

## PASSAGE II

**SOCIAL SCIENCE:** From Henry Brun, *America Today*, © 1996 by Amsco School Publications, Inc.

## THE MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

Across the United States, the teaching of multiculturalism became an educational priority in the 1990's. Schools were encouraged to teach appreciation for the diversity of American society and to foster respect for the beliefs and practices of all cultures. Students were taught to understand and respect both the similarities and differences among the ethnicities, cultures, and religions in their communities. Instruction in multiculturalism included the study of immigration as a building block of American society. The diversity arising from the growth of America as a "nation of immigrants" has been presented as one of the strengths of American society.

However, in a mid-1993 poll conducted by *Newsweek* magazine, 60 percent of those interviewed stated their belief that "immigration was bad for the country." They feared that the nation was losing control of its borders, and they were worried about the long-term prospects for the economy. They were uncomfortable with the fact that so many of the "New Immigrants" have come from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. Some 59 percent stated that immigration had been good for the country in the past. But 66 percent indicated that they did not believe the United States was still a melting pot because newer immigrants maintained their national identities more strongly.

These attitudes have influenced political actions. In August, 1993, Clinton announced his determination to crack down on illegal immigration. The President introduced to Congress a \$172.5 million proposal to strengthen the U.S. Border Patrol and reduce visa fraud and false asylum claims.

In 1986, Congress attempted to stop illegal immigration with the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The IRCA offered amnesty and eventual citizenship to an estimated 3.7 million illegal aliens. It also aimed to shut down the U.S. job market for these people by making it illegal for employers to hire aliens who lacked immigration documents. The IRCA failed. Despite the amnesty, the estimated number of illegal aliens rose to between 2 to 4 million by 1993.

Between 1971 and 1990, 10.5 million legal immigrants were admitted to the United States. Ninety per-

cent were from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. Many of the new immigrants came as refugees. In addition, an estimated 500,000 illegal aliens entered each year.

Since 1970, the United States has accepted 1.5 million Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, Cubans, Russians, and other oppressed nationalities. Most immigrants, however, migrated to the United States seeking greater economic opportunity and a better life. Many Chinese, for example, came from those sections of China where capitalism has begun to develop. Having acquired some business experience, they wished to improve their opportunities by settling in the United States. For similar reasons, immigrants have come from Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, the Philippines, and elsewhere. Rising birth rates and exposure to American TV telecasts have also stimulated immigration. Although many Americans have regarded the new immigrants as poor, uneducated, and unskilled, the majority have proven to be enterprising. Many have begun family businesses. Others have taken jobs that few Americans want.

Some economists have claimed that more immigration will lead to more economic growth and more wealth—and progress for all Americans. However, immigration has led to increased social friction. In some cities, such as Los Angeles, immigrants have flooded the labor market and set off bitter competition for jobs with American citizens.

Rising population levels have also been a major concern. In the early 1990's, immigration produced one-third of U.S. population growth. Projections for the future range from a population of about 383 million in 2050 to 436 million in the year 2090. Some environmentalists have urged an immediate halt to immigration to preserve the ecosystem and the quality of life.

Despite the problems caused by immigration, America will continue to be "a nation of immigrants." As a result, our society will become more multicultural as we approach the 21st century. For some Americans, this will result in increased social stress and economic competition. For others, it will be a continuing source of progress and cultural enrichment.

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