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## **California Policy Options**

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California's Immigration

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# CALIFORNIA'S IMMIGRATION

Roger Waldinger

Over the last thirty years, the United States has again become an immigrant nation. As a share of total population, the foreign-born presence is quite far from turn of the century dimensions; when compared to the nation's total demographic base, the rate at which newcomers are arriving similarly looks modest by historical standards. But in absolute terms, the population of newcomers that moved to the United States during the 1980s was massive, exceeded only by the even larger tide of immigrants who came to the United States in the first decade of the 20th century. And the trend for the last decade of the 20th century is clearly tilted upward: according to the Census Bureau, the U.S. received more immigrants between 1990 and 1994 than it had during the entire decade of the 1970s.

If immigration is a matter of federal policy, with decisions about numbers, categories, and enforcement made in Washington, it is a phenomenon with highly regionalized and localized effects. Many states and areas in the United States have yet to witness immigrant inflows of significant size; for others, the advent of the new immigration has been a transforming event. Nowhere more so than in California. In the period of a brief three decades, the Golden State has become the premier concentration of the foreign-born, home to 12 of every 100 Americans, but one of every three immigrants, as of 1990.

But as in the rest of the nation, immigration has not diffused evenly throughout the state, but has instead converged on a limited number of places. As the site of 20 percent of the nations' entire foreign-born population, the Los Angeles region tops the list; in

effect, the counterpart of Ellis Island is now to be found at LAX. And it is not simply that the state's regions differ in their relative importance as immigrant destinations; they also vary in the types of immigrants that they attract, with the consequence that there is not one, but various immigrant Californias.

This paper surveys the changing profile and status of these newest Californians. As I shall show, California's immigrant population stands out from the nation's in more ways than just size. California's immigrant population is distinctive in national origins, legal status, and skill levels; those identifying characteristics, combined with the growing dependence of a large part of the state's economy on immigrant labor, raise serious questions about the long-term integration of the newest arrivals to the Golden State.

## **Immigration Trends**

Grasping the state's distinctiveness first requires sketching out the background against which the recent developments in California must be assessed. Passage of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965 provides the conventional date for the onset of the new immigration to the United States. The 1965 reform transformed the immigration system with a few bold strokes. First, it abolished the old country of origins quotas, which allotted small quotas to Southern and Eastern Europe and still smaller, almost prohibitively small quotas to Asia. Second, it established two principal criteria for admission to the United States: family ties to citizens or permanent residents or possession of scarce and wanted skills. Third, it increased the total numbers of immigrants to be admitted to the United States.<sup>1</sup>

The system established by the 1965 reforms essentially remains in place to this day, despite constant debate and continuous overhauling. But the Hart-Celler Act spawned changes that were

entirely different from its advocates' plans. The reformers thought that the new act would keep the size of the immigrant influx to modest proportions. But for various reasons the numbers quickly spiraled: 7.3 million new immigrants arrived in the United States during the 1980s -- second only to the peak of 8.8 million newcomers recorded during the first decade of the 20th century. To be sure, at 8 percent, the immigrants comprised a far more modest share of the nation's population in 1990 than was true in 1910 -- when 15 of every 100 Americans were foreign-born. Still, the 1990 level represented a substantial increase over the 5 percent level recorded when the foreign-born share of the U.S. population hit its historic nadir in 1970.

A second unexpected twist concerned the act's beneficiaries. The 1965 legislation was principally targeted at Eastern and Southern Europeans -- the groups hardest hit by the nativist legislation of the 1920s. By the 1960s, however, workers from Italy or Yugoslavia had fallen out of the orbit of trans-Atlantic migration. Instead, the newcomers who took advantage of the newly liberalized system came from Asia, Latin America, and the circum-Caribbean.

The opportunities for Asian immigrants initially derived from the terms of the 1965 act, which created categories for immigrants whose skills -- as engineers, doctors, nurses, pharmacists -- were in short supply. Along with students already living in the United States and who enjoyed easy access to American employers, these professionals comprised the first wave of new Asian immigrants -- creating the basis for the kinship migration of less well-educated relatives. The system was sufficiently flexible for longer established groups, like the Chinese, to renew migration streams, while also allowing entirely new groups -- most notably Koreans and Asian Indians -- to put a nucleus in place and then quickly expand.<sup>ii</sup>

Political developments added substantial, and unexpected momentum to the migrant flow: unexpected pressures repeatedly forced the United States to greatly expand its admission of refugees. The sudden collapse of the U.S.-supported regime in South Vietnam,

followed by Communist takeovers in Cambodia and Laos, triggered a massive, sudden outflow of refugees, many of whom settled on the west coast. The first wave of exiles from the Southeast Asian elite was followed by a larger, more heterogeneous group of refugees in search of sanctuary and a new home in the United States. Thus, the original core of high-skilled immigrants from Asia rapidly grew. By the 1980s, Asia emerged as the number two source area of the foreign-born, accounting for 37 percent of all the newcomers who moved to the United States during the 1980s.<sup>iii</sup>

Thus immigrants who could activate kinship ties to U.S. residents or citizens, or who possessed special skills, or who were seeking asylum from Communist regimes were able to pass through the front door opened by the 1965 reforms in a variety of ways. Mexicans, and later on, Central Americans, were more likely to come through the backdoor of unauthorized migration. The immediate roots of Mexican unauthorized migration lie further back, in the Bracero program begun during World War II to eliminate shortages of agricultural workers. Ostensibly, the Bracero program was destined for a short existence, and the workers it imported were supposed to head back to Mexico after a short stint of temporary labor in the United States. But the influence of agribusiness kept the Bracero program alive until 1964 and with time, an increasing number of migrants "dropped out" of the Bracero stream, heading for better jobs in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and other urban areas. By 1964, when Congress abolished the Bracero program, networks between the U.S. and sending villages throughout Mexico's central plateau were already in place, providing all the information and connections needed to keep the migrants coming -- whether legal documents were in hand or not.<sup>iv</sup>

Once the ex-braceros abandoned the farm labor stream, the institutional mechanisms of the 1965 Act facilitated the passage to legal status. Marriage to a citizen or legal resident, a change in the legal status of one's sibling, assistance from an employer eager to retain a skilled and valued hand -- any one of these events was enough

to eventually transform yesterday's undocumented worker into today's legal immigrant. Since the newly minted legal immigrant could then bring over those immediate relatives still lingering in Mexico, albeit with some delay, the official statistics show a steadily expanding stream of legal migration from Mexico.

Just how many newcomers have arrived without authorization has long been a matter of dispute, with wildly disparate estimates and guesstimates, ranging from 2 to 12 million, a stock in trade in the undocumented immigration debate. More recently, demographers have settled on a methodology for "counting the uncountable," which has in turn yielded estimates on which much of the immigration research community can agree. This methodology suggests an undocumented population of about 2 to 4 million residing in the United States as of 1980, of whom over half had come from Mexico.<sup>v</sup>

Doing something about undocumented immigration dominated immigration policy debates ever since enactment of the Hart-Celler Act; with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, known as IRCA, the Congress attempted to close the back door and control this unauthorized flow. IRCA had three major provisions: a so-called general amnesty for undocumented immigrants who had resided continuously in the United States since January 1, 1982; a second, "special agricultural workers" program, inserted at the behest of agricultural interests, for agricultural workers who had been in the United States for a minimum of 90 days in the year preceding May 1986; and sanctions against the employers of illegal immigrants. In the end, 1.76 million persons applied for IRCA's general amnesty, alongside approximately 1.3 millions persons who used the special agricultural worker option, a program widely known for its openness to fraud and abuse.<sup>vi</sup>

As expected, amnesty did diminish the pool of undocumented immigrants. Although Congress designed sanctions and the more stringent border controls adopted in the wake of IRCA to curb future undocumented flows, the available evidence suggests that these

efforts, while yielding some initial results, in due course failed to curb the flow. Unauthorized migration clearly persists, contributing a net increment of 300,000 undocumented entrants each year.<sup>vii</sup> The best estimates suggest that the total number of undocumented residents grew by over 50 percent between 1980 and 1992, even though more than 3 million persons had passed from illegal to legal status as a result of IRCA.<sup>viii</sup>

*California:* Though a notable change from the past, the re-emergence of immigrant America has been a gradual development, exercising a significant, but nonetheless modest effect on the size and composition of the U.S. population, nationwide. The situation in California has been altogether different. Like other big states, California historically exercised a disproportionate attraction for the foreign-born. But in 1960, the immigrant presence was still relatively slight -- just over 8.5 percent of the state's population; notwithstanding the arrival of over half a million immigrants during the course of the 1960s, the immigrant share of the state's population rose by less than half of a percentage point. But things then quickly changed: the state gained 1.8 million immigrants during the 1970s; another 3.25 million immigrants followed behind a decade later. As an indicator of how exceptional an experience California's was, consider the differences in immigration rates -- with 11 newcomers arriving for every thousand Californians during the 1990s, as opposed to 2.6 newcomers for every thousand persons living in the rest of the United States.

Not only was California the destination for an unusually large group of immigrants, it attracted a distinctive set of migration streams. As a whole, the newcomers to California were a less diverse lot than those who headed elsewhere: in 1990, 71 percent of California's immigrants came from ten countries; elsewhere the top ten countries accounted for 41 percent of the foreign-born. Moreover, one single country ranked dominant as a source of the newest Californians -- Mexico, the birthplace of 38 percent of California's foreign-born. Mexicans were numerous elsewhere, but, with 14

percent of the foreign-born population in the other 49 states, at a much lower level of penetration.

Circumstances of migration provide yet another axis of variation. California regularly receives a sizeable share of the legal immigrant flow, but under normal circumstances, one that is a good deal lower than its total share of the foreign-born population. The source of disparity lies in California's historically crucial role as a destination for undocumented immigrants. In 1980, California was home to half of the two million or so undocumented immigrants counted in that year's census. Over the course of the next ten years, California led the nation as a source of legalization applicants, 54 percent of whom were living in California at the time at which they applied for amnesty. Though amnesty "dried up" a large portion of the earlier arrived, undocumented immigrants continued arriving in the post-amnesty period. By 1992, analysts at the Immigration and Naturalization Service estimated that California was still home to 43 percent of undocumented residents, with still more recent evidence suggesting that California-bound undocumented tailed off in the early to mid-1990s, under the impact of the state's economic crisis.

Within the state, immigration reveals the same tendency toward localization evident at the broader, national scale. Los Angeles county holds 30 percent of the state's population, but 45 percent of its foreign-born residents, and 47 percent of its Mexican-born population. Of the ten largest counties, only San Francisco is comparable in the degree of immigrant concentration, though one relatively unaffected by the flow from Mexico, which accounts for only 2 out of every 100 San Franciscans.

## **Skill levels**

Given the many circumstances of migration, it should be no surprise that the newcomers of the post-1965 years comprise an



extraordinarily diverse lot. Some experts have looked at the educational characteristics of the foreign-born to conclude that the "quality" of America's immigrant streams has gone down,<sup>ix</sup> by which they mean that the educational and skill backgrounds of the immigrants are no longer as high as in years past. Indeed, a contrast of educational attainment shows that immigrants, aged 25-64 years old, compare unfavorably with comparably aged native-born persons. The sharpest disparities show up at the lower end of the educational spectrum: whereas 95 percent of all U.S.-born adults had at least received some secondary schooling as of 1990, 18 percent of the foreign-born population had not completed elementary and about 5 percent appear not to have received any schooling at all.

At a national level, comparisons of this sort miss the point, given the extraordinary educational differences *among* various immigrant groups. Highly educated professionals and managers dominate some streams -- most notably those from the Middle East, from Africa, and from South and Southeast Asia; among many of these groups, median levels of schooling leave America's native white workers far behind. Manual workers with little schooling predominate among other groups -- Mexicans being the most conspicuous such example -- and the contribution of low-skilled workers to America's immigrant pool has risen substantially in recent years. Those populations with refugee origins tend to be internally diverse, with highly educated immigrants characteristic of the early arrivals and less well schooled newcomers more common among those who emigrate in later years. Leaving the very large group of predominantly unskilled Mexican immigrants apart, the educational achievements of native- and foreign-born adults appear roughly similar, with the immigrants have an edge in the proportion who have obtained a college-education or more.

Not so in California, where the gap in native/immigrant skill levels is wider than elsewhere and very much to the detriment of the foreign-born. With agriculture and so much of the state's booming low-skilled sector dependent on immigrant labor, California has

attracted a less selective immigrant population than found elsewhere in the United States. As of 1990, thirty percent of adult foreign-born Californians had not advanced beyond eighth grade, as opposed to twenty percent for those immigrants residing in the other 49 states. The very low levels of schooling attained by the state's Mexican newcomers -- of whom 11 percent had no education at all and another 43 percent eight years of schooling or under -- combined with the very large Mexican share of California's total foreign-born population, accounts for much of the depressed educational profile. Restricting the comparison to the non-Mexican components of the state's foreign-born substantially alters the skills composition, with California slightly ahead of the rest of the nation in the proportion of immigrants with some college or more.

But the California situation is further complicated by yet another one of the state's distinguishing traits: the very high educational attainment of its native residents, the product of the state's attraction for internal migrants with high human capital and its long term investment in higher education. U.S.-born Californians are substantially better educated than their counterparts elsewhere: almost two-thirds of the state's adult population has at least some post-secondary education or more, an achievement shared by just under half of all other U.S.-born adults. Consequently, most of the newer Californians start out with skills that place them well behind their native-born counterparts; even the educationally most advantaged -- such as the Middle Easterners or the non-refugee components among the foreign-born Asians -- include a sizable proportion clustered at the low end of the skills spectrum. Add the difficulties involved in mastering a new language and the other complexities entailed in learning the ropes, the prospects for diminishing the native/immigrant gap seem slim indeed.

## **The Three Immigrant Californias**

Diversity is the salient trait of contemporary immigrant America. And it is no surprise, therefore, that the newcomers to America's most intensely immigrant state should also differ substantially among themselves. National origins comprise the axis of variation along which such differences are usually described. Those distinctions matter in California too, but their importance has to be weighed along side another one of the state's discriminating features -- namely, the differences among its regions.

It is no secret that the Los Angeles region is the monster that drives -- or drags down -- the rest of the state. How could it be otherwise, with fifty percent of the state's population in Los Angeles and its four surrounding counties? But the foreign-population is still even more heavily Angeleno based. Despite the image of L.A. as the nation's most diverse immigrant area, the key to understanding immigrant L.A. is the border and its proximity to the city of the Angels. In 1990, more than half of LA's immigrants came from Mexico and Central America, with Mexico accounting for the great bulk of this group. For many of these newcomers, entry into the U.S. occurred through the backdoor -- which is why Los Angeles county accounted for a third of all the undocumented immigrants counted in the 1980 census and roughly the same proportion of the population who legalized under IRCA.

San Francisco is a less intensely immigrant place; even though the foreign-born presence is unmistakable, the immigrants are under-represented in the greater Bay Area, relative to the region's share of the state's population. It is a different immigrant world, with immigrants from Asia outnumbering Hispanics by almost two to one. It also features greater immigrant diversity overall, since the largest source country -- the Philippines -- furnishes only 13.6 percent among the region's foreign-born. Those who have headed to the San Francisco have also been more likely to follow a legal route:

in 1980, the San Francisco metropolitan area accounted for just 3 percent of the nation's undocumented population -- in contrast to LA's 33 percent; and not surprisingly, legalization applications from the Bay Area were of negligible importance.

The last of the three immigrant Californias is perhaps the most classically immigrant region, or at least the one historically most reliant on the foreign-born -- namely the rural parts of the state. As a totality, the rural region is still a throwback to the Anglo state of years gone by, though the holistic view yields a considerable distortion, obscuring the transformation of a host of localities into immigrant towns of ever increasing foreign-born density. Traces of the past are also evident in the ethnic composition of those newcomers who have gravitated to the fields and farms: this slice of immigrant California remains overwhelmingly Mexican in origin, with only slight spillover from the streams from Asia, Central America, and elsewhere that have transformed both the San Francisco and Los Angeles regions.

Region matters for reasons going beyond the diversity and type of national origins and the circumstances of migration. The three immigrant California's differ sharply on other criteria, most notably, the skills background of the newcomers they attract, and the opportunity structures that the new arrivals confront. On both counts, rural California is a throwback to the past, with persons never having attained a high school degree accounting for two-thirds of its adult immigrant population, and a job structure that remains far more heavily weighted toward blue-collar occupations than is true statewide. The Bay Area, by contrast, provides an image of economic and demographic worlds to come, with a highly educated population -- well above the state average -- characteristic of both its native *and* its foreign-born components and an economy heavily reliant on the types of activities for which a well-trained labor force is an imperative. Los Angeles is less clearly a launching pad into the future. Compared to their counterparts to the north, the newest Angelenos are a relatively unselective group, as one in three has not

gone beyond the eighth grade. And the region's economic structure, its post-industrial and high technology sectors notwithstanding, contains a greater abundance of manual jobs, furnishing a continuing need for workers with few formally acquired skills.

Of course, these regional disparities in selectivity are related to divergences in their attractiveness to migrant streams of different national types. While it is true that Mexican immigrants are more likely to move to Los Angeles than to San Francisco, those who head to southern California are also significantly less well schooled than their compatriots who move up north. And the Los Angeles economy has learned to make good use of its newest, least skilled residents. While the rest of the United States has shed its unskilled labor, Los Angeles has moved in the opposite direction, multiplying its gardeners, janitors, sewers and private servants. In L.A.'s growing ranks of poorly educated workers we see the backdrop for the region's march -- or is it slide? -- into postindustrialism, as well as the factors that make immigration an integral part of the region's economic growth.

## **Socio-economic Progress**

At the turn of the twentieth century immigrants were a relatively homogeneous population of persons narrowly concentrated at the bottom of the occupational scale. At the time, domestic servants and general laborers dominated the ranks of immigrants; one could assume that newcomers were similarly low-skilled, entered at the bottom, and would gradually move up from there.<sup>x</sup>

But the immigrant situation at the end of the 20th century looks very different since, as I have emphasized, the newcomers who move to the United States stand out for their social and economic diversity. On the one hand, today's immigrant waves include large

numbers of highly-skilled, often college educated newcomers; and with their advent, a good proportion of the recent arrivals begins, not at the bottom, but in the middle-class or beyond. Though the fate of the downtrodden usually grabs the attention in ethnic studies, the hidden story of today's immigration is the large number of newcomers who find themselves in a far more elevated status. In contemporary Los Angeles, for example, coveted professional occupations have become immigrant concentrations: more than 35 percent of the pharmacists in the L.A. region are foreign-born, as are more than 25 percent of the dentists, and more than 20 percent of the engineers, of various computer specialists, and of physicians. When else do we find a parallel in American ethnic history?

Relatively quick movement into the middle-class is more prevalent among newcomers from Asia, from the Middle East, and from Europe. Even among the better educated, however, entry into the United States tends to be associated with a drop in earning power and occupational status: the better-prepared newcomers, just like their less fortunate newcomers, suffer from the liabilities of entering the society as outsiders and there is a cost to be paid as they learn the ropes, master English, and familiarize themselves with the needs and practices of American employers. Lower wage and living standards are thus a common characteristic among the newest arrivals; as the past fifteen years have seen so many newcomers moved to the United States, middle-class status eludes a substantial proportion -- even among the better educated. But the key analytic issue has to do with the pattern and rate of change. Research on the immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s showed that, over time, the newcomers first caught up with their statistically equivalent American counterparts and then surpassed them.<sup>xi</sup> While the newcomers of the 1970s and 1980s have also moved ahead over time, they have not advanced at the same rate as their predecessors. However, this generalization breaks down once one separates out the various nationality groups, as Asian and Middle-eastern wage-earners follow a pattern of progress that resembles the immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s. Statewide, for example, real earnings among the cohort of immigrant Asian men

who moved to the United States between 1975 and 1980 rose 84 percent between 1980 and 1990. More recent arrivals have found that the consolidation of Asian niches in higher-skilled sectors, combined with improved access to information and possibly greater receptivity to the use of high-skilled immigrant workers, have altered conditions for the better: as evidence, the 1985-1990 immigrant cohort started off from a higher earnings plateau than did their counterparts at a similar point in time ten years before.

Progress over time does not necessarily translate into parity with white, native-born Californians. Discrimination against Asian immigrants, and especially the men among them, does seem to persist; considerable evidence points to the existence of a "glass ceiling" pattern, in which well-educated immigrants begin by moving ahead, but sooner or later bump into an invisible, but impenetrable obstacle which prevents their careers from developing along the trajectory followed by comparable, native whites. But even if Asian men appear not to quite catch up with their statistically equivalent native-born, white counterparts, high levels of female labor force participation among Asian women boost household incomes, with the result that middle-class status is often attained among the households headed by Asian newcomers.

But one should be wary of over-generalizations and attentive to differences at national, and even sub-national, levels. The circumstances of migration strongly influence the pattern of immigrant adaptation. Among those groups where the immigrant communities build up slowly, the newcomers can make use of the connections and resources developed by the veteran settlers to whom they are linked by kin- or friendship ties. Refugee groups, like the Vietnamese, Cambodians, or Hmong, have had a different, more arduous fate, since they arrived in the United States suddenly, as a huge mass, without an established ethnic community that could ease the pains of adjustment. And even among the higher skilled groups where economic motives for migration predominate, there is usually a sizable working-class component accompanying the middle-class

arrivals. Chinese immigration to Los Angeles, for example, has been dominated by newcomers from Taiwan, who often come with money in addition to skills and professional experience, and move right into middle-class communities in the suburbs. San Francisco, by contrast, has received a largely proletarian flow from Hong Kong and the People's Republic of China, who enter the low-paying, restaurant and garment industries.

But a comparable search for progress turns up many fewer signs of hope when one looks at the experience of groups dominated by "labor migrants", lower-skilled, largely working-class newcomers, of whom the single largest such group in California, as in the U.S. at large, consists of Mexicans. Compared to U.S.-born Mexican-Americans, the relative wages of successive waves of Mexican immigrants substantially diminished during the years between 1970 and 1990, as shown by research using data for the United States as a whole. In 1970, the earnings of a newly arrived Mexican immigrant fell 26.5 percent below the levels enjoyed by his statistically equivalent Mexican-American counterpart. By 1990, the gap separating newcomers and their native counterparts had widened to 33.9 percent. Even more disturbing was the fact that older settlers were falling further behind their native-born counterparts, rather than moving ahead with time, as the earlier research had shown. And bear in mind that the comparisons noted in this paragraph put the situation in the best possible light, since Mexican immigrants are compared to Mexican-Americans, themselves a disadvantaged group.

The obstacles impeding the progress of Mexican immigrants can be readily grasped by examining their experience in Los Angeles -- the capital of Mexican America. In 1970, just over half of the region's relatively small Mexican immigrant population worked in industries in which Mexican were heavily over-represented; twenty years later, a vastly expanded Mexican immigrant population was just as concentrated in Mexican industrial clusters as it had been two decades before. And to a surprising extent, some of the very same



specializations in which Mexicans had originally clustered -- domestic work, apparel and furniture manufacturing, gardening, and agriculture -- retained their importance, providing an entry-way for thousands of new arrivals. Already very segregated from other groups in 1970, Mexicans became more and more so, in occupational and industrial terms, over time.

This capsule history tells us that as Mexican numbers increased, they found themselves crowding into a narrow set of industries in the secondary labor market that proved highly responsive -- as economic theory would suggest -- to shifts in supply. The region's employers adapted to the increased availability of greenhorns by expanding employment; but as network recruitment guided the newcomers to the same industries and occupations in which their kin and friends were already employed, they unwittingly depressed wages for all. Consequently, the terms of compensation at the bottom of L.A.'s economy have deteriorated in the years since 1970.

But there is another side to this story of progress thwarted: namely, the growing integration of newcomers into southern California's growing low-skilled sector. There can be little question that Los Angeles "needs" the large Mexican and Central American population that it has acquired over the past few decades. It is not just anecdotal evidence which suggests that there would be no gardeners, no baby-sitters, no garment workers, no hotel housekeepers without the Mexican and Central American newcomers. The census data tell the same story: the bottom tier of L.A.'s manufacturing and service sectors rests on a labor force that disproportionately -- at the 50, 60, or 70 percent level -- comes from Latino immigrant ranks. One indicator alone shows how thoroughly the newcomers have been integrated into the production systems of the region's low-cost manufacturing and service complexes: of the 83 manufacturing industries with 1,000 employees or more, identified by the censuses in 1990, 53 were industries in which Mexican immigrants were over-represented by at least 50 percent.

## Policy Implications

As of this writing, immigration policy in the United States seems to take two forms. One involves restricting the flow of newcomers, with much talk about reducing the number of legal immigrants, and action almost entirely limited to efforts to keep out or send home those foreign-born persons who come to the United States illegally, or who came legally but declined to return home at the appointed time. The second involves efforts to punish those immigrants already residing in the United States, whether legal or illegal, as long as they have not yet been able to obtain U.S. citizenship, mainly by removing eligibility for most forms of public welfare.

Punishment seems to be in favor these days, and there is little reason to doubt that political authorities will do much to eliminate the entitlements to welfare and other services heretofore enjoyed by immigrants of any vulnerability. While quite willing to lash out at others, political leaders and the citizens who elect them seem most reluctant to change their own behavior: after all, has anyone noted a self-respecting Angeleno who mows his or her own lawn? Of course, why should one, when bargain basement labor is available on a nearby streetcorner? Nor is the standard factory or store owner under much pressure to reduce utilization of immigrants, as long wage and hour enforcement efforts get short shrift, as they do in this state. And though correlation is not causality, as any social scientist will remind you, there is a certain coincidence between the decline of the United Farm Workers and the unprecedentedly high rates at which undocumented immigrants are employed in California's farms. Conservatives are quite right in reminding us that there is no free lunch; for that reason, it does not seem plausible that one can one get serious about reducing undocumented immigration to California without substantially raising the floor at which

California's least skilled workers are employed. Of course, any moves in that direction ensure that well-heeled natives will howl.

Political debate on immigration has been obsessed with how to keep unwanted foreigners out. But these are matters of very limited relevance when thinking about the very large immigrant population that has come to California to stay. To be sure, more effective border enforcement would reduce the number of very low-skilled immigrants who have been crowded into highly competitive labor markets where they find dead-end jobs at wages that are low and declining. However, even if undocumented immigration could be reduced from roughly 300,000 net new illegals arrivals a year to zero -- not a very likely prospect -- the United States would still be the recipient of roughly 800,000 newcomers who arrive via the legal system. The very source of the state's economic punch -- its integration with the global economy -- is precisely the factors that keeps its doors open to the world. The international traffic at LAX is a crude indicator of the extraordinary numbers of people entering the U.S. at anyone time, only a tiny fraction of whom need decide to stay to affect the amplitude of permanent immigration to California.

If the past is prologue, then those newcomers will continue to converge on California, and in particular, on the Los Angeles and the San Francisco regions, which have absorbed a disproportionate share of the immigrant flows. Overall, California's economy has been changing in ways that will impede the long-term mobility of immigrants with lower than average skills. At the moment, even lower skilled immigrants do seem to find plenty of work, whether in agriculture, services, or labor intensive manufacturing industries. As noted above, their greater difficulty involves finding work that pays well, not to speak of jobs that provide health and other benefits, and employers that make a minimal effort to comply with health, safety, and wage codes that have long been on the books.

Moreover, preoccupation with the foreign-born residents of the state obscures their long-range legacy -- which takes the form of

their children. 40 percent of all foreign-born children in the United States reside in California as do 32 percent of all native-born children with at least one foreign-parent, with the latter group comprising the bulk of the new second generation. Clearly, there is evidence, though not reviewed here, that a substantial portion of this new second generation is progressing beyond their parents; while this evidence yields reason for optimism, the key question is whether the children of immigrants can complete and obtain a decent secondary schooling, and then go on to at least some post-secondary education.

The most optimistic forecast suggests that the problems confronted by the children of immigrants are not all that different from the problems faced by the much larger population of children with U.S.-born, working-class parents: the supply/demand equation for less skilled workers has turned highly unfavorable, making extended schooling an imperative. Improving the quality of secondary schooling and improving access to higher education will do much for all of California's working-class families, including those with foreign-born children or parents.

But there is reason to think that still more will be needed. Stable working-class status eludes a large portion of the state's immigrant wage earning population. Though labor force participation rates may be high, and at least two adult members in a household working, low-skills and employers' ability to evade any upward pressures on wages yield a situation in which many immigrant children are working in poverty. History suggests that those children will grow up with greater expectations than their parents; but an impoverished family background will make it harder to realize those dreams. Moving beyond the world of cleaning and factory work will require the literacy and numeracy obtained through extended schooling. But for those skills to get transmitted, a society needs to first make education a priority of the highest rank.

Regrettably, California's current ability to attain that goal seems much in doubt.

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<sup>i</sup> David Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

<sup>ii</sup> The same trajectory was followed by other groups -- various Middle Easterners and Africans -- with the result that the immigrant population diversified to groups that had never previously made the United States their home.

<sup>iii</sup> Calculated from *1991 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992.

<sup>iv</sup> Ernesto Galarza, *Merchants of Labor: The Mexican Bracero Story*, Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, 1964; Douglas Massey, et. al., *Return to Aztlan*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

<sup>v</sup> Robert Warren and Jeffrey Passel, "A Count of the Uncountable: estimates of undocumented aliens counted in the 1980 United States Census," *Demography*, V. 24, 3 (1987): 375-93.

<sup>vi</sup> In point of fact, IRCA enabled two groups of illegal aliens to become temporary and then permanent residents of the United States: aliens who had been living illegally in the United States since January 1982, technically known as legalization applicants; and aliens who were employed in seasonal agricultural work for a minimum of 90 days in the year preceding May 1986 (Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) applicants). As of 1992, the Immigration and Naturalization Service had received 1,759,705 legalization applicants and an additional 1,272,143 SAW applicants.

<sup>vii</sup> Barry Edmonston and Jeffrey Passell, "The Future Immigrant Population of the United States," in Edmonston and Passell, eds., *Immigration and Ethnicity: The Integration of America's Newest Arrivals*, Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1994, Chapter 11.

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<sup>viii</sup> Robert Warren, "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigration Population Residing in the United States, by Country of Origin and State of Residence: October 1994," Immigration and Naturalization Service Statistics Division, 1994,. p. 30.

<sup>ix</sup> See George J. Borjas' book, *Friends or Strangers*, New York: Basic, 1990. He argues that educational levels among immigrants have declined over the past several decades.

<sup>x</sup> Richard Easterlin, "Immigration: Social and Economic Characteristics," in S. Thernstrom, ed. *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.

<sup>xi</sup> Barry Chiswick