



## Population Growth and Immigration

### An Analysis of the NRC Study

By Leon Bouvier

This article, the last in a three-part series on the National Research Council report, *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*, will focus on the section of the report devoted to population size and composition (i.e. age, sex, and race). The two previous articles examined the findings with regard to the U.S. labor market (*Immigration Review* No. 29) and the public services used and taxes paid by immigrants (*Immigration Review* No. 30). Before beginning, however, it is worth highlighting a few comments from leading newspapers regarding this report.

When one depends solely on information from the media when evaluating policies that will affect the future size of the U.S. population, particularly those regarding immigration, it is easy to be misinformed. *The New York Times* summarized the NRC report's findings with the headline: "Immigration Benefits the United States." The sub-heading read "No Huge Costs Are Cited." Whether or not the reader agrees with these rosy projections, he or she might well ask "What about population size?" The answer is provided — finally — on page 17, where the reader finds that immigration might well play "the dominant role" in U.S. population growth in the next half-century.

In an editorial on the same subject, no mention is devoted to the challenges population growth

## Religion-based Refugee Admission

By Don Barnett

The stated goal of the Freedom from Religious Persecution Act, sponsored by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) and Senator Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), is to help eradicate religious persecution around the world. Except for the specific case of Sudan, however, it imposes rather weak economic sanctions on countries found to be persecuting individuals because of their religious affiliation. In addition, those sanctions, such as they are, can be waived by the President at any time.

By contrast, the bill contains refugee and asylum provisions that could be significant. The bill authorizes a new State Department office to certify religions around the world whose adherents are persecuted — Christians in militant Islamic states and communist countries, notably China, are likely first candidates for such certification.

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will bring; nothing is mentioned about the major changes in racial-ethnic composition this growth will cause and what those changes could mean for the United States. The *Times* allocated only 14 lines to this important shift and failed to address whether the United States can adequately support 124 million more people in a mere 52 years.

Unfortunately, the *Times* was not alone in such omissions. A *Chicago Tribune* article, titled “Benefits and Costs of Immigration,” was somewhat less biased and did mention that, while the report “doesn’t come close to justifying the drastic curbs on immigration advocated by some, it does argue for a more nuanced treatment of it in law and public policy.” Still, however, not a single word on population growth was included. An Associated Press article,

titled “Immigrants Benefit Economy,” also did not mention population growth as a consequence of immigration.

The list of such oversights goes on and on. Why no mention of immigration’s impact on population size? In this instance, the explanation appears to have been deadline pressure combined with a slanted press release, a press release that is strongly pro-immigration on all levels, especially economics; and out of five pages, only two paragraphs are devoted to population changes resulting from immigration.

## Demography

But what about the demographic portion of the report itself? Overall, with some important omissions, this is a well-written survey of basic demography and the art of making demographic projections. The section begins with two very important questions: “How will the population of the United States change on the way to the middle of the 21st Century?” and “How will immigration — current and future — contribute to this change?” The authors seek to answer the second question in this section, which in turn helps to answer the first.

Following an excellent introduction to elementary demography, the authors introduce two important concepts that have seldom been used in the construction of population projections: exogamy and ethnic affiliation — the degree to which groups intermarry and the way the descendants of interracial marriages identify themselves.

By looking not only at native-born and foreign-born, this method allows the development of projections for three or four generations (rather than simply a time series) by age, race, and ethnicity. It also allows the development of more assumptions about changing fertility (as well as mortality) over the generations.

## Assumptions

Irrespective of projection methodology or the level of detail or precision, the most important parts of any population projection are the assumptions it makes about fertility, mortality, and immigration.

The authors use five assumptions about annual net immigration, which they call zero, low,

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medium, high, and very high — in order: zero, 410,000, 820,000, 1.23 million, and 1.64 million (see Table 1 below). The medium assumption of 820,000 is close to the average for the period 1990-95 and includes the assumption of about 225,000 net annual illegal immigrants. The zero assumption implies no immigrants or emigrants, and provides a context for discussing the overall net impact of immigration on population change. The low assumption (410,000) assumes a decline to immigration levels that are close to net immigration during the 1980s. The high assumption represents possible expanded legal immigration through modifications in immigration law and the very high assumption suggests greatly expanded immigration. Net illegal immigration is assumed to be zero for the zero assumption, 115,000 for the low assumption, 320,000 for the high assumption, and 400,000 for the very high assumption. Again, regarding immigration, if sometimes indi-

rectly, the researchers also make assumptions about exogamy and racial and ethnic attribution. These assumptions rest on somewhat shaky ground but are nevertheless useful in refining the final product.

Turning to fertility (see Table 2 on the next page), the starting point (1995) rates were 1.81 for the white population, 2.33 for Asians, 2.34 for Blacks, and 2.63 for Hispanics. With generational shifts, these rates change. For example, among third-generations, the respective rates are 1.81, 1.80, 2.31, and 2.04. The last rate (for Hispanics) is surprisingly low and is not explained in any detail. Lower and higher fertility rates are also included for all groups and generations.

The authors “assume that mortality follows the trends specified in the medium series of the national population projections for 1995–2050 made by the Census Bureau.” Overall, life expectancy increases from 75.9 years in 1995 to 82.0 years in 2050 with some variations among groups.

**Continued on next page**

**Table 1. Population in the United States, 1995-2**

	Im	
	Zero	L
Assumed Gross Immigrants Per Year (Thousands)	0	
Assumed Emigration Per Year (Thousands)	0	
Assumed Net Immigrants per Year (Thousands)	0	
<b>Population (Millions)</b>		
1995	263	
2000	272	
2010	287	
2020	298	
2030	308	
2040	310	
2050	307	

## Results

Now we turn to the results of these rather sophisticated techniques. Using the authors' medium demographic assumptions, the U.S. population is projected to increase from 263 million in 1995 to 387 million in 2050 — a gain of 124 million. The researchers conclude, not surprisingly, that “immigration can play a critical role in determining the future size of the U.S. population.” Indeed, with no migration and constant fertility and mortality rates, the U.S. population would be 307 million in 2050. The authors continue:

*“Although the rate at which population is growing will decline, the absolute size of the American nation will continue to expand until, by the year 2050, the population will be 387 million. Allowing immigration to continue at its current levels for the next 55 years will produce a population that is 80 million people larger than it would have been if all net immigration ceased instantly. These additional people are the direct effect of the 45 million more immigrants over this period...Immigration, then, will obviously play the dominant role in our future population growth.”*

The authors devote several paragraphs to the “implications of the size of the population.” With-

out going into any detail in their report, they mention the possible challenges for highways, parks, schools, and so forth, but not a word on the environment. To their credit, they include a footnote in the introduction admitting that they lack experience in environmental studies and were “not charged with examining the environmental repercussions of population growth,” therefore avoiding this difficult and controversial topic. They ask: “Should we care about whether the 2050 population is the 387 million implied by current immigration levels as opposed to the 307 million implied by the absence of net immigration?” The answer: “Our reticence [to answer] rests in part on our conviction that knowledge about many of the crucial parameters on which an informed answer should rest is lacking.”

The authors also devote considerable space to age and sex structure as they will be affected by different levels of immigration. They project that the number of school-age children will expand rapidly. Under current immigration policy the K–8 enrollment will increase to 53.7 million in 2050, compared with 36.8 million in 1995 (an increase of about 17 million). The school-age population in 2050 will be 6.4 million lower if immigration flows are cut in half and 3.9 million greater if they are increased by 50 percent.

**Table 2. Fertility Estimates for U.S. Population Projections by Race/Ethnicity and Immigrant Gene**

Race/Ethnicity	Immigrant Gene	
	Overall	First
Total	1.98	
White	1.81	1.82
Asian	2.33	2.54
Black	2.34	2.76
Hispanic	2.63	3.23

Source: *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic Immigration*

Turning to racial/ethnic categories, despite their sophisticated attempts to measure exogamy and racial identification, the authors' results for 2050 are quite familiar, especially when compared to the work of other demographers. They estimate that the population in 2050 will be 51 percent white, 14 percent Black, 8 percent Asian, and 26 percent Hispanic. Of course, these rates depend a great deal on how people of mixed background define themselves. Indeed, the authors comment:

*"The growing rate of intermarriage among whites, Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians (although most intermarriages are of whites with other groups) ensures that the future of the United States will not be a set of distinct cultures and languages, let alone a unique ethnic identification. If there are many intermarriages, then people will have multiethnic parental ties and more children will have multiple ancestry, possibly weakening traditional ethnic boundaries in the United States."*

Overall, as previously stated, this is an important and well-written demographic section of a larger report. It is unfortunate, however, that the publicity surrounding the report gave short shrift to its demographic findings. While the demographic portion was well done, it once again illustrated the reluctance of some demographers to "tell it like it is." Is a population of 350 or 400 million "good" for America? What are the potential positive as well as negative impacts of a rapid change in the racial-ethnic makeup of the nation's people? These are among the most important issues facing the nation as it enters the next millennium. ❖

*To obtain a copy of the study, contact the National Academy Press at (800) 624-6242 or <http://www.nap.edu> The report costs \$49.95. ISBN 0-309-06356-6.*

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FYI



1 Federal authorities announced the indictment of 20 people accused of taking part in a nationwide scheme to

of as many as 13,000 immigrants in 22 states. The defendants were subcontractors for the three INS-accredited testing organizations: Educational Testing Service, Southeast College National Testing, and NAS, which was removed from the program last year over irregularities by its affiliates. None of the three organizations has been implicated in this case.

1 The government will soon begin replacing millions of with high-tech documents that will use compact-disc technology to store information.

The cards are used by Mexican citizens living along the border who need to cross frequently for business or family reasons. They allow travel up to 25 miles from the border and stays of up to 72 hours, but do not permit employment in the United States.

Until recently, the cards were issued without expiration dates and those with outdated photos could be used easily by imposters.

The new cards will digitally store the holder's photograph, biographical data, fingerprints, and a State Department control number. They will cost \$45 and be good for ten years.

All older cards will expire on Sept. 30, 1999.

1 California's planned cutoff of scheduled for April 1, has been blocked by a court order. The cutoff was prompted by a new federal law, effective since August 1996, requiring states to end all current benefits to illegal immigrants. However, this law specifically included a public health exception that allowed illegal immigrants continued access to subsidized care for screening and treatment of communicable diseases, as well as for immunizations.

A judge ruled that the state failed to ensure women's access to screening and treatment for infectious diseases, regardless of status. Prenatal care is often an important diagnostic tool for discovering AIDS, tuberculosis, and other diseases.

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## RELIGION continued from page 1

Members of the certified religion need not prove or even claim they are persecuted to be considered for refugee admission. They need merely “credibly claim” membership in the certified religion. U.S. officials seeking to bar such an individual from consideration, on the other hand, would be required to furnish an extensive, documented refutation of the applicants claim with an opportunity for the applicant to challenge the denial. More documentary evidence is required to disprove a claim for refugee or asylee admission than is needed to prove one. Moreover, those managing to get to American shores without proper documents could use the same flexible legal criteria in making their case for asylum.

American Christian groups maintain that, without such a law, persecuted Christians will remain a small percentage of refugees resettled in the United States, even though Christians today constitute the world’s largest persecuted religious community. They have a point. Group preferences and family chain migration have replaced flight from state persecution as the criterion for admission for most refugees to the United States. Practically the only way to extend the reach of the program is to add more preferred groups. From the bill’s inception, the human rights community has been the scene of an embarrassing public fight over whether the bill is sufficiently “inclusive.” The bill originally singled out Christians for special consideration but was quickly changed to cover members of any reli-

gion. Still, today the only public criticism of the refugee and asylum provisions is that they represent a “hierarchy of human rights” by mentioning religion at all. “The victims of torture, threatened assassination, female genital mutilation, and other horrors would get shorter shrift,” writes Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times*. This is a disingenuous argument at best since our entire refugee policy is about a “hierarchy of human rights,” with refugee law and federal rules extending extraordinary immigration privileges to at least 15 specific ethnic and/or religious groups.

The argument of conservative Christian groups that persecuted Christians are being ignored in favor of “trendy” humanitarian causes and preferred

groups also needs comment. In 1997, Christian Evangelicals from the former Soviet Union equalled Soviet Jews in numbers admitted as refugees. Together, these two groups account for approximately 26,000 refugee admissions. So far in 1998, evangelicals are the leading refugee

group from the former Soviet Union. This makes this group of Christians the third-largest group admitted by the U.S. refugee program after Cubans and Yugoslavs, even though very few would meet even the loosest standards for a claim of international protection.

Fighting religious persecution has enormous editorial page appeal. The bill garnered rave reviews from celebrity pundits even before it was unveiled

(a) CREDIBLE FEAR OF PERSECUTION DEFINED. — Any alien who can credibly claim membership in a persecuted community found to be subject to category 1 or category 2 persecution in the most recent annual report sent by the Director of the Office of Religious Persecution Monitoring to the Congress under section 6 shall be considered to have a credible fear of persecution within the meaning of section 235(b)(1)(B)(v) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.



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and may yet become a major foreign policy crusade. It was the main legislative priority of the Christian Coalition last Fall and had the support of much of the human rights and religious community, including the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and the U.S. Committee for Refugees. Despite this and the backing of House and Senate Republican leadership, the bill stalled because of opposition from business and the Clinton administration regarding trade restrictions. There had been no discussion of possible effects on refugee and asylee flows and likely there never will be. *The New York Times* magazine, for example, ran a long article on the bill in December 1997 that didn't even mention refugee and asylum clauses in the bill. A new version of the bill, with broadened presidential authority to waive trade sanctions, will be debated on the House floor in April.

The bill has the clear goal of countermanding the more stringent asylum procedures found in the 1996 immigration bill. One of the provisions of the 1996 reform establishes an "expedited exclusion" procedure for foreigners who arrive in the United States without proper documentation or who later are discovered to have entered without the permission of immigration authorities. Under the new procedure, these entrants must convince an asylum officer that their fear of persecution is credible. If they don't, they can be summarily returned to their country of origin, or in some circumstances a different country, without being permitted to apply for asylum. Those who arrive with valid documents but later decide to apply for asylum (a common means of application) must now do so within a year of arrival. To be considered for a full hearing, Wolf-Specter asylum claimants would be required to demonstrate not a "credible fear of persecution" but merely a "credible claim" of membership in a certified religion. According to the bill's supporters, asylum seekers from certified religions would have extra protection from expedited exclusion but would still have to prove their case at a full asylum hearing.

## Refugee Admission Policy

Resettlement priority relates to persons applying overseas for refugee status, not persons already in the United States who are applying for asylum. It is essentially a place in line to be interviewed by U.S.

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FYI



A spokesman for Gov. Pete Wilson said an appeal was being considered and expressed the belief that the courts would eventually uphold the state plan.

California spent \$83.7 million in 1996-97 providing prenatal care to 70,000 illegal immigrants.

1 In February, 23 illegal immigrant women, mostly Mexicans, were taken into custody in Florida. The women allegedly had been smuggled into the country by members of the Cadena family of Veracruz, Mexico, and

in order to pay off smuggling fees of \$2,000. The brothels catered exclusively to Hispanic migrant workers. One member of the Cadena family was taken into custody and authorities were looking for other suspects.

1 California has decided against prosecuting in Orange County in the 1996 elections. California Secretary of State Bill Jones decided the 743 people involved had registered in error, not from criminal intent. The INS has announced an investigation that could lead to the deportation of anyone violating a new law that makes it a felony for ineligible people to register or vote.

1 In California, the Wilson administration plans to require that all or legal residents the next time they renew their professional licenses. Without proper documentation, state licenses will be denied. Professions that will be affected by this legislation include commercial drivers, real estate brokers, bar and liquor store owners, paramedics, securities brokers, and veterinarians.

1 Twenty Cubans, including two small children, were taken into custody in February when their near Miami's hotels and apartment houses. Under a 1995 U.S.-Cuba immigration agreement, Cubans who enter the United States illegally are subject to deportation.

The number of Cubans trying to reach the United States has dropped dramatically since then.

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immigration authorities. The Wolf-Specter bill would place beneficiaries among those of “special humanitarian concern” to the United States, in other words guarantee them a chance at an interview equal to that of any other preferred group. Again, supporters of the bill are quick to say that the bill only ensures that cases are heard for members of those religious groups deemed by the State Department to be severely persecuted. Granting of refugee status is not guaranteed. However, since only a small portion of potential refugees can be interviewed, the decision about priority can be the determining factor in obtaining the coveted immigration status. Also, substituting “credible claim of membership” for “credible claim of persecution” when deciding who is a legitimate asylum seeker or refugee cannot help but lower the standards used to adjudicate a claim at every stage of the process.

The Wolf-Specter bill mandates that none of those currently favored by the refugee program are to be displaced by the new covered group. Presumably this would protect 26,000 of those who have opted not to leave Russia and are still living there a year after being assigned refugee status.

Refugee quota numbers have been declining since 1992 and dropped to 78,000 for 1997. Non-governmental refugee-sponsoring organizations asked for a 43 percent increase in the refugee quota for 1998. (One of the reasons for which being that resettlement agencies need a large client base to justify overhead and staff!) In response, the Clinton administration

reversed the downward trend in refugee admissions by raising the 1998 quota to 83,000. Including Cubans who enjoy the same benefits as refugees, the United States still took in nearly 100,000 refugees in 1997. To this number must be added asylees, whose numbers rose sharply after 1990. In 1997, despite expedited exclusion being in place for half of the year, asylum applications exceeded 100,000. In addition, the vast majority of asylum applicants will stay in the country regardless of the outcome of their hearings. Annual asylee and refugee admissions taken together are running near an all-time high since the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act. The Wolf-Specter bill will cause these numbers to rise even higher.

American refugee and asylum policy will stray even further from its original purpose under the proposed changes. And, if history is any guide, most of those taking advantage of the new legal cause will not be persecuted, yet the flow of refugee admissions will be expanded and the selection process further politicized as new groups jockey for preferred status. ❖

*The contents and status of The Freedom from Religious Persecution Act of 1997 (H.R.2431) can be viewed on the Internet at the Library of Congress' Thomas site. The address is <http://thomas.loc.gov>*

*Don Barnett writes frequently on immigration.*

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## Immigration: Trade by Other Means?

Immigration is often compared with international trade. In fact, the similarities between the two have led some to conclude that they are roughly equivalent. However, while they are alike in many ways, there are also a number of important differences that are often overlooked by immigration enthusiasts. Because these differences are at least as important as the similarities, both should be considered when formulating a sensible immigration policy.

### Similarities

The most obvious similarity is that both trade and immigration alter the supply of labor and change the mix of skills in the economy. With trade, the product of foreign labor comes to the United States in the form of goods. In the case of immigration, the laborers themselves come to the United States. Whether the workers come or only the goods they have produced, the supply of some kinds of labor relative to others is increased. When we import finished goods, for example, we are importing both the unskilled labor that went into assembling the product as well as the skilled labor that went into designing it. To the extent that immigrants possess skills that are different from those of natives, they too will alter the mix of labor in the economy.

While workers who tend to be in competition with imports or immigrants will suffer wage and employment losses, these losses should generate economic benefits for owners of capital, consumers, and other workers who can now be paid more. The primary benefit from changes in the supply of labor is that they allow workers in the receiving country to specialize in areas in which they do relatively well, leaving those tasks they do less well to immigrants and imports — the concept of comparative advantage. Since workers are doing what they do best, there should be some overall economic gain from immigration. Some natives, however, will suffer economically — primarily those in low and unskilled jobs, because this is where immigrants are concentrated.

Immigration and trade also make it possible for the receiving nation to consume products that it might not otherwise have access to. Just as trade allows us to

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## CAPITAL CURRENTS

1 Microsoft, Sun Microsystems, and other computer industry leaders have asked Congress to

and other skilled temporary workers entering the United States through the H-1B program. The Information Technology Association of America claims that nearly 350,000 high-tech jobs in the United States are vacant.

Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.) introduced a bill (S 1723) on March 6 that, if passed, would expand the guest worker ceiling to 90,000 this year and 115,000 in subsequent years.

Currently, H-1B visas, which are valid for up to six years, are capped at 65,000 per year. This ceiling was reached for the first time in 1997 and the government expects to reach the limit by May or June of this year, three or four months before the end of the fiscal year.

Opponents of the quota increase, including the AFL-CIO, the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and the American Engineering Association, argue that the shortage is not as severe as the computer industry claims and suggest that the companies' real motive is to keep wages from rising. These groups feel that the best long-term solution is to focus on the education system, while the short-term shortage can be solved by hiring older professionals, loosening requirements, and providing more on-the-job training.

The administration has yet to reach consensus on a solution, but would like to offer some relief. Under one alternative, the ceiling would be raised, but greater protection would be provided to American workers by requiring employers to recruit Americans before importing workers, banning the use of foreign workers as replacements for laid-off Americans, and reducing the maximum stay for H-1B workers from six to three years.

1 In February, the administration announced a plan to in an attempt to better screen out ineligible applicants, including criminals.

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enjoy Russian caviar, for example, immigration allows us to eat at authentic Chinese restaurants.

## Differences

While those who advocate high immigration tend to emphasize the similarities between trade and immigration, there are also a number of important differences between the two that should not be overlooked. First, immigration, unlike trade, alters the supply of labor permanently, not just in the year that a product is imported. With trade, a society can quickly alter the mix of labor it consumes to suit its changing tastes and needs. By importing workers, however, some of this flexibility is lost. This could become a significant problem if, for example, a receiving nation that has admitted large numbers of unskilled immigrants finds that, because of technological change, its modern economy no longer requires such workers.

The long-term impacts of immigration are not confined to the lifetime of the immigrant. Even after the original immigrant dies, his or her children remain and continue to have an impact on the receiving society. Trade, on the other hand, does not affect the labor market for generations to come — once an imported good is consumed, it no longer has an impact on the receiving society.

Immigration also increases the supply of labor across a broader range of occupations than does trade. For example, natives can avoid competition with imports simply by finding employment in nontraded goods, such as retail or government service. Because immigrants can hold jobs in all sectors of the economy, however, their impact is more widespread.

Recent immigration has also skewed the labor supply much more than trade has. Harvard economist George Borjas has found that, because current immigrants are so much less skilled than natives, immigration has increased the supply of high school dropouts by 21 percent, compared to only 4 percent (implicitly) for trade. For the lowest-skilled, poorest workers, therefore, immigration has a much more harmful effect than does trade.

In addition to the direct effect on the economy, there are other significant differences between importing goods and importing people. One of the most important is that immigrants consume public services. By coming to the United States, an immigrant becomes eligible for public services that would not be provided

if he or she had stayed at home. For example, if a low-wage agricultural worker who heads a large family picks vegetables in his home country, we can have access to the product of his labor simply by importing the produce. If he comes here and does the same work, however, he and his family will have access to taxpayer-provided public services. And his low income makes it very unlikely that he will pay enough in taxes to cover his consumption of these services.

A study by the National Research Council (see *Immigration Review* No. 30) found that during the course of his or her lifetime, the average immigrant without a high school degree will use \$89,000 more in public services than he or she pays in taxes. For an immigrant with only a high school degree, the corresponding figure is \$31,000. As these figures suggest, public service consumption means that large-scale migration of low-skilled immigrants has the potential to harm native-born workers in a way that importing products made by low-skilled workers will not.

Finally, the most important distinction between immigration and trade is that immigrants are human beings with rights and are entitled to be treated in accordance with certain principles. An immigrant, unlike an imported plastic toy, cannot simply be discarded when he or she wears out.

As human beings, immigrants also have a profound influence on the cultural, political, and demographic situation in the receiving country. For example, projections of the size of the U.S. population in 50 years indicate that, barring a change in policy, immigration is likely to add an additional 80 million people to the U.S. population (see Leon Bouvier's article on page 1 of this issue). Trade, on the other hand, does not alter the size or makeup of the population. While these considerations are outside the scope of economics, they have wide-ranging implications, which make immigration very different from importing inanimate objects.

Many advocates of high immigration, especially in the business community, see only the benefits from increased access to foreign labor. Unfortunately, this one-dimensional view of immigration has led some to advocate policies that are unlikely to be in the long-term interests of the country as a whole. If we are to have a beneficial immigration policy, we need to better understand immigration's effects. Proceeding from the assumption that immigration is only "trade by other means" is clearly inadequate. ❖

— Steven Camarota

## Sibling Immigration: A Losing Proposition

As the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform pointed out in its 1997 final report, “The extraordinarily large waiting list for siblings of U.S. citizens...undermines the integrity of the legal immigration system.”

The Family Fourth Preference Visa category was designed to enable U.S. citizens to sponsor their brothers and sisters (as well as the siblings’ spouses and children) for permanent residence in the United States. Admissions in this category are limited to 65,000 per year, but as of January 1997 there were just over 1.5 million people on the waiting list. As a result, applicants must wait years — decades in the countries with the most demand — before they can immigrate. This, combined with the fact that applicants must be at least 21 years old before they can be sponsored, means that immigrants in this category are likely to be substantially older than those entering under different programs and to enter after their most productive years. Therefore, Fourth Preference immigrants are more likely, and in some cases virtually guaranteed, to use more in public services than they pay in taxes, thus having a net negative fiscal impact on the United States.

In addition, because of the long waiting lists and low life expectancies in some countries, prospective immigrants may not even live long enough to legally enter the United States. In the Philippines, for example, this program is so oversubscribed that the waiting list is nearly 60 years long, though the wait could be shorter if applicants drop out of the system or die. If a prospective immigrant applied today at age 21 (the minimum age), he or she may not be eligible to immigrate until approximately age 81. The average life expectancy in the Philippines, however, is only 63 for men and 68 for women. While this is undoubtedly frustrating for applicants, concern for the national interest demands a look at the fiscal impact these immigrants have on the United States.

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Developed as a result of a Coopers & Lybrand study, the plan will use the latest technology and will build on the INS’s continuing efforts to close loopholes and increase the system’s efficiency. Presently, waiting times can be as long as two years.

The plan will require electronic fingerprint checks at several stages of the naturalization process, tighten control of key data, and use bar codes and the Internet to speed up the process and prevent fraud.

The INS expects to implement the plan gradually over the next two years.

In March, Sen. Spencer Abraham (R-Mich.) and Rep. Lamar Smith (R-Texas) held hearings on The Naturalization Reform Act of 1998 (H.R. 2837 and S. 1382), which they sponsored. The bill proposes several methods to ensure ineligible applicants are not granted citizenship, including improved criminal background checks, fingerprint checks, and penalties for not immediately reporting lost or stolen resident alien cards (green cards). On the same day, Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) introduced a bill that would limit the INS’s authority to increase fees until it reduces its backlog of 1.7 million citizenship applications by 30 percent.

1 In February, Sen. Diane Feinstein (D-Calif.) testified at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on terrorism that the State Department issued nearly 10,000

between 1991 and 1996.

“I have grave reservations regarding the practice of issuing visas to terrorist-supporting countries and the INS’s inability to track those who come into the country either using a student visa or using fraudulent documents,” she said.

Citizens of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, and Libya were issued student visas without adequate background checks and were not monitored after arrival, she said. Sen. Feinstein feels that the program should be re-evaluated to better protect the United States from the possibility of terrorists entering without detection.

# IMMIGRATION REVIEW

Research by Guillermina Jasso, Douglas Massey, Mark R. Rosenzweig, and James P. Smith for the New Immigrant Survey (NIS) Pilot Study (reviewed in *Immigration Review* No.30) found that while most (65.8 percent) of the sibling immigrants they studied had the equivalent of a high-school diploma or better, a sizable group (34.2 percent) had no more than 11 years of schooling. According to data from last year's National Research Council study, *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*, high-school drop-outs will have a net negative fiscal impact regardless of their age when they enter the United States. Even if a sibling immigrant without a high-school degree arrived at age 21, at the start of his or her most productive years (which could not happen given the size of the waiting list), he or she would have an average net negative fiscal impact of approximately \$100,000 over the course of a lifetime. The negative effect increases as the immigrant's age at arrival increases, peaking at age 54, where the average negative fiscal impact reaches nearly \$175,000. It slowly decreases after that, but remains over \$100,000 until age 75. With the exception of mainland-born Chinese women, however, the life expectancies in the countries with the most applicants in this category are less than 75 years.

Data from *The New Americans* also show that even those immigrants who have received a high-school diploma need to arrive between the ages of nine and 20 in order to have a net positive fiscal impact. Because siblings can't even be sponsored for admission until they are at least 21 years old, and because the waiting list is estimated to be at least 10 years even for countries that are not oversubscribed, these immigrants also are virtually guaranteed to have a net negative lifetime fiscal impact. This impact is less than \$15,000 if the immigrant enters before the age of 30, but grows rapidly after that, peaking from ages 64 to 71 where the average net negative fiscal impact is over \$200,000.

For immigrants with more than a high-school education the picture is somewhat better, but they still are likely to produce a net negative lifetime fiscal impact. Those who arrive before age 48 have a net positive fiscal effect. In fact, according to *The New Americans* study, if an immigrant with at least some college arrives in the United States in his or her early thirties, he or she could have a net positive fiscal im-

pact in the neighborhood of \$170,000 over the course of his or her lifetime. This potential positive fiscal effect declines rapidly as an immigrant's age at arrival increases; those who arrive at age 49 or older have an average negative net lifetime fiscal impact, reaching nearly \$140,000 if the immigrant arrives at age 70.

Sibling immigrants are unlikely to arrive before they are in their mid forties, however. In fact, the U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform found that more than half of the siblings and their spouses admitted in FY 1996 were above the age of 45. Thus, at best, college-educated sibling immigrants will have a relatively small net positive fiscal impact, nowhere near enough to offset the negative effects of their less-educated counterparts.

*The New Americans* study also looked at the fiscal effects of immigrants and their descendants for the 300-year period after the initial immigrants' arrival. Immigrants with less than a high-school education would need to arrive by age 22 and those with a high school education by age 34 to create, with their descendants, a net positive fiscal impact over the next 300 years. Because of the nature of the sibling category, however, most applicants will be much older. Thus, again, this stream of immigration virtually is guaranteed to produce a net negative fiscal impact for the next three centuries. Those immigrants with more than a high school education and their descendants would have a net positive fiscal effect averaging \$1,000 per year if the original immigrant arrived in his or her early twenties, but this effect declines rapidly as the immigrant's age increases until, at age 49, the impact becomes negative.

While the Fourth Preference category accounts for only a small portion of the total number of immigrants each year — about 65,000 out of nearly 900,000 — it may be the most expendable of all the legal immigration channels because it brings in immigrants with the most distant ties of all the family categories and with the greatest likelihood to result in a negative fiscal impact (with the exception of refugees). At any event, as in the case of the Philippines, it seems a cruel hoax to offer new citizens the opportunity to sponsor their extended family for immigration while subjecting them to such long waits that the prospective immigrant is likely to die before being allowed to enter the United States. ❖

— Patrick McHugh





# Missing the Boat

## A Review of *Forbidden Workers: Illegal*

## *Chinese Immigrants and American Labor*, by Peter Kwong

(New York: The New Press, 1997, 273 pp., \$24, ISBN 1-56584-355-X)

By Sanjay Mongia

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Until the *Golden Venture* tragedy, when a shipload of Chinese illegal aliens washed up in New York, few Americans were aware of the human smuggling trade, and even today most would be shocked by the scale, scope, and level of inhumanity that is occurring within America's borders. Hopefully, Peter Kwong's *Forbidden Workers: Illegal Chinese Immigrants and American Labor* will contribute to heightened public awareness of the tangled web that facilitates and profits from human smuggling and will help end this heinous practice.

No stone is left unturned in this exposé and narrative of the human smuggling trade. Kwong documents the economic and political history and current socio-economic climate in China; the motivations for the illegals who undertake the journey; and the complex and intricate network of "snakeheads" (smugglers), corrupt government officials, and abusive employers who facilitate and profit from the human smuggling trade. After chronicling the illegal immigrants' agonizing journey to our shores, the author describes the hardships and injustices that they endure in the United States.

The book suffers, however, from Kwong's editorializing and forays into the realm of policy, which expose both his ideological bias and naiveté. Anyone alleging that "Asian and Latino immigrants are being used as a tactical weapon to restructure the American Economy...in the end, better serving capital's interests" has a responsibility to substantiate that claim of a capitalist conspiracy. Since Kwong fails to provide any factual evidence, such rhetoric under-

mines his credibility and does the book a great disservice by deflecting attention from its strength as a documentary and exposé of the atrocities of human smuggling.

While Kwong condemns the human smuggling trade, he urges Americans to be more tolerant of and compassionate for the illegal immigrants. But if one's objective is to deter illegal immigration, shouldn't all participants in the human smuggling trade be held accountable and subject to punishment under the law? Kwong suggests severe penalties, aimed at thwarting the human smuggling trade, for the Chinese government, which feigns indignation at illegal immigration, but actually profits through bribery and then turns its back on the exodus that eases domestic overpopulation burdens; the snakeheads, who trans-

Continued on next page

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port the illegals and force them into indentured servitude to pay the more than \$30,000 smuggling fee; and the employers, who hire and profit from illegal workers. He neglects, however, to hold the illegal immigrants themselves — who knowingly and willfully violate the law — accountable to the same standards as other culprits in this egregious arrangement. An effective deterrent policy against illegal immigration must punish (prosecute and deport) *everyone* who violates U.S. immigration laws.

Kwong may wish to elicit sympathy for illegal immigrants from the reader, but his attempt to characterize illegals as “victims” is hampered by the fact that they undertook this journey of their own volition, and because they knowingly and willingly live and work in this country in violation of the law. Strik-

ingly, Kwong makes several comparisons between the human smuggling of Chinese and the earlier slave trade in Africa. One obvious distinction is that the Chinese illegals are coming to America voluntarily, which inevitably affects our perception of them as “victims.” The relative virtues (“fair, decent, hard-working people”) and motives (economic opportunity) of the illegal immigrants do not immunize them from U.S. law. Indeed, an overwhelming number of the Earth’s inhabitants would like a chance to better their lives in America. Most are also decent, honest, hard-working people who may be as deserving of a chance at the American Dream as the illegals aboard the *Golden Venture*. But in reality we cannot accommodate all who may aspire to land at our shores. Sympathy alone is not cause to bypass the rule of law and confer a Green Card to illegal immigrants.

To his credit, Kwong does not disguise the book’s objective: It is to “help end these abuses and build a better America for all Americans, including those who came here to seek democracy, equality, and economic opportunity.” But integrating illegal immigrants with American society is a dubious proposition. By definition, illegal immigrants lack legal standing and are not entitled to the same rights, privileges, and protections as citizens or legal immigrants. Of course, that does not mean that America turns a blind eye to abuses against illegal immigrants;

we do not tolerate 80-hour work weeks, sub-minimum wages, child labor, mandatory home work, or withholding of wages. Certainly, we must be more vigilant in enforcing existing U.S. labor laws, punishing those who engage in such practices and eliminating such abuses from all workplaces in our country. But Kwong should concede that we must also be vigilant in preserving American sovereignty and enforcing U.S. immigration laws.

Kwong’s simplistic analysis of American society is also apparent when he perplexingly asks: “How is it possible that at the close of the twentieth

century...such conditions have re-emerged in a country that sees itself as the champion of human rights and democracy?” This question ignores the fact that American citizens and legal immigrants enjoy pro-

tections, rights, and privileges that are the envy of the world’s people. It demeans citizenship and legal immigrant status for Kwong to suggest that equal protections and rights should be extended to illegal immigrants because it is precisely the fairness and justice of American society that serve as magnets for immigrants. Kwong’s application of a litmus test for

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*...if one’s objective is to deter illegal immigration, shouldn’t all participants in the human smuggling trade be held accountable and subject to punishment under the law?*

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## New from the Center

The center’s latest study, *The Wages of Immigration: The Effect on the Low-Skilled Labor Market*, focuses on the labor market consequences of immigration. With over 14 million immigrants holding jobs in the United States, the effects of immigration on the U.S. labor market is one of the most important and hotly debated issues surrounding contemporary immigration policy.

*The Wages of Immigration* is now available for \$12.

# IMMIGRATION REVIEW

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these principles to the underground economy — operating in violation of the law — is absurd.

As an immigrant and a naturalized citizen, I am dismayed by Kwong's reference to an "anti-immigrant sentiment" in America and his pleas for tolerance of illegal immigrants. This blanket slur fails to dissect Americans' views about immigration and neglects to distinguish legal immigration from illegal immigration. I may favor modest reforms to legal immigration policy and a slight reduction in the overall level of legal immigration, but that does not render me "anti-immigrant." Indeed, I celebrate diversity and the vast contributions that immigrants have made to our culture, economy, and society. Illegal immigration, however, violates the sanctity of America's borders, undermines America's sovereignty, amounts

to a taxpayer burden, and must be unequivocally condemned. Ironically, Kwong criticizes political actions by the American government intended as gestures of goodwill and openness (e.g. granting asylum to Chinese students following the Tiananmen Square massacre and to those fleeing China's "one-child" policy). Since these acts fueled illegal immigration, he rightly notes that the United States fell victim to the law of unintended consequences. The spirit of these actions, however, certainly dispels Kwong's assertion of a pervasive anti-immigrant sentiment in America.

Reflecting his ideological bias, Kwong merely pays lip service to the overwhelming empirical evidence that immigrants (both legal and illegal) take jobs from Americans at the bottom of the labor market, and suppress wages for unskilled, low-wage native workers (who disproportionately tend to be black or Hispanic). Kwong cites the low unemployment rate in New York City's Chinatown and the closed, exclusionary labor market that operates in that community: in fact, the unemployment rate, even among illegal Chinese immigrants with few skills and no knowledge of English, is significantly lower than among other unskilled workers. Absent illegal Chinese immigrants, however, it seems only reasonable

to conclude that more job opportunities would be available to less-skilled natives. Kwong declares that "American business has an unending thirst for cheap, docile, low-wage labor," but in a nation with an abundant supply of unskilled adults, why not satisfy the appetite of business with native workers? Admittedly, Americans would not accept the prevailing (sub-minimum) wages and dreadful working conditions in Chinatown, and we may not be as docile as illegal immigrants since we have legal recourse. The marketplace will reveal whether Americans are willing to collectively pay for the increased cost of doing business in exchange for

basic human and labor rights.

Kwong should be lauded for his courage in exposing the cruel hoax of America as the "Golden Mountain." In reality, the illegals are destined

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*...in a nation with an abundant supply of unskilled adults, why not satisfy the appetite of business with native workers?*

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for indentured servitude — working countless hours for meager pay and under harsh conditions. Incidentally, the snakeheads and Chinese employers who use ethnic solidarity as a tool to keep illegals compliant are the principal culprits and beneficiaries of this arrangement. Every reader will express outrage at the smugglers and exploitative employers who have knitted an isolationist enclave and self-reliant community that perpetuates the dependency of illegal immigrants on their masters. For the sake of future illegal Chinese immigrants who may be eager to make the journey to the Golden Mountain, Kwong reveals the truth about their lives of exploitation at the hands of Chinese expatriates in America.

The book remains tainted by the Kwong's inability to subdue his ideological impulses, however, and a skeptical reader is given just cause to challenge the objectivity and credibility of the author. In the end, he appears unsure of his primary task as he juggles the responsibilities of historian-investigative journalist with those of advocate-editorialist and, as a result, *Forbidden Workers* takes on a seemingly schizophrenic mission. Kwong's choice to stray from the book's strength as a narrative and an exposé of the human smuggling trade was ill-advised. ❖

# IMMIGRATION REVIEW



## IMMIGRATION READING



“Income Disparity and Unionism: The Workplace Influences of Post-1965 Immigration Policy” by Cornell economist and Center Board Member Dr. Vernon M. Briggs, Jr., is Chapter 8 in a new book entitled *Immigration and the American Economy*, edited by James A. Auerbach and Richard S. Belous (National Policy Association, Washington, D.C., Report No. 288, 264 pp., \$19.95, ISBN 0-89068-143-0). The book is comprised of papers delivered at an April 1997 conference.

*Immigration and the American Economy* (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Washington, D.C., 178 pp., \$16, ISBN 92-64-16039-6) is based on a workshop series jointly organized by the government of Japan, the Japan Institute of Labor, the OECD, and the International Labor Organization. It includes individual country reports detailing foreign-worker flows in east and southeast Asia.

*Crush* (Cape Town: IDASA/SAMP, in press) edited by Jonathan Crush consists of nine essays by legal and migration experts on the problems and challenges of transforming South Africa’s inherited system of migration and immigration. Topics include refugee and immigration law, the Aliens Control Act, and the South African constitution.

In December 1997, the General Accounting Office released a report on the *Impact of Immigration on the U.S. Labor Market* (GAO/HEHS-98-20). It found that “a sudden widespread farm labor shortage requiring the importation of large numbers of foreign workers is unlikely to occur in the near future.” To order copies of the report, write to: GAO, P.O. Box 37050, Washington, DC 20013 or call (202) 512-6000.

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