

IMMIGRATION REVISITED

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Most of us, I assume, are like me in that we feel most comfortable when we are surrounded with some level of predictability and certainty. It allows some faith that the future is at least somewhat predictable, allowing us to plan for our lives, those of our families, our loved ones, our community, country and the world in which we, and future generations will live. When things and events present themselves to weaken our concept of comfort and security to a greater extent than is unavoidable in what we have come to believe is a fairly normal life, an uneasiness can creep in, like a rat, and be a cause of concern, and a reason to question and study.

Such is the case of immigration in America to me. When we naive baby boomers (who columnist Dave Barry defines as "people who, when you say 'Shirley, Shirley, bo-berly', instantly respond 'Bannana, fanna, fo-ferly'") first had formal American History, or some overly dry facsimile thereof, we were accurately given a picture of stability. We were taught that we Americans were on a course of progress, and with hard work, prosperity. We were a major world power, with a leadership responsibility to be an exemplary advocate of world justice and freedom for every person in the world, at least if the 'Commies didn't take over.

"These days are gone and I'm not so self assured" - wrote Lennon (the Beatle, not the 'Commie) in the popular song "Help" in 1965, expressing a feeling of personal self doubt; an uneasy feeling I now share with many, a national unsure feeling about our country's present status and future issues we all will face regarding Immigration in America.

Why was the previous immigration activity, policy and results "what made this country great". Why is it the present immigration wave just doesn't feel the same?

Many questions arise. What conditions determined immigration in the past? Is immigration now really that much different? What do we want immigration to be? How can anyone hope to do the just, morally right, and prudent thing for our Country? Who are trying to protect or benefit by all this concern anyway? What are the brutally painful economic implications of our present immigration policy's course? What should our recommendations be for future immigration regulations? Should we assume that we know what's best for us, the immigrants, or their country of origin?

A well known part time philosopher, golfer, tennis pro, full time devoted husband and fearless leader of my immediate original family, often states that

one of the main unifying threads to the tapestry of most of today's world difficulties can be summarized in the straight forward yet all-inclusive statement that " there are just too damn many people".

America has, in the past benefited greatly from its being an immigrant destination. Abraham Lincoln stated that our population was 'largely augmented by emancipation and immigration".

In Lincoln's time, though, there were 34 million Americans and much of the continent's land mass remained to be settled. Now, the nation is 264 million strong and growing , on a continent dramatically more developed than in Lincoln's time.

Between 1880 and WWI, 17 million people entered the country. In 1910, there were 13.5 million foreign born people in the American population. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was the first major revision of the severely restrictive immigration policies of the 1920's. Since then, some 20 million immigrants have entered the United States.

In 1994, there were about 22.5 million foreign born people in the American population. Of all the first world countries, the United States currently receives twice as many refugees and immigrants as the rest of the world combined.

Today's immigrants represent the largest wave of foreign newcomers since the huge influx at the turn of the century.

What drew people to America in the past, and what happened to them, and to America, once they arrived here? What about today's immigrant?

David Kennedy draws upon a quote of General George S. Patton, as he was addressing his troops on the eve of the invasion of Sicily. Somehow I envision George C. Scott in his stirring role of this controversial man. Patton said, starched, brilliant and ready, " When we land, we will meet German and Italian soldiers whom it is our honor and privilege to attack and destroy. Many of you have in your veins German and Italian blood, but remember that these ancestors of yours so loved freedom that they gave up home and country to cross the ocean in search of liberty. The ancestors of the people we shall kill lacked the courage to make such a sacrifice, and continued as slaves."

The standard explanation given for the arrival of our immigrant forebearers, the one that stuck with me throughout my formal, albeit basic American History education was pretty well, although with a bit more verve, captured by this summary of immigration given by General Patton: that immigrants coming to America were the main-chance seeking and most energetic, entrepreneurial, and freedom-loving members of their Old World societies.

They were drawn out of Europe by the irresistible magnet of American opportunity and liberty, and their galvanizing influence on American society made this country the greatest in the world.

Completely different ideas about immigration have been present in American thought, however, especially since the large immigration wave at the turn of the century. The social scientist Edward Alsworth Ross said, "Observe immigrants, not as they come travel-wan up the gang plank, nor as they issue toil begrimed from the pit's mouth or mill gate, but in their gatherings, washed, combed, and in their Sunday best. They are hirsute, low browed, big faced persons of obviously low mentality. They simply look out of place in black clothes and stiff collar, since they belong in skins, in wattled huts at the close of the Great Ice Age. These Ox-like men are descendants of those who always stayed behind.

The author was not describing the teenagers of the 1990's, but what his turn of the century contemporaries called the "new immigrants". They were called "new" because this wave of immigrants came predominately from eastern and southern Europe, in contrast to the "old immigrants" of the early and mid 1800's , who had come mainly from northern and western Europe.

American views on immigration still seem to oscillate between those opposing viewpoints, interpretations, prejudices, and philosophies.

On one hand Immigrants are regarded as noble souls, tugged toward America as the land of opportunity. A cartoon from the 1880s shows Uncle Sam beckoning a line of immigrants onto the boat taking them from their shores. A billboard posted to those waiting in line reads "No oppressive taxes; No expensive Kings; no compulsory military service". And on the boat, further hawking the American opportunity, "Free education, free land, free speech, free ballot", and, as perhaps unknowingly able to look into the future, "free lunch". It is in this optimistic, rosy view that the immigrants' talents, genius and love of liberty account for the magnificent American character.

The other view, especially if soured on the "new immigrant" like Ross, was the view of immigrants as degraded freeloading louts, a blight on the national character and a drain on the economy, destitute, and here for a handout. Emma Lazarus's inscription on the base of the statue of Liberty describes these people all too literally, according to some critics-" your tired, your poor....the retched refuse of your teeming shore".

Bill Murray, playing the character John Winger in the film "Stripes", rallied his fellow boot camp trainees with the motivational speech explaining that we are, and should be, proud Americans, here together sharing the common experience because our ancestors were thrown out of every otherwise decent country in the world. He further explained that we are mutts, a mixture of all types , and that no one is really different from anyone else.

The above have all been cited as "pull factors" in explaining the movement of some 35 million people over the course of a century. They all point out that whatever the drawing force, it was in alignment with the moral character of the immigrants, and it was a matter of individual choice. America was a magnet, drawing the immigrant to either a land of opportunity or dependency.

There is an horrible, unique facet of immigration history that is in a category by itself.

When tallying the total numbers of immigrants to America, the largest country of origin up until the early 1800s was Africa. The involuntary movement of those 10 million Africans was not because of their individual character ideals, the pull of American opportunity, or other matters of individual choice. This was due to the large scale development of plantation agriculture, and the human slavery forcibly imported to run them.

Social scientists also site "push factors" as frequently overlooked forces that are helpful to consider when grappling with understanding what happened, what forces control where we are now, and where we're going, with regards to the significant effect of immigration on our population size and composition.

Disruption seems to be a strong, if not essential "push factor" when considering reasons for the large scale movement seen in the massive European migration to America.

The first important disruptive influence was relatively rapid population growth. In the 1800s the population of Europe nearly doubled. This boom occurred primarily due to improvements in diet, and disease control. Sanitation still ranks as arguably the most cost effective technological advance in medical history.

The second disruption or development was the Industrial Revolution. Cottage industries became factory jobs; there was movement from the countryside to the cities, many of those who were rural farmers becoming city wage laborers. This massive movement of people sometimes overwhelmed the urban labor system and those who could not be reabsorbed domestically, or couldn't make the transition, migrated overseas. The concept of such a trip being made was somewhat more feasible for a larger number of people with larger, faster, improved boats, with comparatively less costly fares, and with relatively increased safety.

Sociologists present an interesting model, explaining the timing, the geographic evolution, and the composition of the great European migration.

This view traced the time line of the Industrial Revolution across Europe, from the British Isles late in the 1700s , across the low countries and Germany in the early and mid 1800s and to eastern and southern Europe in the late 1880s and early 1900s. If a second line traces the chronologic evolution of migration the United States, one finds that the two lines are nearly the same. Immigration came principally from the British Isles in the 1700s and early 1800s, then mainly from Germany, etc., then from middle Europe, and finally from southern and eastern Europe. This is an interesting and an entirely plausible example of the forces in Europe acting as push factors in the Great European Migration.

Tens of millions of new immigrants managed to accommodate themselves in America with relatively great success. There were problems: bigotry, resentment, hate, jealousy, anti-whatever non-majority religion you happened to be a part of , and other forms of anti-foreign radicalism, culminating in the highly discriminatory and restrictive immigration legislation of the 1920s, selectively severely limiting further immigration from eastern and southern Europe. But the immigrants of these times did generally succeed in the process of finding a productive life in America. America also was very successful in finding space for all these people in a relatively short period of time. This was not by social policy, as there wasn't anything substantial, once the immigrant passed the ports of entry.

The new immigrants were successful in the early 1900s as a result of three historical circumstances.

First, the 17 million who arrived here from 1890 to 1914 , never really made up a very large component of the already enormous society that was turn of the century America. That 14.7% was then, and still is, the record for the highest percentage of foreign-born people in the United States. As many people as that was, it still represented a small percentage of the American population. This was a significant factor in the success of this immigrant wave.

The second circumstance was economic. The growing economy needed more workers than the native population could have provided, and the immigrants filled the labor void.

The third was pluralism. The European immigrant population was highly varied in its cultural, religious, national, and linguistic origins. They also distributed themselves over a large geographic region, the entire northeastern quadrant of the United States, and by the 1920s had spread all the way out to Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Varied composition and broad dispersal of the immigrant population carried certain implications; No one immigrant group could realistically aspire to

preserve its Old World culture intact for more than a few generations at best, although many tried with earnest, and were moderately successful for a time. The pluralistic nature of this group also meant that neither any single immigrant group nor immigrants as a whole could mount any kind of effective challenge to the existing society's ways of doing things. No single group had enough weight to dictate a new political order.

So, immigration 100 years ago was, in large part, a product of the Industrial Revolution, spreading the urbanization of Europe to America. The mostly peaceful process of accommodation in some form came about because of the relatively small numbers of immigrants at any given time; the health of the economy; and because of pluralistic and dispersed immigrant population.

At the start I said that today's immigration situation feels different. I think what we discussed about the last big immigrant wave will help in the understanding of significant factors contributing to the present situation.

One significant difference in the present immigration situation is its composition. Over half of the immigration of the past 30 years has come from Mexico, the Philippines, China, Vietnam, Korea, India, and the Dominican Republic. Europe is no longer a significant source of people, in contrast with that earlier immigrant wave.

A great similarity of this wave of people to that at the turn of the century, however, was the push forces contributing to the move, i.e. population growth and early stages of each region's own Industrial Revolution.

Mexico, by far the present leading supplier of immigrants to the United States, conforms to that pattern. The population has tripled since WWII and there have been huge droves of urban migration. Ten million have moved into Mexico City since 1970. The Mexican economy has also grown rapidly. No doubt NAFTA will play a future part in the economics between these countries, but I will not deal with that in this paper.

So, on down logic lane. Immigration today seems to be fueled by similar forces as those that drove the great European wave of 100 years ago. The factors that ease the accommodation of the people to the nation, and the nation to the people need to be revisited to see if they too apply in a similar way as 100 years ago.

Then, accommodation was eased by (i) the relatively small number of immigrants at any given time, (ii) the needs and vitality of the economy, and (iii) the plural nature and wide distribution of the immigrant population.

Today's situation stacks up something like this:

- (i) the numbers, as a percentage of the population, of present immigrants, is about half of the 1910 percentage. Although the numbers are large, this increase in population alone should not be too difficult to absorb.
- (ii) the question of the needs and impact on the economy is confusing. Good arguments exist which conclude that the immigrant worker is good for the economy; on the other hand it is said that these same workers have a negative overall effect. It is somewhat agreed, however, that the immigrant worker stream most likely will cause shifting of a portion of the money pie from the native worker to the owners of the business and to the consumers of the goods produced by the native/immigrant combined work force, as a result of the lowered overall wages earned with the introduction of the predominantly lower skilled immigrant worker pool. Another separate but related concern is for the immigrant who is not a member of the work force.

The most basic early immigration regulations tried to deny entry to anyone likely to become social dependents, such as the chronically ill or criminals. In 1952 legislation, the highest preference was given to immigrants with levels of education, training, or abilities that were deemed to be of benefit to the United States.

The social, demographic, and economic changes initiated by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 have been dramatic and historic. The number of immigrants began to rise rapidly, from 250,000 annually in 1950 to more than 800,000 per year now, along with some 300,000 illegal aliens entering the country and staying.

The 1965 immigration legislation contained generous clauses providing for "family reunification", under which a significant portion of current immigrants are admitted not as workers, but as spouses, children, parents, and siblings of citizens or legally resident aliens. In 1993, fewer than 20 percent of immigrants entered under "employment-based" criteria. As a result, the current immigrant population differs from previous immigrant groups in that it is no longer mostly male, and it is older, the over 65 age group being represented in a significantly higher than the native composition. These immigrants over age 65 are two and a half times more likely to be on Social Security Income as the native over-65 population.

Thus the economic comparison between today and a century ago is complicated by the availability and potential attractiveness of welfare programs that did not exist 100 years ago, along with the incentive provided by the family reunification legislation.

- (iii) The pluralism, or the variety and dispersal of the immigrant stream, made it easier for the European immigrants of 100 years ago to accommodate themselves to the American society. Today, however, one large immigrant stream is flowing into a defined region from a single cultural, linguistic,

religious, and national source, Mexico. Hispanics or Latinos, predominately Mexicans, now compose 28 percent of the population of Texas, and 30 percent of California. It is estimated that , by 2050, non-Hispanic whites may form a minority population in the Unites States.

Hispanization of the southwest is sometimes called the Reconquista. The U.S. took much of this territory by force in the Mexican war of the 1840s, and now it seems, in many respects, to be returning, by a peaceful invasion to its previous owners

This is a new experience for America and for each one of its inhabitants. The Mexican-Americans will have sufficient coherence, and critical mass in a defined region. The Mexican immigration settlement is in the historically unique situation of being the actively largest immigrant group while being contiguous with its country of origin. If they choose, the Mexican immigrant may be able to preserve their distinctive culture, and never have to enter into the assimilation process by which both the newcomer and the native gives and gets to find a common ground for coexistence. Americans may have to struggle to redefine the fundamental ideas such as the meaning of citizenship and national identity.

There is no precedent in American history for these possibilities. No previous group had the size and concentration and easy access to its original culture that the Mexican immigrant group in the Southwest has today.

In the past, no legislation was deemed necessary to aid the process and direction of acculturation, or adapting to the host country's cultural standards, because alternatives to eventual acculturation were unimaginable.

Now we have legislative concerns to ensure, for example, that English is the "official" language for conducting official business.

Care must be exercised here, for if the host nation or culture panics, or loses sensitivity and tact, the fear that acculturation needs more than traditional methods may open and progressively widen a breach between cultures.

We must be increasingly sensitive to these forces at play to avoid the specter of cultural warfare. Although many facets and forces of the previous immigration wave can be seen again in the present immigration surge, today's situation is unique. We must continue to educate ourselves and share in the mission of immigration problem-solving nationally, and in our own lives, and those of our associates and acquaintances.

George Borjas ("Horhay Borha") , points out that, concerning how many immigrants to admit annually to the country to best serve the well being of the native economy, we should admit immigrants whenever their economic contribution will exceed the costs of providing social services to them. The magic number would best be a flexible one linked to the economic situation

of the United States, admitting more when the economy is strong and the unemployment is low, and cut back on immigration when the economy is weak and unemployment rate is high.

The U.S. would be better off economically if its policy of awarding visas favored skilled workers. Skilled workers earn more than less skilled immigrants, and hence pay more in taxes, and they are less likely to use welfare and other social services. Immigration policy as it has been functioning recently, favors the influx of the less skilled worker, redistributes wealth from the native worker to the company owners and to the consumers of the goods. The longer the present policy is in place, the greater the redistribution of wealth, and the more the risk for tremendous political, economic, and cultural implications of a future great shift in immigration policy.

As we face future issues, we must consider all the implications of the "melting pot" metaphor, introduced by Israel Zangwill in 1908. In this metaphor, the national alloy resulted from the intermingling of diverse ethnicities and cultures. This implies that the new human products of the melting pot would be culturally indistinguishable. Also implied, however, is that natives and their indigenous cultural characteristics are irreversibly changed beyond recognition as well. This metaphor has had many critics, from those who say that the "melt" never did occur to any great extent, to those who believe that the American nationality should not be called upon to change at all, while the newcomers should be expected to discard conform to American ways.

Peter Salins points out that the greatest hallmark of assimilation, in the uniquely American style, is that immigrants are free to retain or discard as much or as little of their homeland cultures as they wish, without compromising their assimilation. This unique, American form of assimilation has always been much more flexible and accommodating and, consequently, much more effective in achieving its purpose - to allow the United States to preserve its national unity.

I believe we must intensify our efforts toward embracing the concept that we, the native culture, will continue to change. Change, while inducing fear of the unknown, is also an opportunity to grow in ways yet to be understood. We must continue to be more flexible and accommodating. It has been the successful formula toward maintaining national unity in the past, and it will be the blueprint, if intensified, constantly revised and tuned, of the social tool with which we can best face future cultural challenges from immigration.

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