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OUR NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

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[MONTAGE OF VOICES]: I have never met an immigrant who has asked for money without working, without providing something in exchange.

My grandfather persisted. And he had this little Chinese restaurant where he worked day and night and day. And two generations later, his granddaughter became a member of Congress.

My brother, for instance, has so much pride for everything I've been able to do since getting my citizenship. Yet he's left in the shadows with no ability to get a job that pays him well.

I was just a normal kid, just trying to acclimate and assimilate to being in America.

Birthplace diversity and the diversity in a society really is very significantly positively correlated with economic growth and well-being.

HUDAK: Hi, I'm John Hudak, a senior fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution, and this is episode one of "Our Nation of Immigrants," a special series on U.S. immigration policy that I'm hosting on the Brookings Cafeteria podcast this week.

Over the past few months, I've interviewed over a dozen people to get their insights on the immigration problems we face today. These include elected officials at the city, state, and national levels; a former secretary of homeland security; immigrants and children of immigrants; scholars; and activists. Each plays a unique role in and has a unique perspective on this nation's immigration policy debate. You just heard from a few of them, and you'll hear much more from them throughout this five-part series.

Immigration is one of the most politicized topics in American life today, especially when elections come around. But at the heart of it are real people whose futures and lives are at stake. In this series, I'll be trying to get to the bottom of myths, misinformation and confusion

surrounding the immigration crisis, and at the end of this journey will present what I believe are smart solutions to the broken immigration system in American today.

In this first episode, I examine who are the immigrants that we hear so much about. Where are they coming from, why are they coming to the United States, and where do they go once they arrive?

To answer these questions, I spoke with a number of people who are either immigrants or children of immigrants, all of whom came to this country for different reasons, but all of whom want to, in some fashion, achieve their own version of the American dream. I was particularly struck by the story of Yanneli Llamas, who at the time of this interview was a senior at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where I am a frequent scholar in residence as part of our Brookings Mountain West partnership with the university.

And, I also spoke with one of my own colleagues here at Brookings—one of America's foremost thought leaders on the nation's changing demographics who will give us a look at the big picture of today's immigrants. You'll hear from Senior Fellow Bill Frey a little later, but first, more from Yanneli, whose voice you heard in the opening montage of this episode.

Yanneli was born in the United States to undocumented parents. Her story represents, I think, the complicated web of the immigration system that catches people and their families as they try to build a life in the United States. I interviewed her in person at UNLV back in March, before the pandemic interrupted our lives. Here's Yanneli, continuing her story.

LLAMAS: My name is, Yanneli Llamas. I'm 22 years old. I'm a graduating senior at UNLV. My parents were undocumented most of my life. They obtained their legal residency about three months ago because once I turned 21, I was able to submit paperwork as their petitioner.

My dad has been working in construction cleanup for a very long time. He worked in California in construction. He worked as a window washer. A lot of the times, because a lot of the workers were undocumented, they didn't have the kind of workplace safety concerns that they should have.

My uncle is a naturalized citizen, and he was actually injured on the job, washing windows on a high-rise building in California. And because he was a citizen, he was able to get some financial assistance while he was injured. That would not have been the case if he was undocumented.

So my dad, after seeing that, became a subcontractor. So, in a sense, he owns his own company cleaning and preparing houses, model homes, before they are sold. He works long hours in the Las Vegas sun, which, as you can imagine, is very difficult. He leaves our house by 6:30. Sometimes he doesn't come home until after 8:00. Which was difficult growing up, not seeing my dad, but I always knew that he was doing it for us. My mom, on the other hand, works in housekeeping. So she started off helping other friends who also have their own businesses cleaning houses. We are very ingrained in our church community, so she was able to meet people through there, and she helps clean Catholic schools and rectories. And that's where she's working right now.

HUDAK: Yanneli went on to describe her father’s decision—in part because of economics, in part because of family ties—to seek out work in the United States.

LLAMAS: So, for my dad, he was 18 years old, living in a small town. He had family living in California. And, of course, he saw that they were providing for their families in a much better way than he could. So while he was a teacher back in Mexico, probably working much fewer hours, many fewer hours, he was a teacher in Mexico, and the job was not as labor

intensive as what he does here. But he enjoys what he does here a lot more than teaching. He doesn't make as much as some other people would make. He's definitely very proud of his work.

HUDAK: Yanneli shared with me the story of how her father wasn't happy with his teaching job in Mexico, and so as a young man joined her godfather at his construction job in Santa Ana, California. That began some years of moving back and forth across the border to visit his own parents back in Mexico—a common practice for so many migrants. On one of those trips, in the 1980s, Yanneli's father met the woman who would become his wife, and the mother of Yanneli and her two younger brothers.

LLAMAS: The border was very porous back then. So he would spend a couple months back in Mexico with my grandma, spend a couple months here in the States working back and forth; never really had a problem getting across. He established himself in California and eventually moved to Las Vegas when he knew that he wanted to start settling down because of the job opportunities, and also because of the cost of living.

At one point when he was in Mexico visiting my grandma, he met my mom. They started dating and she said that she always told herself she would never date a *norteño*. She would never date someone that was from the States. But he was very insistent. And he would talk to my uncles and he would send her letters and he would call her. And at one point when he was visiting Mexico, he told her that the best gift she could give him before he came back to the States was to promise to be his girlfriend. And my mom agreed. So, they continued dating long distance, him going back to visit. And during one of those visits he proposed. And she had her visa at the time. So she would also go back and forth between the two countries. They got married. My mom decided to move in with my dad in Las Vegas, and then she got pregnant with me and I was born here.

When my mom's visa renewal was not granted, I was about four years old, which meant that from the time I was four years old up until right before Christmas, she was not able to go back and see her hometown. She was not able to go back and see her parents who were elderly and could not travel on a plane to come out and visit us. Both of my maternal grandparents actually passed away just a few months ago, both within a month of each other. And my mom was not able to go back to Mexico and say goodbye to them. She was not able to go back and see all of her siblings and have the support that she needed in her grief. And that was very painful for me to watch because I felt like she had to go through the pain of losing both parents on her own.

Of course, she had us. But we don't have any other family here in Vegas. And, of course, one can't even begin to compare the pain of losing a parent to the pain of losing a grandparent. But, I haven't really seen much growing up. So, while it was painful to lose my grandparents and what could have been, it was still more painful to see how my mom suffered for months on her own, only to have her permanent legal residency just a few months after.

My dad was in a similar situation. My paternal grandmother passed away about a month ago and my parents weren't granted their legal residency status until right before Christmas. So as soon as that was granted, my parents were ecstatic. We started packing. Within a day, we already had plans to go back to Mexico. So we drove down there and we were able to see my paternal grandmother, who at that point—she was nearly 90 years old. So she was dealing with dementia and a host of other health problems. So, we were able to say goodbye to her just a month before she passed. But again, you think of all the time that was wasted.

HUDAK: Despite these challenges, Yanneli excelled. As a member of a loving family, she often served as a translator for her parents and others. A woman of faith, she volunteers in her church. In high school, Yanneli was valedictorian of her class, earning her a scholarship to

attend UNLV, where she was admitted to the Honors College, doubled majored in criminal justice and English, and minored in the Brookings Public Policy Minor. At UNLV she served in student government and worked as an advocate for victims of human trafficking.

In addition to her already considerable accomplishments Yanneli told me she was planning to go to law school so she can serve the immigrant community—a goal she achieved this fall, as she started her first year at the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, attending with a full scholarship. Despite her successes, she expressed some fear about the rhetoric she hears in the immigration debate.

LLAMAS: It's definitely very scary hearing all the rhetoric surrounding immigration. Again, on Twitter, I saw a tweet—I can't remember who wrote it—but it did say if immigrants just come here for handouts, why does ICE always raid workplaces? And while that's funny, it's also scary to think that your parents could go to work one day and not come back. I am the oldest of three siblings. Both of my brothers are still teenagers. One of my brothers is in middle school, the other one is 16—he's a junior in high school. When all of the ICE raids were happening, I was already developing a plan. What would I do if my parents were deported? I am 22 years old. I am a full-time student. And I'm doing my best to work as much as I can. But I don't make enough to make a mortgage payment. I don't make enough to support myself and two teenage boys. So, I've gotten as far as I have because my family has been very supportive of education. But had my parents been deported, I would have to give it all up. I'm in the honors college, as I mentioned. I got a pretty good LSAT score. I have a near perfect GPA, and I'll be going to law school on a full ride. I would have had to give all of that up. I was seriously considering dropping out of school and getting a full-time job should my parents be deported. Which, looking back now, it was a very scary time, but at the time I just thought this is what needs to be

done. Because to uproot them and I mean, what else would have been left for us? We could, A, go to Mexico with my parents, which I don't see what good that would have done anyone because my brothers can't even speak Spanish very well. On top of that, they haven't graduated high school, so they would essentially be going to another country without any credentials. I just don't see a future for them, especially when they've built all of their lives here. They would be going to a country where they can't even communicate very well.

I would have had to become the head of the family. Again, I'm glad that those worries are behind me because my parents are legal residents now, and it's a significant weight that has been lifted off my shoulders. But this is something that has only happened three months ago. So before three months ago, it was sitting down with my parents when all of the ICE raids were happening and they were all over Twitter, I literally sat my parents and my brothers down and I said to them, “These are your rights. Don't open the door to any strangers. Don't answer any questions. If anyone comes to the door, call me and I will figure things out.” Luckily, I have made some connections in, like, the criminal justice faculty; I know a few lawyers. So, I was already making a contingency plan. But I think what about all the people that don't have those connections that literally would not know what to do if their parents just didn't come home one day? I wouldn't really know what to do if my parents didn't come home one day. Would I move with my family in California? Would I stay here? But one thing's for certain, though, I would not have had the chance to focus on my school or focus on my LSAT or focus on law school applications if I had to be a single mom to two teenage boys.

So, I said before that I am one of the lucky ones because I was born here. So, again, I have a lot of opportunities offered to me that some other people in similar situations don't have. I was able to teach myself English when I was about three years old just from watching public TV.

You know, so Sesame Street was my English teacher. So, by the time I started kindergarten, I was bilingual. A lot of other kids going to my same school were not. Their parents were also recent immigrants, but they hadn't learned English by the time they started school. So, I remember all through elementary school, I would often be seated at a different table with all of the kids that couldn't speak English. So, the teacher would teach the class and then I would essentially teach the small group of kids.

HUDAK: I asked most of the people I interviewed what they would convey to President Trump if they had 5 or 10 minutes to speak with him about immigration policy, and the answers reveal a diverse set of ideas. I sprung this question on each person in an effort to reveal an off-the-cuff, raw expression of what they think is most important. Here's Yanneli's response.

LLAMAS: I think I'd like to convey to him that we are real people, too. I think it becomes so easy to be prejudiced in any way, whether it be based on race or gender or religion, when you dehumanize the people that you're talking about. I know that a lot of people have been facing a lot of hard times—my family isn't the only one that has had difficulty. And it's a lot easier to point to a certain group of people that doesn't look like you, and to say that they're the problem. But I don't think infighting is going to help anything. It's just such a complicated issue and I feel like I've tried to look at it every which way to try to understand why people can look at you and treat you so differently. I'm lighter skinned, so I know that I've had a lot of privilege that many people that aren't as white-passing have had. And even then, I've still faced a lot of the sideways glances or the, "You live in America, Speak English." And I just wish people knew that we're people, too, I don't know how else to convey that.

I think that strides have definitely been made with more representation on TV and in movies. Just over the weekend, I took my brothers to watch *Onward*, which is the new Disney

movie. And it meant so much to me that there's a scene where the main character sits down at like a Krispy Kreme and he begins a conversation with a man that's there with his son getting breakfast. And the man has a Hispanic accent. And I've never seen that before growing up. And it was just so casual and so normal. And it's the little things like that that help you feel seen. I think most people just want to be seen, they want to be known, and they want to be loved. And I would like President Trump to know that we are just people with families trying to make it in this world. You know, we're just doing the best with what we have, loving each other. How are our values any different from any other American?

HUDAK: Yanneli's story is a powerful one. Her family's story is one of strength, faith, education, hard work, dedication, and love. But it's also a story of fear, risk, and the victimization by a set of failed public policies. Yanneli's success story is the heart of immigration in the United States, and stories like hers are not told often enough by our political leaders. And while she has achieved enormous success, it could have been dashed by one knock at the door one warm Las Vegas evening. She planned what to do in case she needed to quit school, give up her dreams, and raise her brothers. And it is important to ask, how many men and women out there like Yanneli did face that crossroads and gave up much because their family was torn apart.

So now we come to the big picture: who are the immigrants, where are they coming from, and where are they going? And just as important, how do we distinguish between those who are here legally, and those who aren't? My colleagues at Brookings, Elaine Kamarck and Christine Stenglein, published a paper last year for the Brookings Policy 2020 project in which they asked how we count people who are in the United States illegally. Some of the findings may surprise

you, and they cut against presidential rhetoric, media narratives, and social media memes that tend to dominate the conversation. Here are a few of those findings:

According to Pew Research, the total number of undocumented immigrants peaked in 2007 at 12.2 million, and by 2017 had fallen to 10.5 million. They account for an estimated 23 percent of the foreign-born population in the U.S.

Many undocumented immigrants pay payroll and income taxes, and all of them pay sales taxes and property taxes—either directly or indirectly.

Sixty-two percent of undocumented individuals came here via a legal visa, and overstayed that visa, while only 38 percent entered the United States illegally.

To find out more about the immigrant population in the United States, I turned to one of the nation's most well-known demographers, Bill Frey, senior fellow in the Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings. He spoke to some of the myths that are out there, and promoted by President Trump, about who today's immigrants are.

FREY: I think the president's view of immigration to the United States today, if it were ever true, it might have been 20 years ago. That is people coming across the border from Mexico—when the economy was good, we wanted them. They weren't treated very well by their employers sometime, but we wanted them and they were good for us when the economy was shaking a little bit, maybe people got a little concerned that their jobs were at risk because of these immigrants or something.

But that was in the past. This century and especially since 2010, most of our immigrants are coming from Asian countries—a little more than half. If you're looking at Latin America versus Asia, half or so are now from Asian countries—from India, from China, from the Philippines, and from other countries in Asia. And they're coming to take both low-skilled and

high-skilled jobs. And we have people coming from Latin America and from other places. I don't want to do a stereotype in saying only Latin Americans do low-skilled jobs and only Asians do high-skilled jobs. There are actually people coming and doing all kinds of jobs. It's a matter of us taking care of them.

But the stereotype is that we have Latin Americans coming across the border, is no longer the case. In fact, we've had a decline of migrants from Mexico over the last 10 years. Latin American folks that come here are from other parts of Latin America rather than from Mexico.

And the other part of what's going on that's not in people's heads about immigration is that immigrants today are much more educated than either they were before or that the U.S. native born population is. So, immigrants coming in the last eight years, between 2010 and 2018 according to the most recent statistics, about 60 percent or so have college degrees compared to 30 or 32 percent for the U.S. population. Again, sort of different than the stereotype we have from some in the administration.

So, I mean, I think when you do political read rhetoric, you try to connect with what people have in their heads, and what a lot of people have in their heads is maybe 20 years old. So rather than rather than inform them about what's changed, you try to get some more votes by doing that and you're going to say that. But that's no longer the case anymore. And we can change our immigration policy in ways that might even help us better, but not to cast aspersions on the kinds of immigrants that are coming to the United States now.

HUDAK: The Census Bureau estimated that the country's population from 2018 to 2019 grew by less than half of one percent. It's the lowest annual growth rate since 1918. I asked Bill if that statistic should alarm Americans.

FREY: Well, it's a little bit of an aberration, I guess you could say. Typically, we have a higher rate of growth than most other industrialized countries in the world. And even at that 0.4 a percent, we're ahead of a lot of them like Germany or Italy or Japan or places like that. But it's atypically low for us because for a good part of the last half of the 20th century, we were growing at about 10 percent a decade or more. More than 1 percent a year. And that even goes up to the 2000 to 2010 decade, the first decade of this century—9.7 percent growth. So, going down to a half percent growth is not typical. I think that we are going to have slower growth in this country because of the aging of the population, which means they're going to be more deaths because more older people and fewer births because there are fewer women in their childbearing ages. And we're going to have to rely much more on immigration than we have in the past. But in fact, the reason we grew so rapidly and faster than all these other industrialized countries, say, in the last 40 years, is because we had healthy immigration up until the last two or three years, which I think is important for us going forward.

So I guess what I'm saying is, I'm not so concerned about this if we look at the last two or three years as an aberration, and the aberration being we have exceptionally low immigration, I think to some degree due to the current administration's policies. But also, we had lower fertility and I chalk that up to another factor: that is the putting off of children on the part of millennials. So young adult people in their 20s have lower fertility than they've ever had. And I think that you can chalk up just to the economy that they had to deal with.

And then if we add a little more immigration, maybe a lot more immigration, we can still stay ahead of all these other countries. But it's a warning sign in the sense that we need to think about what's happened in these last two or three years and what can we do to sort of prop up our growth again.

HUDAK: Bill underscored the point that, as a country, we will need to rely on immigration more in the future, a fact that clashes with communications coming out of the White House about shutting down immigration entirely or nearly entirely. In fact, the American economy depends heavily on immigrants to power growth and American citizens depend heavily on immigrants, often in more ways than they realize.

FREY: I think this has to do with this warning sign we just saw in the last year of the population growing very slowly. Because what that's a symptom of is an aging population—that is, the fastest growing part of our population are people age 65 and over with the baby boomers moving into these ages. Many have already had, more will in the future. And but what's happening at the same time is we have very slow growth of the child population and the youth population due to this declining fertility and the fact that there's fewer women in their childbearing ages. And to make up for that, immigration has to play a role. It's played a big role in the recent decade or two in this U.S., but it's going to continue to have to play a big role over time. And interestingly enough, the Census Bureau came out with these new projections where they looked at different immigration scenarios projecting ahead between now and 2060, forty years from now. And they found that if the current immigration levels, that is ones we've seen before the last two or three years but earlier this decade, continue for the next 40 years, the population of the United States would grow about 22 percent. Well, it's grown 46 percent in the last 40 years—that's less than half the growth. But even then, we're getting some growth out of it.

HUDAK: Some opponents of immigration, especially those worried about the decline in whites as the majority population, believe that the U.S. could stop immigration altogether and halt these trends. Not so, Bill says:

FREY: If we stopped immigration altogether, we'd actually have a decline in our population. That decline would start in around 2035. We now have we now have a population of about 330 million people. If we got to 2060, it'll be down to 320 million, and a lot of that decline is going to be concentrated among the youth and the labor force age population.

So we have this growing senior population, many on Social Security, many depending on Medicare, probably more in the future than there are now, because we know a lot of older people don't have a lot of savings and retirement money backed up … banking on these younger folks to help them by putting money into Social Security, by making the economy more productive. But that younger population could be shrinking if we have much lower immigration than we have now. And really we should up the immigration if we're going to have that kind of growth to keep a more youthful, productive labor force. So, I always talk about "age dependency." It's a demographic term. But the extent to which that you have a very high percentage of seniors to the working age population. It could be almost 1 to 2 if we had no immigration by the time we got to 2060, that would be two workers only, there to support one retiree. And that's really something we can't sustain.

HUDAK: And even if we zero out immigration—if somehow all new immigration to the United States was stopped—the country will still get more diverse because of the diversity in the younger populations who are already here.

FREY: It's true that most immigrants come to the U.S. today, and no matter what our policy would be, would come from countries where we'd get a lot of people of color, as we call them today, either from Latin America or from Asia or from Africa. And that's likely to be the case. And surely if we have more immigrants coming in from those countries, it helps to make our country more diverse.

But we are already pretty diverse. And the part of our diversity is in the younger part of the population, people in their teens and 20s and 30s. And that will continue to be the case. And these are the people who are going to be having children going forward. So, the natural increase part of our population, the excess of births over deaths, we'll be very diverse. We already have more minority babies born in a year than we do white babies born in the year. So, just do the demography without any immigration, and that's going to continue to make our country more racially diverse.

And the other part of it, of course, is the decline and aging of our white population. Since 2000, we already have a decline of whites who are under age 18 in the U.S. During the 2020s period, we're going to have that occurring for people in their 20s—there'll be a decline of whites in their 20s. During the 2030s decade there'll be a decline of whites in their 30s and everybody younger than that. So, the only growth we're going to have, even if there is no immigration, if it's only from natural increase, from births that are already here will be of people of different racial and ethnic groups that are not white in the U.S.

So we won't get as diverse as quickly with no immigration. But these new Census projections say that even if there is no immigration at all when we get to 2060, 49 percent of the population will be people of color. And if we've cut immigration in half, which we really shouldn't do, when we get to 2049 more than half of the population will be people of color and it'll come much sooner for the younger age populations. Bike in 10 years that'll be the case under most scenarios for people under the age of 30.

HUDAK: Another aspect of immigration that I was interested in learning about was not just the question of *who*, but the question of *where*. Where are immigrants going once they get to America? And where are immigrant populations growing?

There is outsized attention on migration across the U.S.-Mexico border. With scandals surrounding detention facilities, family separation policy, and with a focus on building a border wall, that focus on migration from Mexico and Central America is clear. But immigrants are bringing global diversity to communities in every region of this country. Bill Frey explains where they are going, and why that's so important for the future of economic growth.

FREY: It's still the case that a large number of foreigners, or what we call foreign born population, move into these kind of melting pot areas or melting pot states, traditional gateway areas: Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Houston, Chicago are some of the big ones. Those alone that I just mentioned house 36 percent of the foreign-born population in the United States.

But in the last 10 years, they've only accounted for 20 percent of the foreign-born growth. So even though they have a large part of the foreign-born populations, it's dispersing out to other parts of the country—both new foreign-born that are coming to the U.S. and foreign born who lived in those states who were then moving out to other parts of the United States.

And so we see, there's still going to be very heavy growth of the foreign born in Florida and in Texas, places that already have a lot of foreign-born. But in California, the rate of growth of that foreign-born population is going down. They're still getting a lot of immigrants in California, but the rate of growth in that population is going down as those immigrants and foreign-born spread out to, say, the rest of the mountain west, Nevada and Utah and Arizona and places like. And then the East Coast, moving out from the northeast into other parts of the south and the southwest.

I mean, immigrants, like everyone else, move to places where there are jobs. So the parts of the country that are gaining jobs are going to attract more immigrants. And that's going to be the case. I should also say, though, having said that, immigration is still very important for a

metropolitan area like Los Angeles. Because even though the foreign born are leaving Los Angeles, the native-born are leaving even quicker because of the high cost of living. So, there's foreign-born that are moving into California are still kind of important for their growth.

HUDAK: And these migration patterns—both for immigrant and native-born Americans—have huge political and electoral implications

FREY: It's not only California, New York anymore that's getting diverse, but it's moving to the inner part of this country. And as that happens, we're going to see that these kind of red states—which tend to vote Republican because of the kind of social issues, not always because of the social issues or the economic issues, lots of things involved, but the kind of things some of the politicians try to fan the flames of these racial divisions—think they can get this population in the middle of the country energized about stopping immigration, and not doing so much for the young social safety net families who were largely racially diverse in the United States.

I did some projections of what we will see in the 2020 census, because the reason you take a census, according to the Constitution, is to reapportion Congress on the basis of population shifts. And the 2020 census, according to my calculations, will show that the state of Texas will gain three additional seats in Congress. Florida will gain two more seats, and states like Arizona and Colorado and North Carolina, and a few others, will gain an individual seat. Whereas the states that are losing seats are a lot of Rust Belt and northeastern states like Pennsylvania, and New York, and Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, also West Virginia and Alabama.

But normally you would say, well, the states that are gaining seats are Republican states for the most part, not all of them. But for the most part, the states that are losing seats are Democratic seats. But what you don't always think about is who's moving to those states. And a lot of people moving to those states are new immigrants who tend to vote Democratic. So,

moving to Texas or Arizona or North Carolina, states that voted for Republican, at least in the presidential election the last two times and longer for some of them. And also people moving from blue states, native-born people who are moving from California to Texas, California to Arizona.

So the immigrant shifts to the inner part of the country, especially people of color, especially people who are known to vote Democratic, may change a lot of those red states into blue states or at least purple states. I think we've seen this in Nevada actually over the last 20 or 30 years, a very high percentage of Nevada's electorate was white just in 1990. Now it's well below half white, the electorate in Nevada. That's because whites are leaving Nevada, but it's because lots of other minority groups, especially immigrant groups, are moving to Nevada.

Nevada is a pretty good example of what may be happening in other parts of the country, Arizona and in the case of the south. It's not just the new immigrants moving to the states like North Carolina, but also Black migration to the south is an important trend that we continue to see in the United States.

HUDAK: In the end, no matter which immigration policies this or any other presidential administration enacts, our country is growing increasingly diverse. This is a good and necessary thing for the economy and for society, as another episode will explain in more detail. This increasing diversity will also ultimately help reduce political polarization. This is one of the central arguments in Bill's renowned book, *Diversity Explosion: How New Racial Demographics Are Remaking America*, published by the Brookings Institution Press in 2018. I asked Bill to explain his thesis.

FREY: The first edition was written soon after the 2010 census and in the more recent edition I've updated the numbers. But when I first looked at the results of the 2010 census, I was

just flabbergasted. I'm a demographer. I've been doing this for a long, long time. And even I was surprised at the growth of the racial minority population in the United States—Latinos, people of two or more races, Asians especially.

The other thing that sort of hit me in the face is the decline of whites under age 18, which really has happened in the United States since 2000. The reason that's happened is because the white population is older, there are proportionately fewer white women in their childbearing ages. So even though white women are having children, there aren't as many of them having children. What that means is that the younger part of our population is the part that's becoming more racially diverse. I mean, you can just see it in playgrounds, and sand lots, and schools, and everywhere across the country. Not just in places like California or New York, but in the middle of the country. And if it's not there yet, it's coming very soon.

So, one of the reasons I think that we're going to become more open to a diverse society is because the oldest of this very diverse generation is soon to turn age 40, and as they become much more in the middle of things as leaders in government, leaders in politics and so forth, people will come to understand, even old white baby boomers like myself, will see that this diverse soon to be middle age population is going to be very talented and very open to the kinds of changes we need in this country. Really getting back to where we were 150 years ago or 100 years ago at the time of that migration to the United States, which people eventually accepted. But it's true: right now, and especially in the 2016 presidential election and for the last three years, there is this kind of racial divide in the U.S. in terms of politics, in terms of societal views, of the way things should go. And I alluded to people my age as sort of old white baby boomers, but not all of us think this way, but enough of us think this way to make it difficult for these younger, more diverse generations and more in particular issues about immigration to the United States, because immigration is often

associated with the increased racial diversity in this country. And the idea is, well, if we could stop immigration, maybe we'll become white like we were back in the 1950s. But that's not going to happen. And as I say, we already have these very diverse millennials moving into these ages. I think that's one way that the demography is going to change in this country so that people become more accepting of these changes.

HUDAK: For most of the nation's history, there has been an immigration problem in the United States, and that problem is two-fold. First, too often misinformation, bias, and xenophobia infect our rhetoric around who immigrants are, what they do or don't do, and why they are in the United States.

Second, our political leaders lack the will and courage to make comprehensive reforms that resolve the nation's challenges.

We heard from Yanneli Llamas and Bill Frey—two individuals who come at immigration issues from very different perspectives but tell us a similar story. Immigrants are good people, who care about their family and faith, who work hard, and contribute mightily to American society, the American economy, and United States government tax coffers. The diversity they have brought to the United States will continue to transform not just what America looks like, but transform the American economy for the better. Yes, there are bad apples in any bunch. But the idea that immigrants and their children, refugees, and others seeking asylum are an army of criminals colluding to fracture and destroy the United States is a nonsensical stereotype, dripping in xenophobia and not based in reality.

We are in a moment in which immigration policy in the United States lacks humanity. It's a time when political rhetoric is polarized and heated and at times hateful. This is nothing

new. Donald Trump is not the first president to govern over a system in which these problems manifest—even if some of the specific policy choices are new.

But one thing is clear. Immigration policy in the United States is not just failing immigrants. It's failing American citizens. And over the next several episodes we will hear more stories about those who have experienced immigration policy first-hand. But we'll also explore the specific problems within immigration policy and identify some of the most effective solutions moving forward that balances security, humanity, and governing effectiveness.

This has been "Our Nation of Immigrants." A lot of people contributed to the episodes in this special series of the Brookings Cafeteria podcast. First, I want to thank my guests who took time to let me interview them for this episode: Yanneli Llamas and Bill Frey.

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I'm John Hudak.