



Immigration Challenges in Secondary Cities

Mark Tranel, Ph.D.

Public Policy Research Center & Public Policy Administration

University of Missouri – St. Louis

Presented at the
Annual Conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management
Los Angeles CA, November 8, 2008

INTRODUCTION

American immigration gateways are evolving in the 21st Century (Singer, 2008) Traditionally immigrants and refugees would cluster in locations where others of the same ethnicity or nationality had already settled (Massey, 2008) While the metropolitan areas of five states (California, New York, Florida, Illinois, and New Jersey) continue to dominate as the place of residence for the foreign-born population in the United States, particularly since 2000 there has been a decided increase in the size of the immigrant population in states including Missouri, Nebraska, and North Carolina. Prior to this recent trend most of the literature on immigration examined either national issues or issues in these geographies of concentration. A spate of research has begun to consider the impact of immigrant and refugee settlement in suburban and rural areas and small towns. (Logan, 2001)

Another aspect of the immigration experience that receives limited consideration is impact in urban areas that have a steady stream of immigrants and refugees, but in limited numbers. This paper discusses such a case, St. Louis, Missouri. Recognized as a former gateway, St. Louis today has a small but extremely diverse population of foreign-born residents. At the turn of the last century, nearly one-fifth of the population of St. Louis was foreign-born. As the 21st Century begins it is less than five percent. A distinguishing characteristic that has, however, persisted for several decades is the extreme diversity of the immigrant and refugee population within those small numbers. The experience of immigrant and refugee groups in the absence of a substantial population from the same ethnicity/nationality and the structure of local services that exist to assist them are the subjects of this paper.

As the end of the first decade of the 21st Century nears, the foreign-born population of the United States exceeds 12 percent and there has been an increase in immigration in recent years. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004) Coincident with this expansion has been an increase in policy activity. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports 1,267 bills considered in 45 state legislatures in the first six months of 2008, a dramatic change from the 300 bills proposed in 2005. (NCSL, 2008) Immigration issues are now and are likely to be for the coming decade a big policy challenge. It is, therefore, important to understand the range of policy contexts in which such policy will develop.

THE ST. LOUIS DIVERSITY PATTERN¹

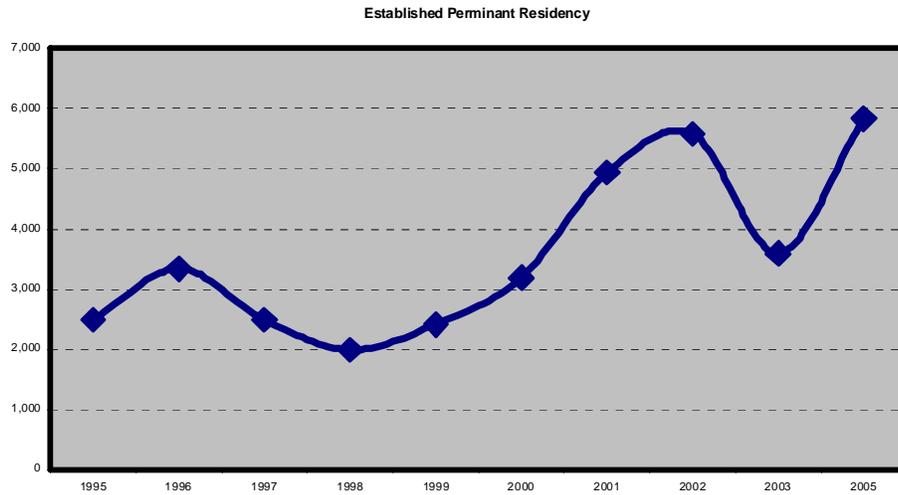
Singer identifies St. Louis as a former gateway city. (Singer, 2008) In 1900 the 111,356 foreign-born residents represented over 19 percent of the population in St. Louis. By 2000 the 80,945 foreign-born residents represented about four percent of the population. The diversity of the ethnicity/nationality of the St. Louis foreign-born population evolved considerably from the start of the 20th Century to the start of the 21st Century. Whereas the immigrants to St. Louis in 1900 came predominately from Northern and Western Europe, by 2000 Asians accounted for 38.9 percent of the foreign-born population and Europeans 35.8 percent. And as shown in Appendix A the St. Louis foreign-born population in 2000 were from 85 countries, but generally in groups of less than 1,000.

Figure 1 shows that over the course of the past decade, while there has been an upward trend in the number of immigrants arriving in St. Louis, the total each year is relatively modest for a metropolitan area of 2.7 million residents. One reason for the low rate of immigration is

¹ The data for this paper were drawn from secondary sources and from interviews with service program administrators to provide a general overview of the immigration pattern and the structure of support services available to this diverse population and outline areas for further research.

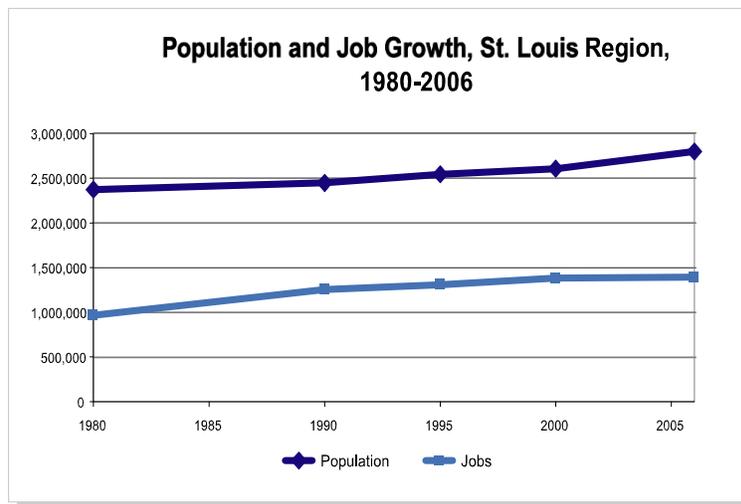
shown in Figure 2. The population of the metropolitan area was static for the 20 years from 1980 to 2000, with a slight growth estimated since the 2000 Census. Economic activity was also static with very little change in the number of available jobs, especially since 1990.

Figure 1



Source: East-West Gateway Council of Government

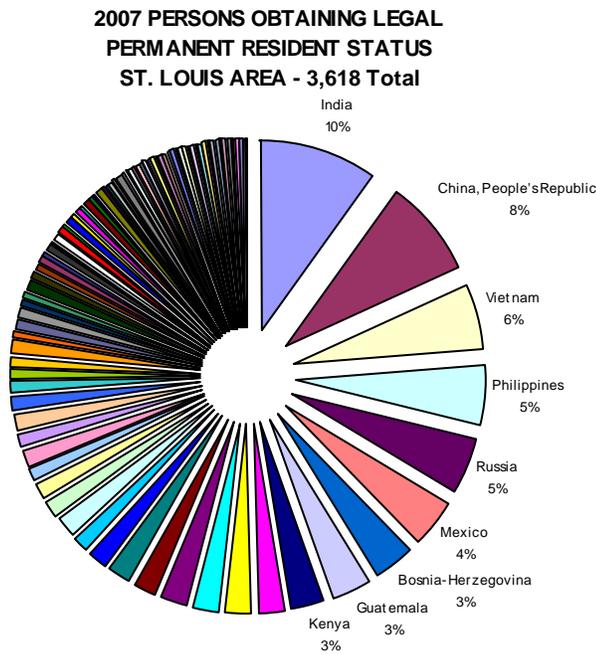
Figure 2



Source: East-West Gateway Council of Governments

While the number of immigrants and refugees moving to St. Louis in the later portion of the 20th Century has been small, the pattern of extreme diversity persists. Figure 3 shows data for 2007 for persons obtaining legal permanent resident status in the St. Louis metropolitan area. While about one quarter (24 percent) of these new residents come from the three countries of India, China, and Vietnam, more than half (53 percent) are groups of less than 85 persons coming from 100 different countries.

Figure 3



Source: Department of Homeland Security

Within this diversity there is a persistent cycle of various nationalities temporarily increasing and abating in numbers, largely due to changes in the federal government's allocation of refugee status by various national groups. In 2008 there has been a notable increase in Russians, Turks, and Albanians. In the early 1990s there was an increase in refugees from India, then Bosnians in the mid- to late-1990s. In the 1980s there were a substantial number of

Southeast Asian refugees moved to St. Louis. (DeVoe, 1983) Yet consistently the overall pattern is dominated by diversity and small numbers.

The foreign-born population in metropolitan St. Louis is not only diverse, but also dispersed. Even among the largest ethnic/national groups, there are few enclaves. For example, the Hispanic population in the five-county Missouri portion of the St. Louis area increased from 18,835 in 1990 to 28,455 in 2000, more than a 50 percent increase. While the Hispanic population increased in 72 of the 83 census tracts in this five-county area, in only seven census tracts was the increase more than 400 persons. (Hobbes, 2004) Rynearson documents the same dispersion for the Southeast Asians who arrived in the 1980s. (Rynearson, pg.15)

Another characteristic of the St. Louis metropolitan area shapes the immigration context. The St. Louis MSA is 77 percent non-Hispanic white and 19 percent non-Hispanic African American. Although the numbers of immigrants and refugees moving to St. Louis is modest, the population growth of the white and black populations groups is so anemic that the Census Bureau estimates immigration accounts for 27.6 percent of the post-2000 metropolitan population increase. St. Louis is historically a highly segregated metropolitan area that draws attention to issues of the white and black communities. (Farley, 2005) In a metropolitan area where foreign-born residents make up approximately four percent of the population, there is very little acknowledgement or understanding of the diversity of the foreign-born residents or the organizational structure that provides them support.

THE ST. LOUIS FOREIGN-BORN EXPERIENCE

There are some characteristics of the experience of foreign-born residents in the St. Louis metropolitan area that are shared and some that are very different depending on whether one is newly arrived or has been in the area for some time. And within the newly arrived group, the

experience can vary depending on whether one is an immigrant or a refugee. St. Louis is the destination of choice for many who do come because of its affordability and accommodation. The cost of living, particularly the cost of housing, is very affordable compared to most of the primary gateway metropolitan areas. For refugees it is not a matter of choice, but the cost advantages are still present. The lower living cost in St. Louis allows many immigrants/refugees the opportunity to send more support to their families in their native lands.

The very nature of the small numbers and diverse origins creates a more tolerant (although not necessarily more supportive) atmosphere. The indigenous St. Louis residents have fewer stereotypes about most of the ethnic/national groups because their small numbers provide less opportunity for direct experience.

For those who have established themselves with employment and can provide personal transportation one notable aspect of the diversity and dispersion of foreign-born residents in St. Louis is what Ann Ryneanson terms 'ethnicity by commute.' (Ryneanson, 2001) This is a factor more so for immigrants with the capacity to relatively quickly move to the suburbs than it is for refugees. The modest numbers of ethnic/national groups can only support a limited number of specialty businesses and community institutions. Indeed many groups do not have any access to such facilities and services that specialize in their particular cultural foods or traditions. But for those that do, the St. Louis experience is living in one community and traveling to another to access ethnic food stores, restaurants, or worship facilities.

For the newly arrived, particularly the refugee, the lack of a substantial public transportation system in the St. Louis area is a particular problem. Over the period of time for which Figure 2 shows a small gain in population, the Census-designated metropolitan area expanded from 9 to 16 counties. In such a greatly decentralized metropolitan area that has

limited access to tax support for public transportation, mobility among place of residence, place of employment, place of children's school and access to ethnic/national facilities and services is a challenge.

There was a consensus among the interviewees for this research that the lack of an identifiable space in the St. Louis geography and the small numbers of most of the ethnic/national groups leads to much faster acculturation in St. Louis than is typically the case in immigrant gateway communities. Other than family members at home, for many new arrivals there may be no one else in their daily routine who speaks their native language or practices their native customs. Because many of the smaller ethnic/national groups cannot live in 'island' of language and culture very much like their homeland, they are immersed in the dominant language and culture. This is, however, differentially affective across groups and individuals. And this ad hoc process of acculturation appears to provide a very basic set of skills, which limits, for example, opportunities for career advancement.

As is the case with immigrants and refugees in all location destinations, the experience can be very different based more on class than ethnicity/nationality. There are those educated in certain occupational categories that have well-developed language and cultural skills based on experience that are able to relocate into a comparable lifestyle. Others, while they may have an accomplished educational background are not able to move into an appropriate job and remain underemployed.

Various types of licensing represents a particular challenge. Many professionals that do not have proficiency in English need assistance getting relicensing, particularly help with studying for medical exams. The extreme range of native languages they come with limits the local resource able to provide them with adequate assistance. This not only applies to health care

professionals such as doctors and nurses, but any career that requires licensing, especially building trades. A different form of licensing that has a major impact is the need for a drivers license. Many new arrivals don't know how to drive and finding a resource with the appropriate language and cultural knowledge is a challenge for immigrants/refugees from the smaller groups arriving each year. (Jennings, 2008)

A factor mentioned frequently in the interviews is the isolation of women in many of the ethnic/national groups in St. Louis. The agency staff interviewed for this research recounted that many immigrant/refugee women are uncomfortable in a group setting for language instruction, for example, because there are few, and often no, others in the class of their ethnicity/nationality, to the point that they often drop out of the instruction. Other problems are more severe. The example of a woman who called a legal services agency requesting assistance but could not describe where she lived is not unique. (Riley, 2008) And because of differences in cultural perspectives on domestic violence women living in isolation don't know their rights and without transportation or language skills they cannot access the resources in the community that should be able to help them.

The lack of familiarity with other cultures can have tragic consequences. *St. Louis Post Dispatch* reporter Sylvester Brown, Jr. documented the case of a Liberian refugee jailed at age 16 for statutory rape and awaited trial in an adult jail a year later. (Brown, 2008) The juvenile fathered two children by an underage girl after they met in an Ivory Coast refugee camp. The young couple's parents died in the camp and they accompanied his maternal grandmother to the United States, settling in St. Louis. Authorities in his St. Louis high school reported his circumstances to police and the police arrested him for statutory rape. After a year in an adult

corrections facility, the court declared him a juvenile and juvenile authorities declined to pursue the case.

THE ST. LOUIS SUPPORT NETWORK

The structure of support services for foreign-born residents in St. Louis, those that are new arrivals and those that have been in St. Louis for some time, immigrants as well as refugees, exists entirely outside of formal government structure. The 16 county governments, the 700+ municipalities and special districts of the metropolitan area do not provide language appropriate or culturally adapted programs or services to this population. Ethnic/nationality specific support services are established and maintained by three types of organizations:

1. through a somewhat unfathomable panoply of nonprofit and faith-based organizations
2. through mainstream service organizations – hospitals, schools
3. information organizations – soccer leagues, dance troupes

Table 1 includes a representative sample of these organizations identified through interviews conducted for this research, on-line resources, and referral lists available from several of the organizations.

Nonprofit and Faith-Based

As Table 1 indicates the organizations that serve the foreign-born population of the St. Louis area tend to specialize in services either to immigrants or to refugees. There are a few organizations that serve both groups. While a few ethnic/nationality groups, notably Hispanics and Chinese, have expansive group-specific service structures, the majority of the new resident groups receive services through neighborhood-based nonprofit resources including faith-based and mutual assistance associations. These organizations need multi-lingual staff but tend to focus on no more than three or four ethnicities/languages. In addition they tend to provide a limited range of services. Some specialize in legal services, other in mental health problems,

including drug and alcohol dependency. In this aspect they are similar to the general structure of nonprofit organizations in the St. Louis area, but their geographic or ethnic/nationality or service focus inherently limits their potential service population. For example, providing in-home tutoring to the homebound elderly and disabled preparing for their citizenship test is a very specialized organizational mission. Another has a primary mission to provide furniture, household items, and clothing to refugees.

This organizational specialization causes a research challenge. There is no central directory of support services for the foreign-born population in the St. Louis area. There is one comprehensive organization, the International Institute. The International Institute provides services to both immigrants and refugees across a broad spectrum of service areas, making referrals to many other immigrant and refugee support organizations. Because of its mission and structure the International Institute has inventoried many of support organizations in the region, but even its listing is not complete.

A problem that interviewees raised in one form or another is that the redundancy in support services organizations cause inefficient competition for the donations on which such organization depend and shifts a greater percentage of funds into program administration rather than direct service delivery. Every organization maintains staff and office space in addition to providing services to a delimited population. Administrators are less effective at delivering services because of the disproportionate amount of time they must spend on fundraising. The competition for funds and clients is an issue not only within the Table 1 category of foreign-born specific service organization but also between them and the organizations in the mainstream service organizations category.

Table 1
Service Organization Structure

	MAINSTREAM SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS	FOREIGN-BORN SPECIFIC SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS	INFORMAL ORGANIZATIONS
IMMIGRANTS	Barnes Jewish Hospital Catholic Charities Family Services Catholic Immigration Law Project Christian Friends of New Americans Community Alternatives Family Health Centers Grace Hill Neighborhood Health Centers Legal Services of Eastern Missouri People's Health Centers Preferred Family Healthcare Queen of Peace Center Salvation Army YMCA of Greater St. Louis	African Mutual Assistance Association of MO Amigos Group Bi-Lingual International Assistance Services Chinese Culture and Education Foundation Interfaith Legal Services for Immigrants La Clinica La Linea de Ayuda Language Access Metro Project Lao Mutual Aid Association Organization of Chinese Americans Puerto Rican Society St. Louis Christian Chinese Community Service Center Vietnamese Health Center	(indicated but not yet documented)
REFUGEES	Catholic Charities Refugee Services	Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services Center for Survivors of Torture and War Trauma International Crisis Aid Oasis International	
INCLUSIVE		Accion Social Comunitaria African Refugee and Immigrant Service Immigrant and Refugee Women's Program International Institute Refugee and Immigrant Consortium of St. Louis	

Some organizations have evolved in response to the diversity. Ethiopian refugees in 1983 established the Ethiopian Refugee Mutual Assistance Association of Missouri. As some other African nationals migrated to St. Louis the organization first changed its name to the Ethiopian Community Association of Missouri. Due to continued diversification in nationalities, in 2002 the organization became the African Mutual Assistance Association of Missouri.

Mainstream Service Organizations

Health care and social service agencies that serve the metropolitan area provide the same services to immigrants and refugees but must make accommodations to be able to provide those services. The distinctive challenge that is uniform across mainstream organizations is the language barrier. For example, a major medical facility in St. Louis maintains the capacity to serve patients using 57 languages. Its refugee health services department has on staff full- and part-time personnel that can translate 21 languages. The other 36 languages are handled using a remote translator on a conference call.

The hospital's refugee health services department provides more than just internal translation services for its health professionals. It provides case management services such as not only making referral for medical treatments, but also making the appointments and providing transportation expenses. The case management services are, however, limited to health needs. It does not function as a resource for housing, employment or other social services needs of a presenting patient. As is the case with the foreign-born specific service organizations, the mainstream organizations specialize so that immigrants and refugees must deal with multiple organizations to receive assistance for their multiple needs.

Beyond health care, another example of the impact of the diversity of languages is on the K-12 educational system. There are few English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs in school districts in the suburban areas of St. Louis and those programs are typically bi-lingual. In the school district that serves the City of St. Louis just over nine percent of students are enrolled in the ESOL program which is not high compared to such enrollment in gateway cities. But reflecting the immigrant/refugee population in the St. Louis area, St. Louis Public Schools ESOL program in 2007 provided instruction to students with 76 native languages, with 16 to 17 languages in some school buildings. One challenge posed by the diversity and small numbers of the foreign-born students with limited, or no, English proficiency is that the teacher cannot be a resource. The ESOL is a centralized instructions program, it does not provide interpreters in the classroom.

Informal Organizations

A number of the interviewees stated the importance of informal organizations such as soccer leagues that are established, for example, to promote recreational sports but then become important as a social support structure for a particular ethnicity or national group.

DISCUSSION

Missouri recently enacted the Illegal Aliens and Immigration Status Verification law. Beyond the immigration law enforcement common in many new state laws, it also includes a provision prohibiting municipalities from enacting 'sanctuary policies.' While not all law makers utilize research information before making such enforcement-based policies, a policy challenge for the coming decade will be developing an information resource for legislators and public administrators to know and understand the composition and needs of the immigrant and refugee population. The academic agenda should be comprehensive, contributing knowledge

across the range of community types in gateway metropolitan areas and states, newly emerging rural areas, and in metropolitan areas where the foreign-born population may not be a large percentage of the population but will be an important part of the community fabric in the coming decade.

References

- Brown, Jr., Sylvester, (2008) *Law, culture loom over young lives, refugee says*, St. Louis Post Dispatch, April 15, 2008, C1.
- Farley, John (2005) *Race, not class: explaining racial housing segregation in the St. Louis metropolitan area, 2000*. Sociological Focus, Volume 38, Number 2, pgs. 133-158.
- Haines, David W. (1996) *Refugees in America in the 1990s: A Reference Handbook*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press
- Hobbs, Darryl (2004) Latinos in St. Louis Today http://oseda.missouri.edu/cambio_de_colores_march_2004.ppt
- Jennings, Joel (2008) "Beyond the Nation-State: Scaling Claims to Latino/a Citizenship in the United States in Jackiewicz, Edward L. and Fernando J. Bosco (editors), *Placing Latin America: Contemporary Themes in Human Geography*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Logan, John (2001) *New Ethnic Enclaves in America's Suburbs*, <http://mumford.albany.edu/censussuburban/SuburbanReport/page1.html>
- Massey, Douglas S. and Chiara Capoferro (2008) "The Geographic Diversification of American Immigration" in Massey, Douglas S., *New Faces in New Places: the Changing Geography of American Immigration*, New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Matsuo, Hisako () "Bosnian Refugee Resettlement in St. Louis, MO in Waxman, Peter and Colic-Peisker, Val (editors) *Homeland Wanted: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Refugee Resettlement in the West*
- National Conference of State Legislatures (2008) State Laws Related to Immigrants and Immigration <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/immig/immigreportjuly2008.htm>
- Riley, Angela (2008) Immigration Law Project at Legal Services of Eastern Missouri, St. Louis Daily Record and St. Louis Countian, June 23, 2008
- Rynearson, Ann M. (2001). "Social Convergence and Cultural Diversity Among Immigrants and Refugees, in Haines, David W. and Carol A. Mortland, *Manifest Destinies: Americanizing Immigrants and Internationalizing Americans*, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Singer, Audrey (2008). "Twenty-First Century Gateways: An Introduction, in Singer, Audrey; Hardwick, Susan W.; Brettell, Caroline B. *Twenty-First-Century Gateways: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2004) The Foreign-Born Population in the United States <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/p20-55/pdf>
- U.S. Department of Homeland Security(2007) Yearbook of Immigration Statistics Supplemental Table 2 Persons Obtaining Permanent Resident Status by Leading Core Based Statistical Areas of Residence and Region and County of Birth <http://www.dhs.gov/ximgt/statistics/publications/yearbook.shtm>
- DeVoe Pamela A. and Ann M. Rynearson (1983) Social Relations in a Refugee Neighborhood: Indochinese in St. Louis, MO <http://content.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb5v19p05v/?query=&brand=calisphere>
- Wittenaur, Cherly (2003) *Bosnians Find a Niche in St. Louis*, Los Angeles Times, June 1, 2003 A-24.

Interviews:

Joani Akers, Co-Director, Oasis International

P. Ariel Burgess, Vice President and Director of Social Services, International Institute

Kate Early, Bilingual Therapist, Catholic Charities Community Services

Eva Enoch, Outreach Coordinator, Refugee Health Services, Barnes Jewish Hospital

Pat Joshu, Executive Director, Immigrant Refugee Women's Program

Ann Rynearson, Senior Vice President, Culture and Community, International Institute

Appendix A
 2000 Foreign-Born Population
 St. Louis Metropolitan Area

Europe:	29,016
Northern Europe:	3,811
United Kingdom	2,944
Ireland	495
Sweden	124
Other Northern Europe	248
Western Europe:	6,951
Austria	419
France	627
Germany	5,199
Netherlands	365
Other Western Europe	341
Southern Europe:	2,534
Greece	554
Italy	1,442
Portugal	96
Spain	435
Other Southern Europe	7
Eastern Europe:	15,720
Czechoslovakia (includes Czech Republic and Slovakia)	414
Hungary	383
Poland	933
Romania	629
Belarus	455
Russia	1,846
Ukraine	1,207
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6,853
Yugoslavia	1,117
Other Eastern Europe	1,883
Asia:	31,558
Eastern Asia:	10,953
China:	5,915
China, excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan	3,888
Hong Kong	622
Taiwan	1,405
Japan	1,497
Korea	3,492
Other Eastern Asia	49
South Central Asia:	7,680
Afghanistan	310
Bangladesh	191
India	5,129
Iran	750

IMMIGRATION CHALLENGES IN SECONDARY CITIES

Pakistan	1,073
Other South Central Asia	227
South Eastern Asia:	9,961
Cambodia	103
Indonesia	214
Laos	444
Malaysia	263
Philippines	3,210
Thailand	778
Vietnam	4,809
Other South Eastern Asia	140
Western Asia:	2,845
Iraq	840
Israel	564
Jordan	150
Lebanon	211
Syria	204
Turkey	267
Armenia	28
Other Western Asia	581
Asia, n.e.c.	119
Africa:	4,322
Eastern Africa:	1,750
Ethiopia	658
Other Eastern Africa	1,092
Middle Africa	149
Northern Africa:	594
Egypt	272
Other Northern Africa	322
Southern Africa:	351
South Africa	298
Other Southern Africa	53
Western Africa:	1,274
Ghana	150
Nigeria	835
Sierra Leone	71
Other Western Africa	218
Africa, n.e.c.	204
Oceania:	580
Australia and New Zealand Subregion:	403
Australia	300
Other Australian and New Zealand Subregion	103
Melanesia	67
Micronesia	44
Polynesia	66
Americas:	15,469
Latin America:	12,489
Caribbean:	1,596

IMMIGRATION CHALLENGES IN SECONDARY CITIES

Barbados	56
Cuba	536
Dominican Republic	141
Haiti	363
Jamaica	282
Trinidad and Tobago	116
Other Caribbean	102
Central America:	8,227
Mexico	6,780
Other Central America:	1,447
Costa Rica	80
El Salvador	259
Guatemala	284
Honduras	264
Nicaragua	83
Panama	397
Other Central America	80
South America:	2,666
Argentina	380
Bolivia	88
Brazil	436
Chile	221
Colombia	522
Ecuador	195
Guyana	93
Peru	408
Venezuela	215
Other South America	108
Northern America:	2,980
Canada	2,958
Other Northern America	22
Total Foreign-Born Population 2000	80,945