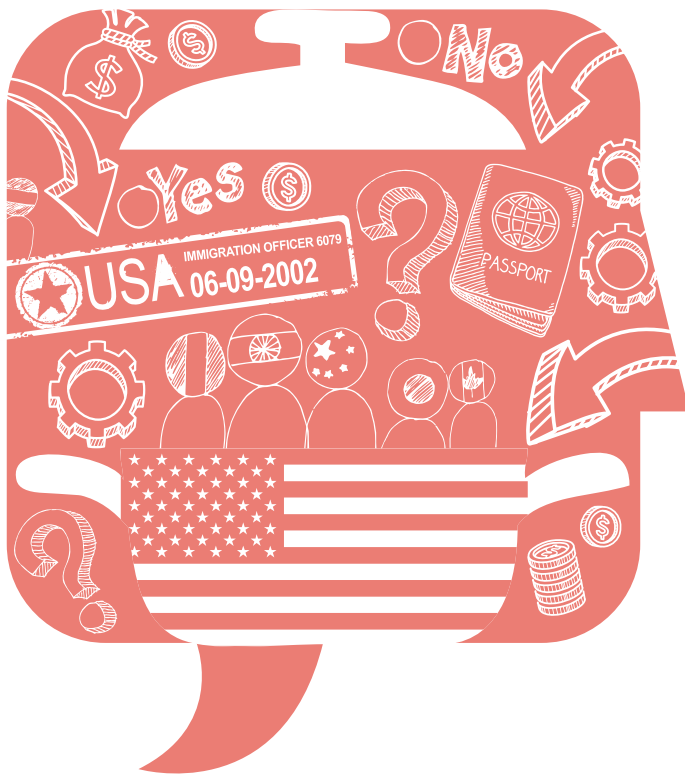


This week's issue:

WHAT MAKES AN AMERICAN?



At least 39 million residents of the U.S. are classified as “foreign-born” – born outside the U.S. Though some of those 39 million are here temporarily for things like school or work, most are now U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Why do so many people want to come join American society? Do they come just for economic or educational reasons, or is there something about the American **culture**, or way of life, that attracts these foreign-born residents?

Advice to foreign visitors to the U.S. might include the following information about American cultural beliefs: Americans value liberty, individuality, privacy, equality, informality, and directness. American **traditions** emphasize values like hospitality (especially Thanksgiving), generosity (especially Christmas), and competition (especially baseball and football). Americans are said to be **resourceful** and hardworking. Furthermore, a major feature of American society is its diversity – different ethnicities, races, and languages are said to blend together in what is called the “melting pot.” The term “melting pot” suggests that different ingredients are mixed together in a way that increases the **complexity** of flavors in the dish – like a delicious soup or stew.

But is a melting pot a good metaphor for American culture? Are the **elements** of culture and tradition mentioned above widely shared by immigrants as well as native-born Americans? Do foreign-born residents, even those who become American citizens, really melt into American society? Of course, it is easy for an immigrant to roast a turkey at Thanksgiving, send holiday cards, and root for their favorite baseball team during the World Series, but does that mean the melting pot is real?

What about immigrants who live in ethnic enclaves – places where almost all the residents come from the same background and speak the same language? What about the families that send their children to special classes in their home language? What about politicians and citizens who want to stop immigration and send undocumented immigrants back to their countries of origin? Has American society lost its capacity to tolerate diversity and absorb new elements? Do these things mean that the melting pot is a myth?

Do you think the melting pot is a good description of American society, or has America become a place where immigrants maintain their identity without adopting American traditions and beliefs?



WHAT MAKES AN AMERICAN?

complexity | culture | element | resourceful | tradition

USE THE FOCUS WORDS

complexity (*noun*) the quality of having many interrelated parts; the quality of not being simple

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The **complexity** of English spelling makes it difficult for some people to learn.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Which task has more **complexity**: completing a math assignment or writing a rap song? Why?

culture (*noun*) a way of life; a group of people who share a particular way of life

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The **culture** in one region of India can be very different from the **culture** in another region: People can speak different languages and eat different foods even though they live in the same country.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Which country would you like to visit to experience a new **culture**? Explain.

element (*noun*) a piece, part, or component

➡ **Sample Sentence:** The ability to jump high is an important **element** of playing basketball.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What **elements** are important to being a great athlete?

resourceful (*adjective*) inventive; capable

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Shanaya proved how **resourceful** she could be when she made a necklace with her father's old tools.

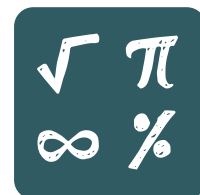
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** How are animals that live in the city (squirrels, birds, etc.) **resourceful**?

tradition (*noun*) a regular practice; a custom that is repeated over time

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Eating together at Thanksgiving has become an important **tradition** for Gary's family.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What new **traditions** would you like to start?

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DO THE MATH

Immigrants have built and shaped the United States. Through the years, these **resourceful** Americans endured many hardships, from discrimination to the Great Depression. They brought cultural **elements** like food, dress, and religious **traditions** from around the world. The **complexity** of our national **culture** reflects the great diversity of our people. Let's think about that diversity mathematically.


This table shows the 20 most common ancestries reported on the 2013 American Community Survey. Don't forget that many people have multiple ancestries, and can check multiple boxes. For example, if all four of your grandparents emigrated from different countries, you might check four boxes. But if you're the first person in your family to immigrate to America, it's more likely that you will report one ancestry.

Largest reported ancestries, by percentage of U.S. population					
1	German	13.5%	11	Central American	1.5%
2	Mexican	10.7%	12	Dutch	1.3%
3	Irish	9.8%	13	Norwegian	1.3%
4	English	7.3%	14	Swedish	1.2%
5	American	6.1%	15	European	1.0%
6	Italian	5.0%	16	South American	1.0%
7	Polish	2.7%	17	Chinese	1.0%
8	French	2.5%	18	Scotch-Irish	0.9%
9	Puerto Rican	1.6%	19	Subsaharan African	0.8%
10	Scottish	1.6%	20	Russian	0.8%

Option 1: According to the table, which of the following statements is true?

- A. Most Americans have German ancestry.
- B. More Americans reported having Chinese ancestry than Puerto Rican ancestry.
- C. More Americans reported having Italian ancestry than English ancestry.
- D. More Americans reported having German ancestry than any other ancestry.

Option 2: If 2,500 Americans were chosen randomly, how many would you predict would be of Mexican ancestry? What about Dutch ancestry? What is a reasonable way of dealing with decimals when working with questions like these?

 **Discussion Question:** Our national **culture** blends **elements** of many different cultural **traditions**, and yet Americans feel great pride in being American. The responses to the question about ancestry on the U.S. Census hint at the **complexity** of Americans' cultural identity. For example, about 6% of Americans – over 20 million people – said their ancestry is “American” although the question was worded to encourage a different answer. What does this mean? Is it possible to have American ancestry? Or do these people just have such strong feelings about the U.S. that they consider themselves “American” regardless of their earlier ancestry? What do you think?



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THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

The students in Ms. Kahn’s class are talking about the cultural makeup of the United States. “There are so many different **elements** of our **culture** that people have brought from all over the world,” says Mario, “but I feel like there’s a shared **tradition** of resourcefulness that unites us as Americans. For example, my great grandparents arrived from Sicily in the 1920s. It took a lot of guts to leave behind everything they knew and start over. They had to be **resourceful** and responsible in order to build a new life out of virtually nothing. It’s the same for lots of groups: The people who came were the risk takers, so wherever they came from, they had something in common.”

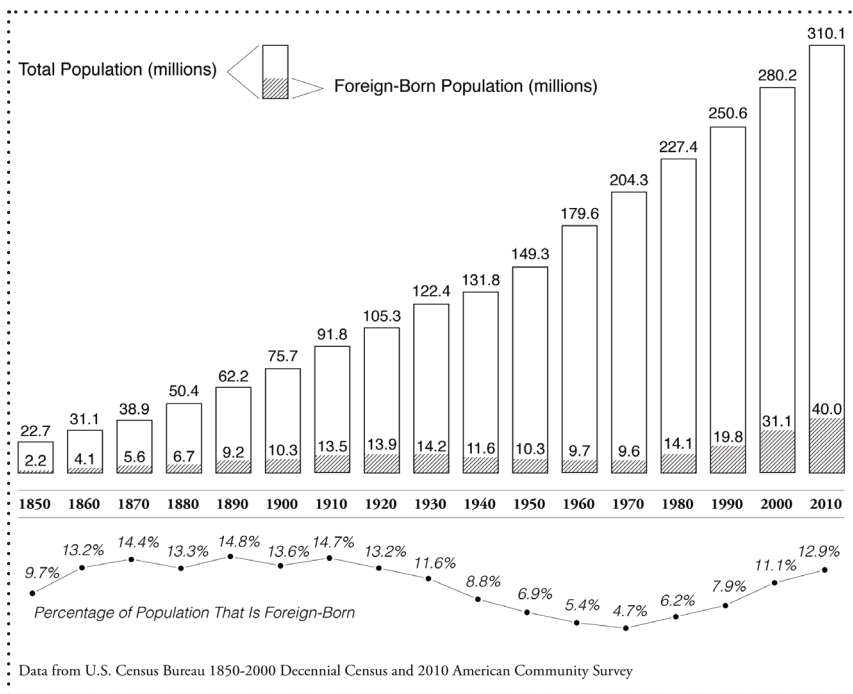
“Okay, but don’t forget that not everyone made that kind of choice to come here,” says Alyssa. “There were slaves from Africa, British criminals sent here as punishment during colonial times, and Native Americans facing invasion. Lots of different groups have been **resourceful**, even those that didn’t choose to immigrate. In my opinion, what’s most impressive about the U.S. isn’t our shared **tradition**, but the **complexity** of all the different **traditions**.”

“Most of my family came from Japan before World War II, and from Hawaii before it became a state in 1959,” says Sumiko. “But one of my grandmothers was descended from Europeans who arrived in the British colonies before 1776. I wonder if immigration has increased or decreased over the last century or two. Immigration is in the news all the time. I bet we’re more of a nation of immigrants now than we’ve ever been before.”

“I doubt it,” says Alyssa.

“Maybe some of you could do some research on U.S. immigration over time,” says Ms. Kahn.

Mario, Alyssa, and Sumiko found some statistics on U.S. immigration since 1850 and presented the following chart to the class.



Over the time period represented in this table, what has been the trend in the total population numbers?

Has the foreign-born population changed in the same way? Explain.

What’s the most accurate way to describe the difference between the data for 1910 and for 2010?

