



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Understanding the Immigrant Experience in Oregon

Research, Analysis, and Recommendations
from University of Oregon Scholars



Robert Bussel, Editor



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Executive Summary

The Immigrant Experience in Oregon

Over the last two decades, the face of Oregon has changed dramatically with the arrival of significant numbers of immigrants and refugees. In cities and small towns, in schools, churches, and workplaces, and in community and civic affairs, these newcomers from abroad have become active participants in Oregon's social and economic life in their quest to achieve civic integration and social acceptance.

In spite of the profound demographic and social changes that Oregon is undergoing as its population has grown more diverse, there has been little systematic analysis of how immigrants are faring in their attempt to establish themselves in their new environment. Moreover, public discussion about immigration has often lacked data, context, and analysis that would illuminate the multiple dimensions of the immigrant experience and examine how communities and social institutions are responding to the presence of newcomers in their midst.

We offer this report as an initial effort to help broaden public understanding of the immigrant experience in Oregon and contribute to a more informed discussion of its complexities. It is time for policymakers, employers, educators, and civic leaders to recognize Oregon's changing social demographics and develop a more systematic approach to helping immigrants adapt to their new environment. As scholars and teachers, we bring an interdisciplinary perspective to this task, drawing on the insights of anthropology, clinical psychology, geography, history, and

sociology in formulating our analysis.

We do not claim to offer a comprehensive or exhaustive study; however, we do provide a concise overview of many aspects of the immigrant experience in Oregon. We also focus special attention on the experience of Latino immigrants, who represent the largest segment of newcomers to Oregon over the last fifteen years.

Here is a summary of our major observations and findings:

I. Immigrants and refugees have dramatically changed the demographics of Oregon's population in the last two decades

- According to 2005 figures, the foreign born comprise 9.7 percent of Oregon's total population, with more than 60 percent of these new arrivals coming since 1990.
- Oregon has become a leading destination point for refugees. The state ranks eleventh nationally for numbers of refugees taken in, and Portland has the nation's twelfth largest refugee population among U. S. cities.
- It is anticipated that new refugee populations are most likely to come from Africa, Myanmar, and the Middle East. Refugees from Africa have been the most numerous arriving in Oregon in recent years.
- More Russians and Ukrainians came to Oregon and Washington between 1990 and 2005 than to any other region of the country.
- By 2005, Latinos comprised 9.9 percent of Ore-

gon's total population. It is estimated that 70–80 percent of adult Latino immigrants to Oregon have come within the past ten years. Between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population doubled in twenty-one of Oregon's thirty-six counties, signaling more dispersed settlement into suburban and rural areas. It is also estimated that by 2020, Latinos will comprise 28 percent of school-age children in Oregon.

II. Oregonians' attitudes toward immigration have historically been marked by ambivalence

- Historically, Oregon's political leaders distinguished between “desirable” and “undesirable” immigrants on the basis of ethnic and racial origin and developed public policy with this distinction in mind. This ambivalence toward newcomers, rooted in suspicion of cultural difference and doubts about the state's ability to integrate immigrants from non-European backgrounds, has been a recurring theme throughout Oregon's history and continues to influence contemporary discussion and attitudes about immigration.

III. Immigrants are making progress in adapting to their new environment

- We find evidence that immigrants are making steady progress in adapting to their new environment. As has been the case historically, they are establishing their own institutions—churches, clubs, businesses—that provide vital services and create social cohesion in addition to participating in existing organizations that address their needs. Their labor market participation rates are high, confirming the presence of a strong work ethic. They are also beginning to become more involved in community and political affairs, are seeking improved educational opportunities for their children, and are becoming more vocal in demanding better conditions of employment.

IV. Latino immigrants face particular challenges as well as opportunities in their quest for acculturation and civic integration

- Latinos are the most populous immigrant group in Oregon. Their growing presence and dispersal to suburbs and rural areas has changed the character of many communities in Oregon, not only providing new energy and vitality but also

creating challenges for schools, employers, law enforcement, and other institutions that are seeking to meet their needs.

- A new trend in Latino immigration has been the arrival of more than fourteen indigenous groups of people from Guatemala and Mexico. With markedly distinctive languages and customs, these groups will require focused outreach and specific assistance to aid them in their adaptation to social life in Oregon's rural communities.
- We find evidence that Latino youths and their parents are particularly challenged when youths embrace their new culture more rapidly, thereby creating tensions in the parent-child relationship. Latino youths also face special challenges in the school environment, where their dropout rates are relatively high, and schools have in some cases been slow to develop culturally sensitive programs of assistance and intervention.
- Although it had earlier antecedents, Latino immigration to Oregon grew most significantly over the last seven decades of the twentieth century. Four distinct generations of Latinos, mostly of Mexican origin, now live in Oregon. As a result, we find the emergence of mixed legal status among members of Latino immigrant households. For example, in Woodburn, 27 percent of households surveyed included both members holding legal status and members that are unauthorized. Mixed status may complicate efforts by these families to seek needed social services and suggests the complexities that must be dealt with in approaching immigration reform.

V. Work and employment: immigrants make important contributions to Oregon's economy

- Immigrants play a vital role in Oregon's economy. They total 11.3 percent of Oregon's labor force, up from 5.4 percent in 1990.
- Immigrants work in a variety of occupations ranging from professional and sales to manufacturing, services, and construction. Of the ten most populous immigrant groups in Oregon, Vietnamese, Ukrainians, and Mexicans have fared less well in the labor market. Mexicans have had the most challenging labor market experiences, although there is some evidence of occupational mobility and increased earnings over time.

- Factors that account most strongly for immigrant success in the labor market are English fluency, length of time in the U. S., and having legal status. We also find a gender gap in earnings for immigrant women.
- Immigrants, especially those who are unauthorized, can face exploitative workplace conditions, including exposure to accident and injury, violations of wage and hour laws, and a lack of health insurance coverage. The emergence of nonstandard work arrangements, including temporary and contracted work, have made it more difficult for immigrant workers to gain redress when faced with employer violations of labor law.

Recommendations

We believe that Oregon has been slow to respond to the increased presence of immigrants in our communities, workplaces, and schools, especially compared with other states that have taken a more active public policy approach. We offer the following recommendations on how communities, policymakers, and other institutions can help immigrants become more successfully integrated into social and economic life.

- There are several models of programs in Oregon that provide comprehensive, coordinated services for immigrants and refugees. These programs have demonstrated success in helping immigrants and refugees become socially and economically integrated. We urge policymakers to consider extending such programs to smaller cities and towns throughout Oregon where immigrants have increasingly settled.
- Rural communities with growing immigrant populations should expand availability of bilingual and multilingual services, encourage greater coordination among existing immigrant outreach programs, and develop closer liaisons among existing institutions, recent immigrants, and long-term residents.
- Latino youths in particular would benefit from interventions that incorporate the concept of familism into school curriculum and interactions with staff members. Sensitivity to the role of family in Latino life would facilitate more effective parental involvement in the education of Latino youths. Also, community-based best practices have proven successful in boosting Latino

student performance, and school districts should draw on these examples in crafting outreach efforts aimed at Latino students.

- Communities should consider creating local task forces that bring together key stakeholders to develop programs and policies that will address the needs of immigrants and create working relationships between newcomers and longer-term residents. The Portland Task Force on Immigrants and Refugees, which relied heavily on immigrant input and involvement, is a model of this type of effort that is worthy of replication.
- Oregon should follow the lead of other states and convene a task force of key stakeholders to develop an overall strategy aimed at helping immigrant workers to become more economically productive and socially integrated.
- Legislation that would provide stronger protections for workers in contingent employment relationships should be considered. Although not exclusively aimed at immigrants, such legislation would address some of the abuses growing out of employment relationships that allow employers to avoid responsibility and liability for their actions.
- Because the labor market experiences of immigrants are powerfully influenced by their legal status, our research affirms the importance of legislation that would provide them with a pathway to citizenship or some form of legal status. We also support programs aimed at increasing access to English language instruction, another key determinant of labor market success and acculturation for immigrants.

As we stated at the outset, we are aware that there are many aspects of the immigrant experience in Oregon that have not been addressed in this report. We are eager to build on this initial effort, explore further opportunities for interdisciplinary cooperation among researchers at the University of Oregon, and identify areas requiring additional study. We hope that this report and its recommendations will not only help generate thoughtful discussion but will also lead to action aimed at helping Oregon's immigrants achieve civic integration and social acceptance.



by Susan Hardwick and Charles R. Martinez Jr.

Chapter 1

Oregon: An Emerging Immigrant Gateway

From political campaigns to front-page stories, it is clear that immigration is one of the hot-button issues of our time. Ongoing debates at the federal level about border enforcement, driver’s licenses for undocumented residents, accessibility of public services, English-only statutes, and the visa allocation system remain national concerns. However, the multiple dimensions and complex implications of increased immigration emerge most visibly in cities, small towns, and neighborhoods across America where newcomers attend schools and churches, seek health care, perform vital labor, and are beginning to participate in community and civic affairs.

In 2005, an estimated 35.7 million legal and unauthorized immigrants were living in the United States. During the first decade of the twenty-first century the United States experienced an extraordinary transformation of its population brought on by two decades of exponential growth in immigration. Not only did more immigrants arrive in the country between 1990 and 2005 than in any other period on record, but also new immigrant settlement patterns emerged in unexpected places all across the nation.

According to recent census reports, the state of Oregon now has one of the most rapidly growing foreign-born populations in the United States. De-



spite popular misperceptions about the homogeneity of race, space, and place in the region, today’s Oregon is increasingly pluralistic and diverse. New immigrants from Latin America, Southeast Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet Union, in particular, have settled here in relatively large numbers, especially since the early 1990s. Evidence of this “diversity shift” is increasingly visible as immigrants become part of the demographic, social, and cultural fabric of both Oregon and the United States. The map and graph shown on page 15 provide evidence of this dramatic demographic shift in Oregon between 1870 and 2000.

Despite the dramatic population change currently re-shaping people and places in Oregon, efforts to document or assess the spatial patterns, political policies, historical context, and community relations that have marked the immigrant experience in Oregon have been limited. This is surprising since Oregon has become an increasingly important destination for relatively large numbers of new immigrants and refugees, especially during the past decade and one-half. The chapters that follow help fill this gap in our understanding of the Oregon immigrant experience.

Table 1 (see page 14) provides a closer look at the evolving population of one specific Oregon county during three comparative periods of time.

As immigrants and refugees from many dif-

ferent parts of the world continue to settle in both urban and rural parts of Oregon, it is essential for policymakers, educators, planners, and the general public to understand more about the experiences and aspirations of these newest Oregonians. Considering the challenges facing many foreign-born Oregonians today, why have such large numbers of immigrants and refugees settled in our state; where are they located; what has been their interaction

Table 1 Foreign-born population of Multnomah County's largest immigrant groups

1870		1900		2005	
Ireland	823	China	7,115	Mexico	25,682
Germany	639	Germany	5,040	Eastern Europe	11,165
China	506	Canada	2,257	Vietnam	10,597
England and Wales	400	England	2,187	China	5,479
British Americas	300	Sweden	1,948	Russia	2,761
Scotland	300	Ireland	1,896	United Kingdom	2,761
France	80	Japan	1,327	Canada	2,652
Sweden and Norway	42	Russia	1,031	Korea	2,264
Switzerland	23	Norway	956	East Africa	1,489
Denmark	21	Switzerland	878	Iran	1,398

SOURCES: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CENSUS OF POPULATION, 1870; CENSUS OF POPULATION, 1900; AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY, 2005 (MULTNOMAH COUNTY)

with local, regional, and state infrastructures and social support systems; and how are they adjusting to their new environment? This first chapter provides general background to help answer some of these questions. We outline the primary reasons why Oregon has emerged as a new immigrant gateway state in the twenty-first century and review some of the processes affecting immigrant integration and adjustment. The chapter concludes with brief summaries of the topics addressed by our colleagues. Our overarching goal throughout Chapter 1 is to introduce and provide context for the more detailed analyses that follow.

Data sources

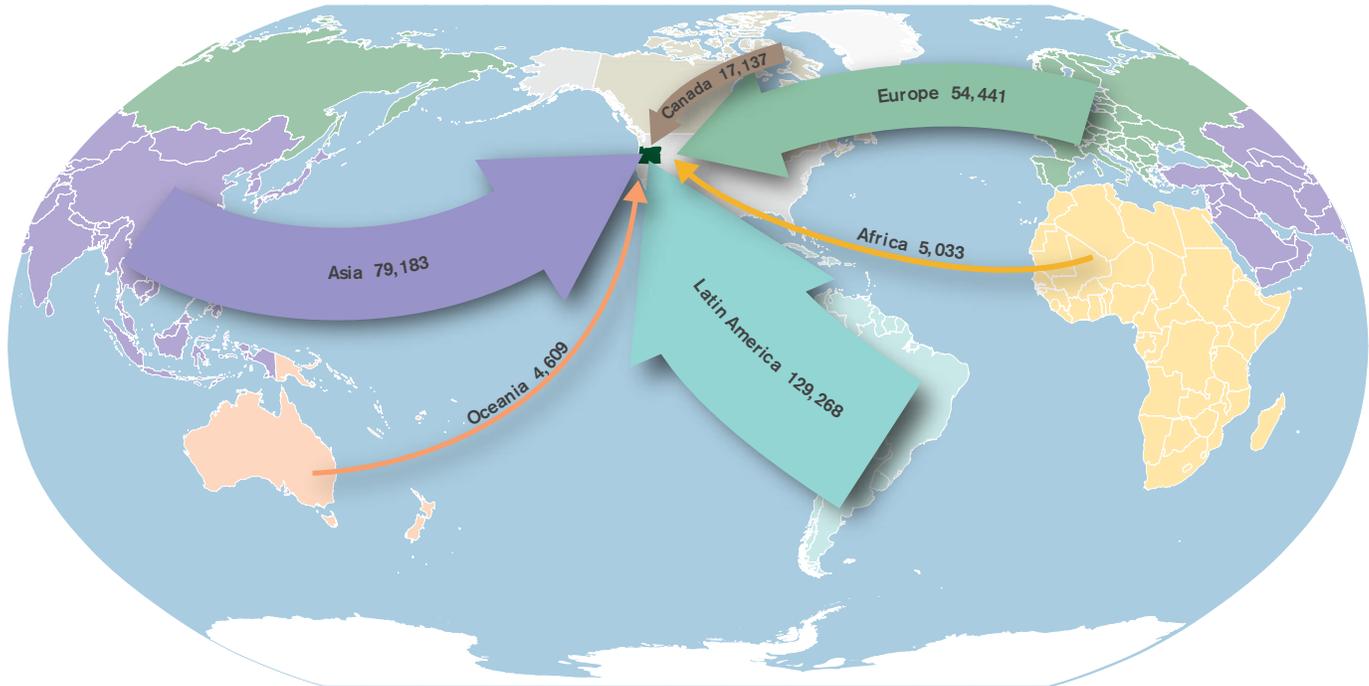
Data were gathered and analyzed for this report from a wide variety of sources. The authors of the following chapters relied on information found in statistical reports such as the U.S. census and school district records, archival documents, prospective survey research, newspaper articles and other published materials, participant observation, and personal interviews with immigrants, refugees, and social service providers in Oregon. It is important to note that census data used for maps, graphs, and tables in various chapters show data only on authorized immigrants. Due to the limitations caused by cultural and linguistic factors, as well as the omission of the potentially large numbers of unauthorized immigrants who reside in Oregon as in other parts of the United States, census data is not fully reliable. As a result, this report provides only estimates of comparative population change at different periods rather than exact counts.

The use of qualitative data sources such as interviews and participant observation in the chapters that follow help corroborate our quantitative findings. Those interviewed for this project include men and women, recent and long-term immigrants, and representatives of various age and income levels. In addition, careful attention was paid throughout this report to provide the most up-to-date information about the immigrant experience as possible. This proved challenging due to the lack of more frequent statistical reports documenting the state's changing demographics up to the present day.

As these caveats suggest, each of these data sources contains its own set of methodological challenges and limitations. As soon as more focused research is conducted with immigrant populations in Oregon, we can anticipate the appearance of more widespread and stable data. Nonetheless, since data on the experiences of immigrant populations are so sparse, the findings presented in this report offer a unique glimpse into the stories and lives of Oregon's newest immigrants.

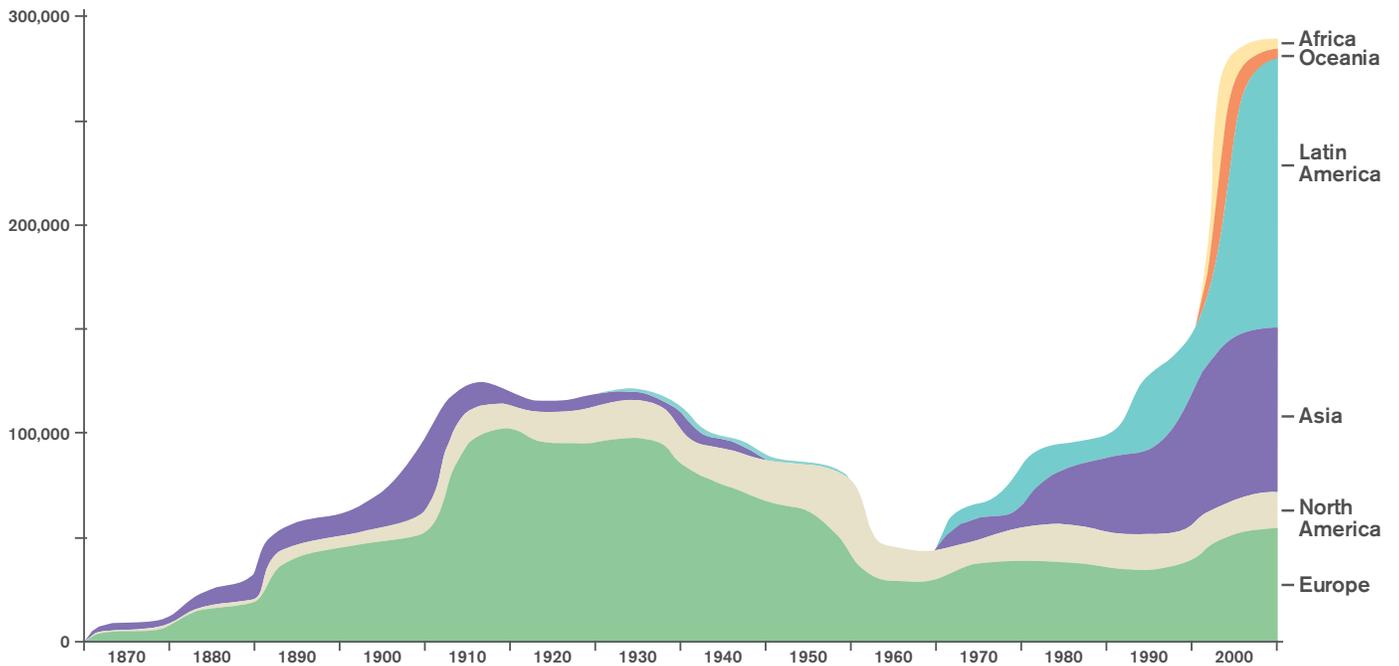
We offer one additional observation regarding our data analysis. Contemporary discourse on im-

Flow of immigrants to Oregon by place of origin, 2000



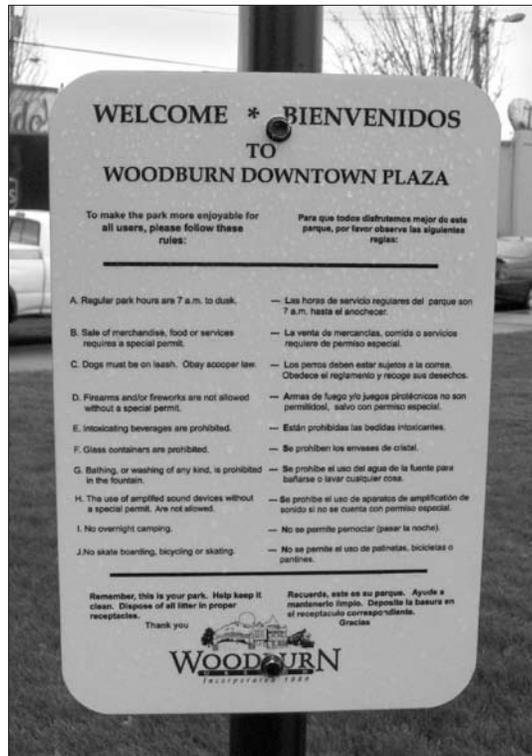
Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Population Census

Immigration to Oregon by place of origin, 1870–2000



Source: US Census Bureau, 1870-2000 Population Census and Loy, William G., Stuart Allan, Aileen R. Buckley, and James E. Meacham, Atlas of Oregon, Second Edition, University of Oregon Press, Eugene, Oregon, 2001

migration invariably focuses on the complicated, controversial issue of legal status. In this report we use the terms “unauthorized” and “undocumented” in referring to those immigrants who lack legal status. We believe these terms reflect the broader social context and complex considerations that have led immigrants to enter the country without authorization. Our goal is to understand and explain the immigrant experience in Oregon, and we believe that the term “illegal” tends to obscure this broader context, narrow the scope of analysis, and short-circuit thoughtful public discussion.



Why has Oregon become an immigrant gateway?

A complex set of interrelated factors has spurred the growth of immigration in Oregon. One of the primary reasons has been the decline in employment in traditional immigrant gateway states. Economic growth in more peripheral regions of the United States, along with a decline in earlier immigrant settlement nodes, has helped shift new immigrant destinations. As the economy of the northwest continued to grow during the past twenty-five years or so, older industrial areas located in the “Rust Belt” suffered an ongoing population loss prompted in part by a sharp decline in once plentiful manufacturing jobs.

Specific groups of immigrants have also been drawn to Oregon for other reasons. For example, migrants from Latin America were attracted by the availability of employment in the state’s agricultural sector. As discussed in a later chapter, from fertile Willamette Valley orchards to potato processing plants in small towns along the Columbia River in the eastern parts of the state, Mexicans and other Spanish-speaking workers have long journeyed to Oregon to take jobs that will pay enough to help support families both in the United States and back at home.

In addition, Oregon is now one of the most important states for refugee resettlement as well

as an important destination for new immigrants from Latin America and elsewhere. Despite its relatively small total population, the state now ranks eleventh nationally for the number of new refugees, with the city of Portland ranking twelfth among top cities of refugee resettlement. Along with the large number of newcomers who come to Oregon under this special political classification designed to help protect victims of religious, political, or other types of persecution in their homelands, U.S. refugee policies strongly encourage family reunification. Therefore, refugees who have already been resettled in the United States are allowed to bring family members from home to join them, thereby adding significantly to their total numbers in refugee-rich states like Oregon.

Another factor that has expanded the number of immigrants and refugees in Oregon is the presence of elaborate resettlement and social service networks that provide new and potential immigrants with support upon arrival. These networks operate from local to transnational levels and are invaluable in helping newcomers find a place to live, register family members for school, seek health care, and face many of the other immediate challenges of beginning a new life in a new place.

Many of the most significant types of networks are based on the importance of family ties and relationships. Because of Oregon’s long history as a site of Latino settlement, small towns and communities continue to attract ever larger numbers of new migrants from Latin America and especially from rural Mexico because of the linguistic, cultural, and social support that is well established in certain parts of the state. Likewise, Oregon’s nationally respected refugee social service organizations that have been operating since the post-Vietnam War era provide new refugees with housing, employment, and other services during their first year of settlement in the state.

These well-organized social and political networks are important elements in attracting refugees and immigrants from other parts of the world to Oregon. Since the 1980s when the refugee resettlement program in the U.S. first began, there has been a shift from leading destination sites such as California and New York to less populated states such as Oregon, Washington, and Minnesota. Refugee populations have also added significantly to the overall diversity of these states. The ongoing arrival of surprisingly large numbers of political and environmental refugees from the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the former Soviet Union, and Africa in Oregon cities such as Portland, Salem, and Medford are discussed in more detail in a later chapter.

Adjustment to a new environment

Structured and unstructured interviews with immigrants and refugees provided answers to questions about the adjustment experiences of newcomers in various parts of the state. For example, we learned that it is quite common for foreign-born Oregonians to continue to feel estranged from the dominant norms and values of their new Oregon lives. During an interview conducted in 2005 in Portland, for example, a young man from Ethiopia expressed his concerns about the future as follows:

I came here six years ago you know. And it all seemed like the right thing to do then. I tried so hard to learn how to speak English and get a job. I even signed up for classes at the community college. But today I still feel like I will *never* be a part of it all. I will always and forever be someone who everyone calls a refugee. Really, I will never be a real person here.

Like this interviewee, the stories of immigrants and refugees who now reside in Oregon often centered on memories of the struggle to survive in their new lives. Others shared painful stories of abuse in their homeland and lengthy, difficult stays in refugee camps awaiting permission to enter the United States. Many spoke dramatically about the color line that separates them from Oregon's mainstream white political culture and their frustrating search for "anything other than minimum-wage employment." Still other participants in one of our studies spotlighted parental concerns that their children were labeled as immigrants, second-language learners, or refugees in school performance records.

One of the primary reasons for this challenging adjustment to Oregon is the historical legacy of life

as the "other" in a primarily white, homogeneous state. Despite the rapid demographic changes currently reshaping our state, the perception of Oregon as a white place is deeply entrenched and has been influenced by the region's larger historical context of settlement dominated by European Americans. The dominant culture, especially in the earliest years of urban settlement, sought to maintain a homogeneous place that actively worked against incorporation of the "other"—from the earliest territorial laws prohibiting African Americans to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, from anti-Japanese sentiment in the 1940s to skinhead violence in the 1980s, and most recently an upsurge in anti-immigrant rhetoric that has contributed to political polarization.

These deep-seated attitudes and perceptions linger among many residents of Oregon today. The region's earliest immigration patterns were dominated by Germans, people from the British Isles, and Scandinavians, with other European Americans coming in even larger numbers from the mid-Atlantic, New England, and Midwestern states after the mid-nineteenth century. These immigrants and internal migrants were instrumental in shaping Oregon's dominant cultural norms and values. After restrictive immigration laws were passed by the federal government in the 1920s, the growth of foreign-born residents in the state slowed considerably, ceasing altogether at times. During the past two-and-one-half decades, however, Oregon has evolved into what Audrey Singer at the Brookings Institution has called a "re-emerging immigrant gateway." Along with other rapidly changing nontraditional immigrant receiving states such as North Carolina, Iowa, and Minnesota, Oregon has experienced population diversity and growth since the late 1980s that has exceeded all expectations. Yet while Oregon has experienced nonlinear socio-demographic growth for the past two decades, the social service, health care, and educational machinery has been slow to respond to these changes, leading to a host of structural barriers that add to immigrants' adaptation challenges.

During the past decade and one-half, economic and political change has significantly affected immigrants' ability to achieve social integration and acceptance. In particular, economic growth in Oregon and elsewhere has been marked by growth in "new economy" jobs, especially in the technology sector. Unlike earlier periods when new immigrants found work in occupations tied to primary production such as lumbering, farming, and fish-

ing, the new economy requires language and employment skills not currently possessed by many foreign-born Oregonians. Complicating the situation, the technology bubble burst in the early years of the new century, triggering a mild recession in the state and nation. Although Oregon's economy largely recovered and employment levels rebounded, both foreign-born and native-born Oregonians remained concerned about their future prospects, especially as signs of a serious economic recession increasingly appear.

Another significant event that has shaped the lives of immigrants in the U.S. was the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Widespread public fear and anxiety following 9/11 have led to the perception that immigrants, especially nonwhite groups, are potentially dangerous outsiders. Foreign-born migrants, especially those who are easily identifiable by skin color, religious beliefs, or distinctive surnames, are now more likely to be considered serious security risks. Homeland Security-era legislation, therefore, has made life in the United States much more difficult for many of Oregon's immigrants, especially in employment settings.

Chapter summaries

Our aim is to inspire more thoughtful conversation and the development of more effective public policies. Information presented in the chapters ahead will provide policymakers and others interested in the unfolding immigrant story in our state with data, context, and analysis needed for more informed decision-making.



In Chapter 2 Bob Bussel lays a historical foundation for understanding the immigrant experience by exploring the ambivalence that Oregonians have often displayed toward newcomers from abroad. Although these attitudes have fluctuated over time, Bussel finds that efforts to distinguish between “desirable” and “undesirable” immigrants are deeply rooted in Oregon's past and remain relevant in contemporary public discourse.

Chapter 3 builds on this important historical context. Here, authors Susan Hardwick and Justyna Goworowska review the settlement patterns and related social, economic, and political activities of more recent groups of immigrants and refugees. Using three cities—Portland, Salem, and Medford—as their primary focus, the authors discuss the experiences of foreign-born migrants whose population has grown markedly in these metropolitan areas. Featured in their analysis are the surprisingly large numbers of new Oregonians from the former Soviet Union, especially Russia and Ukraine, and diverse groups from Southeast Asia who began settling in

the state during and immediately after the Vietnam War. These newcomers are being joined by refugees from Africa and the Middle East, as well as immigrants from China, Korea, the Philippines, India, and other parts of the world. Perhaps the most surprising finding of this third chapter is that Asians currently outnumber Latinos in the Portland metropolitan area.

In Chapter 4, Lynn Stephen, Marcela Mendoza, and Mauricio Magana provide a comprehensive overview of the Latino experience in rural Oregon. Latinos are by far the largest immigrant group in Oregon, comprising nearly 10 percent of the state's total population by 2005, with the vast majority arriving during the past decade. The authors tell a dramatic story of political, social, and economic change in Oregon—change that affected the lives and livelihoods of rural Oregon farmworkers from Latin America in challenging and often painful ways. They observe that in long-term nodes of Latino settlement like Woodburn, Mt. Angel, and Independence, as well as in more recently diversifying smaller communities such as Junction City, Harrisburg, and Monroe, Latinos are becoming an increasingly visible and important part of the local economic, political, and cultural landscape.

Chapter 5 expands upon the Latino story in Oregon with an emphasis on the challenges faced by Spanish-speaking immigrant children and families. In this chapter, Charles Martinez, Heather McClure, and J. Mark Eddy provide additional demographic information on Latinos in Oregon in their incisive assessment of social, educational, and psychological challenges facing our state's largest immigrant group. Their findings affirm the critical need for cultural sensitivity in developing community- and school-based initiatives that assist Latino youths and their parents in adapting to the demands of a new environment.

The final chapter of this report considers the work and employment experience of immigrants in Oregon. Authors Michael Aguilera, Bob Bussel, and Lara Skinner assess the importance of immigrants and refugees in Oregon's economy by analyzing their labor market experiences. They use rich statistical information to review occupational mobility, earnings, longevity of employment, and the factors most responsible for immigrants achieving economic success. They also draw on personal interviews and other qualitative sources to illuminate additional challenges immigrants often face in today's competitive labor market, including substandard working conditions, increased risk of accident or injury on the job, and unprotected informal work arrangements.

In a politically charged atmosphere, we recognize that many questions remain about the immigrant experience in Oregon and the future direction of public policy. Will immigrants residing in Oregon's small towns, cities, and rural communities find genuine opportunities for becoming part of the larger fabric of American life? Does their decision to move to Oregon promise more multiethnic and multiracial neighborhoods, better access to jobs, and eventually more rapid social, economic, and linguistic adjustment? How will native-born residents react to the growing numbers of newcomers in their midst? How will policymakers, communities, major social institutions, and immigrants themselves address these complex concerns? Responding to these questions will be one of Oregon's major twenty-first century challenges. We hope that this report and its recommendations will not only generate thoughtful public discussion but will also lead to action aimed at helping Oregon's immigrants achieve civic and social integration.



by Robert Bussel

Chapter 2

Open Arms or Arms Length: A Historical Perspective on Immigration in Oregon

Americans frequently describe themselves as a “nation of immigrants” and take pride in this characterization. Whether portrayed as a “melting pot” where immigrants shed their previous identities and fully embrace American values or a “beautiful mosaic” where newcomers retain elements of their old culture in the process of becoming Americanized, America’s ability to absorb successive waves of immigrants has distinguished it from other nations and is often cited as an example of cultural strength, generosity, and uniqueness.

Nonetheless, Americans have also displayed considerable ambivalence about the desirability and benefits of immigration. Throughout our history we have worried about the impact of immigrants on our standard of living, expressed concern about their willingness to accept American values, questioned whether newcomers with purported dual loyalties threaten national security, and doubted the country’s capacity to integrate successfully people from different cultures and backgrounds. Oregon’s experience with immigration during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has frequently reflected these concerns, fluctuating between an open-arms and an arms-length approach that at times has manifested itself

in sharp social conflict. The purpose of this chapter is to review this complex history and pose the following questions: Who are the immigrants that have come to Oregon, and what factors prompted them to immigrate? How have Oregonians responded to the presence of newcomers in their midst? How have immigrants adapted to their new environment, and what strategies have they employed in their quest for social acceptance? What are the implications of this history for the current social and political debate surrounding immigration? Addressing these questions will help place Oregon’s current experience with immigration in a broader context and provide a historical perspective that is often lacking in contemporary discussion of this challenging subject.

Before internal migrants and immigrants from abroad came to Oregon, native peoples had lived in the region for thousands of years, and their encounters with Europeans in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries profoundly influenced Oregonians’ subsequent attitudes regarding race, ethnicity, and cultural difference. Natives had extensive commercial interaction with English and later American traders, especially in the lucrative fur trade, but relations deteriorated in the mid-nineteenth century



as ambitious settlers poured into Oregon. Imbued with feelings of white superiority and belief in a “manifest destiny” to extend the American republic’s dominion from coast to coast, white settlers increasingly battled native peoples over land and resources. The results of these clashes were devastating for the natives. Disease decimated their ranks, many tribes lost their land, and most were relocated, often forcibly, to reservations.¹

At the same time Oregonians took steps to preserve political and economic privilege for those of European descent. In 1844, the provisional government barred blacks, both free and slave, from Oregon. The Oregon constitution barred blacks and Chinese from voting or holding land, and in 1866, the legislature approved a sweeping miscegenation law that prohibited whites from marrying blacks, Chinese, or native Hawaiians. This strong antipathy toward people of color and the accompanying desire to assert white supremacy, legitimated through law and reinforced by custom, set the tone for how Oregonians would regard immigrants seeking to enter their new state.²

For most of the nineteenth century Americans, with some notable exceptions, welcomed immigrants to their shores. The young, expanding nation needed labor to grow crops, manufacture goods, build infrastructure, and extract resources needed to spur industrialization. In keeping with the democratic spirit of the American Revolution, the United States also prided itself on providing a haven for those fleeing religious or political persecution. Not all Americans, however, greeted immigrants unreservedly. The Irish who flocked to America in the mid-nineteenth century suffered terribly in their initial quest for economic security and social acceptance. Nativists attempted to limit the cultural and political expression of the Irish and other immigrant groups, and violent clashes periodically erupted when native-born workers resisted what they regarded as unfair competition from new arrivals. Still, the need for labor and the republican sense of openness and generosity trumped anti-immigrant sentiment, and America’s border remained open to most newcomers from abroad for the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century.

Immigration to Oregon accelerated after the territory gained statehood in 1859. Only one out of every ten Oregonians was foreign-born at the time of statehood, with the majority of the state’s native-born population hailing from the midwestern, southern, and mid-Atlantic states. Many were

secondary migrants who had first settled in the Midwest and were attracted to Oregon’s moderate climate, fertile farmland, and in some cases the chance to cash in on the discovery of gold.³

As a matter of public policy, Oregon established clear preferences for the kinds of immigrants it sought to attract. The legislature created the State Board of Immigration to help recruit immigrants to a sparsely populated state blessed with natural resources but in need of a “producing and consuming population.” In its 1887 report the board declared that “Germans and Scandinavians make up the best of foreign-born immigrants.” Two years earlier, the board expressed confidence in the ability of these immigrants to achieve social and economic success: “He [the immigrant] need not long remain in the condition of a laborer. This certainty of rising in the social scale must stimulate the immigrant.” Here the open arms approach to immigration was on display, reflecting both the state’s economic needs and the conviction that newcomers could be successfully incorporated into Oregon’s economic and social mainstream.⁴

As immigrants from southern and eastern Europe poured into the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Oregon State Immigration Commission stated its preferences even more clearly in its 1912 annual report:

“No class of citizens is more valuable to Oregon than is the industrious, thrifty, foreign-born farmer, who emigrates from unfavorable European conditions to carve out a home for his family in a new country. There is a certain immigration from Europe which is undesirable, especially that which congregates in our cities and towns, creating slum districts living below the standard of American workmen, and entering into ruinous competition with American labor.”⁵

The Immigration Commission went on to distinguish between “thrifty producers” and “undesirable immigrants.” German immigrants embodied the former group and were especially prized as enterprising, self-sufficient farmers who embodied agrarian values and a pioneer ethos essential to the mythic self-image of both Americans and Oregonians. In contrast, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were seen as lacking in skills, likely to undercut the standards of incumbent workers, and subversive of the agrarian, frontier spirit that Oregon’s leaders wanted to maintain. Reflecting these views, Governor Oswald West issued this

warning when he addressed the legislature in 1913: “The next few years will decide whether our State is to receive an increased population of desirable or undesirable citizens. The flood-gates of Europe are soon to be thrown open and it will be the work of the Immigration Board to see that the stream which flows toward this State carries as many farmers and home-builders as possible.” Openly seeking to discourage urban settlement and avoid the kinds of social ills that afflicted teeming north-eastern cities with large immigrant populations, Oregonians indicated a strong desire to maintain racial and ethnic homogeneity and to preserve the social harmony that this commonality and more dispersed patterns of settlement made possible. In order to sustain this harmony and cohesiveness, they explicitly identified the types of immigrants they would find acceptable as permanent residents and eventually fellow citizens.⁶

In fact, many late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century immigrants to Oregon achieved economic success and social acceptance with relative ease. Emil Feltz, whose family came to Portland from Germany in 1884, recalled how his father, a skilled blacksmith, first found employment splicing cables at an amusement park and later secured work at the Southern Pacific Railroad. Feltz’s mother worked as a domestic until she married, a pattern followed by many other immigrant women. He also remembered how “Father Gregory,” a priest at Sacred Heart Church with close ties to local politicians, helped other German immigrants find jobs at Portland Traction and Southern Pacific. Clement Risberg, a second-generation Swede who went on to found a prominent trucking company, recounted that his father immigrated in 1903 after a “terrible depression” limited his prospects. He was drawn to Portland by reports of available work from other Swedes. Risberg’s father progressed from an initial job in a sawmill to shipyard work during World War I, a stint with Southern Pacific, and long-term employment with the city of Portland. His mother took in fellow Swedes as boarders to supplement the family’s income. For both Risberg and Feltz, their stories followed a familiar pattern: assistance from a social network of fellow ethnics, the availability of remunerative labor with the chance for

upward mobility, additional income from their spouses, and the opportunity for their children to surpass their achievements.⁷

Other immigrant groups found similar success in their transition to their new homeland. Immigrants from Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland, who according to the 1910 census comprised 40 percent of Oregon’s population, mirrored the experience of Clement Risberg’s family. Seeking great-



er religious freedom and economic opportunity, they often came initially to the Midwest before making their way to Oregon, where they found work as carpenters, longshoremen, and in the state’s many sawmills. Substantial numbers of Nordic women worked outside the home as domestics or operated boarding houses to contribute to family income. In Astoria, many Finns became active unionists, some joined the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World, and others embraced socialism, echoing working-class concerns about unrestrained corporate power that were especially pronounced in the Pacific Northwest. Reflecting the desire to enter the political mainstream, second-generation Nordic immigrants became politically active, gaining seats on the Portland City Council and in the state legislature during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The experience of Simon Benson, a Norwegian immigrant, epitomized the possibilities for immigrant success. Benson, who came to the United States in 1879, built the renowned Benson Hotel and the now famous “Benson Bubbler” fountains along the Park blocks in Portland, and went on to become a respected financier and philanthropist.⁸

It was not only immigrants from northern and central Europe whose acculturation in Oregon was achieved with minimal social conflict. Jews from Germany and eastern Europe, who first came to Oregon in the mid-1800s and arrived in larger numbers later in the nineteenth century, found opportunity in an expanding economy with a relatively open class and social structure. In a city where competition from other ethnic groups was limited and the union movement had not yet taken hold, Jews were able to succeed as merchants and were spared the criticism their countrymen often faced elsewhere. As the historian William Toll explains, Jews tended to be regarded as shopkeepers and small business owners rather than corporate employers or workers competing with the native-born. Moreover, Jewish immigration to Oregon was not nearly as extensive as it had been on the east coast, thereby limiting the perception that Jews were usurping the prerogatives of existing citizens. As a result, Jewish immigrants to Oregon did not experience the intense anti-Semitism that their countrymen often encountered in eastern cities.⁹

Like other ethnic groups, immigrant Jews in Portland created institutions that provided them with essential services, including sick and burial benefits and assistance to children from broken families. Another sign of rising Jewish acceptance and influence lay in the political sphere, where two Jews, Bernard Goldsmith and Philip Wasserman, served successive terms as Portland mayor in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and Julius Meier, a department store executive, was elected governor of Oregon in 1930. None of this is to suggest that Jews and other immigrants to Oregon fully avoided distrust, doubt, or discrimination in their transition to a new environment. Yet buoyed by a growing economy, manageable numbers of immigrants, and the open, optimistic spirit of a recently established state, most of those arriving from foreign lands found in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Oregon an environment that fulfilled its promise as a vehicle for their aspirations.¹⁰

For two groups of late nineteenth-century immigrants, however, Oregon was distinctly unwelcoming, and the response of Oregonians to new arrivals from China and Japan represented a troubling episode in the state's encounters with newcomers. Like other states in the West, Oregon almost immediately viewed Chinese immigrants with suspicion. Attempting to escape poverty and instability in their native land, Chinese immigrants flocked to

California, Oregon, and Idaho from the 1850s to the 1870s, seeking to mine gold or find work on railroads or in canneries. Reflecting their sense of racial superiority and entitlement, white Oregonians barred Chinese from owning mining claims or other property soon after statehood was conferred and were angered as employers sought to undercut their wages by replacing them with lower-paid Chinese workers. In 1869, workers in Oregon City who had lost their jobs to Chinese workers formed a White Laborers Association in an effort to oust their replacements.¹¹

As the Chinese population reached five percent of Oregon's total by the time of the 1880 census, public reaction grew more vocal and violent. After the federal Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882 and banned further importation of Chinese workers, angry Oregonians frequently took the law into their own hands, with mobs driving the Chinese out of Oregon City, east Portland, Salem, and Yamhill. Efforts to expel the Chinese from Portland failed, but their numbers dropped substantially thereafter. Anti-Chinese sentiment culminated in 1887 when thirty-four Chinese miners were murdered by horse thieves northeast of Enterprise along the Snake River. The alleged perpetrators were subsequently acquitted, attesting to the almost complete disregard that most Oregonians held for the Chinese in their midst.¹²

What accounts for this virulent reaction to the Chinese? Governor Sylvester Pennoyer, a leading voice against Chinese immigration, reflected the attitudes of many Oregonians in his 1887 inaugural address:

"Irrevocably devoted to their paganism, idolatry, superstition, and practices, they are entirely unassimilative with our people, blind to the progressive spirit of our race, unappreciative of our institutions, and deaf to the demands and influences of Christianity, and their presence amongst us is only corruption of society, debasing to morals and degrading to labor."¹³

Pennoyer favored deporting Chinese who had not been naturalized but acknowledged that this approach would be logistically difficult and expensive to implement. Instead, in a proposal that has contemporary parallels, he advocated the enactment of legislation that would require all who rented to or employed unnaturalized Chinese aliens to pay a license fee that would be directed to support the state education fund. According to Pennoyer,

this approach would ensure that “the places they now occupy would be filled with laboring men of our own race and blood, who will help build up our free institutions and dot our hillsides and valleys with the happy homes of freemen.”¹⁴ In this succinct formulation Pennoyer reiterated the distinctions that made immigrants either “desirable” or “undesirable” for many Oregonians and underscored that immigrants from Asia were too threatening economically and too different culturally to assume the valued social status of “pioneers” or “freemen.”

Although the most violent forms of opposition to Chinese immigration subsided by the 1890s, political leaders, labor unions, and policymakers continued to denounce the Chinese. From its inception in 1903, the Oregon Bureau of Labor was charged with collecting data on Chinese and Japanese immigrants and discerning “to what extent their employment comes in competition with the white industrial classes of the state.” Echoing the strong racial overtones that permeated the attitudes of many Oregonians, the Oregon State Federation of Labor vowed “to eliminate this yellow peril” by barring employment for Chinese and Japanese workers. Indeed, during the first four decades of the twentieth century, Japanese immigrants who had followed the Chinese to work on railroads, in canneries, and in sawmills became the target of concerted social and political attacks that on occasion turned violent.¹⁵

In some respects the attacks on the Japanese mirrored those faced by their Chinese predecessors. In 1907, a mob in Woodburn stormed the quarters of Japanese workers and demanded their dismissal, claiming that they worked for substandard wages and took jobs away from white workers. Subsequently, native-born Oregonians drove Japanese from Toledo, LaGrande, and Woodburn. In 1923, the Oregon legislature passed an “Alien Land Law.” This law was sparked by resentment of Japanese economic success and barred them from land ownership. Resistance to the Japanese also reflected the strong racial animus that marked the attitudes of many Oregonians toward nonwhites. As the *Central Oregonian* editorialized in 1922, “The melting pot never warms him. . . he considers that he is of a superior race and has no desire to lower himself by becoming Americanized.”¹⁶

In spite of the hostility they often encountered, Japanese immigrants became successful as hotel operators, business owners, and especially in the Hood River area, as farmers. A cohesive community and family life contributed to their success, along with assistance provided by Nikkein Kai, the Japanese Association of Oregon, an organization that offered legal aid and financial advice. Yet all the progress made by the Japanese was erased with the onset of World War II, the harsh reaction unleashed



by the Japanese government’s attack on Pearl Harbor, and the subsequent internment of the Japanese amid doubt about their loyalty. Especially in Hood River, residents opposed to the Japanese sensed the opportunity to restore the superior status of the native-born and eliminate the Japanese as economic and social competitors.¹⁷

These efforts were led by farmers and the American Legion, who declared their “ultimate aim is to get every Jap out of Hood River.” They received high-level political support from Walter Pierce, a Congressman and former governor who in a 1945 speech explained the reasons behind the persistent anger many Oregonians continued to express toward immigrants of Asian descent: “They will always remain a people apart, a cause of friction and resentment and possible peril to our national safety. In the half-century they have lived in the United States, they have never been part of community life.” Although Japanese born in the United States may not be “alien in birth,” Pierce averred, they remained “alien in heart” and simply could not be trusted like other citizens. Fearing that the Japanese will “acquire domination over this fruitful and beautiful land,” he asserted that “they must

leave this land to those who pioneered it.”¹⁸

To be sure, Pierce’s views were not fully representative of those held by all Oregonians. A lawyers’ committee appointed by the Oregon Bar Association argued in a 1945 law review article that anti-Japanese attitudes were prompted by “economic aggrandizement” and the desire of native-born farmers to eliminate the Japanese as competitors. In Hood River, the local ministerial association protested the harsh treatment of the Japanese by area residents. Yet the views espoused by Walter Pierce reflected the deeply held belief of many Oregonians who regarded Asian immigrants as irredeemably alien and unassimilable. These views were accompanied by a profound sense of entitlement to the “fruitful and beautiful” land that their ancestors had first developed and which appeared to be falling into the hands of an undeserving group whose loyalty and legitimacy would forever be in doubt.¹⁹

Two decades earlier, similar convictions had led the nation to restrict immigration and tighten America’s borders. The Immigration Act of 1924 marked the culmination of social fear that American culture was being subverted by immigrants in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution and the labor turmoil that followed World War I. The new law installed a quota system that sharply limited immigration from these regions of the world and favored immigrants from northern and central Europe.²⁰

Several editorials that appeared in *The Oregonian* during this period revealed the shift from an open-arms to an arms-length approach toward immigrants. In June 1920, the paper endorsed accepting more immigrants, asserting that “wisely handled, they can be made as good citizens as were those who came before them. It devolves on the people of Oregon to make them Americans.” Yet in editorials published several years later, *The Oregonian* offered a much more pessimistic assessment. Previously, it explained, immigrants came to the United States from countries with “institutions and traditions that [allowed them to become] easily absorbed into the body of citizenship.” For the last forty years, however, they were migrating from “less fit



nations” and from countries and races “that make them instinctive enemies of any government and that prevent their absorption.” The standard for accepting new immigrants, the paper argued, was that they be “men whom we can welcome not only as workmen but as citizens and neighbors.” Based on Oregon’s long-held distinctions between desirable and undesirable immigrants, it seems reasonable to assume that these editorials reflected popular attitudes in asserting that the welcome mat for immigrants would extend only to those whose racial, ethnic, and cultural origins were seen as compatible with Oregon’s white European majority.²¹

Oregonians’ ambivalence and suspicion toward immigrants again manifested itself in the 1960s during efforts to admit more refugees and reverse the discriminatory effect of the 1924 law by lifting its quotas and allowing expanded immigration from southern Europe, eastern Europe, and Asia. Some letters to Oregon legislators endorsed more liberal immigration policies. Writing to Senator Wayne Morse, Mrs. Jay W. Greenway declared “it is an ugly blot on the name of the United States of America . . . that now, in our time of greatest plenty, we can turn our back on the refugees of the world.” P. G. Sigris, the president of a Greek fraternal organization, also endorsed liberalization, explaining to Congressman Al Ullman that “the great history of these United States is largely attributable to the constant and healthy revitalization engendered by the eager immigrant.”²²

In contrast to these positive assessments of the need for immigration reform, other Oregonians continued to assert the importance of racial and ethnic homogeneity. Virginia Laurence bluntly told Congressman Ullman she opposed President John F. Kennedy’s proposal on immigration “because we feel the Northern European races contribute more to the living standards of our country than the southern Europeans.” Dail Delaney protested to Wayne Morse about Lyndon Johnson’s audacity in “stand[ing] under the Statue of Liberty and sign[ing] over to Southern European immigrants and Cuban refugees the rights, liberties, and opportunities that should belong to unemployed American citizens.” In response, Morse vigorously defended a more

open immigration policy, telling Delaney that “one hundred years ago, many long-time citizens of the United States were saying the same things about Irish immigrants that you are saying about eastern Europeans and Cubans. I think our country and our economy are strong and healthy enough to welcome these people and be helped by them.”²³

With the passage of the Immigration Act of 1965, Wayne Morse’s optimism temporarily won out. Both the nation and Oregon have seen immigration increase dramatically over the past four decades. Beginning in the early 1980s, Oregon became a leading destination point for refugees fleeing turmoil and upheaval in their homelands, attracting refugees from Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Soviet Union. As elaborated on in a subsequent chapter, refugees who are admitted to the U. S. must meet rigorous federal criteria documenting that they are escaping political or religious persecution rather than simply seeking enhanced economic opportunity.

The total number of immigrants from the Soviet Union remained small in Oregon until the mid-1960s when a Russian sectarian group known as Old Believers settled in Woodburn. In response to a constituent’s letter complaining about Russians being “subsidized” to come to Woodburn, Wayne Morse professed being “unaware” of this phenomenon. However, the commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) informed him in a 1965 letter that Russians had been coming to Oregon for some time. After first journeying to Latin America, these earlier Russian Old Believer immigrants were granted visas after a private foundation funded their trip from Brazil to the Willamette Valley, and local social service organizations and churches provided assurances that they would help the newcomers get settled. This influx was noted in an *Oregon Statesman* article in the mid-1960s describing a “Russian invasion” of the St. Paul school district outside of Salem. In response, the superintendent of schools was preparing to hire a “special teacher” who would be able to communicate with the additional twenty to twenty-five Russian-speaking students now in district classrooms.²⁴

The migration of Russians and Ukrainians accelerated in the late

1980s after Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev began permitting those seeking greater religious freedom to leave. In contrast to earlier immigrants to Oregon, post-Soviet-era Russians and Ukrainians are almost all members of fundamentalist religious sects who came to the United States seeking greater freedom to practice their faith. Many who arrived in the 1990s were granted refugee status under legislation passed a decade earlier, and this status granted them access to numerous services and subsidies, including assistance with employment, housing, and education. Russian-speaking refugees have also found a strong network of churches that catered to their spiritual needs and provided them with a much-needed sense of community and cohesiveness. Their transition has been further eased by social sympathy for their refugee status and the sense that they are legitimate, desirable immigrants whose presence reflects the nation’s social generosity and commitment to being a haven for oppressed people seeking freedom. In addition, as Caucasian peoples, these immigrants readily blended with the existing population and did not spark the kind of ethnic or racial antagonism that dogged the Chinese and Japanese a century earlier.²⁵

In addition to Russians and Ukrainians, refugees from Southeast Asia and Africa have also moved to Oregon since the late 1970s, mostly to the Portland metropolitan area. The turmoil following American withdrawal from Vietnam in 1975 led Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians to seek refuge abroad, while civil strife in Ethiopia, Somalia, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo prompted residents to flee these countries. Like the Russians and the Ukrainians, these groups of refugees received assistance from church-sponsored agencies and other private organizations. Vietnamese refugees drew on family and kinship networks to ease their adaptation, and Africans established individual ethnic associations to provide needed services and support.²⁶

Southeast Asians and Africans have also begun to establish their own businesses, often serving ethnic constituencies. Although these groups have faced some ethnic and racially based hostility, their strong support networks have enabled them to make



important strides toward gaining social acceptance. However, following the events of September 11, these immigrants and refugees have felt a greater sense of social scrutiny and have begun to develop new organizations to defend their rights and enable them to speak more effectively in the political arena.²⁷

The wave of immigration that has captured the most public attention and scrutiny, both in Oregon and across the nation, has been the dramatic increase in people coming from Central and South American countries, most notably Mexico. Although Mexicans have long worked and lived in Oregon (this history is more extensively covered in a subsequent chapter), their migration accelerated early in the twentieth century with the growing integration of the American and Mexican economies, the ensuing displacement of Mexican farmers and artisans, the increasing need for labor in the U. S., and turmoil following the 1910 revolution in Mexico. Labor shortages during World War I prompted concerted efforts to recruit agricultural workers. Indeed, it was the continuing need for a farm labor force that established a pattern in which Mexicans were alternately greeted as desirable immigrants and denounced as undesirable intruders into America's social and economic life.²⁸

The Immigration Act of 1924 was the next significant development that influenced the course of Mexican migration into the United States. The Southern Hemisphere was not subject to the national origins quotas imposed on other parts of the world, owing to agricultural interests' desire to ensure an adequate labor supply and a shift in American foreign policy toward a more flexible approach in its dealings with Latin America. Yet the 1924 law for the first time made illegal entry into the United States a crime, provided for the deportation of illegal entrants, and established border protection and national sovereignty as the basis of immigration policy. With the onset of the Depression, deportations of Mexicans increased, including some who held U. S. citizenship. It was not until the late 1930s that Mexicans reentered the country when native-born workers began to find employment in defense-related industries during the military build-up prior to World War II.²⁹

Mexican migration to the U. S. and Oregon increased sharply under the Bracero Program. Launched in 1942, this planned importation of Mexican workers sought to address wartime agri-

cultural labor shortages. As a result of the Bracero Program, the number of Mexicans in Oregon increased tenfold to 15,000 between 1940 and 1945. Braceros won widespread praise for their performance but often faced substandard working and living conditions. Although the wartime Bracero Program ended in 1947, it continued until 1964 under an agreement between the United States and Mexican governments. The agreement created a pipeline for Mexican farm workers to enter Oregon, with braceros joining other Mexicans in establishing themselves permanently in communities such as Woodburn, Independence, and Nyssa in the years following World War II.³⁰

As native-born workers moved to less arduous and better paying employment, labor shortages persisted in the fields, and Oregon growers became even more dependent on Mexican and other foreign-born labor. A 1957 Bureau of Labor report estimated that there were nearly 12,000 Spanish-speaking farm workers in Oregon, of which 10 percent were described as permanent residents. According to the report, many of these workers were subjected to "frequent abuse," and their relations with community residents were characterized as "extremely tense." Still workers continued to journey north. They were only temporarily deterred by "Operation Wetback," an INS effort in the mid-1950s that deported thousands of Mexicans, and by the numerical limits placed on Mexican immigration for the first time by the Immigration Act of 1965.³¹

Like earlier generations of immigrants to Oregon, Mexicans were attracted by the availability of economic opportunity and found their way into occupations besides farm labor, including food processing, manufacturing, construction, and small businesses. They also began to develop institutions to improve their living and working conditions. As Cristina de la Cruz Vendrell recalled, Mexican immigrants in Nyssa formed an organization called *Siempre Adelante* in 1953 to seek fair treatment after a white youth killed a Mexican, and the crime went unpunished. Subsequently, an aggressive and energetic farm workers union, *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (PCUN), was launched, along with a host of community- and church-sponsored organizations that provided social services, job training, and housing. By the mid-1970s, Mexicans and other Latino immigrants had firmly established themselves as a visible presence in Oregon. It was the sharp rise in unauthorized immigration, growing concerns about border security, and fears about the

nation's ability to assimilate so many new arrivals that led to the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA), yet another federal effort to regulate the flow of immigrants into the United States, especially from Mexico.³²

IRCA provided both seasonal agricultural workers and longer-term unauthorized immigrants the opportunity to apply for temporary and later permanent resident status. Yet an *Oregonian* article reported that as of February 1988, applications fell short of the state's projections. Apparently many feared that their noneligible family members might be deported if they came forward, and others found it difficult to obtain the necessary supporting documents. IRCA also included other provisions aimed at curbing immigration, including sanctions for employers who hired unauthorized immigrants and enhanced border security arrangements. Nonetheless, the push from Mexico continued unabated due to limited economic opportunities there and the promise of a better life in the United States.³³

Indigenous workers from the state of Oaxaca were among the new migrants that swelled Oregon's immigrant population. Although their migration began several decades before the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, Oaxacans left in greater numbers following rising food prices and stiff economic competition from American farmers that drove many of them off the land. Efforts to curb immigration again emerged across the nation, including proposals in the 1995 Oregon legislature to limit unauthorized immigrants' access to social and educational services. These proposals failed to win approval. However, after the attacks of September 11, 2001, the focus of American immigration policy began to follow a familiar pattern, with national security considerations becoming paramount in the minds of many citizens and political leaders. It is in this context that the current debate over immigration is being waged. With failure to enact comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level, states and localities across the nation are now engaged in difficult, often contentious, discussion about how best to proceed.³⁴

The controversy over immigration in Oregon

both reflects familiar concerns and some new preoccupations. The question of legality, which had been somewhat less prominent in earlier debates over immigration, now dominates social discussion. As the most visible group in Oregon favoring

immigration restriction has argued, illegal immigration "lowers our moral and civic values by encouraging disregard for the law." This sense of violation dovetails with the profound economic insecurity experienced by many Oregonians who have seen their standard of living erode in a free-trade, global economy. These fears are accompanied by the uneasiness that Oregonians have traditionally felt when encountering people from different ethnic or racial backgrounds. As one retired Salem resident lamented in a 1995 *Oregonian* article: "As I go to the store and shopping centers, they [immigrants] are just taking over." More recently, a proposed bal-



lot initiative that would curtail bilingual education suggests that Oregonians' traditional fears about racial and ethnic difference and their effects on the majority culture's institutions and values have not abated.³⁵

In addition to these economic, cultural, and security considerations, there is another argument against immigration rooted in Oregonians' deep appreciation of the state's natural beauty and its much-valued quality of life. Some critics fear a growing immigrant population "create[s] burdens on our infrastructure and abuse of our environment." This apprehensiveness reflects longstanding concerns that Oregon cannot retain its distinctive way of life unless population growth is limited, a prospect that is allegedly threatened by the tendency of immigrants to have larger families than the native-born.³⁶

Proponents of immigration take a more optimistic view. They observe that whatever costs may be associated with immigration are outweighed by the economic and social contributions of immigrants and express confidence in the state's ability to integrate them into the mainstream of Oregon's

economic and civic life. They also note that immigrants value deeply the concepts of work, faith, and family, encourage their children to embrace the opportunities available to them in their new culture, and are seeking to become more vitally involved in civic and community affairs. The Portland City Council has embraced this perspective, affirming “its commitment to the inclusion of immigrants and refugees in civic and public life” and creating a task force to advise the city on how this objective might best be achieved.³⁷

As Oregonians debate anew whether they should adopt an open-arms or arms-length approach toward immigration, they do so in the context of a foreign-born population that has doubled since 1990 to constitute 10 percent of the state’s total residents. An estimated 125,000–175,000 of these residents are unauthorized. In an interconnected global economy in which goods, services, and people are constantly in motion, immigration represents an extraordinarily complex challenge that defies easy resolution. Oregonians will have some difficult choices to make as they weigh the costs and benefits of immigration, consider what changes in economic, social, and political relations they are prepared to undertake, and as *The Oregonian* posed the question in 1924, decide whether they are willing to accept immigrants “not only as workmen but as citizens and neighbors.” As we have seen, they will make these choices in the context of a complex historical legacy that should leave little illusion about the difficulties of the challenges that lie ahead.³⁸

Notes

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Chapter 3

Urban Immigration in Oregon: The City as Context

This chapter examines the migration pathways and residential patterns of immigrants and refugees in urban areas. We focus our attention on three Oregon cities and their environs—Portland, Salem, and Medford—to illustrate Oregon’s rapidly changing demographic patterns as well as the dynamic economic, political, and cultural processes and policies that are helping shape them. Along with large numbers of Latino immigrants in each of these urban settings, the arrival of refugees from Southeast Asia during and immediately after the Vietnam War, and subsequent political changes in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and Africa (changes that extend to today’s turbulent Homeland Security-era) ensured that the ever-changing populations and landscapes in Oregon’s cities would continue to evolve.

This chapter begins with a broad overview of the historical migration and settlement patterns of immigrants in urban Oregon from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. This section is followed by a more in-depth discussion of the experiences of the largest groups of refugees in the state and their contribution to some of the key demographic and cultural changes that have occurred in Portland,

Salem, and Medford since the 1980s. We also focus on the largest groups of refugees now residing in Oregon—Russians and Ukrainians, Southeast Asians, and Africans. We conclude by posing a set of potential policy questions, considering their long-term implications, and proposing recommendations related to the dramatic recent demographic shift in the state. Throughout the chapter, the inter-

related dynamics of people, place, and space in urban Oregon form the center point of our discussion and provide context for our analysis.

Foreign-born immigrants have settled in Oregon at a time of significant change in our communities, our nation, and the world during the past two and one-half

decades. The often unpredictable economic challenges posed by the state’s boom-bust economy have shaped the ever-shifting perceptions and attitudes of its native-born population along with the lives and livelihoods of both the state’s long-term residents as well as its newest immigrants. In turn, the settlement of increasingly large numbers of diverse groups from outside the U.S. continues to add to the complexities, challenges, and opportunities provided by these interrelated cultural, economic, and political processes. These changes have been accompanied by unprecedented growth in the



state's population, especially in its largest cities. Multnomah County, which includes Portland, is the most populous county in Oregon with a total population of 660,448 in 2007. Portland continues to be the state's largest city by far with 568,380 residents. The two other largest cities in the state are Eugene at 153,690 and Salem with 151,895 people in 2007 (Population Research Center, 2007). A familiar set of problems has also appeared with this rapid population growth, including increased traffic and housing costs, crime, and environmental impacts.

Spanish-speaking immigrants currently form the largest majority of Oregon's foreign-born population. In towns and cities from the Oregon coast to the Willamette Valley, extending across the Cascades into the central and eastern part of the state, these primarily Mexican-born Oregonians are the largest visible group of immigrants recorded in recent census reports and witnessed in schools, health clinics, and local and regional cultural landscapes.

Along with important Latino newcomers, today's newly diverse state of Oregon is also home to tens of thousands of other immigrants born in other parts of the world. The city of Portland currently hosts the largest numbers of these immigrant newcomers (see Figure 1, page 35). Many have arrived as political, religious, or environmental refugees from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, Southeast Asia, and Africa, and these refugees helped swell the total foreign-born population of Oregon's towns and cities during the past two and one-half decades. Demographic changes were especially dramatic during the 1980s and 1990s. For example, the total population of foreign-born residents of Oregon's capital city, Salem, increased more than 70 percent between 1980 and 1990, and another 170 percent between 1990 and 2000. Similarly, more than half of the Portland metropolitan area's foreign-born population arrived after 1990.¹

The map shown in Figure 2 and Graphs 1 and 2 (see page 36) compare the astounding increases in the percentages and numbers of foreign-born in the three cities of Portland, Salem, and Medford between 1980 and 2000.

Immigrant settlement in urban Oregon

Less than a decade ago, an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* reported that the Pacific Northwest was "one of the last Caucasian bastions in the United States" (Kaplan, 1998). Although this observation

failed to acknowledge the changing diversity of Oregon and Washington's population in recent decades, the article did capture the homogeneous racial and ethnic make-up of Oregon and other parts of our region. The foundation for this lingering perception of Oregon's lack of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity is based directly on early patterns of postindigenous settlement that were dominated by immigrants from Germany, England, Scotland, Ireland, Canada, Scandinavia, and other parts of western and northwest Europe during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Interestingly and perhaps not coincidentally, the largest group of refugees living in Oregon cities today also is composed of white settlers, this time from post-Soviet-era Russia and Ukraine.

The earliest European immigrants in Oregon were joined by smaller numbers of other nonwhite groups such as the Chinese who first settled in Portland and in the Medford area and other parts of the Rogue Valley to search for gold and help construct the region's expanding railroad and transportation networks. After the passage of discriminatory and harsh anti-Chinese legislation in the early 1880s, Portland's downtown Chinatown became a place of refuge for Chinese residents from Oregon and other parts of the Pacific Northwest who were escaping the anti-Chinese violence that occurred in cities such as Boise, Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane. As a result, Portland's Chinese population grew to more than 7,800 by 1900 with the majority living on First and Second streets near the city's now historic downtown Chinatown. Most of today's Chinese residents of Portland prefer life in the outer suburbs to be close to employment opportunities and enjoy the benefits of more affordable and available housing options (Hardwick and Meacham, forthcoming 2008).

Another impact of this anti-Chinese legislation was the subsequent arrival of Japanese immigrants who came to fill the employment gap in Rogue and Willamette valley orchards and open small businesses in the region's towns and cities. By 1920, the *Portland City Directory* provides evidence of up to twenty Japanese-owned hotels in the Portland area, along with numerous groceries, restaurants, and other small businesses owned and operated by this immigrant group. By the beginning of World War II, the Japanese had emerged as the largest nonwhite group in the state. Most lived in Portland and the Hood River area. There were also more than 350 Japanese families residing just outside Salem

Figure 1 Place of origin for Portland's foreign born by census tract, 2000

The spatial patterns of Portland's foreign-born population by census tract are shown on this map. Latin American migrants tend to settle in Portland's outer suburbs, especially in the West Hills' towns of Hillsboro and Cornelius, as well as across town in Rockwood and Gresham. Asians, especially South and Southeast Asians, settle all across the Portland inner suburbs, such as Aloha and Beaverton in the West Hills, and Happy Valley and Sunnyside to the east. These patterns are representative

for both Asian immigrants as well as refugees. Africans, represented in Portland primarily by refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan, are located in Portland's north and northeast inner suburbs, as well as in the Beaverton area. Immigrants of European origin (who are primarily post-Soviet-era refugees from Russia and Ukraine), reside in the city's eastside suburbs such as Milwaukie, the Gateway District, and Happy Valley.

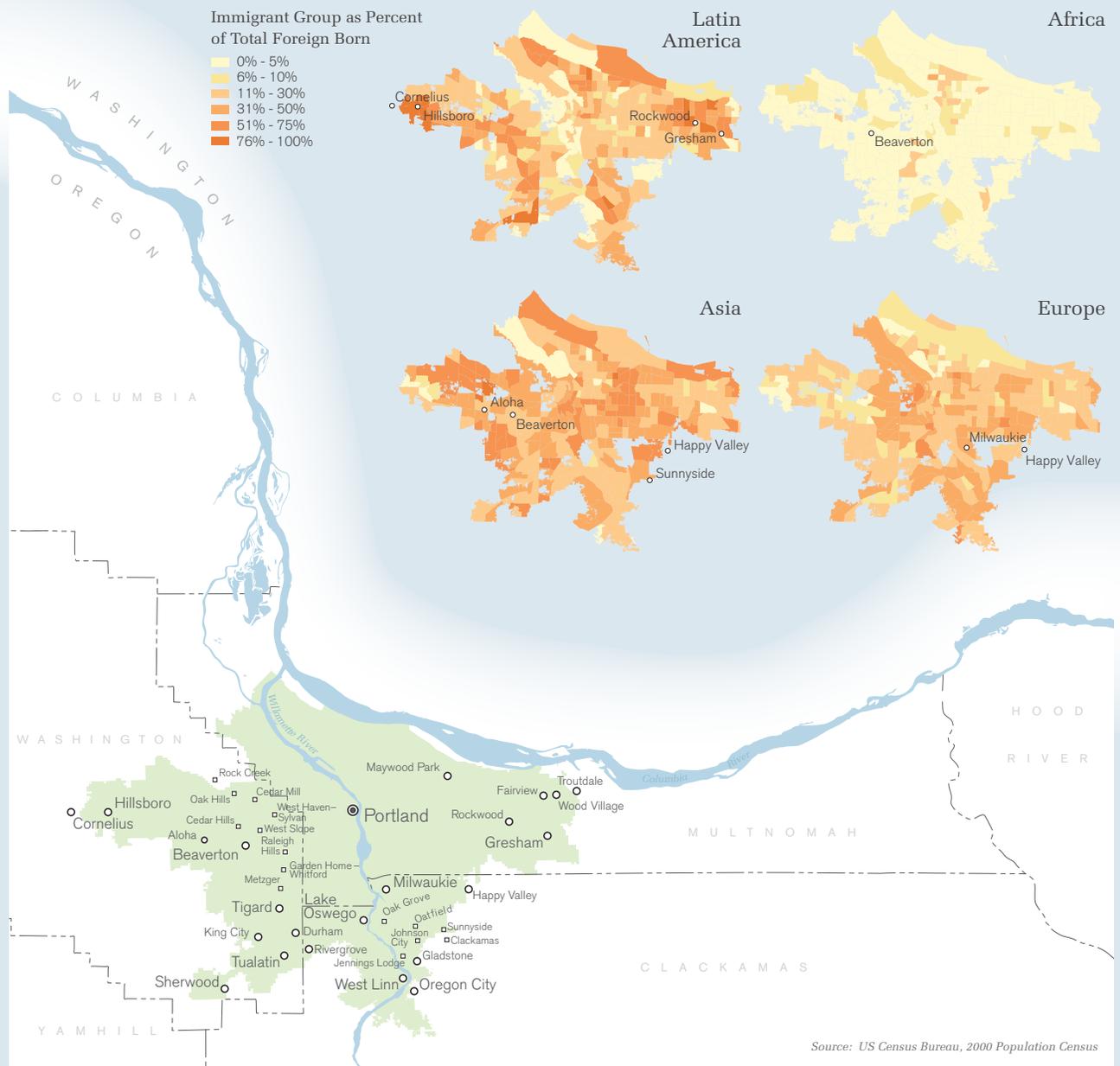
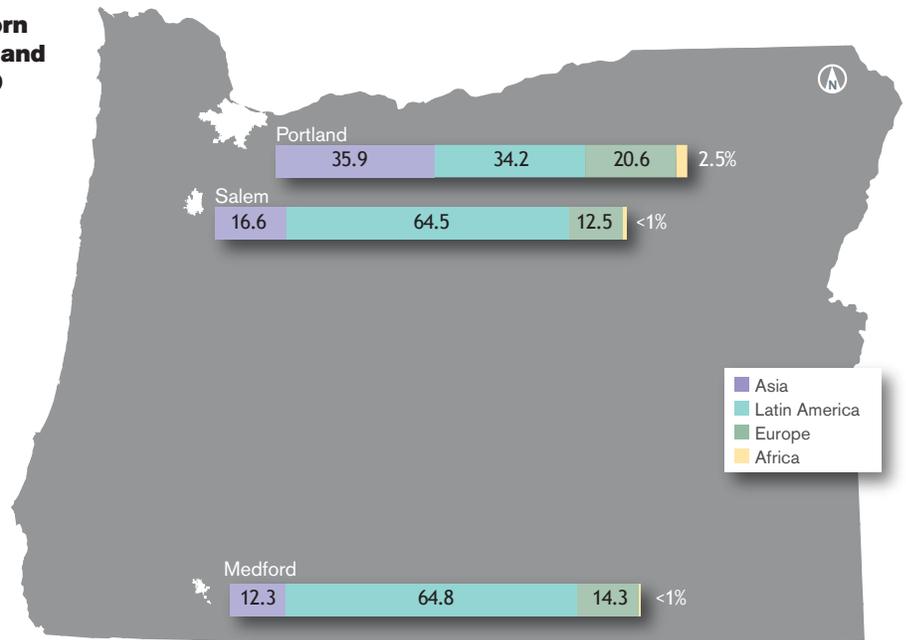


Figure 2 Percent of total foreign born by place of origin for Portland, Medford, and Salem, 2000

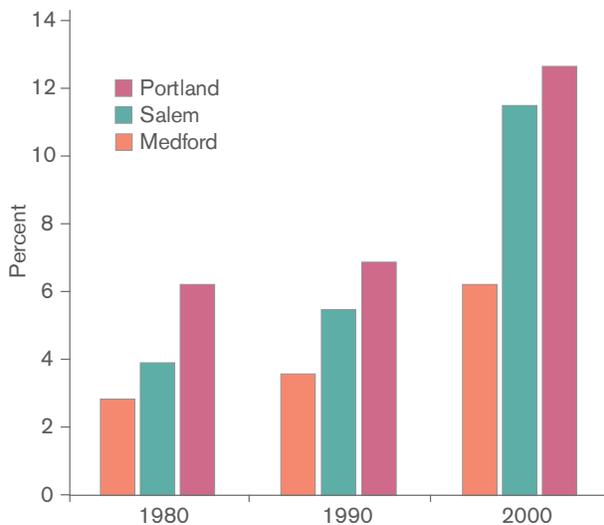
The three cities in this figure present an interesting story on the spatial distribution of Oregon's urban foreign born. Not surprisingly, Latin American migrants are the dominant group in Medford and Salem, with 64.8 percent and 64.5 percent of the total foreign born, respectively. However, this isn't true for the Portland metropolitan area. Asian migrants are the dominant foreign-born group, outnumbering Latin American migrants by slightly over 2,500. Moreover, Portland's distribution of foreign-born populations by place of origin is much more balanced, relative to the other two cities.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2000 Population Census

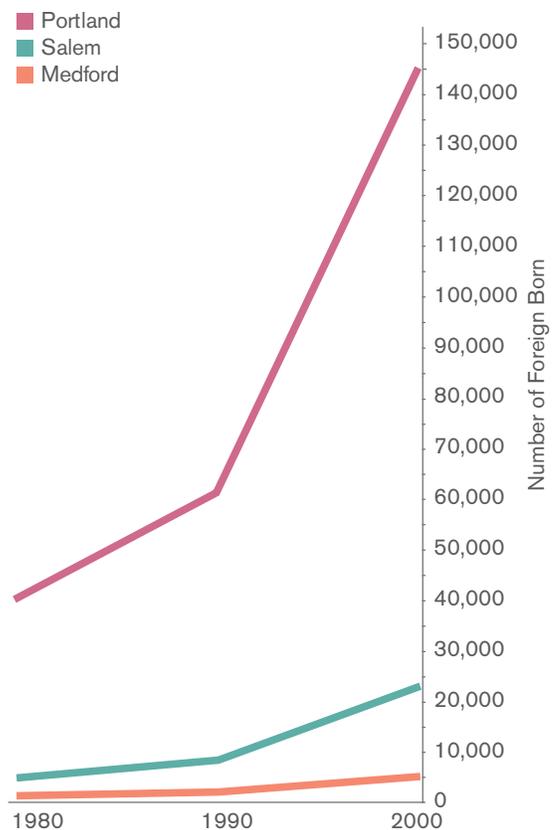
Graph 1 Foreign born as percent of total population for Portland, Medford, and Salem, 1980–2000

Even though foreign born in Oregon may not be represented widely in the total population, the rate at which their numbers are growing is astounding. The foreign born as a percentage of total population for all three cities, Portland, Medford, and Salem, doubled in the 1990–2000 decade.



The change in the number of foreign born in the last two decades (1980–2000) is shown on Figure 2. Overall, the percent change in the number of foreign born in the 1990–2000 decade for Portland was 136 percent, for Medford 140 percent, and for Salem 170 percent.

Graph 2 Decadal foreign-born population change, 1980–2000



Source: US Census Bureau, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Population Censuses.

where they grew crops such as celery, onions, and other vegetables to supply the demands of local urban populations (Hardwick, 2007). This early Asian imprint in the region was curtailed suddenly during the war years, however, when anti-Japanese federal policies were passed that forcibly relocated all Japanese residents of Oregon and other western states to internment camps located in remote places in the interior.

Soon thereafter, the U.S. government passed the Bracero Act in 1942 to help fill the resulting wartime need for farm labor (Gamboa, 1990). This new legislation opened the door to the admission of new immigrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America. Many settled in or near small Willamette Valley towns such as Woodburn and Independence and in Medford-area small towns such as Phoenix. Others ultimately relocated to larger urban centers such as Portland and Salem over the years and to small towns located on the Oregon coast. Although Bracero policies were eliminated in the early 1950s and barred the large-scale admission of new Oregon workers from Latin America, the subsequent passage of newly revised federal immigration policies in 1965 removed country-based quotas that limited the numbers of certain groups allowed admission into the United States.

Many of the post-1965 arrivals from Latin America (as compared with earlier Latino settlers in Oregon), chose to reside in the outer suburbs of Portland in close proximity to employment in nearby agriculture and the amenities of a more urban lifestyle. In Portland's outer West Hills suburb of Hillsboro, for example, the descendants of farm workers who arrived during the post-1960s decades now dominate many of the city's suburban neighborhoods (Abbott, 2001). Here, as elsewhere in many other neighborhoods located in the Portland, Salem, and Medford metropolitan areas, Spanish-speaking residents play an increasingly important role in the evolution of local economic, cultural, and linguistic practices. Throughout this suburban community, Latino-owned businesses and residences compete with upscale development in places like (primarily white) Orenco Station.

Similarly, in suburban Cornelius, a huge supermarket that feared the impending construction of a nearby superstore was sold in 2006 to a Latino-owned business. This business now successfully caters to the needs of the metropolitan area's growing Spanish-speaking population. Today Latinos make up more than one-half of the population of

this formerly white-dominated suburb located in Portland's West Hills. Perhaps even more surprisingly, just across town in the much smaller suburban community of Rockwood, more than half of all local businesses now cater to the metropolitan area's eastside Spanish-speaking population (Blair, 2006). In Rockwood, Latino immigrants made up at least 20 percent of the total population of 28,836 in the year 2000. Similar patterns and landscapes have emerged in the Medford area, especially since the early 1990s, as well as in other urban settings in Oregon such as the Columbia River cities of Hermiston and Boardman, and Madras and Bend just east of the Cascades.

South and Southeast Asians also have increased the overall number of foreign-born Oregonians, especially since the mid-1980s. Many arrived as refugees in the late 1960s and 1970s. Other groups such as Koreans settled in Portland-area suburbs like Sunnyside, Beaverton, and Lake Oswego, and in middle- and upper-middle class residential districts in Salem, Corvallis, Eugene, and Springfield. Ethnic networks encouraged Koreans to relocate to western Oregon from South Korea as well as from other U.S. states such as Texas and California as secondary migrants. Many based their decision to relocate on ethnic networks linked by cell phone, e-mail, and postal mail messages that extolled the environmental and economic virtues of life in Oregon's cities.

Despite significant increases in Asian groups such as Koreans (along with other immigrants from Hong Kong, mainland China, the Philippines, Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia), the fastest growing and largest group of Asians to migrate directly to Oregon from their homeland is Indians. Statewide, the population of Indians in Oregon increased five-fold between 1980 and 2000. Most of these primarily young or middle-aged, well-educated migrants came to work in Portland and Salem's high-tech industries in the 1980s and 1990s. As compared to the patterns of other recently arriving immigrants in urban Oregon, Indians are the most widely dispersed group within each of their destination cities. This is no doubt a result of their knowledge of English upon arrival in Oregon and also the relatively high educational and economic status of this group as compared to the majority of other immigrants in the state.

Surprisingly, as the maps and graphs shown earlier in this chapter indicate, Asians outnumber Latinos as the largest group in the city of Portland,

with Europeans and Africans relatively far behind. In dramatic contrast, in the Salem urban area, a much larger percentage of the foreign-born population is from Latin America as compared to Portland where Asians are more dominant. The percentage of Latin American residents in the city of Medford is about the same as in Salem, but in this Rogue Valley city, Europeans form the second largest group, with Asians a close third, and African-born residents only a tiny minority.

Refugee migration, settlement, and networks in urban Oregon

Oregon now ranks eleventh among the nation's states for the total number of new refugees, with Portland the twelfth most refugee rich city in the United States (Singer and Wilson, 2006). For a state with such a small total population, this ranking is astounding. Oregon's visionary resettlement support system; activist social, ethnic, and religious networks; abundance of refugee sponsors; and economic opportunities, as well as the U.S. government's family reunification policies are the primary reasons why so many refugees from Africa, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and Southeast Asia have become Oregonians. The largest of these refugee groups are Russian-speaking Christians who left their homeland during the post-Cold War era.

Before turning our attention to the refugee experience in Oregon, it is critically important to understand differences in the political status of different incoming groups (Kritz, 1983). *Immigrants*, such as Mexicans, come to this country with their own funding and only the support of family and friends who may already be living here. *Refugees* are admitted to the United States under very different rules and regulations than immigrants. Prior to arrival, each potential refugee must meet a rigorous set of criteria defined by the U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 and upheld by the Department of Homeland Security via a screening process that occurs prior to their approval for admission into the country. Refugees must document that they are escaping political, religious, or racial persecution by the government of their home country. Economic deprivation is not considered a justifiable basis for granting refugee status. A person can be admitted as a refugee,

however, if persecution has been experienced in the past and there is a threat of it becoming an issue in the future if they have a sponsor in the United States.

Another category of émigrés is *asylum seekers*. Migrants in this category do not need American sponsors for their resettlement here, but they cannot qualify for asylee status until they actually reach the United States. There are no quotas for asylee admissions but they must also be able to prove that they legitimately fear religious, political, or racial persecution in their homeland to receive refugee benefits. If a person is already living in the United States (e.g., because their visa expired or they arrived without yet having gained refugee status), they have the right to seek political asylum and ultimately to apply for refugee status if these criteria are met (Libov, 2007).

Refugee resettlement agencies in Portland and Salem have played an especially important role in bringing large numbers of refugees from certain parts of the world into the state. The largest state-based agency by far is the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization



(IRCO), located in a neighborhood populated by refugees in northeast Portland. IRCO coordinates its efforts to find sponsors and housing for refugee applicants in collaboration with voluntary agencies (VolAgs) and the federal refugee resettlement office in Salem. This resettlement agency, which employs more than 150 multilingual social workers, teachers, and other staff members, is also the primary agency offering English-language classes, employment training, and job placement during the first eight months of refugees' residence in the state. IRCO also coordinates a wide variety of other programs in support of Latinos and other immigrants who live within 100 miles of Portland via after-school programs, senior care centers, an Africa House, and an Asian Family Center.²

Along with IRCO's efforts, a host of local sponsors (required for refugee admission into the U.S.) and a series of transnational networks help spread the word to family and friends back home or to refugee camps about relocating to Oregon. Russians and Ukrainians are sponsored primarily by members of fundamentalist Christian church congregations in Portland and Salem and thus are tightly

connected by local and transnational religious networks. Southeast Asians came during and after the Vietnam War aided by sponsors arranged by Catholic Charities and the U.S. government; and Africans relocated to Oregon primarily due to the efforts of sponsors organized by voluntary agencies (VolAgs) such as Lutheran Social Services and Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR). The experiences, motivations to leave their homeland, spatial patterns, and networks of each of these largest refugee groups in Oregon are discussed below in the context of their lives in the Portland, Salem, and Medford urban areas.

Refugees from southeast Asia

The earliest refugee groups to find their way to Oregon's cities came directly from Southeast Asia beginning in the mid-1970s. These Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Mien victims of the Vietnam War found life in Portland confusing and uncertain due to their unplanned arrival, lack of English language skills, and small numbers. In addition, although Asian immigrants are now the largest group of foreign-born residents in the Portland area, during these early years of refugee resettlement in the state, their visible minority status, distinctive values, and belief systems set them apart from the majority white population. Most settled initially in apartment buildings near Sandy Boulevard in north Portland where their presence is still felt today in the numerous Vietnamese-owned restaurants, groceries, and small shops that line this busy commercial arterial.

With the support of the Asian Family Center and sponsors in the area, today's Southeast Asian population in Portland totals more than 40,000 (Po-Cha, 2004). The majority of Vietnamese Portlanders (the largest group) lives in the city's suburbs in both the West Hills and also east of the Willamette River in suburbs such as Happy Valley. Like other groups in Portland, Southeast Asians have been affected by the high cost of living in the city's gentrifying downtown core and continue to relocate at the edges of the metropolitan area. The move to the West Hills in particular was encouraged by this suburban region's Asian ambience (originally spawned by the draw of employment of more highly educated Asian groups at Intel, Hewlett-Packard, and other high-tech firms) and by affordable housing. As a result, Aloha and Beaverton currently have the most rapidly growing Vietnamese population of any locality in the state (Walker, 2004). Vietnamese fami-

lies have also moved to other smaller cities in Oregon during the past decade or so, with significantly large numbers now residing in Salem, Springfield, and Medford.

Other Vietnam War-era refugees who came to Oregon after the Vietnam War and in more recent years include people born in Laos and Cambodia. Like many of their Vietnamese neighbors in suburban Portland and other smaller cities, most lived in refugee camps in Thailand prior to being sponsored for entry into the United States.

Cambodian refugees also found their way to Portland following the war in Vietnam. Indeed, the Cambodian-born director of the state's largest resettlement agency, Sokhum Tauch, was the first Southeast Asian migrant to arrive in Oregon in the mid-1970s. His dramatic story of growing up in a refugee camp in Thailand, finding his way to a refugee center in Pennsylvania, and then taking the train to the Pacific Northwest to seek yet another new life, illuminates the migration and settlement experiences of this first Southeast Asian refugee group to come to Oregon. According to Tauch (2004):

I will never forget when I first looked for rice to cook the day after I got here. I lived way out in a tiny apartment in the suburbs, you know, and the only place my landlady said I could buy rice then was in Chinatown. Since I didn't know how far it was, or how big this city was, I walked all the way downtown and then home again carrying a huge burlap bag of rice all the way back.

Southeast Asians in Oregon also include two other distinctive ethnic groups from the highlands of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma)—Hmong and Mien. Thousands of these Southeast Asian "hill tribes" who were recruited by the U.S. government to fight in a secret war against the Pathet Lao Communists were forced to escape from their hiding places in the jungles of Laos by walking hundreds of miles to safety in Thailand. Today, there are about 3,000 Hmong living in Oregon with most centered in suburban Portland and in the Salem area (Po-Cha, 2006).

Most recently, in late 2007, about 500 new refugees from Myanmar (Burma) arrived in Portland, escapees from a civil war and an oppressive military government in their homeland (Libov, 2007). Struggling to find their way in a new city, these mostly agrarian peoples (and the most recent refugees in our state from Asia) are finding their new lives and landscapes in urban Oregon challenging and confusing.

In an effort to provide support and ease the adjustment experiences of new arrivals from different parts of Asia, a group of Cambodians and other refugees from Southeast Asia currently is constructing a Buddhist Cultural Center in Beaverton. Their goal is to provide a heritage site to commemorate their long journeys to a new life in Oregon cities and suburbs and to celebrate their achievements in the residential, commercial, and economic arenas.

Refugees from Africa

Refugees from other war-torn countries have also found their way to Oregon's cities in more recent years. Currently, new African arrivals in the state outnumber all other groups of refugees. Along Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard in North Portland, streetscapes formerly dominated by African American restaurants and other small businesses are being transformed by ethnic eateries and social gathering places owned by Ethiopians and other refugees from Africa. The earliest people to relocate to Oregon from refugee camps and their homes in Africa came primarily from Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the Sudan. Four years ago, the newest group to arrive from refugee camps—Bantu slaves from Somalia—was settled in Portland. Like other African refugees, most now live in either north or northeast Portland's inner suburbs or in the Beaverton area where a large mosque caters to the religious beliefs of those who are Moslem. Similarly, Christian church congregations, a new Africa House, and a Somali Cultural Center, along with the availability of affordable housing, attract diverse groups of African refugees to residential areas in north, northeast, and eastside Portland.

These newly organized cultural and social networking centers fill a variety of niches for African refugees in Oregon. The first group to organize a cultural center was the Somalis, who opened the Somali Community Center Coalition in a rented office space in an old shopping center in north Portland. More recently, refugees from Eritrea have opened two new community centers. In addition to these gathering places for specific groups of African refugees, IRCO's new Africa House in a newly refurbished two-story historic home in northwest

Portland provides additional support for African refugees, encouragement to participate in social and educational networks, and assistance in coping with their often challenging new lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Prior research by Hume and Hardwick (2005) documented few networks linking African American residents in Oregon with more recently arriving African refugee groups. Their work also found that there is little or no racially or ethnically based affinity that politically or socially links African groups. This lack of racial or ethnic connection among Africans is at odds with the expectations of decision-makers at refugee resettlement agencies where residency for newly arriving refugees is generally determined. Groups such as the Bantus, for example, were placed in apartments located next



door to Somali neighbors. Since Bantus were slaves under the power of Somalis in their former lives in Africa, they prefer not to live in close proximity to this other East African group. Likewise, tensions continue to exist among and between various groups based on competition for scarce resources such as jobs, affordable apartments, and grants from city and county

organizations because there are several hundred different ethnic and national groups from the huge continent of Africa now residing in Oregon's largest urban area.

Russians and Ukrainians

Surprisingly, the states of Oregon and Washington added more new migrants born in Russia and Ukraine than any other part of the country between 1990 and 2005. Attracted primarily by religious networks and sponsors affiliated with Christian fundamentalist church congregations, a network of well-organized social service and refugee resettlement agencies, and a physical environment that resembles their homeland, Russian and Ukrainian Baptists, Pentecostals, and Seventh-day Adventists combined are now by far the largest refugee groups in Oregon.

The diaspora of these particular groups from the former U.S.S.R. to the United States began with changes in both Soviet emigration policies and American refugee policies. Despite the end of the

Cold War more than a decade ago, the religious right in the United States has been influential in securing and holding onto refugee status for these Christian groups as well as for Jews. In addition to the benefits of refugee admission policies for migrants from the former Soviet Union, many Russian and Ukrainian secondary migrants from states such as California and New York heard about the Pacific Northwest from their friends and families who already resided here and subsequently migrated to the Portland area in large numbers.

The early node of Slavic identity in Woodburn set the stage for the arrival of another group of ethno-religious migrants from Russia and the Soviet Union who arrived in mid-century—Russian Old Believers. Old Believers are the most distinctive of all Russian-speaking residents of the Willamette Valley because of their unique style of clothing and their propensity for constructing ornate Russian Orthodox churches and chapels reminiscent of those they erected many centuries ago in Russia. Old Believers are a sectarian group who separated from the Orthodox Church in 1666 after a series of reforms was enacted by the ruling czar and Orthodox patriarch (Hardwick, 1993). An earlier group of refugees from the former Soviet Union who had relocated to Woodburn a decade or so earlier, Russian Molokans, served as sponsors for these Old Believers who wished to migrate to western Oregon from a temporary refuge in Brazil in the mid-1960s (Morris, 1981). There are now about 2,000 Old Believers living in the Woodburn area. Old Believer churches and houses can often be distinguished by the solid fencing around their yards, backed by either tall rows of sunflowers or Cyprus trees.

The small city of Woodburn also featured an early Russian Pentecostal community. Some of the members of this group played a major role in attracting the most recent wave of migrants from the former Soviet Union. Overwhelmed by the numbers of new arrivals in the early 1990s, leaders of this church in Woodburn asked IRCO for help. The decade-and-one-half-long Russian and Ukrainian diaspora to the Willamette Valley that followed, therefore, began with this Woodburn- and Portland-area collaboration.

Since family reunification is a top priority of U.S. immigration policy, the number of new arrivals has continued to increase with the addition of the parents, children, and other family members of these post-Soviet-era refugees. According to Victoria Libov, a Russian social worker who lives in

Beaverton, an estimated 90 percent of these Russian and Ukrainian refugees remain in the area after their initial settlement in the region because of the support provided by refugee resettlement agencies and church networks, and the help of family and friends from home (Libov, 2004).

Russian-speaking refugees own and operate more than 400 businesses in the Portland area and three stores in Salem that cater to the Russian-speaking market (Hardwick and Meacham, 2005). Many of the Portland businesses center on the building industry, real estate, and banking. The expansion of homebuyers from the former Soviet Union, dissemination of Russian-language religious networks and newspapers, and growing numbers of businesses that cater to the Russian and Eastern European market are changing the residential and commercial landscape of our region.

Slavic refugee leaders also are beginning to play a role in reshaping the politics of our region. For example, the Slavic Coalition provides a voice for the Russian-speaking community to ensure maximum opportunities for gaining county and city funding and political power in the urban region. The coalition was founded three years ago to serve as an advocate for youths, family stabilization, and the elderly in the area's Russian-speaking community. Two leaders of the Slavic Coalition were also recently appointed to serve on the Portland mayor's new task force that is making recommendations about immigrant and refugee issues in the metropolitan area.³ Another Ukrainian-born leader in the Salem community is the cultural competency coordinator of one of Oregon's major state agencies headquartered in Salem. These community leaders, and the large community of Russian-speaking refugees that they represent, have helped Oregon become one of the most densely settled Slavic enclaves in the United States in recent years.

Looking toward the future: policies, patterns, and predictions

Since many of Oregon's foreign-born urban residents arrive as refugees, U.S. government policies allowing (or disallowing) refugee admissions into the country largely determine the specific foreign-born refugees who settle in the state during certain periods. During the post-Cold War years, for example, up to 50,000 people from the former Soviet Union per year were allowed entry. In contrast, by late 2007, the Bush administration released new information specifying the total numbers of refugees

who were allowed admission into the country in 2007 as compared to 2008 (Memorandum for the Secretary of State, 2007). As summarized on the following table, the changes in total numbers allowable in each group in 2007 as compared to 2008 are striking:

Refugee arrivals to the United States		
	2007	2008
Africa	16,000	22,000
East Asia	20,000	11,000
Europe and Central Asia	3,000	6,500
Latin America	3,000	5,000
Near East and South Asia	28,000	5,500
Reserve	10,000	20,000

SOURCE: KISSAM AND STEPHEN 2006

This new refugee legislation indicates that Oregon and other parts of the U.S. will see major reductions in the number of new arrivals from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (which includes Russians and Ukrainians), with much larger numbers of people allowed entry from Africa, Myanmar (Burma), and the Middle East due to political and economic oppression in their homelands.

These and other ongoing changes and challenges at the national and global level directly affect what happens regionally and locally in Oregon. Some of these changes reflect the work of pro-immigrant advisory boards in both the public and private sector such as Portland mayor Tom Potter's Immigrant and Refugee Task Force. This diverse advisory group submitted a list of policy recommendations that were accepted by the city of Portland early in 2008. These recommendations include (1) creating an office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs for the city; (2) establishing a multicultural community center; (3) providing additional resources for immigrants and refugee organizations to train and support consultants in civic empowerment; (4) conducting a professional evaluation to assess the city's current human resources policies and practices and recommend changes that would result in the recruitment, hiring, and retention of multilingual and multicultural staff members to serve Portland's fast-growing immigrant and refugee communities. It is recom-

mended that city and county governments in other cities and small towns in Oregon adopt similar models in their own communities.

As federal refugee policies continue to shift, and restrictions on immigration are pursued at federal, state, and local levels, many questions remain about future demographic changes that may occur in our state. In the near future, will Oregon's towns and cities continue to attract large numbers of refugee migrants and immigrants from other U.S. states or directly from places in Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet Union? Will the numbers of new arrivals from the Middle East, especially Iraq, become the state's largest new foreign-born group due to the ravages of war and subsequent economic, political, and environmental problems in their homeland? Likewise, as anti-Latino and anti-immigration rhetoric grows louder in the U.S. and Oregon, how will the numbers of new arrivals from Mexico, the state's largest immigrant group, be affected in the years ahead?

Although the answers to these and other questions remain uncertain, it is clear that our state has become a magnet for immigrant settlement in recent years, much as it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And these newest Oregonians, like others who have come before them, bring with them a set of skills, experiences, and values that will enrich our state in the years to come. However, these foreign-born newcomers will also need support to speed their integration into the state's economy and society. We recommend that the lessons learned and successful programs of social service organizations and networks such as IRCO's Asian Family Center and its Africa House that have played such a valuable role in refugee resettlement and incorporation in Portland be expanded to other parts of the state. The widespread dissemination of employment skills training classes and computer skills workshops, after-school programs for students and their families, senior acculturation programs, and other initiatives in support of immigrants are needed in smaller towns and cities all across the state to help newcomers adjust to their new and potentially promising lives in Oregon.

Only one thing is certain. As has been the case during the past century and one-half, new policies, practices, and patterns of immigration will unfold, and they will continue to influence the fabric of Oregon's diverse peoples, cultures, and social landscapes.

Notes

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1. It is important to remind readers that data provided by U.S. Census of Population reports cited in this chapter are incomplete and thus subject to question. Many immigrants in Oregon (as in other places in the U.S.) are missed in final census counts due to language barriers and fear of government officials. However, census counts do provide useful data for estimating the number of people in comparative places in the state, as well as the residential patterns of various immigrant groups, and thus have been used for the maps and graphs presented here.

2. Migrants who arrive with refugee status receive eight months of financial support in the state of Oregon and ten months in the neighboring state of Washington. This difference may help to explain the relatively large secondary migration of Portland refugees across the Columbia River to Vancouver, Washington during the past ten years or so.

3. Portland mayor Tom Potter appointed selected members to his newly proposed City of Portland Immigration Task Force in 2006. This advisory group recently proposed two major priorities for action to be taken by the mayor's office including (1) development of a new policy that encourages and ensures more diverse hiring in city agencies, and (2) creating and maintaining a director of diversity and a multicultural center in the city of Portland. These recommendations were accepted by the city in January 2008.

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Chapter 4

Latin American Immigration in Rural Oregon

In large part the history of Latinos in rural Oregon is a history of Mexicans in Oregon. This chapter describes the pattern of Mexican immigration and settlement in rural Oregon communities with a special focus on the last three decades.

The face of many rural communities in Oregon has been dramatically altered by Mexican immigrants, a process that has evolved over the course of four generations. Thinking of Mexican immigration as a generational experience offers important insights into immigrants' needs and expectations and illuminates the challenges they face in adapting to life in rural Oregon communities.

When Mexico became independent of Spain in 1821, the Oregon Country southern border became the U.S. territorial border with Mexico. After the U.S. government's attempts to purchase parts of Mexico's northern territory were rebuffed, an armed clash between the U.S. and Mexican armies along the Rio Grande in 1846 prompted the U.S. to declare war on Mexico. With increased immigration to Oregon in the 1840s, heightened confrontations with the native peoples of the area (see Douthit 2002), and U.S. President James Polk's having designs on Mexico's northern territory, the Oregon border was of key importance. In 1846, the year that the U.S.

went to war with Mexico, it also settled the boundary of the Oregon Territory with all land above the forty-ninth parallel going to Great Britain (what is now the Canadian boundary between the province of British Columbia and the U.S.). At the conclusion of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848, the two countries signed the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which called for Mexico to give up more than half of its territory.

The Oregon Territory, which still included the present-day states of Washington and Idaho, went from being a U.S. territory bordering Mexico to a state that would soon share a border with California (the latter gained statehood in 1850). These shifting borders, however, did not greatly restrict the flow of people. According to the Oregon Historical Society, "for years, people moved freely along the open border between the Oregon Country and Mexico, trading supplies and cultural influences. Even before the Civil War, Mexican merchants, miners, soldiers, adventurers, shepherders, and *vaqueros* were in southern Oregon" (Nusz and Ricciardi 2003; Oregon Historical Society 2004).

Some of the earliest Mexican migrants to the state of Oregon were mule-packers, miners, and *vaqueros* (cowboys) who brought their trade from what was greater Mexico to the U.S. Two decades



later, Mexican cowboys migrated to Oregon, accompanying California cattlemen who settled in remote locations in eastern Oregon. According to historian Jeff LaLonde, the vaqueros “were Spanish-speaking Californios, Indians of central California who had grown up riding and herding on the Central Valley’s Mexican land grants” (LaLonde, 2005). Other California ranchers also established themselves in Harney and Malheur counties in eastern Oregon, developing some of the largest cattle-spreads in the state. Mexicans, along with workers from China, Japan, and the Philippines, also built railroads linking the East and West coasts, eventually making mule-pack operations obsolete (Nusz and Ricciardi 2003; Oregon Historical Society 2004).

The 1920s–1940s

Historian Erasmo Gamboa (1990) has written the most complete account of Mexican migration to Oregon in the early- to mid-twentieth century. The fertile Willamette Valley in Oregon and the Puyallup and Skagit valleys in Washington, as well as the tablelands of eastern Washington and Oregon, were able to produce a rich abundance of specialty crops including a wide range of fruits, vegetables, nuts, berries, grapes, sugar beets, onions, hops, and wheat. All of these crops, however, required an extensive and usually seasonal labor supply in regions that were often sparsely populated. The need for labor led Oregon growers to recruit Mexican laborers from both the Southwest and Mexico to work on area farms. By 1910, Oregon ranked seventh among states outside the Southwest with Mexican-born residents (Gamboa 1990:7).

From 1910 through 1930, Mexicans came to Oregon as a result of the upheaval caused by the Mexican Revolution. Approximately 10 percent of the Mexican population—more than a million people—fled to the U.S. from 1910 to 1920, seeking refuge from the war as well as economic opportunity (Sánchez 1993:36). Although movement across the border was not strictly monitored before World War I, the creation of the U.S. Border Patrol in 1924, along with passage of quota laws in 1921 and 1924, quickly changed the nature of the U.S.-Mexican border from a porous, weakly defined demarcation to an international boundary that created the category “illegal immigrant.”

The first temporary worker program allowed Mexicans who would be ineligible for entry under the 1917 Immigration Act to work seasonally in the United States. This program was enacted during World War I and extended until 1922. While the Immigration Act of 1917 established literacy and head tax requirements for Mexicans, within months of its implementation, the U.S. Secretary of Labor “authorized western sugar beet enterprises to recruit alien labor without enforcement of this restriction” (Gamboa 1990:9). By 1924, Mexicans were contracted from the southwestern states to

work in sugar beets for \$3 per day, and Portland became a significant recruiting ground for Mexican workers (Gamboa 1990: 9). Railroad companies were another prime employer of Mexican workers, including several in Oregon (Taylor 1931).

Mexicans who came to Oregon to work in the sugar beet industry and as railroad workers in the earlier part of the twentieth century established roots in the state, particularly in eastern Oregon. Mexican immigration decreased in the 1930s not only because there was

a lack of employment in the U.S. but also due to U.S. policies of deportation and exclusion. During the early 1930s, local authorities through the West and Midwest repatriated more than 400,000 Mexicans. At that time, the Mexican population in the U.S. was more than 1.4 million.

While the deportations of the Great Depression returned about 20 percent of this population, a vast majority remained, and their labor was still needed. Some crop sectors expanded, such as hops that grew significantly after the repeal of Prohibition in 1932. Sugar beet cultivation continued to increase in the 1930s as growers received subsidies. While many impoverished workers flowed into Oregon and the Northwest, there is evidence to suggest that Mexicans were targeted for recruitment by growers, sugar companies, and other employers. Paul Taylor noted in 1937 that Mexican migrants traveled from the Imperial Valley of California to Oregon’s Hood River and Willamette valleys (1937, Gamboa 1990:13). Gamboa has also suggested that migrant laborers from Texas traveled from there to Oregon and Washington for work as well as to midwestern states (1990:14).



Continued growth of the Mexican population in rural Oregon was spurred in the 1940s by three related factors: continuing growth in agriculture and a subsequent need for labor, the onset of World War II, and the existence of the Bracero Program that was designed to recruit Mexican laborers to replace those who either entered the U.S. armed forces or who left farm labor to work in industry. The demand for food production, expansion of irrigation, and electrification boosted commercial acreage, while the war pulled much of the existing labor force into war production. The demographic shift of workers from rural to urban areas resulted in a labor shortage in Oregon and other parts of the Northwest by 1941.

Northwest farmers complained directly to the U.S. government about a lack of labor. Their complaints led to the creation of the Bracero Program, which existed from 1942 to 1947 (see Gamboa 1990), and resulted in approximately 15,136 Mexicans being contracted as farm laborers in Oregon (Gamboa 1995a:41). Additional braceros were also employed on Oregon railroads from 1943 to 1946. They were also put to work constructing fire lanes during forest fires and planted pine seedlings in reforestation projects for the U.S. Forest Service (Gamboa 1990: 57–59).

While the agreements signed by the U.S. and Mexican governments specified that particular conditions be met regarding workers' housing, food, hours worked, transportation, and pay, once braceros were turned over to farmers, employers had full say and could often do as they pleased with workers and their contracts. Erasmo Gamboa documents in great detail the very difficult conditions braceros worked under, including being forced to stay in fields despite freezing temperatures, lack of healthcare, lead poisoning from orchard work, job-related injuries, transportation accidents, and substandard housing and food (1990:65–73). Workers performed admirably under these adverse circumstances and were widely praised for their skill and productivity. But once the war was over, returning Oregon workers and their families began protesting the use of Mexican workers, and public demonstrations took place in many northwestern communities. Workers responded with work stoppages and strikes with the support of Mexican government officials. They resisted as best they could against conditions where employers often had absolute control over all aspects of their lives.

In 1947, Public Law (PL)-45, which had sanc-

tioned the wartime phase of the Bracero Program, expired and was superseded by PL-40. The terms under PL-40 called for workers' contracts to be negotiated directly between employer and bracero and required employers to pay for the screening, selection, and roundtrip transportation of workers from Mexico to the Northwest. Previously, these expenses had been assumed by the U.S. government. Northwest growers were shocked at the terms of the agreement. Anxious over growing anti-Mexican sentiment and the protests mounted by braceros, they decided to no longer contract for their labor. Therefore, the program ended in Oregon in 1947.

1950s–1970s: settlers and a second generation in rural Oregon

Northwest growers, led by the larger commercial agricultural interests, soon found a new source of labor—Mexican-American migratory laborers recruited from California, Texas, and other areas of the Southwest. During the war new canneries and packing companies were opened in the Northwest, increasing the acreage of crops. For example, Oregon's pea processing acreage increased from 21,000 to 50,000 by the end of the war (Gamboa 1990:125). Other crop acreage increased as well, earning places such as Woodburn recognition as “the berry capital of the world” in the mid-1950s.

Like California growers, some Oregon farmers recruited undocumented laborers in the 1950s, but also continued to solicit laborers from the Southwest. Some of the first Mexican families settled permanently in the Woodburn, Hubbard, and St. Paul areas in the early 1950s. Many went from states in Mexico like San Luis Potosí, Sonora, Hidalgo, and, Nuevo León to small towns close to the Texas border such as Progreso and Mission in the 1940s and 1950s. From there they formed the first population of permanent Mexican families in Woodburn and the surrounding area, building on deeper roots in communities such as Nyssa, Ontario, and Independence, which had Mexican settlers during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Many of these families came originally as farmworkers, but began to settle and worked in local canneries, on the railroad, in construction, and in seasonal harvesting work. Erlinda González-Berry and Dwaine Plaza have described these Mexican-origin Tejanos as “pioneer migrants” and document their settlement in central Oregon between the 1950s and the 1970s (2007).

The 1950s in Oregon and elsewhere were also

marked by “Operation Wetback,” a U.S. government program focused on preventing undocumented people from entering the U.S. and on deporting undocumented workers already here. The city of Woodburn and other communities experienced frequent sweeps that picked up and subsequently deported undocumented workers.

In the 1970s a second wave of migration came to rural Oregon from Mexico, including migrant farmworkers from the state of Michoacán and the first indigenous Oaxacans who were brought up by labor contractors from California (see Stephen 2004, 2007). In the mid-1970s, Mexican workers began to work in greater numbers as tree planters and thinners in the reforestation industry, performing work that was previously done primarily by Oregon workers. They worked through contractors and in the off-season looked for jobs in farms, tree nurseries, and canneries, often through the same contractor.

The creation of cultural and political spaces for Latin American immigrants in the 1970s brought new opportunities for social inclusion to rural workers. Organizations such as the Valley Migrant League developed opportunity centers; day care and adult education programs; citizenship, social, and legal skills instruction; and other areas of training (González Berry and Plaza 2007: 101, see Gamboa 1995b, Stephen 2001). The founding of Colegio César Chávez in 1973 in Mt. Angel marked the nation’s only Chicano college that was specifically aimed at Mexican-origin students. The formation of *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* or PCUN (Northwest Treeplanters and Farmworkers United) in 1985 built on the work of the Willamette Valley Immigration Project begun in 1977. From 1985 to 1986, the union began to build a constituency among farmworkers and forestry workers. During the 1990s PCUN engaged in a series of actions aimed at opening up political and cultural space for immigrant Mexican farmworkers, raising farmworker wages, and reaching its first contracts with small organic growers. During the summer of 2002 the union completed negotiations with NORPAC Foods, Inc., a large cooperative of growers that had been the focus of a ten-year boycott. (See Stephen 2001, for a general history of PCUN).

IRCA and the settling of a third and fourth generation of Latino immigrants in rural Oregon

By the 1980s the Latin American immigrant population in rural Oregon included a significant number

of indigenous Mexicans and Guatemalans, many of whom became legal residents through the 1986 Immigration and Reform Act (IRCA) and the accompanying Seasonal Agricultural Workers (SAW) program. The majority of the agricultural workers who were granted legal residency through SAW were men. In the state of Oregon, 23,736 Mexicans and some Guatemalans received permanent residency under the SAW program. While this statistic reflects the number who applied and completed the SAW program in Oregon, the figure of 40,000–50,000 may be more realistic because many workers who now reside in Oregon completed the SAW program in California.

Another wave of primarily Mexican immigrants followed those who were legalized by IRCA, coming either as the immediate family members of those who were legalized in 1986 or through larger social networks they had established in their home regions. Many landed in the smaller rural towns and communities of Oregon. Between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, the Mexican immigrant population in Oregon changed significantly in two respects. Many of the men who became legal permanent residents sent for their wives and children. Once their families arrived, they settled more permanently in communities like Salem, Woodburn, east Portland, Gresham, and Medford. Elsewhere, significant clusters of people from the same community were formed, often built around sibling groups who either joined their nuclear families or brought family members with them from different parts of Mexico and other places in the U.S., particularly from California.

While undocumented relatives of established Mexican immigrant families continued to come to Oregon, during 2000–5, a new wave of young men came to occupy an important niche in the seasonal berry harvest and the picking of other crops. The trend of family settlement and female migration has slowed considerably, and increasingly, seasonal workers are once again largely single, mostly young men (see McConahay 2001). They are found primarily in labor camps and are brought by labor contractors who work them through a circuit encompassing California, Oregon, and Washington. Some of them continue to be Mixtec, but recruiters are also reaching into Triqui communities and into the state of Veracruz as well (Kissman, Intili, and García (2001). Later in the 1990s, unattached younger females and males began to migrate, attaching themselves to older relatives

already in Oregon.

The importance of undocumented Mexicans in key sectors of the Oregon economy is not an isolated case. By January of 2006, the undocumented population of the U.S. was more than 11 million. Of these, more than 6 million or 57 percent were from Mexico. In 2005, Jeffrey Passel estimated that 100,000 to 150,000 unauthorized immigrants resided in the state of Oregon out of a total foreign-born population of 260,095 counted by the U.S. Census office in 2002 (Passel 2005).

Indigenous Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants in rural Oregon

From the late 1980s to the present, indigenous Guatemalan and Mexican immigrants represented an increasing number of workers in rural Oregon, concentrated primarily in agriculture and related businesses. The 2000 census was also the first time that indigenous Mexicans, Guatemalans, and others could make their presence known through two distinct census categories. One of the racial options, “American Indian or Alaska Native,” left a space to indicate a specific tribe. The 2000 census not only showed a significant growth in the number of people who self-identified as American Indian but also in the number of people who identified themselves as both Hispanic and American Indian. Self-identified Latin American indigenous migrants could identify both ethnically as Latinos and racially as American Indians. In the 2000 census, 407,073 people reported themselves nationally as both Spanish-Hispanic-Latino and American Indian and Alaskan Native. This was 1.2 percent of the total U.S. Hispanic population (U.S. Census 2001:10, table 10). While the official number in the census given for Hispanic American Indians in Oregon is 5,081, it is quite likely that the number is much higher. Community outreach workers from

**Table 1 Language profile of Woodburn (Oregon) heads of household, overall
Population and minors, 2003**

Language profile	Percent of all heads of household	Percent of all persons in households	Percent of minors 0–18 years of age
English-dominant	33	25	21
Primary language English (limited or no other language)	31	19	8
Bilingual, English preferred	2	6	13
Spanish-dominant	47	61	69
Primary language Spanish (limited or no other language)	30	37	29
Bilingual, Spanish preferred (Spanish, English)	17	24	40
Mixtec-dominant	10	6	4
Primary language Mixtec (limited or no Spanish)	7	3	<1
Bilingual, Mixtec preferred (Mixtec, Spanish)	1	1	>1
Trilingual, Mixtec with Spanish, English	2	2	>2
Other language-dominant	11	8	6
Bilingual, Russian preferred	2	2	2
Trilingual (Other, Russian, and English or other, Spanish, and English)	8	5	4
Other (Portuguese, Malay, Triqui) with limited or no English	1	1	–

SOURCE: KISSAM AND STEPHEN 2006

the Oregon Law Center have documented the presence of fourteen different indigenous ethnic groups and languages among Mexican and Guatemalan immigrants including Mixteco Alto, Zapoteco, Mixteco Costa, Chinaneco, Tzotzil, Maya, Mixteco Bajo, Triqui, Nahuatl, Zoqur, Chatino, Tojolabal, and Kanjobal (Oregon Law Center 2007).

The presence of indigenous Latin American immigrants is also found outside of agricultural labor camps. Mixtec speakers make up a visible percentage of household heads in the town of Woodburn, a long-time center of agricultural activity and home to four generations of Latin American immigrants. A household survey conducted in 2003 found that 47 percent of heads of household in Woodburn were Spanish-dominant and 10 percent were Mixtec-dominant. Two percent of household heads were trilingual with Mixtec, Spanish, and English. While Mixtec dominance decreased to only 4 percent of the Woodburn population eighteen years

and under, the strong presence of Mixtec speakers in the community signals the importance of the indigenous immigration flows into the community during the past two decades. The multilingualism of the immigrant rural population has affected education, health, safety, and other social services.

The communities they have settled in often share a regional culture that has marked Mexicans as racially inferior, as suitable for hard physical labor, and as politically vulnerable (Stephen 2007, Portes and Rumbaut 2001:277). In addition, the racial hierarchy that permeates Mexico and consigns indigenous peoples to the lowest level of the racial stratification system is reproduced within communities of Mexican immigrants in the United States.

Racial hierarchies with the Mexican immigrant population: case study of indigenous youths

The Mexican racial hierarchy denigrating indigenous people has appeared in alternative educational settings such as the High School Equivalency Program (HEP), where some indigenous Oaxacan immigrant youths have received their high school degrees in Eugene, Oregon. César Domínguez, a nineteen-year-old Mixtec youth from the Huahuapán de León district of Oaxaca, discussed his experience as a Oaxacan participating in the HEP program. In many ways his discussion reflects the racial and ethnic categories that operate in Woodburn. Here is part of Lynn Stephen's (L.S.) conversation with César Domínguez (C.D.) in 2006.

L.S.: Can we talk a little about your experiences in HEP? Were the majority of the students there immigrants?

C.D.: The majority were.

L.S.: Were the majority from Mexico?

C.D.: Yes. There was just one from El Salvador. The rest of us were from Mexico. Some of us were from Oaxaca; others were from Zacatecas, from Sinaloa, from Guerrero, and from the D.F. (Mexico City).

L.S.: And in the group of you who were together in HEP, if someone were to ask you "where are you from," how would you answer them?

C.D.: Well, I would say that I am from Mexico, that I am from Oaxaca. . . . Although some people don't . . . I think that some people don't like people from Oaxaca.

L.S.: No?

C.D.: No, they don't like them. They don't like to be around them.

L.S.: Why?

C.D.: I don't know. Because they think that we are less than others. They think that we don't know how to study, that we don't know how to work . . . things like that.

L.S.: Do they look down on people from Oaxaca?

C.D.: Sometimes. There were two Chilangos (from Mexico City) who didn't like us at all. I had come to realize from even before this that a lot of people from Mexico City don't like us because of the way we talk, the way we live. It's a struggle with them. The Chilangos and the other Norteños (from Northern Mexico) call us Oaxacos. They say that the Chilangos (from Mexico City) are real huevones, real jerks, and those from Zacatecas also consider themselves better than other people. Other people from the north think they are better because of their color. They discriminate against us because they are whiter. They think that they are invincible and better. But I think that this is a stupid way to look at things. It doesn't make sense to not associate with someone just because of this.

L.S.: Were these kinds of ideas common in the HEP program?

C.D.: More or less. Like I said, there were some who thought that they were better than others. They also thought this in terms of the kind of music they had, like corridos. They thought that our music was much simpler and maybe not as good.

César's experience in HEP reinforced his prior experiences with people from Mexico City, who had looked down on him for being from Oaxaca. He identifies language, life style (a reference to culture and poverty), and skin color as three of the criteria that are used to differentiate people from Oaxaca and those from the North and Mexico City in HEP. Later he refers to differences in music, an important part of the after-hours culture in HEP. There, students live together in dorms, study together six days a week, and hang out in the evenings and on Sundays. Music is one of their most important sources

of enjoyment. Thus, within the larger culture of Mexicanos reproduced in the HEP educational program, racial and cultural criteria were used to differentiate and demean students from Oaxaca.

For César, this stereotyping mirrored his experiences in Mexico. He came to the U.S. at the age of sixteen and worked as a farmworker before enrolling in HEP. He currently works as a construction worker and is taking ESL classes at the local community college in the hope that he will eventually get into the regular two-year program. Joining the youth group *Juventud FACETA* provided César with access to the more open and inviting culture of youths from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador. During 2006 he actively participated in the group and accompanied it on pro-immigrant marches in Portland and Salem. In contrast with his experience in HEP where he quarreled with other Mexicans about his ability to study and be validated, within the group of *Juventud FACETA* and in the marches he felt strong and empowered. He commented on the marches in March and May of 2006:

I felt really good and really secure going on the marches. I am not afraid any more. I have come to meet a lot of people and other groups through these experiences. I have made a lot of friends as well, among Mexicanos and among Anglos. The marches were important because if we don't get out and march then the government will take advantage of us. They will say that we are criminals and they will do with us what they please. But we aren't going to allow that to happen. If we are united, that won't happen.

Four generations in rural Oregon: current trends in length of residency, legal status, social capital, and place of origin

Rural Oregon now reflects four different generations of Latino Americans, primarily Mexican immigrants. Some of the oldest towns with a longstanding Latino immigrant presence are St. Paul, Nyssa, Independence, and Woodburn—communities that have a long history of recruiting agricultural workers. Such communities have a diverse and differentiated Mexican immigrant population that came from different places at different times. Latino immigrants in these communities include important leaders and bridge-builders with historical knowledge, personal networks and connections, and social capital that can be mobilized for the civic and political in-

corporation of new immigrant populations.

The variation within the immigrant population in rural areas with long immigration histories is also reflected in the differential legal status of immigrant community members. Table 2 (below) demonstrates this disparity in Woodburn. While a majority of the households surveyed included

Table 2 Citizenship-immigration status profile of Woodburn (Oregon) households (N=128)

Household members are all citizens	33%
Household members are all citizens or legal permanent residents	32%
Mixed status—some household members are citizens or legal permanent residents but others are unauthorized	27%
Unauthorized—all family members are unauthorized immigrants	8%

SOURCE: KISSAM AND STEPHEN 2006

citizens or legal permanent residents, 27 percent of immigrant households surveyed were “mixed status,” and 8 percent were “unauthorized.” Children in households of mixed or unauthorized status often encounter difficult situations. If children are citizens and their parents are unauthorized, the parents are often reluctant to seek services that the children have a right to obtain because of their family income level, such as the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC), Food Stamps, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). If children are undocumented, they may find themselves completing high school with few prospects for college, because they are not eligible for in-state tuition or federal financial aid.

Communities such as Woodburn are also criss-crossed by immigrant social networks that reflect many different origins in Mexico. These differences within the Mexican immigrant population regarding place of origin, legal status, and length of time in the U.S. can become sources of tension. Those from the same community and region tend to associate with one another and create cooperative relationships through businesses, sports clubs, or hometown associations (see Stephen 2007). Table 3 (page 52) reflects the diversity of place represented in the Mexican immigrant population in Woodburn.

While communities such as St. Paul, Nyssa, Woodburn, and Independence have more than seven decades of significant Mexican presence, other

Table 3 Mexico-based migration networks in Woodburn (Oregon)

State and community of origin of Mexican-born head-of-household heads (N=67)	Percent associated with network
Oaxaca Sta. Maria Tindu, Cd. de Oaxaca, San Juan Mixtepec, San Mateo Tunuche, Ocotlan, Huajuaplan, Sta. Maria Caxtlahuaca, Zaachila	24
Michoacan Morelia, Quiroga, Jaripo, San Jeronimo, Chupicuaro, various smaller ranchos	19
Guanajuato Penjamo, Leon, Silao, Guanajuato, Romita	13
Guerrero Acapulco, Coyuca, Tecpan de Galeana, Ometepec	6
Mexico, D.F.	5
Morelos Cuernavaca, Totolapan	5
Jalisco Rancho la Canada, ranchos	5
Veracruz Poza Rica, Coyuca	5
Puebla	3
Sinaloa	3
Nayarit	2
Estado de Mexico	<2
San Luis Potosi	<2
Zacatecas	<2
Tamaulipas	<2
Durango	<2
Colima	<2
Tlaxcala	<2

SOURCE: KISSAM AND STEPHEN 2006

rural areas began to see their first wave of Mexican immigrants much more recently. Over the past ten years the doubling of the Latino, primarily Mexican, population has profoundly changed the face of many small, rural towns whose populations were largely of European origin until just ten or twenty years ago. Restaurants, businesses, schools, churches, libraries, city governments, local cultural institutions, and civic organizations as well as nonprofits, social service agencies, advocacy organizations, and labor unions have all seen dramatic changes in the constituencies they serve, and those who seek to participate in such institutions. For example Junction City in Lane County has seen its Latino population increase from 2 percent in 1980 to 8.3 percent in 2000. By 2010, this figure will most likely double.

Latino students account for 10 percent to 20 percent of enrollments in the public school systems of the interlinked communities of Harrisburg, Junction City, and Monroe. Significant numbers of Latino students in small school systems are highly visible and present new challenges to teachers and administrators. In rural communities where Mexi-

can and other Latin American immigrants are recent arrivals, families and youths are concentrated in low-income jobs. Their jobs usually have some combination of low pay, unstable employment, little prospect for advancement, and dangerous working conditions. Many of these recent immigrants live in mixed-status families where a foreign-born member has undocumented immigration status, other family members are permanent residents, and the youngest members are citizens. Generally, this is the case for about half of the recent Mexican immigrants in the country (Allen 2006, Bean and Stevens 2003). Moreover, recent estimates indicate that from 1995 to 2004, more than 80 percent of all immigrants from Mexico have been undocumented (Passel 2005: 8). Undocumented status strongly conditions these immigrants' ability to find better jobs, advance in their education, and achieve membership in local civic institutions. Table 4 (page 53) highlights the different rates at which Latin American immigrants have been incorporated into nine dif-

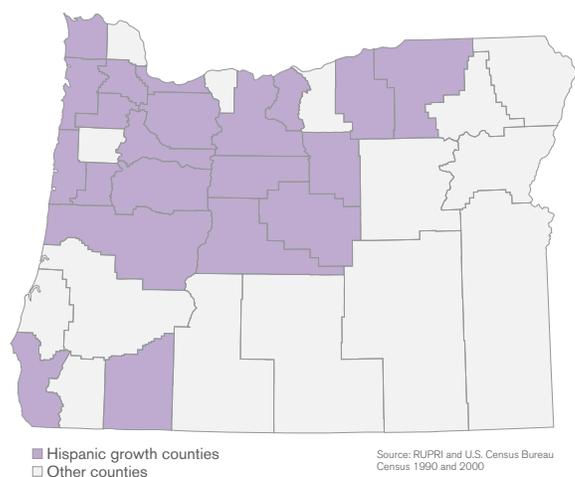
ferent cities and towns in rural Oregon, revealing patterns of older and newer settlement.

Explanation of terms and data sets:

There has been no consistent category on the U.S. Census to measure the Latino population. In

Hispanic growth counties

Counties in which the Hispanic population more than doubled between 1990 and 2000.



1970 the Spanish language category appears for the first time and includes people in households where Spanish is the mother tongue of at least one parent (“head of the family or wife”) or for people for whom Spanish was spoken at home during their youth. In 1980 the category Spanish origin appears. People were counted in this category if they self-identified any of the Spanish origin or descent categories (Mexican, Chicano, Cuban, Puerto Rican, or “other Spanish”). This category changes to Hispanic origin in 1990 and to Hispanic or Latino origin in 2000 based on the same method of self-identification.

For the 1960 Census we were able to find only the “Special Tables” that included “Foreign Stock” and “Puerto Rican Stock” (which amounted to only eight people total in the cities in question)

The trends documented above suggest that the settlement patterns of Latinos in Oregon are similar to patterns elsewhere in the United States during the past two decades. Latin American immigrants are no longer settling in key gateway cities but are spread throughout the United States and have come to establish a significant presence

Table 4 Latinos in rural Oregon¹

	1960 Foreign stock born in Mexico and Puerto Rico	1970 Spanish language* at census county division level	1980 Spanish origin	1990 Hispanic origin (of any race)	2000 Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)	2006 Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race)
Hillsboro	n/a	648/19,434 (3.3%)	1,308/27,644 (4.7%)	4,203/37,520 (11.2%)	13,262/70,186 (18.9%)	20,505/90,754 (22.6%)
Hood River	6/3,657 (0.2%)	52/7,542 (0.7%)	64/4,329 (1.5%)	485/4,632 (10.5%)	1,351/5,831 (23.2%)	n/a
Independence	135/3,293 (4.1%)	339/3,680 (9.2%)	688/4,024 (17.1%)	1,070/4,425 (24.2%)	1,818/6,035 (30.1%)	n/a
Junction City	0/3,906 (0%)	211/7,768 (2.7%)	76/3,320 (2.3%)	73/3,670 (2.0%)	391/4,721 (8.3%)	n/a
Medford	29/24,425 (0.1%)	329/28,454 (1.2%)	1,195/39,603 (3.0%)	2,387/46,951 (5.1%)	5,841/63,154 (9.2%)	9,064/74,090 (12.2%)
Nyssa	121/2,611 (4.8%)	822/3,812 (21.6%)	1,150/2,862 (40.2%)	1,262/2,629 (48.0%)	1,809/3,163 (57.2%)	n/a
Ontario	49/5,101 (1.0%)	1,185/9,288 (12.8%)	1,195/8,814 (13.6%)	2,019/9,392 (21.5%)	3,521/10,985 (32.1%)	n/a
St. Paul	168/1,610 (10.4%)	208/1,570 (13.2%)	n/a	84/322 (26.1%)	91/354 (25.7%)	n/a
Woodburn	45/3,120 (1.4%)	898/10,201 (8.8%)	2,035/11,196 (18.2%)	4,211/13,404 (31.4%)	10,064/20,100 (50.1%)	n/a

SOURCE: KISSAM AND STEPHEN 2006

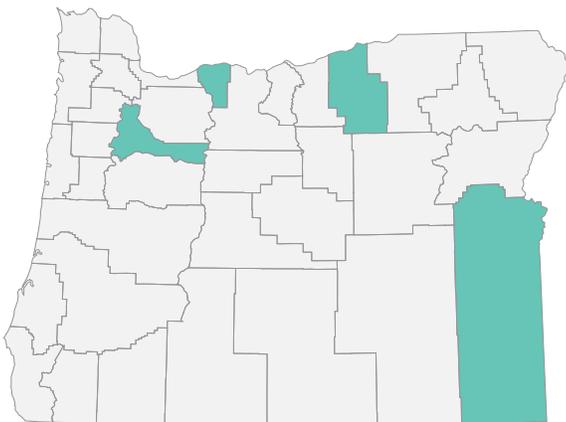
in rural areas of all states.

While the greatest numbers of Oregon Latinos in the 2000 census were found in the metropolitan population, 8.6 percent of the population in smaller cities, and 7.1 of those in rural areas were of Hispanic origin (RUPRI 2006:4). The twenty-one counties in Oregon (out of thirty-six) whose Hispanic populations more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 are Benton, Clackamas, Clatsop, Crook, Curry, Deschutes, Jackson, Jefferson, Lane, Lincoln, Linn, Marion, Morrow, Multnomah, Sherman, Tillamook, Umatilla, Wasco, Washington, Wheeler, and Yamhill.

By 2005, Latinos were the second largest population group in Oregon, comprising approximately 9.9 percent of the total population of 3,700,758 (U.S. Census Bureau 2006a). Latino children were about 15 percent of the state’s population under age eighteen in 2005, but that figure is likely to increase (Kaiser Family Foundation 2005a). During 2005, Latino births were 20 percent of the total births in Oregon (Oregon Vital Statistics County Data 2005). The growth of the Latino population has been sustained since the 1990s, particularly in rural areas, where census undercount is more prevalent—although Oregon’s urban population is growing, a quarter of all Oregonians still live in nonmetropolitan areas. At the current growth rate, 28 percent of students in public schools will be Hispanic by the

Counties with significant Hispanic population

Counties in which the Hispanic population accounted for 20 percent or more of total population in 2004.



■ Significant Hispanic population
□ Other counties

Source: RUPRI and U.S. Census Bureau
Census 1990 and 2000

year 2020. The Oregon Department of Education (2006) made these race and ethnicity projections using actual data on student enrollment from 1980 through 2005.

Conclusion

Over the past ten to fifteen years the increase in the Latin American population has profoundly changed the face of many rural towns that had been initially settled by Americans of European origin. Restaurants, businesses, schools, churches, health clinics, libraries, city governments, local cultural institutions, and civic organizations as well as nonprofits, social service agencies, advocacy organizations, and labor unions have all seen dramatic changes in their membership and in the constituencies they serve.

The presence of the second generation is felt in every public school district, where teachers and administrators receive students who are monolingual in Spanish, and also make efforts to include their parents in the process of education. Students in the upper grades who have limited English proficiency are placed in English as a Second Language classes. The challenge for the schools is to provide culturally appropriate support to encourage these Latino students to remain in the school system. City government, the police, the local courts, and the health clinics in small towns find themselves in need of interpreting and translation services to serve the new residents who are less proficient in English. Churches of various denominations offer bilingual services or religious services entirely in Spanish for their Mexican congregations. Adult immigrants often request English as a Second Language evening classes, while service providers and public administrators would like to get exposed to Spanish language instruction. Immigrant women are eager to enroll in private driving classes, to learn enough English so they can help their children with school homework, and generally to learn the rules of the society where their families are settling. Older workers who have spent twenty or more years laboring in the fields of rural Oregon are beginning to look forward to retirement, and to pass along their jobs to a new generation of



workers who will provide the important labor that sustains the agricultural economy in the state.

We conclude with a series of suggestions that can be helpful to rural communities in creating a local culture that embraces the changing reality of Oregon. Communities such as Woodburn, Oregon, have provided successful models for how to create communities where pluralism is the norm (see Kissam and Stephen 2006).

1. *Embrace multilingualism.* Public libraries, school systems, community colleges, businesses, churches, police forces, and medical providers can hire bilingual staff members (Spanish-English) and provide bilingual materials and activities. The availability of translators who speak not only Spanish, but also can provide certified translation in some of the fourteen indigenous languages of Mexico and Central America is also an important service. The Indigenous Project of the Oregon Law Center based in Woodburn, Oregon, has been training such interpreters for courts and medical situations.

2. *Take advantage of multilingual community members.* Speaking two or more languages is an important community resource (Spanish-English, Mixteco, for example).

3. *Construct well-built, clean housing* that is affordable and accessible to immigrant populations.

4. *Provide liaison services* to improve relations between recent immigrants and longer-term residents. Such liaisons can come from city governments, social service agencies, schools, churches, business associations, and other arenas of civic life.

5. *Local city officials and program administrators* can actively advocate on behalf of immigrants with federal and state policymakers and planners.

6. *Local institutions that have existing outreach programs* for new immigrant arrivals can pool resources, create collaborative projects and councils,

and learn from one another in working with immigrant populations.

7. *Local cultural and civic institutions* can look for ways to build alliances with immigrant community groups and organizations through organizing specific events and collaborating on local projects that affect all. In many cases, local rural cultures are built of different kinds of immigrants with some common experiences that can be tapped in alliance building.

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Chapter 5

Latino Immigrant Children and Families: Demographics, Challenges, and Promise

Latinos have been living and working in Oregon since long before statehood, but prior to several decades ago, accounted for only a small percentage of residents. However, in recent years, Latino immigrants have entered the state at rates far exceeding those of any other racial or ethnic subgroup. In turn, the Latino population has grown dramatically, not only in the limited number of communities that have traditionally attracted new Latino immigrants, but also in rural districts, towns, and cities throughout the state. Rapid growth in the Latino population is expected to continue in the coming years, both through births and new immigration.

While the information on this recent influx of new Oregon residents is scant, there have been a number of recent studies conducted with Latino immigrant children and families that help illuminate their experiences and their process of adaptation to life in the U.S. Findings from these studies continue to emerge, and this new information will be important to service providers, policymakers, and community leaders alike as Oregon works to ensure positive outcomes for all of its residents. In this chapter, we summarize the findings from these studies, and discuss their implications for the well-being of present and future Oregon children and families.



Demographics

According to the limited available data, there are currently 379,000 Latinos living in Oregon (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Of those, some data indicate that between 70 percent and 80 percent of Latino adults in Oregon are recent immigrants (i.e., ten years or less U.S. residency; OSLC-LRT, 2007; OSLC-LRT and FHDC, 2007). However, generational history varies widely in different areas of the state, with some areas having much greater concentrations of U.S.-born residents. Many children of immigrants in Oregon are U.S. born (Martinez, DeGarmo, and Eddy, 2004), with the result that most Latino families are of mixed legal status. About 90 percent of Latinos in Oregon trace their family roots to the country of Mexico, with most of the remainder having origins in Central and South American countries (Martinez and Eddy, 2005; OSLC-LRT, 2007; OSLC-LRT and FHDC, 2007).

Because many Latino immigrants come to the United States from rural areas with limited infrastructure, their opportunities for education are often limited, and approximately 70 percent report being in school up to the ninth grade or less (Martinez and Eddy, 2005). While U.S. Census data from 2004 indicate that 62 percent of the Spanish-speaking population in Oregon speaks English less than “very well,” data collected by researchers working in conjunction with community-based

organizations suggest that up to 90 percent of the recently immigrated adult population is monolingual Spanish speaking (OSLC-LRT, 2007; OSLC-LRT and FHDC, 2007). Nationally, about 70 percent of Mexican family households include two parents, 21 percent are single-mother households, and 9 percent are single-father households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). More recent data indicate



relatively similar proportions for Oregon's Latino residents, with perhaps a slightly higher percentage of two-parent families (i.e., 80 percent; Martinez and Eddy, 2005; OSLC-LRT, 2007).

Financial challenges

There are substantial financial stressors faced by many Latinos in Oregon, with particular economic hardships endured by recent immigrants. While approximately 85 percent of Latino men and 65 percent of Latino women are employed (OSLC-LRT, 2007; Martinez and Eddy, 2005), data from a recent study of Latino families suggests that there can be large per-capita yearly income disparities between Latino (\$4,200) and non-Latino (\$13,500) families (Martinez and Eddy, 2005). As expected, low incomes in the Latino population are often accompanied by a lack of health insurance and an inability to afford health care. A Multnomah County (Portland) report revealed that one-third of Latinos in the county were uninsured, and that many Latinos faced significant health risks (Multnomah County, 2000). Other studies have documented much higher rates of uninsured, with 72 percent of Latino farm workers living in Salem and Independence

(OSLC-LRT and FHDC, 2007), and 67 percent of Latino participants in a multicomunity health research project stating they lacked insurance coverage (Cheriel, 2007).

In addition, for many families, financial strain can often result in limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods, a circumstance commonly referred to as "food insecurity" (Margeheim and Leachman, 2007). Data from earlier in the decade indicate that 45 percent of Oregon Latino adults live in food-insecure households (Oregon Center for Public Policy, 2003). Among those adults, 15 percent said that at least one member of their household experienced hunger in the last year (Oregon Center for Public Policy, 2003). More recent Oregon studies have found 54 percent of Latino participants living in food-insecure households, with 14 percent of these households including one or more members who experienced hunger in the last year (OSLC-LRT and FHDC, 2007).

Discrimination

Despite these challenges, Latino immigrants in Oregon tend to earn enough that they pay more in taxes than they use in public services (Oregon Center for Public Policy, 2007). Unfortunately, stereotypes persist of Latino immigrants as actual (or hopeful) welfare recipients and criminals. An analysis of recent articles on Latinos in *The Oregonian* found that they were often depicted as a drain on public services and as prominent contributors to crime and cultural incompatibility (Padín, 2005). A recent Multnomah County report cited an upswing in xenophobia combined with fears about foreign terrorist threats as further contributors to "structural impediments to stability and success" for Latino immigrants that are "higher than they have been in over fifty years" (Holcomb, 2006).

In a political climate that has been characterized by increasingly hostile attitudes toward Latinos (Pew Hispanic Center, 2007), it is unsurprising that many Latino Oregonians have experienced discrimination. Besides the numerous and well-established negative psychological impacts of discrimination (e.g., Landrine et al., 2006; Finch, Kolody, and Vega, 2000), a number of studies show positive associations between perceptions of racial or ethnic discrimination as a type of stressful life experience

and negative health outcomes, including increased disease risk, and other racial and ethnic health disparities (Williams, Neighbors, and Jackson, 2003; Ryan, Gee, and Laflamme, 2006; Dressler, Oths, and Gravlee, 2005). A recent study conducted with Latinos living in Independence and Salem found that approximately 30 percent of participants felt stress due to negative comments directed at them about the language they speak, their hair, their skin color, or their social status (OSLC-LRT and FHDC, 2007). These findings mirror those of other studies, including a research project currently underway with Oregon Latino farm workers (Farquhar, et al, 2006), and other studies of Mexican agricultural workers in the broader Pacific Northwest region (Andrews, Ybarra, and Miramontes, 2002; García and García, 2005; Dash and Hawkinson, 2001; Fisher et al., 2004; Northwest Federation, 2006; Rosales Castañeda, 2006; Stephen, 2007). Similarly, studies with Latino adolescents have found that up to 50 percent of youths have experienced discrimination in school (Martinez et al., 2004).

Acculturation

Some immigrants attempt to deal with discrimination by eagerly embracing life in the U.S.; others may actively resist cultural accommodations. Regardless, most adults tend to adapt slowly (Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenz, and Sirolli, 2002; Martinez, 2006; Szapocznik, Kurtines, and Fernandez, 1980). In contrast, children tend to adopt characteristics of the new culture in which they live relatively quickly, such as learning English and displaying popular tastes in clothing, music, and technology. With increasing time in residence in the U.S., the difference in cultural adaptation between parents and children, referred to as an “acculturation gap,” tends to widen. While few studies have closely examined how acculturation gaps impact child and family outcomes, initial Oregon studies suggest that such gaps make it more difficult to utilize effective parenting practices. Specifically, for unacculturated parents, one common response to the significant frustrations of trying to parent acculturated children is to reduce support, communication, and monitoring with their teens. Unfortunately, this response greatly increases the susceptibility of their children to negative peer influences and can be the genesis of problem behaviors (Kurtines and Szapocznik, 1996; Martinez, 2006; Pantin et al., 2003).

More generally, research conducted in states

with long histories of immigrant settlement, including Florida, California, New York, Illinois, New Jersey, and Texas, show that risk for poor outcomes tends to increase with higher levels of exposure to life in the U.S. (Amaro, Whitaker, Coffman, and Heeren, 1990; Gil and Vazquez, 1996; Ortega, Rosenheck, Alegria, and Desai, 2000). Oregon researchers also have shown that greater acculturation is related to increased risk, for instance, of smoking, particularly among immigrant women from Latin America (Maher et al., 2005). However, studies in Oregon increasingly suggest that families living outside sites of traditional immigrant settlement face a different set of risks and that the relationship between acculturation and outcomes can be quite complex. An example of this was revealed in a recent examination of “language brokering”—when children assist their parents by translating and interpreting—within immigrant Latino families in Lane County.

Typically, as immigrant families adapt to life in the U.S., monolingual immigrant parents rely on their children (as well as on other more acculturated members of their social networks) to help them function effectively (Santisteban, Muir-Malcolm, Mitrani, and Szapocznik, 2002; Tse, 1995). Children in these families often become the intermediaries between the cultural and linguistic divides that separate their families from the host culture. These children, often referred to as language brokers, may translate and interpret for their parents in important social situations, such as health care visits (Cohen, Moran-Ellis, and Smaje, 1999), parent-teacher conferences (Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido, 2003), and bank transactions (McQuillan and Tse, 1995). In many situations, child language brokers bear primary responsibility for facilitating their family’s access to valuable services, information, or material resources. Although some studies have documented positive effects of language brokering for children, including the development of strong linguistic and interpersonal skills (Halgunseth, 2003; Malakoff and Hakuta, 1991; Valdés, 2003), increased confidence and maturity (McQuillan and Tse, 1995; Walinchowski, 2001), academic curiosity and desire to learn (Buriel et al., 1998), and pride at being able to help out their families (DeMent and Buriel, 1999; Tse, 1995; 1996; Valdés, Chavez, and Angelelli, 2003), in other instances, parents begin to assert less influence over their children as a result of the brokering process. When family relations become strained due to role reversals between adults and

children who broker (Umaña-Taylor, 2003), parental authority and influence may diminish. Parental disempowerment, especially when combined with children's negative experiences of language brokering (DeMent and Buriel, 1999; Love, 2003; McQuillan and Tse, 1995; Umaña-Taylor, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999; Weisskirch and Alva, 2002) may in turn increase risk for poor outcomes among children.

The Lane County study compared families with monolingual Spanish-speaking parents and a bilingual adolescent in which there was a relatively high demand for brokering to families where at least one parent was bilingual with a bilingual youth in which brokering demand was relatively low (Martinez, McClure, and Eddy, 2007). These high- versus low-brokering-demand families differed in other important ways as well, making it clear that brokering cannot be perceived apart from other vital aspects of acculturation, including time in residency, the extent to which individuals embrace "American" activities, values, and behaviors, and changes in socioeconomic status over time. A regard for language brokering as an indicator of these broader acculturative processes revealed key areas of increased vulnerability, especially for those families in which children were bilingual with two monolingual Spanish-speaking parents.

Latino immigrant parents in families in which language brokering demand was high reported more paternal depression and family stress, and less parental monitoring, appropriate discipline, skill encouragement, schoolwork monitoring, homework engagement, and paternal positive involvement than families in which children were bilingual but also had at least one bilingual parent. Similarly, adolescents in high-brokering-demand contexts had more negative outcomes than those in low-brokering-demand contexts, with parents reporting diminished homework quality, lower school performance in language arts, and increased anxiety or depression, and adolescents predicting a likelihood of future substance use. Adolescents in high-brokering-demand contexts also accounted for the majority of the cases in which a middle school adolescent in the sample was found to have used tobacco, alcohol, or another potentially addictive substance.

Findings provided some evidence that fathers may be particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of high-language-brokering-demand environments. Fathers in high-language-brokering contexts reported increased levels of depression and lower

positive involvement and general monitoring of their children's activities. These fathers also reported less appropriate discipline, homework engagement, and monitoring of their adolescent's schoolwork than did fathers in low-language-brokering contexts. Interestingly, mothers rarely differed with regard to language brokering demand. It is unclear whether language brokering raises particular challenges to gender role expectations that fathers will protect and lead the family (Santisteban et al., 2002). If this proves to be true, fathers' risk for negative outcomes perhaps could be related to parent-child role reversals that can result from language brokering and from subsequent challenges to *respeto*, or the unquestioned respect for parental authority, a core value in many Latino families.

These findings in no way suggest that families with high demands for children's language brokering are deficient or to blame for these outcomes. Instead, parents' dependence on their children to translate and interpret is a sensible response to social, cultural, and linguistic barriers and, in fact, language brokering is a common experience among immigrant families throughout the U.S. Unfortunately, at least in some locales in Oregon, the consequences of these barriers, and of parents' reliance on their children for brokering, may generate increased risks to mental health, academic achievement, and other negative outcomes for parents and children.

Academics

Several Oregon-based studies have also paid particular attention to academic outcomes for children of immigrant parents. One key area of work in this regard has focused on academic achievement. Given the significant growth in the Latino population at large, it is not surprising that the population of Latino children in public schools has grown by more than 200 percent in the last ten years (Oregon Department of Education, 2006). As a result, many schools that historically have educated only monolingual English-speaking children are now contending with the implications of institutional barriers for the success of their newest Latino students, some of whom are nonnative English speakers. A study of middle-school students enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in Oregon documented high levels of anxiety; alienation from school counselors, teachers and classmates (especially from European American and more acculturated Latino students); and a lack of procedures for the identification of gifted and talented students enrolled in ESL pro-

grams (Clemente and Collison, 2000). *Salir Adelante*, a Multnomah County report prepared in 2000, documented a similar lack of integration within the public schools and a dearth of programs available to help Latino youths (Busse, 2001).

Oregon studies of ethnic and racial disparities in student achievement have been largely motivated by an alarming Latino school-dropout rate, which is 2.5 times that of non-Latino Whites in Oregon (Oregon Department of Education, 2006). These disparities are particularly alarming in light of research demonstrating that school success is among the most important correlates of overall physical, mental, and social well-being for school-age youngsters (Martinez et al., 2004). Indeed, low academic functioning is correlated with a host of other negative behaviors including substance use, delinquency, and associations with deviant peers (Hawkins, Catalano, and Miller, 1992; Loeber and Dishion, 1983).

Recognizing these academic disparities in Oregon, researchers have sought to identify those factors that predict poor school performance among Latino youths. One example of such work occurred in Lane County in 1999, when a team of researchers worked with Latino high school and college students to conduct the Latino Youth Survey (LYS). The LYS was an intensive community effort to explore the factors that promoted and hindered school success for Latino youths in Lane County and throughout the state. It was embedded as part of a larger Latino youth-mentoring project (Martinez et al., 2004). LYS data consisted of Latino and non-Latino students' and parents' quantitative evaluations of their experiences within the school environment.

Latino students and parents reported experiencing more barriers to their participation at school (e.g., low access to staff resources) than did non-Latino students and parents. Although Latino students did not indicate they were particularly likely to drop out of school, they did report being more likely to do so than their non-Latino peers. As reported earlier, half of the students reported having experienced discrimination for being Latino or observed this discrimination occurring to someone else (Martinez et al., 2004). This type of unique environmental stressor for Latino youths was shown to contribute to academic problems and, unfortu-

nately, appears to be a pervasive experience among Latino youngsters throughout Oregon (Gonzales-Berry, Mendoza, and Plaza, 2006). Significantly, social support buffered effects of discrimination on academic well-being, and parental support was the greatest predictor of adolescents' academic success (DeGarmo and Martinez, 2006). In addition, combined sources of social support from peers, teachers and other school staff members, as well as parents,



were shown to be more important than any one source alone (DeGarmo and Martinez, 2006). These findings were echoed in interviews with Mexican-origin college students, who attributed their early academic challenges not only to racism, but also to the lack of critical mentorship provided by school teachers, principals, and counselors whom Latino youths perceived as key influences on their developing self-esteem and self-confidence (Gonzales-Berry, Mendoza, and Plaza, 2006).

To identify the factors that would predict Latino student success, researchers closely examined the relationships between student acculturation, institutional barriers, academic encouragement (particularly by parents), and student success. They discovered that the likelihood of Latino students' successful grades and projected likelihood of staying in school was diminished by higher levels of academic and institutional barriers (measured by discriminatory experiences), dissatisfaction with school resources, and feeling unwelcome at school. On the other hand, academic encouragement by parents and extracurricular encouragement by school staff members served as key protective factors promoting school success for Latino youths. In the face of difficult life circumstances, such as low socioeconomic status, these data showed that parents and family played a particularly important

role in protecting Latino youngsters, affirming the findings of other Oregon-based studies (Gonzales-Berry et al., 2006). For example, students completed their homework more often when they had their parents' academic encouragement and were able to talk with their parents about important life issues.

Contrary to many findings in the literature that greater levels of acculturation result in adverse adjustment outcomes, the LYS study demonstrated opposite effects: higher levels of acculturation—measured in English proficiency and more years in the U.S.—predicted better school outcomes (Martinez et al., 2004). Significantly, these findings may provide as much insight into the educational school system in Oregon as they do into factors that contribute to Latino student success. It is only within the context of a system that is not flexible enough to



accommodate a pluralistic and culturally heterogeneous student population that students must learn to assimilate quickly to the demands of the system in order to succeed.

As an alternative, LYS data suggest the critical importance of family, community, and school efforts that foster social skills and problem-solving styles, network building, role modeling, advocacy, and mobilization of resources across multiple sites (Stanton-Salazar, Vasquez, and Mehan, 2000). While school systems clearly need to change by addressing structural barriers for Latino students and their parents, a quicker, more direct boost for Latino student success may result from support for familism, a powerful protective force for many Latino children (Vega, 1990; Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, and Miller, 2002). The tenets of familism are to place the family ahead of individual interests

and to prioritize the fulfillment of responsibilities and obligations to immediate family members and other kin, including godparents. Families who ascribe to values of familism often live in close proximity or share the same dwelling with extended family members. In keeping with family obligations and respect for elders, adult children may supplement their parents' income. Though familism may more accurately be regarded as encompassing a range of values and behaviors that reflect cultural ideals, recent Latino immigrant families may hold to these values and practice these behaviors with much greater consistency than U.S.-born families. For Latinos invested in familism, family members are expected to help and support their members to a degree far beyond that found in more individually oriented European American families

(Ingoldsby, 1991). Other components of familism are expectations that adolescents comply with parental rules and supervision regarding dating and practicing abstinence from sexual intercourse before marriage. Some studies have shown that familism reinforces adolescents' development of a greater concern for others. When asked to rank the characteristics of an ideal person of the opposite sex, adolescents from the U.S. gave

higher rankings to such traits as having money and being fun, popular, and sexy. Teens from Mexico and Guatemala were more collectivistic in describing many of the above traits as unimportant and preferring someone who is honest, kind, helpful, and likes children (Gibbons, 2000; Stiles, Gibbons, and de la Garza Schnellmann, 1990; Stiles, Gibbons, de la Garza Schnellmann, and Morales-Hidalgo, 1990).

When familism (reflected in family cohesion, frequent direct interaction, reciprocity, pride, and respect) is mirrored in school curricula and reinforced through staff interactions, schools work cooperatively with Latino parents to reinforce children's connection with a fundamental source of nurturance, guidance, and support (Vega, 1990; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, and Perez-Stable, 1987).

Promise

As discussed earlier, some geographic locales in Oregon have historic Latino enclaves, such as Woodburn, St. Paul, Nyssa, and Independence, and in and around Portland, Salem, and Medford. These enclaves are home to established bilingual and multicultural civic, political, and business institutions, and are sites of vibrant Latino community life and social networks where maintenance of one's language and culture of origin is possible and functional (Stephen, 2007). Also within these enclaves, Latino-serving community-based organizations have partnered with researchers to gain new insight into Oregon Latinos' social capital and community involvement, particularly in relation to health prevention and intervention (McCauley, Beltran, Phillips, Lasarev, and Sticker, 2001; Rogers and Gallegos, 2007; Glass, Hernandez, Bloom, Yragui, and Hernandez-Valdovinos, 2007), such as in the *Poder Es Salud* (Power for Health) project conducted in Multnomah County (Farquhar, Michael, and Wiggins, 2005). This study and others in Oregon have documented the importance of shared religious and cultural traditions within Latino communities. One way these are relayed is through storytelling (Mulcahy, 2005), a process that can strengthen family ties (Farquhar and Michael, 2004) and instill cultural and familial pride (Holcolm, 2006). Shared pride in cultural traditions, close interpersonal ties, and families' fierce determination to succeed in the U.S. have been recognized as protective factors that can increase family literacy (e.g., through the Independence-based *Libros y Familias* or Books and Families program; Keis, 2006), build community (McCook, 2001), strengthen youths' relationships with peers and adults (Northwest Film Center and the Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement, 2003), and reduce youths' likelihood of using drugs or alcohol (Martinez, Eddy, and DeGarmo, 2003; Gil, Wagner, and Vega, 2000; Holcolm, 2006).

Other recent work in Oregon has focused on developing preventive interventions specifically for Latino children and families. For example, to capitalize on Latino family and community assets, a culturally adapted parent support intervention called *Nuestras Familias: Andando Entre Culturas* (Our Families: Moving Between Cultures) was recently developed in Oregon to support positive parenting practices (Martinez and Eddy, 2005). Specifically, the intervention encourages the development of parental skills to provide encouragement and effective monitoring, discipline, and problem solving.

The training also aims to positively influence family environments by providing parents with more tools to ease their own adjustment to life in the U.S., address issues of acculturative stress, bridge acculturation gaps between parents and children, and mediate parent-to-parent conflict. Through providing support for parenting practices, *Nuestras Familias* has been shown to improve parenting effectiveness and reduce the frequency and extent of youth problem behaviors in a variety of domains (Martinez and Eddy, 2005).

Specifically, as a result of this intervention, parents reported improvements in their general parenting practices and greater encouragement of their children's skill development. Middle-school-aged youths in families who received the *Nuestras Familias* intervention also showed improvements in aggressive behavior and a reduced likelihood of using drugs compared to those who did not receive the intervention. Notably, the results also showed that youth nativity status had an impact on the intervention effects, with the strongest positive effects occurring for families with U.S.-born youths. Parenting in families with youths who are U.S. citizens versus those who are immigrants is unique in many ways, and navigating parent-youth acculturation gaps can be very different within these two contexts (Santisteban, Muir-Malcolm, Mitrani, and Szapocznik, 2002; Szapocznik and Kurtines, 1993). Also, Latino youths born in the U.S. experience different types of cultural adaptation challenges, especially in Oregon, where compared to Latino immigrant youths, their different experiences may expose them to unique vulnerabilities.

Interestingly, improvements in youth depression from pre-intervention to post-intervention were seen only among U.S.-born youths, indicating important differences among families depending on youth nativity. In general, foreign-born youths did not appear to benefit from their parents' involvement in the intervention as much as U.S.-born youths, indicating that families experience differential rates of acculturation and may require different types of support for greater family cohesion. Even small improvements in boosting parenting effectiveness and deterring incipient youth behavioral problems, however, can be critical in preventing more serious harmful outcomes for Latino youths who may already be at risk due to the stress that comes with navigating competing demands within their families, schools, and larger social worlds (Martinez and Eddy, 2005). *Nuestras Familias* was

recently highlighted as an “efficacious preventive intervention” for Latino adolescents in a publication by the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (Amaro and Cortes, 2007).

Looking to the future

Future demographic changes in Oregon have important implications for current policies and practices in relation to Latino immigrant families. Available data indicate that Oregon’s Latino population will grow to a minimum of 430,000 by 2025, an anticipated growth rate of 184 percent (U. S. Census Bureau, 1996). Though state figures are not available, national data suggest that over the next twenty-five years, the number of second-generation Latinos in U.S. schools will double, with nearly one-fourth of all labor force growth from children of Latino immigrants (Suro and Passel, 2003). Children of Latino immigrants will be moving into the workforce just as the huge Baby Boom generation of non-Latinos is moving out. In Oregon, the proportion of the state’s population aged sixty-five years and older (defined by the Census as “elderly”) is expected to increase from 13 percent in 2000 to 18 percent by 2030. Related to this projection that one in five Oregonians will be of retirement age by 2030, according to 2004 Census estimates, there were 512,000 non-Latino Oregonians between the ages of forty-five and fifty-four (boomers heading toward retirement), but only 406,000 who were nine years or younger to replace them. The gap will be filled by more than 100,000 children aged nine or younger in Oregon, at least 75 percent of whom are Latino (U.S. Census Bureau News, 2004). Latinos, especially the children of immigrants, will play key roles supplying the labor market and then supporting a very large elderly, and primarily non-Latino, population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). Simultaneously, this generation of Latinos may become increasingly involved in civic participation by engaging in local, state, and federal social and political processes.

The future success of present-day children of immigrants will depend largely upon the ability of their parents and other adults to support them in developing a strong foundation of knowledge, skills, and self-confidence, along with cultivating strong ties to their families and to their larger community. Though data on Latino immigrant families

in Oregon are scant, existing research shows that institutional and social barriers that challenge immigrant parents’ emotional, physical, and economic well-being simultaneously affect their children’s ability to develop this strong foundation, which is so vital to their development into successful adults. In the face of these challenges, many immigrant parents attempt to protect their children through reinforcing family values that emphasize respect, interdependence, and self-reliance, while working to secure their children’s access to educational and life opportunities that will prepare them to be active civic participants as adults. Practices that support the well-being of immigrant families in Oregon, such as the few that were highlighted in this chapter, will ultimately further the leadership development, educational achievement, and community engagement of children of immigrants, and should be central components of local, regional, and state policies. Clearly, much work remains to be done in terms of developing such practices. As this and other chapters in this volume have noted, there are tremendous Latino immigrant community assets in Oregon. Policies and programs that support and build upon these assets will contribute to the positive life chances for the children of immigrants, a group of young people that all of us in Oregon, and in the U.S. as a whole, are relying upon to succeed.

We must better understand the challenges that immigrant Latino families face in adapting to life in Oregon and must work together to deliver services and interventions that diminish these challenges and promote families’ strengths. Individual families within communities are often the best source of information about these challenges but, too often, these voices are not accessed sufficiently as social policies are developed and enacted. Further, community-based best practices have emerged over generations as Latino families have navigated adaptation challenges that come with life in Oregon, yet such best practices are often set aside because they are not viewed as evidence-based. While the shift toward evidence-based practices is important in ensuring dissemination of high-quality and effective services, our communities will benefit from enhancing support for research efforts that allow for validation of these essential community-based practices.

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by Michael Aguilera, Bob Bussel,
and Lara Skinner¹

Chapter 6

Work and Employment for Immigrants in Oregon

Although immigrants leave their countries of origin for many reasons, they most often cite seeking greater economic and social opportunity for themselves and their families as a primary impetus for their migration. This search for a better life has coincided with the availability of employment elsewhere, creating the circumstances that have fueled increased immigration to both the United States and to Oregon over the last two decades. Nonetheless, the aspirations of immigrants for better pay and benefits can clash with the desire of employers to keep labor costs low, and for some elements of the public, immigrant workers, especially those who are unauthorized, are seen as undermining hard-won wage and living standards. Indeed, rising immigration has occurred concurrently with major shifts in the state's economy that have profoundly affected the kinds of work done by Oregonians, their standard of living, and their sense of personal security. As a result, it is no accident that the role of immigrants in the workplace has attracted considerable public attention and at times generated social controversy.

Through their experiences in the workplace, immigrants not only begin the arduous task of up-

lifting themselves economically but also learn the customs and mores of their new culture, gain social and civic skills, and establish themselves as productive, contributing members of society. However, legal status, language and cultural barriers, low skill and educational levels, and lack of knowledge about their legal rights can limit the workplace advancement of immigrant workers. Discrimination and exploitation can also be part of the immigrant

work experience when employers attempt to take advantage of an often-vulnerable population. Work, then, has multiple meanings for immigrants, and the purpose of this chapter is to assess how the foreign

born are faring as workers in Oregon. In addition, we offer some qualitative analysis of the immigrant workplace experience, focusing on occupational safety and health concerns, working conditions, and efforts to improve the skills of immigrant workers and enhance their employment prospects. We conclude with some recommendations for further research and suggestions for improving the work and employment experience for Oregon's immigrant workers.

The importance of immigrants to Oregon's economy can be shown in a variety of ways. Ac-

**“... what motivated us to move to
another country [was] love for our
children, for the hope that they could
have a better future.”**

“Lucia” and “Eduardo,” 2006

According to the Migration Policy Institute, in 2005, more than 194,000 participants in the Oregon work force were foreign born, and it is estimated that 70,000–88,000 of working immigrants in Oregon are unauthorized. Immigrants total 11.3 percent of working Oregonians, up from 5.4 percent in 1990. In Oregon’s \$325 million dairy and cattle milk production industry, its \$778 million nursery and greenhouse industry, and its nearly \$380 million fruit and nut industry, immigrants represent the vast majority of workers. One major residential construction company reports that most of its work force is Latino, along with 20 percent of its subcontractors. One-third of a Portland barge and rail car manufacturer’s employees are Russian, Asian, or Latino, and in 2005, Oregon employers sought to bring in 6,000 skilled workers from abroad under temporary visas, mostly to work in high-technology industries.²

Growing numbers of immigrants are starting their own businesses, including more than 400 Slavic entrepreneurs in the Portland area in 2005 and approximately 6,000 Latino-owned businesses by the end of the 1990s. Immigrant workers also appear prominently in service occupations such as landscaping, cleaning, home health care, restaurants, and to a lesser extent in certain kinds of professional employment. Although precise figures are not available, both quantitative data and anecdotal

evidence underscore the significant presence of immigrants in the Oregon labor force.³

Our analysis of the labor market experiences of immigrants in Oregon is based on the 2000 Census and supplemented by qualitative data taken from other sources. The census data come from the 5 percent sample for the state of Oregon. Although the Census Bureau has released subsequent reports, their sample size for Oregon is small, and the 2000 data remain the most complete, comprehensive source of information about immigrants’ labor market experiences since arriving in the United States. The data are compelling for several reasons. They are representative of the entire state, enable us to compare the labor market experiences of

immigrants with those of natives, and illuminate the work and employment experiences of different groups of immigrants.

There are several terms that will be used throughout our analysis that we wish to define here. We define “immigrants” as individuals who list their place of birth as somewhere other than the United States or a U.S. territory. “Natives” are people born within a U.S. state or territory. We define “unemployment” based on a question from the census that asked whether or not the respondent was employed. Similarly, our analysis of the term “laid off” reflects a census question asking respondents if they had been released or separated

“What is the most common abuse that causes immigrant workers to complain? Wages, wages, wages.”

D. Michael Dale, Northwest Workers Justice Project

Table 1 Labor market outcomes of the ten largest immigrant groups in Oregon

	Mexico	Canada	Germany	Vietnam	Japan	Phillipines	England	China	Korea	Ukraine
Unemployed	12%	5%	4%	6%	6%	4%	4%	4%	6%	10%
Weekly hours worked	40	38	38	39	39	40	38	39	41	36
Laid off	13%	2%	4%	11%	1%	2%	1%	0%	3%	5%
Annual income	\$15,918	\$32,170	\$31,398	\$25,243	\$37,372	\$28,391	\$37,022	\$29,147	\$30,752	\$18,683
Professional	6%	37%	37%	21%	44%	29%	40%	39%	34%	40%
Service	27%	13%	15%	17%	20%	23%	16%	30%	19%	16%
Sales	8%	26%	27%	16%	21%	24%	25%	11%	27%	25%
Farm	20%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Construction	10%	9%	7%	6%	4%	4%	5%	3%	4%	5%
Production	28%	14%	12%	40%	10%	19%	13%	15%	15%	13%

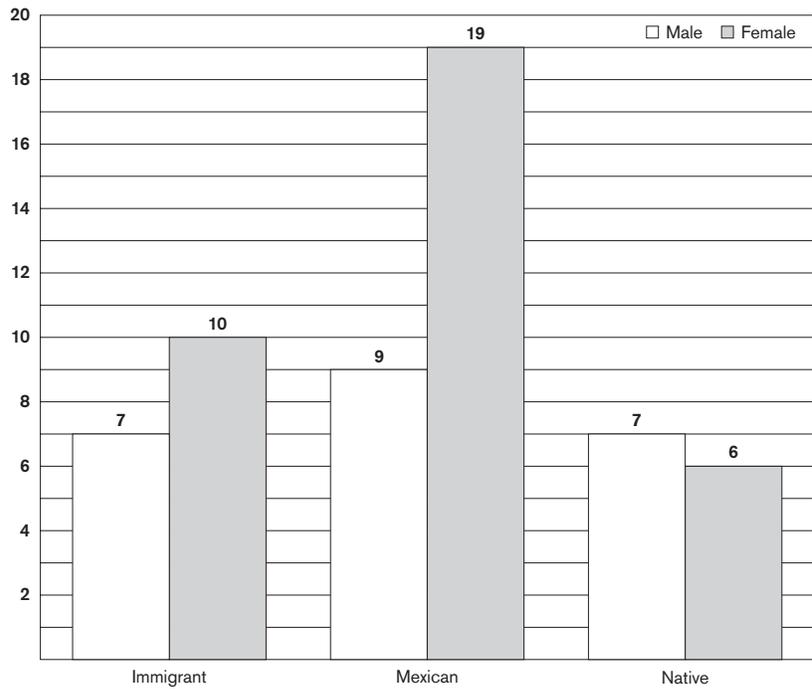
from their job. The information on “hours worked” was collected for the year of 1999. We divided the total hours worked in 1999 by 52 to obtain an estimate of weekly hours worked. “English fluency” is determined by immigrants’ assessment of their proficiency in speaking English. Those who indicated that they spoke English poorly or not at all are not considered proficient at English. Our measure of “income” is based on the yearly earnings of the respondents reported for 1999.

Although the data offer an overview of the labor market experiences of all immigrants, we also focus special attention on Mexican immigrants. They are by far the largest immigrant group in Oregon, accounting for 43 percent of the total number of foreign born.⁴ We also provide explanations as to why some immigrants and immigrant groups do better than others in the labor market. These explanations revolve around the “human capital model,” one of the most widely used constructs to explain economic success, which suggests that immigrants with more skills, higher levels of education, and language fluency are able to maneuver more effectively within the labor market. We also rely on the “assimilation theory,” which finds that immigrants who over time become more socially and culturally similar to natives have better labor market outcomes. This process does not mean that immigrants must relinquish their identity, traditions, and customs but that over time, their ability to acquire certain tools and skills valued by their new culture will enhance their opportunities for economic success.

Labor market experiences of immigrants in Oregon

This section offers a statistical profile of the labor market experiences of immigrants in Oregon. The figures shown below provide different measures of labor market outcomes for all immigrants and also compare the experiences of immigrants and native-born Oregonians. Since Mexicans are by far the largest immigrant group in Oregon, their labor market experiences are highlighted. The section is broken into three categories: labor force participation, occupational distribution, and income attainment.

Figure 1 Percent unemployed for all immigrants, Mexican immigrants, and natives by sex



Labor force participation

Table 1 (page 70) provides the labor market outcomes for the ten largest immigrant groups in Oregon in order of their size in the population. This table demonstrates considerable variation in the work and employment experience of the foreign born in Oregon. One noticeable difference is that three groups in particular, Mexicans, Vietnamese, and Ukrainians, tend to be faring less well than other groups of immigrants. They have higher-than-average unemployment rates and lower incomes. In the case of Mexicans and Vietnamese, few work in professional-class occupations. These results stem from their more recent immigration, lower skill and educational levels, and for Mexican immigrants in particular, the greater likelihood that they are unauthorized. Other groups such as the Japanese and English are participating more successfully in the Oregon labor market, earning higher-than-average salaries, working in professional-class occupations, and experiencing little unemployment. Their performance is most likely attributable to the human capital resources they bring and their longer residency.

Figure 1 (above) shows the percentages of immigrants and natives in Oregon who were unemployed in 2000. The table also provides the same information for Mexicans. Although the unemploy-

ment rate for immigrant and native-born men is comparable, we see a 4 percent difference between immigrant and native-born women. For Mexicans, we see higher rates of unemployment and in the case of Mexican women, an unemployment rate that is almost double the average for all immigrants.

Figure 2 (below) shows the percent of the unemployed who reported being laid off their jobs. It reveals that immigrants are more likely to be laid off than native-born workers. Nine percent of immigrant men who were unemployed were laid off compared to 6 percent of natives. The percentage is somewhat smaller for immigrant women. However,

when compared to the native born, Mexican men were more than twice as likely to experience layoffs while Mexican women were laid off six times as much as their native-born counterparts.

Figure 3 (below) displays the average hours worked per week for men and women. We find that male and female immigrants work as many hours as their native-born counterparts. However, on average men work more hours than women, regardless of immigrant status.

Figures 1, 2, and 3 suggest that immigrant labor force participation rates are comparable to those of natives. Although immigrants' employment is more precarious than that of the native born, their high participation rate underscores the strong commitment to work that immigrants have historically displayed. We speculate that the higher unemployment rates among women may reflect the strong cultural value many immigrant groups place on family obligations and the prominent role women play in this arena. As we shall see, both male and female immigrants also tend to be employed in industries and occupations that are more seasonal or subject to volatility, another factor that may affect the steadiness of their employment.

Figure 2 Percent laid off for all immigrants, Mexican immigrants, and natives by sex

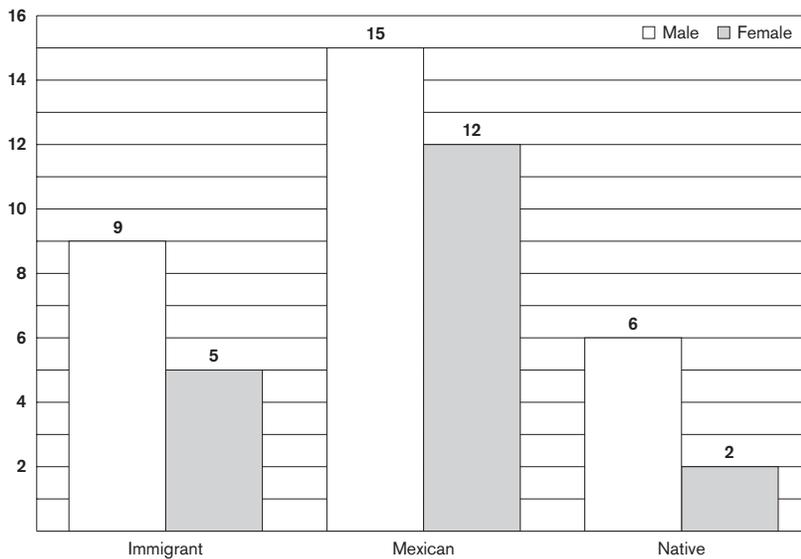
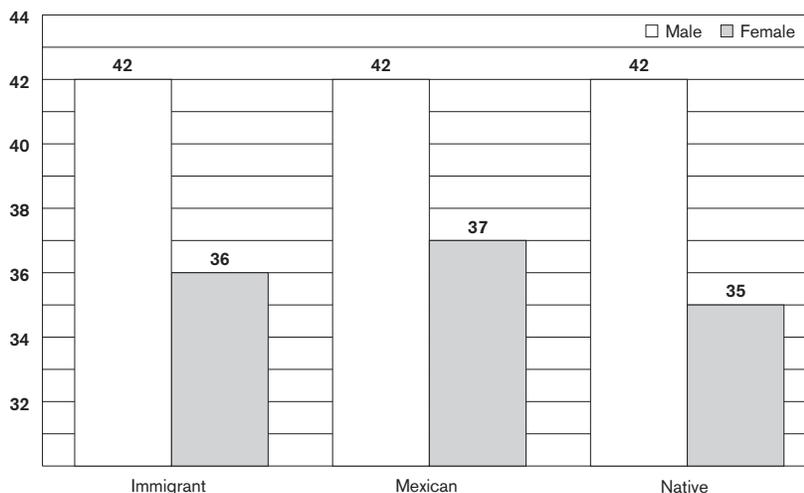


Figure 3 Weekly hours worked for all immigrants, Mexican immigrants, and natives by sex



Occupational distribution

Figure 4 (page 73) focuses on the occupational distribution of all immigrants, natives, and Mexicans. Mexican immigrants are well represented in service and production occupations, with fewer Mexican immigrants entering the white-collar sales or professional fields. In farming and agricultural occupations, Mexicans are more heavily represented as compared to natives, although these remain occupations where the immigrant presence as a whole well exceeds that of natives. It should also be noted that more immigrants have begun to enter professional-class occupations, although to a lesser extent than the native born.

Earlier data from 1990 do sug-

gest the emergence of greater occupational mobility for Latinos in Oregon. The comparison must be qualified, however, because the 1990 figures are not broken down between native-born and foreign-born Latinos nor do they distinguish Mexicans from other Latinos. Nonetheless, in 1990, nearly 30 percent of all Latinos were employed in farming, forestry, and fishery as compared to 20 percent in 2000. The percent of Latinos in sales was 8 percent in 2000 but only 1.2 percent in 1990. The other notable difference is in service occupations, with 8 percent more Latinos employed there in 2000. These comparisons must be approached with caution but do suggest the emergence of some measure of occupational mobility for Mexican immigrants, even though their earnings still lag behind those of natives.⁵

Figure 5 (right) tracks the relationship between English fluency and occupations for all immigrants in Oregon. Not surprisingly, English fluency is an important measure of assimilation. We see that English fluency powerfully determines access to higher skilled, better paying jobs such as those in professional occupations, where more than 30 percent of immigrants employed in these positions indicate they speak English well as compared to only 6 percent of those who speak English poorly. Those who speak English poorly are more heavily represented in service, production, and farming occupations, which tend to be lower skilled, less remunerative, and less likely to be unionized.

Income attainment

Figure 6 (page 74) shows the relationship between citizenship and yearly income for all immigrants in Oregon. The findings show that in each

Figure 4 Occupational distribution for all immigrants, Mexican immigrants, and natives

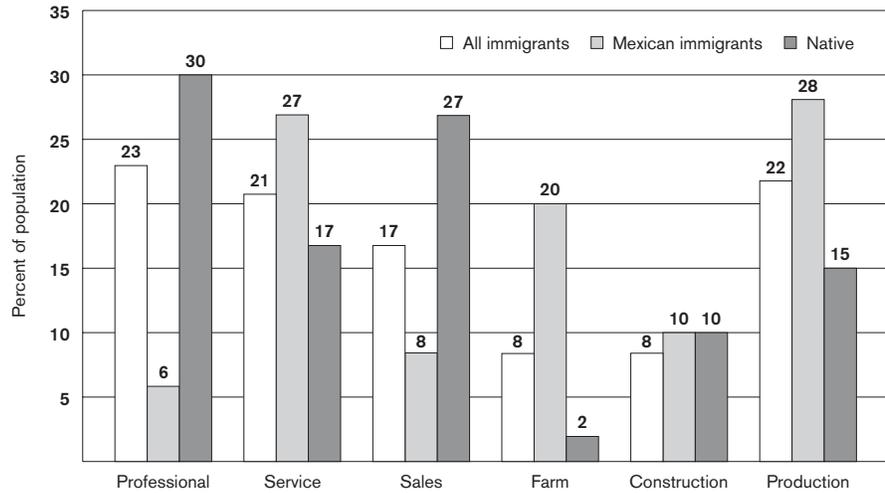
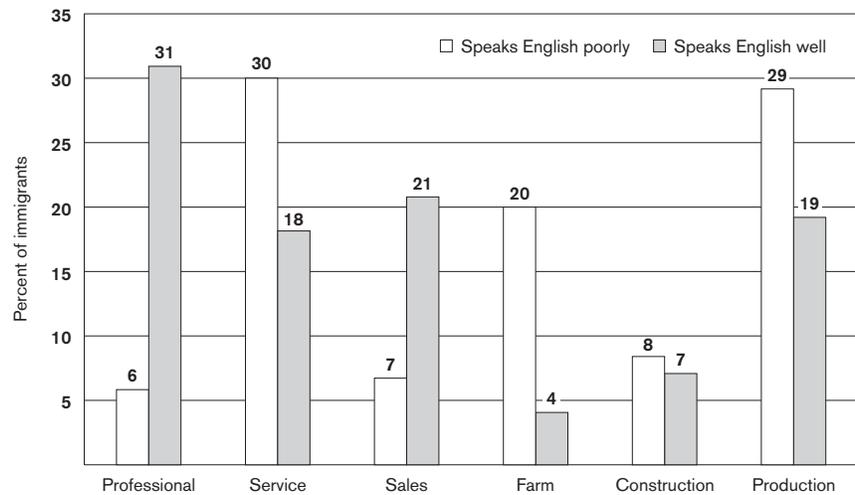


Figure 5 Occupational distribution for all immigrants by English fluency



occupation, immigrants who have been naturalized earn significantly more than those who are not U.S. citizens. U.S. citizenship, a form of structural assimilation by which immigrants are incorporated into key social and economic institutions, serves as a clear pathway to increased economic success. More recent 2005 data confirm this connection, finding a 29.3 percent poverty rate for noncitizens that falls to 11.6 percent for those who are naturalized.⁶ As research on immigrants who gained legal status following passage of the Immigration and Reform Control Act of 1986 suggests, newly legalized immigrants became more occupationally mobile, sought more educational and training op-

portunities, and improved their earnings. Clearly, there is a positive correlation between legalization or naturalization and a greater sense of security, permanency, and personal confidence that leads to enhanced labor market achievements.⁷

Figure 7 (below) illustrates the relationship between education, a form of human capital, and yearly income for the five largest immigrant groups in Oregon. The groups are listed in order of their size within the immigrant population, with Mexicans ranking first and Japanese fifth. For each group, it is clear that higher levels of education are rewarded within the labor market with higher pay. The results vary at each educational level, however, with some groups receiving higher returns than others for their investments in human capital. In particular, Mexicans receive the lowest return for their education at each level. This lower return could result from lack of legal status or discrimination, but further research is needed before a more precise explanation of this disparity can be offered.

Figure 8 (page 75) shows the relationship between English fluency and annual income, suggesting that English fluency is highly correlated with annual income. Immigrants who speak English poorly earned nearly \$15,000 in 1999, while those who spoke English well earned nearly twice as much. Although increased earnings for Mexicans fluent in English are less dramatic, they still fare markedly better than their counterparts who speak English poorly.

Figure 9 (page 75) illustrates the relationship between education and annual income for all immigrants in Oregon. The figure also distinguishes between men and women. The principal finding is that with increases in education, annual incomes rise for both immigrant men and

Figure 6 Annual income of all immigrants by citizenship

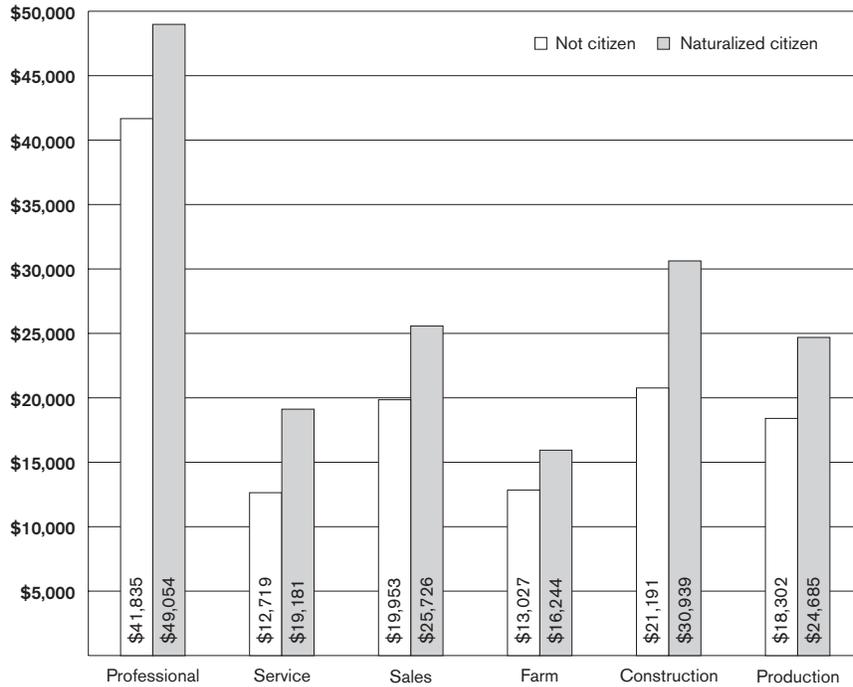
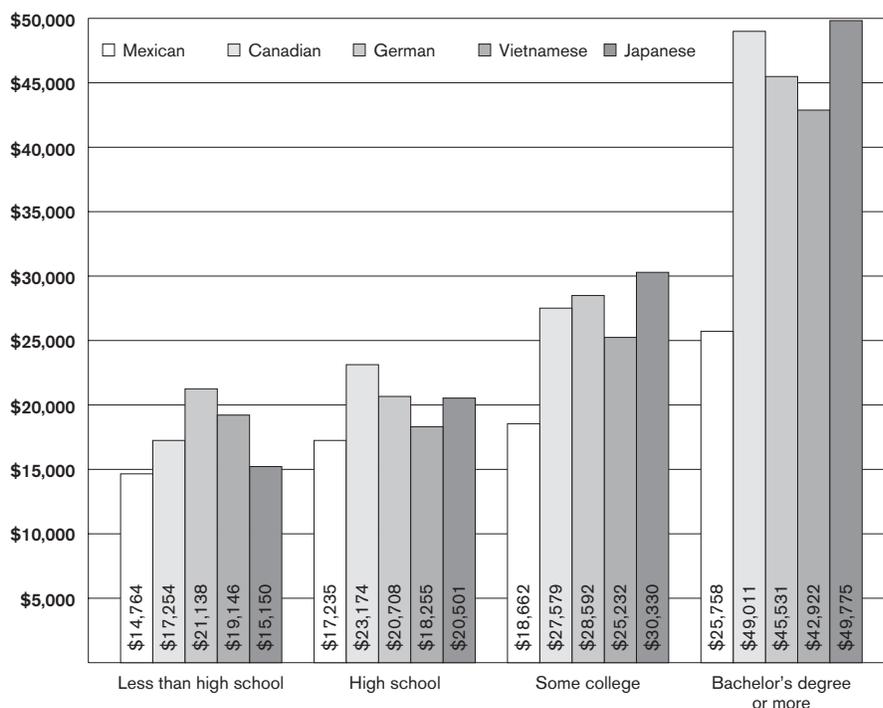


Figure 7 Annual income by educational attainment for five largest national origin groups



women. However, immigrant women’s incomes are significantly lower than immigrant men’s incomes at each educational level, with the gap being greatest for those with college and especially for those with a bachelor’s degree or more. This gender gap mirrors differences among the native born, although in the case of Mexicans, it is lower, because Mexican men and women both tend to be clustered in lower paying occupations.

Figure 10 (below) tracks the relationship between years in the U.S. and yearly income for immigrants in Oregon. With increased time in the U.S., all immigrants earn higher incomes. Time in the U.S. is associated with enhanced social confidence, increased English fluency, and greater acculturation as immigrants grow more familiar with American customs, practices, and mores.

This review of labor market data illustrates how important the attainment of human capital (e.g., education, English fluency) is for immigrant workers in Oregon. Immigrants with higher levels of human capital generally do better within the labor market. This is true for all groups, but the returns are clearly lower for some groups, such as women. We find clear evidence that assimilation is occurring and that this assimilation is associated with improved labor market performance. We also see that English fluency and citizenship are especially important factors that improve labor market outcomes for immigrants.

Working conditions for immigrants

In addition to the challenges immigrants face within the labor market, they often encounter substandard working conditions and lack important workplace protections. Occupational safety and health is one major area of concern. Foreign-born workers tend to be employed in industries—construction, agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, materials handling, and transportation—where injury and accident rates are particularly high. Due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with their

Figure 8 Annual income by English fluency for all immigrants and Mexican immigrants

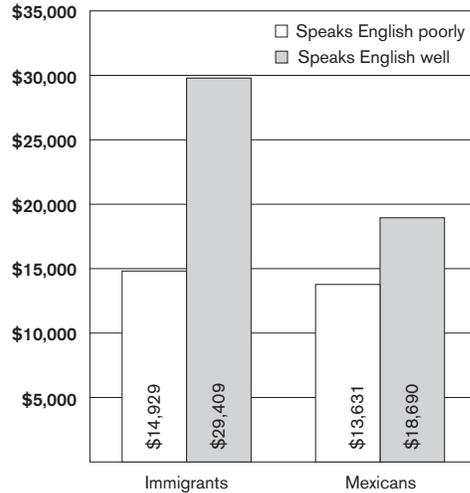


Figure 9 Annual income by educational attainment for all immigrants, Mexican immigrants, and natives by sex

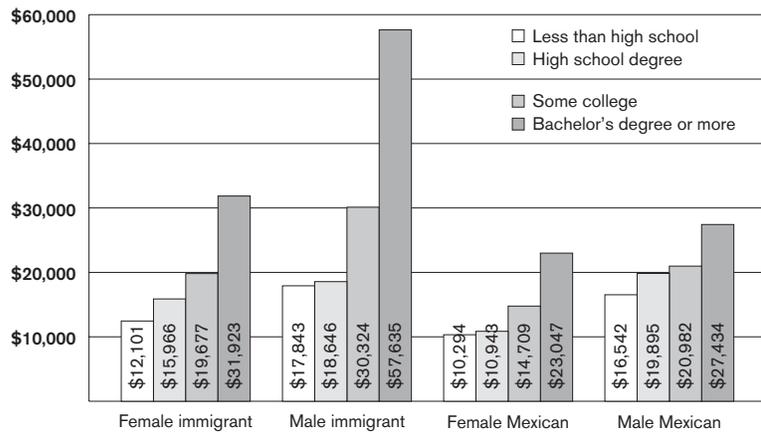
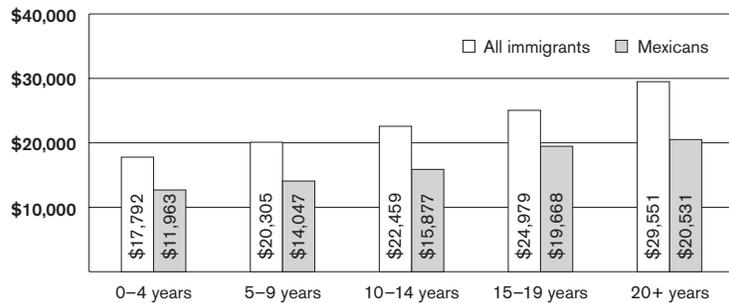


Figure 10 Annual income by time in the United States for all immigrants and Mexican immigrants



legal rights, lack of training, and fear of reprisal, immigrants are less likely to report workplace accidents or injuries to employers or government agencies. Also, immigrants are disproportionately employed in nonstandard and informal work arrangements (e.g., day labor, temporary and part-time work, and contracted employment) that are marked by high turnover, thereby decreasing the likelihood they will report or protest unsafe or dangerous working conditions.⁸

Published articles in 2004 and Congressional hearings in 2006 revealed the prevalence of such conditions among reforestation workers in Oregon and other parts of the northwest, many of whom were employed by contractors. The risk for accident and injury in slippery and wet conditions is high, contractors under pressure to cut costs often fail to provide safety training or protective gear, and federal oversight of working conditions has been sporadic. A June 2007 Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raid on a Portland produce plant further illustrates the potential hazards of such circumstances. The company used a staffing agency to secure its workers, and the onerous conditions of work led to high turnover rates. Workers described numerous examples of unsafe conditions, including extremely cold temperatures, limited provision of protective gear, no safety training, and the presence of electrical cords submerged in water in production areas. Indeed, several years earlier, the Bureau of Labor and Industries found that workers at this plant were unlawfully discharged by the staffing agency after they complained about these hazardous conditions. These workers eventually received \$400,000 in a settlement agreement.⁹

Although we lack data on precisely how widespread these conditions are in Oregon or on accident and injury rates for immigrants, we do have some specific evidence suggesting that Latino workers face greater risks in the workplace. Following news reports that Latinos were overrepresented in on-the-job fatalities, the Oregon Workers Compensation Division began in 2004 to compile statistics on compensable fatalities (those covered by workers compensation) by race and ethnicity. They found that in 2004, 13 percent of these fatalities were Latinos, 9.7 percent in 2005, and 13.5 per-

cent in 2006. Latinos comprised 8.6 percent of the Oregon labor force in 2004, so it appears as if state data mirror national findings about Latinos being disproportionately killed on the job. Moreover, of the fourteen Latinos who died, twelve were foreign born, confirming that immigrant workers constituted the vast majority of job-related fatalities.¹⁰

Interviews with immigrant workers and advocacy groups that work on their behalf also reveal other abuses, especially among the more vulnerable unauthorized population. Not surprisingly, immigrant workers tend to cluster in industries where

wage and hour violations occur most frequently, a finding confirmed in numerous studies. One of the most frequent abuses encountered is nonpayment of wages. State agencies in Oregon do not keep wage-and-hour data on the basis of immigrant

status, so the extent of violations is impossible to ascertain. However, a 2002 survey of more than seventy-five Latino workers in the greater Portland area found numerous examples of workers in service occupations who reported not being paid for work they had performed. Day laborers who take short-term jobs have expressed similar concerns, and in the produce factory raid described earlier, some workers alleged nonpayment of wages or working for pay at below the minimum wage. The entry of immigrant workers into the construction industry has dovetailed with more elaborate levels of subcontracting and labor recruitment, resulting in a diffusion of responsibility and the rise of exploitative practices similar to those seen in agriculture and reforestation. Workers do have the option of pursuing wage claims through appropriate state agencies, but language barriers, fear of reprisal, and impatience with the pace of litigation often deter them from taking such action.¹¹

Historically, labor unions have been a vital source of protection for immigrant workers against the kinds of abuses outlined above. We lack specific data on the number of immigrants who are union members in Oregon, but national estimates show that as of 2003, 10 percent of all union members were foreign born. The union movement's approach toward immigrant workers both nationally and in Oregon has been evolving. Some unions remain deeply concerned that immigrant workers are be-

**“The feeling [among immigrants]
that this is the land of opportunity
still runs pretty deep.”**

*Merced Flores, former associate superintendent,
Oregon Department of Education*

ing used by employers to undercut collectively bargained standards and favor stricter enforcement of immigration laws while other unions have actively sought to recruit immigrant workers into their ranks. There is a growing immigrant presence within Oregon unions, most notably among home health care and child care workers. The carpenters and laborers unions have been reaching out to immigrants in the construction industry, and efforts are underway to develop cooperative relations between building trades unions and day laborers in Portland. The service employees union has been especially active in seeking to organize immigrants employed in building service and maintenance, and for nearly three decades, immigrant workers have benefited from the efforts of *Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste* (PCUN), a capable and energetic union that has worked on behalf of agricultural workers in both the workplace and community arenas.¹²

Of course, there are large obstacles to organizing, especially in the private sector where legal protections for the right to organize are weak, and immigrants, especially those who are unauthorized, are understandably fearful. Yet the advantages of unionization for immigrants in the labor market are clear. One example is the provision of health insurance, which for most American workers is received through their employers. A 2004 Oregon survey found that almost 44 percent of Latinos in Oregon were uninsured. This survey did not distinguish between U.S.- and foreign-born Latinos, but we do know from national data that approximately 60 percent of foreign-born Latinos were uninsured. In part, this lack of insurance is attributable to being employed in low-wage industries that are often nonunion and where wages and benefits are not subject to negotiation. Greater representation by unions could begin to address this need, along with providing immigrant workers with wider access to training and opportunities for advancement that could improve their prospects in the labor market.¹³

Another means of improving labor market outcomes for immigrant workers would be through job training and career development, especially in the case of immigrants who arrive without English fluency and with limited education. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate the extent and effectiveness of job training for immigrants in Oregon, there are numerous examples of initiatives and programs that suggest the linkage between job training and improved labor market outcomes. Some companies have begun to offer language classes and

special training to their immigrant work force. Kaiser Permanente and Mt. Hood Community College collaborated in the late 1990s on a program to train immigrant workers for health care jobs, and the service employees union has sponsored training for immigrants who have joined the union's growing ranks of home health care workers. A fuller assessment of these efforts is a task for subsequent research, but even this cursory review underscores the need for key stakeholders such as employers, unions, community organizations, and educational institutions to pursue collaborations that can assist immigrant workers in developing their labor market potential.

Implications and recommendations

Additional research. Our initial review of labor market data for immigrant workers in Oregon raises several key issues that warrant further examination: the gender gap in earnings among immigrant workers; differential outcomes based on educational attainment, especially for Mexicans; the extent to which discriminatory practices affect labor market outcomes; and the need to delineate more carefully the factors that foster occupational mobility. We also propose to analyze data on entrepreneurship and business ownership among immigrants and to develop more Oregon-specific data on working conditions and job training opportunities.

Policy recommendations. Given that education and other forms of human capital such as English attainment are so important in determining labor market experiences for immigrants, it is clear that policymakers should address inequities that inhibit the ability of immigrants to obtain needed educational services. Policies that increase educational access for immigrants will not only improve their labor market experiences but also enhance their ability to achieve social integration and participate more effectively in community and civic affairs.

Assimilation has long been viewed as the pathway to economic success for immigrants. Assimilation could be encouraged through increasing access to English language training, which would help immigrants surmount a critical barrier to their advancement within the labor market. Although working to improve language fluency and integrating immigrants into U. S. society will increase assimilation, the hostility immigrants may encounter in the receiving communities must be addressed.

Our study supports the importance of providing

immigrants with a pathway to citizenship. Currently, there are an estimated 12 million unauthorized immigrants in the United States and approximately 125,000–175,000 in Oregon. Their labor market experiences are powerfully influenced by their legal status, and legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship would result in improved labor market experiences.

Oregon should follow the lead of other states and convene a task force of key stakeholders to develop an overall strategy aimed at helping immigrant workers to become more economically successful and socially integrated.¹⁴

Legislation that would provide stronger protections for workers in contingent employment relationships should be considered. Although not exclusively aimed at immigrants, such legislation would address some of the abuses growing out of employment relationships that allow employers to avoid responsibility and liability for their actions.

Public policies that strengthen labor laws and support the right of workers to organize unions should be encouraged.

Over the past two decades, immigrant workers have become an integral force in Oregon's economy, and demographic projections indicate that their importance will increase in the twenty-first century. In addition to their economic contributions, history suggests that work has been a major influence in helping immigrants achieve civic integration and social acceptance. Obviously, complex challenges lie ahead as Oregonians determine the values and priorities that will guide their decisions about work, employment, and the direction of the state's economy. Immigrants will doubtless seek to have their needs and interests considered in this process and ensure that their contributions as workers are both recognized and rewarded.

Notes

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Conclusion

Understanding the Immigrant Experience in Oregon

As we have seen, ambivalent or conflicted feelings about immigration are nothing new for either Oregonians or Americans. With the failure of congressional efforts to pass comprehensive immigration reform legislation, both Oregonians and Americans have been left to their own devices, and the debate over what to do about immigration continues at the state and local level.

In the course of the often-heated rhetoric that characterizes this discussion, historical and social context is frequently lacking. Moreover, the experience of immigrants themselves tends to be obscured or neglected. We have tried to address this oversight and focus on the actual experience of immigrants as they navigate the complex process of adapting to a new environment. Indeed, recognizing that immigrants are workers, students, business

owners, community activists, churchgoers, and neighbors allows us to transcend viewing them as abstractions and better appreciate their needs, aspirations, and social contributions.

Ultimately, both immigrants and native Oregonians will have to negotiate the terms of their relationship and reach some form of accommodation. Given the state's historical difficulties in dealing with difference and diversity, this negotiation promises to be complicated and challenging. Nonetheless, it is a negotiation worth having, for its outcome will determine the kind of society Oregon wishes to be during the twenty-first century. We hope that this report will inspire additional research, spark more intensive discussion, and encourage more individuals and organizations to enter this conversation, one that is long overdue and that we postpone to our detriment.

