

## Wall Street Journal

### Review and Outlook

*July 16, 2004*

#### Give Us Your Nerds

If Emma Lazarus were composing her Lady Liberty sonnet today, she might consider that line. But who would have guessed in 1883 that immigrants and their children would be so vital to America's technological prowess more than 100 years later?

So much of today's contentious immigration debate focuses on those arriving from Latin America to work in agriculture or take low-level service jobs that Americans tend to spurn. But a new study by Stuart Anderson of the **National Foundation for American Policy** reminds us that the contributions of skilled foreign-born professionals and their offspring are no less important to the U.S. Without them the country would be hard pressed to maintain its world-wide advantage in such fields as math and science.

The report, titled "The Multiplier Effect," will be released on Monday and available at [www.nfap.net](http://www.nfap.net). Here are some highlights:

- More than half of the engineers with Ph.D.s working in the U.S., and 45% of the nation's computer science doctorates, are foreign-born.
- Children of immigrants comprise 65% of the 2004 U.S. Math Olympiad's top scorers (13 of 20) and 46% of the U.S. Physics Team (11 of 24).
- At this year's Intel Science Talent Search, which recognizes the nation's top math and science students, 60% of the finalists and seven of the top 10 award winners were immigrants or their children. Last year, three of the top four awardees were foreign-born.

Traditionally, these rigorous competitions have served as a font for the next generation of scientists and mathematicians. More than 95% of Intel Science Talent Search winners pursue science as a career, and 70% go on to earn an advanced degree. But the high rate of success among foreigners is even more extraordinary when you consider the tiny segment of the population that generates it.

While the whiz kids and their parents hail from nations as far-flung as India, Romania, China, Vietnam, Israel, Turkey and Russia, many are here on a very limited number of H-1b visas that are reserved for immigrants with technical skills. These visas are given out to fewer than 100,000 foreigners each year, which is less than .04% of the 293 million individuals who live in the U.S.

Anyone who saw "Spellbound," the captivating documentary about the annual National Spelling Bee, knows that math and science aren't the only subjects in which immigrants excel. And policy makers will surely continue to explore why it is that American students aren't competing better in these areas.

At the same time these findings help illustrate that our economy benefits substantially from immigration, in particular from H-1b visa recipients and their children. Any policy that would depress the influx or close off our borders altogether is not in America's long-term interest, especially in a world where economic growth and competitiveness will depend above all on human capital.

If we had listened to the anti-immigration crowd over the past 20 years, says Mr. Anderson in an interview, "we would have wiped out two-thirds of the top future scientists and mathematicians in the United States because we would have barred their parents from ever entering America."