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ROBERTO SGALLA, GIGLIOLA NOCERA,
SABRINA VELLUCCI E DANIELE FIORENTINO

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BETWEEN ADMISSION,
RESTRICTION, AND REGULATION

LAWS AND IMMIGRATION POLICIES IN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

EDITED BY GIULIANO SANTANGELI VALENZANI

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR: DANIELE FIORENTINO

PREFACE BY GIULIANO AMATO

AFTERWORD BY LAUREN BRAUN-STRUMFELS



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Laborem saepe Fortuna facilis sequitur

This volume is the result of a collaborative effort, produced with the contributions and participation of several scholars—most notably Francesco Clementi, Stefano Luconi and Matteo Sanfilippo, who co-authored the texts together with the editor and the project's scientific coordinator.

Appendix A was prepared by Enrico Campelli, and the Suggested Readings were compiled by Annalisa Capristo.

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E-mail: infoagoraco@gmail.com

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PREFACE. THE UNITED STATES AND IMMIGRATION

It should not surprise the reader of the following essay to find two opposing views on the subject at hand. Both views emerge through the authors' shifting focus—now on one, now on the other—revealing an inescapable truth. The United States defines itself and is, indeed, a “nation of immigrants”—people who, over time, have come from all parts of the world, always drawn by the American Dream (which, for many, came true). Yet few countries—like the United States—have imposed so many legal restrictions on immigration, from ethnic or even religious selection to national quotas. By following either one of these two threads, one can construct two equally valid and logically grounded narratives of the unique society that took shape across the Atlantic in the past few centuries. Both perspectives are true, and anyone who wants to understand the United States must be familiar with both—and, above all, be able to grasp the underlying context that explains their coexistence.

As the following pages remind us, it is certainly true that the Mayflower pilgrims left Europe in 1620 in search of religious freedom and freedom from any state-imposed religion. Yet only a few years later, the Puritans of Massachusetts banned members of other Christian denominations—going so far as to execute Quakers who, having been expelled once, dared to return. And the Maryland Toleration Act of 1649 applied only to Trinitarian Christians.

The first citizenship laws of the newly founded Federation—one in 1790, the other in 1795—reserved citizenship for “free white persons,” a term later clarified to mean “Europeans or descendants of Europeans.” Fearing the influence of the Haitian uprising, Congress in 1803 went so far as to ban the arrival of any “negro, mulatto, or other person of colour.” After the Civil War, the abolition of slavery, and the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, the right to citizenship could no longer be denied to those of African birth or descent. Obstacles remained for Asians—whether Chinese, Japanese, or even for Japanese Americans themselves. The reader will find all relevant references in the pages that follow.

Even the period from 1880 to World War I—marked by strong economic growth and a high demand for industrial labor, which brought about intense immigration (twenty million people, one-fifth of them Italian)—was not a time of open immigration. One need only recall the Immigration

Act of 1882: it broadened the category of undesirables, adding not only Europeans with criminal records but also those with mental disorders or deemed “of low intelligence.” A bestselling 1916 book—*The Passing of the Great Race* by Madison Grant—argued that the first to be excluded on these grounds should be Southern Europeans, deemed intellectually and morally inferior to Nordics and thus liable to weaken American society. In particular, the memory of the lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891—and of the climate in which it could unfold—still resonates.

After World War I, between 1921 and 1924, national quotas were introduced. These drastically limited entries—often to just a few hundred per year, in the face of pressure from countries with thousands upon thousands of people seeking entry. It is true that the climate changed with Roosevelt’s New Deal, as the Democratic Party gained strength through the representation of minorities. Moreover, after World War II, the United States could hardly afford not to welcome those fleeing countries where communist regimes were being established. Yet as late as 1952, President Truman unsuccessfully vetoed an Immigration and Nationality Act that, for example, set a quota of just 700 entries for Romania—and only 335 for Italy.

Then came the “Glorious Thirties” of widespread prosperity, along with the affirmation of civil rights through legislation initiated by Kennedy and brought to completion by Johnson.¹ At that point, immigration quotas could no longer be upheld, and the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act abolished them. In the following thirty years, over 18 million immigrants arrived—three times as many as in the previous thirty years. It was the end of restrictions—and of the hostility that had driven them, targeting those seen as different.

Actually, a largely new era was beginning—no longer defined by a model of coexistence carefully shaped by the melting pot ideal and based on supposedly compatible differences, but by a more difficult kind of coexistence. It was made harder not only by the multiplication of differences, but also by the emergence of strong group identities, each returning to

¹ The term “Glorious Thirties” is borrowed from Jean Fourastié’s book entitled, *Les Trente Glorieuses, ou la révolution invisible de 1946 à 1975* (Paris, 1979), in which the French economist refers to the thirty years following the end of World War II, as a time of growth and affluence with no precedents in France, as well as in other countries including the United States. In this volume, the reference is used also to indicate the period of massive immigration that swept the country after the passing of the Hart-Celler Act in 1965 that reopened the “Golden Door” to millions of new arrivals.

its roots and emphasizing what set them apart rather than what brought them together. It was a fractured form of coexistence, in which African Americans, feminist, gay, and transgender movements on one side, and religious and traditionalist groups on the other, began to oppose each other more openly—set against a backdrop of enduring hostility toward immigrants, which increasingly targeted those without legal status. As early as the 1990s, California passed Propositions 187 and 227, both aimed at restricting access to public services for unauthorized immigrants. In 2006, Congress approved the construction of a 700-mile wall along the Mexican border. The Obama Administration doubled the number of deportations compared to the Bush Administration—rising from 175,000 to 950,000. Exploiting fears of terrorism, the Trump administration banned entry from several Muslim-majority countries—marking a return to exclusionary policies.

Yet if we retrace the same historical trajectory—those same decades marked more by restrictions than by liberalization—we certainly find alternating phases: periods of limited entry and others of mass inflows. But the general trend is a steady increase in the immigrant population, as well as in the diversity of ethnic groups represented within it. By 2003, people of Latin American origin had already surpassed African Americans, becoming the second largest broadly defined ethnic group. In more recent years—between 2013 and 2021—India and China replaced Mexico as the top countries of origin for new arrivals. The most recent group to be targeted—illegal migrants—has now surpassed 11 million. The bottom line is that, while the United States accounts for only about 5% of the world's population, it hosts a full 20% of global immigrants.

Let us delve deeper into this. The early American society did not deny the need to grow in numbers—but it did so through limited immigration, ideally made up of people in its own image and likeness. That was the meaning behind the early legislation already mentioned—and it was also the meaning that immigrants themselves perceived and internalized. One example that illustrates this is the many who Anglicized their names to conceal their origins (such as those named Richardson in the United States, who were originally Riccardi). Another is the written-response questions for naturalization applicants—starting with the one asking which side you would be on in a war between the United States and your country of origin.

Distortions, restrictions, humiliations. Yet the melting pot still worked. The American Dream continued to attract people—and so did the de-

mand for labor from the U.S. economy. For a long time, it was realistic to expect rapid access to the middle class, where urban and suburban life often blurred differences—except for the most deeply rooted one, that of African Americans, a group that, over time, came to be seen as native. It is a fact that the supermarket, the street, the cinema, the museum, the school have nevertheless accustomed people to coexistence of differences, to their irrelevance for the equality that matters. And at the core, there was and still is the shared sense of being and feeling all Americans.

The real challenge, the encounter with history that does not make concessions, is what the United States has begun to experience in these years of proud and fractured identities. It is now time for the process of integration to prove its own nature by integrating, without assimilating, and without a white European prototype to which all must conform.

The Tower of Babel reveals itself for what it truly is. If it wishes to endure, it must accept the many differences now within it—and foster mutual acceptance and even a degree of ‘contamination’ between identities. At present, however, there seems to be little willingness to do so. Take, for instance, the woke on one side and the traditionalists on the other. Or consider the political system itself, which may well be the most fractured in the entire Western world.

But it would be a mistake to believe that the resources have vanished—resources that still allow the shared fabric to make itself felt and not be undone by the trends that currently seem to dominate. There is still upward mobility — not for everyone, it’s true, but supported by a more dynamic wage structure than in many other countries. The educational system, while increasingly marked by social inequality, still maintains high enough standards to attract a very large number of foreign students—not just to the most prestigious and expensive universities. The economy remains strong, continuing to lead globally — and it is far from certain that China will surpass it. The United States also projects power on the world stage, thanks to both economic and military strength; no longer the world’s unquestioned sheriff, but still above all others. And finally, there is the enduring strength of being and feeling American, which everyone sensed after September 11, 2001, and which still runs deep, even without similarly dramatic circumstances to bring it to the surface.

This is not to say that the challenge of forging a common identity—despite the many tensions that oppose it—has already been won in the United States. I am simply saying that in a world increasingly marked by conflict and by forms of diversity that are not easily attuned to the reasons

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for coexistence, the United States—despite everything—may still be the country best equipped to succeed. Because it may indeed face more tensions than others—but it also has more resources to uphold what is, fittingly, its national motto: *e pluribus unum*. And perhaps even its destiny: to unite the society that most exemplifies the traits that will define all our future societies.

The evolution lucidly traced in the pages that follow—with all its contradictions and the outcomes to which it has ultimately led—lays out the foundations for such a hypothesis.

INTRODUCTION.

THE UNITED STATES, A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS

According to a well-known definition, the United States is a “Nation of Immigrants.”¹ The concept of “nation,” interpreted as a community of shared identity and used as an alternative to terms like “land” or “country,” suggests the goal of integrating newcomers into American society and involving them in its decisions and choices, rather than simply offering them a destination to pursue their own American Dream—whether economic, religious, or political. While the United States in the 21st century is undeniably multiethnic and multicultural, periodic waves of xenophobia and pervasive racism have frequently hindered the acceptance of migrants and the peaceful coexistence of a truly multicultural society.

Notably, even before the United States gained sovereignty, access to the North American colonies was selective. Despite William Penn’s efforts to promote Pennsylvania as a haven for freedom of conscience, Puritans in Massachusetts banned members of other Christian denominations, even executing returning Quakers after expulsion. Similarly, Maryland’s Toleration Act of 1649 applied only to Trinitarians. A century later, one of the Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, in his *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind* (1751), expressed concerns against German immigrants who, he feared, might transform Pennsylvania—a colony founded by the English—into a German enclave resistant to Anglicization.

Given this context, it is unsurprising that, in the late 18th century, the political elite of the newly founded Republic—composed of European immigrants and their descendants—enacted highly liberal measures for granting U.S. citizenship. These included two years of residence under the Naturalization Act of 1790, later extended to five years in 1795. However, a racial criterion (being “free white persons”) restricted this right to Europeans. This approach was evident even before these laws were enacted. In 1782, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, in his *Letters from an American Farmer*, defined “the American, this new man” as “either an

¹ The concept was reaffirmed in 1958 in the title of an equally famous essay attributed to, though not written by, then-Senator John F. Kennedy (D-MA).

European, or the descendant of an European.” From the outset, reality contradicted the rhetoric of inclusion, as expressed by George Washington in 1783, before his presidency, when he declared that America was ready to receive not only the “respectable Stranger” but also “the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations”.

Nevertheless, the lack of constitutional guidelines and Congress’s authority to regulate citizenship laws (Art. I, sec. 7) made immigration laws a reliable gauge of xenophobia. More significantly, they became a tool for identifying which groups and categories of potential immigrants were targeted by nativist ideologies in U.S. society throughout different historical periods. Determining who could become a U.S. citizen inherently reflected the nation’s priorities, indicating whom the country intended to welcome and whom it sought to discourage from immigrating.

Thus, at the height of Reconstruction, the *Naturalization Act* of 1870 extended the right to apply for citizenship to “aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent”. However, it excluded Asian immigrants, continuing to bar them from naturalization procedures long before the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1882, the *Gentlemen’s Agreement* of 1907, and the *Asiatic Barred Zone* provision of the *Immigration Act* of 1917. These measures effectively closed the doors of the United States to East Asian populations. Conversely, efforts were made simultaneously to prevent a side effect of the *ius soli* (birthright citizenship), formally introduced in 1868 with the Fourteenth Amendment, intended also to integrate African Americans. The application of *ius soli* to the children of Asian immigrants born in the United States was hindered for three decades. Even before the measures of 1882, there was an attempt to interpret the phrase “persons [...] subject to the jurisdiction thereof” as individuals under U.S. jurisdiction but not subject to any foreign state claiming them as its citizens, thus excluding Chinese Americans born in the United States.

It was not until 1898 that the Supreme Court ruling in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* established that the phrase referred to individuals under U.S. jurisdiction by virtue of being present on U.S. soil. Nonetheless, until the enactment of the *McCarran-Walter Act* in 1952, with few exceptions like the Chinese (granted a special exemption in 1943), Asian immigrants remained barred from naturalization. Additionally, the ambiguous definition of Asia’s borders in citizenship laws allowed for the exclusion of immigrants from certain parts of the Middle East. It even compromised the naturalization of Finns until 1908 due to the presumed Mongolian origin of the Finnish population.

Conversely, obtaining citizenship alone did not protect groups deemed undesirable and difficult to assimilate from nativist sentiments and attempts at marginalization. The anti-Catholic campaigns of the mid-19th century unsuccessfully sought to limit the rights of Catholic believers, including proposals to bar them from public office. In contrast, the indirect expropriation of many Californios was successful. They ended up on U.S. soil not by migrating northward, but due to the shifting of the southern border following the United States' victory over Mexico in the 1848 war. Additionally, the second generation of Japanese Americans, despite holding U.S. citizenship by birthright, were interned after Pearl Harbor. Like their parents, who were ineligible for naturalization, they were viewed as a potential fifth column serving the enemy.

The *ius soli* also faced attacks from xenophobes intent on preserving the European heritage of the United States by opposing more recent waves of Hispanic immigration. Well before Donald Trump's "Make America White Again" rhetoric and his accusations that birthright citizenship encouraged illegal immigration by granting citizenship to the children of undocumented immigrants, Democratic Congressman Tom Tancredo had already proposed suspending the *ius soli* for such children in 2006. This revived a proposal made about a decade earlier by journalist Peter Brimelow, himself a British-born immigrant.

More broadly, the concept of a "nation of immigrants" became hostage to economic cycles and shifts in Washington's foreign policy. A few relevant examples include the erosion of the *melting pot* model following national minorities' alignment with their countries of origin during World War I; the recognition of African American sharecroppers and laborers in the rural South as a potential alternative workforce to European immigrants; and the postwar recession caused by the conversion of wartime industries. Together, these factors led to the implementation of restrictive national entry quotas under the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, effectively ending mass immigration. Due to the Great Depression of the 1930s, New Deal reformism left the national quota system untouched and made no exceptions, even for those persecuted by Nazi fascism.

Chinese immigrants gained access to naturalization in 1943 due to the alliance between the United States and Chiang Kai-shek's regime during World War II. Similarly, the Cold War alliance between Tokyo and Washington allowed Japanese immigrants to gain the same benefit under the *McCarran-Walter Act* of 1952. After numerous exemptions granted to exiles fleeing Soviet-style regimes, the national origins quota system was

repealed by the *Hart-Celler Act* of 1965, capitalizing on a period of economic prosperity. This restrictive approach, aimed at limiting unwanted immigration from certain countries, disproportionately penalized newly independent African and Asian nations whose support the U.S. sought during the Cold War. The end of détente, marked by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, enabled the passage of the *Refugee Act* of 1980, which formally established the right to asylum in U.S. law for the first time. Boosted by the economic prosperity of 1983–1987, the *Simpson-Mazzoli Act* of 1986 allowed the legalization of undocumented immigrants who had entered the United States before January 1, 1982.

George W. Bush’s War on Terror led to the construction of the first border barriers between the United States and Mexico under the Border Secure Act of 2006, aimed at preventing terrorist infiltration among undocumented immigrants—a scenario rendered unlikely by the fact that the 9/11 attackers had entered the country with valid visas. The focus on countering Islamic-motivated terrorism led Trump to issue executive orders blocking entry from several Muslim-majority countries. Inconsistent criteria for selecting targeted nationalities—including some at odds with Washington’s international alliances—forced repeated revisions of these measures.

More recently, both Barack Obama and Joe Biden adopted the rhetoric of a “Nation of Immigrants,” even as their policies often contradicted it. For example, while continuing the construction of pre-planned barriers along the southern border, Obama deported more undocumented immigrants than his Republican predecessor. Meanwhile, as advocates of woke culture focused on the ineffectual critique of the Statue of Liberty’s inclusivity—its gaze turned toward Europe and its back to Mexico—the Biden administration addressed the issue with Vice President Kamala Harris’ clumsy appeal to Central Americans to refrain from migrating to the United States. To expedite expulsions, the Biden administration continued Trump’s use of *Title 42* until May 2023, leveraging the Covid-19 pandemic as a basis for restrictive immigration policies. Subsequently, Harris reignited the debate, initially calling for a reassessment of certain immigration policies, and later, during her presidential candidacy, emphasizing the need for new immigration legislation.

FROM THE ALIEN AND SEDITION ACTS OF 1798 TO 1882

Inspired by the principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Constitution (1787), the *Nationality Act* of 1790 was the first legislation to address, albeit indirectly, the issue of immigration. It established that immigrants could actively integrate into the new Republic and defined a path to citizenship, restricted exclusively to “free white persons.” The 1790 legislation was amended by the Naturalization Acts of 1795 and 1798. In 1790, a two-year residency was required for naturalization; in 1795, this period was extended to five years, and in 1798, to fourteen years. In 1802, the residency requirement was reduced to five years, provided that applicants were “free white persons,” the only group eligible for citizenship.

It is worth noting that until the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863, issued by Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War, it was repeatedly affirmed that individuals of African descent, whether enslaved or free, could not be U.S. citizens. Following the Haitian Revolution and fearing its influence, Congress in 1803 banned the arrival of any “negro, mulatto, or other person of colour,” reaffirming the restriction five years later. Additionally, in the landmark case *Dred Scott v. Sanford* (1857), the Supreme Court ruled that no African American, whether free or enslaved, could enjoy the rights of citizenship. To resolve the legal conundrum following Lincoln’s proclamation, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, granting citizenship to anyone born on U.S. soil. Two years later, the *Naturalization Act* extended this right to individuals from Africa or of African descent.

During the period between the Revolution and the Civil War, the rights of European immigrants were also called into question. In the context of the French Revolution, fears arose about European fifth columns: some spreading extremist slogans, others allegedly directed by British authorities. The *Alien and Sedition Acts*, approved in 1798, granted the power to deport anyone considered a threat to the political stability of the new nation. In the following decades, the expansion of migration fueled concerns about the arrival of new groups. The Chinese soon became the main target, while the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) recognized the rights of “Mexicans” who chose to remain in the newly annexed territory. This decision also paved the way for welcoming other Mexicans, who began

migrating to the formerly Spanish regions as laborers, particularly during the California Gold Rush. Notably, the Gold Rush began a month before California was ceded to the United States, marking the start of Hispanic migration to the West, where they have since formed the primary pool of inexpensive labor in the Western regions.

Discrimination against the Chinese officially began with the California Supreme Court's ruling in *People v. Hall* (1854). The ruling barred an immigrant's testimony in a murder case, stating that Chinese individuals, like Native Americans and descendants of slaves, could not testify in court. During the Civil War, Congress passed a law in 1862 banning the "coolie trade" to prevent plantation owners from replacing enslaved labor with Chinese workers in semi-servile conditions. In 1868, the Burlingame Treaty allowed railroads to import free Chinese workers, while the *Page Act* (1875) banned the recruitment of "unfree" workers and women for "immoral purposes". In practice, it was used to restrict Chinese immigration, based on accusations of involvement in prostitution and opium dens. Finally, in 1880, the Angell Treaty revised the Burlingame Treaty and completely banned the recruitment of certain categories of Chinese workers. The framework of anti-Chinese policies was then virtually complete. In 1882, the *Chinese Exclusion Act* was passed, barring the entry of additional categories of Chinese workers.

The year 1882 also saw the passage of the *Immigration Act*, which not only ratified the recent measures targeting the Chinese but also expanded the list of undesirable persons to include those of European descent with criminal records, mental disorders, or low intelligence. Meanwhile, the federal government had spent decades implementing a national immigration policy, often overriding state-level initiatives. The Supreme Court had already opposed such initiatives in the *Passenger Cases* of 1849. On that occasion, it declared that immigration decisions must fall under federal authority, a principle later reaffirmed in *Chy Lung v. Freeman* (1875). The new Immigration Acts aligned with this renewed federal control. The 1864 Act temporarily legalized the recruitment of workers under semi-servile conditions, echoing the system of indentured servants from colonial times. Following protests by labor organizations concerned about labor market competition from foreign workers, the law was repealed in 1868. The 1882 Act built upon earlier measures from New York and Massachusetts, as well as the tradition of English *poor laws* dating back to Elizabeth I, aiming to exclude immigrants deemed too poor, mentally or morally deficient, and likely to become public charges.

FROM 1882 TO 1965. THE AGE OF EXCLUSION

The last three decades of the 19th century in the United States—often referred to as the Gilded Age (a literary term with an ironic undertone from Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner)—were undoubtedly a period of extraordinary growth and development for the United States, though they also intensified a series of destructive internal tensions. Racial, ethnic, and economic tensions contributed to reshaping the approach to immigration.

The defining features of this complex period included extraordinary economic growth, fueled primarily by rapid industrialization and the rise of large industrial conglomerates, which ultimately led to an alarming concentration of power in the hands of a few. Industrial magnates such as the legendary John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie rose to prominence in the public imagination as living embodiments of the American Dream. Unsurprisingly, these years also saw the rise of Social Darwinism in America—a theory asserting that only the fittest survive and prosper in human society. In its most extreme interpretations, this perspective justified poverty and destitution as signs of lacking the qualities needed to succeed in life.

It was inevitable that such rapid but uneven growth would spark internal labor conflicts. Between the 1870s and 1890s, the United States experienced what contemporaries called a “class war,” marked by thousands of strikes across the country—about 10,000 in the 1880s alone.” The relationship between labor unions and immigration remained tense during this period. Nativist sentiments permeated segments of the nation’s largest labor federation, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), reflecting workers’ fears of being undercut by an influx of low-cost immigrant labor. Some labor organizations, such as the AFL, actively advocated for restrictive immigration legislation from the late 19th century onward. Others, often established by immigrants themselves, promoted mutual aid societies to safeguard workers’ rights. Many unions, however, ultimately barred immigrants, women, and Black workers from membership entirely. As a result, immigrants were often driven toward more radical labor unions and groups that welcomed all workers.

Meanwhile, large industrial cities in the North, key drivers of economic growth, expanded primarily due to immigration rather than natural population growth. Between 1870 and 1920, the number of Americans residing

in cities surged from 10 million to 54 million, while the number of cities with populations exceeding 100,000 grew from 15 to 68.

Despite labor disputes, layoffs, and unemployment caused by minor cyclical recessions, industrial expansion sustained a strong demand for labor, offering wages higher than the European average and driving a steady influx of immigrants. During this period, leading industrialists actively lobbied to keep European immigration channels open, ensuring a steady supply of cheap labor while countering union influence.

In this phase, the United States also underwent a significant redefinition of civil rights. In addition to various efforts to restrict and exclude immigrants, the 1896 Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* formally legitimized racial segregation, completing the suppression of civil rights for Black Americans in the Southern states, where voting rights had already been stripped from most through a complex web of legal maneuvers since the 1870s. Endemic poverty and racial segregation in the South fueled a significant northward migration of African Americans, reshaping national society, urban life in northern ghettos, and the labor force. In the minds of many white Americans, the great northern industrial cities had come to symbolize hubs of vice and crime, inhabited by unassimilated (and unassimilable) immigrants and African Americans marginalized from mainstream society.

These developments fueled a resurgence of racist sentiment in segments of WASP America, frequently merging with virulent xenophobia and anti-immigrant positions. The Ku Klux Klan, refounded in Georgia in 1915, directed its hostility not only toward African Americans but also toward Mexicans, immigrants, Catholics, and Jews. Notably, its headquarters and affiliates were no longer confined to the former Confederate South but expanded across much of the country, from North to West.

Between 1880 and 1920, more than twenty million people are estimated to have immigrated to the United States. Approximately one-fifth of them came from Italy. Before the mass exodus of the late 19th century, many Italians from northern regions had already settled in the United States. However, the new wave of emigration at the turn of the century came predominantly from rural southern Italy. These new immigrants built tight-knit communities founded on family ties and regional bonds, favoring industrial cities where employment opportunities were more accessible. While most of these Italian immigrants were young men, the vital role of women in that exodus cannot be overlooked, as they played a crucial part in establishing and strengthening Italian communities in urban ar-

eas. They frequently promoted the establishment of support networks and social organizations, as well as initiatives to improve workplace health and safety conditions—virtually nonexistent at the time, especially for low-skilled immigrant workers. A role, albeit with notable differences, that is still frequently highlighted today for immigrant women from Central and South America in the United States.

The rise of American nativist sentiment during the late 19th and early 20th centuries—particularly between 1882 and 1924—prompted the U.S. Congress to enact numerous measures aimed at curbing, if not halting entirely, the seemingly endless waves of immigration. During this period, a policy of progressively closing borders emerged, targeting populations considered undesirable. In 1882, the previously mentioned *Chinese Exclusion Act* was enacted, severely restricting any further Chinese entry into the country. In 1924, the *Johnson-Reed Act*, also known as the *Quota Law*, was passed, setting entry quotas based on national origin and ethnicity.

The *Quota Law* admitted European immigrants to the United States based on their representation in the 1890 census—over thirty years prior—just as the ethnic composition of immigration was undergoing a major shift. Between 1860 and 1900, approximately fourteen million immigrants arrived in the U.S., mainly from the same traditional regions as before—northwestern Europe. They included Germans, British, Scandinavians, and Irish. By 1890, the immigration landscape had already changed dramatically with the mass influx of Italians, Poles, Jews, South Slavs, Hungarians, and Russians, deemed undesirable by racist nativist movements. That same year saw a record high: immigrants accounted for nearly 15 percent of the total U.S. population (for comparison, this figure was 13.6 percent in 2021). Immigration increased sharply from that point onward. In the first 15 years of the 20th century alone, more than 15 million people immigrated to the United States.

Racism and nativist organizations expanded rapidly, driven by rising populism in the Midwest and South, often intertwined with anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic sentiments. The increasingly diverse ethnic composition of American society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries sparked debates over immigrants' roles and whether the melting pot metaphor accurately reflected American identity.

Anti-immigration laws mirrored the nativist climate of the time, becoming progressively stricter. However, until World War I, they remained relatively lenient due to the increasing need for unskilled labor spurred

by industrial expansion. The *Chinese Exclusion Act*, similarly, was passed only after Chinese workers, crucial to the construction of railroads, were no longer considered indispensable. In 1885, legislation was introduced to prevent industries from hiring laborers overseas. The *Alien Contract Labor Law*, or *Foran Act*, prohibited contract labor agreements with foreign workers outside U.S. borders.

The Immigration Act of 1891 further restricted immigration, expanding the scope of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act to include other groups deemed problematic for the authorities or threatening to the country's ethnic and social balance. The ban was extended to individuals considered Likely to become Public Charges (LPCs), including the sick, criminals, polygamists, and those whose passage to the United States had been financed by third parties. During those same years, the Ellis Island Transit Center opened, joined by Angel Island on the Pacific Coast, both established to screen and process prospective immigrants. These centers became pivotal instruments for restricting and controlling immigration.

During this phase, the Italian government started cooperating with U.S. authorities to regulate emigration flows more effectively, establishing its first immigration office at Ellis Island, working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: the Office of Labor Information and Protection for Italians. Its operation was brief: it was shut down in 1899 with the justification that it could limit U.S. sovereignty. Meanwhile, Italy introduced a significant reform to its migration system, in line with similar changes in other European countries. Italian authorities began to view emigration as an important solution to alleviate domestic poverty and generate remittances to strengthen the national economy. At the same time, authorities sought to regulate departures both to protect migrants and respond to U.S. government pressure. This resulted in Law No. 23 of January 31, 1901, which simplified the passport application process, established the *Commissariato Generale per l'Emigrazione* (Emigration Commissariat), enhanced migrant protections, and set up Inspection Commissions at embarkation ports and protective agencies abroad to assist Italian emigrants. In 1919, legislation progressed further with a thorough reorganization of migration regulations. Within this framework, the *Commissariato per l'Emigrazione* was granted additional powers, including the authority to operate directly in foreign countries to protect Italian emigrants. Additionally, the law allowed for temporary restrictions on emigration to countries that did not comply with the established safety requirements. The growing focus on the protection and safety of Italian workers am-

plified by increasing xenophobic sentiments in the United States—and elsewhere—which had caused numerous violent incidents in preceding years. The most notorious incident was the 1891 lynching in New Orleans, Louisiana, where 11 Italians were brutally killed by a violent mob. The incident had far-reaching consequences, impacting public opinion and diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States, ultimately leading to the temporary recall of ambassadors.

Meanwhile, in the United States, pressure to curb immigration persisted. In 1903, Congress enacted a new Immigration Act, informally labeled the “Anarchist Exclusion Act.” Participation by newly arrived European immigrant workers in radical, multi-ethnic unions like the Industrial Workers of the World stoked fears of “un-American” ideas spreading nationwide. Growing concerns of subversive activities, especially linked to socialist and anarchist elements from Italy and Germany, prompted efforts to tighten entry restrictions, excluding anarchists, individuals with epilepsy, beggars, and exploiters of prostitution.

It is clear that the objectives were different, aiming to progressively exclude those broadly defined as “undesirables,” including ethnic groups considered too different to be assimilated. In 1906, the *Naturalization Act* mandated English proficiency as a requirement for obtaining U.S. citizenship. In 1907, the United States signed the *Gentlemen’s Agreement* with Japan, in which Japan agreed to stop labor emigration to the United States in return for limiting the segregation of Japanese Americans in California.

The real turning point in immigration containment policies occurred with three landmark laws passed in 1917, 1921, and 1924. Adopting Social Darwinist ideas in a reformist guise, some progressives advocated even for eugenic practices to reshape society’s structure. However, the majority viewed legal immigration restrictions as a safer and more acceptable approach. Within this context, Madison Grant’s book *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) achieved significant publishing success, promoting the belief that immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe endangered American society due to presumed intellectual and moral inferiority compared to Nordic immigrants. The three immigration laws passed in 1917, 1921, and 1924 directly reflected these beliefs.

The first of these laws imposed a total ban on immigration from Southeast Asia, becoming known as the “Asiatic Barred Zone Act.” It introduced literacy tests and expanded the list of individuals barred from entering the United States. The second, the *Emergency Quota Act*, sought to severely restrict immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe by

establishing the first nationality-based quota system tied to existing U.S. residents of specific national origins. Quotas were limited to 3 percent of a given nationality's population in the United States, based on the 1910 census. In 1921, these restrictions were tightened, reducing the percentage to 2 percent and using the 1890 census as a reference. These immigration laws remained largely in effect until the 1960s, when the civil rights movement and calls for a more globally oriented government policy led to significant reforms in U.S. immigration policy. At the same time, in the early 20th century, the reformist impulse, and especially the experience of the Great War, contributed to a positive reshaping of citizenship and civil rights. While immigration was restricted, legislation such as the Jones-Shafroth Act (1917) and the *Indian Citizenship Act* (1924) formally extended U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans (U.S. nationals since 1898) and Native Americans. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1920) guaranteed all American women the right to vote (previously, only a few western states had granted limited suffrage).

During the Great Depression, the demographic landscape of the United States shifted further. The 1930s saw a net loss of immigrants, with the foreign-born population dropping from 11.6 percent to 8.8 percent during the decade. However, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal—a comprehensive set of federal programs and reforms designed to combat the effects of the crisis—played a certain role for many immigrants living in the United States. First, the Roosevelt administration ended some of the harshest deportation policies enacted between 1929 and 1932 under Republican President Hoover. As for the New Deal itself, it should be noted that it did not specifically address the needs of immigrant communities, and, in practice, European immigrants ended up benefiting more from federal programs than Mexican immigrants or African Americans. Nevertheless, Roosevelt succeeded in building a powerful Democratic electoral coalition—known to historians as the New Deal Coalition—that lasted until the 1970s. The coalition's membership included blue-collar workers, unionized labor, conservative Southern whites, progressive intellectuals from various backgrounds, and ethnic minorities such as Jews, Catholics, and African Americans. In a sense, Roosevelt's program brought segments of the European immigrant community into national politics.

The outbreak of World War II led to significant changes in several immigration-related policies. Initially, the *Alien Registration Act* and the *Nationality Act* of 1940 aimed to regulate U.S. entry and citizenship rights, primarily through an anti-fascist and anti-communist lens. In

1943, Congress repealed the 1882 *Chinese Exclusion Act* by passing the *Chinese Exclusion Repeal Act*, reopening immigration from China. Two years earlier, after all, the newly established Chinese Republic had become a U.S. ally. In 1948, legislation allowed for the admission of stateless refugees, given the millions of war-displaced persons globally, following widespread outrage over Jewish Holocaust survivors who struggled to find a country willing to accept them.

The emergence of the Cold War in the immediate postwar era profoundly impacted U.S. immigration policy. The conflict with Moscow required a reassessment of restrictive policies—partly due to international prestige—while also reigniting national security concerns and prompting tighter immigration controls. The 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act reflected this duality by reopening the country to workers essential for industrial and scientific development while simultaneously banning suspected communist agitators from entering the United States. However, it continued to rely on ethno-racial quotas, categorizing certain groups as more dangerous based on the political regimes in their countries of origin, which led President Truman to veto the bill—though Congress ultimately overrode his veto with a qualified majority.

The propaganda dimension continued to play a fundamental role. Just as racial issues and segregation caused international embarrassment—particularly in the context of the emerging Third World—restrictive immigration policies also conflicted with the U.S. image as a liberal and democratic nation. Therefore, when Moscow brutally suppressed the Hungarian uprising in 1956, President Eisenhower used his authority to bypass quotas and admit thousands of fleeing Hungarians into the United States.

In the postwar years, the middle-class lifestyle significantly reshaped the country. An increasing number of Americans adopted a suburban, middle-class lifestyle, while divisions based on class, ethnicity, religion, and regional identity faded. Driven by consumerism and substantial government spending, national prosperity offered material comfort and economic security to a growing number of Americans, making the middle class the dominant social group. The economic boom was accompanied by a sharp rise in birth rates, which many viewed positively as a way to maintain high consumption levels in the decades to come. This period became known as the baby boom, with more than four million children born annually until 1965. The population surge significantly impacted the housing market, public school systems, welfare programs, and popular culture. The new

middle-class suburbs brought together people from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, living side by side and attending the same churches, schools, and shopping centers. This trend, combined with restrictions on new arrivals, led to the decline of traditional European ethnic identities, with fewer first- and second-generation immigrants in the population.

Rising calls emerged for a radical overhaul of immigration policies, which increasingly conflicted with the U.S. new global commitments. Following President John F. Kennedy's landmark speech in June 1963, in which he called the quota system "intolerable" and advocated for immigration reform, Congress began debating and eventually passed the *Immigration and Naturalization Act* of 1965. The bill was co-sponsored by Representative Emanuel Celler of New York and Senator Philip Hart of Michigan, with strong support from Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, the late president's brother. Racial issues, coupled with the need to attract emerging Third World nations, made immigration reform nearly inevitable. It is no coincidence that two landmark U.S. legislative acts ending de jure segregation (the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964, the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, and the 24th Amendment of 1964) coincided with the most significant immigration reform since 1924.

FROM 1965 TO 1996. THE “GLORIOUS THIRTY”

The years from 1965 to 1996 could be considered the “Glorious Thirty” of U.S. immigration policy. Two key developments took place during this period: first, growing calls for reform of U.S. immigration policy, fueled by the civil rights movement’s increasing influence and support from both the Supreme Court and Kennedy-Johnson legislation; second, the reevaluation of the quota system, which was considered outdated and discriminatory, particularly toward Greeks, Poles, Portuguese, and Italians who were seeking entry into the United States.

As previously noted, the *Hart-Celler Act* of 1965, also known as the *Immigration and Nationality Act*, abolished the national origins quota system for immigration. Essentially, the 1921 and 1924 laws were repealed, reopening borders to migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, particularly in the case of refugees from the latter.

During congressional debates, experts testified that the reform legislation would result in minimal changes, highlighting that the policy of openness was largely symbolic. In fact, when the bill was signed into law in October 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson declared that the law: “is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or our power.” Nevertheless, it had an immediate, lasting, and profound impact, marking a clear break from past immigration policies.

What did it entail? Rather than the national origins quota system, the law focused on specific categories: relatives of U.S. citizens or permanent residents, individuals with useful skills, and refugees fleeing violence or unrest. Although the law abolished quotas, it still imposed limits on total immigration, per-country admissions, and specific categories. Family reunification continued to be a central goal, allowing entire families to leave their home countries and rebuild their lives in the United States.

As a result, in the first five years following the passage of the law, immigration from Asian countries to the United States—especially from war-torn Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Cambodia)—more than quadrupled, since Asian immigrants had previously faced significant entry barriers. In fact, in the three decades after the *Immigration and Nationality Act* of 1965, over 18 million legal immigrants entered the United States—more than three times the number admitted in the previous 30 years.

Thus, it can be said that it was the defining immigration law: the one that reshaped America's demographic makeup. In the 1950s, over half of immigrants were Europeans, and only 6% were Asians; by the 1990s, only 16% were Europeans, while 31% were Asians. Latino and African immigration also increased substantially, particularly from Mexico, the Philippines, Korea, and the Dominican Republic.

Meanwhile, the country underwent significant transformations. The 1970s marked a period of considerable change in many ways. Many Americans came to realize that postwar prosperity was over. The energy crisis, economic stagflation, rising unemployment, the ignominious withdrawal from Vietnam, and major political scandals (including the Pentagon Papers, Vice President Spiro Agnew's resignation for tax evasion, and Watergate) shattered the optimistic confidence typical of the postwar era. The country also faced demographic shifts: the baby-boom era had ended, and immigration from Asia, the Caribbean, and Africa played an increasingly significant role in population growth. Refugee numbers also surged—for instance, in 1975 alone, 86,000 South Vietnamese refugees arrived, triggering a steady annual increase in immigrants from Southeast Asia.

The decade witnessed profound cultural conflicts. By the late 1960s, societal divisions in America deepened as movements advocating social justice and racial equality became stronger and more radical. The civil rights movement, initially focused on equal rights and integration, fragmented as many African Americans abandoned nonviolent tactics. Chicanos, as well as Native Americans, asserted the recognition of their distinct cultural identities. The redefinition of American identity also took shape through new struggles led by the feminist movement, gay and lesbian groups, and advocates for Americans with disabilities.

Amid growing societal conflicts and concerns over America's perceived decline, a more conservative and traditionalist vision of the American model regained prominence. Religion served as a crucial unifying force during this period. The 1970s witnessed a significant religious revival, which soon evolved, in some respects, into fundamentalism. Many of the new, charismatic religious leaders tapped into the anxieties of a segment of American society, fearful of the country's direction, and condemned feminism, liberalism, divorce, homosexuality, and secularism, while advocating a return to what they considered the original American values. These demands soon amplified the political influence of emerging American conservatism, which had been gaining momentum since at least

the mid-1960s and would eventually find its champion in Reagan in the early 1980s. Within the complex framework of the New Right movement, there was also space for the more strongly anti-immigrant factions, as well as those with a nativist stance, which had never fully faded within society.

Against this backdrop, internal conflict and polarization—fueled by the personalization of political battles, rising political costs, and the powerful expansion of media—made immigration a central public debate topic and a persistent source of political contention. In the 1980s, over seven million immigrants, many undocumented, entered the United States, making up more than a third of the decade’s total population growth. By that time, only one-tenth of these immigrants were from Europe. Major regions of origin had shifted to Latin America, Central America, the Caribbean, Asia, and the Middle East. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, illegal immigration persisted as a contentious political issue, partly due to the emergence of overland corridors between Canada and Mexico. Long-standing fears resurfaced, particularly concerning the challenges of assimilating newcomers and their impact on low-skilled American jobs. In the early 1980s, major labor unions such as the AFL-CIO advocated for systemic reform, calling for measures to reduce the irregular status of a substantial segment of the workforce.

The Immigration Reform Act of 1986 sought to address the issue by tightening immigration enforcement, expanding legal immigration pathways, and imposing stricter controls with harsher penalties and sanctions. While the law featured two amnesty programs for unauthorized immigrants (providing amnesty to over three million undocumented immigrants), its stricter penalties made the legislation harsher than expected. In short, the Johnson era had clearly come to an end. As a result, the *Immigration Act* of 1990, while raising the total immigration cap to 700,000 people, increasingly structured admission pathways, particularly favoring Eastern Europeans following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. This reshaped immigration flows by emphasizing previously underrepresented groups.

The “glorious cycle” ended amid rising anti-immigrant sentiment fueled by the early 1990s economic recession, as low-income Americans competed for jobs with immigrants willing to accept lower wages.

Meanwhile, the United States had undergone further changes. The 1990 census showed that one in four Americans had African, Asian, Hispanic, or Native ancestry. Just a decade earlier, the figure had been one in five. The urban landscape was also transforming, with major cities becoming

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increasingly less ethnically white. Consider Chicago, where, by the 1990s, Hispanics and African Americans together made up 60 percent of the population. Consider California, which by then was receiving one in three incoming immigrants, making it the most populous state in the United States.

FROM 1996 TO THE PRESENT

The second half of the 1990s witnessed a renewed surge in immigration debates and discussions. Despite the passage of the Immigration Act of 1990, illegal immigration increased by 2% from 1990 to 1995, reaching approximately 5.7 million individuals living in the United States by mid-decade. A segment of public opinion, along with a portion of the political establishment, became increasingly convinced of the need to take more decisive action to deter illegal immigration into the country. In the deeply polarized atmosphere of the culture wars that marked the country, many viewed immigration primarily as a threat, stealing jobs from Americans, and felt that it was crucial to restrict it. Nonetheless, many economists continued to view immigration as a vital asset to the country, particularly as newcomers were taking on jobs that American workers had neglected.

Despite internal tensions and political polarization, the 1990s ultimately became a time of perceived prosperity for most Americans, driven largely by economic growth. This was partly due to decisions from the 1970s, but primarily to the rise of the digital technology sector, known as the New Economy. The U.S. economic recovery was bolstered by globalization, a phenomenon not new but which gained momentum in the post-Cold War era, largely due to the actions of the U.S. administration. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Thomas Friedman even referred to the dawn of a new “age of globalization.” The lowering of global barriers naturally facilitated immigration, bringing 13 million people into the United States during the 1990s—over a million per year. The internationalization of the economy brought significant changes to the labor market, with the service and tertiary sectors growing at the cost of agriculture and manufacturing. This made certain jobs less desirable to Americans, leading to a segmentation of the labor market and directing migration flows toward specific jobs.

One fact was already clear: between 1992 and the 2000s, irregular immigration surged while legal immigration fell. This sparked public debate, generating dissatisfaction with current regulations and calls for stricter immigration controls, especially on illegal aliens.

At the federal level, however, action proved cumbersome and challenging due in part to political polarization: in 1994, Republicans led by Newt Gingrich regained the majority in Congress for the first time in 40 years; major initiatives thus shifted to the state level, at least until 1996. Notably,

California, with its large undocumented population, enacted *Propositions* 187 (1994) and 227 (1998), reducing aid for undocumented immigrants and abolishing bilingual education in public schools.

Considering the prominence of immigration in public debate, it was inevitable that the 1996 election would focus on this issue. Perceiving—after *Proposition* 187—that part of public opinion had moved toward restrictive positions, the campaigns of Bill Clinton and Bob Dole mirrored this shift. Both party platforms, while stressing that America had always been a “nation of immigrants,” ultimately embraced a similarly restrictive stance. The Democrats, while denouncing Republican nativist excesses, stressed that the United States must remain “a nation of laws,” declaring illegal immigration intolerable and requiring action to stop it.

In the weeks leading up to the election, Congress enacted a series of laws (with partial Democratic support) aimed at tightening entry for undocumented immigrants. The *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* (August 1996) limited legal immigrants’ access to public assistance programs until naturalization and urged states to impose similar restrictions on state-run services. The *Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act* of April 1996 (enacted after the 1993 World Trade Center and 1995 Oklahoma attacks) introduced measures to expel foreign terrorists and amended the *Immigration and Nationality Act*, enabling the detention or deportation of nonresident aliens convicted of specific crimes. Many of these provisions, however, were scarcely enforced until the issues of terrorism and national security became inextricably linked with immigration after 9/11. Finally, the 1996 *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act* established an increase in border control personnel, authorized the construction of additional barriers along the Mexican border, and increased penalties for various immigration law violations. Additionally, three- and ten-year bans were imposed on aliens attempting to re-enter the U.S. after having previously stayed in the country illegally. By addressing both border control and immigrants’ access to social programs, the new law marked the start of a new chapter in U.S. immigration policy.

However, Congress’s restrictive stance shifted in the following years. From 1997 to 1998, Congress reviewed and, in several cases, repealed stricter immigration provisions enacted in 1996. This shift occurred both because Clinton’s second term was much less aligned with the previous positions and because the strong electoral mobilization of Hispanic Americans in the most recent elections demonstrated that the restrictive

front could be defeated (as it indeed was), even in the country's most conservative heartlands. At least for the time being, then, the anti-immigration turn seemed to have significantly weakened, if not entirely halted.

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York and Washington fundamentally changed the situation and, above all, the tone of the debate. A pervasive sense of insecurity swept across the country, reflected in the unilateral, aggressive, and in some respects radical actions taken by the Bush administration. Combating terrorism immediately became the top priority. Immigration policy shifted from focusing primarily on economic issues to prioritizing homeland security. The fear – even in the public imagination – that potential terrorists might be among the newcomers fueled a climate of widespread hostility toward the Muslims living in America, around four million people.

The *USA Patriot Act*, enacted soon after the attack, significantly expanded deportation powers against suspected terrorists and authorized the Attorney General to detain foreign nationals without formal charges, suspending due process rights. In 2002, the *Homeland Security Act* created the Department of Homeland Security, merging the functions of 22 different agencies into one centralized department. This transfer placed many immigration-related agencies under the Department's jurisdiction, reorganizing them into three new entities: Customs and Border Protection, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and Citizenship and Immigration Services. Since the majority of unauthorized immigration occurred through Mexico, Congress enacted the *Secure Fence Act* in 2006, authorizing the construction of a 700-mile wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

The administration also introduced a series of regulatory and policy changes, many of which aimed at Arab, Muslim, and South Asian communities. These policies included a new system for tracking students and visitors entering and exiting the United States; the collection of information on individuals from specific countries; and allowing immigration agents to detain immigrants without charges for more than 48 hours under undefined exceptional circumstances. Over time, however, these measures eroded the United States' international prestige and tarnished its image as a welcoming nation.

Data show that irregular immigration steadily increased during the Bush presidency, peaking significantly in 2007. It is therefore no surprise that the issue became central once again in the 2008 elections, which were won by Barack Obama. The legacy that Bush Jr. left to the new administra-

tion was a heavy one: a tarnished international reputation, two unpopular and costly military interventions still ongoing, and a new and troubling economic recession.

The United States appeared more diverse than ever. In 2006, the population officially surpassed 300 million (up from 100 million in 1915 and 200 million in 1967), with a level of diversity greater than ever before. This shift was partly driven by the fact that, starting with the 2000 Census, Americans were for the first time allowed to identify with more than one ethnic group.

During the 1990s, the Black population grew twelve times faster than the white population, partly driven by immigration. By 2003, Latinos officially became the second-largest ethnic group in the United States, surpassing African Americans. Asian immigration remained significant; by 2007, Asians or Asian Americans accounted for 5% of the U.S. population. Although most of this immigration was legal, about 11.1 million undocumented individuals were living in the United States by 2005, compared to only 3 million in 1980. In 2005, undocumented workers accounted for nearly 5% of the entire U.S. labor force. The early 2000s underscored the segmented nature of the U.S. labor market: by 2009, immigrants were largely concentrated in manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. Nonetheless, immigrants were far from a homogeneous group, showcasing a broad range of skills across various sectors. In the early 2000s, Mexican workers commonly held jobs in construction and cleaning services, while Southeast Asian immigrants were more likely to occupy managerial and healthcare positions.

While certain continuities existed between the Bush and Obama administrations, the new president undeniably capitalized—both symbolically and politically—on the perception of a clear break with the past. This underscores the deliberate effort to redefine U.S. immigration policy and reclaim its image as a welcoming nation. Obama aimed to facilitate the path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants without criminal records who had resided in the United States for at least five years. Approximately 5 million of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S. stood to benefit. The political climate, however, remained tense, as evidenced by 26 Republican-led states winning an appeal, which resulted in a federal court ruling the president's executive order unconstitutional.

Many observers also noted that, despite political rhetoric, deportations of undocumented immigrants increased under Obama: from 475,000 dur-

ing the last six years of the Bush administration to 950,000 between 2009 and 2014.

The Democratic administration followed a two-track strategy: easing legalization for undocumented immigrants while reinforcing and streamlining border control policies. Following Obama's victory, the Democratic-majority Congress reintroduced the DREAM Act in 2009 (first proposed a few months before 9/11) to legalize many undocumented immigrants who had entered the country as children, but the Senate rejected the measure. In 2012, Obama launched the *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals* (DACA) program, granting temporary work permits and protection from deportation to undocumented immigrants who met specific criteria. Between 2007 and 2016, the number of unauthorized immigrants dropped by 13 percent. Meanwhile, legal immigration rose by 22 percent during the same period, adding over 6 million people.

The United States remained sharply divided on multiple fronts. Long before Trump's political rise, many had warned of mounting political disaffection, citing an increasingly paranoid and chaotic debate, carried on especially online. Support for both major parties waned, and trust in the government plummeted: from 73 percent in 1958 to just 19 percent in 2015. In the United States and globally (including Europe), widespread distrust of institutional politics prompted new responses from both right and left.

Immigration returned to the forefront of public debate. Trump outperformed other Republican candidates (who generally held more conventional views) thanks largely to his restrictive, nativist "America First" immigration stance, featuring a Muslim entry ban, a border wall with Mexico, and efforts to repeal birthright citizenship (protected by the Fourteenth Amendment).

After assuming the presidency, Trump, citing national security concerns, issued a series of executive orders in order to stop granting entry visas to individuals from Muslim countries. The administration backed the proposed RAISE Act of 2017, which sought to halve legal immigration by cutting green card issuance by 50 percent, though the bill ultimately failed.

The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on legal immigration, prompting the Trump administration to virtually halt the issuance of green cards (-90.5% in April 2020) and NIVs (non-immigrant visas, -93%). Essentially, COVID-19-related restrictions became the most significant—albeit temporary—immigration policies enacted by the Trump administration.

During Trump's tenure, internal divisions in American society deepened, driven by political and cultural clashes—often stoked by Trump himself—over critical issues such as race relations, abortion, gender identity, and feminism.

The 2020 election campaign refocused attention on immigration. Candidate Joe Biden strongly criticized Trump's approach, calling it amoral and discriminatory, and pledged to immediately reverse controversial policies, such as prolonged border detentions for undocumented immigrants and family separations. Actually, Biden had made clear his intention to revive Obama's proposed plan, including a path to citizenship for undocumented residents, paired with stricter border control enforcement.

Regardless of party stances on specific agenda issues, the 2020 elections have already gone down in history for what they revealed about the state of U.S. institutional stability. The seemingly irreparable level of political polarization emerged in full force on January 6, 2021, when a group of Trump supporters staged a full-scale insurrection, storming the Capitol in an attempt to block the certification of Joe Biden's victory.

Upon taking office, the Biden administration faced enormous challenges related to the health and economic crises caused by Covid-19, which crippled entire economic sectors and led to widespread unemployment. On the international stage, contentious relations with Russia and China dominated much of the administration's attention. It comes as no surprise, then, that immigration was not an immediate priority for the presidency.

However, in line with his campaign promises, Biden promptly halted construction of the Mexico border wall and ended the controversial "Remain in Mexico" program launched in 2019, which required immigrants from Mexico to stay there until their U.S. immigration court hearings.

On January 20, 2021, Biden also announced the introduction of a *U.S. Citizenship Act*, reaffirming his commitment to modernize the U.S. immigration system. The bill outlined a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, including DREAMers and agricultural workers, while strengthening border security measures. The stated objective was to reduce delays in immigration processes related to family reunification and employment, expedite asylum and refugee applications, and tackle the root causes of Central American migration. It further aimed to modernize the system by fostering diversity, simplifying procedures, and providing resources for immigrant integration. However, the bill stalled in Congress, especially in the Senate, where Democrats had only a narrow

majority. The bill sparked debate over the proposed eight-year path to citizenship and stricter border security measures. To break the stalemate, some Democratic lawmakers pursued more limited immigration measures. Though many of these efforts were blocked or scaled back, Biden achieved significant immigration reforms. In his first three years in office, the administration enacted 535 immigration-related policies. These efforts restored, and in some cases surpassed, pre-pandemic legal admission levels, with refugee admissions nearing the record highs of the 1990s. A new border procedure to deter irregular arrivals was implemented, temporary humanitarian protections were extended to hundreds of thousands of migrants, and law enforcement priorities were focused on specific categories of unauthorized immigrants.

The last major immigration reform attempt occurred in July 2023, when Democratic senators reintroduced a bill to grant green cards to undocumented immigrants. The proposal failed to gain support, leaving comprehensive U.S. immigration law reforms still unrealized despite repeated efforts. Even a bipartisan bill introduced in the Senate in early 2024—intended to curb mass arrivals at the southern border—ultimately failed after a few months due to disagreements between the two parties, which were then focused on campaigning for the November 2024 elections.

Regarding legal immigration, new trends have emerged over the past decade that lawmakers will need to address. Although Mexico has remained the top source of immigrants since 1980, the dynamics of new arrivals changed significantly after 2010. Immigrants today are more likely to come from Asia, especially India and China. From 2013 to 2021, India and China surpassed Mexico as the top sources of new arrivals, though during the pandemic, mobility restrictions restored Mexico's leading position as the top source. Between 2010 and 2021, the immigrant population from India grew by 929,000, while that from China/Hong Kong increased by 572,000.¹

The immigrant population from the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Guatemala, Honduras, Brazil, Nigeria, Colombia, the Philippines, and El Salvador each increased by about 200,000 individuals since 2010. Among groups with over 100,000 entries in 2021, Venezuelan immigrants experienced the fastest growth from 2010 to 2021 (196%), followed by Nepali (151%), Afghan (127%), Burmese (111%), and Nigerian (102%) immi-

¹ Migration Policy Institute's Data (MPI)

grants. In comparison, the total foreign-born population grew by 13% from 2010 to 2021.

Gender is also an important factor. In the early 20th century, women were significantly outnumbered by men during immigration waves. Today, however, they make up about 51% of the U.S. immigrant population. Some groups of immigrant women have higher labor force participation rates than U.S.-born women.

In recent years, it's not by chance that gender has become increasingly central to migration studies, also in historical perspective. Gender dynamics shape migration decisions and settlement patterns, often transforming traditional roles in both sending and receiving countries. Numerous scholars have emphasized the critical role immigrant women of Mexican origin play in the United States in addressing exclusionary dynamics that they and their communities often encounter.

The ongoing influx of undocumented immigrants kept immigration central to the political debate ahead of the elections, especially after the pandemic subsided, reopening migration routes at the southern border. Gallup polls conducted throughout 2024, available online, indicated that immigration emerged as the top concern for most respondents. A growing hardline faction within the Democratic Party has urged the president to adopt stricter immigration policies. During her presidential campaign in 2024, candidate Kamala Harris promised to pursue comprehensive border reforms, tighten migration laws, and “enforce our laws” against illegal immigration.

Estimating the number of undocumented immigrants in the United States remains inherently difficult. However, estimates from the Center for Immigration Studies indicate that as of early 2022, approximately 11.35 million undocumented immigrants were residing in the country. More significantly, they reveal that the total foreign-born population (those born abroad and naturalized) had climbed to a record 46.7 million (2022 data), highlighting once again the country's multicultural and multiethnic identity.

Immigration clearly remains a central issue in U.S. politics, strongly influencing voter preferences.

It is worth noting that the United States currently hosts the world's largest migrant population, exceeding the combined totals of the next four countries—Germany, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the United Kingdom—according to 2020 United Nations data. Though the United States represents only 5% of the global population, it hosts nearly 20% of all international migrants.

MAJOR LAWS ON IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES (FROM 1882 TO THE PRESENT)

For the full text of these laws, see: <https://uslaw.link/>

- Immigration Act of 1882 (Pub. L. 47–376)
- Chinese Exclusion Act (Pub. L. 47–126) 1882
- Geary Act (Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892) (Pub. L.52-60) 1893
- Immigration Act 1891 (Pub. L. 51–551)
- Immigration Act of 1903 (or Anarchist Exclusion Act) Pub. L. 57–162
- Immigration Act of 1907 (Public law 59-96)
- Immigration Act 1917 (Pub. L. 64–301)
- Immigration Act 1918 (Dillingham-Hardwick Act) (Pub. L. 65–221)
- Emergency Quota Act 1921 (Pub. L. 67–5)
- Immigration Act 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act)(Pub. L. 68–139)
- Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act) (P.L. 82-414)
- The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart–Celler Act) Pub. L. 89–236
- Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1976 and 1978
- Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA or the Simpson–Mazzoli Act) (Pub. L. 99–603)
- Immigration Act 1990 (Pub. L. 101–649)
- Immigration and Nationality Technical Corrections Act of 1994 (Pub. L. 103–416)
- Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (Pub. L. 104–208)
- Homeland Security Act (HSA) of 2002, (Pub. L. 107–296)

APPENDIX – A

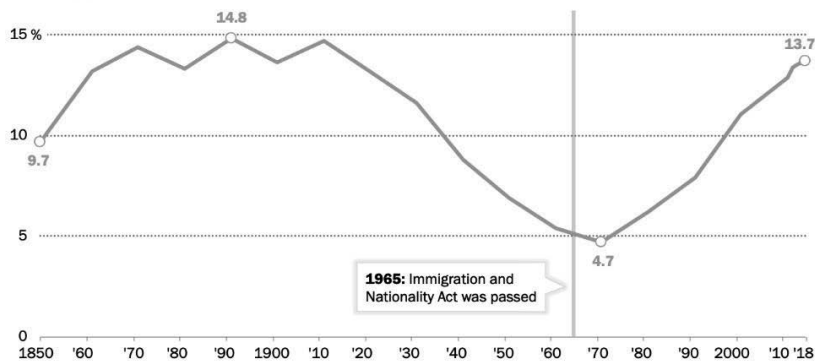
TABLES AND CHARTS

1. *The Numbers*
2. *Migration Waves and Origins*
3. *Labor Integration*
4. *The Language Issue*
5. *Public Perception and Deportations*

1. The Numbers

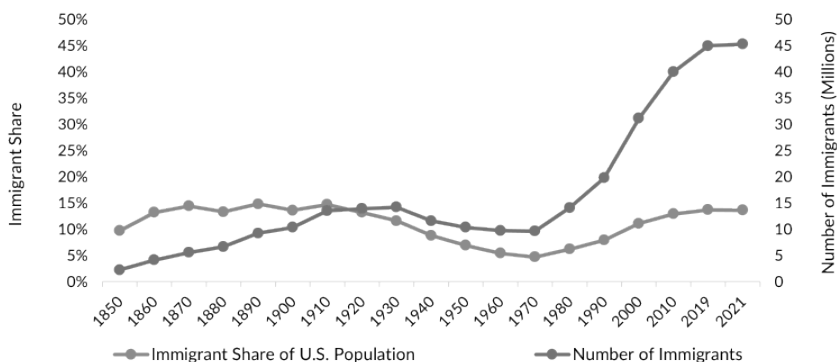
Immigrant share of U.S. population nears historic high

% of U.S. population that is foreign born



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850-2000" and Pew Research Center tabulations of 2010-2018 American Community Survey (IPUMS).

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Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI) tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-21 American Community Surveys (ACS), and 1970, 1990, and 2000 decennial census. All other data are from Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 1990" (Working Paper no. 29, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, 1999).

BETWEEN ADMISSION, RESTRICTION, AND REGULATION

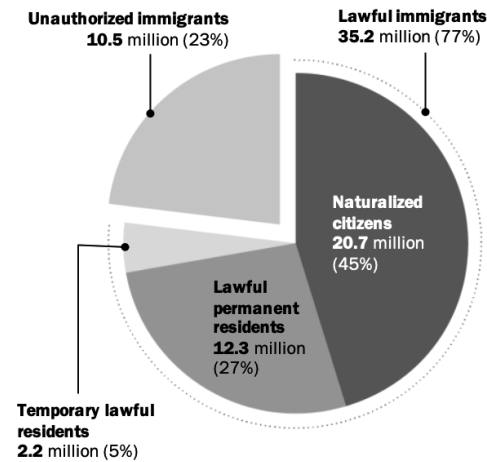
Top States by Absolute and Percent Growth in Immigrant Population, 2010-21

Rank	Absolute Growth		Percent Change	
	1	Florida	951,000	North Dakota
2	Texas	950,000	Delaware	41%
3	California	301,000	South Dakota	39%
4	New Jersey	290,000	Idaho	32%
5	Washington	257,000	Kentucky	29%
6	Massachusetts	244,000	Washington	29%

Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2010 and 2021 American Community Surveys (ACS)

Unauthorized immigrants are almost a quarter of U.S. foreign-born population

Foreign-born population estimates, 2017

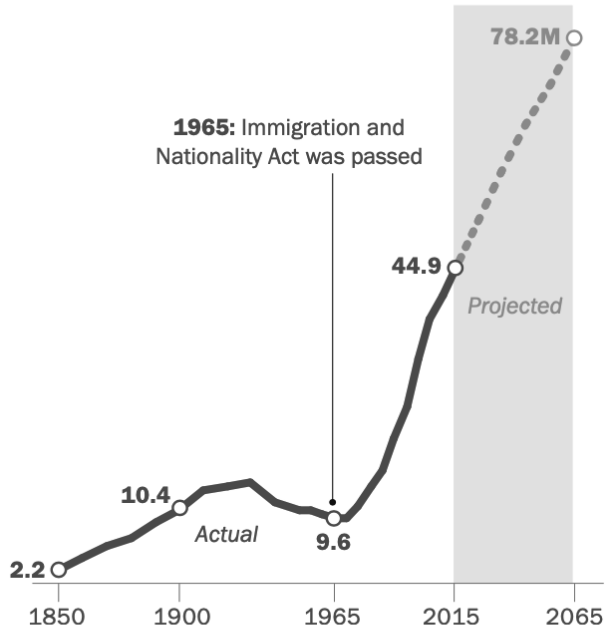


Note: Figures for the total and subgroups differ from published U.S. Census Bureau totals because census data have been augmented and adjusted to account for undercount of the population. All numbers are rounded. Unauthorized immigrants include some with temporary protection from deportation under Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), as well as pending asylum cases.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented U.S. Census Bureau data.

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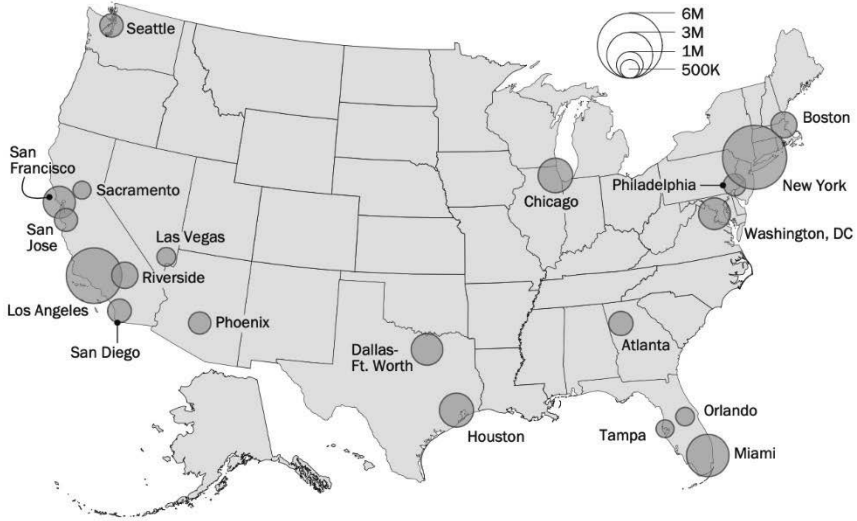
U.S. foreign-born population reached 45 million in 2015, projected to reach 78 million by 2065



Source: Gibson and Jung (2006) for 1850 to 1890; Edmonston and Passel (1994) estimates for 1900-1955; Pew Research Center estimates for 1960-2015 based on adjusted census data; Pew Research Center projections for 2015-2065.

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20 metropolitan areas with the largest number of immigrants in 2018

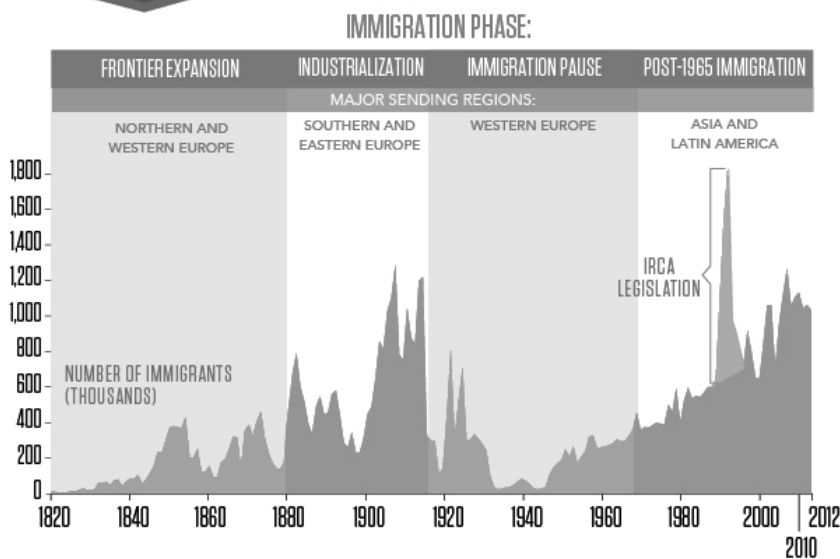


Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2018 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

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2. Migration Waves and Origins

U.S. IMMIGRATION HAS OCCURRED IN WAVES, WITH PEAKS FOLLOWED BY TROUGHS



110k

NUMBER OF FOREIGNERS WHO ENTER THE UNITED STATES PER DAY

7.5 MILLION

LEGAL IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES FROM LATIN AMERICA AND ASIA, 2000-2009

12.2 MILLION

PEAK NUMBER OF UNAUTHORIZED IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES, 2007

Note: IRCA adjustments refer to the amnesty provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, under which 2.7 million undocumented foreign U.S. residents obtained legal immigrant status.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security, 2012).

BETWEEN ADMISSION, RESTRICTION, AND REGULATION

Year	Asia	Americas	Australasia	Africa	Northwestern Europe	Central Europe	Eastern Europe	Southern Europe
1820	5	38	-	1	6,499	973	15	204
1830	-	2,296	-	2	5,198	1,978	5	36
1840	1	3,815	-	6	50,228	29,709	8	188
1850	7	15,768	-	-	228,148	78,901	46	1,228
1860	5,476	6,343	-	126	84,492	54,573	69	2,075
1870	16,825	42,658	36	31	290,567	122,873	913	4,273
1880	5,839	101,692	968	18	225,575	104,082	5,049	13,985
1890	4,448	3,833	1,167	112	193,697	159,699	36,321	55,963
1900	17,946	5,455	428	30	85,212	133,354	97,639	108,495

The number of immigrants by region of origin between 1820 and 1900. The data is taken from Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 Bicentennial Edition. The different regions of origin are composed as follows: Asia (Turkey, China, India, Japan, Philippines, Other countries); Americas (Canada, Mexico, West Indies, Other countries); Australasia (Australia, New Zealand, Other Pacific Islands); Northwestern Europe (Great Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Other countries); Central Europe (Germany, Poland, Other countries); Eastern Europe (Baltic States, Russia, USSR, Other countries); Southern Europe (Italy, Other countries).

APPENDIX A: TABLES AND CHARTS

Year	Asia	Americas	Australasia	Africa	Northwestern Europe	Central Europe	Eastern Europe	Southern Europe
1910	23,533	89,534	1,907	1,702	170,915	290,020	212,079	253,277
1920	17,505	162,666	2,185	648	85,997	11,480	5,664	143,154
1930	4,535	88,104	1,051	572	70,545	44,984	4,931	26,974
1940	2,050	17,822	228	202	15,993	25,850	1,389	7,215
1950	4,508	44,191	517	849	35,111	147,080	803	16,117
1960	21,604	119,525	2,140	1,925	50,297	42,741	1,617	25,516
1970	90,215	161,727	3,639	7,099	24,736	23,056	2,193	60,661

The number of immigrants by region of origin between 1910 and 1970. The data is taken from Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970 Bicentennial Edition. The different regions of origin are composed as follows: Asia (Turkey, China, India, Japan, Philippines, Other countries); Americas (Canada, Mexico, West Indies, Other countries); Australasia (Australia, New Zealand, Other Pacific Islands); Northwestern Europe (Great Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Other countries); Central Europe (Germany, Poland, Other countries); Eastern Europe (Baltic States, Russia, USSR, Other countries); Southern Europe (Italy, Other countries).

3. *Labor Integration*

**Total U.S. labor force grows since 2007,
but number of unauthorized immigrant
workers declines**

Labor force estimates, in millions

	2017	2007	Change
U.S. total	164.4	153.3	+11.2
U.S. born	135.7	127.9	+7.8
Lawful immigrant	21.2	17.2	+4.0
Unauthorized immigrant	7.6	8.2	-0.6

Note: All numbers are rounded; changes calculated from unrounded numbers. Based on civilian labor force.

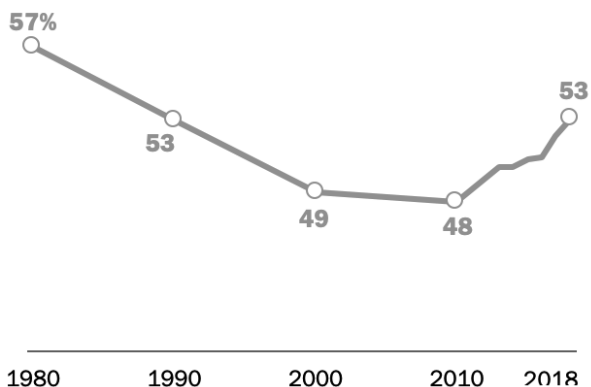
Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented U.S. Census Bureau data.

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4. *The Language Issue*

Half of immigrants in U.S. are English proficient as of 2018

% of foreign-born population ages 5 and older who are English proficient



Note: English proficient are those who speak only English at home or if they speak a non-English language at home, they indicate they can speak English at least “very well.”

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 1980-2000 decennial censuses and 2010, 2013-2018 American Community Surveys (IPUMS).

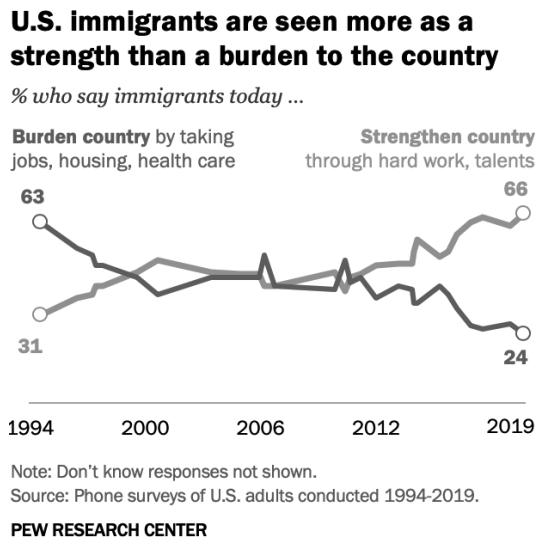
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BETWEEN ADMISSION, RESTRICTION, AND REGULATION

	Number	Share of All Speakers of Foreign Languages
TOTAL	67,754,000	100.0%
Spanish	41,255,000	60.9%
Chinese (incl. Mandarin and Cantonese)	3,405,000	5.0%
Tagalog (incl. Filipino)	1,715,000	2.5%
Vietnamese	1,523,000	2.2%
Arabic	1,391,000	2.1%
French (incl. Cajun)	1,175,000	1.7%
Korean	1,073,000	1.6%
Russian	1,045,000	1.5%
Portuguese	937,000	1.4%
Haitian	895,000	1.3%
Hindi	865,000	1.3%
German	857,000	1.3%
Yoruba, Twi, Igbo, other languages of Western Africa	640,000	0.9%
Amharic, Somali, other Afro-Asiatic languages	596,000	0.9%
Yiddish, Pennsylvania Dutch, other West Germanic languages	574,000	0.8%
Polish	533,000	0.8%
Italian	513,000	0.8%
Urdu	508,000	0.7%

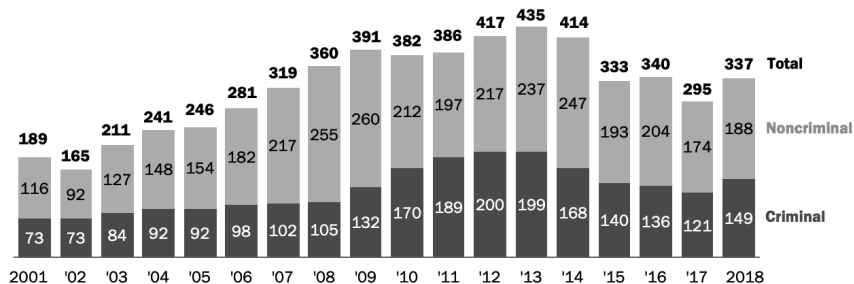
Note: The table shows the languages spoken by at least 500,000 people.
 Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau 2021 ACS.

5. Public Perception and Deportations



U.S. deportations of immigrants slightly up in 2018

In thousands, by fiscal year and criminal status



Note: Criminal status is based on prior criminal conviction. Data refers to removals by U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security publications. Data for 2001-2004: "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2010." Data for 2005-2014: "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics: 2014." Data for 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 from "Yearbook of Immigration Statistics" for each respective year.

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SOURCES:

- <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/>
- https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#immigrants_now_historically
- <https://www.prb.org/resources/trends-in-migration-to-the-u-s/>

APPENDIX – B

PRESIDENTIAL SPEECHES

1924 - Calvin Coolidge
1952 - Harry Truman
1965 - Lyndon B. Johnson
1986 - Ronald Reagan
1996 - Bill Clinton
2006 - George W. Bush
2014 - Barack Obama
2019 - Donald Trump
2024 - Joe Biden

STATEMENT ON SIGNING
THE IMMIGRATION ACT OF 1924

CALVIN COOLIDGE
May 26, 1924

In signing this bill, which in its main features I heartily approve, I regret the impossibility of severing from it the exclusion provision, which in the light of existing law affects especially the Japanese. I gladly recognize that the enactment of this provision does not imply any change in our sentiment of admiration and cordial friendship for the Japanese people, a sentiment which has had and will continue to have abundant manifestation. The bill rather expresses the determination of the Congress to exercise its prerogative in defining by legislation the control of immigration, instead of leaving it to international arrangements. It should be noted that the bill exempts from the exclusion provision Government officials, those coming to this country as tourists or temporarily for business or pleasure, those in transit, seamen, those already resident here and returning from temporary absences, professors, ministers of religion, students, and those who enter solely to carry on trade in pursuance of existing treaty provisions. But we have had for many years an understanding with Japan by which the Japanese Government has voluntarily undertaken to prevent the emigration of laborers to the U.S. and in view of this history relationship and of the feeling which inspired it would have been much better, in my judgment, and more effective in this actual control of immigration, if we had continued to invite that cooperation which Japan was ready to give and had thus avoided creating any ground for misapprehension by an unnecessary statutory enactment.

That course would not have derogated from the authority of the Congress to deal with the question in any exigency requiring its action. There is scarcely any ground for disagreement as to the result we want, but this method of securing it is unnecessary and deplorable at this time. If the exclusion provision stood alone, I should disapprove it without hesitation, if sought in this way at this time. But this bill is comprehensive measure dealing with the whole subject of immigration and setting up the necessary administrative machinery. The present quota act of 1921 will terminate on June 30 next. It is of great importance that a comprehensive

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measure should take its place and that the arrangements for its administration should be provided at once to avoid hardship and confusion. I must therefore consider the bill as a whole and the imperative need of the country for legislation of this general character. For this reason, the bill is approved.

REMARKS ON VETO OF BILL TO REVISE THE LAWS
RELATING TO IMMIGRATION, NATURALIZATION,
AND NATIONALITY

HARRY S. TRUMAN

June 25, 1952

To the House of Representatives:

I return herewith, without my approval, H.R. 5678, the proposed Immigration and Nationality Act. In outlining my objections to this bill, I want to make it clear that it contains certain provisions that meet with my approval. This is a long and complex piece of legislation. It has 164 separate sections, some with more than 40 subdivisions. It presents a difficult problem of weighing the good against the bad, and arriving at a judgment on the whole. H.R. 5678 is an omnibus bill which would revise and codify all of our laws relating to immigration, naturalization, and nationality. A general revision and modernization of these laws unquestionably are needed and long overdue, particularly with respect to immigration.

But this bill would not provide us with an immigration policy adequate for the present world situation. Indeed, the bill, taking all its provisions together, would be a step backward and not a step forward. In view of the crying need for reform in the field of immigration, I deeply regret that I am unable to approve H.R. 5678. In recent years, our immigration policy has become a matter of major national concern. Long dormant questions about the effect of our immigration laws now assume first rate importance. What we do in the field of immigration and naturalization is vital to the continued growth and internal development of the U.S. — to the economic and social strength of our country — which is the core of the defense of the free world. Our immigration policy is equally, if not more important to the conduct of our foreign relationships and to our responsibilities of moral leadership in the struggle for world peace. In one respect, this bill recognizes the great international significance of our immigration and naturalization policy, and takes a step to improve existing laws. All racial bars to naturalization would be removed, and at least some minimum immigration quota would be afforded to each of the free nations of Asia. I have long urged that racial or national barriers to naturalization be abol-

ished. This was one of the recommendations in my civil rights message to the Congress on February 2, 1948. On February 19, 1951, the House of Representatives unanimously passed a bill to carry it out. But now this most desirable provision comes before me embedded in a mass of legislation which would perpetuate injustices of long standing against many other nations of the world, hamper the efforts we are making to rally the men of East and West alike to the cause of freedom, and intensify the repressive and inhumane aspects of our immigration procedures. The price is too high, and in good conscience I cannot agree to pay it. I want all our residents of Japanese ancestry, and all our friends throughout the far East, to understand this point clearly. I cannot take the step I would like to take, and strike down the bars that prejudice has erected against them, without, at the same time, establishing new discriminations against the peoples of Asia and approving harsh and repressive measures directed at all who seek a new life within our boundaries. I am sure that with a little more time and a little more discussion in this country the public conscience and the good sense of the American people will assert themselves, and we shall be in a position to enact an immigration and naturalization policy that will be fair to all [...]

With the idea of quotas in general there is no quarrel. Some numerical limitation must be set, so that immigration will be within our capacity to absorb. But the overall limitation of numbers imposed by national origins quota system is too small for our needs today, and the country by country limitations create a pattern that is insulting to large numbers of our finest citizens, irritating to our allies abroad, and foreign to our purposes and ideals [...] It repudiates our basic religious concepts, our belief in the brotherhood of man, and in the words of St. Paul that "there is neither nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." The basis of this quota system was false and unworthy in 1924. It is even worse now. At the present time, this quota system keeps out the very people we want to bring in. It is incredible to me that, in this year of 1952, we should again be enacting into law such a slur on the patriotism, the capacity, and the decency of a large part of our citizenry. Today, we have entered into an alliance, the North Atlantic Treaty, with Italy, Greece, and Turkey against one of the most terrible threats mankind has ever faced. We are asking them to join with us in protecting the peace of the world. We are helping them to build their defenses, and train their men, in the common cause. But, through this bill we say to their people: You are less worthy to come to this country than English men or Irishmen; you Italians, who

need to find homes abroad in the hundreds of thousands - you shall have a quota of 5,645; you Greeks, struggling to assist the helpless victims of a communist civil war — you shall have a quota of 308; and you Turks, you are brave defenders of the Eastern flank, but you shall have a quota of only 225!

Today, we are “protecting” ourselves, as we were in 1924, against being flooded by immigrants from Eastern Europe. This is fantastic. The countries of Eastern Europe have fallen under the communist yoke — they are silenced, fenced off by barbed wire and minefields - no one passes their borders but at the risk of his life. We do not need to be protected against immigrants from these countries — on the contrary we want to stretch out a helping hand, to save those who have managed to flee into Western Europe, to succor those who are brave enough to escape from barbarism, to welcome and restore them against the day when their countries will, as we hope, be free again. But this we cannot do, as we would like to do, because the quota for Poland is only 6,500, as against the 138,000 exiled Poles, all over Europe, who are asking to come to these shores; because the quota for the now subjugated Baltic countries is little more than 700 — against the 23,000 Baltic refugees imploring us to admit them to a new life here; because the quota for Rumania is only 289, and some 30,000 Rumanians, who have managed to escape the labor camps and the mass deportations of their Soviet masters, have asked our help. These are only a few examples of the absurdity, the cruelty of carrying over into this year of 1952 the isolationist limitations of our 1924 law.

In no other realm of our national life are we so hampered and stultified by the dead hand of the past, as we are in this field of immigration. We do not limit our cities to their 1920 boundaries — we do not hold our corporations to their 1920 capitalizations - we welcome progress and change to meet changing conditions in every sphere of life, except in the field of immigration. The time to shake off this dead weight of past mistakes is now. The time to develop a decent policy of immigration - a fitting instrument for our foreign policy and a true reflection of the ideals we stand for, at home and abroad — is now. In my earlier message on immigration, I tried to explain to the Congress that the situation we face in immigration is an emergency — that it must be met promptly. I have pointed out that in the last few years, we have blazed a new trail in immigration, through our Displaced Persons Program. Through the combined efforts of the Government and private agencies, working together not to keep people out, but to bring qualified people in, we summoned our resources of good

will and human feeling to meet the task. In this program, we have found better techniques to meet the immigration problems of the 1950s. None of this fruitful experience of the last 3 years is reflected in this bill before me. None of the crying human needs of this time of trouble is recognized in this bill. But it is not too late. The Congress can remedy these defects, and it can adopt legislation to meet the most critical problems before adjournment [...]

First, I urge the Congress to enact legislation removing racial barriers against Asians from our laws. Failure to take this step profits us nothing and can only have serious consequences for our relations with the peoples of the far East. A major contribution to this end would be the prompt enactment by the Senate of H.R. 403. That bill, already passed by the House of Representatives, would remove the racial bars to the naturalization of Asians. Second, I strongly urge the Congress to enact the temporary, emergency immigration legislation which I recommended 3 months ago. In my message of March 24, 1952, I advised the Congress that one of the gravest problems arising from the present world crisis is created by overpopulation in parts of Western Europe. That condition is aggravated by the flight and expulsion of people from behind the iron curtain. In view of these serious problems, I asked the Congress to authorize admission of 300,000 additional immigrants to the U.S. over a 3-period. These immigrants would include Greek nationals, Dutch nationals, Italians from Italy and Trieste, Germans and persons of Germanic origin, and religious and political refugees from communism Eastern Europe. This temporary program is urgently needed. It is very important that the Congress act upon it this year. I urge the Congress give prompt and favorable consideration to the bills introduced by Senator Hendrickson and Representative Celler (S. 3109 and H.R. 7376), which will implement the recommendations contained in my message March 24. I very much hope that the Congress will take early action on these recommendations. Legislation to carry them out will correct some of the unjust provisions of our laws, will strengthen us at home and abroad, and will serve to relieve a great deal of the suffering and tension.

Note: On June 27, the U.S. Congress passed the bill over the President's veto.

REMARKS AT THE SIGNING OF THE IMMIGRATION BILL

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

October 3, 1965

Mr. Vice President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ambassador Goldberg, distinguished Members of the leadership of the Congress, distinguished Governors and mayors, my fellow countrymen: We have called the Congress here this afternoon not only to mark a very historic occasion, but also to settle a very old issue that is in dispute. That issue is, to what congressional district does Liberty Island really belong - Congressman Farberstein or Congressman Gallagher? It will be settled by whoever of the two can walk first to the top of the Statue of Liberty.

This bill that we will sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or our power. Yet, it is still one of the most important acts of this Congress and of this administration. For it does repair a very deep and painful flaw in the fabric of American justice. It corrects a cruel and enduring wrong in the conduct of the American Nation. Speaker McCormack and Congressman Celler almost 40 years ago first pointed that out in their maiden speeches in the Congress. And this measure that we will sign today will really make us truer to ourselves both as a country and as a people. It will strengthen us in a hundred unseen ways. I have come here to thank personally each Member of the Congress who labored so long and so valiantly to make this occasion come true today, and to make this bill a reality. I cannot mention all their names, for it would take much too long, but my gratitude — and that of this Nation - belongs to the 89th Congress. We are indebted, too, to the vision of the late beloved President John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and to the support given to this measure by the then Attorney General and now Senator, Robert F. Kennedy.

In the final days of consideration, this bill had no more able champion than the present Attorney General, Nicholas Katzenbach, who, with New York's own "Manny" Celler, and Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, and Congressman Feighan of Ohio, and Senator Mansfield and Senator Dirksen constituting the leadership of the Senate, and Senator Javits, helped to guide this bill to passage, along with the help of the Members

sitting in front of me today. This bill says simply that from this day forth those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here. This is a simple test, and it is a fair test. Those who can contribute most to this country - to its growth, to its strength, to its spirit - will be the first that are admitted to this land. The fairness of this standard is so self-evident that we may well wonder that it has not always been applied. Yet, the fact is that for over four decades the immigration policy of the U.S. has been twisted and has been distorted by the harsh injustice of the national origins quota system.

Under that system the ability of new immigrants to come to America depended upon the country of their birth. Only three countries were allowed to supply 70 percent of all the immigrants. Families were kept apart because a husband or a wife or a child had been born in the wrong place. Men of needed skill and talent were denied entrance because they came from southern or eastern Europe or from one of the developing continents. This system violated the basic principle of American democracy the principle that values and rewards each man on the basis of his merit as a man. It has been un-American in the highest sense, because untrue to the faith that brought thousands to these shores were a country. Today, with my signature, this system is abolished. We can now believe that it will never again shadow American Nation with the twin barriers of prejudice and Our beautiful America was built by a nation of strangers. From a hundred different places or more they have poured forth land, joining and blending in one mighty and irresistible The land flourished because it was fed from so because it was nourished by so many cultures and peoples.

And from this experience, almost unique in the history of nations, has come America's attitude toward the rest of the world. We, because of what we are, feel safer and stronger in a world as varied as the people who make it up — a world where no country rules another and all countries can deal with the basic problems of human dignity and deal with those problems in their own way. Now, under the monument which has welcomed so many to our shores, the American Nation returns to the finest of its traditions today. The days of unlimited immigration are past. But those who do come will come because of what they are, and not because of the land from which they sprung. When the earliest settlers poured into a wild continent there was no one to ask them where they came from. The only question was: Were they sturdy enough to make the journey, were they strong enough to clear the land, were they enduring enough to make a

home for freedom, and were they brave enough to die for liberty if it became necessary to do so?

And so it has been through all the great and testing moments of American history. Our history this year we see in Vietnam. Men there are dying — men named Fernandez, Zajac, Zelinko, Mariano, and McCormick. Neither the enemy who killed them nor the people whose independence they have fought to save ever asked them where they or their parents came from. They were all Americans. It was for free men and for America that they gave their all, they gave their lives and selves. By eliminating that same question as a test for immigration the Congress proves ourselves worthy of those men and worthy of our own traditions as a Nation.

So it is in that spirit that I declare this afternoon to the people of Cuba that those who seek refuge here in America will find it. The dedication of America to our traditions as an asylum for the oppressed is going to be upheld. I have directed the Departments of State and Justice and Health, Education, and Welfare to immediately make all the necessary arrangements to permit those in Cuba who seek freedom to make an orderly entry into the U.S. Our first concern will be with those Cubans who have been separated from their children and their parents and their husbands and their wives and that are now in this country. Our next concern is with those who are imprisoned for political reasons. And I will send to the Congress tomorrow a request for supplementary funds of \$12,600,000 to carry forth the commitment that I am making today. I am asking the Department of State to seek through the Swiss Government immediately the agreement of the Cuban Government in a request to the President of the International Red Cross Committee. The request is for the assistance of the Committee in processing the movement of refugees from Cuba to Miami. Miami will serve as a port of entry and a temporary stopping place for refugees as they settle in other parts of this country. And to all the voluntary agencies in the U.S., I appeal for their continuation and expansion of their magnificent work. Their help is needed in the reception and the settlement of those who choose to leave Cuba.

The Federal Government will work closely with these agencies in their tasks of charity and brotherhood. I want all the people of this great land of ours to know of the really enormous contribution which the compassionate citizens of Florida made to humanity and to decency. And all States in this Union can with Florida now in extending the hand of helpfulness and humanity our Cuban brothers. The lesson of our times is sharp and clear in this movement of people from one land to another. Once again,

BETWEEN ADMISSION, RESTRICTION, AND REGULATION

it stamps the mark of failure on a regime when many of its citizens voluntarily choose to leave the land of their birth for a more hopeful home in America. The future holds little hope for any government where the present holds no hope for the people. And so we Americans will welcome these Cuban people. For the tides of history run strong, and in another day they can return to their homeland to find it cleansed of terror and free from fear. Over my shoulders here you can see Ellis Island, whose vacant corridors echo today the joyous sound of long ago voices. And today we can all believe that the lamp of this grand old lady is brighter today - and the golden door that she guards gleams more brilliantly in the light of an increased liberty for the people from all the countries of the globe. Thank you very much

STATEMENT ON SIGNING THE IMMIGRATION REFORM
AND CONTROL ACT OF 1986

RONALD REAGAN

November 6, 1986

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 is the most comprehensive reform of our immigration laws since 1952. In the past 35 years, our nation has been increasingly affected by illegal immigration. This legislation takes a major step toward meeting this challenge to our sovereignty. At the same time, it preserves and enhances the Nation's heritage of legal immigration. I am pleased to sign the bill into law. In 1981, this administration asked the Congress to pass a comprehensive legislative package, including employer sanctions, other measures to increase enforcement of the immigration laws, and legalization. The act provides these three essential components. The employer sanctions program is the keystone and major element. It will remove the incentive for illegal immigration by eliminating the job opportunities which draw illegal aliens here. We have consistently supported a legalization program which is both generous to the alien and fair to the countless thousands of people throughout the world who seek legally to come to America. The legalization provisions in this act will go far to improve the lives of a class of individuals who now must hide in the shadows, without access to many of the benefits of a free and open society. Very soon, many of these men and women will be able to step into the sunlight and, ultimately, if they choose, they may become Americans [...]

The act I am signing today is the product of one of the longest and most difficult legislative undertakings of recent memory. It has truly been a bipartisan effort, with this administration and the allies of immigration reform in the Congress, of both parties, working together to accomplish these critically important reforms. Future generations of Americans will be thankful for our efforts to humanely regain control of our borders and thereby preserve the value of one of the most sacred possessions of our people: American citizenship.

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

January 23, 1996

The state of the Union is strong. Our economy is the healthiest it has been in three decades. We have the lowest combined rates of unemployment and inflation in 27 years. We have created nearly 8 million new jobs, over a million of them in basic industries, like construction and automobiles. America is selling more cars than Japan for the first time since the 1970s. And for three years in a row, we have had a record number of new businesses started in our country. Our leadership in the world is also strong, bringing hope for new peace. And perhaps most important, we are gaining ground in restoring our fundamental values. The crime rate, the welfare and food stamp rolls, the poverty rate and the teen pregnancy rate are all down. And as they go down, prospects for America's future go up.

We live in an age of possibility. A hundred years ago we moved from farm to factory. Now we move to an age of technology, information, and global competition. These changes have opened vast new opportunities for our people, but they have also presented them with stiff challenges. While more Americans are living better, too many of our fellow citizens are working harder just to keep up, and they are rightly concerned about the security of their families.

We must answer here three fundamental questions: First, how do we make the American Dream of opportunity for all a reality for all Americans who are willing to work for it? Second, how do we preserve our old and enduring values as we move into the future? And, third, how do we meet these challenges together, as one America? [...]

The era of big government is over. But we cannot go back to the time when our citizens were left to fend for themselves. Instead, we must go forward as one America, one nation working together to meet the challenges we face together. Self-reliance and teamwork are not opposing virtues; we must have both.

I believe our new, smaller government must work in an old-fashioned American way, together with all of our citizens through state and local governments, in the workplace, in religious, charitable and civic associations. Our goal must be to enable all our people to make the most of their

own lives -- with stronger families, more educational opportunity, economic security, safer streets, a cleaner environment in a safer world. To improve the state of our Union, we must ask more of ourselves, we must expect more of each other, and we must face our challenges together [...]

As we move into the era of balanced budgets and smaller government, we must work in new ways to enable people to make the most of their own lives. We are helping America's communities, not with more bureaucracy, but with more opportunities. Through our successful Empowerment Zones and Community Development Banks, we are helping people to find jobs, to start businesses. And with tax incentives for companies that clean up abandoned industrial property, we can bring jobs back to places that desperately, desperately need them. But there are some areas that the federal government should not leave and should address and address strongly. One of these areas is the problem of illegal immigration. After years of neglect, this administration has taken a strong stand to stiffen the protection of our borders. We are increasing border controls by 50 percent. We are increasing inspections to prevent the hiring of illegal immigrants. And tonight, I announce I will sign an executive order to deny federal contracts to businesses that hire illegal immigrants.

Let me be very clear about this: We are still a nation of immigrants; we should be proud of it. We should honor every legal immigrant here, working hard to become a new citizen. But we are also a nation of laws [...]

America has always sought and always risen to every challenge. Who would say that, having come so far together, we will not go forward from here? Who would say that this age of possibility is not for all Americans? Our country is and always has been a great and good nation. But the best is yet to come, if we all do our part.

ON IMMIGRATION REFORM

GEORGE W. BUSH

May 15, 2006

Good evening. I've asked for a few minutes of your time to discuss a matter of national importance -- the reform of America's immigration system.

The issue of immigration stirs intense emotions, and in recent weeks, Americans have seen those emotions on display. On the streets of major cities, crowds have rallied in support of those in our country illegally. At our southern border, others have organized to stop illegal immigrants from coming in. Across the country, Americans are trying to reconcile these contrasting images. And in Washington, the debate over immigration reform has reached a time of decision. Tonight, I will make it clear where I stand, and where I want to lead our country on this vital issue.

We must begin by recognizing the problems with our immigration system. For decades, the United States has not been in complete control of its borders. As a result, many who want to work in our economy have been able to sneak across our border, and millions have stayed.

Once here, illegal immigrants live in the shadows of our society. Many use forged documents to get jobs, and that makes it difficult for employers to verify that the workers they hire are legal. Illegal immigration puts pressure on public schools and hospitals, it strains state and local budgets, and brings crime to our communities. These are real problems. Yet we must remember that the vast majority of illegal immigrants are decent people who work hard, support their families, practice their faith, and lead responsible lives. They are a part of American life, but they are beyond the reach and protection of American law.

We're a nation of laws, and we must enforce our laws. We're also a nation of immigrants, and we must uphold that tradition, which has strengthened our country in so many ways. These are not contradictory goals. America can be a lawful society and a welcoming society at the same time. We will fix the problems created by illegal immigration, and we will deliver a system that is secure, orderly, and fair. So I support comprehensive immigration reform that will accomplish five clear objectives.

First, the United States must secure its borders. This is a basic responsibility of a sovereign nation. It is also an urgent requirement of our nation-

al security. Our objective is straightforward: The border should be open to trade and lawful immigration, and shut to illegal immigrants, as well as criminals, drug dealers, and terrorists [...]

The United States is not going to militarize the southern border. Mexico is our neighbor, and our friend. We will continue to work cooperatively to improve security on both sides of the border, to confront common problems like drug trafficking and crime, and to reduce illegal immigration.

Another way to help during this period of transition is through state and local law enforcement in our border communities. So we'll increase federal funding for state and local authorities assisting the Border Patrol on targeted enforcement missions. We will give state and local authorities the specialized training they need to help federal officers apprehend and detain illegal immigrants. State and local law enforcement officials are an important part of our border security and they need to be a part of our strategy to secure our borders [...]

Second, to secure our border, we must create a temporary worker program. The reality is that there are many people on the other side of our border who will do anything to come to America to work and build a better life. They walk across miles of desert in the summer heat, or hide in the back of 18-wheelers to reach our country. This creates enormous pressure on our border that walls and patrols alone will not stop. To secure the border effectively, we must reduce the numbers of people trying to sneak across.

Therefore, I support a temporary worker program that would create a legal path for foreign workers to enter our country in an orderly way, for a limited period of time. This program would match willing foreign workers with willing American employers for jobs Americans are not doing. Every worker who applies for the program would be required to pass criminal background checks. And temporary workers must return to their home country at the conclusion of their stay [...]

Third, we need to hold employers to account for the workers they hire. It is against the law to hire someone who is in this country illegally. Yet businesses often cannot verify the legal status of their employees because of the widespread problem of document fraud. Therefore, comprehensive immigration reform must include a better system for verifying documents and work eligibility. A key part of that system should be a new identification card for every legal foreign worker. This card should use biometric technology, such as digital fingerprints, to make it tamper-proof. A tamper-proof card would help us enforce the law, and leave employers with no

excuse for violating it. And by making it harder for illegal immigrants to find work in our country, we would discourage people from crossing the border illegally in the first place.

Fourth, we must face the reality that millions of illegal immigrants are here already. They should not be given an automatic path to citizenship. This is amnesty, and I oppose it. Amnesty would be unfair to those who are here lawfully, and it would invite further waves of illegal immigration.

Some in this country argue that the solution is to deport every illegal immigrant, and that any proposal short of this amounts to amnesty. I disagree. It is neither wise, nor realistic to round up millions of people, many with deep roots in the United States, and send them across the border. There is a rational middle ground between granting an automatic path to citizenship for every illegal immigrant, and a program of mass deportation. That middle ground recognizes there are differences between an illegal immigrant who crossed the border recently, and someone who has worked here for many years, and has a home, a family, and an otherwise clean record [...]

Fifth, we must honor the great American tradition of the melting pot, which has made us one nation out of many peoples. The success of our country depends upon helping newcomers assimilate into our society, and embrace our common identity as Americans. Americans are bound together by our shared ideals, an appreciation of our history, respect for the flag we fly, and an ability to speak and write the English language. English is also the key to unlocking the opportunity of America. English allows newcomers to go from picking crops to opening a grocery, from cleaning offices to running offices, from a life of low-paying jobs to a diploma, a career, and a home of their own. When immigrants assimilate and advance in our society, they realize their dreams, they renew our spirit, and they add to the unity of America.

Tonight, I want to speak directly to members of the House and the Senate: An immigration reform bill needs to be comprehensive, because all elements of this problem must be addressed together, or none of them will be solved at all. The House has passed an immigration bill. The Senate should act by the end of this month so we can work out the differences between the two bills, and Congress can pass a comprehensive bill for me to sign into law.

America needs to conduct this debate on immigration in a reasoned and respectful tone. Feelings run deep on this issue, and as we work it out, all of us need to keep some things in mind. We cannot build a unified country

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by inciting people to anger, or playing on anyone's fears, or exploiting the issue of immigration for political gain. We must always remember that real lives will be affected by our debates and decisions, and that every human being has dignity and value no matter what their citizenship papers say [...]

Our new immigrants are just what they've always been -- people willing to risk everything for the dream of freedom. And America remains what she has always been: the great hope on the horizon, an open door to the future, a blessed and promised land. We honor the heritage of all who come here, no matter where they come from, because we trust in our country's genius for making us all Americans -- one nation under God.

ADDRESS TO THE NATION: REMARKS ON IMMIGRATION

BARACK H. OBAMA

November 20, 2014

My fellow Americans, tonight, I'd like to talk with you about immigration.

For more than 200 years, our tradition of welcoming immigrants from around the world has given us a tremendous advantage over other nations. It's kept us youthful, dynamic, and entrepreneurial. It has shaped our character as a people with limitless possibilities -- people not trapped by our past, but able to remake ourselves as we choose.

But today, our immigration system is broken -- and everybody knows it.

Families who enter our country the right way and play by the rules watch others flout the rules. Business owners who offer their workers good wages and benefits see the competition exploit undocumented immigrants by paying them far less. All of us take offense to anyone who reaps the rewards of living in America without taking on the responsibilities of living in America. And undocumented immigrants who desperately want to embrace those responsibilities see little option but to remain in the shadows, or risk their families being torn apart.

It's been this way for decades. And for decades, we haven't done much about it.

When I took office, I committed to fixing this broken immigration system. And I began by doing what I could to secure our borders. Today, we have more agents and technology deployed to secure our southern border than at any time in our history. And over the past six years, illegal border crossings have been cut by more than half. Although this summer, there was a brief spike in unaccompanied children being apprehended at our border, the number of such children is now actually lower than it's been in nearly two years. Overall, the number of people trying to cross our border illegally is at its lowest level since the 1970s. Those are the facts.

Meanwhile, I worked with Congress on a comprehensive fix, and last year, 68 Democrats, Republicans, and independents came together to pass a bipartisan bill in the Senate. It wasn't perfect. It was a compromise. But it reflected common sense. It would have doubled the number of border patrol agents while giving undocumented immigrants a pathway to citizenship if they paid a fine, started paying their taxes, and went to the

back of the line. And independent experts said that it would help grow our economy and shrink our deficits.

Had the House of Representatives allowed that kind of bill a simple yes-or-no vote, it would have passed with support from both parties, and today it would be the law. But for a year and a half now, Republican leaders in the House have refused to allow that simple vote.

Now, I continue to believe that the best way to solve this problem is by working together to pass that kind of common sense law. But until that happens, there are actions I have the legal authority to take as President -- the same kinds of actions taken by Democratic and Republican presidents before me -- that will help make our immigration system more fair and more just.

Tonight, I am announcing those actions.

First, we'll build on our progress at the border with additional resources for our law enforcement personnel so that they can stem the flow of illegal crossings, and speed the return of those who do cross over.

Second, I'll make it easier and faster for high-skilled immigrants, graduates, and entrepreneurs to stay and contribute to our economy, as so many business leaders have proposed.

Third, we'll take steps to deal responsibly with the millions of undocumented immigrants who already live in our country.

I want to say more about this third issue, because it generates the most passion and controversy. Even as we are a nation of immigrants, we're also a nation of laws. Undocumented workers broke our immigration laws, and I believe that they must be held accountable -- especially those who may be dangerous. That's why, over the past six years, deportations of criminals are up 80 percent. And that's why we're going to keep focusing enforcement resources on actual threats to our security. Felons, not families. Criminals, not children. Gang members, not a mom who's working hard to provide for her kids. We'll prioritize, just like law enforcement does every day [...]

Now here's the thing: We expect people who live in this country to play by the rules. We expect that those who cut the line will not be unfairly rewarded. So we're going to offer the following deal: If you've been in America for more than five years; if you have children who are American citizens or legal residents; if you register, pass a criminal background check, and you're willing to pay your fair share of taxes -- you'll be able to apply to stay in this country temporarily without fear of deportation. You

can come out of the shadows and get right with the law. That's what this deal is.

Now, let's be clear about what it isn't. This deal does not apply to anyone who has come to this country recently. It does not apply to anyone who might come to America illegally in the future. It does not grant citizenship, or the right to stay here permanently, or offer the same benefits that citizens receive -- only Congress can do that. All we're saying is we're not going to deport you.

I know some of the critics of this action call it amnesty. Well, it's not. Amnesty is the immigration system we have today -- millions of people who live here without paying their taxes or playing by the rules while politicians use the issue to scare people and whip up votes at election time [...]

The actions I'm taking are not only lawful, they're the kinds of actions taken by every single Republican President and every single Democratic President for the past half century. And to those members of Congress who question my authority to make our immigration system work better, or question the wisdom of me acting where Congress has failed, I have one answer: Pass a bill.

I want to work with both parties to pass a more permanent legislative solution. And the day I sign that bill into law, the actions I take will no longer be necessary. Meanwhile, don't let a disagreement over a single issue be a dealbreaker on every issue. That's not how our democracy works, and Congress certainly shouldn't shut down our government again just because we disagree on this. Americans are tired of gridlock. What our country needs from us right now is a common purpose -- a higher purpose.

Most Americans support the types of reforms I've talked about tonight. But I understand the disagreements held by many of you at home. Millions of us, myself included, go back generations in this country, with ancestors who put in the painstaking work to become citizens. So we don't like the notion that anyone might get a free pass to American citizenship.

I know some worry immigration will change the very fabric of who we are, or take our jobs, or stick it to middle-class families at a time when they already feel like they've gotten the raw deal for over a decade. I hear these concerns. But that's not what these steps would do. Our history and the facts show that immigrants are a net plus for our economy and our society. And I believe it's important that all of us have this debate without impugning each other's character. Because for all the back and forth of Washington, we have to remember that this debate is about something

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bigger. It's about who we are as a country, and who we want to be for future generations [...]

My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants. We were strangers once, too. And whether our forebears were strangers who crossed the Atlantic, or the Pacific, or the Rio Grande, we are here only because this country welcomed them in, and taught them that to be an American is about something more than what we look like, or what our last names are, or how we worship. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal -- that all of us are created equal, and all of us have the chance to make of our lives what we will.

That's the country our parents and grandparents and generations before them built for us. That's the tradition we must uphold. That's the legacy we must leave for those who are yet to come.

ADDRESS ON IMMIGRATION

DONALD J. TRUMP

January 8, 2019

My fellow Americans,

Tonight, I am speaking to you because there is a growing humanitarian and security crisis at our southern border. Every day customs and border patrol agents encounter thousands of illegal immigrants trying to enter our country. We are out of space to hold them and we have no way to promptly return them back home to their country. America proudly welcomes millions of lawful immigrants who enrich our society and contribute to our nation. But, all Americans are hurt by uncontrolled illegal migration. It strains public resources and drives down jobs and wages. Among those hardest hit are African-Americans and Hispanic Americans. Our southern border is a pipeline for vast quantities of illegal drugs, including meth, heroin, cocaine and fentanyl. Every week 300 of our citizens are killed by heroin alone, 90 percent of which floods across from our southern border. More Americans will die from drugs this year than were killed in the entire Vietnam War [...]

Last month, 20,000 migrant children were illegally brought into the united States, a dramatic increase. These children are used as human pawns by vicious coyotes and ruthless gangs. One in three women are sexually assaulted on the dangerous trek up through Mexico. Women and children are the biggest victims by far of our broken system. This is the tragic reality of illegal immigration on our southern border. This is the cycle of human suffering that I am determined to end.

My administration has presented Congress with a detailed proposal to secure the border and stop the criminal gangs, drug smugglers and human traffickers. It's a tremendous problem. Our proposal was developed by law enforcement professionals and border agents at the department of homeland security. These are the resources they have requested to properly perform their mission and keep America safe. In fact, safer than ever before. The proposal from Homeland Security includes cutting-edge technology for detecting drugs, weapons, illegal contraband and many other things. We have requested more agents, immigration judges, and bed space to process the sharp rise in unlawful migration fueled by our very strong

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economy. Our plan also contains an urgent request for humanitarian assistance and medical support. Furthermore, we have asked Congress to close border security loopholes so that illegal immigrant children can be safely and humanely returned back home. Finally, as part of an overall approach to border security, law enforcement professionals have requested \$5.7 billion for a physical barrier. At the request of Democrats, it will be a steel barrier rather than a concrete wall [...]

For those who refuse to compromise in the name of in the name of border security, I would ask, imagine if it was your child, your husband or your wife whose life was so cruelly shattered and totally broken. To every member of Congress, pass a bill that ends this crisis. To every citizen, call Congress and tell them to finally, after all of these decades, secure our border. This is a choice between right and wrong, justice and injustice. This is about whether we fulfill our sacred duty to the American citizens we serve. When I took the oath of office, I swore to protect our country. And that is what I will always do so help me God. Thank you and good night.

STATEMENT ON THE BIPARTISAN SENATE AGREEMENT
FOR NATIONAL SECURITY LEGISLATION

JOSEPH R. BIDEN

February 4, 2024

For too long, going back decades, the immigration system has been broken. It's time to fix it. That's why over 2 months ago I instructed members of my administration to work with a bipartisan group of Senators to—finally—seriously address the issue. And that's what they've done, working around the clock, through the holidays and over weekends. Now we've reached an agreement on a bipartisan national security deal that includes the toughest and fairest set of border reforms in decades. I strongly support it.

It will make our country safer, make our border more secure, treat people fairly and humanely while preserving legal immigration, consistent with our values as a nation. It would give me, as President, a new emergency authority to shut down the border when it becomes overwhelmed. It will make our asylum process fairer and more efficient while protecting the most vulnerable. It will expedite work permits so that those who are here and qualify can get to work more quickly.

It will create more opportunities for families to come together, through short-term visits as well as increased permanent lawful pathways. It ensures the most vulnerable, unaccompanied young children, have paid legal representation. And it will provide the resources I have repeatedly requested to secure the border by adding border patrol agents, immigration judges, asylum officers, and cutting-edge inspection machines to help detect and stop the flow of fentanyl. While this agreement doesn't address everything I would have wanted, these reforms are essential for making our border more orderly, secure, fair, and humane.

The bipartisan national security agreement would also address two other important priorities. It allows the United States to continue our vital work, together with partners all around the world, to stand up for Ukraine's freedom and support its ability to defend itself against Russia's aggression. As I have said before, if we don't stop Putin's appetite for power and control in Ukraine, he won't limit himself to just Ukraine and the costs for America will rise. This agreement also provides Israel what they

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need to protect their people and defend itself against Hamas terrorists. And it will provide lifesaving humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people.

There is more work to be done to get it over the finish line. But I want to be clear about something: If you believe, as I do, that we must secure the border now, doing nothing is not an option. Working with my administration, the United States Senate has done the hard work it takes to reach a bipartisan agreement. Now House Republicans have to decide. Do they want to solve the problem? Or do they want to keep playing politics with the border? I've made my decision. I'm ready to solve the problem. I'm ready to secure the border. And so are the American people. I know we have our divisions at home, but we cannot let partisan politics get in the way of our responsibilities as a great nation. I refuse to let that happen. In moments like these, we have to remember who we are. We're the United States of America, and there is nothing, nothing beyond our capacity if we do it together.

I urge Congress to come together and swiftly pass this bipartisan agreement. Get it to my desk so I can sign it into law immediately.

AFTERWORD. PUBLICITY, PROPAGANDA AND IMMIGRATION

J.P. Spanier arrived in New York from Naples on the morning of August 1, 1904, armed with letters from Prime Minister Giovanni Giolitti's general secretary, from a member of the provincial governing council of Naples, and from no less than Giolitti himself. The letters introduced the American, a 25-year resident of Italy, as a representative of the corporation known as the Gould Railway System seeking to facilitate the emigration of Italians to farms in east Texas and western Louisiana.¹ In a missive marked "highly confidential" to a trusted friend in New York, a skeptical Ambassador Edmondo Mayor Des Planches conceded the railroad agent had notes from a who's-who of prominent Italian politicians, had sailed with a member of parliament, and on top of that "I know he sees Roosevelt." Spanier had a superb pedigree with business connections to powerful capitalists "Rockefeller, Gould, et cetera." Still, the ambassador requested his friend's unvarnished opinion about Spanier from "a moral, social point of view and as a businessman."²

Spanier arrived in New York with business plans for American economic development through colonization, defined at the time as the facilitated transfer of families recruited directly from Italy to live and work "among the society of fellowmen of the same dialect, the same habits, the same tastes" in the United States.³ From 1904 through 1907 in particular, cor-

¹ Giovanni Giolitti to Mayor Des Planches, March 28, 1904, busta 170, fascicolo 3813, Ambasciata Washington 1901-1909, Archivio Storico Diplomatico dell'Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome (hereafter AW).

² Des Planches to R. di Cesnola, August 11, 1904, b. 170, f. 3813, AW. The men likely met in their youth in Turin. By 1904, Count Luigi Palma di Cesnola had become the first Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a position he held for twenty-two years until his sudden death later that fall at age 72. Cesnola was a decorated veteran of the first Italian war for independence in 1848-49, the Crimean War, and the US Civil War, where he fought for the Union and was captured and held at the infamous Libby Prison for nine months. *New York Times*. "Gen. Di Cesnola Dies after Short Illness." November 22, 1904. <https://nyti.ms/4fEeUht>.

³ Felice Ferrero, "A New St. Helena," *The Survey* (November 6, 1909), 173. Ferrero was a journalist on the editorial board of the *Corriere della Sera* in Milan when he wrote this article based on his visit to the eastern North Carolina Italian colony of St. Helena.

responding to the years that migration to the US from Italy peaked, a flood of letters, pro-colonization editorials, and offers from banks and land agencies arrived at the embassy in Washington, marketing opportunities available especially in the American South for thrifty Italian immigrants willing to invest in a small farm of their own.⁴ This record of recruitment, so different from the pathways that most Italian immigrants carved into the United States, becomes legible only in Italian archives as officials of the *Ministero degli Affari Esteri* mediated these efforts, investigating and promoting the offers despite often questioning their likelihood of success. While Spanier offered a bridge between poor migrants and the investment capital they needed, acting Commissioner of the *Commissariato generale dell'emigrazione*, Egisto Rossi, doubted it would ever spark more than a few sales “due to the fact that our emigration is made up in its vast majority of laborers with limited financial means, and small capitalists who leave their homeland to become settlers abroad are very rare.”⁵

Still, *Esteri* officers charged with managing migration in the early twentieth century vacillated between explicit support for these proposals to sell cotton farmland on installment to permanently settle poor Italians outside of American cities for their own supposed benefit, and the performance of their duty to enforce the 1901 emigration law with its extensive protective mandates against exploitation and fraud. Even though he had just two months earlier published an article praising colonization, the consul in New York, Gustavo Tosti, warned Des Planches that Spanier, an “in-between” working on behalf of “railroad magnates,” had to be watched closely.⁶ “He has the personality, after all”, of the land agents who embellish in order to sell more land contracts. The consul advised that Spanier could continue only “if it has been demonstrated truthfully that he has a

⁴ 1906 was the year when Italian departures for the United States peaked at 358,569 persons out of a record-breaking one million total arrivals, and the following year 298,124 Italians emigrated to the United States when total arrivals from all sending countries hit 1.28 million. Migration statistics derived from Istituto Centrale di Statistica, *Sommario di Statistiche Storiche Italiane: 1861-1955* (Rome, 1958), 66. The numbers can vary somewhat between Italian (counting departures) and US sources (counting arrivals).

⁵ Rossi to Spanier, March 10, 1905, b. 170, f. 3813, AW.

⁶ Gustavo Tosti to Des Planches, 11 and 14 August 1904, marked “particular and confidential”; Gustavo Tosti, “The Agricultural Possibilities of Italian Immigration,” *Charities* (May 7, 1904): 472-476.

good site for farmland.”⁷ Despite his claims of philanthropic motivation, Spanier, connected to a “credit network” of America’s most prominent financiers and undoubtedly driven in part by their desires, would have to prove his model worked “to show his project” to the Ambassador while visiting the United States that August.⁸ Meanwhile, rural Southern colonization found support in the pages of the Italian and the American press as a solution to problems exacerbated by mass migration like urban overcrowding, poverty, and crime.⁹

Railroad agents like Spanier operated with a great deal of independence, navigating a liminal space of their own definition that placed company-financed emigration outside of American law prohibiting contract labor, and Italian law banning inducements to migration. One way they did this was by forging relationships with officers in the Italian government who oversaw and influenced the flow of migration, particularly the *Commissariato generale dell’emigrazione* (or CGE), a new bureaucracy created in 1901 within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Acting CGE commissioner Egisto Rossi had initially dismissed Spanier in a letter to Des Planches as “*un americano amantissimo dell’Italia*” but over the fall and into the spring of 1905, Spanier’s intense charm campaign convinced the diplomats to support him.¹⁰ “You have noticed from the newspapers I sent you from America my efforts towards helping the Italian emigrant,” Spanier told Rossi in October 1904. “I wish to see him taken from the cities, put on farms and th[u]s create a house for himself and I am sure you will do all you can to help me in this desire of mine.”¹¹

While Spanier told Rossi he wanted “to help those poor families who have no capital and need to make a position for themselves,” the principal in a Memphis firm, the H.C. Williamson Land Investment Company, pressed Spanier to confirm “your ability to send emigrants who are able

⁷ Gustavo Tosti to Des Planches, August 11, 1904, b. 170, f. 3813, AW.

⁸ The ambassador also reached out in confidence to the first commissioner of emigration, Luigi Bodio, who had stepped down just a few weeks prior. Des Planches to Luigi Bodio, “Riservatissimo: Sig. Spanier,” August 15, 1904, b. 170, f. 3813. See also Des Planches to Egisto Rossi, “Riservato: Cav. Spanier,” August 12, 1904, b. 170, f. 3813, AW.

⁹ Lauren Braun-Strumfels, “A Desirable Class of Homeseekers”: Colonization, Race, and Italian Migration in the Progressive Era US South,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* vol. 43, no. 2 (Winter 2024): 34-69.

¹⁰ Rossi to Des Planches, 1 September 1904, b. 170, f. 3813, AW.

¹¹ Spanier to Rossi, 24 October 1904, b. 170, f. 3813.

to pay as much as 10 per cent of the purchase price of the land they buy.”¹² The Middlesex Banking Company also based in Memphis (a city that managed profits generated by the rich alluvial lands to the south along the Mississippi River) explicitly compared the quality of Black and Italian farmers. Describing Italians as instrumental to white economic success:

we could take care of a considerable number of Italian families on these properties. And as we have found from personal experience that the Italian farm laborer is far superior to the negro, it might be of advantage to the [rail]road you represent, and also our Companies, if you could arrange to send us a supply of Italian farmers, capable of taking hold intelligently of a piece of land and working it.¹³

In the early twentieth century newspaper reports and editorials helped spread this racial logic and trumpeted Italians’ suitability for the region’s needs, directly contradicting prevailing notions about Italian undesirability and inviting these ‘ideal’ new citizens to occupy a firmly defined position in the American South that would undermine Black capital accumulation and political power.¹⁴ “The New South is already giving object lessons to the country at large in the successful attraction and utilization of the influx so heedlessly reckoned as “undesirable,” announced the influential 1905 study *The Italian in America*.¹⁵

If in the nineteenth century the business of migration effectively regulated itself, by 1901 Italy - sole among the European sending countries that controlled the ports through which its own citizens migrated - had erected a series of new regulations aimed at the transit sector.¹⁶ Rossi used the

¹² H.C. Williamson to J.P. Spanier, December 8, 1904, b. 170, f. 3813.

¹³ A.E. Cameron to J.P. Spanier, December 1, 1904, b. 170, f. 3813.

¹⁴ Braun-Strumfels, “A Desirable Class of Homeseekers.”

¹⁵ Eliot Lord, John J.D. Trenor, and Samuel Barrows, *The Italian in America* (New York: B.F. Buck, 1905), 183.

¹⁶ The comprehensive Emigration Law of 1901 was the culmination of three decades of debate over the extent to which the state could and should control exit at the same time as mass Italian migration to the United States shaped that country’s emerging immigration bureaucracy. See Braun-Strumfels, *Partners in Gatekeeping: How Italy Shaped US Immigration Policy over Ten Pivotal Years 1891-1901* (University of Georgia Press, 2023); and Dolores Freda, “La Legislazione sulle migrazioni Italiane fino al 1901.” *Studi Emigrazione*, no. 215 (2019): 379–92. On the business of migration in the nineteenth century, see Katherine Carper, “The Migration Business and the Shift from State to Federal

procedures established by Esteri to determine the suitability of Spanier's proposals. He contacted the consulate in New Orleans by wire to request a full report of the lands on offer. Within two weeks Rossi had received the report in Rome from New Orleans Consul Giacomo Fara Forni.¹⁷ The consul firmly counseled the CGE against extending its support for the Spanier colonization plan for northeast Texas. Spanier's persistence had secured the capital and the land, but he knew he still required Italian government approval to enact it. "I have received many letters from other parts of Europe, asking me to allow them to take up the lands [in Cherokee County, TX], but I have kept [the] same [lands] for Italians, as it is Italians that I want," the agent emphasized.¹⁸ Reconsidering his earlier support, Rossi replied with a warning of the potential for a "chaotic" situation if "a greater number of emigrants flowed into a region than it was prepared to receive."¹⁹ As the CGE was concerned with acts or messages "aimed at encouraging emigration," Rossi concluded "the establishment in the Kingdom of a "Gould Railway System" Agency to provide information to our emigrants to be absolutely incompatible with Italian law."²⁰ Spanier's operation to facilitate organized emigration, advertising to potential migrants in Italy the possibility of company-financed land purchases in the American South, was illegal.

With a mission focused on *tutela* of Italians throughout the emigration process, officers of the MAE and CGE navigated the equivocal relationship that Americans had with Italian migrants during the years of mass movement. Where men like J.P. Spanier, and the corporations, landown-

Immigration Regulation," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 11, no. 3 (September 2021): 340–60; and Jose Juan Pérez Meléndez, *Peopling for Profit in Imperial Brazil: Directed Migrations and the Business of Nineteenth-Century Colonization*. (Cambridge University Press, 2024).

¹⁷ He was very familiar with the condition of Italian immigrants in the South, having worked to navigate complicated bilateral negotiations after US immigration authorities prevented a ship carrying over 1,400 passengers from Palermo from disembarking for over a week at the port of New Orleans in October 1904. See Lauren Braun-Strumfels and Clara Zaccagnini, "On the Border in New Orleans," in *Rituals of Migration: Irish and Italians on the Move* ed. Kevin Kenny and Maddalena Marinari (New York University Press, 2025).

¹⁸ Spanier to E. Rossi, February 9, 1905, b. 170, f. 3813. Emphasis added.

¹⁹ The CGE "should exercise much caution before authorizing significant propaganda to favor a specific country, also to avoid contributing to creating disorderly migrations." Rossi to Spanier, March 10, 1905, b. 170, f. 3813.

²⁰ E. Rossi to Spanier, March 30, 1905.

ers and bankers he represented, described Italians in desirable terms as capable of contributing to the benefit of the nation, others prominent voices declared Italians a dangerous element that threatened American civilization due to varied reasons: their Catholicism, their radical politics, their poverty, and their proximity to Africa.²¹ American intellectuals even borrowed concepts and degrading terms from the debate over the “Southern Question” in Italy after these ideas fell out of favor there. Racialized prejudice against Southern Italians and Sicilians emphasized their illiteracy, “filthy habits of life” and “servility” that destined these people to “pauperism” and threatened to “lower the American standard of living and labor and citizenship.”²² At the same time, both English- and Italian-language newspapers in the US predicted recruited Italian farmers like those Spanier sought had the “right material for the making of good American citizens,” carefully employing a language of class-based desirability to convince readers of Italians’ benefit to the South.²³

Filtered through Americans’ own economic needs, like for people who came before and who have come since, Italian migrants were simultaneously welcomed and rejected. Americans have long had an ambivalent relationship with immigration. Immigrants have been held up as the bedrock of American civilization, an indelible marker of American exceptionalism, and the spirit of the nation itself, which, of course, was forged not in the cauldron of ethnic, religious, or historical homogeneity but rather in a kind of “civic nationalism.” The prevailing belief of what America is, has made America. Immigrants, as Italians were at the turn of the twentieth century, continue to be simultaneously desired and reviled, recruited and expelled. Immigrants are desirable if they fulfill a position that Americans

²¹ Commonly described as “savage,” “swarthy,” or “dark-skinned,” as historian Erika Lee has written, “Italians were yoked to Native Americans and African Americans.” An Immigration Restriction League founding member, the lawyer Prescott Hall, described their race as “partly African, owing to the negroid migration from Carthage to Italy.” Quoted in Erika Lee, *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 125.

²² Lord, Trenor, and Barrows, 17-18. On the influence of racial ideology on perceptions of Italy’s “Southern Problem,” see Peter D’Agostino, “Craniums, Criminals, and the ‘Cursed Race’: Italian Anthropology in American Racial Thought, 1861-1924.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 2 (2002): 319–43.

²³ Charles Scott, “Italian Farmers for Southern Agriculture,” *Manufacturers’ Record* (November 9, 1905), 423.

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have carved out for them. Leading Black paper the *New York Age* editorialized in 1905 only Italians who “come with the expectation of sticking very closely to the soil” would be welcomed.²⁴

²⁴ Thomas H. Malone, “Italians, Also, Must be Serfs,” *New York Age* (June 1, 1905).

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING: A SELECTION OF BOOKS IN ENGLISH

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QUESTO VOLUME È STATO COMPOSTO CON I CARATTERI MINION DISEGNATI
DA ROBERT SLIMBACH NEL 1990 PER ADOBE SYSTEMS
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