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*Changing Faces:
Immigrants and Diversity
in the Twenty-First Century*

HERMAN MELVILLE EXAGGERATED 160 years ago when he wrote, “You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the world.”¹ However, the results of the 2000 Census show that his words accurately describe the United States today. Two decades of intensive immigration are rapidly remaking our racial and ethnic mix. The American mosaic—which has always been complex—is becoming even more intricate. If diversity is a blessing, America has it in abundance.

But is diversity a blessing? In many parts of the world the answer has been no. Ethnic, racial, and religious differences often produce violence—witness the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in Sudan, and the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland. Against this background the United States has been a remarkable exception. This is not to say it is innocent of racism, bigotry, or unequal treatment—the slaughter of American Indians, slavery, Jim Crow segregation, and the continuing gap between whites and blacks on many socioeconomic indicators make clear otherwise. However, to a degree unparalleled anywhere else, America has knitted disparate peoples into one nation. The success of that effort is visible not just in America’s tremendous prosperity, but also in the patriotism that Americans, regardless of their skin color, ancestral homeland, or place of worship, feel for their country.

America has managed to build one nation out of many people for several reasons. Incorporating newcomers from diverse origins has been part of its experience from the earliest colonial days—and is ingrained in the American culture. The fact that divisions between Congregationalists and Methodists or between people of English and Irish ancestry do not animate our politics today attests not to homogeneity but to success—often hard earned—in bridging and tolerating differences. America’s embrace of “liberty and justice for all” has been the backdrop that has promoted unity. The commitment to the ideals enshrined in the Declaration of Independence gave those denied their rights a moral claim on the conscience of the majority—a claim redeemed most memorably by the civil rights movement. America’s two-party system has fostered unity by encouraging ethnic and religious groups to join forces rather than build sectarian parties that would perpetuate demographic divides. Furthermore, economic mobility has created bridges across ethnic, religious, and racial lines, thereby blurring their overlap with class divisions and diminishing their power to fuel conflict.

The tremendous changes the United States is experiencing in its racial and ethnic mix—changes that promise to continue for several decades—will test these forces that knit Americans together. At a minimum, the rapid growth in the size of America’s Latino and Asian communities as a result of immigration means that our national narrative on diversity will no longer be only, or perhaps even primarily, about whites and blacks. It will also increasingly be about what this chapter focuses on—immigrants and their progeny, many of whom do not fit neatly into either racial category. Diversity in the twenty-first century will still be about race, but it will involve a palette with more hues. How well America succeeds in weaving its newcomers into its social fabric will do much to determine whether the American experiment with diversity continues to be a success.

In this regard, some observers warn that our new, more complex American mosaic spells great trouble. In this telling of the newest episode in the long story of American diversity, the United States is becoming too diverse, too quickly. We are exceeding our capacity to absorb newcomers, creating new societal divisions, and destroying the ineffable ties that bind us together as Americans. If we fail to slow demographic change by curtailing or even halting immigration, say the pessimists, we risk destroying America.

Fears of fragmentation have a long lineage in American history. Substitute “Italian” and “Pole” for “Asian” and “Latino,” and today’s warnings would sound familiar to Americans living one hundred years ago. Of

course, claims need not be novel to be right, and America's past success at incorporating newcomers does not guarantee future success. Yet fears that increasing diversity due to immigration will be America's undoing are overblown. Americans may have become more tolerant of cultural differences, but that hardly means that the forces of assimilation have evaporated. The remarkable geographic mobility of immigrants and the willingness of Americans to marry and have children across racial and ethnic lines bring people together. True, increased diversity will change who we are; immigration always has. Nevertheless, rather than witnessing the death of America, we are more likely to relearn one of the abiding lessons of American history: it is possible to build one nation out of many people.

By the same token, however, diversity should not be romanticized. Yes, it enriches and energizes society; but it also creates stresses, many of which reflect the consequences of immigration. If ignored, these stresses could be disruptive. The remedy here, however, is not to keep immigrants out. Instead, it is to worry about what happens to them once they arrive. Whether by encouraging immigrants to become citizens, facilitating their economic and social mobility by providing them with more opportunities for English-language and vocational training, or introducing them to the ways of the bureaucracy, both government and civil society can do more to help them and their offspring become full members of American society. The fiscal costs of such policies are small; their long-term benefits for national unity are substantial.

America's increasing diversity also poses challenges for affirmative action. Although affirmative action was designed to redress the legacy of discrimination against African Americans and certain other minorities, its beneficiaries increasingly are people who arrived in the United States after the civil rights revolution began. Meanwhile, the growing number of multiracial Americans increasingly complicates affirmative action's static racial and ethnic categories. Defenders of race-based affirmative action often claim that the gains in racial equality would quickly evaporate without it. Such claims, however, underestimate the degree to which the principle of nondiscrimination has become rooted in American society—to the extent that many minorities oppose racial and ethnic preferences. Conversely, substantial support exists across racial and ethnic lines for class-based affirmative action policies. That convergence points to an opening to experiment with policies that might diminish the centrality of race and ethnicity in American life while promoting the interests of all disadvantaged Americans, regardless of their skin color or ancestral homeland.

America's Changing Faces

Americans could once be neatly categorized as either white or black. Today our national portrait is increasingly enriched with Asian, Latino, and multiracial faces. Three developments are responsible: large-scale immigration from Asia and Latin America; higher birth rates among some racial and national groups; and a growing number of interracial unions. One result of these three trends is that ethnicity, national origin, and race will remain a key feature of American identity, as it has been throughout U.S. history. At the same time, however, the changing racial and ethnic mix is not being felt uniformly across the United States or across generations. Nonetheless, the change is extensive, extending even to whom and how we worship.

John and Caroline Smith Meet Juan Carlos Guzman and Zheng Tian

A precise picture of America's growing diversity is hard to draw. One problem is that almost every census for the past two hundred years has changed the way it collected racial and ethnic data. For instance, the Census Bureau did not ask a question about Hispanic background until 1980. The 2000 Census gave people for the first time the option to identify themselves as being of more than one race. Because of these methodological changes, racial and ethnic data are not strictly comparable over time. Further complicating matters, the Census Bureau asks separate questions about race and Hispanic background. So while Americans routinely talk about "whites," "blacks," and "Hispanics" (or "Latinos") as distinct groups, they are not mutually exclusive categories in census data. In particular, a person who self-identifies as "Hispanic" could be of any race. This creates classification problems. Should someone who identifies as "Black" and "Hispanic" be counted as black (which means undercounting the number of Hispanics); or as Hispanic (which means undercounting the number of blacks); or as both (which means overcounting blacks and Hispanics relative to everyone else); or be placed in a new category of "Black Hispanics" (which means undercounting both groups)?

With these methodological difficulties in mind, table 7-1 shows how America's racial and ethnic composition changed over the last three decades of the twentieth century.² In 1970, nearly 99 percent of U.S. residents could be characterized as either solely white or solely black. By contrast, in 2000 the percentage of the population identifying itself as either white or black had fallen to slightly less than 88 percent, even though the black share of the population actually rose a percentage point. The more than

Table 7-1. *U.S. Population by Race, Age, and Hispanic Background, 1970–2000*Percentage^a

<i>Category</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>Difference, 1970–2000</i>
<i>Race</i>					
Total					
White	87.4	83.2	80.3	75.1	–12.3
Black	11.1	11.7	12.0	12.3	1.2
Other ^b	1.4	5.2	7.6	12.5	11.1
<i>Children^c</i>					
White	84.8	78.6	75.1	68.6	–16.2
Black	13.7	14.7	15.0	15.1	1.4
Other ^b	1.5	6.7	9.9	16.3	14.8
<i>Adults^d</i>					
White	88.9	84.9	82.2	77.4	–11.5
Black	9.8	10.5	11.0	11.4	1.6
Other ^b	1.4	4.5	6.8	11.2	9.9
<i>Ethnicity</i>					
Hispanic background ^e	. . .	6.4	9.0	12.5	6.1 ^f

Sources: Census of Population 1980, Characteristics of Population, vol. 1, ch. B, part 1; Census of Population and Housing, 1990: Summary Tape File 3 on CD-ROM; Census 2000 Summary File 1.

a. Rounding may affect totals.

b. For 1970, 1980, and 1990, “Other” refers to individuals who marked any race other than black or white, which included American Indian, Eskimo or Aleut, Asian and Pacific Islander, and some other race. In 2000, “Other” refers to American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian, and some other race. In addition, the 2000 Census allowed individuals to mark more than one race; those individuals are included in the “Other” category.

c. Children defined as 0–17 years.

d. Adults defined as 18 and older.

e. Hispanic or Latino ethnicity is collected separately from race in the Census. Hispanics may be of any race; therefore race and Hispanic background are not additive.

f. Difference between 1980 and 2000.

twelve percentage point decline in the white share of the population was accompanied by a substantial rise in the share of the population that identified a race other than white or black only, such as Asian, American Indian, or multiracial. The share of this “Other” category rose from 1.4 percent in 1970 to 12.5 percent in 2000.

The growing share of the Other category reflects three growth trends. One is tremendous growth in the size of the Hispanic community. As table 7-1 shows, the percentage of U.S. residents identifying themselves as Hispanic stood at 12.5 percent in 2000, nearly double that of 1980. Although

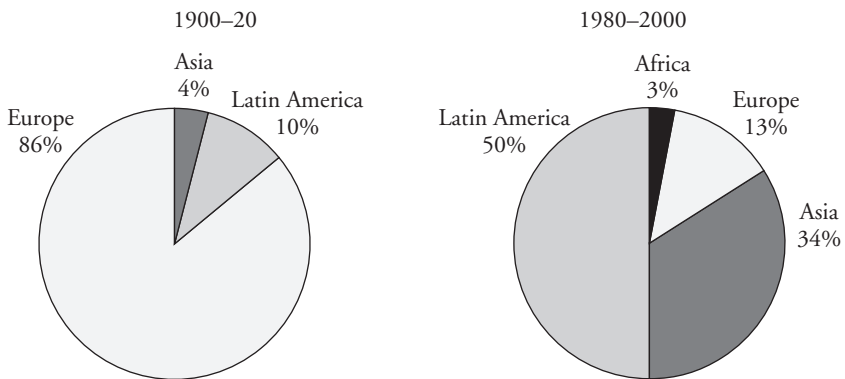
48 percent of Hispanics identified themselves as white, 42 percent identified their race as Other. The second trend is the growing number of Asians in the United States. Between 1980 and 2000, Asians more than doubled as a percentage of the total population, rising from 1.7 percent to 3.6 percent (counting those who identify their race as Asian alone) or 4.2 percent (counting people who say they are Asian alone or Asian and some other race). The third trend is the growing number of multiracial individuals. Some 6.8 million people, or 2.4 percent of the population, identified themselves in the 2000 Census as being of two or more races. Nearly three out of four of these multiracial individuals marked one of their races as white. The most common combination was of white and "some other race" (32.3 percent); white and American Indian and Alaska Native (15.9 percent); white and Asian (12.7 percent); and white and black or African American (11.5 percent).

Although the data on race and Hispanic background show that America is becoming more diverse, in a way they also understate that diversity. As the number of Asians and Hispanics has increased, the composition of their communities has broadened as well. People of Chinese and Japanese descent historically dominated America's Asian community. Chinese remain America's largest Asian community, but the Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, and Korean communities have all exceeded the Japanese community in size. As for Hispanics, established Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban populations have been joined in the past three decades by substantial numbers of Dominicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, and Colombians. Although these communities are nowhere near as linguistically or culturally diverse as America's Asian population, they nonetheless represent a variety of nationalities with distinct histories and experiences. In that respect, these populations are not as unified as the labels "Asian," "Hispanic," or "Latino" suggest.³

What Happened?

What accounts for America's increasing racial and ethnic diversity? One driver is immigration. Between 1970 and 2000, the United States experienced the largest influx of immigrants since the classic era of immigration brought some 30 million newcomers to U.S. shores between 1880 and 1930. In the 1970s, 4.5 million immigrants arrived legally in the United States, more than one and a half times the total of the 1960s. The number topped 7.3 million in the 1980s and 9.1 million in the 1990s.⁴ These legal immigrants were joined by millions who entered the United States illegally.

Figure 7-1. *Regional Origin of Legal Immigrants, Beginning and End of the Twentieth Century*



Source: U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Fiscal Year 2000 Statistical Yearbook*.

For obvious reasons, no one knows how many undocumented aliens have entered the country over the past two decades or how their numbers varied from year to year. The best estimates put the number of people living illegally in the United States in 2000 between 7 and 8.5 million.⁵

Immigration today differs from the classic era of immigration in a key way: the source countries for immigrants have changed. A century ago, most immigrants came from Europe. Most of the rest came from other parts of the Americas.⁶ Very few came from Asia. This regional (and racial) distribution reflected deliberate government policy. Beginning with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and lasting until the Immigration Act of 1965, U.S. immigration policy deliberately sought to keep out Asians. Today, however, the regional mix of immigrants looks vastly different. Figure 7-1 shows that 85 percent of legal immigrants to the United States during the first two decades of the twentieth century originated in Europe, largely southern and eastern Europe. In the last two decades of the century, in contrast, 87 percent of legal immigrants came from outside of Europe, with half from Latin America alone.

Family formation among immigrants after they arrive in the United States is the second part of the story of increasing diversity. Immigrants tend to be young adults. So they arrive in America during the years in which they begin to start families, and their children become a piece of the

American patchwork of race and ethnicity. Moreover, some immigrant groups, particularly those from Latin America, have higher fertility rates than native-born Americans, including native-born Latinos. While non-Hispanic white women on average give birth to 1.9 children over the course of their lifetime, and black women, 2.1 children, Hispanic women bear on average 3.2 children. (The total fertility rate of Asian-American women falls between that for non-Hispanic white women and black women: 2.0 children.)⁷ These two realities explain why one in five babies born in 2000 had a foreign-born mother even as the foreign born accounted for only one in nine U.S. residents in 2000. These trends are also the major reason why minority children accounted for 98 percent of the increase in the size of the child population in the United States between 1990 and 2000.⁸

The third factor responsible for increasing diversity is interracial unions. The fading of social taboos on interracial sex has meant a corresponding rise in the number of interracial children. The 2000 Census found that children were twice as likely as adults to be multiracial; about 4 percent as compared with 2 percent of adults.⁹ Nearly 6 percent of all marriages in 2000 crossed ethnic or racial lines (or both), up from 3 percent in 1980. One out of every four marriages involving a Hispanic or an Asian is mixed. In California, nearly one out of every twelve non-Hispanic whites who marries does so to an Asian or a Hispanic.¹⁰ By one estimate, one-fifth of all adult Americans already have a close family member who is of another race than their own. The rate is even higher for nonwhites.¹¹ The existence of multiracial children today will help perpetuate America's increasing ethnic and racial diversity tomorrow. As today's multiracial children reach adulthood, the United States is likely to see an even larger upsurge in multiracial identity as it becomes more socially acceptable and as they have multiracial children of their own.

Geographical Differences

Although the United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse, that diversity is not being felt uniformly throughout the country. More than three-quarters of people who identified themselves as "Hispanic" in the 2000 census lived in seven states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Arizona, and New Jersey. Half lived in just two: California and Texas.¹²

One unsurprising result of the geographical concentration of Hispanics is that they constitute substantial portions of the population in metropolitan areas with established Latino populations such as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Miami. What is surprising is the extraordinarily high growth rate of Hispanics in cities and regions where few Latinos historically have lived. For example, several metropolitan areas in the Southeast—Atlanta, Raleigh-Durham, Greensboro, and Charlotte to name the top four—saw their Hispanic populations increase by more than 900 percent over the past twenty years. Many more metropolitan areas, especially in newer settlement areas, are absorbing Latinos in their suburban areas. In 1990, Hispanics living in the one hundred largest metropolitan areas were split equally between central city and suburban residence. Over the next decade the Latino suburban population grew 71 percent, raising the share of Hispanics who live in the suburbs to 54 percent in 2000.¹³

Asians are even more geographically concentrated than Hispanics. According to the 2000 Census, six in ten people who identified themselves as Asian alone live in just five states: California, New York, Texas, Hawaii, and New Jersey. Slightly more than one in three live in California alone. Conversely, in forty-one states, the Asian share of the population falls below the national average of 3.6 percent. Thus, while one in ten residents of New York City is Asian, only one in a hundred Detroit residents is.¹⁴

Generational Differences

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity is also not being felt uniformly across generational lines. As table 7-1 shows, the share of the population that is other than solely white or black is 5 percentage points higher among children than among adults. The fact that younger Americans are more likely to be Asian or Hispanic than older Americans can be seen in the census data on median age. In 2000, the median age of the total U.S. population was 35.3 years. This was up from 28.0 years in 1970, and the change reflects the aging of the Baby Boom generation and the fact that it was followed by the Baby Bust generation. In contrast to the country as a whole, the median age of the Hispanic population in 2000 was 25.9 years, or slightly more than nine years younger.¹⁵ Meanwhile, the median age of people who identified themselves as Asian alone was 32.7 years, and the median age of those who identified themselves as Asian in combination with one or more other races was 31.1 years.¹⁶ Again, one consequence of

the greater racial and ethnic diversity among younger Americans will be to perpetuate increased diversity.

Church, Temple, and Mosque

America's increasing racial and ethnic diversity has also meant increasing religious diversity, a fact that September 11 helped spotlight.¹⁷ Exactly how much America's religious make-up has changed is difficult to pinpoint. Federal law prohibits the Census Bureau from asking questions about religious faith, and methodological questions plague most other estimates. Still, three things are clear. First, the number of Americans who describe themselves as Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims grew sharply in the 1990s. The American Religious Identification Survey found that the number of adults in the United States who described themselves as Hindus tripled between 1990 and 2001. The number who described themselves as Buddhists and Muslims more than doubled.¹⁸

Second, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims constitute a tiny percentage of the U.S. population. For instance, Islamic organizations place the number of Muslims in the United States at 6 million to 7 million—roughly equivalent to America's Jewish population—though other, more systematic studies say the number is at best half that.¹⁹ Even at the higher number, however, Muslims constitute less than 2.5 percent of the total U.S. population. On a related point, Muslims in the United States are most likely to be African American or of South Asian, not Arab, descent; most Arab Americans are Christian. Buddhists and Hindus constitute less than 1 percent of the population.

Third, in religious affiliation, Americans remain overwhelming Christian. In 2001, roughly eight in ten Americans described themselves as Christian, down only slightly from nine in ten a half century earlier.²⁰ Virtually all Latino immigrants are Christian, with the vast majority being Catholic. If Americans do become decidedly less Christian in their religious affiliations in coming years, it will be because they convert to other religions or cease being religious, not because of immigration.

What Not to Worry About

Is America's growing diversity a cause for celebration, indifference, or alarm? To judge by the current state of American politics, the answer would seem to be celebration. The U.S. economy is remarkably productive, in part because of the contributions of immigrants. America has not erased

the legacy of Jim Crow, but it has moved far beyond the days of Bull Connor. What was once white solid support for racially discriminatory laws has given way to strong opposition.²¹ Although black mobility remains a concern, African Americans have made substantial economic and social progress. Despite frequent claims that whites, blacks, Asians, and Latinos all see the world differently, polls show that on most issues their views are more similar than different. This is especially true with regard to questions about the quality of life in the United States, the appeal of American political values, and the duties of individual Americans.²²

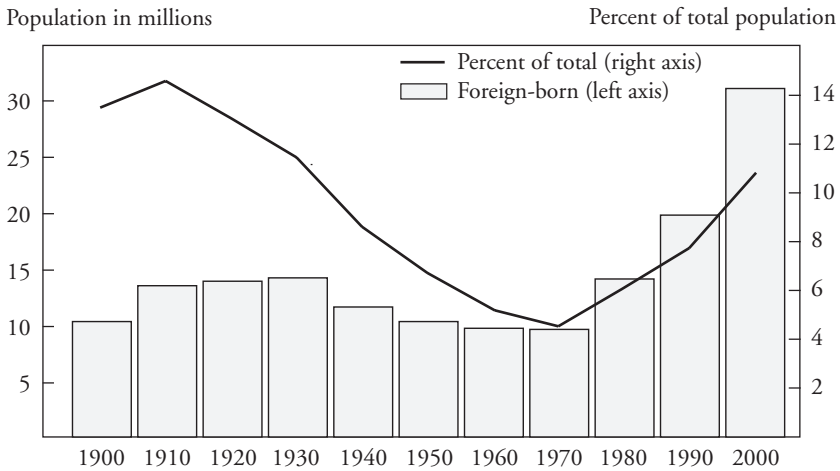
Yet for many observers, America's successes today mask an underlying deterioration in its polity.²³ The exact nature of the perceived peril varies by author, although it almost inevitably involves anticipated social fractures triggered by immigration. Some pessimists worry that the United States is taking in too many immigrants. Others worry less about sheer numbers and more that the social forces that once encouraged immigrants to assimilate have dissipated, making it impossible to sustain a cohesive society. Still others worry that America's increased diversity will exacerbate regional and generational schisms.

It is impossible to refute these arguments, especially since most of them are vague about when their predictions will come true. There certainly is no reason to believe that greater diversity must make America stronger. Through bad luck, ill will, or incompetent public policy, growing diversity could produce the social and political calamities that pessimists fear. But disaster is neither preordained nor likely. While the diversity story comes with bad news, there is also considerable good news. Indeed, what may be most surprising about the pessimists' arguments is their lack of confidence in the resiliency of the American society they trumpet.

America Is Full Up

One fear, voiced more openly after September 11, is that the United States is exceeding its capacity to absorb new immigrants. If history is any guide, such fears are misplaced. As figure 7-2 shows, the portion of the U.S. population that is foreign born increased substantially over the last three decades of the twentieth century. In 2000, roughly one out of nine U.S. residents was born abroad, up from one in twenty in 1970. This was still below the one-in-seven figure reached in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Put differently, during the classic era of immigration, immigrants arrived at a rate of 6.3 per thousand people in the U.S. population. Today the rate of immigration, including illegal migrants, is less than 4 per

Figure 7-2. *Foreign-Born Population and Percent of Total Population of the United States, 1900–2000*



Source: "Profile of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States: 1997," Current Population Reports, Special Studies P23-195, figure 1-1; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census 2000.

1,000 members of the U.S. population.²⁴ Raw numbers alone, then, would suggest that the United States has yet to reach the point at which it can no longer absorb more newcomers.

Of course, the trend of the past three decades could continue or even accelerate. Pessimists fear what the writer Sergio Troncoso has trumpeted, namely, that "unlike the episodic waves of Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrants, Latin-American immigrants to the United States will be a constant and significant stream into this country. Forever."²⁵ On one level, this claim is true. Unless immigration law is entirely rewritten, continued immigration from Latin America is a certainty because immigration policy favors family unification.²⁶ No one can deny that if the percentage of the population that was foreign born surged well beyond levels experienced a century ago it could overwhelm America's absorptive capacities. That upper limit may be quite high, however. In 1999 the foreign-born as a share of the total population stood at 24.6 percent in Australia and 19.2 percent in Canada. Both countries enjoy economic prosperity and social peace.²⁷

Moreover, it is not inevitable that immigration into the United States will remain at levels witnessed in the 1990s, let alone increase. Trends can

and do change. Tougher enforcement of immigration laws and a prolonged economic recession in the United States could depress immigration levels. So too could deliberate U.S. efforts to use trade policy and economic assistance to promote economic growth in Latin America, especially in Mexico (the largest source country), thereby reducing the supply of immigrants heading north looking for jobs. (Only two Latin American countries number in the top ten recipients of U.S. foreign assistance, and none receives more than \$200 million annually.)²⁸ European immigration to the United States dwindled after World War II not because Europeans were barred from entering the country, but because their economic prospects at home improved. Finally, immigration flows might drop if Washington adopted new policies that made it harder for people to immigrate to the United States. Although September 11 pushed immigration to the forefront of the political agenda, neither the White House nor Congress has attempted to change the rules regulating who can immigrate to the United States. The focus instead has been on tightening the rules governing the admission of business, tourist, and student visitors.²⁹

Immigration flows—both legal and illegal—may in fact already be slowing, at least temporarily, because of the end of the 1990s economic boom. One possible indicator of this decline is the number of applicants for the annual diversity immigrant visa “lottery.” This program makes available 50,000 green cards to persons from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. Applications fell to 9 million for the one-month application period immediately following the September 11 terrorist attacks compared with the previous period a year earlier, when 13 million applied.³⁰ Another possible indication of slowing immigration may be found in the apprehensions of illegal immigrants along the U.S.-Mexican border. Apprehensions hit 1.8 million in FY2000, before dropping to 1.2 million in FY2001, marking the first major decline after a decade of increases.³¹ These apprehension data should be viewed cautiously, because they reflect the government’s commitment to enforcement as much as immigration flows. It is significant, then, that during the first half of 2002, when border security tightened in response to September 11, apprehensions ran at only half the rate of a year earlier.³²

Immigrants Will Not Assimilate

Most pessimists admit that the current level of immigration is not by itself a problem. They argue instead that the problem is that the character of immigration and the context in which it is occurring differ radically from

America's historical experience. What is said to make today different from yesterday varies by observer. Some worry that Asian and Latino immigrants come from "alien" cultures.³³ Others argue that an information economy frustrates assimilation. Education was not critical to the blue-collar manufacturing economy of the early 1900s, enabling immigrants to get ahead by dint of their hard work. Now the U.S. economy resembles an hourglass—many high-paying, knowledge-intensive jobs at the top, many low-paying, low-skilled jobs at the bottom, and little in between.³⁴ Still other observers argue that inexpensive air travel, cheap telephone service, and the Internet encourage immigrants and their offspring to remain tied to their ancestral homeland. Finally, many observers worry that the rise of multiculturalism means that immigrants have arrived at a time when the forces that once encouraged assimilation have ebbed.³⁵

None of these claims is new.³⁶ Fears that immigrants will not assimilate predate the Constitution. Benjamin Franklin complained in the early 1750s that Germans arriving in Philadelphia "will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them . . . [They] will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion."³⁷ Thomas Jefferson worried several decades later that most immigrants would come from European countries ruled by monarchs. "They will bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their early youth; or, if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing, as is usual, from one extreme to another. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty."³⁸ A century later, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge warned that immigration threatened "a great and perilous change in the very fabric of our race," and Representative Martin Dies urged the quarantining of "this Nation against people of any government in Europe incapable of self-government for any reason, as I would against the bubonic plague."³⁹

Claims that the structure of the American economy would trap immigrants and their offspring in low-paying jobs were common a century ago.⁴⁰ While today's technology is better, yesterday's immigrants did not sever their ties to their homelands on reaching America. Anyone reading one of the more than two hundred Norwegian-language newspapers in the United States in the late 1800s might have concluded that Norwegian immigrants would never become Americans.⁴¹ The desire to carve out ethnic enclaves separate from the English-speaking majority appeared long before the rise of multiculturalism. "In the first half of the nineteenth century, several German societies were formed with the express intention of so

concentrating immigration in particular areas that they could, in effect, take over. One German spoke for many when he dreamed of Pennsylvania becoming ‘an entire German state where . . . the beautiful German language would be used in the legislative halls and the courts of justice.’”⁴²

The long lineage to fears of immigration highlights an often-overlooked fact: America has been a diverse and multiethnic society for much of its history. Today the children of Irish, Italian, Greek, and Polish immigrants are often depicted as members of a common white European (or Anglo) culture. But when those immigrants arrived on U.S. shores, the native-born saw them as physically distinct, culturally alien foreigners who hailed from lower races.⁴³ The federally sponsored Dillingham Commission, which released a forty-two-volume report on immigration in 1910–11, argued that Slavic immigrants were prone to “periods of besotted drunkenness [and] unexpected cruelty” and that southern Italian immigrants had “little adaptability to highly organized society.”⁴⁴ The children and grandchildren of these immigrants nonetheless became Americans, suggesting that some skepticism is in order regarding claims that today’s immigrants and their offspring will not.

Still, pessimists insist today is different. Evaluating all the potential differences between then and now would consume an entire book. Nevertheless, two claims are worth exploring in depth: that today’s immigrants are less interested in joining mainstream American society and that society increasingly encourages them to stand apart.

Have today’s immigrants lost interest in assimilating? Polling data suggest not. An extensive *Washington Post* poll of Latino immigrants found that nearly nine in ten “believe it is important to change so they can fit into larger society.”⁴⁵ Foreign-born parents are more likely than native-born parents to believe that a person who settles in the United States but refuses to learn English or who never stands during the national anthem at public events is “a bad citizen.”⁴⁶ Studies of immigrant high-school students find that “two-thirds of those interviewed believe that hard work and accomplishment can triumph over any prejudice they’ve experienced, and about that many (the figure varies slightly with age) say there is no better country than the United States.”⁴⁷ Of course, these results may simply reflect immigrants’ telling pollsters what they think they are supposed to say. But if so, that suggests immigrants have already internalized key elements of American civil life.

The tangible sign of the desire to fit into American society can be seen in efforts to learn English. Despite frequent claims that today’s newcomers

refuse to learn English, and despite the prevalence of the Internet and cable television (or perhaps because of them), today's immigrants and their offspring are learning English as fast as or faster than their predecessors one hundred years ago. The language shift has been so rapid in some communities that children have difficulty communicating with their own parents.⁴⁸

The shift to English is occurring most rapidly among Asian immigrants. They are fewer in number and speak such a wide range of languages that it is difficult for them to sustain self-contained language enclaves. Latinos may retain their native tongue longer than Asians do, but they too are mastering English. While 73 percent of first-generation Latinos say they speak primarily Spanish at home, only 17 percent of the second generation and just 1 percent of the third generation say they do. Just as important, whereas only 37 percent of first-generation Latinos say they can read a newspaper or book in English very well or pretty well, the number jumps to 90 percent for the second generation.⁴⁹

However, do Latinos and Asians see themselves as Americans? Pessimists point to polling data that suggest that for Latinos—evidence on Asian attitudes is scarce—the answer is no. For example, a 1999 *Newsweek* poll found that Latinos over thirty-five years old were most likely to identify themselves as American; those under thirty-five were more likely to identify as Hispanic or Latino.⁵⁰ Another poll found that 54 percent of Latino teens identify themselves as “Hispanic Only” or “More Hispanic than American.”⁵¹ A third poll found that only 33 percent of U.S. residents of Asian descent say they are culturally American.⁵²

Pessimists assume these responses say something about political allegiance. But do they? It is more likely that they reflect the reality that these groups have different cultural heritages. For instance, the same poll that found that only 33 percent of Asians said their culture and traditions were uniquely American also found that just 54 percent of African Americans—who, after all, are not immigrants—thought that their traditions were quintessentially American. Oddly enough, residents of Latin American descent (61 percent) and Middle Eastern descent (64 percent) were more likely than African Americans to see themselves as culturally American.⁵³

The fact that ethnic identification might not have the political significance often assigned to it helps explain why the public reaction to September 11 ran directly contrary to what the pessimists' arguments predicted. The country did not descend into ethnic squabbling, with Asian and Latino Americans repudiating “Anglo” foreign policy. Americans, regardless of their race and ethnicity, were instead remarkably unified.

September 11 did not produce ethnic divisions because the social forces encouraging assimilation are far stronger than pessimists recognize. True, the old assimilationist model that sought, sometimes aggressively, to mold immigrants and their offspring into model Americans has fallen by the wayside. But it is not clear that becoming an American ever depended on schools' providing a daily dose of biographies of Teddy Roosevelt, recitations from Longfellow, or demonstrations on how to fold the flag.⁵⁴ As David Hackett Smith and others have shown, existing cultures always exert tremendous influence on newcomers, even when they arrive in substantial numbers.⁵⁵ This is probably especially true for a culture like America's, whose traits of liberty, individuality, and prosperity are so appealing. Indeed, to an extent usually not appreciated, in pursuing their own self-interest, American social, economic, and political institutions unconsciously encourage assimilation.

This process may be most evident in the actions of the Democratic and Republican parties. For both parties, the drive to win Latino and Asian votes has been and will continue to be a matter of political survival. The Republicans learned that firsthand in the 1990s, when their decision to run on an anti-immigrant platform helped turn them into the minority party in California, the country's most populous and electorally valuable state. With the country split down the middle in recent national elections, both parties know that whoever makes the biggest inroads among Latino and Asian voters will hold the upper hand in future elections. (The national Latino vote is projected to increase from 5.9 million in 2000 to about 7.9 million in 2004, or by about a third.)⁵⁶ In turn, Democratic and Republican efforts to recruit Latinos and Asians into the political process will accelerate their integration into American society.

These efforts are having results. The number of Latinos registered to vote more than doubled between 1980 and 2000, as did the number who actually voted.⁵⁷ The number of Latinos elected to public office has also increased. In 2003, there were 22 Latino members of Congress (excluding nonvoting delegates) and 217 state legislators.⁵⁸ The first figure had tripled and the second more than doubled from two decades earlier. Latinos have made even greater strides at the local level.⁵⁹ Asian Americans also show greater political activity. Among those registered to vote, Asian-American turnout rates are comparable to those of non-Hispanic whites in midterm elections and only slightly lower in presidential elections.⁶⁰ The number of Asian Americans holding elected office at the local, state, or federal levels rose from 106 in 1978 to 503 in 1998.⁶¹ These successes will undoubtedly

be emulated and thereby further the assimilation of immigrants and their offspring.

Efforts by Democrats and Republicans to reach out to immigrants and their offspring are (and will be) mimicked by other institutions in American society. Organizations as diverse as the U.S. military, the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions, the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches, and local PTAs have made it a priority to reach out to immigrant communities. The reason is simple—membership organizations must find new members or see themselves decline, and immigrant communities are a rich target for recruits. While self-interest rather than altruism drives these organizations, the net effect is to incorporate immigrants and their offspring into American society.

Demographic Balkanization

A third set of fears is that increased diversity is pushing the United States toward “demographic balkanization.”⁶² The argument here proceeds from the indisputable fact that increasing diversity is not being felt uniformly across the United States. Some worry that ethnic settlement patterns are creating a demographic divide that will soon pit cosmopolitan melting-pot states on the American littoral against a largely non-Hispanic white heartland. As one writer puts it: “We are seeing the emergence of two different Americas: One that is young, urban hip, and multiracial, and another that is aging, village traditional, and mostly white.”⁶³ Over time, the argument goes, this demographic divide will become more politically salient. The two Americas will have an increasingly difficult time understanding each other because their interests and values will diverge.

Others see a different demographic divide. They note that today’s immigrants and their offspring are disproportionately Hispanic, or, more exactly, disproportionately Mexican. They have settled primarily in California and the Southwest, displacing the native born and swamping other immigrant groups. So the coming demographic divide will not pit the coasts against the heartland, but Mexican America against everyone else. The journalist Peter Brimelow warns that the United States faces the resurgence of “a threat thought extinct in American politics for more than a hundred years: secession.”⁶⁴ Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington concurs: “Mexican immigration looms as a unique and disturbing challenge to our cultural integrity, our national identity, and potentially to our future as a country.”⁶⁵ Grist for these claims can be found in the talk of *La Reconquista*

by some Latino activists. The editor of *Latina* magazine proclaims: "The United States of the 21st century will be undeniably ours. Again."⁶⁶

Talk of secession is far-fetched. While it is true that Iowa will not look like California or Florida any time soon, politics in the United States has never rested on demographic homogeneity for its political success. Nor are future regional demographic differences likely to be as sharp as pessimists claim. Historically, immigrants and their offspring disperse from traditional gateway cities over time in search of better jobs and quality of life. Today's immigrants are repeating that pattern. Moreover, the fact that many recent immigrants are bypassing traditional gateway communities and settling in areas that historically have seen few immigrants is effectively blurring the dividing line between a "browning" littoral and a "white" heartland. This dispersion is robbing the demographic differences that will persist of their political relevance.

Probably the only way that the fears of demographic balkanization could be realized is if American society made ethnicity politically relevant. As the political scientist Rodolfo de la Garza has said, "The cohesion of the group will be a function of how society deals with the group. If society decides that being a Hispanic is no more significant than being an Italian, then the group will be as cohesive as Italians, which means not very much."⁶⁷ Americans have mostly taken this approach. The irony is that pessimists would do the opposite. By emphasizing the "otherness" of immigrants, and especially of Mexicans, they could well help produce the future they fear.

Generational Conflict

A final set of fears targets the consequences of generational differences in diversity. Again, as table 7-1 shows, Asians and Latinos constitute a greater share of younger Americans than of older Americans. This creates the possibility that the intergenerational bargains that underlie much of government policy will collapse. Will elderly whites support the spending needed to educate children to whom they have no ethnic ties? Will Asian and Latino workers support generous cost-of-living increases for retirees with European surnames? In both cases, otherwise "ordinary" intergenerational conflict could take on a sharper ethnic and racial edge—poisoning politics and intensifying social divisions.

Although such clashes could emerge in some localities, are they in the offing nationwide? One reason for doubt is that the tendency of ethnic groups to concentrate mitigates intergenerational conflict. In cities and

towns where Latinos or Asians emerge as new majorities, the racial or ethnic edge to intergenerational conflict disappears. A more fundamental reason is that the intergenerational argument exaggerates the depth of division in society. Age does not neatly separate whites from nonwhites, or Latinos from non-Latinos, or newcomers from natives. All groups have children. Everyone ages. Moreover, on many specific programs, more unites Americans of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds than divides them. Retirees may be disproportionately non-Hispanic whites, but elderly Latinos are far more likely to rely on Social Security for all their income.⁶⁸

Of course, politicians could fail to recognize that such common interests exist, or they could decide for cynical reasons to sow the seeds of racial and ethnic division rather than promote unity. No doubt some of each will happen. But to focus on how things could go wrong is to miss the fact that the dominant political winds are blowing in precisely the opposite direction. Again, both Democrats and Republicans are seeking Latino and Asian votes today—just as their predecessors sought to woo Irish, German, and Italian immigrants. These efforts to build winning coalitions are far more likely to blur divisions among groups than to intensify them, thus minimizing the chances that generational cleavages will mirror ethnic and racial ones.

What to Worry About

Pessimists exaggerate the problems created by America's growing diversity, but they are right that it poses challenges. One such challenge is encouraging immigrants to become citizens and full participants in American society. Another is ensuring that no racial or ethnic group finds itself bypassed by economic growth. A third is dampening the social conflict that diversity can produce. These challenges have no simple solutions. Meeting them requires a mix of strategies and by necessity will involve the efforts of federal, state, and local government as well as those of business and community-based groups. Because each of these three challenges is intimately tied up with the question of immigration, meeting them also requires rethinking the traditional American approach to immigrants, which worries greatly about how many should come, but cares little about what happens to them when they get here.

Citizenship and Legal Status

American political culture has always expected immigrants to become citizens. U.S. naturalization laws are generally more liberal than those of other

industrialized democracies. The nationality of an immigrant's parents is immaterial, and immigrant offspring born in the United States are American citizens at birth. Any immigrant who has legal permanent residency or refugee status is eligible to naturalize after residing in the United States for five years (or less for special categories of immigrants), passing an English and civics exam, filing the appropriate paperwork, and paying a fee of \$260 (in 2003).

However, nothing compels immigrants to become citizens. Whether today's immigrants are less inclined to seek citizenship than their predecessors—and if so, by how much—is unclear. The most commonly cited statistic is the Census Bureau's calculation of the proportion of foreign-born residents living in the United States who have gained citizenship. It dropped from 63.6 percent in 1970 to 37.4 percent in 2000. This simple figure does not, however, establish that immigrants have become less interested in citizenship. Historically, immigrants become more likely to seek citizenship the longer they live in the United States. The average foreign-born resident in 2000 had lived in the United States six years fewer than the typical immigrant in the 1970s. The Census Bureau calculates that this difference in length of residency accounts for roughly a third of the drop since 1970 in the percentage of the foreign-born population that is naturalized.⁶⁹

Further reducing the usefulness of statistics on the percentage of the foreign born who are naturalized is the implicit assumption that all foreign-born residents are eligible for citizenship or, to be more precise, that the percentage who are has not changed. The first assumption is clearly wrong, and the second almost certainly is. The more than 30 million foreign-born residents of the United States fall into five broad groups: naturalized citizens (estimated at roughly 30 percent of the foreign-born); legal permanent residents (also roughly 30 percent); refugees and asylees (7 percent); nonimmigrant residents (3 percent) such as foreign students and temporary workers; and undocumented residents (28 percent), a category that includes people who entered the United States clandestinely as well as those who enter legally for a temporary stay but fail to leave when their time is up.⁷⁰ The size of the nonimmigrant and undocumented categories and the fact that both have grown substantially over the past three decades are significant because neither group is eligible for citizenship. When the nonimmigrant and undocumented populations are excluded, naturalization exceeds 50 percent even before controlling for length of residency in the United States.

While simple statistics like the percentage of the foreign-born who are naturalized create the mistaken impression that interest in citizenship has plummeted, there are still reasons to worry that the desire to naturalize might be declining or might decline in the future. One reason is that advances in communication, transportation, and information technology are making it much easier for immigrants to maintain close ties with people and institutions in their home countries.⁷¹ As has always been the case, many immigrants arrive in the United States with the intention of one day returning home. (The rates of return among sojourners actually appear to be lower today than they were before World War II.)⁷² The greater ease with which immigrants can maintain ties to their communities of origin and the ease and speed with which they can return there encourage the belief that residence in the United States will be temporary. For those immigrants who do return, these close ties are a blessing. But for those whose temporary residence becomes permanent, often without their consciously thinking about it, those same technological advances could slow their complete integration into American society.

Equally important is the pull side of the equation. Although Americans rhapsodize about the importance of citizenship, they have fallen out of the practice of encouraging immigrants to become citizens. Washington has not made it a policy priority. Presidents and members of Congress seldom mention the issue, and public outreach to immigrant communities is minimal. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the agency long responsible for naturalization, sometimes seemed designed to discourage it. By all accounts, it was one of the worst run in the federal government. The agency struggled throughout the 1990s with a backlog of unprocessed citizenship applications, and the wait for approval in the recent past exceeded two years in some parts of the country.⁷³ Given the frustration the native-born express about their dealings with government, it would hardly be surprising if immigrants took the INS's failings as a sign that the government did not value their citizenship aspirations.

The failure to encourage naturalization matters. Citizenship is by no means a cure-all, nor is it appropriate for guest workers or immigrants who are true sojourners. But for immigrants who have put down roots in the United States, citizenship is essential to becoming a full member of society, even if in every other way they have integrated and their native-born children are citizens. The obvious problem is that without citizenship they are shut out of the political process. The fact that almost 40 percent of adult Latinos are not U.S. citizens is the main reason that one out of every eight

U.S. residents in 2000 was a Latino, but only one in every fourteen potential voters was.⁷⁴ If immigrants remain outside the political process, the loss is twofold. They lose the opportunity to influence public policy to reflect their interests and values; and society loses the opportunity to incorporate them fully into the community.⁷⁵

Government and civil society thus should make it a higher priority to encourage immigrants to naturalize. All signs indicate that immigrants would be receptive to such encouragement. The INS stumbled in the 1990s partly because so many immigrants wanted to naturalize. Many immigrants rushed to naturalize in the second half of the 1990s because legislative changes denied welfare benefits to noncitizens. Regardless of whether they used public assistance, immigrants realized that without citizenship they could not claim full rights in American society. As a result, the percentage of the foreign-born population who had naturalized in 2000 was actually 2 percentage points higher than it was only three years earlier.⁷⁶ Similarly, citizenship applications jumped 65 percent in the first eight months after September 11.⁷⁷ For some immigrants, naturalization was an act of patriotism; for others it was a way to protect themselves against a political backlash.

Efforts to encourage naturalization may have some bumps ahead in the new plan that abolished the INS and transferred its responsibilities to the new Department of Homeland Security. Immigrants now will file citizenship and other immigration documents with the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (formerly INS Services) in the Department of Homeland Security. Whether the department responsible for keeping terrorists out will manage to be welcoming to immigrants remains an open question. Even if the Department of Homeland Security succeeds in striking the proper balance between these different objectives, many immigrants are likely to regard the changes with trepidation, at least in the short term, because they worry it signals a fundamental change in America's embrace of newcomers.

Democrats and Republicans at all levels of government need to compensate for this mixed message. The president should create an office of citizenship within the White House to coordinate federal, state, local, and private efforts to promote citizenship. The new Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, in keeping with the INS's charge under the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act "to promote the opportunities and responsibilities of United States citizenship," should greatly expand its outreach efforts to immigrant communities and undertake periodic

naturalization campaigns.⁷⁸ Public service announcements and other forms of public outreach should send the message that immigrants are wanted as citizens, that America is inclusive both in theory and in practice. Emphasis should be placed on making sure that naturalization rules and procedures are reasonable, transparent, and nondiscretionary.⁷⁹ Funding for citizenship classes and naturalization programs should also be increased, and volunteers recruited to usher immigrants through the process.

Civil society also has a major role to play. Ethnic associations can do much to encourage their fellow ethnics to become citizens. Churches, sports clubs, and neighborhood organizations can also be vehicles to promote naturalization, not to mention the kinds of political participation that turn formal citizenship into substantive citizenship.⁸⁰ Private companies and labor unions can play a role as well, even if only by facilitating their employees' efforts to naturalize. The Chicago office of AT&T, for example, responded to employee requests and worked with the regional INS office to distribute naturalization applications and study guides and to provide space for naturalization ceremonies.⁸¹

However, policies aimed at those who are here legally are not enough. Washington must also face up to the issue of those who are here illegally. Proposals to simply expel undocumented residents are unworkable. The American public almost certainly would not tolerate a policy of mass expulsions, especially since so many undocumented residents have American spouses or children and have put down roots in the community. By the same token, leaving millions to continue living in the shadows of society does not serve America's long-term interests. The fact that undocumented workers are unable to work in the open means they must work for less (which in turn depresses the wages of the low-skilled native-born as well). Their inability in many states to obtain a driver's license or open a bank account impedes their ability to upgrade their skills or to build capital. The net effect is to increase the chances that they and their offspring will be locked into underclass status.

The wise approach would take the undocumented foreign-born out of the shadows and put them on the path to citizenship. Policy should be redesigned to allow undocumented immigrants to earn legal status based on their years of residence, work history, and lack of a criminal record. In a nod to the argument that a blanket amnesty would reward law breaking, undocumented workers who regularize should be required to pay a fine in addition to the application fees that all new entrants must pay. Such a policy of "earned adjustment" should be coupled with a new temporary work

visa program for Mexican nationals.⁸² Mexico is the largest source country of undocumented workers, and the cross-border flow is likely to continue as long as the sizable wage differential between the two countries persists. One perverse result of not having a temporary work visa program that reflects actual market forces is that migrants who make it across the border have a greater incentive to stay in the United States.⁸³ It also means that Washington has less knowledge about who is crossing its borders, thereby increasing the security threat to the United States. The Bush administration had been moving toward an overhaul of the guest-worker program with Mexico before September 11. It should reconsider doing so now.

Economic Progress

A second challenge in America's increasing diversity is economic—ensuring that no ethnic group is locked into an underclass. There are signs of trouble on this front, especially for Latino immigrants and their offspring. Between 1980 and 1999, the average annual earnings of all Hispanics declined by 10 percent relative to all workers. To put that in perspective, over the same period the average annual earnings of African Americans held steady relative to the entire population, while those of Asians were actually higher than those of the work force as a whole.⁸⁴

A substantial education gap underlies the economic gap between immigrants and the native born. Although some immigrants are well educated—an immigrant is more likely than a native-born American to hold a Ph.D.—many are poorly educated and low skilled—which is why immigrants are also more likely than the native-born not to have a high-school diploma.⁸⁵ Those with lower education attainment most likely arrived in the United States having already completed their schooling in their home country, where the education standards tend to be lower.

The nativity gap—that is, the difference between those youth born in the United States and those who arrived as children—helps explain why Latino youth lag behind on key education indicators. Thirty-one percent of Hispanic boys fail to obtain their high school diploma, nearly triple the rate for African American boys (12.1 percent) and four times the rate for non-Hispanic white boys (7.7 percent). Hispanic girls fare only slightly better, with 23 percent dropping out, compared with 13 percent of African American girls and 6.9 percent of non-Hispanic white girls.⁸⁶ Latinos who come to the United States as teens come primarily to work and not to attend school; in fact, because of their high work hours, they are the highest paid segment of the youth labor force.⁸⁷

These economic and education data are disturbing, but not surprising. Most immigrant groups initially fare poorly relative to the native born. The economic and education attainments of Irish immigrants in the 1840s or Italian immigrants in the 1890s hardly augured well. Nor have the prospects of native-born Americans always looked encouraging. In the 1950s, two-thirds of whites in California were high-school dropouts, and a quarter lived in poverty.⁸⁸ Fifty years later their children worry that new immigrants will form a hostile underclass. But their own history shows that socioeconomic profiles are not set in stone.

There is also positive news on the economic front. Even proponents of reducing immigration agree that immigrants make significant progress over time.⁸⁹ While Hispanics' earnings have fallen relative to those of the population as a whole in recent years, their average annual earnings held steady between 1980 and 1999.⁹⁰ This is noteworthy because it coincided with a rapid influx of low-skilled Latino immigrants, which depressed Hispanic earnings potential. By the time second-generation Hispanic workers reach prime working age (beyond twenty-five years old), they fare at least as well as African Americans, though worse than whites and Asians.⁹¹ Moreover, Hispanics have the highest labor force participation rate of any ethnic or racial group. This commitment to work, rather than an inherent hostility to education, helps explain the high drop-out rates among Hispanic youth.⁹² Indeed, higher levels of education appear to be why native-born second-generation Latinos (that is, those with at least one immigrant parent) fare better economically than their foreign-born counterparts.⁹³

The public policy challenge is to institute measures to encourage positive economic trends while discouraging bad ones. This is not to argue that it is possible to have an immigrant-specific economic policy. How immigrants and their offspring fare will depend largely on how the overall economy fares. Robust economic growth will make it easier for immigrants and their offspring to get ahead; sluggish economic growth will make it harder. By the same token, poor immigrants and their offspring will benefit from the same policies that will help poor white and blacks—better public schools, more job training opportunities, and less onerous tax policies.

Nevertheless, modest steps can and should be taken to promote economic mobility among immigrants and thereby provide a substantial long-term payoff for the country as a whole. Some of these steps do not directly target the problems of the second generation, which largely mirror those of the offspring of native-born, low-skilled parents. But helping immigrants move up the economic ladder may be the single biggest thing society can

do to help their children succeed. Moreover, while Washington has a key role to play in funding many of these initiatives, state and local government, and civil society as well, have the lead role to play in their design and implementation.

One such step would be to make a sizable investment in English-language training. Despite the importance of English in facilitating economic progress among immigrants—not to mention their overall integration—federal and state support for adult English as a second language (ESL) programs is low. Washington distributed \$460 million to state governments in fiscal year 2001 to fund adult education programs. Much of this money funds GED preparation classes and literacy programs for English speakers, not ESL programs.⁹⁴ The unsurprising result is that the demand for English-language classes far outstrips the supply. New York City, for instance, offered substantially fewer English-language classes for immigrants in 2000 than it did in 1990, even though the city welcomed nearly 1 million immigrants in the intervening decade.⁹⁵ California and Texas officials estimate that the demand for English-language classes exceeds supply by nine to ten times.⁹⁶ Failing to meet this demand represents a missed opportunity to foster economic independence, integrate immigrants into society, and strengthen the pathways to citizenship—all of which would strengthen social cohesion.

Efforts to expand English-language training should seek to make it reasonably convenient for immigrants to attend; classes offered only during working hours or that require long commutes to a central campus are self-defeating. Finding new ways to increase English instruction are also important. Combining English-language training with other activities, such as Head Start programs, can improve the chances that immigrants will enroll.⁹⁷ In industries such as construction, where immigrants have clustered, some private firms have offered English-language training to their employees. Major corporations and trade unions have also gotten into the act. Boeing and the International Association of Machinists have joined forces to provide ESL classes to workers.⁹⁸ These efforts should be encouraged and emulated.

Government and civil society should also invest substantially in services designed to educate immigrants about the intricacies of America's financial system. Mastering the use of credit, building up home equity, and investing for the future have always been keys to building financial security in the United States over the long term and providing for the next generation.⁹⁹ Yet most new immigrants arrive in the United States with no experience

with savings and checking accounts, let alone credit cards, mortgages, or investments in the stock and bond markets. Programs that teach newcomers basic financial practices can play a critical role in helping them gain a foothold in the American economy and develop financial security. Such programs can also improve the physical security of immigrants. Some local police departments have reduced incidents of burglary and robbery in immigrant neighborhoods by teaming with area banks to persuade immigrants to use the banking system rather than keeping cash in their homes. All these efforts have a substantial multiplier effect. As immigrants learn to navigate the U.S. financial system, they can become guides for other immigrants.

Investment in community college education and vocational training also needs to be expanded. For poorly educated immigrants and their offspring, community college courses designed to teach marketable skills can assist their efforts to climb the rungs on the economic ladder. Making vocational programs work requires more than just offering classes. It also requires holding classes near where immigrants live and at times they can attend, reaching out to immigrants to inform them of opportunities, and finding instructors who speak their native language. Like English-language training and financial education, vocational training is by no means a cure-all. But such deliberate nuts-and-bolts attempts to encourage the clear desire immigrants have to get ahead can significantly improve the chances that they will succeed.

A final and more long-term strategy for minimizing the chances that immigrants and their offspring get locked into an economic underclass is to invest more in early childhood education. A key element here is federal programs such as Early Head Start (which targets children between the ages of one and three) and Head Start (which targets children between ages three and six). Both have been shown to strengthen the cognitive and language skills of preschoolers, giving them a firmer foundation on which to begin their formal education.¹⁰⁰ Of course, these successes can be undone in later years by badly run, unsafe, and underfinanced schools—a problem whose solution requires broader education reform efforts. Still, early childhood education could be an important key to helping many children climb beyond their modest beginnings.

Social Conflict

Diversity enriches American society, but it also sows the seeds of social conflict.¹⁰¹ Immigration presents particular problems. Newcomers change

existing communities, sometimes overnight; threaten established interests; and place new demands on government. The native-born often resist, seeking to stave off what they see as threats to their way of life. Thus Long Island homeowners protest the “atrocities” that illegal immigrants are inflicting on their town, and a North Carolina town responds to an influx of Latinos by inviting David Duke to speak against U.S. immigration policy.¹⁰² African Americans may feel particularly threatened. Their hard-fought efforts to gain political power may be eclipsed by a growing Latino vote, and poor blacks in many local labor markets face increased competition for lower-skilled jobs. The potential friction between natives and newcomers is nothing new. Americans often imagine that their ancestors made a smooth transition from immigrant to citizen. In practice, the transition has always been marked by contention and conflict.

Rather than ignoring this potential for conflict, Americans should confront it. In social policy as in medicine, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Waiting until former Klansmen are asked to address town meetings before responding makes the task of building ties between newcomers and natives that much harder. Nontraditional immigrant settlement areas should be particular targets because they have little infrastructure to absorb new immigrants.

The federal government can help cities and towns defray the costs associated with a rapid influx of immigrants. Education costs are probably the highest priority, given the cultural and fiscal impact immigrants can have on local schools. A federal program to handle this challenge already exists, the Emergency Immigrant Education Program (EIEP). Enacted in 1984, it provides impact aid to school districts that experience a surge in the number of foreign-born students who have been attending U.S. schools for three years or less. The money can be used for a variety of purposes, ranging from increasing parental involvement to tutoring or buying books. The program has never been fully funded, however. In FY 2001 its funding amounted to only \$150 million, or about \$186 per eligible student—well below the \$500 per student that Congress initially authorized.¹⁰³ Funding EIEP at its authorized level—or better yet, increasing both the authorized and the appropriated amounts—would help cities and towns better adjust to the emergence of new immigrant communities.

Although the federal government has a role to play, much of the work of preventing conflict needs to be done at the state and local level. That is where the impact of immigration is most deeply felt and where appropriate responses can be most effectively fashioned. States should follow the

lead of Maryland, Massachusetts, and Illinois in creating offices designed to reach out to immigrant communities. These offices should help identify emerging problems, serve as a source of policy ideas for local governments, and coordinate state, local, and community-based programs. Their goal should be to help newcomers meld into the community by acting as bridges to local institutions such as schools, government offices, and hospitals as well as by helping the community overcome fears of newcomers.

The kinds of outreach that should be encouraged are diverse. Some cities and towns have set up task forces to advise newcomers about local laws (especially on zoning, a source of much friction) and how to navigate the government bureaucracy. Many local police forces now engage in community policing, making deliberate efforts to reach out to immigrant communities and to solicit their feedback and involvement in law enforcement. In other localities, community groups have sponsored formal employment centers to ease the tensions created by immigrant day laborers who seek employment by congregating in front of stores and major intersections. Of course, these and similar efforts to smooth interactions between new and established communities will not eliminate social conflict. But they can diminish it substantially, thus increasing the chances that America's growing diversity will be far less wrenching than it otherwise could be.

Affirmative Action

Even as government and civil society act to address the stresses and strains associated with immigration, America's growing diversity is complicating one of its most controversial policies—race-based affirmative action. Affirmative action policies are in place in several arenas: job hiring and promotion, government contracts, and college and university admissions. Intended to remedy the injustices of slavery and Jim Crow, affirmative action assumed that racial group affiliation made individuals presumptively eligible or ineligible for benefits. It also rested on the presumption that people can be sorted into mutually exclusive racial categories. That may have been possible in 1970, when virtually all of Americans were identified as either black or white. It is much harder to do three decades later, when racial and ethnic identities have multiplied and a growing segment of the population is multiracial.

From its earliest days, affirmative action applied not just to African Americans, but to Asians, Hispanics, and American Indians as well.¹⁰⁴

Because these minority populations were so small in the 1960s, the consequences of making them eligible for preferences attracted little discussion or dispute. The post-1960s surge in immigration, however, confronted government officials with the task of deciding—usually without any public debate—which specific nationalities qualified under the vague labels of “Asian” and “Hispanic.”¹⁰⁵ This has produced numerous oddities. For instance, people of Spanish, Pakistani, and Portuguese heritage qualified (at least for some programs), but those of Bosnian, Iranian, and Moroccan descent did not. Yet even as the beneficiaries of affirmative action expanded, the American political debate on the merits of racial preferences remained framed in black-white terms. Neither the Clinton administration’s 1995 review of affirmative-action policies nor the final report of the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform mentioned the issue of immigrant participation.¹⁰⁶

The decision to allow respondents to select more than one race on the 2000 census adds another layer of complexity. With six major racial categories to choose among—white, black or African American, American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, and some other race—there are now more than sixty-three possible racial combinations. (Adding Hispanic background to the mix in turn doubles the number of possible combinations.) This raises the question of how people who are white and something else should be treated for affirmative action purposes. The Clinton administration’s answer, which the Bush administration accepted, is that “Mixed-race people who mark both White and a non-white race will be counted as the latter for purposes of civil rights monitoring and enforcement.”¹⁰⁷

While affirmative action has adapted to America’s changing demography, those adaptations complicate an already imperfect system. Furthermore, these adaptations add three new complaints to the traditional ones that racial preferences are always wrong, that they primarily help affluent minorities rather than poor ones, and that they were intended to be temporary.¹⁰⁸ First, if affirmative action is intended to remedy past discrimination, why should immigrants and their offspring be eligible for affirmative action at all? This policy is especially questionable when some national groups that have qualified, such as Asian Indians, are more prosperous than the average American. Second, the decision to count mixed-race individuals as nonwhite enshrines into policy the one-drop rule of race that segregationists had championed. This accentuates, rather than diminishes, the importance of race even as it creates the odd outcome whereby some

people who consider themselves non-Hispanic whites become eligible for affirmative action. (Roughly 25 percent of those who identify themselves as black and white consider themselves white, as do roughly half those who say they are of mixed Asian-white descent.)¹⁰⁹ Third, expanding affirmative action may actually defeat its original purpose of helping African Americans. By hiring Asians, Latinos, or black immigrants, employers can meet affirmative action goals while continuing to discriminate against native-born blacks.¹¹⁰

The debate over the future of affirmative action takes place against a backdrop of mixed public attitudes toward it. Diversity is widely accepted as a social good. However, preferences for ethnic and racial minorities in hiring and school admissions have long been unpopular with whites. Non-whites are not of a single mind on affirmative action's merits, either. Blacks have always been the policy's strongest supporters, though their support is neither axiomatic nor monolithic.¹¹¹ Asians and Hispanics—though not Asian or Hispanic elites—have expressed ambivalence.¹¹² This partially explains why efforts to end affirmative action, such as successful referenda in California in 1996 and in Washington in 1998, produced no sizable political backlash. The California case is the more remarkable of the two, given the state's tremendous diversity and the size of its nonwhite population. Substantial portions of the nonwhite community have been more attached to the notion of nondiscrimination than to the idea of racial preferences.

How the debate over affirmative action evolves depends greatly on the actions of the U.S. Supreme Court. In recent years the Court has narrowed the conditions under which affirmative action plans are permissible in hiring practices, though it has stopped short of declaring them unconstitutional. The issue will soon be joined, at least in the area of higher education. In December 2002 the Court agreed to hear challenges to the University of Michigan's undergraduate and law school admissions policies.

Many proponents of affirmative action fear that if the Supreme Court rules that ethnic and racial preferences are unconstitutional, the floodgates of discrimination will open, wreaking havoc on an increasingly diverse American society. This pessimism, while understandable, exaggerates things. It overlooks the robustness of civil rights law, which is far more important to guaranteeing minority rights than affirmative action. Equally important, it fails to recognize how profoundly racial attitudes and behavior have changed since the days of the civil rights movement. This was acutely evident in the intense public pressure on Senator Trent Lott to step

down as Senate majority leader in late 2002 after he made remarks seemingly endorsing segregation. The country's reaction to September 11, which emphasized inclusion rather than exclusion, is further evidence. Contrary to fears of a sharp backlash against Arab and Muslim Americans, the number of bias incidents remained remarkably small.¹¹³

Moreover, the public pressure on government to have universities and bureaucracies that look like the American people would continue. For that reason, class-based affirmative action policies—that is, initiatives designed to help lower-income groups, regardless of their race or ethnic origin—may replace race-based ones.¹¹⁴ In the wake of decisions to end the use of ethnic and racial preferences in higher education, both California and Texas adopted plans to guarantee places at one of its university campuses to a set percentage of the top students in every high-school graduating class in the state. (Florida also has instituted a percentage plan.) These policies effectively benefited the graduates of poorer school systems and reversed the decline in nonwhite undergraduate enrollment that had occurred immediately after racial preferences were jettisoned.¹¹⁵ These government policies will invariably be supplemented by private-sector initiatives. For instance, in 2002 a consortium of companies such as Boeing, GlaxoSmithKline, and McGraw-Hill joined to help universities retain and increase their diversity in the event affirmative action is ruled unconstitutional. The companies' motive was not altruism, but self-interest: they calculate that a work force that reflects the same racial and ethnic diversity as their customer base will benefit their corporate bottom lines.¹¹⁶

What if the Supreme Court finds that the University of Michigan's admissions policies are, or could with modification be, constitutional? In this instance, should the government look for practical ways to diminish its reliance on racial and ethnic preferences? Good arguments for considering class-based (or class- plus race-based) rather than race-based affirmative action are provided by the current policy's drift away from its original purposes, its ambivalent support among nonblack minorities, its elevation (rather than reduction) of the importance of race, the strength of the nondiscrimination principle in American society, the economic and social gains blacks have made over the past three decades, and the difficulties of administering ethnic and racial preferences in a society in which people do not fit into mutually exclusive categories.

A shift toward class-based policies could help bridge the racial and ethnic divides that current policies aggravate. Polls show that need-based policies enjoy support across all racial and ethnic groups.¹¹⁷ (Prominent African

American intellectuals such as Orlando Patterson and Cornel West have endorsed the idea as well.)¹¹⁸ Class may be a near-taboo word in American politics, and many Americans may persist in believing they live in a class-free society. However, they also understand intuitively what social scientists have amply documented—regardless of color or surname, which side of the tracks you grow up on greatly affects your life prospects. Most people support the idea of taking steps to make the playing field more level, provided that all disadvantaged groups stand to benefit.

In America, however, race still matters. Therefore, class-based affirmative action alone will not be a magic bullet. The percentage plans that California and Texas university systems adopted did not reverse the decline in minority enrollments in their state's graduate and professional schools. In the University of California system, African American and Latino enrollment at the flagship Berkeley and Los Angeles campuses still lags behind what it was before race-based affirmative action was halted.¹¹⁹ Critics argue that percentage plans depend on continued racial segregation at American high schools to succeed in producing diversity at the college level. To the degree that percentage plans create incentives to desegregate they might be seen as a social good, not only because integration has a value in itself, but also because the non-Hispanic white majority would presumably have a greater stake in seeing minority schools succeed. However, if percentage plans are deemed objectionable, they can be replaced by alternative schemes that would target preferences at the graduates of schools in poor communities or at the residents themselves.

At the same time, race-conscious policies have obvious flaws. What distinguishes a class-based strategy is that it is neutral toward race and ethnicity, but not indifferent to them. To the extent that race and ethnicity are tied to income—and they are in the United States—need-based policies help advance racial and ethnic groups without being exclusively about race. That is an important virtue in an increasingly diverse American society in which policies that make racial and ethnic differences more politically salient do more harm than good.

However, because class-based affirmative action is not a cure-all—and because race for good reason remains a politically volatile subject in American society—decisions to move away from race-based affirmative action should be embedded in a broader set of policies aimed at helping minorities. This is something the Bush administration notably failed to do when it decided to oppose the University of Michigan's admissions policies. At a minimum, colleges, businesses, and government should develop better

outreach and mentoring programs and provide more scholarships for lower-income students. Ultimately, however, government at all levels must confront the problem of failing public schools. Failing to take such steps would both ask class-based policies to do too much and send a signal that many minorities will read as evidence that white America is indifferent to their plight. That would feed ethnic and racial tensions rather than help ease them.

The Future of Diversity

The American mosaic is changing. Our national portrait is no longer painted solely in shades of black and white, but in Technicolor. We are becoming more Asian, Latino, and multiracial. That trend would continue even if we closed our borders tomorrow. The diversity created by three decades of relatively high immigration is self-sustaining. The children of today's immigrants and the willingness of Americans to look beyond racial and ethnic lines in choosing mates will see to that.

Will these diverse faces still cohere as a nation? One reason for optimism is that America has succeeded many times in the past in melding different groups into one nation. The American creed of liberty, justice, and equality for all under law adds a powerful force for assimilation. True, many immigrants discovered on arriving that the native born dismissed them as inferiors, too culturally alien ever to become Americans. Yet if we as a society have often fallen short of our ideals, we have not abandoned them. Instead, we have struggled to translate them into reality.

Our governmental and societal institutions should continue that tradition and reach out to immigrants, urge them to become citizens, and welcome them into the American family. Government and civil society should also move proactively to institute policies and programs designed to lessen the friction that arises when newcomers meet natives, thereby helping to diminish the political conflicts that can arise from diversity.

Our ideals alone, however, are not responsible for the success of American diversity. Equally important has been the reality of economic mobility. Immigrants historically have found that they could climb the ladder of economic success no matter how humble their origins. This mobility prevents racial, ethnic, and religious divisions from coinciding with class divisions and diminishes the potential for conflict. Conversely, when economic mobility has been denied to people based on their race or ethnicity—most notably African Americans—diversity has become a source of social unrest.

There may be no surer way to guarantee that any ethnic, racial, or religious group will reject integration into American society than to deny its members the tools and opportunities they need to achieve the American dream.

A test for American society in the coming decades, then, will be whether it can continue to facilitate the economic mobility of immigrants and their offspring. This process could, of course, be left to the magic of the market. But given what is at stake, and given the understandable concerns that the avenues for economic mobility may be narrower in an information economy than they were in a manufacturing economy, it makes far more sense for government to abandon its traditional *laissez-faire* approach to immigrants. Washington needs to take the lead by sizably increasing its investment in English-language training, expanding vocational and early childhood education opportunities, and moving affirmative action away from race-based preferences to class-based ones. However, the responsibility is not Washington's alone. State and local governments, as well as nonprofit organizations and private firms, have key roles to play in promoting economic mobility.

Proposals to encourage citizenship, minimize frictions between natives and newcomers, and promote economic mobility are easy to dismiss because they involve mundane everyday tasks and require only modest amounts of spending. They admittedly lack the grandeur of a war on poverty or a trillion-dollar tax cut. Yet much like an aspirin a day, they could produce substantial benefits over the long term. This is not just because some of these proposals would increase the quality of the nation's human capital, which, as Lawrence Katz, Claudia Goldin, and Bradford DeLong show in chapter 2 of this volume, is crucial to the country's long-run economic health. On a deeper level, they would demonstrate once again that America's great strength as a society lies in its diversity.

Notes

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