Immigration and Ethnicity: The United States at the Dawn of the 21st Century

Rubén G. Rumbaut

The Blackwell Companion to Sociology is a milestone collection of new essays by renowned sociologists, covering both the traditions and strengths of the field as well as newer developments and directions. Authors from the US, the UK, Europe and elsewhere have contributed to this all-in-one reference work, highlighting the relevance of interdisciplinary and international perspectives, while at the same time representing the scope and quality of sociology in its current form.

Table of Contents

List of contributors.
Preface.

Part I: Referencing Globalization:

1. The Sociology of Space and Place: John Urry (Lancaster University).
2. Media and Communications: John Durham Peters (University of Iowa).
3. Modernity—One or Many? : Peter Wagner (University of Warwick).
4. Emerging Trends in Environmental Sociology Frederick H. Buttel (University of Wisconsin, Madison) and August Gijswijt (International Sociological Association).

Part II: Relationships and Meaning:

6. Civil Society: A Signifier of Plurality and Sense of Wholeness: Barbara A. Misztal (Griffith University, Brisbane).
8. Sociology of Religion: Christian Smith (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill) and Robert D. Woodberry (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill).
9. Intimate Relationships: Raine Dozier (University of Washington) and Pepper Schwartz (University of Washington).

Part III: Economic Inequalities:

11. On Inequality: Siddiquur Rahman Osmani (University of Ulster).
12. The Persistence of Poverty in a Changing World: Melvin L. Oliver (Ford Foundation) and David M. Grant (Cleveland State University).
13. Racial Economic Inequality in the USA: William A. Darity, Jr. (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and Samuel L. Myers, Jr. (University of Minnesota).

Part IV: Science, Knowledge, and Ideas:

15. The Sociology of Science and the Revolution in Molecular Biology: Troy Duster (University of California, Berkeley).
16. Structures of Knowledge: Richard E. Lee (State University of New York at Binghamton) and Immanuel Wallerstein (Binghamton University).


Part V: Politics and Political Movements:

18. Political Sociology: Mike Savage (University of Manchester).

19. Why Social Movements Come into Being and Why People Join Them: Bert Klandermans (Free University, Amsterdam).


Part VI: Structures: Stratification, Networks, and Firms:

21. Occupations, Stratification, and Mobility: Donald J. Treiman (University of California at Los Angeles).

22. Social Networks: Bonnie Erickson (University of Toronto).

23. Networks and Organizations: David Knoke (University of Minnesota).

Part VII: Social Inequalities: Individuals and Their Well Being:

24. Social Inequality, Stress, and Health: Joseph E. Schwartz (State University of New York at Stony Brook).

25. Two Research Traditions in the Sociology of Education: Maureen T. Hallinan (University of Notre Dame).

26. Aging and Aging Policy in the US: Madonna Harrington Meyer (Syracuse University) and Pamela Herd (Syracuse University).


Part VIII: Social Action:

29. Immigrant Women and Paid Domestic Work: Research, Theory, and Activism: Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (University of Southern California).

30. The Subject and Societal Movements: Alain Touraine (École des Hautes Études).

31. The Myth of the Labor Movement: Rick Fantasia (Smith College).

Appendix: Data Resources on the World Wide-Web: Compiled by Kathryn Harker (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

Bibliography.

Index.
American ethnic groups have been forged, along with peculiarly American ideologies and classifications of “race,” in the tumultuous course of the United States’ national expansion. In myriad ways, their unequal modes of incorporation reflect fundamentally different starting points, contexts of reception, and attendant definitions of the situation. The development of social, political, and economic inequalities based on race and ethnicity has been not only a central theme but a central dilemma of the country’s history, shaped over many generations by the European conquest of indigenous peoples and by massive waves of both voluntary and involuntary migration from all over the world. Indeed, immigration as well as enslavement, annexation and conquest have been the originating processes by which American ethnicities have been formed and through which, over time, the United States has been transformed into what is arguably the world’s most ethnically diverse society. The national self-image created by that history reflects the experience of a country that has time and again been revitalized and renewed by immigration. But chimerical conceptions of “race” also derive from those fateful encounters, those social relations formed between strangers: phenotypical and cultural differences came to be associated with steep gradients of privilege and power, and became hardened into invidious, indelible, outward markers of social status and identity in caste and class hierarchies. It took a bloody civil war in one century, and a civil rights revolution in the next, to end slavery and the legal underpinnings of racial exclusion, but not their bitter legacy. What’s past is prologue.

Already in The Souls of Black Folk, written soon after Africa was partitioned by European colonial powers and Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam and the Hawaiian islands were seized by the United States in the wake of the Spanish-American-Cuban War, W.E.B. DuBois had prophesied famously that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line--the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (1989 [1903], p. 10). To be sure, much has changed since then in international and intergroup relations, mainly in the years after World War II, including the decolonization of Africa and Asia and the English-speaking Caribbean, and the dismantling of Jim Crow in the United States. But much has not, so that another preeminent African American scholar, John Hope Franklin, could recently "venture to state categorically that the problem of the twenty-first century will be the problem of the color line" (1993, p 5).

That “color line” has historically defined the boundary between two broad modes of ethnic incorporation into American social life: one epitomized by “assimilation,” the master process that purports to explain how it came to be that tens of millions of European immigrants from heterogeneous national and cultural origins and their descendants were absorbed into the mainstream of the society, their identities eventually becoming largely symbolic and fading into a “twilight of ethnicity” (Nahirny and Fishman, 1996 [1965]; Gans 1979; Alba 1985; Waters 1990; but see also Glazer and Moynihan 1963); and another largely resistant to such absorption into the majority regardless of level of acculturation or socioeconomic attainment, characterized instead by persistently high social distances in intergroup relations, discrimination, and segregation of racialized minorities (cf. Massey and Denton 1993; Pedraza and Rumbaut 1996). Thus, for example, in The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups (1945), the most authoritative statement of the matter near mid-century, Warner and Srole described the straight-line "progressive
advance” of eight immigrant groups in the major status hierarchies of Yankee City (Newburyport, Massachusetts), explicitly linking upward social mobility to assimilation, which they saw as determined largely by the degree of ethnocultural (religion and language) and above all racial difference from the dominant group. While “racial groups” were subordinated through caste restrictions on residential, occupational, associational, and marital choice, the clash of “ethnic groups” with the dominant institutions of the “host society” was not much of a contest, particularly among the young. The polity, the industrial economy, the public school, popular culture, and the American family system all undercut and absorbed ethnicity in various ways, so that even when “the ethnic parent tries to orient the child to an ethnic past… the child often insists on being more American than Americans” (p. 284). And for the upwardly mobile, with socioeconomic success came intermarriage and the further dilution of ethnicity.

Our conventional models of immigrant acculturation and ethnic self-identification processes largely derive from the historical experience of those (and earlier) European immigrants and their descendants. Indeed, only a few decades before, the large-scale “new” immigration of putatively “unassimilable” southern and eastern Europeans—Italians, Poles, Greeks, Russian Jews, and many others—had occasioned vitriolic public alarms and widespread fears about the “mongrelization of the race,” culminating in forced Americanization campaigns and the passage of the restrictionist national-origins quota laws of the 1920s (cf. Higham 1955). But today a new era of mass immigration, now overwhelmingly non-European in composition, is again raising familiar doubts about the assimilability of the newcomers and the dark prospect that they might become consigned to a vast multiethnic underclass—and questions about the applicability of explanatory models developed in connection with the experience of European ethnics.

The Size, Composition, and Concentration of Contemporary Immigration

At the dawn of the 21st century, new American ethnic groups are forming faster than ever before, an outcome now due entirely to international migration and once more accompanied by the official construction of ethnoracial categories into which to classify them. The emerging ethnic groups of the 21st century will be the children and grandchildren of today’s immigrants. Their numbers and diversity will ensure that the process will have a profound societal impact, although it is too early to grasp except in opaque speculation their probable trajectories of incorporation. Four decades into a new era of mass immigration, it is now a commonplace to observe that the United States is in the midst of its most profound demographic transformation in a century. Whether in terms of its size, composition, or spatial concentration, the sheer magnitude of the phenomenon is impressive (see Table 1). The “foreign [or immigrant] stock” population of the United States in 1997 numbered approximately 55 million people—that is, persons who are either foreign-born (27 million) or U.S.-born children of immigrants (28 million). That figure is one fifth (20.5%) of the total U.S. population, and growing rapidly through ongoing immigration and natural increase (Rumbaut 1998).

Still, as Table 1 shows, the current proportions fall well short of those that obtained during the last era of mass immigration a century ago. During the period from 1880 to 1930, the foreign-stock population consistently comprised one-third of the national total (peaking at 35.3% in the 1910 census), with the foreign-born share reaching nearly 15% of
the total in 1890 and again in 1910, compared to 8% in 1990 and 10% today. In that earlier period, it was not only the sheer size of the immigration flows but the sharp shift in its national origins after 1890 from northwest to southern and eastern European countries that heightened nativist fears. Today’s immigration is likewise large in volume and marked by an even sharper shift in its composition: while the proportion of immigrants arriving during 1880-1900 came overwhelmingly from Europe (97%), the proportion of European immigrants arriving during 1980-1998 plummeted to just over 10% of the total number of legal admissions. Of today’s 27 million foreign-born—already the largest immigrant population in world history—fully 60 percent had arrived after 1980, and 90 percent since 1960. Of those post-1960 immigrants, the latest Current Population Survey data available show that the majority (52 percent) had come from Latin America and the Caribbean; nearly a third (29 percent) had come from Asia and the Middle East. The Filipinos, Chinese, and Indochinese alone accounted for 15 percent of the total, or as much as all of those born in Europe and Canada combined. And African immigration, while smaller and less noticed, was also rapidly increasing, having grown to eight times its volume over the past three decades.

**[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]**

As in the past, today’s newcomers are heavily concentrated in areas of settlement. Fully one-third of the immigrant-stock population of the country resides in California, and another third resides in Florida, Texas, and the New York-New Jersey region, with the ethnic concentrations being denser still within metropolitan areas in this handful of states. As of 1997 in Los Angeles County, for instance, a preponderant 62 percent of the area’s 9.5 million people were of immigrant stock, as were 54 percent of New York City’s and Orange County’s, 43 percent of San Diego’s, and 72 percent of Miami’s (Rumbaut 1998). In general, patterns of concentration or dispersal vary for different social classes of immigrants (professionals, entrepreneurs, manual laborers) with different types of legal status (regular immigrants, refugees, the undocumented). The likelihood of dispersal is greatest among immigrant professionals, who tend to rely more on their qualifications and job offers than on pre-existing ethnic communities; and, at least initially, among recent refugees who are sponsored and resettled through official government programs that have sought deliberately to minimize their numbers in particular localities (although refugee groups too have shown a tendency to gravitate as "secondary migrants" to areas where their compatriots have clustered, as have Cubans to South Florida, Southeast Asians to California). The likelihood of concentration is greatest among the undocumented (e.g., over 25 percent of the 3 million IRCA applicants who qualified for amnesty nationally were concentrated in the Los Angeles metropolitan area alone) and working-class immigrants, who tend to rely more on the assistance offered by pre-existing kinship networks; and among business-oriented groups, who tend to settle in large cities. Dense ethnic enclaves provide immigrant entrepreneurs with access to sources of cheap labor, working capital and credit, and dependable markets. Over time, as the immigrants become naturalized U.S. citizens, local strength in numbers also provides opportunities for political advancement and representation of ethnic minority group interests at the ballot box. The research literature has shown that, among legal immigrants and refugees, the motivation and propensity to naturalize is higher among upwardly-mobile younger persons with higher levels of education, occupational status, English proficiency, income and property,
and those whose spouses or children are U.S. citizens. Undocumented immigrants by definition remain disenfranchised and politically powerless (Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

But unlike the last great waves of European immigration, which were halted by the passage of restrictive legislation in the 1920s and especially by the back-to-back global cataclysms of the Great Depression and World War II, the current flows show no sign of abating. On the contrary, inasmuch as immigration is a network-driven phenomenon and the United States remains the premier destination for a world on the move, the likelihood is that it will continue indefinitely. To varying degrees of closeness, the tens of millions of immigrants and their children in the U.S. today are embedded in often intricate webs of family ties, both here and abroad. Such ties form extraordinary transnational linkages and networks that can, by reducing the costs and risks of migration, expand and serve as a conduit to additional and thus potentially self-perpetuating migration. Remarkably, for example, a recent poll in the Dominican Republic found that half of the 7.5 million Dominicans have relatives in the U.S. and two-thirds would move to the U.S. if they could. Similarly, by the end of the 1980s, national surveys in Mexico (a country now of 100 million people) found that about half of adult Mexicans were related to someone living in the United States, and that one third of all Mexicans had been to the United States at some point in their lives; more recent surveys suggest still larger proportions (Massey and Espinoza 1997). Immigrants in the U.S. in 1990 who hailed from the English-speaking Caribbean, notably from Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Belize, and Guyana, already constituted between 10% and 20% of the 1990 populations of their respective countries—a growing double-digit group which now also includes El Salvador. By the same token, despite four decades of hostile relations, at least a third of Cuba's population of 11 million (and maybe half of Havana's) now have relatives in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, while over 75% of first- and second-generation Cubans in Miami have relatives in Cuba—ironically, a greater degree of structural linkage than ever before in the history of U.S.-Cuba relations. Not surprisingly, when in July 1999 the U.S. diplomatic mission in Havana held a lottery for 20,000 immigration visas to the U.S., it received 541,000 applications in 30 days—meaning that about 10 percent of the total eligible population of Cuba applied to leave. Potentially vast social networks of family and friends are implied by these figures, microsocial structures that can shape both future migration and incorporation processes, as well as patterns of settlement in areas of destination, and may offer hints about the future of American pluralism (Rumbaut 1997).

Causes and Contexts of Contemporary Immigration

Changes in U.S. immigration laws—in particular the amendments passed in 1965, which abolished the national-origins quota system and changed the preference system to give greater priority to family reunification over occupational skills—have often been singled out as the principal reason for the "new immigration" and the change in the national origins of its composition. But the ostensibly causal effects of the 1965 Act have been exaggerated, especially so with regard to Latin American immigration (legal or illegal) and the large-scale entry of Cold War refugees. It bears emphasizing that until this law was passed, Western Hemisphere immigration had been unrestricted, largely at the behest of American agribusiness; and in fact, as Aristide Zolberg has pointed out (1995, p. 155), the legislative history of the 1965 Act "indicates very clearly that the objective was to deter the growth of black and brown immigration" from Latin America and the
Caribbean, while increasing that from Southern and Eastern Europe. For that matter, the 1965 law had nothing to do with determining, for instance, the huge Cuban exile flows of the early 1960s, or the even larger Indochinese refugee flows that would follow much later in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. What is more, the most important consequences of the 1965 Act, notably the rapid growth of previously barred immigration from Asian and African countries in the Eastern Hemisphere, were largely unintended.

The law does matter, of course: it influences migration decisions, regulates the migration process, and constitutes a key context of reception shaping the incorporation of newcomers, especially their right to full membership and future citizenship. Thus, the right of an immigrant to become a U.S. citizen through naturalization was legally restricted on racial grounds until 1952. The first federal naturalization law of 1790 gave that right only to "free white persons," and a revised law in 1870 extended it to persons of African descent or nativity. Moreover, the original native inhabitants of the continent were presumed to be "loyal to their tribes" and not granted United States citizenship until 1924. Most Asian immigrants were excluded from access to American citizenship until the McCarran-Walter Act of 1952. Asian Indians had been able to naturalize on the grounds that they were Caucasians until the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 1923 case, decided that they would no longer be considered white persons. The Chinese were removed from the classes of "aliens ineligible for citizenship" upon the repeal of the [1882] Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, when China and the U.S. were World War II allies. In all of these instances and many more, the law, backed up by the public force of the state, provides a source of political capital unavailable to residents without legal standing (see Aleinikoff and Rumbaut 1998). But it cannot control historical forces or determine the size or source of migration flows.

International migrations are rooted in historical relationships established between the sending and receiving countries—rooted in colonialism, war and military occupation, labor recruitment and economic interaction—through which migration footholds are formed, kinship networks expand, remittances (in the tens of billions of dollars annually) sent by immigrants to their families abroad link communities across national borders, and all of this turns migration into a social process of vast transformative significance, both for countries of origin and of destination, and one sustained by factors that extend beyond the realm of government action or the economic impulses that originally generated it. To be sure, migration pressures as a result of global inequality can only mount in a world that is more and more a place with a declining proportion of rich people and a growing proportion of poor people. Today, the biggest such development rift in the globe is located along the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border, and indeed the longest, largest, and most continuous labor migration anywhere in the world is that from Mexico to the United States. The National Population Council predicted in 1999 that as many as 8 million more Mexicans will migrate north of the border by 2020 unless Mexico manages to create one million jobs per year to meet population growth. But even in this paradigmatic instance the story is not reducible to a neoclassical economic function of wage differentials, employer demand and labor supply.

While today's immigrants come from over 150 different countries, some regions and nations send many more than others, despite the equitable numerical quotas provided to each country by U.S. law since 1965. Indeed, less than a dozen countries account for
the majority of all immigration to the U.S. One pattern, a continuation of trends already under way in the 1950s, is clear: immigration from the more developed countries has declined over time, while that from less developed countries has accelerated. However, among the less developed countries, the major sources of legal and illegal immigration are located either in the Caribbean Basin—in the immediate periphery of the U.S.—or are a handful of Asian nations also characterized by significant historical ties to the U.S. In fact, immigrants from Mexico and the Philippines alone account for a third of the total. These two countries share the deepest structural linkages with the U.S., dating to the Mexican and Spanish-American Wars in the last century, and a long history of dependency relationships, external intervention and (in the Philippines) direct colonization, as well as decades of active agricultural labor recruitment by the U.S.—of Mexicans to the Southwest, Filipinos to plantations in Hawaii and California—that preceded the establishment of family networks and chain migrations. The extensive U.S. military presence in the Philippines has also fueled immigration through marriages with U.S. citizens stationed there, through unique arrangements granting U.S. citizenship to Filipinos who served in the armed forces during World War II, and through recruitment of Filipinos into the U.S. Navy. Tellingly, in their analysis of spouse-immigrant flows, Jasso and Rosenzweig (1990) found that the most powerful determinant of the number of immigrants admitted as wives of U.S. citizens was the presence of a U.S. military base in the country of origin. Geopolitical factors thus shape the marriage market in immigrant visas, a vivid example of the connection between macro and micro social structures.

American foreign policy in the transformed post-World War II world, notably the doctrine and practice of global communist containment, is itself a key factor in explaining several of the most sizable migrations from different world regions—indeed, in effectively helping to create the conditions that generated the flows in the first place (cf. Zolberg, Shurke, and Aguayo 1989). During the Cold War this included direct U.S. involvement in "hot" wars in Korea, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Central America, and interventions in Guatemala, Iran, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and elsewhere—all of whom, not coincidentally, are among the leading source countries of contemporary immigrants and refugees. Among the most numerous recent European arrivals have been (former) Soviet Jews and Poles, admitted mainly as political refugees, like other groups from communist countries. Emigration connections forged by U.S. intervention and foreign policies were also a common denominator in the exodus of the Chinese after the 1949 revolution (and more recently in the issuance of immigrant visas to tens of thousands of Chinese students in the U.S. after the events of Tienanmen Square in 1989), and Iranians after the 1978 revolution. Indeed, immigrants from the four communist countries figuring most prominently in American foreign policy—Cuba, Vietnam, China and the (former) Soviet Union—accounted in 1997 for nearly one-sixth of the total U.S. foreign-born population (exceeded only by Mexico and the Philippines). In short, contemporary immigration to the U.S. and the creation and consolidation of social networks that serve as bridges of passage to America have taken place within this larger historical context and cannot be adequately understood outside of it, nor reduced to a cost-benefit economic calculus of individual migrants or to the immigration laws of particular states.

The size and source of new immigrant communities in the U.S. today are thus directly if variously related to the history of American military, political, economic and—pervasively—cultural involvement in the major sending countries, and to the linkages that
are formed in the process which (often unintentionally) open a surprising variety of legal and illegal migration pathways. Ironically, immigration to the United States—and the pluralization of American ethnicity—may be understood as a dialectical consequence of the expansion of the nation to its post-World War II position of global hegemony. As the United States has become more deeply involved in the world, the world has become more deeply involved in America—indeed, in diverse ways, it has come to America (Rumbaut 1994). As such, American pluralism today is not and cannot be construed as solely an internal matter of intergroup relations, of purely domestic concern; it is also fundamentally international and transnational in its nature and scope, and reflects the U.S. role in the world.

Contemporary Immigration and Ethnic Stratification

A widespread point of view in the contentious debate about the new immigration is that it constitutes, relative to those who came in earlier decades, a "declining stock" of less educated and more welfare dependent populations, partly because of its national origins, and partly because of putatively nepotistic family reunification preferences in U.S. law (Borjas 1990). This latter contention has been rebutted by recent research that shows that immigrants who are admitted through family ties are as successful in their economic contributions as those who come under employment preferences (cf. Rumbaut 1997). Furthermore, the fact that most immigrants to the U.S. since the 1960s have come from comparatively poorer nations does not mean that the immigrants themselves are drawn from the uneducated, unskilled, or unemployed sectors of their countries of origin. In fact, a substantial proportion of contemporary immigrants exceed the human capital of native workers by a wide margin, especially in education (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). These highly educated, professional or managerial immigrants are more likely to speak English, to live in the suburbs, and to accommodate to "American ways"—and “invisibly” at that, meaning that they are not publicly perceived as a "problem." Available occupational data from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)—indicating the number employed as professionals, executives, and managers at the time of immigrant admission—show that over the past three decades, well over two million immigrant engineers, scientists, university professors, physicians, nurses, and other professionals and executives and their immediate families have been admitted into the U.S. From the late 1960s to the late 1990s, one-third of all legal immigrants worldwide to the U.S. (excluding dependents) were high-status professionals, executives or managers in their countries of origin—a higher percentage than that of the native-born American population—despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of immigrants were admitted under family preferences over this period (Rumbaut 1997).

Still, there are very sharp differences in the class, and “ethclass” (Gordon 1964), character of contemporary immigration to the U.S. In fact, the diversity of contemporary immigration is such that, among all ethnic groups in America today, native and foreign-born, different immigrant nationalities account at once for the highest and the lowest rates of education, self-employment, home-ownership, poverty, welfare dependency, and fertility—as well as the lowest rates of divorce and of female-headed single-parent families, and the highest proportions of children under 18 residing with both natural parents. These differential starting points, especially the internal socioeconomic diversification of particular waves and “vintages” within the same nationalities over time,
augur differential modes of incorporation and assimilation outcomes that cannot be extrapolated simply from the experience of earlier immigrant groups of the same nationality, let alone from immigrants as an undifferentiated whole.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Table 2 ranks the principal U.S. immigrant groups by their proportion of college graduates among adults 25 and older, and compares them to native racial-ethnic groups on various indicators of socioeconomic status (as of the last census). The foreign-born as a whole had the same proportion of college graduates (20 percent) as the native-born population, as well as an equivalent rate of labor force participation and self-employment. They were, however, more likely than natives to be poor and to work in low-status jobs. But decontextualized data at this level of analysis conceal far more than they reveal, although that is often the level at which arguments about the supposedly "declining stock" of new immigrants are made. It is worth repeating that, by far, the most educated and the least educated ethnic groups in the U.S. today are immigrants, a reflection of polar-opposite types of migrations embedded in very different historical contexts. Disaggregated by region and country of birth, the huge differences among them are made clear, underscoring the fact that these groups cannot sensibly be subsumed under pan-national, one-size-fits-all, made-in-the-USA racialized categories like "Asians" or "Latinos"—or "blacks" or "whites." Not, that is, without obliterating the entire histories, cultures and identities of distinct peoples in the process—an unintended consequence of official ethnoracial classifications. (Since 1977, those categories have been set by Statistical Directive 15 of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget, the agency responsible for determining standard classifications of racial and ethnic data on all federal forms and statistics, including the census. OMB Directive 15 fixed the identities of Americans in five broad categories for statistical and administrative purposes, but through widespread public use the categories soon began to shape those identities and have evolved into political entities, with their own constituencies, lobbies and vested interests.)

One point that stands out in Table 2 is the extremely high degree of educational attainment among immigrants from the developing countries of Africa and Asia—47 and 38 percent were college graduates, respectively. An upper stratum is composed of the most sizeable foreign-born groups whose educational and occupational attainments significantly exceeded the average for the native-born American population. Note that all of them are of Asian origin—from India, Taiwan, Iran, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, and China—with recently immigrated groups reflecting the highest levels of attainment. Also in this upper stratum (not shown in Table 2) were smaller immigrant groups, notably from Nigeria, Egypt, South Africa, Kenya, Israel, Lebanon, Ghana, and Argentina. In fact, by the mid-1970s, one-fifth of all U.S. physicians were immigrants, and there were already more foreign medical graduates from India and the Philippines in the U.S. than native African American physicians. By the mid-1980s, over half of all doctoral degrees in engineering awarded by U.S. universities were earned by foreign-born students, with one-fifth of all engineering doctorates going to students from Taiwan, India and South Korea alone; and one third of all engineers with a doctorate working in U.S. industry were immigrants. These "brain drain" immigrants are perhaps the most skilled ever to come to the United States. Their class origins help explain the popularization of
Asians as a "model minority" and to debunk nativist calls for restricting immigrants to those perceived to be more "assimilable" on the basis of color, language and culture.

By contrast, as Table 2 shows, the lower socioeconomic stratum includes recent immigrants from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, and to a lesser extent Haiti—many of whom were undocumented. They had higher rates of labor force participation but much lower levels of educational attainment, were concentrated in low-wage unskilled jobs, and had poverty rates as high as those of native minority groups though much lower proportions of households on welfare. Here also were less educated but less visible and older European immigrants from Italy and Portugal (34 percent of Portuguese adult immigrants had less than a fifth grade education, compared to less than 2 percent of the total U.S.-born population). And two Asian-origin nationalities, Laotian and Cambodian refugees, exhibited by far the highest rates of poverty and welfare dependency in the U.S. Southeast Asians and to a lesser extent Chinese and Korean workers are much in evidence, along with undocumented Mexican and Central American immigrants, in a vast underground sweatshop economy that expanded during the 1980s and 1990s in Southern California. These data too debunk stereotypes that have been propounded in the mass media as explanations of "Asian" success, and point instead to the contextual diversity of recent immigration and to the class advantages and disadvantages of particular groups.

A middle stratum, composed of groups whose educational and occupational characteristics are close to the U.S. average, is even more heterogeneous in terms of national origin, as seen in Table 2. It includes older immigrants from the Soviet Union, Britain, Canada and Germany, and more recent immigrants from Vietnam, Cuba, Colombia, and Jamaica. However, not at all evident in Table 2 is the fact that within particular nationalities there are often also many class differences which reflect different "waves" and immigration histories. For example, while 31 percent of adult immigrants from China have college degrees, 16 percent have less than a fifth grade education. Desperate Haitian boat people arriving by the thousands in the 1980s and 1990s mask an upper-middle-class flow of escapees from the Duvalier regime in the early 1960s; by 1972 the number of Haitian physicians in the U.S. represented an incredible 95 percent of Haiti's stock. Similarly, the post-1980 waves of Cuban Mariel refugees and Vietnamese "boat people" from modest social class backgrounds differed sharply from the elite "first waves" of the 1959-1962 Cubans and the 1975 Vietnamese, underscoring the internal diversification of particular national flows over time—and the complexities of contemporary “ethclass” formations.

Among the employed, the percentage of older, longer-established Canadian and certain European immigrants in professional specialties exceeds the respective proportion of their groups who are college graduates; but the percentage of recently-arrived Asian immigrants who are employed in the professions is generally far below their respective proportions of college graduates. These discrepancies between educational and occupational attainment point to barriers such as English proficiency and strict licensing requirements that regulate entry into the professions and that recent immigrants--most of them non-white, non-European, and non-English speakers--must confront as they seek to make their way in America. In response, some immigrants shift instead to entrepreneurship as an avenue of economic advancement and as an alternative to
employment in segmented labor markets. As Table 2 shows, Korean immigrants are the leading example of this entrepreneurial mode of incorporation, with self-employment rates that are higher by far than any other native-born or foreign-born groups.

Some Questions and Reflections on American Pluralism

The rapid growth of this emerging population—unprecedented in its diversity of color, class, and cultural origin—is changing fundamentally the ethnic and racial composition and stratification of the American population, and perhaps also the social meanings of race and ethnicity, and of American identity. All of this has led to a burgeoning research literature (cf. Smith and Edmonston 1997; Hirschman, Kasinitz and DeWind 1999), and an intensified, at times xenophobic, public debate about the new immigration and its manifold impacts on American society. Less noticed has been the fact that a new second generation of Americans raised in immigrant families has been coming of age—transforming their adoptive society even as they themselves are becoming transformed into the newest Americans. Over time, its members will decisively shape the character of their ethnic communities and their success or failure (Gans 1992; Portes 1996; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 2000; Zhou 1997; Rumbaut 1998). Hence, the long-term effects of contemporary immigration will hinge more on the trajectories of these youths than on the fate of their parents. These children of today’s immigrants—a post-immigrant generation oriented not to their parents’ immigrant pasts but to their own American futures—are here to stay, and they represent the most consequential and lasting legacy of the new mass immigration to the United States.

What will the long-term national consequences will be? Will the new ethnic mosaic reinvigorate the nation or spell a quantum leap in its social problems? Will the newcomers move into the mainstream of American life or will they be marginalized into an expanded multietnic underclass? Will their social mobility be enabled by the structure of opportunities or blocked by racial discrimination and a changed economy? Will their offspring’s search for identity fade with time, acceptance and intermarriage into the “twilight of ethnicity” or will a hostile reception and a color line lead instead with heightened salience into the “high noon” of ethnicity? Different groups’ frames of remembrance and retellings of their past—their definitions of the situation—tell much about who has been included and excluded in the national narrative, and hence about the society’s contexts of reception and terms of belonging (Aleinikoff and Rumbaut 1998). As these newest members “become American,” in their own plural ways, what kinds of narratives will they tell, and on what terms of belonging? Will their children and grandchildren “repeat” the history and experience of previous waves of European immigrants? If we can learn something from that checkered past, it may be to harbor few illusions about the value of gazing into crystal balls. When those now-legendary millions of young European strangers were disembarking at Ellis Island early in this century, who could have imagined what the world would be like for their children in the 1930s, or their grandchildren in the 1960s? And today, who can foresee what world will await the children of millions of Latin American and Caribbean and Asian and African strangers in the 2020s, or their grandchildren in the 2050s? In a world changing faster than we seem to learn about it, it may be a fool’s errand to extrapolate naively and myopically from the present in order to divine the distant future.
Still, in the context of today’s debates about the one and the many, about multiculturalism and the “disuniting of America,” about the contested meaning of race, the rise of ethnic consciousness and the politics of identity, it might help to gain some distance from the objects of contention and listen for a moment to a different voice, less ethnocentric, more cosmopolitan. In The Buried Mirror (1992), his quincentennial reflections on Spain and the New World, the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, himself a progeny of that original encounter between the Old World and the New, put the matter this way:

History begs the question, How to live with the Other? How to understand that I am what I am only because another person sees me and completes me? This question, which arises every time that white and black, East and West, predecessor and immigrant, meet in our times… became the central question of conquest and colonization in the Americas (p. 89).

Writing before the passage of Propositions 187, 209 and 227, Fuentes sees “the universal question of the coming century” posed most forcefully in California, especially in Los Angeles, the world’s premier immigrant metropolis and a gateway to both Asia and Latin America. “How do we deal with the Other?” He seeks his answer in his hybrid origins: “We [Hispanics] are Indian, Black, European, but above all mixed, mestizo. We are Iberian and Greek, Roman and Jewish, Arab, Gothic and Gypsy.” Indeed, after nearly 800 years of Arab rule in Spain, lasting until the triumph of the reconquista with the fall of the last Moorish kingdom in 1492, the Arab cultural influence was pervasive, so that today fully a quarter of all Spanish words are of Arab origin. For Fuentes the answer lies in forging

centers of incorporation, not of exclusion. When we exclude, we betray ourselves. When we include, we find ourselves… People and their cultures perish in isolation, but they are born or reborn in contact with other men and women, with men and women of another culture, another creed, another race. If we do not recognize our humanity in others, we shall not recognize it in ourselves. Often we have failed to meet this challenge. But we have finally seen ourselves whole in the unburied mirror of identity, only when accompanied—ourselves with others (pp. 348, 353).

So long as ethnoracial and economic inequalities remain deeply entrenched in American institutions, such a “post-ethnic” cosmopolitan vision will fail to be fulfilled. But the United States today is in the midst of a profound transformation, and inexorable processes of globalization, especially international migrations from Asia, Africa, and the Americas, will diversify further still the polyethnic composition of its constituent populations—and make more exigent the challenge of their incorporation. At such times, and in a field as dynamic and controversial as this one, when issues of immigration, race and ethnicity command national policy attention and have become the stuff of acrimonious public debates – from assimilation to affirmative action to bilingual education to multiculturalism to border control to citizenship – there is an urgent need for an inclusive sociological vision with wide-angle lenses that can grasp the complexity of the ever-changing present within its larger historical context.
American pluralism is Janus-faced—looking behind to vastly different and even antithetical pasts, looking ahead to scarcely predictable if polythetic futures—mixing a plurality of interests, origins and outlooks capable of interpreting the nation’s “foundational fictions” and the ethnonational experience from very different vantage points. It is bound to remain thus unless and until this “permanently unfinished” country manages to reconcile the erstwhile irreconcilable dualities of its history: a country stamped at once with all of its alluring, perennial promise as a land of opportunity and fresh starts for the ambitious stranger and the tempest-tost, and with all of its enduring, bitter legacy of racial exclusion and color lines, of blocked opportunities and deferred dreams. Still, the challenge of (and to) American pluralism is not a peremptory challenge, imperious and impervious to debate; rather, it is played out in the context of a civic culture that offers room for open discussion and question. What’s past is prologue, yes; but it need not be the epilogue too. An inclusive, not intolerant, American pluralism need not produce bitter legacies, but better ones, while teaching us at once some poignant lessons of empirical sociology and universal history.

Rubén G. Rumbaut
WORKS CITED

BOOKS (ENGLISH)


**ARTICLES AND CHAPTERS**


### Table 1.
Decennial Trends, 1890-1998, in the U.S. Foreign-Born and Foreign-Stock Population (Census Bureau Data), and in Legal Immigration by Region of Origin (INS Data on Admissions to Permanent Residence)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census Year</th>
<th>U.S. Census Bureau Data: Foreign-Born and Foreign-Stock Population</th>
<th>Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Data: Legal Immigration by Decade and Region of Last Residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foreign-born&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>% of total U.S. population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N (millions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Data on nativity from decennial censuses, 1890-1990, and from the Current Population Survey for 1997. Since the 1890 census, persons born in a foreign country but who had at least one parent who was a U.S. citizen have been redefined as “native” rather than “foreign-born.” In 1997, the estimate of 25.8 million “foreign-born” persons excludes more than one million persons born in a foreign country but counted as U.S. “nationals” under this definition, which privileges citizenship status over nativity. Persons residing in the U.S. who were born (or whose parents were born) in any “outlying areas” of the U.S. are also classified as “nationals.” These have included Puerto Rico since 1900, and others at different times; e.g., persons born in the Philippines were classified as native in 1900-40 and as foreign-born in 1950 (after independence in 1946) and since.

<sup>b</sup> The “foreign-stock” population is defined as the sum of the foreign-born population (the first generation) and the native population with at least one foreign-born parent (the second generation). The question on nativity or birthplace of parents was asked in censuses from 1870 to 1970, but dropped from the 1980 and 1990 (and 2000) censuses. The question has been asked in the March Current Population Surveys annually since 1994.

<sup>c</sup> Data include 1,359,186 formerly undocumented immigrants who had resided in the U.S. since 1982 and whose status was legalized in fiscal years 1989 and 1990 under the amnesty provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986.

<sup>d</sup> Data include another 1,329,209 formerly undocumented immigrants, mostly Special Agricultural Workers, whose status was adjusted to permanent resident under IRCA in fiscal years 1991 and since. Virtually all IRCA legalizations were completed by 1993.

### Table 2.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region/ Country of Birth</th>
<th>Persons (N)</th>
<th>Median Age</th>
<th>Educationa (%)</th>
<th>Labor Force and Occupationb (%)</th>
<th>Incomec (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Graduates</td>
<td>In Labor Force</td>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>363,819</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>4,979,037</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and Canada</td>
<td>5,095,233</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America/Caribbean</td>
<td>8,416,924</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above U.S. Average:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>450,406</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>244,102</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>62.2</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>210,941</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>67.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>147,131</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>912,674</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>290,128</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>568,397</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>529,837</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>62.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near U.S. Average:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet Union *</td>
<td>333,725</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>39.7</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>640,145</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>57.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>744,830</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>711,929</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>54.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland *</td>
<td>388,328</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam *</td>
<td>543,262</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>64.4</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba *</td>
<td>736,971</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>64.1</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>286,124</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>334,140</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>177,398</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>168,659</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>169,827</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Below U.S. Average:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Public Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>225,393</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>580,592</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>347,858</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>225,739</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia *</td>
<td>118,833</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos *</td>
<td>171,577</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>210,122</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>485,433</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>4,298,014</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Foreign-Born:</strong></td>
<td>19,767,316</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Native-Born:</strong></td>
<td>228,942,557</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Native Racial-Ethnic Groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Poverty</th>
<th>Public Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian (Native-Born)</td>
<td>2,363,047</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>188,128,296</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>65.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black (Non-Hispanic)</td>
<td>29,216,293</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islanders</td>
<td>365,024</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>2,727,754</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan</td>
<td>1,959,234</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican (Native-Born)</td>
<td>8,933,371</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Educational attainment for persons aged 25 years or older.

*b* Labor force participation and occupation for employed persons 16 years or older; "Upper White-Collar" = professionals, executives, and managers; "Lower Blue-Collar" = operators, fabricators, and laborers.

*c* Percent of persons below the federal poverty line; and of households receiving public assistance income.

* Denotes country from which most recent migrants to the U.S. have been officially admitted as refugees.

**Sources:** U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Foreign Born Population in the United States*, CP-3-1, July 1993, Tables 1-5; *Persons of Hispanic Origin in the United States*, CP-3-3, August 1993, Tables 1-5; *Asian and Pacific Islanders in the United States*, CP-3-5, August 1993, Tables 1-5; and data drawn from a 5% Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the 1990 U.S. Census, subject to sample variability.