The Melting Pot Is Overflowing Essay, Research Paper

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Since the founding of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, immigrants have been coming to America. Immigration is usually caused by push and pull factors meaning, certain elements that attract immigrants to the United States, and certain influences, which force them to leave their native country. As a young nation in the early 19th century, the United States was brimming with a bounty of pull factors. The most enticing among these pull factors, which to this day still remain as strong incentives, include the magnitude of opportunity, freedoms, and social mobility available in the United States. These elements are prevalent in this country, but often nonexistent in many of the foreign nations from which immigrants came. Some came in search of religious freedom, others came seeking fortune in the land of opportunity, while still others were brought against their will, bound in chains to be slaves.

This continual flow of immigrants provided settlers along the Atlantic coast, pioneers of the unexplored West, builders for the Erie Canal and transcontinental railway, pickers for cotton in the South, vegetables in the Southwest, and laborers for American industrialization. Together, these immigrants have built one of the most complex and diverse nations in the world. Thus, the United States can rightfully be labeled as a nation of immigrants.

The number of legal immigrants has increased dramatically in the last half of the twentieth century. Between 1960 and 1970, 3.3 million immigrants arrived and more than double that amount, 7.3 million, came between 1981 and 1990. During the 1950 s, the 600,000 immigrants that came from Latin America and the Caribbean accounted for one in four immigrants. Three decades later, 3.5 million immigrants came to the Americas, accounting for 47 percent of all admissions.

Today, more than ever the United States is faced with the challenges of social and cultural adaptation of the new groups of immigrants. The growth of the large amounts of these new immigrants in certain parts of the culture precludes assimilation into a singly unifying culture. Latin America and Caribbean groups, for example have followed distinctive settlement patterns with the majority attempting to maintain their ethnic identity and culture by concentrating in a particular geographic area. While most Hispanic immigrants come from rural areas, the majority have settled in the U.S urban centers, with the largest concentration of Los Angeles, Miami, Florida, and Texas.

Bilingual education is an integral element of the immigration debate in this country. Public bilingual education originated within the context of minority rights, but has evolved to be the first step toward an official recognition of multilingual extending from schools across all institutions of American society. However, opponents assert that the language learning and assimilation process is actually hindered by reinforcing the native tongue and segregating non-English speakers from the rest. The continuos issue of bilingualism also raises questions about the definition of an American national identity and new affirmations of identity and pride by ethnic groups within the US.

The controversy surrounding the English only legislation has appeared on both local and national agendas in an attempt to determine the political, social, and economic fate of some immigrants. A variety of issues intersect in the controversy over official English including immigration, the rights of minorities, cultural diversity in school curriculum, and in the American society as a whole.

A difficult and unanswered question concerns how to control illegal immigration. Illegal immigrants are highly vulnerable to employer exploitation and usually lack the means to protest the abuse. This exploitation raises questions of how to deal with these abuses to human rights. Finding solutions should be at the forefront of humanitarian concerns for United States in the approaching 21st century.

Essentially, if we can learn to embrace multiculturalism within our own society, we will simultaneously learn to take a global perspective on our own welfare. This is crucial in a world in which individual nations, large and small, are becoming increasingly interdependent, both economically and environmentally. The defining creeds to our national identity and individual freedom, democracy, and diversity definitely have a unifying power. To value equality and understand respectfully the diversity of the worlds cultures, and to celebrate the diversity of cultures within our own nation should be the goal for the United States as we enter the 21st century. The Untied States has the potential to set a positive example as a nation founded on values of equality, justice, and acceptance and to contribute to and unprecedented global prosperity.