
Introduction

International Migration and Immigration Research: The State of the Field

THE LAST DECADES of the twentieth century have witnessed a revival of large-scale immigration to the United States. The rise in the number of immigrants and the dramatic change in their national origins are revealed in a simple comparison between the 1950s and the 1980s. More than two-thirds of the 2.5 million immigrants admitted during the 1950s were from Europe, while more than 80 percent of the 7.3 million immigrants who arrived in the 1980s were from Latin America and Asia (Rumbaut 1996, 25). At century's end, the proportion of persons of foreign birth is inching closer to 10 percent of the total U.S. population (Schmidley and Alvarado 1998). More than 50 million Americans—one-fifth of the total population—are immigrants or the children of immigrants.

As high as these figures may seem to contemporary eyes, a high level of immigration is not an uncommon situation in American history. From the founding days of the republic to present times, international migration has been the defining attribute of American society. The language and political ideals of the early English settlers, as well as their land hunger and frequent disregard for Native American rights, set the stage for later arrivals. The eighteenth-century American economy was built with the labor of free immigrants, indentured servants, and slaves from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean. During the nineteenth century, immigrants played a disproportionate role in settling the frontier and later contributed much of the labor and consumer demand that fed the industrial revolution. The twentieth century opened with a fierce political and cultural debate that culminated in the closing of the door to free immigration in the 1920s. The low levels of immigration during the following forty years, from the mid-1920s to the mid-1960s, were unusual in American history (Massey 1995). The last third of the twentieth century has seen a return of immigration to center stage in the American drama.

Although the popular version of American his-

tory emphasizes continuity from colonial times to the present, the lineage is primarily cultural, not genealogical. The simple fact is that the United States is largely populated by persons whose ancestors lived elsewhere two centuries ago.¹ This country's culture, as well as its politics and economy, has been continually expanded and remolded by successive waves of immigrants. It is hard to imagine any part of American history or popular culture that has not been touched by immigration. The Statue of Liberty is perhaps the most widely understood cultural icon of American society, both at home and abroad. The role of immigrants in American society and their cultural contributions are often celebrated in Hollywood movies. The notion that almost any person from anywhere can "make it in America" has had a powerful impact on the image of America abroad and at home.

As the renewal of immigration has reverberated through American society over the last thirty years—demographically, economically, politically, and culturally—there has been a resurgence of scholarship on immigration in every branch of the social sciences. Taking stock of this fast-moving field is the aim of this volume. In particular, the chapters in this compendium assess the state of theories of international migration, the incorporation of immigrants and their descendants into American society, and the economic, social, and political responses to immigration. Theories are interpretative frameworks that try to make sense of the many "facts," often incomplete and confusing, that emerge from empirical research. Theories also offer conceptual maps that orient scholars to important research questions and modes of inquiry. By addressing the state of theories in the field of immigration research, our objective is to see the big picture—where we have been and where we are going.

In this introduction, we provide a glimpse of some of the significant issues that await the reader. We also explain how this volume came to be and compare the project with another Social Science

Research Council initiative on international migration in the 1920s. We conclude with a discussion of the boundaries of the field of international migration and immigration studies, the links between social science and social policy, and a few thoughts on the future of the field.

THEN AND NOW

It is virtually impossible to understand the present age of renewed immigration to the United States without some historical context. Are the numbers of immigrants too high? Can the United States absorb the newcomers? Has the political response to recent immigrants been hostile or racist? Every scholar who has fresh data on these questions (indeed, every person who has an opinion) is likely to compare the present with the past—or more precisely, with his or her interpretation of the past. How could it be otherwise? History is our template for understanding the present. American history offers an unusually rich panorama of immigrant experiences and national encounters with successive waves of immigrants from many parts of the globe. Sorting and sifting through the past to understand the present is the essential backdrop of most of the chapters in this collection.

There are many pasts to choose from. Indeed, throughout most of the nation's history the profound ambivalence of many Americans about immigration has been expressed in contradictory ways. Although immigration has been a central element of the national fabric throughout American history, and the slogan "nation of immigrants" is used as an emblem of national pride by almost every political and civic leader, there is an undercurrent of xenophobia that seems to be a persistent part of American culture, even among those who are only a generation removed from other lands.

In the late nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, as a swelling wave of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe crowded into American cities, many old-stock Americans feared that "their country" was changing for the worse. These fears crystallized in a variety of forms, from sentimental efforts to signal ancestral roots through such organizations as the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Society of the Mayflower Descendants to aggressive efforts of the eugenic and social Darwinist movements to assert the biological inferiority of the newcomers (Baltzell 1964).

Many intellectuals were firmly in the anti-immigrant camp. In 1894 a group of young, Harvard-educated "Boston Brahmins" founded the Immigration Restriction League, a group that had a major influence on pushing Congress toward more restrictive immigration legislation (Bernard 1982, 93). Henry Adams, the nineteenth-century man of letters and descendant of two American presidents, frequently railed against the new immigrants, especially the growing numbers and prominence of Jews in American society (Baltzell 1964, 90–93). The fear of immigrants and hostility toward them during the earlier era of mass immigration were critically analyzed in John Higham's classic book *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1865–1925* (1955/1988). In part III of this volume, Professor Higham reflects on the differences between the era about which he wrote and more recent history and considers the possibilities of going beyond an intellectual history of nativism to a social science analysis of the phenomenon.

The United States is once again in an era when opposition to immigration is rising (Espenshade and Huber, this volume). As the numbers of immigrants rose during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a renewal of the intellectual and political debate over immigration to the United States. Some people fear that immigrants will become just like other Americans, while others fear that they will not. Some fear for what the United States is becoming in an age of renewed immigration.

Although the current debate is less inflamed with overt claims about the inherent inferiority of the new immigrants, there are some striking parallels in the discussion over the immigration "problem" between the early and the late decades of this century. Peter Brimelow, a British immigrant, warned the United States that it was admitting an "alien nation" with the new wave of immigration from Asia and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s (Brimelow 1995). In recent elections, several politicians have played "the immigration card" in hopes of riding into office on the underlying fear of immigrants held by many Americans.

The shifting tides of social and political responses to the new age of immigration are one of the major themes analyzed in part III of this volume (see the chapters by Espenshade and Huber, Mollenkopf, Rodriguez, Sánchez, and by Johnson, Farrell, and Guinn). There is some basis for claims that anti-immigrant sentiments are a persistent undercurrent in American society and rise to the surface whenever immigration rises to a noticeable

level. But a comparison with the past indicates that the American reaction to immigration in the late twentieth century is not simply a replay of the early decades of the century. There are significant variations from place to place, and notable changes over time, that defy a simple explanation of continuity. Nor does it appear that anti-immigrant pressures will be able to close the door to continued immigration in the near future.

One of the most important differences between the earlier era and our own time is that the contemporary debate includes more balanced and analytical assessments of the costs and benefits of immigration (see the chapters by Plotke, by Carter and Sutch, and by Friedberg and Hunt). Of course, the political claims of those violently opposed to immigration are generally unrelated to any careful assessment of the costs and benefits of immigration. Nativist appeals are typically framed in terms of moral claims and rights (who belongs and who does not) and of the cultural deficiencies of potential immigrants.² These sentiments must contend, however, with a political environment in which 20 percent of the population are first- or second-generation Americans and with a culture that celebrates its immigrant ancestors.

Arguments about the contemporary progress of immigrants can draw on rather different interpretations of the past. When assimilation was thought to be the inevitable outcome for European immigrants, the model could be generalized to all immigrant groups (Gordon 1964). As doubts arose about the assimilation model as an accurate account of the historical immigration experience, the present and possible future scenarios were reinterpreted (Gans 1992a; Glazer and Moynihan 1970). The chapters in part II of this volume evaluate alternative theoretical frameworks with nuanced comparisons of the relative socioeconomic progress of immigrants in the present and the past.

Although the facts about the progress of immigrants and their children during the first half of the twentieth century are not so elastic as to fit any interpretation, there is room for differing emphases. One author may point to the struggles and sufferings of the first generation, while another author chooses to emphasize the socioeconomic mobility of the second generation. Does a narrowing of occupational differences between ethnic groups reveal an open-opportunity structure? Or does the persistence of bigotry in country clubs, college admissions at elite universities, and certain spheres of employment show the true nature of American so-

ciety? The world is full of contradictions, and selected examples can point to opposite conclusions.

The socioeconomic progress of immigrant communities has been neither immediate nor universal, but the overwhelming weight of evidence is that the children of European immigrants experienced substantial intergenerational socioeconomic mobility. And through residential integration and intermarriage, the social distinctions, and even the ethnic identifications, between European national-origin groups have blurred (see the masterful review in Alba and Nee, this volume). The question that now haunts the field is: What lessons should be drawn for—or predictions made about—the children of the post-1965 immigrants to the United States? The final evidence is not yet in on this question, and it may not be in for several decades; thus, there is a lively debate across the chapters in part II of the volume.

In part I, the authors assess the state of theories of international migration, with a particular focus on explaining why people migrate across international boundaries, and to the United States in particular. For most Americans, the answer is self-evident—if the door is open, then they will come. And if the front door is closed but a back door is open, then they will still come. This perspective, which emphasizes the pulls of the American economy and the centrality of state regulation, is the major theoretical framework in the policy studies wing of the immigration field (Keely 1979; Papademetriou and Hamilton 1995; Teitelbaum and Weiner 1995). It neglects, however, the determinants of international migration in the sending countries and assumes that the potential supply of immigrants is unlimited.

There is a plethora of theories on why people migrate, but relatively little agreement among them on the important causal variables. The problem has been that these theories “belong” to different disciplines or schools of research. Although the standard aim of social science research is to disconfirm theoretical expectations, this is a more difficult task if empirical tests are weak and the field is fragmented into different research communities that espouse independent theories. In such a situation, multiple theories can flourish with few incentives to move toward convergence.

In a very important chapter that could change the character of the field, Douglas Massey reviews and evaluates a number of propositions from different theories of international migration. He reports that the major theories of international migration are not mutually exclusive in their em-

pirical expectations, and indeed there is considerable support from the empirical literature for several of the theories. To our knowledge, this is one of the first efforts to synthesize theories that have been generally thought of as mutually exclusive in the literature (see also Massey et al. 1998).

Other chapters in part I illustrate the challenges of constructing theoretical frameworks and developing interdisciplinary approaches to the study of international migration. Alejandro Portes offers a classic statement on the uses and misuses of theory, citing clear examples from the research literature. Charles Hirschman provides a typology of the development of social theories across the social sciences. Other chapters point to critical gaps in the field, including the significance of gender theory (Pessar); the conceptualization of transmigrants, that is, persons who live and work in multiple societies (Glick Schiller); and the role and development of state regulation of migration (Zolberg).

IMMIGRATION STUDIES AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

This book is the product of a conference titled "Becoming American/America Becoming: International Migration to the United States," which met in Sanibel, Florida, on January 18–21, 1996, and was organized by the Committee on International Migration of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC). That committee was created in 1995 with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to promote interdisciplinary scholarship and training in the field of immigration studies (for more background, see DeWind and Hirschman 1996).

The formation of the Committee on International Migration reflects both the academic and policy interests of contemporary scholars and the historical role of the Social Science Research Council as a forum for addressing important national issues by bringing together leading scholars from across the social sciences. This context has shaped the committee's assessment of the field, the planning for the Sanibel conference, and this volume.

Policy considerations have had a major influence on the development of the field of international migration and immigration studies over the last two decades. Indeed, academics from almost every discipline have addressed the current policy debates and the significant empirical questions un-

derlying them (Bean, Edmonston, and Passel 1990; Borjas 1990; Hamermesh and Bean 1998a). Questions about problems of measurement of immigration and the consequences of immigration have led to several recent national commissions and National Academy of Science panels (Levine, Hill, and Warren 1985; Smith and Edmonston 1997; U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform 1994; U.S. Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy 1981).

The direction of the Committee on International Migration and the goals of the conference were framed more broadly than the current policy debates and popular controversies. This does not indicate a lack of interest in policy questions, but rather the belief that stepping back from the immediate debate will allow us to understand how and why migration patterns have developed as they have. With this logic, we asked the contributing authors to assess the theoretical status of research on international migration and contemporary immigration to the United States. Such an assessment, we believe, will contribute to better social scientific research, greater public enlightenment, and, in the long run, a more reasoned approach to public policy discussions. Our most fundamental goal is to contribute to the intellectual coherence of international migration studies as an interdisciplinary field within the social sciences. Social science research and theory can provide an understanding that is both a counterweight and a complement to the moral and sentimental voices speaking out in public debates.

Although this is not the only book to present an overview of contemporary immigration, our emphasis on the assessment of social science theories of immigration is probably unique. This priority grew out of the initial discussions among the members of the interdisciplinary SSRC committee. The committee members had to establish first a meaningful dialogue across disciplinary boundaries. Disciplines differ in their vocabularies, their research styles, and even their interpretations of evidence. But underneath the brush, we discovered that all social science disciplines share many of the same theories or explanatory frameworks. By focusing on an assessment of theories of international migration, we hope to enhance interdisciplinary communications and the development of a truly interdisciplinary field of international migration studies.

Although this book aims to provide a comprehensive account of the causes and consequences of international migration, the emphasis is on the

American experience, and in particular on the adaptation of immigrants to living in the United States, the impact of immigrants on this country, and the reactions of Americans to the presence of immigrants. Our initial plan was to address contemporary immigration to the United States from a broadly comparative and historical perspective, but we soon realized that the complexity and scope of such an effort would be too great a challenge. The rapid growth of research on immigration to the United States by scholars from many disciplines suggested that our primary goal should be the integration of this diverse body of scholarship. Putting the contemporary American experience into a broader historical and international context is a high priority for the future activities of the SSRC committee.

The other major goal of the SSRC committee is to strengthen the interdisciplinary field of international migration and immigration studies. The committee has established fellowship programs for predoctoral students and postdoctoral fellows whose research promises to contribute to “theoretical understandings of the origins of immigration and refugee flows to the United States, the processes of migration and settlement, and the outcomes for immigrants, refugees, and native-born Americans” (SSRC 1998). As part of these efforts to encourage a new generation of immigration researchers, the committee has organized workshops to assist students of minority social background to prepare research and funding proposals. We trust that the next assessment of the state of the field will include the work of some of the students whose career beginnings have been encouraged and supported by our committee’s initiatives.

This is not the first time that the Social Science Research Council has drawn together scholars to advance research and understanding on international migration. Seventy years ago, from 1924 to 1927, the SSRC first mobilized social scientists to study immigration with the establishment of the Committee on Scientific Aspects of Human Migration. The earlier SSRC committee produced, directly or indirectly, an amazing range of significant books and research articles, including studies of Swedish immigration, Mexican immigration and labor in the United States, statistical compendia of international migrations, and original research on the cityward migration of African Americans (Gamio 1930, 1931; Janson 1931; Kennedy 1930; Kiser 1932; Lewis 1932; Ross and Truxel 1931; Taylor 1930, 1932; Willcox and Ferenczi 1929, 1930).

There are some interesting parallels in the demographic and political contexts behind the founding of the two SSRC committees in 1924 and 1995. Both committees were formed after several decades of mass immigration, an acrimonious public debate on continued immigration, and changes in immigration legislation. The Social Science Research Council had just been created in 1923 with the assistance of private foundations to help bring social scientific knowledge to bear on important national issues. At that time, the social sciences were still trying to establish their scientific credentials, independent of efforts at social reform. The premise was that social science knowledge would have credibility in the public arena only if research conclusions were not seen as politically determined. The fledgling SSRC must have seen the study of immigration and the integration of immigrants into American society as a promising opportunity to demonstrate the importance of social science research as something more than fields of knowledge derived from the natural sciences (Merriam 1926, 187).

The field of international migration may also have been considered an important area by the SSRC because of the prior use, or misuse, of social science research by advocates of immigration restriction. The Dillingham Commission Report of the U.S. Senate, which contained forty-two volumes of papers and statistical analyses, provided a “scientific” base for restrictions on immigration from southern and eastern Europe (U.S. Immigration Commission 1907–1910).³ The lines between social science analysis and the expression of opinions and prejudices were frequently blurred. Leading American social scientists, including E. A. Ross, a major sociologist, and John R. Commons, a founder of modern economics, wrote books that supported the dominant prejudices of the era, namely, that the new immigrants were unlikely to assimilate into American society (Commons 1907; Ross 1914).

In retrospect, it is clear that the Committee on Scientific Aspects of Human Migration played a critical role in changing the character of social science research on immigration by tilting the field away from advocacy and toward a more scholarly approach. The 1924 SSRC committee, which used the word *Scientific* in its title, was actually an outgrowth of a National Research Council committee on the same subject that had a predominantly natural science orientation (Yerkes 1924). The process of selecting eminent research scholars for committee membership established an important

precedent. The other significant aspect of the committee membership was its multidisciplinary composition; included were representatives from anthropology, psychology, economics, political science, and statistics (Abbott 1927, 2–3).

The publications sponsored by the 1924 SSRC committee reveal a remarkable breadth of vision. Several books examined immigration to the United States from the broader context of global migration systems. The inclusion of internal migration, specifically that of African Americans from the South to the North, within the committee's mandated research focus demonstrated the need to reach across traditional areas of academic specialization. In a very fundamental sense, the 1924 committee shared the 1995 committee's strategy of stepping back from the immediate policy debate in order to understand the broader issues. The social scientific publications initiated by the 1924 committee have stood the test of time as reliable analyses—something that we hope will be said about this volume in future decades. The 1924 committee also demonstrated the importance and value of independent social science research even during periods of intense political controversy. Perhaps such times are when an independent social science is needed most of all.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

By all the standard measures of scientific progress, the field of international migration and immigration studies is thriving. In addition to a burgeoning literature of research articles and important monographs (Lieberson 1980; Massey et al. 1987; Portes and Bach 1985), new books for university courses (Daniels 1991; Jacobson 1998; Portes and Rumbaut 1996; Reimers 1992), encyclopedic surveys (Cohen 1995), and proceedings of conferences (IUSSP 1997) have been published in recent years. In spite of this enormous flurry of activity and attention, or perhaps because of it, there appears to be relatively little integration in the field. Scholars from varied disciplines and perspectives bring rather different research questions, assumptions, and analytical frameworks to their inquiries. The explicit goal of this volume is to bring these many strands of work somewhat closer together through the reassessment of theories in the field.

We do not intend to dampen the diversity of a dynamic field under the banner of a new all-encompassing theory. Rather, we set forth three questions—or sets of questions—that can serve to

organize theories and research in the field of international migration.

1. What motivates people to migrate across international boundaries, often at great financial and psychological cost?
2. How are immigrants changed after arrival? (Responses to this question address such issues as adaptation, assimilation, pluralism, and return migration.)
3. What impacts do immigrants have on American life and its economic, sociocultural, and political institutions?⁴

The chapters in part I address theories of international migration and some of the foundational concepts in the field. Although these chapters focus primarily on international migration to contemporary American society, the essential questions they raise could be addressed to other times and other countries. Part II focuses on the questions of immigrant adaptation and incorporation into American society. Two generations ago “assimilation” (admittedly defined in different ways) was considered an inevitable outcome for most immigrants, at least those of European origin. In recent years the inevitability and even the desirability of assimilation have been the subject of considerable political controversy and scholarly reassessment. In part III, the authors review how American society has changed and even been transformed with the absorption of immigrants.

The answers to these questions are not straightforward, and this is not simply because the empirical evidence is complicated and sometimes inconclusive. The empirical record can often be murky, but the ways in which questions are posed and embedded in theoretical arguments can matter even more. Theories serve to codify the received wisdom—what issues are important and why—and provide guidance for empirical research. If a theory is to be a useful guide for research, its core must be selective, emphasizing certain aspects of social reality. Assessments of theories, such as the essays in this volume, evaluate not only the empirical evidence associated with a theory but also the assumptions behind the questions.

For each of the three parts of the volume, we have written introductory essays that attempt to provide overviews of the issues, theories, and debates covered in the individual chapters and to assess their contributions to the field of international migration and immigration studies. These introductory essays are not meant to summarize the contents of the individual chapters, but to organize the themes that underpin a field of inquiry and to highlight issues of agreement and disagreement.

Alejandro Portes's pioneering scholarship has identified and explored the core issues in the study of international migration and the adaptation of immigrants to American society (Portes 1996b, 1998; Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). His essay, a revision of the keynote lecture he gave at the conference, is published as the lead chapter in the volume.

In addition to organizing the development of theory and the interdisciplinary research on international migration, we would also like to try to bring a small amount of conceptual order to the field based on common understandings. Perhaps the place to begin is with a few words on our perception of the scope of the field. Are theories of international migration distinctly different from general theories of migration? Should we distinguish between the fields of international migration studies and immigration studies? On these questions, and on many other conceptual issues, including the relationship between social science theories and research on international migration and the field of immigration policy (including refugee policy), there is no overarching consensus. We offer our own conceptual map on these matters simply to lay out the underlying issues that sometimes cause confusion.

Although international migration can be defined as migration across an international boundary, this does not resolve the question of whether general migration theories subsume international migration. Since well-defined international boundaries and the regulation of movement across them are relatively modern phenomena (and still not in force everywhere), there cannot be a historical division between the two fields. In an ideal theoretical framework of migration, we might wish to distinguish types of migration based on a number of criteria, such as distance, intention of permanence, duration of stay, voluntary or involuntary mobility, and mode of travel. In a framework that used such criteria, crossing an international border would be an important distinction, but hardly one that called for an independent theory.

Nonetheless, the research communities that study international migration and internal migration have taken shape as parallel fields of study rather than as one. In large part, this has happened because of the overriding focus on state policies, the single most important independent variable in studies of international migration, but one that is not meaningful for studies of internal migration. If we were studying internal migration in the former socialist bloc, where internal passports or travel documents were required for domestic migration,

this distinction would be of less importance. Another major difference that has certainly influenced the nature of empirical research is the availability of data.

Conventional data sources, such as censuses and national surveys, typically include the universe of persons exposed to the risk of domestic migration. National data sources allow for the comparison of domestic migrants with nonmigrants in comparable places of origin and nonmigrants in the places of destination. There are no comparable data for the study of international migration. By definition, only migrants from other countries are included in censuses and surveys in the country of destination; we know nothing about the numbers and characteristics of nonmigrants in the countries of origin. Administrative data on border crossings are widely used in international migration research, but such data cannot be used to study immigrant selectivity or outcomes in the places of settlement.

International migration studies cover scholarship on the process of movement from one country to another. By definition, the field is comparative, and the units of analysis could be countries, specific international flows, or individuals. Immigration studies, another widely used term, covers generally the same phenomenon, but from the perspective of the receiving society (Jones 1992). Questions about immigrant adaptation and assimilation are central to immigration studies but may be secondary topics in the field of international migration research. One might also consider another subarea with a label of "emigration studies," which would be issues in international migration analyzed from the perspective of the sending country—for example, diaspora studies.

Given that some of these terms are used interchangeably by other authors, we do not try to establish an orthodox vocabulary. In some instances, we refer to the field of "international migration and immigration studies" in order to be as inclusive as possible, although this is an overly long and inelegant phrase. The organization of the parts of this volume—by research questions—represents our vision of how the field should be framed and organized for cumulative empirical research.

LOOKING BACK AT THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The twentieth century has been distinguished by contradictory forces that have both accelerated and retarded long-distance migration. The accelerating forces have included the development of the

modern technology of transportation and communication and the integration of a world market. Information about opportunities for land, work, and freedom in distant places spreads more quickly than ever, and the costs of movement have been dramatically reduced.⁵ At the same time, the incentives for migration have been spurred by the buildup of population pressure in agricultural regions with only limited capacity for additional labor absorption. The pressures occurred in a historical context in which the traditional feudal or semifeudal economies and the moral order that tied peasants to the land were eroding or collapsing entirely with the spread of the market economy. The net consequence has been a rise in rural-to-urban migration, but it should be noted that the overwhelming share of the movement has been internal rather than international migration.

It is not only proximity that directs the exodus from rural areas to national rather than international destinations. Throughout the twentieth century modern states have created new political bureaucracies to regulate national borders and to monitor those who cross them. These actions cannot be explained by the natural ethnocentrism in any society or the inherent fear of strangers, since these forces have always been present. The rise of modern states over the last century or so has been accompanied by the peculiar ideology that each state should be inhabited primarily by a single “nation” of people who share a common culture, language, and history. Empires rarely cared about the national origins of their inhabitants as long as they paid taxes and did not challenge authority. Many of the new “nation states,” however, were created as national homelands for specific populations.

The problem for the United States, and other “settler societies,” has been to define who belongs to the nation. The debates over immigration law are part of the larger question of national identity that influences almost every aspect of political, social, and cultural life. In the earlier decades of the twentieth century the forces that wanted American society and culture to be predominantly defined by its eighteenth-century ethnic stock—ignoring the substantial numbers of African Americans and Native Americans—won the political battle with the imposition of the national-origin quotas. From the 1960s through the 1990s, the political winds have been reversed, or at least modified substantially, with a broadening of the ethnic origins of new waves of immigration.

Many of the chapters in this volume report on

the controversies and discrepant findings regarding the eventual outcomes of the late-twentieth-century immigration waves. We suspect that many of these debates may be a function of duration of residence or generation in the host country. Indeed, some of the variance in outcomes may be “noise” that results from modest fluctuations over short observation periods. Over the short term it is difficult to measure the net impact of immigration independently of other period effects. There are certain to be short-term problems of adjustment that follow from the initial shocks of arrival; these problems may depend on the characteristics of the migrants, the host community, and unique conditions at the time of arrival. These short-term problems may not, however, be indicative of the long-term impacts of immigration.

AN AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

Above and beyond the goals of greater interdisciplinary communications, clearer statements of theory, and more cumulative research, we also have some suggestions for the future research agenda of the field. Most important, we would argue for greater emphasis on the long-term outcomes of international migration on the receiving societies and on immigrants and their descendants. The close links between immigration studies and policy considerations pull the field to the study of short-term outcomes, particularly on issues that might be considered social problems. The initial problems of adjustment are important and should not be neglected, but the impact of international migration may appear to be quite different with a time horizon of fifty years rather than five years. In the balance of this introduction, we develop this argument in the context of a broader assessment of the field of immigration studies, and the social sciences more generally.

As noted earlier, the study of immigration has always been closely tied to considerations of immigration policy. This can be a major stimulus to research, but it can also be a potential liability. The link to policy contributes to considerable public interest in research results and additional sources of support for research and training. Too much attention on policy matters, however, can lead to an exclusive focus on the period immediately after arrival and an assumption that immigration is a “social problem.” There is actually a very long list of perceived “immigration problems,” including the uprooted migrants who must adapt to strange sur-

roundings and the consequences for the receiving society that must absorb the migrants. This last problem, it is generally assumed, has adverse financial implications and may endanger social integration.

These problems are not entirely imagined. Long-distance migration can be a traumatic experience, and adjustments to new environments are rarely smooth and entirely pleasant (Handlin 1973). The arrival of significant numbers of people from different backgrounds may be profoundly disturbing to those in the receiving society. Immigration probably creates short-term “shocks” to host-community institutions, including labor markets and schools. The sudden increase in population numbers can also add to pressures on the housing market and demand for other scarce community resources. Although these problems are real, the perceptions of policymakers (and perhaps of the broader public) can easily create biases for the research community. In the early decades of the twentieth century these pressures amplified the popular prejudices that marked the writings of social scientists on the dangers of continued immigration (Commons 1907; Ross 1914). At present, these pressures deflect attention from the study of the long-term consequences of immigration.

The study of earlier waves of immigration and the ways in which long-distance migrations have proven to be major pathways of social change are usually consigned to historians and practitioners in other branches of the social sciences (Davis 1989; McNeill and Adams 1978). A subtle bias often emanating from immediate policy perceptions is the assumption that the contemporary situation is unprecedented and that a substantial number of immigrants is a serious problem that requires strong actions by the state.⁶ The close study of history is the only guard against such potential biases (Liebersohn 1996). Fears were strong at several points in American history that the presence of large numbers of immigrants and continued immigration posed significant problems for the broader society. A few examples might suffice to show that these fears were transitory—lasting less than a generation—and much exaggerated at the time.

At the time of World War I, there were fears that German Americans might have dual loyalties and be somewhat reluctant to join in the war effort against Germany. There was a very substantial German American presence in many midwestern cities, where German culture and institutions, including German-language schools, were a strong presence. With only modest resistance, however,

the German American community completely acceded to pressures to “Americanize” during World War I, and almost all signs of an ethnic institutional presence were eliminated (Child 1939; Portes and Rumbaut 1996, 105–7). The same fears and prejudices were aimed at Japanese Americans during World War II, but with a much greater vengeance. In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, all Japanese Americans on the West Coast were rounded up and forced to live in “relocation camps” for several years (Daniels, Taylor, and Kitano 1992).

Contemporary accounts of these events would probably have rationalized these fears and stressed the problems of immigrant absorption. In retrospect, it is clear that the hysteria of potential disloyalty was largely, if not entirely, imagined and that the American government overreacted. Within a fairly short time span the events themselves have disappeared from the national memory, though not necessarily for the peoples whose lives were disrupted. Since there is very little current immigration from either Germany or Japan, these national-origin groups are no longer in the category of newly arrived threat to the social order. Indeed, the contemporary images of German Americans and Japanese Americans are extremely positive. What a difference a generation makes!

Joel Perlmann and Roger Waldinger (this volume) note that many southern and eastern European immigrants, and even the Irish, were not considered “white” by many Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fear that the white race would soon be a minority in the United States was a major argument for the national-origin quotas introduced in the 1920s. Although these perceptions seem archaic today, the same fallacy is perpetuated with claims that continuing immigration from Latin America and Asia will lead to white Americans becoming a minority of the U.S. population by the middle of the twenty-first century (Bouvier 1992). With more than 30 percent of Asians and Hispanics marrying outside their community, the current boundaries of the race and ethnic populations are certain to change dramatically in the coming years (Smith and Edmonston 1997, 113–22; Hirschman, forthcoming). Any prediction of the future ethnic composition of the population is certain to be wide of the mark.

Another example of the fallacy of relying on short-term cross-sectional patterns to understand long-term outcomes is revealed with a recent comprehensive assessment of the fiscal impact of immi-

gration (Smith and Edmonston 1997, chs. 6 and 7; see also Smith and Edmonston 1998, chs. 3, 4, and 5). Evaluations of the net cost of immigration to the U.S. fiscal system can be done by comparing the taxes paid by immigrants (or immigrant households) relative to the costs of government benefits received (transfer payments, education, and so on) by the same households. Cross-sectional estimates using this accounting logic, at the state level, show that immigrants are a net economic burden, largely because immigrant families have more children in public schools than do native-born families (Smith and Edmonston 1997, tables 6.2 and 6.3).

An alternative framework is to compute the fiscal impact of immigration that includes the projected taxes and benefits received over the lifetimes of the immigrant and his or her descendants. Cross-sectional estimates are biased because the current costs of educating the children of immigrants are counted, but not the taxes paid from the future earnings of immigrants and their descendants. When longitudinal projections, with a variety of assumptions, are computed for the national fiscal system (including federal, state, and local governments), the net present value of immigration is very positive (Smith and Edmonston 1997, table 7.6). There are social costs of immigrant absorption, but these are magnified in the conventional cross-sectional accounting framework.

The question of the short-term versus long-term impact of international migration on immigrants can be addressed by examining rates of return migration. Assuming that immigrants who eventually leave the United States are acting on some assessment of advantages and disadvantages, return migration offers a crude indicator of dissatisfaction with the migration experience.⁷ Although there are no official statistics on emigration from the United States, the best estimates are that about one-third, perhaps more, of immigrants emigrate from the United States (Jasso and Rosenzweig 1990, 124). The rates of return migration from immigrant streams earlier in the century were probably even higher. These figures suggest a moderate degree of “rejection” or short-term dissatisfaction among immigrants, but much less among the children of immigrants, who rarely return to their parental county of origin.

We do not wish to overinterpret the contrast between the rates of emigration of the first- and second-generation immigrants, since there are many plausible reasons for the difference. The

point is simply that the pattern is consistent with our argument that measures of the short-term immigrant adaptation or adjustment do not reliably predict long-term (intergenerational) outcomes. Migrants are willing to endure the pains of migration, especially over long distances, only because they are highly motivated. We conjecture that the losses are immediately felt but the gains may be visible only over the span of generations. This means that cross-sectional evaluations, especially in the years immediately after migration, may reveal the costs of long-distance migration but not the gains that may result.

These examples suggest that the framing of research questions is critically important. Although the review and development of social science theory are sometimes derided as esoteric exercises, far removed from both the real world and empirical research, we hope that careful readers of this volume will conclude that there is nothing quite so practical and useful as a good theory. A good theory is one that not only poses a plausible causal argument but also suggests the spatial and temporal dimensions to which it applies. Theories that incorporate insights from different disciplines and develop in tandem with empirical research hold the power to illuminate the fundamental character and direction of human societies.

At century's end, the United States is once again making fundamental economic, social, and cultural changes that could scarcely have been imagined only a few decades ago. Immigration appears to be one of the major forces of change and renewal. The authors of the chapters in this volume draw on the accumulated wisdom of history, the best of social science theory and research, and their own creative ideas to explain how immigration has shaped American society over the twentieth century and what it might become in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Jeffrey Passel and Barry Edmonston estimate that about one-third of Americans in 1990 were descended from persons who arrived after 1900 and another one-third were descended from nineteenth-century immigrants (Passel and Edmonston 1994, 61). Interestingly, almost 90 percent of blacks were descended from families that had been here for at least four generations before 1900; only about one-third of whites (non-Hispanic) had such deep roots (67–69).
2. These reactions are not unique to American society, and indeed, they may be more moderate in the United States than elsewhere.

3. William P. Dillingham was a senator from Vermont and chair of the Senate committee that produced the report. According to William Bernard (1982, 94), the report “began with the assumption that the new immigrants were racially inferior to the old immigrants from northern and western Europe and manipulated mountains of statistics to provide a ‘scientific’ rationale for restricting their entry.” See also the critique of the Dillingham Commission Report in Handlin (1957).
4. A fourth, perhaps equally important, question is: What impact does international migration have on the sending society? This question is beyond the scope of this volume, but we can note here that although sending countries lose, at least temporarily, the labor and capital of emigrants, in the long term they may receive substantial economic gains through remittances and return migration.
5. These technological and social changes may have led to more rapid increases in temporary movement than in permanent settlement. Just as the cheapening of transportation and the easier flow of information around the globe have allowed greater opportunities for international mobility, they also have allowed people to return to their native countries more easily than was the case for earlier waves of international migrants.
6. Although Stephen Castles and Mark Miller (1998, 4) observe that “international migration has grown in volume and significance since 1945, and most particularly since the mid-1980s,” recent research shows that the absolute number of persons living outside their country of birth increased from 1965 to 1990, but the percentage of the world’s population classified as international migrants remained at 2.3 percent (Zoltnik 1998).
7. Some immigrants may have come with the intention of making a temporary sojourn to earn money and then to return home. For such individuals, the return home may not be a statement of dissatisfaction with their original migration.

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