

concluded it in 1848, the United States has been in practical control of the continent. It has simply seemed to be a foregone conclusion.

By the end of the twenty-first century, this will no longer be the case. The question of Mexico's power relative to the United States will be raised again in the most complex and difficult way imaginable. Mexico, after two hundred years, will be in a position to challenge the territorial integrity of the United States, and the entire balance of power of North America. If this sounds far-fetched, go back to my introductory chapter and think about the way the world changes in just twenty years, remembering that we are talking about nearly a century here.

The Mexican challenge will be rooted in the economic crisis of the 2020s, which will be solved by the immigration laws that will be passed in the early 2030s. These laws will aggressively encourage immigration to the United States in order to solve America's labor shortages. There will be a massive influx of immigrants from all countries, and this will obviously include Mexico. The other immigrant groups will behave much as previous immigrants did. But the Mexicans will behave differently for a single reason, having nothing to do with culture or character, but having to do with geography. And that, coupled with the growing strength of Mexico as a nation, will shift the North American balance of power.

Historically, other immigrant groups have had what we might call a lumpy distribution in the United States. They have lived in ethnic enclaves, and while they might have dominated in those neighborhoods and influenced surrounding politics, no one group simply overwhelmed any region or state since the late nineteenth century. As the second generation reached adulthood, they became culturally assimilated and distributed themselves around the country as they pursued economic opportunities. The life of the ethnic enclave was simply not as attractive as the opportunities available in the wider society. In the United States, minority populations were never an indigestible mass—with the major exceptions of the one ethnic group that did not come here voluntarily (African Americans) and those who were here when Europeans arrived (American Indians). The rest all came, clustered and dispersed, and added new cultural layers to the general society.

This has always been the strength of the United States. In much of Europe, for example, Muslims have retained religious and national identities

distinct from the general population, and the general population has given them little encouragement to blend. The strength of their own culture has therefore been overwhelming. In the United States, Islamic immigrants, like other immigrant groups, were transformed over generations into a population that bought into basic American principles while retaining religiosity almost as a cultural link to the past. This both bound the immigrants to the United States and created a chasm between the first generation and later ones (as well as between the American Muslim community and Muslims elsewhere in the world). This has been a well-worn path for immigrants to the United States.

Immigrants from Mexico will behave differently starting in the 2030s. They will distribute themselves around the country, as they have in the past, and many will enter the mainstream of American society. But unlike other immigrant groups, Mexicans are not separated from their homelands by oceans and many thousands of miles. They can move across the border a few miles into the United States but still maintain their social and economic links to their homeland. Proximity to the homeland creates a very different dynamic. Rather than a diaspora, at least part of Mexican migration is simply a movement into a borderland between two nations, like Alsace-Lorraine between France and Germany—a place where two cultures intermingle even when the border is stable.

Consider the map on page 226, drawn from U.S. census bureau data, of Hispanic population concentration in the United States in 2000.

In 2000, looking at Hispanic residents as percentages of counties in the United States, we can already see the concentration. Along the border from the Pacific to the Gulf of Mexico there is an obvious concentration of people of Mexican origin. The counties range from about one-fifth Mexican (we will use that term to apply here to ethnicity, not citizenship) to over two-thirds Mexican. In Texas, this concentration goes deep into the state, as it does in California. But the border counties tend to be the most heavily Mexican, as would be expected.

I've superimposed the outline of the territory that used to be part of Mexico and became part of the United States: Texas and the Mexican Cession. Notice how the Mexican community in 2000 is concentrated in these formerly Mexican territories. There are pockets of Mexicans outside