

from the Editor . . .

Each new group of immigrants has changed America, and America has changed them. It's been a two-way process that hasn't always been easy or pleasant, but for the most part it seems to have worked.

Based on a lifetime of observing the process in Boston, here's my take on it:

- (a) New immigrants arrive with high hopes and little else.
- (b) They get the cold shoulder from groups that came before them, yet they manage to carve out a place for themselves in the local economy.
- (c) Then, with a few notable exceptions, they and their children turn around and treat new immigrants exactly as they themselves were treated.

It's a pattern that goes all the way back to the Pilgrims, who referred to themselves as the "Saints" and all others as "Strangers." Although they tried their best to keep outsiders at arm's length, the realities of commerce ultimately forced the Saints to deal with the Strangers. And so it has always been, in Boston and every other American community that's ever experienced a sizable influx of immigrants. (Think "Sharks and Jets.")

The tension between economics and ideology continues to play itself out in America's long-running debate over immigration. Every time a new ethnic group enters the mix, the main sources of conflict are broadly the same:

Pro: "Let them in! We need their labor."

Con: "Not so fast! They'll work for less and take our jobs"

Pro: "But they'll bring new energy and ideas!"

Con: "Maybe. But if we let too many of them in, they'll change our culture."

Even after 400 years, we still can't quite decide if we're "a nation of immigrants" or "a nation overrun by immigrants." But then maybe that shouldn't surprise us, given that immigration is so intertwined with issues of economic anxiety and national identity.

Thankfully, you and I don't have to untie that particular knot by ourselves. The difficult task of formulating U.S.

immigration policy falls to Congress and the voters. Our more modest goal in this issue of *The Ledger* is to highlight resources and background information that might help you participate more fully in the national discussion on immigration.

As always, I've tried to identify resources that represent a diversity of opinion. (They're listed in alphabetical order.) If you detect any hint of bias, please be assured that it doesn't represent the official view of the Federal Reserve.

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