CHAPTER 1

The Three Phases of U.S.-Bound Immigration

Maricopa County, Arizona, was not a good place to be in the first years of the twenty-first century if you were foreign and of brown skin. A child of Italian immigrants retired from the Drug Enforcement Administration and then turned county sheriff unleashed a veritable campaign of terror against Latin American immigrants, aiming to make the county as inhospitable to them as possible. Sheriff Joe Arpaio was enthusiastically egged on by a white electorate composed largely of retirees from northern states who could not see any contradiction between their hiring of Mexicans and Guatemalans as nannies, maids, and gardeners and the persecution to which Sheriff Joe subjected them.[1]

Repeatedly elected by Maricopa citizens, Arpaio devised ever more refined ways of punishing Mexicans and Central Americans unlucky enough to find themselves in Phoenix, Tempe, or the rural areas of the county. Although not all of them came surreptitiously across the border, Arpaio and his men acted as if they all were illegal. Brown-skinned people in Maricopa were guilty until proven innocent. Finally, in December 2011, the Federal Justice Department released a report claiming that "Sheriff Joe Arpaio harasses, intimidates and terrorizes Latinos and immigrants, and he's been doing it for years."[2] Sheriff Joe stated that he would not go down without a fight, but faced with the prospect of a massive federal lawsuit, his reign of terror may be coming to an end.

The antics of Joe Arpaio in southern Arizona highlight a leitmotif found throughout the history of immigration to America. Although the

words at the base of the Statue of Liberty speak of an open country welcoming the poor and wretched of the earth, realities on the ground have been very different. As in Maricopa, foreigners who fuel the local economy with their labor, not only as urban servants but as hands in the fields, have been consistently persecuted by the authorities and denounced by nativists as a threat to the nation. As noted by a number of authors, this peculiar American waltz between labor demand and identity politics has repeated itself in every major period of immigration dating back to colonial days.

As we will see, the contradiction between welcoming foreign workers and demonizing their languages and cultures has been more apparent than real, having played into the hands of a number of actors. Sheriff Arpaio's repeated election in Maricopa happened for a reason, as he represented the linchpin of a de facto functional immigration policy. Unraveling these and other riddles of the peculiar relationship between immigration and the development of American society and economy is the goal of this book. We begin the story with the great waves of immigration accompanying the American industrial revolution.

THE GREAT EUROPEAN WAVE, 1880–1930

Political Economy

As shown in table 1, more than twenty-three million immigrants came 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 more than 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 system, this economy generated enormous synergy among 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 they 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. As Rosenblum notes, Tocquevillean 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 found 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

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

	1880–1889		1890–1899		1900–1909		1910–1919	
	N	%	*N*	%	*N*	%	*N*	%
Total immigration	5,248,568	100.0[a]	3,694,294	100.0	8,202,388	100.0	6,347,380	100.0
United Kingdom[b]	810,900	15.5	328,759	8.9	469,578	5.7	371,878	5.8
Ireland	674,061	12.8	405,710	11.0	344,940	4.2	166,445	2.6
Scandinavia[c]	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[d]	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[e]	—	—	52	—[f]	34,651	0.4	27,180	0.4
Eastern Europe								
Russia[g]	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[i]	0.1	123,650	1.5	708,715	11.2
Mexico	2,405	—[f]	734[i]	—[f]	31,188	0.4	185,334	2.9
West Indies[j]	27,323	0.5	31,480	0.9	100,960	1.2	120,860	1.9
Central and South America	2,233	—[f]	2,038	0.1	22,011	0.3	55,630	0.9
Other Countries								
Australia[k]	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

SOURCE: Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children, 1920*, 324–25; cited in Kraut, *The Huddled Masses*, 21.

[a]Totals are rounded to nearest percent as in census report.

[b]England, Scotland, Wales.

[c]Norway, Sweden, Denmark.

[d]Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland.

[e]Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro.

[f]Less than one-tenth of one percent.

[g]Includes Finland and boundaries prior to 1919.

[h]Includes Canada.

[i]Immigrants from British North America and Mexico not reported from 1886 to 1893.

[j]Includes Jamaica.

[k]Includes Tasmania and New Zealand.

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 more than 702,000 one year later: "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 having a "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 burying forever the independent artisan class. As 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]

TABLE 2 PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN-BORN AMONG WHITE MALE GAINFUL WORKERS, TEN YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER, 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*, 202; cited in Rosenblum, *Immigrant Workers*, 77.

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 why 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.

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 accumulated 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. In chapter 5 we will examine in detail the interplay between nativist discrimination and identity politics during this period. The main point here is that the interplay between the economic basis of immigration and the cultural reaction to it was definitely evident during those years.

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 of 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 sharp focus.[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 at finding themselves increasingly cast 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* 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 and became 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 backgrounds 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 Slavs. 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 industrialism, which included not only supplementing a scarce domestic labor force but disciplining it through strike-breaking 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 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 we will see 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 stagnant 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 industries 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 the trade unions. From 1920 to 1929 union membership dropped by almost two million. In 1933 it stood at fewer than three 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 support 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 vast 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 to 1855 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 transpacific 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 on American shores.[20] The great difficulties of reaching the Pacific Coast and the need to integrate the vast new territories provided 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 from the 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 east from Sacramento, California, and west from Omaha, Nebraska, 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 because

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 depicted as "half civilized beings who spread filth, depravity, and epidemic."[22]

The weak Qing Dynasty could do little for its nationals abroad, and the rising xenophobia in California and elsewhere culminated in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which 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 26:1 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-1880s, 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, for example, forty Japanese farmers owned fewer than five thousand 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 has pointed out, "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 . . . worse, 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. Of Japanese men in Los Angeles, 40 percent 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 decadelong Mexican Revolution. Free access to Mexican 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. In 1918, however, 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

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

Decade	*N* (000s)	% of total immigration
1881–1890	2	.04
1891–1900	1	.02
1901–1910	50	.60
1911–1920	219	3.80
1921–1930	459	11.20
1931–1940	22	4.20
1941–1950	61	5.90

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

declaring workers who commuted between residences in Mexico and jobs in the United States to be 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 it to new southern and eastern European migrants. For reasons we have already seen, 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: its cyclical character. Because the border and their home communities were relatively close, Mexican migrants found reverse migration a much easier enterprise than did 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 practice, together with the predominantly nonurban destinations of the Mexican labor flow, reduced its visibility, making it a less tempting target for nativist movements of the time than the Italians and Poles. That honeymoon period was short-lived, however, as we will see shortly.

While the history of U.S.-bound immigration before the 1930s evidenced few parallels between the eastern and western regions, a decisive feature was common to both: 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, as well as 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 over the changes that such flows wreak in the host societies, often proclaiming that they "transform the mainstream."[29] These assertions confuse impressions at the surface of social life with actual changes in the 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, can have great impact on the demographic composition of the population, it is an open question whether such changes also lead to transformations in more fundamental elements of the host nations.

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 class 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, proved resilient enough to withstand the foreign onslaught and to gradually integrate newcomers into the citizenry. It is a commonplace 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 held the upper hand. Eventually, children and grandchildren of immigrants began ascending the ladder of the American economy and the status system, but 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 at this point 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 struc-

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.

tural 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 *change* American society as reinforce its existing structures of wealth and power. The actual social transformations wrought in the fabric of society by these flows came largely as unanticipated consequences of their numbers and their cultural backgrounds.

As shown in table 4, places of destination of Europeans were overwhelmingly urban. Foreigners lived in cities at far higher rates than natives did, triggering a veritable urban explosion. The overall effect was to shift the social and 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 country. 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: "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."[32]

Despite these voices, the balance of votes in the House did shift in favor of increasingly urbanized and immigrant-receiving states. While the House of Representatives is certainly not the only locus of national political power, it is an important one. Hence, the combination of sheer numbers with U.S. constitutional provisions led to a direct transformation of immigrant settlement patterns into political influence. That influence was *not* exercised by the immigrants themselves but by native politicians in the migrant-receiving states. As we will see in chapter 5, it would take some time for the children and grandchildren of migrants to come into their own in the American political process.

Immigration's other major effect was to transform the cultural landscape through the massive arrival of believers in other creeds. Over time, European immigrants and their descendants gave 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, 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 homogenous against the separation of church and state and the right to religious freedom enshrined in the 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.

RETRENCHMENT, 1930–1970

The historical replacement of European 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 which census year to use as the basis for determining the annual admittance quota of 2 to 3 percent of the resident immigrant nationality already in the country. 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 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 about what to do at the time that "Hoovervilles" of impoverished families rapidly dotted the land. The Great Depression proved to be the greatest immigrant-control measure of all times, since

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

Year	Immigrant arrivals, age 16–44 (000s)	% of 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.

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, aged 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

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

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

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 a million were sent back. As 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 to Mexico along with the immigrants.[37] Prefiguring the stance of Sheriff Arpaio in today's Arizona, being brown-skinned and mestizo-looking was sufficient reason for federal officials to put you aboard a bus bound for Mexico.

The 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 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* (physical laborers) 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 almost half a million workers over the next decade. 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 dif-

ferences came into close and prolonged contact. As an outgrowth of the war, prejudice and hostility against the children of Europeans became largely 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 helping hand into the middle class.[40] The effects on individual mobility facilitated by the GI Bill were most notably seen among white veterans, although not among blacks in the South.

As so often happens in retrospective narratives, necessities were built out of contingencies, with later authors speaking of an "inevitable" process of assimilation under which natives and immigrants melted into a single whole. Others would suggest 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 at 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 had fought and died in the war, they were not beneficiaries of the melting machine, at least not to the extent of other ethnic minorities. On their return from the lines, they still found themselves confined to the *barrios* and victimized by 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 major changes in the nation's institutional framework. Predictably, black mobilizations in the Southeast and 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 fundamental 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 Truman's veto. The 1965 amendments completed the task. These events 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 years of age, spouses, and parents of U.S. citizens were exempt from those numerical limits.

In the floor debates over the new legislation, 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 mil-

lions," 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 more than 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 them 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 we will see, 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 impact on the receiving society and economy would become far more nuanced and complex.

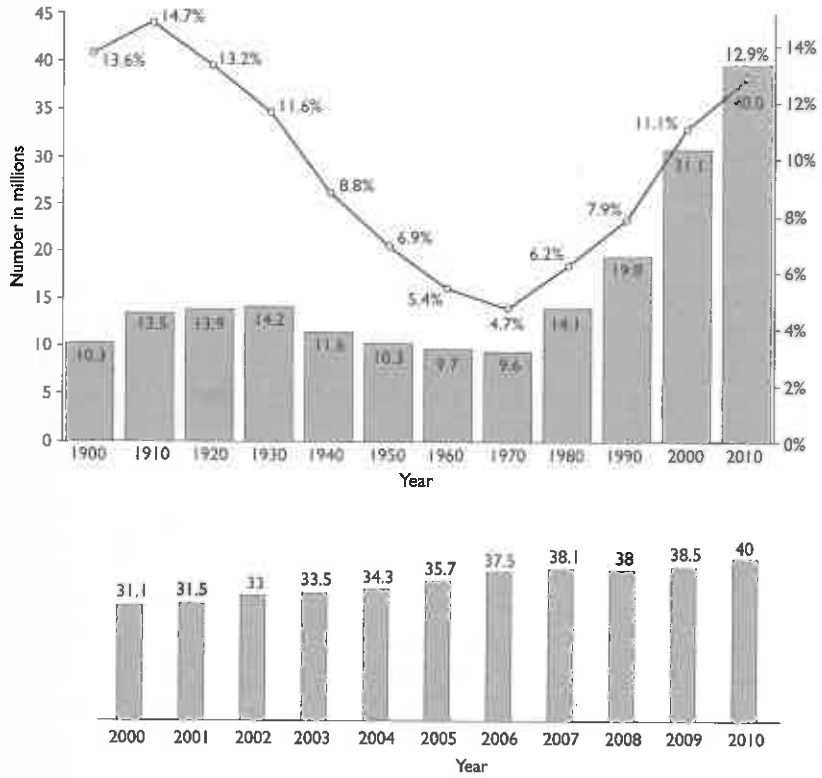

FIGURE 1. The evolution of the foreign-born population of the United States. *Top:* Number and percentage. *Sources:* Decennial census for 1900 to 2000; and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2010. *Bottom:* Total immigrant population, 2000–2010 (millions). *Sources:* 2000 decennial census; and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Surveys, 2001–10.

Industrial Restructuring and the Hourglass

As in the 1920s, it took time for the new Immigration Act of 1965 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 Sates 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 why 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 more than 33 percent of the labor force to less than 15 percent. The slack was taken up by service employment, which skyrocketed from 12 percent to almost 33 percent 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. These 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 percent) did not reach $25,000, and exactly a third had annual incomes below this figure. More than half of American families (57 percent) 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 homeowners 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 miniscule $6,300, and the average wealth of white households was twenty times that of Hispanic households—the widest wealth gap 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 illustrates this changed situation. Contemporary immigration has responded to this new "hourglass" economy by bifurcating, in turn, into major occupational categories. As

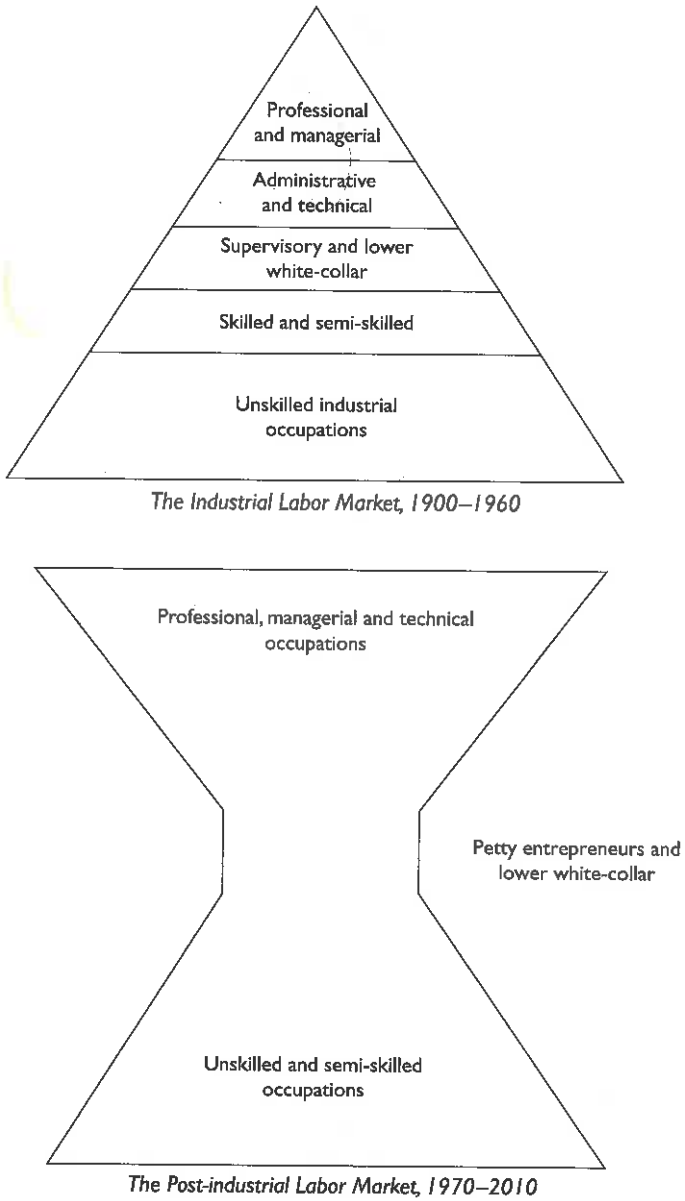

FIGURE 2. Changing labor markets.

we have seen, the end of the Bracero Program rechanneled the low-skill agricultural flow from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean into the category of "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.

Immigrants and Their Types

There are two main dimensions within 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 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 SSI (Supplemental Security Income) or Medicaid, to which citizens are entitled. Cross-classifying these dimensions produces the typology presented in table 7. 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 menial and generally low-paying 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

TABLE 7 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, Haitian laborers	Chinese, Dominican, Indian physicians and dentists practicing without legal permits	Chinese, Indian, Mexican operators of informal businesses in ethnic enclaves and ethnic neighborhoods
Legal, temporary	H-2 West Indian cane cutters; Mexicans and Central Americans admitted with H-2A visas	Chinese, Indian, and Korean software engineers and technicians admitted with temporary H-1B visas	
Legal, permanent	Mexicans and Central Americans legalized under amnesty provisions of the 1986 Immigration Act	Argentine, Chinese, Filipino, Indian physicians, engineers, and nurses admitted under occupational preferences of the 1965 and 1990 Immigration acts	Chinese, Dominican, Korean owners of legal firms in ethnic enclaves and low-income urban areas
Refugees, asylees	Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Somali refugees; Central American asylees	Pre-1980 Cuban; post-1990 Russian, Ukrainian, and Iranian professional refugees	Cuban and Vietnamese owners of legal firms in ethnic enclaves and in the general market

Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 aimed primarily at discouraging the surreptitious component of this flow, while compensating employers by liberalizing access to legal temporary workers. A decade later, Proposition 187, an initiative passed by California's electorate in 1994, sought to discourage undocumented immigration by barring illegal aliens from access to public services. We discuss the intent and effectiveness of these two measures in the final chapter. For the moment it suffices to note the principal ways physical-labor immigration has materialized in recent years.

First, migrants can cross the border on foot or with the help of a smuggler, or they may overstay a U.S. tourist visa. In official parlance illegal border crossers have been labeled EWIs (entry without inspection); those who stay longer than permitted are labeled visa abusers or overstayers. In 2010 the Department of Homeland Security apprehended 516,992 foreigners, of whom 463,382 were EWIs apprehended at the southern border. The overwhelming majority of these were Mexicans. What is important here is that the total apprehension figure for 2010 was less than one-third that reported a decade earlier (1.8 million), a fact that we discuss below.[52]

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 Act 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, out of a total of 219,380 Mexicans admitted for legal residence, 58,602 (26.7 percent) came under the worldwide quota as family-sponsored entries, and an additional 150,963 (68.8 percent) arrived outside quota limits as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens.[53] In 2010 total legal Mexican migration had dropped to 139,120, but out of these, 24.5 percent arrived under the quota as family preferences and 63.7 percent as quota-exempt immediate relatives.[54] As we noted previously, these were mostly returnees with prior lengthy residences in the United States.

The last avenue for labor migrants is to come as contract laborers.

There is a provision in the 1965 Immigration Act for the importation of temporary foreign laborers when a supply of "willing and able" domestic workers cannot be found. This provision was maintained and actually liberalized by the 1986 reform. In both cases the Secretary of Labor has to certify that a labor shortage exists before foreign workers are granted a visa. Because the procedure is cumbersome, few employers sought labor in this manner in the past. An exception is the sugar industry in 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.[55]

The 1990 Immigration Act stipulated 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. In recent years, however, the supply of Mexican workers willing to cross the border clandestinely has diminished significantly because of the rising costs and perils of the journey and the drop in construction and urban employment opportunities in the wake of the 2007–9 recession. Demand for agricultural workers has remained steady, however, and, in response, the federal government has been compelled to expand the H-2 program. The number of seasonal agricultural workers (H-2A visas) thus grew from 46,433 in 2006 to three times that figure just three years later. According to Massey, the number of temporary legal workers from Mexico reached 361,000 in 2008, rivaling numbers last seen during the Bracero Program.[56]

The principal magnet drawing foreign manual workers to the United States is undoubtedly the level of North American wages relative to those left behind. Despite its rapid depreciation in real terms, the U.S. minimum wage continues to be six to seven times that prevailing in Mexico, which is, in turn, higher than most in Central America. The actual wages many U.S. employers pay their foreign workers exceed the legal minimum and are significantly higher than those available for skilled and even white-collar work in Mexico and other sources of this type of immigration. This is why many foreign workers are willing to accept harsh labor conditions. To them the trek to the United States and the economic opportunities associated with it often represent the difference between stagnation or permanent poverty in their home countries and attainment of their individual and family economic goals.

The demand for physical labor in the bottom tier of the labor market originates not only in agriculture but in a number of other labor-inten-

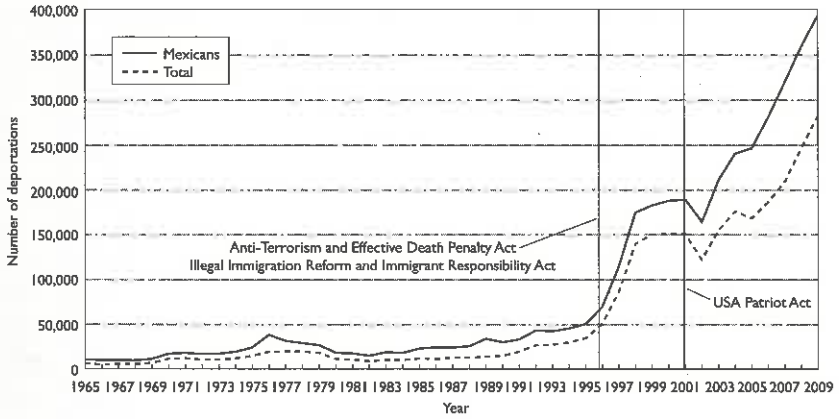

FIGURE 3. Deportations from the United States, 1965–2009. *Source:* Massey and Pren, "Unintended Consequences."

sive industries, including construction, restaurants, landscaping, and other services. As target earners, migrants are ideally suited for jobs that native workers do not want. Employers additionally favor this source of labor because they do not have to pay for costs of transportation or the risk of the journey, which are assumed by the migrants themselves.

Beginning in 2008, and 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 launched a nationwide campaign of deportation against unauthorized workers. Borrowing a page from Sheriff Arpaio in Arizona, 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, reaching nearly four hundred thousand in 2009 and again in 2010. This campaign amounted to a veritable war waged by the United States against its poorer immigrants. The outcome was not long in coming: added to the rapid decline in job opportunities in the wake of the 2007–9 recession, the response of would-be migrants in Mexico and Central America was to desist from their plans. Unauthorized apprehensions plummeted at the southern border to figures not seen in decades.[57]

This rapid decline in the clandestine migrant flow may have been the aim of nativist agitators, but it spelled disaster for hundreds of businesses, especially those in agriculture. As prefigured by the experience of Arizona, established migrants left the areas of harsher enforcement,

and new workers did not arrive. Crops rotted in the fields, and urban restaurants, landscaping services, and other would-be employers found themselves unable to source their needs for physical laborers. As Tom Nassif, president of Western Growers in California, put it: "Given the fact that 70 to 80 percent of our work force is improperly documented, ICE audits can eliminate that percentage of our productive capacity. You cannot stay in business."[58]

The *Wall Street Journal* concluded, "This campaign is doing great harm to U.S. agriculture as farmers are unable to find enough workers to harvest their crops."[59] In response to this perfectly foreseeable outcome of the country's war on its immigrants, the Obama administration was compelled to reverse itself in late 2011. The ICE campaign was partially halted, with the Secretary of Homeland Security declaring that, thereafter, only aliens with a criminal record would be deported, and cases would be reviewed "one by one." At the same time, and as seen previously, the H-2 program was expanded rapidly. Its growth and greater flexibility amounted to an unheralded new temporary labor program in favor of American growers.[60]

As of this writing, the Obama administration's declared intent to limit deportations to "criminal aliens" has not been translated into practice—with ICE deporting another four hundred thousand persons in 2011 and adding even more officials to its campaign. The result is a contradictory situation in which the same type of migrant now welcomed through the expanded H-2 program continues to be deported, at considerable expense, by another agency of the same government. This situation is unsustainable in the long run.

Not surprisingly, manual labor immigrants are found at the bottom echelons of the economic hierarchy. They earn the lowest wages, typically live below the poverty line, and are commonly uninsured. Census 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 2010 was 14.4 percent, but among Mexican immigrants it reached 28.9 percent, among Guatemalans 27 percent, and among Dominicans 26.1 percent. While 13.8 percent of the native-born population was without health insurance, 57.8 percent of Mexicans, 53.6 percent of Salvadorans, and 62.8 percent of Guatemalans lacked such coverage.[61]

Willingness to work for low wages and few benefits, together with diligence and motivation, makes these workers desirable to American

employers in numerous sectors of the economy. This flow does not represent an "alien invasion" because an invasion implies moving into someone else's territory against that person's will. In this instance the movement is greatly 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 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. The recent misguided campaign to deport unauthorized migrant workers and the subsequent reversal by the federal government to address the predictable consequences of its own campaign demonstrates, above all else, the strength of this match.

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 for 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, a total of 34,452 "persons of extraordinary ability," "outstanding researchers," "executives," and their kin, plus an additional 44,468 professionals holding advanced degrees, and their families, were admitted for permanent residence.[62]

By 2010, and despite the recent 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. The number of professionals with advanced degrees jumped further, to 66,831 in 2011. Although in relative terms employment-related immigration has only represented about 13 percent of the legal total since 2000 (14 percent in 2010), it has been the main conduit for the addition of permanent highly trained personnel to the American labor force. Their entry helps to explain why more than 25 percent 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.[63]

Foreign professionals seldom migrate because of lack of employ-

ment back home. The reason is that they not only come from higher educational strata but that they are probably among the best in their respective professions, which is indicated by their ability to pass 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 with 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.[64]

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. Although there are about two million Filipinos and a comparable number of Indians now living in the United States, we seldom hear reference to a Filipino or an Indian immigration "problem." 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.[65]

Professional immigrants are among the most rapidly assimilated linguistically and culturally. Reasons are, first, their educational and occupational success and, second, the absence of strong ethnic communities to support their culture 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.[66] 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 first decade of the new millennium several important exceptions emerged to this general pattern. First, some refugee groups—such as Iranians, Iraqis, and those arriving from the 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 U.S. 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 extreme, 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 subsequently expanded, 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.[67]

Although the cap on H-1B visas reverted to sixty-five thousand 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 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (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 fewer than 250,000.[68]

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 8, in 2009 almost 42 percent of H-1B workers (88,961) were in computer-related fields, with an additional 11.8 percent (25,578) 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 8, 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. More than half of H-1B workers in 2008 came from India, with an additional 15 percent from China, the Philippines, and Korea. Of the top five sending countries, only one was not in Asia. Annual median income for these foreign workers in 2009 was $64,000, which, despite the economic downturn, represented an increase of $4,000 over prior years.[69]

Although reasonable, this level of compensation is not particularly high for university-trained workers. Indeed one of the major advantages for firms hiring H-1B workers is the contribution that they make to keep salaries down for professional and 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 agricultural laborers during the Bracero Program, H-1B visa holders are generally tied to the firm that brought them to the United States and, hence, are at the mercy of its decision to continue to employ them or not.

Finally, as shown in table 7, there are some foreign professionals who are in the country illegally or who have not managed to meet the high 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 licenses. Their clients are almost always other immigrants, mostly from the same country, who trust these professionals and find them a preferable, low-cost option

TABLE 8 THE H-1B PROGRAM, 2008–2009

	Approved petitions			
	2008		2009	
	#	%	#	%
A. By country of birth				
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. By level of education				
Less than a bachelor's degree		1.0		1.0
Bachelor's degree		43.0		40.0
Master's degree		41.0		40.0
Doctoral degree		11.0		13.0
Professional degree		4.0		6.0

C. By occupation and income	#	%	Mean salary ($000s)	Median salary ($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.*

to regular health care. Unauthorized medical, dental, and other professional practices are thus localized in immigrant enclaves and other areas of high ethnic concentration.[70]

Despite these different situations, foreign professionals have generally done very well occupationally and economically in the United

States. India and the Philippines have been prime sources of this type of migrant under both permanent and temporary legal entry programs. In 2010 the Filipino population of the United States had mean household earnings of $90,315, while Asian Indians reached $116,186. Both figures significantly exceeded the national average of $69,506 in that year. While median earnings for all male workers were $46,500, those for Chinese males were $53,751 and for Asian Indians $77,484.[71]

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 markets; it also contains a number of banks, import-export houses, industries, and real estate offices. Signs reading "English spoken here" assure visitors that their 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.[72]

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 more than a quarter of a million nationwide, with the principal concentration in metropolitan Miami/Ft. Lauderdale. Most are small, averaging 7.7 employees at the latest count, but they also include 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 now done by these firms.[73]

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 sociologist Franklin Fraizer called "the art of buying and selling" can usually overcome other obstacles to entrepreneurship.[74] 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 the exception in both early 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. Today, Koreans hire and promote Koreans in New York and Los Angeles, and Cubans do the same for other Cubans in Miami, just as sixty years ago 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.[75]

An ethnic enclave is not, however, the only manifestation of immigrant entrepreneurship. In cities where the concentration of these immigrants is less dense, they tend to take over businesses catering to low-income groups, often in the inner cities. In this role as "middleman minorities," entrepreneurial immigrants are less visible because they tend to be dispersed over the area occupied by the populations they serve. Koreatown in Los Angeles is not, for example, the only manifestation of entrepreneurship among this immigrant group. Koreans are also present in significant numbers in New York City, where they have gained increasing control of the produce market, and in cities like Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, where they have progressively replaced Italians and Jews as the principal merchants in low-income inner-city areas. Indian immigrants, particularly from the state of Gujarat, have carved a unique intermediate niche for themselves as owners and operators of low- and mid-budget motels nationwide.[76]

The emergence of ethnic enclaves and other forms of immigrant entre-

preneurship has been generally fortuitous. While the 1990 Immigration Act includes a preference category for "employment creating" investors and allows up to ten thousand immigrant visas a year for such investors, few foreigners have made use of this option. This is, in part, a consequence of the high capital requirements to qualify. In the late 1990s this preference attracted barely one thousand new immigrants per year. By 2010 the situation had not changed, with just 1,745 new arrivals under this category.[77] No explicit entry preference exists for small entrepreneurs with little or no capital, and none is likely to be implemented in the future. In general, entrepreneurial minorities come under preferences designated for other purposes. Koreans and Chinese, two of the most successful business-oriented groups, have made good use of the employment-based preference categories for professionals and skilled workers and, subsequently, of the family reunification provisions of the 1965 and 1990 immigration laws. Cubans usually came as political refugees and were initially dispersed throughout the country. It took this group more than a decade after arrival to regroup in certain geographic locations, primarily South Florida, and then begin the push toward entrepreneurship.[78]

More recent refugee groups such as the Vietnamese and Russians have also followed the entrepreneurial path, creating new enclaves on both coasts. The principal Vietnamese concentration is in Orange County, California, around the town of Westminster. The main Russian enclave is found in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn. Research on the Vietnamese in California has found the same pattern of economic success of ethnic entrepreneurs reported among other groups.[79] Finally, even some unauthorized immigrants have gone into business on their own, attempting to escape low-wage work by setting themselves up as independent mechanics, gardeners, handymen, and house cleaners. Naturally, entrepreneurship cannot be expected to yield the same benefits for these migrants that it does for those enjoying legal status. Their businesses are generally small and informal. Paradoxically, the stepped-up efforts to penalize employers of undocumented labor under the ICE campaign of deportation are likely to have stimulated the growth of informal businesses among the undocumented. From house cleaning and repairs to restaurants and food stands catering to other immigrants, informal enterprises may offer to unauthorized migrants a more attractive option than increasingly precarious wage employment.

Recent research has shown that a high proportion of successful migrant firms depend for their operation on transnational ties, primarily

with the owners' home country. They commonly import goods for sale in the immigrant community or in the open market, export high-tech U.S. goods to the home nation, and draw on contacts there for sources of capital and labor. A recent study of entrepreneurial activities among Latin American immigrants in the United States found that as much as 58 percent of firms in these communities relied for their continued viability and growth on these transnational ties. Specific studies of highly entrepreneurial communities such as the Chinese and Koreans have documented the same patterns.[80] We will return to the consequences of ethnic enterprises and transnationalism when we examine immigrants' economic and political adaptation in chapters 4 and 5.

Refugees and Asylees

The Refugee Act of 1980, signed into law by President 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 in 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 his or her country's regime. In practice, however, the United States continued during the two Reagan administrations 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 illegal aliens.[81]

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's 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. Although it is still driven by geopolitical interests and expediency, there is more room at present for broader humanitarian considerations. Thus, the national origins of the current refugee flow have become more diversified and include countries that are not necessarily adversarial to the United States. Still, the number of refugees pales in comparison to that of regular immigrants and, especially, to the growing category of temporary workers. In 2001 a total of 68,925 refugees arrived in the United States, 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.[82] 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. Major contributors to this flow in 2010 included Iraq (18,016), Burma (16,693), Bhutan (12,363), Somalia (4,844), and Cuba (4,818).[83]

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 whereas 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 the 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. Thus, prior to 1990, refugees were mostly opponents and victims of communism in the Soviet Union and its allies, including Cuba and Vietnam. In the early 1990s they came primarily from Russia and the successor states of the former Soviet Union, as U.S. refugee policy was used to stabilize and ease economic conditions for the fragile new governments in these countries. By the late 1990s the refugee flow had diversified to include significant numbers from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Somalia, Iran, and Iraq.[84]

Asylee applications during the 1990s were, by contrast, dominated by migrants from Central America—primarily El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. These were movements that originated in violent civil wars in these countries, pushing large numbers to move

abroad and eventually seek entry into the United States. Their wishes did not accord, however, with the interests of the U.S. government at the time, which routinely denied their requests. The end of the civil wars and return of political democracy in all three countries was followed by urgent entreaties by the new governments to U.S. authorities to grant the asylum requests of their conationals. While reasons for asylum had been largely removed by the end of the armed conflicts, the new Central American leaders argued that their economies desperately needed the remittances sent by their migrants, living and working in the United States as unauthorized aliens. The American government responded to these requests by granting temporary protected status (TPS) to Salvadorans and other Central Americans whose asylum petitions had been denied. This concession was renewed on a yearly basis, and, over time, many of these migrants managed to regularize their status. By 2010 asylee admissions had dwindled to just 21,113. The only significant number of asylees during that year came from the People's Republic of China (6,683).[85]

As shown in table 7, refugees and asylees vary greatly in terms of 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 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 those with 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 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 will 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 opportunity created, in turn, a key source of social capital for them and their children to cope with their new environment.

OVERVIEW

In 2010 about 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 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 will serve 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 nativists and xenophobes along the three successive phases of U.S.-bound immigration will also be a leitmotif of the following analysis. The emblematic figure of Sheriff Joe Arpaio represents the latest incarnation of a long history of intolerance toward newcomers despite the multiple contributions that their presence has made in the long run. Similarly, the progressive bifurcation of the economy and increasing inequality within the immigrant population in the postindustrial era 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, vibrant nation that it is without the work and talent of millions of immigrants. At present they fill the diverse labor needs of a vast economy, rejuvenate the population, and add energy and diversity to the culture. Without this continuing flow the United States would come to resemble the situation of other rich, but demographically stagnant, nations whose growing elderly populations loom as a major problem 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 political leadership in a changing global system.

Immigrant America

A Portrait

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Rubén G. Rumbaut

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