

EXPLORING IMMIGRATION

Module 5

SPEAKER It's a beautiful day to become a citizen. 00:00:11

CROWD APPLAUSE 00:00:17

NARRATOR Holland, Michigan, like many other local communities across the country, is trying to deal with problems associated with the arrival in recent years of large numbers of immigrants from non-Anglo Saxon cultures. 00:00:56

MAN #1 As mayor of the city of Holland it gives me great pleasure to rise and offer a few heartfelt words at the ceremony of friendship and international understanding. 00:01:06

NARRATOR At the national level, the federal government has been unable or unwilling to give priority to the wide spurred problems caused by both legal and illegal immigration. 00:01:19

In 1986 Congress passed and President Reagan signed the Immigration Reform & Control Act. Before it became law, business interests succeeded in watering down controls on the employment of illegal immigrants. 00:01:37

MAN #2 The Immigration Reform & Control Act known as IRCA was passed in 1986. It came from the recommendations of the U.S. Select Commission on Immigration & Refugee Policy, and was steered, shepherded through the Congress in the Senate by Senator Alan Simpson and Senator Ted Kennedy, and in the House of Representatives by Peter Rodino from New Jersey and Hamilton Fish from New York; all 4 of whom were on the Select Commission, and it had a principle objective. 00:02:11

The principle objective was to curtail illegal immigration and to get rid of a system of indentured labor, which was the last remaining vestige of indenture and slavery in the United States. That is to say the toleration of large numbers of workers in the United States who had no legal status and who had no way of protecting themselves against exploitative employers; and so that was our intention.

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It did not succeed totally, but it set forth the principles and laid down the mechanisms by which we could control illegal immigration better, more effectively, without expecting perfection; and by which we could get rid of – thereby get rid of this system of indenture. And a principle way of getting rid of it was to legalize approximately 3 million aliens who had been here for a long time continuously.

00:03:12

MAN #3 So we did the '86 bill, 2.9 million people came forward, an extraordinary act of generosity; and yet the groups were still saying that we're not a generous enough country, we must bring in more, must bring in more. 00:03:25

Well anyway the 2.9 came forward and they weren't from Mexico, they were from all over the world; they were from Canada, England, Austria, you name it. And they'd been waiting in the United States just for such an act of grace. 00:03:38

So they came forward and then we began to turn our attention to legal immigration. Well then by that time in – in – after the '86 Act and then there was the great rush of the Statute of Liberty and American the Beautiful and – and I always said well – you know but the Statute of Liberty, the marvelous poem by Emma Lazarus doesn't say send us everybody you got legally or illegally. 00:04:02

NARRATOR In 1994 civil rights icon Barbara Jordan was appointed Chair of a presidential commission on immigration reform that would suggest possible revisions in the unsuccessful 1986 law. 00:04:19

MAN #4 In the '90's we did the bill and it was probably too generous. The lottery and then I knew from then on it was going to straight up. So then the Barbara Jordan report, Barbara Jordan is a magnificent woman, with her Commission and she gave us some wonderful recommendations after '90 and she died. And when she died, everything I tried to do died with her. 00:04:46

And she was a wonderful ally and she was talking about a breathing space, maybe 550, 600,000 a year and then look at it for 5 years; where are we going, where are we going demographically, where are we going as Americanization; that was a word she used. Hell if I had used it, they'd have pulled the temple down; Sampson without hair. 00:05:06

But she did and she talked of that, and – and she was honest, true as a dye to herself; and we couldn't get that done. And – and the things that she was saying were very important, but – and the Commission work is superb, but it went a glimmering. And I tried it in the Senate and got it rammed in my ear in royal fashion. 00:05:31

MAN #5 We have got to have explicitly what we in the Commission, U.S. Commission of Immigration Reform, called an Americanization policy and be proud of it and not flee from it; and there are different components to it. 00:05:48

One is to have a set of adjustment opportunities provided for by state and local governments, by churches and other private organizations, and to – and they do a lot of this already. But there are – we encourage, we gave specific practices that would help private and non – and – and non-profit and public organizations do those things to help people become Americans, to help them become more comfortable. And especially of course we're concerned about children, and that's where the real test is. 00:06:24

The second thing is, obviously you've got to have a common language. You have a national civic culture, it's based on an ideal and not on a tribal blood myth; so you've got to have a way of communicating. We want to keep up an emphasis on civic education in the schools so that children, youngsters, will really come to understand what this marvelous thing, this really, really sacred document, the Constitution of the United States is; why its – its embrace of freedom of speech, of assembly, of religion, the other Bill of Rights and the 14th Amendment especially, why they are so important in making a free society. 00:07:02

NARRATOR A romantic version of our immigration history often influences legislation on the subject. 00:07:11

CHILDREN SINGING 00:07:18

NARRATOR It prompted future President John Kennedy to call on Professor Fuchs for help promoting immigration reform. 00:07:27

MAN #6 When John Kennedy was a United States senator he wrote a book called *A Nation of Immigrants*. John Kennedy, like so many of us, and I put Ronald Reagan in this same category; we're romantic immigrationist. That is to say they saw in immigration a reaffirmation of the American myth and its narrative, and tended to overlook any problems connected to immigration. And they tended to see immigration as without much cost and it's not an unlimited – costless phenomenon. 00:08:09

John Kennedy wrote this book very favorable to immigration and attacked the national origins quota system, which was the method of selecting immigrants, a restricted number of immigrants, that was used in the 1924 legislation. 00:08:24

Now he wasn't the first president to make that attack. Truman had attacked the national origins quotas system. Eisenhower attacked the national origins quota system, spoke about it in an inaugural

address, set up legislation; but nothing happened. And nothing happened with John Kennedy's administration either. The votes simply weren't there. 00:08:48

But he died, he was killed. He became a martyred hero. The things that he valued and stood for took on elevated significance. He was succeeded by a skillful man who had been Vice President and Senate Majority Leader who knew every trick in the book to get difficult, controversial legislation passed in the Congress. 00:09:07

Johnson took it on, spoke about it eloquently, and of course we got the 1965 Immigration Act. Teddy Kennedy played a major role as a young, brand new Senator in the United States Senate in helping to manage that legislation on the floor; and Johnson did everything he could do to get it passed, and he succeeded. 00:09:32

He sent the Secretary of State Dean Rusk up to the Hill to explain why this would be a triumph for the United States over the terrible, awful, which it was, Soviet Union and its closed system who didn't want to let anybody out and nobody would want to come in there. And here the whole world would want to come in here and we're perfectly open and free to – anybody can leave whenever they'd like. What a marvelous propaganda weapon in the Cold War. 00:10:00

NARRATOR Since Barbara Jordan's death in 1996 there has been much debate about the nature of immigration reform, but little movement toward enacting a new law. 00:10:14

MAN #7 The problem with immigration in the United States is that we have a set of policies that we've had and been developing for some time, say about 40 years at least, that have largely created a – a system which is widely dysfunctional; and – and that dysfunction is agreed on the left and the right. 00:10:33

The second problem we have, which is more of a broader problem with our politics, is a – an inability in many ways to solve which is becoming a larger and larger and larger problem. 00:10:43

That fact really hasn't changed. We went through a very large debate, actually two debates, over attempts to solve it from a comprehensive matter; both of which failed. Any new administration comes in with that same set of dilemmas. Congress has changed a little bit, but the issue, the particulars, the problem has not changed hardly at all. If anything, it has gotten worse. 00:11:07

The key thing to understand about immigration policy over the last say 40 years is the deep confusion behind it, which I'd say we need to back up and put it in a broader perspective just for a moment; which is what's driving immigration policy, all the rules and regulations about border security, who can come in, when, temporary workers. All of that is no longer informed by a clear principle, and as a result it's very confusing. 00:11:37

I would affirm that Congressmen themselves and their staffs don't really know how those rules and regulations work. And as long as we're not informed by a deeper principle, what is the objective for immigration policy, what – what purpose does it serve. It's hard to have a particular policy. And as a result, the various factions in – within Congress, the various interest groups, get little pieces here and there, pulling and pushing, and you have a large incomprehensive policy that then over the course of those 40 years sends us in all sorts of different directions. 00:12:15

MAN #8 The problem with immigration today is not them, it's us. The immigrants are very similar, we've changed. The immigrants are coming from what we would call the Third World. And in fact a century ago they were coming from was then the Third World; Sicily, Eastern Europe, that sort of things. And they're coming from small towns or rural areas. For the most part they're you know pretty motivated, kind of strivers, not the poorest people in those

communities but kind of one step up looking for something more. So they're very similar people, but they're coming to a very different kind of place. 00:12:53

One quick way I describe that is that a century ago an immigrant from Sicily or Odessa came from a place where there was horse manure in the streets and they came to New York or Boston and there was horse manure in the streets there to. Now they're coming to a 21st century place that isn't like that at all anymore. 00:13:08

We've got you know the internet. We don't have flying cars yet, but it's that kind of thing. I mean it's a huge cultural gap that just wasn't as big as it used to be, and it's much more difficult both really for the immigrants and for us to deal with people who are that different from us. 00:13:30

NOISE FROM OUTDOORS – TRAFFIC GOING BY, STREET NOISE 00:13:44

MAN #9 This problem of 19th century workers in a modern society resonates down the generations because a century ago if you had a Sicilian frankly there wasn't the - that much emphasis on education among their families either; and so those kids may have dropped out early, gone to work, that sort of thing. 00:14:05

It didn't really matter that much if you dropped out at 7th grade 100 or 150 years ago. Today it does. Nowadays it doesn't work that way. And so immigration is creating potentially another underclass in a way that we really didn't see happen a century ago; not because today's immigrants are less desirable, but because there's a mis-match between them and us. 00:14:31

MAN #10 We have now a very extensive system of – of benefits, of rules and regulations in American society which broadly is called the welfare state. A hundred years ago when immigrants came that was not the case, which meant that those immigrants scrapped together, worked

together, got out of – of where they started, got the corner grocery store, went forward and succeeded. 00:14:57

The concern today is that immigrants are coming here and there is a very easy way for them to become dependent; and so that system doesn't work anymore. So this – this question of who's coming here and what kind of skills they have is not only an economic question, do they have the kinds of skills that our economy needs, it tells us something about the individuals, the types of individuals, and whether they are the kinds of immigrants who will more likely go the path of assimilation and succeed in American society which many of them do, or they will tend to live in enclaves and become dependent upon benefits from state and local government and the federal government. 00:15:42

MAN #11 The federal government did commission a study on the deficit back in the early '90's, the Jordan Commission. And their findings was that the typical immigrant household receives \$13,000 a year from the federal government in benefits. They pay \$10,000 in federal taxes, which leaves a deficit of \$3,000 per household, per immigrant household, throughout all the immigrant communities in – in the United States on average. 00:16:14

If you multiply that \$3,000 times all the households in this country that are headed by immigrants, you have a very large sum that is attributable to immigration that is a deficit item. That study which was done in the early '90's is – is surely you know underestimating the current situation, simply because there are more programs that are available to immigrants; and certainly the size of the immigrant population is far larger now than it was then. 00:16:43

So bottom line is we have a big deficit problem that is attributable to immigration, yet no one in Washington seems to be focusing on this particular part of – of the deficit. 00:16:56

CHILDREN SINGING 'THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND' 00:17:37

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