On Immigration and Crime

by Ramiro Martinez, Jr., and Matthew T. Lee

ABSTRACT

The connection between immigration and crime is one of the most contentious topics in contemporary society. These discussions are not new, as debates on the issue date back more than 100 years. A general point on which both pro- and anti-immigration writers agree is that, as we enter the new millennium, the latest wave of immigration is likely to have a more important impact on society than any other social issue. In this essay, we survey the vast body of theoretical and empirical works on the relationship between immigration and crime in 20th-century America. Throughout, we include new writings as well as older, sometimes neglected works. We discuss three major theoretical perspectives that have guided explanations of the immigration/crime link: opportunity structure, cultural approaches, and social disorganization. We also examine empirical studies of immigrant involvement in crime. We conclude with a review of public opinion about immigrants, especially as it relates to immigrants and crime, and then provide original data on the connection between public opinion and immigrant crime.

There are important reasons to believe that immigrants should be involved in crime to a greater degree than native-born Americans. For example, immigrants face acculturation and assimilation problems that most natives do not, and immigrants tend to settle in disorganized

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neighborhoods characterized by structural characteristics often associated with crime, such as widespread poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, and a preponderance of young males. However, despite claims by pundits and writers that high levels of "immigrant crime" are an unavoidable product of immigration, scholars rarely produce any systematic evidence of this recently reemerging social problem.

Although a host of reasons exists to expect that immigrants are high-crime prone, the bulk of empirical studies conducted over the past century have found that immigrants are typically underrepresented in criminal statistics. There are some partial exceptions to this finding, but these appear to be linked more to differences in structural conditions across urban areas where immigrants settle rather than to the cultural traditions of the immigrant groups. Local context is a central influence shaping the criminal involvement of both immigrants and natives, but in many cases, compared with native groups, immigrants seem better able to withstand crime-facilitating conditions than native groups. In conclusion, this review suggests that native groups would profit from a better understanding of how immigrant groups faced with adverse social conditions maintain low rates of crime.

ABSTRACT

The linkage between immigrants and crime is one of the most controversial contemporary social issues. Discussions of this relationship are notably contentious; they are also not new, as debates on the matter date back more than 100 years. The one point on which writers both pro- and anti-immigration agree is that as we enter the new millennium the latest wave of immigration is likely to have a more significant impact on society than any other social issue (Suarez-Orozco 1998; Brimelow 1996). If the past is any guide, the immigrant-crime relationship will be at the center of attempts to make sense of this impact.

Historically, public opinion about immigration, and the immigrant-crime link especially, has been formed by stereotypes more often than reliable empirical data (Espenshade and Belanger 1998; Simon 1985). Similarly, early 20th-century immigration policy was guided more by questionable research and prejudicial beliefs than a solid foundation of knowledge based on the existing scientific literature (as cited in Sellin 1938). It is therefore essential to systematically review the scholarly literature on immigration and crime so that current public and policy debates may be better informed.

Historically, public opinion about immigration, and the immigrant-crime link especially, has been formed by stereotypes more often than reliable empirical data. Similarly, early 20th-century immigration policy was guided more by questionable research and prejudicial beliefs than a solid foundation of knowledge based on the existing scientific literature.

In this essay, we survey the vast body of theoretical and empirical works on the relationship between immigration and crime in 20th-century America. Throughout, we include both contemporary writings as well as older, sometimes neglected works. It is important to note that this literature is problematic in at least three ways (see Short 1997; Marshall 1997): (1) discussions of a particular immigrant group usually mask the wide variations in living conditions (e.g., socioeconomic status) of persons within that group; (2) the use of broad racial and ethnic categories conceals important subgroup differences and makes comparisons across studies difficult (e.g., Asian immigrants may be grouped together in one study but treated separately in another study as Filipinos, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc.); and (3) patterns of criminal involvement vary widely across generations of immigrant groups, and there is no agreed-upon rule for determining how many generations should pass before "immigrants" can be considered "natives."

In the first section of this essay, we discuss the three major theoretical perspectives that have guided explanations of the immigration-crime link: opportunity

structure, cultural approaches, and social disorganization (see Bankston 1998). Next, we examine empirical studies of immigrant involvement in crime. We have organized this body of research into subsections on group-specific comparisons of early and recent immigrants in the United States. Finally, we review public opinion about immigrants, especially as it relates to immigrants and crime, and then provide original data on the relationship between public opinions and immigrant crime.

Theoretical Perspectives

A seemingly infinite variety of explanations have been proposed to make sense of the voluminous and often contradictory data produced by research on the relationship between immigration and crime. Some early 20th-century American writers alleged that immigrant groups were biologically deficient compared with nonimmigrants and that crime was one of a host of deleterious outcomes that could be expected as long as "inferior" immigrants were allowed to enter the country. For example, one writer feared that immigration was likely to "destroy the inherent racial and family-stock qualities—physical, mental, and spiritual—of the people of the immigrant-receiving country" (Laughlin 1939, 5). Much of this biologically oriented work was associated with the long-discredited eugenics movement, and although it failed to provide solid empirical evidence to back such claims, these ideas did guide U.S. immigration legislation in the 1920s (Sellin 1938; Hagan and Palloni 1998).

Current popular theories tend to emphasize social-psychological (e.g., stress from acculturation pressures) or, more often, sociological variables (e.g., community disorganization). There is much disagreement between and within schools of thought as to the importance of different factors, but most theoretical work can be classified into one of the major perspectives mentioned in the next section. Explanations usually draw on several theoretical elements, and it is surely an analytical contrivance to think that "cultural" factors can be separated from their "structural" contexts.

Opportunity structure

Opportunity structure theories stress the material and social structures that shape the values and activities of groups in American society (Bankston 1998). Because legitimate opportunities for wealth and social status are not equally available to all groups, some will "innovate" by taking advantage of available illegitimate opportunities. This type of explanation was popularized by Merton (1938) and draws attention to the ways in which disadvantaged groups (which often includes immigrants) may be denied the legitimate means (e.g., jobs) to

attain culturally prescribed goals (e.g., a middle-class lifestyle). Cloward and Ohlin (1960) added the notion that some groups, particularly those living in "high crime" urban areas, have more illegitimate opportunities than others.

Scholars have long noted the tendency for new immigrants to settle in urban neighborhoods characterized by poverty, substandard housing, poor schools, and high crime rates (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920; Taylor 1931; Shaw and McKay [1942] 1969; Hagan and Palloni 1998). Segregated into such neighborhoods, immigrants may turn to crime as a means to overcome blocked economic opportunities or to organized crime to gain a foothold in politics (Whyte 1943). Other writers have suggested that previously noncriminal immigrant groups may simply be "contaminated" by the criminal opportunities that abound in their neighborhoods (Lambert 1970, 284; compare Sampson and Lauritsen 1997 on the "proximity" hypothesis). According to this view, immigrant criminality is more a function of preexisting structural factors like poverty (Yeager 1997); a preponderance of young, unattached males (Taft 1936; Gurr 1989); or the availability of alcohol (see Alaniz, Cartmill, and Parker 1998) than either the biological makeup or cultural traditions of immigrant groups.

Contemporary immigrant gangs can be viewed as an alternative means of securing wealth and status in urban areas in which immigrants are concentrated and a loss of blue-collar jobs has eroded the principal basis of upward mobility used by earlier generations of immigrants (Gans 1992). Patterns of factory life associated with the industrial revolution socialized earlier waves of immigrants (e.g., Irish, Italians) and facilitated their economic stability and assimilation into American culture, thus suppressing their crime rates (Lane 1997). But the contemporary loss of industrial jobs, traceable to the recent transition of the economy from a manufacturing to a service orientation, has had drastic consequences on the legitimate (and illegitimate) opportunities in American cities (cf. Wilson 1987; Anderson 1990). Although deindustrialization impacts both immigrants and nonimmigrants, newcomers (who are both economically and culturally marginal in American society) may find the potential benefits of the "informal economy" particularly attractive (Bankston 1998; see also Vigil and Long 1990). Since the possibility of gang membership is not open to everyone and is, in fact, usually based on ethnic identity, among other things (see Sanchez-Jankowski 1991), the availability of illegitimate opportunities in gangs is one structural variable that differentially influences immigrant crime across social units such as cities or neighborhoods.

Cultural approaches

In addition to this list of structural issues, scholars have viewed cultural forces as influencing criminal involvement, and immigrant crime in particular. The

"culture of poverty" thesis—where low-income people adapt to their structural conditions in ways that perpetuate their disadvantaged condition—is one example of a cultural explanation (Lewis 1965). Thus, engaging in crime as a means of acquiring social status draws children away from schoolwork, which reduces the probability of future economic advancement. A variant of this explanation for crime, the "subculture of violence" thesis, suggests that violence can become a "normal" and expected means of dispute resolution in economically disadvantaged areas (Wolfgang and Ferracuti 1967).

Because immigrants and ethnic minorities are more likely than native whites to reside in such areas, these cultural theories would seem particularly useful. Of course, as Sampson and Lauritsen (1997) point out, the subculture of violence theory cannot explain the wide variations in violent crime rates across structurally diverse minority neighborhoods, and they conclude that structural conditions are ultimately more important than cultural traditions. Bankston (1998) also notes that the existence of gangs across a variety of disadvantaged immigrant groups implies that they are the product of similar structural conditions rather than an outcome of the cultural traditions of any specific group. Finally, it would be a mistake to attribute comparatively high rates of minor crimes, such as illegal gambling among New York City's Puerto Rican newcomers in the 1950s, to their specific cultural traditions, since similarly disadvantaged native blacks also had high rates. As Handlin (1959, 101) points out, neither ethnic group saw gambling as a crime. Instead, the numbers game represented the American ideal of economic advancement.

Nevertheless, some writers suggest that certain types of crime are more prevalent among specific immigrant groups because of cultural traditions that are brought from the home country. Both Sutherland (1947) and Sellin (1938) argued that immigrant groups had "cultural predispositions" toward certain crimes. For example, in the 1920s, Italians had high rates of conviction for homicide but low rates of arrest for drunkenness (Sutherland and Cressey 1960). A study of Hawaii during the same period revealed that Chinese immigrants brought with them traditions of certain types of graft and gambling (Lind 1930b).

One prominent strain of cultural theory that is especially well suited to the immigration-crime relationship can be found in Sellin's (1938) writings on "culture conflict." Sellin (p. 21) recognized that the criminal law reflects the values of the "dominant interest groups" in society, and that the values of other social groups, particularly immigrants, were quite different. In cases in which the cultural codes of subordinate and dominant groups conflict, legal agents label as deviant the behavior of members of the subordinate classes. Nevertheless,

the criminal may be acting according to subculturally accepted norms and feel no "mental conflict" when violating the law. Sellin (p. 68) provides a classic example:

> A few years ago a Sicilian father in New Jersey killed the sixteen-year-old seducer of his daughter, expressing surprise at his arrest since he had merely defended his family honor in a traditional way. In this case a mental conflict in the sociological sense did not exist.

Thus, Sellin (p. 69) distinguishes "internal" (mental) conflict that may involve guilt or shame from "external" (i.e., at the level of cultural codes) conflict that does not. As society becomes more complex through processes of differentiation (of which immigration is just one), the potential for conflict among operative "cultural codes" also increases.

Four years earlier, Sutherland (1934, 51–52) offered a similar explanation, stating that "the conflict of cultures is therefore the fundamental principle in the explanation of crime [and] . . . the more the cultural patterns conflict, the more unpredictable is the behavior of the individual." This thesis has broad applicability to all social groups, but it clearly provides a key reason why immigrants are likely to engage in crime, perhaps suggesting that immigrants should have higher crime rates than the native population, other factors being equal.

Another body of literature in the cultural tradition has focused on the processes by which immigrants adapt to the traditions of the host country (Padilla 1980). It has long been asserted that acculturation to a new environment involves "adjustment to heterogeneous conduct norms" and this, in turn, can lead to higher crime rates (Sellin 1938, 85). Immigrant gangs, for example, usually owe as much to American cultural traditions as to those of the immigrant culture; adult Vietnamese refer to Vietnamese delinquents as "Americanized" (Bankston 1998). Immigrant gangs also form as a reaction to ethnic tensions in diverse neighborhoods; they provide physical protection from other ethnic-based gangs and maintain ethnic identities in the face of pressures for assimilation (Chin 1990; Du Phuoc Long 1996).

Other theoretical and empirical work on acculturation and crime found that delinquency among Korean-American youths varied by mode of acculturation: separation, assimilation, and marginalization. Interestingly, assimilated youths were more likely to be delinquent than those who were separated or marginalized (Lee 1998). Similarly, Stepick (1998) reports that Haitian children in South Florida adjust to extreme anti-Haitian sentiment by trying to "pass" as being African-American. Increasingly, these children are becoming part of the

criminal justice system as a result of alienation from both their Haitian background and American society (p. 120).

Social disorganization

The social disorganization perspective, although not denying the importance of cultural or structural forces, adds to the other perspectives a concern with the breakdown of community social institutions that results from social change. Bursik (1988, 521) concisely describes disorganized areas as possessing an "inability to realize the common values of their residents or solve commonly expressed problems." In organized neighborhoods, local community institutions work together to realize community goals, protect values, and generally control the behavior of community members in ways that conform to these goals and values. Bankston (1998) notes that immigration may undermine established institutions via a process of population turnover, while it also makes agreement about common values more difficult. The implication is that when social control is weakened in this manner crime will flourish.

One early influential statement of this perspective was set forth by Thomas and Znaniecki in their five-volume work published between 1918 and 1920 titled *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America.* Thomas and Znaniecki wrote about the many social changes affecting Polish peasants in this time period, including the disorganizing influences inherent in moving from simple, homogeneous, rural areas of Poland to the complex, heterogeneous, urban areas of the United States. They defined social disorganization as "a decrease of the influence of existing social rules of behavior upon individual members of the group" (Thomas and Znaniecki 1920, 2). The effectiveness of social rules (i.e., laws) derived from the individual's investment in them (i.e., attitudes favorable to laws). In the organized society, there was congruence between group rules and individual attitudes. Disorganization implied a gap between rules and attitudes, such that an individual did not feel bound by the rules and was free to disobey them (i.e., engage in crime). Viewed in this light, disorganization was a neutral term that suggested the possibility of social change, both positive and negative, and individual liberation from oppressive community standards, although it has generally been applied to studies of crime. One contribution to this literature is the recognition that crime not only is a function of economic (e.g., poverty) or cultural (e.g., subculture of violence) forces, but is intimately tied to the fundamental processes of social change.

Thomas and Znaniecki (1920, 82–83) describe two general types of disorganization that affect communities (and other organizations such as the family). The first, especially relevant to immigrant communities, causes a decay in solidarity

when the young generation adopts the values of the new community rather than the traditional "old world" values of the parent's generation (see also Schneider 1995 on "cultural anomie"). One example is the influence of American schools on immigrant children—learning a new language and values generates new desires in children for experiences that the older generation cannot provide, simultaneously reducing parental and communal ability to control their behavior (see also Young 1936). The second type of disorganization occurs among members of the old generation as values are subjected to differential interpretations over time or as rules are simply not enforced, leading to "social disharmony." For Thomas and Znaniecki, this second type of disorganization is rooted in the individual's unique temperament and may be expressed through a lack of compliance with social rules, even though there is no explicit rejection of the rules themselves. Control is thus weakened gradually through the cumulative actions of individuals who contribute to social change, even if this is not their intention.

Although not chiefly concerned with crime, Thomas and Znaniecki ([1920] 1984) did apply the idea of disorganization to the crimes of Polish immigrants. Murder among the Polish, for example, had a very different etiology in Poland as compared with the United States. Murder among the Polish in Poland was predominantly confined to one's own small communal group—murders of strangers were rare. The motive (e.g., revenge) in these cases was most often strongly felt and was preceded by long periods of brooding and a sense of violation of deeply held values. In contrast, murder in America by Polish immigrants was more likely to involve a victim who was a stranger or not well known to the offender and less likely to involve a concern with the seriousness of violating standards of the community. In the disorganized areas of America into which Polish immigrants settled, the social ties of the old country were weakened and community controls were loosened. Freed from traditional social controls, and subjected to social forces that influenced their lives in ways they could not control or sometimes understand, some Polish immigrants exhibited a "general nervousness" and "vague expectation of hostility" (Thomas and Znaniecki 1984, 286) that was virtually unknown in the old country. In such circumstances, murder could be provoked by seemingly trivial offenses partly because the immigrant feels the need to take individual action against affronts since:

> the murderer does not feel himself backed in his dealings with the outside world by any strong social group of his own and is not conscious of being the member of a steadily organized society. His family is too weak and scattered to give him a safe social refuge . . . where he could ignore outside provocations in the feeling of his social importance and security. (Thomas and Znaniecki 1984, 286)

Thus, the weakened Polish community in America was not able to solve disputes and organize behavior as it had in the old country, and this had implications for a host of social problems, including increased crime.

Despite the voluminous work of Thomas and Znaniecki, scholars most often associate the social disorganization perspective with the writings of Shaw and McKay (1931, [1942] 1969; see also Ross 1937; Kobrin 1959) on the ecological distribution of delinquency. Shaw and McKay utilized the concept of social disorganization to great effect by using quantitative data from Chicago neighborhoods to specify the role of community disorganization in producing high crime rates, other conditions (e.g., residential poverty, ethnicity) being equal. Their most important finding was that "within the same type of social area, the foreign born and the natives, recent immigrant nationalities, and older immigrants produce very similar rates of delinquents" (Shaw and McKay 1969, 158). Or, in the words of one of their critics, "nativity and nationality have no vital relationship to juvenile delinquency" (Jonassen 1949, 613). The Chicago data suggested to Shaw and McKay (though not to Jonassen) that certain areas had consistently high rates of delinquency, regardless of which immigrant groups lived there, and that as immigrant groups moved out of these areas and into better neighborhoods, their juvenile delinquency rates fell as well.

Inspired by Thomas and Znaniecki, the theoretical explanation suggested by these patterns was that neighborhoods characterized by "disorganizing" factors such as high population turnover and ethnic heterogeneity will be less likely than other neighborhoods to control the behavior of their inhabitants. According to this view, immigrants will have high crime rates only when they settle in disorganized neighborhoods, not because of biological factors or criminal cultural traditions. Thus, Lind (1930a, 1930b) stresses the value of distinguishing homogeneous but poor "ghettos" from heterogeneous, disorganized, and poor "slums." According to this view, crime might flourish in slums but not in ghettos, even though both are characterized by economic deprivation and other deleterious social conditions, because ghetto residents exert a degree of control over neighbors that is missing in disorganized slums (Lind 1930a). However, recent work on nonimmigrant black ghettos has found that homogeneous areas are not better organized for social control (Anderson 1990) and suffer from the concentration of multiple social problems (Sampson and Wilson 1995). Contemporary studies on immigrants in this tradition are lacking.

Recent theoretical work by Sampson and Lauritsen (1997) has attempted to demonstrate how macrosocial and local community-level structural forces can be combined to improve on the classic disorganization framework. Although this work developed from an attempt to explain black-white crime differences as well as the wide variation in black crime rates across structurally different

community areas, the theory can also advance our knowledge of the link between immigration and crime. Sampson and Lauritsen suggest that powerful factors (e.g., segregation, housing discrimination, structural transformation of the economy) coincide with local community-level factors (e.g., residential turnover, concentrated poverty, family disruption) to impede the social organization of inner cities (p. 340; see also Sampson and Wilson 1995). A deeper understanding of the interaction effects of these variables would enhance existing theories by better incorporating the role of the "massive social change" (Sampson and Lauritsen 1997, 340) experienced by the mostly black residents in U.S. inner cities in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the post-1965 immigration wave brought newcomers into these same structural conditions, we might expect high rates of immigrant crime during this time period. This question is the subject of the next section on empirical studies of immigration and crime.

Empirical Studies

There have been two major waves of immigration in the 20th century. The first consisted mainly of Europeans and Canadians and lasted until the mid-1920s, when congressional acts ended the flow of large numbers of immigrants into this country. The second, referred to as the "new immigration," began after 1965, peaked in the early 1990s, and was dominated by Afro-Caribbeans, Asians, and Latin Americans (Suarez-Orozco 1998; Hagan and Palloni 1998). Mexico is currently the largest single source of immigrants, both legal and illegal (Baker et al. 1998). In the following section, we consider some of the major studies of immigration and crime undertaken during both waves.

Early studies

In a recent historical study, Roger Lane (1997, 298) concluded that "homicide in the modern world has been mostly an irrationally impulsive crime, committed by young men, especially poor and aimless young men energized by frustration and anger." The same could be said about other crimes. Because immigration brings a disproportionate number of young males into the host country, we might expect immigrants to exhibit higher crime rates than the native population. In some cases, this has been the case (Gurr 1989; Monkkonen 1989). Beyond this population issue, each of the theoretical perspectives discussed previously offers compelling reasons why immigrants should have high crime rates: They usually settle in high-poverty, high-crime, disorganized communities and encounter problems of adjustment that native groups do not experience. Also, many immigrants move from rural areas into urban areas, and this also exerts a disorganizing influence on communal and familial structures (Young 1936). In fact, urban growth and immigration usually occur simultaneously and increases

in crime are often more a function of urbanization than any other factor (Handlin 1959). Yet the major finding of a century of research on immigration and crime is that immigrants display tremendous variations over time and space in their criminal involvement and, contrary to popular opinion, nearly always exhibit lower crime rates than native groups (Hagan and Palloni 1998; Tonry 1997; Ferracuti 1968; Sellin 1938).

The earliest studies on crime among the first wave of immigrants, which ended in 1924, were based on evidence that was uneven at best (Tonry 1997, 21). These studies suggested that newcomers were less likely to be involved in crime than the native born. A special report issued by the Industrial Commission of 1901 found that "foreign-born whites were less criminal than native whites," while the 1911 Immigration Commission concluded that "immigration has not increased the volume of crime" and that the presence of immigrants may have even suppressed criminal activity (Tonry 1997, 21). A review of other early immigrant-crime studies discovered that, contrary to stereotypes, most researchers did not find first-wave immigrants to be crime prone (McCord 1995), although results did vary by city (e.g., immigrants in Boston, but not in Chicago, were disproportionately involved in crime). These studies generally found that children of immigrants had crime rates higher than their immigrant parents but not higher than native-born children. This suggests that the acculturation to American life of the second generation of immigrants, and not the assumed "criminal traditions" of immigrant groups, was related to immigrant crime rates (Hagan and Palloni 1998; Sellin 1938; Sutherland 1934). Acculturation was apparently weakening the impact of traditional social controls in immigrant communities.

Even so, studies of the first wave of immigration support the conclusion that immigrants were not as highly involved in crime as natives (Abbott 1915; Lind 1930b; Taft 1936; Ferracuti 1968). A prominent report published in 1931 by the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, popularly known as the Wickersham Report, noted that immigrants had lower overall crime rates than nonimmigrants, although some groups appeared disproportionately involved in specific types of crime. Mexicans in one study, for example, displayed higher rates of arrest for some violent crimes than native whites (though lower than native blacks; see Bowler 1931, 119). However, as Taylor (1931) and later Sellin (1938, 76) pointed out, these rates are "untrustworthy" because reliable Mexican population estimates were not available because of the migratory nature of that group, a situation made worse by the fact that the 1930 census figures were not yet available (Taylor 1931).

Immigrant rates were untrustworthy for other reasons as well. Another author of the 1931 report discussed ways in which prejudice against Mexicans by

criminal justice personnel worked to inflate their arrest rates (Warnshuis 1931). For example, police in a community with a large Mexican presence expressed the belief that most crimes were committed by Mexicans, while an examination of arrests revealed that only 4 Mexicans out of 252 total persons arrested were booked in 1 month; 3 of these were for "disorderly conduct," and none were convicted. In terms of official statistics, police prejudice had practical consequences when serious crimes occurred: Police would sometimes arrest "all the Mexicans they could find" (p. 283), artificially inflating Mexican crime rates.

Scholarly research and public concern about immigration and crime practically disappeared in the middle third of the 20th century. This is not surprising because immigration was low during this time period and large segments (e.g., Italians, Irish) of the first wave had been assimilated into American society.

Despite the limitations of the Mexican crime data, Taylor (1931) was able to draw several conclusions. First, the number of Mexican crimes committed was about what could be expected by the number of Mexicans in the population and the crime rates were similar to those of other groups. Second, patterns of criminal arrest varied considerably across cities and were shaped by a host of social factors, including poverty and the age and sex distributions of the immigrant population. Taylor (p. 235) also discovered that Mexican criminal involvement displayed "interesting diversity within the same locality," suggesting the need to examine structural factors differentially affecting immigrants in socially meaningful areas such as neighborhoods, rather than in larger political divisions such as cities and States. In short, there was no single conclusion that could be drawn about "Mexican crime rates" independent of the local community context.

This last point was investigated by Lind (1930a, 1930b) in work on immigration and crime in the ethnically diverse city of Honolulu, Hawaii. Following proponents of the Chicago school of sociology like Robert Park and Louis Wirth, Lind (1930a, 206–207) stressed the distinction between "slums"—ethnically diverse, unstable, and poor neighborhoods—and "ghettos," which were also economically depressed but characterized by a stable, organized, and racially homogenous group of residents (see also Whyte 1943 on "rooming house" verses "settlement" districts). Lind found that due to neighborhood heterogeneity and instability, groups in slums had multiple moral codes and were less effective in organizing families and community organizations to control the behavior of residents who were members of that group. Thus, delinquency was rare in poor but stable Japanese neighborhoods and high among native

Another study found that immigration was not related to youth violence in California, while alcohol availability was an important influence on serious crime among young males in three cities with a heavy Latino population. Finally, a study of Puerto Rican newcomers found that those living in New York City had high rates of homicide, while Puerto Ricans living elsewhere had rates comparable to native whites.

Hawaiians residing in economically better off, but disorganized, areas (Lind 1930b). In addition, Lind (1930a, 209) documented that Japanese delinquency rates also varied by the degree of neighborhood segregation and population concentration. Such findings provided empirical support for the argument that immigrant crime is a function of generic processes (i.e., disorganization) associated with urban living rather than the cultural traditions or predispositions of immigrants (see also Shaw and McKay 1969).

Other research found that compared with native groups, some immigrant groups were able to resist the disorganizing effects of slum areas to a higher degree than native groups. One study showed that although Seattle's Japanese immigrants lived in an economically deprived, high-crime, disorganized area, their "strong family and community organization" was able to keep their children's delinquency rates low (Hayner 1933, 319). This is consistent with results reported by Taft (1936, 736) showing that immigrants usually displayed lower crime rates than nonimmigrants and that variations could be explained by some combination of "adverse conditions" found in high-crime areas and the insulating effect of the "cultural values which different national groups bring." Von Hentig (1945, 793; contra Glueck and Glueck 1930) reports similar findings: Descendants of native-born groups were much more involved in serious crime than descendants of immigrants or of mixed parentage, though there were "vast diversities by States." Again, some combination of ecological conditions and cultural factors seemed important for explaining the involvement, or lack thereof, of immigrants in crime.

Contemporary studies

Scholarly research and public concern about immigration and crime practically disappeared in the middle third of the 20th century (Hagan and Palloni 1998). This is not surprising because immigration was low during this time period and large segments (e.g., Italians, Irish) of the first wave had been assimilated into American society (Lane 1997). But the post-1965 wave of immigration (largely Latino, Asian, and Afro-Caribbean) has generated renewed interest in the topic, in part because the arrival of these immigrants coincided with the rise in crime rates in this country during the late 1960s and 1970s.

Some writers have suggested that immigrant criminality was becoming an increasingly serious problem in the 1990s, as evidenced by the increase in prosecutions in U.S. district courts of noncitizens from 1984 to 1994 (3,462 cases to 10,352 cases, respectively; see Marshall 1997). Yet this finding does not take into account the tremendous increase in immigration over this time period and is largely the result of increased prosecution for drug offenses as well as for immigration offenses to which natives are not subject. As we discuss in the following section, public opinion continues to associate immigrants with crime, so it is important to review recent studies that have investigated this relationship.

The 1994 U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform compared crime in cities along the U.S.-Mexico border with nonborder cities in order to assess the impact of Mexican immigrants on crime rates. The Commission concluded that crime rates in border cities such as El Paso, Texas, were generally lower (in some cases much lower) than rates in nonborder cities. In addition to city rate comparisons, regression analysis revealed that "crime is lower on average in border areas than in other U.S. cities when the characteristics of the urban population are held constant" (1994, 20). A followup study conducted a more direct statistical test of the effect of immigration on levels of crime and found "no consistent or compelling evidence at the SMSA [Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area] level that immigration causes crime" (Hagan and Palloni 1998, 380).

Much of the recent work on immigration and crime has focused on gangs (see Bankston 1998; Marshall 1997). This is not surprising, since new immigrants often settle in urban areas characterized by a high level of gang activity, and many immigrant gangs form as a means of protection from these existing threats (Chin 1990). Although there have been numerous studies of specific immigrant gangs (cf. Du Phuoc Long 1996), there has been no research that systematically compares the level of immigrant involvement versus native involvement in gangs or suggests reasons to suspect that immigration increases gang activity (Bankston 1998).

Post-1965 studies of nongang criminal involvement of specific immigrant or ethnic groups have been rare (Martinez and Lee 1999). The studies that have been conducted tend to agree with research on the first wave: Immigrants are not disproportionately involved in crime and often are much less involved than native groups. For example, research on homicide in San Antonio found that homicide rates among Mexican males fell between those of native whites and native-born blacks and that homicide remained concentrated in poor areas of the city, regardless of whether the residents were black or Mexican over the 1940 through 1980 period (Bradshaw et al. 1998). Another study found that immigration was not related to youth violence in California, while alcohol availability was an important influence on serious crime among young males in

In the small number of studies providing empirical evidence, immigrants are generally less involved in crime than similarly situated groups, despite the wealth of prominent criminological theories that provide good reasons why this should not be the case.

three cities with a heavy Latino population (Alaniz, Cartmill, and Parker 1998). Finally, a study of Puerto Rican newcomers found that those living in New York City had high rates of homicide, while Puerto Ricans living elsewhere had rates comparable to native whites (Rosenwaike and Hempstead 1990).

A number of studies have examined homicide among several prominent ethnic groups in Miami. Although Mariel refugees were often portrayed by the media as high-rate killers, the empirical evidence demonstrated that they were rarely overrepresented as either victims or offenders, and in fact, after a short time, were much less likely to offend than Miami's established Cubans (Martinez 1997a). In addition, despite a constant influx of Latino immigrants in the 1980s, Miami's homicide rates continued to decline (Martinez 1997b). Finally, Martinez and Lee (1998) found that Miami's Haitians and Latinos were underrepresented in homicide relative to group size, while African-Americans were overrepresented, and in some cases the rate of homicide among the two immigrant groups was *lower* than that of non-Latino whites (Anglos).

Consistent with earlier studies, the criminal involvement of immigrant groups varies considerably in different cities. A good example of this variation is provided in a study of Latino homicide among El Paso's Mexicans and Miami's Cubans (Lee, Martinez, and Rodriguez 2000). Despite the two cities' similar structural characteristics (e.g., employment, poverty), Miami's Latino homicide rate was almost three times that of El Paso. In addition to city-specific characteristics such as Miami's older population, greater income inequality (see Martinez 1996 for a discussion of absolute deprivation versus relative deprivation among Latinos), and possibly greater availability of guns, other local conditions shaped the comparatively high Cuban homicide rate. For example, Cubans settled in a more violent area of the country (south Florida) than did Latinos in El Paso, and this regional context may shape each group's involvement in homicide. Wilbanks (1984; see also Epstein and Greene 1993), demonstrated that Miami's homicide trends mirror those for south Florida generally, and that this area experienced a sharp rise in homicides *prior to* the arrival of thousands of Cuban refugees in the Mariel boatlift of 1980. Thus, Miami's Latinos lived in a location experiencing higher levels of violence than El Paso's Latinos.

Just as important differences were revealed by the experience of two groups of Latinos described in the preceding research, other studies have also examined within-group differences among ethnic groups (see Hawkins 1999 for a similar strategy). Martinez and Lee (2000) investigated Afro-Caribbean homicides in Miami and found that Mariel Cuban, Haitian, and Jamaican immigrants were generally less involved in homicide than natives. Comparing the early 1980s, when these groups first began arriving in Miami in large numbers, to the late 1990s, the authors noted a strong pattern of declining violence, especially for Jamaicans and Mariels, while Haitians continuously maintained a low overall rate. As these immigrant groups grew in size and had a lower proportion of young males, homicide rates rapidly declined. This finding suggests that, contrary to key propositions of social disorganization theory, rapid immigration may not create disorganized communities but may instead stabilize neighborhoods through the creation of new social and economic institutions (see also Portes and Stepick 1993).

The general conclusions of recent research on immigration and crime echoes themes found in earlier studies. In the small number of studies providing empirical evidence, immigrants are generally less involved in crime than similarly situated groups, despite the wealth of prominent criminological theories that provide good reasons why this should not be the case (e.g., residence in disorganized neighborhoods, acculturation difficulties, conflicts between cultural codes). Furthermore, immigrant experiences vary greatly with local conditions, as illustrated by the study of Cubans in Miami and Mexicans in El Paso, and it is likely that these conditions shape criminal involvement to a larger degree than the cultural traditions of the groups themselves. We now turn to a review of persistent public opinions about immigrants and crime.

Public Opinion on Immigration and Crime

Rita Simon (1985, 1987, 1993) points out that, regardless of the time period, public opinion has almost always been negative on the issue of whether additional immigrants should be permitted to enter this country (see also Espenshade and Belanger 1998). In addition, the most recent immigrants are almost always viewed unfavorably, although public opinion eventually improves with the passage of time (Roper Reports 1995). According to Simon (1987, 47), older ethnic communities are viewed more positively than recent arrivals, even if the earlier communities were initially disliked.

For example, the Chinese and Japanese are viewed more favorably today in public opinion polls than they were in the 1920s, although they were once

Articles in other popular magazines also expressed the low public opinion in which immigrants were held. One 1923 issue of the Saturday Evening Post viewed immigrants from southeastern Europe as the "dullest and dumbest people in Europe," while another from the same year quoted eugenicist Harry Laughlin as saying "If America doesn't keep out the queer alien mongrelized people of Southern and Eastern Europe, her crop of citizens will eventually be dwarfed and mongrelized in turn."

widely subjected to discriminatory legislation and prejudicial public attitudes (Abbott 1931). Similarly, opinion was decidedly against Irish, Italians, and Poles in the 1920s, but white ethnic groups are usually better regarded today, at least in some recent surveys. A 1985 survey showed that 82 eminent social scientists believe, like most Americans for the past century and a half, that the current group of immigrants (mostly Latinos) is somehow different than previous groups: They are thought less likely to assimilate and especially dangerous to cultural values and institutions (Simon 1993).

In addition to this temporal issue, opinions about immigrants are not uniformly distributed across social groups—persons with advanced education, prestigious jobs, and higher incomes hold more favorable opinions of all immigrants regardless of country of origin (Simon 1987), although some surveys have shown that compared with other groups, blacks and Latinos hold immigrants in high esteem (Espenshade and Belanger 1998). However, small wording changes in these surveys make a big difference in the attitudes of respondents. For example, immigrants who have lived in the United States for at least 5 years are viewed much more favorably than recent arrivals. It is also telling that in surveys that place concerns about immigration in a wider context of social issues, immigration ranks much lower than other issues such as crime and jobs as well as "don't know" responses (Espenshade and Belanger 1998).

To place the current anti-immigrant sentiment in context, it is informative to examine trends in opinions about immigration and crime throughout the 20th century.[1] As Ferracuti (1968, 190; see also Short 1997; Abbott 1931) points out, in the first half of the 20th century, "popular opinion often expressed the view that migrants were responsible for a large fraction of the crime rate," despite considerable empirical evidence that they were not. Statements like the following from a turn-of-the-century New York City police commissioner were typical: "[S]omething like 85 out of one hundred of our criminals should be found to be of exotic origin" (Simon 1985, 70–71). This commissioner viewed Italians as particularly dangerous "malefactors"

(Simon 1985, 71) and promoted the view that the French and Belgians organized white slavery rackets.

The idea of criminal immigrants was not a product of the 20th century; a series of articles in the *New York Times* published in 1880 was also concerned with criminal Italians, a particularly "clannish race," and the prototypical "bad Irish boy [who was] about as unwholesome a product as was ever reared in any body politic" (Simon 1985, 186). Note also that the 1892 Democratic Party platform nodded approvingly at legislation designed to keep the United States from "being used as a dumping ground for known criminals" from Europe and China (Simon 1985, 18). Such views had long been reflected in scholarly writings as well. For example, an article by William Jeffrey in an 1893 issue of the *Journal of Political Economy* also blamed immigrants for increasing crime rates (Simon 1985).

This image appeared in prominent periodicals throughout the first wave of immigration. A 1915 editorial in *North American Review* called for a restriction of immigration on the grounds of the "criminal and economic worthlessness" of southern European immigrants (Simon 1985, 71). Articles in other popular magazines also expressed the low public opinion in which immigrants were held. One 1923 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* viewed immigrants from southeastern Europe (e.g., Italy, Greece) as the "dullest and dumbest people in Europe," while another from the same year quoted eugenicist Harry Laughlin as saying "If America doesn't keep out the queer alien mongrelized people of Southern and Eastern Europe, her crop of citizens will eventually be dwarfed and mongrelized in turn" (Simon 1985, 85). The assumed criminal nature of immigrants is a common theme in these writings, with authors claiming that immigrants were filling penitentiaries and insane asylums faster than the native born. During the 1920s, Italians, Jews, Poles, Russians, Greeks, and others were commonly portrayed as criminals.

Contemporary anti-immigrant sentiment is often promoted by organized interest groups that accuse Third World nations of exporting their excessive numbers to the United States (Simon 1993, 69). And as in the past (see Sellin 1938), current legislation—such as California's Proposition 187 and the U.S. Congress' 1996 Immigration Reform bill—has not relied on scholarly research, even though it has been justified on the grounds that it will stem the tide of "criminal aliens," who are a growing presence in the criminal justice system (U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform 1994; Scalia 1996). This imagery has profound consequences for recent immigrants who must confront these enduring negative stereotypes, are singled out for discrimination, and are consistently viewed in public opinion polls as burdens to society (Simon 1987; Roper Reports 1995).

One consequence of prejudicial attitudes about immigrants can be seen in the rise in reported hate crimes against Asian-Americans that occurred in some communities in the 1980s (Zinsmeister 1987). Citizens in areas in which Asian immigrants were settling believed that these immigrants "come from jungle communities," eat dogs, and represent unfair labor competition because they work "day and night" (Zinsmeister 1987, 8). Gore Vidal echoed this last concern in a 1986 article in the *Nation,* claiming that unless the United States and Canada cooperated with each other and limited the number of Asian newcomers, Americans would end up as "mere entertainment" for Asians (p. 350). These ideas, when added to the traditional allegation that immigrants are a highly criminal population, facilitate a resentment against immigrants that may increase the probability of hate crimes.

Public opinion and immigrant homicide in three cities

As a point of departure, we focus on homicide victim rates, not offending rates, in the following section. Although much of our discussion has centered on offender motivation, the immigration-crime link should be evident in the following analyses of homicide victim rates given the closeness of the victim and offender relationship in most cases. The Federal Bureau of Investigation's 1995 Uniform Crime Report (UCR) notes that in 75 percent of homicide cases cleared with an arrest, the victim and offender had *some* type of prior relationship (spouse, family member, lover, friend, neighbor) or previous contact such as an acquaintance or coworker (U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation 1997, table 2.12). Thus, in most cases, the "stranger element" is absent even after considering the proportion of unknown offenders, which could fall in any category of familiarity or individual characteristic (age, race, gender). Furthermore, the vast majority of all homicides were intraracial (white on white, black on black) and speaks to neighborhood residential patterns and segregation that have long been part of American society. Most persons tend to live in areas in which other residents have similar attributes, including race and ethnicity.

In addition, historical and contemporary studies also report that many killings were victim precipitated and that the event initially arose out of an argument (as one example) that turned lethal (Wolfgang 1958; Martinez and Lee 1998). The closeness of this relationship is further illustrated in a recent city-level homicide study of black and white victim rates. Ousey (1999, 410) reports that the effects of structural conditions on homicide victim and arrest rates are substantially similar and provide the same conclusions. This is not surprising

given the spatial proximity between victims and offenders, most of whom reside in the same neighborhood and share points of economic comparison (Anderson 1990). In fact, both are also products of communities weakened by a host of social problems that impede the ability of institutions to maintain order and provide opportunities to those most in need and typically more active in crime in general and violence specifically.

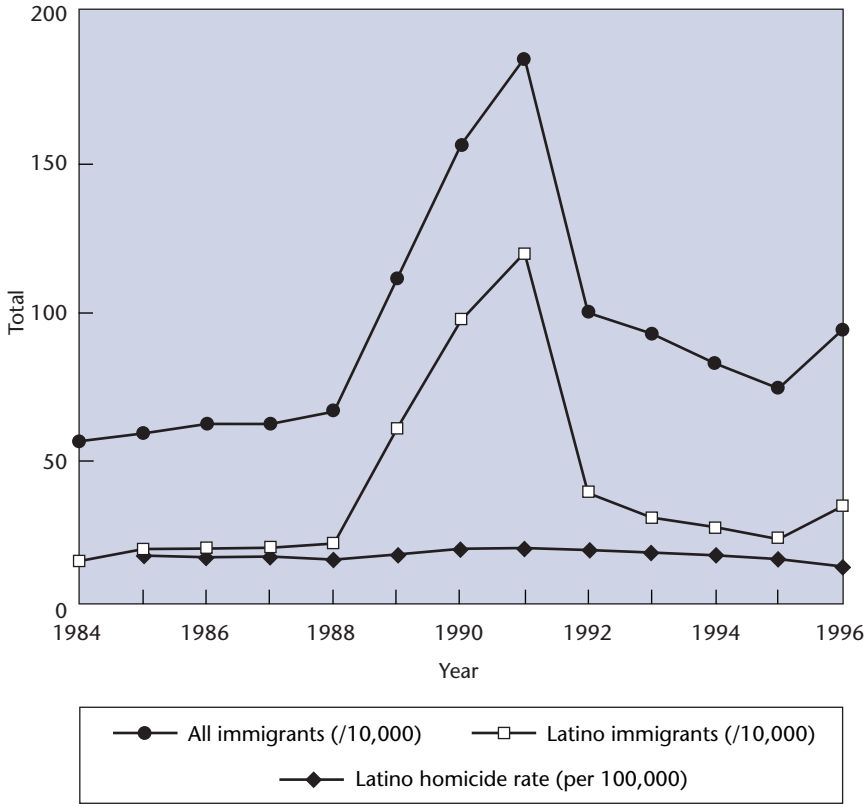
Because immigration adds to the country's total population—and especially the population of young, unattached males—it will also likely increase the absolute volume of crime. The key question is whether immigrants contribute a disproportionate amount of crime beyond what we would expect from native populations with similar demographic characteristics.

Finally, data issues also encourage us to focus on victim data. Homicides are rare events relative to any other type of violent crime (e.g., armed robbery, aggravated assault). Disaggregating these already scarce cases by ethnicity thins an already shallow pool even more, encouraging researchers to use all available homicide victim incidents. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, no large-scale datasets are available or, if available, are not fully complete that break down offending behavior for Latinos. Critics might suggest that our findings in the following section are city specific. We admit there is a chance that our findings might differ from those of others, but again, most of our cases involve members of the same group, and in all instances, the contours of victim and offender data followed each other closely. Therefore, victimization rates represent a valuable, albeit not entirely satisfactory, proxy for group-specific offending behavior.

Despite claims by pundits and writers that high levels of crime are an unavoidable product of immigration, scholars rarely produce any systematic evidence of this recently reemerging social problem (Beck 1996; Hagan and Palloni 1998; Sampson and Lauritsen 1997). As Hagan and Palloni note, because immigration adds to the country's total population—and especially the population of young, unattached males—it will also likely increase the absolute volume of crime. The key question is whether immigrants contribute a disproportionate amount of crime beyond what we would expect from native populations with similar demographic characteristics. As exhibit 1 shows, the recent wave of immigrants (predominantly Latino) appears not to have affected rates of Latino homicide.[2]

Although theory and popular wisdom suggest that immigrants should be disproportionately involved in crime, the trends reported in exhibit 1 show that Latino homicide rates remained remarkably stable despite a massive increase in Latino immigrants in the early 1990s. Similar findings showing no systematic relationship between immigration and crime rates have been reported for the early 20th-century wave of immigration as well (Hagan and Palloni 1998, 369). In the final section of this essay, we explore the relationship between public opinion, local context, and immigrant crime by reporting previously unpublished group-specific homicide victim data.

Exhibit 1. Total and Latino immigration counts with the national Latino homicide victim rate



Sources: Immigration figures are reported by the U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service (1997, 1987); homicide rates are based on data from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics (1998).

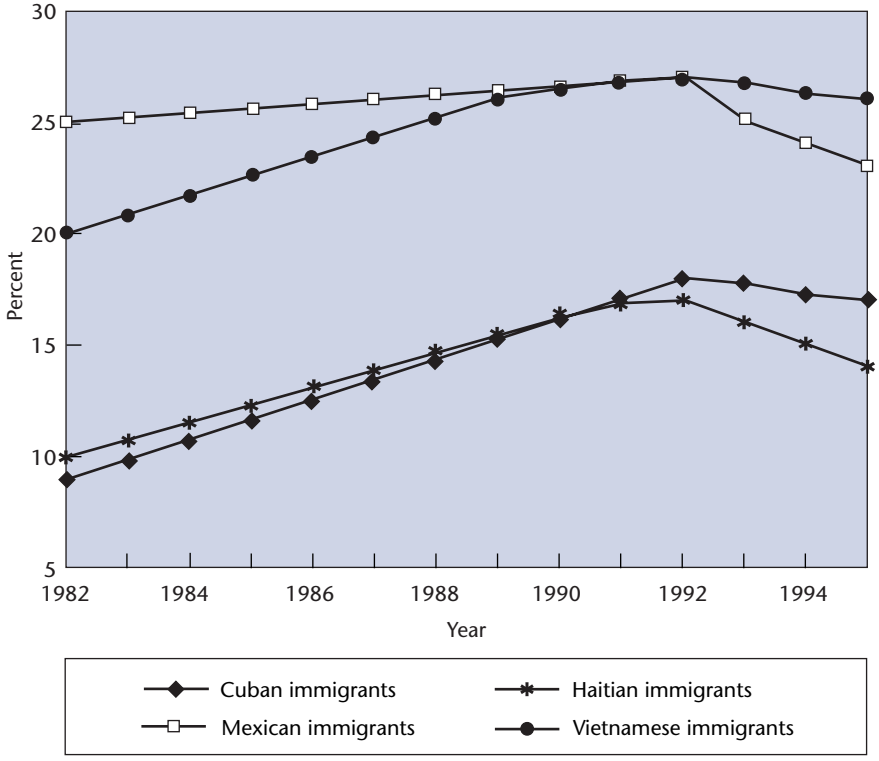
In this section, we present empirical findings for the latest available time period from an ongoing study of immigrant homicide victimization in three cities, El Paso, Miami, and San Diego. Little evidence exists that violence among Latinos in these cities, almost one-third foreign born, is persistently and systematically influenced by high levels of immigration. Despite this finding, public opinion has remained negative on the issue of whether specific immigrant groups have "been a good thing for the country," which suggests that these immigrant groups face widespread prejudice and, presumably, difficulties adjusting to American society (Roper Reports 1995). As exhibit 2 shows, only a small percentage of Americans (in no case more than 27 percent) hold favorable opinions of the immigrants listed. Although positive attitudes toward Mexicans and Vietnamese are twice as high as those about Cubans and Haitians, they nevertheless still are expressed by a relatively small proportion of the U.S. population. By comparison, European immigrants (i.e., English, Irish, and others from the first wave of immigration) are generally viewed at least twice as favorably as the recent immigrant groups. For example, 45 percent of respondents in 1995 rated the Irish favorably (see Roper Reports 1995).

Before turning to an examination of group-specific homicide rates, as these might be influenced by unfavorable public attitudes, we first present total homicide rates for the three cities involved. We have commented throughout this essay on the importance of local conditions in shaping immigrant crime, and it is important to place the homicide involvement of immigrant groups in their local context. Since victim data are more fully complete than offender information, and given that roughly 20 to 25 percent of homicide cases are neither cleared with an arrest nor have an identified assailant, victim rates are used as proxies for homicides. Offender rates, at least in these cities, follow the same racial and ethnic contours of victimization data, allowing us to remain reasonably confident that our argument applies to all homicide cases.

The Mariel contribution to local homicide was concentrated for a few years and then greatly declined, dropping below Miami's total and Latino rates and even below national rates for cities of Miami's size.

As exhibit 3 shows, homicide rates per 100,000 persons in Miami are much higher than in San Diego and El Paso, so we would expect that this finding would shape immigrant homicide. Therefore, in the exhibits that follow, the homicide rates of immigrant groups will be compared with relevant local and national rates. In many of the exhibits, immigrant rates mirror both city-specific and national trends.[3]

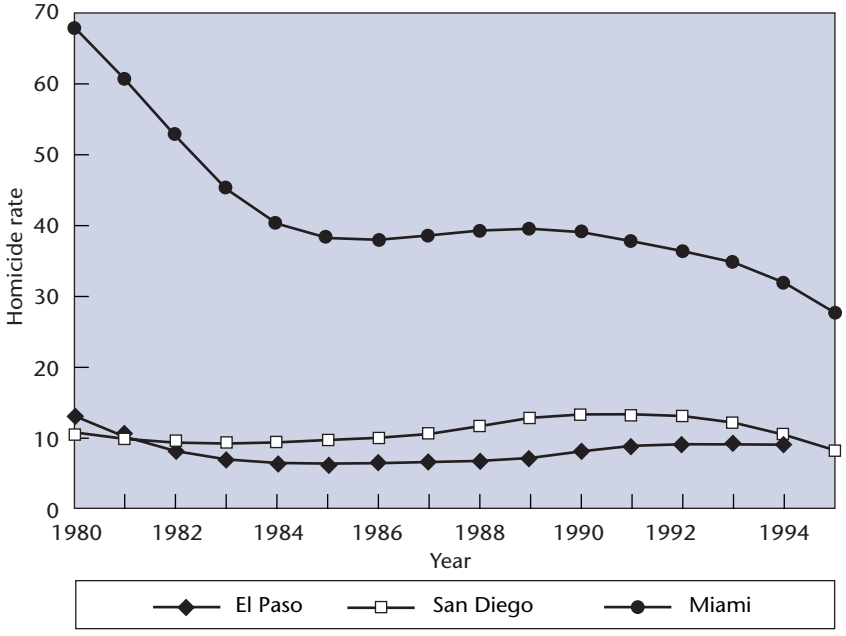
Exhibit 2. Percent of U.S. population sample who believe selected immigrant groups have been a "good thing for the country"



Source: Roper Reports 1995, 113–114.

There are probably some unique instances for Latinos and others in which changes in public attitudes and victimization rates shift over time. Take, for example, the highly publicized 1980 Mariel boatlift in which almost 125,000 people fled Cuba, with most ending up in south Florida (see Portes and Stepick 1993). The popular media linked these refugees to already record-high crime rates in Miami, labeled them as escorias, or scum, released from Cuban prisons, and generated a great deal of negative publicity about the group as a whole (see Aguirre, Saenz, and James 1997). As we see in exhibit 4, the Mariel homicide victim rate did exceed the Miami city total from 1980 to 1986. However, the Mariel Cubans never surpassed the African-American level of victimization

Exhibit 3. Total homicide victim rates for three cities

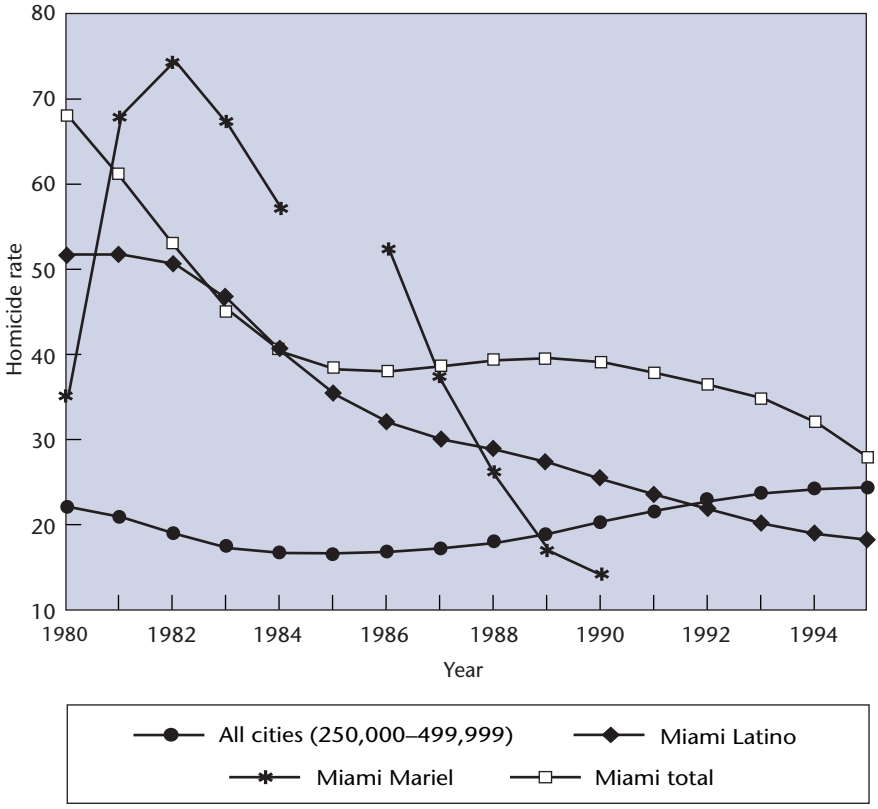


Sources: City of El Paso Police Department homicide investigations records 1980–95; City of Miami Police Department homicide investigations records 1980–95; City of San Diego Police Department homicide investigations records 1980–95. Population estimates are based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990).

and apparently landed in Miami during an overall period of urban strife (see Martinez 1997 for data collection material). This is not to suggest that the Mariels were *not* overinvolved in crime. In fact, they did contribute, like others, to the high crime levels in Miami, but at the same time they were not the persistent and high-crime-prone immigrants portrayed in the media. The Mariel contribution to local homicide was concentrated for a few years and then greatly declined, dropping below Miami's total and Latino rates and even below national rates for cities of Miami's size.

The negative attitudes toward Cubans persisted much longer than the initial negative publicity. Using the work of Portes and Stepick (1993) as a starting point, we note that the percentage of the national population agreeing that "Cubans were a

Exhibit 4. Miami's Mariel homicide victim rates in local and national context

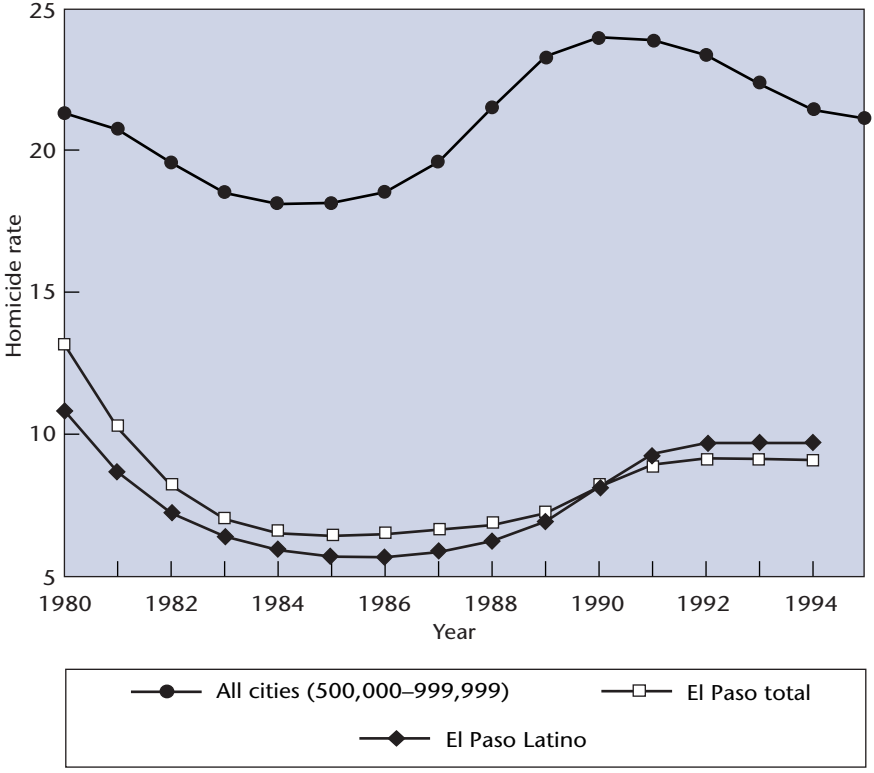


Sources: City of Miami Police Department homicide investigations records 1980–95. Population estimates are based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990); population estimates for Mariels are based on data discussed in Portes, Clark, and Manning (1985); homicide rates for all cities are based on data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1980–95).

good thing for the United States" was below 10 percent and rose only to about 17 percent for Cubans in 1995, according to the latest available Roper Reports (see exhibit 2). This was despite the substantial decline of Mariel violence in Miami, where most of the refugees settled.

The same negative attitudes hold true in cities on the U.S.-Mexico border. Public opinion toward Mexicans never reflects the persistently low Latino (Mexican) victim rates in the two largest border cities—El Paso and San Diego.

Exhibit 5. El Paso's Latino homicide victim rates in local and national context

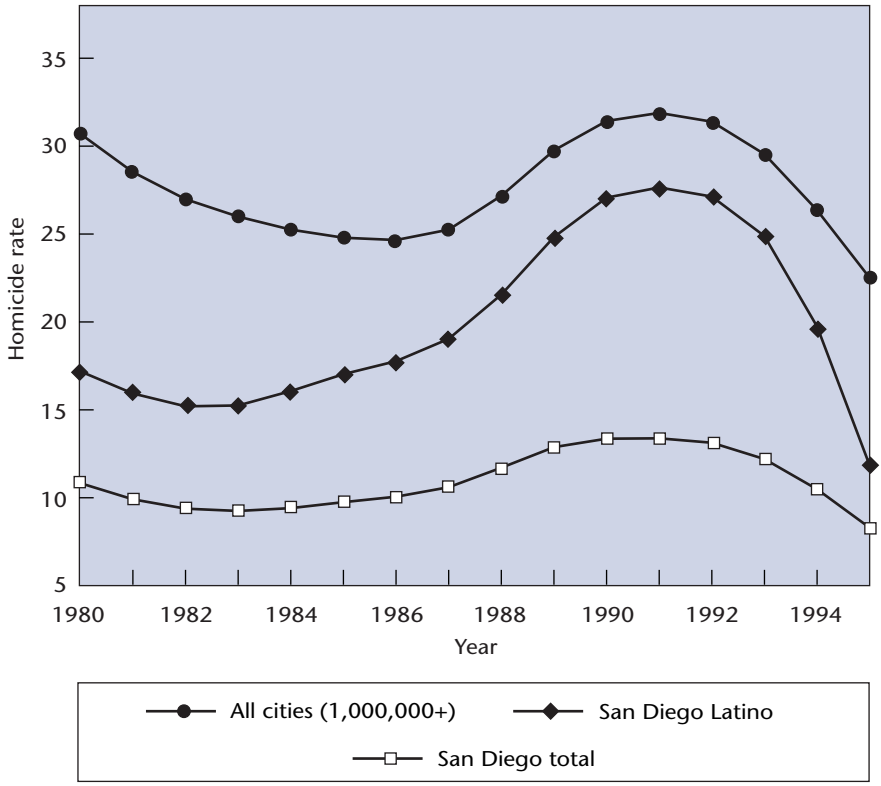


Sources: City of El Paso Police Department homicide investigations records 1980-95. Population estimates are based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990); homicide rates for all cities are based on data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1980–95).

The homicide rate in these two cities never approached that of other cities of similar size (see exhibits 5 and 6). Exhibit 2 shows how national attitudes toward Mexicans remained flat, then actually declined, notwithstanding the low Mexican-origin homicide rates.

The connection between low victim rates and public perception becomes most apparent in the case of Miami's Haitians, as shown in exhibit 7. Miami is not only a major destination for Afro-Caribbeans, it is home to the second largest Haitian community in the United States. Yet, again, public attitudes toward

Exhibit 6. San Diego's Latino homicide victim rates in local and national context

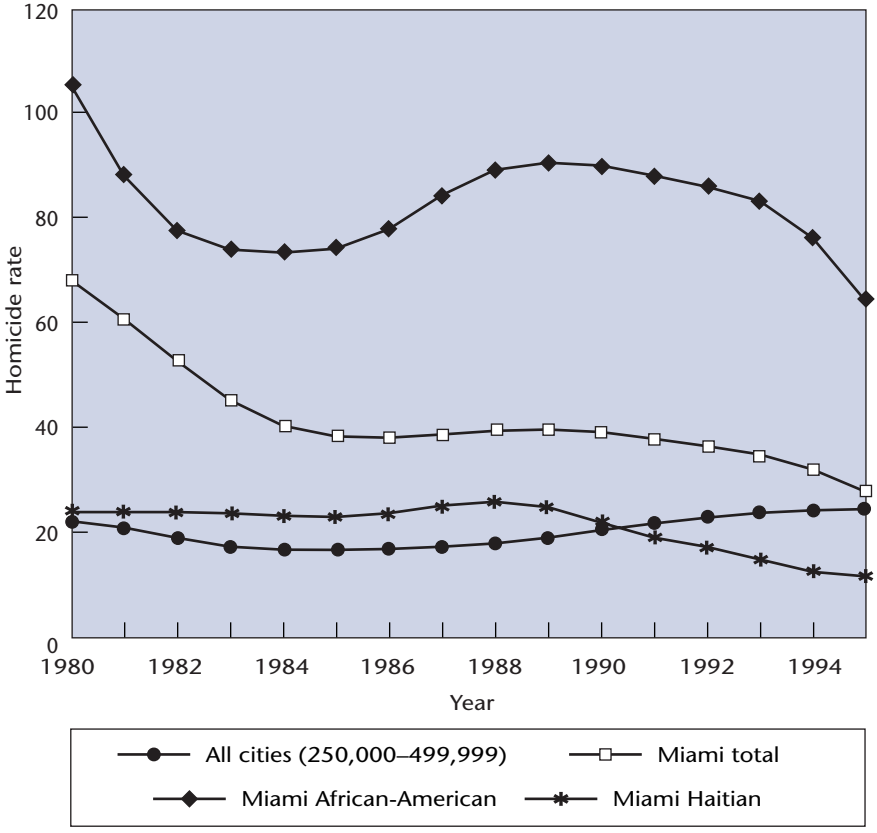


Sources: City of San Diego Police Department homicide investigations records 1980–95. Population estimates are based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990); homicide rates for all cities are based on data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1980–95).

Haitians have rarely been favorable (see exhibit 2) and are actually worsening, despite Haitians having homicide rates lower than those of *any* ethnic group in Miami and lower than the average in all small cities in the 1990s.

Finally, we examine homicide rates among San Diego's Asian immigrants (predominantly Vietnamese) in exhibit 8 and compare these rates with public attitudes about Vietnamese. At first glance, the level of homicide among Asians appears to ebb and flow; however, the rate never rises above single digits (7.5 to 8.0 per 100,000 Asians in San Diego). In fact, Asian rates fall below San Diego's total rate and well below the rates of cities with more than

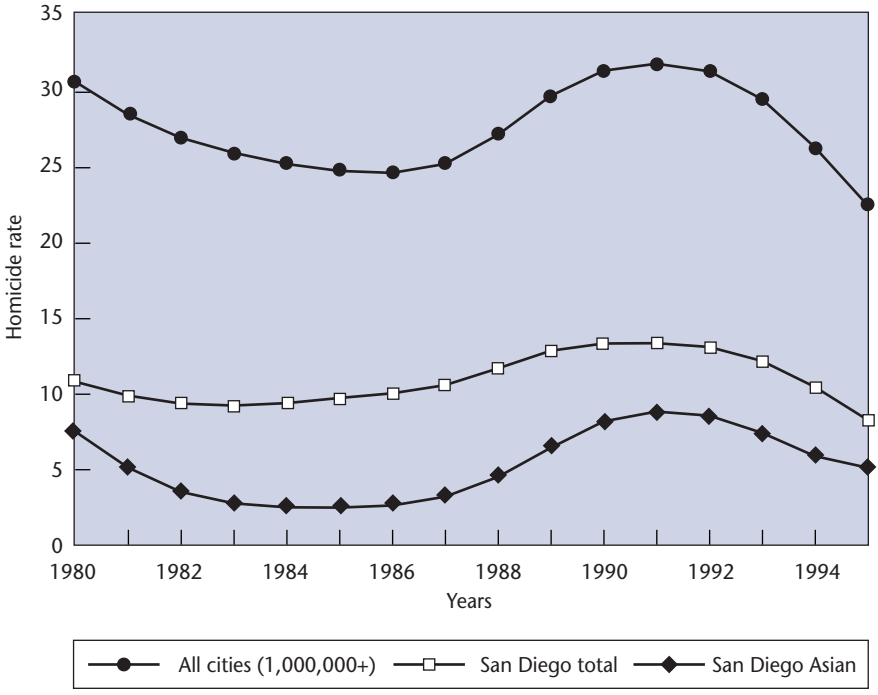
Exhibit 7. Miami's Haitian homicide victim rates in local and national context



Sources: City of Miami Police Department homicide investigations records 1980–95. Population estimates are based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990); homicide rates for all cities are based on data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1980–95).

1 million residents. Despite this, positive attitudes toward the Vietnamese have not materialized to any appreciable degree over the period of this study (see exhibit 2). Like the other immigrant groups, Asians continue to be viewed unfavorably despite their comparatively low involvement in crime, at least as measured by homicide rates. Apparently, national attitudes toward ethnic groups are not in line with crime rates (if we assume a favorable attitude to low crime groups) but are instead probably shaped by ethnic or racial stereotypes, not empirical data.

Exhibit 8. San Diego's Asian homicide victim rates in local and national context



Sources: City of San Diego Police Department Homicide Investigations records 1980–95. Population estimates are based on data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990); homicide rates for all cities are based on data from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (1980–95).

Conclusion

We can draw a number of broad conclusions from this review of immigration and crime in 20th-century America. First, there are good theoretical reasons to believe that immigrants should be involved in crime to a greater degree than natives. For example, immigrants face acculturation problems that natives do not, and immigrants tend to settle in disorganized neighborhoods characterized by deleterious structural conditions such as poverty, ethnic heterogeneity, a preponderance of young males, and possibly more criminal opportunities in the form of gangs. Also, the cultural codes of immigrants may conflict with the legal codes constructed by native groups. Despite these and other reasons to expect high levels of immigrant crime, the bulk of empirical studies conducted

over the past century have found that immigrants are usually underrepresented in criminal statistics. There are variations to this general finding, but these appear to be linked more to differences in structural conditions across areas where immigrants settle than to the cultural traditions of the immigrant groups. Local context appears to be the central influence shaping the criminal involvement of both immigrants and natives, although in many cases, immigrants seem more able to withstand crime-facilitating conditions than native groups.

We offer some plausible explanations for why immigrant crime rates are lower than expected. Contrary to a tradition of social science research on urban violence dating back to the pioneering work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1920), contemporary immigration might not create disorganized communities but instead stabilize neighborhoods through the creation of new social and economic institutions. Immigrants reside in highly impoverished communities but provide a buffer to further neighborhood decline through higher levels of intact and extended families and regular contact with the world of work. Moore and Pinderhughes (1993) note that immigrant Latinos, as a whole, have relatively high rates of employment, but in lower blue-collar occupations (e.g., operators, fabricators, and laborers) and in the informal economy (e.g., street vendors, domestics). Thus, immigrants are characterized more as the working poor than as chronically unemployed, and they work in areas dominated by small business owners and the self-employed.

To illustrate, in some areas, immigration has influenced the economy by increasing marginal jobs for newcomers in the secondary sector and contributed to labor market competition with other urban minority groups (see Aponte 1996). Thus, although immigration is linked to heightened poverty, many scholars describe a pool of foreign-born residents who are typically working, often at subsistence levels, and who are routinely attached to the labor market, although at times through the informal economy (see Introduction in Moore and Pinderhughes 1993).

Furthermore, Wilson (1987, 1996) and Sampson (1987) also describe how economic attachment is a key factor in maintaining family structures, stabilizing community institutions, and decreasing social problems in urban neighborhoods. The consequence for crime and violence is that although immigrant poverty is just as widespread as in African-American communities, its impact on violence might be lower than predicted because of greater attachment to the economy through low-paying but relatively steady jobs in ethnic enclaves, simultaneous with lower rates of family disruption (see also Portes 1996). Although speculative, this is at least one plausible account for our finding that immigrant crime is lower than expected. We invite future elaborations on this topic.

Much more research is needed on immigration and crime, particularly on the latest wave of immigration, to advance our knowledge beyond the general conclusions provided by this essay. Like others, we suggest that future research should be more open to the idea that immigration can be a positive influence on communities to suppress crime. We agree with Hagan and Palloni (1998, 382) that researchers should:

> place the priority on finding ways to preserve, protect, and promote the social capital that . . . immigrants bring to their experience in the United States, rather than overemphasize issues of crime and punishment.

Academic study of immigrants that is limited to gangs and crime can serve only to promote the impression that immigrants are a crime-prone group—an image that the empirical research of the past 100 years does not support. In sum, this review suggests that native groups would profit from a better understanding of how immigrant groups faced with adverse social conditions maintain relatively low levels of crime.

This project would not have been possible without the generous cooperation of former Police Chief Donald Warshaw, Assistant Chief John Brooks, Lt. Bobbie Meeks, and Lt. John Campbell of the Miami Police Department (MPD). Former Chief of Police Jerry Sanders graciously provided entry to the San Diego Police Department (SDPD), and Lt. Glenn A. Breitenstein and Lt. Jim Collins kindly opened the doors to the SDPD homicide unit files. Special thanks to past and current detectives in the MPD and SDPD homicide investigation units for allowing us to consistently and continuously interrupt their daily work schedule over the past several years. The El Paso Police Department provided homicide data to S. Fernando Rodriguez and we thank them both. We would also like to thank Robert J. Bursik, Sr., and Gary LaFree for valuable comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this chapter. Funding to Ramiro Martinez, Jr., was provided, in part, through the National Science Foundation (SBR–9515235), a Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Minority Fellowship, the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Consortium on Violence Research (NCOVR). NCOVR is supported under grant SBR–9513949 from the National Science Foundation. The conclusions presented in this article are those of the authors and should not be taken as the view of any official agency. We alone are responsible, of course, for any errors of fact.

Notes

1. The fear that too many crime-prone immigrants are entering the United States is a contemporary concern, in addition to other reasons for anti-immigrant sentiment. In a national bestselling book promising "common sense about America's immigration disaster," a writer at *Forbes* and *National Review* magazines states: "[I]mmigration is not the *only* cause of crime. It may not even be the major cause of crime. But it is a *factor*" (Brimelow 1996, 182; emphasis in original).

Hailed as a "non-fiction horror story of a nation that is willfully but blindly pursuing a course of national suicide" (Jesse E. Todd, Jr., cited in the front matter of Brimelow 1996), such alarmist writings assume a strong link between immigrants and crime while providing little empirical data. In fact, Brimelow (p. 182) claims that "there has been no serious academic study of the impact on crime" of the post-1965 wave of immigration.

2. Although not evident in exhibit 1, the Latino homicide rates fluctuated from slightly more than 16 per 100,000 in 1985 to a high of 18.6 in 1991, and declined to a low of 12.4 in 1996 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1998). The massive increase in legal immigration did not increase Latino homicide rates, which actually declined somewhat throughout the 1990s. Homicide rates for blacks and whites also declined after the peak years of immigration. Black rates fell from a high of 41.6 per 100,000 in 1991 to 29.9 in 1996, while white rates over a similar period dropped from 4.4 to 3.5. Thus, homicide rates declined for all groups after the arrival of large numbers of immigrants.

3. All rates are per 100,000 group-specific persons as measured by the 1990 census.

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