Immigration to the USA

Immigration describes the process of people crossing the border of another country in order to build up a new life there. From the perspective of the new country’s population the new alien people are seen as and called ‘immigrants’. Related to America, the British Puritans that came to the USA in the 17th century were immigrants for the Native Americans. The whole US society was created through immigrants and only few native people are left. Today most immigrants come to America to live the ‘American Dream’ believing in the principle of hard work in order to become rich. Especially Hispanics from Latin America cross the border to the USA hoping for a better life there.

**Advantages:** cultural exchange,

**Disadvantages:** ethnic minorities,

**Melting Pot**

Metaphor for integration of immigrants into the culture of their new home. The process of cultural assimilation can be seen as a melting process, in which all immigrants from different origins melt together in a big pot creating one culture out of many different principles and values. Referring to the USA one can say that only a little number of people still belong to the native people. The American culture consists of many different cultures of immigrants from different nations. In comparison to other nations there was not an immigration of whole tribes at first to the USA but many different small groups and single persons that later formed the American culture. Especially people from Mexico are still immigrating to the United States also adding their values to the amount of different values that are brought together in the American culture according to the principle of the melting pot.

**Salad Bowl**

While in the ‘melting pot’ different principles and values are united without being individual but rather forming a great body, the salad bowl offers a mixture of ingredients that can still be recognized as an individual. In relation to American this means that different cultures a brought together in one country that are still are still being preserved by the immigrants but not serving for the integration into a new culture. According to the theory of the salad bowl many values are mixed up still keeping their traditional principles.

**American Quilt**

The metaphor of the American Quilt describes the USA being a patchwork blanket that is created through sewing of many different single parts. In the figurative sense this means that the American culture is built up by the adding of many different cultures. They are bound together and cannot be
separated, however the single cultures remain individuals and stay apart from each other. This means that not all of the people of the United States are having the same values and principles.

American Pizza

Due to the concept of the American Pizza the USA is a pizza that contains a mixture of different ingredients, figuratively cultures. The single ones are united but keep their traditions because they still do not merge in a single homogeneous culture. The American Pizza is close to the concept of the salad bowl.

Samuel P. Huntington: The “Original American Creed”

The concept of the American Creed is based on the Anglo-Protestant “core” culture in America being traced back to the Founding Fathers and shared by all Americans. It consists of fundamental principles like Christianity and religious commitment, the English language, individualism and work ethic. Advocates of this idea intend to create a “heaven on earth” which is to be defended against threatening influences from outside. According to them, the product of the distinct Anglo-Protestant culture is menaced by multiculturalism and those people from abroad who were attracted by their idea of the American way of life. New waves of immigrants from Latin America and Asia that are reaching America, as well as diasporas (religious/ethnic groups who left their ancestral homeland and migrated to another country) are leading to a profound change. Especially the “Hispanization”, which implements the spread of the Spanish language, endangers the original culture. Furthermore “doctrines” of multiculturalism and international and cosmopolitan ideas contribute to the distraction from the “substance of identity”.

Huntington describes this principle and gives incentives about how the future development can look like:
1. The loss of the true sense of the American Creed
2. A separated America with two different cultures
3. The exclusion of ethnic minorities
4. A re-affirmed “core” culture
5. A combination of these possibilities

Latin American Immigration to the USA

The US immigration debate often focuses on immigrants from Mexico and Central America due to their unprecedentedly high and rapidly growing number. Latin American and Caribbean immigrants together account for 53 percent of the US foreign-born population. Most of them have a lower education level and English language proficiency, are employed in low-paid jobs and therefore have a smaller income. Second-generation immigrants have an advanced living standard and education. The motives for migration are often hopelessness, poverty, misery and unemployment. People hope to improve their life in the neighboring country America, which has always been a symbol of material wealth and the place to live the American Dream.
The “Hispanic Challenge”

Samuel P. Huntington created the thesis of the “Hispanic Challenge” which America is facing. Waves of immigrants have always reached the USA frequently, but the new people arriving from Latin America differ from previous ones. The size and continuity of the immigration is unprecedented and the problem is that those foreigners found their own, separated communities, where they start a new life. This enables them to live excluded in their enclaves and they do not feel the need to “assimilate” to their environment. Furthermore, they often have a low education and skills, harm the welfare system and the economy and contribute to a decreasing living standard. The “hispanization” of America could separate the USA into two peoples with two different languages. This could lead to discrimination against the Americans (who are only mono-lingual), furthermore their culture could be “absorbed” and would be lost. In Huntington’s opinion, there is no “Americano Dream” and the American Dream has to be dreamed in English.

The “Americano Dream”

In contrast to S.P. Huntington, David Brooks (Lional Sosa) claims that there is an “Americano Dream”, and that Mexican-American assimilation is taking place. Even though this might take longer time in some cases, the immigrants are aware that they have to learn English and that it is necessary to integrate. To him, the immigrants are a source of new energy, tastes and optimism. He says that there is only little difference between Mexican-American lifestyles and other American lifestyles. Furthermore, he states that nowadays the Americans are not bound together by the legacy of the Founding Fathers anymore, but by a different mentality, the same conception of the future and progress. Finally Brooks makes the broken American integration machinery responsible for lacking integration in some cases and claims immigration must continue.

Tortilla Curtain

The novel by T.C. Boyle tells the story of a couple of illegal immigrants from Mexico into the US, Cándido and his pregnant wife América. After being robbed at the border they are homeless and camp in Los Angeles at a dump, but both are dreaming of a better life. They wish for a peaceful, worryless, safe life with a job, enough money to feed the family. They want “nothing fancy, no palaces like the gringos built- Just four walls and a roof. Was that so much to ask?” (exc. novel). They are dreaming a variation of the American Dream.

The novel shows how two illegal immigrants, driven by poverty and misery, try to establish a new life in the USA. Cándido and America are representative for thousands of other Mexicans who suffer from the same fate.
Minute Men

Men that were supposed to be ready to fight in one minute in the American Revolution. Today it is a term used for anti-immigrant extremists and activists whose main aim is to keep illegal immigrants from Mexico out of the United States. In order to do so they are organizing border patrols along the Arizona - Mexico border, building fences. Minutemen blame illegal immigrants as scapegoats for everything, e.g. for low wages and the breakdown of the system.

Development of immigration

Through the 19th century the desire for cheap, unskilled labour rose in the United States in the course of the fast economic development.

The first significant wave of Mexican workers coming into the United States began in the early years of the twentieth century. The need for Mexican labour increased sharply when the United States entered World War I. The Mexican government agreed to export Mexican workers as contract labourers to enable American workers to fight overseas.

After the war, an intensifying nativist climate led to restrictive quotas on immigration from Europe and to the creation of the U.S. Border Patrol, aimed at cutting back the flow of Mexicans.

But economic demand for unskilled migrant workers continued throughout the century encouraging Mexican immigrants to cross the border—legally or not.

Furthermore immigrants often formed distinct ethnic neighbourhoods, tending to remain somewhat isolated from the wider culture.

Illegal Immigration

It was estimated that undocumented workforce made up about five percent of the U.S. workforce. It was also estimated that about 70 percent of those undocumented workers were from the country of Mexico.

For many generations Mexicans have illegally crossed the border into the United States. All of them are searching a better life in the neighbour country.

The Mexican job payments are sometimes so low that the people cannot afford to cover even the most basic necessities. Thus, many Mexicans from both small and big cities find the neighbouring United States to be extremely attractive.

Many individuals come from poverty-stricken towns in Mexico and desire to come to the United States to achieve the "American Dream." For many, just gaining employment at a low-wage job in the United States provides a much higher standard of living than in their home country.
But there are an increasing number of security measures that have been implemented at and around the Mexico-U.S. border. As a result, it has become more difficult to illegally cross the border.

That is why some illegal immigrants illicit the assistance of a "coyote", or smuggler, to help them navigate through the land and cross the border.

**Immigration Reforms**

The United States will always attract immigrants searching for a better life. But the problem is, as said above, that many immigrants do not follow the immigration channels. That is the reason why immigration reforms are constantly part of political discussions. By introducing new restrictions, or by amending or removing faults or abuses the government tries to improve the situation.

For instance in 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) was passed, creating, for the first time, penalties for employers who hired illegal immigrants.

In current discussions the politicians try to increase the number of border patrol agents or add vehicle barriers and fences at the borders. Furthermore there are plans for increasing funding to expand detention centres and closer cooperation with countries to take their citizen back.

(amnesty? Electronic cards compulsory for employers?)

⇒ Do not forget about the “Is illegal immigration an economic burden to the US?”-debate!