

Immigration

by Elizabeth Mylott

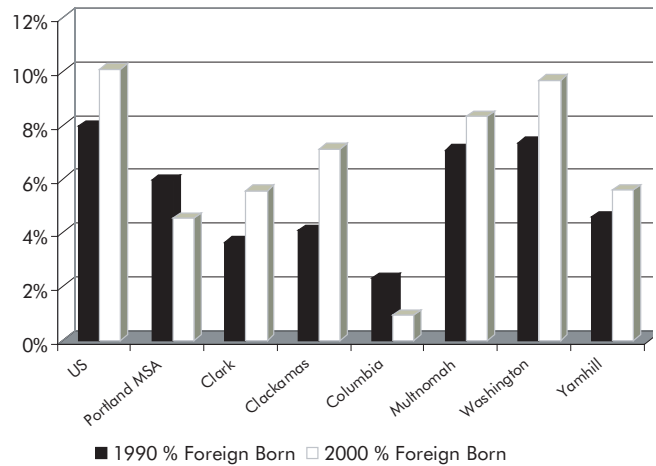
The number of immigrants living and working in the metroscope is increasing. In 2005, the foreign born population numbered 250,955, a dramatic increase from the 1990 level of 88,072. Not only are more immigrants settling here, but the proportion of the population who is foreign born is also increasing—from 5.96% in 1990 to 12% in 2005.

Immigrants move to the United States for social, political and economic reasons. Some are making a permanent relocation and will go on to become naturalized U.S. citizens. Others will remain permanently as resident aliens. Still others come intending to stay for a limited period of time and then return to their country of origin. Nationally, as immigration rates are increasing, so are the percentages of immigrants who naturalize. In a 2003 study, the Urban Institute found that after almost 30 years of decline, from 64% in 1970 to 39% in 1996, the number of legal immigrants who naturalized rose to 49% in 2002. In the metroscope, however, just 90,000 of the 250,955 or 36% of foreign born residents living in the region in 2005 were naturalized.

Does the low number of naturalized immigrants reflect a population who does not plan to remain permanently in the U.S.? Immigration patterns suggest several significant differences in eligible immigrants who have not yet naturalized and those who have. Those who have not yet naturalized tend to have lower levels of education and limited English language skills. In 2005, only 30.4% of area immigrants reported speaking English “very well,” and nearly half had not gone beyond high school. The metroscope had a high percentage of immigrants from Latin America. Nationally this is the group least likely to become naturalized.

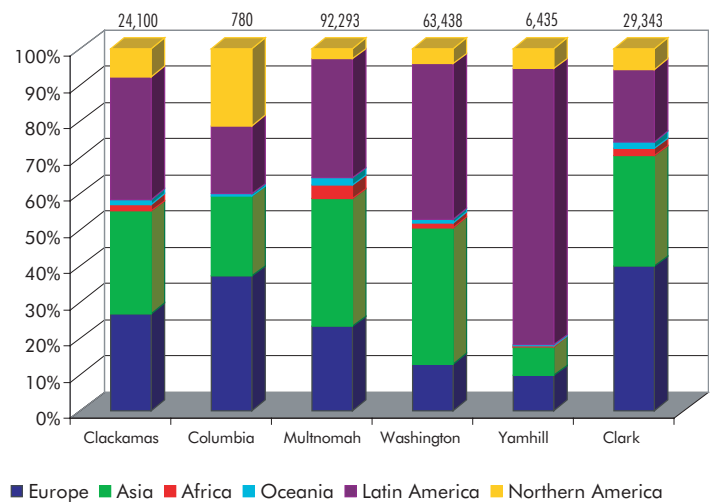
Of those planning either to return to their country of origin or to settle permanently in another country, many are young and single or living apart from their families. Just over 30% of the total population falls between the ages of 25 and 44. Of the foreign-born population, 48% fall into that category.

Percent Foreign Born of Total Population
1990 and 2000



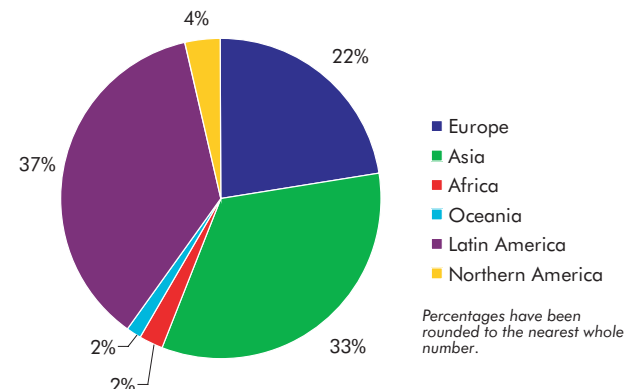
Source: U.S. Census

Composition of Foreign Born by County, 2000



Source: U.S. Census

Composition of Foreign Born in the Portland Region, 2005



Source: American Community Survey, 2005

Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.