

Chapter 2

Theoretical Perspectives: Economics, Culture, Politics

Introduction

A variety of theoretical perspectives provide insight into immigration. Economics, which assumes that actors engage in utility maximization, represents one framework. From this perspective, it is assumed that individuals are rational actors, i.e., that they make migration decisions based on their assessment of the costs as well as benefits of remaining in a given area versus the costs and benefits of leaving. Benefits may include but are not limited to short-term and long-term monetary gains, safety, and greater freedom of cultural expression. Individual costs include but are not limited to the expense of travel, uncertainty of living in a foreign land, difficulty of adapting to a different language, uncertainty about a different culture, and the trepidation about living in a new land. Psychic costs associated with separation from family, friends, and the fear of the unknown also should be taken into account in cost-benefit assessments.

Migration decisions can be analyzed at both the microeconomic and macroeconomic levels. At the macro-level, the nation as a whole can be considered as the unit of analysis. Nations can adapt the same welfare maximization framework that is employed by individuals. For example, nations can adopt a goal of maximizing the aggregate welfare of their citizens. In order to achieve this goal, nations have a vested interest in maximizing the net benefit of all residents, including legal and illegal immigrants.

Measuring net contributions of residents nevertheless is far from a simple matter. Some empirical data regarding economic contributions of nationality groups is available. This information, however, provides only a rough indicator of costs or benefits attributed to specific immigrant groups. Benefits and costs associated with immigration also include the political and cultural impact of these groups on native-born Americans and the underlying norms of the nation. Immigrants can either undergird or undermine widely accepted national values. Information regarding factors such as earnings, dependency, and work habits of immigrants can help in developing assessments of net benefits.

Immigration represents both a threat and opportunity. It is a threat in the sense that allowing non-natives to reside within national borders might negatively

affect the lives of natives. Economic outcomes such as reduced wages may result. Outcomes such as crime, reduced work effort, and changes in family structure may also occur. Political outcomes may include a less vigilant or greater commitment to democratic values. This would imply a less or more informed electorate, and a diminished or enhanced commitment to activities such as voting. Non-natives may have a weaker or stronger commitment to the political values of autonomy or independent thinking. The collective values of the nation may in turn be altered by the influx of non-natives whose values are injurious or supportive of the prevailing ethos. In addition, immigrants may support spending on more or fewer public goods or just a different mix of public goods. Immigrants therefore may change the role of government and its priorities.

From the perspective of the home country, out-migration may be either encouraged or discouraged. Nations possessing a surplus of workers may want to rid themselves of potentially disruptive citizens. They may want to hold on to their most productive workers while encouraging others to leave. Nations may attempt to restrict out-migration by constructing barriers that imprison their populations. Home countries may benefit by large-scale out-migrations if migrants remit earnings back to their families. Host countries may benefit from the vitality, creativity, and work efforts of migrants. These newcomers may help to control labor costs, increase technical expertise, and enhance entrepreneurship.

American immigration policies in the past have vacillated between postures of great openness to great restriction. Motivations for one policy rather than another vary. Openness is often motivated by a growing national economy and the need to supply workers to expanding enterprises. Closure also is motivated by economic factors such as the desire to maintain existing salaries and the fear of competition for jobs. Opinions sharply diverge in terms of the economic, cultural, and political benefits or costs of immigrants.

The literature regarding immigration is large and growing. Much of it is polemical in nature, however, objective empirical studies also can be found. Immigration is a cross-disciplinary subject with historians (Higham 1955; Hutchinson 1981; Daniels 1990; Nugent 1992), sociologists (Massey 1998; Alba and Nee 2003; Portes and Rumbaut 2006), political scientists (Zolberg 1981; Hollifield 1992; Huntington 2004), and journalists (Geyer 1996) contributing to the debate.

Economic Perspectives on Immigration

Economics provides a useful means to understand immigration (Teitelbaum 2008). Various schools of thought have focused upon economic rationality in an attempt to explain why people move from one geographical region to another. These schools of thought include the following:

- (1) *Neoclassical school of thought*: This school of thought proposes that decisions to migrate are made by rational individuals who seek to maximize their utility. The international supply and demand for workers determines differences in employment prospects and earnings between individuals in different nations. In theory, economic prospects are evaluated by individuals who wish to maximize their personal earnings. As a result workers will be inclined to move away from the lower-wage countries and move to countries where they can earn higher wages. This flow rests on the assumption of free mobility of labor. Migration can be viewed as an international settling of cost differences among workers in different nations. Workers seek to increase earnings through migration. All other things being equal, wages for workers in high-wage areas will decline as a result of migration from lower-wages countries. Also, wages will tend to increase in regions where the numbers of workers declines. Employers will have to pay higher salaries to keep workers if out-migration is a serious alternative. Migration flows should terminate when wage differences between regions are eliminated and there is no economic incentive for moving from one place to another.
- (2) *Dual labor market theories (segmented labor market theory)*: These theories propose that employers and governments in industrialized countries benefit by recruiting low-wage workers. This labor force of low-wage workers expands or contracts in response to demands of economies in industrialized countries. Migrants dominate the lower paid “secondary” labor market.
- (3) *World systems theories*: These theories propose that international migration flows from peripheral societies to advanced capitalist societies. The theory proposes that markets are global and that the world system operates to redistribute resources from the periphery to the core.
- (4) *Social group and family theories*: These theories propose that decisions to migrate are made by the social group or family; migration can raise the collective income and protect the group against risk from local conditions (Teitelbaum 2008, 54).

Neoclassical Perspectives on Immigration

From the perspective of neoclassical economics migration will eventually produce a global equalization of wage rates. A variety of problems, however, are associated with this model. For example, the assumption of free mobility of labor is faulty. Individuals may not have the economic means to migrate. Furthermore, potential migrants may not have complete information about economic opportunities elsewhere. Nations may erect formidable barriers to exit.

Host countries (countries receiving migrants) may not be able to attract migrants because of political barriers and/or restrictive legislation. Unions and other groups (in wealthy nations) have a vested interest in preventing an equalization of global

wages. Historically, large labor organizations have attempted to limit the numbers of immigrant workers. Employers, on the other hand, often have attempted to increase the pool of specialized workers. Employers often gain (and workers lose) with more open immigration while at the same time national income increases (Borjas 1995, 8). In the past, legislation has limited entry of immigrants. The perspective of a global “hiring hall” that will equalize wages across borders, however, is fraught with problems.

The global equalization theory is limited in its application because it does not adequately take into consideration the real constraints on migration. Repressive regimes may try to “lock” their residents in, fearing that given the opportunity people will leave in great numbers. Nations might try to prevent their countries “best and brightest” from leaving fearing that the “brain drain” will negatively impact their economy. Workers in low-wage nations may not have the social network of contacts useful in adapting to the norms of new lands.

Because of the limitations to global movement, the wage equalization perspective is more useful for understanding internal migration patterns and for understanding migration patterns between culturally and economically similar countries. Empirical evidence has shown that international migration within the European Economic Area is only weakly responsive to income differences between nations. Other weaknesses of the equilibrium model refer to historical reluctance of backward economies to export labor (it had to be coerced) and the failure of the model to account for migration resulting from noneconomic reasons, such as political developments, persecution, and religious belief (Gorter et al., 1998, 4–5).

The microeconomic perspective of migration focuses upon the individual as the unit of analysis. From this perspective, individuals personally calculate the costs and benefits of their move. If one is living in a nation where job prospects are bleak, the opportunity costs (lost earnings) of leaving that area are negligible. Therefore there is impetus to move. Even an “off the books” job at sub-minimum wage in a high-wage nation may produce greater income for the migrant than if he or she remained in his/her home country. Noneconomic factors also can be weighed by individuals. If one is living in a country where one’s life is threatened there is very high incentive to leave. Living underneath bridges or working at sub-minimum wage is a situation preferable to physical harm. The survival instinct is a strong personal motivator for migration. In the past, renowned scientists such as Albert Einstein and Enrico Fermi migrated to the United States in order to escape political repression and possible death.

Migration may be beneficial to both host and home countries. Migration benefits the donor country since immigrants (both legal and illegal) can send money back home to their families. In the aggregate, repatriation of earnings will boost the gross domestic product of nations that receive the money. Migrations may also benefit the home country by reducing internal pressures for jobs and social services. Migrants can save money for transportation and send for their families to live in the host country. Employers in host countries may also benefit from lower labor costs due to the inflow of additional workers. These lower costs can accrue for both lower and higher skilled positions. If, for example, a large number of computer scientists or

engineers are admitted to the host country, wages in these fields should moderate or decline. People at all stages of the skill continuum can evaluate their opportunities for leaving or staying in their native land. The “best and brightest” of a home country may be more motivated to migrate because they anticipate achieving significantly greater earnings in their new surroundings.

In the past, immigrants to the United States were led to believe that the streets in America were “paved with gold.” This image often departed dramatically from the immigrants’ individual realities. However, in many cases immigrants that came to America prospered enormously. In a few cases migrants to the United States established massively profitable organizations. These organizations employed many native-born Americans and contributed greatly to the nation’s gross domestic product. Andrew Carnegie (steel) and Levi Strauss (blue jeans) are just two prominent examples of immigrants that built what are today very large corporations.

While Carnegie and Strauss established their reputations in the nineteenth century, the example of the relatively poor immigrant rising to great riches is still a reality for some. Recent examples of highly successful entrepreneurs include Sergey Brin (Google), and Jerry Yang (Yahoo). Silicon Valley as a whole has benefited enormously from the talents of immigrants. A bit more than half the companies started in Silicon Valley from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s have founders who were not born in the United States (Richtel 2009).

In microeconomic deliberations, individuals must also assess the psychic costs of migration. Psychic costs include those of abandoning family, friends, and familiar environments. Each individual may place different weights on these costs. To some, abandoning friends and family is unthinkable. For others, there is relatively low cost involved in migration. Safety is an obvious concern. Many find themselves in great danger because of political turmoil or regime change. For example, the costs of remaining in home countries for European Jews in the 1930s–1940s, Cubans after 1959, and South Vietnamese elites after 1975 would have been high. Many would have been put to death by the new political leaders. Similarly, persons residing in violent regions today have strong motivation to leave in order to enhance their personal security.

In Chapter 3 we continue with a more detailed discussion of the neoclassical perspective on immigration. In this chapter we extend the basic neoclassical model of immigration to incorporate aspects of immigration policy and politics in the analysis.

Dual Labor Market, World Systems, Social Group and Family Theories

The dual labor market theory divides the economy into two components, labeled the “primary” and “secondary” sectors. The secondary sector is characterized by short-term employment, little prospect of promotion, and the determination of wages by market forces. Workers in the secondary sector are primarily in low or unskilled

jobs. These can be blue-collar manual labor, white collar (e.g., filing clerks), or service industry (e.g., waiters) positions. Secondary sector jobs are characterized by easy entry, job instability, and low earnings relative to education or experience. Members of the secondary sector may be paid “under-the-table” in the informal economy. The dual labor market has also been described as “segmented labor market theory” (See Chapter 1, Piore 1979).

Immigration is likely to expand the total number of people in the secondary sector. This occurs with heavy influxes of non-skilled workers (as exists today) who may have to work illegally because of their status. Large numbers of migrants possessing inadequate levels of “human capital” may also necessitate increases in public spending. Health costs, policing/safety costs, and education costs expand with influxes of unskilled migrants. Expenses for means-tested entitlement programs may increase without being sufficiently offset by additional tax payments from migrants (Borjas 1995, 16).

World systems theory differentiates between core, semi-periphery, and periphery nations. Core nations are defined as those who are the most economically diversified, wealthy, and powerful, economically as well as militarily. Core nations are industrialized with high value service specializations such as information technology and finance. In contrast to the core, periphery nations are the least economically diversified, and often depend on extracting raw materials from the land. These nations are targets for investment from multinational corporations, and tend to have a high percentage of poor and uneducated residents. Semi-periphery countries fall between these two extremes.

The world systems approach has been viewed as a mechanism to redistribute resources from the periphery to the core (Wallerstein 1974). Immigration to the core is similarly conceptualized in terms of human capital. Under this perspective less-educated workers are funneled to wealthier regions. Immigrants from peripheral regions may be unfamiliar with the norms of advanced industrialized societies and must adapt to their new surroundings. This process of adaptation in turn can produce cultural tension and may add to the host nation’s incarceration, welfare, and other costs.

Social group and family theories postulate that families and groups play a key role in decisions to migrate. Once a family member or community is established in a new area, the psychic costs of migration are greatly reduced. The pattern of migration about people from specific nationality groups following friends and relatives is well established. Today, large ethnic enclaves exist in major US cities. The US Census Bureau reported that in 2000 the Hispanic populations of New York and Los Angeles comprised about 2.1 and 1.7 million people, respectively. The number of Hispanic people in Chicago and Houston approximated three-quarters of a million and the Hispanic population of San Antonio approximated 671,000. The following cities contained high proportions of Hispanic residents: El Paso (76.6% of total residents), San Antonio (58.7%), Los Angeles (46.5%), Houston (37.4%), Dallas (35.6%), and Phoenix (34.1%) (Guzman 2001, 7). Psychic, integration, and assimilation costs of moving to enclave cities are lower because of familiarity with language, food, holiday celebrations, and customs.

The pattern of new migrants moving to areas where they may have friends, family, or neighbors from their home country is not novel. At the turn of the twentieth century, large cities were known for their very distinctive neighborhoods that were compartmentalized by race and ethnicity. Jewish, Italian, Irish, Chinese, Hispanic, Polish, and other enclaves typified Eastern and Midwestern cities such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Borjas (1995, 19) concluded that economics is a useful perspective to assess immigration policy. He surmised that nations do not necessarily implement the most efficient policy. Studies of the economic impacts of immigration, however, can provide information about the costs of pursuing specific types of action or inaction. Borjas recognized that immigration statutes are not entirely motivated by economics but reflect the political will of the polity. Social interests as well as humanitarian concerns must also be considered when trying to understand the political dynamic.

Cultural Perspectives on Immigration

The importance of culture on national development is well recognized. The French aristocrat, Alexis de Toqueville observed in the 1830s that the destiny of America was shaped by its Puritan culture (Tocqueville 1945 vol. 2, 32). Others recognized the relevance of religion and more specifically Protestantism to America. German sociologist Max Weber noted in the early 1900s that the culture of Protestantism (especially Calvinism) led to wealth creation and a higher standard of living than enjoyed in places that adopted other cultures. Weber observed that Protestantism encouraged people to work hard, to develop their own businesses, to be entrepreneurial, to accumulate wealth, to save, and to invest (Weber 1958). The relative wealth of Protestant Northern Europe compared to Catholic Southern Europe was linked to these cultural differences.

Weber argued that the “spirit of capitalism” was alive and well in the United States. This spirit was identified with Benjamin Franklin’s attitudes toward the use of time (time is money), credit (credit is money), and money itself (money begets money). For Weber, American Puritans supported a unified ethos or holistic culture. The Protestant idea of a “calling” was essential to this ethos. The idea of a “calling” was in turn linked to money and virtue. Weber (1958, 54) stated, “The earning of money within the modern economic order is, so long as it is done legally, the result and the expression of virtue and proficiency in a calling; and this virtue and proficiency are, as it is now not difficult to see, the real Alpha and Omega of Franklin’s ethic.”

In the United States the values aligned with religion have played a significant role in the development of an American culture. According to Weber, Protestants have “shown a special tendency to develop economic rationalism which cannot be observed to the same extent among Catholics either in one situation or in the other. Thus the principal explanation of this difference must be sought in the permanent

intrinsic character of their religious belief.” Weber observed that Catholics were “quieter, having a less acquisitive impulse” preferring a life of “the greatest possible security, even with a smaller income,” to “a life of risk and excitement, even though it may bring the chance of gaining honour and riches” (Weber 1955, 40–41). If the choice was between eating well or sleeping well, Weber believed Protestants would choose the former, Catholics the latter.

British historian James Bryce observed in the late nineteenth century that the “religious zeal and religious conscience” of New England in “large measure passed into the whole nation” (Bryce 1891 vol. 2, 599). More recently, Nobel laureate Milton Friedman noted that core values (i.e., culture) of a nation affected its economic growth and its ability to sustain capitalism (Brimelow 1995, 177). These core values of America are thought to be related to the values of seventeenth and eighteenth century settlers. Components of America’s core values are thought to consist of “the Christian religion, Protestant values, moralism, a work ethic, the English language, British traditions of law, justice, and the limits of government power, and a legacy of European art, literature, philosophy, and music” (Huntington 2004, 40).

Former Harvard professor Samuel Huntington argued that Protestantism promoted work and placed responsibility for success clearly on the individual, “The work ethic is a central feature of Protestant culture . . . In other societies, heredity, class, social status, ethnicity, and family are the principal sources of status and legitimacy. In America work is. In different ways both aristocratic and socialist societies tend to demean and discourage work. Bourgeois societies promote work” (Huntington 2004, 71).

Broad cultural differences have been identified between the United States and Mexico. These differences have taken on greater saliency as the flow of immigrants from Mexico has turned from a trickle to a flood. In 2007, it was estimated that more than 9 million persons of Mexican birth resided in the United States (US Census Bureau 2009). This represented more than 28% of all foreign-born residents in the United States.

Differences in cultural views between Mexican-born Americans and other American residents were traced to difference in beliefs about the predictability of events (Mexicans view events as less predictable), differences in concepts of time (American “do it now,” versus Mexican “it can wait”), and differences in attitudes toward history (Mexicans are said to be obsessed with the past, Americans with the future). Huntington contended (2004, 254) that traits such as “mistrust of people outside the family; lack of initiative; self-reliance, and ambition; low priority for education; acceptance of poverty as virtue necessary for entrance into heaven” held Latinos back.

Culture also interacts with norms of a society or institutional “rules of the game.” According to Nobel laureate Douglas C. North, these “rules of the game” shape human interactions. A large influx of persons unfamiliar with existing norms may alter the “rules of the game.” Ignorance of societal norms increases transaction costs of doing business. Uncertainty and ignorance about the dominant cultural norms lead to misunderstanding and distrust between groups that adhere to different values. This distrust in turn can exact an economic cost (Fukuyama 1995).

Cooperation between different groups, however, allows economies to prosper. North (1990, 3) observes that institutions (what he defines as “rules of the game” in a society) structure political, social, and economic incentives. Agreement on rules in turn shape the way societies evolve over time and are “the key to understanding historical change.” North attributed the decline of Spain and rise of England in the seventeenth century to their institutional differences. He explains that in England property rights and patent laws encouraged innovation. In England, rules permitted impersonal exchange that, in turn, was viewed as essential for political stability. In Spain, personal relationships remained the key to political and economic exchange. This encouraged “disincentives to productive activity.” It also led to a framework where “neither political stability nor consistent realization of the potential of modern technology” was present (North 1990, 114–116).

The view that an influx of immigrants (particularly Third World immigrants) will inexorably lead to a weakening of the American culture appears to be gaining support (Lamm and Imhoff 1985; Geyer 1996; Huntington 2004; Brimelow 2007). The apocalyptic perception of inevitable cultural decline due to immigration, however, is not universally shared. Some sociologists contend that in contrast to the scenario of immigrants weakening the American culture, the opposite holds in that American native influences are damaging to new migrants. Portes and Rumbaut (2006, 282) observe that immigrants immediately encounter social contexts that promote behavior such as dropping out of school, joining street gangs, or participating in the drug subculture. Behavior embedded in America’s ghettos such as teenage pregnancy, poor work habits, and the erosion of discipline characterize neighborhoods where a large number of immigrants first settle. This subculture, if adopted by immigrants, can lead to a downward spiral. Some immigrant parents have become so distraught at what they see as the permissiveness of American culture that they send their children back home to be educated.

How immigrants react to their cultural environment has clear consequences. Portes and Rumbaut (2006, 263) propose the possibility of downward assimilation. This downward assimilation can occur when learning the cultural ways of the host country leads to downward mobility. Immigrant youth who embrace the culture of others in their neighborhood are likely to join the most disadvantaged at the bottom of society. Some immigrants, however, resist the lure of downward assimilation and successfully steer away from negative influences. These immigrants are more likely to be characterized by strong family and community ties.

Immigrants may attempt to hold onto some aspects of their cultural distinctiveness while at the same time embracing their new environment. In the past, ethnic groups in America have been able to maintain linkage to traditions of the “old country” while embracing the values of their new environment. As described by Portes and Raumbault (2006), however, adaptation may take different forms and may not always produce positive outcomes.

Differences between native-born Americans and immigrant groups can lead to misunderstanding, hostility, and tension. Understanding of rules of the game (North 1990) as well an understanding of the economic system (Weber 1958) may differ between persons of different cultural background. Policy makers have

a responsibility to bridge the gap between peoples of diverse cultures and create a unified society. How policy makers respond to immigration is ultimately a political question. Institutions such as the Congress and the President over time have promoted different sets of public policies. The intent of these policies has been to reinforce existing norms and values of the native American population. An aim of immigration policy has been to integrate and assimilate recently arrived immigrants. Policies have ranged from those of great inclusion to those of highly restrictive exclusion (See Chapter 6).

Political Perspectives on Immigration

Historical Views on Immigration

Immigration policy has generated a good deal of controversy in recent years (Nelson 1994; Brimelow 1995; Schuck 1998; Huntington 2004; Erler et al. 2006; West and Marini 2007). Disagreement over immigration, however, is as old as the republic. Since colonial times an inherent distrust of “foreigners” has tempered America’s embrace of open borders.

A historical review of reactions to “non-American” migrants is instructive. The settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony were particularly antagonistic to people who dissented from their world view and their religious beliefs. Illustrative of this intolerance was the hanging in Boston Commons of the Quaker Mary Dyer. Others such as Roger Williams whose religious beliefs diverged from the strict dogma of the Puritans were banished. Williams was forced to flee to present day Rhode Island where he established his own church that advocated greater religious freedom. Williams was eventually deported to England.

American leaders traditionally have been open to immigrants that they believed would be loyal and of good character. George Washington stated that America was open to receive not only the opulent and respectable stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions. Washington welcomed Catholics from Quebec, however, he discouraged entry of persons who he thought could threaten liberty. For Washington, an important criterion for entry of immigrants was “decency and propriety of conduct.” Washington encouraged Dutch Mennonites to settle in the United States because they were “sober, industrious, and virtuous” as well as “friends to the rights of mankind” (West 2007, 85–86).

Thomas Jefferson was open to immigration yet cautioned the nation about its potential impact on America’s political culture. Jefferson observed that every species of government had its specific principles; he viewed American principles as grounded in the English constitution, natural rights, and natural reason. Jefferson surmised that change in the character of citizens could be destabilizing, and that the question of immigration as a practical matter had to be considered within the context of the sovereign right of each nation to determine its own immigration policies (Erler 2007, 18, 20).

Jefferson questioned whether those brought up under despotism could acquire and maintain the spirit of self-government. To assure this spirit, Jefferson recommended populating the country from its native stock whose forbearers understood self-government and the “love of liberty.” For Jefferson, a nation of independent farmers would be the best protection against tyranny. He believed a livelihood of agriculture inculcated republican habits of independence, honesty, and self-reliance. In contrast to the virtues found in the independent farmer, Jefferson stated that dependence “begets subservience and venality,” “suffocates the germ of virtue,” and prepares people to be “fit tools for the designs of ambition.” For Jefferson, immigration policies are important because, “it is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour” (Erler 2007, 23).

In the nineteenth century xenophobia and the politics of exclusion grew in popularity. During this time, the “Know Nothing” or American Party (particularly strong in the 1840s and 1850s) attempted to drastically curb immigration and the granting of citizenship. Religion played a fundamental role in fomenting anti-foreigner sentiment. Anti-immigrant riots occurred in Philadelphia (1844), when native-born Americans (i.e., “nativists”) burned two churches and many homes of Irish Catholics. Rioters feared that the Pope and his Catholic followers had a plan to take over America. The Irish were singled out as the most dangerous immigrant group.

In 1855 riots broke out in Louisville, Kentucky against both Irish and German Catholics. Businesses and homes were burned in the so called “Bloody Monday” riots. Conservative estimates place the death toll at 22; the Bishop of Louisville placed the death toll at well over 100 with entire families consumed in the fires. After the Louisville riots more than 10,000 citizens left the city, most going to St. Louis, Chicago, or Milwaukee (Bloody Monday 2009).

Nativist groups that provoked anti-immigration riots of the nineteenth century assumed that “outside” groups represented a danger to the United States. This fear derived from anxiety over a destruction of cultural values as well as economic decline.

Restrictive views derive from multiple sources. Some nativists in the United States focused on the impact of low-skilled “foreigners” on their wages. Others relived the centuries old European divisions between Protestants and Catholics. “Good government” advocates of the late nineteenth century (mostly Protestants) contended that Catholics (particularly those in political machines) represented a threat to values of public service, fair elections, the power of reason, and independent thinking. Urban reformers claimed that “American” values were endangered by the materialistic orientation of immigrants and urban machines that emphasized patron-client relations, loyalty to the party, and tangible rewards (Koven 2008, 65).

Immigrants were criticized by politicians on both sides of the political spectrum. Free market conservatives on the political right accused immigrants of transporting the “virus” of socialist ideas. It was purported that these ideas were threatening to undermine fundamental American democratic institutions. Alternatively, liberals or progressives on the political left accused immigrants of inertia, organizational

incapacity, and docility. Progressives believed that the traits of docility would weaken labor unions and political organizations of the working class (Portes and Rumbaut 2006, 122).

Despite the historical antagonisms in America, immigrants have made many contributions to American politics. The Irish are particularly well known for their mobilization of politics as a vehicle for upward mobility. American politicians of Irish descent include leaders such as John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Richard J. Daley, and Tip O'Neal. Political machines were created and sustained by Irish immigrants. Immigrants from other nations also have chosen to become involved in the political life of the nation. Henry Kissinger (Germany) and Madeleine Albright (Czechoslovakia) served as Secretaries of State. They demonstrated that "foreigners" can play a great role in shaping public policy.

Contemporary Views on Immigration

Traditionally, a variety of American politicians have adopted a positive view toward immigration. Robert Kennedy in the Introduction to his brother's book *A Nation of Immigrants* (Kennedy 1964, x) stated, "President Kennedy understood the fruitful interplay between the immigrants and the nation they adopted. They [immigrants] must be given full credit for changing America from a colony to a leader of the free world, from a predominantly agricultural economy to a highly diversified, highly skilled industrial complex." According to Robert Kennedy, America's attitude toward immigration reflected faith in the possibility "for men and women who start at the bottom to rise as far as their talent and energy allow." He characterized immigrants' contributions to the United States as "one of the dramatic success stories of world history" (Kennedy 1964, xi).

More recently, criticism of American immigration policy has developed. Brimelow (1995, 125–126) questions America's embrace of multiculturalism. He asserts that multiethnic societies such as Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union, Cyprus, Pakistan, and Lebanon are associated with violence, disintegration, and hatred between groups. In these nations, the centralizing pressures of the state were not strong enough to overcome centrifugal pressures to break apart. The result of multiculturalism in these nations was dangerous fragmentation.

Brimelow observed multiethnic, multiracial, and multicultural societies have had a troubled past. He acknowledges that the United States has been quite good at getting immigrant groups to live together but that the American success story "depended on time, numbers, degree of difference and, above all, on some very specific policies, like 'Americanization,' which tended to swamp all differences with a common American civic culture" (Brimelow 1995, 128).

The durability of what is known as the "American Creed" has been questioned. This "Creed" is identified as a specific set of values such as optimism, individualism, morality, pragmatism, and resourcefulness (Commager 1950, 29). Liberty, self-government, political awareness, independence, and freedom are other hallmarks

of Americanism (Koven 2008, 13). Contemporary critics argue that “Americanism” and the “American Creed” are being altered by the influx of new migrants. From this cultural perspective, immigrants are a threat not only to national unity, but to the political mind-set that has guided the nation since its inception.

Immigration opponents contend that fragmentation of the American mind-set through multiculturalism is a distinct possibility. According to Huntington (2004, 340), “A multicultural America will, in time become multicreedal America with groups with different cultures espousing distinctive political values and principles rooted in their particular cultures.” Georgie Anne Geyer (1996, 329) predicted, “what has been a largely unified, coherent, law-abiding ‘America’ will be a crowded, bickering, highly criminalized, incoherent nation. Citizenship will have been so overtaken by group rights, on both explicit and implicit levels, that any sense of community responsibility or civic potency will largely have died.” Brimelow (1995) argued that immigration would lead to balkanization. Other scholars, however, note that remarkable advances have occurred in American life after passage of the Immigration Act of 1965. These scholars point to economic growth, a rise in public tolerance, support for racial equality, a renaissance of some urban neighborhoods, and the enrichment of many aspects of American culture (Schuck 1998, 355, 356).

Portes and Rumbaut (2006, 167) contend that the strength of America’s political institutions will overcome pressures toward balkanization. They claim that the potency of America’s institutions will permit groups to maintain their own cultural identities without risk to the entire nation. Rather than enforced “cultural homogeneity and heightened chauvinism,” they maintain that what holds America together is “the strength of its political institutions and the durable framework that they offered for the process of ethnic reaffirmation.”

Anti-immigration politicians stress the value of American culture and the necessity of maintaining it in order to enhance America’s survival. Political scientist Stanley Huntington reinforced this position, stating that in the mid-twentieth century America was a multiethnic, multiracial society with an Anglo-Protestant mainstream culture and a common political Creed. By the end of the century it appeared that America could evolve into a culturally bifurcated Anglo-Hispanic society (Huntington 2004, 221). How such a transformation would impact America’s economic, cultural, and political place in the world remains a source of anxiety.

Toward a Policy of Optimal Immigration

Every public policy has a cost and benefit. Consistent with this view, policy makers can attempt to maximize the net benefit (benefits minus cost) of immigration. Under this scenario of optimization, one would encourage immigration until the marginal benefit and costs of the last immigrant are equal. Such a marginal cost benefit approach assumes that societal benefits and costs can be measured accurately.

Chapter 3 presents an analytical model for evaluating the economic net benefits of immigration in order to derive a potentially efficient level of immigration.

While it is difficult to accurately quantify costs and benefits of individuals, various alternative approaches can be pursued as proxies. Economic and cultural characteristics of nationality groups can be identified, as done in Chapters 4 and 5 of this book. However, making inferences about individual immigrants based on aggregate statistics is also problematic. A large number of unknowns always exist. Even comparisons of earnings may not reflect future potential for economic contribution to the national economy. Immigrants from some nations may be more poorly educated and lack language skills, yet over time and over generations may contribute as much or more than others. Studies of earnings and transfer payments reflect a static perspective. They cannot assess the long-term benefits and costs of greater closure or greater openness of borders. Such studies cannot clearly identify the long-term benefit of increases in national vibrancy that is derived from greater openness.

Numerous policies such as the literacy test have been implemented in the past to ensure some “quality control” in immigration. Characteristics such as literacy, however, may assess educational opportunity in the home country, rather than innate ability or ambition. In the past, nationality was used as a filter. Over time, however, nationality was seen as unfairly rewarding older European “stock” and inappropriately limiting the entry of others. The nationality filter assumed that entry should be limited to groups that helped build America historically. Nationality filters did consider the “fit” between “American values” and those of non-Europeans. It did not consider the adaptation potential of different non-European nationality groups, but merely assumed that immigration patterns that worked in the past would work in the future.

The concept of optimality assumes that assimilation, exclusion, and other costs can be objectively measured. It assumes that societal benefits can be clearly identified and compared to costs. While these assumptions may be heroic, policy makers have an obligation to assess as best as possible the alternatives available to them.

Conclusions

Americans should take note of Thomas Jefferson’s statement that the question of immigration has to be considered within the context of the sovereign right of each nation to determine its own policies. Decision makers have an obligation to carefully consider immigration policy alternatives and their consequences. The benefits and costs of immigration must assess economic, political, and cultural dimensions of policy prescriptions.

Economically, the United States has a vested interest in maximizing its national income. Quality of life and military security are both related to economic strength. Politically, the United States adheres to Jeffersonian principles such as right of self-governance, rule by consent of the governed, respect for rule of law, love of

liberty, individualism, and self-reliance. These principles underlie the political system that supports free elections and peaceful transfer of power based upon the votes of citizens. The extent to which these principles are eviscerated or supported by newcomers is a source of concern.

The American way of life (i.e., culture) has been linked to “the continued centrality of Anglo-Protestant culture” (Huntington 2004, 30). This culture is grounded in values such as hard work, asceticism, honesty, frugality, savings, and investment. According to Weber (1958), Protestantism helps to explain differences in wealth and poverty between nations. However, its durability in the face of large influxes of “new immigrants” has been questioned. In the past millions of immigrants became assimilated to the “American way of life” and willingly embraced their adopted country. This pattern can change or be replicated in the future.

American Immigration Policy
Confronting the Nation's Challenges

Koven, S.G.; Götzke, F.

2010, XII, 236 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-95939-9