



DISCUSSANT RESPONSE

by

Mohan Vachani
Vice President
Bedford Properties
Lafayette, California, USA

to Valery and Nina Soyfer's

MIGRATION AS A CROSS-CULTURE PHENOMENON

The Nineteenth International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences
Seoul, Korea August 19-26, 1992

© 1992, International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences

Migration as a Cross-Cultural Phenomenon

Discussion Paper

Dr. Mohan Vachani

Vice President, Chief Financial Officer

Bedford Properties

Lafayette, California

Abstract

Professor Valery and Nina Soyfer have done an excellent job of providing an overview of how international migration of people over the last several thousand years has played a role in shaping human history. From time to time a set of powerful forces -- economic, religious, political or war-related -- compel a body of people to pick up and leave their familiar surroundings in sufficiently large numbers so as to become a cross-cultural phenomenon that shapes the world for future generations. Two examples of migration have been discussed in detail here. One occurred in conjunction with the creation of new nations of India and Pakistan. Another has shaped the American civilization over the last two centuries. History has taught us that successful cross-cultural assimilation occurs when immigrants arrive with a firm commitment that the new land is their home; that there is no going back, that their success is tied to the success of their adopted country. Current trends point towards acceleration of the cross-cultural phenomenon even to the point that such cross-cultural assimilation will take place without the physical migration of people.

Professors Valery and Nina Soyfer have done an excellent job of providing an overview of how international migration of people over the last several thousand years has played a role in shaping human history. From time to time a set of powerful forces compel a body of people to pick up and leave their familiar surroundings in order to find a better life elsewhere. These forces can be economic, religious, political or war-related. But no matter; the end result is migration of people in sufficient by large numbers so as to become a cross-cultural phenomenon that shapes the world for future generations. Over the millennia, such events have facilitated the formation of new nations and have played a very important part in the artistic, scientific and cultural development of both individual countries and all of mankind. Professors Valery and Nina Soyfer have given many examples of such large scale migration.

In this discussion paper, I will elaborate on two of those examples. I have selected them because I have been a part of these migrations and they have shaped my life.

Formation of India and Pakistan

Professor Soyfer observes that the decomposition of the former British Empire led to the formation of new states, including India and Pakistan. During this process more than 16 million people moved from one country to another. This occurred in the late 1940's, with the most intense migration taking place in 1947-48. My family was a part of those 16 million people and we migrated from the area which became Pakistan to the area which is now India. I was five years old. Our family, like all other migrants, carried only what could be packed in a few suitcases. Everything else was left behind. Indeed such is the norm with most migration examples described by Professor Soyfer. Immigrants arrive in the new environment with few possessions but lots of ideas and a strong will to work hard and succeed. There

America as a nation of Immigrants

Professors Valery and Nina Soyfer state that the intensive migration to America in the 19th and 20th centuries was critical to the success of American civilization. A well-worn but by no means hackneyed phrase is that the United States is a "nation of immigrants". In the *Uprooted*, Oscar Handlin opens, "Once I thought to write a history of immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the Immigrants were American History."

Throughout the years, immigration to the United States has been punctuated by massive waves of newcomers. Frequently, three such waves are identified. Each wave was caused by a set of powerful forces and each has shaped the cross-cultural phenomenon.

1820-1860: The First Wave

The first great wave of immigration to the United States began in the 1820's. Immigration was 143,000, 599,000, 1,717,000 and 2,598,000 during the four decades beginning in 1820.

These numbers are particularly significant in relation to the total population at that time. For example, between 1845 and 1854, when our 3 million immigrants arrived, the total U.S. population averaged 20 million. This first wave arrivals, like those who came before them, were mostly from northern and western Europe -- British Isles, Germany and Scandinavia. The forces causing this wave of immigration were:

1. Owing to the industrial revolution, capital to labor ratios were soaring; machines were replacing people in Europe.
2. The doubling of European population between 1750 and 1850 rendered the scarcity of jobs and land.
3. Due to technological improvements in shipping, trans oceanic voyages were becoming safer.

4. U.S. industry was actively recruiting migrant labor.
5. With improvements in communications technology and postal services, stories of a better life in the U.S. travelled back to Europe, enticing more people.

Because most arrivals in the first wave differed insignificantly from the native Puritan stock, many had little difficulty blending in the host society. Although the new immigrants arrived without any wealth or material possessions, they had vigor and hard work ethics and were rapidly assimilated in the host culture leading to economic prosperity.

1860-1930: The Second Wave

Beginning in about 1860, immigration from southern and eastern Europe began to increase giving rise to the second wave. In relative terms, immigration from northwestern Europe began to trail off -- from 90% of the total immigrants in 1860 down to 25% by 1930. Unique forces that led to this wave were:

1. Trans oceanic travel became even more efficient.
2. Southeastern Europe lagged northwestern Europe in industrial development.
3. Labor recruitment efforts from the U.S. shifted to this region because cheaper and yet skilled labor force was available.

This wave provided several cross-cultural assimilation challenges that shaped society for decades. These immigrants had darker complexions and practiced non-Protestant religion. Also, the opportunities in the U.S. were more abundant in the industrialized northeast. Agricultural pursuits involving ownership of land were more limited. Consequently, these

immigrants congregated in ethnic enclaves near their places of work. Because most of these new immigrants had little wealth upon arrival and tended to have poorly paying jobs, the appearance of these ethnic enclaves reflected the destitution of those residing in them. Some of the cross-cultural problems facing the society can be gauged by two excerpts from the popular press of the day:

"The character of our immigration has also changed - instead of the best class of people, we are now getting the refuse of Europe - outcasts from Italy, brutalized Poles and Hungarians"
(Philadelphia Enquirer, Nov. 28, 1890).

"The swelling tide of immigrants from Southern Europe and the orient who can neither read nor write their own language and not even speak ours, who bring with them money enough to stave off starvation but a few days, is a startling national menace that cannot be disregarded with safety" New York Herald, Nov. 10, 1900).

However, my first hypothesis of successful migration described earlier determined the outcome. These immigrants had made America their home; there was no turning back. They were willing to work hard and become part of society. Stanley Lieberson writes in *A Piece of the Pie* (1980):

"...these new European groups piled up in the slums of the great urban centers of East and Midwest. The descendants of these Southeastern Europeans have done relatively well in the United States. By all accounts, their education, occupations, and incomes are presently close to, or even in excess of, white Americans from the earlier Northwestern Europeans..."

1965 - Present: The Third Wave

Today more than half a million people enter the United States each year as legal immigrants. The make-up of immigrants has once again changed dramatically. While almost half were European as recently as mid 1960's, today nearly 90% come from Asia and Latin America. I am a part of this third wave of immigrants to the U.S. The forces behind this wave are:

1. Post world war economic expansion, the large job market and a fine and broad system of universities and centers of advanced learning in the U.S. created opportunities to attract the best and the brightest from among the world. This led to the phenomenon of "brain drain" as described by Professor Soyfer.
2. The fertility rates in the U.S. peaked at 5.8 during the late 1950's. But they fell sharply to 2.5 by 1970 and by 1972, had dropped below the level of 2.1 needed for replacement reaching a low of 1.8 in 1975. This created a shortage of labor in many sectors of the economy.
3. The 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 dismantling the old Quota system opened up immigration opportunities for Asians and Latin American countries.
4. The period has witnessed a sizeable inflow of refugees from Cuba and Indo-China due to the well known world events.

The cross-cultural implications of this third wave of immigration are still evolving but the challenges are obvious. The new immigrants speak different languages, have a totally different cultural background and also "look" different from the first and

second wave of largely European immigrants. The fertility rate of these new immigrants is also higher there by virtually guaranteeing that their ratio of the U.S. population will continue to increase. This has far reaching implications which have been discussed in recent articles under the common theme of "browning of America". The U.S. was created and continues to be redefined, primarily by voluntarily immigration. This process has been one of the country's great strengths infusing it with talent and energy. The "browning of America" offers tremendous opportunity for capitalizing anew on the merits of many people from many lands.

The outcome will be determined by how well the immigrants follow the first hypothesis of successful migration discussed earlier. They must make America their home -- not just their own little ethnic enclave -- but the nation at large. They must participate in the political process and enter the mainstream of society in all aspects. Says Allan Bloom, in the best selling "The Closing of the American Mind". "... obviously, the future of America can't be sustained if people keep only to their own ways and remain perpetual outsiders. The society has got to turn them into Americans...". The burden is squarely on immigrants' shoulders. They have a good start since they arrive already committed to U.S. values; that is part of what attracted them.

A truly multi-racial and multi-cultural society will undoubtedly be harder to govern. Consider just one example. The expected show down in the early 21st Century between the rising numbers of workers who must be taxed to pay for elder's social security benefits - the large majority of recipient will be white, whereas a majority of workers paying for them will be "brown".

Therefore, it is important that the third wave immigrants to America succeed in the cross-cultural assimilation process. The thoughtful members of society are constantly imploring people to

look beyond their ethnic enclaves, to get involved, to make a difference. Based on my observations in the realm of political fund raising and candidates running for office, in the business and cultural arenas, I feel optimistic that this assimilation is underway. But the road will be rocky.

Some observations about the future:

I believe that migration and the related cross-cultural phenomenon will accelerate. Continued growth in transportation technology has made it both convenient and affordable for people to migrate wherever the opportunities are. Moreover, the opportunities are immediately recognized on a world-wide basis due to incredible communication technology including the use of TV and satellite broadcasts. Finally, combine this with the inherent nature of the human mind to explore new frontiers and find happiness. Yes, migration will continue and accelerate.

However, I will offer the following hypothesis. I believe that because of the improvements cited above - particularly the communications technology -- the cross-cultural phenomenon will take place without the physical migration of people. Thus, different cultures around the world will migrate and be assimilated by other cultures based on transfer of information. I am using culture in the broadest sense, not only the language, music, festivals, customs, eating habits but also the standard of living, wealth, housing, transportation methods, etc. I believe that technology will become the great equalizer. Already, production plants can be transferred around the globe wherever the lowest cost production can be procured. Some of the service functions are being transported to wherever the cheaper sources are. Global free trade and competition is forcing restructuring in all industries. I ask myself the following question: Why should the Chief Financial Officer of Bedford Properties located in the U.S. have a different standard of living than a person in

a similar job in Korea, or in Japan, or in Brazil, etc. Future events in the world will determine the answer to this question but the trend is unmistakable: cross-cultural forces in the world will accelerate. The world is shrinking.