

Immigrant Settlements: Who's Moving to New Destinations and Why?

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Immigrant numbers are on the increase in new destinations throughout the country. This geographic change has been well documented for the total foreign-born population (Bump, et al., 2005; Lichter and Johnson, 2006; Massey, 2008; Singer, 2004) as well as for Mexicans and Hispanics (Durand, et al., 2005; Kandel and Cromartie, 2004; Millard and Chapa, 2004; Odem and Lacy, 2009; Riosmena and Massey, 2012; Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005). Although some researchers have looked at where new destination migrants originate and are settled along with their characteristics (Bump, et al., 2005; Kritz, et al., 2011; Leach and Bean, 2008), most of what we know about these issues comes from case studies carried out in specific communities or states (Anrig and Wang, 2006; Goździak and Martin, 2005; Marrow, 2011). One research issue that remains unclear is whether foreign-born dispersion to new destinations is being driven primarily by secondary migration of immigrants from other parts of the country or by recent immigrants arriving from abroad. It is also unclear whether and how the socio-economic and ethnic characteristics of migrants moving to new destinations from elsewhere in the United States or abroad differ. These are important issues to clarify in order to assess whether today's spatial relocation of immigrants parallels the assimilation process that shaped the dispersion of European immigrants in the previous century. This paper looks at these issues by drawing on confidential-use microdata statistics (CUMS) from the 2005-2009 American Community Surveys (ACS). Because CUMS files have a large number of sample cases and flexible geographies, it is possible to examine new immigrant destinations for the entire country and also to take foreign-born heterogeneity into consideration in defining new destinations and analyzing the determinants of immigrant dispersion.

Historically immigrant resettlement and dispersion beyond the traditional gateways was a multigenerational process led by immigrants and their descendants who had acquired language and other socio-cultural skills that allowed them to assimilate spatially (Alba and Nee, 2003, p. 112-114; Gordon, 1964). If immigrants are now moving directly from abroad to parts of the country where relatively few of their compatriots live, this not only calls into question classic assimilation theory which was based on the incorporation experiences of European immigrants in Chicago and Northeastern cities but also raises a host of questions regarding why immigrants who have little U.S. experience would want to migrate to new destinations which by definition are places where relatively few of their compatriots live and where they will not have the social and public support systems that are generally available to them in large metropolitan areas. In this analysis, we first review what is known about the origins and characteristics of immigrants moving to new destinations and draw on CUMS data to provide a descriptive overview of immigrants' settlement patterns in 2005-2009. Then we use multiple regression techniques to evaluate whether immigrant dispersion to new destinations is consistent with classical assimilation tenets based on the experience of European immigrants in the past century.

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