „We have room for but one language in this country, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house.“ President Clinton issued executive order 13166 on August 11, 2000 to require government agencies and recipients of federal funds to make efforts to provide services and information in other languages to persons who are not proficient in English ([www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/Pubs/eolep.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/cor/Pubs/eolep.htm)).

## **Conclusions: The US as an Unfinished Nation**

Past immigration flows to the United States resemble waves, with the number of immigrants rising and falling. The fourth wave of US immigration, which began after 1965 legislative changes shifted priority for admission from particular countries to those with family members in the US, has resulted in the arrival of a million immigrants a year, plus 500,000 unauthorized migrants in recent years. Many Americans want the federal government to take steps to reduce legal and especially illegal immigration, so that the current period would be the peak of the fourth wave. Others are comfortable with current levels of legal immigration, and want unauthorized foreigners to be legalized.

The United States is a nation of immigrants that first welcomed virtually all newcomers, later excluded certain types, and since the 1920s has limited the number of immigrants admitted each year with a complex quota system. Immigrants and refugees arrive through America’s front door, which was opened wider in 1990 to accommodate more relatives of U.S. residents and more workers desired by US employers. But the fastest growth in entries has been via side and back doors, as nonimmigrant tourists, foreign workers and students, and unauthorized foreigners arrive in larger numbers.

Research on the economic, social, and political effects of immigration does not provide clear guidelines for policy. Immigrants have minor effects—for better or worse—in the huge American economy and labor market. Most immigrants are better off in America than they were at home, even though many arrive with little education and find it hard to climb the American job ladder. State and local governments point out that the taxes paid by immigrants go mostly to the federal government, while state and local governments bear the brunt of the costs of providing services to them.

Historically, most immigrants did not become naturalized citizens, choosing instead to live in the US but retain their original nationality. During the mid-1990s, there was a spike in naturalizations, and it appears that a higher share of immigrants will naturalize in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. US-born children are citizens at birth, regardless of the legal status of their parents.

Immigrants are often isolated from native-born Americans, as they were a century ago when most Americans lived on farms and the immigrants crowded into cities. However, immigrants and Americans mixed in the early 1900s in the military during WWI, in factories that attracted both Americans leaving the farm and immigrants, and in urban churches, schools, and unions. Immigrant isolation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is reinforced by the fact that many newcomers live and work in different places than US citizens, and many do not speak English. However, there are examples of natives and immigrants cooperating to achieve common goals, and signs that immigrant children may be acquiring English faster than previous immigrants.

The United States is likely to remain the world's major destination for immigrants. US history and traditions suggest that, within a few decades, most of today's immigrants will be an integral part of the American community, albeit a changed community, as the immigrants change and America changes to accommodate them. Past success integrating immigrants does not, however, guarantee that history will repeat itself. As the nation searches for a durable immigration policy, the United States—and the immigrants who are on their way here—are on a journey to an uncertain destination.

## **US Lessons for Europe**

Europe was shaped by emigration; the US was shaped by immigration. US history and experience are infused with myths and realities that imagine foreigners leaving countries offering less opportunity and freedom and beginning anew in the US. From Horatio Alger to Barack Obama, the notion that hard work brings success in the US is widespread.

The major US instrument of immigrant integration is the private sector labor market. The flexible US labor market makes it easy for newcomers to find jobs, and a higher share of immigrant men than US-born men are in the labor force. However, many immigrants with little education and lack of English find it hard to climb the US job ladder. They may be better off in the US than they were at home, but may not reach economic parity with US workers. Most immigrant parents nonetheless express satisfaction with their lives in the US, emphasizing that their children will have opportunities that they did not have because of migration.

Europe has a smaller private sector labor market and fewer highly skilled migrants who are well known successes in business, such as the immigrant co-founders of Google and Intel. Australia, Canada and New Zealand use point systems so that their immigrants, on average, have more education than native-born residents. The US is unique in attracting large numbers of very highly educated immigrants as well as large numbers of low-skilled immigrants.

Low-skilled migrants may be more acceptable in the US because they are associated with work rather than social assistance, suggesting that it may be difficult for industrial countries to accept large numbers of low-skilled migrants if they lack flexible private-sector labor markets, have thin social safety nets, and are willing to accommodate significant income inequality. In the US, the association of low-skilled migrants with hard work at low wages is linked to the notion that hard work can enable anyone to climb the job and income ladder. In Europe, by contrast, low-skilled migrants are more often associated with social assistance rather than economic progress that can benefit them as well as natives, and sometimes with political extremism that may pose dangers for natives.

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