



# BECOMING AMERICAN



## BEYOND THE MELTING POT



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# About This Issue



The United States is often referred to as the “Great Melting Pot,” a metaphor that connotes the blending of many cultures, languages and religions to form a single national identity. But this metaphor fails to capture the slow, complex and frequently turbulent process by which immigrants of diverse backgrounds and beliefs join U.S. society, even as they transform it.

Debate — even rancor — over immigration is neither new nor uncommon in U.S. history. Immigration is both an important part of our national identity and a source of social and political tension. Today, as during earlier periods of mass immigration to the United States, integrating newcomers into the American mainstream is a dynamic process that requires adaptation and change not only on the part of immigrants, but by receiving communities, public institutions and private entities.

Since their earliest days, cities like Los Angeles, New York and Chicago have received — indeed, have been built by — large influxes of immigrants. In recent years, thousands of smaller U.S. towns and cities have begun to experience the cultural transformation that comes with welcoming sizable proportions of immigrants into their populations. From the South to the Midwest and the West Coast, growing numbers of immigrants are settling in areas populated mostly by the descendants of 19th- and early 20th-century European immigrants, creating challenges and opportunities for newcomers and established residents alike. This issue of *eJournal USA* examines how long-time residents and newcomers are learning to understand one another and live peaceably together in three U.S. communities: Marshalltown, Iowa; Beaverton, Oregon; and Louisville, Kentucky.

— *The Editors*



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A new citizen displays his certificate of U.S. citizenship. Despite occasional immigration-related social and political tensions, immigrants have always eventually been integrated into U.S. society and institutions.



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Credit: Patricia Haller, Downtown Detroit Partnership

Many European immigrants settled in U.S. cities. Their legacy includes ethnic neighborhoods like Greektown in downtown Detroit, Michigan.

# A Permanently Unfinished Country

Reed Ueda



© Minnesota Historical Society/CORBIS

Dutch immigrants pose alongside a train taking them to Minnesota. Immigrants from northern Europe settled in the Midwest and developed the region's agricultural economy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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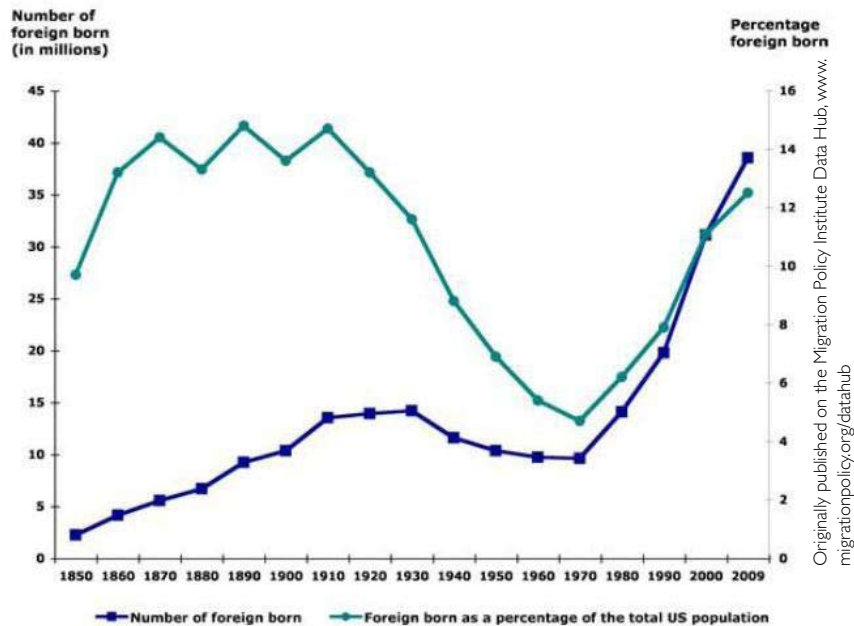
The United States has been called “a permanently unfinished country,” because it has been continuously built and rebuilt by immigrants. Indeed, it has been the world’s leading destination country for immigrants from the 19th century to the present. Newcomers pose a recurrent challenge fundamental to American life: How can communities of immigrants — different from natives and from each other — learn to act collaboratively under conditions of openness, change and choice?

U.S. legislators and policymakers have promulgated

laws and institutional reforms to help meet this challenge by enlarging immigrants’ opportunities for education and social mobility. Leaders have also promoted a pluralistic form of democracy that includes newcomers in voluntary activity and civil association. Immigration has sparked social and cultural change that has resulted in immigrants and native-born citizens partnering to create a shared collective and institutional life, both as a national community and as a constellation of local communities marked by differences in class, race, religion and culture.

In the 1840s, an average of 170,000 immigrants arrived each year on U.S. shores and, by 1850, 10 percent of the country’s total population of 23,000,000 was foreign born. From the 1840s to the Civil War, Irish Catholic immigrants fleeing from famine spurred the growth of cities and provided the labor for canal

## Foreign-Born Population and Foreign Born as Percentage of the Total US Population, 1850 to 2009



Originally published on the Migration Policy Institute Data Hub, [www.migrationpolicy.org/datahub](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/datahub)

building and railroad construction. Germans, Dutch and Scandinavians moved into the upper Midwest where their family farms developed the region's agricultural economy. They often established rural communities that replicated the villages of Norway, Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands. Emigration from southeastern China also increased during this period. Farmers and laborers whose families had lived for generations in the vicinity of Hong Kong and its hinterland began to immigrate to the United States seeking improved living conditions and opportunities.

In the decades after the Civil War, the immigrant flow reached new peaks. By the 1880s, more than 500,000 immigrants entered the country each year. The majority of these newcomers continued to come from Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. Britain and Canada also supplied many newcomers. In the 1890s, the patterns of European immigration began to shift from northern and western Europe to southern and eastern Europe, bringing Italians, Greeks, Slavs and Jews from eastern Europe and Russia, who were labeled as "new immigrants" by newspapers of the day. The number of

immigrants arriving each year rose to just under one million. Fearing the recomposition of the American populace by immigration, some opinion makers and leaders called for the exclusion of immigrants from Asia and the introduction of a quota system based on national origin to reduce the number of immigrants from Europe, especially from countries in southern and eastern Europe. In 1921 and 1924, Congress followed suit and passed new legislation establishing restrictive quotas and exclusions.

From 1930 to 1960, immigration played a minor role in American life. The quota system greatly limited the flow of legally admissible foreign-born persons. In addition, the high unemployment levels of the Great Depression created an enormous economic disincentive for immigrating to the United States, and World War II hindered voluntary migration. After

the war ended, the U.S. admitted some refugees, but the quota system limited immigration. {For more information on refugees, see eJournal USA, *Refugees Building New Lives in the United States* <http://www.america.gov/refugees.html>}

A turning point occurred in 1965 with the adoption of the Hart-Celler Immigration Act. This law abolished exclusions and restrictions on immigration based on race and national origins and established a new immigration framework prioritizing family reunification and occupational preferences. This opened the U.S. to people from all parts of the world and generated a large influx both of highly educated and less well-educated immigrants. The number arriving each year began to equal and exceed the annual immigration rates of the early twentieth century. Most importantly, the national origins of immigrants shifted from Europe to Latin America and Asia. By 2000, more than half of all U.S. immigrants came from Latin America and over a quarter came from Asia, in contrast to a century earlier when nearly nine out of ten immigrants came from Europe.

From the 1970s to the start of the twenty-first century — an era of increasing globalization — immigrants





© Richard H. Cohen/Corbis

Chinese dragon dancers perform along Hester Street during New York City's Chinatown Lunar New Year. Hester Street, once the heart of a thriving Eastern European Jewish neighborhood is now home to many Chinese immigrants.

continued to select the United States as their preferred destination. More than ever before, the U.S. populace was heterogeneous, and the United States' reputation as a land of opportunity and a society open to ethnic and cultural pluralism continued to attract newcomers. Just as the national foods, speech, music, dress and behaviors of Italians, Germans, Jews and Irish had transformed U.S. communities during the Industrial Revolution, the cultures brought by Mexican, Brazilian, Korean, Filipino, Arab and Caribbean immigrants reshaped cultural and consumer behavior in the post-industrial era.

By the late twentieth century, the descendants of the early twentieth century "new immigrants" from southern and eastern Europe — and the first Asian, Hispanic, and Caribbean immigrants from that era — were fully integrated into U.S. society. Slavic, Jewish and Mediterranean immigrants of the early twentieth century had gained a central place in the regional culture of the industrial north, while Mexicans in the southwest, and Chinese, Japanese, Koreans and Filipinos of the Pacific coast and Hawaii profoundly influenced these regions.

Moreover, as residential and social mobility increased among the descendants of these immigrants, ethnicity became less significant in their occupational, educational, housing, and even marriage choices.

The United States successfully maintained national cohesion while absorbing the enormous influx of immigrants of the early twentieth century. Recently, some scholars and commentators have wondered whether this pattern will continue as the nation integrates arrivals from Latin America, Asia, Africa, Europe and the Middle East. Some public leaders and commentators indicate that continued popular support for immigration depends on the long-term progress and integration of all immigrant groups. History shows that successive waves of U.S. immigrants have displayed remarkable creativity and flexibility in adapting to the American pluralistic culture, even as they helped to transform it. ■

*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*



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Crowds still flock to the annual San Gennaro Festival, first celebrated in 1926 by Italian immigrants who had settled on New York's Lower East Side, a neighborhood that has welcomed successive waves of immigrants since the 19th century.

# Immigration As a Two-Way Street: Beyond the Melting Pot

Mark A. Grey



© Paul Chinn/San Francisco Chronicle/Corbis

Pei Gei Xie (front) and other students in a citizenship class recite the Pledge of Allegiance at a community college in San Francisco's Chinatown. Adjusting to new lives in the United States can be challenging for immigrants as they try to learn English, understand American customs and cultural practices and find employment.

*Mark Grey is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Northern Iowa and Director of the Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration. He is also lead author of Postville USA: Surviving Diversity in Small-Town America.*

Millions of immigrants begin their new American lives in cities. Since the 19th century, immigrants have propelled the rapid growth both of American coastal cities like Boston, New York and San Francisco, and their interior counterparts,

including Chicago, Cleveland, and Kansas City. For most immigrants, settling in large cities allows them to build enclaves with fellow newcomers who speak the same language, enjoy similar customs and practice the same religion. These enclaves have often been located near jobs that attracted immigrants. For example, large neighborhoods of Poles, Czechs and other Eastern Europeans grew around the great meat packing factories of Chicago and Kansas City. The urban nature of American immigration is still felt in many cities where one can visit legacy ethnic neighborhoods with names like "Chinatown" or "Little Italy."



Signs written in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Chinese welcome voters to the Office of the Registrar of Voters in California's Santa Clara County. Nora Sy (background, center) and A.J. Castillo proofread candidates' statements in the Filipino dialect of Tagalog. According to recent census data, an estimated 50% of Santa Clara's population speaks a language other than English at home.

© AP Images

Although immigrants by the thousands still settle in large cities like Los Angeles, a growing number of immigrants instead choose smaller U.S. cities, suburbs and rural communities. In general, these new settlement patterns reflect the availability of jobs, but they also reflect the availability of affordable housing and good schools. Growing immigrant populations are often found where older Americans are retiring from the workforce and younger ones are departing, often for large coastal cities.

Immigration to smaller U.S. cities and rural areas is bringing new population and economic and cultural renewal to many regions of the country. But it also brings challenges for both the newcomers and established residents. One metaphor that is often used to describe the United States is the "Great Melting Pot." This refers to the fusing of many different cultures, languages and religions to form one national identity. However, the "melting pot" notion is too simple. The process of transforming a

country of many immigrants into a nation has often been slow and complex. Indeed, many American immigrant communities worked, lived and married exclusively among their fellow immigrants for decades. Most immigrant enclaves have eventually faded as distinguishable ethnic neighborhoods only through changes in the economy, increased usage of the English language and a growing number of marriages outside the ethnic enclave.

When many people talk about immigration they use the word "assimilation" to describe how previous generations of newcomers became part of American society and thus played their part in the "melting pot." But the term "assimilation" often misleads. First, it assumes that many of our immigrant ancestors quickly and willingly changed their cultural practices and spoke English. In fact, history shows us that many immigrant communities remained distinct for generations. Secondly, insisting on the assimilation of newcomers assumes that

their integration is a one-way process in which only the newcomers make changes in lifestyle, cultural practices and language. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Integration of immigrants to the United States is a vibrant, dynamic process that involves not just immigrants but receiving communities, public institutions and private organizations. It is true that newcomers must learn English, come to understand American lifestyles and cultural practices and find jobs. These adjustments can be very difficult and can take several years, if not decades, particularly for those who lack job skills readily transferred to U.S. workplaces and for whom learning English is difficult. These newcomers often find themselves with less desirable jobs earning relatively low wages.

Established residents and their institutions also are responsible for integrating immigrants. “Accommodation” is probably the best way to describe the give-and-take. Schools, for example, provide interpreters to communicate with newcomer parents. Hospitals and clinics provide signage that reflects lower literacy rates among newcomers, as well as interpretation services. Law enforcement officials

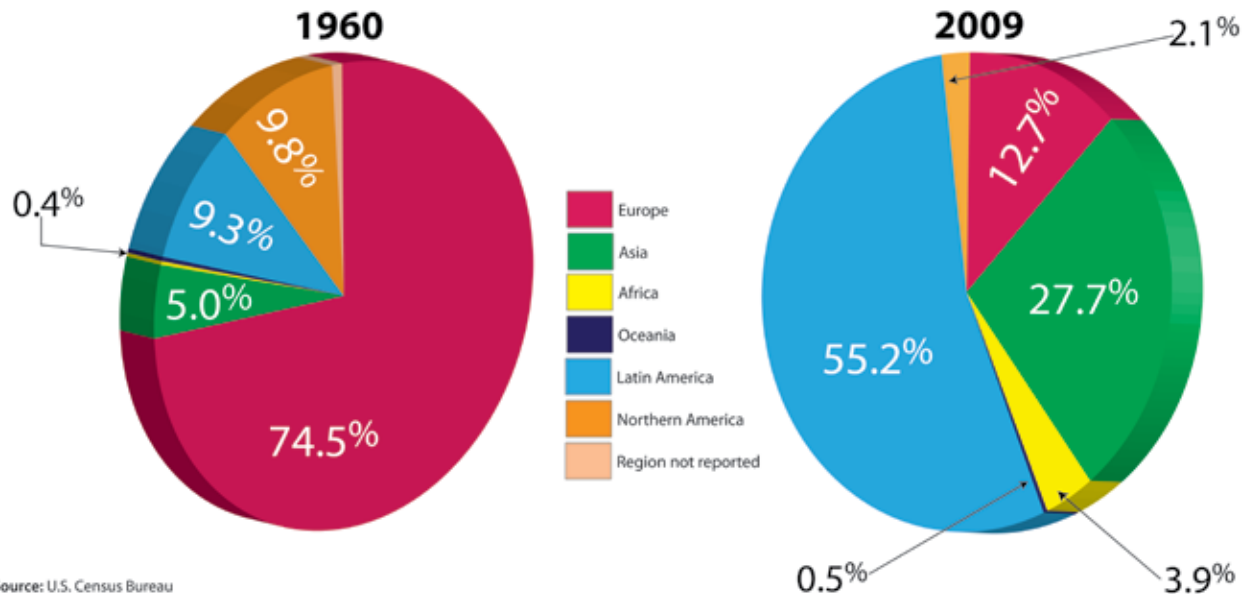
learn about newcomer populations through cultural competency training. Individual citizens also help by tutoring newcomers in English and orienting them to local resources. A growing number of U.S. workplaces make reasonable accommodations for newcomers’ religious needs, as long as safety is not compromised. One example is allowing Muslim women to wear head coverings in factories, as long as the head coverings fit underneath her hardhat and other protective gear.

Recognizing and managing expectations on the part of newcomers and citizens alike also are important. Immigrants soon learn the streets are not “paved with gold.” Learning to live and work in the United States requires a great deal of persistence. Patience is also required of American citizens. Immigrant newcomers cannot be expected to learn English overnight or “assimilate” and adopt American customs and lifestyles in a few short weeks. Immigrants are certainly transformed by settling in the United States, but their new communities are transformed as well.



Samiul Haque Noor, originally from Pakistan, was named New York City’s best food vendor in 2006. The popularity of Noor’s vendor cart, “Sammy’s Halal,” exemplifies how immigrants continue to enrich — and transform — American cuisine and culture.

## Where Were They Born? Regional Origins of U.S. Foreign-Born Population



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

**In 1960, nearly three-in-four foreign-born Americans were born in Europe. Today more than four-in-five were born either in Latin America or Asia.**

Debates and social tension about immigration in the United States often reflect unrealistic expectations that newcomers will swiftly learn and speak English. These expectations often underestimate how long it takes to learn English, especially for adults. Anti-immigrant sentiment is often expressed with complaints about immigrants who “refuse to learn English” or about bilingual signs in stores and hospitals. These frustrations sometimes lead to adoption of laws making English the official language of some communities and states. This debate has come and gone for generations.

More recent controversies focus on the presence of illegal immigrants. Estimates vary, but the general consensus is that about 10 million immigrants living in the United States today either entered the country illegally or overstayed the ascribed length of time for their visit. Anger over illegal immigration is often associated with U.S. citizens’ perceptions that immigrants compete for jobs needed by Americans, contribute to rising crime rates and use limited public services like schools and hospitals.

Research on these topics is often inconclusive, but when many Americans believe illegal immigrants are responsible for declines in their quality of life or that immigrants take more than they give, the frustration expresses itself in a variety of ways. Many Americans are frustrated that Congress has not passed comprehensive immigration laws to address illegal immigration.

Absent congressional action to address illegal immigration, a growing number of states and cities are enacting their own laws. For example, some communities have made it illegal to rent houses and apartments to immigrants who lack formal proof of their legal immigration status. Some states have made it impossible for an illegal immigrant to get a driver’s license. Some places even ban publicly funded health care for illegal immigrants and their children except in emergencies.

Recently, the state of Arizona required law enforcement officials to verify the immigration status of anyone they suspect might be in the United States illegally. A U.S. Federal court struck down one provision of this



Randy West

A native of Mexico walks in the Parade of Cultures in Louisville, Kentucky.

law. Litigation continues, as does the national debate about immigration.

Despite these social and political tensions, debate — and rancor — about immigration are neither new nor impossible to work through. Similar debates have come and gone throughout U.S. history. They usually reflected broad changes in the economy and job markets. At times descendants of earlier immigrants sought to restrict immigration of new populations. For example, laws that restricted immigration from China and Ireland were often instigated at the federal and local level by “natives” who themselves were the children or grandchildren of

immigrants. This so-called “nativist” sentiment has crested several times in U.S. history, and yet integration prevailed in the end — although the process was often challenging for newcomers and natives alike.

Over the course of U.S. history, immigrants’ countries of origin have changed along with the languages, customs and cultures they bring. Today’s immigrants face the same challenges as earlier newcomers in adapting to U.S. society and culture. And some U.S. citizens evince the same negative attitudes toward immigrants that their own immigrant ancestors encountered. Yet despite the reciprocal challenges of adaptation and integration, immigrants continue to seek better lives in the United States, and U.S. society continues to be transformed. ■

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By 2000, more than half of all U.S. immigrants came from Latin America and Asia. Shoshana and Renan Cruz began publishing a bilingual newspaper in St. Cloud, Minnesota, in 2005 to help bridge the gap between the state’s Spanish- and English-speaking populations.



Tammy R. Lawson

The survival of Marshalltown's downtown district comes in large part thanks to immigrant-owned and operated businesses.



# Revitalizing a Midwestern City: Immigrants in Marshalltown

Anne C. Woodrick



Tammy R. Lawson

A window announcing the opening of a small grocery store on Main Street is one example of how immigrants contribute to the economic vitality of Marshalltown, Iowa.

*Dr. Anne C. Woodrick is Professor of Anthropology at the University of Northern Iowa. She received her BA in Anthropology from the University of Michigan and her doctorate from the University of California, San Diego. Her research interests include the role of religion in community development and mobilization among Latino immigrants in the United States.*

In the late 1980s, new jobs in an expanding meat processing industry attracted an immigrant Hispanic workforce to the Midwest and significantly changed the ethnic make-up and culture of many small agricultural towns. One of these is Marshalltown, Iowa, where an influx of Hispanic workers and their families has challenged long-time residents and newcomers to find ways to communicate, understand each other and work together.

Marshalltown, which has a population of 25,814, is an agricultural and industrial town located in central Iowa. Like the rest of Iowa, Marshalltown historically has been very homogeneous. The town was settled in 1853 by primarily German, Irish and Norwegian settlers. Twenty years ago only 5% of the population was non-European; the percentage included refugee families from Southeast Asia, Native Americans, and African Americans. None of these groups ever developed a significant population base in Marshalltown. However, the 292 Hispanic residents, or 0.76% of the population living in Marshall County in 1990, were the foundation for a rapid ethnic diversification of the town and its environs.

The expansion of the Swift & Company meatpacking facility in Marshalltown in the late 1980s attracted some Hispanics who left their homes in California's central valley seeking new labor opportunities, a more tranquil

lifestyle and a lower cost of living. Within a decade more than 3,700 Hispanics had settled in Marshall County [9.6% of the total population] and by 2009 just over 6,100 Hispanics resided there [15.8% of total population]. One significant reason for the rapid increase was the networking that developed between the Swift Plant and the residents of Villachuato, Michoacán, Mexico. By 1998 just under a third of the entire production line at Swift's were Villachuantans. Although the resident Hispanic population represents many Latin American countries and most Mexican states, a high percentage of the immigrants are from Michoacán, Jalisco and Guanajuato, Mexico.

Today the Hispanic presence in Marshalltown is obvious. Spanish signs are everywhere. One elementary school has a bilingual curriculum. Several churches, Catholic and Protestant, offer religious and non-religious programming for Hispanics. Large and well-attended Mexican fiestas for weddings and quinceañeros celebrations occur frequently. Mexican shops of all varieties are located in the town's center. New Hispanic owned businesses have been established. Every social institution in town has been influenced by the newcomers.

### **TENSIONS BETWEEN NATIVES AND NEWCOMERS**

Tensions between newcomers and long-time residents developed around four broad issues. Logistical issues centered on how local institutions and businesses could accommodate and serve the new, fast growing newcomer population. Initial outreach and service encountered another major issue — the socio-cultural gap between the townspeople and residents. Communication was difficult if not impossible. Language and cultural barriers could not just be solved by hiring translators, who initially were not even always fluent in both languages. In many cases, townspeople had unrealistic expectations, thinking that the newcomers would learn English overnight and behave like Iowa natives immediately. Hispanic immigrants tried to negotiate their new environment, but they became discouraged when trying to communicate and misunderstandings were common. Even when Hispanics shared a common social practice, like attending church, different cultural behaviors created problems.

Legal/political issues also created tensions. The most significant issue has been the undocumented status of many Hispanics. Some Anglo Marshalltown residents lumped Hispanic newcomers into one category: Mexican "illegal alien."

A fourth source of tension has been discrimination, based largely on negative stereotypes. In Marshalltown tensions were exacerbated by the rapid increase in the immigrant population and through observations and printed materials that easily misconstrued or misinformed. The majority of comments about Hispanics published anonymously in the local newspaper's "Say It As It Is" column conveyed that Hispanics were ruining Marshalltown.

### **RELIGIOUS AND CIVIC EFFORTS**

In 1989, Hispanic immigrants in Marshalltown were isolated and ignored newcomers. This slowly began to change. Initially, one person reached out to the Hispanic newcomers. He could not solve all the problems but he did make a difference and set into motion programs that later became significant in transforming Marshalltown into a culturally diverse and successful community. In December 1990, a Hispanic community identity developed through the organization of a religious congregation by a Lutheran priest, John Allen, who encouraged dialogue between himself and the newcomers. Allen educated townspeople about the immigrants and advocated for their needs. He organized a civic task force (later the Diversity Committee), comprised of key town officials and leaders, to coordinate accommodation efforts. Ministry outreach programs provided English as a Second Language classes, created a food bank and provided housing needs. Allen clearly understood the need to integrate the new immigrants into the wider Marshalltown society.

At the same time the nearby Catholic church had hired Father Ouderkirk to oversee a new Hispanic ministry. Allen and Ouderkirk became friends and wrote a special liturgy for Hispanic congregants. This strengthened the Hispanic community identity. Lay Hispanic leadership opportunities expanded within the Church. The Catholic Hispanic ministers acted as a protective shield for the immigrant community. They helped educate parishioners and community members to dispel stereotypical ideas and misinformation. They helped Hispanics with legal paperwork. The Diversity Committee continued addressing logistical issues. Hispanics were invited to join the diversity committee, but rarely attended.

## CHALLENGES AND PROGRESS

In 1996, INS enforcement officials came to the meat packing plant and arrested 99 Hispanic workers who did not have legal documentation to work in the United States. The “illegal aliens” were deported, media coverage about illegal Mexicans increased, and the earlier efforts at integration were eroded.

Negative press about illegal Hispanic immigration brought up all the old feelings and negative stereotypes.

One beneficial outcome of the raid was an open public forum sponsored by the Diversity Committee. Hispanics and townspeople met and discussed the raid and its consequences. The following year the Diversity Committee advertised the annual 4th of July celebration as Heritage Day and recognized all the town’s ethnic groups. The practice continued in subsequent years.

In 1998, another change in the Catholic Hispanic ministry served as a catalyst for the Hispanic community. In church study groups, Hispanics talked about



Tammy R. Lawson

A decade ago, students at the local community college painted a mural downtown along Center Street that celebrates Marshalltown’s diversity.



Tammy R. Lawson

Marshalltown Heritage Day festival on the Fourth of July is an annual event that celebrates the town's diversity with music, food and a ceremony recognizing those who have recently become U.S. citizens.

experiences with exploitation and discrimination. Sister Karen Thein encouraged them to bring the issues forward to the city council. They did, and she interpreted for them. Hispanics then organized their first public protest on Palm Sunday. They emphasized how Hispanic values about family, work and religion were no different than Anglo values.

### **COMMUNITIES COME TOGETHER**

In 2001, a group of university professors organized the first of several learning trips, bringing key Marshalltown leaders to Villachuato, Mexico. There the leaders came to understand the historical and economic context of immigration and the day-to-day realities of families torn apart by migration. They returned home with radically changed perceptions and soon launched a number of innovative outreach programs, among them an elementary bilingual curriculum and a Spanish language video explaining Marshalltown laws. City leaders also recognized the importance of Hispanics for local economic growth and development. These initiatives increased social engagement and understanding.

In 2004, the Diversity Committee disbanded because Hispanic leaders were becoming active participants in

the Marshalltown community. Hispanic leaders, several of whom were among the first newcomers, identified issues that affected their well-being and sought solutions. Hispanic youth have learned from their parents' experiences, and actively engage in public forums and advocate for their rights.

The tensions in Marshalltown have not completely disappeared. Progress has been followed by setbacks. Tensions between established residents and newcomers ebb and flow, and never completely disappear. But Marshalltown has made significant progress in integrating Hispanic immigrants through the efforts of empathic, dedicated, visionary people who promoted but did not mandate communication and engagement between the newcomers and the townspeople. Innovative approaches to old problems stimulated new ideas and directions. Anglo and Hispanic leaders encouraged routine opportunities for open dialogue, experiential learning for city leaders and civic responsibility. As a result, Marshalltown exemplifies how recent immigrants can become better integrated into civil discourse and action. ■

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Tammy R. Lawson

The Marshalltown Public Library hosts an annual Día de los Niños/Día de los Libros Fiesta, a youth day celebration at which volunteers help Spanish-speaking families sign up for library cards. Today Hispanics constitute about 20 percent of Marshalltown's total population of 25,000.



Alan Borrud

Shariar Ahmed talks to visitors at the Bilal Mosque during a 9/11 commemorative open house welcoming more than 300 non-Muslims. Hailing from more than 20 countries, Bilal mosque attendants are unified by the English language, Ahmed says.

# Beaverton: Oregon's Most Diverse City

Amy Martinez Starke



Alan Borrud

Shivi Vanka conducts an Indian classical dance class. A Beaverton resident since 1986, Vanka originally hails from South India.

*Freelance writer Amy Starke was a reporter for the Oregonian for 18 years. She has lived in Beaverton for 19 years and can't decide which is her favorite: Mexican, Korean or Indian food.*

Stroll through the farmers' market and you will hear a plethora of languages and see a rainbow of faces. Drive down Canyon Road and stop for halal meat or Filipino pork belly at adjacent markets. Along the highway, browse the aisles of a giant Asian supermarket stocking fresh napa cabbage and mizuna or fresh kimchi. Head toward downtown and you'll see loncheras — taco trucks — on street corners and hear Spanish banda music. On the city's northern edge, you can sample Indian chaat.

Welcome to Beaverton, a Portland suburb that is home to Oregon's fastest growing immigrant population.

Once a rural community, Beaverton, population 87,000, is now the sixth largest city in Oregon — with immigration rates higher than those of Portland, Oregon's largest city.

## BEAVERTON'S TRANSFORMATION

Best known as the world headquarters for athletic shoe company Nike, Beaverton has changed dramatically over the past 40 years. Settled by immigrants from northern Europe in the 19th century, today it is a place where 80 languages from Albanian to Urdu are spoken in the public schools and about 30 percent of students speak a language besides English, according to English as a Second Language program director Wei Wei Lou.

Beaverton's wave of new residents began arriving in the 1960s, with Koreans and Tejanos (Texans of Mexican origin), who were the first permanent Latinos. In 1960,



Alan Borrud

Gobugi Asian Market, a family-owned business, is one of several markets catering to Beaverton's large Korean population.

Beaverton's population of Latinos and Asians was less than 0.3 percent. By 2000, Beaverton had proportionately more Asian and Hispanic residents than the Portland Metro area. Today, Asians comprise 10 percent and Hispanics 11 percent of Beaverton's population.

Mayor Denny Doyle says that many in Beaverton view the immigrants who are rapidly reshaping Beaverton as a source of enrichment. "Citizens here especially in the arts and culture community think it's fantastic that we have all these different possibilities here," he says.

### IMMIGRANTS IN BEAVERTON

Sig Unander, 58, who grew up in Beaverton and has worked for years in the Spanish-language media in the Portland metro area, notes that most Mexican newcomers to Beaverton seem to have family in the town. "There is a chain migration link with large extended families," he says. "They go where they have some connection."

Gloria Vargas, 50, a Salvadoran immigrant, owns a popular small restaurant, Gloria's Secret Café, in downtown Beaverton. "I love Beaverton," she says. "I feel like I belong here." Her mother moved her to Los Angeles as a teenager in 1973, and she moved to Oregon in 1979. She landed a coveted vendor spot in the Beaverton Farmers Market in 1999. Now, in addition to running her restaurant, she has one of the most popular stalls there, selling up to 200 Salvadoran tamales — wrapped in banana leaves rather than corn husks — each Saturday. "Once they buy my food, they always come back for more," she says.

"It's pretty relaxed here," says Taj Suleyman, 28, born and raised in Lebanon, and recently transplanted to Beaverton to start a job working with immigrants from many countries. Half Middle-Eastern and half-African, Suleyman says he was attracted to Beaverton specifically because of its diversity. He serves on a Diversity Task Force set up by Mayor Doyle.

Mohammed Haque, originally from Bangladesh, finds Beaverton very welcoming. His daughter, he boasts, was even elected her high school's homecoming queen.

South Asians such as Haque have transformed Bethany, a neighborhood north of Beaverton. It is dense with immigrants from Gujarat, a state in India and primary source for the first wave of Beaverton's South Asian immigrants.

The first wave of South Asian immigrants to Beaverton, mostly Gujaratis from India, arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, when the motel and hotel industry was booming. Many bought small hotels and originally settled in Portland, and then relocated to Beaverton for better schools and bigger yards. The second wave of South Asians arrived during the high-tech boom of the 1980s, when the software industry, and Intel and Tektronix, really took off.

Many of Beaverton's Asians converge at Uwajimaya, a 30,000-square-foot supermarket near central Beaverton. Bernie Capell, former special events coordinator at Uwajimaya, says that many come to shop for fresh produce every day. But the biggest group of shoppers at Uwajimaya, she adds, are Caucasians.

Beaverton's Asian population boasts a sizable number of Koreans, who began to arrive in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

According to Ted Chung, a native of Korea and Beaverton resident since 1978, three things stand out about his fellow Korean immigrants. Upon moving to Beaverton, they join a Christian church — often Methodist or Presbyterian — as a gathering place; they push their children to excel in school; and they shun the spotlight. Chung says he and his fellow Korean émigrés work hard as small businessmen — owning grocery stores, dry cleaners, laundromats, delis and sushi shops — and are frugal so they can send their children to a leading university.

Most recently, immigrants from Central and South America, as well as refugees from Iraq and Somalia have joined the Beaverton community.





Alan Borrud

Salsa Market is popular with both Hispanic and Anglo cooks seeking Mexican ingredients. The owner, Enrique Aguilar, originally from Mexico, moved to Beaverton in 2008.

## MANY HELPING HANDS

Many Beaverton organizations help immigrants.

The Beaverton Resource Center helps all immigrants with health and literacy services. The Somali Family Education Center helps Somalis and other African refugees to get settled. And one Beaverton elementary school even came up with the idea of a “sew in” — parents of students sewing together — to welcome Somali Bantu parents and bridge major cultural differences.

Historically white churches, such as Beaverton First United Methodist Church, offer immigration ministries. And Beaverton churches of all denominations host Korean- or Spanish-language services.

Mayor Denny Doyle wants refugee and immigrant leaders to participate in the town’s decision-making. He set up a Diversity Task Force whose mission is “to build inclusive and equitable communities in the City of Beaverton.” The task force is working to create a multicultural community center for Beavertonians of all backgrounds.

The resources and warm welcome that Beaverton gives immigrants are reciprocated in the affection that many express for their new home.

Kaltun Caynan, 40, a Somali woman who came to Beaverton in 2001 fleeing civil war, is an outreach coordinator for the Somali Family Education Center. “I like it so much,” she said, cheerfully. “Nobody discriminate[s] against me, everybody smiling at me.”

Shahriar Ahmad, an engineer from Bangladesh and president of Bilal Mosque, moved to Beaverton in 1985 and cherishes his new country.

“The immigrant community,” he said, “feels a sense of gratitude and appreciation to be away from political oppression, violence, economic difficulties, the harshness of life.”

“We are here, we love this place, I have gotten more from this country than anywhere in the world and there is a distinct bias in my heart for this place.” ■

*The opinions expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. government.*



Alan Borrud

Uwajimaya is a 30,000-square-foot Asian supermarket in Beaverton known for its variety of Asian foods and fresh produce.



Randy West

Tuan Vu, 24, came to the United States from Vietnam when he was eight. Vu studied French and international studies at the University of Louisville and now works for the Crane House, which houses the Vietnam Oral History Project

# Leading New Lives in Louisville, Kentucky

Cary Stemle



Randy West

From left, Layla Lensa, Halima Kelifa and Mako Hussein, all natives of Ethiopia, wave their American flags after 400 immigrants took the oath of American citizenship during Louisville's 2010 WorldFest.

*Cary Stemle is a freelance writer in Louisville, Kentucky. A former editor of LEO Weekly, an alternative newsweekly, and former reporter for Business First of Louisville, his work has also been published by Time.com, Louisville magazine, Business First, and NetWorld Alliance.*

In Louisville, Kentucky, three Ethiopian women — Layla Lensa, Helima Kelifa and Mako Hussein — hold tiny American flags and smile into the bright sunshine. A warm, brisk wind occasionally ripples their headscarves, as they soak in their first moments as American citizens. Alongside 368 others, these women just became official U.S. citizens during a mass naturalization ceremony in Louisville, Kentucky.

The naturalization ceremony is part of “WorldFest,” a two-day international festival celebrating the cultural diversity of Louisville’s residents through food, art, and performance. As the three newly-minted Americans explore the rest of the festival, they encounter Sundar Sridharagopal, an enthusiastic and talkative 36-year-

old working at a booth for the Young Professionals Association of Louisville. Sundar, who works in information technology, came to Louisville in 2001 to pursue a graduate degree in social entrepreneurship at the University of Louisville. The city reminded him of his birthplace, Madurai in southern India, and he “knew right away that this was going to be my home.” Sundar offered the three women some friendly advice: “Don’t expect others to come to you,” he told them. “Go and tell them your story — don’t wait until they ask. If you do that in America, people are always with you.”

## GROWING DIVERSITY

Louisville is the largest city in the state of Kentucky with an estimated population of 722,000. From 1990 to 2004, Louisville’s foreign-born population increased by 388 percent, and foreign-born residents represented 49 percent of Louisville’s population growth during the same period.



Randy West

Jerry Abramson, the mayor of Louisville, poses for a picture with people from Bangladesh before the WorldFest parade begins.

Immigrants to Louisville are more diverse than immigrants nationally. For example, 15 percent of Louisville’s immigrants come from Africa compared with 2 percent nationally; 35 percent come from Asia and the Pacific versus 26 percent nationally; but only 38 percent come from Latin America versus 55 percent nationally. These new arrivals often are well educated: about a third hold a college degree compared with 19 percent of native-born residents.

### JOINING THE MAINSTREAM

Many foreign-born residents describe Louisville as a welcoming place with good social services for immigrants, a friendly populace and a relatively low cost-of-living. But the city has not always been so welcoming. According to University of Louisville historian Thomas Owen, the city’s most active immigration period was from 1840 to 1890 when waves of predominantly Roman Catholic Germans and Irish moved to the city. During an 1855 election, anti-immigrant residents turned on Roman Catholic immigrants during the violent “Bloody Monday” riot.

In sharp contrast to the days of “Bloody Monday,” today’s immigrants to the city find several non-profit organizations dedicated to helping them adjust to life in a new country. Among these are two organizations — Catholic Charities and Kentucky Refugee Ministries — authorized by the U.S. Department of State to assist refugees who have been legally admitted to the United States. Catholic Charities, which is affiliated with the U.S.

Conference of Catholic Bishops, has helped resettle about 11,000 refugees from 30 countries since 1975, spokesman Bart Weigel said. In addition, Catholic Charities has a five-person legal services department that provides free or low-cost legal services to both refugee and non-refugee immigrants; Weigel said that department has assisted about 2,200 to 2,500 foreign-born non-refugees annually since 2005.

Kentucky Refugee Ministries, which is affiliated with the Church World Service and Episcopal Migration Ministries, also helps non-refugee immigrants with legal services, but works primarily with refugees and has resettled more than 8,100 since 1990, providing housing, food, clothing and transportation, case management, English language and employment training. According to grants coordinator John Koehlinger, about 75 percent of employable refugees (not including children, mothers of young children, people with disabilities, for example) are placed in full-time jobs within 150 days of their arrival in Kentucky, although that figure has decreased recently, most likely due to the current economic downturn.

Louisville is also home to Interfaith Paths to Peace, an inter-religious organization that brings together people from different faiths. The Center for Interfaith Relations hosts the Festival of Faiths, a multi-day, annual event that features national and international panelists who discuss commonalities among diverse faiths and strengthening the role of religion in society.

Another faith-based organization, Jewish Family and Career Services, provides substantial career-based services for immigrants and refugees of all faiths. JFCS holds workshops to help participants research and prepare for careers, and its Center for Microenterprise Development has helped foreign-born citizens open about 30 businesses, ranging from trucking to crafts, dining to childcare, home furnishings to interpreting and translation. The non-profit Americana Community Center, which initially gained a foothold by serving the city’s Vietnamese population that began to grow more than three decades ago, also provides a wide spectrum of services to various immigrant groups in Louisville.

Louisville public schools have struggled to keep up with the influx of foreign-born residents. The Urban Institute notes that, as of 2000, students in Louisville’s schools spoke at least 78 languages, and the number studying English as a second language grew by 122 percent — from 900 to 2,000 — from 1997 to 2005. In response, in 2007 the school system started the ESL



Randy West

Grayce Avila and Jose Flores, dressed as Aztec royalty, walk with the Mexican delegation in the WorldFest parade.

Newcomer Academy for students in grades 6-10 who are at beginner levels of English proficiency or in their first year of instruction in a U.S. school.

### FROM MANY PLACES, FOR MANY REASONS

Semsudin Haseljic, a Bosnian Muslim, came to Louisville through Catholic Charities in 1994 after losing his legs to a land mine. Today he works at Kentucky Refugee Ministries as a program manager. He describes Louisville as welcoming — “big enough and small enough for everyone” — and points to clusters of Bosnian-owned businesses, ranging from automotive repair to hair salons. Haseljic also operates a small tax preparation business and volunteers many hours as the de facto head of the Bosniak-American Islamic Center, which provides basic social services and works to preserve culture for the city’s Bosnian population, which he estimates at 4,500 to 5,000. Most of the Bosnians in Louisville are Muslim, he

explains, and like him, also fled the ethnic cleansing there and arrived in Louisville via Catholic Charities. Haseljic notes that Louisville has at least eight mosques, and said incidents of religious intolerance seem rare, a view echoed in a recent story in the *Courier-Journal* detailing the completion of the new Muslim Center of Louisville and the adjacent Islamic School of Louisville. Dr. Ammar Almasalkhi, a board member of the Center and the School, told the newspaper that mosque supporters are on good terms with their neighbors and have “received so many words of encouragement and letters of support from non-Muslim friends,” while Haleb Karimi, a Muslim and board member of a Louisville interfaith organization, said, “Most people here are peaceful. I’m so happy to be part of this community.”

Surekha Kulkarni, who was at the WorldFest selling jewelry, moved with her family from India to Louisville in 1986 so that her son, who has dyslexia, could attend the dePaul School, which serves children with learning disabilities. She is an outspoken champion of Louisville, where she and her husband, Suhas, initially owned and operated a grocery. Her husband also worked in heavy equipment exports before starting his own computer software consulting company. Surekha will soon begin using her paralegal training; she will work with her daughter, an attorney, who has returned to Louisville from Fresno, California to practice immigration law.

Sundar, who advised the Ethiopian women, recently became a “Louisville Connector” in a program sponsored by the Leadership Louisville Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to developing a diverse group of community leaders. Though still working toward citizenship, Sundar has never hesitated to become involved in the community and says he would like to see more immigrants do the same.

“I call it the ‘three Ts’: time, treasure — the tax dollars that they pay — and talent. Citizenship is more than a card. It’s not just voting rights or the ability to own a business. You have to give something back to the community.” ■

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# Additional Resources

## Publications and websites on U.S. Immigration

### Books and Articles

#### **Becoming an American: The Chinese Experience**

The dramatic story of Chinese immigrants' struggle and triumph, progress and setbacks, discrimination and assimilation, taken from personal stories.

<http://www.pbs.org/becomingamerican/index.html>

#### **Chicago, City of the Century: Decades of Immigrants**

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/chicago/feature/sf\\_nations.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/chicago/feature/sf_nations.html)

#### **Destination America**

This resource-rich site includes compelling immigration stories, the history of immigration to the United States, a quiz, and resources.

<http://www.pbs.org/destinationamerica/index.html>

#### **Immigration: Library of Congress**

A presentation of the history of immigration, using primary sources of the Library of Congress.

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/>

#### **Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930**

Selected historical materials from Harvard University's collections document voluntary immigration to the United States.

<http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/>

#### **Immigrant Voices — Primary Sources**

[http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/ethnic\\_am.cfm](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/historyonline/ethnic_am.cfm)

#### **Migration Policy Institute “Data Hub”**

The latest facts, stats, and maps on international migration.

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub>

#### **The New Americans**

Personal stories and cultural riches from the newest wave of immigrants to the United States.

<http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans/index.html>

#### **New York Times, Opinion Coverage of Immigration**

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/opinion/immigration/index.html>

#### **University of Minnesota's Immigration History Resource Center**

The Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota is an international resource on American immigration and ethnic history.

<http://www.ihrc.umn.edu/research/links.php>

#### **Welcome to USA.Gov**

WelcometoUSA.gov is the primary gateway for new immigrants to find basic information on how to settle in the United States.

<http://www.welcometousa.gov/>

#### **Online Readings**

##### **eJournal USA, Immigrants Joining the Mainstream**

<http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa/0208.html>

##### **eJournal USA, Refugees Building New Lives in the United States**

<http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa.html#0710> <http://www.america.gov/publications/ejournalusa.html#0710>

##### **Immigration and America's Black Population**

<http://www.prb.org/pdf07/62.4immigration.pdf>

##### **Immigration to Play Lead Role In Future U.S. Growth**

<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/729/united-states-population-projections>

**President Obama's Speech on Comprehensive Immigration Reform**

<http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/July/20100701152942ihecuor0.3162435.html#ixzz174rCcDjb>

**U.S. Census Bureau. U.S. Foreign-Born Population: Reports**

A listing of all recent Census Bureau reports on the U.S. foreign-born population.

<http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemoforeign/reports.html>

**What Immigrants Say About the United States, eJournal USA, Snapshot USA**

<http://www.america.gov/st/diversity-english/2008/July/20080813164048SrenoD0.8159143.html>

**Additional Readings**

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**Segal, Uma A., ed. et al.** *Immigration Worldwide: Policies, Practices, and Trends* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010.

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