

**Argentine Americans**  
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In *The Encyclopedia Latina: History, Culture, Society* (2005)  
Edited by Ilan Stavans  
New York: Grolier

Argentina is best known as an immigrant receiving, not sending, country. Most of its past immigrants came from Spain and Italy, and more recent ones have come from Bolivia and Paraguay. But beginning in the 1950s, Argentines began leaving their country in three major phases. The first phase (1950s-1970s) was primarily economic, when professionals left due to dissatisfaction with their working conditions, income levels, and standards of living. The second phase was primarily political but also economic. A repressive military government during Argentina's "Dirty War" (1976-1983) and hyperinflation and economic deterioration throughout the 1980s gave all classes of Argentines greater motive to emigrate. While both of these emigration flows were composed primarily of manual laborers, their high proportion of professionals earned them reputations as "brain drain" migration flows. And due to these earlier migrations, there is now a sizable number of second-generation Argentines living in the United States.

The third and current phase is primarily economic. Today, Argentines are responding to a severe economic crisis (1998-present) and Argentina's default on billions of dollars of debt (December 2001) by leaving in rapidly expanding numbers and heading to diverse places like Spain, Italy, the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Israel. The magnitude of the crisis has reversed a century of economic stability in Argentina and made a middle-class lifestyle harder to protect. For example, whereas Argentina was one of the top ten richest countries in the world in 1900, in 2001-02 its GDP fell rapidly, joblessness stood at over twenty percent, and an estimated half of its 37 million-person population had fallen into poverty. Argentina's National Migration Directorate cites an exodus of 255,000 Argentines between 2001 and mid-2003 (roughly six times the number of emigrants who left Argentina between 1993 and 2000).

Thus, the overall picture of the Argentine American community is changing very rapidly due to recent immigration, especially immigration *after* the year 2000. To illustrate, although U.S. immigration figures are not recent enough to document the new movement, between 1971 and 2001, the INS admitted 77,976 documented Argentine immigrants, and the U.S. census counted 70,680 Argentine immigrants in 1980, 99,523 in 1990, and 136,578 in 2000 (168,991 by adjusted 2000 Hispanic/Latino figures). Other unofficial estimates of Argentine immigrants are even higher. Collected 2002 estimates show somewhere between 40,000 and 180,000 Argentines in Florida, and various sources document an increase in the number of visa requests made at the American embassy in Buenos Aires. In February 2002, the INS removed Argentina and Uruguay from its visa-waiver program in response to swelling numbers of Argentine and Uruguayan nationals overstaying their visas in the United States, and then the Argentine embassy also

delivered a request to the American government to grant Temporary Protected Status (TPS) to Argentines who had fled the economic crisis and were living in the U.S. illegally – although it is not likely to be granted.

These dramatic increases in new immigration have already impacted the profile and character of the Argentine American community substantially. Both in the past and today, Argentine immigrants have stood out for their high educational levels, geographical dispersion, and positive integration in the U.S. labor market. They have tended to identify racially as whites, speak English well, and have capital to invest. However, while Argentine immigrants remain highly educated and professionally represented – in 2001, 32.3 percent of Argentines admitted by the INS still came under official employment preferences – undocumented migration is on the rise, ethnic Argentine communities are becoming more visible, and many Argentine professionals with university degrees have taken on work as janitors, waiters, and low-paid service attendants. Therefore, while Argentines have been migrating to the U.S. and doing fairly well for several decades now, new migration has made the community younger, more residentially concentrated, and more socio-economically precarious overall. Such recent changes are important to consider in an ethnic community that has not been very concentrated or visible in the past (where, for example, Juan Alonso's *The Chipped Wall* and *Killing the Mandarin* still stand among the few Argentine American novels, the first originally published in 1966!)

In 2000, Argentine immigrants settled primarily in California (20.3%), Florida (20.1%), New York (13.8%), Texas (7.5%), and New Jersey (6.2%). Greatest recent growth has occurred in South Florida. Upper Miami Beach is now informally known as “Little Buenos Aires,” and tango music and *parrillas* (Argentine steakhouses) are symbols of the growing Argentine presence there. In addition, Argentine immigrant organizations and institutions in the United States are beginning to grow. Among them are larger Argentine-American chambers of commerce as well as smaller Argentine businesses, Argentine restaurants (such as the *Confitería Buenos Aires Bakery/Cafe* in Miami, alongside many *parrillas*), immigrant advocacy groups, and music, dance, and cultural groups (such as the *Argentine Arts Organization* in Lake Worth, Florida, and *Tango Societies* in many areas including Boston, New Hampshire, and Minnesota). All of these institutions help Argentine maintain valuable cultural values, manage adaptation pressures, organize politically, and promote greater knowledge of Argentine history and culture in the United States.

### **Suggested Readings**

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