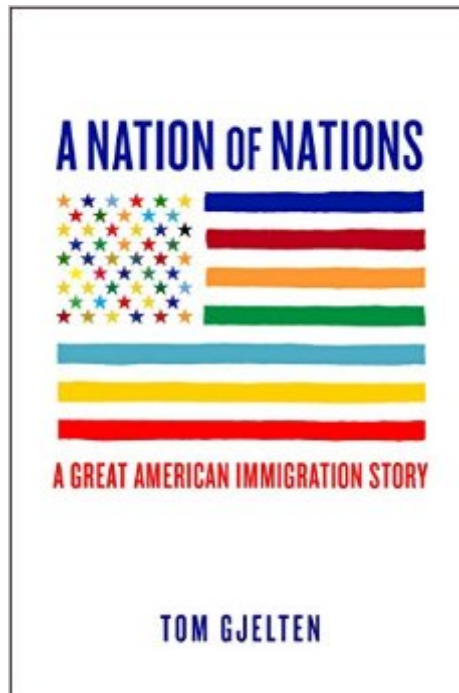


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# A Nation Of Nations: A Great American Immigration Story



## Synopsis

The dramatic and compelling story of the transformation of America during the last fifty years, told through a handful of families in one suburban county in Virginia that has been utterly changed by recent immigration. In the fifty years since the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, the foreign-born population of the United States has tripled. Significantly, these immigrants are not coming from Europe, as was the case before 1965, but from all corners of the globe. Today non-European immigration is ninety percent of the total immigration to the US. Americans today are vastly more diverse than ever. They look different, speak different languages, practice different religions, eat different foods, and enjoy different cultures. In 1950, Fairfax County, Virginia, was ninety percent white, ten percent African-American, with a little more than one hundred families who were the other. • Currently the African-American percentage of the population is about the same, but the Anglo white population is less than fifty percent, and there are families of Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American origin living all over the county. A Nation of Nations follows the lives of a few immigrants to Fairfax County over recent decades as they gradually "Americanize." • Hailing from Korea, Bolivia, and Libya, these families have stories that illustrate common immigrant themes: friction, between minorities, economic competition and entrepreneurship, and racial and cultural stereotyping. It's been half a century since the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act changed the landscape of America, and no book has assessed the impact or importance of this law as this one does, with its brilliant combination of personal stories and larger demographic and political issues.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Gjelten has written a compelling portrait of the immigration experience as seen through portrait-like series of interviews with three or four multi-generational and extended families, interwoven with historical chapters that fill in the politics of immigration policy as played out at the federal and local governmental levels. The book is organized around the passage of the landmark Immigration Reform Act of 1965, and its effects, intended and unintended, on Fairfax County, Virginia. The book makes a strong case for why the strength of the American culture has always depended on its being welcoming to new immigrants, and how the new immigrants of today reinforce what is great about our country. The book contains stories of great academic achievement, business, political and entrepreneurial success, etc. by people who arrived speaking no English and only the clothes on their backs. But it also doesn't shy away from discussing the downside, such as crime, ongoing destructive discrimination against immigrants, inter-ethnic conflict, and the existence of religious extremism. At a time when we are debating whether or not we should offer a path to citizenship for millions who are here illegally, and whether we should open our shores to refugees from the Middle East, this book provides a helpful, hopeful framework.

Writer Tom Gjelten basically takes two routes to a current snapshot of the immigration situation in this country. A painstakingly researched and detailed description of the how the Immigration Act of 1965 came about is book-ended by the chronicles of several immigrant families--mostly living in the Washington DC area. Both parts of the book are valuable and interesting, but the stories of immigrants themselves are the most compelling and ultimately provide the truest picture of why immigration has always been an essential part of the American saga. Their struggles, energy and determination are inspiring and reassuring to anyone who has doubts about their prospects as citizens. While Gjelten doesn't make any absolute statements about the certainties of assimilation with the current tides of immigrant groups, he provides enough background data and facts to suggest that these groups who differ more widely culturally than past waves of Europe-originated peoples will ultimately accept the national ethos and fit in well. While a bit dry in places, the scholarship in this book is evident and the author's perceptions of the human condition are right on.

The immigrant population in the last 25 years centered in Arlington, VA. A view of individuals, why and how they came, and cultures. Important background information for learning social changes

and integration into the United States. Excellent background information to help understand our country.

I took it out of my local library but really did read it. I'm an immigration attorney so I know a fair amount of the context and the law. I thought it was very interesting and informative and I learned a lot. I'm not a huge fan of "ensemble" books with lots of characters that I get mixed up after a while, and there was some of that here in the personal narratives. I've recommended it both to "lay" friends and to a book group interested in immigration.

This book provides general understanding of many immigrants from a variety of backgrounds and nations which is important. It is readable and useful as an introduction of behaviors during the last 100 years, but does not go into depth that should be the next step for many Americans who know little beyond the uniformed right wing political rhetoric that has gone on for too long. I have some problems with the attributions for success in legislation given to John F. Kennedy for much of the progressive legislation that Lyndon Johnson was able to pass. I suggest the the author and the public gain additional depth by reading the volumes about LBJ by Robert A. Caro to gain an understanding of who did what and how during those turbulent times.

I heard a book review on NPR and immediately bought the book. I am about half way through it (as I am reading three books concurrently) and it is a great and informing read. It's perfect timing and coincides with global issues and immigration challenges.

Enjoyed the book and read it over a weekend. I am neither a political or immigration specialist of any kind. I liked that Mr. Gjelten combined both the deep factual dive on immigration history, which I did appreciate, with actual stories, which I also appreciated. Great book, fast read, enjoyed it.

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