

A NOTE ON CANADIAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES DURING THE 1980S AND 1990S

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ABSTRACT

Considerable media attention had been directed towards the flow of highly talented Canadians to the United States in the 1990s. There are firm theoretical reasons, however, to believe that qualitative differences in migration began as early as the 1980s, owing to the widening distribution of earnings and the related increased returns to education in the United States relative to Canada, both of which could result in qualitative improvements in the migration flow. US immigration policy remained essentially unchanged during the 1980s, but changed markedly in the 1990s owing to the implementation of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) and its successor, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). We use a flexible empirical approach to document these changes in immigrant quality using 1980, 1990 and 2000 US census data. Our results suggest that improvements in Canadian immigrant quality occurred during the 1990s, but these also happened earlier, casting doubt on the hypothesis of improving Canadian immigrant quality in the 1990s. Quantile regressions also show that improvement in the entry quality of immigrants was not limited to the upper tail of the earnings distribution.