

WE-7

We the
American...

Foreign Born

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e, the American Foreign Born

Introduction

Most of us are descended from people who were born and reared in the United States. Almost 20 million of us, however, must go back to Mexico, the Philippines, Canada, Cuba, Germany, and many other countries to learn about previous generations. We, who were born in another country of foreign parents and now live in the United States, are America's foreign born.

In colonial days, most of America's immigrants came from Great Britain and Ireland, with a few from Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg. During the early 19th century, Germans began coming in ever-increasing numbers, while the French, Norwegians, and Swedes, feeling the push of economic pressures at home and the pull of prospective free land and good wages in America, began moving to the United States.

Between 1850 and 1882, the Chinese, fleeing famine in their homeland, immigrated to America, where they worked in mining camps and on the expanding railroad. Immigration stopped for several decades when American labor reacted to the low wages the Chinese accepted

and forced Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act.

For 20 years following the Civil War, a relatively large number of Canadians entered the country. Italians began arriving in 1890, and from 1900 until the start of World War I, about a quarter of all immigrants were Italian. After World War II, many Germans arrived in the United States. The 1970's saw large numbers of Asians and Latin Americans arriving in the United States.

Today, the flow of immigrants to America is regulated by laws, and prospective immigrants are admitted at many ports of entry. In addition, an estimated 200,000 undocumented aliens enter the country annually.

Where do we, the foreign born, come from? Where do we live in the United States? What kind of work do we do? What education do we have? How much do we earn? We are a mosaic of social and cultural characteristics.

The following pages provide a portrait of We, the American foreign born.

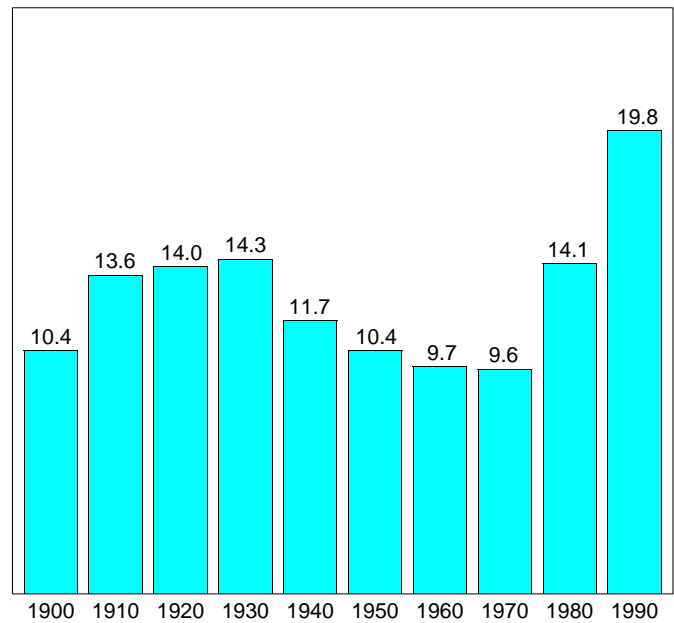
In 1990, we the American foreign born reached our greatest number in the history of the United States.

In 1990, the foreign-born population was 19.8 million or 7.9 percent of the total population. This was the largest number of foreign-born persons in U.S. history and the highest proportion of foreign born in the past 40 years.

In 1980, the foreign-born population numbered 14.1 million or 6.2 percent of the total population; 1970 figures were 9.6 million or 4.7 percent; and 1960 figures were 9.7 million or 5.4 percent.

Around the turn of the century, however, the proportions of foreign born were higher than in 1990. For example, in 1900, the foreign-born population was 13.6 percent of the population or 10.4 million; and in 1910, the proportion of foreign born was 14.8 percent or about 13.6 million.

Figure 1.
Foreign-Born Population: 1900 to 1990
(Millions)



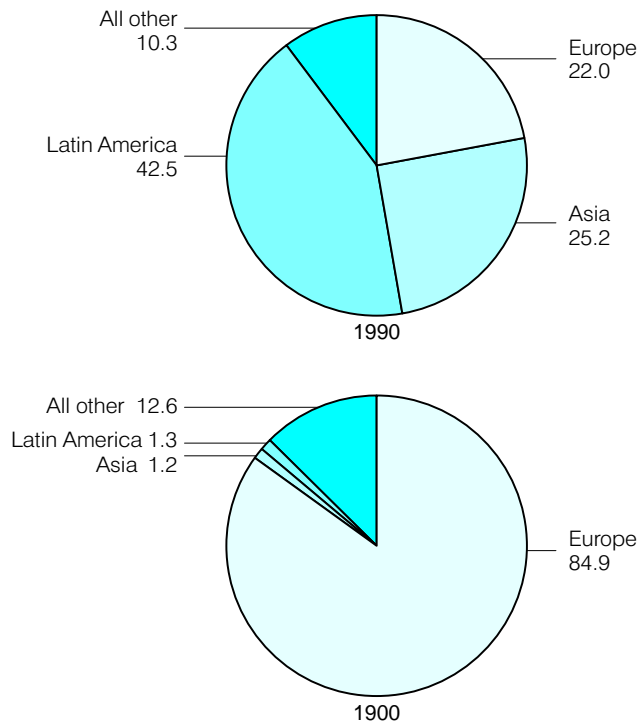
Today, most of us come from Asia or Latin America.

Immigration records, started in 1820, show that until 1970 most of the foreign born came to America from Europe. Of the total of nearly 42 million people who immigrated between 1820 and 1960, 34 million were European. In the 30 years since then, only 2.7 of the 15 million immigrants who came to the United States were European.

The proportion of the total foreign born from European countries declined from 85 percent in 1900 to 22 percent in 1990.

The proportion of the total foreign born from Latin America and Asia increased from less than 1.5 percent each in 1900 to 43 percent and 25 percent, respectively, in 1990.

Figure 2.
Percent Foreign Born by Region of Birth: 1900 and 1990



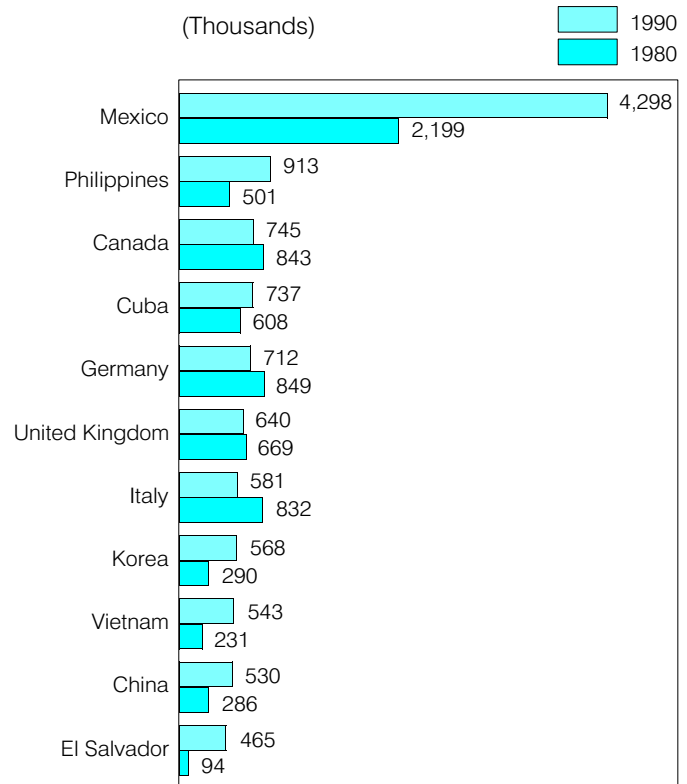
We come from many countries, including Mexico, the Philippines, Canada, and Cuba.

Ten countries contributed at least 500,000 people each to the foreign-born population living in the United States in 1990.

Poor economic conditions in Mexico combined with its proximity to the southern border and demand for unskilled labor in the United States resulted in a very large increase in the number of Mexican foreign born since 1970. More than 1 in 5 of the country's foreign born were born in Mexico, which was the largest foreign-born group in 1990.

Several foreign-born groups lost population between 1980 and 1990. Of the 40 groups with more than 100,000 foreign-born persons in 1990, 14 declined in size. With the exception of Canadians, all of these groups were European. Italians, followed by Scottish, Hungarians, Germans, and Greeks had the largest declines.

Figure 3. Largest Foreign-Born Groups by Country of Birth: 1980 and 1990



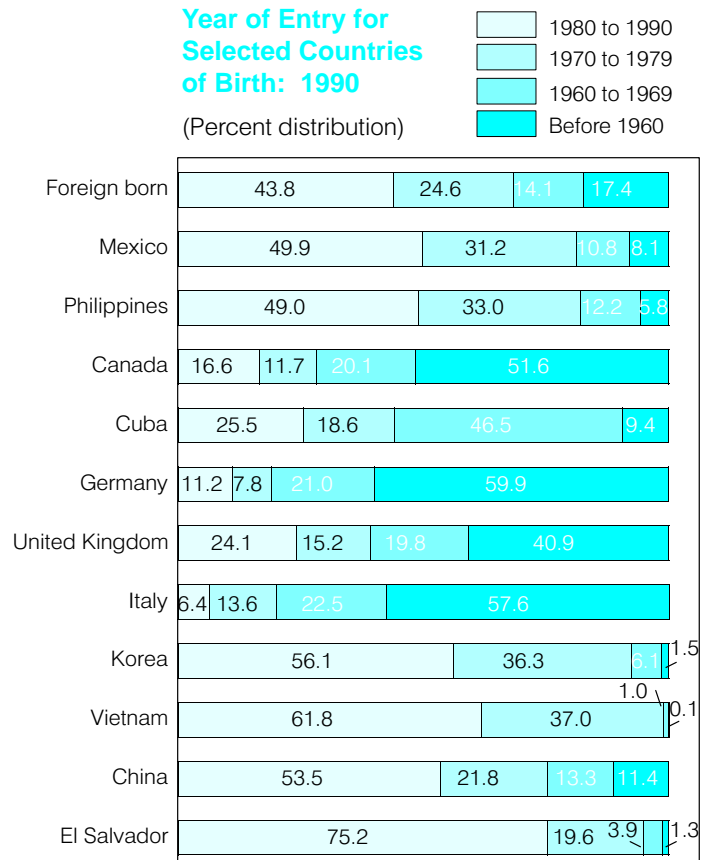
One of every four of us came to America between 1985 and 1990.

The largest wave of immigrants occurred between 1985 and 1990. During this period, 1 of every 4 foreign born arrived in the United States. Nearly 44 percent of the total foreign-born population arrived between 1980 and 1990.

Between 1980 and 1990, 3 of every 4 Salvadoran immigrants arrived along with more than half of the immigrants from Korea, Vietnam, and China, and nearly half of the Mexican and Filipino immigrants.

More than 70 percent of Canadian, German, and Italian immigrants arrived prior to 1970. Cubans arrived in large numbers during the 1950's and 1960's.

Figure 4. Year of Entry for Selected Countries of Birth: 1990



We settle near our ports of entry.

American immigrants tend to settle near their port of entry. More than two-thirds of those who came from Italy, for example, live in the northeastern part of the country, where they landed. Similarly, more than half of the foreign born who immigrated from China and Japan have remained in the West, and most immigrants from Mexico live in the States that border Mexico.

Throughout this century, both California and New York have had the largest share of immigrant population. As the source of immigration changed from mostly European to mostly Latin American and Asian, California and New York traded places in rank. In 1950, nearly 25 percent of immigrants lived in New York, while only 14 percent lived in California. In 1990, nearly one-third of the immigrants lived in California, while New York's share of immigrants decreased to 14 percent. Nearly half of all the foreign born in America live in California or New York. Eight of every 10 immigrants live in just 10 States. Florida, Texas, New Jersey, and Illinois each have between 5 and 8 percent of the foreign-born population.

In recent decades, most immigrants have settled in big cities and their suburbs. In 10 cities throughout America, foreign born account for half or more of the city's population. In Hialeah city, Florida, 7 out of every 10 people are foreign born.

Figure 5.
Foreign-Born Population for Selected Cities: 1990

(Thousands)

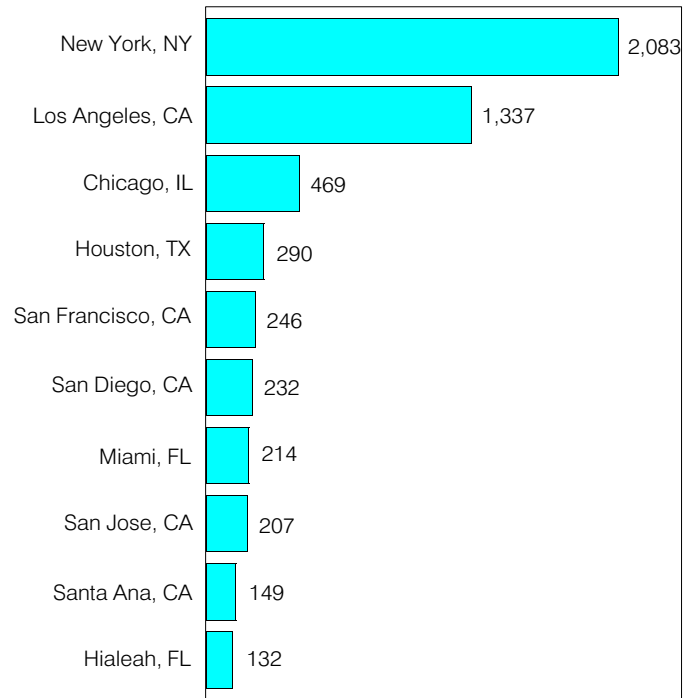
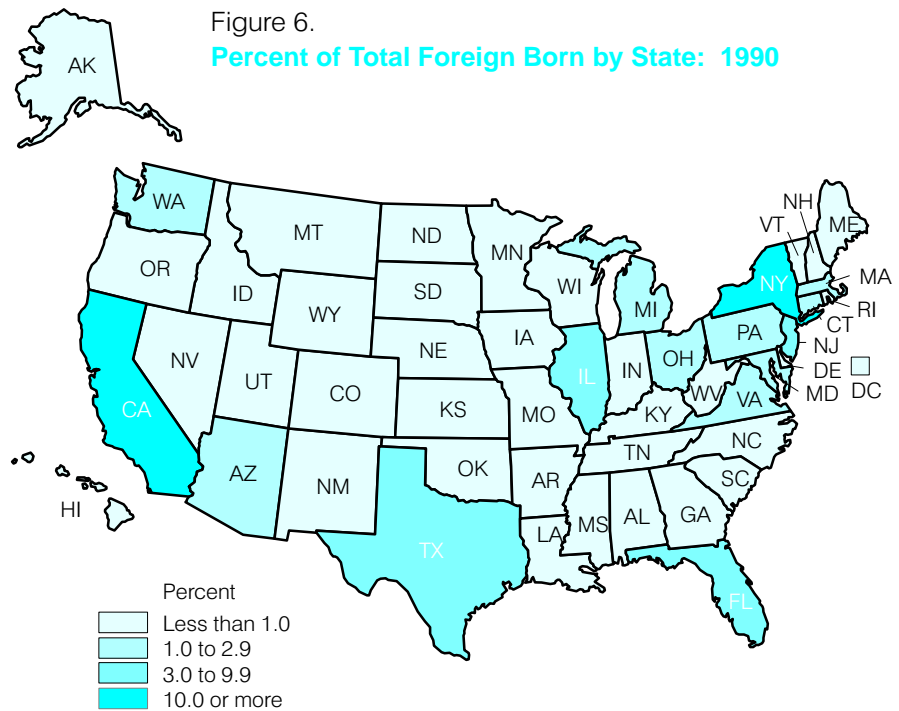


Figure 6.
Percent of Total Foreign Born by State: 1990



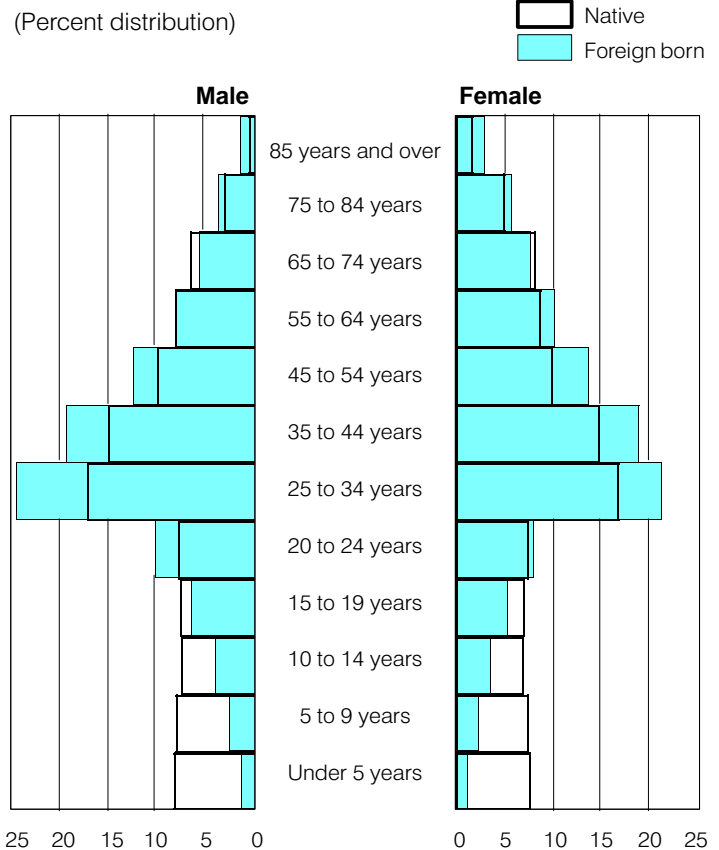
We are older than the native-born population.

Compared with the native-born population, a greater proportion of both male and female foreign born were between the ages of 20 and 64. One of every four foreign-born males was between the ages of 25 and 34. In 1990, about 13 percent of the foreign-born population was 65 years old and over, compared with about 12 percent of the native population.

There has been a dramatic shift in the median age of the foreign-born population over the past 20 years. With the large influx of immigrants since 1970, the median age had decreased from 52 years old to 37 years old in 1990.

Among foreign-born groups, Mexicans, Salvadorans, and Vietnamese had the youngest populations with median ages of about 30. Italian immigrants had the highest median age at 59. Canadian and German immigrants had median ages of 53.

Figure 7. Age and Sex of the Population: 1990



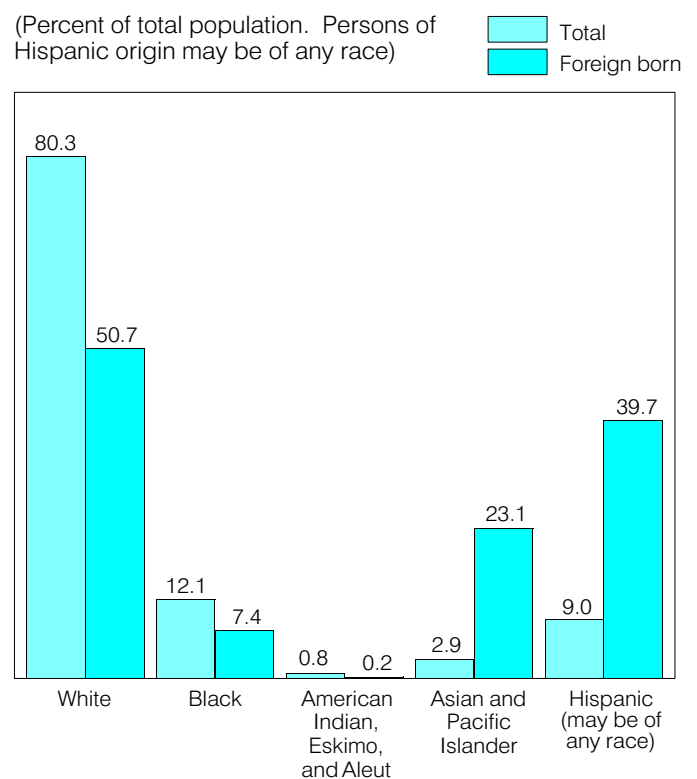
We represent a larger share of some racial and ethnic population groups.

Among the foreign born, about 23 percent were Asian and Pacific Islander, 7 percent were Black, and nearly 40 percent were Hispanic. Among all Americans, 3 percent were Asian and Pacific Islander, 12 percent were Black, and 9 percent were Hispanic in 1990.

Our racial and ethnic composition has shifted during the past 20 years. In 1970, the foreign-born population was 90 percent White. The share of Whites among the foreign-born population decreased to about 50 percent in 1990.

The share of Hispanics among the foreign-born population increased from 15 percent in 1970 to 40 percent in 1990.

Figure 8. Race and Hispanic Origin: 1990



We have about the same proportion of college graduates but a smaller proportion of high school graduates than the native-born population.

About 26 percent of the foreign-born population 25 years old and over had less than a 9th grade education compared with 9 percent of native-born Americans. About 59 percent of the foreign born had at least a high school diploma compared with about 77 percent of their native-born counterparts. About 20 percent of both groups have bachelor's degrees or higher.

About 6 percent of both the native and foreign-born populations have an associate's degree, and 13 percent and 12 percent, respectively, have a bachelor's degree. A larger share of foreign born (9 percent) than native Americans (7 percent) have graduate degrees.

About 43 percent of the foreign born from the Philippines had a college degree or higher compared to only 4 percent from Mexico.

Many of us speak a language other than English in our homes.

About 80 percent of the newcomers speak a language other than English at home compared with about 8 percent of the native-born population.

Over 95 percent of Mexicans, Cubans, or Salvadorans spoke Spanish at home. More than 9 of 10 foreign born from the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, or China spoke an Asian language, and 79 percent of those from Italy and 58 percent of those from Germany spoke a language other than English.

More than half of those who spoke Spanish or an Asian and Pacific Islander language at home did not speak English "very well." In fact, 43 percent of the Mexican and nearly half of the Salvadoran foreign born were "linguistically isolated."

Figure 9. Educational Attainment for Selected Countries of Birth: 1990 (Percent of persons 25 years old and over)

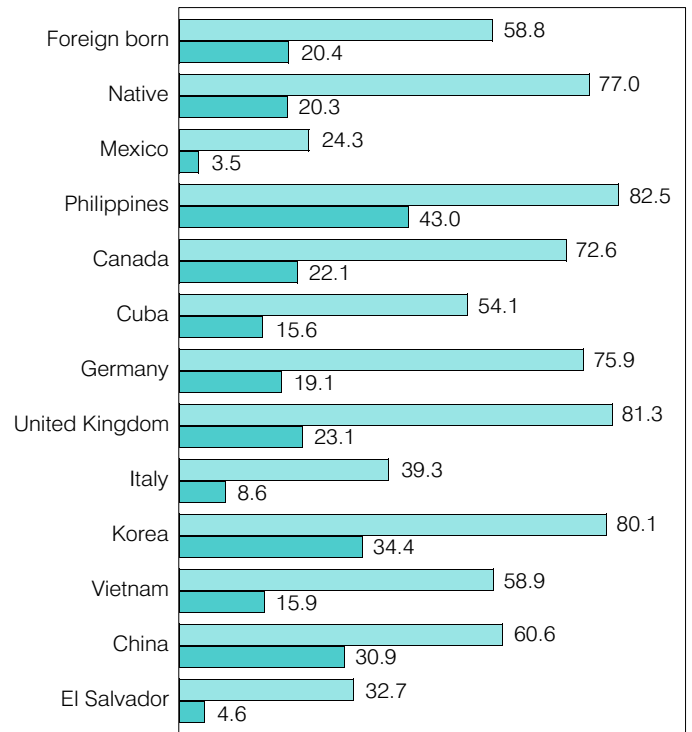
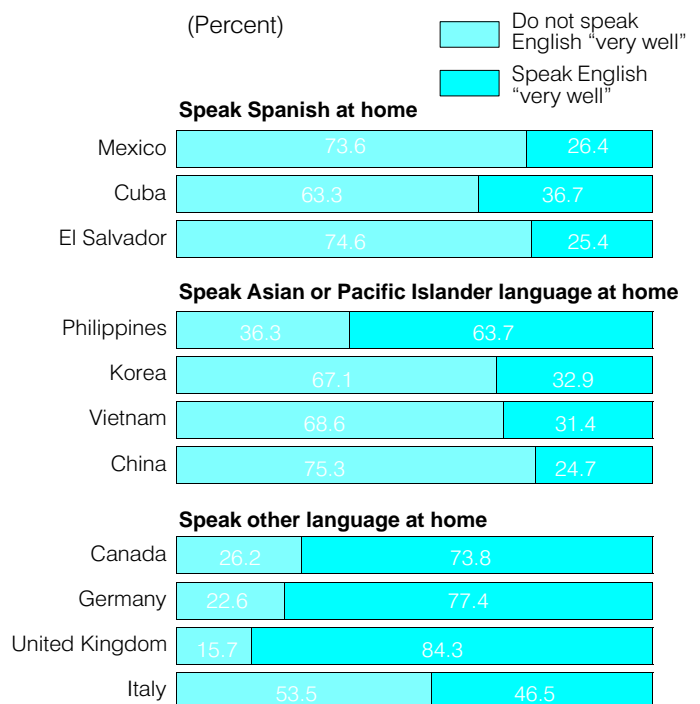


Figure 10. Language Spoken at Home and Ability to Speak English for Selected Countries of Birth: 1990 (Percent)



Like native-born Americans, the occupations of foreign-born males differed from foreign-born females.

A greater proportion of foreign-born males than foreign-born females tend to be in farming, fishing, or forestry occupations. However, foreign-born females are as likely as foreign-born males to be managers and professional workers.

In general, foreign-born males were less likely to be in managerial and technical types of occupations and more likely to be in labor, service, and farming type occupations than native-born males.

About 23 percent of foreign-born females were employed as household and service workers compared with about 16 percent of native-born females.

Nearly 8 percent of the foreign born compared to about 6 percent of the native born were unemployed in 1989. About 19 percent of families with a foreign-born householder had three or more workers compared with about 13 percent of families with a native-born householder.

Our occupations differ depending on our country of birth.

The proportion of employed foreign-born workers 16 years old and over in managerial and professional occupations ranged from 6 percent for immigrants from Mexico to more than 40 percent for immigrants from the United Kingdom.

More than one-third of Canadian, German, United Kingdom, and Chinese foreign born worked as managers. One of every five Italians were engaged as craft and repair workers.

Probably reflecting the older median age of the Canadian, German, United Kingdom, and Italian foreign born, higher proportions of these groups were not in the labor force.

Figure 11. Occupations of Employed Males and Females: 1990

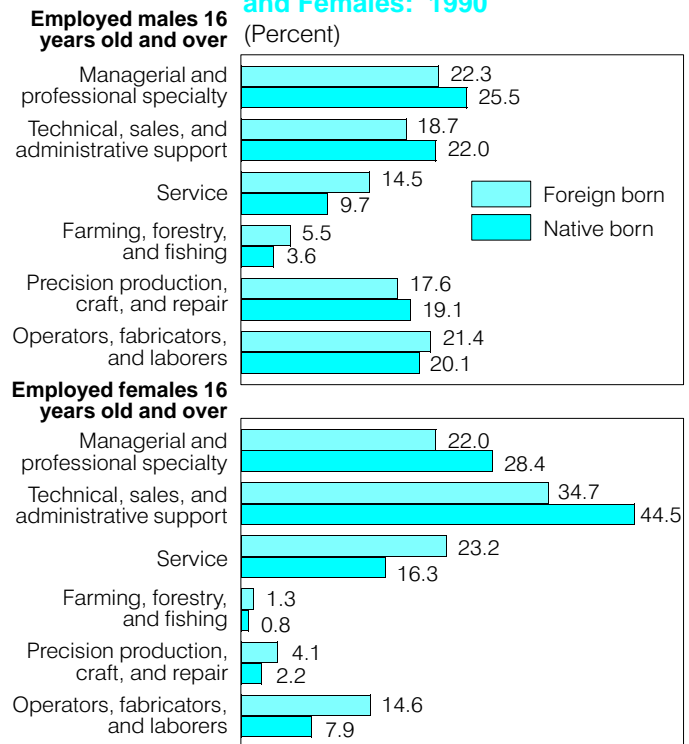
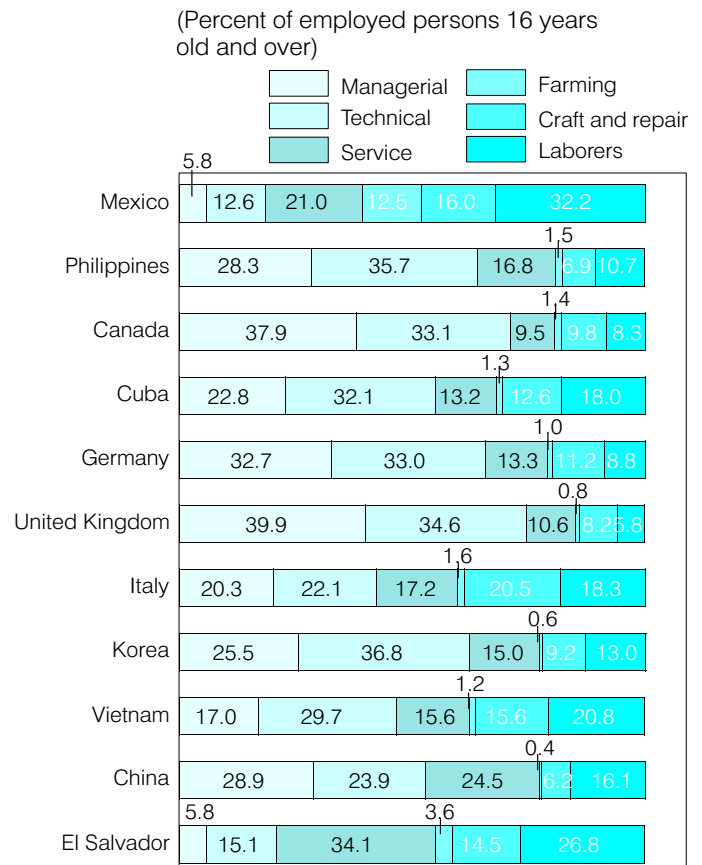


Figure 12. Occupational Distribution for Selected Countries of Birth: 1990



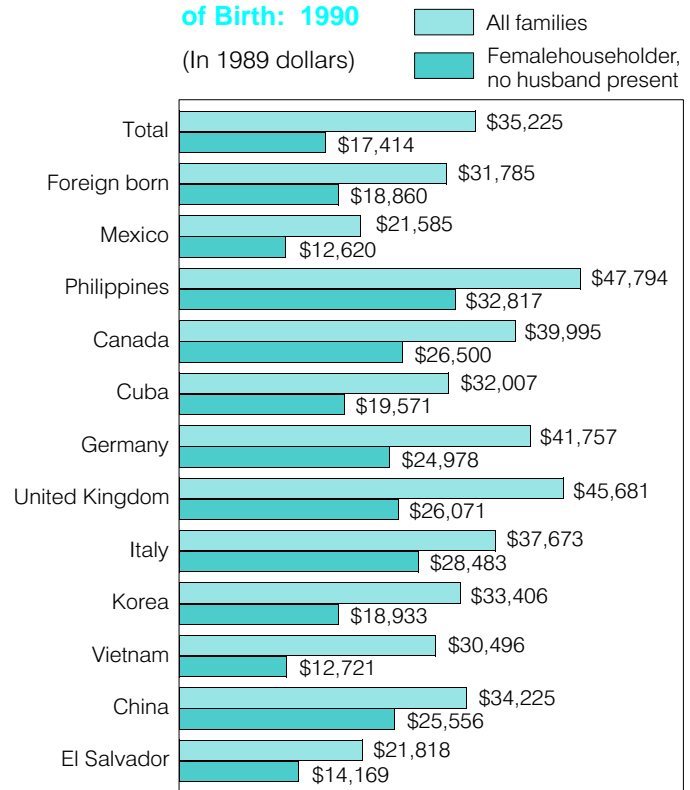
Our incomes vary depending on our country of birth.

Median family income varied widely by country of birth. In 1989, median income of the nearly 6 million families headed by a foreign-born person was \$31,785 compared with \$35,225 for all American families. However, median income for families with a householder born in the Philippines was \$47,794. Medians among householders born in Mexico and El Salvador were the lowest at \$21,585 and \$21,818, respectively.

About 55 percent of the foreign-born population were living in households with incomes over \$25,000, 24 percent had incomes over \$50,000, and 5 percent had incomes over \$100,000.

In general, families maintained by a female with no husband present had lower median incomes than all families. However, families with a foreign-born female householder had a slightly higher median income than for all families, \$18,860 versus \$17,414.

Figure 13.
Median Family Income for Selected Countries of Birth: 1990



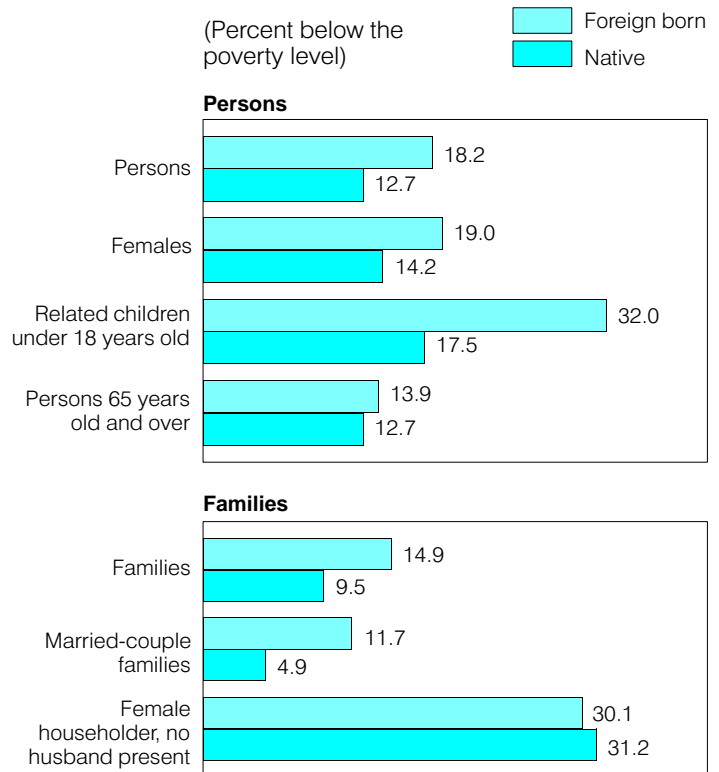
More of us fall below the poverty level than the total population.

Children of the foreign born were about twice as likely to be living in poverty than all children. Among both foreign born and the remainder of the population, children were more likely to be living in poverty than adults.

About one-third of the population 65 years old and over born in Cuba, Germany, or the United Kingdom were living below the poverty level. Twenty-five percent of the Canadian elderly and 56 percent of the Italian elderly were living in poverty.

Slightly smaller proportions of households maintained by a foreign-born female with no husband present were living in poverty than households maintained by a native-born counterpart.

Figure 14.
Poverty Rates for Persons and Families: 1990



Information in this report is based on the 1990 Census of Population and Housing. Estimated population and housing unit totals based on tabulations from only the sample tabulations may differ from the official 100-percent counts. Such differences result, in part, from a sample of households rather than all households. Differences also can occur because of the interview situation and the processing rules differing between the 100-percent and sample tabulations. These types of differences are referred to as nonsampling errors.

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We, the American Blacks
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We, the First Americans
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We, the American Women
We, the American Elderly
We, the American Children
We, the Americans: Our Education
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