

## **The Unanticipated Consequences of Immigration Policy**

**Peter Kivisto**

In attempting to understand the “unanticipated consequences” of U.S. immigration policy, three issues are relevant: (1) the historical context; (2) the intentions of legislators; and (3) the actual impact on immigration. Five unanticipated consequences of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act and subsequent legislation will be identified. First, the Act made possible a huge influx of Asian immigrants. Second, because priority was accorded to family reunification and there were no limits on the number of spouses, unmarried minor children, and parents of U.S. citizens, this, too, contributed to the resulting migratory wave. The third unanticipated consequence involves the issue of labor demand. The focus on family reunification contributed to inadequate attention to employment-based immigration, resulting in rather inflexible policies that do not offer the highly-skilled a direct and automatic route to becoming permanent residents. Fourth, by capping levels of immigration from the Western Hemisphere and ending the Bracero Program, circular migration did not end, but instead the status of many migrants shifted from legal to undocumented. Fifth, while measures such as the Secure Fence Act of 2006 made it considerably more difficult for the unauthorized to enter the country, it also became an impediment to the undocumented already in the country from exiting.