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Immigrants: Cultures and Controversies

> All the problems we face in the United States today can be traced to an unenlightened immigration policy on the part of the American Indian.
>
> **—Comedian Pat Paulsen**

With his dry sense of humor, the late comedian Pat Paulsen reminds us of a simple, yet often overlooked fact: We all are immigrants in one way or another, maybe not directly but certainly indirectly. Some of us are descendants of ancestors who arrived three or four generations ago or more; others of us may be first-generation American citizens; others still may be here temporarily legally or otherwise in hopes of gaining permanent status or citizenship. Plainly stated, no Californian can claim original homestead rights save, perhaps, the Native American Indian.

That seems simple enough. Still, this point is sometimes overlooked by those whose family roots here are deeper than those of others are. Some of these residents view their length of presence somehow as a position of seniority that confers more rights and more legitimacy for them than those who have come here recently or may be new to California altogether. Roy Beck makes this claim in *The Case against Immigration* when he writes, "among the losers from immigration are all Americans who prefer to live in a more middle class and less economically polarized society."[1] Translation: Immigrants are a threat to the rest of us already here, even though "the rest of us" come from descendants who were immigrants themselves.

If Beck is right, there are an awful lot of threatened Californians, much more here than almost anywhere else in the United States. That's because in California, immigrants account for about 27 percent of the population, more than twice the national portion of 12 percent. In addition, whereas immigration has slowed considerably in the rest of the nation, it remains far more significant here. Of the 11 million illegal or undocumented

immigrants throughout the United States, 2.7 million live in California alone—far more than any other state. Either way, immigrants are a powerful force in California, not only in numbers but also in the passions that arise with their presence regardless of their accuracy or justification.

But California's population is more than a collection of immigrants. In fact, people from the rest of the United States began coming here long before streams of foreigners. Like the other new Californians, they have added to the state's overall demographic texture through their attempts to live more fulfilling lives by virtue of their acquired educations, vocations, or other opportunities, as well as by contributing new and different layers to the state's social composition.

Two facts are abundantly clear, however, when viewing California's demography. First, the make-up of the people who reside here today is more complex and diverse than the arrangement of the past. They are less white, poorer, and speak numerous languages. Second, the state has ceased being a magnet for population growth. Yes, the number of Californians increased by about 10 percent between 2000 and 2010 to 37,250,000, but the pace was no greater than what transpired in the rest of the nation. Because of "flat" growth, the state's congressional delegation remains at 53 members. The last time California failed to gain at least one new seat in Congress was after the 1920 census. Every other southwest state grew more than California during the first decade of the 21st century. This is another sign that California's golden magnetism has diminished.

The remaining portions of this chapter focus on the make-up of California's population particularly in terms of its changing diversity. We'll look at domestic migration as well as immigration from abroad, tracing where today's Californians originated and why they have come. We'll also explore cultural clashes, and try to determine whether the differences between groups are too great to overcome. And if the answer is "yes," we'll need to consider a more foreboding second question, namely what to do about a state whose population may be too diverse to get along.

DOMESTIC MIGRATION

There's nothing new about people coming to California from other parts of the nation; that pattern has persisted for nearly 300 years. What is new,

however, is that recently there's been an exodus of sorts from California by some citizens to other states. A stubbornly weak economy and high cost of living have proven a potent combination for chasing some people out of California to places where they believe there is a better opportunity to succeed. A mild climate may be good for the soul, but it doesn't pay bills.

Before we focus on any new migration tendencies, we need to spend a little time on the past. Most California transplants journeyed to their adopted home in response to a major event either in this state or in their state of origin. By tracing westward movements from other parts of the United States, as well as when and why, we'll add to our understanding of the complex California collage.

The Call of Gold

Few Americans traveled to California until the Gold Rush of 1848. Why bother? It was a pretty hard place to reach, given thousands of miles of inhospitable land between the populated east coast and here. The land mass known as Alta California was part of a large swath of the western part of North America under the auspices of Mexican rule, or ownership claim, anyway. Mexican governance wasn't prominent in the entire west coast but in the case of California, Mexican presence was clearly established, thanks to a string of 21 multi-purpose missions.

Originally constructed by the Spanish, the previous rulers of Mexico, the missions served as sources of religious outreach, land management, and education centers; in some cases, nearby were military presidios, or barracks.[2] In those days, Mexican officials on site had their hands full with generally passive tribes of Native Americans, who after a while, began to resent the ways that Mexicans intruded on their territory, values, and lives.

White Americans were few in number, perhaps 10,000 or less, until the unearthing of gold at Sutter's Mill along the American River, about 50 miles east of Sacramento. The discovery occurred on January 24, 1848, days before the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildalgo on February 2, 1848, which ended a three-year war between the United States and Mexico over Mexican-controlled land. Under terms of the treaty, Mexico ceded California and much of its southwest claims to the United States. Of course, communication was slow in those days, and word of the great gold find never reached the closing moments of the treaty negotiations and signatures. Otherwise, who knows how matters might have turned out, with

the knowledge that potential great fortunes resided in a pastoral location known for farming and little else. In fact, the news did not reach the east coast until August 1848.

Suddenly, California became a valuable destination, with the promise of gold proving to be a magnet for those in search of instant wealth. Over the coming months, about 90,000 people made their way to California; two-thirds were Americans who arrived from all parts of the United States. By 1855, the number of new Californians swelled to a half million; again, they were mostly white Americans, although a few hundred free African Americans also managed to migrate to California in search of gold.

There wasn't much government organization in those days. During the first couple of years particularly, the Gold Rush took place in a "no man's land" legal environment. California was neither part of Mexico nor a state until September 9, 1850. The new arrivals pretty much expropriated what they wanted, when they wanted, and where they wanted with force serving as their "rule" of law. As one historical account of the time notes, "California society in 1848 was at once decentralized, independent, and deferential."[3] Might was right, especially since most of the gold was found in sparsely populated public lands in the hills. With California now separated from Mexico, the miners ignored Mexican rules of ownership and operation.[4]

Much of the Gold Rush vigilantism had a strong racist tinge. Anger was directed with regularity toward Mexicans, Native Americans, and the few Asians, and further codified in the Constitution of 1849 and subsequent state legislation. In Article II of the state Constitution, voting power was given explicitly to white males over the age of 21, leaving out Native Americans, Mexicans, and other nonwhites. Then in 1850, the state legislature passed "The Act for the Government and Protection of Indians," an ironic name because it facilitated removal of Native American Indians from lands contested by whites and placed resolution of any differences between a white and an Indian in the hands of the local white Justice of the Peace.[5] Minorities didn't have a chance, which, some critics would say, was a harbinger of things to come for centuries.

More discrimination was legitimized at the second state constitutional convention of 1879. There a splinter group known as the Workingmen's Party, a discouraged group largely comprised of Irish ex-railroad laborers, advocated for Chinese exclusion from California.[6] Their voices were heard and additional anti-Chinese measures were added to the revised state constitution. Clearly, a pattern was set.

The Railroad

The difficulties associated with Americans traveling to California were eased immensely with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869. At last, people could move from one end of the country to another in a matter of weeks, not months. But transport ease wasn't enough to induce the relocation of Middle America; the attraction of plentiful land was, however. Congressional passage of the Timber and Stone Act in 1878 allowed settlers to purchase up to 160 acres of vacant federal land for $2.50 per acre—an incredible buy in those days. From that point on, the flow of American immigrants was steady, if not overwhelming. Most came from the east coast, specifically New York, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Maine; a few others came from interior states such as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri.[7] Thanks to the railroad, the population of Los Angeles County doubled between 1890 and 1900 to 170,000.

That was just the beginning. During the early years of the 20th century, California became the home to large-scale farmland irrigation, the movie studios, and even a nascent petroleum industry. Many people initially came as tourists, with large numbers deciding to relocate permanently upon arrival. The railroad brought out people to work these new sources of employment as well as other jobs. By 1910, more than half of California's population had transplanted themselves from the Midwest. White, Protestant, and middle class, they identified disproportionately with the Progressive philosophy. Briefly organized as a political party, Progressives espoused "direct democracy," or political participation in the political system by the white middle class to offset corporate domination of the state legislature, while eschewing political involvement of racial minorities, particularly Japanese Americans.[8] As with other eras, the new white Californians pushed others of different races aside, even those who had preceded them.

There were others, although not nearly in the same numbers as middle class whites. Between the last decade of the 19th century and first three decades of the 20th century, a cadre of African Americans also came out to California, although in smaller numbers than did their white counterparts. Many of the men worked for the railroad as waiters and porters, taking up residence in major railroad-served cities such as San Francisco, Oakland, and Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, particularly, the African American population grew from 2000 in 1900 to nearly 40,000 by 1930.[9]

Still, the numbers of African Americans there amounted to less than 4 percent of the city's population of 1.2 million at the time.

The Great Depression

It was bad enough that the Great Depression ravaged the U.S. economy. Worse yet, many farmers in the "Dust Bowl" states of the southwest suffered an agricultural drought without end or parallel. Combined, these two incidents were enough to send hundreds of thousands of poor, disproportionately evangelical white Protestants packing in Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, and the surrounding areas. Between 1935 and 1940 alone, more than 250,000 "Dust Bowl" victims moved to California, a sizable portion of whom settled in the San Joaquin Valley to grow cotton they had failed to produce in their home states.[10] By 1940, the number of migrants largely from the southwest reached more than 700,000, nearly half of whom settled in rural areas of California.[11] A decade later, their numbers doubled again.[12] Of course, migrants came from the rest of the nation as well, but the people from the southwestern part of the country were by far the largest portion of new Californians. We also know that foreign arrivals were extremely few during this period because of strictly enforced immigration laws and reduced mobility because of the global depression.[13]

Given that 6,950,000 people lived in California at the time of the 1940 census, an infusion of 700,000 people from one part of the country represented a substantial change in the state's demography. The new composition altered the tenor and proportions of the state's racial, ethnic, and religious values. As historian James Gregory explains, "If the arrival of blacks from the South helped turn the northern Democratic Party into the voice of Democratic liberalism, the influx of white heartlanders [into California] has spread lower-middle-class conservatism."[14] Once again, California was changing.

Post-World War II

After World War II, California went through yet another growth spurt. As with previous population metamorphoses, the composition of the state evolved yet again in both quantity and origins. Remarkable changes occurred between 1950 and 1985. Researchers Hans Johnson and Richard Lovelady divide this fertile period into three distinct parts, each with its

own combination of demographic characteristics.[15] Between 1950 and 1965, the state grew like crazy. An average of 272,000 people moved in each year, with more than 90 percent from other states. Few Californians left.

Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, the migration pattern changed somewhat. With a sputtering aerospace industry, the state's economy failed to keep up with other parts of the nation. California drew an average of about 40,000 domestic migrants during this period, with international migration averaging 100,000 each year, a staggering 2.5 times the domestic amount. Something else happened during this period: between 1970 and 1972, the state actually experienced its first domestic loss—that is, more people left than came, but the change was temporary.

During the third part of this 35-year period, 1975–1985, the state experienced another surge in population growth. Domestic net migration picked up to an average of 60,000 annually. However, the greatest growth occurred among foreign immigrants, who came to California in numbers averaging 200,000 plus during the period.

The flow of domestic migration to California seesawed during the next decade. Between 1985 and 1990, Johnson and Lovelady note, migration from other states averaged a net gain of 100,000 annually. Then the domestic migration bottom fell out. Between 1990 and 1995, people left California in droves, averaging a net annual population loss of 125,000 during the span.

Beginning in 1995, the battle between net gain and net loss of domestic Americans was over. The redirection happened over a short span of time. Between 1995 and 2000, more than 1.4 million people living in the United States moved to California, while 2.2 million Californians went elsewhere. The lack of well-paying jobs, accented by the dot com bust in 2000 sent people running to what they saw as greener pastures accented by lower cost of living and better quality of life. Other western and southern states gained people from the rest of the nation, and California became one of their donors.[16] The reversal continues to this day.

Losing Curb Appeal

When people shop for new homes, they search for "curb appeal"; they need to feel good about the look of the house, including the lawn, the paint, the roof, the plants—everything—before they walk in. If the house has curb appeal, there is a much greater likelihood that it will entice the interest

of the prospective buyer. Otherwise, it's on to the next house on the list. For Americans living elsewhere as well as many of those who reside here, California has lost its "curb appeal." The high cost of living, sketchy job opportunities, a slowly deteriorating infrastructure, scarce resources, and a host of intangibles have led many prospective Californians to look elsewhere, with many here ready to join them.

The exodus is underway with demographics just as interesting as are those of the domestic migrants who arrived here in the first place. Recent data show that more than 70 percent of those leaving California are white, well above the white percentage of the state's population. They have lower incomes than those remaining, less education, and higher unemployment rates.[17] Moreover, the whites who remain in California are older than nonwhites are. The median age for whites is 44, compared with 28 for Latinos. As demographer Hans Johnson explains, whites simply are not replacing themselves; meanwhile, other groups have increased their proportions of the population mix.[18] All this points to a changing California.

IMMIGRANT PATTERNS

Depending upon a range of climatological factors, ocean waves pound the surf with varying degrees of intensity, strength, and volume. That has been no less the case with the flow of newcomers into California. The immigration pattern has been uneven over the past three centuries, but there is a pattern nonetheless. They have landed here again and again, although in varying numbers, for widely divergent reasons, and with widely different outcomes. Some immigrants have come in search of land and fortune; a few have journeyed here because of political regime changes in their former homeland; others have simply wanted a fresh start in a new environment; still others have been lured to California under false pretenses. About the only consistency with the irregular streams of immigrants has been the general lack of acceptance of the newcomers by those already in place—even if the "natives" have been here for a short time.

Immigration brings change to the *status quo*. The presence of newcomers can alter social, economic, and political conditions already in place. Immigrants bring their own experiences to a new environment. There is

a kind of awkward social overlay of the old with the new—trying simultaneously to fit in the present while not abandoning the past entirely. The concept is hardly new to the United States, which has received immigrants since its very beginning and has more immigrants than any other nation. But there is a difference between immigration patterns to California and the rest of the United States. Historically, the preponderance of immigration arrivals for most of the United State has originated in various parts of Europe. Not so here, where most of the state's newcomers have come from Mexico and points south, with a few additional arrivals from Asia.

This distinction comes with its own set of challenges. With each new wave of immigration, another level of social complexity and diversity is added to those already rooted in the state. The temporary disequilibrium plays out with different patterns, sometimes with ugly outcomes. What offers hope for the newest arrivals occasionally strikes fear for those with established routines and relationships. Maybe it shouldn't be that way, but it often is. Xenophobia—the fear of strangers—can be a powerful offset to the inclusive outreach of the traditional community "welcome wagon," and nowhere has this emotion been expressed with greater intensity and frequency than in California. It's a collective ugly side of the state that outsiders rarely sense unless they're the new immigrants looking in. The result is a state with sociological fissures as problematic for California's multi-ethnic society as earthquakes are to the land.

Like layers of sandstone that compress over time, each group of immigrants adds something to the make-up of the state in the form of new cultural traditions. Still, the pulsations of new arrivals have impacted California, and continue to do so to this very day. The list is long and shows no sign of ending. It helps to explain how the "new" California is increasingly different from the "old" California.

Native Americans[19]

Native Americans have the oldest ties and have suffered some of the greatest costs. Experts differ on their first entry dates probably from what it is now Siberia—some say 15,000 years ago, others suggest much earlier. Whatever the time of origin, this group clearly reached and established a foothold in California well before anyone else. Historians estimate that between 100,000 and 1 million Native Americans lived here when European settlers first arrived in the mid-1700s.[20] They formed

their own tribal governments and welcomed occasional visits from white traders and explorers. Once the Spanish began what appeared to be permanent occupation of Native American land, the welcoming spirit quickly disappeared.

Over time, hundreds of thousands of Native Americans died from exposure to European diseases to which they had no natural immunity. Successive occupiers including Spanish, Mexican, and later California state and U.S. governments expropriated almost all American Indian lands and most of their constitutional rights.[21] Between 1848 and 1865, the U.S. Calvary killed more than 15,000 Native Americans, all in the name of bringing peace to the new state.[22] In the years shortly after California joined the union, tens of thousands of other Native Americans were deported to reservations in other territories. By 1910, the population had dropped to 16,000. During the 20th century, the federal government stepped in with various forms of assistance, often laced with sizable amounts of paternalism.[23] Belatedly, the relationship between Native Americans and the rest of the state underwent reassessment. Approximately 400,000 Native Americans live in California today, although now they represent but a tiny fraction of the state's 38 million residents. Under various treaties, a fraction of their 100 million acres of land has been returned. Native Americans have paid a steep price for their claim to California.

Spanish

In the mid-1700s, both Spanish and Russian explorers cast their eyes on California. Approaching the land from the south and the north, the two groups and their governments ultimately reached dramatically different conclusions. After a brief flirtation with areas near what is now San Francisco from the early 1800s through 1841, Russian traders and merchants retreated to places closer to home; perhaps the supply lines were too thin to justify continued presence.

It was much easier for the Spanish who, because of the proximity to their home base in Mexico, experienced little difficulty in charting a presence in what is now California. Beginning in 1769, seven years before American colonists declared independence from England, Spanish missionaries set up the first of 21 missions in San Diego. Soldiers quickly claimed ownership of the land for the Church, moving further north with each new

venue. The final mission completed in 1823 near what is now Sonoma, more than 1500 miles north of San Diego.

As they solidified their positions, missionaries went about their business of "pacifying" the state's Native American population. The new occupiers were relentless in their efforts to convert the native population while subjecting them to near-slavery status.[24] It was a terribly uneven exchange: Spanish colonists seized land while Native Americans died from European diseases to which they had no immunities. Ultimately, the land under control of the missionaries represented about one-sixth of what is now California.

Mexicans

After the Mexicans revolted successfully against their Spanish occupiers in 1821, the new order strengthened its presence in California. The Mexicans ruled the territory differently than the Spanish did. In an attempt to mollify the hostile Native American population, Mexican rulers organized a more secular government system and ceased most of the proselytizing, but they continued the near-slavery status of Native Americans.[25] Equally important, Mexicans controlled large swaths of valuable land.

But their reign over the territory was brief. An end to the Mexican-American War and the discovery of gold brought thousands of Americans to California within months. Mexican rule terminated in 1849, when the relatively few whites already here declared independence as the first step to seeking American statehood the following year.

Mexican influence has been a constant in California. Millions have come often to work in the most menial positions, especially backbreaking farm labor jobs with low pay, abysmal housing, and no benefits. During World War II, the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Program, an agreement between U.S. and Mexican authorities, encouraged Mexicans to work on farms in California and other states to make up for men at war. The farm labor program continued in one form or another through the 1980s, providing a clear path for Mexicans to work not only on California farms but also in factories. Since then, millions of other Mexicans have made California their permanent home, some legally and others not. Today, residents of Mexican descent are by far the largest minority group in California, comprising more than one third of the state's residents.

Irish and Chinese

The California immigration turnstile continued to operate. The unskilled Irish and Chinese were enticed to the state in its infancy with the promise of immediate work. They were brought in during the 1860s as laborers to complete railroads dedicated to connecting the nation—the Irish building tracks for the railroad company moving west, the Chinese building tracks for the railroad company moving east. Dismissed when the transpacific railroad was connected at Promontory, Utah in 1869, neither group had the wherewithal or desire to return to their native lands.

Now out of work and unprepared for anything other than manual labor, most of the Irish and Chinese laborers ended up in San Francisco, where they competed for employment on the bottom rung of the economic ladder. Cities seemed to offer more services and opportunities than rural areas did as well as the potential for employment, which helped to explain why these immigrants sought comfort in the City by the Bay. Today, San Francisco's Chinatown is the largest Chinatown in the United States and the largest Chinatown outside of China.

Japanese

By the turn of the 20th century, Japanese immigrants began arriving to fulfill their dreams of economic prosperity. A few hundred had trickled in as laborers during the last two decades of the 19th century, but the numbers of arrivals did not increase dramatically until the first decade of the 20th century. By 1910, more than 40,000 Japanese lived in California; the population nearly doubled to 71,000 by 1920. Their numbers and their financial successes grew. By 1940, just before the start of World War II, the Japanese American population in California hovered near 100,000.

Japanese immigrants and their families worked hard, especially in agriculture-related enterprises, where they grew produce and flowers. They were hard working and incredibly innovative. Japanese farmers developed the state's first hothouses, which allowed them to grow products with year-round availability. Excluded from labor unions and trade associations because of discrimination, Japanese Americans often lived near each other. Anti-Asian sentiment notwithstanding, many family-run Japanese American enterprises became successful within a generation. Their contributions were stalled in 1942, when in response to the

attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese military, the U.S. attorney general ordered Japanese Americans to divest themselves of their land and report to "internment centers." After the war and upon release from confinement, many Japanese Americans were able to assume their place in California society, their humiliation notwithstanding.

Vietnamese

After the Vietnam War ended in 1975, the United States admitted more than 1 million South Vietnamese who had been forced to flee their country in the wake of North Vietnam's communist victory over the South Vietnamese-American alliance. Some were associated with the political or military elite, but most were members of the army or peasants who had been loyal to or identified with the South Vietnamese government. Hundreds of thousands fled in small boats, taking little more than the items they could carry on their backs.

The overwhelming percentage settled in California, with 41 percent of the entire Vietnamese Diaspora in the United States and the largest Vietnamese population outside their native country. Even more telling, today 20 percent of all Vietnamese immigrants to the United States live in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The San Jose metropolitan area is home to another 8 percent. These are the two largest Vietnamese communities in the United States.[26]

Contrary to many immigrant groups, Vietnamese Americans enjoy a higher rate of home ownership in California. Fewer live in poverty, compared to other immigrant groups. Knowledge of the English language remains a nemesis, however; as of 2008, two-thirds of all Vietnamese immigrants had limited proficiency in English.[27] Still, overall, California's newest immigrant group appears to be making an easier adjustment than its predecessors did.

Others

In addition to the groups discussed previously, others from faraway lands have come to California in less dramatic fashion, albeit in fewer numbers and perhaps less dramatic fashion. Indians, Filipinos, and Koreans have been among many from the Pacific Rim who have crossed the ocean to study in American universities or with skill sets in search of new lives.

Eastern Europeans have arrived since the end of the Cold War. In lesser numbers, people from South America, Central America, Central Asia, and Africa also have come to the Golden State.

Illegal Immigrants

Some people call them "aliens," others use the less offensive term "undocumented residents," but whatever the description, illegal immigrants are part of California's population—and not just a small part. No state has as many illegal immigrants as California has, where 2.7 million of the 11 million in the entire nation reside. Here's another way of understanding the numbers: California has about as many illegal immigrants as the total populations of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, *combined*.

Illegal immigrants are hardly new to the United States or to California, for that matter. They have been entering the United States from just about everywhere around the globe almost since this country's founding. Unlike today's commotion-filled setting, illegal immigrants were pretty much ignored altogether until the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 because until that time, almost all immigrants were from Europe, a continent with a collective culture similar to ours. But the Chinese were another story; they were different, as were the Japanese who followed, which ultimately led to the Immigration Act of 1924. Both of these pieces of legislation were vital to the interests of white majorities in California.

Skip ahead to the 1920s when, for the next half century, a group of 300,000 or so Mexicans emerged as a sizable part-time agricultural labor force. We say "part time" because they would come in January or February, work their way up the state to harvest various crops, and then leave in September. A small percentage headed further north to assist with harvests in Oregon and Washington, but most returned to Mexico until the next winter, when they would begin the cycle again.

Then conditions changed. Many farm laborers moved to cities, usually taking better and less strenuous jobs in construction, housekeeping, gardening, or in some cases workers on assembly lines in manufacturing plants. With their relative affluence, many decided to plant permanent roots in California. Others from Mexico took their places in the fields before some of those moved away to cities. After all, it was easier to stay rather than go through the hassle of illegal border crossings every year.

The results were stunning in terms of a population shift. Before 1986, nearly half of all Mexican migrants travelled back to Mexico at the end of the harvest season. By 2002, only a quarter of them returned to their homes and families.[28] Nationally, the explosion was palpable. Of the 12 million illegal immigrants in the country at the time, one study estimated that half came to the United States between 2000 and 2008 alone.[29] Beyond farm labor, illegal immigrants now account for sizable percentages of the workforce as roofers, insulation workers, drywall installers, food processers, janitors, restaurant workers, and textile workers.[30]

It would be silly to deny that illegal immigrants have emerged as a sizable constituency among California's population. They have and they are. The question is, does their presence bring harm or benefit to the state? That's where the discussion becomes interesting. Given the huge presence of illegal immigrants here, it's worthwhile to look into the question.

The Case for Illegal Immigrants Remaining in California

Upwards of 60 percent of all illegal immigrants in California are Mexican, with most of the rest coming from Central America and Asia. Commonly with little education and an inability to speak English, illegal immigrants take jobs on the bottom rung of the economic ladder, particularly those associated with farm labor. California growers believe that this group accounts for 90 percent of their labor pool; as such, crops would go unpicked without this labor pool.[31] According to a study by the Pew Hispanic Center released in 2011, illegal immigrants comprise nearly one-tenth of California's entire workforce, and they are anything but a drag on the economy. In fact, the study found that illegal immigrants had an unemployment rate of 9.7 percent in California, considerably below the overall state rate of 12.5 percent.[32] Overall, when considering compensation for services, illegal immigrants actually earn 31 percent less than their legal counterparts earn doing similar work.[33] This inexpensive labor is actually a boon to employers both in terms of worker availability and company profits.

Some observers see benefits beyond filling corporate coffers with cheap labor. In fact, immigrants are consumers, too, whether legal or illegal. In his research on Mexican immigration, Tomas Jimenez observed businesses that discriminate against immigrants hurt themselves because of

lost revenues.[34] A recent *BusinessWeek* article described the benefits of illegal immigrants as follows: "The problem for critics of illegal immigration is that corporate efforts to sell to the undocumented weaves them ever more tightly into the fabric of American life."[35] What's so bad about that?

The Case against Illegal Immigrants Remaining in California

Opponents of illegal immigration argue that the state must send them away because of their overwhelming numbers and consumption of costly state services. There is no question that illegal immigrants account for a sizable portion of the state's population. In California's public schools, one out of every ten students is the child of an illegal immigrant, adding to the cost of education.[36] That alone amounted to about $2.3 billion, according to a 2009 state report. In addition, prison expenses for illegal immigrants totaled $834 million and healthcare costs added another $703 million.[37] Together these three categories approach $4 billion. Critics say that money contributes to the state's annual budget deficit problems.

Others view illegal immigration as a threat to American culture. The more immigrants come here, the more they water down traditional norms and values. Writing about this concern, eminent political scientist Samuel Huntington states that for the United States, Mexico is ground zero for the immigration problem: "While Europeans see the immigration threat as Muslim or Arab, Americans see it as both Latin American and Asian, but primarily as Mexican."[38] Clearly, this school of thought fears "strangers," those with values other than the values associated with the European roots of white Americans.

An Issue, Yes; a Problem, No

What do we make of this debate? There's no question that immigrants, legal or illegal, change the social dimensions of California more so than elsewhere in the United States due to the extent of their numbers. The government statistics for various forms of aid are large, to be sure. On the other hand, shouldn't we also consider contributions in terms of revenues?

Because of their status, many illegal immigrants are paid cash "under the table." Still, they use that money to purchase consumer goods and services, like anyone else. Many have bought cars, furniture, and other sizable staples. Those acquisitions usually include sales taxes for state

and local governments. Also, by virtue of their purchasing power, illegal immigrants add to consumer demand, which requires companies to employ more people to make those products.

Much of this discussion is logical, but without "hard" numbers. After all, no one asks a customer his or her legal status at the time of purchase. However, there is at least one reasonably concrete number: the Social Security Administration estimated that in 2007, illegal immigrants contributed $12 billion to the system with intentionally invalid Social Security numbers. Given that California has about one fourth of the illegal immigrant population, that number alone comes to about $3 billion that illegal immigrants will never see.

No doubt, the biggest challenge with immigrants—legal or illegal—is in the public schools, as discussed in Chapter 2. Without professional assistance in acquiring English, immigrants are set up for failure, period. To the extent that we provide assistance in learning English, immigrant children will do better in school, acquire skills, and become better equipped to get good jobs that generate more taxes for governments. Sadly, public policymakers and the public alike have not seen the benefits of this investment.

Still, there's a larger question, even more fundamental than economics or education: It's the question of who belongs here and who doesn't, and under what circumstances? What gives some of us the sense that we have more of a right than others do? For whatever reasons—economic, social, or psychological—some people feel threatened by illegal and legal immigrants alike. Such an attitude is unfortunate and an anathema to what our society claims to be, a democracy. In his celebrated work, *The Book of Democracy*, James David Barber ends with assessing the best ways to create and maintain a democracy. One way, Barber notes, is through immigration. Democracies, Barber writes, should permit immigration from other democracies, and not dictatorships. "This would probably motivate the people living in nondemocracies—and perhaps even their leaders—to convert to democracies."[39] So much for the philosophical viewpoint at 35,000 feet.

But let's take a closer look on the ground. Are immigrants the source of our problems, economic or otherwise? No, according to recent survey data. A statewide Field Poll released in 2011 asked respondents about the impact of immigration on their quality of life. While 39 percent said immigrants made their quality of life "worse," 47 percent replied that there was "no change" in their lives and 10 percent actually answered that their lives were improved. When asked about the impact of immigrants

in their communities, the results were even more one-sided. About one quarter (26 percent) answered that their lives were "worse," while 62 percent replied "no change" and another 9 percent cited improvement in their lives.[40] Clearly, California's problems do not stem from immigration.

This is not to suggest that the federal government shouldn't act on the immigration issue—it should do so by discouraging border crossings by those without employment and providing an orderly means to citizenship opportunities for those who have otherwise obeyed the laws. The state of California can help, too, by enacting legislation that permits illegal immigrants to acquire driver licenses. By doing so, the state would be better able to monitor the driver behavior of a huge percentage of California.

PERSISTENT DISCRIMINATION

The equality issue extends back to the days before California attained statehood and when the Spanish, and then Mexicans, mistreated the Native Americans simply because of their race and unwillingness to accept western European traditions.[41] Discrimination of Native Americans, a given when Westerners landed in California, continued after the Gold Rush and statehood in 1850. Now whites replaced Mexicans as oppressors.

New victims of discrimination were added over time. Even though California was admitted to the Union as a free, or non-slave state, the few African Americans here were treated as second-class citizens; they weren't allowed to vote until passage of the 15th Amendment, ratified in 1870, and the experience was not always pleasant. Well into the 20th century, they were denied access to housing and schools in white neighborhoods. Some of the discrimination was blatant; most was through intimidation and neglect.[42] Many of these injustices were corrected when the state legislature passed the Rumford Fair Employment Practices Act in 1959 and the Rumford Fair Housing Act in 1963, both authored by the African American assembly member of the same name. But the voters said otherwise in 1964 when they passed a California Association of Realtors–sponsored ballot proposition that specifically allowed renters and sellers to avail their property only to those they deemed suitable.[43] Three years later, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the California law as a violation of the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution.

More groups fell to the wickedness of discrimination. After Chinese and Irish foreign laborers completed construction of the transcontinental railroad, they were dismissed without repatriation to their native lands. That led to disproportionate numbers of each landing in San Francisco, where they struggled on the bottom rungs of the economic ladder under the most trying of circumstances. Both groups suffered discrimination, although the nonwhite Chinese endured more grief, no doubt because of their difficulties with English and non-Western appearances.

The Chinese were barred from state citizenship, land ownership, and employment, according to the terms of the revised California Constitution of 1879. Mobs of whites in San Francisco and Los Angeles occasionally tortured the newest immigrants, and received little punishment from government authorities.[44] Some Chinese had set up small farms outside the cities, but their land ownership opportunities were denied, particularly after Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Whatever the benefits of wide open California, equality was not one of them.

Discrimination was a mainstay for Japanese immigrants, who arrived in California around the turn of the 20th century as well. Many went into farming and soon were not only producing the best crops, but were envied by white farmers who were unable to produce at the same levels or sell at the same prices.[45] In 1913 and again in 1920, the state legislature passed restrictive laws prohibiting Japanese immigrants from owning land. Congress also passed the Immigration Act of 1924, although those Japanese Americans born here, "Nisei" they were called, continued as successful farmers. A simmering animus of whites toward Japanese Americans boiled over with the start of World War II. Then-California Attorney General (and later U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice) Earl Warren asked President Franklin Roosevelt to relocate Japanese Americans to places far from California and the Pacific shores. Never mind that most were U.S. citizens—many of them were actually born here. Roosevelt complied with an Executive Order and the whole mess was upheld by the United States Supreme Court.[46] Still, in spite of their persecution by the U.S. government, many young Japanese Americans volunteered to serve their country in the U.S. military. They were packaged into the 442nd infantry regiment, shipped off to the European front regiment and, in a moment of irony, became the most decorated American military unit of the war. After Japan surrendered, the internees were released from their confinement, mostly penniless. Not until 1988 did Congress admit mistake, when each

surviving internee was given an official apology and a government check for $20,000. Still, this rectification hardly offset years of involuntary servitude and humiliation.

As for Latinos, their treatment was mixed and has remained so to this day. During the 1930s, Mexicans who dwelled in the cities were routinely segregated and limited largely to manual labor and housecleaning jobs. With labor shortages during World War II, hundreds of thousands came across the California border to become the backbone of the agriculture workforce. For a moment in time, they were welcomed almost as saviors because the state had no one else to pick crops and support the agricultural community.[47] This was no small acknowledgment, given that until that moment, Mexicans had been belittled and segregated just like African Americans. Whites had kept them in their place. But the nation now was at war, and California's fertile land had become its breadbasket. So, large numbers of Latinos were given temporary opportunities to work the fields and carry out other mundane agricultural jobs, not, however, without local authorities reminding them that these new Californians benefitted courtesy of the white establishment.[48] Like other minorities, Latinos remained second-class citizens.

One other point before we leave the topic of discrimination—prejudice has not always been a matter of whites denying opportunities to nonwhites. In some instances, whites have been intolerant of other whites, such as when "Okies" (a disparaging name for Oklahomans) and other mostly poor farmers from the southwest United States moved to California during the 1930s.[49] California also has witnessed discrimination of one minority against another, the results equally harmful to the aggrieved party. One recent study of Los Angeles found situations where African Americans were victimized by Latinos; in another part of the city, profound tension existed between Koreans and African Americans.[50] Similarly, a San Francisco weekly that today describes itself as "The Voice of Asian America," has published a column entitled "Why I Hate Blacks."[51] In California, no one group has a monopoly when it comes to bigotry.

Racism, California Style

The pattern here has been clear: Whatever the state's reputation as a laidback, "kumbaya" kind of setting, race has been a dominant theme in California throughout its history, and an ugly one at that. Although many

of the constitutional issues have been clarified repeatedly in the courts and through legislation, minorities disproportionately find themselves in the worst schools, in the most depressed residential areas, and with the fewest vocational opportunities. None of this is coincidental. Demographic studies show that even today, half of all neighborhoods in California remain segregated.[52] More on these themes later.

STRIKING BACK

When we think of some of the great civil rights battles in recent years, people often point to confrontations like the public school showdown in Little Rock, Arkansas or the lunch counter sit-ins in Birmingham, Alabama during the early 1950s. These are seminal moments in the efforts to overcome racism and move toward equality, where people put their lives on the line, where the state and national governments clashed, and where the nation watched with concern. The issue of racial strife in California often is far from the top of most people's minds, at least in terms of public discussions. Yet, because of the abuses cited previously, California has been the center of its own brutal battles relating to racism.

Zoot Suit Riots

By the 1930s, a sizable Mexican population had developed in Los Angeles. Many Mexicans from poor neighborhoods during that period began wearing "zoot suits," distinctive, baggy garments that identified their heritage. Other minorities, particularly African Americans, wore zoot suits as well, but these clothing sets were most closely associated with Mexicans.[53] Police, elected officials, and a very bigoted print media at the time harassed the Mexican population incessantly, in part because of their attachments to these garments.

Matters were exacerbated during World War II when hundreds of servicemen, sensing protection from the Establishment, began attacking Mexicans in zoot suits on a regular basis. They patrolled Mexican neighborhoods, going after any Mexicans they saw along the way. In a show of racial solidarity, the organized African American community in Los

Angeles joined with Mexican organizers to condemn the vigilantism. The effort, while courageous, further fueled white anger.

Outright rioting ensued in 1943, after nine Mexicans were falsely convicted of a murder. For several weeks, Mexicans fought with whites mostly in an effort to keep whites from harming them. Nevertheless, the exchange led to the trials and convictions of hundreds of Mexicans on a variety of charges, most of which were unfounded. When all was said and done, few servicemen suffered any indignities from the courts.[54]

The zoot suit riots received a good deal of notoriety for a short time; after all, the United States had a war to fight. For the better part of two decades after the war, Los Angeles authorities treated Mexicans as troublemakers. But from that point on, racial lines were drawn and opposed by Mexicans.[55]

Watts and Other Cities

Of course, Latinos have not been the only group to strike back at their condition. Though relatively small in numbers, African Americans have also been victims of persistent discrimination. Like Latinos, historically, most African Americans in California had little education, worked in menial jobs, and lived in racially segregated neighborhoods. The police and other authorities kept them in their place, often through brutal treatment, encouraged by the press, realtors, and banks.[56]

African American groups protested mistreatment for years, largely through nonviolent means, and generally receiving lip service from local leaders in return. One day in August 1965, Los Angeles finally exploded when crowds in Watts, a black portion of the city, erupted against police making a traffic stop. The police chief fueled the flames by referring to the rioters as "monkeys in the zoo."[57] Racial tension remained overt in Los Angeles from that point on, fueled by authorities operating more or less with a policy of racial containment. Describing social conditions during the 1980s and 1990s, Min Hyoung Song notes that local government became "less a tool for properly managing the city, providing necessary social services, and planning for an equitable future, and more a regime of incarceration, retributive justice, and increased surveillance."[58] It was only a matter of time before another explosion would occur.

In April 1992, another riot occurred a year after police pulled over Rodney King, an African American driver who had been speeding. A

video showed that almost immediately after King stepped out of his car, four police began pummeling him. But it wasn't just another police beating, which would have been bad enough; it was a spectacle. In addition to the four officers taking shots at defenseless Rodney King, 25 others watched in approval as a police helicopter hovered overhead. Local television news programs carried the event and the African American community simmered. On April 29, 1992, a largely white jury acquitted the four officers. That night, thousands of African Americans took to the street in rage. When the violence subsided, 53 people were killed and property damage exceeded $1 billion.

But brutality against African Americans has neither been restricted to Los Angeles nor diluted over time. A 2005 report by the California NAACP identified a series of unprovoked attacks by police officers throughout the state against African Americans between 1996 and 2005.[59] Referring to housing discrimination against African Americans, Peter Schrag noted "These things were not supposed to happen in California, where blacks lived not in crowded tenements as they did in Newark or Detroit, but in detached little houses."[60] Yet, the pattern has witnessed a long history and little has changed in either perception or practical terms. A full decade after the 1992 riots, half of the respondents in a survey of Los Angeles residents believed that a similar event would occur within the next five years.[61] Expectations are low.

The Fields

The cities have not been the only centers of discrimination and brutality. Farm workers have long suffered from oppressive working conditions, decrepit housing, and minimal compensation. Comprised predominantly of Mexicans, these migrant laborers carry out their backbreaking work for a little more than half the year. They begin south in the Imperial Valley with cantaloupes in March and end in the wine country and orchards to the north part of the state with grapes in October and apples in November. These farm workers became a meaningful part of California agriculture during World War II, when most American men went into the service. Periodically, U.S. immigration authorities have launched sweeps against these workers, commonly referred to as "braceros," only to look the other way when conditions dictated otherwise.[62]

Today, about 500,000 farm workers harvest fruits and vegetables in the state's 90,000 farms. About 70 percent are noncitizens and most earn annual incomes of less than $10,000 per year. From those funds, workers must pay for lodging, food, and other necessities as they travel up and down the state. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of 2007, the average farm worker earned $8.64 per hour. Try living off that with a spouse and a couple of kids. Moreover, three-fourths of all migrant workers are illegal and, as such, ineligible for government healthcare and unemployment insurance.[63]

For years, groups of farm workers attempted to secure agreements with farmers for better wages and working conditions; their efforts were futile. In 1965, Cesar Chavez and others demanded that farm workers be paid the federal minimum wage; again they were spurned. They went on strike, but strikes in the past had been short-lived before they were broken either by stonewalling growers or the courts. This time, Chavez and his team organized a boycott of California grapes. The agricultural labor group, now named the United Farm Workers, sent members to delivery docks at grocery stores, where they asked fellow union members to leave the grapes in the trucks. The Union also asked consumers to refrain from purchasing table grapes. The strike lasted for two years before a leading agricultural corporation signed a collective bargaining agreement, and another three years before all of the grape growers fell into line and the boycott officially ended. Since then, the union has entered into agreements with growers of other crops. Today, the UFW has 30,000 members. There is even a state holiday commemorating Cesar Chavez and his work. Still, organizing efforts leave much to be accomplished. The battle goes on.

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN CALIFORNIA'S SHRINKING WHITE WORLD

Every day the demography of California becomes less white. That's because for several decades most of the population growth has occurred among racial and ethnic minorities, particularly Latinos but also Asians. Census bureau data show that between 2000 and 2010, California's population expanded by 10 percent, matching the rate of the nation. But that's not the most important part of the story.

Over the 10-year period, the Latino population increased by 28 percent, and the Asian population increased by 32 percent. As for African Americans in California, their numbers increased by only 2 percent. Meanwhile, the non-Hispanic white population actually decreased by 5 percent. Combined, the non-Hispanic white population actually decreased from 46.7 percent to 40.1 percent. Today, Latinos are a close second at 37.6 percent. Combined, racial and ethnic minorities now account for about three-fifths of California's population.

The ever-changing composition of the state impacts both those who are chosen to lead and those who are the recipients of their policies. For example, in the November 2010 elections, whites comprised 65 percent of the voters, far beyond their 46.7 percent of the population. Whites also were 67 percent of the state legislature, whereas the 24 Latinos comprised 20 percent of the two-house body. (More on this in Chapter 8.)

This disconnect won't last forever. As larger percentages of minorities gain election to various offices, past discriminatory policies enacted by elected officials and the voters alike are sure to be revisited. Those changes will be as interesting as the changing demographics of the state. The new representation lines for the state legislature and Congress augur an upswing for the most representation of minorities in state history.

Meanwhile, we can't leave this chapter without stating the obvious: When we ask why the state is "not so golden after all," part of the answer lies in the inability of its diverse society to live with each other harmoniously and thrive. It is a state of profound animus.

ENDNOTES

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