

THE SHAPE OF THE FUTURE: IMMIGRATION AND CHANGING AMERICA

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In the publication The Fourth Wave, the authors, who believed that the economic impacts of immigration were positive, concluded: "... non-economic issues are likely to become increasingly important in formulating national immigration policy. Dealing successfully with these latter issues is perhaps the greatest challenge presented by the fourth wave of immigration." (Thomas Muller and Thomas Espenshade, The Fourth Wave, The Urban Institute Press, Washington, DC, 1985, p. 187)

It is indeed time to move beyond looking solely at the economic aspects of immigration and begin to consider what immigration means for American society, for American culture, for the American people and their quality of life. Twenty-first century America will encompass far more than simply a labor force. More than 9 million people migrated to the U.S. during the eighties. Even if illegal movements are reduced as a result of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, immigration levels will climb in the nineties, as more people qualify to bring in their immediate relatives. With the passage of new immigration legislation in 1990, that number will increase even more dramatically. The GAO estimates an increase of about 200,000 in annual legal immigration because of the 1990 legislation. (Dick Kirschen, "Legislating by One Senator's Rules," National Journal (October 27, 1990). The historical high of the first decade of this century was equalled in the eighties. It will be surpassed in the nineties. The Congress should consider decreases rather than increases in levels of immigration. The recommendations of the Hesburg Commission remain appropriate today: approximately 450,000 immigrants annually.

Changes in the source of immigration to the U.S. are equally important. At the turn of the 20th century, some 90 percent of all immigrants came from Europe; at the end of the 20th century, some 90 percent may come from Latin America and Asia. We must also bear in mind that for the past 20 years, the fertility of the resident population of the nation has been so low that it is not replacing itself.

Thus the United States population is on the verge of a massive compositional shift. Soon after 2050, today's majority, the Non-Hispanics or Anglos, may be but another minority in a society comprised of many racial minorities: Native-Americans, Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Anglos. Today, Anglos comprise about three-quarters of all Americans.*

At the time of Columbus some 2 million Native-Americans inhabited the region. By the nineteenth century, their numbers had dwindled to a half-million and they comprised but a small minority of the nation's population. Later, the western Europeans saw their numerical dominance threatened by millions of newcomers from eastern and southern Europe as well as from Asia. The result: a gradual shift, within the white population, from being predominantly of western and northern European ancestry to being far more diverse in origin. Persons of English ancestry are

* For convenience the term "Anglo" will be used to mean "non-Hispanic White." We are aware that "Anglo" as well as "Hispanic" masks considerable variation in ethnic origins.

now but a minority among white Americans.

Today's emerging demographic shift is equally remarkable. Over 16 million people have moved to the United States legally since 1950. Currently over 750 thousand persons enter the country legally every year. How many millions move here illegally is almost impossible to ascertain. Conservative estimates suggest that perhaps as many as 200 to 400 thousand enter annually.

The millions of immigrants who come to the United States are most likely to settle in just a few states. Almost half of all immigrants reside in California. Indeed, California accepts more immigrants than any nation in the world. Texas and New York are also home to many immigrants. Soon these states, where one-third of all Americans reside, will become "minority-majority" states. That is to say, there will be no majority ethnic group. By 2000, in California, Anglos will comprise less than half that state's population. Similar changes will occur in Texas and New York a few years later.

Let it be stated very clearly from the start. There is nothing wrong with changing ethnic composition. Previous shifts, have been beneficial to the nation. So too, the current shift may eventually prove to be equally beneficial.

As we look to the 21st century, sometimes referred to as the Pacific century, now may be the most opportune time for the U.S. to cast its eyes and interests towards Asia and Latin America while not neglecting Europe and Canada. Europe has long ceased being the center of the universe. The population growth in Latin America and the economic growth in Japan and the newly industrialized countries of Asia together with the economic potential of China suggest that economic power and numbers are moving in those directions.

The world is becoming more and more internationalized in communication, in commerce, in industry. An emerging multi-racial United States conveniently located between, on one hand, the European Community and the newly democratic nations of eastern Europe, and on the other hand, the growing economic giants of Asia and the massive populations of Latin America, should be perfectly suited for the 21st century. The United States, comprised of significant proportions of people descendant from European, Asian, Latin American, as well as African sources, would most certainly be at the center of the universe.

To repeat: there is nothing wrong with increased ethnic diversity. Yet, failing to realize that the massive levels of immigration that cause such diversity pose serious challenges would be like the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand.

A common reply to these expressions of anxiety is that "we've heard it before." The United States is a nation of immigrants and this latest wave (sometimes called the "fourth wave") is merely the latest in an on-going process. It is pointed out that the huge immigration that began in 1880 and ended with World War I (the "third wave") led to similar expressions of doubt and worry.

Over 20 million Europeans came to the United States during the third wave of immigration. In addition, Chinese and Japanese immigrants arrived in the western states. Most of the European immigrants coming from eastern and southern Europe differed in religion, language, and culture from the American residents who had arrived earlier from northern and western Europe.

The impact of these newcomers on white America was enormous. Confrontations between residents and newcomers contributed to restrictionist sentiments and legislation in the 1920s which limited immigration from eastern and southern Europe and stopped immigration from Asia. White America was becoming heterogenous, but Anglo-Saxons remained the majority.

Nevertheless, these various migration streams -- whether from southern and eastern Europe, or from Asia -- contributed to the creation of a new concept of America and an entirely new ethnic balance. This called out for a new mode of cultural adaption on the part of both, residents and newcomers.

The Anglo-Saxon majority favored the total assimilation of the new European groups into an Anglo-dominated society. (It was taken for granted -- indeed, it was ordained -- that Mexicans, Blacks, and Asians would remain culturally separated from those of European ancestry.) Cultural

pluralism, and even the "melting pot," were opposed. Theodore Roosevelt felt nothing but disdain for the hyphenated American and Woodrow Wilson declared that: "Any man who thinks himself as belonging to a particular national group in America has not yet become American." (Quoted in Willi Paul Adams, "A Dubious Host," The Wilson Quarterly, New Year's 1983, p. 111.)

As we look back over the past century to assess how the cultural adaptation process among persons of European ancestry developed, it seems quite clear that the pressures to "Americanize" everyone to Anglo-conformity did not succeed. Most European groups have retained some semblance of ethnicity over the years.

If cultural pluralism means that various groups remain culturally and structurally separate from one another thus creating the possibility of also maintaining cultural patterns different from those of the host society, then the evidence suggests that neither has this form of cultural adaptation succeeded among Americans of European ancestry.

By the 1980s the melting pot had worked quite well for the immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. In addition to different groups acting increasingly alike, a new population may be in the process of forming. Sociologist Stanley Lieberson calls them the "unhyphenated Americans."

Over the past four decades something exciting has been happening to the majority American population. The ingredients in the melting pot have been boiling and out of it has come a new concept of American as the nation keeps redefining itself.

In the field of corporate business, a second-generation Italian, Lee Iaccoca, reached the top. In higher education, the late A. Bartlett Giamatti served as president of Yale University and later Commissioner of professional baseball. A second generation Armenian, Vartan Gregorian, was named president of Brown University.

In the 1968 national election, both parties offered second generation American vice-presidential candidates, one of Polish, the other of Greek parentage. Among those who were mentioned as potential candidates in the 1988 election were second generation Italians, Greeks, and Basques. Most important was the fact that to most people it didn't seem to matter. Who would argue that Michael Dukakis is less American than George Bush?

If the reply of President Herbert Hoover to a mild letter of criticism from then Congressman Fiorello LaGuardia is an example, such a question could not have been asked in 1930. "It seems to me, ..., that you are a little out of your class in presuming to criticize the President. It strikes me as impudence. You should go back to where you belong and advise Mussolini on how to make good honest citizens in Italy... Like a lot of other foreign spawn, you do not appreciate this country which supports you and tolerates you." (As quoted in E. Digby Baltzell, The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America, Vintage Books, 1964, p. 30)

The nation has come a long way since then, at least within its majority population. As Robert Christopher puts it, there has been a "de-Wasping of America's power elite." (Crashing the Gates: The De-Wasping of American's Power Elite, Simon and Schuster, 1989) Now we must turn to the future and ask ourselves: What kind of America will emerge? Will we continue redefining ourselves?

There are similarities between the third and fourth waves of immigrants. Both are very large. Both movements led to protests and intergroup conflict. Both movements resulted in legislation that curtailed at least some portion of the immigration. The Quota Laws of the 1920s were a direct result of third wave immigration. The 1986 Immigration Refugee Control Act (IRCA) is not blatantly discriminatory as was its predecessor. Its purpose is to reduce, if not end, illegal immigration.

There are also substantial and important differences between the two waves.

First, in 1900 the U.S. population totalled 75 million; today it is over 250 million. In one sense the impact of immigration was greater then given the difference in population. In another sense, the impact is greater now. The resident population is not replacing itself and soon, all growth will come from immigration. A century ago, while fertility was falling, births still far exceeded deaths and the population was growing, with or without immigration. In no way could the host

population become a minority; today, as we look into the future, that is a distinct probability.

Second, while both waves are heterogeneous, the earlier movement was overwhelmingly within the dominant European population. Although many of these newcomers were ethnically different than their predecessors, they were all of European background. By the second and third generations, inter-ethnic marriages were commonplace. Unhyphenated American now describes many white residents.

Today, the major groups come from Latin America and Asia. While interracial marriages are on the increase, they remain a rare occurrence. The possibility of attaining what Philip Wylie once called a "tea-colored" society is hardly within our reach. This is not to say that such a "new America" cannot be attained in the more distant future. Indeed the noted Black sociologist, W.E.B. Dubois predicted that, "Some day, on American soil, two world races may give to each those characteristics both so sadly lack." Dubois called for the maintenance of racial purity only "until this mission of the Negro people is accomplished, and the ideal of human brotherhood has become a practical possibility." (The Souls of Black Folk, Greenwich, Conn., 1961, p. 22)

A third difference lies in the stage of industrialization. The earlier wave coincided with the robust expansion of industrialism in America. The new factories had a huge appetite for low and semi-skilled labor as America began its glory days as the pre-eminent industrial power. Upward economic mobility was possible in such a period. New immigrants could literally begin at the bottom of the economic ladder and gradually work their way up. Later, the G.I. Bill of Rights made higher education possible for the children of immigrants resulting in still more upward mobility.

Today, the nation is predominantly a service-based economy, and is in a new and lasting era of international competition. If it is to retain a substantial industrial capacity, it must be through a shift toward knowledge-intensive sectors in both manufacturing and services, leaving the low-wage mass production industries to take root elsewhere. This does not imply a larger labor force, and not one recruited primarily from the poor populations of the Third World. It will require a labor force of high educational and skill levels and aspirations. Yet, educational funds have been reduced rather than increased and there is no program that resembles the G.I. Bill of Rights. Today, while some economic mobility is still possible, this manner of climbing economically and socially is far less prevalent than in the early days of industrialization. In a service society, only those with adequate education and appropriate training will qualify for upward mobility. With as many as three-quarters of future jobs requiring at least some post-secondary education, many of the newest immigrants will simply not qualify.

Fourth, at the time of the Third Wave, individual immigrants (or families) were accepted and they became part of the successful melting pot described earlier. Strong pressure was exerted on the newcomers to become "more like us." While "Americanization" may not have succeeded, it did contribute to a feeling of having to join the mainstream if one were to make it in America. This pressure was especially effective on the second generation, many of whom turned their backs on their parents and ancestral land in an effort to become "more like us."

More recently, the nation seems to have lost its concern for individuals. Today, the emphasis is on group rights. Such a concept was, and is, appropriate for Black and Native Americans. However, group rights should not be applied to new immigrants. "It has gone so far in terms of immigration that, in one foreign-relations appropriations bill being considered, there is a section claiming that if aliens can show that they are part of a 'group' of people who could even remotely be persecuted at home, the U.S. attorney-general has to prove that they are not. In this brave new world, aliens have 'rights'; the highest ranking American justice official has 'duties.'" (Georgie Anne Geyer, "Bush was right about the Chinese Students," The Virginian-Pilot, Feb. 1, 1990, p. a-15) Such an emerging political philosophy is not conducive to the development of a united society.

Finally, it is particularly important to bear in mind that the earlier wave ended in the 1920s. Restrictive legislation, depression, and war all combined to drastically lower the levels of immigration. These factors contributed to the assimilation and social elevation of the new

immigrants and their descendants. The shutting off of the immigration flow made it difficult for ethnic cultures to be maintained. As a result, the newcomers were better able to adapt to their new homeland. As sociologist Richard Alba explains: "A continuing influx of European immigrants would have continuously renewed ethnic cultures and sentiments, retarding if not altogether preventing the assimilation of the descendants of the immigrants. The shutting off of the immigrant flow made clear to the second and third generations that their future lay in the new society." (Italian-Americans: Into the Twilight of Ethnicity, Prentice-Hall, 1985, p. 168)

Now there is no end in sight to the legal (and perhaps illegal) immigration coming chiefly from Asia and Latin America. Given the increase in the number applying for citizenship every year, and taking into consideration the 3 million persons amnestied as a result of the 1986 IRCA legislation (who in turn may opt for citizenship), as well as the impact of the 1990 legislation, immigration to the United States will continue to climb for the foreseeable future. The "breathing time" accorded the immigrants earlier in this century will not be available to the current waves now entering the country.

These substantial differences between immigration waves make it clear that the concerns of the 1990s are dissimilar from those of a century ago.

Can the relative success achieved over the past half century in the adaptation of third wave immigrants and their descendants into a new kind of America (a true melting pot within the majority population) be duplicated with the current and future mix of racially different ethnic groups? This is the issue that the United States must face.

Given the different situation in 1990-2000 as compared to that in 1890-1900, it seems unlikely that a repetition of the successful melting pot process will occur. What then are alternative options?

The choices lie between cultural pluralism and a new mode of adaptation that I have called pluralistic assimilation. Whatever direction the nation follows will determine the kind of America that will evolve in the 21st century.

Obviously, cultural pluralism is part and parcel of American life. Ethnic enclaves are still present in large cities. Religious and cultural holidays remain on the calendars of many Americans.

However, cultural pluralism took on a different meaning in the 1960s, particularly after passage of the Civil Rights legislation of 1964. European ethnic groups began to clamor for "rights" similar to those that had been bestowed to Black Americans. To some people, cultural pluralism "implies the conscious pursuit of a national order in which Americans find their identity primarily as members of ethnic and/or religious blocs and only secondarily as individuals engaged in carving out a position in the general society." (Christopher, p. 20) Ironically, at the same time that the melting pot was proclaimed dead and was being replaced by cultural pluralism, the rate of ethnic intermarriage among all European groups was increasing.

Cultural pluralism remains in vogue today. Sociologist Alejandro Portes sees cultural pluralism as stemming from the discrimination suffered by immigrants to the United States. "It emphasizes the experience of immigrant groups which, though acculturated to dominant values and norms, have been rebuffed in their attempts to seek entrance into the core society... The rejection experienced by immigrants and their descendants... constitutes a central element in the reconstitution of the ethnic culture." (Alejandro Portes and Robert Bach, Latin Journey: Cuban and Mexican Immigrants in the United States. Univ. of California Press, 1985, p. 25) The immigrants then rely more and more on in-group cohesiveness and cultural reassertion as the only effective means to break out of their situation. Portes refers to this explanation of cultural pluralism as the "ethnic resilience hypothesis."

From this argument, one could conclude that if these new immigrants had been accepted by American society, rather than shunted aside as was the case, assimilation would have been more successful. Furthermore, Steinberg has pointed out that "a pluralism based on systematic inequalities is inherently unstable because ethnic groups at or near the bottom of the social ladder have little reason to endorse the ethnic status quo. On the contrary, groups aspiring to class

mobility are typically forced to adopt strategies that are designed to advance class interests, but at the same time, whittle away at the pluralist structure." (Stephen Steinberg, Ethnic Myths: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America, Beacon Press, 1981, p. 256)

Too often, Americans confuse the fact that we are a pluralistic nation with acceptance of cultural pluralism. America is pluralistic in the sense of having many religions and ethnic groups represented in its population. Nevertheless it has constantly striven to achieve overall unity in its basic interests and ideals. E Pluribus Unum succinctly describes the nation. If cultural pluralism was but a supplement to these common interests and ideals as earlier understood, it would be totally appropriate. However, cultural pluralism, as presently conceived, argues for the primacy of the homeland language and culture. Today's Miami is an appropriate example. Rather, we should try to mold a more unified, even though racially diverse society. While assimilation of the type suggested at the turn of the 20th century is out of question today, we should examine it to see how it can be adapted to a new situation.

The challenge to America is to find a way to assure that all its residents, of whatever background, have equal access to all avenues of success and in the process adapt to American culture while contributing to its ever changing content. At the same time, all its residents, of whatever background, must have the choice of maintaining their own subculture within the broader American society. As the nation gradually becomes multi-racial, it is particularly important that a form of cultural adaptation emerge that takes the best of cultural pluralism and cultural assimilation while at the same time maintaining the American culture and assuring its acceptance by all.

"Pluralistic assimilation," derived from historian John Higham's pluralistic integration model, might be an appropriate mode of cultural adaptation. All groups would be assimilated, both culturally and structurally, into the already diverse mainstream American society. This is not "Anglo-conformity" nor even "White American conformity." This is really "assimilation among" rather than "assimilation into" and reflects the changing demographic picture and the fact that no one ethnic group will dominate, numerically, as in the past. Furthermore, the inclusion of structural assimilation suggests that all groups will have access to power, whether economic or political. Pluralistic reflects the fact that we are no longer dealing with ethnic groups of the same race. These multi-racial groups may maintain their identity at the same time that they become "assimilated" into the new mainstream American society.

The approaches of two prominent Black politicians illustrate the difference between cultural pluralism and pluralistic assimilation. Rev. Jesse Jackson is a prime example of cultural pluralism in action. In his campaigning, racial differences are identified and the "Rainbow Coalition" represents cultural pluralism. On the other hand, the governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, L. Douglas Wilder, exemplifies pluralistic assimilation. In his campaigning, almost no reference is made to race. Jackson campaigns as a Black American; Wilder campaigns as an American who happens to be Black.

Pluralistic assimilation might suit the increasingly multi-racial nature of American society. However, for "pluralistic assimilation" to even begin to occur, certain conditions must be present.

First, American society must provide every possible means to make economic and social advancement possible for all its citizens. This will require easy and inexpensive access to higher education as well as technical training. (A "G.I. Bill" for the 21st century) It will necessitate a complete revamping of the nation's educational institutions to allow for the better preparation of all Americans for the occupations of the 21st century. Should these plans fail and Blacks and Hispanics find themselves overwhelmingly in lower paying jobs while Asians and Anglos are predominantly in the higher paying jobs, conflict is inevitable.

Second, white Americans should cease thinking of the newest immigrants as well as other minorities as "they" while white Americans are the "we's." The newcomers and minorities should be accepted as fellow Americans. Every effort should be made to encourage them to participate fully and equally in this dynamic society. Somehow or other, white Americans must shed their

racist attitudes. If anything, racism has risen in the 1980s and there is scant evidence of any decline as we enter the 1990s. The potential for increased inter-racial hostility is evident, given the shifts in population distribution. Unless racism is drastically reduced, there is little chance for pluralistic assimilation to succeed.

Third, as the nation welcomes its newest Americans, in turn the newcomers should demonstrate their desire to join in this exciting experiment, as individuals rather than as groups. New residents should eagerly opt for citizenship, not only for economic reasons, but for the opportunity to become Americans. In 21st century America, considerable diversity will be accepted; cultural separatism should not.

Fourth, concern for individual rather than group rights must be restored. Continued emphasis on the latter can only postpone the ultimate unification of all Americans. In the process of reestablishing individual rights a new patriotism could emerge --one not based on military chauvinism but one based, as Camus once wrote, on the ideal of what the country might be.

Finally and most important, levels of immigration should be reduced rather than increased. Only in this way will the newest immigrants be able to gradually become part of American society. Any continuation of massive immigration will postpone, if not end, the promise of any real assimilation into the new American society.

The path to pluralistic assimilation will be strewn with obstacles. The path to the melting pot among White ethnic groups was not exactly a bed of roses. Let us be honest: because different races are involved, the path will be rougher.

Irrespective of the level of immigration, striking changes will take place in the ethnic composition of the United States in the 21st century -- that is inevitable. Americans should accept this challenge and welcome the opportunity to become the world's first multi-racial developed country. The nation may be in the vanguard of similar shifts that may gradually occur to accompany to the increasingly international mode of business and communications.

However, such shifts should not take place too rapidly. The challenge for America is not one of increasing numbers, but of careful selection and adaptation of culturally diverse newcomers who will enhance American social and economic life and make the more diverse United States of the 21st century a model for other societies.

Now is the time to ask: "What kind of America do we want in the 21st century?" Do we prefer cultural pluralism where each group maintains its own language and culture and rejects many of the basic American values? Or do we prefer a more unified society where its subgroups accept the basic values while, at the same time, contribute to changes in these values? Now is the time for policy-makers to move beyond the purely economic aspects of the immigration issue to the broader social aspects.