

# Why Americans Emigrate



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The economic crisis has put a substantial crimp in a cornerstone of the American dream – their ability to climb the socio-economic ladder. Evidence from [a number of studies](#) suggests that Americans’ rate of socio-economic mobility has slowed in recent years and that other nations have overtaken it. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that young ambitious Americans may be headed overseas – to China, India, emerging economies and other places to pursue economic opportunity.

Yes, it is true that America remains mired in a long-term economic crisis and transformation. But even though America has plenty of problems – from high levels of joblessness, significant inequality, comparatively high levels of crime and violence, substantial poverty and political dysfunction in Washington – which make life ever more difficult for working- and middle-class people, the reality is that it still remains the most entrepreneurial place in the world. It's not just New York that fits the adage, "if I can make there, I can make it anywhere": Nowhere else can match the pull and opportunity of Silicon Valley for those who want to make it in tech, Hollywood for film, and even smaller places like Nashville for those who want a career in popular music. Despite the fact that the government has erected all sorts of obstacles to ambitious immigrants who want to come to the United States, America continues to attract the lion's share of the world's best and brightest.

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As for those young people born in the U.S. who are pursuing opportunities abroad: this is a great trend, not a sign of America's failings. I have noticed this among my own graduate students in business, public policy and urban affairs over the past decade, as well as in my studies of the "[Creative Class](#)." There was a time a century or so ago when talented and ambitious Americans, particularly those who wished to pursue careers at the frontiers of science and technology, went abroad to Germany and England for their studies and training. Of course all of this changed in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with America's rise to the front ranks in arts and culture, academe, and science and technology. But now with globalization and "[the rise of the rest](#)," a small but growing group of Americans are headed abroad for economic opportunity and to learn and grow. This is a good thing.

AnnaLee Saxenian of the University of California has a name for all of this. She calls it "[brain circulation](#)" — a wonderful term that captures the flow and mobility of people in our global age.

America has much to do [to re-establish its middle class](#), to create family-supporting jobs, reduce gaping inequality and re-establish upward mobility for its people. That said, it still remains a land of opportunity for many talented and ambitious people around the world. This country should do all it can to embrace the new realities of a highly mobile, ever-circulating global economy — by making it easy for Americans to go overseas and by welcoming the ambitious and energetic immigrants who have contributed so much to this country's innovative and dynamic economy.