By early 2004, Delfino [an undocumented immigrant] was armed with ... phony papers, a car, a shared house, a job, some English. It was then that his attention turned to other things. Back in Mexico, his family’s eight-by-twelve-foot shack had been the most visible sign of its ... low social standing. The shack had dirt floors, leaked rain, and left them unprotected from the cold. A girl’s family once refused Florentino’s [Delfino’s brother] marriage proposal because that shack was all he could offer her.

Delfino began sending extra money home every month. ... In the middle of 2004, the family moved its shack to one side—it took only a few men to lift it. On the site where the shack once stood, Delfino built the first house in his village ever paid for with [American] dollars. It ... had an indoor toilet, a kitchen, and concrete floors. The house was fronted by two smoked-glass windows so wide and tall that it looked as if the house wore sunglasses.

“I wanted it to look good when you pass,” Delfino said, “and to have a nice view.” In Xocotla, nothing like it had ever been built so quickly by a youth so poor.

A few months later, Florentino [also arranged with his father] to have a house built in the village ... All this helped change their father [Lázaro]. He had stopped drinking and discovered Alcoholics Anonymous. He was now in his forties and tired of waking up in the pig muck. ... His sons could now send him money for construction materials and know he wouldn’t spend it on booze. So within a year of Delfino’s arrival in the United States, Lázaro was not only sober but supervising construction of first Delfino’s house, and then Florentino’s ...
In this chapter, we focus on the current wave of immigration to the United States and the myriad issues stimulated by this influx of newcomers. We have already addressed some new groups in American society in Chapters 7 and 8. Here, we will look at recent immigrants in general terms and then address some additional groups of new Americans: non-Hispanic groups from the Caribbean, Arab Americans and Middle Easterners, and immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa. A consideration of these groups will broaden your understanding of the wide variations of culture, motivations, and challenges for the present and the future.

Lázaro had never been the object of anyone’s envy. He found that he liked it. He kept building those houses, telling everyone that he’d build until his sons in America told him to stop.

For a time, the Juárez brothers were the village’s largest employers—spending close to forty thousand dollars on labor and supplies. As Florentino’s house went up, the family of the girl who’d refused his marriage proposal let it be known that they regretted their decision. When Delfino returned to Xocotla for a few months in late 2004, older men, who’d once laughed at his mohawked hair, came to him to borrow money. “Now everyone says hello,” said Delfino.

—Sam Quinones (2007, pp. 284–286)

Delfino and Florentino represent the experiences of thousands of immigrants—legal as well as undocumented—who have crossed the border into the United States over the past century. Driven by the poverty of their home village and attracted by the allure of work in el Norte, they pay thousands of dollars to their guides and often risk their lives in pursuit of the dream of earning a decent wage. Many are sojourners who remain focused on the families they have left behind. They send millions of dollars home and are the main—or even the sole—support for their kin, the hope and lifeblood for perhaps scores of relatives. Some are Mexican, such as Delfino and Florentino, and others are Chinese, Salvadoran, Filipino, Guatemalan, or Haitian. Some arrive legally, others come as tourists and overstay their visas, and still others enter illegally. Their goals and desires are as disparate as their origins, but they share the dream of being able to feed, shelter, and clothe their families.

Are they a threat to U.S. jobs or American culture? Do they threaten to bankrupt local welfare and school systems? Should the undocumented be sent to prison? What about their children? What benefits do these immigrants provide? Will they (or their children or grandchildren) enter the middle class, as immigrants have done before?

These and other issues are addressed in this chapter, but you should be aware that many of these questions will have no easy or obvious answer. The United States is once again grappling with fundamental questions about acceptance and rejection, inclusion and exclusion—about what it means to be an American. In this text, we have studied these issues academically, as intellectual matters to be discussed, analyzed, and understood. You will deal with these same issues as a citizen of this nation, probably for your entire life.

Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on the current wave of immigration to the United States and the myriad issues stimulated by this influx of newcomers. We have already addressed some new groups in American society in Chapters 7 and 8. Here, we will look at recent immigrants in general terms and then address some additional groups of new Americans: non-Hispanic groups from the Caribbean, Arab Americans and Middle Easterners, and immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa. A consideration of these groups will broaden your understanding of the wide variations of culture, motivations, and
human capital in the current immigration stream to the United States. To conserve space, only groups that have at least 100,000 members are considered.

Then, the most important immigration issues facing U.S. society will be addressed and the chapter will conclude with a brief return to the “traditional” minority groups: African, Hispanic, Asian, and Native Americans—peoples of color who continue to face issues of equality and full integration and must now pursue their long-standing grievances in an atmosphere where public attention and political energy is focused on other groups and newer issues.

**Current Immigration**

As you are aware, the United States has experienced two different waves of mass immigration. Chapter 2 discussed the first wave, which lasted from the 1820s to the 1920s. During that century, more than 37 million people immigrated to the United States, an average rate of a little fewer than 400,000 per year. This wave of newcomers, overwhelmingly from Europe, transformed American society on every level: its neighborhoods and parishes and cities, its popular culture, its accent and dialect, its religion, and its cuisine.

The second wave of mass immigration may well prove to be equally transformative. This wave began in the 1960s and includes people from every corner of the globe. Over the past four decades, more than 30 million newcomers have arrived (not counting undocumented immigrants), a rate that far exceeds the pace of the first mass immigration. Since the 1960s, the United States has averaged about 650,000 newcomers each year, a number that has tended to increase year by year (see Exhibit 9.1). The record for most immigrants

![Exhibit 9.1 Number of Legal Immigrants, 1960–2008 (Does Not Include IRCA Adjustees)](image)

in a year was set in 1907, when almost 1.3 million people arrived on these shores. That number was almost equaled in 2006, and, if undocumented immigrants were included in the count, the 1907 record has certainly been eclipsed several times since the 1960s.

The more recent wave of immigration is much more global than the first. In 2008 alone, immigrants arrived from more than 200 separate nations, from Albania to Zimbabwe. Only about 11% of the newcomers were from Europe. A third were from North America (with 17% from Mexico alone), and another third were from Asian nations (most from China), while South America supplied another 9%. The top 20 sending nations for 2008 are listed in Exhibit 9.2. Note that Mexico accounted for more than double the number of immigrants from the next-highest sending nation.

Exhibit 9.2  Number of Legal Immigrants for Top 20 Sending Nations, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1.2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Rep.</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>90,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>80,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


How will this new wave of immigration transform the United States? How will the immigrants be transformed by the United States? What do these new immigrants contribute? What do they cost? Will they assimilate and adopt the ways of the dominant society? What are the implications if assimilation fails?
Questions like these have been asked throughout this text, and in this chapter, these questions will be applied to the recent wave of immigrants. First, however, several more case studies of New Americans will be reviewed, focusing on information and statistics comparable with those used in Chapters 5 through 8. Also, additional data on the relative standing of these groups are available in the Appendix (www.pineforge.com/healeyds3e).

Each of the groups covered in this chapter has had some members in the United States for decades, and some for more than a century. However, in all cases, the groups were quite small until the latter third of the 20th century. Although they are growing rapidly now, all remain relatively small, and none are larger than 1% of the population. Nonetheless, some will have a greater impact on American culture and society in the future, and some groups—Arab Americans, Muslims, and Middle Easterners—have already become a focus of concern and controversy because of the events of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terrorism.

**Recent Non-Hispanic Immigration From the Caribbean**

We discussed immigration from Latin America and the Caribbean in Chapter 8. The groups we discussed in that chapter were Hispanic, but there are several other traditions present in the region. Here, we discuss two prominent non-Latino Caribbean groups: Haitians and Jamaicans. Haiti and Jamaica are economically much less developed than the United States, and this is reflected in the educational and occupational characteristics of their immigrants. A statistical profile of both groups is presented in Exhibit 9.3, along with non-Hispanic whites for purposes of comparison. Additional information on the relative standing of these groups is provided in the Appendix (www.pineforge.com/healeyds3e).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% Foreign Born</th>
<th>% Speaking English Less Than “Very Well”</th>
<th>% High School Degree or More</th>
<th>% College Degree or More</th>
<th>% of Families in Poverty</th>
<th>% in Managerial or Professional Occupations</th>
<th>Median Household Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Whites</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>54,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>904,501</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>82.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>46,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>814,417</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>74.9</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>43,436</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Haitians

Haiti is the poorest country in Western Hemisphere, and most of the population relies on small-scale subsistence agriculture for survival. Estimates are that 80% of the population lives below the poverty line, and fewer than one third of adults hold formal jobs. Only about half the population is literate, and Haitians average less than three years of formal education (Nationmaster.com, n.d.).

Haitian immigration was virtually nonexistent until the 1970s and 1980s, when thousands began to flee the brutal political repression of the Duvalier dictatorship, which—counting both father (“Papa Doc”) and son (“Baby Doc”)—lasted until the mid-1980s. In stark contrast to the treatment of Cuban immigrants (see Chapter 7), however, the United States government defined Haitians as economic refugees ineligible for asylum, and an intense campaign has been conducted to keep Haitians out of the United States. Thousands have been returned to Haiti, some to face political
persecution, prison, and even death. Others have been incarcerated in the United States, and in the view of some, “During the 1970s and 1980s, no other immigrant group suffered more U.S. government prejudice and discrimination than Haitians” (Stepick, Stepick, Eugene, Teed, & Labissiere, 2001, p. 236).

What accounts for this cold, negative reception? Some reasons are not hard to identify. The first Haitian immigrants to come brought low levels of human capital and education. This created concerns about their ability to support themselves in the United States and also meant that they have relatively few resources with which to defend their self-interests. In addition, Haitians speak Creole, a language spoken by almost no one else, and a high percentage of members spoke English poorly or not at all. Perhaps the most important reason for the rejection, however, is that Haitians are black and must cope with the centuries-old traditions of rejection, racism, and prejudice that are such an intimate part of American culture (Stepick et al., 2001).

Haitian Americans today are still mostly first generation, and more than 55% of the group arrived after 1990. Overall, they are comparable with Hispanic Americans in terms of such measures of equality as level of education, income, and poverty. Still, research shows that some Haitians continue to face the exclusion and discrimination long associated with nonwhite ancestry. One important study of Haitians in South Florida found that a combination of factors—their hostile reception, their poverty and lack of education, and their racial background—combined to lead the Haitian second generation (the children of the immigrants) to a relatively low level of academic achievement and a tendency to identify with the African American community. “Haitians are becoming American but in a specifically black ethnic fashion” (Stepick et al., 2001, p. 261).

The ultimate path of Haitian assimilation will unfold in the future, but these tendencies—particularly their low levels of academic achievement—suggest that some of the second generation are less likely to move into the middle class and that their assimilation will be segmented (Stepick et al., 2001).

Jamaicans

The Jamaican economy is more developed than Haiti’s, and this is reflected in the higher levels of education of Jamaican immigrants (see Exhibit 9.3). However, as is true throughout the less developed world, economic globalization has caused the Jamaican economy to falter in recent decades, and the island nation has been unable to provide full employment opportunities to its population. Jamaica is a former British colony, and immigrants have journeyed to the United Kingdom in addition to the United States. In both cases, the immigrant stream tends to be more skilled and educated and represents something of a “brain drain,” a pattern we have seen with other groups, including Asian Indians. Needless to say, the loss of the more educated Jamaicans to immigration exacerbates problems of development and growth on the island.

Jamaicans typically settle on the East Coast, particularly in the New York City area. As a former British colony, they have the advantage of speaking English as their native tongue. On the other hand, they are black, and, like Haitians, they must face the barriers of discrimination and racism faced by all nonwhite groups in the United States. On the average, they are significantly higher than Haitians (and native-born African Americans) in socioeconomic standing, but poverty and institutionalized discrimination limit the mobility of a
segment of the group. Like all other groups of color in the United States, the danger of segmented assimilation and permanent exclusion from the economic mainstream is very real.

**Middle Eastern and Arab Americans**

Immigration from the Middle East and the Arab world began in the 19th century but has never been particularly large. The earliest immigrants tended to be merchants and traders, and the Middle Eastern community in the United States has been constructed around an ethnic enclave based on small business. The number of Arab Americans and Middle Easterners has grown rapidly over the past several decades but still remains a tiny percentage of the total population. Exhibit 9.5 displays some statistical information on the group, broken down by the ancestry group with which people identify. Additional information on the relative standing of these groups is provided in the Appendix (www.pineforge.com/healeyds3e).

Middle Easterners and Arab Americans rank relatively high in income and occupation. Most groups are at or above national norms in terms of percentage of high school graduates, and all groups have a higher percentage of college graduates than non-Hispanic whites, with some (Egyptians and Iranians) far more educated. Although poverty is a problem for all groups (especially Arabs), many of the groups compare quite favorably in terms of occupation and income.

Many recent immigrants are, like Asian groups, highly educated people who take jobs in the highest levels of the American job structure. Also, consistent with the heritage of being an enclave minority, the groups are overrepresented in sales and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% Foreign Born</th>
<th>% That Speak English Less Than “Very Well”</th>
<th>% High School Degree or More</th>
<th>% College Degree or More</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Whites</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>54,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab</td>
<td>266,152</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>45,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>194,932</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>95.8</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>62,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iranian</td>
<td>413,845</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>93.3</td>
<td>60.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>67,919</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>489,364</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>63,495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrians</td>
<td>150,527</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>55,461</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

underrepresented in occupations involving manual labor. One study, using 1990 census data and a survey mailed to a national sample of Arab American women in 2000, found that immigrant Arab American women have a very low rate of employment, the lowest of any immigrant group. The author’s analysis of this data strongly suggests that this pattern is a result of traditional gender roles and family norms regarding the proper role of women (Read, 2004).

Arab Americans and Middle Easterners are diverse and vary along a number of dimensions. They bring different national traditions and cultures and also vary in religion. Although Islam is the dominant religion and most are Muslim, many members of these groups are Christian. Also, not all Middle Easterners are Arabic; Iranians, for example, are Persian. (Also, about a third of all Muslims in the United States are native-born, and about 20% are African American.)

Exhibit 9.6  Map of Middle East Showing Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Syria
Residentially, Arab Americans and Middle Easterners are highly urbanized, and almost 50% live in just five states (California, New Jersey, New York, Florida, and Michigan). This settlement pattern is not too different from the other recent immigrant groups except for the heavy concentration in Michigan, especially in the Detroit area. Arab Americans account for 1.2% of the total population of Michigan, a far higher representation than in any other state. Arab Americans make up 30% of the population of Dearborn, Michigan, the highest percentage of any city in the nation. (Conversely, the greatest single concentration is in New York City, which has a population of about 70,000 Arab Americans.) These settlement patterns reflect chains of migration, some set up decades ago. Exhibit 9.7 shows the regional distribution of Arab Americans and clearly displays the clusters in Michigan, Florida, and Southern California.

Exhibit 9.7 Regional Distribution of Arab Americans, 2000

There has always been at least a faint strain of prejudice directed at Middle Easterners in American culture (e.g., see the low position of Turks in the 1926 social distance scales presented in Chapter 1; most Americans probably are not aware that Turks and Arabs are different groups). These vague feelings have intensified in recent decades as relations with various Middle Eastern nations and groups worsened. For example, in 1979, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, Iran, was attacked and occupied, and more than 50 Americans were held hostage for more than a year. The attack stimulated a massive reaction in the United States, in which anti-Arab and anti-Muslim feelings figured prominently. Continuing anti-American activities across the Middle East in the 1980s and 1990s stimulated a backlash of resentment and growing intolerance in the United States.

These earlier events pale in comparison, of course, to what happened on September 11, 2001. Americans responded to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by Arab terrorists with an array of emotions that included bewilderment, shock, anger, patriotism, deep sorrow for the victims and their families, and—perhaps predictably in the intensity of the moment—increased prejudicial rejection of Middle Easterners, Arabs, Muslims, and any group that seemed even vaguely associated with the perpetrators of the attacks. In the nine weeks following September 11, more than 700 violent attacks were reported to the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, followed by another 165 violent incidents in the first nine months of 2002. In this same time period, there were more than 80 incidents in which Arab Americans were removed from aircraft after boarding because of their ethnicity, more than 800 cases of employment discrimination, and “numerous instances of denial of service, discriminatory service, and housing discrimination” (Ibish, 2003, p. 7). The intensity of anti-Arab feelings were also registered by a dramatic, one-year increase in the number of hate crimes recorded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (see Exhibit 4.9).

Anti-Arab passions may have cooled somewhat since the multiple traumas of 9/11, but the Arab American community faces a number of issues and problems, including profiling at airport security checks and greater restrictions on entering the country. Also, the USA Patriot Act, passed in 2001 to enhance the tools available to law enforcement to combat terrorism, allows for long-term detention of suspects, a wider scope for searches and surveillance, and other policies that many (not just Arab Americans) are concerned will encourage violations of due process and suspension of basic civil liberties.

Thus, although the Arab American and Middle Eastern communities are small in size, they have assumed a prominent place in the attention of the nation. The huge majority of these groups denounce and reject terrorism and violence, but, like Colombians and Italians, they are victimized by a strong stereotype that is often applied uncritically and without qualification. A recent survey of Muslim Americans, a category that includes the huge majority of Arab Americans and Middle Easterners, finds them to be “middle class and mostly mainstream.” They have a positive view of U.S. society and espouse distinctly American values. At the same time, they are very
concerned about becoming scapegoats in the war on terror, and a majority (53%) say that it became more difficult to be a Muslim in the United States after 9/11 (Pew Research Center, 2007).

Relations between Arab Americans and the larger society are certainly among the most tense and problematic of any minority group, and, given the continuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the threat of further terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda or other groups, they will not ease any time soon.

**Immigrants From Africa**

Our final group of New Americans consists of immigrants from Africa. Immigration to the United States from Africa has been quite low over the past 50 years. However, there was the usual increase after the 1960s, and Africans have made up about 5% of all immigrants in the past few years.

Exhibit 9.8 shows the total number of sub-Saharan Africans in the United States in 2007, along with the two largest national groups. The number of native Africans in the United States has more than doubled since 1990, and this rapid growth suggests that these groups may have a greater impact on U.S. society in the future. The category “sub-Saharan African” is extremely broad and encompasses destitute black refugees from African civil wars and relatively affluent white South Africans. In the remainder of this section, we will focus on Nigerians and Ethiopians rather than this very broad category. The Appendix (www.pineforge.com/healeyds3e) presents additional information on the relative standing of these groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% Foreign Born</th>
<th>% That Speak English Less Than “Very Well”</th>
<th>% High School Degree or More</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic Whites</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>89.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>38.4</td>
<td>54,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Sub-Saharan Africans</td>
<td>2,702,367</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>39,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopians</td>
<td>159,779</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>40,298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerians</td>
<td>224,131</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>52,896</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, although they may be growing, Nigerians and Ethiopians are tiny minorities: Neither group is as much as 0.1 of 1% of the total population. They are recent immigrants and have a high representation of first-generation members. They both compare favorably with national norms in education, an indication that this is another example of a “brain drain” from the countries of origin. Nigerian and Ethiopian immigrants tend to be highly skilled and educated, and they bring valuable abilities and advanced educational credentials to the United States. Like some other groups,
many of the immigrants from Nigeria and Ethiopia are motivated by a search for work, and they compete for positions in the higher reaches of the job structure.

Nigeria is a former British colony, so the relatively high level of English fluency of the immigrants is not surprising. Exhibit 9.8 shows that, on the average, members of the group have been able to translate their relatively high levels of human capital and English fluency into a favorable position in the U.S. economy. They compare quite favorably with national norms in their occupational profiles and their income levels.

Compared with Nigerians, Ethiopians rank lower in their English fluency and are more mixed in their backgrounds. They include refugees from domestic unrest along with the educated elite. For example, almost 50% of Ethiopian immigrants in 2006 were admitted as “refugees and asylees” versus only 5% of Nigerian immigrants. Refugees, virtually by definition, bring fewer resources and lower levels of human capital and thus have a more difficult adjustment to their host nation. These facts are reflected in Exhibit 9.8. Although Ethiopians compare favorably with national norms in education, they have much higher rates of poverty and much lower levels of income. These contrasts suggest that Ethiopians are less able to translate their educational credentials into higher ranked occupations.

**Modes of Incorporation**

As the case studies included in this chapter (as well as those in Chapters 7 and 8) demonstrate, recent immigrant groups can occupy very different positions in U.S. society. One way to address this diversity of relationships is to look at the contact situation, especially the characteristics the groups bring with them (their race and religion, the human capital with which they arrive) and the reaction of the larger society. Three main modes of incorporation for immigrants in the United States seem to exist: entrance through the primary labor markets, entrance through the secondary labor markets (see Chapter 4), or entrance through the ethnic enclave. We will consider each pathway separately and relate them to the groups discussed in this chapter.

**Immigrants and the Primary Labor Market**

The primary labor market consists of more desirable jobs with greater security, higher pay and benefits, and the immigrants entering this sector tend to be highly educated, skilled professionals, and businesspeople. Members of this group are generally fluent in English, and many were educated at U.S. universities. They are highly integrated into the global urban-industrial economy, and, in many cases, they are employees of multinational corporations transferred here by their companies. These immigrants are affluent, urbane, and dramatically different from the peasant laborers so common in the past (e.g., from Ireland and Italy) and in the present (e.g., from the Dominican Republic and from Mexico). The groups with high percentages of members entering the primary labor market include Egyptian, Iranian, and Nigerian immigrants.

Because they tend to be affluent and enter a growing sector of the labor force, immigrants with professional backgrounds tend to attract less notice and fewer racist reactions than their more unskilled counterparts. Although they come closer to Blauner’s pure immigrant group than most other minority groups we have considered,
racism can still complicate their assimilation. In addition, Arab Americans must confront discrimination and prejudice based on their religious affiliation.

**Immigrants and the Secondary Labor Market**

This mode of incorporation is more typical for immigrants with lower levels of education and fewer job skills. Jobs in this sector are less desirable and command lower pay, little security, and few benefits and are often seasonal or in the underground or informal economy. Because working conditions in this sector are commonly unregulated by government agencies or labor unions, they are often substandard and unsafe and sometimes miserable. Workers have little or no protection from unscrupulous bosses, and workplaces that can be best described as “sweatshops” are common across the nation.

The secondary sector includes jobs in landscaping, construction, the garment industry, domestic work, and some forms of criminal or deviant activity, such as drugs and prostitution. The employers who control these jobs often prefer to hire undocumented immigrants because they are easier to control and less likely to complain to the authorities about abuse and mistreatment. The groups with high percentages of members in the secondary labor market include Haitians and the less skilled and less educated kinfolk of the higher status immigrants.

**Immigrants and Ethnic Enclaves**

As we have seen, some immigrant groups—especially those that can bring financial capital and business experience—have established ethnic enclaves. Some members of these groups enter U.S. society as entrepreneurs, owners of small retail shops, and other businesses; their less skilled and educated coethnics serve as a source of cheap labor to staff the ethnic enterprises. The enclave provides contacts, financial and other services, and social support for the new immigrants of all social classes. Some Arab Americans, along with Cuban Americans and Jewish Americans in the past, have been particularly likely to follow this path.

**Summary**

This classification suggests some of the variety of relationships between the new Americans and the larger society. The contemporary stream of immigrants entering the United States is extremely diverse and includes people ranging from the most sophisticated and educated to the most desperate and despairing. The variety is suggested by considering a list of occupations in which recent immigrants are overrepresented. For men, the list includes biologists and other natural scientists, taxi drivers, farm laborers, and waiters. For women, the list includes chemists, statisticians, produce packers, laundry workers, and domestics (Kritz & Girak, 2005).

**Immigration: Issues and Controversies**

In this section, we consider some of the key issues and controversies sparked by contemporary immigration. How receptive has the larger society been to the new immigrants? Is racism—modern or traditional—at work in shaping attitudes? What are the
views of the immigrants? What are their goals and desires? Finally, we address the issues about which many Americans are most concerned: The costs of immigration to taxpayers and undocumented immigrants. Discussions on these issues have become very heated, particularly in the border states, and we will have to be careful to separate facts from myths as we proceed.

How Welcoming Are Americans?

One factor that affects the fate of immigrant groups is the attitude of the larger society, particularly the groups in the larger society that have the most influence with governmental policymakers. Overall, we can say that native-born Americans (even those with immigrant parents or grandparents) have never been particularly open to newcomers. The history of this nation is replete with movements to drastically reduce immigration or even eliminate it completely. We have already mentioned some of the anti-immigration movements directed against the first mass wave of immigrants from Europe (Chapter 2), Mexico (Chapter 7), and China and Japan (Chapter 8). Here we will look at attitudes and reactions to contemporary immigrants.

First, Americans have a lot of reservations about immigration; the majority of respondents in one recent poll felt that the volume of immigration should be decreased (54%) and only a small minority (11%) advocated an increase. Secondly, a report from the Pew Research Center (2006) found that an increasing percentage of Americans see immigrants as threats to their jobs and local communities. Exhibit 9.10 shows that, between 2000 and 2006, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents who viewed immigrants negatively and a corresponding decline in favorable views.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigrants today . . .</th>
<th>September 2000</th>
<th>December 2005</th>
<th>March 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are a burden because they take jobs, housing, and health care</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen the United States with their hard work and talents</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


What factors might account for people’s view of immigration? One possibility is that negative views of immigrants are linked to fear of job loss and financial insecurity. For example, one survey shows that white Americans who felt that their financial situation had worsened over the past few years were more likely to support a reduction in immigration. This relationship is displayed in Exhibit 9.11. The table shows that
there is a lot of support for decreasing immigration regardless of people’s perceptions of their financial situations. However, support for decreasing immigration is strongest among people who feel that their own personal financial situation has gotten worse in recent years. This relationship between a sense of threat and prejudice is consistent with the Noel hypothesis (see Chapter 3) and the outcome of Robber’s Cave experiment (see Chapter 1) and should come as no surprise at this point in the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibit 9.11</th>
<th>Position on Immigration by Perception of Personal Financial Situation, 2006 (Whites Only)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you think that the number of immigrants to America should . . .</strong></td>
<td><strong>Over the past few years, do you think that your financial situation has been getting better, worse, or stayed the same?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be increased</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain the same</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be decreased</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** National Opinion Research Council (1972-2006).

Besides a sense of personal threat, what other factors are associated with anti-immigrant attitudes? A recent study (Pettigrew, Wagner, & Christ, 2007) examined attitudes in Germany and compared these with other recent studies of European attitudes and anti-immigration feelings in Canada and the United States. The researchers found similar patterns in all locales and concluded that negative views of immigrants were highly correlated with prejudice. The same forces that produce prejudice—exposure to prejudiced norms and values during childhood, low levels of education—also produce anti-immigrant feelings. We discussed relationships of this sort in Chapter 1 when we noted that prejudice is partly cultural and is passed on from generation to generation.

However, remember that prejudice also is related to intergroup conflict. The researchers (Pettigrew et al., 2007) found that a sense of collective threat was the single strongest predictor of antiforeigner attitudes, more so than the individual-level threat examined in Exhibit 9.11. That is, the most important cause of anti-immigrant attitudes was the sense that newcomers threatened the way of life, political freedoms, and cultural integrity of the nation as a whole, not just jobs or personal financial stability. As in so many other instances we have investigated, these forms of prejudice are defensive: they are reactions to the sense that the dominant status of one’s group is at risk. As we have seen on numerous occasions (e.g., the Robbers Cave experiment discussed in Chapter 1, rigid competitive relations discussed in Chapter 4), competition between groups—or even the perception of competition—can stimulate powerful emotions and extreme forms of prejudice and discrimination.
Does this mean that everyone who has reservations and questions about immigration is a racist? Emphatically not. Although anti-immigrant feelings, prejudice, and a sense of threat are linked, this does not mean that all who oppose high levels of immigration are bigots or that all proposals to decrease the flow of immigrants are racist. These are serious and complex issues, and it is not helpful to simply label people bigots or dismiss their concerns as prejudiced.

Conversely, we need to clearly recognize that anti-immigrant feelings—particularly the most extreme—are linked to some of the worst, most negative strains of traditional American culture: the same racist and prejudicial views that helped to justify slavery and the near-genocide of Native Americans. In popular culture, some talk radio and cable TV “news” shows, letters to the editor, and so forth, these views are regularly used to demonize immigrants, blame them for an array of social problems, and stoke irrational fears and rumors, such as the idea that Latino immigrants are aiming to return parts of the Southwest to Mexico (see the Web site for the Minutemen—an anti-immigrant, vigilante group that has taken it upon itself to help patrol the southern border—at http://www.minutemanproject.com/ for illustrations). At any rate, when American traditions of prejudice and racism are linked to feelings of group threat and individual insecurity, the possibilities for extreme reactions, hate crimes, and poorly designed policy and law become formidable.

The Immigrants

One recent survey of immigration issues (National Public Radio, 2004) included a nationally representative sample of immigrant respondents. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that their attitudes and views differed sharply from those of native-born respondents on a number of dimensions. For example, immigrant respondents were more likely to see immigration as a positive force for the larger society and more likely to say that immigrants work hard and pay their fair share of taxes.

More relevant for the ultimate impact of the contemporary wave of immigration, the survey found that only about 30% were sojourners (i.e., ultimately planning to return to their homelands), a finding that suggests that issues of assimilation and immigration will remain at the forefront of U.S. concerns for many decades.

The survey also showed that immigrants are very grateful for the economic opportunities available in the United States, with 84% agreeing that there are more opportunities to get ahead here than in their countries of origin. Conversely, the immigrant respondents were ambivalent about U.S. culture and values. For example, nearly half (47%) said that the family was stronger in their homelands than in the United States, and only 28% saw U.S. society as having stronger moral values than their homelands.

We have seen that the immigrant stream is highly diversified, but it would be helpful to keep in mind the characteristics of the “typical immigrant.” The modal or most common immigrant is from Mexico, China, or other Asian or Central American nation and has decided to cross the border largely out of desperation and the absence of viable opportunities at home. They would prefer to enter legally but their desperation is such that they will enter illegally if necessary. Coming from less developed nations, they bring little human capital, education, or job skills. Many will come to the
United States for a time and then return home, circulating between nations as has been done for decades.

As is typical of the first generation, they tend to be more oriented to their home village than to the United States, and they are often less interested in acculturation or learning English. Frequently, they don’t have the time, energy, or opportunity to absorb much of Anglo culture and are further hampered in their acquisition of English by the fact that they are not very literate in their native language. They are hard working and frugal, often sharing living quarters with many others so as to save on rent. They send much of their earnings home to support their family and kin and spend little on themselves. They are generally determined to find a better way of life for their children, even if the cost is to live in poverty at the margins of society.

**Costs and Benefits**

Many Americans believe that immigration is a drain on the economic resources of the nation. Common concerns include the idea that immigrants take jobs from native-born workers, strain institutions such as schools, housing markets, and medical facilities, and do not pay their fair share of taxes. These issues are complex and hotly debated at all levels of U.S. society, so much so that passion and intensity of feeling on all sides often compromise the objective analysis of data. The debate is further complicated because conclusions about these economic issues can vary depending on the type of immigrants being discussed and the level of analysis being used. For example, conclusions about costs and benefits can be very different depending on whether we focus on less-skilled or undocumented immigrants or the highly educated professional immigrants entering the primary job market. Also, conclusions might vary depending on the level of the analyses: national studies might lead to different conclusions than studies of local communities.

Contrary to the tenor of public opinion, many studies, especially those done at the national level, find that immigrants are not a particular burden. For example, a study conducted by the National Research Council (1997) found that immigrants are a positive addition to the economy. They add to the labor supply in areas as disparate as the garment industry, agriculture, domestic work, and college faculty (National Academy of Sciences, 1997). Other researchers have found that low-skilled immigrants tend to find jobs in areas of the economy in which few U.S. citizens work or in the enclave economies of their own groups, taking jobs that would not have existed without the economic activity of their coethnics (Heer, 1996; Smith & Edmonston, 1997). One important recent study of the economic impact of immigrants concluded that there is a relatively small effect on the wages and employment of native workers, although there do seem to be negative consequences for earlier immigrants and for less-skilled African American workers (Bean & Stevens, 2003).

Another concern is the strain that immigrants place on taxes and services such as schools and welfare programs. Again, these issues are complex and far from settled, but research tends to show that immigrants generally cost less than they contribute. Taxes are automatically deducted from their paychecks (unless, of course, they are being paid “under the table”), and their use of such services as unemployment compensation, Medicare, food stamps, and Social Security is actually lower than their proportional
contributions. This is particularly true for undocumented immigrants, whose use of services is sharply limited by their vulnerable legal status (Marcelli & Heer, 1998; Simon, 1989). Bean and Stevens (2003), in their recent study, find that immigrants are not overrepresented on the welfare rolls. Rather, the key determinant of welfare use is refugee status. Groups such as Haitians, Salvadorans, and Vietnamese—who arrive without resources and, by definition, are in need of assistance on all levels—are the most likely to be on the welfare rolls.

In general, immigrants—undocumented as well as legal—pay state and federal taxes and make proportional contributions to social security and Medicare. The undocumented are the most likely to be paid “off the books” and receive their wages tax-free, but estimates are that the majority (at least 50%) and probably the huge majority (up to 75%) of them pay federal and state taxes through payroll deduction (The White House, 2005). Also, all immigrants pay sales and the other taxes (e.g., on gas, groceries, clothing, cigarettes, and alcohol) that are levied on consumers.

Far from being a drain on resources, there is evidence that the immigrant population plays a crucial role in keeping the Social Security system solvent. This source of retirement income is being severely strained by the “baby boomers”—the large number of Americans born between 1945 and 1960 who are now leaving the workforce and becoming senior citizens. This group is living longer than previous generations and, since the birth rate has stayed low over the past four decades, there are relatively fewer native-born workers to support them and replace the funds they withdraw as Social Security benefits. The high rate of immigration may supply the much needed workers to take up the slack in the system and keep it solvent. In particular, most undocumented immigrants pay into the system but (probably) will never draw any money out, because of their illegal status. They thus provide a tidy surplus—perhaps as much as 7 billion dollars a year or more—to help subsidize the retirements of the baby boomers and keep the system functioning (Porter, 2005).

Final conclusions about the impact and costs of immigration must await ongoing research, and many local communities are experiencing real distress as they try to deal with the influx of newcomers in their housing markets, schools, and health care facilities. Concerns about the economic impact of immigrants are not unfounded, but they may be confounded with and exaggerated by prejudice and racism directed at newcomers and strangers. The current opposition to immigration may be a reaction to “who” as much as to “how many” or “how expensive.”

Finally, we can repeat the finding of many studies (e.g., Bean & Stevens, 2003), that immigration is generally a positive force in the economy and that, as has been true for decades, immigrants, legal and illegal, continue to find work with Anglo employers and niches in American society in which they can survive. The networks that have delivered cheap immigrant labor for the low-wage secondary job market continue to operate, and, frequently, the primary beneficiaries of this long-established system are not the immigrants (although they are often grateful for the opportunities), but employers, who benefit from a cheaper, more easily exploited workforce, and American consumers, who benefit from lower prices in the marketplace and who reap the benefits virtually every time they go shopping, have a meal in a restaurant, or purchase a home.
Is Contemporary Assimilation Segmented?

In Chapter 2, we reviewed some of the patterns of acculturation and integration that typified the adjustment of Europeans who immigrated to the United States before the
1930s. Although their process of adjustment was anything but smooth or simple, these groups eventually Americanized and achieved levels of education and affluence comparable with national norms. Will contemporary immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean experience similar success? Will their sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters rise in the occupational structure to a position of parity with the dominant group? Will the cultures and languages of these groups gradually fade and disappear?

Final answers to these questions must await future developments. In the meantime, there is considerable debate on these issues. Some analysts argue that assimilation will be segmented and that the success story of the white ethnic groups will not be repeated. Others find that the traditional perspective on assimilation—particularly the model of assimilation developed by Milton Gordon—continues to be a useful framework for understanding the experience of contemporary immigrants. We will review some of the most important and influential arguments from each side of this debate and, finally, attempt to come to some conclusions about the future of assimilation.

The Case for Segmented Assimilation

Sociologist Douglas Massey (1995) presents perhaps the most compelling argument in favor of the segmented-assimilation perspective. He argues that there are three crucial differences between the European assimilation experience of the past and the contemporary period, each of which calls the traditional perspective into question. First, the flow of immigrants from Europe to the United States slowed to a mere trickle after the 1920s because of restrictive legislation, the worldwide depression of the 1930s, and World War II. Immigration in the 1930s, for example, was less than 10% of the flow of the early 1920s. Thus, as the children and grandchildren of the European immigrants Americanized and grew to adulthood in the 1930s and 1940s, few new immigrants fresh from the old country replaced them in the ethnic neighborhoods. European cultural traditions and languages weakened rapidly with the passing of the first generation and the Americanization of their descendents.

For contemporary immigration, in contrast, the networks and the demand for cheap labor are so strong that it is unlikely that there will be a similar hiatus in the flow of people. Immigration has become continuous, argues Massey, and as some contemporary immigrants (or their descendants) Americanize and rise to affluence and success, new arrivals will replace them and continuously revitalize the ethnic cultures and languages.

Second, the speed and ease of modern transportation and communication will help to maintain cultural and linguistic diversity. A century ago, immigrants from Europe could maintain contact with the old country only by mail, and most had no realistic expectation of ever returning. Most modern immigrants, in contrast, can return to their homes in a day or less and can use telephones, television, e-mail, and the Internet to stay in intimate contact with the families and friends they left behind. According to one recent survey (National Public Radio, 2004), a little more than 40% of immigrants return to their homelands at least every year or two, and some (6%) return every few months. Thus, the cultures of modern immigrants can be kept vital and whole in ways that were not available (and not even imagined) 100 years ago.
Third, and perhaps most important, contemporary immigrants face an economy and a labor market that are vastly different from those faced by European immigrants of the 19th and early 20th century. The latter group generally rose in the class system as the economy shifted from manufacturing to service (see Exhibit 4.4). Today, rates of upward mobility have decreased, and just when the importance of education has increased, schools available to the children of immigrants have fallen into neglect (Massey, 1995).

For the immigrants from Europe a century ago, assimilation meant a gradual rise to middle-class respectability and suburban comfort, even if it took four or five generations to accomplish. Assimilation today, according to Massey and others, is segmented, and a large percentage of the descendants of contemporary immigrants—especially many of the Hispanic groups, Haitians, and peoples of color—face permanent membership in a growing underclass population and continuing marginalization and powerlessness.

A recent study reinforces some of Massey’s points. Sociologists Telles and Ortiz (2008) studied a sample of Mexican Americans who were interviewed in 1965 and again in 2000. They found evidence of strong movements toward acculturation and integration on some dimensions (e.g., language) but not on others. Even fourth-generation members of their sample continued to live in “the barrio,” marry within the group, and, contrary to evidence presented in Exhibits 9.12 and 9.13 from a different study, did not reach economic parity with Anglos. The authors single out institutional discrimination (e.g., underfunding of schools that serve Mexican-American neighborhoods) as a primary cause of the continuing separation, a point that is consistent with Massey’s conclusion regarding the decreasing rates of upward mobility in American society.

The Case Against Segmented Assimilation

Many of the best recent studies come to a similar conclusion: the second generation is generally rising relative to their parents. This finding seems to contradict the segmented assimilation thesis and resurrects the somewhat tattered body of traditional assimilation theories. These studies (e.g., Alba & Nee, 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2003; Fernandez-Kelly & Portes, 2008; Kasnitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holloway, 2008; White & Glick, 2009) argue that contemporary assimilation will ultimately follow the same course as European immigrant groups 100 years ago and as described in Gordon’s theory (see Chapter 2). For example, two recent studies (Alba & Nee, 2003; Bean & Stevens, 2003) find that most contemporary immigrant groups are acculturating and integrating at the “normal” three-generation pace. Those groups (notably Mexicans) that appear to be lagging behind this pace may take as many as four to five generations, but their descendents will eventually find their way onto the primary job market and the cultural mainstream.

Studies of acculturation show that values Americanize and that English language proficiency grows with time of residence and generation (Bean & Stevens, 2003). We discussed some of these patterns in Chapter 2 (see Exhibit 2.8) and Chapter 7 (see Exhibits 7.8 through 7.11).

In terms of structural integration, contemporary immigrant groups may be narrowing the income gap over time, although many groups (e.g., Dominicans, Mexicans, Haitians, and Vietnamese) are handicapped by very low levels of human capital at the start (Bean & Stevens, 2003). Exhibits 9.12 and 9.13 illustrate this process with respect
Exhibit 9.12  Wage Differential of Mexican Workers Relative to Whites, MALES

Exhibit 9.13  Wage Differentials Relative to Whites, FEMALES

to wage differentials between Mexican and white non-Hispanic males and females of various generations and levels of education. In these exhibits, complete income equality with non-Hispanic whites would be indicated if the bar touches the 100% line at the top of the graph.

Looking first at males, recent Mexican immigrants earn a little less than half of what white males earn. The difference in income is lower for earlier immigrants, lower still for Mexicans males of the second and third generation, and lowest for the most educated (“BA”) members of those generations. In other words, income equality tends to increase over the generations and as education increases. Conversely, note that third-generation males do not rise relative to their parents’ generation. This is contrary to the view that assimilation will proceed in a linear, stepwise fashion across the generations and is reminiscent of the findings of Telles and Ortiz (2008), cited earlier. For females, the wage differential also shrinks as the generations pass and level of education increases. Note that for third-generation, college-educated females, the wage differential shrinks virtually to zero, indicating complete integration on this variable.

These patterns generally support the traditional perspective on assimilation. The wage gap shrinks by generation and level of education, and integration is substantial by the third generation (although complete only for one group). This pattern suggests that the movement of Mexican immigrants is toward the economic mainstream, even though they do not close the gap completely. Bean and Stevens conclude that this pattern is substantially consistent with the “three-generation model”: The assimilation trajectory of Mexican Americans and other recent immigrant groups is not into the urban poor, the underclass, or the disenfranchised, disconnected, and marginalized. Assimilation is not segmented but is substantially repeating the experiences of the European groups on which Gordon based his theory.

How can we reconcile these opposed points of view? In large part, this debate concerns the nature of the evidence and judgments about how much weight to give to various facts and trends. On the one hand, Massey’s points about the importance of the postindustrial economy, declining opportunities for less educated workers, and the neglect that seems typical of inner-city schools are very well taken, as is the evidence supplied by Telles and Ortiz. On the other hand, it seems that even the least educated immigrant groups have been able to find economic niches in which they and their families can survive and eke out an existence long enough for their children and grandchildren to rise in the structure, a pattern that has been at the core of the American immigrant experience for almost two centuries.

Of course, this debate will continue, and new evidence and interpretations will appear. Ultimately, however, the debate may continue until immigration stops (which is very unlikely to happen, as Massey points out) and the fate of the descendents of the last immigrant groups is measured.

### Recent Immigration in Historical and Global Context

The current wave of immigration to the United States is part of a centuries-old process that spans the globe. Underlying this immense and complex population movement is the powerful force of continuing industrialization, economic development, and
globalization. The United States and other advanced industrial nations are the centers of
growth in the global economy, and immigrants flow to the areas of greater opportunity.
In the 19th century, population moved largely from Europe to the Western Hemisphere.
Over the past 50 years, the movement has been from the Global South to the Global
North. This pattern reflects the simple geography of industrialization and opportunity
and the fact that the more developed nations are in the Northern Hemisphere.

The United States has been the world’s dominant economic, political, and cul-
tural power for much of the last 100 years and the preferred destination of most
immigrants. Newcomers from around the globe continue the collective, social nature
of past population movements (see Chapter 2). The direction of their travels reflects
contemporary global inequalities: Labor continues to flow from the less developed
nations to the more developed nations. The direction of this flow is not accidental or
coincidental. It is determined by the differential rates of industrialization and mod-
erization across the globe. Immigration contributes to the wealth and affluence of
the more developed societies and particularly to the dominant groups and elite
classes of those societies.

The immigrant flow also is a response to the particular dynamics of globalization,
particularly since the 1980s (Sen & Mamdouh, 2008). The current era of globalization
has been guided by the doctrine of neoliberalism, or free trade, which urges nations to
eliminate barriers to the free movement of goods and capital. The North American
Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which we have mentioned on several occasions, is
an example of a neoliberal policy. When NAFTA went into effect in 1994, the three
nations of North America became, for many purposes, a single economic unit.
Corporations and capital were free to cross national borders, and many U.S. firms
moved their operations to Mexico in search of cheaper workers and weaker environ-
mental and labor regulations. Neoliberal agreements such as NAFTA also opened
Mexico and other less developed nations to consumer goods manufactured and con-
trolled by large, transnational corporations. These corporations were often able to
undersell indigenous goods, driving small-scale local farmers and manufacturers out
of business. Finally, the international agencies that regulate the global economy pres-
sture states to reduce the size of their governmental sector. This often means that the
national budget for health and education is slashed and that services once controlled
and subsidized by the government (e.g., water, electricity) are sold to private busi-
nesses. The result of these global forces is an increasingly vulnerable population in less
developed nations, unable to provide for themselves, educate their children, or afford
the simplest of daily necessities.

We tend to see immigrants as individuals acting of their own free will and, often,
illegally (“They chose to come to the United States and break the law”), but the picture
changes when we see immigration as the result of powerful, global economic and polit-
ical forces. Globalization today allows for the free movement of capital and goods but
not people. As the domestic economies and social systems of less developed nations
crumble, the victims of neoliberal globalization are left with few choices: they cross bor-
ders not only to the United States but to other advanced industrial nations, illegally if
they have to, because “it is the best choice to achieve a dignified life—if not for them-
seisms, then for their children” (Sen & Mamdouh, 2008, p. 7). When viewed through the
lens of globalization, it is clear that this population movement will continue because immigrants simply have no choice. It is very unlikely that they can be stopped by further militarization of the border or by building bigger and taller walls. They come to the United States in their numbers, as immigrants did in the past, because the alternatives are unacceptable or nonexistent.

These thoughts suggest that the tendency of many citizens of the more developed world to reject, demonize, and criminalize immigrants is self-defeating. Punitive, militaristic policies will not stem the flow of people from the Global South to the North. Globalization, in its neoliberal form, is incomplete: It allows for the free movement of goods and capital but not of people. It benefits transnational corporations and the mega businesses that produce consumer goods but victimizes the vulnerable citizens of the less developed nations. As long as these forms of globalization hold, the population pressure from South to North will continue.

New Immigrants and Old Issues

This chapter focused on some of the issues raised by high levels of immigration since the 1960s. As these issues are debated and considered, a fundamental fact about modern American society needs to be remembered: The issues of the “traditional” minority groups—African Americans and American Indians, for example—have not been resolved. As shown in previous chapters, these groups have been a part of American society from the beginning, but they remain, in many ways, distant from achieving complete equality and integration.

Many of the current issues facing these groups relate to class as well as race. The urban underclass is disproportionately made up of peoples of color and remains marginal to the mainstream society in terms of access to education and job opportunities, decent housing, and good health care. Although it is probably true that American society is more open and tolerant than ever before, we must not mistake a decline in blatant racism or a reduction in overt discrimination for its demise. In fact, there is abundant evidence that shows that racism and discrimination have not declined, but have merely changed form and that the patterns of exclusion and deprivation that have sustained in the past continue in the present.

Similarly, gender issues and sexism remain on the national agenda. As has been shown at various points throughout the text, blatant sexism and overt discrimination against women are probably at an historic low, but, again, one cannot mistake change for disappearance. Most importantly, minority women remain the victims of a double jeopardy and are among the most vulnerable and exploited segments of the society. Many female members of the new immigrant groups find themselves in similarly vulnerable positions.

These problems of exclusion and continuing prejudice and sexism are exacerbated by a number of trends in the larger society. For example, the continuing shift in subsistence technology away from manufacturing to the service sector privileges groups that, in the past as well as today, have had access to education. The urban underclass consists disproportionately of groups that have been excluded from education in the past and have less access in the present.
The new immigrant groups have abundant problems of their own, of course, and need to find ways to pursue their self-interests in their new society. Some segments of these groups—the well-educated professionals seeking to advance their careers in the world’s most advanced economy—will be much more likely to find ways to avoid the harshest forms of American rejection and exclusion. Similarly, the members of the “traditional” minority groups that have gained access to education and middle-class status will enjoy more opportunities than previous generations could have imagined (although, as we have seen, their middle-class position will be more precarious than their dominant-group counterparts).

Will we become a society in which ethnic and racial groups are permanently segmented by class, with the more favored members enjoying a higher, if partial, level of acceptance while other members of their groups languish in permanent exclusion and segmentation? What does it mean to be an American? What should it mean?

**MAIN POINTS**

- Since the mid-1960s, immigrants have been coming to the United States at nearly record rates. Most of these immigrant groups have coethnics who have been in the United States for years, but others are “New Americans.” How will this new wave of immigration transform America? Will they assimilate? How?
- Non-Hispanic immigrants from the Caribbean include Haitians and Jamaicans. Some are driven by economic needs; others are political refugees. All face the issues of racism and institutionalized discrimination.
- Arab Americans, like other New Americans, have been growing rapidly in number, and their local communities tend to be centered in economic enclaves. The events of 9/11 make this group a special target for hate crimes and for security concerns.
- Immigrants from Africa remain a relatively small group, and many bring high levels of education and occupational skills, although others are concentrated in the lower levels of the occupational structure.
- Contemporary immigrants are generally experiencing three different modes of incorporation into U.S. society: the primary labor market, the secondary labor market, and the enclave. The pathway of each group is strongly influenced by the amount of human capital they bring, their race, the attitude of the larger society, and many other factors.
- Relations between immigrants and the larger society are animated by a number of issues, including the relative costs and benefits of immigration, concerns about undocumented immigrants, and the speed of assimilation. One important issue currently being debated by social scientists is whether assimilation for New Americans will be segmented or will ultimately follow the pathway established by immigrant groups from Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries.

**STUDY SITE ON THE WEB**

Don’t forget the interactive quizzes and other resources and learning aids at [www.pineforge.com/healeyds3e](http://www.pineforge.com/healeyds3e)
FOR FURTHER READING

The following are recent, important studies of New American groups:


QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND STUDY

1. What differences exist between these New Americans in terms of their motivations for coming to the United States? What are the implications of these various “push” factors for their reception and adjustment to the United States?

2. Compare Arab and Middle Eastern immigrant groups with those from the Caribbean. Which group is more diverse? What differences exist in their patterns of adjustment and assimilation? Why do these patterns exist?

3. Compare and contrast African immigrants with the other groups. How do they differ? What are the implications of these differences for their adjustment to the larger society?

4. What, in your opinion, are the most important issues facing the United States in terms of immigration and assimilation? How are these issues playing out in your community? What are the implications of these issues for the future of the United States?

5. Will assimilation for contemporary immigrants be segmented? After examining the evidence and arguments presented by both sides and using information from this and previous chapters, which side of the debate seems more credible? Why? What are the implications of this debate? What will the United States look like in the future if assimilation is segmented? How would the future change if assimilation is not segmented? Which of these scenarios is more desirable for immigrant groups? For the society as a whole? For various segments of U.S. society (e.g., employers, labor unions, African Americans, consumers, the college educated, the urban underclass, and so on)?
INTERNET RESEARCH PROJECTS

A. Update and Expand This Chapter by an Internet Search

Many of the groups covered in this chapter have Web sites dedicated to them (e.g., Arab Americans are the subject of http://www.allied-media.com/Arab-American/default.htm). Select several of the groups covered in this chapter and conduct a search for relevant Web sites. See what you can learn about the concerns and situations of each group, and compare the information with what has been presented in this text. What information can you collect about their socioeconomic profiles? What can you learn about their points of view regarding the United States and their treatment by the larger society? What issues are most important for them (e.g., learning English, job discrimination, hate crimes, availability of welfare services, and so on)?

B. Update and Expand This Chapter With Data From the U.S. Census

The U.S. Bureau of the Census collects an array of information about most of the groups covered in this chapter, and the information is available online. Go to http://www.census.gov and click on “American FactFinder” on the left-hand panel of the home page. Next, click on “Data Sets” on the left-hand panel, then click on American Community Survey on the left-hand panel, and select “2007 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.” In the next window, select “Selected Population Profiles,” and then click “Add” to move the United States to the bottom window, and click “Next.” Choose the “Ancestry Groups” tab and find a group covered in this text or some other group in which you are interested. Click “Show Result,” and a statistical profile of the group and the U.S. population will be displayed. Extend the analysis in this chapter by selecting several variables and comparing the profile of your group with the total population.

Note

1. From Antonio’s Gun and Delfino’s Dream: True Tales of Mexican Migration, by Sam Quinones. Copyright © 2007 by Sam Quinones. Reprinted by permission of the University of New Mexico Press.