Migration

Field Note  Risking Lives for Remittances

A decade ago, I was on my way to Rosenstiel Marine Center on Virginia Key, off the coast of Miami, Florida. I noticed an overcrowded boat, with about 70 people on board. The Haitians were fleeing the most impoverished country in the Western Hemisphere. Most of the would-be illegal immigrants were men, and there were perhaps half a dozen women and as many children. They jumped overboard prematurely when the Coast Guard approached, and some undoubtedly lost their lives; others made it to the beach and ran for the road. Unfortunately, they reached shore in a bad spot—there was not much in the way of built-up area to hide.

Invariably, the Haitians the Coast Guard caught were sent home to Haiti with other illegal Haitian immigrants. The travel is treacherous, and hundreds die off the coast of Florida each year. The hope of a job in the United States and the lack of hope in their lives and homes in Haiti compel them to try. The immigrants know that if they make it to shore and can find their way to the homes of friends and family, they can find employment and live under the radar of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (Fig. 3.1).

Across the world, hundreds of thousands of migrants have fled their homelands by boat for

Figure 3.1
Little Haiti, Miami, Florida. A vendor in the Caribbean Market in Little Haiti sells everything from jewelry to cans of silly string. © Jeff Greenberg/Alamy.
opportunities—in North America, Australia, China, and Europe. These “boat people” are sometimes welcomed and sometimes turned away. In the United States, the government welcomed the Haitian “boat people” of the 1970s, but since 1981, the United States has had a policy of deporting all Haitian “boat people.”

Governments greatly impact migration flows by opening and closing doors to migrants. In some cases, the policy is not as simple as the door being open or shut. Since the Clinton administration, the U.S. government has had a “wet foot, dry foot” policy toward Cuban immigrants. If Cuban immigrants are intercepted at sea, they are deported, but if Cuban immigrants make it to land, they have the right to stay.

Why are immigrants willing to risk their lives on overcrowded boats or by crossing treacherous deserts? Why are so many illegal immigrants from certain regions young men whereas illegal immigrants from other regions are mainly young women? Geographers who study gender and migration realize that the dynamics of individual households in the sending countries determine who will migrate for jobs in another country. Young men and women leave poor regions of the globe with the central purpose of earning money and sending money home. Today, an estimated 10 million illegal immigrants live in the United States. The southwestern United States and southern Florida attract millions of immigrants, legal and illegal (Fig. 3.2). Illegal immigrants typically gain jobs in agriculture, service industries, or

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**Figure 3.2**

Legal Immigration from Middle and South America to the United States, 1981–2002. 
construction. They also typically live, at least in the short term, with multiple families or adults in one apartment or home. They work two or more jobs, live as cheaply as possible, and send home as much money as possible. Monies migrants send home to family are called remittances. Haitians living in the United States send home about $350 million annually, a figure equivalent to 15 percent of Haiti’s gross national product and about double the value of Haitian exports.

The economies of many poorer countries in the Caribbean, Africa, Central and South America, and Eurasia depend in part on remittances sent to their citizens. In 2003, Mexican immigrants sent $12 billion in remittances home, up from $10 billion the year before.

Not all immigrants are illegal. Of the estimated 34 million immigrants in the United States today, 24 million are legal immigrants. Countries recognize the need for immigrant labor, and many have policies allowing—indeed encouraging—legal immigrants to work under temporary visas to fill a need. Thousands of people who work in the United States and Canada are there on temporary visas to fill seasonal jobs in agriculture and forestry. In the United States, over 45,000 agricultural laborers legally enter the country each year under a program that allows unskilled laborers into the country, as long as no Americans want the jobs. Canada began to allow agricultural laborers into the country in 1966. In both Canada and the United States, the vast majority of legal agricultural laborers come from Mexico. Canadian companies travel to Mexico to recruit agricultural laborers from rural Mexico and recruit laborers for the hotel industry from urban areas of Mexico.

Since September 11, 2001, many countries have cracked down on immigration, making legal and illegal immigration more difficult. The United States has earmarked more money for building fences along its border with Mexico, hiring additional border patrols, and installing new technology to intercept would-be terrorists. The cultural landscape of the border region is changing. The government is erecting specially designed fences that are difficult to climb, while at the same time ensuring the fences have spaces where people across the border can speak with each other. The new fences and security south of San Diego, California, are pushing illegal immigration farther east into the desert. The fences in the desert are marked by empty water bottles and memorials to Mexicans who have died trying to cross the border (Fig. 3.3).

At the same time globalization is leading to a freer flow of goods across the world and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has established freer trade among Mexico, the United States, and Canada, the free flow of people is far from realized. Less than a decade ago, the U.S. government commissioned a barrier dividing Nogales, Arizona, from Nogales, Mexico. The New York Times reported that the architecture firm that designed the wall followed government requirements that it be aesthetically pleasing to “evoke the friendship” between the two countries while also making it “resistant to physical assault by means such as welding torches, chisels, hammers, firearms, climbing over or penetration with vehicles.” Illegal immigrants go to great lengths to find their way into the United States, and similarly, the U.S. government goes to great lengths to deter illegal immigration.

In this chapter, we examine various types of migration and question why migrants choose to leave a particular place and why they go to a particular place. We also examine the barriers governments erect to slow human migration, questioning why government policies shift and how policies affect migration flows. By employing geographic concepts such as scale in our analysis of human migration, we
seek to shed light on the nature and meaning of migration flows and to gain an appreciation for why people migrate, where they migrate, and how people, places, and landscapes change as a result.

Key Questions For Chapter 3

1. What is migration?
2. Why do people migrate?
3. Where do people migrate?
4. How do governments affect migration?

WHAT IS MIGRATION?

Movement is inherently geographical. The movement of people changes the people, as well as the way they see themselves in the world. Movement changes places—both the places the people left and the places where they go. Human movement speeds the diffusion of ideas and innovations; it intensifies spatial interaction and transforms regions; and it is often closely linked to environmental conditions.

Movement of humans takes several forms. Mobility ranges from local to global—from the daily to once in a lifetime. Movement of people has been eased by an increase in mobility over the past decades. With ease of mobility, people broaden their perspectives, and widening horizons enhance the likelihood of relocation. All movement involves leaving home. The three types of movement we discuss in this section vary based on time away.
from home. Cyclic movement involves shorter periods away from home; periodic movement involves longer periods away from home; and migration involves a degree of permanence the other two do not: with migration, the mover may never return “home.”

Cyclic Movement

Cyclic movement involves journeys that begin at our home base and bring us back to it. The great majority of people have a daily routine that takes them through a regular sequence of short moves within a local area. These moves create what geographers call activity spaces. The scale of activity space varies across societies. You may go to classes every weekday and perhaps to a job as well, creating a relatively confined and stable activity space, diversified by shopping trips and social activities. The average activity space of a North American covers a greater amount of territory than that of an average African or Southwest Asian.

Commuting is also a cyclic movement. Commuting, the journey from home to work and home again, takes minutes to hours and can involve several modes of transportation. The average North American commuter travels a greater distance each day than the average Chinese villager does in a year. Advances in transportation technology have expanded daily activity spaces. Cars and vast infrastructure enable people to commute over long distances. In Washington, D.C., commuters combine use of their cars, commuter trains, and the metro to travel upwards of 100 miles each way, each day, commuting not only from the surrounding suburbs, but also from Delaware, West Virginia, and central Virginia. By airplane, commuters arrive at work in Washington, D.C., from New York City. Others, such as members of Congress, commute from their home State, keeping houses there and apartments in the Washington, D.C., area.

Another form of cyclic movement is seasonal movement. Every autumn, hundreds of thousands of travelers leave their homes in Canada and northern parts of the United States and seek the winter sun in Florida and other “Sunbelt” States, returning in the spring. This seasonal transfer has huge economic consequences (and electoral significance) in depopulated Northern towns and burgeoning tourist centers in the South.

This kind of seasonal movement is a luxury. Another type of cyclic movement, nomadism, is a matter of survival, culture, and tradition. Nomadism is dwindling across the world, but it can still be found in parts of Asia and Africa. Westerners often envision nomadism as an aimless wandering across steppe and desert by small groups of rootless roamers—people who claim no territory and do not behave territorially. In reality, nomads need to know their territory well in order to find water, food, and shelter in their cyclic movements. Nomadic movement takes place along long-familiar routes repeated time and again. The nomads and their animals visit water sources and pastures that have served their ancestors for centuries. Weather conditions may affect the timing of their route, but barring obstacles such as fenced international borders or the privatization of long-used open country, nomads engage in cyclic movement.

Periodic Movement

Periodic movement, like cyclic movement, involves returning home. Periodic movement involves a longer period of time away from the home base than cyclic movement. One common type of periodic movement is migrant labor, which involves millions of workers in the United States and tens of millions worldwide. The need for migrant labor in the farm fields of California, Florida, and other parts of the United States creates a large flow of cross-border movers, many of whom eventually become immigrants.

A specialized form of periodic movement is transhumance—a system of pastoral farming in which ranchers move livestock according to the seasonal availability of pastures. This is a periodic form of movement because it involves a long period of residential relocation (unlike classic nomadism). In Switzerland, for example, cattle are driven up the mountain slopes to high, fresh pastures during the summer; farm families follow the herds, taking up residence in cottages that are abandoned during the cold winter. In the “Horn” of Northeast Africa, hundreds of thousands of people follow their livestock from highland to lowland and back in search of pastures renewed by seasonal rainfall.

Periodic movement takes on other forms as well. If you leave home to attend a college far away, you may not return for nine months or more, and if you also go to summer school, you may be back only for brief holidays. Although you may retain a home address in your place of origin, you now spend the great majority of your time in your new abode, and your mobility cannot be categorized as cyclic.

Military service is another form of periodic movement. In a given year, as many as 10 million U.S. citizens, including military personnel and their families, are moved to new locations where they will spend tours of duty that can last several years.

Migration

When movement results in permanent relocation across significant distances, it is classified as migration. The process of migration involves the long-term relocation of
an individual, household, or larger group to a new locale outside the community of origin.

**International migration**, movement across country borders, is also called external migration. When a migrant leaves the home country, he or she is classified as an emigrant (one who migrates out) of the home country. When the same migrant enters a new country, he or she is classified as an immigrant (one who migrates in) of the new country. Emigration subtracts from the total population of a country, and immigration adds to the total population of a country.

Countries also experience **internal migration**—migration that occurs within a single country’s borders. Mapping internal migration routes reveals patterns of well-defined streams that change over time. Early in the twentieth century, a major migration stream took tens of thousands of African American families from the South of the United States to the industrializing cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Today, major internal migration movements in the United States are carrying migrants to the Sunbelt and the Far West (Fig. 3.4).

Internal migration varies according to the mobility of the population. In mobile societies, internal migration over long distances is common. In the United States, the flow of internal migration is not as simple as rural to urban. Rather, in the past few decades, internal migrants have flocked to the economically dynamic regions of the Sunbelt and Far West. Internal migrants have escaped from large cities and rural areas to move to medium-sized cities for retirement or family-friendly lifestyles; and wealthy individuals who seek solace and space have moved into environmentally attractive rural areas, trying to keep the area “rural,” while pushing out farmers. The U.S. population is the most mobile in the world. More than 5 million people move from one State to another every year, and nearly seven times as many—an average of 35 million—move within their State, county, or community. On average, an American citizen moves once about every six years.

In Peru, a less mobile society, the pattern of internal migration is much simpler. Migrants have left rural areas and moved to Lima, the capital. Global and national investment capital is concentrated in Lima. The capital represents the major focus of economic opportunity for a rural population with diminishing economic prospects. Lima receives the vast majority of Peru’s migrants, regardless of age, gender, or marital status.

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**Figure 3.4**

**Recent Internal Migration in the United States.** *Courtesy of: United States Census Bureau, 2005.*

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**NET DOMESTIC MIGRATION RATES BY STATE: 1995 to 2000**

- 70.9 to 151.5
- 17.5 to 70.8
- 0.1 to 17.4
- -17.5 to 0.0
- -43.3 to -17.6
- -81.7 to -44.4
THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY

Choose one type of cyclic or periodic movement and then think of a specific example of the kind of movement you chose. Now, determine how this movement changes both the home and the destination. How do these places change as a result of this cyclic or period movement?

WHY DO PEOPLE MIGRATE?

Migration can be the result of a voluntary action, a conscious decision to move from one place to the next. It can also be the result of involuntary action, a forced movement chosen by one group of people for another group of people. Forced migration involves the imposition of authority or power, producing involuntary migration movements that cannot be understood based on theories of choice. Voluntary migration occurs after a migrant weighs options and choices (even if desperately or not so rationally), and can be analyzed and understood as a series of options or choices that result in movement.

The distinction between forced and voluntary migration is not always clear-cut. The enormous European migration to the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is often cited as a prime example of voluntary migration. However, some European migration can be construed as forced. The British treatment of Irish during their colonial rule over Ireland can be seen as political persecution—a cause for forced migration. During British colonialism in Ireland, the British took control of nearly all of the Irish Catholic lands and discouraged the operation of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Until 1829, the British enforced penal laws preventing Irish Catholics from buying land, voting, or carrying weapons. The mass exodus of immigrants from Ireland to North America in the mid-1800s can be seen as forced, both because of the British treatment of the Irish and because of the potato famine, but it can also be seen as voluntary in that the Irish chose to go to North America.

At the scale of an individual region or country, we can question whether a decision to migrate is forced or voluntary. At the scale of the household, the decision to migrate is all the more complex. For certain members of a migrating household, the move may be under duress, and for others, the move may be a preferred choice. The neutral title "migrant" veils the complexities of decision making at the household scale. Geographical studies of gender in migration reveal the complexities of migration at the household scale. At the household scale, geographers consider power relationships, divisions of labor, and gender identities in understanding migration flows. Here, decisions are made, in geographer Victoria Lawson’s terms, in a "cooperative conflict bargaining process." Who has a say in this process and how much of a say each individual has depend on gendered power relationships and responsibilities in the household.

Studies of gender and migration find that, in many regions, men are more mobile than women and men migrate farther than women. Generally, men have more choices of employment than women, and women earn less than men in the jobs they find at the destination. A study of migration in Mexican households found that strongly patriarchal households shield young women from migration, sending young men out to work. Mexican households without a strong patriarchy send young, unmarried women to the city or another country to gain employment.

Thus, geographers cannot easily describe migration flows in terms of men and women or forced and voluntary. Ultimately, the decision or directive to migrate happens to an individual migrant within a household, place, country, region, and world, each of which has its own dynamics. The key difference between voluntary and forced migration, however, is that voluntary migrants have an option (at the very least—where to go or what to do once there); forced migrants do not.

Forced Migration

The largest and most devastating forced migration in the history of humanity was the Atlantic slave trade, which carried tens of millions of Africans from their homes to South America, the Caribbean, and North America, with huge loss of life. The number of Africans sold into slavery will never be known (estimates range from 12 million to 30 million). The map in Figure 3.5 is an approximation of the numbers involved, with a general display of destinations.

Because slavery plays a major role in U.S. history, many students in the United States assume the vast majority of African slaves were forced across the Atlantic and into the southeastern United States. However, as the map shows, a considerable majority of Africans were forced across the Atlantic to the Caribbean region, to coastal Middle America, and to Brazil.

The Atlantic slave trade began during the sixteenth century, when Africans were first brought to the Caribbean. In the early decades of the seventeenth century, they arrived in small numbers on plantations that were developing in coastal eastern North America. Plantation economies from the southeastern United States to Brazil helped drive the slave trade. The wealth promised through plantation agriculture created a demand for slaves by plantation owners, who paid European shippers for slaves, who in turn paid African raiders for slaves. Of all crops produced on plantations in the Americas and Caribbean during the 1700s, sugar was the
Figure 3.5

Most important economically, Figure 3.5 reflects the scramble for sugar islands in the Caribbean, as the map names Spanish, British, Danish, French, and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean as destinations for slaves. Add the coffee, fruit, and sugar plantations in Brazil and the cotton plantations of the southeastern United States, and the destinations on the map make sense.

The terror and destruction of slave raiding afflicted large areas of Africa. Much of West Africa was exploit ed, from Liberia to Nigeria and inland to the margins of the Sahara. So many Africans were taken from the area that is now Benin to Bahia in Brazil that significant elements of the local culture remained intact in the transition. Today there are strong ties between Bahia and Benin, and cultural exchanges are growing stronger. The entire Equatorial African coastal region was victimized as well, and Portuguese slave traders raided freely in the Portuguese domains of Angola and Mozambique. Arab slave raiders were active in East Africa and the Horn, penetrating Equatorial Africa and often cooperating with the Europeans. Zanzibar, off the coast of mainland Tanzania, long was a major slave market.

We know proportionately where slaves ended up, but we can never gauge the full impact of this horrific period. In *A Colonizer’s Model of the World*, geographer James Blaut discussed the sheer loss to African civilizations when significant populations were enslaved. The Atlantic slave trade also changed the Caribbean, where on many islands the vast majority of people are of African-Caribbean descent, and few, if any, indigenous peoples remain. In combination, the slave trade inflicted incalculable damage on African societies and communities, and changed the cultural and ethnic geography of Brazil, Middle America, and the United States.

Although no forced migration in human history compares in magnitude to the Atlantic slave trade, there have been other forced migrations that have changed the world’s demographic map. For 50 years beginning in 1788, tens of thousands of convicts were shipped from Britain to Australia, where they had a lasting impact on the continent’s population geography. In the 1800s, the U.S. government took lands from thousands of Native Americans and forcibly moved them to other areas of the country—some far from their traditional homelands. In
the Soviet Union during Stalin’s ruthless rule between the late 1920s and 1953, the government forcibly moved millions of non-Russians from their homes to remote parts of Central Asia and Siberia for political reasons. During the 1930s in Germany, the Nazis were responsible for a significant forced migration of Jews from portions of Western Europe that fell under their control.

Forced migration still happens today. It continues to occur, for example, in the form of countermigration, in which governments send back migrants caught entering their countries illegally. In the 1990s, the United States repatriated Haitian arrivals from Florida, and Hong Kong expels all illegal immigrants from Vietnam today, even those seeking asylum as refugees. When Hong Kong was associated with the British government, the policy toward illegal immigrants was similar; that is, Vietnamese illegal immigrants were detained and repatriated. At that time, Hong Kong differentiated between illegal immigrants and refugees, but today the Hong Kong government, now associated with China, expels all Vietnamese immigrants, refugee or not.

Push and Pull Factors in Voluntary Migration

Why do people choose to migrate? Researchers have been intrigued by this question for more than a century. Studies of voluntary migration flows indicate that the intensity of a migration flow varies with such factors as similarities between the source and the destination, the effectiveness of the flow of information from the destination back to the source, and the physical distance between the source and the destination.

Over a century ago, British demographer Ernst Ravenstein sought an answer to the question of why people voluntarily migrate. He studied internal migration in England, and on the basis of his data he proposed several laws of migration, many of which are still relevant today including:

1. Every migration flow generates a return or countermigration.
2. The majority of migrants move a short distance.
3. Migrants who move longer distances tend to choose big-city destinations.
4. Urban residents are less migratory than inhabitants of rural areas.
5. Families are less likely to make international moves than young adults.

Ravenstein also posited an inverse relationship between the volume of migration and the distance between source and destination; that is, the number of migrants to a desti-

Ravenstein’s idea is an early observation of the gravity model, which predicts interaction between places on the basis of their population size and distance between them. The gravity model assumes spatial interaction (such as migration) is directly related to the populations and inversely related to the distance between them—an assumption that had more meaning in an age before airplane travel and the Internet. In mathematical terms, the equation for the gravity model is the multiplication of the two populations divided by the distance between them.

Although the gravity model gives us a guide to expected migration, migration is not as simple as a mathematical equation. When a person, family, or group of people makes a voluntary decision to migrate, push and pull factors come into play. Push factors are the conditions and perceptions that help the migrant decide to leave a place. Pull factors are the circumstances that effectively attract the migrant to certain locales from other places—the decision of where to go. A migrant’s decision to emigrate from the home country and migrate to a new country results from a combination of push and pull factors—and these factors play out differently depending on the circumstance and scale of the migration. Because a migrant is likely to be more familiar with his or her place of residence (source) than with the locale to which he or she is moving (destination), a migrant will likely perceive pull factors more accurately than push factors. Push factors include individual considerations such as work or retirement conditions, cost of living, personal safety and security, and, for many, environmental catastrophes or even issues like weather and climate. Pull factors tend to be vaguer and may depend solely on perceptions construed from things heard and read rather than on experiences in the destination place. Often, migrants move on the basis of excessively positive images and expectations regarding their destinations.

When considering pull factors, the principle of distance decay comes into play (Fig. 3.6). Prospective migrants are likely to have more complete perceptions of nearer places than of farther ones, which confirms the notion that the intensity of human activity, process, or function declines as distance from its source increases. Since interaction with faraway places generally decreases as distance increases, prospective migrants are likely to feel much less certain about distant destinations than about nearer ones. This leads many migrants to move less far than they originally contemplated.

Many migration streams that appear on maps as long, unbroken routes in fact consist of a series of stages, a phenomenon known as step migration. A peasant family in rural Brazil, for example, is likely to move first to a village, then to a nearby town, later to a city, and finally to a metropolis such as São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. At each stage a new set of pull factors comes into play.
Not all migrants from one place follow the same steps. When 1000 people leave a village and migrate to a town in a given year, most, if not all, of them may dream of making it to—and in—the “big city.” But only about 500 may actually move from town to city, and of these, only 200 eventually reach the metropolis that impelled them to move in the first place. Along the way the majority are captured by intervening opportunity. This happened when African Americans by the tens of thousands migrated northward after World War I to seek work in growing cities like Chicago and Cleveland. Many found employment in St. Louis and Cincinnati; that is, they encountered intervening opportunities along their northbound routes.

Along any route of migration, whether direct, in steps, or interrupted by intervening opportunity, a voluntary migrant weighs push and pull factors.

**Types of Push and Pull Factors**

What specific factors impel people to pull up stakes and leave the familiar for the uncertain? What specific factors help migrants choose a destination? Research has shown that typically a combination of factors, not just one, leads to deciding it is time to move and deciding where to go.

**Economic Conditions**

Poverty has driven countless millions from their homelands and continues to do so. Perceived opportunities in destinations such as Western Europe and North America impel numerous migrants, both legal and illegal, to cross the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, and the Rio Grande in search of a better life.

**Political Circumstances**

Throughout history oppressive regimes have engendered migration streams. Desperate “boat people” fled Vietnam by the hundreds of thousands after the communists took control of the country in 1975. In 1972 Uganda’s dictator, Idi Amin, expelled 50,000 Asians and Ugandans of Asian descent from his country. The Cuban communist dictatorship expelled more than 125,000 Cubans in 1980 in the “Mariel Boatlift.” Migrations driven by politics are therefore marked by both escape and expulsion.

**Armed Conflict and Civil War**

The dreadful conflict that engulfed the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s drove as many as 3 million people from their homes, mostly into Western Europe. Many people became permanent emigrants, unable to return home. During the mid-1990s, a civil war engulfed Rwanda in Equatorial Africa, a conflict that pitted militant Hutu against the minority Tutsi and “moderate” Hutu. The carnage claimed an estimated 800,000 to 1 million lives and produced huge migration flows into neighboring Zaire (now Congo) and Tanzania. More than 2 million Rwandans fled their homeland.

**Environmental Conditions**

A major example of migration induced by environmental conditions is the movement of hundreds of thousands of Irish citizens from Ireland to the New World during the 1840s. The potato blight destroyed the potato crop, creating famine. The famine was exacerbated by a set of political conditions for which the British government has recently apologized—a reminder that environmental conditions rarely operate in a social vacuum. But this migration with an environmental component permanently altered the demographics of both Ireland (the source) and the northeastern region of the United States (the chief destination).

Environmental crises such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and volcanic eruptions also stimulate migrations. For example, a surge of migration follows every major earthquake in California. But because many migrants return, the net outflow generated by such momentary crises is relatively small. Some environmental crises, such as volcanic eruptions, leave long-term environmental change to the landscape, making return migration difficult, if not impossible. For example, the Caribbean island of Montserrat had a small population of about 10,000 prior to a
This photo shows the damage caused by the 1995 eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano on the Caribbean Island of Montserrat. In the foreground you can see the grey volcanic ash clogging the roadbed, and in the background the abandoned capital city of Plymouth. Many buildings cannot even be entered because the ash has buried their first floors or caved in their ceilings. This scene illustrated for me the complexities of migration in the face of natural disasters. Many Montserratians fled to the U.S. when Plymouth was destroyed, and were given “temporary protected” immigration status. The U.S. government told Montserratian refugees to leave in 2005—not because the volcanic crisis was over or because the housing crisis caused by the volcano was solved. Rather, the U.S. government expected the volcanic crisis to last at least ten more years; so, the Monsterratians no longer qualified as “temporary” refugees.

Credit: Jason Dittmer, Georgia Southern University.

Volcanic eruption that began in 1995. The volcano has been active since then, prompting a migration flow. Geographer Jason Dittmer studied how drastically the physical and cultural landscapes of Montserrat have changed since the onset of volcanic activity. Dittmer explains that roughly half the island has been proclaimed an Exclusion Zone, a region that includes the capital city of Plymouth (Fig. 3.7). People are not allowed in this zone of active volcanic activity. The people who remained must now live in the northern part of the island where the soils are thin, the land is rocky and making a living is difficult. Over 7000 people migrated off the island, and the remaining 3000 migrated to the northern coast of the island, where the effects of the volcano are less felt.

Culture and Traditions
People who fear that their culture and traditions will not survive a major political transition, and who are able to migrate to places they perceive as safer, will often do so.
When British India was partitioned into a mainly Hindu India and an almost exclusively Muslim Pakistan, millions of Muslim residents of India migrated across the border to the new Islamic state. Similarly, in the 1990s after decades of Soviet obstruction, more than 2 million Jews left the former Soviet Union for Israel and other destinations. And turbulent political conditions in South Africa during the mid-1990s impelled many whites to emigrate to Australia, Europe, and North America.

**Technological Advances**

For some migrants, emigration is no longer the difficult and hazardous journey it used to be. Although many migrants still move by simple and even difficult means, some use modern forms of transportation and communication, whose availability can itself encourage migration.

Gone is the time when would-be emigrants waited months, even years, for information about distant places. News today travels faster than ever, including news of job opportunities and ways to reach desired destinations. Television, radio, and telephone stimulate millions of people to migrate by relaying information about relatives, opportunities, and already established communities in destination lands. Advances in communication technology strengthen the role of kinship links as push or pull factors. When deciding where to go, a migrant is often pulled to places where family and friends have already found success. Thus, Turks quickly heard about Germany’s need for immigrant labor. Algerians knew where the most favorable destinations were in France. Haitians knew that a “Little Haiti” had sprung up in the Miami area.

When migrants move along and through kinship links, they create what geographers call chain migration. Chain migration occurs when the migrant chooses a destination and writes, calls, or communicates with others to tell family and friends about the new place. The migrant may help create a positive perception of the destination for his family and friends, and the migrant may promise help with migration, by providing housing and assistance obtaining a job. Reassuring family and friends that a new community has been formed, a place where they can feel home, encourages further migration along the same chain. Chains of migration built upon each other create immigration waves—swells in migration from one origin to the same destination.

**WHERE DO PEOPLE MIGRATE?**

It is tempting to reduce the flow of migration to simple economics—a chance for a job in another place trumps the lack of a job at home. However, migration is much more complicated. Migration depends on various push and pull factors, ranging from persecution in civil war to environmental disaster, from disempowerment in the home to discrimination in the country, and each migration flow is helped or hampered by existing networks and governmental actions.

In this section of the chapter, we examine where people migrate, that is, what destinations they choose. At the global, regional, and national scales, we can see several major migration flows over the past 500 years, flows where hundreds of thousands of people migrated along the same general path. We focus on where—the destinations in these major migration flows. A large movement of migrants changes places—both the place the migrants left and the destination. As we discuss migration flows at the global, regional, and national scales in this chapter, remember that these flows give only an overview of migration. At the local and household scales, each person or family migrating required life-altering decisions and those decisions fostered global change.

**Global Migration Flows**

Before 1500, long-distance, global-scale migration occurred haphazardly, typically in pursuit of spices, fame, or exploration. To put exploration in perspective, you should realize that a complete map of the world’s continents did not exist until the early 1800s. European explorers, who included surveyors and cartographers, played a major role in finally mapping the world. On the heels of exploration came European colonization—a physical process where the colonizer takes over another place, putting its own government in charge and either moving its own people into the place or bringing in indentured outsiders to gain control of the people and the land. First, Europeans colonized the Americas and the coasts of Africa and parts of Asia from the 1500s to the 1800s. Then, Europeans colonized interior Africa and Asia starting in the late 1800s and into the 1900s.

The past five centuries have witnessed human migration on an unprecedented scale, much of it generated
by European colonization. The major flows of global migration from 1500 on are shown in Figure 3.8. The migration flows include movements from Europe to North America (1); from Southern Europe to South and Middle America (2); from Britain and Ireland to Africa and Australia (3); from Africa to the Americas during the period of slavery (4); and from India to eastern Africa, Southeast Asia, and Caribbean America (5).

Among the greatest human migrations in recent centuries was the flow from Europe to the Americas. Emigration from Europe (1 and 2 in Fig. 3.8) began slowly. Before the 1830s, perhaps 2.75 million Europeans left to settle overseas. The British went to North America, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa (3). From Spain and Portugal, many hundreds of thousands of Europeans emigrated to Middle and South America. Early European colonial settlements grew, even in coastal areas of present-day Angola, Kenya, and Indonesia. The rate of European emigration increased sharply between 1835 and 1935, with perhaps as many as 75 million departing for colonies in Africa and Asia, and for economic opportunities in the Americas. Although millions of Europeans eventually returned to their homelands, the net outflow from Europe was enormous, as evidenced by the sheer number of Canadians and Americans who identify themselves as being of European ancestry.

As already discussed, the Americas were the destination of another mass of immigrants: African slaves. African
slaves were among the very first non-American Indian settlers in this country (4). Although it is mapped as just one of the eight major migrations, its immense and lasting impact on both sides of the Atlantic sets it apart from all the others.

Even as the Atlantic slave trade was in progress, the European impact was generating other major migrations as well. The British, who took control over South Asia, transported tens of thousands of “indentured” workers from present-day India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka to East and South Africa (see symbol (5) on Fig. 3.8). Today, people of Indian ancestry form substantial minorities in South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania and, until their forced migration from Uganda, in that country as well. Their disproportionate share of commerce and wealth is now a major source of ethnic friction.

Long before the British arrived in India, Hindu influences radiated into Southeast Asia, reaching the Indonesian islands of Java and Bali. Later, the British renewed the Indian migration stream, bringing South Asians to the Malay Peninsula (including Singapore) and to their Pacific holdings including Fiji (Fig. 3.8).

The British were also instrumental in relocating Asians, mainly from India, to such Caribbean countries as Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana (the trans-Pacific stream marked 5 in Fig. 3.8). The Dutch brought many Javanese from what is today Indonesia to their former dependency of Suriname along the same route.
Regional Migration Flows

The stories of huge flows of migrants mapped in Figure 3.8 were unprecedented and meet few rivals in terms of sheer number today. Although some global migration flows already discussed were forced and some voluntary, each occurred across an ocean. Migration also occurs at a regional scale, with migrants going to a neighboring country to avail themselves of short-term economic opportunities, to reconnect with their cultural group across borders, or to flee political conflict or war.

Economic Opportunities

Regional migration is often based on economic opportunities. European colonialism helped establish islands of development throughout the world. Islands of development are often coastal cities because their establishment was based on access to trade (Fig. 3.9). Islands of development are places within a region or country where most foreign investment goes, where the vast majority of paying jobs are located, and where infrastructure is concentrated.

To understand migration flows from one poor country to another, it is not sufficient to analyze the flow at the global scale. We need to understand where the region fits into the global interaction picture, and to see how different locations within the region fit into interaction patterns at both the global and regional scales. For example, within the region of West Africa, the oil-producing areas of Nigeria are islands of development. In the mid-1970s, poor people in Togo, Benin, Ghana, and the northern regions of Nigeria, perceiving that economic life was better in coastal Nigeria, were lured to the coast for short-term jobs while the oil economy was good. The migrants, usually young men, worked as much as they could and sent almost all of the money they earned home as remittances to support their families. They worked until the oil economy took a fall in the early 1980s, and at that point, the Nigerian government decided the foreign workers were no longer needed. The Nigerian government forcibly pushed out 2 million foreign workers.

Global economic processes and the lasting effects of European colonialism certainly played a role in this West African migration flow. If we study a flow like this only at the global scale, we see migrants moving from one poor country to another poor country. But if we use both the global and regional scales to study this flow, we understand regional economic influences and the pull of islands of development in Nigeria.

European colonialism also had an impact on regional migration flows in Southeast Asia. Europe’s colonial occu-
Reconnection of Cultural Groups

Regional migration flows also center on reconnecting cultural groups across borders. A migration stream with enormous consequences is the flow of Jewish immigrants to Israel. At the turn of the twentieth century, fewer than 50,000 Jewish residents lived in what was then Palestine. From 1919 to 1948, Great Britain held control over Palestine, and Britain encouraged Jews (whose ancestors had fled more than a thousand years earlier from the Middle East to Europe) to return to the region. By 1948, as many as 750,000 Jews resided in Palestine, when the United Nations intervened to partition the area and establish the independent state of Israel (the original boundaries of the new state are shown in orange in Fig. 3.11). Following the division of the land between the newly created Israeli state and the state of Palestine, another migration stream began—600,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were pushed out of Israeli territories. Many sought refuge in neighboring Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere.

Through a series of wars, Israel expanded its area of territorial control (Fig. 3.11) and actively built settlements for new Jewish immigrants in Palestinian territories (Fig. 3.12). Jewish immigrants from the Eurasian region continue to migrate to Israel. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, thousands of Jews who had been unable to practice their religion in the Soviet Union migrated to Israel. Today Israel’s population of 6.4 million (including about 1 million Arab citizens) continues to grow through immigration as well as substantial natural increase.

Figure 3.10
Even before Cuba became a communist state, thousands of Cuban citizens applied annually for residency in the United States. During the 1960s, Cuban immigration to the United States swelled; the U.S. government formalized the flow as the Cuban Airlift, an authorized movement of persons desiring to escape from a communist government. The vast majority of Cuban immigrants arrived and remained in the greater Miami area. In southern Florida they developed a core of Hispanic culture, and in due course Dade County declared itself bicultural and bilingual.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Cubans continued to arrive in the United States as refugees until in 1980 another massive, organized exodus occurred, which brought more than 125,000 Cubans to U.S. shores; the migrants qualified for refugee status under U.S. regulations. The Cuban influx persisted throughout the 1980s, but in the 1990s diplomatic efforts to stem the tide began to slow the flow of migrants. Still, by 2000, the official legal number of Cuban arrivals had exceeded 500,000.

### National Migration Flows

National migration flows can also be thought of as internal migration flows. Historically, two of the major migration flows before 1950 occurred internally—that is, within a single country rather than across international borders. In the United States, a massive migration stream carried the center of population westward (and more recently also southward, as Fig. 3.13 shows). As the American populace migrates westward, it has also shifted from north to south, to reflect migration flows from south to north and back again. After the American Civil War, and gaining momentum during World War I, millions of African Americans migrated northward to work in the industrial Northeast and Midwest. Migration continued during the 1920s, declined during the depression years of the 1930s, and then resumed its upward climb.

In the 1970s, the trend began to reverse itself: African Americans began leaving the North and returning to the South. The reversal had several causes. Although the civil rights movement in the 1960s did not change conditions in the South overnight, it undoubtedly played a role in the reverse migration. Disillusionment with living conditions in the urban North and West coupled with growing economic opportunities in southern cities also drew African Americans southward. African Americans who lived in northern cities migrated to southern cities, not to rural areas, as the urban economies of the Sunbelt began to grow.

Russia also experienced a major internal migration, but there it was from west to east, from the heartland of the Russian state to the shores of the Pacific. This eastward migration significantly altered the cultural mosaic of Eurasia, and understanding this migration flow helps us understand the modern map of Eurasia. During the czarist...
Field Note

Just a few miles into the West Bank, not far from Jerusalem, the expanding Israeli presence could not be missed. New settlements dot the landscape—often occupying strategic sites that are also easily defensible. These "facts on the ground" will certainly complicate the effort to carve out a stable territorial order in this much-contested region. That, of course, is the goal of the settlers and their supporters, but it is salt on the wound to those who contest the Israeli right to be there in the first place.

Figure 3.12
Jerusalem, Israel. © Alexander B. Murphy.

Figure 3.13
(1800s–1910s) and communist periods (1920s–1980s), Russian and Soviet rulers tried to occupy and consolidate the country's far eastern frontier, moving industries eastward, building railroads and feeder lines, and establishing Vladivostok on the Pacific Coast as one of the world's best equipped naval bases. This had the effect of opening up southern Siberia, incorporating numerous ethnic minorities under Russian and Soviet rule, and containing China.

Also during the communist period, the Soviet government employed a policy of Russification, which encouraged people of Russian heritage to move out of the Moscow region and fill in the country. By 1980, as many as 30 million Russians had moved out toward the borders. That number has declined following the Soviet collapse, but the map will long carry the impact of Russia's eastward expansionism.

Mexico offers a more recent example of internal migration. As many as 1 million Mexicans successfully cross into the United States each year, both legally and illegally. Many Mexicans emigrate from the northern areas of Mexico into the southern areas of the United States. In the northern Mexican State of Zacatecas, an estimated one out of every two people is currently living in the United States. As a result, the northern areas of Mexico are experiencing a labor shortage. In response, Mexican workers from areas farther south in the country are migrating northward to fill the labor shortage, especially in Mexico's agricultural sector. Many Mexicans migrating north within the country are Huichol Indians, one of Mexico's indigenous populations. Ironically, the Huichol are experiencing the same kind of substandard living conditions, lack of acceptance by locals, and exploitation by employers that the Mexicans from the north are experiencing in the United States.

**Guest Workers**

The countries of Europe that were major participants in World War II lost many young men in this long conflict. After the war, European countries, rebuilding their economies with the help of the U.S.-sponsored Marshall Plan, found themselves in need of laborers. Two flows of migration into Western European countries began: first within, as workers from poorer European countries and regions migrated to economically growing areas, and second from outside of Europe, as millions of foreign workers immigrated from North Africa (the majority to France) and Turkey (mostly to Germany) as well as from the Caribbean region, India, and Africa (many to the United Kingdom).

Western European governments called the labor immigrants guest workers. The laws allowing guest workers into Europe assumed the workers would fill the void left by those who died during World War II, and then they would return to their home countries. Instead, the guest workers stayed—both because they wanted to and because they were needed. Two to three generations of Turks have now been born in Germany. The German government, which had for decades defined German citizens as those of German descent, only recently allowed Turks to become citizens of the country.

Thousands of guest workers live outside of their home country and send remittances from their jobs home. Guest workers often work as agricultural laborers or in service industries (hotels, restaurants, tourist attractions). The home states of these workers are fully aware that their citizens have visas and are working abroad. In many instances, the economies of the home countries come to rely on the remittances, and the home governments work with destination countries and with the international labor organization to protect the rights of the guest workers.

Despite the legal status of guest workers and the work of governments and international organizations to protect them, many employers abuse them because many guest workers are unaware of their rights. Long hours and low pay are common, but guest workers continue to work because the money is better than they would ordinarily receive and because they are supporting families at home.

When the need for the laborers declines, destination governments can squeeze out guest workers. Nigeria, as noted earlier, did exactly that in the early 1980s when the Nigerian government sent foreign workers from other areas of West Africa home (unfortunately, often by force). Similarly, the government of the home country can pull out its guest workers, bringing them home when conditions in the destination become perilous. For example, over 30,000 Indonesians were working in the Middle East before the 2003 Iraq War; the Indonesian government decided to pull its workers home just before the war began.

Guest workers are legal immigrants who have work visas, usually short term; often the destination governments extend the visas if certain sectors of the economy still need laborers. Whether short or long term, the international flow of guest workers changes the ethnic, linguistic, and religious mosaic of the places where they go. In Europe, for example, guest workers from Turkey, North Africa, South Asia, and other former colonial holdings have altered the cultural landscape of the region. New temples, mosques, restaurants, grocery stores, shops, and service industries geared toward migrants have taken root in Europe's cultural landscape.

**Refugees**

The story is familiar: thousands upon thousands of poor people flee a crisis in their home region or country by walking. They put their few earthly possessions and their babies on their backs and walk. They walk to another
town. They walk beyond their country’s border. They walk to a refugee camp without adequate food, water, or amenities. International agencies attempt desperate relief efforts while disease spreads, dooming infants and children and emaciating adults. As they walk, they remember all they are leaving behind—the only life they have known. But in the midst of war and persecution, it is too hard to hold onto this life. So, they walk.

The world’s refugee population proportionately has grown even faster than its total population. In 1970, the United Nations reported 2.9 million persons were refugees; the majority were Palestinian Arabs dislocated by the creation of the state of Israel and the armed conflicts that followed. In 1980, the refugee total had nearly tripled, to over 8 million, and by 1990 the estimated number approached 17 million. In 2000, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 24 million people around the world were refugees, forced from their homes and unable to return.

The United Nations agency that monitors the refugee problem is the key organization supporting displaced persons. It organizes and funds international relief efforts and negotiates with governments and regimes on behalf of the refugees. But UNHCR is not alone in tracking this global problem; other offices often contradict UNHCR’s data, arguing that the situation is even worse than the United Nations suggests.

Why has this dispute arisen? First, there are different definitions of what constitutes a refugee. The UNHCR defines a refugee as “a person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” Countries interpret this definition in different ways, especially since the phrase “well-founded” leaves much room for judgment. Second, refugees often flee into remote areas where it is difficult to count them, let alone provide help. Third, governments and regimes sometimes manipulate refugee numbers to suit their political objectives. Also note that the UNHCR definition says nothing about displacement resulting from environmental disaster.

Perhaps the biggest problem with the UN definition has to do with internal refugees (also called displaced persons)—that is, people who have been displaced within their own countries (such as the victims of Hurricane Katrina), do not cross international borders as they flee, and tend to remain uncounted (if not almost invisible). In 2000, UNHCR estimated that as many as 25 million people (in addition to the 24 million official refugees) might be displaced, forced to abandon their homes. Thus, the United Nations distinguishes between international refugees, who have crossed one or more international borders during their move and encamped in a country other than their own, and internally displaced persons, who abandon their homes but remain in their own countries. Resettlement efforts tend to be more successful with displaced persons because those fleeing their countries altogether often resist repatriation.

Because the status of refugee has an official, internationally sanctioned basis, UNHCR and other agencies must make difficult decisions when they distinguish between refugees and migrants who may be just as poor or desperate but who do not qualify for refugee status. When a refugee meets the official criteria, he or she becomes eligible for assistance, including possible asylum, to which other migrants are not entitled. Such assistance can extend over decades and become the very basis for a way of life, as has happened in the Middle East. In Jordan, Palestinian refugees have become so integrated into the host country’s national life that they are regarded as permanent refugees, but in Lebanon other Palestinians wait in refugee camps for resettlement and still qualify as temporary refugees.

Although it is not always easy to distinguish between a refugee and a voluntary (if desperate) migrant, refugees can be identified by at least three characteristics, individual or aggregate:

1. Most refugees move without any more tangible property than they can carry or transport with them. When the United States and its allies began their retaliatory bombing in Afghanistan following the terrorist attack on New York and Washington in September 2001, tens of thousands of Afghan refugees climbed across mountain passes to reach the relative safety of Pakistan, unable to bring any but the barest personal belongings.

2. Most refugees make their first “step” on foot, by bicycle, wagon, or open boat. Refugees are suddenly displaced, limiting their options, and the great majority have few resources to invest in their journey.

3. Refugees move without official documents that accompany channeled migration. International refugees almost without exception migrate without authorization and often carry few or no identifying papers.

Regions of Dislocation

The refugee situation changes frequently as some refugees return home, conditions permitting, and as other, new streams suddenly form. Yet we can make certain generalizations about the overall geography of refugees. In the early twenty-first century, Africa south of the Sahara had the largest number of refugees in the world as well as the greatest potential for new refugee flows. The second-ranking geographic realm in terms of refugee numbers was Southwest Asia and North Africa, the realm that includes the Middle East, Iran, and Afghanistan. South Asia, as a result of Pakistan’s proximity to Afghanistan, ranked third (Fig. 3.14).
**Subsaharan Africa**

Africa's people are severely afflicted by dislocation—and not just in terms of the 8 million “official” refugees accounted for by international relief agencies. Many millions more are internal refugees. Of all regions in the world, Subsaharan Africa is most impacted by migration because the vast majority of the world's migration flows are refugees, and the majority of refugees are in Subsaharan Africa. Add to that the extreme poverty and devastation of disease in many parts of Subsaharan Africa, and each day is a humanitarian crisis in parts of the region.

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first, several of the world's largest refugee crises occurred in Subsaharan Africa. The renewed outbreak of hostilities between cultural groups based in Hutu and Tutsi ethnicity in Rwanda and The Congo led to a disastrous exodus of refugees directly and indirectly involving millions, a genocide that killed hundreds of thousands and the collapse of order in the country then known as Zaïre. Refugee flows entered not only The Congo but also Tanzania and Uganda; Tutsi–Hutu strife also engulfed Burundi and dislocated tens of thousands. In West Africa, civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone sent columns of hundreds of thousands of refugees streaming into Guinea and Ivory Coast; in 1997, the UNHCR reported more than 1.5 million refugees in this small corner of Africa. And Angola, strife-torn ever since...
the days of the Cold War, still has well over 1 million internal refugees (some estimates put the total nearer 2 million).

Sudan, which has been in a civil war for two decades, is the site of the worst refugee crisis in Africa today (Fig. 3.15). The conflict in Sudan is between the Muslim, Arabized north and the animist and Christian, African south. But the conflict is more complicated than that. Sudan’s northern provinces contain about 60 percent of the total population, but while this region is overwhelmingly Muslim, only about two-thirds of the northerners speak Arabic as their native language. These Muslim but non-Arab northerners have been targets of anti-Islamic propaganda from the south.

Intensifying the struggle between the north and the south was the decision by the Muslim-dominated regime in Khartum to impose Islam’s Shari’a religious laws (a judicial code based on the Koran, Islam’s holy book) on the entire country. Shari’a laws, especially the criminal code, are harsh (prescribing, for example, the amputation of hands or limbs for theft). In the south, where people are ethnically and culturally different from those in the north, and where Christianity and traditional religions are stronger, that action eliminated any prospect of a compromise.

The war in Sudan has caused immense damage—over 2.2 million people have died in the fighting or have starved as a result of the war. More than 5 million people have been displaced, with over 1.6 million in neighboring
Uganda alone. Both sides of the Sudanese civil war have interfered with the efforts of international agencies to help the refugees.

The crisis has only grown more complicated, as the Muslim, Arab, northern government began a campaign of genocide early in this century against the Muslim, African Sudanese in the western part of the country, a region called Darfur. The U.S. government and the United Nations Security Council are calling the government's actions in Darfur genocide, as the Sudanese government funds the militia known as the Janjaweed. The Janjaweed are waging a campaign against darker-skinned African Muslims in Darfur—a campaign that includes killing over 30,000, raping women and girls, taking lands and homes from Africans, and displacing 1.5 million people. The government-backed campaign in Darfur is occurring at the same time that a peace accord between the north and south is close at hand.

The long-lasting refugee crisis in Sudan helps us understand the complexity of political conflict and migration flows in Subsaharan Africa. Sudan, a country drawn by European colonialism, is home to traditional religions in the south, Christianity brought by Western missionaries in the south, and Islam brought by North African traders in the north. The Muslim against Muslim conflict in Darfur demonstrates that political conflict is not just religious—it is also ethnic and political. Mixed into this extremely local conflict are regional and global-scale debates about what to do. Regionally, the African Union, an organization committed to finding African solutions to African problems, has committed Nigerian and Rwandan troops to Darfur to try to solve the crisis. The African Union is supported with American and European monies and military strategizing. At the global scale, the United Nations Security Council met in Kenya in 2004 trying to find a solution and eventually passing a resolution condemning the Sudanese government and threatening punitive damages against the government for their actions in Darfur. Two members of the Security Council, China and Pakistan, abstained from the vote because each of these countries relies on oil imports from Sudan.

North Africa and Southwest Asia
This geographic region, extending from Morocco in the west to Afghanistan in the east, contains some of the world's long-lasting and most deeply entrenched refugee problems. A particularly significant set of refugee problems center on Israel and the displaced Arab populations that surround it. Decades of United Nations interventions have more or less stabilized this situation, but many refugees are still in camps, and other crises elsewhere have tested the United Nations' capacity to provide relief. For example, in 1991, in the aftermath of the Gulf War that followed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, a significant percentage of the Kurdish population of northern Iraq, threatened by the surviving military apparatus and under
Baghdad’s control, abandoned their villages and towns and streamed toward and across the Turkish and Iranian borders. The refugee movement of Iraq’s Kurds involved as many as 2.5 million people and riveted world attention to the plight of people who are condemned to such status through the actions of others. It led the United States and its allies to create a secure zone for Kurds in northern Iraq in the hope of persuading displaced Kurds in Turkey and Iran to return to their country. But this effort was only partially successful. The Kurdish people of Iraq were severely displaced by the events surrounding the Gulf War; as Figure 3.14 shows, many remain refugees in Turkey as well as Iran.

During the 1980s, Afghanistan was caught in the Soviets’ last imperialist campaign and paid an enormous price for it. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of 1979, in support of a puppet regime, and Afghan resistance generated a double migration stream that carried millions westward into Iran and eastward into Pakistan. At the height of the exodus, 2.5 million Afghans were estimated to be living in camps in Iran, and some 3.7 million gathered in tent camps in Pakistan’s northwestern province and in southern Baluchistan. The Soviet invasion seemed destined to succeed quickly, but the Russian generals underestimated the strength of Afghan opposition. U.S. support for the Muslim forces in the form of weapons supplies helped produce a stalemate and eventual Soviet withdrawal, but this was followed by a power struggle among Afghan factions. As a result, most of the more than 6 million refugees in Iran and Pakistan—about one-quarter of the country’s population—stayed where they were.

In 1996, an Islamic Fundamentalist movement (the Taliban), which was spawned in Pakistan, emerged in Afghanistan and took control of most of the country, imposing strict Islamic rule and suppressing the factional conflicts that had prevailed since the Soviet withdrawal. Although several hundred thousand Pashtun refugees moved back to Afghanistan from Pakistan, the harsh Taliban rule created a countermigration and led to further refugee movement into neighboring Iran, where their number reached 2.5 million. Eventually, Afghanistan became a base for anti-Western terrorist operations, which reached a climax in the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. Even before the inevitable military retaliation began, and despite efforts by both Pakistan and Iran to close their borders, tens of thousands of Afghan refugees flooded across, intensifying a refugee crisis that is now nearly a quarter-century old.

South Asia

In terms of refugee numbers, South Asia is the third-ranking geographic realm, mainly because of Pakistan’s role in accommodating Afghanistan’s forced emigrants. During the Soviet intrusion in the 1980s, the UNHCR counted more than 3 million refugees; during the 1990s, the total averaged between 1.2 and 1.5 million. That number rose when Allied retaliation against terrorist bases began in October 2001.

The other major refugee problem in South Asia stems from a civil war in Sri Lanka. This conflict, arising from demands by minority Tamils for an independent state on the Sinhalese-dominated and -controlled island, has cost tens of thousands of lives and has severely damaged the economy. The United Nations reports about 1 million people (out of a population of 19 million) are now internal refugees.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is a reminder that refugee problems can change quickly. Indochina was the scene of one of the twentieth century’s most desperate refugee crises—the stream of between 1 and 2 million people who fled Vietnam in the aftermath of the long war that ended in 1975. In the early 1990s, it was Cambodia that produced an exodus of 300,000 refugees escaping from their country’s seemingly endless cycle of violence, ending up in refugee camps on the Thailand side of the border. Today, the largest refugee camps in this realm are internal refugees in Myanmar (formerly Burma), victims of the repressive rule of the generals who are seeking to subjugate the country’s minorities. But as the UNHCR states, that figure is an estimate only; information from Myanmar’s closed society is difficult to secure.

Europe

In the 1990s, the collapse of Yugoslavia and its associated conflicts created the largest refugee crisis in Europe since the end of World War II. In 1995, the UNHCR reported the staggering total of 6,056,600 refugees, a number that some observers felt was inflated by the Europeans’ unusually liberal interpretations of the United Nations’ rules for refugee recognition. Nevertheless, even after the cessation of armed conflict and the implementation of a peace agreement known as the Dayton Accords, the UNHCR still reports as many as 1.6 million internal refugees in the area—people displaced and unable to return to their homes.

Other Regions

The number of refugees in other geographic realms is much smaller. In the Western Hemisphere, only Colombia in 1997 had a serious refugee problem, caused by the country’s chronic instability associated with its struggle against narcotics. Large areas of Colombia’s countryside are vulnerable to armed attack by “narcoterrorists” and paramilitary units; these rural areas are essentially beyond government control, and thousands of villagers have died in the crossfire. Hundreds of thousands more have left their homes to seek protection as refugees.

People who abandon their familiar surroundings because conditions have become unlivable perform an
ultimate act of desperation. In the process, the habits of civilization vanish as survival becomes the sole imperative. The Earth’s refugee population is a barometer of the world’s future.

**THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY**

Imagine you are from an extremely poor country, and you earn less than $1 a day. Choose a country to be from, and look for it on a map. Assume you are a voluntarily migrant. You look at your access to transportation and the opportunities you have to go elsewhere. Be realistic, and describe how you determine where you will go, how you get there, and what you do once you get there.

**HOW DO GOVERNMENTS AFFECT MIGRATION?**

The control of immigration, legal and illegal, the problem of asylum-seekers, international and internal, and the fate of cross-border refugees, permanent and temporary, have become hot issues around the world. In Europe, right-wing political parties whip up anti-immigrant sentiment. In California, the State government demands federal monies to provide services for hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants; if the federal government cannot control its borders, they argue, States should not have to foot the bill. In Cuba, the Castro regime has used migration as a threat: in August 1994, Castro threatened to open Cuba’s doors to a flood of emigrants who would invariably all flee to the United States. And in the United States, the federal government faced reproach for preventing tens of thousands of Haitians from entering Florida.

Efforts to restrict migrations are nothing new. Media coverage, democratic debate, and political wrangling only make it seem so. In the fourteenth century, China built the Great Wall in part as a defensive measure but also as a barrier to emigration (by Chinese beyond the sphere of their authorities) and immigration (mainly by Mongol “barbarians” from the northern plains). The Berlin Wall, the Korean DMZ (demilitarized zone), the fences along the Rio Grande—all evince the desire of governments to control the movement of people across their borders.

**Legal Restrictions**

Typically, the obstacles placed in the way of potential immigrants are legal, not physical. Restrictive legislation appeared in the United States in 1882, when Congress approved the Oriental Exclusion Acts (1882–1907). Congress designed these immigration laws to prevent the immigration of Chinese people to California. In 1901, the Australian government approved the Immigration Restriction Act, which ended all nonwhite immigration into the newly united country. In particular, the Australian government was targeting Japanese, Chinese, and South Asian immigrants. The act also prohibited immigration by South Pacific Islanders who worked on Australia’s large sugar plantations. The Australian government furthered action against the plantation workers (the Kanakas) by deporting the South Pacific Islanders by the end of 1906. These immigration policies created what is known as the White Australia Policy, which remained in effect until modification in 1972 and again in 1979.

**Waves of Immigration in the United States**

Changes in a country’s migration policies are reflected in the number of people entering the country and the origin of the immigrants (see Fig. 3.16). The United States experienced two major waves of immigration before 1930 and is in the midst of another great wave of immigration today. Major changes in the government’s migration policies are reflected in this graph. Push factors are also reflected in Figure 3.16, as people in different regions found reasons to leave their home and migrate to the United States.

During the 1800s, the United States opened its doors to immigration, and most of the immigrants arrived from Europe, especially Northern Europe (Scandinavia) and Western Europe (including Ireland, Great Britain, Germany, and France). In the later part of the 1800s, a greater proportion of Europeans who immigrated to the United States came from Southern and Eastern Europe (including Italy, Spain, Portugal, Russia, and Poland).

Following World War I, political tides in the United States turned toward isolationism—staying out of entanglements abroad. In addition, Congress feared growing migration from Eastern and Southern Europe. Many whites in the United States at the time saw whites from Eastern and Southern Europe as darker skinned and with an inferior race of whites. In this context, Congress passed restrictive legislation in 1921, deterring immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Congress set immigration quotas, whereby each year, European countries could permit the emigration to the United States of 3 percent of the number of its nationals living in the United States in 1910. In 1910, the greatest proportion of immigrants in the United States came from Northern and Western Europe, thus the quotas allowed migration from Northern and Western Europe and severely restricted immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe (Fig. 3.16).

In 1924, Congress altered the Immigration Act by lowering the quota to 2 percent and making 1890 the base
year, further reducing the annual total to 150,000 immigrants and further discouraging Eastern and Southern European migration.

The rapid fall in total immigration to the United States is clear in Figure 3.16. Just prior to the Great Depression, Congress passed the National Origins Law in 1929, whereby Congress continued to limit immigration to 150,000 per year. Congress also tied immigration quotas to the national origins of the U.S. population in 1920. As a result of this provision, Congress in effect prevented the immigration of Asians. With these laws in effect and the Great Depression in full swing, immigration slowed to a trickle during the 1930s, and in some years emigration actually exceeded immigration in the United States.

After 1940, Congress modified the restrictions on immigration to the United States. In 1943, Congress gave China equal status to European countries, and in 1952 granted Japan a similar status. In 1952, immigration began to rise again (Fig. 3.16) after Congress passed a new Immigration and Nationality Act. Congress designed the act to incorporate all preceding legislation, establishing quotas for all countries and limiting total immigration to 160,000. However, far more than 160,000 immigrants entered the country as refugees, thereby filling quotas for years ahead. Estimates vary, but more than 7 million immigrants may have entered the United States as refugees between 1945 and 1970.

By 1965, Congress recognized the 1952 act as a failure and abolished the quota system. Congress set new limits, which are also reflected in Figure 3.16. The United States allowed 170,000 immigrants per year from countries outside of the Western Hemisphere and 120,000 from countries in the Americas. Refugee policies and guest worker policies over the last three decades allowed many more immigrants than these limitations.

The United States and Australia are not the only countries that have restricted immigration. Many countries practice selective immigration, in which individuals with certain backgrounds (criminal records, poor health, subversive activities) are barred from entering. Other countries have specific requirements. For example, South Africa long demanded “pure” European descent;
New Zealand favored persons of British birth and parentage; Australia’s assisted passage program favored immigrants from Britain, the Netherlands, Malta, and Italy; Brazil preferred people with a farming background; and Singapore courts financially secure persons of Chinese ancestry. Today South American countries place limits on the number of immigrants who may cross their borders, and several countries are instituting quota systems. Thailand has restricted Chinese immigration, and Myanmar limits immigration from neighboring India. France has cared for repatriation of North Africans without residency permits and for restrictions on further immigration from the former French North African colonies (Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia).

**Post–September 11**

Since September 11, 2001, government immigration policies have incorporated security concerns. Prior to that date, the U.S. border patrol was concerned primarily with drug trafficking and human smuggling. The new government policies affect asylum-seekers, illegal immigrants, and legal immigrants.

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**Figure 3.17**

Countries from which Asylum Seekers to the United States are Automatically Detained.


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<MAP>
Immediately after September 11, the George W. Bush administration cracked down on asylum-seekers. The U.S. government marked 33 countries as countries where al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups operate, and the government automatically detained anyone from one of these 33 countries who enters the United States looking for asylum (Fig. 3.17).

New government policies also affect illegal immigrants. The Justice Department currently has a policy that allows it to detain any illegal immigrant, even if the person has no known ties to terrorist organizations. This policy stems from the department's concern that terrorists may use Haiti as a “staging point.” The idea behind this law is that terrorists could travel to Haiti temporarily and then illegally immigrate from Haiti to the United States to commit terrorist attacks. Similarly, much of the government fence-building along the United States–Mexico border (discussed at the beginning of this chapter) is a response to concern that terrorists will use Mexico as a staging ground to immigrate illegally and commit terrorist attacks.

In addition to focusing on asylum-seekers and illegal immigration, the post-September 11 world is concerned with legal immigration. The 9/11 Commission Report,
released in 2004, discusses the issue of terrorists using fabricated or altered papers to immigrate to the United States. The 9/11 terrorists entered the United States using visas. The Commission reported that the Federal Aviation Administration flagged more than half of the 9/11 hijackers with the profiling system they had in place. However, the policy at the time was to check the bags of those flagged, not the people themselves. The Commission explains, “For terrorists, travel documents are as important as weapons,” and it recommends stepping up inspections and questioning at travel checkpoints, to see these checkpoints as “a chance to establish that people are who they say they are and are seeking access for their stated purpose, to intercept identifiable suspects, and to take effective action.”

People and organizations opposed to the post-September 11 policies counter that raising fences and detaining people will not combat terrorism; rather, it will intensify hatred of the U.S. government, thus promoting terrorism. Organizations such as Human Rights First, Amnesty International, and the Migration Policy Institute claim that the new government crackdowns have violated civil liberties and done nothing to make Americans safer.

Others opposed to the new border regulations argue the crackdown has only slowed traffic and the flow of business and tourism, and has utterly failed to slow illegal immigration, which along the U.S.–Mexican border is up from last year.

Regardless of which side of this debate you choose, we can all agree that concern about migration, both legal and illegal, will continue to shape security policy in the United States, Europe, and beyond in the decades to come.

**THINKING GEOGRAPHICALLY**

One goal of international organizations involved in aiding refugees is repatriation—return of the refugees to their home countries once the threat against them has passed. Take the example of Sudanese refugees. Think about how their land and their lives have changed since they became refugees. You are assigned the daunting task of repatriating Sudanese from Uganda once a peace solution is reached. What steps would you have to take to re-discover a home for these refugees?

## Summary

In the last 500 years, humans have traveled the globe, mapped it, connected it through globalization, and migrated across it. In this chapter, we discussed major global, regional, and national migration flows. Migration can occur as a result of a conscious decision, resulting in a voluntary migration flow, or migration can occur under duress, resulting in forced migration. Both kinds of migration have left an indelible mark on the world and on its cultural landscapes. Governments attempt to strike a balance among the need for migrant labor, the desire to help people in desperate circumstances, and the desire to stem the tide of migration.

As the world’s population mushrooms, the volume of migrants will expand. In an increasingly open and interconnected world, neither physical barriers nor politically motivated legislation will stem tides that are as old as human history. Migrations will also further complicate an already complex global cultural pattern—raising questions about identity, race, ethnicity, language, and religion, the topics we turn to in the next three chapters.

## Geographic Concepts

- remittances
- cyclic movements
- activity spaces
- nomadism
- periodic movements
- migrant labor
- transhumance
- military service
- migration
- international migration
- internal migration
- forced migration
- voluntary migration
- laws of migration
- gravity model
- push factors
- pull factors
- distance decay
- step migration
- intervening opportunity
- kinship links
- chain migration
- immigration wave
- explorers