

THE **NEW** BAZAAR

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EPISODE 2: Identity in America

Mark Hugo Lopez on race, ethnicity, and immigration in the US

CARDIFF GARCIA: Hi. I'm Cardiff Garcia, and this is The New Bazaar. Coming up on today's show.

MARK HUGO LOPEZ: Back in the 1990s, about two thirds of Americans viewed immigrants as a burden and not a strength. Today those numbers are entirely reversed.

CG: Economist Mark Hugo Lopez on America's changing identity. The census is taken in the US every 10 years and last week we got the results of the 2020 census. And most of the stories about it focused on how the US is becoming a more diverse country, specifically that the share of people of Asian and Hispanic heritage had gone up. But the finding that intrigued me the most was that the share of people who identify as multi-racial had more than tripled in the decade since 2010.

It went from less than 3% of the population to more than 10%. And the reason is not because there was a sudden influx of 24 million multi-racial people into the US, it's because the census itself got better at asking questions so that people could more precisely identify who they were. And a lot of people who had identified as single race on the census 10 years ago now were able to identify as multiracial.

And what this shows is that how we view the racial and ethnic breakdown of the country is not just a reflection of how people categorize themselves when they're filling out the census, it's also a reflection of the categories that are made available to them. Today's guest, Mark Hugo Lopez, is the director of race and ethnicity research at Pew Research Center, which itself just conducted a huge survey that actually went even a step further than the census in giving people

choices for how to self identify their racial and ethnic and foreign country origins.

And one of the findings is that when people have these increasingly better options for how to identify themselves, it can also change how they see themselves in obvious and subtle ways. This is so fascinating to me because for one thing, it matters for economic reasons, societal reasons. A more accurate, detailed picture of the country's demographic profile gives us a better sense of who's up, who's down, sometimes where economic resources should go. But it also matters for individual reasons, because think about it, what could be more personal than self identity, literally how you label yourself to yourself and in relation to other people?

So I really enjoyed discussing this in detail in my chat with Mark, a chat in which we also cover immigration trends, how American views on diversity have changed over time, and even a little bit of politics. Finally, a quick note. Throughout this episode, I use the words Latino and Hispanic interchangeably following the convention that Pew Research itself uses. And now, my conversation with Mark Hugo Lopez. Here it is.

CG: Mark, I want to start with one of the big things that you and your colleagues at Pew have been focusing on in the last few years, which is understanding all the ways that Americans identify themselves and how the public identifies itself.

And you and your colleagues at Pew have actually found that there are ways in which identity for some groups has actually changed over time, that the way people see themselves can change over the years. So let's start there. What are some examples of how that works?

MARK HUGO LOPEZ: Uh, yes. Back in the 1990s, the US Census Bureau started to talk about, uh, allowing Americans to choose more than one racial identity on the upcoming 2000 census and by the 2000 census had implemented in the census form, the opportunity for people to select whether or not their uh, race is white or if they're white and black, or if they're white and black and Asian. In other words, you're able to select more than one race now.

That wasn't the case, uh, prior to 2000, and this is one of those reflections where both, uh, the census but also the public's views of their

identity has changed. Uh, people wanted to claim and to identify with all the different roots and ancestries in their background, and this is something that you see happening in a number of different ways, but that's one really big example and big change that happened recently. There were others as well, such as even the, uh, the creation of a Hispanic identity is something that comes out of the 1960s.

Prior to the 1960s, uh, many U S government forms didn't include the option for people to self identify as Hispanic or not. However, by the 1970s, you start to see it implemented in government surveys and by the 1980 census there is a specific question asking people, are you of Hispanic origin and later on it became, are you of Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin, which is the current formulation today.

CG: Yeah, and also we should bring that up to the present now, which is the 2020 census, which was taken last year. Um, the questions started allowing for people to be more specific about their own racial and ethnic backgrounds and Pew Research, uh, your own organization also conducted a survey that in some ways mirrored what the census was doing to- to discover with a little bit more, I guess, specificity, you know, what people's backgrounds are. Can you kind of discuss what it was about the census that's making that possible? And then tell us something about your own survey that- that sort of echoes what's going on with the census?

MHL: Uh- uh, yeah. So the 2020 census, uh, for the first time has asked, um, both people who indicate that their race is white and people who indicate that their race is black, has asked them in a follow-up, uh, what is the origins or the ancestries of your background? So people could indicate, for example, if they indicate they're white, they might also indicate that they're of Irish origin, or if they indicate that they're black, they might indicate that they're of Nigerian background.

Now, this is something that's been in place for Hispanics since- since the 1980s. In the case of, uh, Asian Americans as well, there are many check boxes you can mark to indicate if you're Chinese or Indian in origin or Filipino. But one of the things we wanted to try in our own work at the Pew Research Center was to not only take the census race question, which is somewhat new in 2020, as I just indicated with regards to people who are white or black being able to indicate their

origins, um, but also wanted to- to ask about identity and race and ethnicity in a different way.

So our survey included the asking of, uh, and mimicking of exactly the Census Bureau's 2020 decennial census race and ethnicity questions, but also included an open-ended question earlier on in the same survey asking people to just in an open-ended question, describe your race and ethnic identity. Uh, and so we had some interesting findings in this, that, uh, particularly for Hispanics that are, uh, that are interesting in that when you take a look at the open-end, most people who indicate that they're white, uh, in the census question will indicate in an open end that their background is white.

Um, same thing for people who indicate that they're black on the census style race question, in an open end they'll say generally something that matches that identity in the open end. Uh, but for Hispanics, only about half give and enter in the open end that is a Hispanic, uh, answer. Many people who might indicate that they're Hispanic on the census question instead might in an open end say that they're white or that they're something other than Latin American. And that to me is an interesting story because it shows you how complex and how, uh, how nuanced identity can be. And that for not for everybody does it, do census questions necessarily work. Some people don't see themselves in those questions.

CG: One of the interesting things about the Pew survey is that it allows for the idea that race and ethnicity are actually two different things. And it seems from the findings that traditionally a lot of Latinos when asked about their race would have simply said, "Well, I'm Latino." And now it is getting a little bit more granular where you can say, "I am Latino and I am white," or, "I am Latino and I am black. I am Afro-Latino." So what are we learning about that kind of a granularity when it comes to race and ethnicity?

MHL: It's a great question. And when it comes to particularly the way in which Hispanics or Latinos in the United States identify themselves in census questions, for example, in the 2010 census, 37% of Latinos in the race question, when asked if they're white, black, uh, native American or Asian American, about 37% indicated that their race was some other race and wrote in that their race was Hispanic or Latino or

Mexican, those were actually the most common responses in that writing category.

So if you think about that, people are indicating that their race is Hispanic. Uh, this is uh, interesting because for many Latinos, uh, who come particularly from Latin America who are recent arrivals, the ways in which we ask about race and ethnicity here don't necessarily, um, reflect the ways in which people from countries in Latin America see race and ethnicity. In fact, many may not even think about race, they tend to think about their nationality as the main way in which they see their identity. That's why Mexican was one of those most common answers among those who indicated some other race.

But our work over the years has also shown that, um, there's a lot of nuance here and also how you ask the question can make a difference in the responses that you get. So, for example, in the traditional Census Bureau's race question which asks if somebody is white, black, or African-American, Asian or Asian-American, native American, or American-Indian, or some other race, you'll find that fewer than 5% of Hispanics will indicate that their race is black.

Uh, the single largest category that people will indicate is that their race is white, about half of Latinos will say that in the most recent data from the US Census Bureau, and then of course, as I add that some other race category is actually the second largest category of racial responses for Hispanics. But when it comes to a direct question such as, are you Afro Latino or Afro Caribbean, or I say, Afro Dominican if you're from the Dominican Republic, you'll find that about a quarter of Latinos will say that they are Afro Latino.

And that is a different, uh, share, at least according to our surveys and what you get in a standard race question that you would use and say something like the census. Also, if you ask directly if somebody is of indigenous roots like are they Quechua, are they Mayan, uh, do they have, uh, some sort of Caribbean indigenous roots, you'll find that maybe about a quarter of Latino adults will also indicate that they are indigenous and about a third will indicate that they're uh, Mestizo or Mulatto or- or mixed in some way.

In other words, how you ask these questions can make all the difference in the world to how people identify. And I think that that reflects a lot

about the nuance of identity that, uh, many people, uh, have when they think about themselves. It matters who asked the question, when the question was asked, how the question is asked in terms of how somebody might identify themselves.

CG: Yeah. And- and that's so fascinating because it suggests that identity can actually be a little bit amorphous, a little bit fluid, not based on, you know, how people themselves evolve over time necessarily, but just on something immediate like the subtle changing of the question and how it's asked. I mean, in a way this blows my mind a little bit because again, identity is so personal, but at the same time, you know, how we regard ourselves is sort of subject to other kinds of external influences as well. It's not purely coming from inside of us, it's also coming in part from how society is asking the question of what identity actually is. I don't even have a question for this, I'm just kind of curious to get your own thoughts on it as somebody who studies this every single day.

MHL: You're exactly right that, uh, there are so many nuances to how people might respond to a question. And sometimes the external, uh, factors, that is what's happening in society today, what are the labels that people use to describe themselves today and that are considered acceptable versus what's not considered acceptable can change. And you can actually see this- these changes in just the way the Census Bureau even has asked about race, for example.

When it comes to asking about, uh, racial identity, uh, over the years, you've seen uh, negro used instead of African-American. Uh, you've seen black used to describe people who identify their race as black or African-American. But you've also seen some other, um, terms like uh, quadroon or octoroon in the late uh, 19th century. So there've been some changes in the terms people use, but, uh, terms fall into and out of fashion.

And even today, when we talk about say the nation's Hispanic population, um, many would actually prefer to be called Latino and not Hispanic. And some would prefer to be called Latinx and many want to be called by their country of origin term because that's actually what they identify with more, not the pan-ethnic term of Hispanic or Latino or Latinx. But identity is something that is, uh, really personal but also depends on who's asking and where it's asked.

So to give you another example of some of these changes, in the- in the space of, um, of Asian American research, the term Asian American is a pan-ethnic term, is something that emerged in the '60s and '70s um, to show the numbers of the population of people who trace their roots to Asia. But in more recent years, there's been a movement to present this data in a dis-aggregated way.

Uh, that is to tell the stories of Asian-American groups like Bhutanese compared to Nepalese, compared to Chinese, compared to Indian and compared to Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, uh, and to present those stories and tha- that data in a dis-aggregated way to highlight the differences and nuances within the population. Because in many ways, a pan-ethnic term might mask or some might even say erase some of the stories of different groups given how wide the variety of demographic characteristics alone and economic characteristics alone are among those groups.

CG: Yeah. And this idea certainly applies a- across the board, I think. I mean, the- the example of Hispanics certainly comes to mind because probably because it's the one I'm most familiar with, my family is Cuban. And it's not just that Cubans, for example, have had a different experience of migrating to the US than like Mexicans or Peruvians or Colombians but also every individual Cuban family is different.

And your own experience of being in the US, your family's experience can depend on things like, you know, how long ago your family arrived, what kinds of resources you had when you arrived, what part of the country you moved to and so on. And so this example of Hispanics also comes to mind because the issue of dis-aggregating the data by different groups of Hispanics was such a big deal in the 2020 elections because Donald Trump ended up doing better with Hispanic voters than people had expected. And so it seems like your survey and the survey questions in the census, things getting more and more specific, that's all kind of in line with a broader societal trend of trying to understand people a little bit better based on their specific circumstances.

MHL: Uh, that's right. And I think the 2020 election really brought home a lot of this, particularly around the nation's Latino population. As the results of the 2020 elections started to emerge, one of the stories that uh, started to be told is one about how the Latino voters in 2020 at least compared to 2016 had leaned more towards Donald Trump than

perhaps many analysts had expected but that it wasn't just a story of Florida, which has tended to have a more Republican leaning population of Hispanic voters because of the presence of Cuban-Americans and Venezuelan, uh, Americans, Nicaraguans and so forth, people whose story of migration to the United States is one that's oftentimes tied to particular, uh, presidential administrations.

But at the same time, we were seeing in the... in- in Arizona and in Texas, and even in places like, um, uh, like California and Philadelphia, a greater share of Latino voters supporting Trump in 2020 than was the case in 2016. Now our own voter verified survey that we just published recently shows that, uh, Donald Trump, uh, appears to have won among our verified voters study, uh, Hispanic voters, uh, maybe around 35 to 38% of Hispanic voters' support, uh, up from what it was in 2016.

If you take a look at that, that puts Donald Trump's support at levels that we'd last seen at least as high as this, uh, in 2004 with then President George Bush and perhaps even, uh, Ronald Reagan's level of support back in the 1980s for, uh, Latino voters. But one big question that came up about all of this is oh, why are Latinos, uh, leaning towards Trump so much? Because there was some indication that this was starting to happen or this was gonna happen, uh, even before the election. And, uh, uh, it cannot just be because more Cuban Americans voted as what some analysts might say.

And if you look at the data, you do see shifts in a number of different ways. Um, Hispanic women and Hispanic men both shifted more towards Trump. You see third generation Hispanic Americans and they leaned more towards Trump than was the case back in 2016. And of course, the story of Florida and South Florida particularly with its Cuban American and Venezuelan, uh, American voter populations also, uh, seemed to lean more strongly towards Trump than was the case back in 2016.

So Biden still did win the Latino vote by a wide margin, so I want to be clear about that. But Trump seems to have done somewhat better than uh, many analysts had expected among the Latino voters. And I think that reflects the diversity of the population. Uh, this is a population that doesn't hold the same point of view on every issue. And that's something

that our research at the Pew Research Center has shown over the decades, which is that Hispanic voters are a diverse group.

CG: And by the way, there's a kind of tendency, I think, amongst a lot of political pundits and- and maybe even some parts of the news media to act as if immigration is the one big overriding issue for Latinos, but for a lot of Latinos, it's not.

MHL: Uh, that's right. And also I would say that the link to or how close one is and one's family is to your immigrant roots, uh, can also, um, play a role in shaping one's views on a policy like immigration. But at the same time, over the years, we've found that issues like education and healthcare and perhaps unsurprisingly, jobs in the economy have been top of mind issues for Latinos for at least the- the last 10 years that I've been doing polling of the nation's Hispanic population above often immigration as an issue.

Now that's not to say that Latinos aren't generally very supportive of things like offering some sort of a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants or saying that immigration is an important issue for the country to address perhaps more so than the general US public, but it is not the one and only issue that defines how Hispanic voters are going to vote. And I think that that really reflects who, um, the public is, and that is whether you're Hispanic or not, uh, local issues matter, candidates who are running matter, many issues, particularly, um, issues like the economy and jobs can matter a lot.

And for Latinos in this last year or so, they were hit hard by the recession brought on by the pandemic, uh, unemployment rates uh, skyrocketed in, uh, April and May of, uh, of 2020. Uh, but of course, um, we've also seen some real gains in employment in the last, uh, few months for Latinos. So the story of jobs and jobs in the economy, perhaps it's no surprise that it's an important issue for Latinos just like it is by the way for most Americans.

CG: Yeah, absolutely. But Mark, I- I actually have another question for you about the importance of getting more granular data on people's identities. I remember near the beginning of the COVID epidemic, there was this push to better understand who was being most affected by the epidemic and sort of break down the number of cases and the number of

COVID deaths by race and ethnicity but the data were not being collected early on in the same way in every state.

So some states were including Hispanics under the white category, for example. And also I remember that there was a problem early on in New York City because the data had a category for a Latino and a category for black residents. But of course, there's a lot of black Latino residents in New York City and so you end up having to choose a category and that could end up skewing the numbers. And so I remember that as- as kind of one small example of why getting this data can really matter.

MHL: Uh, it's a- it's an important point to make when we talk about racial and ethnic identity in the United States. As social scientists, we've often times created mutually exclusive groups, groups like white non Hispanics, black non Hispanics, Hispanics and Asian non Hispanics to compare these groups in relatively straightforward ways with the- the usual statistical tools. And yet when you talk to people, people will oftentimes say that they are black but also Hispanic or Latino in the same breath and emphasizing the importance of both of those identities to themselves, um, which indicates that perhaps our presentation of data with these mutually exclusive categories.

And by the way, even thinking about, uh, how the nation's population projections suggest that the nation will be majority non-white at a certain point in the 2040s and not sure if the public necessarily itself thinks of itself in such stark or such uh, clear mutually exclusive terms. And that's something that our data has shown, is that many Latinos also have racial identities. They see their race as black or white and it's very interesting to see those differences and nuances in how they interact with the ethnic terms that they also use.

CG: And Mark, I- I know that your team at Pew has been looking at America's black population more closely as well, including Afro-Latinos and multi-racial black Americans. And you've found some interesting demographic details. So can you tell us a little bit about that survey?

MHL: Uh, yeah, so, uh, so it's a survey but also a demographic work. Let me talk about the demographic work, sir- first and then I'll jump into the survey. We took a look at the nation's population of people who say that they are either black alone or say that their race is black along with some other racial or ethnic identification. When you do that, you'll find that

there's about 47, 48 million people who say that in some way or another, they have a black identity, uh, a black racial identity.

Um, now most, um, about 45 million or so of that is going to be people who are single race, black Americans who are not Hispanic. But there's a growing share who are multi-racial and a growing share and number who are black and Hispanic. The multi-racial story is really an interesting one. So people who say that they're black but also say they're black and white or black and Asian or black, white, and Asian, multi-racial black Americans tend to be younger, tend to be better educated and tend to be living along the coast in California or in New York or- or Florida compared with single race black Americans who tend to be in the South or in the Midwest. So there are some interesting demographic differences across those groups.

When it comes to, say, religious affiliation, and we had done a large survey, uh, back in 2019 that looked at the nation's black American population broadly defined, uh, and asked about religious affiliation and a number of other religious uh, activities and characteristics like for example, um, how important religion is in their daily lives, there are some differences, not lot but there are some differences so that, for example, single race uh, black Americans tend to be people who are going to churches that are, uh, Christian churches, Christian churches in the south, uh, uh, very different than say black Hispanics who tend to be Catholic and might be more likely to be foreign born, uh, because they might be Dominican or they might be Puerto Rican, or they might be Cuban.

Uh, although again, Puerto Ricans are uh, US born or US citizens at birth so just want to- want to be clear about that. But it is interesting to see that there are some differences across all of these groups that indicates how rich and diverse and nuanced the story of the population is whether we're looking at demographics or whether we're looking at some other public opinion data. But this is, uh, something that will characterize our work moving forward on black Americans, Asian Americans and Hispanics, that is to tell these nuanced and diverse stories across broader populations that are sometimes overlapping.

CG: And Mark, I want to turn to immigration now. And specifically, I want to ask about what Pew has found on American attitudes towards immigration. You know, it's pretty clear that there's been more

anti-immigrant rhetoric, restrictionist rhetoric in, I guess the last half decade or so, certainly since Donald Trump started his campaign for the 2016 elections. Not that that kind of rhetoric wasn't there already, of course it was. Uh, but it's become more central, I think, more prominent. And I'm just curious to know what effects that might have had on American attitudes and then we'll talk about the effects on immigration itself.

MHL: When we take a look at public opinion about the, uh, about Americans' views of immigrants, and we've been asking the same question for at least since the 1990s, so for 20 plus years of, um, are imm- are immigrants a strength for our country because of their hard work and talents that they bring or are they a burden to the country because they take jobs, housing, and healthcare. Um, it's a- it's a question that's been around for a while, some might even say it's a clunky question. Um, but it's one that we have a long trend for and we've noticed a change.

So back in the 1990s, about two thirds of Americans viewed immigrants as a burden and not a strength, about a third said they were a strength. Today, those numbers are entirely reversed and you see two thirds of American adults saying that immigrants strengthen our country with their hard work and talents and about one third say that they're a burden. Now there are some partisan differences. Democrats are much more likely to say immigrants strengthen the country, about 80 plus percent say this, um, whereas Republicans are- are more likely to say that they're a burden on the country.

Um, and you see some differences in viewpoints even among groups that have large numbers of immigrants such as Hispanics. Not all Hispanics necessarily see immigrants as a strength. But when you, um, look at it a little bit more and look at some of the nuances of opinions about immigrants and how the opinions have changed, when Donald Trump became president and uh, Donald Trump started making a number of changes through executive actions and orders to immigration policy, you started to see Democrats particularly increase in their share saying that immigrants strengthen the country.

So they were already more likely than Republicans before Trump to say this and they were on the rise, um, even before Trump became president. But when he became president, that's where we started to

really see a sharp increase in the share of Democrats who say that immigrants strengthen, uh, the country. So there may be a partisan element to this as- as well.

CG: And what does the public say should actually be done about immigration policy?

MHL: So this includes, for example, border security. So many Americans, a majority, will say border security should be a very important goal for US immigration policy. But when it comes to deporting those who are in the country without authorization, relatively fewer, although still a significant share about half will say that that should be an important goal for US immigration policy. And when it comes to dreamers, um, many Americans actually support providing a way for them to work in the country and live in the country, uh, if they meet certain requirements.

Um, and, uh, you'll see that that's true even among Republican, uh, US adults who, uh, the majority of whom support a program or something like uh, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or DACA program. When it comes to something like, um, uh, pathway to citizenship for the undocumented, you also see, uh, generally speaking, the US public strongly supports that although Republicans are less likely than Democrats to- to do so. But, uh, the US public has become more supportive of- of, uh, uh... sees immigrants as a strength, more so, and also is more likely to support many policies that would provide some sort of, um, uh, benefit to immigrant groups like, uh, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals or undocumented immigrants.

However, at the same time, we find that, um, many Hispanic adults, for example, particularly Hispanic immigrants think that the US immigration system needs to be overhauled. So while there may be this view that immigrants are strengthening the country and so forth and that immigration policy should have a number of particular elements to it, the general view of the current system is one that needs to be changed, uh, because of the, uh, because of a number of things including the length of time say it takes to- to get a green card or to wait in line, or- or those are all some of the elements that we've found over the years both Asian immigrants and Hispanic immigrants point to as a problem with the US immigration system.

CG: Yeah, and Mark, you mentioned those executive orders, uh, from the Trump administration. There were literally hundreds of such orders, the vast majority of which, possibly every single one of which was intended to restrict immigration flows, to lower the number of people coming to the country every year. And I was looking at a chart showing immigration flows since 2016. It was a- a chart from the Migration Policy Institute. And it shows that those flows have in fact fallen each year since 2016 but perhaps not fallen by quite as much as people might know or- or people might have expected. What do you think?

MHL: Uh, that's exactly the way the- the trend on the number of immigrants coming to the US was already in decline prior to Trump's, uh, election in 2016. So we already starting to see uh, slight declines and for example, the number of international students coming to the US is one example. Um, but that was already underway prior to Trump's, uh, election. Now with Trump's election, that continued although still significant numbers of people were entering the US both legally and, uh, without authorization.

If you think about the number of unaccompanied minors, uh, crossing the US border, 2019 was a- a year that saw a large spike in the number of unaccompanied minors from central America and families coming to seek asylum. Um, but there's a number of things I think here to keep in mind which is that it does take a long time for immigration applications particularly for green cards or for people to come in on family reunification visas to be processed.

So there's a little bit of a lag as well for some of the, uh, entry numbers, at least on the legal side, uh, to keep in mind. So we may see a continued decline. Maybe it may be, uh, a sharper decline in coming years although I think it remains to be seen what will happen because COVID has certainly changed a lot and during 2020, the number of, uh, immigrants entering the US legally dropped sharply. And that makes sense because there was a I- there was like the, uh, um, US citizenship and immigration services offices closed and a lot of applications were just not being processed or were being processed much more slowly.

But, uh, the question of how the U S is doing internationally when it comes to immigration and immigrants, it's actually a very interesting question because many countries around the world have seen the success of the United States in recruiting a wide variety of immigrants,

particularly immigrants who might have a college degree or who are scientists, uh, but also immigrants who are experts in masonry or who are uh, working on- in agriculture and they're looking to compete with the US in those markets, but also to offer alternatives to the US in those markets.

And you can see this in international education. Other countries like Australia are looking to attract more foreign students. Uh, you could see this in- in high skilled immigration, as some might call it. The European Union has sought to attract more immigrants with PhDs, um, who are at the beginning of their careers to come and work in the European Union and this is true with the UK as well. So when we talk about the competitive landscape for immigration, many of the countries are now also at the same time that we've had the debate about immigration here are also changing the way that they attract immigrants, and that is adding more competition in the world market for people who are, uh, likely to immigrate.

CG: Yeah, Mark I want to talk a little bit about the long-term view on immigration and immigration flows to the US because there have historically been some very big decades long fluctuations. And right now the US has almost 14% of the population, uh, made up of immigrants, that is close to a record high, but it is not actually the record high which was closer to 15% back in the late 1800s. And so I- I hear some times... this usually comes from people who um, tend to be immigration restrictionists and are- are wondering about this "unprecedented experiment" that the US is running on immigration.

And I sometimes want to say, well, number one, it's not unprecedented, a higher share of the population has been made up of immigrants in the past. But also at close to 14%, that's actually a smaller share of the population that's immigrants than in a number of other countries. And so this idea that this is this crazy experiment in immigration, just because the share of the population that's made up of immigrants has been rising since about 1970, it just doesn't sound quite right to me. So what do you think should be the sort of appropriate comparisons to make here, and what are your- what are your thoughts on this?

MHL: So, as you noted, the nation has gone through a number of, uh, waves of immigration. Uh, actually, uh, there've been three big- three big ones, and we're currently in the- in the third, big wave of immigration.

But the nations of foreign born share uh, of the population reached almost 15% in 1890. And during the Great Depression, there was a sharp slowdown in immigration to the United States partly 'cause the world, uh, was in an economic uh, depression.

And there were not a lot of job opportunities in the United States, which is one of the big reasons why people come to a place like the US uh, if they decide to leave their- their countries of birth. Where we're going to go, I think it's- it's- it's unclear. Um, I... It's unclear how COVID is going to impact the immigration around the world. I think it's still a large unknown. And many other countries, as you noted, um, have higher shares of their populations that are foreign born and have actually had uh, a higher share of foreign born for a longer period of time than the US has been at say, 13 or 14% as we are now.

Um, and those are oftentimes European countries, which I think is an important point to note 'cause, uh, countries like the UK have a very diverse immigrant pool, perhaps even a more diverse immigrant pool than the US does because many US immigrants are from Latin America, for example. But the, uh, uh, the story of immigration around the world, I think is going to be one that might be different in the coming decades as uh, countries continue to, um, age and the needs for immigrants may shift from high skill to perhaps more of an emphasis on, uh, workers who could provide services for those who are uh, elderly.

So we'll have to see where things uh, emerge and where things turn, but it also looks like in the future, a place like Africa may end up being a larger source of immigrants than it is today, not only internally within the continent, but also internationally, um, since it has a relatively young population. Meanwhile, Latin America is one of the fastest aging places in the world and by the end of the century is expected to be, uh, the oldest region in the world at least by median age.

CG: You- you mentioned the high share of immigrants in the US that come from Latin America, but actually over the last couple of decades the- there's been a kind of shift in the origins of immigration flows to the US. People are coming from other countries than where they were coming from, you know, in the- in the decades immediately after the 1960s. Can you just give us a sense of how there's been this change not

just in the number of immigrants coming into the US but in- in sort of the origins of- of where they came from?

MHL: So since 1965, the US has received about 59 million people. So 59 million people have arrived in the US from other countries over the course of five decades. Now, initially the biggest source was Latin America. And in fact, among people who live in the US today who were born in another country, about 45 million people, about half trace the roots to Latin America with Mexico being the single largest group. But at least since the Great Recession, since 2007, we... even before the Great Recession, I should say, we already started to see a shift.

Uh, migration from Latin America, particularly Mexico was declining and the Great Recession led to a pretty sharp decline in new arrivals from Mexico. But at the same time, we were in, uh, we had... we're seeing a steady increase in the number of, uh, new arrivals coming from places like India and China, um, the second and third, or I should say the third and second largest immigrant origin groups in the United States. Mexicans are the largest followed by Chinese and then Indians.

And so you see this shift as Mexico declines as a source of new immigrants and India and China uh, continue their rise. And- and it isn't that there was a sharp increase from Asia, it's just Asia was always rising and it now... it has eclipsed, uh, Latin America as a source of new immigrants. That's been the case since at least 2007. It's also interesting how this is playing out in other ways too.

When you think about the nation's undocumented immigrant population, which numbers uh, maybe around uh, 11 million people or so, when you take a look at the numbers of who is becoming an unauthorized immigrant these days, there's a lot more new unauthorized immigrants coming in from people who may have overstayed their visa here in the US and they tend to be from places like India. So in the past, it had been largely people who entered the US without authorization by crossing the Southern border and uh, stayed in the country illegally.

Those were oftentimes the single biggest source of new unauthorized immigrants in the country, people from Mexico or central America. But that's not the case anymore. It seems that a larger source of new

undocumented or unauthorized immigrants are people who overstay visas, and many of those are from places in Asia like India.

CG: And in- in terms of, uh, how this has played out with respect to the economy, I- I think a kind of coincident trend is that a higher share of immigrants who are coming to the US also either have a college degree or are coming here specifically to get one so there- there's a higher average education level for the immigrants that are coming, right?

MHL: That's right. Uh, so education levels for immigrants have been rising even among Latin American immigrants, by the way. So this isn't just because of the shifting composition of the nation's newly arrived immigrants who tend to lean towards Asia and Asian immigrants generally speaking have had uh at least a college degree or are more likely to be uh, college educated than say the general US public.

But even in Latin America and in Mexico, we're seeing a shift in who's coming to the US at least up through 2019, which was a shift towards a more educated, uh, college educated, um, uh, group of new arrivals compared with say in the 1980s and '90s when many were people who didn't say, for example, had not completed 12 years of education or did not have uh, the equivalent of a high school diploma from Mexico. So there has been a shift even in Latin American immigration as frankly Latin America's um, educational systems have changed and, uh, have more requirements for people who continue in schooling longer. And so that too is reflected in the pool of immigrants coming to the US.

CG: And Mark, let- let's close with this. In all your years of studying race and ethnicity and identity, what have been some things that have surprised you, maybe even in terms of topics where Americans largely agree with each other or really just any other interesting, surprising takeaways from doing this job?

MHL: Uh, well, one of the interesting findings that we've had over the years is the support among the US public for the view that a diverse country makes for a better country. That's something that we've seen over the last uh, decade or so, uh, increase in share. Um, so today, for example, about three quarters of US adults will say that, um, diversity makes the US a stronger and better place. That's one of those

interesting findings that we hadn't asked about, but I was uh, interested to see what we would find.

Another one on race and identity is the many different ways that people want to identify themselves and identify their identity. People want to tell you their stories. And I think one of the best ways to explore people's personal stories is just to ask them and let them tell you about who they are. So that means trying very hard to not apply labels or not to make assumptions about who somebody is. I know that sounds pretty obvious, but I think you'll find it in any interaction that we make with anybody. Sometimes we do make some assumptions and jump to some conclusions and start using labels in a way that, um, doesn't necessarily reflect the way people see themselves.

So uh, in our work at the center, we have tried to just let people tell us who they are, both in surveys, but even when I'm traveling one-on-one, that's an important thing that I try to do, which is just let people tell me about their backgrounds without even asking, eventually it'll come up. And that's, uh, that's when I find it most interesting and most exciting.

CG: Yeah, and- and I mean, maybe more philosophically, has your own understanding of the US changed from doing this job? Has it somehow perhaps made you more optimistic, more pessimistic, um, or- or had some other effect?

MHL: Uh, it's been quite a journey particularly to understand the- the nuances of the nation's Latino population. Uh, and it's also been a personal journey for me as well in the sense that I've, uh, I have learned a lot about my own, um, family's background, but with this, uh, with a more, with more of an awareness of what others have talked about going back and looking at some of the, for example, uh, immigration documents and my grandparents, uh, from Mexico, it was, uh, it's been striking to understand the nuances of their story in a way that I didn't. Even though I knew the facts of their story in the past, understanding those nuances of how they entered the country and- and what their journeys were to get to the Los Angeles area, which is where I'm from is really something that was new for me.

CG: Yeah. I'd- I'd love to hear more about- about your family and- and how it came here. You said that you had discovered some interesting nuances. Uh, can you- can you share some of that with us?

MHL: Uh, yes. Um, a few years ago I was at my aunt's and, uh, we were talking about, uh, uh, a suitcase of paperwork that she had found from my grandmother. And my grandmother had passed away many years ago, but my aunt was unable to really decipher what all this paperwork was partly because even though she speaks Spanish, she isn't necessarily a- a fluent Spanish speaker at least when it comes to reading, uh, government documents. So, um, having been at the Pew Research Center for a while and having uh, worked on my own Spanish and having, uh, studied some of these questions about immigrants and immigration, uh, we took a look at those pa- at that paperwork.

And it was really exciting to see and find some of the documents from, uh, places in Mexico in Jerez where my family is from, uh, and finding out that, uh, my great-grandmother and my grandmother had tried to get ahold of their birth certificates from them- from, uh, from Jerez but were unable to do so 'cause the- 'cause the local government couldn't find them.

So that made it difficult for my families, uh, my grandmother, my great-grandmother to actually, uh, apply for US citizenship. But that's one example of one of the things that we found. Another was to find the, uh, the various photographs, but also, uh, US immigration and alien documents indicating when my grandparents on my father's side had come to the US. And interestingly they crossed the US Mexico border at El Paso and had done so in 1911 and had done so within days of each other.

They didn't know each other back then of course, so either it was a real coincidence or also it may have been hard for them to remember exactly when they crossed and it just so happened they gave similar dates. I don't know. Um, but this is all part of the story that I did not know that is the journey through El Paso to then, uh, come to Southern California and work in the vineyards and also in the meat packing industries in Southern California which is where my family's roots are.

CG: Uh, that's a beautiful story, Mark. Uh, and before I let you go, uh, I wanna just ask if you have any long form recommendations for our

listeners, something longer than, you know, a newspaper article. It could be a magazine, it could be a podcast episode, it could be a book, anything you want. Uh, yeah, what would you recommend to our listeners?

MHL: Well, you know, I've been spending uh, a lot of time going through some old paperwork from my father and one of the things that I found is one of his favorite books, which is something that I hadn't gotten back to in a long time but I've started rereading again, which is Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*. And it is a story of, uh, of uh, a Hispanic family in New Mexico. But what I like about this particular novel is it gets at the nuances of and the diversity of the US Hispanic experience.

It's not all just about immigration, it's not all just about being, uh, in a particular place, but it- this story is one that I think is unique and uh, I'd recommend folks to take a look at this. They might find it, uh, both a beautiful story and an interesting story but one with- which touches on some of the themes we've talked about here today.

CG: Mark Hugo Lopez, director of race and ethnicity research at Pew Research. Thanks so much.

MHL: Thank you.

CG: And that's a wrap for today's show. You can find links to the report that Mark and I discussed along with some other relevant links in the show notes for this episode. The New Bazaar is a production of Bazaar Audio from me and executive producer, Aimee Keane. And speaking of important demographic changes in the US, Aimee is herself a multiracial Canadian immigrant to this here land. And I'm sorry, Canada, no take backs. She's ours now, you can't have her back, I'd be lost without her. Thanks for everything Aimee.

Adriene Lilly, our sound engineering wizard somehow makes even my voice at least tolerable to the human ear. And for the gorgeous theme music that has now burrowed itself into your ears, we thank Scott Lane and DJ Harrison of Subfloor Studio. Please follow or subscribe to The New Bazaar on your app of choice. And if you like today's show, leave us a review or tell a friend or even better, do both.

I know I repeat that after every episode, but reviewing the show or passing it along really is the best way to ensure that this podcast is something that we can keep doing for as long as we're blessed with good health and good luck. And if you want to get in touch with us, I'm on Twitter as @CardiffGarcia or you can email Aimee and me both at hello@bazaaraudio.com. That's hello@B-A-Z-A-A-R-A-U-D-I-O.com. Thanks so much for tuning in and we'll see you next week.