

CHAPTER 1



Immigration and the American Dream

What is the American Dream to which immigrants are drawn? How does the dream attract so many immigrants—both legal and undocumented—to America, and how do they fare when they arrive? These are questions that are central to an understanding not just of the immigration flows of the last two decades but of the future influx from abroad, and of how American society will evolve and change in the coming century. Some eagerly celebrate immigration and the diversity it brings; others worry over the numbers and their impacts. One can be both a celebrator and a worrier, but the celebration story fits more neatly with the upbeat and positive views of America, and there is much to celebrate, even if it is tinged with some worries down the road.

This introductory chapter focuses on the dual nature of the dream as it is being realized in the 21st century. It addresses the varied facets of this dream—such as homeownership, education for one’s children, and acquisition of material goods—and examines the varying paths new immigrants follow as they thrive and prosper.

A popular magazine article in the early 1990s asserted that unemployment is lower in Switzerland, owning a home is easier in Australia, attending college is likelier in Canada, yet dreams more often come true in America (Topolnicki, 1991). The headline was a teaser for a special issue of the magazine on the continuing importance of the American

Dream. The unabashed focus on material well-being (“despite what we’ve heard about our nation’s decline—we still live better than anyone else”) is an evocation of the successes of living in America. Is that dream still the lure for the dramatic flows of immigrants at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries? Is the dream of a new and better life that brought countless millions a century ago from Europe now bringing a new surge of migrants from Asia and Central and South America? Most important, are the new immigrants en route to achieving the American Dream, or are some becoming sidetracked into a backwater with few opportunities, where the struggle is simply one of staying afloat?

Dreams are intangible, and the American Dream is no less intangible than so many other dreams of our futures. Is the American Dream epitomized by Horatio Alger—clerk to corporate president, poverty to wealth, obscurity to professional distinction? Or is it exemplified more typically by such less glamorous outcomes as a steady job, a comfortable home, and a secure future for one’s children? Does it still have relevance in our current society; does it still have the power to stimulate and excite, to generate tenacity and commitment? When one looks around the universities of the US,¹ as well as at the enterprises newly launched (whether high-tech “dot-coms” or low-tech gardening trucks plying their trade along the streets of Southern California), there does seem to be something at work. Both low-paying jobs and highly skilled occupations are filled by energetic people from other places around the globe.

Many commentators who explore the ideas of the American Dream speak of the collective dream embodied in the Bill of Rights (freedom from religious or political persecution), and to be sure this is still an important and enduring force in creating the context for immigration. Indeed, as the story goes, the immigrant who moved from Russia to New York was asked about why he had moved. Was it because of the housing? “No,” he responded, “I couldn’t complain.” Was it because of the medical care? “No, I couldn’t complain,” he responded once more. Was it because of the job opportunities? “No, I couldn’t complain,” he said again. Then why, persisted the interviewer, did you immigrate? “Here I can complain,” he replied. The story resonates with all who are motivated by the most basic desire—to the extent possible to have the freedom to be in control of one’s own life.

However, most individuals are much more prosaic in their conception of the dream. The individual immigrant has always focused on material well-being and prospects for a better future, either in America or upon returning home with some tangible wealth. An early-20th-century

Italian immigrant celebrated his motivation to make money and return home:

“If I am to be frank, then I shall say that I left Italy and came to America for the sole purpose of making money. I was not seeking political ideals. . . . I was quite satisfied with my native land. If I could have worked my way up . . . in Italy, I would have stayed in Italy. But repeated efforts showed me that I could not. America was the land of opportunity, and I came, intending to make money and then return to Italy.” (Miele, 1920)

That dream persists in the late 20th century, for both the poor and the better-off. A recent newspaper report tells of a fashionable young hairdresser who, while doing well enough, wanted more:

“I’m a fighter, I’m not satisfied with just getting by and that’s what I felt I was doing here [in Mexico.]” . . . [I]t was the contrast of deterioration of life in Mexico with the constant reports of opportunities in the US which made up her mind. (LaFranchi, 1999, p. 1)

The dream was to do better. Contreras, the hairdresser was making what her friends called “a decent living.” But there were “few prospects for improvement,” and in the end it is that elusive search for improvement that is at the heart of the dream. Whether it is immediate gains for the individual or longer-term benefits for a family’s young children, the prospects of moving up the ladder of success are all important. It is fashionable to decry the material gains of American society, even to “get off the ladder,” but for many, and especially newcomers, the economic opportunities are paramount and are probably a greater part of the collective consciousness than we recognize.

A young computer engineer unknowingly paralleled the Italian immigrant from 80 years before. “Can I be frank?” asked Suman Kar, a 20-year-old senior at the Bombay Institute (a technology institute similar to Cal Tech or MIT), as he explained why he has accepted a job in Silicon Valley: “It’s the money” (*New York Times*, February 29, 2000, p. A1). The job will pay nearly seven times as much as he would earn in India.

The dream is and was unabashedly material, nor was it much concerned with assimilation into a new society. It is the same dream that propels so many new immigrants today, the dream of improving their lot, of doing better. Repeatedly, media anecdotes of immigrant success recount the sacrifices the first generation makes to ensure second-generation suc-

cesses. The native-born population may not resonate so fully with the American Dream, or even doubt its salience. Some of the native born are ready with an outright rejection of its mythology, but the immigrant population is embracing the opportunities offered by the American tradition of hard work, long hours, and often menial tasks. Who are these successful immigrants, where do they work, and where do they live? These questions will define the chapters that follow.

DREAMS AND THE PATHS TO SUCCESS

In a discourse on the American Dream, Hochschild (1995) suggested that it is a set of tenets about achieving success.² It is not just the outcome of a high income and a secure job; it is the enduring notion that even those who are poor and have limited skills can succeed. So many who are disadvantaged are still optimistic about their future. Here we have the two elements that are threaded through the American Dream, a belief that there is a fair chance of succeeding and ample opportunities to do so. Everyone has a chance, the opportunities are there, and hard work will be rewarded. Of course, it does not always work out so simply: skills and opportunities are not always perfectly matched; constraints and discrimination in the system prevent some from achieving their dreams; sometimes skills cannot be transferred from other societies. Even so, the enduring belief that effort will be rewarded is clearly a motivating force for so many of the new immigrants.

Attempts to define the American Dream have struggled with just how much the dream is spiritual and how much material. On the one hand, the dream emphasized a life which had the noble ends of freedom and self fulfillment—a life that was better, richer, and fuller. On the other hand, the American Dream included specific defining symbols: a house, a car, and abundant consumer goods (Galbraith, 1976; Reisman, 1980). In one of the more unabashedly material interpretations of the dream, a young couple sits gazing at the night sky and at vistas filled with a split-level ranch house, a sports car and family station wagon, and helpful home appliances (Calder, 1999, p. 3). Whatever its internal contradictions, the American Dream embodies both material well-being and the search for a life that is more internally satisfying according to every man or woman's ability. It is perhaps part of its enduring quality that it has this dual nature.

Those who have sought to interpret the American Dream have suggested that it has always been more than the search for material well-being. Even so, the evidence suggests that the search has been more material than not. Recent criticism of the notion of the American Dream has tended toward a rejection of the notion of upward mobility and certainly a serious castigation of the idea that the selfish and individual pursuit of the American Dream only generates overproduction and an orgy of consumption. To many, late-20th-century American society was one of heedless conspicuous consumption and little concern for its impact on the social and physical infrastructure. At the same time, commentators often fall back, albeit grudgingly, on the recognition that in some way the choice of democracy and the market economy is still a powerful force in creating our society. Even though it is clear that enlightened self-interest alone is not a panacea for the problems facing an urban society, there seems no other more persuasive ethic.

Whatever the confusion over the nature of the American Dream, it appears that the idea of relatively equal opportunities to pursue a wide variety of activities, including private economic interests, is an enduring force that is attractive well beyond national borders. The world is indeed critical of much heedless and thoughtless political behavior on the part of the United States as a nation. But as in Great Britain, Germany, France, The Netherlands, and all the democratic developed economies, other things being equal, the opportunities in such nations seem to outweigh the problems. The attraction of opportunities in a stable democratic society, even only a “relatively” caring democratic society, are powerful lures for many in poorer and less stable situations.

The American Dream embodies not only aspirations but also the avenues by which they can be realized. Without opportunities, dreams remain just that. But with opportunities the dreams can be realized, and it is the very fact that at least some dreams are being realized which is driving much of the immigration. In the minds of those pursuing it, the American Dream may be a loosely defined cluster of aspirations, but it clearly encompasses the chance to make money, to buy a house, and to ensure an education for the next generation. But it also has an element of individuality, of being able to do this on one’s own in highly individual ways, unimpeded by authoritarian structures and to do it in a society, governed fairly, not corruptly. Of course, constraints are real and the opportunities may be tinged by inequality. However, it is some combination of personal freedoms and material opportunities that are at the heart of the enduring

concept of American dreaming, and we may say French, German, Dutch, and British dreaming, because immigrants are seeking to enter those societies with the same intensity as they are seeking to enter the United States.

DEFINING THE DREAM

How can one define a dream? It obviously varies for different individuals and families. At the same time the discussion in the previous paragraphs suggested some common elements: a reasonable income, secure housing, and political freedom. The process of attaining the American Dream is in essence the process of becoming middle class, which encapsulates moving up the socioeconomic status ladder, becoming homeowners in (often suburban) communities, and participating in the political process.³

In this sense of the previous paragraph I am using middle-class status as a measure of success in realizing the American Dream. Still, there remains the problem of definition, as there is no official definition, no agreed-upon classification of those who are middle class and those who are not. However, even though there is no standard measure for the middle class, the concept exists in subtle forms, from casual conversation to television advertisements (Levy and Michel, 1986). In some ways it is easier to enumerate the concomitants of the middle-class lifestyle than to provide a precise definition. Clearly the concomitants include material goods, a home and at least one car, other consumer items like television sets, dishwashers, and personal computers, but also the funds to educate and raise healthy children and provide support for a comfortable retirement.

Income

Despite the lack of a generally accepted definition of the term “middle class,” there is a very good working definition that we can use to guide our analysis. The University of Michigan Population Studies Center used a range of incomes linked to the threshold that defines a family in poverty. In their definition, the middle class ranges from 200 to 499% (or in other words from two to five times) the poverty line for a household of four.⁴ The justification for this categorization is twofold. Using the poverty line as a control point ties the measure to a recognized basic support

level for a family of four (a household). Equally important, the measure is relatively consistent over time and can be used comparatively across different censuses. Defining the lower level of the middle class at two times the poverty level excludes the poor and the near poor, but it also is sufficiently broad to capture both lower-middle-class and upper-middle-class incomes.⁵ This measure fulfills the idea of tying the definition of “middle class” to a relative measure of income and generates a range of middle-class incomes. The definition for the late 1990s creates about a 40% middle-class distribution (Figure 1.1). The definition of 40% of all U.S. households as middle income is consistent with the broad findings of Levy (1998) and similar to the income findings of Leigh (1994).⁶ Their income ranges were roughly in the region of \$30,000 to \$80,000 in 1997 dollars and are not especially different from the ranges we will use in the empirical analysis later in the book. The range suggested by Levy (1998) for middle incomes, \$30,000 to \$80,000, is quite similar to the 2000 range of \$34,000 to \$85,000 based on the above University of Michigan Population Studies Center definition.⁷

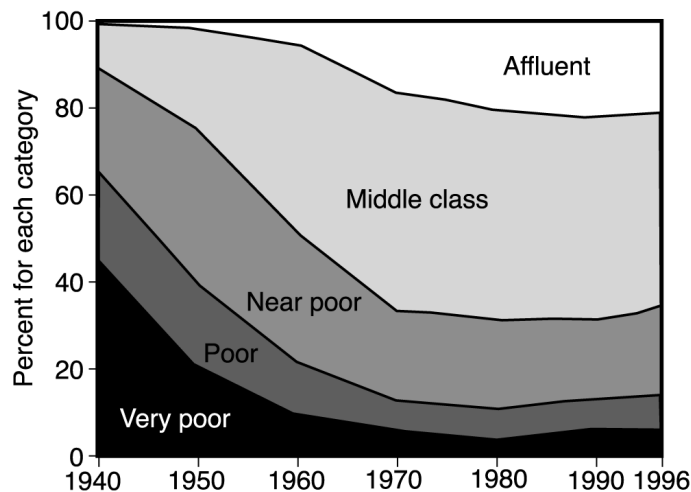


FIGURE 1.1. Economic status of the U.S. population: 1940–1996. *Source:* Analysis by the University of Michigan Population Studies Center of microdata samples from the U.S. Censuses of 1940–1990 and the March 1996 Current Population Survey, and modified from a figure in *Population Today*, vol. 25, November 1997.

Homeownership

The American Dream is more than just a dream of a good income. Another central dimension is homeownership. Owning a home is a core part of the dream, as it provides security and implies putting down roots and community commitment. Thus, income alone is an insufficient measure of the middle-class lifestyle, even though income is what affords access to the material goods which are the essence of the middle-class lifestyle (Levy, 1998). Buying a home is one of those critical purchases, perhaps the most critical purchase, and a central part of the American Dream. A fairly substantial literature notes that homeownership is linked to prestige and symbolizes “making it” in the United States (Ratner, 1996). But there are tangible reasons for making homeownership a central component of middle-class status as well—safety and autonomy, not to mention the financial and tax advantages of homeownership (Johnston, Katimin, and Milczarski, 1997). Thus, homeownership is an integral part of middle-class status.

Homeownership has taken on symbolic meaning beyond the value and assets of the home and is interconnected with the notions of upward and outward mobility—of increasing household assets and relocation to the suburbs. Moreover, the role of homeownership has become increasingly salient and central in the past half century. Before 1940, substantially less than half of U.S. households owned their own home, but since 1960 the average has climbed to about 66% in the country as a whole. Clearly, owning a house is now the norm and is a central part of the American and the middle-class lifestyle. Household surveys continue to reiterate the basic desire for homeownership and its pervasiveness across incomes (Heskin, 1983).

At the same time, a recent discussion (“The Muddle about the Middle Class,” Population Reference Bureau, *Population Today*, Vol. 28, January 2000, p. 8) emphasized that varying living costs will determine who is middle class and that what makes up the middle-class lifestyle has changed over time. Nevertheless, the combination of an income range and ownership encompasses much that we think of as middle class, and that is the definition that will be central to my empirical analysis.⁸

Definitions and Perceptions

Most Americans identify themselves as middle class—either lower-middle class or upper-middle class—rather than working class or wealthy. The broad appeal of the middle class and its idealization has grown out of

notions embedded in the American idea of equality and the ideals of upward mobility—the ideas that are central to the American Dream. There is a strong feeling that the United States is a nation, at least for white America, with near limitless opportunities for upward progress and continuing gains in material success. “Making it,” defined in terms of a house, car, leisure time, and a secure retirement, is truly embedded in the American psyche.

At the same time definitions of the middle class are complicated because the basket of material goods that is regarded as symbolizing the middle-class lifestyle has changed over time. For example, a two-bath, two-car home is now closer to the norm for most middle-class households than the one-bath, one car home of the 1950s (Figure 1.2). It also takes more than one earner to create the middle-class lifestyle at the beginning of the 21st century. Households have changed in composition: two earners are common, and smaller households are the norm. This shifting economic and demographic context make it difficult to place boundaries on the middle class. But even though definitions are not straightforward and in the end are inextricably dependent on the exact quantitative measures used, the range I have suggested here is one that can be employed to examine the relative progress of both the native-born and the foreign-born population.

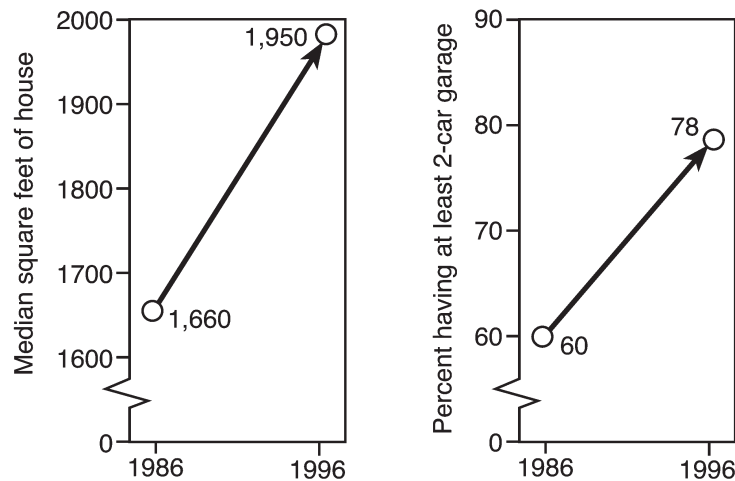


FIGURE 1.2. Characteristics of new single-family homes. *Source:* National Association of Homebuilders, www.nahb.com.

THE AMERICAN DREAM AND THE NEW IMMIGRANTS

The American Dream is an impressive ideology, luring people to America and thence to local opportunities in one or another place or region (Hochschild, 1995).⁹ California in the 1880s was the dream of Charles Fletcher Lummis, city editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, and General Harrison Gray Otis, long the newspaper's publisher, and they sold the California Dream across the nation (McWilliams, 1973). The newspaper was the medium by which such men portrayed the opportunities and advantages of California, and the Union Pacific and the Atchison, Topeka, & Sante Fe railroads were the modes of transportation to bring people there. California as a destination embodied the dreams of internal migrants from the east coast. Now, however, the dream of California or the larger United States is conveyed not by newspapers, as it was in the late 19th century, but rather it is beamed electronically via satellites into the towns and villages of a visually interconnected world. American movies and TV programs provide powerful media for creating and vehicles for transmitting the images of American society worldwide—the allure of opportunities for individual advancement beyond a person's region of birth.

We know that a large part of the moving is done by a small part of the population (Morrison and Wheeler, 1978). Migration is likely to be self-selective, chosen by those "pioneer individuals" who are more willing to take risks, individuals who perhaps have a wider vision of the possibilities in unknown areas and who have a different perspective toward the future (Morrison and Wheeler, 1978, p. 80). These individuals are caught up in the image of "elsewhere" and perhaps its idealized possibilities, which have played a powerful role in the past and clearly continue to do so today.

The stories in the media and the dramas on the screen suggest that people everywhere should pursue their own hopes and dreams, and if the opportunities to pursue the dreams are not possible there, then move to where the dream can be pursued. Kerr (1996, p. 74) has suggested that the products of American culture are a "vast amorphous propaganda machine" which is capturing the imaginations of people everywhere. That may be an exaggeration, but it is certainly a powerful part of the imagery which is influencing the large-scale flows of boat people from Cuba, the substantial influx of immigrants smuggled from China, and the daily flows of undocumented migrants from Mexico. A common refrain bears out the hope of succeeding in America, and the lack of opportunities in

their home countries often serves to reinforce the power of the American Dream.¹⁰

The hope of succeeding is relevant for all groups but especially for Latinos, whom *The Economist* (December 14, 1996, pp. 28–29) celebrated as the “new Italians”—coming to the United States without significant education and high-end skills, hard working, taking low-end, low-paying jobs, and integrating into the U.S. economy. A book entitled *The Americano Dream*¹¹ celebrates the successes of one Latino immigrant entrepreneur, Lionel Sosa, founder and head of the largest Hispanic advertising agency in the United States. The celebration of Latinos as the next Italians picks up a theme that will be a central element of later chapters in this book: the willingness to make severe sacrifices to achieve greater long-term goals. The parallel with earlier waves of Italian immigrants emphasizes the arrival of relatively poor and unskilled immigrants who eventually worked their way into the American middle class. Drawing the parallel suggests that the new Latino immigrants are more like the earlier waves of Italians than they are like the earlier waves of Jews or today’s waves of Asian immigrants, who typically arrive with education and professional skills (what economists term “human capital”). The dream is the same even if the path to achieving the dream may be rather more complicated in today’s changing global economy. (See the Appendix for a brief discussion of how the words “Hispanic,” a Census term, and “Latino,” a term often used in the media, are currently vying for acceptance by the public and in the research literature. Both terms are used in this book—“Hispanic” when census data are discussed.)

The Americano Dream unabashedly focuses on how to make it—how to use self motivation and how to transform the Latino cultural heritage into an asset, especially the strengths that come from family and hard work (Sosa, 1998). The concepts that we have seen as central to the American Dream are central to the *Americano Dream* as well. But there is a slight and important addition—hard work, individual reliance, and family guidance and ethnic identity, certainly Latino if not ethnic additions to the native-born perspective of making it with hard work and perseverance.

While *The Americano Dream* celebrates the success of its author, it is also a manual for immigrant success, a how-to book. The synopsis of the book notes that it will teach effective approaches to problem solving and, most important of all, an assertive, can-do attitude and ways to transform “your” cultural heritage into an asset that can become a viable tool for success. The marketing of the book emphasizes its value for anyone interested in starting a business or climbing the corporate ladder. Perhaps

most interestingly, the book confronts the generational differences among Latinos, and especially the relationships between older and younger Latinos. Nor does the book shy away from the obstacles that may stand in the way of Latino success and, by extension, immigrant success. There are external and internal barriers to success. It is not only discrimination and societal barriers that may hold immigrants back, but also the internal barriers—lack of self-worth and feelings of equality—are equally critical. Thus, success involves more than simply acquiring human capital; it is acquiring a positive mind-set as well.

These examples highlight the continuing power and relevance of the American Dream. Success and its path may have different forms but still are part of the consciousness of the newcomers to the United States. They bring the same hope with which earlier waves arrived in the United States. And just as there were worries about whether the earlier waves were going to make it, those worries exist today. Contemporary observers were concerned about the concentration of Italians in the slum areas of large cities and in low-paying occupations (Nelli, 1983). Italians were contrasted with the thrift and self-reliance of the Germans and other immigrant groups from Northern Europe. Today's comparison of Asian and Mexican immigrants has a similar ring. While Asian entrepreneurs are often hailed as the integrated model minority (and it is true that they are more likely to be citizens), such comparisons, as we will see, are as flawed today as they were 100 years ago.

The American Dream and Assimilation

To an extent the American Dream, for the foreign born, implies melting-pot-type assimilation to American culture and values. But there is an increasing debate over assimilation, and assimilation has fallen out of favor and even into disfavor as an overarching terminology for the process of immigrant incorporation. Many social scientists have rejected the terminology as imposing ethnocentric and patronizing demands on minorities. Others have recast it to include multiple paths to incorporation in the new society—what is known as “segmented assimilation” (Portes and Zhou, 1993). Some have even suggested that assimilation is dead (Glazer, 1993). For nearly all there is general agreement that the paths to incorporation are hardly linear and that the process is more like a bumpy road than a smooth transition (Gans, 1997). The metaphor is now more mosaic than melting pot; indeed, it may be better to think of blending than assimilation.

There is no question that the paths to incorporation are quite divergent. Some groups are lagging, and at the other extreme many new arrivals often start out at parity with whites if not actually ahead of them (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr, 1996, p. 19). Monterey Park is but one of several well-established Asian middle-class communities around greater Los Angeles, and the suburbanization of immigrants is proceeding apace (Clark, 1998). Whether this stands assimilation theory on its head will continue to be debated, but it is worthwhile emphasizing that assimilation is more than just buying an expensive house in a middle-class suburb. It is a complex and multifaceted process.

There are attempts to provide a more nuanced discussion of assimilation and to rescue it from a premature grave. A thoughtful “rethinking” of assimilation theory while conceding the problems argues that assimilation as a concept is still useful (Alba and Nee, 1997). At its most general, assimilation can be seen as the “disappearance of an ethnic/racial distinction and the cultural and social differences that express it,” as Alba and Nee (1997, p. 863) put it. They emphasize that it clearly cannot be viewed in the old normative terminology which favored an eradication of minority cultures. But they suggest that assimilation can still be used as a way of understanding the social dynamics of American society—that is, as a term for a process “that occurs spontaneously and often unintendedly in the course of interaction between majority and minority groups” (Alba and Nee, 1997, p. 827). For Alba and Nee assimilation remains a key concept for the study of intergroup relations.

Past discussions of assimilation invariably invoked the notions of the middle class as the norm or standard to which immigrants might aspire. For Gordon (1964) it was acculturation to the “middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins” (p. 72), and the link to middle-class outcomes recurs in the discussions of assimilation which followed Gordon. Even Portes and Zhou (1993), in their discussion of segmented assimilation, identify acculturation to the white middle class as one of the possible paths of assimilation. Zhou (1997) in a re-examination of segmented assimilation also contrasts the paths of assimilation that can emerge when immigrant children are in contact with other poor minorities rather than the middle class. Because assimilation has always been linked to the notion of making it to the middle class, and because a major focus of the present book is on this progression to middle-class status, I believe that Alba and Nee’s recasting and broadening of the concept of assimilation is useful for the discussions which follow. There is certainly an argument to be made that there were and are links between

assimilation and seeking middle-class status. They occurred in the past, and (as later chapters will show) they are occurring today.

The debates about assimilation—its use and value—are likely to continue, but it is worthwhile making two points about its relationship to entry to the middle class. As DeWind and Kasinitz (1997) note, the discussion of immigrant incorporation is highly speculative and three or four decades is not a very long time in the immigration incorporation process. The interaction of the new immigrants in the coming decades with the changing U.S. economy and with changing social structures and political cultures, as well as consequent changes in the immigrants themselves, will likely produce outcomes that are not easily predicted. Previous waves of immigrants have made it and been incorporated into the changing American society: Many of the earlier waves of immigrants “are virtually indistinguishable on most economic and social criteria” (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind, 1999b, p. 130). It is quite possible that the same will happen for many if not all of the new immigrants and that the new groups may be equally indistinguishable in a new blended society.

Assimilation may be too easily and uncritically accepted, and just as easily and uncritically dismissed. We must draw power from the ideas without imposing a linear notion of assimilation. Even Gans (1997), certainly a critic of the assimilation concept, notes that in the long run the process of immigrant interaction in the new society may repeat many of the past findings of rapid acculturation and slower assimilation (Gans, 1997, p. 892). Along with Alba and Nee (1997), I regard assimilation as a useful concept for describing a process which is continuing, even if in more complex ways than in the past.

VIEWING THE PRESENT THROUGH THE PAST

In considering assimilation, it is useful to look back a century, as myth and distance have tended to cloud our understanding of those early migration flows. There is more in common between then and now than we may at first recognize. Immigrants in the early 20th century included educated Jews and Germans as well as poor rural farmers from Italy. Then as now, immigrants were drawn by the prospect of jobs that could provide money to send home to their families. Contemporary observers and later analysts documented the seasonal nature of the migratory flows from Italy and the heavy remittance transfers back to Italy (Nelli, 1983).

The early immigration from Italy was made up of largely unskilled working-age males, echoed a half century later in Mexican immigration to Southern California, before the immigration laws and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) changed the dynamic.

As it is today, the American Dream has long been a motivating factor in earlier waves of immigration to America. Fascinating remnants of that dream from earlier eras can be discerned in particular settings. Rosedale, Mississippi, a community in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, is one such setting. Here, Chinese immigrants found a niche in grocery stores and service activities. Originally plantation workers, certain Chinese found other outlets for their talents. Wong's Food Market willingly served blacks in an era of segregation when others refused. A half-century later, their market—and elderly Wongs—remain, entrepreneurs whose children have moved away to higher rungs on other ladders—in San Francisco, New York, and Los Angeles.¹²

Contemporary immigration to the United States is indeed at levels which are similar to those in the first decades of the 20th century. It generates the same processes of social integration and upward mobility. And, as in the earlier flows, the current waves bring a diverse mixture of poor and better-off immigrants. The United States as a whole has absorbed more than 20 million legal and undocumented immigrants in the past three decades (Clark, 1998; Smith and Edmonston, 1997), with little to suggest that the levels of influx will decrease anytime soon. As is well known, the changes in the size and composition of the flows were initiated with new immigration legislation. The Hart–Cellar Act of 1965 changed the terms of entry and, by emphasizing the mixture of skills and family reunification rather than country quotas, reshuffled the origins in favor of Asia and Mexico and Central America rather than Europe. Although the change in immigrant policy was designed to shift the emphasis to a skill-based quota system, other changes opened the immigration door for immigrants who were less skilled than previous waves of immigrants.

Migration to the United States in the early part of the 20th century was heavily labor-market driven but not solely so. Some immigrants came as religious and political refugees. However, jobs were important, and when there was an economic downturn in the United States, the laborers returned to their home countries in Europe (Nelli, 1983). Migration was sensitive to employment conditions. The demand–pull migration flow of the early 20th century was replicated during and after World War II in the Southwestern United States with the shortage of agricul-

tural workers from 1942 to 1964. (The same phenomenon occurred in Germany in the postwar years.) But unlike the earlier period when immigration slowed as the economy slowed, the new immigration had a self-perpetuating dynamic, fueled by supply–push factors and the persistence of “beaten path” networks established by the earlier flows. The expanding population of Mexico and the lack of jobs generated a continuing flow of job seekers, who crossed the border into the United States any way they could. The flows were often highly focused spatially, both in their origins and their destinations. Added to the job flows were the refugee populations from Southeast Asia and destabilized Eastern European nations.

The enduring networks established during the era of permissive labor migration practices of the 1960s and 1970s set up the information networks linking origins and destinations. These networks contained information not only about the job opportunities but about ways of getting to the United States and where to find a safe haven. All this was the basis for flows of family members in the 1980s and 1990s. Several studies of Mexican communities have documented the initiation and perpetuation of migration between Mexico and the United States (Massey and Espinoza, 1997; Massey, Goldring, and Durand, 1994). Despite recessions, the flow of legal and illegal migrants has continued,¹³ a trend that is relatively new in immigration globally but which has rapidly assumed a significant proportion of all population movements worldwide. Earlier waves came by boat and were mostly processed for permanent or temporary entry. Now immigrants come by foot and by air as well as clandestinely by sea. The illegal flows have become an issue in a time of refocused concerns on the nation-state and the role of law (Hollifield, 1996). In fact, the latest data suggests that the number of illegal immigrants in the United States may be more than 8 million, nearly 3% of the total population (Passel, 2001; Warren, 2000).

The expansion of civil rights legislation to encompass minority groups other than African Americans provided a more receptive climate for foreign-born groups than had been present during the earlier waves of immigrants. Judicial activism, the rise of immigrant advocacy groups, and the advent of numerically large ethnic minorities in communities in the United States has further contributed to expanded rights for foreign-born ethnic groups (Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield, 1994). The confluence of the demand for labor and the emphasis on the rights of immigrants to have the same protections and privileges as those of the native born have certainly made immigration a less traumatic experience than it

was for those who arrived in the past without protections. Thus, immigration has become much more than simply a labor-supply issue; as the numbers have increased, the issue of how the immigrants will fare and assimilate has become again a central part of the public discussions of immigration. Will they in fact assimilate in ways which are similar, or at least appear to be similar, to the patterns of assimilation of the earlier waves of immigrants from Northern and Southern Europe?

TRAJECTORIES OF SUCCESS

Invariably, immigrant success evolves over considerable time. In the past immigrants usually arrived poor, and the classic path was a slow trajectory extending across several generations to a more secure and successful position in the new society. Each cohort does better than its predecessor cohort. Even then, success was not guaranteed and required a passage through perilous and unsafe labor conditions. It was the sweatshops of late-19th-century and early-20th-century lower Manhattan, difficult as they were, that provided entry-level jobs for those who had few if any skills. The classic path is one in which the immigrant arrives poor and with few skills, precariously gains a foothold on the first rung on the ladder and slowly moves up. But, as demonstrated later in this book, it is only one of the possible paths at present. At this point, immigrants are arriving who may be considered “already” middle class, some of whom have significant levels of education and important previous professional training—the human capital mentioned earlier.

The social mobility of the past waves of European immigrants has been extensively documented in the sociological literature. There has been significant convergence in economic status, educational levels, life chances, and residential patterns between the descendants of the earlier waves of European immigrants and the original American settlers (B. Duncan and O. D. Duncan, 1968; Hirschman, 1983; Lieberman and Waters, 1988; Neidert and Farley, 1985). As documented in the seminal contributions of Lieberman and his colleagues (e.g., Lieberman, 1985; Lieberman and Waters, 1988) for white immigrants from Europe, the differences between them, their descendants, and the original American stock have largely vanished in the several decades since the waves of migration in the first two decades of the 20th century.

Much of the current debate about the future paths of the foreign born in the United States revolves around whether or not the classic path of so-

cial mobility is still accessible to new immigrants. Within the debate there is a subdebate about whether the new immigration is contributing to the polarization of society into rich and poor, and the shrinkage of the middle class. Part of this concern is whether or not there is a bifurcation within immigrant flows as well, into rich and poor newcomers to America.

All of these questions have generated considerable confusion and heated debate. Do the new immigrants have a chance of making it into the middle class, and who is making it? Will the individuals who arrive at the bottom remain trapped there? Some evidence suggests that the old path is still open. Gottschalk (1997) shows, for the population as a whole, that of those in the lowest-income quintile (the bottom 20%), more had progressed out of the lowest quintile than were still in it 17 years later: 58% had advanced above the lowest quintile, 23% had moved up one quintile, 14% had made it up two quintiles, 13% up three, and 8% had reached the top quintile. Research demonstrating such fluidity is at the heart of arguments about immigrant success. Clearly, a remarkable proportion of immigrants does move up in the classic pattern, even though many stay behind. The earlier processes were the same: not everyone made it, and certainly not in one generation.

Specific studies of Latino immigrants in Southern California paint a similar picture. Myers (1999) examines the changes in particular age groups arriving at about the same time, finding substantial evidence of upward mobility. Over time, immigrants move out of poverty, from the city to the suburbs, and become homeowners. The data showed that Latino and Asian immigrants often escape poverty over time and gain access to suburban homeownership—exactly the process we would expect of new immigrants. Rodriguez (1996) tells a mirroring story of entry into the middle class. Latino immigrants are doing better over time, more are in the middle-income ranges, and many have joined professional occupations. For many Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants the findings are even clearer.

Trajectories of success are often measured in terms of social integration, of assimilation to the host country mores. Are the new immigrants assimilating to the host country patterns? Are they able to integrate into the economy and the society? These questions are at the heart of much recent research claiming evidence of Balkanization and separation (Frey, 1996), and of segmented assimilation, which was discussed earlier (Zhou, 1997). To reiterate an earlier observation that remains true of the current scene, it is important to recognize that it has always taken time for immigrants to move into the mainstream (Rodriguez, 1996). Each new wave of immigrants subtly changes what it means to be an American. For Rodri-

guez, the question is not whether immigrant groups have cut their ties to their homelands but rather whether they are putting down roots in the United States.

By such measures of “rootedness” as citizenship, homeownership, language acquisition, and intermarriage, the evidence favors assimilation and trajectories that are following the patterns of previous immigrants. In the past, immigrants were slow to become citizens, but that seems to be changing, even for Mexicans who were traditionally much less likely to naturalize.¹⁴ Homeownership rates are rising and are extremely high for some immigrants groups (Clark, 1998). Moreover, the longer residents are in the country, the more likely they are to be homeowners. Second- and third-generation immigrants are very likely to speak English at home and their intermarriage rates are high (Allen and Turner, 1996; Clark, 1998; Rodriguez, 1999).

Sometimes success comes for the first generation. Mee Moua, a lawyer and lobbyist, left the Laotian highlands with her family when she was a child, part of the Hmong (Montagnard) refugee migration of the early 1970s (*New York Times*, February 2, 2002, p. A13). Now she is the first Hmong elected to a state legislature. Her election to the Minnesota Senate is another signal of the way in which immigrants transform themselves to citizens and participants in American democracy and American society. Ms. Moua is clearly a member of the middle class, professional, home-owning, and now not only a political participant but a policy maker as well.

There is also strong evidence for direct additions to the middle class. Migrations in the late part of the 20th century have in many cases been of people who have more skills and greater education than the population of the country they are from. Among immigrants from India are many who are skilled engineers and managers. Similarly immigrants from Malaysia, Thailand, Hong Kong, and China are often skilled and highly qualified. Middle Eastern and Korean immigrants who have become the entrepreneurs of small and not-so-small businesses came with both human capital and financial resources. There are middle-class professional flows from Mexico and Central America, countries which are often identified as the origin of low-skilled and poor immigrants.

Bifurcated Flows

At the same time, the bifurcation of the immigrant flows cannot be ignored. It is a function of the changing economy, growth in high-tech industries and low-skilled service jobs at the same time. In the middle

1990s, the number of low-paying jobs (under \$15,000 annually) has grown by about 4% a year—twice as fast as all other jobs. At the same time, a quite significant expansion of jobs has occurred in the technology sector, a growth which is still occurring despite the recent downturn in the economy.

The bifurcation of immigration into flows of “haves” and “have-nots” partly reflects the increasing number of refugees who are arriving in the United States. Many of these newcomers were already poor in their native countries and were relatively low skilled. In addition, the refugees are coming with few resources. The evidence confirms that many refugees are poor; in California at least, “long term welfare dependence is the norm for many refugees” (Barnett, 1999, p. 3). Approximately a million refugees have been admitted in the last 10 years. In addition, many refugees have arrived temporarily as a result of natural disasters or civil wars and other destabilizing political events. These temporary refugees are likely to be granted permanent status. The temporary residence for the large influx of Central American refugees after Hurricane Mitch in 1998 is due to expire but will probably be translated into permanent status. Similarly Kosovar Albanians and Liberians are likely to have their refugee status changed. All of this reiterates the diverse paths by which immigrants attempt entry to the United States and to grasp an opportunity for upward mobility. It is worth recalling that these foreign-born groups are entering in a wholly new context and therefore we should not simply group the refugees with other economically motivated immigrants.

Refugees and poor, low-skilled workers are the ones most likely to have real difficulty making social and economic gains. However, the data show that the poverty rate for all Latinos in Southern California increased only slightly and that poverty declined among those who arrived in the decade of the 1970s. Clearly, an influx of newcomers with high poverty levels is what has pulled the average down (Myers, 1999). Second- and third-generation Mexican American children were less likely to be in poverty. Specific groups such as Vietnamese children were also less likely in general to be in poverty (Oropesa and Landale, 1997).

About a third of all recent Latino immigrants live at or below the official poverty line. The recent immigrants, legal and illegal, have nowhere to start but at the bottom of the economic ladder. In addition, the flows generated by family reunification are continuing to add to the poor population. There are now more poor Latinos in the United States than there are poor African Americans. But again the story is not without its positive spin. The new Latino immigrants by and large are in the workforce: Many

of them have found low-skilled, low-paying jobs, a condition that is not unusual in the immigrant experience. The issue, as always, concerns the avenues of upward mobility. The very size of the poor population, and the continuing supply of additional low-skilled poor immigrants, may create an underclass for which there is no way upward (Clark, 1998).

The flows of immigrants with significant accumulations of human capital are a direct response to the restructuring of the American economy to emphasize both high-level and basic services. In the former, bright creative minds from anywhere in the world can find jobs in the financial markets and computer software/engineering firms that have sprung up to operate the late-20th-century economy. These same workers, often immigrants themselves, need a service population to tend lawns, care for children, park cars, and wash dishes in the new restaurants that have sprung up to cater to this new high-end population. In addition, changes in just-in-time manufacturing has re-created the sweatshops of offshore companies in urban California garment districts. Together, these bifurcated flows are transforming the immigrant process and the places they settle.

TRANSFORMATION OF PLACES: A NEW SOCIETY

Immigration transforms those who embark upon it; it also transforms the places where they settle. The latter changes, in the end, are no less significant or noteworthy than the former. Together, the transformations of people and of the locales they inhabit are what is altering American society. Many immigrants will make it and move up and enrich the neighborhoods into which they move, though some will find difficulty in moving up to better-paying jobs and are likely to remain clustered in inner-city barrios and ghettos.

Earlier anecdotal reports, buttressed by U.S. Census 2000 data, paint a picture of notable—sometimes dramatic—local change through immigration. Immigrant flows are now branching out beyond entry-port states like California, New York, Florida, and Texas to numerous locales that offer these new Americans opportunities to thrive and prosper. They include small and medium-size cities in the Midwest and the South. Locales as different as Las Vegas, Nevada, Lexington, Kentucky, Nashville, Tennessee, and Fairfax County in Virginia are experiencing significant transformations. Las Vegas has had a 139% growth in the Hispanic population, and that growth is replicated in a large number of small and me-

dium-sized cities across the country. Immigrants are not just arriving and staying in the gateway cities; they are moving from Los Angeles, Dallas, Phoenix, and San Francisco to cities where there are perceived opportunities. In Las Vegas, Lilia Guzman learned that even a kitchen helper can lead a middle-class lifestyle, including health insurance, vacations, and homeownership (*Los Angeles Times*, November 30, 1999, p. B-1). The Korean Business Directory in the Washington, DC area lists 560 Korean-owned businesses in Annandale, Fairfax County (*Washington Post*, May 16, 1999, p. A1). To be sure, the success stories are always attractive and not all moves end happily, but these two short anecdotes exemplify the changes that immigration is bringing to the nation as a whole and not just to the high-immigrant-impact states.

Small communities like Dodge City, Kansas, Amelia, Louisiana, and Georgetown, Delaware, have seen a dramatic increase in the number of immigrants. Onetime seasonal workers looking for more permanent work were willing to take low-paying jobs in chicken-packing plants and have moved from being migrant seasonal workers to becoming permanent residents. The growing immigrant population has generated opportunities for small businesses to serve the immigrant community. Drawn by increasing numbers of fellow immigrants, they set up groceries to provide familiar foods or services in a familiar language. It is these entrepreneurial activities which begin the long process to integration, acculturation, and the middle class.

Often the newcomers are repopulating communities that were in decline. Nearly 10% of the population in Utica, New York, are former refugees, perhaps the highest proportional concentration in the United States. An eclectic mix of Bosnians, Russians, and Vietnamese have come to Utica, drawn to jobs not in the old factory-based economy of General Electric but to those in countless small businesses engaged in telemarketing, check processing, and telecommunications. Many of the new immigrants originated in Eastern Europe, speak passable English, and often are well educated. The influx of refugees and other immigrants has strengthened local economies, increased the tax base and often revitalized inner-city run-down housing (*Wall Street Journal*, March 8, 1999, p. 1).

Examining *only* immigrants or *only* places yields an incomplete picture of the immigrant process. It is the intersection of opportunities localized in places and of immigrants willing to take risks that, in combination, generates so many variations on the common underlying transformation and immigrant assimilation process. Immigration and assimi-

lation are dynamic processes. Given the relatively high levels of mobility in American cities and communities, those who are more successful venture beyond their immigrant neighborhoods. If the arriving immigrants who replace the departing ones happened to be poorer, that community registers an increasing poverty rate, even though the individual migrants may be doing much better over time. However, the “place” effect is real: poorer people in residence may lower tax bases and so diminish available resources to help the new immigrant population. The issue to consider concerns the difference between outcomes for places and outcomes for people. If poor but employed immigrants move into a neighborhood and crowd together in marginal housing, the local community may register a worsening of local conditions. But these new individuals, perhaps unemployed or marginally employed before, experience real gains in their lives. The place may be worse off, but the in-migrants are better off. To the extent that the immigrants can in turn improve the neighborhood, there are gains for the community as well as the newcomers. In the latter case, the influx of new immigrants can mean revitalization and a growing tax base.

In other instances new immigrants settle immediately in the suburban communities of the large gateway cities, exemplified in those of Southern California as well as of San Francisco, Dallas, and numerous other large metropolitan areas. As older native-born white owners retire and move to retirement villages and warmer climates, immigrant families are purchasing their houses. The more affluent groups have created suburbs within the suburbs (Li, 1998). The data on suburbanization in California reveals that the foreign born who have more education and are citizens and professionals are very likely to have moved to the suburbs of San Francisco and Los Angeles (Clark, 1998). The 2000 Census data report significant growth of foreign-born ethnic groups in nearly all medium-sized cities in the United States. Nor is this a phenomenon occurring only in the United States. A detailed study of Toronto, Canada’s largest city, reports on South Asian, Jamaican, and Filipino families moving to the suburbs north and west of central Toronto (Bourne, 1996).

Support Services and Local Contexts

Opportunities for upward mobility exist in a wide variety of contexts both local and national. However, the concentration of new immigrants in a few neighborhoods in a small set of gateway communities, the entry points for the upward mobility they seek, requires local support to facili-

tate upward mobility. Without local government services and the support of religious and other nonprofit organizations, new immigrants often have difficulty making the upward shifts they are striving for. In essence, the investment in education, job training, and health care is providing the basic resources to increase the human capital of the new immigrants. It is through the support of local governments that immigrants can advance toward mainstream incorporation.

Places serve not only as entry points but also as homes and communities, which are themselves culturally transformed. As the immigrants revitalize existing businesses and add new ones, they turn their dreams into reality. At the same time, there is often an undercurrent of resentment when, for example, signs may only be in Korean, Persian, or Thai. Clearly, it is in the best interests of the new businesses to make their sites more accessible by using bilingual signs. But new immigrants have traditionally served their own ethnic groups first, as a means to the successful creation of a path to financial security—in essence to the middle class.

With changing neighborhoods come changing social and cultural traditions—Mexican soccer and social organizations, and Asian Mah-Jongg clubs—which in turn make our communities more like home for prospective migrants. Perhaps the most welcomed is the proliferation of new ethnic cuisines. And, as people's tastes broaden and cultures intersect over food, the cultural landscape itself gradually transforms. A few blocks from Los Angeles City Hall, Jean Han, the Korean owner of a tiny fast-food restaurant, *The Kosher Burrito*, serves up an eclectic mix of food to an equally mixed clientele. And, as the cultural landscape changes, so too will the political landscape, as candidates running for elected office have to consider a diverse population with different needs from the formerly majority white population. The ferment between immigration and social and cultural change and what was once unique to some large inner-city communities will soon be commonplace in communities across California and the nation. The look and the feel and the issues that have been central in multiethnic counties like Los Angeles will become the look, feel, and issues of Fresno, Stockton, Modesto, and Visalia in California, and soon Rockford, Illinois, Peoria, Indiana, Syracuse, New York, and Wilmington, Delaware.

Perhaps more than any other cultural phenomenon, the emergence of soccer is a metaphor for the impact of Latino immigrants on local communities in the United States and especially in California. In the latter half of the 1990s, soccer games held in the Coliseum in Los Angeles, built originally for the 1932 Olympics, host to the 1984 Olympics, and home of

the USC football team, have transformed the sport in Southern California (O'Connor, 1999). It is immigrant driven. Mary Price (2002) describes how soccer has created Latino cultural spaces in Washington, DC. In Los Angeles soccer drew more fans in 1998 than the Raiders final National Football League season there in 1994. But even more important than the professional soccer teams in the big stadiums are the countless "pickup" Saturday morning and afternoon games in countless small urban parks in Los Angeles, San Jose, Dallas, and Fort Worth. The millions of young teenagers playing in the soccer leagues have already changed the cities and towns that were once devoted to American football only.

Where only two decades ago the transformation of society occurred in particular locations and only slowly diffused across the country as a whole, that process is accelerating across the nation. Obviously the greatest changes occur where most immigrants settle, so the changes appeared first in the large cities, in New York and Los Angeles. Now, those changes are diffusing across the nation, affecting communities large and small, from the Midwest to Appalachia, as new migrants branch out across the nation in search of the American Dream.

RECONSIDERING THE DREAM

The following chapters focus on how new arrivals in the nation as a whole and in large immigrant population states in particular acquire education and human capital, and eventually become American citizens and enter the middle class. But my intent is to go beyond mere statistics to the less easily quantified allure of the motivating force, the immigrant dream of both material gains and personal freedom. Not all the immigrants, of course, surmount the obstacles of poor schools or manage to find well-paying jobs; indeed, many immigrants do appear to be having great difficulty in make the transition to the middle class. Are they less likely or more likely than the native born to make that transition? That question is central part of the focus of the chapters that follow.

There are two kinds of immigrant stories in the popular media. One is about new immigrants who work hard and whose children are the high school and college valedictorians. Then there are the tales of poor families who suffer hard luck and misfortune. Not surprisingly, the media is attracted to the success stories, to the stories that fit with the image of the American Dream—hard work, perseverance, and success. Stories of immigrant single parents laboring in sweatshops are less engaging because

success has not yet materialized out of hard work and perseverance. In the long run, they or their children may yet be successful. An important goal of this book is to attempt some assessment of generational success.

A recent positive media story headlined "Zero Down, Hard Work and Dreams That Came True" (*Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1999, p. A-1) captured the most positive story of immigrant striving. An El Salvadoran family, the Garcias, the father, the mother, and five children, arrived in California a decade ago, fleeing the war in their home country. Now, Manuel Garcia operates an independent truck, they own their home (and other residential property), and all five children are in college or college bound. Clearly this story epitomizes the American/California Dream: a tale of an intact, hardworking, upwardly mobile family who had the abilities and skills to use the opportunities that were available to them. But, Manuel has not taken a vacation in 11 years, and the birthday and graduation celebrations are far from ostentatious. For this family, the difference was between their home country where it was living day by day or the chance to make something in safety and security. Those intangibles are as much a part of the dream as are cheap credit and rewards for risk taking.

The Garcia family had one thing in common with many of the new immigrants. They had family in the United States and could use that initial contact as a start in the long process of becoming American. But for another immigrant, Miguel DeLeon, the lack of family contacts did not deter upward mobility. However, Miguel had another advantage: some education, which enabled him to enter a managerial position. When the business was going to fail, he fell back on that other immigrant characteristic, the willingness to take risks. He took over the business with the help of small business loans and sacrifices by his fellow employees. The process is never smooth, but for those with some human capital, a willingness to work hard, and the know-how to access loans or credit, the American Dream is possible. Immigrant success might be defined as having a good job, an adequate income, buying a house, and participating in society—in sum, becoming middle class. These "successes" define the chapters of this book and constitute its organizing theme. As Mr. DeLeon laughingly commented in a *Life and Times* television interview (Oct. 22, 1998) in Los Angeles, the American Dream means a house, a car, education for the kids, and a dog and a cat. While this book is not about the dog and the cat, it is about the house, education, and making it to the middle class.

The American Dream remains a pervasive idea if only because peo-

ple want to believe it. We want to believe that anything is possible, that wealth is a function of brains and hard work rather than influence or inheritance, and that American society as a whole provides the milieu in which this can happen. The inspirational tales of immigrant success have found a place in the hearts of those that are already here, and they are a potent force in generating the continuing flow of new arrivals. They are all focused on the chance of joining the American middle class.

NOTES

1. Nearly half my colleagues in the Geography Department at UCLA are foreign born, from Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong, Trinidad, and the United Kingdom. In several of the science departments at UCLA the proportion of foreign-born professors is even higher.
2. Although Hochschild's book (1995) is an excellent discussion of the power of the American Dream, the book is in fact quite critical of the concept itself. The book emphasizes the flaws in the dream, especially for African Americans.
3. It is important to draw a distinction between the use of the term "class" in the American context with that of British use. American usage tends to emphasize socioeconomic status as a measure of class, and that is the terminology of the presentation here. Fielding (1995) uses "social class" in the British sense to examine how second-generation immigrants do in the United Kingdom.
4. The ratio is similar to one used by the Federal Interagency Forum for Child and Family Statistics in its annual report, *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Child Well-Being, 2002* (www.childstats.gov).
5. An alternative to using a market-basket measure, or an income range, is to use an income threshold to measure the middle class, though obviously a threshold will include incomes in the upper range of the distribution as well. For example, Rodriguez (1996) in his study of Hispanics chose the median income for the total population as a threshold. In contrast to the studies of thresholds and ranges, Reed (1999) uses a ratio of the income at the 75th percentile to the income at the 25th percentile. Although she was primarily interested in income inequality, the 75th/25th ratio is also a measure of the middle 50% of the income distribution.
6. Most working definitions suggest some form of economic middle class, but even an economic definition can range widely from a specific income to the income needed to buy a particular combination of goods and services. Clearly, a set income range captures part of what it is to be middle class, but in fact it is the ability to own a house, buy a car, have health insurance, and pay for col-

lege education that is the way in which the income is translated into a middle-class lifestyle. However, in the end most definitions depend heavily on an income classification. Even those who have emphasized a market basket of goods have tended to translate that basket of goods into an income range.

7. Levy (1998) further restricted it for families in the prime earning years of 25–54, and although we will examine all household heads 18 years and older we will also examine two finer age breakdowns of the data.
8. The substantive analysis of the middle class is based on household incomes. This is an appropriate unit of analysis for our study of the middle class, as it is households, or families, with or without children, who are central in the progress of immigrant households. Such households often pool resources and move upward by a concerted effort of all household members. It is true that the results would be slightly more conservative if we used individual head of household incomes.
9. Hochschild (1995) also argues that there are flaws in the American Dream, especially for African Americans. She notes that not everyone was able to participate equally and that perhaps the resources may no longer balance the dreams. In such cases effort and talent may not guarantee success. But regardless of the flaws, the dream is obviously alive and well as the dreams of doing better are a fundamental element of the continuing pull of America.
10. It would be ironic, of course, if the American Dream were to work for the new immigrants but failed for the native-born African American population. But as in the case of the immigrant populations, many African Americans have been able to move up to join the middle class. Lingering barriers to mobility is a problem of the underclass.
11. This 1998 book by Lionel Sosa is designed to show Latinos how to market themselves to a wider American business culture. It is an unusual case study of how to “achieve the American Dream” by using both the Latino heritage and the successful practices of American business.
12. I am indebted to Peter Morrison and Calvin Beale for this anecdote that illuminates the enduring nature of the immigration process. See also Loewen (1988).
13. In general I use the terms “illegal” and “undocumented” interchangeably, though the latter is increasingly the term of choice to describe the foreign born who have entered the United States without inspection. There are of course a limited number of immigrants who may be in an undocumented and potentially illegal status for reasons other than unauthorized entry, but these are a small number.
14. Proposition 187 had the unforeseen outcome of increasing the likelihood of naturalization. Congressional decisions to cut benefits to noncitizens naturally stimulated legally admitted immigrants to become citizens.