

Postwar Immigrant America

A Social History

Reed Ueda

Immigrants Admitted, 1940-1990



THE BEDFORD SERIES IN HISTORY AND CULTURE

**Postwar
Immigrant America**
A Social History

Reed Ueda

Tufts University

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Foreword

The Bedford Series in History and Culture is designed so that readers can study the past as historians do.

The historian's first task is finding the evidence. Documents, letters, memoirs, interviews, pictures, movies, novels, or poems can provide facts and clues. Then the historian questions and compares the sources. There is more to do than in a courtroom, for hearsay evidence is welcome, and the historian is usually looking for answers beyond act and motive. Different views of an event may be as important as a single verdict. How a story is told may yield as much information as what it says.

Along the way the historian seeks help from other historians and perhaps from specialists in other disciplines. Finally, it is time to write, to decide on an interpretation and how to arrange the evidence for readers.

Each book in this series contains an important historical document or group of documents, each document a witness from the past and open to interpretation in different ways. The documents are combined with some element of historical narrative—an introduction or a biographical essay, for example—that provides students with an analysis of the primary source material and important background information about the world in which it was produced.

Each book in the series focuses on a specific topic within a specific historical period. Each provides a basis for lively thought and discussion about several aspects of the topic and the historian's role. Each is short enough (and inexpensive enough) to be a reasonable one-week assignment in a college course. Whether as classroom or personal reading, each book in the series provides firsthand experience of the challenge—and fun—of discovering, recreating, and interpreting the past.

Natalie Zemon Davis
Ernest R. May

Preface

The uprooting and transplanting of people—the accelerating movements creating “worlds in motion,” in the words of historian Bernard Bailyn—have been defining features of global transformation since the sixteenth century. Immigration to the United States in the post–World War II era unfolded into the most highly evolved manifestation of these changes. This book analyzes the history of that immigration in light of the global and international forces that prompted it.

In charting the latest evolutionary stage of the world’s most welcoming “immigration country,” this volume explores connections between the cycles of immigration and assimilation that have occurred throughout the nation’s history. Late twentieth-century immigration from India, Mexico, and Vietnam has replaced earlier migrations from Scotland, Italy, and Russia and has shown both similarities with and differences from earlier patterns.

This volume also probes the impact of the arriving ethnic groups on the historic foundations of the American nation. The new Asian and Hispanic immigrants revitalized political and civic institutions inherited from the colonial founders. They reshaped the debate over how democracy could encompass ethnic groups with greater inclusiveness and egalitarianism.

Analyzing these features of postwar worldwide immigration requires an interdisciplinary approach joining history with the concepts and methodologies of the various social sciences. Thus, demographic and quantitative analysis are applied to the rise of worldwide immigration; sociology and demography provide an understanding of the development of group life; and ideas from political science and law illuminate the relationship of immigrants to American government and its ethnic policies.

In its global perspective and analytic treatment, *Postwar Immigrant America* endeavors to go beyond a narrative account of twentieth-century American immigration.

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Reed Ueda

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INTRODUCTION

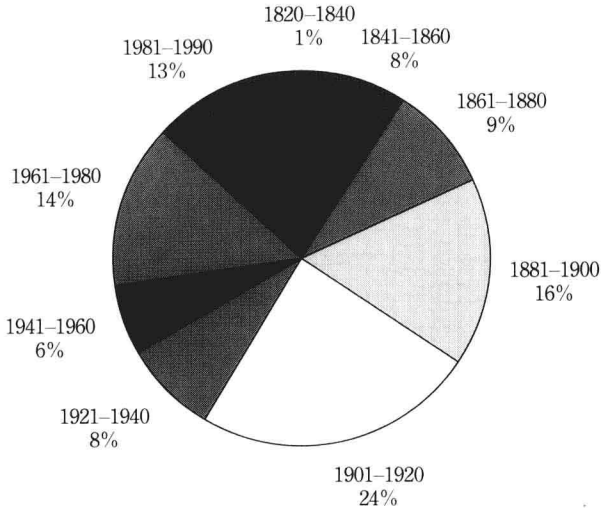
The Historical Context of Immigration

The United States became history's first "worldwide" immigration country in the twentieth century. By the 1990s, the flow of newcomers swelled to include people from every region and culture of the globe. Forty million of the sixty million immigrants since the founding of the country—two out of three newcomers—arrived in the twentieth century, making it the greatest era of immigration in national and world history (see Figure I.1).

The United States had long been distinguished for the continuous and unique role that immigrants played in its population history. From the early nineteenth to the early twentieth century, the United States attracted three-fifths of all the world's immigrants—more than received by all other large immigration-receiving countries in the world combined (Figure I.2). Among all the world's immigration countries, the United States accepted by far the greatest variety of nationalities. From the early nineteenth century to World War II, 16 percent of American immigrants came from Germany, 12 percent from Italy, 12 percent from Ireland, 12 percent from the multifarious ethnic enclaves of Austria-Hungary, 11 percent from Great Britain, and 10 percent from Russia. Other English-speaking immigration countries such as Australia and Canada drew their settlers almost wholly from other Anglophone nations. Immigration to Latin American societies also showed a narrow spectrum of national diversity, limited chiefly to Iberian and Italian origins. Ethnic variety in American immigration increased even more in the late twentieth century, especially with the rise of immigration from Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa, from which few immigrants had come in the early twentieth century. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service reported admissions in 1990 from thirty Asian countries (including

Figure I.1. Immigrants Admitted to the United States by Period, 1820–1900

Immigration to the United States from 1820 to 1990 can be divided into three relatively equal parts: 1820–1900 (81 years, 33.6%); 1901–1940 (40 years, 33.6%); and 1941–1990 (50 years, 32.8%).



Source: Derived from *1990 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), p. 15.

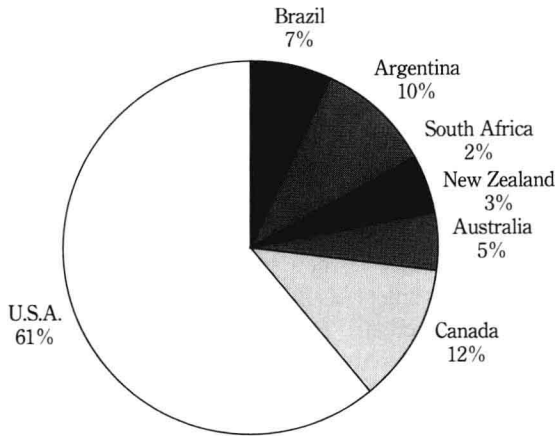
the Middle East), seventeen Central and South American countries, thirteen Caribbean countries, and thirteen African countries.¹

The United States is the great exception among world nations, most of which—including Germany, Japan, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, and Korea—have no tradition of immigration and little interest in developing one.² The German political leader Volker Ruhe expressed the viewpoint of such nations by announcing in 1991, “We [in Germany] are not an immigration country and we will not become one.”

Despite the enormous numbers and variety of those who chose to come to America, immigrants were a minority among the peoples of the world. It is important to remember that the vast majority of Chinese, Mexicans, Swedes, and Italians chose to remain home. For every Irish immigrant who came to the United States during the potato famine of the 1840s, five people remained in Ireland. There were plenty of reasons to remain home. Leaving meant a painful separation from one’s support system. When the immigrants left, they lost everything and everyone familiar. Historian Oscar Handlin has called this uprooting a trauma that left a permanent scar. Nearly all immigrants went

Figure I.2. Destination of Immigration, 1820–1930

In the 110 years before the Great Depression, the United States attracted three-fifths of all immigrants—more than all other nations in the world combined. Countries in the British Empire attracted about one-fifth.



Source: Derived from William S. Bernard, ed., *American Immigration Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), p. 202.

through the pain of snapping the ties of extended family life. An immigrant woman arriving at Ellis Island recalled, “We hated to leave. I had a grandfather and grandmother living in Europe and my father was an only child. It was terrible to part with the two of them, but they wouldn’t go along. They wanted to die in Europe.” The loss of the old moorings filled the immigrants with self-doubt. In Abraham Cahan’s early twentieth-century novel *The Rise of David Levinsky*, the protagonist David Levinsky recalls, “Who can depict the feeling of desolation, homesickness, uncertainty, and anxiety with which an emigrant makes his first voyage across the ocean? . . . And echoing through it all were the heart-lashing words: ‘Are you crazy? You forget your place, young man!’”³

Most people chose to live with familiar oppression and poverty rather than throw everything away to uncertain, unfamiliar promises. The immigrant was a risk taker who had the courage or the recklessness to give up the known, with its limits, for the unknown, with its possibilities. Most immigrants—from Mexican farm laborers to Polish steelworkers—were bold adventurers on voyages of discovery who had to have the resiliency to cope with tremendous social change, pressures, and loss.

Despite the sacrifices and losses, many immigrants persevered to realize a

new vision of the individual and society. They found that American conditions of tolerance toward diversity, compared with the rigid boundaries that existed in most other countries, made the forging of new identities and cultural ties inescapable. The immigrant absorbed new ways from neighboring people who were different. The children of Japanese immigrants in Hawaii learned new games, new words, new values, new tastes in food, new styles of dress, and new ways of forming relationships from neighbors, playmates, and classmates who were Hawaiian, Filipino, German, Chinese, and Portuguese. The process of acculturating with unfamiliar surrounding elements had deep roots in the nation's social history. During the American Revolution, the French immigrant Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur described this mixing process in his community: "*He* is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds."⁴

American immigrants created a new society differing fundamentally from old societies such as those they left in Sweden, Germany, or Japan. These societies took strength from homogeneity. Solidarity came from all people being the same. In the United States, the immigrants built a society whose strength came from the immense multiplicity of ethnic groups. Moreover, the society hinged on the existence of conditions that permitted dissimilar groups to act and live together without intrusive government. The resultant mutualism and interdependency helped integrate the nation.

Immigration created the American nation and defined its role in world history. Immigration to America adjusted the balance of human and material resources between nations, creating new international economic and cultural ties that affected the relations between countries. Otto von Bismarck, the "Iron Chancellor" who unified Germany in the 1870s, assessed American immigration as the "decisive fact" of the modern world.⁵

At the heart of American history lay the cycle of national creation and re-creation through immigration. The new nation emerging from the American Revolution grew out of the first immigration consisting of Protestant colonials from the British Isles and northern Europe. After the Civil War, with large numbers of Irish Catholics and newcomers from Germany and Scandinavia, the immigrant nation continued to evolve. By the turn of the century, it received immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, East Asia, Mexico, and the Caribbean. These waves constituted the second immigration. After 1965, the American nation absorbed a great influx of immigrants from around the world in the third immigration.

As an ever-changing society formed out of three historical immigrations, the civic and social foundations of American nationhood shifted accordingly. The historian John Higham has called attention to the need to understand the

differences immigration has made for national development. He has pointed out that the first immigration, by bringing diverse population elements before the founding of the country, prepared the way for an eclectic and universalistic form of citizenship. Higham found that the second immigration generated new communal and organizational modes for immigrant adaptation such as machine politics, organized labor, and ethnic associations, as well as cultural modes such as mass entertainment and media. The third immigration has reinforced the developments of the first and second immigrations but is contributing a unique shift: moving the nation toward a transnational, interracial world society and a multicultural politics.⁶

As a history of post-World War II immigrant America, this volume treats the third immigration, but it also touches on the multigenerational evolution of the second immigration and in a minor and oblique way the residual features of the first immigration. This work depicts a postwar immigrant America that was a cumulative fusion of these stages of ethnic incorporation, an expanding historical synthesis embodying a global international culture.

THE CHANGING WAVES OF IMMIGRATION

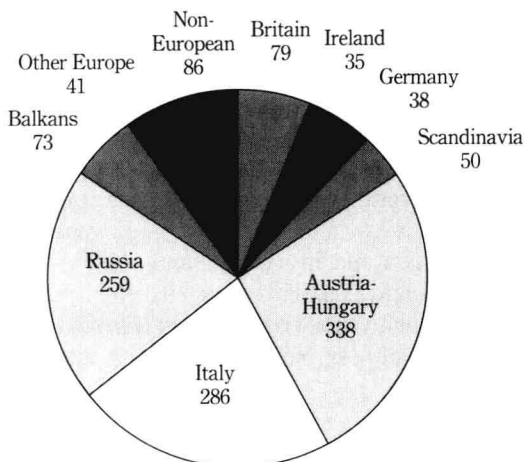
An immense tide of European immigration was the cardinal ethnic factor transforming the American nation from the birth of the industrial revolution to the Great Depression. Thirty-five million Europeans uprooted by economic and social distress moved to America in the century after 1830. During this period, the early American nation that grew out of colonization by Great Britain turned into a new immigrant nation of strikingly varied nationalities drawn from the metropolises and far-flung borderlands of the entire European continent.⁷

International migration spiraled toward the United States from wider and wider geographic circles. By the Civil War, the chief sources of immigration had spread outside of Great Britain to northern and western Europe. After 1890, the flow of American immigration was fed increasingly by streams originating from southern and eastern Europe, principally from the states of Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia (Figure I.3). The label "Old Immigrant" was affixed to groups arriving from northern and western Europe, the label "New Immigrant" to groups from southern and eastern Europe. In 1896, immigrants from the latter area for the first time in history composed a majority of newcomers, 57 percent of all immigrants in that year. Their numerical predominance continued into the 1920s.⁸

The largest groups among the New Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were, in order of their numbers, the Italians, the Slavs, and the Jews.

**Figure I.3. Country of Origin of Immigrants to the United States, 1907
(Number of arrivals in thousands)**

The rise of immigration from countries in southern and eastern Europe had become very pronounced in 1907, the peak year of annual immigration up to that time.



Source: Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), Diagram 1, p. 63.

Eighty percent of the Italians came from southern Italy. The Jews came chiefly from the multinational empires of Russia and Austria-Hungary. The Slavs comprised a huge variety of ethnic subgroups such as Poles, Czechs, Russians, Slovaks, Slovenians, Serbians, Bosnians, Montenegrins, Croats, and Bulgarians, who had come from provincial areas in Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. From 1899 to 1924, 3.8 million Italians, 3.4 million Slavs, and 1.8 million Jews entered the country.⁹

By comparison, in the early twentieth century, immigration from the non-European world was dwarfed in scale and impact. Asian immigration, flowing chiefly to the far western United States, was the first mass migration from outside Europe, coinciding approximately with the rise of southern and eastern European immigration. Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos composed the bulk of Asian immigrants to America during this time; Koreans and Asian Indians constituted a much smaller influx. The major periods of immigration from the Asian countries ranged in a rough consecutive order. Between 1850 and 1924, 368,000 Chinese immigrants entered the United States. From 1890 to 1924, 270,000 immigrants came from Japan; from 1899 to 1924, 9,200 arrived

from Korea and 8,200 from India; and between 1910 and 1930, at least 50,000 to 60,000 came from the Philippines. The American territory of Hawaii was a receiving area of a similarly timed and comparably sized immigration from China, Japan, Korea, and the Philippines.¹⁰

Although Asian immigration was relatively small, its pattern of short periodic bursts resembled the New Immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Ninety percent of all immigrants from Italy from the nineteenth century to World War II came in the thirty years from 1890 to 1920. Similarly, 92 percent of all immigrants from Austria-Hungary and Russia in that period arrived between 1890 and 1920. The brief yet intense intervals of immigration from Asia and southern and eastern Europe were circumscribed artificially by the passage of restrictionist laws that reduced the influx from these regions. Limits on admissions were first imposed on Asians at the end of the nineteenth century, but by the 1920s such restrictions affected the New Immigrants from Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and the eastern Mediterranean.

As the supply of Asian laborers in the far west was cut off, agricultural and industrial capitalists began to look toward the reservoir of cheap workers across the border in Mexico. Because of the spread of "peonage," or debt servitude, northern regions of Mexico accumulated surplus labor that began to spill across the U.S. border. In the first decade of the twentieth century, only 31,000 Mexicans arrived, but in the second decade the influx swelled to 185,000. The drain on workers during World War I prodded the U.S. government in 1917 to issue passes to "temporary farmworkers" from Mexico. This was a preliminary experiment in a guest worker system of labor migration that would be expanded in the future.¹¹

From 1900 to 1930, more than 100,000 blacks from the West Indies entered the United States. Increasing population and chronic seasonal unemployment in their home islands caused an inter-island migration of laborers. This circulating flow spilled over to Florida and the urban centers of the northeast as new economic, transportation, and communication links between the West Indies and the United States were forged by the spread of the commercial fruit industry.¹²

THE MATRIX OF PUSH AND PULL

Throughout the history of the United States, immigration was generated by an international force field of displacing "push" and attractive "pull" factors. These were by-products of economic reorganization and political centralization in the transatlantic and transpacific basins. The matrix of push and pull factors covered different regions and changed over time. It created a gigantic

demographic watershed that drained off a growing flood of immigration to the United States.¹³

A key push factor was the unprecedented expansion of population in the modern era. In Europe, Asia, and the Western Hemisphere a “demographic transition”—a rise in the rate of population growth—resulted from improved nutrition and health support systems that lowered death rates. The resulting immense and rapid increase of population redefined economic prospects, eroding available resources for increasing numbers of people. The number of young workers seeking a livelihood grew faster than the number of slots the economy could generate anew or open by attrition. In this fashion, an economic surplus population expanded.¹⁴

Population increase coincided with regional economic stagnancy to determine the timing of exodus. The demographic transition moved across Europe roughly from west to east, encouraging the progressive “morselizing” or subdividing of land as it moved. Available land also shrank as large landowners accumulated small holdings to increase the output of commercial crops. In the late nineteenth century, the demographic and economic structure of southern and eastern Europe resembled that of western Europe a half-century earlier and became the source of the greatest exodus from Europe after 1890. In specific subregions of East Asia, economic decline and population pressure coincided to produce an impetus for migration that was roughly contemporaneous with that from southern and eastern Europe.¹⁵

The spread of capitalist manufacturing and marketing introduced new strains into the economic life of the populace. Early industrial capitalism in Europe displaced or marginalized artisans by creating the factory system of production. Peasants lost supplementary income from cottage manufactures when factory goods flooded the local markets. Cottage industries dwindled and eventually disappeared. Also, the emerging capitalist economy grew by boom and bust cycles. As the rural economies of Europe were drawn within an international market, peasants and laborers became more vulnerable to external vicissitudes. Intermittent economic setbacks came to farmers by fluctuating crop prices and to workers by slackening demand.¹⁶

The differential between the lower demand for labor in Europe, Asia, and Latin America and the higher demand in the United States created a pull factor that combined with push forces to exert pressure to immigrate to America. In contrast to provincial regions in the Eastern Hemisphere and Latin America, the United States was a leading sector of job growth. Commercial farms and plantations in the western states and Hawaii maintained a huge demand for Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Mexican laborers. Midwestern and Great Plains states promoted the development of family farms, attracting waves of