Understanding the Immigrant Experience

Lessons and themes for economic opportunity

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Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force
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America is becoming more diverse

Changing Face of America

Percent of total U.S. population by race and ethnicity, 1960-2060

Source: Pew Research Center
Immigration is a major driver of population growth and change.

U.S. population is projected to grow 48% from 2005 to 2050.

More than 80% of that growth will be immigrants and their descendants.

Hispanic population is now growing more from U.S. births than immigration.

Source: Pew Research Center’s tabulations of Census PUMS data
Charlotte has transformed from a black/white Old South city to a multi-ethnic New South city.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census and American Community Survey 1-year estimates for Charlotte
What brought immigrants to Charlotte?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strong Economy</th>
<th>Receptive Community</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Growing service-based economy</td>
<td>• Little immigration history or experience meant less prejudice</td>
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<td>• Labor shortage across occupational spectrum</td>
<td>• Immigrants filled gaps in labor force, not competing for jobs</td>
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<td>• Bank of America phenomenon in early 1990s</td>
<td>• Immigration was a non-political issue</td>
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<th>Job Opportunities</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Year-round employment</td>
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<td>• Entrepreneurship encouraged</td>
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<td>• Opportunities for women</td>
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What does Charlotte’s immigrant population look like today?
135,000 immigrants live in Mecklenburg County.

One in seven (14%) Mecklenburg residents are immigrants.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
Charlotte’s immigrants are diverse
They arrived at different times, from different parts of the world.

One-half immigrated before 2000.

One-half came from Latin America.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County.
One-third are U.S. citizens

Among European immigrants, over half are citizens; for Latin Americans, only one-fifth have citizenship.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
One-half speak English very well, but 30% are language isolated.

English ability is highest among European immigrants and lowest for Latin Americans.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
How are Charlotte’s immigrants faring socio-economically?
30% lack a high school degree; one-eighth have graduate/professional degree.

Nearly half of Latin American immigrants lack a high school degree. Almost one-quarter of Asians have a graduate/professional degree.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
35% earn less than $25,000; nearly 20% earn more than $75,000

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
One-fifth of immigrant families live in poverty (27,500 immigrants)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
6% are unemployed and looking for work

10% of African immigrants are unemployed.

Unemployment rate

- 12%
- 10%
- 8%
- 6%
- 4%
- 2%
- 0%

African

10% of European immigrants are self-employed.

Self-employment rate

- 12%
- 10%
- 8%
- 6%
- 4%
- 2%
- 0%

European

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
Many have low-status occupations, but a sizeable group have high-status jobs.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
Nearly one-half are home owners, but one-sixth of owners are cost-burdened

70% of European immigrants own their home.
44% of Latin American immigrant home-owners are cost-burdened.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates for Mecklenburg County
Many immigrant children attend CMS schools

Impacts of immigration can be seen in the racial/ethnic make-up of CMS students.

Students from over 150 different countries attend CMS schools.

30,000 language minority students attend CMS schools.

Source: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools 2013 fact sheet; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015-16
Many of those with limited English ability struggle to graduate high school.

Only 64% of Limited English Proficient students graduate within 4 years— the lowest graduation rate of all sub-groups in CMS.

Hispanic students have the lowest graduation rate of the racial/ethnic sub-groups.

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014-15 NC School Report Cards for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools
How well are immigrants faring in terms of economic mobility?
Examines change over time for immigrants themselves and intergenerational change across first, second, and later generations

Multiple markers of socio-economic mobility

Data from Current Population Survey 2003-2013
Immigrants arrive in the U.S. with varying levels of education

Indian immigrants bring an average of 16.3 years of education.

For Mexican immigrants, the average is 9.4 years.
Despite these large differences, there is strong intergenerational progress

Second generation immigrants met or exceeded schooling level of native-born Americans.

Second generation Mexican and Central American immigrants made great progress relative to their parents but were still well below native-born Americans.
Employment success differed by gender

Immigrant men had higher rates of employment than native-born men and higher rates than later generations, especially for the less-educated.

Immigrant women had substantially lower employment rates than native-born, but later generations approached parity with native-born women.
Employment success differed by race/ethnicity

Second and later generations of:

- **Hispanic** men had higher employment than first generation immigrants, when lower educational attainment is accounted for.

- **Asian** men attained similar employment levels as white non-Hispanic men.

- **Black** immigrant men moved toward employment levels of native-born Blacks.
Immigrants often concentrate in certain occupations and industries. Subsequent generations display intergenerational improvement in occupational distributions, similar to education and earnings.

Immigrant groups concentrated in low-status occupations experience substantial improvement in occupational position by the second generation but do not reach parity with native-borns in later generations.
Like employment status, occupational progress differs by gender

Immigrant women experience greater gains than immigrant men, and the gap between native-borns narrows greatly in later generations.

Second generation men are more likely to have jobs with healthcare and retirement benefits than their immigrant parents.
Immigrants earned less than native-born workers with comparable skills, initially, but improved with time in U.S.

Immigrants experience a substantial penalty as skin color darkens.

Asian immigrants do as well as native-born whites. Hispanic/Mexican immigrants experience slower earnings assimilation.
Black and Hispanic immigrants see less intergenerational mobility

Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean bring high levels of schooling and subsequent generations meet or surpass native-born blacks in educational attainment. But they still experience a skin color penalty when it comes to earnings.

Other studies find some evidence suggesting that third and later generations of Hispanic immigrants will not experience upward mobility.
Where do Charlotte’s immigrants live?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS</th>
<th>PERCENT IMMIGRANTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 1,000</td>
<td>&gt; 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 – 1,000</td>
<td>15 – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 500</td>
<td>&lt; 15%</td>
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Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
Regional immigrant groups are spread out across the county.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates
Of neighborhoods where immigrants make up 15% or more of the population, the majority of immigrants are from:

- Latin America
- Asia
- No single majority group

Latin Americans prevail in East and Southwest Charlotte.

Asians are more prominent in University City and pockets of South and East Charlotte.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates