

Yesterday's America
A Background History of the Impact of American Immigration to 1965
for National Video Communications, Inc.
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America has often been called a "nation of immigrants." This label could be applied to every country at one time in its history. Waves of human migrations characterized our early experience as a species. Our own "Native Americans" came here from areas in Asia across the frozen land bridge over the Bering Strait about 30,000 years ago. Small groups of Siberian hunters following giant mammals were the first American immigrants. These Asiatic peoples spread throughout North and South America, reaching Cape Horn some 20,000 years ago. Although they came to an unpopulated geographical region, Native American immigration had a definite environmental impact. They practiced agriculture and used fire to control vegetation, basically modifying the environment they encountered. There is no evidence that early Americans were concerned about subsequent Asiatic immigration, but they were keenly aware of the problem of population density and planned their villages and activities accordingly. Tribal warfare also emerged, which can be interpreted as a hostile reaction to newcomers.

The impact of English and European "discovery," exploration, and settlement of the New World illustrated the negative effects of immigration on native populations. Spanish and French exploration pre-dated the English arrival, but those two nations seemed less interested in permanent settlements in the New

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World. Although the Spanish established St. Augustine in Florida in 1565 and some outposts in Texas and New Mexico about thirty years later and the French created a foothold in Canada, America would be transformed mainly in the early years by English colonists. After the ill-fated Roanoke settlers disappeared mysteriously in the 1580s, the English managed to stave off starvation to develop Jamestown in what would become Virginia. Puritan Separatists followed 13 years later in 1620 and founded the Plymouth colony in Massachusetts. Reformist Puritans, seeking to set up a “city on a hill” to purify Christendom, came to Massachusetts Bay in 1630, carefully “planting” a town that would become Boston. Even “before the Mayflower,” to quote the title of a famous history book, other immigrants arrived. They did not come voluntarily in search of religious freedom. They were slaves transported from their homeland in Africa.

Between 1630-1650, approximately 20,000 whites arrived in America, most of them of English descent. Intolerance of certain classes of new arrivals emerged from the beginning of American colonization. Although they were fellow English citizens, non-conforming religious thinkers such as Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were banished from Massachusetts Bay. English Quakers were routinely persecuted, occasionally executed. This suggests that even if immigration could be limited to a single country, conflicts would inevitably arise over religious beliefs, social-economic class identity, and a host of other types of

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categorization that pit human beings against each other.

Catholicism represented the biggest threat, according to most English colonists. By the time of the Revolution, an estimated 98 per cent of Americans were Protestant. Pennsylvania gave haven to Quakers but, as one historian said, “even the most liberal colonies harbored a deep suspicion of Catholicism.” Only Rhode Island extended freedom of religion and political rights to Catholics. Maryland, founded by George Calvert as a sanctuary for Catholics in the 1630s, had trouble attracting enough members of the religion to make for a viable colony and passed a Toleration Act in 1649 as a signal to Protestants that they were welcome. So many came that the Maryland legislature repealed the act 5 years later and restricted the immigration of Irish Catholic servants to this former Catholic refuge. Virginia and South Carolina enacted similar discriminatory laws.

Another concern of early Americans centered on the moral, intellectual, and mental fitness of immigrants. Since England had begun a policy of exiling capital criminals to the New World, Virginia felt justified in fashioning statutes designed to keep “jail birds” and those who “deserved to die in England” out. Delaware had similar provisions, as did Maryland, which also legislated against “paupers.”

Although English men and women comprised the bulk of early colonial settlements, Scots-Irish (Scottish Protestants who went to Ireland and then to America) numbered about 150,000 by the time of the Revolution. A large portion of them migrated to western Pennsylvania to establish farms and become

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the prototype of the American “frontier” people. Small numbers of Dutch came to New York, including some Jewish immigrants, and Swedish newcomers established the colony of Delaware, but Germans constituted the second largest group of whites, about 10 per cent of the total population by 1790, compared to 60 per cent for those of English ancestry. Most of the early Germans were Protestants and went mainly to Pennsylvania, where many became prosperous farmers. In fact, the name “Pennsylvania Dutch” is actually a reference to Germans, the “Dutch” being a corruption of the word “Deutsch,” or German.

A truism in immigration history is that as the numbers of a specific group reach a certain level, the tolerance of the majority is transformed into hostility and resistance. For example, as the number of German immigrants to Pennsylvania reached the thousands per year, the colonial assembly determined that they were now more detrimental than beneficial. While it is true that many of the more recent German immigrants of the early 1700s were poor indentured servants, the criticism of them quickly went from the particulars of their social station to a blanket condemnation of Germans as a people.

The Pennsylvania Assembly noted that Germans originally came as families “of substance,” an “industrious, sober people.” Now they represented, “a great mixture of the refuse of their people.” Benjamin Franklin said they were as “ignorant a set of people as the Indians” and “generally the most stupid of their own nation.” While the critics took care to distinguish between the early “good

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Germans” and the later “bad” ones, it now appeared that one’s country of origin could be a determining factor in one’s inferiority.

Besides Franklin, another Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson, wondered whether immigration might hurt the nation. He calculated in 1782 that the current population figure of 3 million would double every 27 years (it actually more than doubled to 7.2 million in the 1810 Census). Within a century, he thought, American population density would approach that of the British Isles, so what would be the need of additional people from other countries? A rational, dispassionate conjecture that resonates today in our public debate on the impact of immigration on American society.

The slave-owning Jefferson, ever sensitive to the problem, also saw great potential for increased racial conflict if Africans were allowed to stay in America. He endorsed a policy of freedom for slaves but also their deportation because of what he saw as the inevitable “extermination of the one or the other race.” We have thus far avoided such extreme developments, but the “race question” weighs heavily on the minds of all thoughtful Americans. President Clinton’s call for a dialogue on race has produced few tangible solutions to our problems and Americans, both black and white, are divided about whether Africans who have an almost 400 year history in this country will ever be fully accepted as Americans.

Jefferson’s social concerns ran counter to the economic needs of colonial

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America and the new United States. Economic interests actively promoted the employment opportunities of America in England and Europe by sending pamphlets and recruiting agents to those parts of the world to sign up workers or entice them with offers of free land. This clash between pro-immigration forces who favor a steady supply of cheap labor and anti-immigration groups who fear the social and cultural consequences of unrestricted access to this country has been a traditional element in the history of the national immigration dialogue.

Residency in America did not necessarily bring citizenship. Before the Declaration of Independence in 1776, immigrants to the colonies had to petition Parliament to become naturalized citizens or another class called “denizens.” The latter had some of the privileges of citizenship, but not all. They could buy and hold land, for instance, but could not inherit it. They were also deemed ineligible for public office. Individual colonies had immigration policies but did not have the authority to bestow citizenship. Parliament finally passed a naturalization act for the colonies in 1740 which granted citizenship after 7 years of residency by an individual who also had to swear loyalty to the Crown and provide evidence of his Christian faith. (Quakers and Jews were exempted from this religious requirement and Catholics were completely barred.)

The law had little immediate effect because European wars kept immigration figures low. With the peace that followed the Seven Years War (known as the

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French and Indian War in the colonies) in 1763, immigration increased significantly, fueled in part by the desire of England to bring settlers to their newly acquired territories of Canada, Florida, and Midwestern regions of America. This continued until tensions between England and the colonies resulted in a 1774 Parliamentary prohibition of immigration to America. This action became one of the litany of complaints detailed in the Declaration of Independence. King George III, according to our revolutionary manifesto, “has endeavored to prevent the population of these states.”

After the Revolutionary War ended with American independence, immigrants began streaming in again, lured by glorified descriptions of the new “land of opportunity” where hard-working people could be free and prosperous, a place where, in the words of one French writer, different nationalities “are melted into a new race of men.” This sentiment epitomizes the mythological but still powerful view of America as the beacon to the industrious dreamers of the world.

The new U.S. Congress, empowered by the recently ratified Constitution to “establish a uniform rule of naturalization,” did so in 1790 with the Naturalization Act, giving the opportunity for citizenship to all “free white persons” who swore an oath of allegiance to the Constitution following two years residency (one of which had to be spent entirely in a single state) in the United States. Children under 21 automatically became citizens when their parents did.

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The Revolution in France made the early years of the American republic a time of discord. Federalists who feared the excesses of the Jacobins might reach our shores pushed for and received an extension of the residency period to 5 years in 1795. In addition, the new federal law stipulated that all prospective citizens had to clearly announce their intentions a full 3 years prior to naturalization.

The Federalists went even further in 1798 and won enactment of the Alien and Sedition Acts (3 separate bills). The residency period now became a staggering 14 years, with a 5 year requirement for declaration of intention prior to citizenship. Congress gave the president—in this case, the Federalist John Adams—the power to suspend due-process procedures in wartime in order to imprison or deport any alien he identified as an agent of an enemy power. He could also, even during peacetime, deport or imprison those foreigners he considered threats to the country. The Sedition Law essentially provided for punishment for anyone making “false, scandalous, or malicious” remarks about the government.

Although he had expressed reservations about the desirability of immigration to America, Thomas Jefferson roundly denounced the Alien and Sedition Acts and, after his election in 1800, ended all prosecutions and pardoned all those who had been convicted under the statutes. Congress brought back the 5 year waiting period. An ominous carryover, however, could be seen in the retention

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of presidential power to deport foreign nationals who the chief executive perceived to be threats to the country, with no regard to due-process for the suspect aliens. Little official work took place in Congress on immigration policy, but the tradition of xenophobia (fear of foreigners) had been well-established.

During the New Nation period, the principal activity of the federal government regarding immigrants came in the 1819 Steerage Act, which set standards for ships transporting aliens to America. This had been a serious problem. Many ships regularly lost 1/5 to 1/2 of their immigrant passengers to disease and starvation. The steerage law mandated minimum space, food, and water per person and a report of passengers who had died and who had arrived safely in port.

This humanitarian concern came at the beginning of the Age of Reform (1820-1860). Many groups, such as the New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, organized to help poor immigrants by setting up soup kitchens and providing other social services. They also spurred legislation that made ship captains responsible for any “undesirables” they transported (i.e., those who were poor, sick, or mentally ill). The law required that captains post bonds to help defray costs of any public support their passengers might incur after arrival in America. An 1837 Supreme Court ruling, which stayed in effect for 40 years, upheld the right of states to pass these kinds of laws regulating immigration since it did not involve the Congressional prerogative in “commerce,” but only

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the legitimate police powers of individual states.

The second major wave of immigration began in the 1820s and lasted through the 1850s, characterized by large numbers from Ireland and Germany and extreme, often violent, nativist reactions. About 143,000 aliens came in the 1820s, about 35 per cent of them Irish, mostly Catholic, twice the figure for English immigrants in the decade. In the 1830s the number of new arrivals increased four-fold to almost 600,000, with Irish percentages staying at about 35 and Germans surpassing the English in second place, about 25 per cent of the total. These two groups in turn combined for about $\frac{3}{4}$ of all the 2 million immigrants who came to this country during the 1840s.

The early stages of American industrialization created thousands of new factory jobs and served as an impetus for immigration from Ireland and Germany, two countries experiencing political unrest and economic problems, including the disastrous Irish potato famine (1845-1854). Where 700,00 had come from these two nations from 1820-1840, the number reached 4.2 million from 1840-1860, which represented the highest percentage of newcomers in proportion to total population (about 20 million) in American history. Much of the focus of immigration histories has been on the reasons for coming to this country and the lives of the strangers in the land. We need to balance that story with more analysis of what these increased numbers meant to the U.S., both in positive contributions and negative consequences.

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Regardless of where they came from, it is irrefutable that increasing numbers resulted in a heightening of urban problems such as over-crowding, disease, inadequate health care, unsanitary conditions, and crime. While a positive spin can be put on the story, with an argument that greater numbers stimulated more and better social services, the simple fact remains that the lives of Americans, especially city-dwellers, changed dramatically because of the influx of millions of new residents in such a short period of time.

Immigration had a definite impact on urban politics. William "Boss" Tweed may have been unethical and creative enough to carve out an empire (and some historians doubt the extent of his power) without a constant flow of new arrivals, but it sure helped to have a ready pool of people swearing allegiance to his Tammany Hall machine because of their feelings of indebtedness to him. Tweed, after all, took very good care of these newcomers, giving them food, shelter, education, and employment. They, in turn, became a reservoir of political support, voting (once they became citizens) to maintain his power and that of the other bosses.

Immigration had an adverse effect on the development of labor unions and the working class in general during this time. Even with the enormous industrial expansion in the country, there were few periods of labor shortages. Foreigners were always available, eager for work, and willing to accept lower wages and poorer working conditions. In spite of the ethos of the "American dream of

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success,” most workers never had the necessary chances in this “land of opportunity” to achieve meaningful upward mobility. They were relegated to remaining low-paid and relatively unskilled laborers throughout their working lives. With fewer immigrants, a scarcity of employees might have improved the overall lot of the working class. There may have been more opportunities out west, but even there they would have to compete with a flood of other ambitious newcomers, even if they had the economic and psychological resources to make the move, which very few did.

The significant numbers of Irish and Germans, and their mostly lower social-economic status, provoked angry reactions from some “native-born” Americans. Irish railroad workers near the nation’s capital, for example, got into fights with their employers and two construction supervisors were killed. A citizens group passed a resolution condemning the Irish “employed on the Baltimore and Washington Railroad” as “a gang of ruffians and murderers.”

Religious conflicts also increased in number. A New York weekly publication, *The Protestant*, declared its intention to teach “Gospel doctrines against Romish corruption.” The rapid increase in the number of German and Irish Catholics frightened many Americans. Wild rumors and supposed “exposes” about sexual misconduct among priests and nuns resulted in a mob burning a convent to the ground. Eight persons were arrested, with no convictions. In Philadelphia, Catholics and Protestants fought over the version of the Bible to be used in

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the public schools. Disagreement led to rallies and eventually riots that resulted in numerous killings and the calling out of the state militia in 1844.

One of the major political expressions of anti-immigrant sentiment came in the creation of the Native American Party, an anti-Catholic watchdog group that invoked pledges of secrecy, to divulge nothing of their activities, hence the name "Know-Nothings." Nativist parties did well in local New York state elections in the 1840s. Their ideas received support from some leaders, such as *Philadelphia Sun* editor Lewis C. Levin, who encouraged Congress to enact strict anti-immigration laws, especially a 21-year waiting period for naturalization.

Levin's ideas were being articulated at a time of "unprecedented expansion and immigration," to quote one scholar. With the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848, the U.S. had possession of Texas, California, most of current Arizona and New Mexico, Nevada, part of Colorado, and the Utah territory. James Marshall's discovery of gold in the American River near Sacramento on January 24, 1848 provided another powerful impetus to immigration. In addition to gold-seekers from the eastern and midwestern states, the lure of getting rich quick brought in South Americans, many of whom were already skilled and experienced miners, and a large influx of Chinese. Less than 1,000 Chinese lived in the U.S. in 1850, but after the Gold Rush the number reached 25,000 by 1852 in California alone, representing about 10 per cent of the state population.

The "Chinese question" soon became a contentious political issue. Some

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welcomed them as valuable workers, “one of the most worthy classes of our newly adopted citizens,” according to outgoing California Governor John McDougal in an 1852 statement. The new governor, John Bigler, saw the Chinese as threats and called on the assembly to restrict their numbers. With the governor’s urging and the force of a report indicating that the Chinese were driving white settlers away because of their different language and customs, the Assembly passed a \$3 a month foreign miners tax and a law that made ship captains post \$500 bonds for each immigrant that landed.

Beyond public dislike of their “strangeness,” the Chinese were also accused of being “coolies” whose slave labor wages drove down those of white miners. Stories circulated about secret Chinese cabals that supposedly sent their poor countrymen to California to exploit the state’s mineral resources. Descriptions of Chinese in newspapers played up their inferiority. The *San Francisco Daily Alta California* editorialized that they were “morally a far worse class. . . than the negro.” In another story, the paper labelled them “semi-human Asiatics” who might have to be forcefully removed from the state. In 1854 the foreign miners tax went up to \$6 a month. The conviction of a white man for killing a Chinese man was thrown out by a state appellate court because a California law prohibited blacks, mulattoes, and Indians from giving evidence and the Court interpreted the statute as applying also to Chinese.

The “Chinese problem loomed as an intense, but largely localized, issue.

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Back east during the 1850s the old prejudices against Catholics reached a boiling point in growing fears of a Papal conspiracy to take over the country. A statement by the Catholic Archbishop of New York that the primary goal of the Church was to convert “all pagan nations, and all Protestant nations,” coupled with the increasing numbers of Catholic immigrant societies, fed this paranoia. Urban social disorder, for whatever reason, did increase during the 1850s, leading the *New York Herald* to declare: “Had we no Irish or Germans or Italians in this country, the duties of a police officer would be a sinecure.”

With the strong possibility of an imminent civil war, newly elected President Abraham Lincoln tried to reverse the bitter animosities that immigration had created in the decade before he became chief executive. In a February 1861 speech to a German-American group, Lincoln said he refused to condemn people based on ancestry. He said Germans were “no better than other people, nor any worse. They are all of the great family of man.” Lincoln reasoned that America had plenty of room for newcomers and “if they can better their condition by leaving their old homes . . . I bid them all God speed.”

Lincoln’s rousing endorsement of the American Dream coincided with Congressional policy, which encouraged immigration from Europe, although it did prohibit importation of Chinese “coolie” laborers in 1862. In that same year, Congress passed the momentous Homestead Act, which gave 160 acres of land to individuals who paid a \$10 registration fee and agreed to live on the land

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and work it for five years. The act, in the words of one historian, “set off a mass migration of land hungry Europeans dazzled by a country that gave its land away.”

Some worried that Lincoln and his Republican allies really wanted to increase the pool of Union soldiers. To allay these suspicions, Lincoln stated publicly that he opposed conscription of foreigners, but those who were in the process of naturalization were eligible for the draft by virtue of the Enrollment Act. Irish Catholic immigrants, most of whom were Democrats, opposed the military draft, especially since it granted exemptions for free blacks. They were at the forefront of the violent agitation that occurred in 1863 surrounding the draft issue. Since most Irish Catholic immigrants were in manual labor jobs, they resented competition from African-Americans, something they believed would increase due to Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Ethnic-racial tensions reached a peak in 1863 when 3,000 longshoremen went on strike and were replaced by new workers, many of them black. On July 11, a mob burned draft headquarters in New York City and attacked officers with rocks and clubs. An entire city block went up in flames. Predominantly Irish rioters roamed the streets and attacked blacks at random. Some observers placed the death toll at 100 or more; others said it may have reached the thousands.

On whole, the American people endorsed the economic benefits of continued immigration after the Civil War. Pennsylvania Congressman William Kelley

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echoed this attitude when he said: "The pressing want of our country is men."

Not only did the infrastructure of the South need to be rebuilt, but now the transcontinental railroad project, interrupted by war, could resume, which would require thousands of workers. Charles Crocker, one of the "Big Four" owners of the Central Pacific, hired 7,000 Chinese and about 2,000 whites to lay track. The Chinese were valued for their skills but also because they were willing to work for less and would take more risks in working around dangerous explosives.

White employees and unions felt the large percentage of Chinese workers hurt labor in general. Coupled with a lingering ethnic prejudice, whites felt justified in seeking restrictions on Chinese immigration. Democrat Henry Haight won the California gubernatorial election in 1867, a victory he saw as a protest "against populating this fair state with a race of Asiatics, against sharing with inferior races the government of the country."

In spite of the vehemence of many Californians, the U.S. Senate approved the Burlingame Treaty (1868) that legalized Chinese immigration. Just as today, when Southwestern states tend to support more restrictive legislation against Mexican immigration, federal policies often clashed with the desires of particular regions. When Congress amended its original Naturalization Law, however, concessions were made to anti-Chinese sentiment. Although not mentioned by name, the 1870 Naturalization Act now allowed citizenship only of "white persons," as before, and "aliens of African nativity" as part of the Reconstruction

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efforts to help former slaves.

This did not deter private citizens from venting their hatred on the Chinese. Mobs killed Chinese and burned their homes in several incidents in the late 1860s and throughout the 1870s. Congress passed legislation in March 1875 that prohibited the importation of Asians against their will (i.e., coolie laborers and prostitutes). This failed to satisfy many Californians and anti-Chinese proposals continued to surface in the state political arena.

Irish immigrant Denis Kearney and his Workingmen's Union and political party spearheaded many of the efforts to make the Chinese "leave our shores" because of how they supposedly lowered the quality of life for whites. When California re-wrote its constitution in 1879, Kearney supporters were instrumental in inserting provisions to keep the vote from anyone born in China, as well as barring them from property ownership and various legal rights. Congress finally responded in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act, the first federal immigration law to completely ban aliens from one country. Congress renewed the law in 1892 and again in 1902, when it transformed it into a "permanent" ban. (It would later be repealed.)

In spite of the exclusion act, whites continued to inflict violence on Chinese. In 1885, full-scale riots took place in Seattle and, in the same year, 28 Chinese miners were killed by whites in Rock Springs, Wyoming. By 1892 all Chinese workers were under the control of state and federal government. They

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had to carry proof of residency at all times. If they did not, they were subject to immediate deportation. Some Chinese challenged the laws in court, but invariably lost, the notable exception being the Supreme Court ruling that children of Chinese immigrants were protected by the 14th Amendment clause giving citizenship to all persons born in the United States.

Outside the West, the major concern of “native-born” Americans regarding immigration involved outsiders from Europe. From 1880 to 1920, 23.5 million immigrants came to America, most of them from such southern and eastern European countries as Italy, Greece, Poland, and Russia, although “old” immigrant groups continued to come in large numbers, with about 1.5 million Germans and over 650,000 Scandinavians arriving in the 1880s. The “new” immigrants, about 1 million of them, constituted 20 per cent of the total for the 1880s. During the next 3 decades, that figure would rise to 60 per cent of total to less than 30 per cent from the older regions of Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia and the British Isles. The federal government established a new reception center on Ellis Island in New York Harbor in 1892 to “process” the 12 million immigrants who entered the country there during the next forty years.

Since many of the “new” immigrants looked different—darker hair and complexion--, were usually either Catholic or Jewish, did not speak English, and were mostly poor and uneducated, concern about their effects on American society reached a new level. Troubling statistics abounded. The national

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homicide rate tripled in the 1880s, with most of the murders occurring in cities that housed the new immigrants. Juvenile delinquency and youth gangs burgeoned and the suicide rate steadily increased between 1870 and 1900, as did alcoholism. What role immigrants played in the rise of these social pathologies remains debatable, but many Americans at the time thought there had to be a connection.

By 1890 the U.S. had a population of 15 per cent foreign-born, about 2/3 of them men between the ages of 15 and 40 with few or no job skills, living primarily in already crowded cities. In 1900, Philadelphia had a foreign-born population of 50 per cent, Boston 2/3, Chicago $\frac{3}{4}$, and New York City a full 80 per cent. Could the steep rise in the alien population be of only coincidental significance to the increase in social problems? Many Americans thought otherwise, although some rallied to the defense of newcomers, seeking to help them. Jacob Riis, himself a Dutch immigrant, published a collection of photographs and writings, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) to alert the nation to the gravity of urban problems. In New York City almost $\frac{1}{2}$ of all dwellings were tenement buildings, the overcrowded, poorly ventilated structures whose environment Riis vividly recorded. Settlement homes, the first in New York in 1886, tried to meet the needs of the urban immigrant poor. Jane Addams' Hull House in Chicago (founded 1889) typified the approach of altruistic reformers, offering food and shelter, but also classes in English and U.S. History, as well as

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folk festivals to help people hold onto some of their ethnic traditions and cultural identity.

Immigrants also engaged in self-help movements that had a similar dualistic objective of achieving assimilation while simultaneously preserving old world cultures. In a nutshell, this is one of the central issues today: To what extent can we maintain a culturally pluralistic society without sacrificing social harmony and a unique American identity.

It must be remembered that the American way of life that is extolled by many today is partly a product of contributions by outsiders in the past. Immigrants clearly contributed immensely to who we are as a people today. Some of the more notable examples are Joseph Pulitzer, who purchased the *New York World* newspaper in 1883 and established a journalistic empire. We honor this Hungarian-born entrepreneur every time a writer wins the award that bears his name. Neal Gabler detailed the seminal work of Jewish immigrants in the creation of that American institution Hollywood in his book, *A World of their Own*. Irving Berlin, a Russian-Jewish emigre, wrote some of the most red-blooded and dearly loved American songs, including "White Christmas" and "God Bless America." Louis Brandeis and Fiorello LaGuardia put their stamp on the worlds of law and politics, respectively, and indicated the increasing involvement of the American "ethnic" in mainstream life.

In spite of what should have been self-evident contributions from newcomers, nativist sentiment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century mushroomed. A year before Americans dedicated the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor as a symbol of their national pledge to provide a haven for the world, Josiah Strong published *Our Country* (1885). He did not share the ideas of Emma Lazarus, whose poem with the famous lines—"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free"—became permanently enshrined as a plaque on the Statue of Liberty.

Strong reflected the influence of Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism philosophy that identified a process of "survival of the fittest" that supposedly operated in the artificial social world just as it does in the natural environment. He had no doubt that God "is training the Anglo-Saxon race for an hour sure to come in the world's future," that it is "destined to dispossess many weaker races, assimilate others, and mold the remainder, until in a very true and important sense it has Anglo-Saxonized mankind." This confidence cloaked a real anxiety Strong felt about the dangers of the "new" immigrants "diluting" the "native American stock."

Other elements of American culture reflected similar xenophobia. Owen Wister's class popular Western novel *The Virginian* (1902) trumpeted the Anglo-Saxon Westerner as an antidote to what the author saw as a "debased and mongrel city" that he said was "crawling with alien vermin." The first American

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film with a story line, coincidentally, glorified the Western hero the next year with the release of *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), with true-blue American Bronco Billy Anderson as the star.

Immigrants were also feared because they seemed to infect America with new radical political philosophies that they brought from the Old World. Events seemed to justify American concern. French and German Socialists were blamed for the 1877 Great Railroad Strike, a violent nationwide work stoppage that resulted in millions of dollars of property damage and the loss of over 100 lives. In the same year, 20 members of the Irish-American radical labor group, the Molly Maguires, were executed for crimes related to strikes in Pennsylvania coal mines. This confirmed, for many Americans, what one historian called “the connection between foreigners and organized mayhem.”

In 1885, Bohemian and Polish workers went on strike in Cleveland. They carried guns and clubs as they forcibly shut down the Rolling Mill Company. The next year, in Chicago, German anarchists were indicted for taking part in the Haymarket Square riot that resulted in the deaths of seven police officers and an unknown number of civilians. While Germans belonged to the “old” and more favored immigrant grouping, they represented a problem, according to the majority: too many foreigners with too many un-American ideas and actions.

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To defend and promote “American” ways, nativists began organizing and acting to stave off the perceived threat of the new arrivals. Henry Bowers started the American Protective Association in 1887, which echoed the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the earlier Know-Nothings. Wisconsin established a policy in 1890, followed by other states, of mandatory instruction in English for all students in the public schools. Some nativists took violent measures. A group of prominent citizens in New Orleans helped a mob break into a prison to abduct and kill 11 Italian aliens in 1891, even though all of them had been found not guilty of murder charges. In 1899, 14 Jewish societies in Brooklyn issued a statement declaring that “no Jew can go on the street without exposing himself to the danger of being pitilessly beaten.” Three years later, Irish immigrants attacked a Jewish funeral procession in New York City, sparking a riot. In light of the recent synagogue burnings and the shootings at the Granada Hills, California Jewish Center in August 1999, it appears that 100-year-old prejudices are clearly still with us.

Labor unrest involving alien radicals caught the attention of Congress after the 1886 Haymarket Square riot. Representative Melbourne Ford of the House Select Committee on Investigation of Foreign Immigration proposed a law that would prevent known anarchists from entering the country. No federal action ensued until the assassination of President William McKinley by avowed anarchist

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Leon Czolgosz, an American born of Russian Polish parents. He attributed his action to a speech by anarchist Emma Goldman, who “set me on fire.” Congress enacted a law in 1903 that barred entrance to the U.S. of anarchists and “persons who believe or advocate the overthrow by force or violence of the government of the United States, or of all government or all forms of law, or the assassination of public officials.”

Statistics painted a portrait of a changing America from 1870 to 1900, from 26,000 Italians to a million, from only 4,000 Russians to $\frac{3}{4}$ million, from 4,000 Poles and 5,000 Portugese to 160,000 and 60,000, respectively. The next decade (1901-1910) witnessed the largest influx of immigrants in U.S. history, a total of almost 8.8 million with over 2 million of them from Italy. In 1905, for the first time, more than one million newcomers arrived in a single year. Public perceptions and official reports (such as the 42-volume study by the U.S. Immigration Commision released in 1911) filled in the details of an ever-more frightening picture of an America transformed by immigration.

Acting on studies that alleged that at least half of the criminal, insane, and poverty-stricken were foreigners, Congress in 1891 shifted more control of immigration to the federal government, in terms of increased medical supervision of aliens and new exclusions of classes of “undesirables” in physical, psychological, and moral categories. Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge

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and the Boston Immigration Restriction League pushed for literacy tests in the 1890s to stem the tide of “new” immigrant groups. This approach repeatedly failed in Congress until 1917 when a literacy measure passed over Wilson’s veto.

As the 20th century approached, anti-immigration activists starting developing supposedly scientific theories of race and ethnicity. M.I.T. and Columbia U. sociology-anthropology professor William Ripley, in *The Races of Europe* (1899), classified Europeans into Teutonic, Alpine, and Mediterranean types, based on physical appearance, but drew no real conclusions as to the “best” group. David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University, did make those distinctions in a 1902 book that claimed Teutonic people were more highly developed than the two darker hair and skin types.

The field of “eugenics” seemed to have a new relevance as Americans keenly felt the onslaught of even more massive immigration. Between 1901 and 1920, 14.5 million immigrants entered the country, the most for any 20-year period in American history. The Chinese population had decreased from 125,000 in the 1880s to about 60,000 in 1920, but Japanese immigration figures were on the rise to 110,000 and thousands of Mexicans fled their revolution in 1910. Fully ten per cent of the Mexican population resided in the Southwestern United States by the time of World War I and over a million Mexicans entered the country between 1910-1930. If the nation could somehow reduce the number of people

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from “inferior” gene pools, the eugenicists’ argument went, America could continue its greatness. If not, we would suffer the decline and fall of previous civilizations. With an almost 14 per cent foreign-born population by 1900, the issue seemed more than academic to most Americans. It involved their very quality of life.

With the outbreak of war between Russia and Japan in 1904, West Coasters again feared an influx of Asian immigrants, this time from Japan rather than China. The *San Francisco Chronicle* spoke of an imminent “Japanese invasion” and declared that the nation could not tolerate immigration from yet another “new” area of the world, especially one whose citizens, according to the *Chronicle*, were coming to our land “solely for the purpose of learning methods by which they will fight us in future years.”

The public seemed to accept the U.S. Immigration Commissioner’s depiction of the Japanese as “tricky, deceitful, immoral, and un-Christian.” The San Francisco school board ordered principals to transfer all Japanese students they had (which amounted to less than 100) to the Oriental Public School. The Japanese government lodged a diplomatic protest and the U.S. government forced the San Francisco school district to reverse its policy, but anti-Japanese prejudice remained high. President Theodore Roosevelt reached a “Gentlemen’s

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Agreement” in 1907-1908 by which he promised not to allow humiliating measures to restrict Japanese immigration and the Japanese government in turn agreed to stop all Japanese laborers from migrating to the U.S.

In 1908, amidst the growing concerns over “new” immigration, Israel Zangwill produced a play in New York, titled *The Melting Pot*. Born in a Jewish ghetto in London, Zangwill believed passionately in the idealistic American Dream and communicated his ideas through the character David Quixano, a Russian-Jewish immigrant in New York. “All my life,” David said, “America was waiting, beckoning, shining—the place where God would wipe away tears from off all faces.” He referred to America as “God’s crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming.”

Many businessmen, increasingly dependent on cheap foreign-born labor, seemed equally confident that aliens could be assimilated in the great melting pot. Companies such as Ford and International Harvester conducted English classes and “Americanization” programs for their workers. As in the past, certain political interests refused to accept the argument for the economic benefits of continued immigration.

Although World War I had the effect of slowing immigration to the U.S., a new Ku Klux Klan emerged in 1915, the second year of the European war, as an extreme reaction to non-white and immigrant groups, especially Catholics. Some

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in Congress worried about a “barbarian horde” of refugees that might flee to this land because of the conflict, that new arrivals might include “dangerous and deadly enemies of the country.” In fact, Congress passed Alien and Sedition Laws in 1917, very similar to those enacted in the 1790s. Federal immigration policy became very specific that year. In addition to the previous Chinese exclusion law, legislation now prohibited immigration from a wide area of Asia, including India, Burma, Arabia, Afghanistan, and sections of Russia.

U.S. entry into World War I in 1917 and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia the same year heightened public apprehension about the possibility that foreign radicals might engineer rebellions in this country. Legislation against anarchists now included a provision for Congress to deport radicals. Emma Goldman, along with about 250 other foreign nationals, were shipped to the Soviet Union in 1919, the same year Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer initiated the “Red Scare,” an organized effort to round up suspected radicals. One of his biggest busts took place on January 2, 1920, as federal agents in 33 towns arrested 2,500. Some 10,000 were eventually apprehended that month. While most cases were dismissed, 600 persons were deported, although no proof existed that tied them to any terrorist activities.

A milder approach to control the influence of aliens came through state legislation that mandated an “English-only” policy in schools. Nebraska, for

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example, passed a statute in 1919 making the teaching of any language other than English illegal, one of 15 states that did this. The Supreme Court invalidated all of these state laws, saying they were in violation of the 14th Amendment right to “liberty,” which included the right “to acquire useful knowledge.”

After World War I, economic imperatives again came into conflict with cultural and political opposition to immigration. The federal government made provisions for Canadians and Mexicans to come for short, specified time periods to work in sectors that needed more employees. The program worked only too well for nativists who continued to see larger cultural and intellectual implications of an unrestricted flow of the “wrong” kinds of people.

Since many of the “new” immigrants had not done well in I.Q. tests given by the U.S. Army during World War I, the military concluded that “American intelligence is declining” and that steps needed to be taken to promote “pure-bred races” to foster the “upward evolution” of America.

Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which became a popular book in the 1920s, used rhetoric more than statistical evidence to echo the argument of the Army. In a stunning display of de-humanizing literature, Grant claimed the “new” immigration “contained a large and increasing number of the weak, the broken and the mentally crippled . . . Our jails, insane asylums

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and almshouses are filled with this human flotsam and the whole tone of American life, social, moral and political, has been lowered and vulgarized by them.” He saw a definite danger in what he called “mongrelization,” the intermingling of Anglo-Saxon and “primitive” peoples and said America must stop the “maudlin sentimentalism that has made it an asylum for the oppressed.”

Immigration restriction became a campaign issue in the 1920 presidential contest, with the Republicans adopting a platform plank calling for stricter laws. At the state level, some California politicians continued to agitate for even more stringent measures to keep Japanese aliens out. Some of the best newspapers in the state, including the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Sacramento Bee*, fanned the flames with sensationalistic stories and headlines about Japanese plans to take over agriculture and industry in the state.

Since the federal literacy test had barred less than 2,000 foreigners, Congress moved to pass more effective anti-immigration legislation, finally settling on a quota system that set a formula of 3 per cent of a nation’s 1910 U.S. Census population as the maximum immigration figure for new arrivals annually. Woodrow Wilson failed to sign it and it did not become law the first time around in 1920.

In California, both houses of the state legislature adopted a resolution calling for “absolute exclusion” of all Japanese immigrants. And with new president

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Warren G. Harding in office, the Senate passed the previous year's quota bill. George Henry Jackson spoke for the majority who supported the measure. He ridiculed the notion of a "melting pot," arguing that America "has not melted any of them. They are either Germans or Irish or Italians or Poles or Magyars or Austrians." In its final form, the 1921 law kept the 3 per cent formula, with certain groups being exempted, including anyone from the Americas. The 100,000 Canadians who immigrated annually seemed to be of no concern to Americans and no arguments were advanced that Mexico and the rest of Latin America would be a significant source of new arrivals. The law set a figure of 357,803 allowable immigrants per year, with 197,630 from the older northern and western European countries and the rest from the newer southern and eastern European regions. The law remained in effect until 1924.

In the interim, debate continued to rage, with many nativists favoring a formula based on an earlier census when the "new" immigrant numbers were much smaller than in 1910. Harvard professor Robert Ward, in a 1922 *Scientific Monthly* article, saw the issue as more a biological than an economic one. "If we want the American race to continue to be predominantly Anglo-Saxon-Germanic," he wrote, an earlier census basis had to be employed.

Congress acted again and passed the historic Immigration Act of 1924, often referred to as the National Origins Act. A 2 per cent quota and an 1890 census

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basis replaced the terms of the 1921 law. Total European immigration would now be reduced to about 164,000 a year. All Asians were completely excluded and those from the Americas were left unregulated, although later that year Congress created the Immigration Border Patrol. After several years of determining how to arrive at accurate “national origins” statistics, the law became fully functional in 1929, with the upshot being that 82 per cent of future immigrants would come annually from the older areas of Germany, Scandinavia, and the British Isles.

With the economic pressures of the Depression, federal policy became harsher, and the Hoover administration began a program to send Mexicans back to their native country. During some years of the 1930s, more people left the country than entered. The total figure of 528,000 immigrants for the entire decade marked the lowest figure since the 1820s. Franklin Roosevelt did allow about 15,000 Germans to remain in the country as an effort to protect them from Hitler’s regime, although he failed to act to save Jewish refugees who reached Havana harbor in May 1939 aboard the *S.S. St. Louis*. The U.S. State Department, possibly due to its strong anti-Semitism, refused to allow them to disembark. One historian estimated that about a third of those forced to return died in the Holocaust.

A bill sponsored by New York Democratic Senator Robert Wagner and Massachusetts Republican Representative Edith Nourse Rogers to accept

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20,000 German refugee children was voted down, also in May 1939. Since some of the children were Jewish, opposition to the measure seemed to be based on anti-Semitism. When the Second World War began less than five months later, however, resistance to admission of refugees centered more on fears of internal subversion. To this end, Congress passed the Alien Registration Act in June 1940 in order to monitor any suspected anti-American activities by aliens.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 heightened anti-immigration sentiment considerably. Federal and local law enforcement agencies detained and questioned Japanese, Italian, and German aliens suspected of being subversives. On the West Coast, some 100,000 Japanese-Americans were put in internment camps by virtue of an executive order by President Roosevelt. Although some early movement occurred in the East to erect similar facilities for Italians and Germans, nothing tangible transpired.

At the same time that American hatred of Japanese swelled, pressure to repeal the Chinese exclusion acts mounted. As a wartime ally, China enjoyed a new positive image. The Citizens Committee to Repeal Chinese Exclusion, which included such notables as Walter Judd, started a movement in 1943 to achieve their goal and that year they celebrated their first success when the Board of Supervisors of San Francisco, long a hotbed of anti-Chinese agitation, came out for repeal. Some labor leaders and influential newspapers such as the *New York*

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Times came on board and President Roosevelt publicly persuaded Congress to act, which it did with a bill signed by FDR on December 17, 1943 that made Chinese eligible for citizenship, although the quota for Chinese immigrants was initially set at only 105 per year.

After the war, Congress passed the War Brides Act (December 1945) that permitted the entry of alien spouses and children of veterans with no regard to quotas. Another law gave immigrants from India and the Philippines naturalization rights. Chinese wives of American citizens were also allowed to enter the U.S. outside of quota restrictions, but Japanese aliens were still completely barred.

In June 1948 Congress passed the Displaced Persons Act, which did not completely satisfy President Truman, a proponent of more liberal admission policies for those from war-torn countries. When the first shipload of displaced persons arrived in New York Harbor in October, Attorney General Tom Clark declared it the beginning of a process “that will transform the victims of hatred, bigotry, religious intolerance and wars into happy and peaceful souls.”

A more practical outlook emerged after the war concerning the 200,000 Mexican farm workers and 130,000 railroad employees who had come to the U.S. between 1943 and 1946. The official “bracero” program of supplemental labor, as well as illegal aliens (commonly called “wetbacks”), had become vital to

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the U.S. economy. Even the Immigration and Naturalization Service Los Angeles office chief admitted that deporting them “particularly during harvest seasons, would have brought disaster to the agricultural enterprises employing them.” Within a decade, however, the economic benefits of the Mexican laborers were seen as less significant than the social impact of their growing populations in U.S. border states such as Texas and California.

Federal immigration policy in the 1950s certainly reflected the larger historical picture of a nation that seemed to feel like a “fortress under siege,” struggling to remain vigilant against supposed Communist subversion and rapid technological and cultural changes. Congress determined that the national origins formula of the 1920s had worked well for the past 25 years, but it also passed the Internal Security Act in September 1950, similar to the earlier Alien and Sedition laws of the 1790s and the World War I period. The legislation had a more contemporary air in that it specified the American Communist Party as a “subversive” group.

In 1952, a major law, the Immigration and Nationality Act (also called the McCarran-Walter Act), established a uniform federal immigration policy that eliminated all racial categorization and gave alien husbands of American citizens the same rights as alien wives. Reflecting the growing concern over illegal

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Mexican immigration, the laws also stipulated that aiding illegal aliens would constitute a felony. In addition, the measure gave the first 50 per cent of a country's quota to those with valuable skills and the remainder primarily to relatives of U.S. citizens or alien residents.

Although Japanese were now eligible to immigrate (185 a year), Truman vetoed the bill because it discriminated against some NATO nations and most of Eastern Europe. Congress passed it over his objection, but that did not stop Truman from pushing for more liberal policies. He put together a Commission on Immigration and Naturalization to study the issue in more depth. The commission released a report, titled *Whom We Shall Welcome*, in January 1953, Truman's last month in office. The report criticized federal immigration policy as a detriment to American foreign policy and suggested two major reforms: (1) an increase in the number allowed to enter the country annually; (2) a new quota system that did not use racial or ethnic considerations. In his first State of the Union Address in 1953, President Eisenhower endorsed these two goals.

McCarren-Walter stood, but Congress did pass the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 that gave 214,000 visas to victims of the Nazi and Soviet regimes. For the first time, the refugee allotments were independently granted, not subtracted from national quotas. The door began to close, however, regarding illegal Mexican immigration. In 1953, 100,000 illegal aliens a month were being detained and deported by the Border Patrol whose head officer complained that the "Mexican

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problem” represented “perhaps the greatest peacetime invasion ever complacently suffered by any country under open, flagrant, contemptuous violation of its laws.” Attorney General Herbert Brownell even considered using the Sixth Army to defend the Mexican border. Government statements and media stories aroused public concern in California about the disease, drugs and political radicalism Mexicans were allegedly bringing into the country. Mexican-American organizations shared the general public disapproval of illegal aliens.

Agribusiness interests, who benefitted greatly from a steady pool of cheap illegal immigrant labor, stood alone in trying to weaken the border patrol. They did not prevail, as Congress gave renewed support for the I.N.S. and the Eisenhower administration began “Operation Wetback” in June 1954 to round up suspected illegal Mexican aliens, with the help of a now compliant agricultural community. The government declared the program a success and estimated that one million illegals had been sent back to Mexico, an unverifiable figure. One clear result could be seen in the increase in the number of legal Mexican agricultural laborers entering the country, from 222,000 in 1954 to 432,000 in 1956.

Following the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, President Eisenhower issued an “emergency parole,” authorized by the 1952 immigration act, to allow 30,000 refugees to enter the country. President Kennedy used the same

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executive power to bring in 60,000 Cubans in 1962 and later several thousand Chinese. This led to the passage of the Migration and Refugee Assistance Act in 1962 that President Kennedy had pushed. In 1963 the president proposed wholesale immigration reform. Since refugee problems had proliferated and the country had become more sensitive to its own civil rights issues, a majority in Congress seemed receptive to change.

JFK outlined a plan to end the national origins formula within five years and to substitute a system that gave priority to immigrants with useful skills and secondarily to relatives of recent immigrants in this country. The proposal set a maximum of 10 per cent of total allowable immigrants for any one country. The young president never got a chance to see his ideas implemented but Lyndon Johnson, to the surprise of some, vigorously backed his predecessor's immigration reform bill. As LBJ saw it, we were justified in asking immigrants what they had to offer this country, but not in asking: "In what country were you born?"

With a Harris Poll indicating 2/3 of Americans supporting the JFK reforms, LBJ employed his considerable legislative talents. After an initial setback, the measure passed the House in 1965, but not before the Immigration Subcommittee reversed JFK's priority approach and made family re-unification more important than job skills. The Senate added a quota of 120,000 for the Western Hemisphere countries before it passed the upper house on

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September 22, 1965, with a 76-18 vote. The House worked out some minor compromises and a new federal immigration policy emerged. In its final form, the law provided for 120,000 from the Americas and 170,000 from elsewhere, with no single country outside the Western Hemisphere allowed more than 20,000 slots. A full 75 per cent of the quotas were reserved for relatives; about 6 per cent for refugees and the rest assigned on the basis of needed skills. Since the bracero program ended in 1964, the new law provided for the temporary employment of aliens during labor shortages, a feature that related almost exclusively to agribusiness.

During the Liberty Island ceremony commemorating the new law, LBJ declared it “one of the most important acts of this Congress and of this administration” because it would “make us truer to ourselves both as a country and as a people.” Such sentiments were seldom heard again in the ensuing 35 years, as Americans adjusted to a deluge of Asian and Latin American immigration that profoundly affected American society.