



THEN: Immigrants arriving at Ellis Island, New York, circa 1900

The Great IMMIGRATION Debate

We're a nation of immigrants, but we endlessly argue about who to welcome to our shores. Why are we so divided? BY PATRICIA SMITH

Who gets to be an American? That's the question at the heart of the immigration debates that have consumed Washington during President Trump's first year in office. In that time, Trump has moved to reshape American immigration policy in a profound way.

He's stepped up arrests and deportations of undocumented immigrants, including high-profile raids on 7-Eleven stores last month. He's announced the end of DACA—a program that has protected young people who were brought to the U.S. illegally as children—unless Congress agrees on a deal to save it. He's reduced the number of refugees admitted to the

U.S. to the lowest number in decades. And he's started talking about new restrictions on legal immigration.

"I don't think we've seen a president focus on immigration quite like this one has," says Sarah Pierce of the Migration Policy Institute, an immigration think tank in Washington, D.C.

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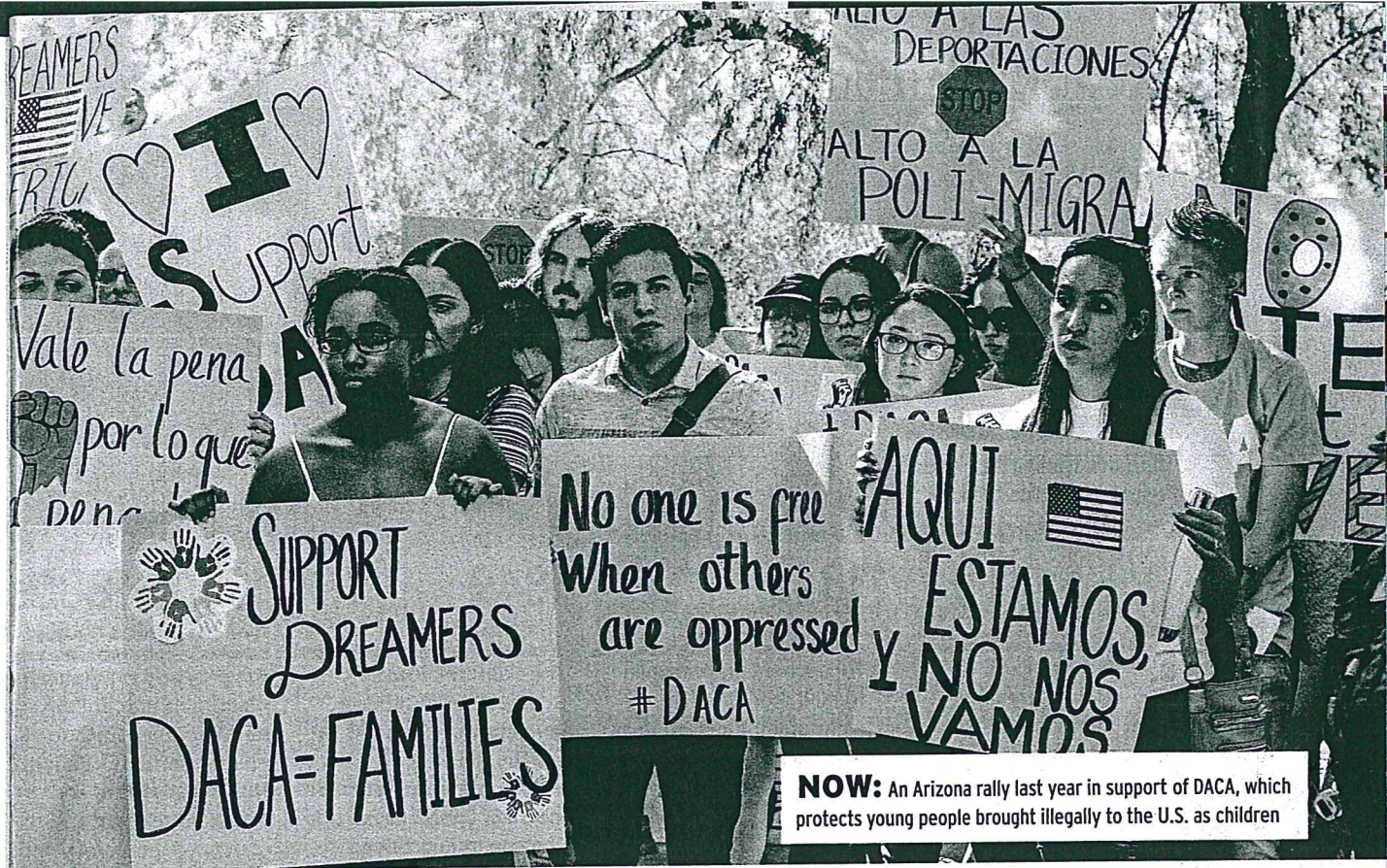
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NOW: An Arizona rally last year in support of DACA, which protects young people brought illegally to the U.S. as children

what kind of immigration to allow and from where—and whether to allow those who come here illegally to stay.

President Trump's intense focus on immigration issues and his provocative statements have raised the temperature of the debate. His pledge to build a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border has been cheered by his supporters but derided by many other Americans. His travel bans on people from six majority-Muslim countries, announced as part of tighter security measures, prompted outrage and lawsuits.* And recently, Trump's reported use of derogatory words to describe Haiti and some African countries that send immigrants to the U.S. sparked an uproar.

But even though immigration seems to be generating a lot of anger and headlines today, historians say the debates about who to let in and who to keep out are nothing new.

"Throughout American history, there has always been a tussle over immigration," says Alan Kraut, a history professor at American University, in

Washington, D.C. "We have admitted millions of people because we needed their labor, their talents, their bodies to settle our vast territories and work in our factories. At the same time, we've resisted their presence."

The First Immigrants

That ambivalence goes back to the nation's founding (see *Timeline*, p. 12). In 1776, most Americans were immigrants, or the descendants of immigrants, from the British Isles. The majority were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who came in search of economic opportunity or to escape religious or political persecution. But the population also included Native Americans and large numbers of Dutch, Spanish, and Germans, in addition to blacks, who were brought from Africa as slaves beginning in 1619.

Americans have often been wary of welcoming foreigners. Even before America's founding, Benjamin Franklin worried that German

immigrants were taking over his state.

"Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens, who shortly will be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of us Anglifying them?" Franklin wrote in 1751.

The 19th century brought very different immigrants, starting with the Irish and later Italians, both largely poor farmers and Catholic. Then came the Chinese, who arrived on the West Coast in great numbers during the Gold Rush and later helped build the railroads, and Jews fleeing pogroms in Russia and Eastern Europe.

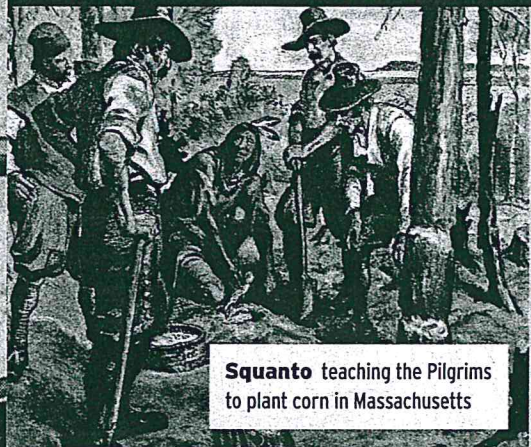
Before 1875, there were few restrictions on immigration. America's westward expansion, the Industrial Revolution, and the abolition of slavery created enormous demand for labor to work on the nation's farms and in its factories and mines.

But the surge in Irish and Italian immigrants to a largely Protestant nation provoked a backlash. In the 1840s, the American Party, also known as the Know-Nothings, formed in opposition to immigration. Its members feared that

CHRISTOPHER BROWN/POLARIS

*The ban includes six majority-Muslim countries—Chad, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, and Yemen—plus North Korea and Venezuela.

Timeline IMMIGRATION IN THE U.S.



Squanto teaching the Pilgrims to plant corn in Massachusetts



Chinese gold miners, California, 1852

Pre-1776

Colonial Period

In the century and a half before independence, most settlers are from the British Isles; German immigrants settle mainly in Pennsylvania.



Benjamin Franklin feared that German immigrants were "a colony of aliens [who] will never adopt our . . . customs."

immigrants would take their jobs and that Catholics would take over the country.

In the West, people protested against Chinese immigrants, and in 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, barring immigrants from China. (The ban was repealed in 1943.)

Opposition to immigration intensified as the number of immigrants soared at the beginning of the 20th century. In 1907, the peak year for immigration in this period, almost 1.3 million new immigrants arrived on America's shores.

1845

The Potato Famine

Widespread starvation in Ireland prompts massive emigration; 2 million Irish head to the U.S. in a decade.

1849

The Chinese

The California Gold Rush attracts Chinese immigrants who later help build the first transcontinental railroad. In 1882, Congress bars Chinese immigration.

1860s-1880s

Italians, Poles & Jews

Poverty and religious discrimination in Eastern and Southern Europe spur an influx of Polish, Russian, Jewish, and Italian immigrants.

In the 1920s, Congress imposed quotas that sharply reduced the number of immigrants and gave preference to Northern Europeans in an attempt to re-create the ethnic profile of early 19th-century America. As intended, these quotas worked against Southern and Eastern Europeans, and during World War II they prevented millions of Jews and other refugees from escaping the Nazis and the Holocaust.

In 1965, the U.S. eliminated quotas altogether, leading to an influx of arrivals from Asia and Latin America.

That was the last time the U.S. passed a major immigration overhaul.

Fixing Illegal Immigration

In recent decades, much of the debate and many of the political battles over immigration have focused on immigrants who cross the border illegally—largely from Mexico and Central America—or who try to stay permanently when their temporary visas expire (see "Where They're From"). It was the key issue of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, and his promise to build a border wall to keep undocumented immigrants out resonated with many Americans. As president, his crackdown on the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants already in the United States also fulfills promises he made on the campaign trail.

"We will find you, we will arrest you, we will jail you, and we will deport you," Trump promised last summer at an event in New York.

But Americans remain divided about whether undocumented immigrants should be forced to go home. Some argue that they're good for the U.S.

WHERE THEY'RE FROM

Top countries of origin of undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

1. Mexico	6,177,000
2. Guatemala	723,000
3. El Salvador	465,000
4. Honduras	337,000
5. China	268,000

SOURCE: MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE (MPI)

Top countries of origin of legal immigrants in the U.S.

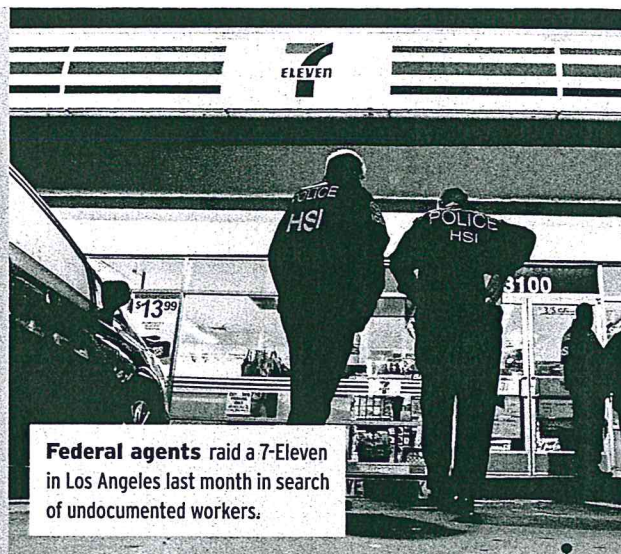
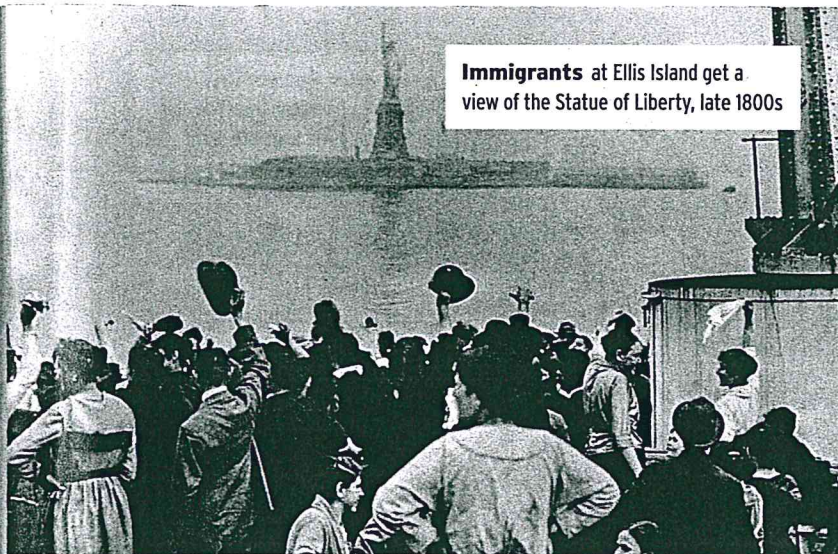
1. Mexico	5,397,000
2. India	2,168,000
3. China	2,075,000
4. Philippines	1,754,000
5. Vietnam	1,235,000

SOURCE: ESTIMATES BASED ON MPI DATA

COVER: TOM PENNINGTON/GETTY IMAGES (CHLOE KIM); KONA/REUTERS (KIM JONG UN); CLIFTON ADCOCK/OKLAHOMA WATCH (PADDLE); 100%#E#N#B#R#H/COVER IMAGES/NEWSCOM (POPSICLES); JIM MCMAHON (MAP)

PHOTO RESEARCHERS/GETTY IMAGES (BENJAMIN FRANKLIN); THE GRANGER COLLECTION (1776-1849)

Immigrants at Ellis Island get a view of the Statue of Liberty, late 1800s



1892

Ellis Island

Ellis Island opens in New York Harbor, the main entry point into the U.S. In 1907, a million immigrants pass through. It closes in 1954.

1921

Quotas by Nationality

Congress imposes immigration quotas that favor the admission of Northern Europeans over Southern and Eastern Europeans.

1965

Quotas Abolished

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolishes quotas. The U.S. sees an influx of Asians and Latin Americans over the next 40 years.

2001

9/11 Attacks

In response to the September 11 terrorist attacks, the USA Patriot Act tightens immigration with stricter border security.

2018

The Undocumented

Congress has been sharply divided about immigration reform—and what to do about the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

economy, since many take jobs that most Americans don't want. Others say they push down wages, compete with Americans for jobs, and put stress on local services like schools and hospitals.

Democrats have generally favored some kind of path toward legalization for those here illegally, provided they pay fines, learn English, and wait their turn to be considered. But many Republicans say that would reward those who've broken the law, so the priority instead should be on tightening border security.

DACA

There has been more sympathy across political lines for those brought to the U.S. illegally by their parents as kids, since those children did nothing wrong themselves. Those so-called Dreamers have been protected for five years by a program known as DACA—Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals—which President Barack Obama created to shield them from deportation and allow them to work legally. But in September, President Trump announced

that DACA protections will end in March unless Congress takes action before then.

Aside from cracking down on undocumented immigrants, the Trump administration has also proposed major changes to the country's legal immigration system. These include sharp reductions in the number of legal immigrants and making the criteria for selection more merit-based. Immigration critics have applauded these moves.

"Nobody's suggesting that we stop immigration entirely, just that we slow it down," says Ira Mehlman of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a group that supports more restrictions. "This isn't the 1870s; we're not trying to populate a continent."

But others see robust immigration as critical to the nation's well-being. After all, some of the most innovative high-tech companies, like Google, eBay, and Tesla, were founded by immigrants, they note.

"The identity of the United States is a nation of immigrants," says Kraut, the historian. "Immigrants have made an

enormous contribution. Their talents have helped make us the pre-eminent society in the world in terms of higher education and advanced research."

Some scholars see the recent calls to restrict immigration as evidence of anxiety about the country's changing demographics. The Pew Research Center projects that foreign-born Americans will exceed 15 percent of the population by 2025, breaking the record of 14.8 percent set in 1890. And by 2055, whites will make up less than half of the nation's population.

"The immigration debate is bound up with fears about America becoming a majority-minority country," says Gary Gerstle, a professor of American history at the University of Cambridge in Britain.

But Gerstle thinks Americans will eventually put aside their fears, as they did with previous generations of immigrants.

"These moments of transition in America's perception of itself are very trying times," he says. "But ultimately the new America wins, and the new America turns out to be something the old Americans can live with." •

Do undocumented immigrants harm or help the economy?