

foreign-born residents, and they represented almost seven percent of the total population. Rather than being concentrated in the urban core, 65 percent of the foreign-born resided in three suburban counties (Fairfax, Virginia, and Montgomery and Prince George's in Maryland). Only a few neighborhoods in the District of Columbia, such as Mount Pleasant/Adams Morgan and Chinatown, have a sustained history as immigrant neighborhoods. Today, as in 1980, the vast majority of immigrants still reside in the suburbs (see photograph on page 1).

By 1990, the foreign-born had doubled in size to nearly half a million, representing over 11 percent of the population, which was just slightly higher than national averages. By Census 2000, metropolitan Washington emerged as one of the fastest growing major metropolitan regions in the country. Nearly half of that growth was a direct result of the increase in the foreign-born population, which tallied over 830,000. Although the growth rate has slowed since the 1990s, Washington is still a major immigrant destination. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, sometime during the past three years the number of immigrants has surpassed one million. The impact of this demographic change is evident in the diversity of languages spoken, foods sold in restaurants and shops, and places of worship. Schools cope with a diversity of foreign language students who require the assistance of specialized translation services. For example, not long ago I attended a public school event in Arlington, Virginia that was simultaneously translated into Spanish and Mongolian!

The top sending country to the DC region is El Salvador, at almost 15 percent of the foreign-born population. Salvadorans first came to the region in significant numbers during the war in the 1980s and they have continued to settle here. While few received refugee status, many eventually received legal residency or temporary protected status, a legal limbo under which many continue to live. In contrast, Indian immigrants arrived in great numbers in the 1990s. Many

came as temporary high-tech workers (H1B visa-holders) to support the growing biotech and communications industries located in the Washington region (Suro 1999). Over time, they adjusted their status, became permanent residents, and many invested in their own businesses. Koreans, the third largest group, have deeper roots in the D.C. region that extend back to the Korean War, although the majority of Koreans have settled here since the 1980s. Similarly, the arrival of Vietnamese coincided with the refugee flows in the 1970s and the fall of Saigon. Eden Center, a shopping mall in Arlington County's Seven Corners section, is a major social and commercial setting for the area's large Vietnamese population (see Wood, 1997). As an indicator of where this group's political sympathies lie, the yellow flag with red stripes of "South" Vietnam still flies next to the U.S. flag in the Eden Center parking lot (see photo at upper right).

In line with national immigration trends, Washington has immigrants from China, Mexico and the Philippines in the top ten. Yet also on that list of top sending countries are less common regions of origination such as Sub-Saharan Africa (Ethiopia, Nigeria Ghana), Central America (Guatemala and Honduras), the Andes (Peru and Bolivia), the



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Eden Center, a shopping center in Arlington County, Virginia, is a vibrant commercial and social place for the region's largest Vietnamese community. Note the flag of South Vietnam flying next to the U.S. flag.

Middle East (Iran), and South Asia (Pakistan). Collectively, immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa total over 130,000 people (12 % of the region's foreign-born) with Ethiopia being the largest sending country. Ethiopians have made their mark in the District of Columbia by establishing a concentration of businesses near U Street and 9th in the Shaw neighborhood (easily reached by Metro on the Green Line, U Street/Cardozo Station). While relatively few Ethiopians live there, they have concentrated ethnic restaurants in this area that serve a diverse clientele (Chacko, 2008). If you have never tried Ethiopian food or heard Ethiopian music, it is well worth the visit.

To get a sense of the incredible diversity of the region's immigrant population, ride the Metro's red line to Wheaton, Maryland, in Montgomery County. Wheaton is a large suburb due north of the District of Columbia and just outside of the Capital Beltway. Here one finds a major mall and a mix of housing: new expensive town homes, post-World War II apartments, and single-family homes. In the 2000 census, 40 percent of the population in the Wheaton-Glenmont CDP was foreign-born and came from over 80 countries. In terms of racial mix, the area went from being over 90 percent white in 1970 to an area that was racially mixed in 2000 (40 percent white, 18 percent black, 26 percent Hispanic and 12 percent Asian). Local officials acknowledge that this transformation has brought certain



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Ethiopian entrepreneurs in the Shaw Neighborhood of Washington D.C. Ethiopian restaurants and small shops are concentrated on 9th and U Streets in NW Washington.

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challenges to the community, but they also contend that immigrants have contributed to the resurgence of downtown Wheaton as an eclectic and multi-ethnic place filled with mom-and-pop restaurants and ethnic businesses. This reputation was highlighted in a metro-wide campaign highlighting the diversity of restaurants in Wheaton as "Deliciously Habit Forming" (Singer, et. al 2008, 137-168).

Throughout its history, the Washington metropolitan area attracted relatively few immigrants because it lacked the industrial core that typically drew them to other mid-Atlantic cities such as Baltimore and Philadelphia. Washington shifted from a national capital to an international one after World War II. During the postwar period, several intergovernmental agencies, such as the World Bank, were established in Washington, and foreign embassies also expanded their presence in the city. Although the number of foreign-born within the metropolitan population was quite small (just 4% in 1970), this became a base for subsequent waves of immigration built on family and social networks, as well as the settlement of various refugee groups from Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Audrey Singer, Susan Hardwick and Caroline Brettell have labeled metropolitan Washington, along with cities such as Atlanta, Phoenix, Sacramento, Minneapolis and Portland, Oregon, as "21st Century Gateways" (Singer et al, 2008). These cities had very few foreign-born residents in 1970, but today are

home to large numbers of immigrants who, for the most part, settle in the suburbs and not the urban core. Many of these localities lacked the institutions that support immigrant communities commonly found in well-established destinations such as New York City or Chicago. Yet, as is often the case, immigrants construct their own support systems. In many cases, they work closely with local governments and religious organizations. Due to the rapid social and demographic changes observed in 21st Century Gateway cities, there can be serious tensions, especially surrounding the issue of undocumented immigrants. In 2007, tensions between immigrant and native populations erupted in Prince William County in Northern Virginia. A series of policies were proposed by the county board to restrict access to public services by illegal immigrants, most of which were later deemed unconstitutional. Then, Prince William applied for 287g funds to train local police to check the legal status of people arrested for crimes (such as traffic violations) with the aim of deporting undocumented individuals. Such aggressive local policies have had a chilling effect on the large Latino population in Prince William County, with some Latinos opting to leave. At the same time that Prince William County was drawing national headlines, Arlington County, Virginia resolved to "promote the integration of immigrants" instead of enacting divisive laws. Clearly, the practices and policies of local jurisdictions are extremely important with regards to

immigrant integration and can vary widely within the same metropolitan region.

In a relatively short period of time, immigration has made metropolitan Washington one of the most ethnically and racially diverse places in the country. While in Washington next spring for the 2010 AAG Annual Meeting, take some time to experience the diverse immigrant communities of the region, either on your own or through some of the many interesting AAG field trips now being organized. ■

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