

## Immigration Trends: Opportunities and Challenges

Urban Institute, Michael E. Fix

**MR. NNAMDI:** From Los Angeles, California, this is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

As recently as 1970, California was 80 percent white. But demographers now predict that sometime next year, non-Hispanic whites will no longer be the majority in this, our country's most populous state. Millions of new immigrants, mostly from Latin America and Asia, are rapidly turning the Golden State into a multi-ethnic society.

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The transition is nowhere more readily apparent than in Los Angeles, with its sprawling neighborhoods of immigrants from Mexico, Korea, Vietnam, Iran, Russia, and dozens of other countries. Just exactly what does this huge demographic shift mean for LA, and have the city's business and political leaders responded effectively to the opportunities and challenges presented by immigration?

During the course of this hour, we'll look at the controversy surrounding immigration policy in Los Angeles and the United States as a whole and examine whether California, often the nation's trend-setter, is at the leading edge of a demographic change that will affect much of America in the coming years.

Joining us for this discussion in our studio in Los Angeles is Ann Marie O'Conner. She is a reporter with the *Los Angeles Times*. Good to have you aboard, Ann Marie.

**MS. O'CONNER:** Thank you for having me.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Also joining us is Susan Drake, executive director of the National Immigrant Law Center. Hi, Susan.

**MS. DRAKE:** Hi. Thank you for having us.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Joining us from the studios of WAMU in Washington, D.C., is Michael Fix, program director of population studies with the Urban Institute. And it is in collaboration with the Urban Institute that we bring you these programs on America's cities. Michael Fix, welcome.

**MR. FIX:** Thanks for having me, Kojo.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Michael, allow me to start with you. In the year 2001, [demographic] projections apparently show that whites will no longer be the majority in California. What are the available statistics that support that prediction?

**MR. FIX:** Well, let me just talk a little bit about the levels of immigration to the United States as a way of framing our conversation and think a little bit about immigration in Los Angeles. One of the things that strikes you immediately when you think about Los Angeles and cities is that now and historically, immigration to the United States has been an urban phenomenon. Ninety-three percent of immigrants live in cities, as opposed to about three-quarters of natives. So the successes and the challenges and the cause of immigration and of immigrants is played out within the urban context.

We have to understand that the levels of immigration to the United States are high by historical standards. About 1.1 million immigrants come to the United States every year. Eight hundred thousand, the great majority, are legal. Two hundred thousand to 300,000, we believe, come illegally and stay. And if you think about it, that means that immigrants are about 10 percent of the general population.

But if you look underneath that, what you see is a very striking statistic, that one in five children in the United States is the child of an immigrant. And let me slip into the Los Angeles context and say that in Los Angeles, what we see is very rapid growth in immigration, from 800,000 roughly in 1970 up to three and a half million

in 1999. So one in five children nationwide is the child of an immigrant, but in Los Angeles, three out of every five children are the child of an immigrant.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Ann Marie, where, in the main, are the immigrants coming from to Los Angeles?

**MS. O'CONNER:** Well, most of the immigrants are coming from Latin America, of course, but there are also many immigrants from Asia, not only from places like China and Korea but also from South Asia, from India, from Pakistan. There's an enormous Iranian community here—and even now, people from Afghanistan.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Is that demographic, Susan Drake, reflective of just Los Angeles or the state of California or the country as a whole?

**MS. DRAKE:** Well, the numbers will vary, of course, depending on which state or which urban area you're looking at. I know one of the striking things that you can find when you look at some of the research that Michael Fix and others at the Urban Institute have done is the dramatic changes over the most recent years in terms of percent increases outside of the urban core cities like Los Angeles, in areas of the Midwest, in the South, in the Plains states. And so some of the lessons that we might want to talk about that you look at in an urban area are things that people are also struggling with in a very new kind of way in many other areas of the United States.

**MR. NNAMDI:** We're talking about immigration and the effect it has on the United States in general and California, the city of Los Angeles in particular. You can join us by calling 1-800-433-8850. You can e-mail us at [pi@wamu.org](mailto:pi@wamu.org).

Ann Marie, do the various immigrant populations in Los Angeles tend to intermingle, or do you find that each ethnic group tends to set up separate communities?

**MS. O'CONNER:** Well, that's a fascinating question that is part of a cultural—an uneven cultural impact that we see all over the United States. The rates of intermarriage, actually, in the city of Los Angeles are quite low between immigrants and U.S.-born people or people outside of their ethnicity into another ethnicity.

Where you find a high degree of intermarriage rates is in the suburbs, in upscale suburbs like Walnut or like Diamond Bar, suburbs out in the eastern San Gabriel. That is where a lot of the assimilation is actually taking place, rather than in the city. I think part of the reason for that is that Los Angeles is much more residentially segregated than the rest of Los Angeles County. Strangely, it's the suburbs that are the cutting edge of residential integration, not the cities.

And I also think part of it is because of the relative resegregation of the Los Angeles unified school system. Only, I think, one out of nine students in the school system now are white. Many people have pulled their—upscale people of all ethnicities—have pulled their children into private schools. So I think that, to some degree, for some people in Los Angeles who are U.S.-born, immigration is more of an abstraction. It's not something that they deal with on a face-to-face basis. They don't relate to immigrants as peers always, but often as employees. So under those circumstances, assimilation is less rapid here.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Indeed, Michael Fix, what are the problems associated with assimilation in the kind of situation that Ann Marie O'Conner has just described? Because of LA being a patchwork of immigrant communities, does it make it more difficult for a city administration, for instance, to develop coherent social policies?

**MR. FIX:** I think it could have that effect. I think one of the striking things about the changes in cities with the advent of high-level immigration is that you can no longer so easily associate segregation of a minority group or an ethnic group with lack of social mobility or lack of economic mobility, so that what you have is you have some segments in some places which really are basically ghettos, which are low-income and highly segregated, and I'll get into that in just a second. But what you also see now with the new demography and with the new change in cities is you see the evolution of enclaves, like Little Havana in Miami or the Iron Bound in Newark, New Jersey, which are quite vibrant communities but which may be comparatively insular.

On the problematic scale, what I see in terms of segregation, which is particularly difficult, is the advent in most recent years of high levels of segregation within schools, not just by race, not just by ethnicity, but by language. What we have found with our statistics is that limited English-proficient children tend to go to school with other limited English-proficient children. So what we're finding is increasing linguistic isolation in the nation's schools.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Susan.

**MS. DRAKE:** And I think one of the issues, I know, that advocacy groups and people who are working with low-income communities see is the parallel issues that the linguistic segregation creates in terms of people's access or lack of access to services that, in fact, could help them become self-supporting and to earn incomes that will help them support their families.

A lot of newly arrived immigrants, just as they were back in the early part of the 20th century, are often—the parents are often stuck in low-wage jobs, working many, many long hours. And when they do need health insurance or they need access to other social services, which are some of the issues that—we're a legal services agency; we hear a lot all the time from social workers, clinicians, other legal aid lawyers—we find that it's extremely difficult for folks to get access to services that are really meaningful job-training services because of some of the language barriers and the inability of the sort of social structure and the social system to adapt to the changing demographics.

**MR. NNAMDI:** And the fact, I guess, Ann Marie O'Conner, that we have not really prepared for this, even though we may have realized that this was coming—because during the course of the past decade, we focused a lot of rhetoric on the size and on the scope of immigration. But it would appear that despite that focus, despite that political rhetoric, there has not been an appropriate or adequate response to the growing number of foreign-born residents.

**MS. O'CONNER:** Well, I always liken it to it raining outside. There was an ideological emphasis rather than an urban planning emphasis when people looked at immigration. I think that that came to a height under Pete Wilson, governor of California, at a time when immigrants were really reaching critical mass. But instead of looking at it as "How can we organize?" they sort of tried to come up with exclusionist legislation and tried to find ways to contain it. And to me, it was sort of, "Well, it was raining outside and everyone was talking about whether it should rain or not, but meanwhile, everyone got wet."

**MR. NNAMDI:** (Laughs.)

**MS. O'CONNER:** And that's kind of where we are now.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Indeed, Michael Fix, it would appear that, as Ann Marie pointed out, much of the ideological focus of that debate over immigration ignored the social services and, I guess, educational aspects of immigration. Is it too late to fix that? I'm sorry to use a pun on your name.

**MR. FIX:** (Laughs.) It can't be too late to fix it and it can't be too late to work hard to fix it and it can't be too late to begin to address some of the issues the policy created in the mid- to late 1990s as an anti-immigrant sentiment sort of found its way into the policymaking universe. And we had several real important manifestations of that. One of them was the exclusion of legal immigrants from work support services like food stamps, like health, like job training and the like. And those restorations of those work support benefits seem to make sense and seem quite doable in the current political context.

One is struck, when one looks at the platforms of the two parties that we've just seen, when one looks at their immigration platforms, how inclusive and how moderate they are. And, in fact, it's striking that the Democratic platform calls explicitly for a comprehensive immigrant integration agenda. So I feel like there's been a political transformation here, and I think that these issues are now finding their way, albeit reasonably slowly, onto the political stage and in a way which grapples with the issues and doesn't deny them.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Whether or not what we are seeing is a political transformation or the slow awakening to reality by the political parties, we can debate forever. Susan Drake, for one, does not seem to be quite as enthused about this political transformation as some other people seem to be.

**MS. DRAKE:** Well, hopeful, perhaps, but looking to see if, in fact, the reality matches the rhetoric.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Well, one had to notice—we covered the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia two weeks ago, and one had to notice the dramatic change in what used to be a blatantly hostile attitude towards immigration to a more accommodating one at that convention.

**MS. DRAKE:** I mean, it's clear, I think, when you look at the platforms of both parties, as Michael has pointed out, that there is a growing recognition on behalf of politicians on both sides that Latinos and other immigrant groups have registered to become citizens, and not only registered but are voting in record numbers. And they've made the difference already in a number of key elections around the country.

The critical element, though, is going to be are these messages of inclusion actually going to translate into practices, so that the reality of—are we actually going to go back and take a look at the restrictive laws that were passed in 1996, that have had a pretty devastating impact on the ability of immigrant families to reunite and get services?

**MR. NNAMDI:** Susan Drake is the executive director of the National Immigrant Law Center. She joins us in Los Angeles, California, along with Ann Marie O'Conner, who is a reporter with the *Los Angeles Times*. At the studios of WAMU in Washington, D.C., joining us is Michael Fix, program director of population studies with the Urban Institute, in collaboration with whom we do these city broadcasts. We've got to take a short break. We'll be right back.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Welcome back to the conversation we're having about immigration in the nation generally, with a focus on Los Angeles, California. You can join the discussion by calling 1-800-433-8850. That's 1-800-433-8850.

Ann Marie O'Conner, do national immigration policies tend to affect California first?

**MS. O'CONNER:** That's a good question.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Or is California the trend-setter for national immigration policies?

**MS. O'CONNER:** That's a very good question. I would say that for years, with Proposition 187, which sought to deny services to illegals, some of the trends came out of here. The trend against affirmative action came out of here. I would say that many of the social trends emerged from here, just as California is going to be 50 years ahead of the rest of the nation in being more than 50 percent non white. But I'd like to hear from some of our other experts on that, actually.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Susan.

**MS. DRAKE:** Well, I think that Ann Marie is perfectly right that Proposition 187 was really the foreteller of

extremely restrictive policies federally that Congress enacted in 1995 and 1996. The irony is that when they got enacted at the federal level, they not only restricted services and access of support systems to folks who were not yet able to be legal, but also dramatically restricted the due process, judicial rights, and access to services of people who were here who were already legal. And we are really still only unraveling the extent to which the legacy of these restrictions, which has had a dramatic impact in Los Angeles and in California, much more so, disproportionately than in the rest of the country, and what it is, in fact, needs to be unraveled.

And I think it's that question, circling back to before the break. You know, is the message of inclusion, which we've seen in the political platforms, actually going to be played out? In going back and taking a look at these restrictions and the extent to which they're going to make it much more difficult for people to stay legal, to become legal, to become contributing parents, much more difficult for people to get access to job training, health care, and other services that will keep those kids healthy and doing well in the schools.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Michael Fix, we look to California for patterns of immigration. Should we also be looking to California as a trend-setter in national policy on the issue of immigration?

**MR. FIX:** Let me flip that a little bit, Kojo. What I think I see is that policymakers react to California. They look at immigration through the lens of California and through the lens of Los Angeles when they frame policies. And that's interesting nationally, because the immigrant population in California is not like the rest of the United States in some important ways. It is a much more heavily immigrant state than is typical of the rest of the country.

Overall, it's much more heavily Mexican than the rest of the country. The immigrant population in California is younger. It's less educated. To some extent, it's poorer. It's more likely to be recently arrived. It's more likely to be composed of refugees and it's more likely to be composed of the undocumented. So when you make policy nationally, using California as your lens, what you do is you understate the incomes, the educations and essentially the legality of the U.S. immigrant population more generally. And it's kind of a false lens to look through in some ways.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay. Well, if we're looking through that false lens anyway, let's continue to look through it even though we understand there are likely to be some distortions at the national level. But talk about if, indeed, there is a political transformation taking place, how will that political transformation reflect itself in the changes in U.S. immigration law, for instance, that would facilitate immigrant integration?

**MR. FIX:** In—

**MS. O'CONNER:** I would—

**MR. FIX:** Go ahead, Susan.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Go ahead, Michael.

**MR. FIX:** I'll defer to Susan right here.

**MR. NNAMDI:** That was Ann Marie, actually.

**MR. FIX:** Ann Marie? I'm sorry.

**MS. O'CONNER:** Well, I was going to say, I actually agreed with Susan when she said that she wanted to see some of the new rhetoric, which is strikingly different from just several years ago, translated into actions, because immigration is one of those areas where the devil is truly in the details, and everything revolves around little slips of paper and dates and deadlines. And there are some tremendous detailed issues facing America now with immigrants that it will be interesting to see how policymakers react to.

To give you an example, of the 6 million estimated illegal immigrants in the United States—no one really knows how many there are—at least 1 million are minors. And many of their parents—(audio break)—just past it nationwide. But in California, you have kids who have actually somehow gotten scholarships to Harvard but now cannot afford to go to law school because they are still illegal. They cannot apply for federal aid. They are ineligible for all the kinds of help that a U.S.-born child would have, yet they've lived here since they were little children, and in many cases speak poor Spanish and would have a poor acculturation to their home countries.

So they are stuck in a sort of limbo. And we are going to have—every single year, for years to come now, 50,000 per year are going to pass into this limbo. So how do you take kids who are acculturated Americans and enfranchise them in the same way that others who've grown up in the United States are enfranchised? This is just one of what I view as dozens and dozens of sort of little niggling issues that affect hundreds of thousands of people.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Michael?

**MR. FIX:** Let me give you another issue. One of the things that the 1996 welfare law did was it barred legal noncitizens from getting public benefits. Now, when we think about families, the way I usually think about families is there are citizen families and there are noncitizen families. But the way I have always thought about families, as it turns out, is completely wrong.

In point of fact, most immigrant families are composed of noncitizen parents and citizen children, so that what you have is these mixed-status families, where one or more of the parents is a noncitizen and one or more of the kids is a citizen. Well, it's important. Well, one in 10 children in the United States lives in this kind of a mixed-status family. Going to Los Angeles, 60 percent of the poor children in Los Angeles live in a

mixed-status family.

So if you're a policymaker and you craft a law which disadvantages the noncitizen parent, it's likely that you'll inadvertently hurt the citizen child because there will be, you know, fewer food stamps to go around in that family or less resources generally available to that family. It's the kind of complexity that policymakers are going to be coming to grips with increasingly, hopefully, as the decade unfolds.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Well, if there is indeed this political change that we referred to earlier, if indeed policymakers are going to address these issues, it would have to be because fundamental attitudes toward foreign-born Americans are shifting. That's what politicians tend to respond to in their policies. Susan Drake is the executive director of the National Immigrant Center. Do you see such an attitudinal change?

**MS. DRAKE:** Well, we certainly see that politicians are counting the votes, and we certainly see that they are also responsive to the fact that we have a tremendous need for workers in this country because the economy is just rolling along at a superb clip, due in no small part to the hard work and economic contributions of immigrants, not just folks who start their own businesses and who are buying homes in record numbers, but also to folks who are working as cashiers and cooks and teachers' aides and putting together—working in the garment industry, in agriculture.

And one of the, I think, real tests of our goals as a nation, to try to bring our practices in line with our philosophy, is whether or not the support systems for those working families, who are actually contributing so greatly to the economic development, are they going to be able—comprised very, very highly of immigrant families—are they going to be able to get access to the kinds of services that they need? Are we going to go back and sort of take a look and fix the restrictions that we enacted in 1996?

**MR. NNAMDI:** Again, the question of if attitudes are changing, Ann Marie O'Conner, does the political will exist to indeed implement the kinds of policy changes that are necessary? Here in Los Angeles, could you give us some indication about how those changes in attitudes or how those political changes might or might not be reflecting themselves in how this political and business community is dealing with providing services and accommodating the integration of its immigrant population?

**MS. O'CONNER:** Here, I think it's very spotty. It has tended to focus around sort of strangely veiled issues like bilingual education. To me, it's difficult to see whether they will address some of these issues. There's been pressure, to give you one example from here, to make it possible for undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses, to give you one example, because, just as a practical matter, it's unsafe for them not to have driver's licenses. If it's impossible for them to get them, then they're not going to have insurance. It just leads to a whole slew of problems. And that arose and was debated, and I think it sort of died without a whimper.

**MS. DRAKE:** Well, no, it's still alive in the legislature, although the bill has been amended so that folks could get driver's licenses who are in the process of obtaining legalization.

**MS. O'CONNER:** Right.

**MS. DRAKE:** So it's, at the moment, still alive. I think one of the key political wind shifts that we do see nationally, that's also tremendously led by folks here in Los Angeles, is the changing positions of the labor movement. Many, many of the labor unions here in Los Angeles and in California are the leadership, knowing that if they're going to try to get support to the folks who are working in the hotel industry—the Justice for Janitors campaign was a perfect example of people working enormous hours.

And the union movement—I think, as most folks know, the national AFL-CIO in February adopted a pretty fundamental shift in its attitude toward immigrant workers. Back in the mid-'80s, they had gone along with a lot of the restrictionist beliefs, and they're now realizing that in order to protect all workers, they have to be able to be sure that folks are able to unionize, that they're able to assert their labor rights without a fear that either they or their co-worker is going to be deported.

**MS. O'CONNER:** I think one of the signs of will to accommodate immigrants here is the city of Los Angeles rule that police cannot ask the immigrant status of someone. And that was created specifically, Special Order 40. It's very controversial here still. It was created specifically so that you wouldn't create a disenfranchised class of people who could not report crimes, who could not be witnesses to hit-and-runs. And in the LAPD Rampart scandal over police corruption, one of the issues that arose was that they were violating that order. And that created a lot of concern among public officials, because they're afraid that if there is a subclass in Los Angeles of people who do not have rights, it's going to erode many institutions, not just institutions for illegal immigrants but institutions serving other types of people.

**MR. NNAMDI:** This is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi. Allow me to get to the telephone. The number, again, 1-800-433-8850. Let's talk with Jack in Hickory, North Carolina. Jack, you're on the air. Go ahead, please.

**CALLER:** Hi. Thanks. I have three things to comment on, and the fourth one just came up while I was listening. First was, a lot of people don't understand the importance of the Latino vote. Why it's being courted is because it's a hugely concentrated vote in the big states. And with our form of election where your votes don't count, it's electoral votes that count, and if you can carry California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Illinois, you've got a great chance of winning an election. And those are huge areas where there are very large Latino populations.

I wanted to also jump the subject and mention how upset I am with the Immigration Service. My wife and I got married three and a half years ago, and I think this is just so cruelly unfair, very cruel. We

immediately—she came legally. We got married legally. We applied all the proper forms legally. We did all the proper things legally, properly. And then Immigration waited a year and a half to interview us to see if we had a valid marriage, and that's when the clock started ticking for our three-year residency, three-year marriage. And three years from that date, she can apply for citizenship, which we feel like we've been robbed of a year and a half because we were married legally a year and a half before that. We just don't get credit for it because Immigration didn't get around to interviewing us for a year and a half. And—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Well—

**CALLER:** —it affected her ability to get her citizenship.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Indeed, that is a problem that you hear a lot of involving people who are married to people who are foreign-born and trying to get their residency in this country. Is that an example, Susan Drake, of the kind of intervention that state legislatures or the federal government will have to make in response to immigration?

**MS. DRAKE:** It's a very good example of the dislocations, really severe dislocations in an individual's life that the sort of lack of resources and lack of acknowledgement of the scope of the work that the Immigration & Naturalization Service has to do. There are just unbelievable waits, waits that would be totally unacceptable from any other government bureaucracy, because of the inability of the Immigration Service, as well as their lack of resources, to respond to the kinds of issues that the caller is talking about, just simply processing an interview so somebody can get on with going ahead and becoming a citizen.

Over a million people at one point were backlogged for months, if not years, in their citizenship applications. And it comes out also when you look at people who are refugees or asylees. It can take the INS months to reprocess a simple permission to be allowed to get your work authorization renewed, which means that your employer is afraid maybe he is not legally employing you anymore and you are at risk of losing your job simply because you're waiting on a government bureaucracy for months, past the time it was due for them to take an action on your paperwork.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Michael Fix, we're talking about an individual problem here that a caller talked about. But then we mentioned earlier the increasing influence of foreign-born workers in the labor movement. Then our caller mentioned the increasing political clout of the Latino vote. Are those two phenomena that will, in your view, drive the changes in the kinds of laws, the kinds of immigration laws, that had our caller waiting or has him waiting for so long?

**MR. FIX:** It will have a big impact if the economy doesn't change. If the economy changes, if the economy goes down, I think the impact will be diminished. In a strong economy, increased naturalization, increased Latino voting, increased immigrant voting, foreign-born voting, generally will have a big impact.

Let me mention two other things that I think will—reasons that we may have a change, or at least one other reason we may have a change in the political environment around immigration. Historically immigration has been perceived as a six-state issue, and the legislators who were, in many cases, not all cases, who were most committed to it lived in those six states.

As to the demographic phenomenon of the dispersal of the immigrant population has expanded, as other states view themselves now as receiving states of immigrants and are now coming to grips with immigrant integration, the question of the politics of immigration and their willingness to exceed the policies of exclusion may shift.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Michael Fix is program director of population studies with the Urban Institute. He joins us from the studios of WAMU in Washington, D.C. Joining us in Los Angeles is Susan Drake, executive director of the National Immigrant Law Center, and Ann Marie O'Conner, who is a reporter with the *Los Angeles Times*. You, too, can join us. Just call 1-800-433-8850. For those of you already on the line, stay there. We'll be right back.

(Announcements.)

**MR. NNAMDI:** We're back in Los Angeles, talking about the effect of immigration not only on the nation in general but on its cities in particular—in this case, the city of Los Angeles—and what's being done or not being done about that, what can be done about that; a conversation you can join at 1-800-433-8850. Actually, we were joined earlier by Jack in Hickory, North Carolina, but Jack wasn't done.

**CALLER:** Yes, with you again. I told you—I complained about the way my wife had been mistreated with the year-and-a-half wait about being married.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Right.

**CALLER:** She also—that's the legal side. She has a son who's 29 and has a hearing problem. He was born with only about 80 percent hearing. So it's a real requirement that we get him—he has to be with family. And he's been in limbo for the last several years because of that.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Where is he?

**CALLER:** We have been able to bring him—

**MR. NNAMDI:** You mean, he's in the country.

**CALLER:** —as a visitor—

**MR. NNAMDI:** He's been in immigration limbo is what you're saying.

**CALLER:** Yes, he's in immigration limbo because of that. And when my wife—as soon as my wife qualifies for her citizenship, then after her years is up, which is really four and a half years, then she can apply for citizenship, which may take another two years.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Another kind of problem in the continuing problems of Jack with the Immigration Service. Any more, Jack?

**CALLER:** Yes, I also—my wife and I are translators here in Hickory, and Hickory is a furniture manufacturing area that has drawn a large number of illegal immigrants, particularly from Mexico. And right down the road is a processing plant for poultry that's drawn a huge number of Guatemalans. But when you were talking earlier about driver's licenses and families with illegal and legal and citizens within --

**MR. NNAMDI:** Right.

**CALLER:** My wife goes to a lot of births, and there are a lot of children who have been born in Hickory that are now U.S. citizens with parents who are totally illegal, and they're growing in, like you said, a society where they --

**MR. NNAMDI:** In a kind of limbo.

**CALLER:** —former culture, and yet their parents could be deported at any moment, which is a real problem. And this morning I saw three men from Mexico. I always strike up conversations. They're from Florida, and they were up to North Carolina trying to get ID cards, because in Florida it was too hard for them to try and come up with an identification.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Well, I think you've discussed a myriad of problems that result from our immigration policies, Jack.

**CALLER:** It's so mixed up.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Allow me to get some responses, starting with you, Susan Drake.

**MS. DRAKE:** Well, I think that the mixture of issues that Jack raises is sort of a good crystallization of some of the difficulties that we have facing us; for example, these extremely large poultry processing and meat packing plants, which are making millions of dollars in states like North Carolina, Nebraska, throughout the Plains states, and are drawing workers from Mexico and other immigrant workers because of the extraordinary difficulty and dangerous nature of the work.

And so you have a population of folks that are out there who do not have access to services, find it difficult to become legal, and yet they really are the backbone of an increasingly important element of the economy. And the degree to which politicians will be hopefully listening to some of those factory owners, who need to have their workers legal, as well as some of the unions that want to go in and be sure that folks are protected and have rights, I think it's going to be a real test for us as a nation in terms of unraveling some of these difficulties.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Let's go to Debbie in Little Rock, Arkansas. Debbie, you're on the air. Go ahead, please.

**CALLER:** Yes, good afternoon.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Hi.

**CALLER:** I have a question regarding people who have applied and have been granted asylum and who intend to go for citizenship. I would like to understand how child support—they becoming actually a deadbeat dad. What kind of laws, or how does the policy address that issue so we wouldn't be importing even more deadbeat dads? Could you address—do you know anything about that?

**MR. NNAMDI:** Nothing at all, Debbie. And I'm not sure that any of our panelists do either. You're addressing a specific aspect of immigration law when we're really trying to focus on how immigration law affects our cities and what city leaders and business leaders are doing about that. If we had an immigration lawyer on the broadcast, then we might have been able to answer that question. But I don't think we can.

**CALLER:** Okay, thanks.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Debbie, thank you very much for your call. Let's move on to Cleveland, Ohio, where Tom awaits us. Tom, you're on the air. Go ahead, please.

**CALLER:** Kojo, how you doing?

**MR. NNAMDI:** Fine.

**CALLER:** I'll tell you what. I'm going through the Census projections, the OMB projections for the congressional redistricting that will occur next year. And, you know, we're going to lose, between Connecticut and Illinois, you're going to have a whole band of states that are going to lose congressional representation: Connecticut, one; New York, three congressmen; Pennsylvania, two congressmen; Ohio, one.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay, what do you see as the relationship between that and immigration?

**CALLER:** Well, yeah. I mean, we're having this unchecked immigration into California, Arizona, Texas, Florida, Georgia; you brought up Carolina, too. And you're seeing the population of these states swell. And,

you know, we're not accounting for the congressional representation that states like Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut are going to lose. And this is really upsetting the whole apple cart. It's upsetting the whole balance of American politics. And next year, when people realize what's happened and they see the California delegation swell up even more and the Texas and the Florida and the Georgia delegations all swell up, people are going to be howling, howling mad. And, you know, when you—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Okay, allow me to get a—

**CALLER:** —not there any more—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Allow me to get a response for that, Tom, from Michael Fix; Tom making the point, Michael Fix, that there's likely to be some political backlash against immigration as a result of the Census.

**MR. FIX:** There may. But one man/one vote, constitutional representation, are pretty deeply embedded characteristics of our constitutional government. And while Bridgeport, Connecticut, and upstate New York may lose some votes as a result of immigration, it's not clear that there will be a political backlash from it, because I think these are—even the Northeast now perceives the flow of immigration into these communities to be—while they may lose some political power, but for the presence of immigrants, they would be losing even more political power and they would be losing some of their economic strength in New York City. But for the flow of immigrants into the city, you would probably have a declining, for example, school system and fewer teachers.

So, to some extent, he's right. And I think it'll be a tension, but there are countervailing benefits that flow from the immigration as well.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Which gives me the opportunity to ask you, Susan Drake, to talk about some of the positive effects of immigration. What do we gain as a country by immigration?

**MS. DRAKE:** Well, it's interesting. You know, at the same time that all these restrictionist laws and pressures were coming out of California in the midst of the recession, you could go to the cultural pages and the restaurant reviews and you could see the cutting edge of the fact that we have this unbelievable diversity where we have the world represented in Los Angeles, as well as in cities like New York, and the pride that people take in the fact that in the United States we have this diversity that you can have food from many cultures, that you can have music from all over the world. And at just the people level, I think people's fundamental understanding is that our role internationally in terms of the globalization of the international economy and our ability to compete is tremendously advantaged by the fact that we really have the world represented here also in the United States.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Back to the telephone. Let's go to Hamig in Washington, D.C. Hi, Hamig. You're on the air. Go ahead, please.

**CALLER:** Yes. I wanted to make two comments. I am an immigrant, although I don't think of myself as one. I grew up in California. I also direct a natural program to teach higher mathematics and high-powered mathematicians to school systems nationwide, particularly the inner cities, to work with socioeconomically disadvantaged kids.

It's ironic that while we're doing so poorly relative to socioeconomically disadvantaged kids, who are citizens within the country, that the immigrants, the children of the immigrants in those school systems, are now having the best record and the best grades and performance.

Now, what we are doing, on the other hand, that is disadvantageous to our country is that by limiting immigration and limiting—the laws that limit people who are within the country, then we are limiting the resources that we can have, and the people who could otherwise become very productive citizens or productive members of the society will have to be semi-criminals or act as semi-criminals, and—

**MR. NNAMDI:** Your point, Hamig, being that these restrictive laws are restricting some of the most productive elements, productive human beings, in our country, when, in fact, these laws, if changed, these individuals could be helping our country in a much more open way than they are now permitted to.

**CALLER:** Absolutely, because these people are not really going anywhere. And I'm glad that finally—I think Susan made a comment about the positive impacts of immigrants within the United States.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Yeah. As a matter of fact, I think you were helping her to make her argument pretty well.

**CALLER:** One other point is something that you don't consider as a consequence of immigration, that it is actually, in some ways—is that the people who come to this country even legally really go through a bizarre and very difficult process through our embassies outside of the United States. Their first exposure to get to America, the land of opportunity, the wonderful land of equality and so on that they have heard so much about, is this almost tyrannical attitude and approach of the people within the consulate system.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Indeed, Hamig. But that is another issue that we won't have time to get into during the course of this broadcast. But I thank you for joining us. This is Public Interest. I'm Kojo Nnamdi.

Ann Marie O'Conner, there also seems to be a significant movement of immigrants out of California, it would appear, even though we're talking about the widespread immigration that affects the city of Los Angeles. There seems to be a rate of immigration from California to the rest of the U.S. by immigrants.

**MS. O'CONNER:** That's very true. While there has been some white flight from California to states east, there has also been a lot of movement of immigrants outside of the state. Often they will go to cities where they



simply find more opportunities and less competition in the labor market, improbable places, small towns and cities in the Midwest, places in northern Maine, throughout the South. I think that that's a trend that you've seen that's been very pronounced over the last five years or so.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Well, let's get back to California for a second, because I think that's what David in Rockville, Maryland, wants to talk about. David, your turn.

**CALLER:** Hi. (Laughs.) I'm on the air, I guess.

**MR. NNAMDI:** You are, David.

**CALLER:** Thank you. I don't often hear this program, but I did today. I'm working usually, unfortunately, and I'm obviously missing quite a bit.

**MR. NNAMDI:** You are.

**CALLER:** I gather. My question is this. I read somewhere recently that within the next 50 to 75 years, the population of California, obviously including Los Angeles, will double. And all of the new—most of that new population will be immigrant population, most of which will be Hispanic. What are the implications of that?

**MR. NNAMDI:** That's why we did this broadcast.

**CALLER:** Well, exactly. But that's the question. We're talking about a major, potentially explosive cultural shift.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Michael Fix of the Urban Institute, program director of population studies, it sounds like a question for you.

**MR. FIX:** Well, one thing is clear. Let's not talk about the very long range, because I am, like many people, terrible about projecting very far out. But let me talk just about the more intermediate range. In the more intermediate range—that is to say, even in the next 5 to 10 years—increased immigration to California and high birthrates among immigrants is going to mean an expansion, a significant expansion, in the school-based population in the city and in the county, and how that population is—for example, it is projected by the Rand Corporation that the secondary school population in Los Angeles County and in California will grow by 30 to 40 percent just over the course of the next five to seven years. Without projecting what major population changes mean over 50 years, just that adjustment is going to require substantial institutional alteration, institutional focus, institutional shifts, and, I would argue, probably new resources, probably in part from Washington, to cope with.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Susan?

**MS. DRAKE:** I think that that's true, and I think one of the legacies of the kind of refusal to acknowledge the implications of these demographic shifts is clear from—for example, Proposition 13 in California was one of the early propositions that set a trend nationally against people's willingness to raise taxes to support schools, to support the other kinds of institutional infrastructure that we need to deal with a growing population. Back in the 1950s, when all the kids in the schools were white, it was easy to get school bonds passed. It was easy to get new kinds of infrastructure passed. And we're going to have to have an honest kind of reassessment of the need to support these populations so they can become productive.

**MR. NNAMDI:** Indeed, we will see whether there have been attitudinal changes and whether there is indeed a political transformation taking place in the country that is more accommodating of and sensitive to the immigrant population.

Susan Drake is the executive director of the National Immigrant Law Center, Ann Marie O'Conner is a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, and Michael Fix is program director of population studies with the Urban Institute. Thank you all for joining us.

During the course of this past few days, Public Interest has been coming to you from Los Angeles, California, where our engineer is John Hote; our engineer in Washington, Karen McManus. Dory Anismon is on the phones. Graham Griffith is our producer in Los Angeles.

We'd like to thank you all for listening. See you next week.

## Other Publications by the Authors

- [Urban Institute](#)
- [Michael E. Fix](#)

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