

IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION ON **LOS ANGELES**

(A review and analysis of data, articles, surveys and studies done on the issue of immigration.)

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PROVISO

Most of the research done to produce this report occurred on or before the summer of 2000. The result is that the latest census (2001) could not be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the information contained in the report is useful and provides a solid background for further research.

When dealing with the historical aspects of immigration and residential enclaves, I depended heavily on *The Ethnic Quilt* because it is a comprehensive source which focuses on the Los Angeles area.

My recommendation is that further research be done to incorporate the 2001 census data.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are several schools of thought on the impact of immigration on the U.S. and California. There are those who see it as vital to the US and the Californian economy. At the other spectrum are those who see immigrants as sapping the life out of our economy.

One view of immigration is succinctly summarized as follows: "Americans have traditionally been hostile to new waves of immigrants, yet immigration has been vital to the development of our national character. From the Alien and Sedition Acts of the 1790s, to the anti-immigrant 'Know Nothing' Party of the 1840s, to the Chinese Exclusion Act of the 1880s, to the National Origin Quotas of the 1920s, to our failures to accept refugees from Nazi Germany, to our imprisonment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, to Operation Wetback in the 1950s, to Proposition 187 today, our record has been consistent. Bring in immigrants when we need cheap labor or when we are threatened militarily. Scapegoat and deport them in times of economic uncertainty. Now the anti-immigrant argument runs that we have reached our 'carrying capacity,' that immigrants represent a 'silent invasion,' that we need a breathing space, a 'temporary' moratorium on immigration to allow those immigrants already here to assimilate."¹

Another school of thought states: "More than half of all immigrants in the United States reside in just seven cities: Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Miami, San Diego, Houston, and San Francisco. A controversial issue is whether immigrants are a benefit or a burden to these areas . . . Examining a range of economic variables . . . this essay finds that those cities with heavy concentrations of immigrants outperformed cities with few immigrants. Compared with low-immigrant cities², high-immigrant cities³ had double the job creation rate, higher per capita incomes, lower poverty rates, and 20 percent less crime. Unemployment rates, however, were unusually large in high-immigrant cities. These findings do not answer the critical questions of whether the immigrants cause the better urban conditions or whether benign urban conditions attract the immigrants. But the essay does refute the assertion that the economic decline of cities is caused by immigration; that assertion cannot be true because, with few exceptions, the U.S.

¹ *Immigration: America Stands Unique In The World*, Law Offices of Carl Shusterman (December 1996).

² The author defines "low-immigration" cities as those which, in 1990, had "3 percent foreign-born or fewer".

³ The author defines "high-immigration" cities as those which, in 1990, had 20 percent or more foreign-born population.

cities in greatest despair today - Detroit, Saint Louis, Buffalo, Rochester, Gary - have virtually no immigrants.”⁴

With regard to rates of assimilation into the American mainstream, the main obstacle has been negative attitudes (sometimes on both sides) especially when reflected in the laws of the land. For example: “In 1923, the Supreme Court ruled that Asian Indians were ineligible for naturalization and therefore unable to immigrate to the U.S. Although the Court conceded that Indians were Caucasian, they were not white . . . Again, in 1934, the Supreme Court interpreted the naturalization Law of 1790 to define `white peoples within the meaning of the statute (as) members of the Caucasian race as defined in the understanding of the mass of men. The term excludes the Chinese, the Japanese, the Hindus, the American Indians, and the Filipinos . . . Yet, less than a decade later, Americans suddenly discovered their brotherhood with persons of different races . . . The event that triggered this instant Enlightenment was World War II. When a bill was introduced in Congress just before the war to grant citizenship to Asian-Indian immigrants who had resided in the U.S. for over 15 years . . . As the war proceeded, however, policymakers saw the inconsistency of asking Filipinos, Indians, Koreans, Chinese and others to fight Nazi and Imperial Japanese racism while practicing racial discrimination at home . . . as an extension of World War II, the Cold War saw the U.S. engaged in political and military conflicts throughout the non-white world, as well as in civil rights struggles at home. In the midst of these conflicts, Senator Edward Kennedy sponsored, and President Johnson signed, a new law which treated immigrants from all countries the same. All racial impediments to immigration and citizenship were abolished . . . Its large immigrant population established Los Angeles as the Capital of the Pacific Rim . . . The Cold War ended, causing massive layoffs and downsizing, particularly in Southern California. A significant part of the electorate chose to make immigrants the scapegoat for these problems. The result is new and pending immigration legislation which threatens one of the great wellsprings of our energy, vitality and growth.”⁵

Ironically, history has shown that sometimes the effect of strong local anti-immigrant feelings is the mobilization and stimulation of rapid integration through naturalization. For example in California, anti-immigrant sentiments became a catalyst which increased the rate of naturalization among Latinos and encouraged greater participation in the political process: “The anti-immigrant message spewed by Governor Wilson helped to defeat the Republicans in the State Assembly. It is no coincidence that, for the first time, a Latino is Speaker of the Assembly in California. Rabid anti-immigrant legislators like Andrea Seastrand in Santa Barbara and Robert Dornan in once arch-conservative Orange County were rejected by voters. The victor over Dornan was a little-known Latina named Loretta Sanchez . . . Thirty years of immigration to

⁴ *Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution.

⁵ *Immigration: America Stands Unique In The World*, Law Offices of Carl Shusterman (December 1996).

California have radically changed the demographics of the state. The anti-immigrant tide has energized Asian, Latino and other immigrant voters. Any political party that endorses an anti-immigrant platform in California is risking political suicide.”⁶

Signs of integration and assimilation include: investment of time and finances into the building of a community; participation in the political process; acquisition of local mannerisms; participation of locals and other groups in functions that reflect cultures that are not ordinarily their own. Integration and acculturation is a two way process. The new immigrants must be willing to be a constructive part of the new society that they find themselves in, and the locals must be willing to respect the culture and rights of the newly arrived.

Groups that are not integrated into American society have also been left out of the political leadership process. The fact that a particular group has representation among local and/or national political leaders is highly significant in American society. It could be argued that the election of a member of a hitherto immigrant group is the ultimate sign of societal acceptance since several voters who are not from the representative’s ethnic/racial/religious etc. origin have to show their support in order for the candidate to achieve political success.

A review of history indicates that from a physical perspective one major impact of immigration on Los Angeles is the creation of enclaves of ethnic groupings. Generally speaking, the more recent the ethnic group and/or the poorer the group the stronger the incentive to congregate in a given area for mutual support. Examples include Guatemalans and Salvadorans. There are exceptions however. For cultural reasons certain groups have chosen to remain in enclaves in relatively high density areas despite their wealth and acculturation, e.g. Jews and Persians.

A factor which has had a major impact on the geographical location of all non-white or non-Anglo Saxon groups, has been the animosity of the formerly dominant protestant white group. Backed by the segregation laws and powers of enforcement, many ethnic groups were heavily limited in the areas they could legally reside. This fact alone created many of the earliest geographical enclaves. These early residential areas still exist today, e.g. South Central (blacks); Fairfax District (Jewish); Chinatown (Chinese); Little Tokyo (Japanese).

In the new global economy immigration is a reality. “From a human relations perspective, immigrants bring with them their old hatreds and prejudices.”⁷ The key to success on the human relations front is the ability of Angelenos to harness the advantages of diversity while simultaneously negating the prejudices that are inherent in people that are ignorant of cultures that are different from their own, whether such people be immigrants or long time local residents.

⁶ *Immigration: America Stands Unique In The World*, Law Offices of Carl Shusterman (December 1996).

⁷ Interview with Prof. Ali Modares in September 2000.

Conclusion:

One highly controversial issue is whether immigrants are an asset or a liability to the societies they move into.

Bearing in mind that Los Angeles is a gateway for immigration and one of the nations high-immigration cities, the analysis done by Stephen Moore of the Hoover Institution, becomes most pertinent. The facts he reviewed indicate the fallacy of many of the negative arguments thrown around about immigrants and their effect on the areas they reside in, for example:

1. "The two cities with the largest increases in unemployment were low-immigration cities . . . The city with the largest decline in unemployment was a high-immigration city: Sacramento." (*Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution).

This observation shows the fallacy of the view that immigrants **cause** unemployment.

2. "The ten cities with the highest growth in income had a median foreign-born population in 1980 that was higher than the median for the slowest per capita income growth cities (10.2 percent versus 7.8 percent). The cities with the greatest gains in income in the 1980s also gained more immigrants than the cities with the smallest gains in income." (*Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution).

This indicates that immigrants contribute to a long term overall rise in income which may offset any short term fall in wages in a particular industry.

3. "The ten cities with the lowest poverty rate in 1990 had a median foreign-born population of 10.3 percent, which was twice the median foreign-born population of 4.3 percent in the ten cities with the highest poverty rates." (*Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution).

This shows the fallacy of the argument that immigrants increase the overall level of poverty in the areas they settle in.

4. "Low-crime cities had roughly twice as large an immigrant presence as the high-crime cities in both 1980 and 1990." (*Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover

Institution).

This analysis shows the fallacy of the argument that a high immigrant population leads to a high rate of crime. What may be occurring is that the media's emphasis and focus on crimes committed in cities of high immigration and its failure to give equal time to crimes in low immigration growth areas, has created a warped view of the facts in order to create a potent illusion that immigrants cause crime rates to increase.

5. "[T]he cities with the highest taxes had substantially lower shares of foreign-born in their populations than the ten cities with the lowest taxes." (*Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution).

This observation discredits the argument that high rates of immigration in a given area will so increase the use of government/city provided services that taxes will be forced upwards to meet the new demand.

6. Using an urban economic health index that is based upon nine weighted economic variables, the author concludes that: "the ten highest economic growth cities in the 1980s had a mean foreign-born population in 1990 of 9.0 percent. The ten cities that declined most rapidly had a median foreign-born population of 3.8 percent . . . Five of the ten fastest-growing cities were high-immigration cities . . . Only two of the ten fastest-declining cities were high-immigration cities in 1990: Miami and Houston." (*Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution).

This analysis shows the fallacy of the argument that immigrants cause urban decline. In fact: "The ten highest-growth cities in the 1980s also started the period with larger immigrant populations (6.0 percent) than the cities with the most severe economic deterioration (3.5 percent) . . . The median increase in immigration in the ten highest-growth cities was 3.0 percent, versus a median increase in the foreign-born population of zero in the fastest-declining cities." (*Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution).

In conclusion the author notes that: "the findings . . . are confounded by the fact that immigrants have historically been attracted to states and areas with strong economies and opportunities."⁸

⁸ *Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution.

This begs the question: "Are immigrants contributing to the economic well-being of cities or simply choosing areas that are already prosperous?" The author states: "The best evidence we have that immigrants are contributing to the success of the cities where they live is that those cities with the largest numbers of immigrants arriving before 1980 generally had strong subsequent economic growth during the 1980s. Because the immigrants came before the growth, the subsequent growth could not have lured them."

It is clear that though one cannot state conclusively that immigrants cause economic prosperity, one can forever dispel the notion that immigrants cause urban decline. "The presence of immigrants is unquestionably associated with urban growth and renewal, rather than decline."⁹

"Nearly two hundred years ago James Madison observed: 'That part of America that has encouraged [foreigners] has advanced most rapidly in population, agriculture, and the arts.' This appears to have been precisely the case in the 1980s."¹⁰

⁹ *Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution.

¹⁰ *Immigration And The Rise And Decline Of American Cities*, by Stephen Moore, Hoover Institution.