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# IMMIGRANT AND NATIVE MIGRANT MAGNETS

▶ *Hundreds of thousands of people move to the U.S. each year seeking a better life. Millions of Americans move within the U.S. each year for the same reason. But the two groups are looking in increasingly different directions, creating two distinct groups of places that act as immigrant and domestic-migrant magnets.*

**P**eople usually move for positive reasons. They are looking for a new or better job, improved quality of life, lower cost of living, greater security, and so on. People who move to the U.S. from other countries tend to settle in a few particular places, at least at first. For them, getting to the U.S. is an accomplishment in itself. For those who are already here, motives for moves are often similar, and often economic in nature. But the destinations they choose are vastly different.

The surging immigration of the 1990s continues to cluster into just a handful of large, mostly coastal metro areas. In contrast, domestic migrants are attracted to growth poles in economically booming metros and nonmetro counties east of the California immigrant ports and to dynamic metros in the Southeast and Texas and interior parts of the North. They prefer smaller metros and nonmetropolitan areas.

First observed in the 1980s,\* the destinations of these two mover groups are even more distinct in the 1990s, leading to the designation of "immigrant magnets" versus "native magnets." Since immigrants will continue to fuel a significant portion of the nation's total population growth and U.S. residents will continue to be mobile, America's social

\* See "The New White Flight," American Demographics, April 1994.

geography will probably continue to shift. As a result, the needs and wants of consumers and employees may become increasingly distinct and linked to the places where people live and work.

## COMING TO AMERICA

It is not surprising that foreign immigrants still gravitate toward traditional "port of entry" metropolitan areas. At the turn of the 20th century, largely European-origin immigrants clustered in New York and Chicago. When immigrant origins shifted primarily to Latin America and Asia in the second half of the century, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Miami became dominant new immigrant destinations.

**BY WILLIAM H. FREY**

In the early 1990s, the five areas mentioned above, along with Washington, D.C., Houston, San Diego, Boston, and Dallas, absorbed two-thirds of the nation's immigrant growth. These ten metros were home to 27 percent of the total population in 1995, but more than 60 percent of all foreign-born residents.

Why do immigrants continue to concentrate in these places? For the same reasons that earlier waves of European immigrants did: immigration occurs in "chains" that link family members and friends to common destinations. This is especially the case for less-skilled immigrants who rely on kinship ties and informal networks for employment

## MIGRANT MAGNETS

(U.S. metropolitan areas with significant net immigration or domestic migration, 1990-95)

immigrant magnets	immigration	net domestic migration
<b>Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County, CA CMSA</b> .....	<b>792,712</b>	<b>-1,095,455</b>
<b>New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA CMSA</b> .....	<b>705,939</b>	<b>-1,113,924</b>
<b>San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose, CA CMSA</b> .....	<b>262,519</b>	<b>-260,961</b>
<b>Chicago-Gary-Kenosha, IL-IN-WI CMSA</b> .....	<b>216,309</b>	<b>-279,763</b>
<b>Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL CMSA</b> .....	<b>157,059</b>	<b>-4,631</b>
<b>Washington-Baltimore, DC-MD-VA-WV CMSA</b> .....	<b>125,479</b>	<b>-91,643</b>
<b>Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, TX CMSA</b> .....	<b>110,323</b>	<b>45,017</b>
<b>San Diego, CA MSA</b> .....	<b>85,025</b>	<b>-140,591</b>
<b>Boston-Worcester-Lawrence-Lowell-Brockton, MA-NH NECMA</b> .....	<b>74,316</b>	<b>-165,822</b>
<b>Dallas-Fort Worth, TX CMSA</b> .....	<b>72,246</b>	<b>75,978</b>
<b>Atlanta, GA MSA</b> .....	<b>32,391</b>	<b>259,094</b>
<b>Las Vegas, NV-AZ MSA</b> .....	<b>12,501</b>	<b>211,536</b>
<b>Phoenix-Mesa, AZ MSA</b> .....	<b>27,516</b>	<b>165,760</b>
<b>Portland-Vancouver, OR-WA CMSA</b> .....	<b>22,618</b>	<b>128,878</b>
<b>Denver-Boulder-Greeley, CO CMSA</b> .....	<b>22,360</b>	<b>118,696</b>
<b>Seattle-Tacoma-Bremerton, WA CMSA</b> .....	<b>42,617</b>	<b>89,347</b>
<b>Austin-San Marcos, TX MSA</b> .....	<b>10,253</b>	<b>86,696</b>
<b>Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill, NC MSA</b> .....	<b>6,175</b>	<b>86,016</b>
<b>Orlando, FL MSA</b> .....	<b>16,675</b>	<b>80,685</b>
<b>Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL MSA</b> ..	<b>18,297</b>	<b>77,650</b>
<b>Dallas-Fort Worth, TX CMSA</b> .....	<b>72,246</b>	<b>75,978</b>
<b>West Palm Beach-Boca Raton, FL MSA</b> .....	<b>18,899</b>	<b>74,903</b>
<b>Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA</b> ...	<b>6,214</b>	<b>69,198</b>
<b>Nashville, TN MSA</b> .....	<b>5,096</b>	<b>63,592</b>

\*Metropolitan area definitions are consistent with Office of Management and Budget definitions of CMSAs, MSAs, and NECMA counterparts as of June 30, 1995.

Source: Author's analysis of Census Bureau data

### Most metros with the greatest pull for immigrants lose more domestic migrants than they gain.

opportunities. For the Latinos and Asians who comprise the overwhelming majority of today's immigrants, the places where they first touch American soil contain self-sustaining ethnic communities that provide both social and economic support.

It used to be the case that the big cities where immigrants congregated were also the hot spots for native migrants. Cities like New York were where all the high-paying jobs and big companies were concentrated. But today's entry ports are not also magnets for domestic

migrants. Collectively gaining 2.6 million immigrants in the first half of the 1990s, these ten metros collectively lost 3 million residents via domestic net outmigration with other parts of the U.S. Clearly, domestic migrants are following different paths than immigrants. In some cases, immigrants may actually be "pushing" them along their way.

### STILL GOING WEST, AND SOUTH

The effect of technological progress on people's geographic distribution is nothing new. When railways went through the American West in the late 19th century, they made the Pony Express obsolete but created boomtowns along rail routes. When the interstate highway system went through, some train towns became ghost towns. At the same time, improved road systems and increased access to air travel made it easier to move people and businesses outside major cities. Now, with new telecommunications technology, people who do certain kinds of work can move to more and different kinds of places. The result has been a geographic scattering of magnets for domestic migrants.

Just as "immigrant magnet" metros are not popular destinations for domestic migrants, the reverse is also true for the 14 "native magnets." These areas experienced the nation's greatest gains from net domestic migration over the 1990-95 period. Yet for most, the additional contribution of immigration has been minimal. The exception is Dallas, which also qualifies as a high-immigration metro, though attracting the fewest immigrants of the top ten. Its renewed 1990s job growth is attracting back homegrown migrants as well.

Domestic migrants are less dependent on family or kinship ties for social and economic networking. Their geographic relocation decisions are more "economically rational," or at least more specific. They are lured by better employment opportunities, and in many cases, environmental or other amenities. It is not necessarily the case that immigrant-magnet areas cannot fulfill domestic migrant desires. But the geography of recent employment growth and high-amenity "hot spots" has drifted away from the big cities where immigrants still concentrate.

Metro areas in western states, particularly in the rebounding Rocky Mountain region, as well as Texas, have benefited from gains in computer software and hardware development. They also boast climates conducive to a variety of recreational activities, and relatively low costs of living. These considerations have attracted migrants to places like Las Vegas, Phoenix, Portland, Denver, Seattle, and Austin. Smaller-sized western areas with high rates of domestic-migration growth include Boise City, Idaho; Bellingham, Washington; and Fort Collins-Loveland and Grand Junction in Colorado.

Central southeastern areas have continued a growth trajectory that began in the 1980s. Atlanta, the economic capital of this region, leads all U.S. metros in its attraction of domestic migrants. Southeastern metros benefit from the same mix of new industries and amenities that attract migrants to western growth centers. Coupled with an entrepreneurial

spirit, low business costs, and tie-ins to university-driven high-tech development (as in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina), this has created growth in metros like Raleigh-Durham-Chapel Hill and Charlotte-Gastonia-Rockhill in the Carolinas; Orlando, Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, and West Palm Beach-Boca Raton in Florida; and Nashville. Moreover, the mild climate, lower living costs, and slower pace of life in many of these areas serves to lure a growing number of elderly and pre-elderly migrants away from higher-cost and colder northern cities.

### NATIVE FLIGHT CONTINUES

For Americans of the 1950s, leaving the congested crime-ridden city behind meant loading up the family station wagon and heading for the nearest suburbs. Today, domestic migrants are moving further afield, to smaller metropolitan areas and even non-metropolitan territory.

The counties currently seeing the fastest growth via domestic migration are located in scenic, non-metropolitan areas of the Mountain West, Texas, and the Ozarks, as well as outer suburban counties surrounding domestic-magnet metros. Many of these areas are attractive to "footloose industries" or even "footloose professionals" like writers and consultants. The latter are only a modem removed from interacting with colleagues and clients elsewhere.

Another important segment of domestic migrants are preretirees in their 50s and early 60s who can afford to work part-time, or are otherwise able to relocate to an area they envision as a possible retirement locale. Now that baby boomers are approaching this life stage, they will be an increasingly important source of population gain for smaller, amenity-laden places.

There is also evidence that certain domestic migrants experience some level of "push" away from immigrant magnets by the presence of immigrants themselves. This is of keen interest to those evaluating current immigration policy, especially as it reflects the possible job displacement of native-born Americans by immigrants. Data show that outmigration from immigrant magnets is most pronounced among less-educated, lower-income domestic migrants. They are the workers who most directly compete with the less-skilled immigrants moving into metros like Los Angeles and New York.

Selective outmigration may not only result from job competition with immigrants. It could also be a function of perceived higher social costs that immigrants bring about. These perceptions helped fuel support for Proposition 187 in California, which prohibits children of illegal immigrants from participating in public education. It may also

## SMALL-TOWN APPEAL

(counties with populations exceeding 5,000 in 1990 ranked by domestic migration rate per 100 population, 1990-95)

rank	county	place	domestic migration rate	immigration rate
1	Douglas County, CO ....	Denver-Boulder-Greeley, CO CMSA	51.4	0.4
2	Elbert County, CO .....	nonmetropolitan	45.4	0.3
3	Park County, CO .....	nonmetropolitan	41.7	0.2
4	Summit County, UT .....	nonmetropolitan	39.8	0.5
5	Flagler County, FL .....	Daytona Beach MSA	37.7	0.5
6	Washington County, UT .	nonmetropolitan	36.7	0.3
7	Teller County, CO .....	nonmetropolitan	35.4	0.1
8	Paulding County, GA ....	Atlanta MSA	34.7	0.1
9	Henry County, GA .....	Atlanta MSA	34.4	0.6
10	Forsyth County, GA .....	Atlanta MSA	33.7	0.2
11	Nye County, NV .....	Las Vegas, NV-AZ MSA	32.5	0.4
12	Stone County, MO .....	nonmetropolitan	31.0	0.1
13	Archuleta County, CO ...	nonmetropolitan	28.3	0.4
14	Bryan County, GA .....	Savannah, GA MSA	28.0	0.1
15	Kendall County, TX .....	nonmetropolitan	27.8	1.3
16	Polk County, TX .....	nonmetropolitan	27.7	0.9
17	Ravalli County, MT .....	nonmetropolitan	27.4	0.1
18	Bandera County, TX .....	nonmetropolitan	26.8	0.1
19	Kootenai County, ID ....	nonmetropolitan	26.7	0.3
20	Coweta County, GA .....	Atlanta MSA	26.5	0.2
21	Mohave County, AZ .....	Las Vegas, NV-AZ MSA	25.7	0.3
22	Pike County, PA .....	NewYork-Northern NewJersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-CT-PA CMSA	25.5	0.5
23	Christian County, MO ...	Springfield, MO MSA	25.2	0.1
24	Taney County, MO .....	nonmetropolitan	25.1	0.1
25	Valley County, ID .....	nonmetropolitan	25.0	0.2

Source: Author's analysis of Census Bureau data

### More than half of the hottest counties for domestic migrants are nonmetropolitan.

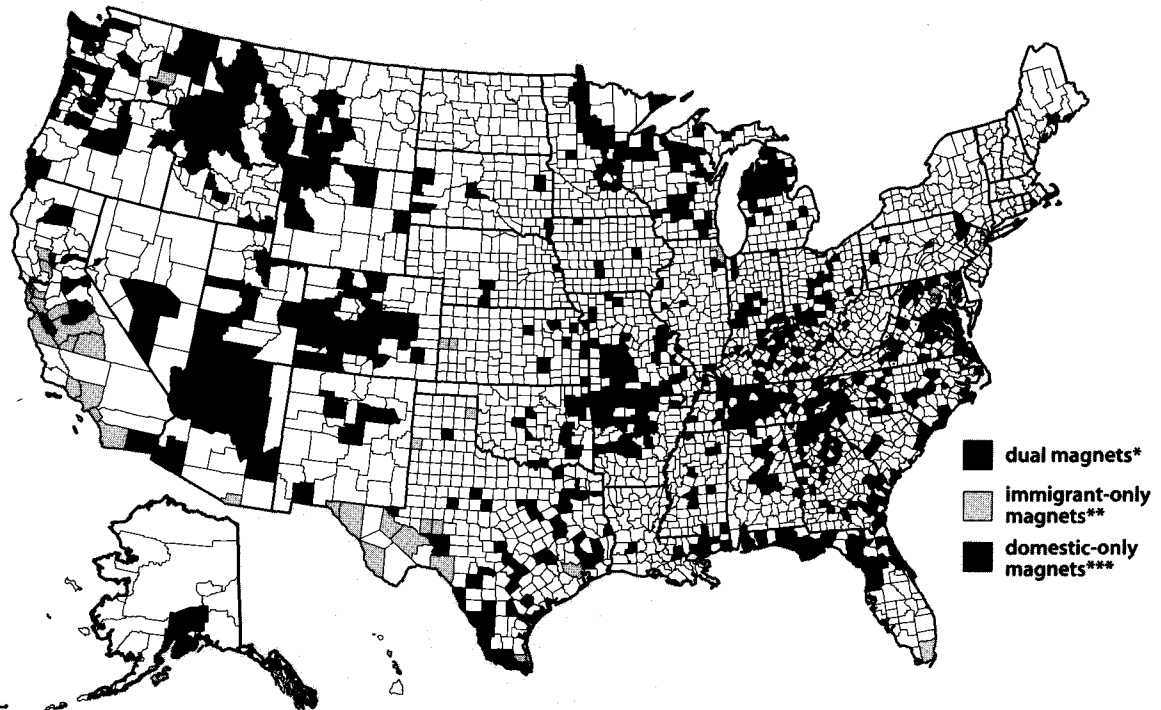
result from other perceived consequences of immigration: increased congestion, contributions to higher crime rates, and potential for ethnic conflict—which often fueled the "flight to the suburbs" in an earlier era.

Other motivations for leaving high-immigrant areas are not necessarily connected to immigration itself. The downturn in California's economy due to the recession of the early 1990s and defense cutbacks led to a much more broadly based domestic outmigration than that which occurred in the late 1980s. This most recent "flight" included lots of college graduates, too.

Likewise, cyclical economic conditions have created shifts in the

# DUELING MAGNETS

(U.S. counties by category of migrant growth, 1990-95)



Note: \* 3-plus percent growth from immigration, domestic migration gain  
 \*\* 3-plus percent growth from immigration, domestic migration loss  
 \*\*\* 5-plus percent growth from domestic migration, less than 0.5 percent from immigration

Source: Author's analysis of Census Bureau data

**Just 20 counties in the U.S. experienced sizeable growth from immigration and also gained domestic migrants during the early 1990s.**

domestic migration attraction of Texas immigrant magnets. Houston's energy-related outmigration of the late 1980s reversed in the 1990s, and Dallas's domestic gains increased as well. But both high-immigration areas continued to lose less-skilled domestic migrants during both "good" and "bad" economic periods, lending credence to the "push-pull" relationship in the amount of attraction these places hold for immigrants versus domestic migrants with similar skills.

## SPATIAL DIVISIONS LEAD TO LIFESTYLE DIVISIONS

Early in the 20th century, the distance between immigrant communities and native-born communities could be measured in mere yards by city neighborhood boundaries. Later on, it widened to miles as a stark contrast between city and suburb became apparent. Current patterns suggest that the distance between these two kinds of communities is widening even further.

Between 1990 and 1995, 1,214 U.S. counties had domestic migration gains of 3 percent or more. In 85 percent of these counties, immigrant growth over the five-year period was less than 0.5 percent. These "domestic magnet counties" are physically far removed from the much-smaller universe of 70 counties where immigrant growth exceeded 3 percent (50 of which had negative domestic migration). The division has gone beyond city versus suburb.

In fact, the city-versus-suburb distinction has blurred within immigrant magnets. The greater New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island consolidated metropolitan statistical area (CMSA) is broadly defined as 29 counties in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. While most immigrants to the region initially descend upon the City of New York and Long Island, 21 of the metro's counties

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saw immigrant gains and domestic migration losses between 1990 and 1995. Similar but less dramatic patterns took place in the greater metro areas of Los Angeles-Riverside-Orange County and San Francisco-Oakland-San Jose. Hence, these metros and regions are taking on a distinctly immigrant character in their demographics and lifestyles.

In contrast, domestic-growth areas are getting older and whiter. They may also be getting more conservative. Already, the nonimmigrant South and Mountain West have become more conservative, not unlike the suburbs of the 1950s. Political issues such as preserving

funds for the Social Security system and Medicare, declaring English as an official language, and abolishing affirmative action could take on new regional-based constituencies. This will go both ways, of course. Although California politicians are currently gaining support for anti-immigrant measures like Proposition 187, the tide could turn as the state's population becomes more dominated by immigrants and their descendants.

Of course, this scenario of region-based differences presupposes the continuation of separate immigration and domestic migration paths. Earlier waves of immigrants did eventually assimilate spatially, first to adjacent neighborhoods and later to suburbs and other parts of the country. But this isn't happening as fast with the newest immigrants. More than half of Asian immigrants and more than 60 percent of Hispanics who have arrived in the U.S. since 1965 continue to reside in the top-ten immigrant magnets, according to the Census Bureau's 1995 Current Population Survey. Meanwhile, the continued proclivity of native-born Americans to seek out better jobs, amenities, and a higher quality of life suggests the emergence of separate native- and foreign-born regions with more than mere demographic significance.

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#### **TAKING IT FURTHER**

Additional information and supporting background statistics are available in "Immigration, Internal Out-movement, and Demographic Balkanization in America: New Evidence for the 1990s," by William H. Frey, Research Report No. 96-364. University of Michigan: Population Studies Center, 1996; telephone (313) 998-7275, or via the World Wide Web at <http://www.psc.lsa.umich.edu/pubs>.