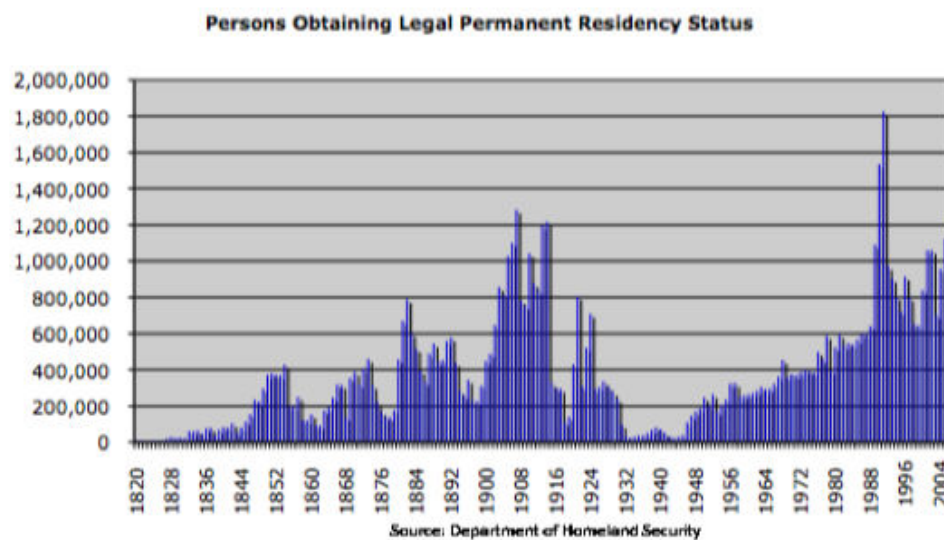


Creating Valid Immigration Statistics

Sherrie A. Kossoudji

This past spring, at an international conference, a prominent economist presented a paper on the cyclicity of immigration to the United States. He used, as the data for the paper, the official statistics of immigration to the United States. Unfortunately, those statistics include both new entrants and status adjusters. While new entrants have just immigrated to the United States, status adjusters could have immigrated at any time in the past. Any paper on the flow of immigration that uses these statistics will come to erroneous conclusions because these data do not actually measure immigration flows.

Each year in the statistics, status adjusters are between 30 and 80 percent of all immigrants accounted for in that year's statistics. The following graph shows the number of persons obtaining permanent residency status (the typical immigration statistics used). The spike in the early 1990's was not a spike of immigration but represented the millions who adjusted their status under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. That is, papers that attribute these numbers to new immigration will be flat out wrong.



In this paper I create a valid time series of immigration statistics by adjusting the immigration numbers in each year using available data sets to estimate when status adjusters actually migrated to the United States. As an example, to qualify for IRCA amnesty, migrants must have arrived in the United States before 1982. A data set, The Legalized Population Survey, of their histories was included as part of the legislative act. It includes information on date of entrance to the United States. The status adjusters in the early 1990's spike, from IRCA, can have their actual immigration dates estimated through the use of the Legalized Population Survey.

Throughout the time series, the actual dates of immigration will be estimated using various data sets. A valid time series of immigration will be created and the cyclicity of immigration will be re-estimated using valid data.