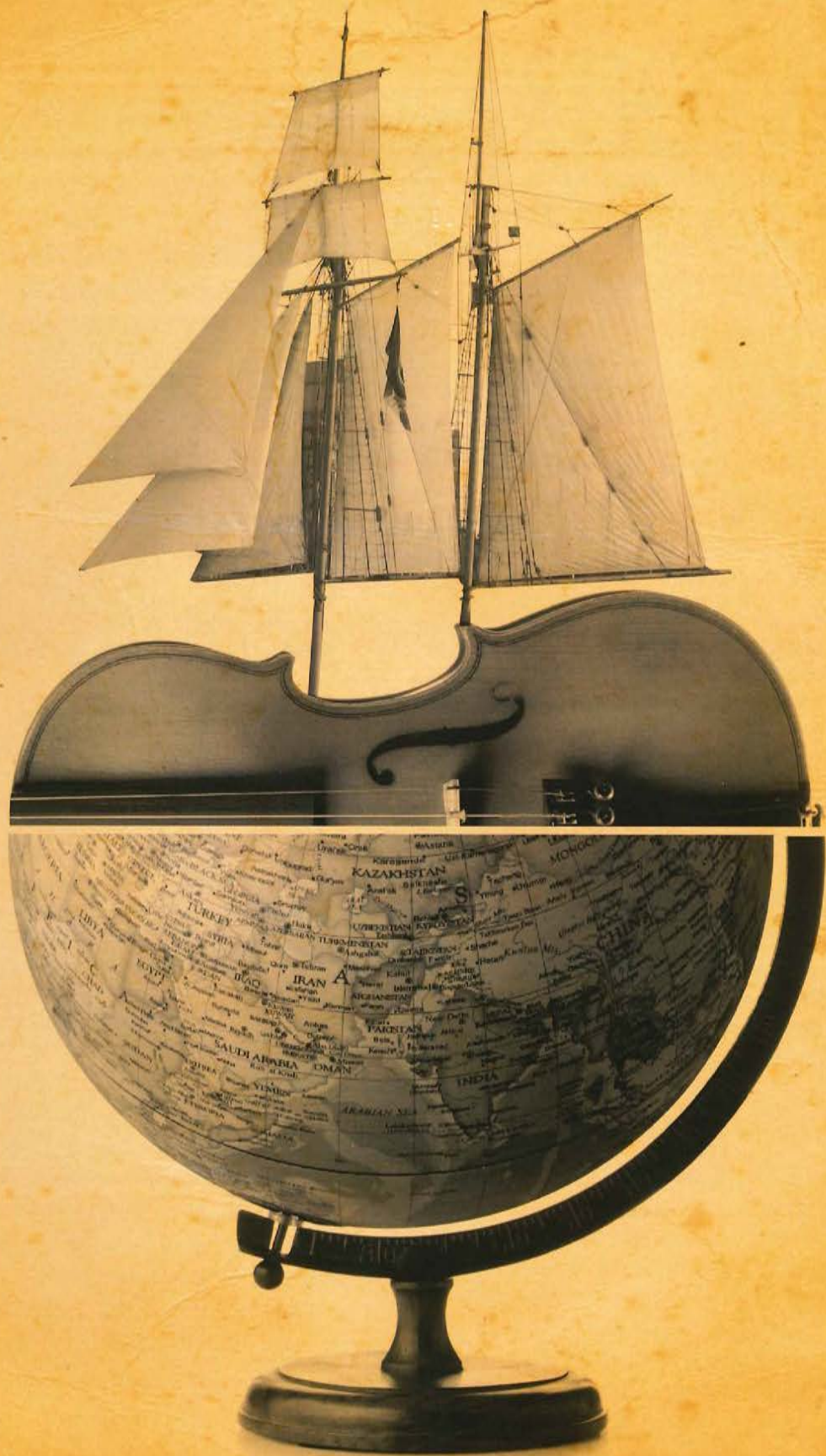


STEERAGE SONG

THEATER
Latté Da
THEATER MUSICALLY



EXPLORING IMMIGRATION, PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Play guide compiled by Jane Caplow

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Steerage Song is being produced by
Theater Latte Da at the Lab Theatre

A new docu-musical
By Peter Rothstein and Dan Chouinard
Music Direction by Dan Chouinard
Directed by Peter Rothstein

September 25 – October 20, 2013
Previews on September 25, 26, & 27
Opening Night on September 28

CREATING STEERAGE SONG



It's hard to pinpoint where ideas come from. Maybe the idea for *Steerage Song* came to me on a trip to Ellis Island. I found myself astounded with the enormity of the place and the enormity of the choices made by the millions who passed through its gates. Or perhaps the idea came from my frustration with our current immigration system and its lack of compassion and integrity. I desperately want this land of promise to exercise its promise. But most likely the idea came from my mother and her love of Irish song. For me, where you come from has always been linked to music, and I thank my mother for that. Creating *Steerage Song* has been a fascinating journey to our immigrant past; en route I've learned a great deal about immigration today; I look forward to the songs we will sing tomorrow.

—Peter Rothstein, Artistic Director



As one who counts among his favorite roles those of saloon piano player and European street accordionist, I felt no hesitation when Peter Rothstein suggested some years ago that we write a show together based on immigrant folk songs and Tin Pan Alley tunes written by and for immigrants. Music was my point of entry to this research-and-writing project, but woven through the music was the history of a world I knew only on its surface, from the depleted and unstable landscape of late-1800s Europe on through the profiteering transatlantic steamship lines and the robust squalor of New York's Lower East Side. After walking those streets, scrolling through the miles of microfilm and shuffling the piles of music, I'm grateful for the chance to offer up a bit of what we've learned.

—Dan Chouinard, Music Director

IMMIGRATION: AN OVERVIEW

ESSAY BY JEFF TURNER

AS A SENATOR REPRESENTING THE STATE OF MASSACHUSETTS, John F. Kennedy declared America to be a nation of immigrants. He recognized that the contributions of those who left their homes and families to travel to our shores “can be seen in every aspect of our national life. We see it in religion, in politics, in business, in the arts, in education, even in athletics and in entertainment.” He went on to declare, “There is no part of our nation that has not been touched by our immigrant background.”



Early voices articulating the promise of this newly emerging nation were just as enthusiastic. In *Letters From an American Farmer*, published in 1782, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur was unequivocal in his pride and admiration for his new country. He writes, “What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European, or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.”

Fifty years later, Alexis de Tocqueville, a French historian and political thinker, visited the United States to observe this young country in action. In his landmark study *Democracy in America* (1835) de Tocqueville noted how the daily arrival of newly emigrated men, women and children to the eastern coast triggered an even more complex set of migrations. Improvements in transportation and communication emboldened those already established to venture out into uncharted territory, embracing the Jacksonian idea of Manifest Destiny and, with it, the great expansion across the continent. For de Tocqueville, the newly emigrated European “is obliged to work for hire, and he rarely proceeds beyond that belt of industrious population which

adjoins the ocean.” He left “his cottage for the trans-Atlantic shores; and the American, who is born on that very coast, plunges in his turn into the wilds of Central America. This double emigration is incessant; it begins in the remotest parts of Europe, it crosses the Atlantic Ocean, and it advances over the solitudes of the New World. Millions of men are marching at once towards the same horizon; their language, their religion, their manners differ, their object is the same. The gifts of fortune are promised in the West, and to the West they bend their course.”

Nevertheless, such enthusiasm for the promise of the American immigrant does not tell the entire story. As articulated by de Crèvecoeur in 1782, de Tocqueville in 1835 and Kennedy in 1958, the immigrant has been figured as a symbol of the promise of egalitarianism. But other voices have been and continue to be less appreciative. Scholar Vanessa Beasley writes, “Just as there is a tradition within American culture of viewing the immigrant as a symbol of hope and opportunity in the United States, there is an attendant rhetoric—one that is at least as old and equally if not more hardy—that suggests quite the opposite.” In *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880–1921* (2001), Alan Kraut recognizes that “strangers are regarded with suspicion in most societies.” And such suspicion has fueled nativist sentiment since the colonial period. Nativism, as defined by historian John Higham, is a prejudice informed by “an inflamed and nationalistic type of ethnocentrism” exacerbated by an “intense opposition to an internal minority based on its foreign (i.e. un-American) connections.” Here, as Beasley acknowledges, the immigrant becomes both a drag on America’s economy and a potentially dangerous interloper. She notes, “[T]here seem to be two consistent and interrelated sources of anxiety about immigrants; one revolving around economics and one around cultural issues, especially those related to the country’s safety and security.”

One reason for this source of anxiety was the great competition for work and job security in America. According to historian Howard Zinn, there “were 5½ million immigrants in the 1880s, 4 million in the 1890s, creating a labor surplus that kept wages down.” Zinn argues that “immigrants were more controllable, more helpless than native workers; they were culturally displaced, at odds with one another, therefore useful as strike-breakers. Often their children worked, intensifying the problem of an

oversized labor force and joblessness; in 1880 there were 1,118,000 children under the age of sixteen (one out of six) at work in the United States. With everyone working long hours, families often became strangers to one another." As these families splintered, mythic notions of what it meant to be American were being closely scrutinized.

On October 28, 1886, the Statue of Liberty was formally dedicated on Liberty Island in the middle of the New York Harbor. Here Emma Lazarus's famous sonnet "The Great Colossus"—written in 1883 to help raise money for the construction of the pedestal upon which the statue would stand and later, in 1903, engraved upon a bronze memorial tablet and mounted inside the pedestal—would serve as a national invitation to those who wished to start their lives anew in America:

*"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*



Ironically, the Statue of Liberty and the great poem which has inspired so many to make the voyage to America arrived only a few years after Congress began to implement laws which would assuage nativist fears and control and contain the flow of immigrants, effectively closing Lazarus's "golden door" inch by inch over the next 40 years.



The Page Act of 1875 marked the beginning of federal regulation of immigration in America, prohibiting the entrance of those considered "undesirable." In particular, the law enacted exclusionary measures to refuse entry to Chinese laborers and any Asian woman considered "immoral." The Immigration Act of 1882 levied a tax upon all who entered the United States and gave broad license to refuse any and all lunatics, convicts, idiots and those with the likely capacity to become charges of the state. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was even more explicit, restricting the access of all Chinese laborers for a period of ten years. This act was renewed by Congress in 1892 and made permanent in 1902. Fearing that the American way of life was being threatened by unwanted aliens from southern and eastern Europe, the Immigration Restriction League was organized in 1894 to further the nativist cause.

In 1917 a literacy test for immigrants was adopted after being defeated in Congress in 1896, 1898, 1902 and 1906. Congressional attempts to enforce a literacy test were vetoed by President Grover Cleveland in 1897, President William Howard Taft in 1913, and President Woodrow Wilson in 1915 and 1917. The measure was eventually passed by overriding Wilson's second veto. The need to police America's immigrant population grew more and more popular following World War I and was compounded by the "Red Scare" due to the rise of communist ideology following the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the success of the Bolshevik Party led by Vladimir Lenin. For example, in a letter written in 1919 to the National Defense Society, a nationalist political group, former President Theodore Roosevelt argued, "[W]e should insist that if the immigrant who comes here in good faith becomes an American and assimilates himself to us, he shall be treated on an exact equality with everyone else, for it is an outrage to discriminate against any such man because of creed, or birthplace, or origin. But this is predicated upon the person's becoming in every facet an American, and nothing but an American... There can be no divided allegiance here. Any man who says he is an American, but something else also, isn't an American at all. We have room for but one flag, the American flag. . . . We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language . . . and we have room for but one sole loyalty and that is a loyalty to the American people."

The Immigration Restriction Act of 1921 legislated for the first time in our history the use of a quota system to establish specific limits to the number of immigrants to be admitted into the United States from Europe. Though Emma Lazarus's sonnet spoke to the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," under this law, in the words of Senator Kennedy, those yearning to breathe American air could do so "as long as they come from Northern Europe, are not too tired or too poor or slightly ill, never stole a loaf of bread, never joined any questionable organization, and can document their activities for the last two years." In 1924 the Johnson-Reed Act (which included the passage of the National Origins Act and the Asian Exclusion Act) was signed into law by President Calvin Coolidge. Under this piece of legislation, those eligible to receive an immigrant visa would be set at two percent of the number of people from that country already living in America based on data collected by the 1890 national census. This had the effect of severely narrowing the flow of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, who were fewer in number in 1890, while allowing larger numbers to emigrate from northern and western Europe in an effort to affirm a comfortable homogeneity of the American people. To serve this goal, the "golden door" was completely closed to all immigrants from Japan, China, the Philippines, and Southeast Asia.

In 1960 the United States included 9.7 million foreign-born residents representing a total of five percent of the population—the lowest number since the 1890 census data was released. For all intents and purposes, America at the end of the 1950s reflected a homogeneity which would have been unimaginable 100 years earlier. It would not be until 1965 and the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act (or the Hart-Celler Act) that the national origins quota system would be dismantled. Over a five-year period the quota system as legislated during the 1920s would be phased out and the number of immigration visas would be assigned to a general pool. Yearly visas issued to the Eastern Hemisphere would now be limited to 170,000 while the Western Hemisphere would be limited to 120,000 immigrants. The bill also introduced a preference system focusing specifically on desirable work-place skills as well as those seeking entrance to unite with family members who were already citizens or resident aliens. The law wasn't completely progressive. While the door opened to immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, for the very first time Latin Americans would be expected to adapt to newly enforced limitations. Additionally, due to the elimination of *bracero* programs, which had provided for unlimited legal immigration for manual and agricultural laborers from Mexico and Central America, the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act worked to increase the number of illegal immigrants entering the country. Furthermore, the bill also prohibited entry to "sexual deviants," including lesbian and gay populations which had earlier been rejected on the grounds of mental deficiencies. Still, the legislation was considered to be a landmark shift in immigration reform, aligning with the Johnson administration's Great Society ideology which sought to address racial injustice, the elimination of poverty and urban renewal.

Upon signing the law on October 3, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson remarked, "Our beautiful America was built by a nation of strangers. From a hundred different places or more they have poured forth into an empty land, joining and blending in one mighty and irresistible tide. The land flourished because it was fed from so many sources—because it was nourished by so many cultures and traditions and peoples. And from this experience, almost unique in the history of nations, has come America's attitude toward the rest of the world. We, because of what we are, feel safer and stronger in a world as varied as the people who make it up—a world where no country rules another and all countries can deal with the basic problems of human dignity and deal with those problems in their own way."

"Musically, their songs drew upon European, Middle-Eastern, and African idioms to weave a distinctly American fabric. When lyricists wedded that music to the everyday speech of ordinary people, they made the American vernacular sing. Once the right words fit the right music, we cannot hear one without thinking of the other"

— FROM AMERICA'S SONGS BY PHILIP FURIA AND MICHAEL LASSER

Immigration continues to be central to the discourse of what it means to be American, and in 2013 that debate is more contentious than ever. Progressives call for radical reform while nationalists fight to protect our borders as well as the rights of those determined to be law-abiding, tax-paying citizens. Still, as John F. Kennedy wrote, "Immigration policy should be generous; it should be fair; it should be flexible. With such a policy we can turn to the world, and to our own past, with clean hands and a clear conscience." Peter Schrag concurs. In *Not Fit For Our Society: Immigration and Nativism in America* (2010), Schrag writes, "The United States is hardly the only destination in the great migrations of the modern era or the only developed nation confronting the problems or evaluating the opportunities that its third-world immigrants bring. . . . [Nevertheless,] we are the only nation founded on the principles of equality and opportunity and on the expectation, indeed the imperative, that our growth would require immigrants from other places. We began both with an appeal to the opinions of mankind and, implicitly, with an invitation. Partly that our invitation grew from humanitarian idealism, partly from an economic premise that soon became an essential element of continental expansion glorified as Manifest Destiny and later stretched into imperial ambition. Who else was going to fell the trees, clear the land, build the canals and railroads, work the fields, factories, and mines? How else could we verify the promise Americans had made both to themselves and to the world? It's those expansionist ambitions and the need for workers to pursue them that, mixed with the founders' egalitarian principles, have been the greatest checks on American racism and nativism. The debate, sometimes the struggle, between them is what has so often given the American story its particular texture and drama."

ELLIS ISLAND WELCOMES IMMIGRANTS, 1892-1954

FROM 1892 TO 1954, over twelve million immigrants entered the United States through the portal of Ellis Island, a small island in New York Harbor. Ellis Island is located in the upper bay just off the New Jersey coast, within the shadow of the Statue of Liberty. Through the years, this gateway to the new world was enlarged from its original 3.3 acres to 27.5 acres mostly by landfill obtained from ship ballast and possibly excess earth from the construction of the New York City subway system.

Before being designated as the site of the first Federal immigration station by President Benjamin Harrison in 1890, Ellis Island had a varied history. The local Indian tribes had called it "Kioshk" or Gull Island. Due to its rich and abundant oyster beds and plentiful and profitable shad runs, it was known as Oyster Island for many generations during the Dutch and English colonial periods. By the time Samuel Ellis became the island's private owner in the 1770's, the island had been called Kioshk, Oyster, Dyre, Bucking and Anderson's Island. In this way, Ellis Island developed from a sandy island that barely rose above the high tide mark, into a hanging site for pirates, a harbor fort, ammunition and ordinance depot named Fort Gibson, and finally into an immigration station.

From 1794 to 1890 (pre-immigration station period), Ellis Island played a mostly uneventful but still important military role in United States history. When the British occupied New York City during the duration of the Revolutionary War, its large and powerful naval fleet was able to sail unimpeded directly into New York Harbor. Therefore, it was deemed critical by the United States Government that a series of coastal fortifications in New York Harbor be constructed just prior to the War of 1812. After much legal haggling over ownership of the island, the Federal government purchased Ellis Island from New York State in 1808. Ellis Island was approved as a site for fortifications and on it was constructed a parapet for three tiers of circular guns, making the island part of the new harbor defense system that included Castle Clinton at the Battery, Castle Williams on Governor's Island, Fort Wood on Bedloe's Island and two earthworks forts at the

entrance to New York Harbor at the Verrazano Narrows. The fort at Ellis Island was named Fort Gibson in honor of a brave officer killed during the War of 1812.

Prior to 1890, the individual states (rather than the Federal government) regulated immigration into the United States. Castle Garden in the Battery (originally known as Castle Clinton) served as the New York State immigration station from 1855 to 1890 and approximately eight million immigrants, mostly from Northern and Western Europe, passed through its doors. These early immigrants came from nations such as England, Ireland, Germany and the Scandinavian countries and constituted the first large wave of immigrants that settled and populated the United States. Throughout the 1800's and intensifying in the latter half of the 19th century, ensuing political instability, restrictive religious laws and deteriorating economic conditions in Europe began to fuel the largest mass human migration in the history of the world. It soon became apparent that Castle Garden was ill-equipped and unprepared to handle the growing numbers of immigrants arriving yearly. Unfortunately compounding the problems of the small facility were the corruption and incompetence found to be commonplace at Castle Garden.

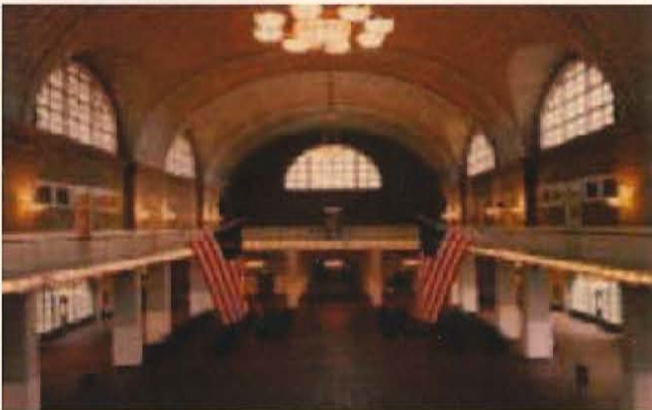
The Federal government intervened and constructed a new Federally-operated immigration station on Ellis Island. The new structure, built of "Georgia pine" opened on January 1, 1892; Annie Moore, a 15 year-old Irish girl, accompanied by her two brothers entered history and a new country as she was the very first immigrant to be processed at Ellis Island



Main Building circa 1892

on January 2. Over the next 62 years, more than 12 million were to follow through this port of entry.

During the evening of June 14, 1897, a fire on Ellis Island, burned the immigration station completely to the ground. Although no lives were lost, many years of Federal and State immigration records dating back to 1855 burned along with the pine buildings that failed to protect them. The United States Treasury quickly ordered the immigration facility be replaced under one very important condition. All future structures built on Ellis Island had to be fireproof. On December 17, 1900, the new Main Building was opened and 2,251 immigrants were received that day.



While most immigrants entered the United States through New York Harbor (the most popular destination of steamship companies), others sailed into many ports such as Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, San Francisco and Savannah, Miami, and New Orleans. The great steamship companies like White Star, Red Star, Cunard and Hamburg-America played a significant role in the history of Ellis Island and immigration in general. First and second class passengers who arrived in New York Harbor were not required to undergo the inspection process at Ellis Island. Instead, these passengers underwent a cursory inspection aboard ship; the theory being that if a person could afford to purchase a first or second class ticket, they were less likely to become a public charge in America due to medical or legal reasons. The Federal government felt that these more affluent passengers would not end up in institutions, hospitals or become a burden to the state. However, first and second class

passengers were sent to Ellis Island for further inspection if they were sick or had legal problems.

This scenario was far different for “steerage” or third class passengers. These immigrants traveled in crowded and often unsanitary conditions near the bottom of steamships with few amenities, often spending up to two weeks seasick in their bunks during rough Atlantic Ocean crossings. Upon arrival in New York City, ships would dock at the Hudson or East River piers. First and second class passengers would disembark, pass through Customs at the piers and were free to enter the United States. The steerage and third class passengers were transported from the pier by ferry or barge to Ellis Island where everyone would undergo a medical and legal inspection.

If the immigrant’s papers were in order and they were in reasonably good health, the Ellis Island inspection process would last approximately three to five hours. The inspections took place in the Registry Room (or Great Hall), where doctors would briefly scan every immigrant for obvious physical ailments. Doctors at Ellis Island soon became very adept at conducting these “six second physicals.” By 1916, it was said that a doctor could identify numerous medical conditions (ranging from anemia to goiters to varicose veins) just by glancing at an immigrant. The ship’s manifest log (that had been filled out back at the port of embarkation) contained the immigrant’s name and his/her answers to twenty-nine questions. This document was used by the legal inspectors at Ellis Island to cross examine the immigrant during the legal (or primary) inspection. The two agencies responsible for processing immigrants at Ellis Island were the United States Public Health Service and the Bureau of Immigration (later known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service – INS).

Despite the island’s reputation as an “Island of Tears”, the vast majority of immigrants were treated courteously and respectfully, and were free to begin their new lives in America after only a few short hours on Ellis Island. Only two percent of the arriving immigrants were excluded from entry. The two main reasons why an immigrant would be excluded were if a doctor diagnosed that the immigrant had a contagious disease that would endanger the public health or if a legal inspector thought the immigrant was likely to become a public charge or an illegal contract laborer.

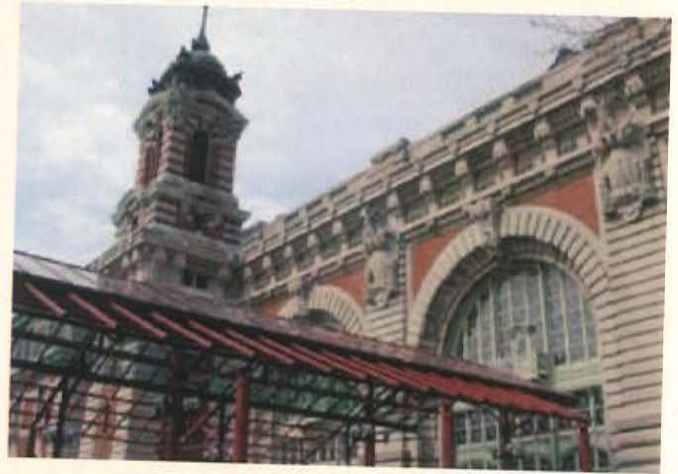
During the early 1900’s, immigration officials mistakenly thought that the peak wave of immigration had already passed. Actually, immigration was on the rise and in 1907, more people immigrated to the United States than any other year; approximately 1.25 million immigrants were processed at Ellis Island in that one year. Consequently, masons and carpenters were constantly struggling to enlarge and build new facilities to accommodate this greater than anticipated influx of new immigrants. Hospital buildings, dormitories, contagious disease wards and kitchens were all feverishly constructed between 1900 and 1915.

As the United States entered World War I, immigration to the United States decreased. Numerous suspected enemy aliens throughout the United States were brought to Ellis Island under custody. Between 1918 and 1919, detained suspected enemy aliens were transferred from Ellis Island to other locations in order for the United States Navy with the Army Medical Department to take over the island complex for the duration of the war. During this time, regular inspection of arriving immigrants was conducted on board ship or at the docks. At the end of World War I, a big "Red Scare" spread across America and thousands of suspected alien radicals were interned at Ellis Island. Hundreds were later deported based upon the principal of guilt by association with any organizations advocating revolution against the Federal government. In 1920, Ellis Island reopened as an immigration receiving station and 225,206 immigrants were processed that year.

From the very beginning of the mass migration that spanned the years (roughly) 1880 to 1924, an increasingly vociferous group of politicians and nativists demanded increased restrictions on immigration. Laws and regulations such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the Alien Contract Labor Law and the institution of a literacy test barely stemmed this flood tide of new immigrants. Actually, the death knell for Ellis Island, as a major entry point for new immigrants, began to toll in 1921. It reached a crescendo between 1921 with the passage of the Quota Laws and 1924 with the passage of the National Origins Act. These restrictions were based upon a percentage system according to the number of ethnic groups already living in the United States as per the 1890 and 1910 Census. It was an attempt to preserve the ethnic flavor of the "old immigrants", those earlier settlers primarily from Northern and Western Europe. The perception existed that the newly arriving immigrants mostly from southern and eastern Europe were somehow inferior to those who arrived earlier.

After World War I, the United States began to emerge as a potential world power. United States embassies were established in countries all over the world, and prospective immigrants now applied for their visas at American consulates in their countries of origin. The necessary paperwork was completed at the consulate and a medical inspection was also conducted there. After 1924, the only people who were detained at Ellis Island were those who had problems with their paperwork, as well as war refugees and displaced persons.

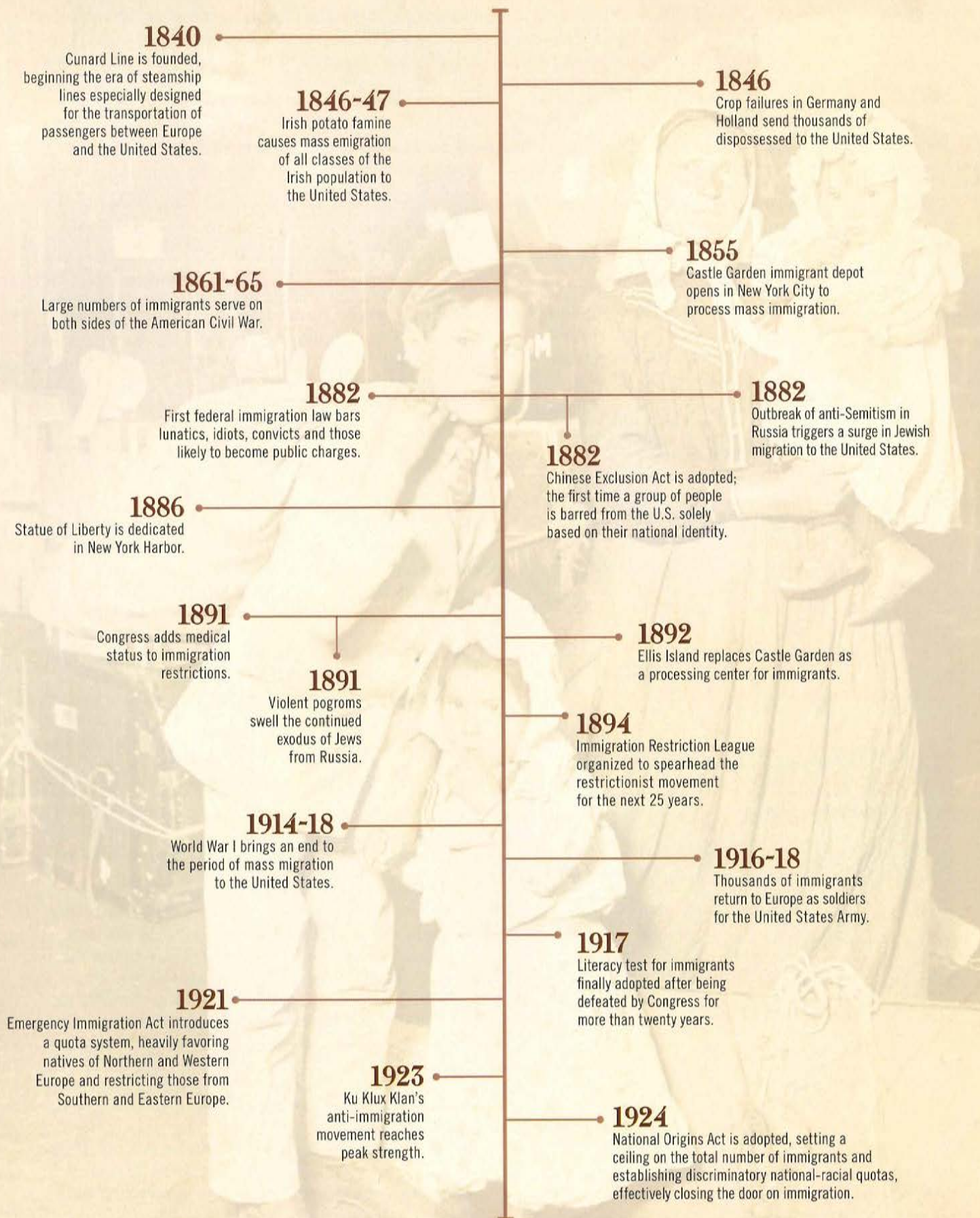
Ellis Island still remained open for many years and served a multitude of purposes. During World War II, enemy merchant seamen were detained in the baggage and dormitory building. The United States Coast Guard also trained about 60,000 servicemen there. In November of 1954 the last detainee, a Norwegian merchant seaman named Arne Peterssen was released, and Ellis Island officially closed.



In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson declared Ellis Island part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument. Ellis Island was opened to the public on a limited basis between 1976 and 1984. Starting in 1984, Ellis Island underwent a major restoration, the largest historic restoration in U.S. history. The \$160 million dollar project was funded by donations made to The Statue of Liberty - Ellis Island Foundation, Inc. in partnership with the National Park Service. The Main Building was reopened to the public on September 10, 1990 as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Journeys: The Peopling of America(r) Center, 1550-1890 a major expansion of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum which explores arrivals before the Ellis Island Era, opened in 2011. The museum received almost 2 million visitors annually until it closed in October 2012 due to damage from Superstorm Sandy. While the exhibits remained intact, the infrastructure was destroyed by flooding, and the museum is undergoing necessary repairs and upgrades.



A CHRONOLOGY: UNITED STATES IMMIGRATION from 1840–1924



THOUGHTS ON THE JOURNEY

AN INTERVIEW WITH ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER

The son and grandson of rabbis, Isaac Bashevis Singer studied at a rabbinical seminary in Warsaw (1920–27), before pursuing a career as a writer. He emigrated alone on a tourist visa in 1935 at the age of 31. He went on to write over forty books—novels, plays, memoirs, short stories, and children's books—first in Yiddish, and then translated into English. He is best known for his novels and short stories, set in the Jewish ghettos of eastern Europe, such as The Family Moskat, The Manor, Satan in Goray, The Estate, The Magician of Lublin, and A Crown of Feathers and Other Stories. He was the recipient of numerous literary awards including two National Book Awards (1970 and 1974). In 1978, he won the Nobel Prize for literature.

I was brought up in Warsaw...which is not very much unlike New York. It is noisy, it is dirty. There is everything which a big city has, all the good sides and all the bad sides. So I wasn't really very much shocked when I came to this country, to New York, because we had the same thing there in a smaller way. But just the same, we all were brought up that America is almost like a different planet, and in a way I was very confused when I came here.

First of all, I did not know English. I hadn't studied any English there, so I was actually mute when I went to a bus or to a trolley car. I didn't know what to say. In addition, things looked to me very different. For example, when I looked into a drugstore and I saw that they served sandwiches there, I was bewildered because for us a drugstore was a most dignified place where one took off one's hat, and the idea that people sit there on little benches, and drink coffee, and smoke, looked to me almost sacrilege. Now, I know, that it was silly because there is nothing special about a drugstore...



In fact, so many things looked so different that I thought, in my heart, I will never be able to write about this country. And the truth is, for thirty years, I never dared to write anything about this country, but now I have been here in America longer than I have been in Poland and I would say that I have my deep roots also here. And I have learned, it is true, that I don't write about people born in this country, I write mostly about immigrants, but at least I dare to write about America.

There was anti-Semitism [in Warsaw], but I personally did not have much of this kind of experience, because I always lived among Jewish people, on the Jewish streets. First I went to the synagogue or to the study house where I studied Talmud, and there was no anti-Semitism there. Later, I was connected with the Yiddish writers for the Yiddish Writers Club, so although I knew that it existed and I read about it in the newspapers, I personally didn't have any trouble.

However, what you read in the newspapers is very much real, and you know that what happened to another man can the next day happen to you, so we were all afraid, especially in the '30s. Men from a pro-Fascist party, they were almost pro-Nazi, visited Poland, and we Jews knew that Poland was a very dangerous place for us. This was one of the reasons, or perhaps the main reason why I wanted to get away from there. Also, my brother was here, who was a writer, many years older than I. I considered him my master, my teacher, and I wanted to be together with him.

I came by boat, a French boat called *Champlain*. I was told later that this boat was sunk during the war. It was quite an elegant, beautiful boat. As a matter of fact, the agent from whom I bought the ticket told me that if I would have waited another two weeks I could have gone with the *Normandy*, which made its maiden voyage, and this was considered among many people a great privilege to go on this first trip. But I felt that the ship would not add anything to my value. I came here the first of May 1935. I traveled tourist class, which was good enough for me. I remember my arrival quite well. A man from the *Jewish Daily Forward* waited for me and also my brother, and they took me in a car. My first impression of New York is a city like all cities. It is not the planet Mars or Venus or Jupiter. When I saw the skyscrapers, I felt there was something unusual, but just the same, the Polish had already tried to build a skyscraper in Warsaw, a lower skyscraper, let's say. It had eighteen floors, but even this was big.

Many immigrants had this kind of feeling that America is so different that they really felt that they were coming into a different world, but I don't have to tell you that the world is actually the same. It only takes time until you learn the language and you get acquainted with people, you realize that human nature is everywhere the same. Although there are many differences, I would say that American people looked to me then, and they look to me now, more kind and more sincere and more ready to help people than the Europeans. But there is also a reason for this, because American people are richer and they are accustomed to immigrants. They are not clannish as the Europeans are, where people have fought for every inch of earth for generations. There are great differences, but there are also many, many things which are common to all people.



The first thing I saw from the ship was the Statue of Liberty, and it always made a great impression on me. I even heard about the Statue of Liberty when I was a small boy in Warsaw, when I went to *heder*. They spoke about this because there were many people in our neighborhood who could not read or write, and they had relatives in America, so they came to my mother that she should read their letters. And they all wrote about it, how they came to America, how they saw the Statue of Liberty, and they also wrote about Ellis Island, which they called the Island of Tears, and about all the troubles some of the immigrants had when they came. There was a great fear of this island because people were told that if the doctors find someone is sick, or that they think he is sick, they send him back.

So many immigrants, I remember, before they went to America, went to doctors to cure their eyes and all kinds of sicknesses which they suspected might hinder them of entering the United States. In my case, when I came to this country, they only asked me if I was a communist, and I said, "God forbid!"

A country where the great majority are immigrants is different than a country where people have been living for hundreds of years, but this doesn't mean that the difference makes a country of immigrants worse. It may even be the opposite, because people who come to another country, who are torn out from their homes, learn that things are not just as they thought. When you stay long at home, where you never leave your own country, you have the illusion that everything which happens in your country is hard, this is human nature. If you are accustomed to eating for breakfast, say, a roll and coffee, and you travel and see them eat corn flakes, you think that the world is going to pieces because you see that things can be so different. In a way traveling is a lesson in tolerance. We learn by traveling and by immigrating...

But as far as literature is concerned, it is necessary that a man who writes should have roots somewhere. If, let's say, he has been traveling all his life, let's say like children of ambassadors, who one day they are in Spain, the next day in China, and the next year in Russia and so on, for such children writing would be very difficult, although we never know. If a person is really born with a talent, he may overcome all kinds of difficulties and still write, but as far as we know from the history of literature and from experience, it is a fact that being rooted is very important. Writing without roots is almost no literature—it becomes journalism.

It is possible to write and be alienated, but I will tell you, in a way we are all alienated. Every human being feels that he is a stranger on this planet. I don't think alienation is more a problem here than in any other country, because people who

have been born here should feel at home. The reason for this talk about alienation is people who try to deny themselves—a man who says, "I am Jewish, but I am not Jewish, I am a Frenchman, but I don't want to be a Frenchman." People who try to assimilate to deny their roots are alienated. But, if you are frank and sincere, you say, I am so and so, my name is so and so, I speak this and this language, I am not ashamed of anything, such a person is able to feel at home anywhere. In other words, spiritually at home. It's the man who likes to put a mask on his face, who says that he is alienated, it is his own fault. I have heard this business about alienation from many Jewish writers who say, "I am not a Jew, I am not American, or I am only half an American and half a Jew." If you are half of everything, you already don't belong. But if you do like I do, you say, "I'm hundred percent a Jew and I am also hundred percent an American, a naturalized American, but just the same an American," and you are not ashamed of anything, and you don't deny anything, and you don't change your name, and you don't change your language and your habits, then you are at home everywhere. It's only this fear, this desire, to mimic others which makes people feel like strangers.

The first year here I lived in Seagate in Brooklyn, and then in Manhattan on East Nineteenth Street, a furnished room, and I lived there for some time. Later on, when I married, I lived one year on Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn. And then I moved back to Manhattan, and I lived about twenty years on Central Park West, a few years on West Seventy-second Street, and now the Lower West Side near Union Square.

As a young man, I chose the neighborhoods because rent was cheaper. It was also natural to me to live more or less among my people. I wouldn't have gone, say, to Staten Island. I like to live in the middle of everything and not far from the public library on Forty-second Street. I would say I still like the West Side because there are more of my kind of people, the people who read the *Jewish Daily Forward* on the West Side than on the East Side. But the East Side is also nice, I wouldn't mind having an apartment there, too. *[Laughs.]*

My happiest surprise about being here was when I once went into the subway, and I saw a sign in Yiddish that said you are not allowed to smoke. I said to myself, "Here, in this City?" In Poland, only the Jews had signs in Yiddish. The government never used the Yiddish language. Here, I saw people use the Yiddish language. I saw a lot of tolerance in this country, and I still keep seeing it. When I read the *New York Times*, I see that banks which advertised Christmas Savings Books now have Hanukkah Savings Books and Hanukkah candles in bank branches. There's no question about it. There's not another country I know of, so tolerant, and has such a feeling for strangers and for strange cultures as this country.

My parents never came to this country. To my parents, America was like another planet, you know. But my brother lived here, and I have a son who lives in Israel, but he came to visit me twice here. Once he stayed three years, so I would say I feel like an American. I am a member now of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Americans consider me one of them, and consider the Americans my people.

—*Ellis Island Interviews, Peter Morton Coan, 1997*

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ARTS

HOW IMMIGRANTS CREATED AMERICA'S MIX TAPE

Without the breakthroughs of blacks, Jews, Italians, Irish and others, would this country's music even exist?

BY HOWARD REICH, ARTS CRITIC FOR THE *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

AS IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION GRINDS THROUGH CONGRESS —

and as immigrants are branded “illegals,” “criminals,” “anchor babies” and worse — perhaps it's time to think of this population in another light.



Not so much as individuals coming here to feed their families but as part of a larger wave of humanity that repeatedly has transformed and deepened culture in America, nowhere more than in music.

For if you subtract from our musical landscape the work of immigrants, undocumented and otherwise, you have a rather anemic sound. Jazz, blues, gospel, ragtime, spirituals, marches, Broadway show tunes, Hollywood film scores: It all ultimately derives from those who came to these shores (and their children), some by intent, others in chains.

The template for American music, a cacophonous merger of a thousand cultures thrown together like nowhere else on Earth, is built on the shoulders of immigrants. And it's not simply that they brought with them their music and cultural values: More important, they applied what they knew to a wholly unfamiliar environment, along the way conjuring radical new methods for creating music. Their work came to define the American sound and has been embraced and celebrated as such around the globe.

“The contribution of the immigrant to American music is comparable to the immigrant's contribution to the American political system,” says Sterling Stuckey, a retired University of California history professor and author of the landmark book “Slave Culture” (which will

be reissued in a 25th anniversary edition by Oxford University Press in the fall).

“The contribution has been immense.”

And it goes back centuries. Though it's impossible to pinpoint a particular moment when immigrants began inventing American music, a dramatic turning point surely occurred in 1804, the year a young nation made the Louisiana Purchase. President Thomas Jefferson sought to buy from the French just the city of New Orleans, because of its crucial value as a port. But a cash-strapped Napoleon sold the entire, still-uncharted Louisiana Territory for \$15 million — roughly 4 cents an acre.

In a single stroke, America became a thrilling, noisy eruption of sound.

The Louisiana Purchase “gave American music a plural nature,” says Alfred Lemmon, director of the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection, an enormous archive of Southern culture.

Or, as Lemmon put it to me several years ago, “Before the Louisiana Purchase, everything cultural in America was pretty much focused in New England, which means it was white European musical culture. With the Louisiana Purchase, the complexion of life and music in America changed abruptly.”

All at once, slave chants, African prayer, Creole songs, street music, parade music, marching bands and more rang out under the American flag. The most profound contribution came from Place Congo, today known as Congo Square, the New Orleans gathering place where slaves were allowed to convene periodically to participate in the singing, dancing, drum-beating and hand-clapping exhortations of their distant homeland.

“Upon entering the square, the visitor finds the multitude packed in groups of close, narrow circles, of a central area of only a few feet,” wrote Henry Didimus in a rare eyewitness report of the slave-era ceremonies at Place Congo. “And there in the center of each circle sits the musician, astride a barrel, strong-headed, which he beats with two sticks, to a strange measure incessantly ... for hours together, while the perspiration literally rolls in streams and wets the ground.

“And there, too, labor the dancers male and female, under an inspiration or possession, which takes from their limbs all sense of weariness, and gives to them a rapidity and a durability of motion that will hardly be found elsewhere outside of mere machinery.”

Here was ground zero of the new American music, rooted in the ancient cultural practices of Africa but soon to morph into original, distinctly indigenous art forms.

Frederick Douglass, a former slave, wrote of spirituals that expressed “souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish,” but this was just one musical byproduct of the

transplantation of African culture here. In the aftermath of the Civil War, an evolving repertoire of church music, band tunes, funeral marches and ragtime flowered in America, setting the stage for blues, gospel and jazz.

Each represented a new, wholly American way of creating sound — through group improvisation, call-and-response, bending of notes, swinging rhythm — the very antithesis of formal, rigid, European music.

Blacks, Creoles, ethnic whites and others were writing new rules for how music was made in America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and by the 1920s Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton were sending the new music around the world from Chicago via recordings and radio broadcasts. Both early jazz giants were born in New Orleans, and both transformed the cultural legacy of black antiquity into a music recognized everywhere as distinctly American.

Their innovations would foreshadow other breakthroughs, including the blues-tinged songs of gospel pioneer Thomas A. Dorsey; the soulful, sacred-meets-secular singing of Ray Charles; the church-inspired exclamations of Mahalia Jackson and Aretha Franklin; and so many more.

Broadway, too, benefited from the largesse of black cultural innovation — ragtime piano master Eubie Blake, a son of former slaves, joining with Noble Sissle to create the breakthrough 1921 show “Shuffle Along” and others yet to come.

“I can’t imagine what this music would be” without them, says David Baker, chairman of the jazz studies department of Indiana University. “Without Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake, there probably never would have been a ‘West Side Story.’”

Nor without the influx of European Jewish immigrants, who raised families on the Lower East Side of Manhattan and elsewhere, early in the 20th century. The most celebrated of their offspring, George Gershwin, was born Jacob Gershwine, his scores to “Porgy and Bess,” “Rhapsody in Blue” and other works merging black musical technique with Russian-Jewish melodic inflections.

But Gershwin was just one of a wave of Broadway and Hollywood tunesmiths who forged a musical theater decidedly more colloquial, breezy, snappy — more American, in other words — than its European operatic counterparts. Irving Berlin (born in Russia as Israel Baline), Harold Arlen (Hyman Arluck), Jule Styne (Julius Stein), Sammy Cahn (Samuel Cohen) and others similarly brought immigrant Jewish musical culture to the stage and screen, embracing elements of jazz and all-American swing along the way.

The great songwriter Cole Porter, born and raised in Indiana, acknowledged as much, telling Richard Rodgers that he had decided to start writing “Jewish tunes.”

“I laughed at what I took to be a joke,” Rodgers wrote.



GEORGE GERSHWIN



“But not only was Cole dead serious, he did exactly that. Just hum the melody that goes with ‘Only you beneath the moon or under the sun’ from ‘Night and Day,’ or any of ‘Begin the Beguine’ or ‘Love for Sale’ or ‘My Heart Belongs to Daddy’ or ‘I Love Paris.’ These minor-key melodies are unmistakably eastern Mediterranean. It is surely one of the ironies of the musical theater that despite the abundance of Jewish composers, the one who has written the most enduring ‘Jewish’ music should be an Episcopalian millionaire who was born on a farm in Peru, Ind.”

And let’s not forget the Hollywood composers who came here fleeing Nazism, such as Erich Wolfgang Korngold (scoring Errol Flynn swashbucklers such as “The Sea Hawk”), Franz Waxman (“Sunset Boulevard” and “Rebecca”) and Friedrich Hollander (“Sabrina” and “The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T”).

It’s critical to understand, however, that the expat Jews and other Europeans who influenced American music were preceded and followed by waves of immigrants, all scraping their way up from tenements.

“The ghetto is the cradle, because the struggle is to get out of the ghetto,” songwriter Cahn told Max Wilk in “They’re Playing Our Song: The Truth Behind the Words and Music of Three Generations.”

“In the beginning, the first waves, everything was Irish. The songs, the performers, comics — (Edward) Harrigan and (Tony) Hart, Eddie Foy, George M. Cohan, all Irish. Politicians, entertainers, writers, all Irish. ...

“Next wave into the ghetto, Jewish. Same pattern emerges. Singers, performers — (Al) Jolson, (Joe) Weber and (Lew) Fields, comics, all Yiddish. Now it went to the Italians. Think hard — Italians. Performers — (Frank) Sinatra, Vic Damone, Tony Bennett, (Perry) Como. Politicians, writers, gangsters, prizefighters, all Italians, all struggling to get out of the ghetto.”

That’s how it always has been in American life and musical culture, the sounds of immigrants rushing forward, even in classical music. The rhythms of the Caribbean course through the work of America’s first great composer, the Creole pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk; jazz-age syncopations punctuate scores of Gershwin, Aaron Copland, William Schuman, Leonard Bernstein and many more.

The process came to a kind of apex in the enormous oeuvre of Duke Ellington, whose works defy categorization but embrace jazz, blues, gospel, spirituals and other facets of the immigrant experience.

“If you look at it like a stream, it’s like the Mississippi River,” says Gunther Schuller, the eminent American composer-scholar-author. “It just keeps spreading out. ... It’s what we’ve called the grand melting pot, and that’s what it is. And you can’t stop the melting.”

Indeed, Afro-Cuban dance rhythms, Mexican mariachi music, South American tango and other traditions too numerous to name long have echoed in our music and continue to do so.

Why does it matter? Why should we understand that American music is predicated on the work of generations of immigrants?

“People say ... we’re in this post-racial period,” says Monica Hairston, executive director of the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College Chicago.

They say, “We’re past all that, since we know that things like race and ethnic differences don’t matter anymore. ...

“It’s really the opposite. I think it’s really important we keep talking about it and remind everyone.

“It’s not divisive. It’s our story.”

As our country assesses the value of immigrants, it’s a story worth remembering.

WAY DOWN UPON THE HUDSON RIVER: TIN PAN ALLEY'S NEW YORK TRIUMPH

RACHEL RUBIN, PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

BROADWAY IN THE 1920s was a showcase for the sweeping changes transforming American culture in the early 20th century, including new roles for women, the mixing of social classes in new settings like Prohibition-era speakeasies and creative innovation by African Americans in jazz clubs and music halls. Sons of immigrants from Europe — including the Gershwins, Irving Berlin, Jerome Kern and Harold Arlen — made up a large percentage of the new word and music smiths writing for Tin Pan Alley and Broadway's musical revues. Their syncopated rhythms borrowed from the jazz craze and their lyrics helped create a vibrant, witty new American argot. Tin Pan Alley and Broadway contributed such classic standards as "Alexander's Ragtime Band" (Berlin), "I Got Rhythm" (Gershwin and Gershwin), "Ol' Man River," (Kern and Hammerstein), "Stormy Weather" (Arlen and Koehler), "Ain't Misbehavin'" (Razaf, Waller, Brooks), "Anything Goes" (Porter) and many more. These songs formed the musical backdrop of an era. The production of these songs also became big business.

The first major book written about Tin Pan Alley was published in 1930 by Harvard professor Isaac Goldberg, and it was subtitled "A Chronicle of the American Popular Music Racket." Goldberg's humorous use of the word "racket" captured something about the origins of the name 'Tin Pan Alley' given to the music composed by poorly-paid songwriters banging away in cubicles in downtown New York City on cheap pianos. The word also expressed Goldberg's view that the burgeoning music industry of his time was a slightly shady one. Our contemporary understanding of this music, on the other hand, is shaped by decades of nostalgic packaging that enshrines these popular songs as "standards," comprising the "great American songbook."

In its own time, "Tin Pan Alley" was an insurgent popular music that was a challenge made by immigrants and their working-class children to the dominance of the polite middle-class "parlor" music of the time. It also borrowed a great deal from the popular music being created contemporaneously by African American musicians. "Tin Pan Alley" referred to an actual location where popular music publishers had their offices in New York City — first Union Square, then West 28th Street, and then further uptown. But "Tin Pan Alley" also meant a style of music that tended initially toward ethnic novelty songs and later, in the "classic" period (from the mid-1920s on), toward 32-bar love songs that relied heavily on internal rhymes and punning in the use of language. Such songs fed, and became the basis for, the burgeoning musical revues on Broadway.

Tin Pan Alley music was urban music, and its initial popularity relied on sounds and themes that were perceived by white audiences as connected to African American life in the United States. Even so, opportunities for actual African Americans to get a hearing on Tin Pan Alley were quite rare. The heyday of Tin Pan Alley coincided with what African American historian Rayford Logan has termed the "nadir" of race relations in the United States. While some commentators find evidence for intercultural sympathy in the sprightly rhythms, blue notes, and vernacular lyrics of Tin Pan Alley songs, it is also important to remember that the music flourished in a context of institutional racism.

The rise of Tin Pan Alley — as music and institution — depended on the mass immigration of East European Jews to New York beginning in the early 1880s, and the historical shift of America's black population from South to North. Around the time of World War I, African Americans began leaving the South in droves; ultimately more people of African descent moved in the first few decades of the 20th century than at any time since the Middle Passage. What we now call Tin Pan Alley depended on a meeting of Jews and African Americans in the modern American city, where the two cultures interacted informally in neighborhoods, music halls and businesses.



The key Jewish figures of Tin Pan Alley—Irving Berlin, George Gershwin, Al Jolson, and Harold Arlen, to name a few—were consummate modern New Yorkers. Their careers were intimately wound up with their relationships to actual African Americans and with the sights and sounds of blackness. This was nothing new: Black-face minstrelsy had been the dominant form of American popular entertainment for much of the 19th century, and these Jewish artists were, on some level, the heirs of this tradition. It is no surprise that both Berlin and Gershwin had early hits with songs that made reference to the work of Stephen Foster—the most important songwriter for the minstrel stage in the 19th century.

The popularity of the music of Tin Pan Alley depended on networks of production and distribution that radiated out from the music publishing houses to the Broadway stage, and to increasingly national circulation. Until the end of the 19th century, American popular music was presented in a series of overlapping regional scenes, with only occasional songs or musical forms becoming nationwide successes. The Chicago World's Fair of 1893 changed this. As historian Susan Curtis explains, this event provided the opportunity for ragtime to move from an almost exclusively African American and mid-western phenomenon to a national trend. There was no ragtime played at the World's Fair, but numerous ragtime pioneers, including Scott Joplin, played around town and their music was carried from Chicago to the rest of the country.

The first generation of Tin Pan Alley composers was obsessed with ragtime and its musical and commercial possibilities. They were also interested in repackaging the instrumental ragtime compositions that Scott Joplin and his colleagues had developed as the foundation for their own novelty songs. The decade of Tin Pan Alley's rise, the 1910s, might be usefully marked off by the debut of Irving Berlin's "Alexander Ragtime Band" in 1911 on one end, and George and Ira Gershwin's "The Real American Folk Song (Is a Rag)" in 1918. Both songs rely on audiences hearing the music as sounding

recognizably "black," while the lyrics tell tales of national triumphalism: the music of Alexander's band is so natural, after all, that it will make you want to go to war!

By the 1920s, the notion that Tin Pan Alley was a particular Jewish success story was so entrenched that when Cole Porter, an Episcopalian from Indiana, was asked how he would go about writing successful "American" music, he noted—with no seeming irony—that he would pen "good Jewish music." This triumph of Jewish immigrants' music-making paralleled a time of great nativism and prejudice in American political life, a development that culminated in the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act in 1924.

In the early part of the century, Broadway's popular 'revues' were loosely cobbled-together amalgams of music, dance and vaudeville that relied on a constant stream of songs by Tin Pan Alley writers. But in the 1920s, Broadway shows became organized for the first time around fully-developed through-narratives, with 1927's *Showboat* marking the first musical with a beginning-to-end plot.

Although some Tin Pan Alley songwriters successfully became Broadway show writers—*Showboat* was written by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II—the business began to change. It became increasingly difficult for songwriters to pitch and place single songs in the more tightly organized new shows. At the same time, sound technology hit the movies, with the transformative success in 1927 of *The Jazz Singer*, the first full length motion picture with synchronized dialogue. Suddenly, the movies could not only talk, they could sing. The real action for songwriters began shifting to Hollywood, where vertically integrated shops hired songwriters to move West and work for the film studios. The same songwriters continued to dominate Broadway (and Hollywood), but they no longer needed to be situated on West 28th street.



FAMOUS MUSICIAN IMMIGRANTS OF CASTLE GARDEN AND ELLIS ISLAND

AL DUBIN (Alick Dubin)*
lyricist, Switzerland 1896

AL JOLSON (Asa Yoelson)*
singer/songwriter, Lithuania 1894

ARTHUR TRACY (Arthur Tracavutskys)
"The Street Singer," entertainer, Russia 1906

BOB HOPE (Leslie Hape)
entertainer, England 1908

CHARLES B. LAWLOR*
composer, Ireland 1869

ENRICO CARUSO
tenor, Italy 1904

ENZIO PINZA
tenor, Italy 1893

GUS KAHN (Gustav Gerston Kahn)*
lyricist, Germany 1892

HENNY YOUNGMAN (Henry Junggman)
entertainer, England 1906

IRVING BERLIN (Israel Beilin)*
composer/lyricist, Russia 1893

JEAN SCHWARTZ
composer, Hungary 1891

JOHN MCCORMACK*
tenor, Ireland 1917

JULE STYNE
composer/lyricist, England 1912

SIDOR BELARSKY*
singer, Russia 1930

SOPHIE TUCKER (Sonya Kalish)*
singer, Russia 1886

VERNON DUKE (Vladimir Dukelsky)
composer, Russia 1921

THE VON TRAPP FAMILY SINGERS
Austria 1938

XAVIER CUGAT
bandleader, Spain and Cuba 1915

* Represented in *Steerage Song*

IRVING BERLIN



Born Israel Baline in Russia in 1888, Irving Berlin (1888–1989) was one of eight children. His family moved to New York via a stop in Ellis Island in 1893 to escape the pogroms in Russia. At age eight, he took to the streets

of the Lower East Side of New York City to help support his mother and family after his father died. In the early 1900s he worked as a singing waiter in restaurants and started writing songs. His first published hit was "Marie From Sunny Italy." In World War I, he wrote the musical *Yip, Yip, Yaphank*; the big hit song in the musical was "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning." On Armistice Day, 1938, he introduced "God Bless America," which was sung by Kate Smith. In World War II, Berlin wrote the musical *This is the Army*,

which raised \$10 million for the Army Emergency Relief. His hits in this musical were "This is the Army, Mr Jones" and "I Left My Heart at the Stage Door Canteen."

Berlin wrote more than 900 songs, 19 musicals and the scores of 18 movies. Some of his songs that have become classics include "There's No Business Like Show Business," "Easter Parade," and "White Christmas."

Berlin also supported Jewish charities and organizations and donated many dollars to worthwhile causes. On February 18, 1955, President Eisenhower presented him with a gold medal in recognition of his service in composing many patriotic songs for the country. Berlin also assigned the copyright for "God Bless America" to the God Bless America Fund, which has raised millions of dollars for the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

Irving Berlin died on September 22, 1989, at the age of 101.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS: CONTEMPORARY IMMIGRANTS SHARE THEIR STORIES

TAN LE: MY IMMIGRATION STORY

TRANSCRIPT FROM A 2012 TEDXWOMEN TALK

HOW CAN I SPEAK IN 10 MINUTES ABOUT THE BONDS OF WOMEN OVER THREE GENERATIONS, about how the astonishing strength of those bonds took hold in the life of a four-year-old girl huddled with her young sister, her mother and her grandmother for five days and nights in a small boat in the China Sea more than 30 years ago, bonds that took hold in the life of that small girl and never let go — that small girl now living in San Francisco and speaking to you today? This is not a finished story. It is a jigsaw puzzle still being put together. Let me tell you about some of the pieces.



Imagine the first piece: a man burning his life's work. He is a poet, a playwright, a man whose whole life had been balanced on the single hope of his country's unity and freedom. Imagine him as the communists enter Saigon, confronting the fact that his life had been a complete waste. Words, for so long his friends, now mocked him. He retreated into silence. He died broken by history. He is my grandfather. I never knew him in real life. But our lives are much more than our memories. My grandmother never let me forget his life. My duty was not to allow it to have been in vain, and my lesson was to learn that, yes, history tried to crush us, but we endured.

The next piece of the jigsaw is of a boat in the early dawn slipping silently out to sea. My mother, Mai, was 18 when her father died — already in an arranged marriage, already with two small girls. For her, life had distilled itself into one task: the escape of her family and a new life in Australia. It was inconceivable to her that she would not succeed. So after a four-year saga that defies fiction, a boat slipped out to sea disguised as a fishing vessel. All the adults knew the risks. The greatest fear was of pirates, rape and death. Like most adults on the boat, my mother carried a small bottle of poison. If we were captured, first my sister and I, then she and my grandmother would drink.

My first memories are from the boat — the steady beat of the engine, the bow dipping into each wave, the vast and

empty horizon. I don't remember the pirates who came many times, but were bluffed by the bravado of the men on our boat, or the engine dying and failing to start for six hours. But I do remember the lights on the oil rig off the Malaysian coast and the young man who collapsed and died, the journey's end too much for him, and the first apple I tasted, given to me by the men on the rig. No apple has ever tasted the same.

After three months in a refugee camp, we landed in Melbourne. And the next piece of the jigsaw is about four women across three generations shaping a new life together. We settled in Footscray, a working-class suburb whose demographic is layers of immigrants. Unlike the settled middle-class suburbs, whose existence I was oblivious of, there was no sense of entitlement in Footscray. The smells from shop doors were from the rest of the world. And the snippets of halting English were exchanged between people who had one thing in common, they were starting again.

My mother worked on farms, then on a car assembly line, working six days, double shifts. Somehow she found time to study English and gain IT qualifications. We were poor. All the dollars were allocated and extra tuition in English and mathematics was budgeted for regardless of what missed out, which was usually new clothes; they were always secondhand. Two pairs of stockings for school, each to hide the holes in the other. A school uniform down

to the ankles, because it had to last for six years. And there were rare but searing chants of “slit-eye” and the occasional graffiti: “Asian, go home.” Go home to where? Something stiffened inside me. There was a gathering of resolve and a quiet voice saying, “I will bypass you.”

My mother, my sister and I slept in the same bed. My mother was exhausted each night, but we told one another about our day and listened to the movements of my grandmother around the house. My mother suffered from nightmares all about the boat. And my job was to stay awake until her nightmares came so I could wake her. She opened a computer store then studied to be a beautician and opened another business. And the women came with their stories about men who could not make the transition, angry and inflexible, and troubled children caught between two worlds.

Possibilities that would not have been allowed were outrageously encouraged. There was an energy there, an implacable optimism, a strange mixture of humility and daring. So I followed my hunches. I gathered around me a small team of people for whom the label “It can’t be done” was an irresistible challenge.

Grants and sponsors were sought. Centers were established. I lived in parallel worlds. In one, I was the classic Asian student, relentless in the demands that I made on myself. In the other, I was enmeshed in lives that were precarious, tragically scarred by violence, drug abuse and isolation. But so many over the years were helped. And for that work, when I was a final year law student, I was chosen as the young Australian of the year. And I was catapulted from one piece of the jigsaw to another, and their edges didn’t fit.

Tan Le, anonymous Footscray resident, was now Tan Le, refugee and social activist, invited to speak in venues she had never heard of and into homes whose existence she could never have imagined. I didn’t know the protocols. I didn’t know how to use the cutlery. I didn’t know how to talk about wine. I didn’t know how to talk about anything. I wanted to retreat to the routines and comfort of life in an unsung suburb — a grandmother, a mother and two daughters ending each day as they had for almost 20 years, telling one another the story of their day and falling asleep, the three of us still in the same bed. I told my mother I couldn’t do it. She reminded me that I was now the same age she had been when we boarded the boat. No had never been an option. “Just do it,” she said, “and don’t be what you’re not.”

So I spoke out on youth unemployment and education and the neglect of the marginalized and the disenfranchised. And the more candidly I spoke, the more I was asked to speak. I met people from all walks of life, so many of them doing the thing they loved, living on the frontiers of possibility. And even though I finished my

degree, I realized I could not settle into a career in law. There had to be another piece of the jigsaw. And I realized at the same time that it is okay to be an outsider, a recent arrival, new on the scene — and not just okay, but something to be thankful for, perhaps a gift from the boat. Because being an insider can so easily mean collapsing the horizons, can so easily mean accepting the presumptions of your province. I have stepped outside my comfort zone enough now to know that, yes, the world does fall apart, but not in the way that you fear.

Possibilities that would not have been allowed were outrageously encouraged. There was an energy there, an implacable optimism, a strange mixture of humility and daring. So I followed my hunches. I gathered around me a small team of people for whom the label “It can’t be done” was an irresistible challenge. For a year we were penniless. At the end of each day, I made a huge pot of soup which we all shared. We worked well into each night. Most of our ideas were crazy, but a few were brilliant, and we broke through. I made the decision to move to the U.S. after only one trip. My hunches again. Three months later I had relocated, and the adventure has continued.

Before I close though, let me tell you about my grandmother. She grew up at a time when Confucianism was the social norm and the local Mandarin was the person who mattered. Life hadn’t changed for centuries. Her father died soon after she was born. Her mother raised her alone. At 17 she became the second wife of a Mandarin whose mother beat her. With no support from her husband, she caused a sensation by taking him to court and prosecuting her own case, and a far greater sensation when she won. *(Laughter) (Applause)* “It can’t be done” was shown to be wrong.

I was taking a shower in a hotel room in Sydney the moment she died 600 miles away in Melbourne. I looked through the shower screen and saw her standing on the other side. I knew she had come to say goodbye. My mother phoned minutes later. A few days later, we went to a Buddhist temple in Footscray and sat around her casket. We told her stories and assured her that we were still with her. At midnight the monk came and told us he had to close the casket. My mother asked us to feel her hand. She asked the monk, “Why is it that her hand is so warm and the rest of her is so cold?” “Because you have been holding it since this morning,” he said. “You have not let it go.”

If there is a sinew in our family, it runs through the women. Given who we were and how life had shaped us, we can now see that the men who might have come into our lives would have thwarted us. Defeat would have come too easily. Now I would like to have my own children, and I wonder about the boat. Who could ever wish it on their own? Yet I am afraid of privilege, of ease, of entitlement. Can I give them a bow in their lives, dipping bravely into each wave, the unperturbed and steady beat of the engine, the vast horizon that guarantees nothing? I don’t know. But if I could give it and still see them safely through, I would.

MY LIFE AS AN UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT

BY JOSE ANTONIO VERGAS

ONE AUGUST MORNING NEARLY TWO DECADES AGO, my mother woke me and put me in a cab. She handed me a jacket. “Baka malamig doon” were among the few words she said. (“It might be cold there.”) When I arrived at the Philippines’ Ninoy Aquino International Airport with her, my aunt and a family friend, I was introduced to a man I’d never seen. They told me he was my uncle. He held my hand as I boarded an airplane for the first time. It was 1993, and I was 12.



My mother wanted to give me a better life, so she sent me thousands of miles away to live with her parents in America — my grandfather (*Lolo* in Tagalog) and grandmother (*Lola*). After I arrived in Mountain View, Calif., in the San Francisco Bay Area, I entered sixth grade and quickly grew to love my new home, family and culture. I discovered a passion for language, though it was hard to learn the difference between formal English and American slang. One of my early memories is of a freckled kid in middle school asking me, “What’s up?” I replied, “The sky,” and he and a couple of other kids

laughed. I won the eighth-grade spelling bee by memorizing words I couldn’t properly pronounce. (The winning word was “indefatigable.”)

One day when I was 16, I rode my bike to the nearby D.M.V. office to get my driver’s permit. Some of my friends already had their licenses, so I figured it was time. But when I handed the clerk my green card as proof of U.S. residency, she flipped it around, examining it. “This is fake,” she whispered. “Don’t come back here again.”

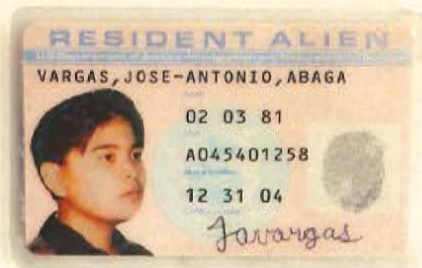
Confused and scared, I pedaled home and confronted Lolo. I remember him sitting in the garage, cutting coupons. I dropped my bike and ran over to him, showing him the green card. “*Peke ba ito?*” I asked in Tagalog. (“Is this fake?”) My grandparents were naturalized American citizens — he worked as a security guard, she as a food server — and they had begun supporting my mother and me financially when I was 3, after my father’s wandering eye and inability to properly provide for us led to my parents’ separation. Lolo was a proud man, and I saw the shame on his face as he told me he purchased the card, along with other fake documents, for me. “Don’t show it to other people,” he warned.

I decided then that I could never give anyone reason to doubt I was an American. I convinced myself that if I worked enough, if I achieved enough, I would be rewarded with citizenship. I felt I could earn it.

I’ve tried. Over the past 14 years, I’ve graduated from high school and college and built a career as a journalist, interviewing some of the most famous people in the country. On the surface, I’ve created a good life. I’ve lived the American dream.

But I am still an undocumented immigrant. And that means living a different kind of reality. It means going about my day in fear of being found out. It means rarely trusting people, even those closest to me, with who I really am. It means keeping my family photos in a shoebox rather than displaying them on shelves in my home, so friends don’t ask about them. It means reluctantly, even painfully, doing things I know are wrong and unlawful. And it has meant relying on a sort of 21st-century underground railroad of supporters, people who took an interest in my future and took risks for me.

Last year I read about four students who walked from Miami to Washington to lobby for the Dream Act, a nearly decade-old immigration bill that would provide a path to legal permanent residency for young people who have been educated in this country. At the risk of deportation — the Obama administration has deported almost 800,000 people in the last two years — they are speaking out. Their courage has inspired me.



Staying Papers The documentation that Vargas obtained over the years — a fake green card, a fake passport, a driver's license — allowed him to remain in the U.S. In Oregon, a friend provided a mailing address.

There are believed to be 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. We're not always who you think we are. Some pick your strawberries or care for your children. Some are in high school or college. And some, it turns out, write news articles you might read. I grew up here. This is my home. Yet even though I think of myself as an American and consider America my country, my country doesn't think of me as one of its own.

My first challenge was the language. Though I learned English in the Philippines, I wanted to lose my accent. During high school, I spent hours at a time watching television (especially "Frasier," "Home Improvement" and reruns of "The Golden Girls") and movies (from "Goodfellas" to "Anne of Green Gables"), pausing the VHS to try to copy how various characters enunciated their words. At the local library, I read magazines, books and newspapers — anything to learn how to write better. Kathy Dewar, my high-school English teacher, introduced me to journalism. From the moment I wrote my first article for the student paper, I convinced myself that having my name in print — writing in English, interviewing Americans — validated my presence here.

The debates over "illegal aliens" intensified my anxieties. In 1994, only a year after my flight from the Philippines, Gov. Pete Wilson was re-elected in part because of his support for Proposition 187, which prohibited undocumented immigrants from attending public school and accessing other services. (A federal court later found the law unconstitutional.) After my encounter at the D.M.V. in 1997, I grew more aware of anti-immigrant sentiments and stereotypes: *they don't want to assimilate, they are a drain on society*. They're not talking about me, I would tell myself. I have something to contribute.

To do that, I had to work — and for that, I needed a Social Security number. Fortunately, my grandfather had already managed to get one for me. Lolo had always taken care of everyone in the family. He and my grandmother emigrated legally in 1984 from Zambales, a province in the Philippines of rice fields and bamboo houses, following Lolo's sister, who married a Filipino-American serving in the American military. She

petitioned for her brother and his wife to join her. When they got here, Lolo petitioned for his two children — my mother and her younger brother — to follow them. But instead of mentioning that my mother was a married woman, he listed her as single. Legal residents can't petition for their married children. Besides, Lolo didn't care for my father. He didn't want him coming here too.

But soon Lolo grew nervous that the immigration authorities reviewing the petition would discover my mother was married, thus derailing not only her chances of coming here but those of my uncle as well. So he withdrew her petition. After my uncle came to America legally in 1991, Lolo tried to get my mother here through a tourist visa, but she wasn't able to obtain one. That's when she decided to send me. My mother told me later that she figured she would follow me soon. She never did.

The "uncle" who brought me here turned out to be a coyote, not a relative, my grandfather later explained. Lolo scraped together enough money — I eventually learned it was \$4,500, a huge sum for him — to pay him to smuggle me here under a fake name and fake passport. (I never saw the passport again after the flight and have always assumed that the coyote kept it.) After I arrived in America, Lolo obtained a new fake Filipino passport, in my real name this time, adorned with a fake student visa, in addition to the fraudulent green card.

Using the fake passport, we went to the local Social Security Administration office and applied for a Social Security number and card. It was, I remember, a quick visit. When the card came in the mail, it had my full, real name, but it also clearly stated: "Valid for work only with I.N.S. authorization."

When I began looking for work, a short time after the D.M.V. incident, my grandfather and I took the Social Security card to Kinko's, where he covered the "I.N.S. authorization" text with a sliver of white tape. We then made photocopies of the card. At a glance, at least, the copies would look like copies of a regular, unrestricted Social Security card.

Lolo always imagined I would work the kind of low-paying jobs that undocumented people often take. (Once I married an American, he said, I would get my real papers, and everything would be fine.) But even menial jobs require documents, so he and I hoped the doctored card would work for now. The more documents I had, he said, the better.



After his college graduation with his grandfather, Lolo, who provided most of his resources for his journey to America.

While in high school, I worked part time at Subway, then at the front desk of the local Y.M.C.A., then at a tennis club, until I landed an unpaid internship at The Mountain View Voice, my hometown newspaper. First I brought coffee and helped around the office; eventually I began covering city-hall meetings and other assignments for pay.

For more than a decade of getting part-time and full-time jobs, employers have rarely asked to check my original Social Security card. When they did, I showed the photocopied version, which they accepted. Over time, I also began checking the citizenship box on my federal I-9 employment eligibility forms. (Claiming full citizenship was actually easier than declaring permanent resident “green card” status, which would have required me to provide an alien registration number.)

This deceit never got easier. The more I did it, the more I felt like an impostor, the more guilt I carried — and the more I worried that I would get caught. But I kept doing it. I needed to live and survive on my own, and I decided this was the way.

Mountain View High School became my second home. I was elected to represent my school at school-board meetings, which gave me the chance to meet and befriend Rich Fischer, the superintendent for our school district. I joined the speech and debate team, acted in school plays and eventually became co-editor of *The Oracle*, the student newspaper. That drew the attention of my principal, Pat Hyland. “You’re at school just as much as I am,” she told me. Pat and Rich would soon become mentors, and over time, almost surrogate parents for me.

After a choir rehearsal during my junior year, Jill Denny, the choir director, told me she was considering a Japan trip for our singing group. I told her I couldn’t afford it, but she

said we’d figure out a way. I hesitated, and then decided to tell her the truth. “It’s not really the money,” I remember saying. “I don’t have the right passport.” When she assured me we’d get the proper documents, I finally told her. “I can’t get the right passport,” I said. “I’m not supposed to be here.”

She understood. So the choir toured Hawaii instead, with me in tow. (Mrs. Denny and I spoke a couple of months ago, and she told me she hadn’t wanted to leave any student behind.)

Later that school year, my history class watched a documentary on Harvey Milk, the openly gay San Francisco city official who was assassinated. This was 1999, just six months after Matthew Shepard’s body was found tied to a fence in Wyoming. During the discussion, I raised my hand and said something like: “I’m sorry Harvey Milk got killed for being gay. . . . I’ve been meaning to say this. . . . I’m gay.”

I hadn’t planned on coming out that morning, though I had known that I was gay for several years. With that announcement, I became the only openly gay student at school, and it caused turmoil with my grandparents. Lolo kicked me out of the house for a few weeks. Though we eventually reconciled, I had disappointed him on two fronts. First, as a Catholic, he considered homosexuality a sin and was embarrassed about having “*ang apo na bakla*” (“a grandson who is gay”). Even worse, I was making matters more difficult for myself, he said. I needed to marry an American woman in order to gain a green card.

Tough as it was, coming out about being gay seemed less daunting than coming out about my legal status. I kept my other secret mostly hidden.



Benefactors Vargas with the school officials Rich Fischer and Pat Hyland at his high-school graduation.

While my classmates awaited their college acceptance letters, I hoped to get a full-time job at The Mountain View Voice after graduation. It’s not that I didn’t want to go to college, but I couldn’t apply for state and federal financial aid. Without that, my family couldn’t afford to send me.

But when I finally told Pat and Rich about my immigration “problem” — as we called it from then on — they

helped me look for a solution. At first, they even wondered if one of them could adopt me and fix the situation that way, but a lawyer Rich consulted told him it wouldn't change my legal status because I was too old. Eventually they connected me to a new scholarship fund for high-potential students who were usually the first in their families to attend college. Most important, the fund was not concerned with immigration status. I was among the first recipients, with the scholarship covering tuition, lodging, books and other expenses for my studies at San Francisco State University.

As a college freshman, I found a job working part time at The San Francisco Chronicle, where I sorted mail and wrote some freelance articles. My ambition was to get a reporting job, so I embarked on a series of internships. First I landed at The Philadelphia Daily News, in the summer of 2001, where I covered a drive-by shooting and the wedding of the 76ers star Allen Iverson. Using those articles, I applied to The Seattle Times and got an internship for the following summer.

But then my lack of proper documents became a problem again. The Times's recruiter, Pat Foote, asked all incoming interns to bring certain paperwork on their first day: a birth certificate, or a passport, or a driver's license plus an original Social Security card. I panicked, thinking my documents wouldn't pass muster. So before starting the job, I called Pat and told her about my legal status. After consulting with management, she called me back with the answer I feared: I couldn't do the internship.

This was devastating. What good was college if I couldn't then pursue the career I wanted? I decided then that if I was to succeed in a profession that is all about truth-telling, I couldn't tell the truth about myself.

After this episode, Jim Strand, the venture capitalist who sponsored my scholarship, offered to pay for an immigration lawyer. Rich and I went to meet her in San Francisco's financial district.

I was hopeful. This was in early 2002, shortly after Senators Orrin Hatch, the Utah Republican, and Dick Durbin, the Illinois Democrat, introduced the Dream Act — Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors. It seemed like the legislative version of what I'd told myself: If I work hard and contribute, things will work out.

But the meeting left me crushed. My only solution, the lawyer said, was to go back to the Philippines and accept a 10-year ban before I could apply to return legally.

If Rich was discouraged, he hid it well. "Put this problem on a shelf," he told me. "Compartmentalize it. Keep going."

And I did. For the summer of 2003, I applied for internships across the country. Several newspapers, including The Wall Street Journal, The Boston Globe and The Chicago Tribune, expressed interest. But when The Washington Post offered me a spot, I knew where I would go. And this time, I had no intention of acknowledging my "problem."

The Post internship posed a tricky obstacle: It required a driver's license. (After my close call at the California D.M.V., I'd never gotten one.) So I spent an afternoon at The Mountain View Public Library, studying various states' requirements. Oregon was among the most welcoming — and it was just a few hours' drive north.

Again, my support network came through. A friend's father lived in Portland, and he allowed me to use his address as proof of residency. Pat, Rich and Rich's longtime assistant, Mary Moore, sent letters to me at that address. Rich taught me how to do three-point turns in a parking lot, and a friend accompanied me to Portland.

The license meant everything to me — it would let me drive, fly and work. But my grandparents worried about the Portland trip and the Washington internship. While Lola offered daily prayers so that I would not get caught, Lolo told me that I was dreaming too big, risking too much.

I was determined to pursue my ambitions. I was 22, I told them, responsible for my own actions. But this was different from Lolo's driving a confused teenager to Kinko's. I knew what I was doing now, and I knew it wasn't right. But what was I supposed to do?

I was paying state and federal taxes, but I was using an invalid Social Security card and writing false information on my employment forms. But that seemed better than depending on my grandparents or on Pat, Rich and Jim — or returning to a country I barely remembered. I convinced myself all would be O.K. if I lived up to the qualities of a "citizen": hard work, self-reliance, love of my country.

At the D.M.V. in Portland, I arrived with my photocopied Social Security card, my college I.D., a pay stub from The San Francisco Chronicle and my proof of state residence — the letters to the Portland address that my support network had sent. It worked. My license, issued in 2003, was set to expire eight years later, on my 30th birthday, on Feb. 3, 2011. I had eight years to succeed professionally, and to hope that some sort of immigration reform would pass in the meantime and allow me to stay.

It seemed like all the time in the world.

My summer in Washington was exhilarating. I was intimidated to be in a major newsroom but was assigned a mentor — Peter Perl, a veteran magazine writer — to help me navigate it. A few weeks into the internship, he printed out one of my articles, about a guy who recovered a long-lost wallet, circled the first two paragraphs and left it on my desk. "Great eye for details — awesome!" he wrote. Though I didn't know it then, Peter would become one more member of my network.

At the end of the summer, I returned to The San Francisco Chronicle. My plan was to finish school — I was now a senior — while I worked for The Chronicle as a reporter for the city desk. But when The Post beckoned again,

offering me a full-time, two-year paid internship that I could start when I graduated in June 2004, it was too tempting to pass up. I moved back to Washington.

About four months into my job as a reporter for The Post, I began feeling increasingly paranoid, as if I had “illegal immigrant” tattooed on my forehead — and in Washington, of all places, where the debates over immigration seemed never-ending. I was so eager to prove myself that I feared I was annoying some colleagues and editors — and worried that any one of these professional journalists could discover my secret. The anxiety was nearly paralyzing. I decided I had to tell one of the higher-ups about my situation. I turned to Peter.

By this time, Peter, who still works at The Post, had become part of management as the paper’s director of newsroom training and professional development. One afternoon in late October, we walked a couple of blocks to Lafayette Square, across from the White House. Over some 20 minutes, sitting on a bench, I told him everything: the Social Security card, the driver’s license, Pat and Rich, my family.

Peter was shocked. “I understand you 100 times better now,” he said. He told me that I had done the right thing by telling him, and that it was now our shared problem. He said he didn’t want to do anything about it just yet. I had just been hired, he said, and I needed to prove myself. “When you’ve done enough,” he said, “we’ll tell Don and Len together.” (Don Graham is the chairman of The Washington Post Company; Leonard Downie Jr. was then the paper’s executive editor.) A month later, I spent my first Thanksgiving in Washington with Peter and his family.

In the five years that followed, I did my best to “do enough.” I was promoted to staff writer, reported on video-game culture, wrote a series on Washington’s H.I.V./AIDS epidemic and covered the role of technology and social media in the 2008 presidential race. I visited the White House, where I interviewed senior aides and covered a state dinner — and gave the Secret Service the Social Security number I obtained with false documents.

I did my best to steer clear of reporting on immigration policy but couldn’t always avoid it. On two occasions, I wrote about Hillary Clinton’s position on driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants. I also wrote an article about Senator Mel Martinez of Florida, then the chairman of the Republican National Committee, who was defending his party’s stance toward Latinos after only one Republican presidential candidate — John McCain, the co-author of a failed immigration bill — agreed to participate in a debate sponsored by Univision, the Spanish-language network.

It was an odd sort of dance: I was trying to stand out in a highly competitive newsroom, yet I was terrified that if I stood out too much, I’d invite unwanted scrutiny. I tried to compartmentalize my fears, distract myself by reporting on the lives of other people, but there was no escaping

the central conflict in my life. Maintaining a deception for so long distorts your sense of self. You start wondering who you’ve become, and why.

In April 2008, I was part of a Post team that won a Pulitzer Prize for the paper’s coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings a year earlier. Lolo died a year earlier, so it was Lola who called me the day of the announcement. The first thing she said was, “*Anong mangyayari kung malaman ng mga tao?*”

What will happen if people find out?

I couldn’t say anything. After we got off the phone, I rushed to the bathroom on the fourth floor of the newsroom, sat down on the toilet and cried.

In the summer of 2009, without ever having had that follow-up talk with top Post management, I left the paper and moved to New York to join The Huffington Post. I met Arianna Huffington at a Washington Press Club Foundation dinner I was covering for The Post two years earlier, and she later recruited me to join her news site. I wanted to learn more about Web publishing, and I thought the new job would provide a useful education.

Still, I was apprehensive about the move: many companies were already using E-Verify, a program set up by the Department of Homeland Security that checks if prospective employees are eligible to work, and I didn’t know if my new employer was among them. But I’d been able to get jobs in other newsrooms, I figured, so I filled out the paperwork as usual and succeeded in landing on the payroll.



A doctored version of this card has helped keep Vargas in the United States.

While I worked at The Huffington Post, other opportunities emerged. My H.I.V./AIDS series became a documentary film called “The Other City,” which opened at the Tribeca Film Festival last year and was broadcast on Showtime. I began writing for magazines and landed a dream assignment: profiling Facebook’s Mark Zuckerberg for The New Yorker.



Pre-Flight In the Philippines with his mother, who was supposed to follow him to the United States but never did.

Photograph courtesy of Jose Antonio Vargas

The more I achieved, the more scared and depressed I became. I was proud of my work, but there was always a cloud hanging over it, over me. My old eight-year deadline — the expiration of my Oregon driver's license — was approaching.

After slightly less than a year, I decided to leave The Huffington Post. In part, this was because I wanted to promote the documentary and write a book about online culture — or so I told my friends. But the real reason was, after so many years of trying to be a part of the system, of focusing all my energy on my professional life, I learned that no amount of professional success would solve my problem or ease the sense of loss and displacement I felt. I lied to a friend about why I couldn't take a weekend trip to Mexico. Another time I concocted an excuse for why I couldn't go on an all-expenses-paid trip to Switzerland. I have been unwilling, for years, to be in a long-term relationship because I never wanted anyone to get too close and ask too many questions. All the while, Lola's question was stuck in my head: What will happen if people find out?

Early this year, just two weeks before my 30th birthday, I won a small reprieve: I obtained a driver's license in the state of Washington. The license is valid until 2016. This offered me five more years of acceptable identification — but also five more years of fear, of lying to people I respect and institutions that trusted me, of running away from who I am.

I'm done running. I'm exhausted. I don't want that life anymore.

So I've decided to come forward, own up to what I've done, and tell my story to the best of my recollection. I've reached out to former bosses and employers and apologized for misleading them — a mix of humiliation and liberation coming with each disclosure. All the people mentioned in this article gave me permission to use their names. I've also talked to family and friends about my situation and am working with legal counsel to review my options. I don't know what the consequences will be of telling my story.

I do know that I am grateful to my grandparents, my Lolo and Lola, for giving me the chance for a better life. I'm also grateful to my other family — the support network I found here in America — for encouraging me to pursue my dreams.

It's been almost 18 years since I've seen my mother. Early on, I was mad at her for putting me in this position, and then mad at myself for being angry and ungrateful. By the time I got to college, we rarely spoke by phone. It became too painful; after a while it was easier to just send money to help support her and my two half-siblings. My sister, almost 2 years old when I left, is almost 20 now. I've never met my 14-year-old brother. I would love to see them.

Not long ago, I called my mother. I wanted to fill the gaps in my memory about that August morning so many years ago. We had never discussed it. Part of me wanted to shove the memory aside, but to write this article and face the facts of my life, I needed more details. Did I cry? Did she? Did we kiss goodbye?

My mother told me I was excited about meeting a stewardess, about getting on a plane. She also reminded me of the one piece of advice she gave me for blending in: If anyone asked why I was coming to America, I should say I was going to Disneyland.

Jose Antonio Vargas (Jose@DefineAmerican.com) is a former reporter for The Washington Post and shared a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of the Virginia Tech shootings. He founded Define American, which seeks to change the conversation on immigration reform.

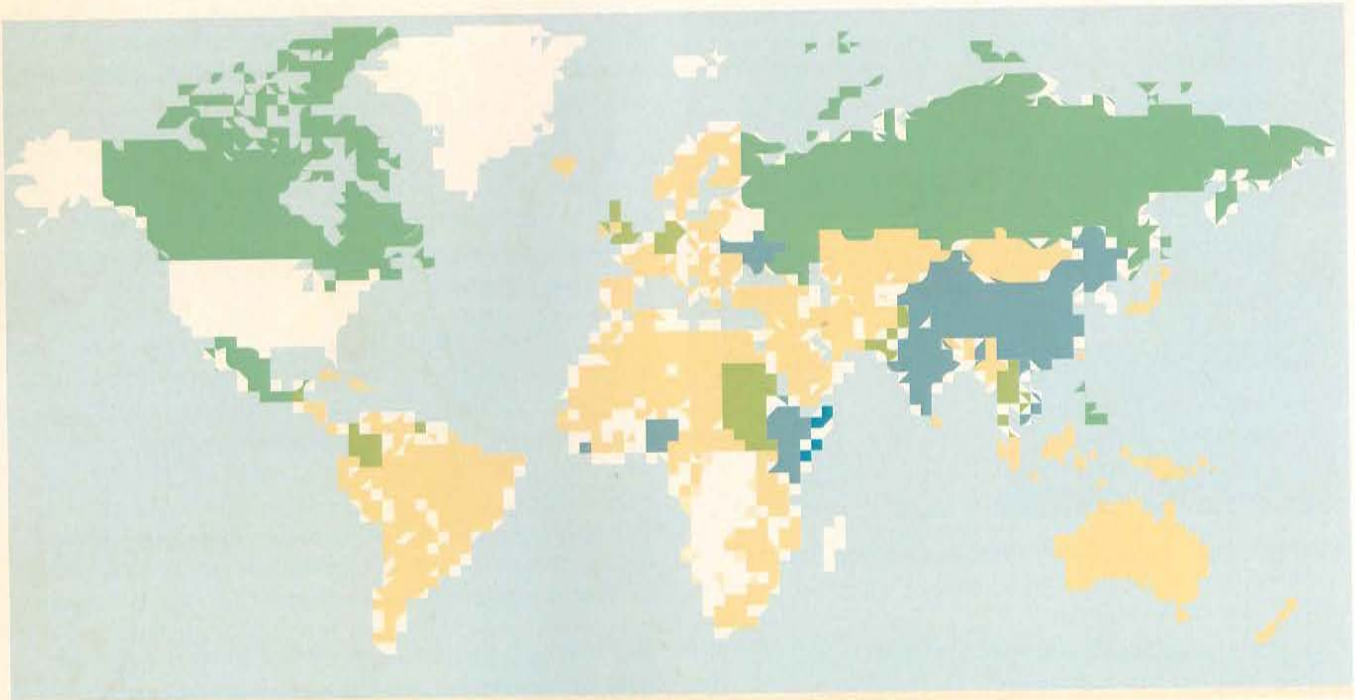
PRESENT DAY SNAPSHOT: IMMIGRATION IN MINNESOTA

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, tens of thousands of immigrants have arrived in Minnesota. They have come from all over the world, and settled throughout the state.

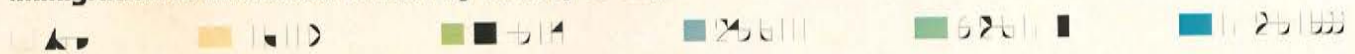
They've come for the same reason that attracted immigrants in the past: opportunity. And they experience the same difficulties of adjusting to life in a new country—language barriers, culture shock, a sense of loss, and isolation.

Established Minnesotans, for the most part, are eager to

welcome and learn more about these new members of our community. Certainly there are challenges inherent in incorporating new languages and customs into the fabric of Minnesota life. However, the economic and cultural benefits enrich our schools, neighborhoods, businesses, and communities. And make Minnesota a more interesting place to live.



Immigration to Minnesota in 2002 by country of origin



Why Minnesota?

During the 1990s alone, Minnesota's foreign-born population more than doubled, from 110,000 to 240,000

For many immigrants, Minnesota provides the first glimpse of life in the United States. Others settle briefly elsewhere in America, but relocate to Minnesota because of family ties, economic and educational opportunities, or for other reasons.

Minnesota is attractive to immigrants for the same reasons it is attractive to the rest of us: a strong economy, good quality of life, educational opportunities, and a thriving civic and cultural life.

Minnesota also has a history of active volunteerism regarding immigration and refugee resettlement, led primarily by faith-based organizations.

History of Immigration in Minnesota

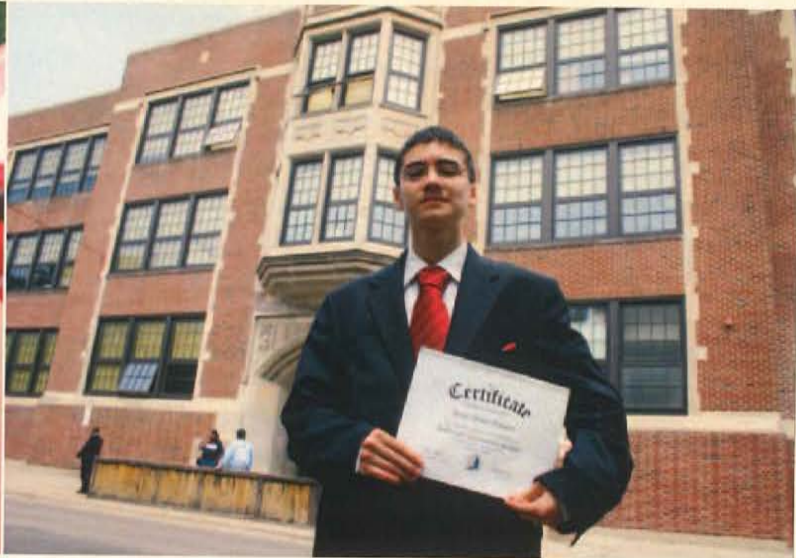
	1900	2000
Total population	1,751,394	4,919,479
Number of immigrants	505,518	260,454
Percent of population	29%	5.3%
Number who don't speak English well or at all	75,071	79,341
Percent who don't speak English well or at all	1.8%*	5.7%**
Family size, number of persons	4.5	2.5

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN:

1900: 2/3 came from three countries, Germany, Sweden, and Norway
 2000: 17% from Europe, 40% Asia, 24% Latin America, and 13% Africa

* includes persons age 10 and older; non-English speakers include some American Indians
 ** includes persons age 5 and older

EMBRACING IMMIGRATION



Frequently Asked Questions about Immigration

This fact sheet is designed to help you answer commonly asked questions and challenge assumptions about immigration history, policy, and impact. It is not intended to be a comprehensive guide; for more resources, please visit www.MinnesotaMeeting.com.

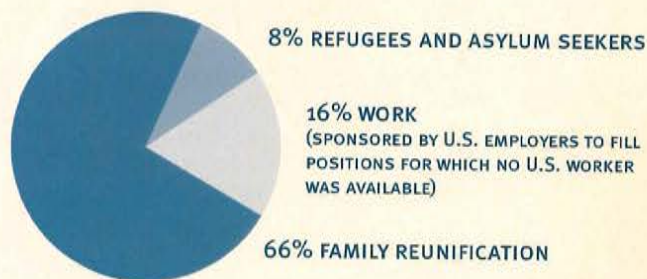
WHO ARE TODAY'S IMMIGRANTS?

- 15% of U.S. workers were born in other countries.
- A significantly higher percentage of immigrants are of working age, as compared to native-born residents.
- During the 1990s, Minnesota's foreign-born population more than doubled, from 110,000 to 240,000.
- Immigrants comprise a smaller percentage of Minnesota's population than a century ago: 5.3% in 2000 vs. 29% in 1900.
- Currently 6.3% of Minnesota's population is foreign-born, which is less than half the national average.

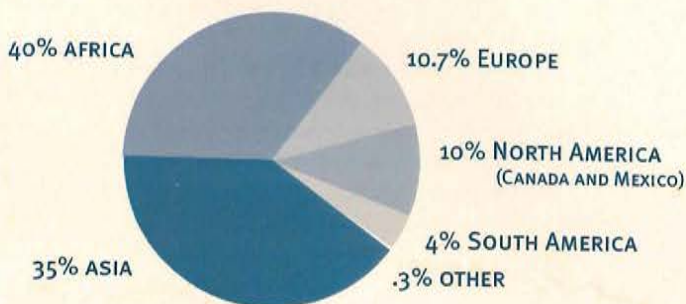
WHO GETS TO COME TO THE U.S. LEGALLY?

U.S. immigration policy allows immigration for three main reasons: family, work, and freedom – in that order.

Of the immigrants coming legally to the U.S. in 2004:



In 2006, the 18,254 immigrants legally admitted to Minnesota came from:



In the past decade, annual legal quotas have admitted about 1 million immigrants each year.

For most low-skilled workers, there is no legal way to immigrate to the United States. 5,000 visas each year are provided to unskilled workers. (By comparison, an estimated 700,000-800,000 undocumented persons enter the U.S. each year; research shows that the economy readily absorbs these new additions.)

While high-skilled workers have more legal pathways available to them, the U.S. issues too few visas (currently capped at 65,000 per year) to meet market demand.

THE DEBATE: OPINIONS ON THE FUTURE OF IMMIGRATION

A NATION OF MUTTS

BY DAVID BROOKS

OVER THE PAST FEW DECADES, American society has been transformed in a fit of absence of mind. First, we've gone from a low immigrant nation to a high immigrant nation. If you grew up between 1950 and 1985, you grew up at a time when only about 5 percent or 6 percent of American residents were foreign born. Today, roughly 13 percent of American residents are foreign born, and we're possibly heading to 15 percent.

Moreover, up until now, America was primarily an outpost of European civilization. Between 1830 and 1880, 80 percent of the immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe. Over the following decades, the bulk came from Southern and Central Europe. In 1960, 75 percent of the foreign-born population came from Europe, with European ideas and European heritage.

Soon, we will no longer be an outpost of Europe, but a nation of mutts, a nation with hundreds of fluid ethnicities from around the world, intermarrying and intermingling. Americans of European descent are already a minority among 5-year-olds. European-Americans will be a minority over all in 30 years at the latest, and probably sooner.

If enacted, the immigration reform bill would accelerate these trends. It would further increase immigration levels. According to the Census Bureau, roughly 20 million immigrants will come to this country under current law. The Congressional Budget Office expects another 16 million under the new provisions.

It would boost the rise of non-Europeans. Immigration would be more global. Hispanics are now projected to make up 30 percent of the U.S. population by 2050. We would hit that mark sooner with reform.

In other words, immigration reform won't transform America. It will just speed up the arrival of a New America that is already guaranteed.

As we stand on the cusp of this New America, it's understandable to feel some anxiety. If you take sociology and culture seriously, it's sensible to wonder whether this is the sort of country we want to be. Can we absorb this many immigrants without changing something fundamental?

Let's make some educated guesses about what the New America will look like. It will almost certainly be economically dynamic. Immigration boosts economic dynamism, and more immigration would boost it more. There would also be a lot of upward striving. Immigrant groups tend to work harder than native groups. They save more. They start business at higher rates than natives.

My colleague Anne Snyder delineates several possible changes to the social fabric. Basically we are witnessing the end of the old ethnic-racial order. Traditionally, mainstream America has been defined by the big block of

whites, while other big blocks — blacks, Hispanics, Asians — occupied different places on the hierarchy.

Soon there will be no dominant block, just complex networks of fluid streams — Vietnamese, Bengalis, Kazakhs. It's a bit like the end of the cold war when bipolar thinking had to give way to a radically multipolar mind-set.

Because high immigration is taking place at a time of unprecedentedly low ethnic hostility, we're seeing high rates of intermarriage. This creates large numbers of hybrid individuals, biracial or triracial people with names like Enrique Cohen-Chan. These people transcend existing categories and soften the social boundaries between groups.

This won't lead to a bland *mélange* America but probably a move to ethnic re-orthodoxy. As Alvaro Vargas Llosa points out in his book, "Global Crossings," the typical pattern is that the more third-generation people assimilate, the more they also value their ethnic roots. We could soon see people with completely unaccented English joining Chinese-American Federations and Honduran-American Support Networks.

The big divides could be along educational lines, not ethnic ones. Because educated people intermarry at higher rates, we could have an educated cosmopolitan class with low ethnic boundaries and a fair bit of integration in white-collar workplaces. Then, underneath, there could be a less-educated, more-balkanized layer, with high residential and professional segregation and more ethnic hostility.

We could also see more ethnic jostling between groups. The most interesting and problematic flashpoint may be between immigrants and African-Americans. We now have this bogus category, "minority," in which we lump the supposed rainbow coalition of immigrants and blacks. But, in fact, tensions between "minority" groups could soon be more plainly obvious than any solidarity.

Finally, it would make sense that the religion of diversity, which dominates the ethos of our schools, would give way to an ethos of civic cohesion. We won't have to celebrate diversity because it will be a fact. The problem will be finding the 21st-century thing that binds the fluid network of ethnic cells.

On the whole, this future is exciting. The challenge will be to create a global civilization that is, at the same time, distinctly American. Immigration reform or not, the nation of mutts is coming.

WE SEE ALL IMMIGRANTS AS LEGAL OR ILLEGAL. BIG MISTAKE.

BY ROBERTO SURO

A CENTURY AGO, the immigrants from across the Atlantic included settlers and sojourners. Along with the many folks looking to make a permanent home in the United States came those who had no intention to stay, and who would make some money and then go home. Between 1908 and 1915, about 7 million people arrived while about 2 million departed. About a quarter of all Italian immigrants, for example, eventually returned to Italy for good. They even had an affectionate nickname, “uccelli di passaggio,” birds of passage.

Today, we are much more rigid about immigrants. We divide newcomers into two categories: legal or illegal, good or bad. We hail them as Americans in the making, or brand them as aliens fit for deportation. That framework has contributed mightily to our broken immigration system and the long political paralysis over how to fix it. We don't need more categories, but we need to change the way we think about categories. We need to look beyond strict definitions of legal and illegal. To start, we can recognize the new birds of passage, those living and thriving in the gray areas. We might then begin to solve our immigration challenges.

Crop pickers, violinists, construction workers, entrepreneurs, engineers, home health-care aides and particle physicists are among today's birds of passage. They are energetic participants in a global economy driven by the flow of work, money and ideas. They prefer to come and go as opportunity calls them. They can manage to have a job in one place and a family in another.

With or without permission, they straddle laws, jurisdictions and identities with ease. We need them to imagine the United States as a place where they can be productive for a while without committing themselves to staying forever. We need them to feel that home can be both here and there and that they can belong to two nations honorably.

Imagine life with a radically different immigration policy: The Jamaican woman who came as a visitor and was looking after your aunt until she died could try living in Canada for a while. You could eventually ask her to come back to care for your mother. The Indian software developer could take some of his Silicon Valley earnings home to join friends in a little start-up, knowing that he could always work in California again. Or the Mexican laborer who busts his back on a Wisconsin dairy farm for wages that keep milk cheap would come and go as needed because he could decide which dairy to work for and a bi-national bank program was helping him save money to build a better life for his kids in Mexico.

Accommodating this new world of people in motion will require new attitudes on both sides of the immigration battle. Looking beyond the culture war logic of right or

wrong means opening up the middle ground and understanding that managing immigration today requires multiple paths and multiple outcomes, including some that are not easy to accomplish legally in the existing system.

A new system that encourages both sojourners and settlers would not only help ensure that our society receives the human resources it will need in the future, it also could have an added benefit: Changing the rigid framework might help us resolve the status of the estimated 11 million unauthorized migrants who are our shared legacy of policy failures.

Crop pickers, violinists, construction workers, entrepreneurs, engineers, home health-care aides and particle physicists are among today's birds of passage. They are energetic participants in a global economy driven by the flow of work, money and ideas. They prefer to come and go as opportunity calls them. They can manage to have a job in one place and a family in another.

Currently, we do not do gray zones well. Hundreds of thousands of people slosh around in indeterminate status because they're caught in bureaucratic limbo or because they have been granted temporary stays that are repeatedly extended. President Obama created a paler shade of gray this summer by exercising prosecutorial discretion not to deport some young people who were brought to this country illegally as children. But these are exceptions, not rules.

The basic mechanism for legal immigration today, apart from the special category of refugee, is the legal permanent resident visa, or green card. Most recipients are people sponsored by close relatives who live in the United States. As the name implies, this mechanism is designed for immigrants who are settling down. The visa can be revoked if the holder does not show “intent to remain” by not maintaining a U.S. address, going abroad to work full time or just traveling indefinitely. Legal residents are assumed to be on their way to becoming

Americans, physically, culturally and legally. After five years of living here, they become eligible for citizenship and a chance to gain voting rights and full access to the social safety net.

This is a fine way to deal with people who arrive with deep connections to the country and who resolve to stay. That can and should be most immigrants. But this mechanism has two problems: The nation is not prepared to offer citizenship to every migrant who is offered a job. And not everyone who comes here wants to stay forever.

It may have once made sense to think of immigrants as sodbusters who were coming to settle empty spaces. But that antique reasoning does not apply when the country is looking at a long, steep race to remain competitive in the world economy, particularly not when innovation and entrepreneurship are supposed to be our comparative advantage. To succeed, we need modern birds of passage.

The challenges differ depending on whether you are looking at the high end of the skills spectrum, the information workers or at low-skilled laborers.

A frequent proposal for highly skilled workers comes with the slogan, "Staple a green card to the diploma." That is supposed to ensure that a greater share of brainy international students remain in the United States after earning degrees in science and technology. But what if they are not ready for a long-term commitment? No one would suggest that investment capital or design processes need to reside permanently in one nation. Talent today yearns to be equally mobile. Rather than try to oblige smart young people from abroad to stay here, we should allow them to think of the United States as a place where they can always return, a place where they will spend part, not all, of their lives, one of several places where they can live and work and invest.

Temporary-worker programs are a conventional approach to meeting low-skilled labor needs without illegal immigration. That's what President George W. Bush proposed in 2004, saying the government should "match willing foreign workers with willing American employers." An immigrant comes to do a particular job for a limited period of time and then goes home. But such programs risk replacing one kind of rigidity with another. The relatively small programs currently in place don't manage the matchmaking very well. Competing domestic workers need to be protected, as do the migrant workers, and the process must be nimble enough to meet labor market demand. Nobody really has pulled that off, and there is no reason to believe it can be done on a grand scale. Rather than trying to link specific migrants to specific jobs, different types of temporary work visas could be pegged to industries, to places or to time periods. You could get an engineering visa, not only a visa to work at Intel.

Both short-term visas and permanent residence need to be part of the mix, but they are not the whole answer. Another valuable tool is the provisional visa, which

Australia uses as a kind of intermediary stage in which temporary immigrants spend several years before becoming eligible for permanent residency. The U.S. system practically obliges visitors to spend time here without authorization when they've married a citizen, gotten a job or done something else that qualifies them to stay legally.

We also could borrow from Europe and create long-term permission to reside for certain migrants that is contingent on simply being employed, not on having a specific job. And, legislation could loosen the definitions of permanent residency so that migrants could gain a lifetime right to live and work in the United States without having to be here (and pay taxes here) more or less continuously.

The idea that newcomers are either saints or sinners is not written indelibly either in our hearts or in our laws. As the size of the unauthorized population has grown over the past 20 years or so, the political response has dictated seeing immigration policy through the stark lens of law enforcement: Whom do we lock up, kick out, fence off? Prominent politicians of both parties, including both presidential candidates, have engaged in macho one-upmanship when it comes to immigration. So, President Obama broke records for deportations. Mitt Romney, meanwhile, vows to break records for border security.

Breaking out of the either/or mentality opens up many avenues for managing future immigration. It could also help break the stalemate over the current population of unauthorized migrants. No election result will produce a Congress that offers a path to citizenship for everybody, but there is no support for total deportation, either.

If we accept that there are spaces between legal and illegal, then options multiply.

Citizenship could be an eventual outcome for most, not all, people here illegally, but everyone would get some kind of papers, and we can engineer a way for people to work their way from one status to another. The newly arrived and least attached could be granted status for a limited time and receive help with returning to their home countries. Others might be offered life-long privileges to live and work here, but not citizenship. We'd give the fullest welcome to those with homes, children or long time jobs.

By insisting that immigrants are either Americans or aliens, we make it harder for some good folks to come and we oblige others to stay for the wrong reasons. Worse, we ensure that there will always be people living among us who are outside the law and that is not good for them or us.

Roberto Suro is a professor of public policy and director of the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute at the University of Southern California. He is a coauthor of "Writing Immigration: Scholars and Journalists in Dialogue."

FURTHER READING

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THEATER

Latté Da

ABOUT

Founded by Peter Rothstein and Denise Prosek, Theater Latté Da is now celebrating its 16th year of combining music and story to illuminate the breadth of the human condition. One of the most celebrated companies in the vibrant Twin Cities arts community, Theater Latté Da has garnered critical acclaim and earned a host of awards including four IVEY Awards, the Gabriel Award for Broadcast Excellence and regular "Best of the Year" nods from the media. Throughout its relatively brief history, the theater has received more than 70 honors and awards for its exceptional work. Theater Latté Da stands out as a bold innovator, investing in the art of musical theater and taking it to new heights for Twin Cities area audiences and beyond. The company remains committed to a rigorous experimentation and creates work that speaks to a contemporary audience, challenging us to think deeply about the world in which we live.

In 1998, Theater Latté Da began performing at the intimate 120-seat Loring Playhouse. By 2007, Theater Latté Da productions were playing to sold-out houses and they began searching for spaces with different performance configurations to meet the unique aesthetic demands of each production. Since 2007, Theater Latté Da has produced shows at the Guthrie Theater, Ordway Center, Pantages Theatre, Southern Theater, History Theatre, Fitzgerald Theater, the Rarig Center Stoll Thrust Theatre and The Lab Theater. Theater Latté Da is now emerging as a leader in the American Musical Theater, having produced more than 50 mainstage productions, including nine world premieres and nine area premieres, and dozens of productions celebrated for their bold re-imagination.

OUR MISSION

Theater Latté Da seeks to create new connections between story, music, artist, and audience by exploring and expanding the art of musical theater.

OUR VALUES

We believe in work that is bold, collaborative and ultimately transformative; we act with integrity and gratitude.

BOLD

We make bold choices in support of our mission and vision, both on and off stage. We value adventurous musical storytelling and are committed to experimenting with content and form in our quest to expand the art of musical theater.

COLLABORATIVE

We believe musical theater to be the most collaborative of art forms, incorporating music, drama, poetry, dance and design. We are inspired and strengthened through partnerships with artists, organizations and the broader community, and embody a collaborative spirit in all we do.

TRANSFORMATIVE

We believe in producing art that transforms artists and audiences. By illuminating the unseen, giving voice to the unheard, and empathizing with the unknown, we open eyes, ears and hearts.

INTEGRITY

We hold ourselves to the highest standards of artistic and fiscal integrity. We are committed to honesty, equality and transparency in all aspects of our administration and art.

GRATITUDE

We are grateful for our artists, audiences, donors, board and staff. We recognize that each individual plays an important role in our organization's success, and we actively seek out opportunities to acknowledge each person's contribution.