



The
ROOTS
of our

IMMIGRATION CRISIS


By Shelley Brooks, Ph.D., Academic Coordinator

Immigration is a quintessentially American issue, given that immigrants and their descendants make up the vast majority of the U.S. population (the 2010 census indicates that American Indians and Alaska Natives make up only 1.7% of our total popula-

tion). Of the 98% of the population that is not considered Native American, 13% were born abroad, and later moved to the United States. The United States has long been a nation of immigrants, and so we might ask why immigration is still such a volatile issue?

Most prominent in the debate right now is the DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program, which grants undocumented immigrants who came to the country in their youth additional time without deportation, and the ability to hold a job. There are about 800,000 such people who fall under this category. President Trump has called to end this program started under President Obama. He has also called for ending [chain-migration](#) and the [diversity lottery](#), in favor of a merit-based immigration policy. Also up for debate is the building of a wall between the United States and Mexico to deter illegal immigration. During his year in office, President Trump has kept these issues front and center, and made strong remarks about who he does and does not want to extend a welcome to in this country.

The debate over immigration policy often comes down to different ideas about the social and economic impact of immigrants. Those who agree with the [reports](#) that show how immigration fuels a stronger U.S. economy generally favor welcoming immigrants. Many of these proponents also support the DACA program and consider ways to provide undocumented immigrants with legal access to work, and potentially even a path to citizenship. Those who believe that high numbers of immigrants take jobs from native-born Americans and/or negatively alter Amer-



chain migration – a term used to describe a policy that allows U.S. citizens or green card holders to bring certain relatives to the United States



diversity lottery – the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program allows for 50,000 people (drawn from a pool of applicants from countries with low rates of immigration to the U.S.) to obtain visas to live in the U.S.



merit-based immigration – a policy that would award legal immigration to those who rank high in terms of their skills, educations, work history, knowledge of the English language, business activities, community service, ties to the U.S., and country of nationality.



undocumented immigrants: foreign-born people who do not have the legal right to be or remain in the United States

ican culture and society, generally call for stricter border security (like a wall) to prevent further illegal immigration, and may also call for ending DACA and reducing immigration more broadly. It is estimated that around eleven million people in the United States today are undocumented immigrants, that is, they were not granted the legal right to live here. The number of undocumented immigrants has remained relatively steady in the past many years, despite numerous policies to prevent entry and eligibility to work.

The intense debate over the DACA program may reach the Supreme Court. After a federal judge in California temporarily blocked Trump's effort to end DACA, the Justice Department took the unusual move of asking the Supreme Court to review the federal court's decision. Lawmakers from both parties will continue to debate the short and long-term options for an immigration policy that will adequately address the complex human, economic, and social factors involved. Readings on the following pages will help provide the historical context for understanding today's immigration debate.

Immigration History

The **Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882** was the first piece of legislation that restricted immigration to the United States. Responding to pressure from western laborers who did not want the competition, legislators created the act to restrict future immigration from working class Chinese (who had been arriving for three decades to work the gold fields, build the Transcontinental Railroad, and work in the growing western cities). The exclusion stayed in place until World War II, when China became an ally of the United States against Japan.

In 1907, the so-called **Gentlemen's Agreement** with Japan informally limited Japanese laborers as well. After these two piecemeal efforts, the U.S. passed a comprehensive immigration law in 1924. The law was a response to the "third wave" immigrants who came at the turn of the twentieth century, most of whom were southern and eastern Europeans with Catholic and Jewish – not Protestant – backgrounds. The **1924 Immigration Act** limited their future numbers by allotting the bulk of new immigration spots to western and northern European immigrants. The 1924 act did not address immigration from North or South America.

Many Mexicans, looking to escape the decade-long civil war that began in 1910, immigrated to the American southwest in these years and found work in agriculture and manufacturing. During the Great Depression, when many Americans were out of work and relying on government welfare, certain government officials and some private groups orchestrated the deportation of at least one million Mexican Nationals and even some American citizens with Mexican heritage. This was known as the **Mexican Repatriation Program** (the California Legislature issued a formal apology for this program in 2005, and authorized the creation of a public commemoration site in L.A.). Following on the heels of repatriation, the United States and Mexico agreed in 1942 to create the Bracero Program to employ Mexicans in needed agricultural positions during WWII. The Bracero Program lasted until 1964, and ultimately brought five million Mexicans to work temporarily in the United States (with the agreement that they

would return to Mexico at the end of their employment).

The United States has long wavered between beckoning to immigrants with available jobs, and creating legal and social barriers to discourage this immigration. In 1965, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's civil rights agenda, Congress passed the **Immigration and Nationality Act** that did away with the quotas (numerical limits) that had restricted the number of non-western and northern European immigrants since the 1920s. The new law increased the total number of immigrants admitted each year to 290,000, a near doubling of the previous total. An

amendment in 1976 put a ceiling of 20,000 immigrants from any one country. But far more people wished to immigrate to the U.S. than these numbers allowed. By the close of the twentieth century, the number of people entering the United States illegally each year was estimated to be around 250,000. The **1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act** granted amnesty to those living continuously in the U.S. since before 1982, while creating harsher penalties for employers who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants. Even with this act, as well as the **1990 Immigration Act** – which increased the number of legal immigrants to 700,000 each year – the number of actual immigrants far exceeded the legal limit.



Statue of Liberty, New York. Library of Congress

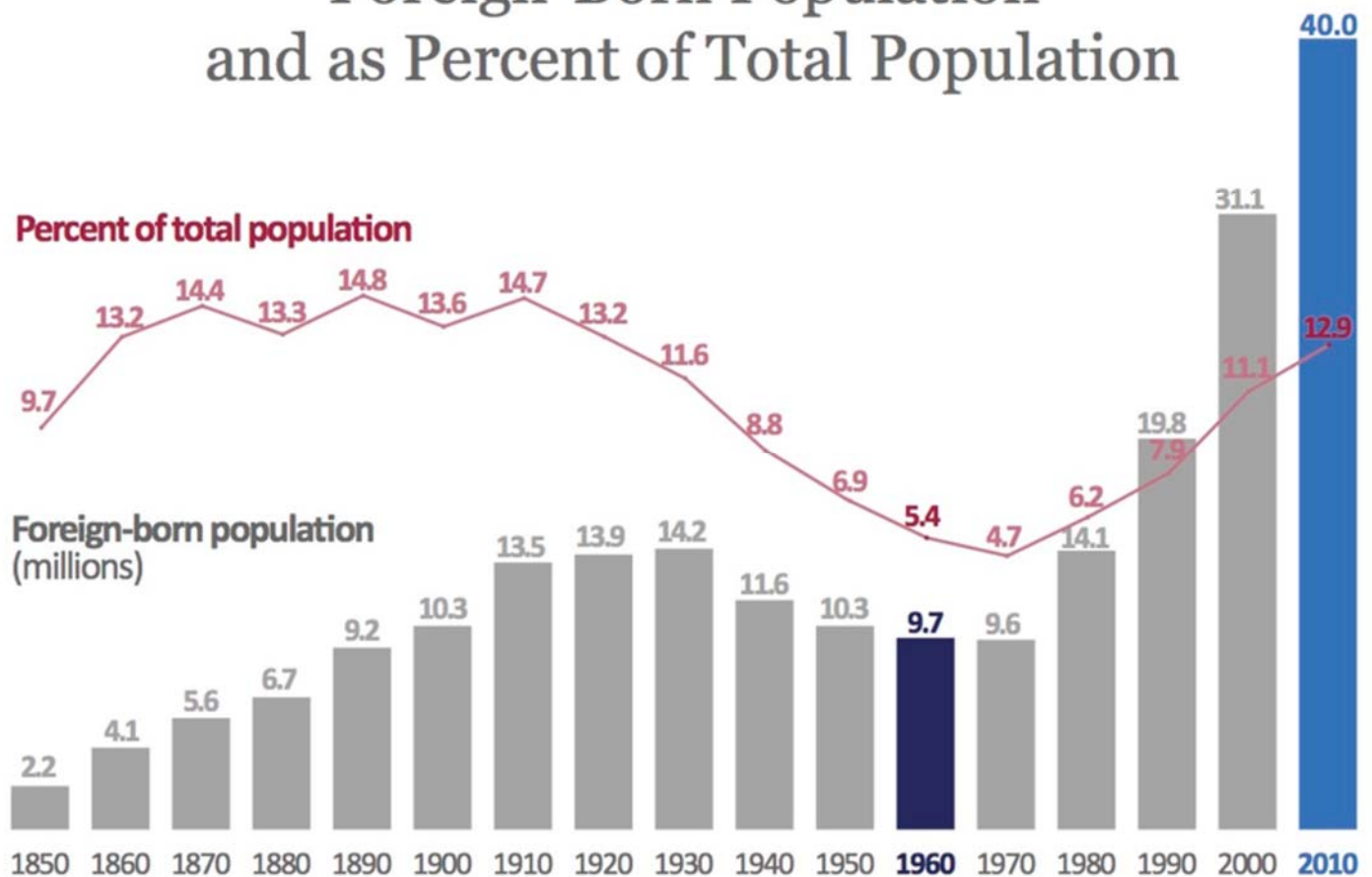
The post-WWII immigration acts, coupled with a strong economy, have helped to create an increasingly diverse American population. In 1960, one in twenty Americans was foreign born, hailing primarily from Europe. In 2010 one in eight Americans was foreign born, with the majority coming from Latin America and Asia. California contains the highest number of foreign-born residents, at a full one quarter of the state's population. Today, the United States' immigration law admits considerably more people, under a more fair system, than it did after its first comprehensive immigration act. But Americans continue to grapple with immigration policy because of its enormous impact on the country's national identity.

Immigration by the Numbers

In your groups, first review the Foreign-Born Population graph and the two maps that detail the number of Foreign-Born Residents in 1960 and 2010 in order to get a better understanding of the ways in which immigration has shaped the American population over the past century and a half. Then, discuss:

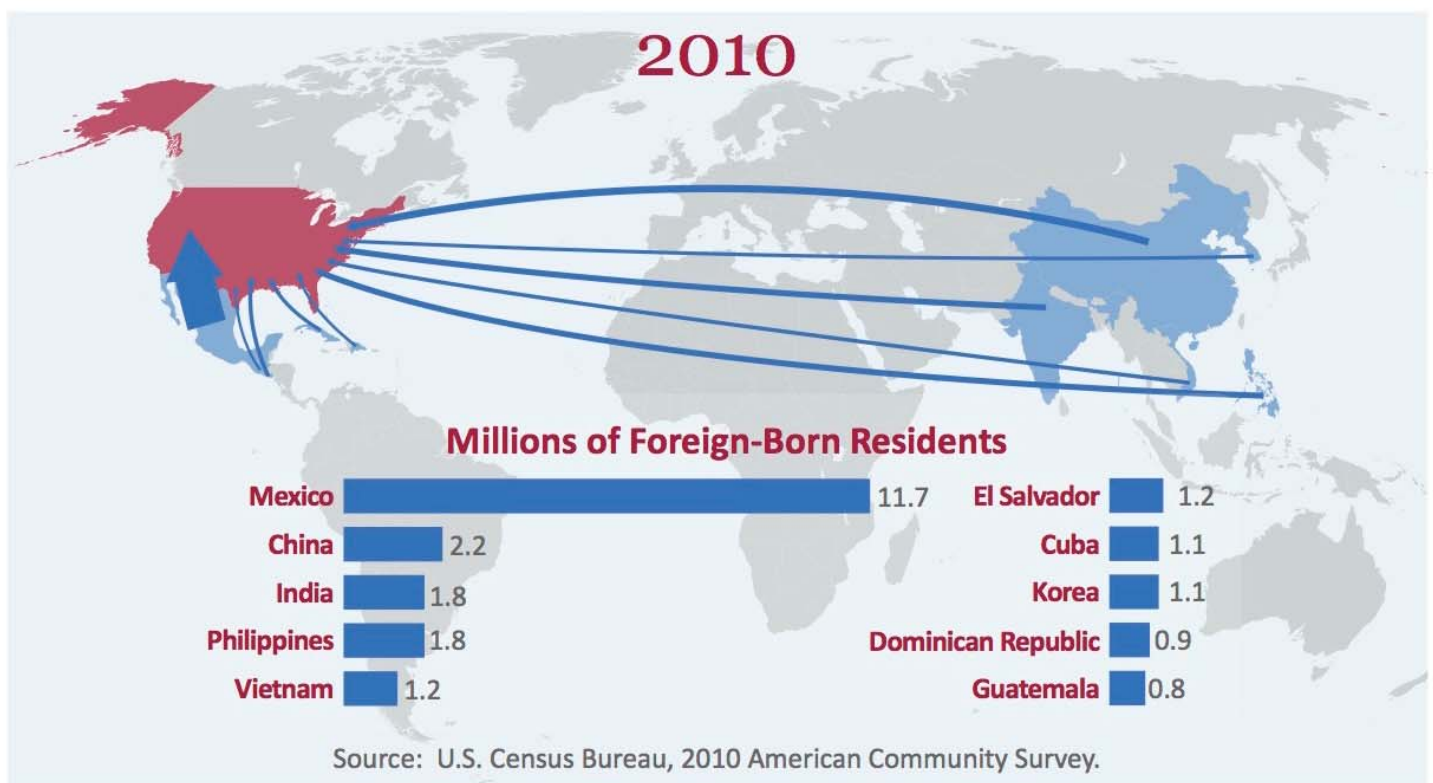
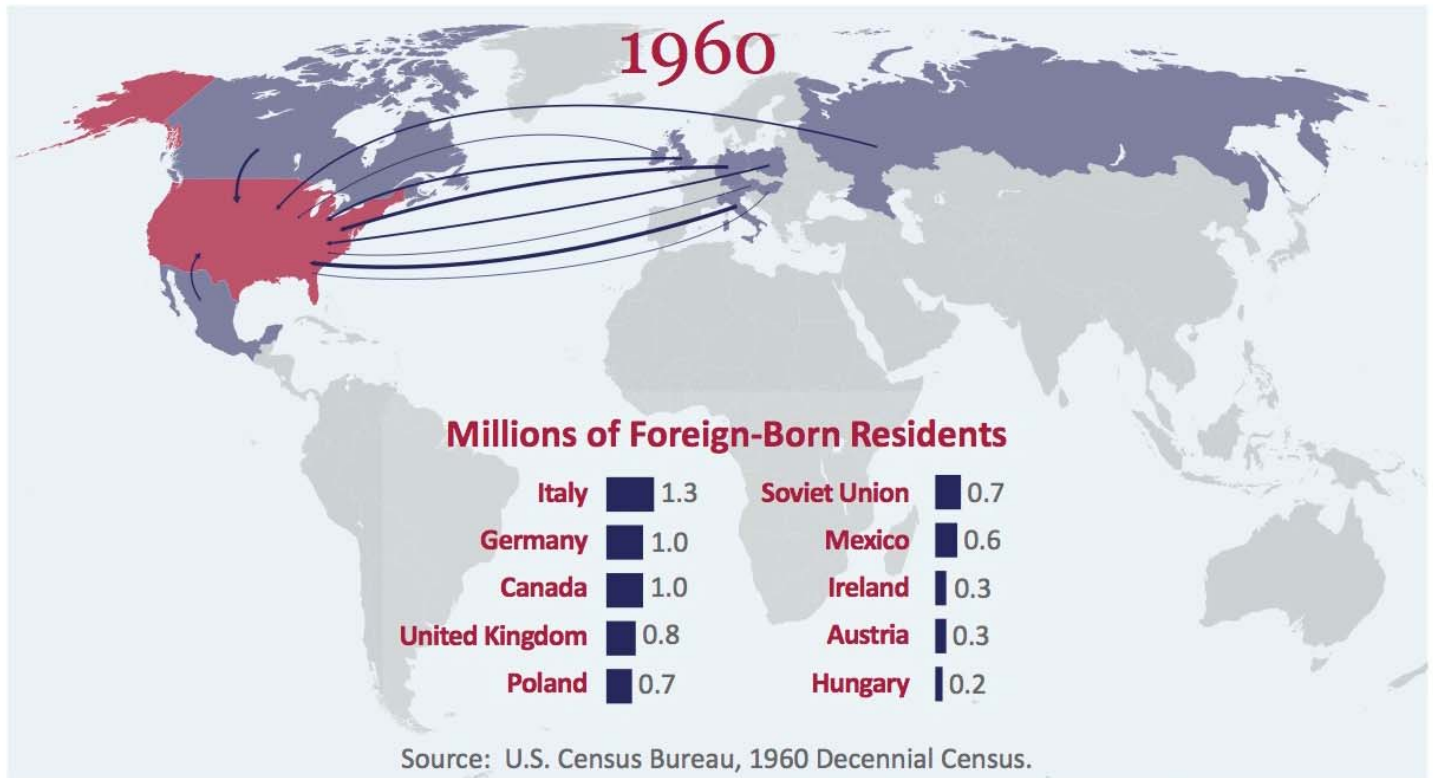
1. The red line in the first graph details the percentage of the total US Population that is foreign-born each decade. How would you describe the relationship between the percentage of immigrants and the total size of the US population?
2. Chart the following events on the graph. What relationship, if any, is there between these events and the number of immigrants in the US?
 - a. World War I: 1914-1918
 - b. Second Ku Klux Klan (anti-Catholic/Jewish/foreigner as well as anti-black): 1915-1930s
 - c. Great Depression: 1929-1941
 - d. World War II: 1939-1945
 - e. The Cold War: 1947-1991
 - f. Civil Rights Movement: 1954-1968
 - g. Great Recession: 2008-2010

Foreign-Born Population and as Percent of Total Population



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1850–2000 Decennial Census; 2010 American Community Survey.

Immigration by the Numbers



Citizens, Residents, and Refugees



Naturalization Ceremony, Charlottesville, VA, 2006. White House Photo.

There are several different ways that a person can legally reside in the United States. Do you know them?

Birthright Citizens

There are 2 types of natural born U.S. citizens. The first type is called Jus soli, or “right of the soil.” Jus soli citizens have U.S. citizenship by virtue of being born in the United States. This is a citizenship rule in a minority of countries around the world. Jus sanguinis, or “right of blood” citizens have U.S. citizenship by virtue of being born to American citizens, even if they were born outside of the US.

Naturalized Citizens

Naturalized citizens refer to foreign-born citizens who have been granted U.S. citizenship after fulfilling specific requirements established by Congress in the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). In 2014, 654,949 foreign-born became naturalized citizens. In addition to fulfilling the specific requirements necessary to achieve citizenship, naturalized citizens must also pay an application fee that can exceed \$680.

Permanent Resident (Green Card holder)

A Green Card is the first step in becoming a naturalized citizen. After being a permanent resident for five years, an application to become a naturalized citizen of the U.S. can be submitted. There are 30 immigrant visa categories, including Spouse of a U.S. Citizen, Employer Sponsored Specialty

Worker, and Refugees and Asylum. In 2014, the United States Customs and Immigration Service (USCIS) issued 467,370 Permanent Resident or Green Cards. Application fees for Green Cards typically exceed \$900.

Nonimmigrant Visa Holder

Nonimmigrant Visa Holders can visit, study, or work in the US for a limited amount of time. This is the quickest, cheapest, simplest method for achieving short-term residency in the United States. In 2014, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued 9,932,480 nonimmigrant visas. There are 24 nonimmigrant visa categories, including Student Visas, Business/Tourist Visas, Workers in Specialty Occupations Visas, and Temporary Agricultural Worker Visas. Application fees for these Visas can range anywhere from \$15 to more than \$500.

Refugee Status or Asylum

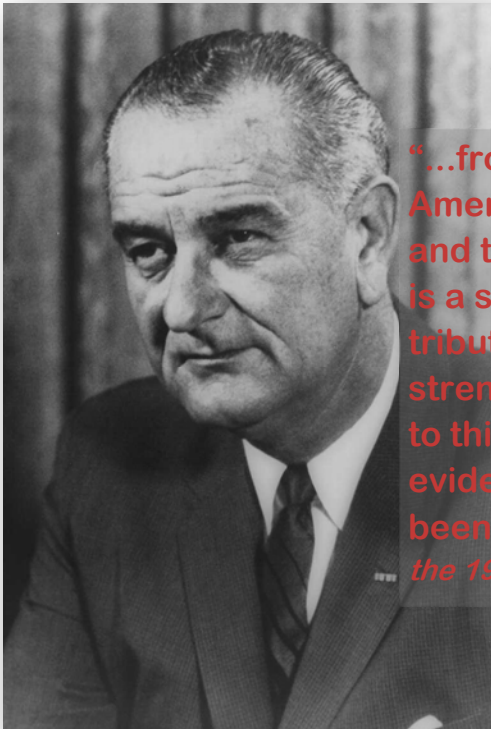
Refugee Status, or asylum, may be granted to people who have been persecuted or fear they will be persecuted in their home country (fear of serious harm from violence, torture, inappropriate imprisonment, or denial of basic human rights or freedoms) on account of race, religion, nationality, and/or membership in a particular social group or political opinion. Individuals currently outside the US apply for refugee status; individuals within or at US borders apply for asylum. In 2013, 69,909 people were granted refugee status and 25,199 people were granted asylum.

The Presidents on Immigration



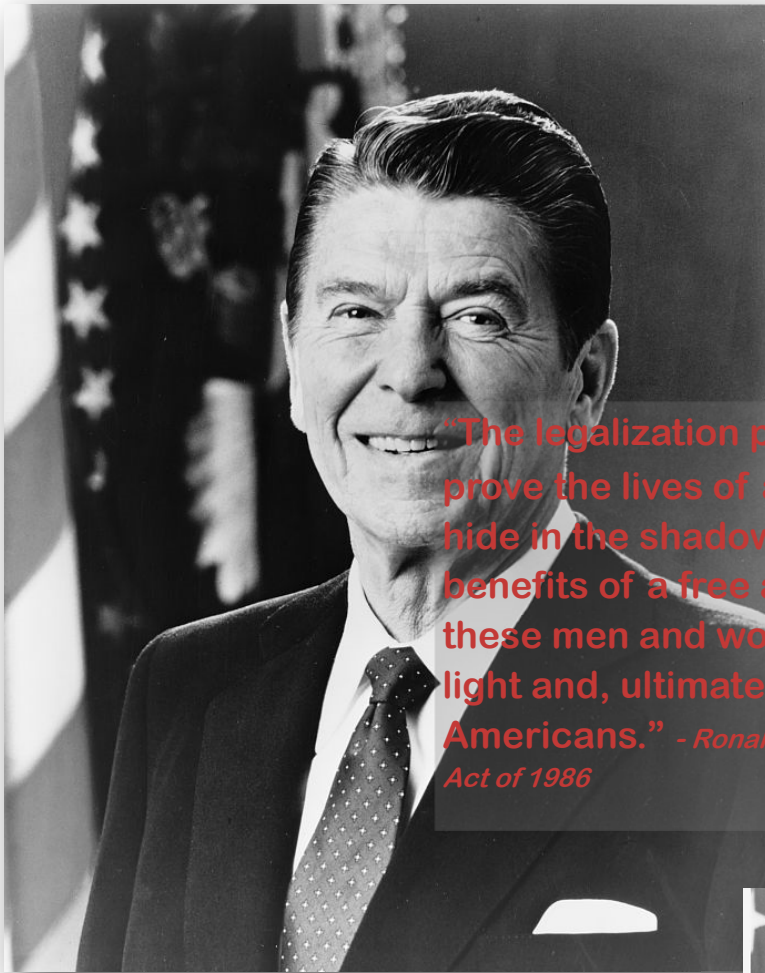
“Everywhere immigrants have enriched and strengthened the fabric of American life.” - John F. Kennedy, *Nation of Immigrants*, 1958

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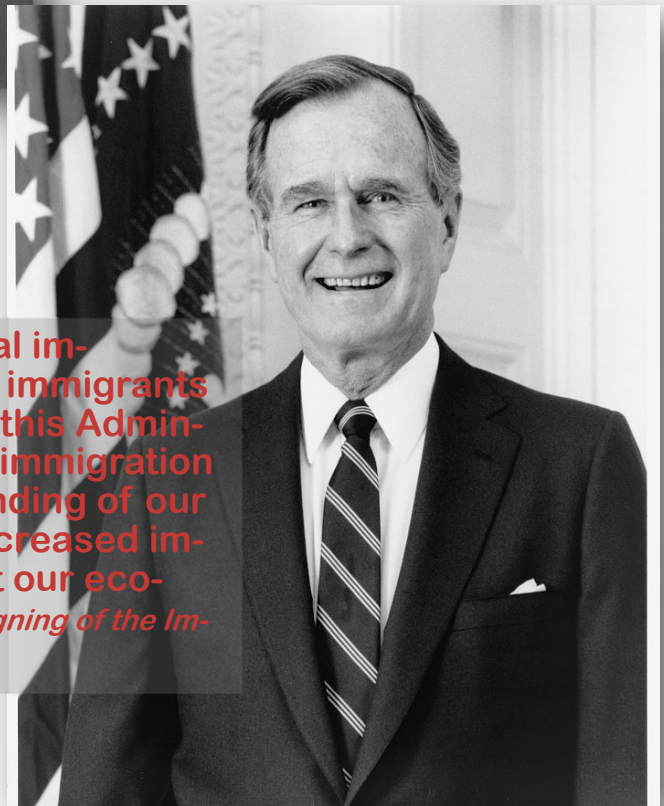
“...from this day forth those wishing to immigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here. This is a simple test, and it is a fair test. Those who can contribute most to this country--to its growth, to its strength, to its spirit--will be the first that are admitted to this land. The fairness of this standard is so self-evident that we may well wonder that it has not always been applied.” - Lyndon Baines Johnson, *on the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act*

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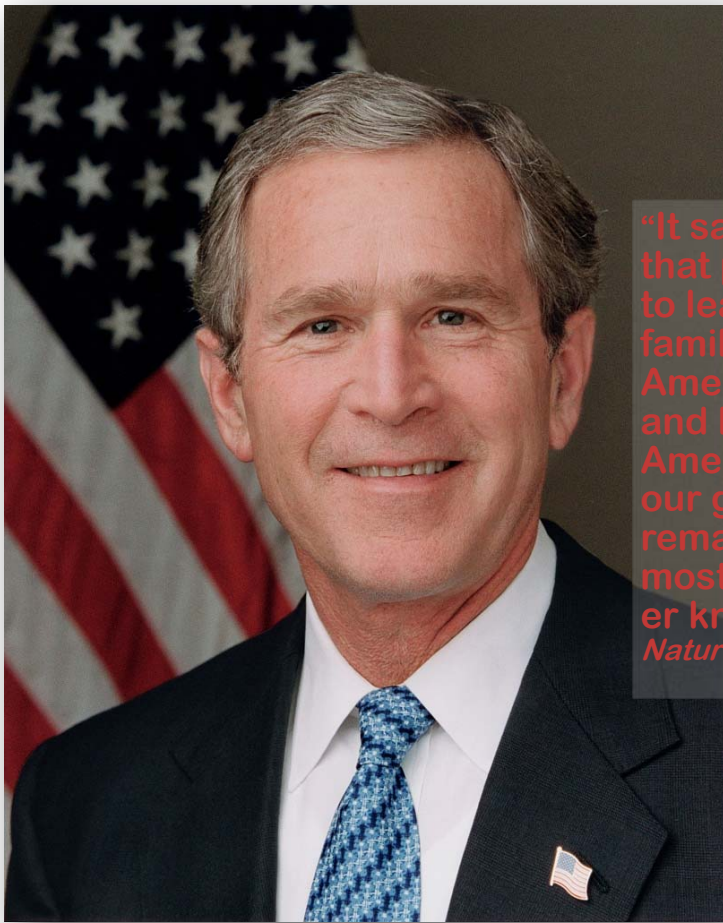
“The legalization provisions in this act will go far to improve the lives of a class of individuals who now must hide in the shadows, without access to many of the benefits of a free and open society. Very soon many of these men and women will be able to step into the sunlight and, ultimately, if they choose, they may become Americans.” - Ronald Reagan on the *Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986*

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“...This Act recognizes the fundamental importance and historic contributions of immigrants to our country. [It] accomplishes what this Administration sought from the outset of the immigration reform process: a complementary blending of our tradition of family reunification with increased immigration of skilled individuals to meet our economic needs.” - George H.W. Bush on the signing of the *Immigration Act of 1990*.

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“It says something about our country that people around the world are willing to leave their homes and leave their families and risk everything to come to America. Their talent and hard work and love of freedom have helped make America the leader of the world. And our generation will ensure that America remains a beacon of liberty and the most hope fill society this world has ever known.” - George W. Bush, Remarks at 2006 Naturalization Ceremony

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tographer: David Valdez, 1989

John F. Kennedy, Head and Shoulders Portrait: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/96523447/>. Library of
Congress, 1961.

Lyndon B. Johnson, Head and Shoulders Portrait: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/96522661/>. [Library
of Congress, 1964.](#)

Naturalization Ceremony, Charlottesville, VA: [https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/
releases/2008/07/images/20080704_p070408jbweb-0279-515h.html](https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2008/07/images/20080704_p070408jbweb-0279-515h.html). White House Photo, 2008.

Ronald Reagan, Head and Shoulders Portrait: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/96522678/>, [Library of
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