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MISSISSIPPI:

Immigrant Entrepreneurs, Innovation, and Welcoming Initiatives in the Magnolia State

In Mississippi, there is no doubt that immigrant entrepreneurs and innovators play an important role. Immigrant entrepreneurs bring in additional revenue, create jobs, and contribute significantly to the state's economy. Highly skilled immigrants are vital to the state's innovation industries and to the metropolitan areas within the state, helping to boost local economies. Furthermore, local government, business, and non-profit leaders recognize the importance of immigrants in their communities and support immigration through local "welcoming" and integration initiatives.

Immigrant entrepreneurs contribute to Mississippi's economy.

- From 2006 to 2010, there were 4,534 new immigrant business [owners](#) in Mississippi,¹ and in 2010, [4.2 percent](#) of all business owners in Mississippi were foreign-born.²
- In 2010, new immigrant business owners³ had total net business [income](#) of \$181 million, which is 3.2 percent of all net business income in the state.⁴
- In 1908, Russian immigrant Sam Stein [founded](#) Stein Mart in Greenville, Mississippi. Although the company is now headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida, it maintains a presence in 29 states with over 260 stores.⁵

Highly skilled immigrants are vital to Mississippi's innovation industries, which in turn helps lead American innovation and creates jobs.

- Immigrants contribute to Mississippi's economic growth and competitiveness by earning degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields from the state's research universities. In 2009, more than [35 percent](#) of STEM graduates from the state's research-intensive universities were foreign-born, and almost 67 percent of graduates earning PhDs in engineering in Mississippi were not born in the U.S.⁶
- In 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor certified 544 H-1B high-skilled visa labor certification [applications](#) in Mississippi, with an average annual wage of \$56,374,⁷ which is higher than Missouri's median household [income](#) of \$38,718 or per capita income of \$20,521.⁸
- An [expansion](#) of the high-skilled visa program would create an estimated 1,800 new jobs in Mississippi by 2020.⁹ By 2045, this expansion would [add](#) around \$788 million to Gross State Product and increase personal income by more than \$800 million.¹⁰

While the numbers are compelling, they don't tell the whole story.

- Immigrant entrepreneurs not only contribute to large innovative companies, but to small business formation in local communities. In towns across Mississippi, immigrant family-owned small businesses contribute to the vitality of their local communities. Although initially aimed at other immigrant customers, many businesses quickly see an expansion of their clientele to include a diverse array of immigrant and native-born customers alike.
- After Hurricane Katrina in 2005, immigrants and immigrant business owners were a part of the rebuilding effort in Gulf Coast [communities](#),¹¹ including places in Mississippi such as Biloxi and Gulfport.¹²
 - According to Andy Guerra, president of the Gulf Coast Latin American Association, there are several “grocery/corner stores catering specifically to Latinos, nearly a dozen Mexican restaurants, a Spanish-language radio program and talks of opening new businesses continue daily in Harrison County.”¹³
 - The growing immigrant population has allowed local business owners to expand current operations and open new locations. The Diaz family, who run La Bamba Latin Store on Judge Sekul Avenue in Biloxi, were able to grow and expand their business.¹⁴
 - Enrique Vega, owner of El Rancho Mexican Restaurant on Pass Road, also in Biloxi, said his business benefits from a diverse mix of local, military, and immigrant customers.¹⁵
 - Lucio Cano, from Mexico, opened Lucio's Mundo Latino Grocery in Waveland in 2006. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Cano had owned a Mexican restaurant in Pass Christian, which was destroyed by the storm.¹⁶
 - Nolvía Bacallo and her husband, Jose, originally from Cuba, opened Las Palmas Cuban Restaurant in 2006. At their restaurant, customers represent a broad mix of locals and immigrant newcomers.¹⁷
- In Gulfport and Biloxi, an immigrant business corridor is found along Pass Road between Cowan Road and Keesler Air Force Base. Within several blocks, restaurants featuring cuisines of Mexico, Greece, Korea, Japan, the Caribbean, among other places, are available, along with a Mexican supermarket.¹⁸

In Mississippi, local leaders have begun recognizing and supporting immigration through “welcoming” and integration initiatives.

- The **Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance** (MIRA) is a [statewide organization founded in 2000](#) in response to the state's growing immigrant population. Specifically, MIRA “works to support immigrants in the exercise of their rights through providing

legal services, organizing, advocacy and public education.”¹⁹

- o In addition to providing services designed to more effectively integrate immigrants into Mississippi, MIRA also conducts activities to [educate](#) the broader public about immigrant issues.²⁰
- o Examples of MIRA’s broader [educational activities](#) include educating the state legislature to help pass a bill upholding *Plyler v. Doe*, which guarantees the enrollment in public schools of immigrant children; and advocating for bilingual education in Mississippi and for opening the teacher licensing process to “credit immigrant teachers for their education and experience.”²¹
- The **Immigration Clinic of Catholic Charities of Jackson** has a [mission](#) to “welcome the stranger” through “direct services, education, and advocacy on behalf of the immigrants” in Mississippi.²²
 - o The organization’s Immigration Clinic provides a variety of direct [services](#) to the immigrant population in the area, including family-based services to individuals seeking adjustment of immigration status, work authorization, naturalization and citizenship, as well as interpretation and translation services.²³
 - o Additionally, the Immigration Clinic conducts [education outreach](#) for immigrants and the broader community. In particular, the organization ensures that the immigrant community is aware of their rights and responsibilities and educates the “general population about the immigrant community in order to promote understanding, acceptance, and protection of immigrant rights.”²⁴

Endnotes

¹ Robert W. Fairlie, [Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Success in the United States](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012).

² Ibid.

³ The sample of new immigrant business owners during this time period includes individuals who do not own a business in the first survey month and report starting a business in the second survey month with 15 or more hours worked per week.

⁴ Robert W. Fairlie, [Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Success in the United States](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2012).

⁵ Partnership for a New American Economy, [“Map the Impact of Immigrants Across America: Mississippi”](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2013).

⁶ Partnership for a New American Economy, [“Map the Impact of Immigrants Across America: Mississippi”](#) (New York: Partnership for a New American Economy, 2013).

⁷ Office of Foreign Labor Certification, [Annual Report: October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Labor, 2012).

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, [“State & County Quick Facts: Mississippi”](#) (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011).

⁹ Frederick R. Treyz, Corey Stottlemeyer, and Rod Motamedi, [“Key Components of Immigration Reform: An Analysis of the Economic Effects of Creating a Pathway to Legal Status, Expanding High-Skilled Visas, and Reforming Lesser-Skilled Visas”](#) (Amherst, MA: Regional Economic Models, Inc., 2013).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Katharine Donato and Shirin Hakimzadeh, [“The Changing Face of the Gulf Coast: Immigration to Louisiana,](#)

[Mississippi, and Alabama](#)” (Washington, D.C.: Migration Policy Institute, 2006).

¹² Joshua Norman, “Corner groceries, restaurants, radio...Coast Latino flavor growth is robust in Biloxi, Gulfport” (Biloxi, MS: *Sun Herald*, June 4, 2006).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ryan LaFontaine, “Latino business is good in Hancock County” (Biloxi, MS: *Sun Herald*, June 4, 2006).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nicole Dow, “Biloxi businesses offer tasty tour of the world” (Biloxi, MS: *Sun Herald*, June 19, 2011).

¹⁹ Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance, “[Our History](#)” (Jackson, MS: Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance, 2013).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Catholic Charities, Inc. “[Immigration](#)” (Jackson, MS: Catholic Charities, Inc., 2009).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Immigrant Entrepreneurs in:

Mississippi

*In 2010, new immigrant
business owners generated*

**\$181
million**

*in total net business
income*



4.2%

*of business owners in
Mississippi are immigrants*



4,538

*immigrants became new business
owners in Mississippi
between 2006-2010*

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