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Immigration and the Foreign Born

SIMON KUZNETS

and

ERNEST RUBIN

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(Resolution adopted October 25, 1926 and revised February 6, 1933 and February 24, 1941)
Preface

This paper originated as part of a study of the international economic relations of the United States begun in the later 1940's. It seemed important to examine not only the flows of goods and of capital, but also that of people. Indeed, immigration and emigration may well be the international flows that had the most profound impact upon the growth, and, for a long time, also upon the short-term movements of this country's economy.

Before this flow of people across the boundaries could be analyzed, the checking and reconciliation of immigration and emigration data with the census data on resident foreign born had to be carried through. This difficult task was undertaken by Ernest Rubin. It was brought to completion along the lines set forth in detail in Part III and the appendixes, for the preparation of which Dr. Rubin is largely responsible. It was possible and seemed useful to subject the tested series to an analytical examination that would reveal the broad findings—at least as clues for further exploration. This was done in Part II, for which Simon Kuznets is responsible.

Although the substantive findings are preliminary and cannot be treated at adequate length, a brief summary may be useful to guide the reader and to indicate the broad questions suggested by the record. We are indebted to George Soule for preparing a draft of the summary that constitutes Part I of the paper.

The advice of Professor Dorothy S. Thomas of the University of Pennsylvania, who reviewed the paper, led to the checking and revision of the mortality calculations for 1870–1900. We are indebted to Professor Thomas for her advice; to Miss Lillian Epstein and Miss Elizabeth Jenks for assistance in the analysis in Part II and in the calculation of the annual series of foreign born; and to
Moses Abramovitz, Daniel Creamer, Solomon Fabricant, Clarence D. Long, and Geoffrey H. Moore for their careful reading and comments on the manuscript.

The paper reveals how deeply wars and restrictive legislation have cut into the pattern of population growth. Indeed, the change in the whole climate of international relations has been so drastic that it is hard to imagine a return to the unprecedentedly wide and free movement of people in the world—a movement which enabled millions in their prime working years to migrate and thus take advantage of better economic opportunities and contribute markedly to the growth of their country of destination.

Although this movement, like many other historical processes, is unlikely to recur in the same form, we can learn much by examining and analyzing it. Partly because the supply of data is inadequate and partly because the processes touched so deeply upon the life of the country, dispassionate and methodical study has been rather rare, and some of the most conspicuous aspects of the processes still await analysis. An understanding of these past processes and of the implications of the decisions made about them is of great *practical* importance, today perhaps more than ever. Decisions about immigration, like those about the public domain, internal improvements, industrial organization, and protection, were among the basic secular decisions—basic in that they were far-reaching, and secular in that they were important for the long-term development of the economy. Although such decisions cannot be reversed easily, and often cannot be reversed at all, retrospective understanding of their consequences may forestall haste in future decisions and stimulate foresight where it is obscured by overconcern with the apparently pressing problems of the day.

These comments are made because the obvious relation between proper analysis of the past, conforming to canons of objectivity and respect for fact, and intelligent social decisions is so often overlooked. Even a hasty survey of the data in this field and a glance at the implications of some of the findings reveal the vast need for a methodical quantitative analysis of this aspect of the country's past growth. Little analysis of this type, as far as we know, is to be
found in the literature. To such an analysis, the often tedious and sometimes statistically daring type of work undertaken here is a prerequisite.

Simon Kuznets
Ernest Rubin
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preface</strong></td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I. Summary</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Basic Trends</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Contribution to Population Increase</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Long Swings</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration and Business Cycles</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration and Variations in Population Growth</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Foreign Born in the Labor Force</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II. The Comparison and Some General Implications of Its Results</strong></td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Comparison</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Arrivals and Departures</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. The Underlying Trends</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The Long Swings</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Response to Business Cycles</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Intradecade Flows</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Contribution to Increase of Population and Labor Force</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part III. Statistical Methods and Problems</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. General Outline of Method</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Census Data on Foreign Born Population</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Race</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Treatment of Transients</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Age and Sex</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Undercounts and Errors</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Migration Data
   a. General Organization and Character 55
   b. Estimating Departures of Aliens, 1870–1907 57
   c. Scope of Data: Reporting Area 57
   d. Minor Questions of Scope 60
   e. Distribution by Sex 61
   f. Age Classes 62
   g. Biases in the Migration Data 63
4. Mortality Data and Methods 64
   a. Data for 1900–1940 64
   b. Estimation of Mortality for 1870–1900 65
   c. Calculating the Survival Ratios 68
   d. Effects of Possible Errors in Mortality Data 71
5. Problems of Reconciliation 72

APPENDIX A. NOTES ON EARLIER RESEARCH FOR DECADES
   SINCE 1870 87
   1. Introduction 87
   2. The Estimates by Mayo-Smith 88
   3. The Estimates by Rossiter 91
   4. The Estimates by Wilcox 93
   5. A Brief Comparison 94

APPENDIX B. REFERENCE TABLES 95

TABLE
   1. Illustrative Calculation of Survival and Migration
      for a Single Census Period, 1900–1910 11
   2. Comparison of Census Enumerations and Migration-Survival
      Estimates of Foreign Born White Population, 1880–1940 14
   3. Average Volume per Decade of Arrivals, Departures,
      and Net Balances, Trough to Trough and
      Peak to Peak Long Swings, All Alien Passengers,
      1823–1932, and Immigrants, 1910–1932 22–24
x
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5. Indexes of Conformity to Business Cycles, Arrivals, Departures, and Net Balance, 1871–1939</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Migration and Deaths by Decades, Total Alien Migration, 1870–1920, and Immigrants and Emigrants, 1920–1940</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Estimated Minimum Proportion of Foreign Born Population Who Were in the Country 10 Years or Less, 1880–1940</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B–1. Annual Arrivals and Departures, All Alien Passengers, 1870–1945, and Immigrants and Emigrants, 1908–1945</td>
<td>95–96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B–4. Foreign Born White Population of the United States, Male and Female, Estimated for Census Dates, 1880–1900</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

xi
TABLE

B—7. Calculation of Estimates of Foreign Born White Males, July 1, 1900–1910 104

CHART

   Panel B: Changes between Census Enumeration at Beginning of Census Period and Census Enumeration and Migration-Survival Estimates at End of Census Period, 1870–1940 17
2. Arrivals, Departures, and Net Balance of Alien Passengers, Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 1870–1945 20
3. Average Volume per Year of Arrivals, Departures, and Net Balance during Cycles (Trough to Trough and Peak to Peak) Established in Net Balance, All Alien Passengers, 1871–1942, and Immigrants, 1908–1943 29
4. Net Arrivals, Gross National Product per Worker, and Residential Construction, Total Value in 1929 Prices and Index of Number of Units Started, 1869–1945 (1929 = 100) 31