

Immigration

Path to Prosperity or Calamity?

It has often been said that the United States is a country of immigrants. Since the turn of the 20th century, hundreds of thousands of Irish, Italian, Slovenian and Hungarian immigrants, among others, have found their way to cities such as Cleveland, Ohio, to start new lives. America was seen as a melting pot of backgrounds, where economic opportunity and good fortune bubbled within reach of anyone willing to take a chance and pursue a better future for themselves and their families. Given this welcoming past, it is quite curious that, since 1955, “nine national surveys have shown an overwhelming majority of U.S. citizens opposed to increasing immigration levels” (Fallon, 1996, p. 141). There has been and continues to be a debate in this country about the impact of immigration on the U.S. economy and society. Significant amounts of research have provided both proponents and opponents of immigration with data to buttress their respective arguments. However, in the final analysis, it is difficult to dispute that immigration provides – or has the potential to provide – an economic benefit to our gross domestic product (GDP) and contributes to the long-term stability of our society.

As Northeast Ohio begins the second decade of the 21st century, local political, business and community leaders are engaged in a concerted effort to redesign and recast the future of the region economically and socially. Several initiatives are currently under way to improve educational attainment for students from preschool through college graduation, stimulate business and economic growth, and enhance the quality of life for people in the region. These efforts include early-childhood development programs, innovative and career-oriented public schools, and scholarship and mentorship programs, to reference a few. Although noble, these efforts have generated marginal results at best, particularly for marginalized immigrant and minority populations.

Nevertheless, Cuyahoga County, the largest county in Northeast Ohio, is continuing to search for practical solutions to challenges that undermine its ability to provide social stability and realize economic growth. These challenges are centered on one key issue: population decline.

Over the past decade, Cuyahoga County’s population has contracted by 8.5 percent, shrinking from more than 1.3 million in 2000 to slightly more than 1.2 million in 2009, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Of the total population in Cuyahoga County in 2000, 68 percent were Caucasian, 28 percent were African-American, 0.2 percent were American Indian, 1.8 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2 percent were Hispanic. According

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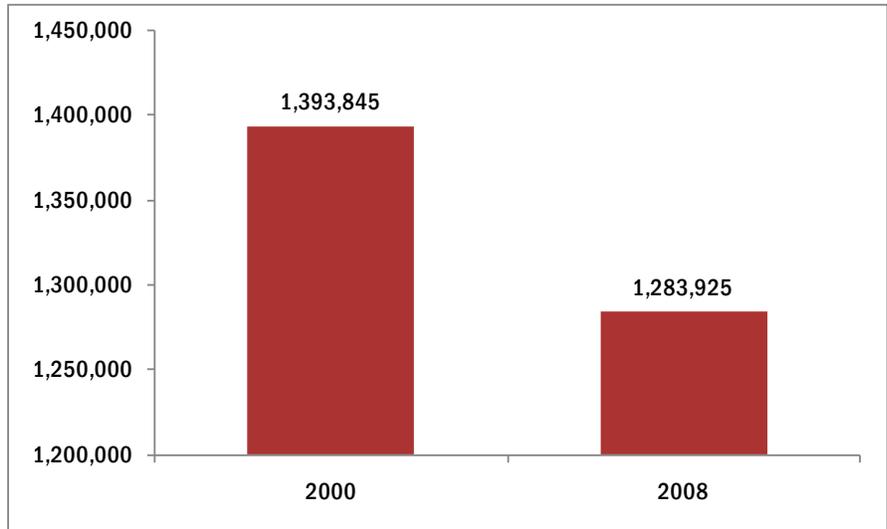
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to Census Bureau estimates, between 2000 and 2007, Cuyahoga County experienced declines among both its white (-10.6%) and black (-2.3%) populations.

However, a 2008 report prepared by Cleveland State University and the Center for Community Solutions noted that Cuyahoga County was experiencing a few pockets of growth – among Asian and Hispanic residents. Titled “Hispanic and Asians Increase in Numbers in Cuyahoga County: An Analysis of 2007 County Population Estimates,” the report attributed growth in the Asian population to migration into Cuyahoga County, whereas growth in the Hispanic population was found to be due to both migration patterns and birth rates that were higher than in the non-Hispanic population (Salling, 2008). The Salling report found that the Asian population in the county grew by 16.6 percent from 2000 to 2007, and the number of Hispanics increased by 11.2 percent. Partly due to growth among these two populations, Cuyahoga County accounted for 20.5 percent of all immigrants who, over the past few years, chose to call Ohio home.

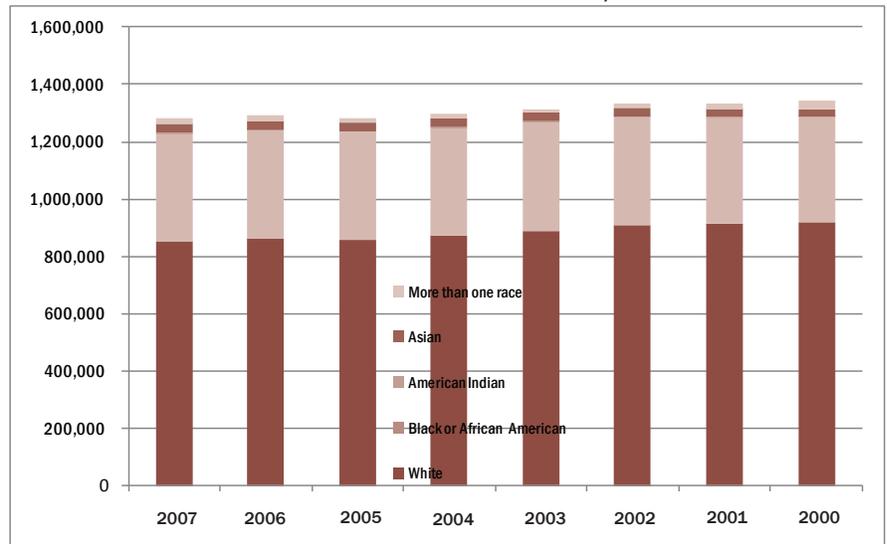
The overall population decline in Cuyahoga County corresponded with a general decline in the region’s socioeconomic well-being. The recession of 2001 had a lasting effect on Cuyahoga County’s economy and on area families. Statistics paint a bleak picture: From 2000 through 2005, the median household income in Cuyahoga County declined by 13.3 percent, according to the American Community Survey. Private, non-farm employment decreased by 10.8 percent for county residents from 2000 to 2007. Between 2006 and 2009, more than 45,000 home foreclosure cases were filed in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas

CUYAHOGA COUNTY POPULATION DECLINE, 2000-2008



Source: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Cuyahoga County Profile, September 2008

CUYAHOGA COUNTY POPULATION BY RACE, 2000-2007



Source: 2007 Cuyahoga County Population Estimates by Race and Hispanic Origin, Cleveland State University & Center for Community Solutions

PolicyBridge is a non-partisan public policy think tank founded in 2005 to monitor urban policy issues affecting the quality of life for minorities in Northeast Ohio and inform regional public policy debates by framing issues of relevance to the minority community. PolicyBridge would like to thank Fran Stewart for her help in preparing this report and all those who provided guidance. For more information, visit PolicyBridge’s website at www.policy-bridge.org.

Court. Poverty in Cuyahoga County increased from 13.1 percent in 2000 to 15.9 percent in 2008.

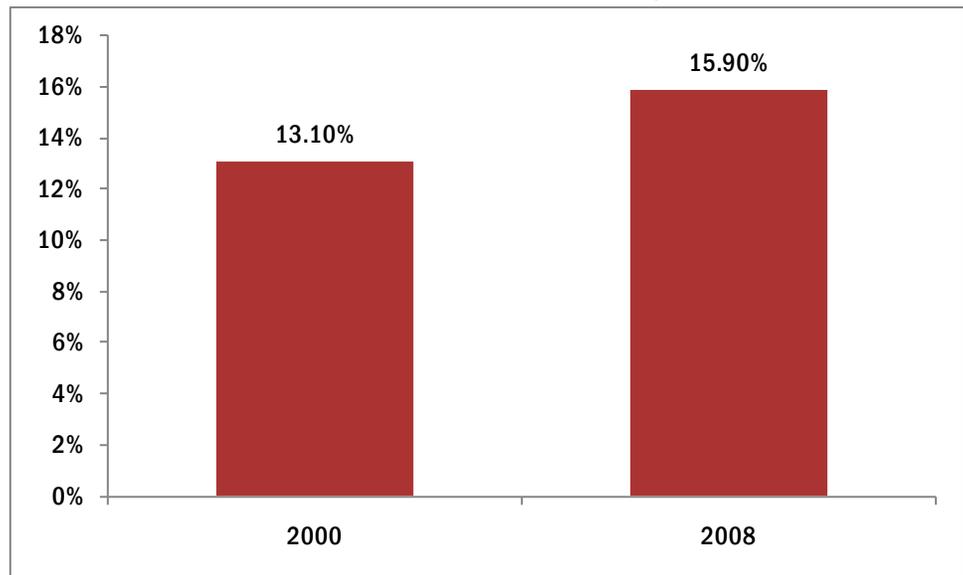
Population losses have serious consequences in terms of economic vibrancy and political clout. The declining numbers in Cuyahoga County ultimately will affect the number of congressional seats apportioned for Northeast Ohio. The nation’s southern and western regions have seen population increases over the past three decades, compared to significant losses in eastern and midwestern states. This shifting population pattern has shifted congressional seats – and thus, political power – from the East and Midwest to the South and West. It is estimated that Sun Belt states will gain 89 seats in the House of Representatives by the end of 2010 (Frey, 2010). It is also estimated that Ohio will experience a loss of seven congressional seats during the same period. There is clear evidence that federal money follows population. Some \$400 billion in federal goodies are handed out annually on the basis of census statistics (Frey, 2010). The practical long-term implications of this phenomenon are two-fold: 1) Eastern and midwestern states will have less political clout, and 2) they will receive fewer federal dollars.

Encouraging population growth in Ohio – and Cuyahoga County, specifically – through immigration must be an imperative to offset the outflow of residents to other parts of the country. Regardless of ethnic background, the emphasis must be on attracting new residents to the state and region.

Innovative and creative strategies are needed to address factors that have contributed to Cuyahoga County’s economic decline and to promote policies that enhance the economic well-being of all its residents. For one proven strategy, Cuyahoga County needs merely to look to its past: We can look back to 1874 when the numbers of Italians, Austrians, Hungarians and Russians eager to come to Cleveland were so great that police officers had to be pressed into service as immigration officers to process new arrivals. After World War II, Cleveland’s roaring industrial engine – and

the economic opportunities it drove – drew Ukrainians, Hungarians, Cubans and Mexicans to the region, as well as large numbers of black workers from the South and white workers from Appalachian regions of the nation. To offset today’s population declines, give new life to the vast numbers of foreclosed and vacant homes, and help to revive the region’s sputtering economic engine, Northeast Ohio must return to its more open-door past and aggressively position itself as a welcoming and promising destination for immigrants.

CUYAHOGA COUNTY POVERTY RATE INCREASE, 2000-2008



Source: Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Cuyahoga County Profile, September 2008, & Case Western Reserve University Center on Poverty and Community Development, NEOCANDO, 2000.

The Immigration Debate

Whenever proponents and opponents of immigration debate policy changes, the arguments invariably turn to the cost burden of illegal immigration on the U.S. economy. Opponents of policy changes that support liberal citizenship initiatives cite the cost of illegal immigration as a significant drain on the economy of the United States. A 2008 report from the Federation for American Immigration Reform, titled “The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United



States Taxpayers,” delved deeply into this issue. The report estimated the annual cost of illegal immigration at roughly \$113 billion. Of that \$113 billion, illegal immigration was found to cost state and local governments \$84.2 billion and the federal government \$29 billion. The report also calculated that tax collections from illegal workers, both in the mainstream and underground economies, did not offset expenditures made at the federal, state and local levels of government. Some key findings of the report are as follows:

- Illegal immigrants cost taxpayers an average of \$1,117 annually per U.S. household. However, the real cost per household varies considerably based on the size of the illegal population in each state and municipality.
- Educating the children of illegal immigrants constitutes the single-largest cost to taxpayers, at an annual price tag of nearly \$52 billion. Nearly all of those costs are absorbed by state and local governments.
- Taxes paid by illegal immigrants offset about one-third of the total cost of illegal immigration borne by the federal government. At the state and local levels, less than 5 percent, on average, of the public costs associated with illegal immigration is recouped through taxes paid by undocumented workers.
- Most illegal immigrants do not pay income taxes. Among those who do, much of the revenues collected are refunded when the undocumented workers file tax returns. Many also claim tax credits, which result in payments from the U.S. Treasury.

Based on these findings, the “FAIR” report recommends that the United States pursue strategies, including denial of job opportunities and deportation, that would discourage future illegal immigration and would diminish the current population of undocumented residents.

The Case for Encouraging Immigration

There are estimated to be more than 12 million undocumented foreign nationals living in the United States today. The primary reasons that foreign nationals come, both legally and illegally, to this country are employment and other economic opportunities. Many of the undocumented workers currently in the United States have resided here for many years, pay taxes, have children who are American citizens, and are well-integrated, contributing and otherwise law-abiding members of their communities (Som & Momblanco, 2006).

It is also important to note that U.S. employers who hire foreign workers, both legally and illegally, are also motivated by economic advantage. Many American companies welcome these workers with open arms.

In the four years after President George W. Bush took office in 2001, the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (which was the predecessor to the Department of Homeland Security) scaled back its enforcement efforts by 95 percent, according to a 2007 Washington Post article. By 2003, the number of employers prosecuted for hiring undocumented workers had dropped from 182 to 4. This dramatic reversal was attributed in no small way to lobbying efforts by pro-business and pro-immigrant organizations (Som & Momblanco, 2006). This makes it clear that many American businesses have viewed (and continue to view) immigration as a viable strategy for cutting costs and enhancing efficiencies.

However, national security concerns, high unemployment and shrinking government budgets have returned the immigration debate to the forefront of the nation’s consciousness. Over the past few years, there has been a significant focus on stepping up enforcement of existing immigration laws to better control the flow of undocumented foreign nationals into the country. There have also been calls for increased enforcement of existing laws against businesses that knowingly employ undocumented workers, as well as efforts in Congress to impose new restrictions on illegal immigrants (Som & Momblanco, 2006). Those who support a tougher stance on enforcement cite national security concerns, such as weak border protection, the drain on public benefits and resources, and employment competition for low-skilled jobs as reasons why more strict immigration controls are needed.

In the middle, between these overly lax and overly harsh views on immigration, another policy perspective has begun to emerge. A growing movement at the national and grassroots levels calls for a complete overhaul of U.S. immigration policies and laws. Such comprehensive immigration policy reform would include: greater border protection to support

national security concerns; a phased-in “amnesty” process to legalize undocumented workers; temporary visas and a multiyear path to permanent resident status for undocumented workers; and permanent visas for highly educated and skilled documented foreign nationals and workers.

This middle-ground position aims to develop pragmatic, realistic solutions instead of untenable, ideological posturing. Building a wall around the nation’s borders, seeking to fine or imprison employers who knowingly employ undocumented workers, and attempting to locate and deport more than 12 million people is highly impractical, if not impossible (Som & Momblanco, 2006). Conversely, wholesale amnesty for more than 12 million undocumented workers currently in the United States would create a situation that would be impossible for the Department of Homeland Security to process. The immediate and widespread amnesty process would also put a significant strain on the resources of federal, state and local governments. A wholesale rewarding of people who broke federal laws with a path to citizenship could have serious long-term ramifications, including encouraging an unmanageable flow of illegal immigrants seeking economic opportunity, family stability and social services.

The country, as well as Northeast Ohio, continues to be divided on the question of immigration and how best to reform existing policies and laws. The current environment in Washington D.C., which has been ever more partisan because of the intense focus on congressional midterm elections, does not seem to bode well for any action this year to reform existing immigration laws. Regardless of the inability of lawmakers to come together to address this issue, it is clear that the current immigration system is broken and in need of significant repair. Given the projected continued shift in demographics to an older population (both nationally and regionally) and the anticipated need for workers to enable the U.S. economy to remain competitive in an ever-evolving global market, immigration policies and legislation will certainly impact the nation’s – and region’s – social stability and economic competitiveness and growth.

The Bottom Line: Economic Impact

Although much of the immigration debate focuses on cost, conservative and progressive economists and policy analysts have lately been highlighting the dramatic benefits of immigrant labor to our nation’s economy. Bill Beach, director of the Center for Data Analysis at the conservative Heritage Foundation, had this to say in 2008: “If we want a stronger U.S. economy, we need to have the right flow of labor into the U.S., as 50 percent of the growth in the labor force in the last 20 years has come from immigrant sources” (University of Arizona, 2008).

One benefit of immigrant labor is its price-reducing effect. Labor-intensive services are less expensive because of the availability of cheaper immigrant workers. When low-skilled immigrants fill labor-market gaps, they are initiating economic activity that would not otherwise happen (Lofstrom, 2008). The resulting impact is a bigger U.S. economy. There are also indirect fiscal gains, such as increased tax revenues, as businesses grow and the wages of high-skilled workers rise (Gans, 2008).

Another benefit of immigrant labor is its value to the financial strength of the Social Security and Medicare systems. As Baby Boomers begin to retire from the workforce, the nation will need large numbers of new workers to offset these losses. However, without a continuous flow of immigrants into the country, the nation’s working-age population is not expected to keep pace with the need for new workers. Because immigration adds to the supply of younger workers who contribute payroll taxes that finance the Social Security and Medicare systems, foreign-born workers are critical to the long-term viability of these benefits programs. The typically higher fertility levels among immigrant families also will help provide the needed young workers of the future for an otherwise aging population. A report by the National Academy of Sciences found that a typical immigrant and his or her descendants will pay an estimated \$80,000 more in taxes than they will receive in combined local, state and federal benefits in their lifetimes (Annig & Wang, 2004). A 2006 report by the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office supported these findings: “[O]ver the past two decades, most efforts to estimate the fiscal impact of immigration in the U.S. have concluded that, in aggregate and over the long term, tax revenues of all types generated by immigrants—both legal and undocumented—exceed the costs of the services they use.” However, the federal government does not always share this tax revenue with states and local governments in proportion to the services immigrants use.



A 1998 study by the National Research Council found that most immigrants who arrive in the United States before age 25 become net taxpayers over their lifetime. The study also showed that, instead of being a drain on the U.S. economy, immigration actually provides a net fiscal gain of approximately \$10 billion annually.

Moreover, a 2009 report issued by the President's Council of Economic Advisers estimated the combined benefit to U.S. citizens from immigrants' participation in the U.S. economy at an astounding \$37 billion a year. The report further identified the contributions of documented and undocumented immigrant workers in strengthening and expanding the living standards of America's middle-income and low-income workers. These findings included:

- **Immigrants contribute as workers.** Americans rely on the goods and services immigrants produce.
 - One of every four doctors in the United States is foreign-born.
 - One in three computer software engineers in the United States is foreign-born.
 - More than 42 percent of medical scientists are foreign-born.
 - Immigrants accounted for 25 percent of U.S. patents in 2006.
 - Undocumented immigrants contribute significantly to the U.S. workforce, particularly in the areas of construction, agriculture, maintenance and hospitality. They pick and process our food, and build and clean our homes and offices.

- **Immigrants contribute as consumers.** Immigrant consumers create new jobs by increasing demand for products and services.
 - In the Chicago metropolitan area, undocumented immigrants spend \$2.89 billion on goods and services, creating an additional 31,908 jobs in the local economy.
 - Immigration is a significant contributor to the rapid growth of the Hispanic and Asian-American consumer market, which together accounted for an estimated \$1.46 trillion in buying power in 2008.
 - Immigrant consumers will be particularly critical in reviving the nation's devastated housing market. According to Harvard University's Joint Center on Housing Studies, immigration contributed to more than 40 percent of net household formations between 2000 and 2005.

- **Immigrants contribute as entrepreneurs.** Immigrant-owned businesses employ American workers and raise capital from abroad to invest in the U.S. economy.
 - More than one in 10 self-employed businesspeople in the United States is an immigrant.
 - Engineering and technology companies headed by immigrants created 450,000 U.S. jobs between 1995 and 2005.
 - Latin American immigrants in South Florida have helped to make the area a leader in attracting foreign direct investment, particularly international banking.

- **Immigrants contribute as taxpayers.** Policies that strengthen and expand the American middle-class are funded by taxes immigrants pay.
 - Immigrants pay sales, property and income taxes. The Social Security Administration estimates that three-quarters of undocumented immigrants pay payroll taxes.
 - The average immigrant pays \$1,800 more in taxes than he or she receives in public benefits, according to a study by the National Research Council and National Academy of Sciences.
 - Undocumented immigrants contribute \$7 billion a year in Social Security taxes even though they cannot claim benefits from this program. At current immigration levels, new immigrants entering the United States will provide an estimated net benefit of \$407 billion to the Social Security system over the next 50 years.

The Competitive Edge: Jobs and Growth

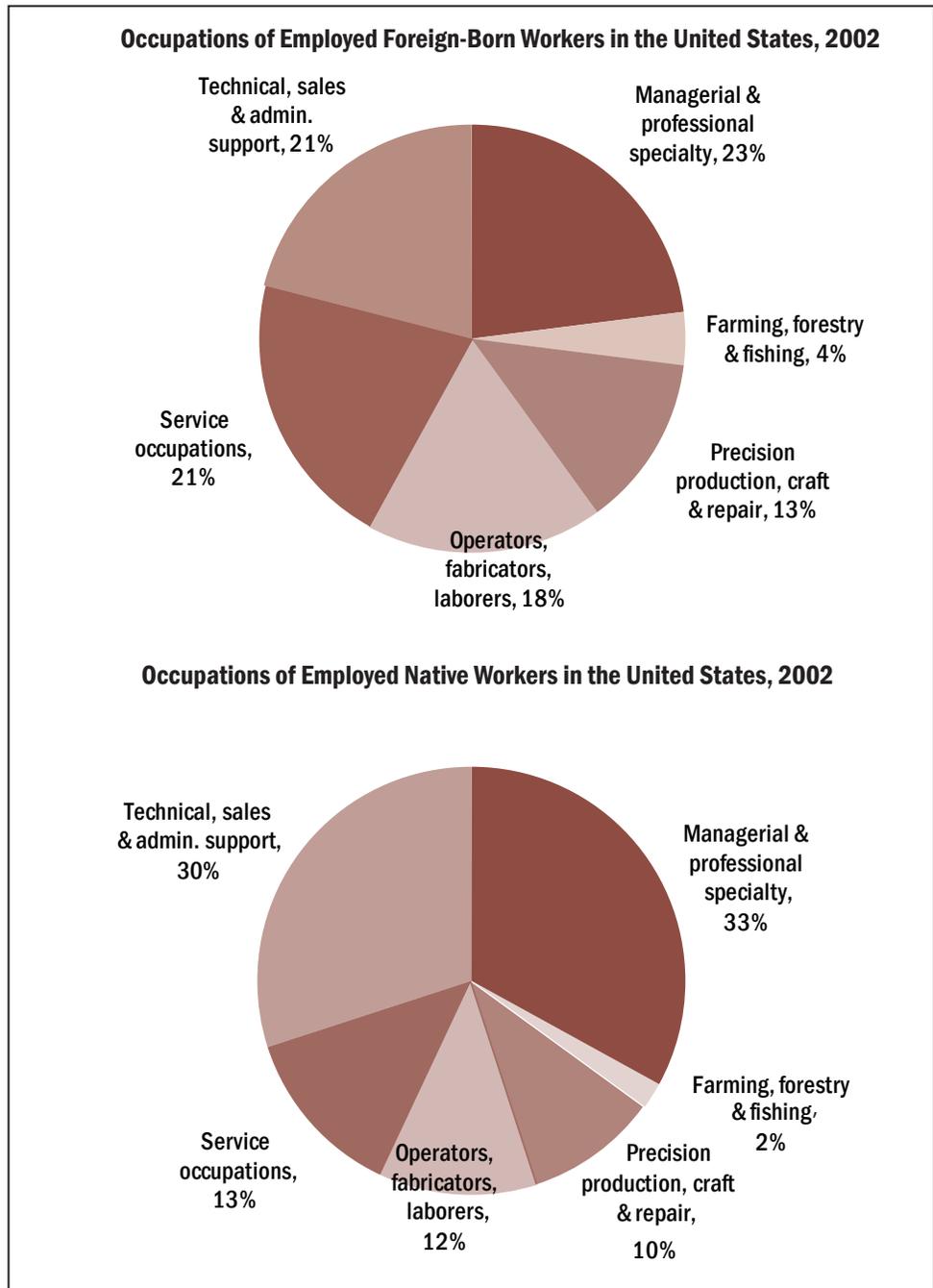
In addition to bottom-line economic benefit, there are other reasons that argue for a welcoming strategy toward immigrants: They improve our competitiveness, bring needed skills and help create jobs.

Immigrants keep the United States internationally competitive, and they give our businesses a more global perspective. Thomas Friedman, the three-time Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, recently wrote: “Our greatest asset is our ability to cream off not only the first round intellectual draft choices from around the world but the low-skilled, high-aspiring ones as well ... This influx of brainy and brawny immigrants is our oil well ... an endless source of renewable human energy and creativity.”

Lower-skilled immigrants complement the skills of the current labor force and are preventing negative growth rates in aging communities. High-skilled immigrants account for about half of the Ph.D. engineers, life scientists, physical scientists, and math and computer scientists in the United States. Of the first 100 Nobel Prizes awarded to American researchers, 44 went to immigrants or their children.

An example of the impact of immigrant workers

HOW IMMIGRANT AND NON-IMMIGRANT OCCUPATIONS DIFFER



Source: Migration Policy Institute, Current Population Survey.
 Note: Refers to employed workers age 16 and over.



on the U.S. economy is found in a study conducted by the National Dairy Industry, which confirmed that immigrants maintain an essential role in that sector of the economy. A loss of just 50 percent of immigrant dairy workers would lower dairy farm sales by \$6.7 billion and reduce total economic output by \$11.2 billion annually. Removing all immigrant dairy workers would cost nearly 133,000 U.S. jobs, affecting both immigrant and U.S.-born workers.

A 2006 report from the Immigration Policy Center reflects the consensus of economists on the effects of immigrant labor on wages. The research concludes that immigration affects wages of U.S.-born workers differently, depending on education level. The study showed that immigration had small positive effects on individuals with high school diplomas (85% of U.S. adults over age 25) and small negative effects on individuals who did not graduate from high school (15% of U.S. adults over age 25). Effects in both directions are very small, but, on average, immigration raises U.S.-born workers' wages slightly.

Economists have estimated that lower-skilled immigrants who become legal residents experience increases in their real wages by about \$4,405 annually. This increase in pay, in turn, affects the wages of U.S.-born workers by raising the "wage floor."

Concern for individuals who experience wage depression is valid, as these individuals are already facing many systematic challenges. In the African-American community, there are concerns about the economic impact of immigration. With unemployment in the African-American community at higher rates than those for other ethnic and racial groups, immigrant workers are viewed as additional competitors for scarce employment opportunities, especially in areas with high numbers of lower-skilled workers. However, immigrants must not be used as a scapegoat for larger economic disparities in the United States. Many of the nation's most respected economists have argued that the way to address the needs of the working poor is not to penalize immigrants, but to provide the poor from all ethnic backgrounds with educational opportunities that lead to skills with higher wages. Arguably, policies that support legalization for undocumented workers would help "level the playing field," ensuring that all workers enjoy the same rights and opportunities and preventing exploitation of immigrant labor, which harms low-wage U.S.-born workers, as well.

Immigrants do not take jobs away from U.S. workers. The U.S. economy is incredibly dynamic, with millions of jobs continuously being created, dissolved, moved and modified. Immigrants make unique contributions to the U.S. economy by creating new jobs through entrepreneurship, filling jobs for which there are no qualified U.S. workers, and taking positions that would otherwise be shipped overseas or replaced through technology. Immigrants generally perform different tasks and fill different roles in the workplace. Thus, they rarely compete with U.S.-born workers for jobs (Advocates for Human Rights, 2006).

A 2002 survey by the Migration Policy Institute showed that, of the 18.9 million foreign-born workers in the United States, 4.4 million (23%) were in managerial and professional occupations; 3.9 million (21%) were in technical, sales and administrative support occupations; 4 million (21%) were in service occupations; 3.5 million (18%) worked as operators, fabricators and laborers; and 0.7 million (4%) worked in farming, forestry and fishing occupations.

In contrast, U.S.-born workers were concentrated in management and clerical support. Of the 116.2 million U.S.-born workers, 38 million (33%) were in managerial and professional occupations, while 34.4 million (30%) were in technical, sales, and administrative support occupations. Though there is some overlap between the employment sectors that are highly populated by immigrant workers and those with high levels of U.S.-born workers, there is ample evidence that immigrant workers target employment sectors that are typically not pursued by U.S.-born workers.

The Local Picture: Refueling a Sputtering Economic Engine

An article discussing immigrants' impact on Ohio's economy quoted Richard Herman, a Cleveland author and activist: "People who say that immigrants are a drain on the economy or the old boogeyman, 'they are taking our jobs,' are missing the point." Herman pointed to recent studies that demonstrate a strong and consistent association between cities with thriving immigrant populations and cities that are thriving economically (Malaska, 2010).

Ohio's population growth over the past 10 years has been largely stagnant. Experiencing only 1 percent growth in population for the past decade, the state fell far short of the national average of 7 percent.

Since 2000, immigrants have accounted for 72 percent of Ohio's population growth (Malaska, 2010). In particular,

ethnic groups from Africa, Asia, Latin America and India account for 400,000 new Ohioans, which, according to recent Census Bureau statistics, was nearly 4 percent of Ohio's total population. That growth is not only important to the state, but to Northeast Ohio, as well.

Over the past few years, Northeast Ohio in general and Cuyahoga County in particular have experienced a number of challenges that have further weakened an economy that never fully recovered from the recession of 2001. Employment opportunities have decreased. Median household incomes have declined. Poverty has risen. And home foreclosures have skyrocketed. These challenges have served to erode family and social structures, as well as the local housing market.

These socioeconomic declines have been accompanied – or exacerbated – by a pronounced population decline in Cleveland and surrounding communities of Northeast Ohio. This loss of population has serious long-term economic and political implications. Fewer residents will lead to fewer federal dollars in the future. Fewer voters will lead to less elective representation in Congress. A decrease in Northeast Ohio's share of federal dollars will certainly weigh heavily on a local economy that is struggling to grow and increase the number of employment opportunities for its residents. Loss of congressional representation will not only impact the level of federal funding received, but also reduce the clout of the region's elected officials in influencing their colleagues and advocating for policies to help Northeast Ohio grow.

There are numerous initiatives under way in Northeast Ohio and Cuyahoga County that attempt to remedy these challenges. Without these initiatives, our region and county economies would be much worse. Still, with all that is being done, there is a need for more innovative and creative strategies to reverse the decline in our economy and enhance the region's viability for all residents.

The American Community Survey estimated the total number of Cuyahoga County Latin American immigrants between 2006 and 2008 to be 8,640. During the same period, African immigrants totaled 3,370, for a combined total of 12,010 immigrants during the three-year period. The National Research Council and National Academy of Science estimate that the average immigrant pays \$1,800 more in taxes than he or she receives in public benefits. Therefore, if we assume these 12,010 immigrants contribute the average in taxes, the net financial benefit to Cuyahoga County is as much as \$21.6 million.

Policies and activities targeted toward aggressively recruiting and retaining foreign-born skilled and low-skilled workers may offer the antidote to decline that the region needs. This area must begin to formally and informally institutionalize strategies, tactics and processes that promote and support immigration into Cuyahoga County.

As detailed earlier, the potential economic and social benefits resulting from the contributions of immigrants are significant. Research suggests that immigrants contribute between \$10 billion and \$37 billion per year to the national economy. Though there is still some disagreement about the costs of immigration at the state and local levels, it is difficult to dispute that those communities that encourage immigration and welcome immigrants have stronger economic growth and social stability. There is warranted concern about adding competition from low-skill, low-pay immigrant labor to the already vulnerable and highly stressed jobs environment for low-skill U.S.-born workers, but even here the potential benefits of increased demand for products and services may outweigh the potential costs. Research suggests that the resulting impact on the economy of immigration leads to modest increases in wages for low-skilled, as well as more highly-skilled, workers.

Several factors related to comprehensive immigration reform cause U.S.-born citizens concern. Economic concerns have been a source of inquiry by scholars and researchers for many years. There are also social implications (language barriers and educational disparities) that are perceived by many to undermine American society. These are real and legitimate challenges that must be addressed with sensitivity and compassion by any initiative to recruit and retain foreign-born people.

However, as the research suggests, aggressive and welcoming immigration strategies may provide the fuel needed to kick-start Northeast Ohio's economic engine into high gear. An obvious first step is simply to encourage and support immigration successes that are already occurring in the region. Since 2000, two demographic groups in Cuyahoga County – Asians and Hispanics – have experienced more than a 10 percent increase in population. Developing strategies that welcome and target these growing groups would be one way to increase the number of highly skilled and lower-skilled immigrants living in and contributing to Northeast Ohio.



In many ways, an aggressive, welcoming view of immigration would simply be a return to Cuyahoga County's industrial development – when people from a wide variety of backgrounds came to the region for economic opportunity. The widespread prosperity this county and region experienced in the early 20th century was in large part due to immigrants who brought their skills, hopes and resources to the area. Every community within Cuyahoga County continues to be shaped by its ethnic heritage. Some of the most prominent citizens in our communities today were at one time immigrants to the region. Their talent, time and treasure made this a community where people of different races and ethnic backgrounds wanted to live. We must make this community that community again.

Recommendations

- Advocate at the federal level for the creation and passage of Comprehensive Immigration Reform legislation. This reform legislation should include, but not be limited to, greater border protection to support national security concerns; a phased-in “amnesty” process to legalize undocumented workers in a reasonable timeframe that would not overburden governmental systems that are already stretched beyond their capacity; temporary visas and a multiyear path to permanent resident status for undocumented workers; and permanent visas for highly educated and highly skilled documented foreign-born workers.
- Advocate with local elected officials in Congress for an equitable distribution process for sharing revenues the federal government receives from both legal and undocumented immigrants with state and local governments. This would significantly relieve state and local governments of the financial burden they carry and better balance the costs associated with providing services to legal and undocumented immigrants.
- Increase efforts to aggressively recruit and retain highly skilled and less-skilled foreign-born workers, factoring in the current and projected labor market needs of the county and region. This will help fuel the region's economic engine, as well as help to stave off the projected loss of elected representation in Congress.
- Support and participate in the creation of the proposed Cleveland “Welcome Center.” The Welcome Center represents a visible sign to immigrants and U.S.-born citizens that this community wants people from other countries and ethnic backgrounds to relocate here. The Welcome Center will telegraph racial and ethnic inclusion and must take care to be culturally sensitive to the needs of immigrants and native-born residents alike.
- Develop racial and ethnic inclusion policies and strategies to broaden participation in the labor force for immigrants, minorities and other residents in Cuyahoga County. These policies and strategies, along with the proposed Welcome Center, will help to create an environment for the full participation of all residents in the county's economic growth and social stability.
- Increase the number of foreign-born students annually attending local and regional institutions of higher education. Attracting more foreign-born students to area colleges and universities will expose them to the local community and help attract them as key components of a skilled labor pool eager to fill the employment opportunities of the future.
- Develop inter-ethnic and inter-racial groups to identify and remove the barriers immigrants will encounter. These groups will need to meet regularly and provide ongoing input to local elected officials, educators and business leaders to ensure that racial, ethnic and cultural sensitivity remains a consistent part of the interaction.



- Track on an annual basis the economic impact of foreign-born workers on the regional economy. Submit reports to local economists, elected officials and media sources for review and analysis.

- Connect strategies for integrating foreign-born workers and addressing racial and inclusion policies to a broader framework inclusive of African-American citizens. Highlight the shared opportunities and challenges for these minority groups and ensure that policy recommendations appropriately address their unique needs. Host annual forums to build community awareness and engage the public in dialogue. Set benchmarks and evaluate progress.

- Develop a complementary series of migration strategies to attract middle-income and professional African-Americans to Northeast Ohio. Migration strategies targeting middle-income and professional African-Americans to this region would increase population, promote family and neighborhood stability, provide intellectual capital to the region and add revenue to our shrinking tax base.



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