





# America and Immigration: a Mixed History With Lessons for Today

"Instead of their learning our language, we must learn theirs," complained a Pennsylvania businessman, irritated that the immigrants were causing the native-born to abandon neighborhoods to the newcomers. Another common complaint the native-born had against these immigrants was that they were willing to work for less.

While this may sound like modern America, and it is, it is also a description of colonial America, in Pennsylvania. Benjamin Franklin was the businessman, a highly successful printer, who did not like being forced to learn the language of the immigrant Germans, while others grumbled that English neighborhoods were being "taken over" by the Germans, introducing their different manners and customs.



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And the Germans were willing to do the jobs the English did not want to do, or at least they were willing to do them for less. A common irritation for the English was when they saw advertisements and street signs in both English and German, and sometimes only in German!

Franklin asked a question, which no doubt summed up the feelings of many other Pennsylvanians: "Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us, instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our language or customs any more than they can acquire our complexion?"

Franklin's mixed reaction to the immigration of non-English peoples into English America well illustrates the contradictory feelings that Americans have had toward immigration throughout our nation's history. Almost every new ethnic group coming to America has been met with suspicion, contrary to those who like to quote the poem of Emma Lazarus, which proclaims, "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses."

Perhaps Americans' attitude toward immigration is best explained by the fact that immigration has always offered a mixture of positive and negative consequences, all at the same time.

The political situation today is far different from that which existed in early American history, and even from that which existed in the waves of immigrants arriving in the late 19th century into the early part of the 20th century. The America today's immigrants encounter is far different, offering a cornucopia of government benefits, which discourages work and self-reliance and encourages dependence upon







government and those politicians who provide these benefits. This creates a permanent "underclass" that provides a reliable voting bloc for those who stay in power by promising an ever-expanding welfare state. Immigrants of yesteryear did not expect to be taken care of by a paternalistic federal government, much less given free cellphones. As Tom Woods wrote for the Foundation for Economic Education, in his essay entitled Liberty and Immigration, "The current crisis is indeed unique in American history."

Despite widespread perception to the contrary, throughout our entire history, large waves of immigration have provoked resistance and resentment from many native-born Americans, and immigration has always been controversial. And though, by and large, new arrivals have managed to succeed economically, overcome resentment, and make many positive contributions to their adopted homeland, there were challenges. Thus the history of past waves of immigration into America suggests that the challenges presented by the present generation of immigrants will also be overcome, and that, in the long run, the United States will benefit. But as we shall see, while there are similarities between the past waves of immigration and today's, there are also important differences that make today's immigration much more challenging — even threatening — to our constitutional Republic.

A closer examination of the role immigration has played in American history will give us an idea of both the similarities and the differences we find in today's immigrants compared to those of earlier generations, and provide some lessons to apply for our present condition and what course we should take going into the future.

### **How the Founders Viewed Immigration**

Franklin was not the only "Founding Father" to hold such cautious views toward immigration. Thomas Jefferson addressed his own concerns about immigrants in his *Notes on Virginia*. His principal concern was that they tended not to hold in high regard (at least not in as high a regard that Jefferson believed his fellow ethnic English had) the concepts of liberty and limited self-government that had been developed in the English residents of English America. He said America's happy situation derived from "a composition of the freest principles of the English Constitution, with others, derived from natural right and reason," but most of the non-British immigrants were coming from monarchial nations.

Jefferson was concerned that non-British immigrants would "bring with them the principles of the governments they leave, imbibed in their early youth; or, if able to throw them off, it will be in exchange for an unbounded licentiousness, passing, as is usual, from one extreme to another. It would be a miracle were they to stop precisely at the point of temperate liberty."

It was Jefferson's opinion that it would be "safer" to let the natural increase of the American population grow, rather than have it come through mass immigration. He explained his concern: "Suppose 20 millions of republican Americans [were] thrown all of a sudden into France, what would be the condition of that kingdom? If it would be more turbulent, less happy, less strong, we may believe that the addition of a half a million of foreigners to our present numbers would produce a similar effect here."

Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton disagreed on many other things, but they were in complete agreement in taking a cautious approach to immigration. "The influx of foreigners," Hamilton wrote, "must, therefore, tend to produce a heterogeneous compound; to change and corrupt the national spirit; to complicate and confound public opinion; to introduce foreign propensities. In the composition of





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society, the harmony of the ingredients is all-important, and whatever tends to a discordant intermixture must have an injurious tendency."

Hamilton noted the unhappy fate of the American Indians because of immigration from Europe. "Prudence requires us to trace the history further and ask what has become of the nations of savages who exercised this policy, and who now occupies the territory which they inhabited? Perhaps a lesson is here taught which ought not to be despised."

Hamilton is clearly correct. The culture of the indigenous Indian tribes was overwhelmed by "immigrants" from Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. A separate article on that issue alone could be written, but the history of the dissolution of the Indian culture provides a stark example of how a native culture can be overwhelmed by immigration.

#### A History of Mixed Blessings and Curses

After the initial settlement of the colonies, very little population growth resulted from immigration. Technically, the English and Scottish settlers were not "immigrants," since they were still within the British Empire. Still, natural increase accounted for most of the population growth, except for the Germans in Pennsylvania that caused Franklin so much concern.

Most of the colonial-era settlers were Protestant Christians, with notable exception in the "Catholic" colony of Maryland. At the time of the first census of the United States, the Catholic population was less than five percent. Those designated as "Irish" were not Irish, who were overwhelmingly Catholic, but rather Scots-Irish (Presbyterian Scots who had settled in the northern provinces of Ireland). This separate development of the colonies contributed greatly to the creation of an environment that caused the growth of respect for religious liberty.

It is difficult to imagine American history without the Scots-Irish. In his book *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*, former Senator Jim Webb recalled a high-ranking British army general telling him that the Scots "are the hardest, toughest people on earth." The Romans proved unable to conquer them. Later, the English were only able to subdue them after making a Scot, James Stewart, king of England.

Webb recalled his reaction to the general: "I could not restrain a knowing smile, for the culture had hardly changed after it crossed the Atlantic Ocean three hundred years ago and set up its communities in the Appalachian Mountains. There's an old saying in the mountain South. Insult a Yankee and he'll sue you. Insult a mountain boy and he'll kill you."

Many other ethnic groups completed the mixture of peoples of colonial America. None were more important, of course, than the black Africans, brought to the colonies in chains as slaves. Their hard labor contributed greatly to the prosperity of the cotton fields and tobacco plantations of the American South.

The colony of New Sweden, with few colonists, was conquered by the Dutch in 1655, but pioneers on the American frontier owed a great debt to the Swedes for their innovation known as the log cabin. The Dutch formed New Netherland, in what is now New York and New Jersey, before they were in turn conquered by the English. The Dutch settlers remained, however, adding yet another ingredient to the growing American "melting pot." Some Jews escaped centuries of antagonism in Europe by settling in Philadelphia (where Pennsylvania had long tolerated any person who expressed a belief in one God) and





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Newport (where Rhode Island had no established church and complete religious liberty).

Arriving in the 1770s, the French settler Michel-Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur commented on the variety of human beings he saw in the colonies, "What then is the American, this new man?," marveling at this "strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country."

Still, at the time of the first census of the United States in 1790, 80 percent was of British ancestry. From 1770 to 1830, immigration was insignificant. By then, the English, the Scots-Irish, the Dutch, the Germans, and the other smaller ethnic groups had settled into what many probably thought was going to be the permanent ethnic mix.

But attracted by economic opportunity, or to escape religious and political persecution in Europe, immigration began to increase. While we often hear "America is a nation of immigrants," except for the indigenous peoples already here, and the black Africans brought to these shores as slaves, most of the residents of the United States at the time of its independence were subjects, or the descendants of subjects of the British Empire. They were simply moving to another part of that Empire. Calling them "immigrants" would be like calling someone who moves from Wisconsin to Florida an immigrant. The more accurate term would be "migrant."

Even at the low numbers of immigration in the early years of the Republic, the "foreign vote" probably tipped the scales in favor of Jefferson's "Republican" Party in the election of 1800, when he narrowly defeated the Federalist Party incumbent, John Adams. Sensing that immigrants were trending toward Jefferson's party, the Federalist-controlled Congress enacted the Alien Acts in 1798. These three acts were attempts to mitigate the influence of aliens — those residing in the United States who were not yet citizens. One act increased the period of residence required for a foreign-born person to become a U.S. citizen from five to 14 years. Other acts allowed the deportation or, in wartime, the imprisonment of aliens, at the president's discretion. These laws proved unable to prevent the election of Jefferson, however, and were allowed to expire when Jefferson settled into the White House in 1801 and his party took control of Congress.

Perhaps this early overreaction to immigration in the early years of the Republic provides some guidance for today's lawmakers, as they struggle to deal with this difficult issue. While immigration provides many challenges for our country, it is imperative that we do not overreact with laws that are draconian, unconstitutional, and antithetical to liberty.

In 1820, immigration into the country was less than 10,000 people. As late as 1830, the numbers were still less than 25,000. By 1830, 98.5 percent of the population was native-born. But 600,000 came in the next decade, and America was on its way to being, if not a nation of immigrants, certainly a nation with a large number of immigrants and their descendants. Still, the native-born population remained far greater than the non-native population, which is contrary to what the phrase "nation of immigrants" could be interpreted to imply.

The 600,000 immigrants arriving in the 1830s were followed by 1.7 million in the 1840s, mostly from Ireland and Germany.

The potato famine depopulated Ireland. An estimated two million died in the Emerald Isle, about one-fourth of the population. They were too poor to buy land in the western part of the United States — and besides that, the land in Ireland had failed them — so they moved into cities in the East, swelling the populations of Boston and New York City. They were willing to work for less than native-born workers,





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and this led to great resentment. Despite their widespread illiteracy, they soon learned to read signs that appeared in storefront windows and at factory gates: "No Irish Need Apply."

But as poor as first-generation immigrants were, they soon became citizens and gained the right to vote. Politicians took notice, and began courting the Irish vote. Much like today, this immigrant voting bloc began to change the political demographics of the country, especially in certain states, such as Massachusetts and New York. Powerful city machines, such as Tammany Hall, were soon dominated by the Irish.

Then there were the Germans, who arrived in the hundreds of thousands, mostly driven to America by their own crop failures. But mixed in with the mostly hard-working farmers were a number of political radicals, who sailed after the failed revolutions that swept across Europe in 1848. As a group, Germans tended to be modestly more wealthy than the Irish, and they largely headed for the Middle West, especially Wisconsin, to continue farming.

These Germans made positive contributions to American culture, including the Conestoga wagon, so important in the settling of the West. They also became the backbone of antiwar, noninterventionist sentiment in 20th-century America, having seen enough of the militarism of Europe.

Irish and German immigrants were significant in a number of ways. Their numbers, especially the Germans, helped swell the ranks of the Union armies during the Civil War, and may have tipped the balance in that great conflict. Unfortunately, immigration has probably contributed to a decline in the understanding of the value of the idea of sovereign states in a federal system as a powerful tool in the struggle to maintain limited government.

With the rising tide of Catholic immigration, there were fears this flood would overwhelm the native Protestantism of the country. In 1849, the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner was formed to combat Catholic immigration, and this soon evolved into the American Party of the 1850s. Popularly known as the "Know-Nothing Party" because members held secret meetings about which they would tell inquirers, "I know nothing," they demanded restrictions on immigration and the deportation of alien poor.

Anti-Catholic literature was common. *Awful Disclosure*, by Maria Monk, even alleged that nuns regularly had babies by priests, and buried their tiny bodies underneath convents. This libelous tract sold over 300,000 copies.

But anti-foreign feeling by itself was not enough to propel the American Party into power. For one thing, the American economy was growing rapidly, and general prosperity mitigated resentment toward the newcomers. And there is little doubt that the Irish industrial workers and the German farmers were contributing to that prosperity enjoyed by all Americans.

For years, American Unitarians, such as Horace Mann, pushed for the establishment of public schools, but most Americans had little regard for either the Unitarian religion or their idea of public schools. Unitarians denied the doctrine of the Trinity (that God exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and promoted the idea of the "perfectability of man." Mann suggested "perfection" could best be accomplished through public schools, even boldly predicting, "Let the common [public] school be expanded to its capabilities, let it be worked with the efficiency of which it is susceptible, and ninetenths of the crimes in the penal code would become obsolete; the long catalogue of human ills would be abridged; men would walk more safely by day; every pillow would be more inviolable by night."





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Finally, Mann found some allies to implement his idea of public schools — Protestant ministers who saw public schools as a way to make Protestants out of Catholic children. Protestant Christianity provided the philosophical foundation for these early public schools — prayer and Bible reading from a Protestant perspective were part of the school day until the 1960s — and Catholics knew it. This led to the creation of a parochial Catholic school system, which coexisted with the public schools for the next several decades. Of course, Catholics of today no longer fear their children being indoctrinated into Protestant Christianity in the public schools. Christianity — whether Protestant or Catholic — has been largely expelled from America's public schools, replaced by secular ideology, despised by evangelical Protestants and devout Catholics alike.

After the Civil War, technological improvements in ships, making transatlantic voyages more feasible for the average traveler, combined with the growing need for workers in America's expanding factories, led to what historians have often referred to as "the new immigration." Beginning in the 1880s and continuing to the time of World War I, America saw a shift in the pattern of its immigration from northern and western Europe to southern and eastern Europe. Immigrants even came from Asia, crossing the Pacific Ocean.

In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which stipulated that only a limited number of Chinese immigrants could enter the country for the next 10 years, and this law was renewed in 1892 and 1902. H. Paul Jeffers, writing in *An Honest President*, a biography of President Grover Cleveland, said that Cleveland had first been "sympathetic to the plight of the Chinese, most of whom had been brought into the country as laborers for building railroads in the West." They were often subjected to violence, leading Cleveland to the conclusion that overcoming the deep prejudice against absorbing the Chinese into the mainstream of American life "was an impossible goal."

Cleveland signed a bill in 1888 to ban the return to the United States of Chinese who had left the country. He said, "The experiment of blending the social habits and mutual race idiosyncracies of the Chinese laboring classes with those of the great body of the people of the United States has been proved by the experience of twenty years ... to be in every sense unwise, impolitic, and injurious to both nations." Immigrants from Japan faced similar hostility, as both groups were willing to work cheaper than native-born Americans. This anti-Japanese immigration policy contributed to the deterioration of American-Japanese relations in the 20th century.

Jeffers said that Cleveland did not approve of "hyphenated Americans," contending that immigrants must leave their nativism behind and "become Americans." Cleveland's view was the prevailing opinion of both American politicians and American citizens.

Italian immigrants from 1880 to 1920 numbered more than five million. One of the more famous descendants of this wave was the only undefeated heavyweight boxing champion in history, Rocky Marciano. Over one million Swedes and Norwegians came during this same time period, with most settling in the Midwest, especially in Minnesota (thus the NFL team, the Vikings). Over two million Jews fled Russia to escape persistent persecution. Greeks, Poles, and others from Eastern Europe joined, and, interestingly for today, Syrians and Lebanese Christians also came, hoping to leave the Muslimdominated Middle East.

Most of these immigrants from Europe and the Middle East came through New York Harbor, with the processing done at Ellis Island in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, erected in 1886. The French had







given the statue to honor the United States' association with liberty. The statue had nothing to do with immigration, but not surprisingly, it came to be associated with immigration.

One of the myths of the processing done at Ellis Island is that the processors summarily changed immigrants' family names. Writing in *Hey, America, Your Roots Are Showing*, Megan Smolenyak explained: "In spite of what you've been told or what you still read in normally reliable sources, names were not changed at Ellis Island. All those stories you've heard about the last syllable of your surname being lopped off by some official who found it too cumbersome to pronounce? Not true." What is true, is that "many of our immigrant ancestors' names were changed — by them — and after their brief interlude at Ellis Island."

It was the greatest flood of legal immigration, in percentage terms, in history. Many nativists were worried that these new immigrants could not be assimilated. Various restrictions were proposed, and finally, in 1921, Congress responded with the National Origins Formula, with further revisions in 1924. This both restricted the total number of immigrants and established quotas based on national origins. For the next 40 years, there was relatively little immigration into the country. Exceptions included refugees from communism, such as the Cubans and the Hungarians; immigrants from the Philippines; and war brides. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 also allowed about 200,000 "displaced" Europeans — displaced by World War II — to immigrate into the country.

During World War II, following the Great Depression, the employment situation drastically changed. By 1942 the country was experiencing a severe labor shortage, and enforcement of immigration laws, as it related to workers from Mexico, became lax. Illegal immigration from Mexico increased by 6,000 percent from 1944-1954. These laborers, like the Chinese, the Irish, and others before them, were willing to work for lower wages — it is estimated that the Rio Grande valley cotton growers were only paying about half the wages paid elsewhere in Texas.

This led to the Eisenhower administration's "Operation Wetback," in which over one million illegal Mexican workers were forcibly repatriated to Mexico, in a joint effort by the United States Border Patrol and city, county, state, and federal authorities.

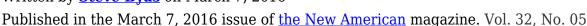
## Today's Immigration and Its Challenges

In 1965, the Hart-Celler Act radically changed American immigration laws, abolishing the quota system. The law replaced the quotas with preferences based on family relationships. Potential immigrants who had relatives in the United States were given preference. Thus, once some immigrants made it to the United States from places such as China, India, and Pakistan, they became part of what is commonly referred to as "chain migration."

President John F. Kennedy initially proposed this radical change in immigration policy. Democratic consultant Patrick Reddy praised the Kennedys for this change in 1998: "The 1965 Immigration Reform Act promoted by President Kennedy, drafted by Attorney General Robert Kennedy, and pushed through the Senate by Ted Kennedy has resulted in a wave of immigration from the Third World that should shift the nation in a more liberal direction within a generation. It will go down as the Kennedy family's greatest gift to the Democratic Party."

The law dramatically increased immigration — legal and illegal. By the 1980s, a new federal law was passed to deal with the situation — the Immigration Reform and Control Act. The law gave amnesty to







about three million illegal aliens already in the country, with the government promising to curtail future illegal immigration. Since the government did not keep this promise or many other promises in regard to subsequent amnesties, amnesty supporters today have a very difficult time convincing anti-amnesty Americans that the government would do anything to restrict future illegal immigration. About three million people, mostly from Mexico, received the amnesty. For the first time, the law prescribed penalties for employers who hired illegal aliens.

Instead of stemming the tide of illegal immigration, the numbers have only increased dramatically. Legal Mexican immigrant totals neared eight million in 2000. Estimates of the numbers of illegal immigrants is placed at 12 to 20 million (80 percent from Mexico), with many believing it is closer to 30 million. No one knows for sure, but about one-fifth of the formerly Mexican population now lives within the borders of the United States.

These immigrants share many of the characteristics of other immigrants in American history. Many come for economic opportunity, and add economic vibrancy to neighborhoods that had deteriorated and business areas of cities that had also declined economically. They are accused of driving down wages, introducing crime (the immigrants of the late 19th and early 20th century were also charged with the rise of ethnic gangs in urban America), and speaking foreign languages, much to the resentment of many Americans.

They also tend, like their predecessors, to vote for the "party of government," the party that provides more social programs. Despite claims that these Hispanic immigrants are "natural conservatives" because they are hard workers and have devotion to family, the reality is that, for the majority, government social-program availability trumps social conservatism when they enter the voting booth.

The millions of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe also tended to vote Democrat. (In 1928, Democrat Al Smith of New York carried the 12 largest cities of the United States, despite losing by a large margin to Republican candidate Herbert Hoover.) These immigrants and their descendants provided the foundation for Democratic Party hegemony for a generation of American politics. But by the end of the 1960s, as a result of the Democratic Party's lurch to the left, the immigrants' disatisfaction with the Vietnam War, and their gradual assimilation during the 40 years of scant immigration, the Democrat run was ending. The Republicans, starting in 1968, won five of the next six elections, ending with Bill Clinton's election in 1992. The Kennedy family's immigration law "gift" to the Democratic Party, combined with the Republican Party's own liberal drift with candidates such as the Bushes, Bob Dole, John McCain, and Mitt Romney, had begun to do its own work. Since the Republicans' presidential victory in 1988, the Democrats have dominated presidential elections.

But there are important differences between these post-1965 immigrants and their predecessors. As Pat Buchanan points out in *The Death of the West*, "Unlike the immigrants of old, who bade farewell forever to their native lands when they boarded the ship, for Mexicans, the mother country is right next door. Millions have no desire to learn English or to become citizens. America is not their home; Mexico is; and they wish to remain proud Mexicans. They have come to work. Rather than assimilate, they create Little Tijuanas in U.S. cities, just as Cubans have created a Little Havana in Miami. Only America hosts twenty times as many people of Mexican descent as of Cuban descent. With their own radio and TV stations, newspapers, films, and magazines, the Mexican Americans are creating an Hispanic culture separate and apart from America's larger culture. They are becoming a nation within a nation."





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As Buchanan so aptly wrote, a country is not just an area marked on a map. It possesses a national identity or an ideal based on a common culture and values. If immigration from other cultures is large enough, it can change the culture of the country.

This unfortunate situation also weakens American unity and patriotism. Large numbers of immigrants are actually discouraged from assimilating. This results in the decline of American national sovereignty in the face of international institutions — the World Court, the World Trade Organization, the United Nations — which grow increasingly more powerful. When President Obama campaigned in 2008, he promised the "transformation" of America. Recently speaking to a group of newly naturalized Americans, he commented that they were an important part of creating the "new" America he envisioned.

As America becomes increasingly divided along ethnic lines, the ideal of a United States of America becomes increasingly more difficult to achieve. Union of America with other nations becomes increasingly easier to achieve if a large number of residents simply have no allegiance to the United States and the constitutional Republic we have long enjoyed.

"The extraordinarily high rate of immigration, legal and illegal, into the United States is an indication that our country is doing something right," wrote Tom Woods. "Currently, half the world's immigrants come to the United States."

Yet, to hear the Left tell it, America is populated mostly by bigots and haters. Why would so many of the world's people want to come to a country that hates them so much?

Woods asked whether we will "be more or less free after even two more generations of immigration the size and composition of recent decades. That immigrants and the American bureaucracy that serves them will become yet another pressure group, clamoring for privileges and benefits in Washington, can scarcely be doubted."

He continued, zeroing in on the problem we now face: "In order to destroy the cultural and ethnic cohesion that acts as a bulwark against its expansion, the state has a history of engaging in deliberate demographic scrambling. When this forced integration inevitably produces animosity, the state is all too eager to impose order on a chaos of its own creation."

Wood concludes, "A facile advocacy of open borders gives the central state exactly what it wants; the chance to supersede the preferences of property owners, and to provide the pretext for further encroachments on local and individual liberty."

Americans have always had immigration, with periods of time to absorb these new immigrants. It is undeniable that immigration has given the United States many blessings, but also many challenges. That is why Americans have always been both hot and cold toward increased immigration.







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