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Immigration. What a mess. How did we get to this point? Let's look at the history.

The first immigrants to come to the United States arrived from Europe during the Colonial period. Many were merchants looking to trade and barter or settlers in search of religious toleration.

When they reached North America, also known as the New World, they encountered groups of Indians who welcomed them.

Other groups of immigrants arrived involuntarily. English convicts were sent over as they were not wanted in their own country and, beginning in 1619, African slaves were forcefully transported over as part of the slave trade.

Slaves, without rights, were commonly wanted for cheap labor but convicts were a nuisance to the Colonies. The act of dumping English convicts led to the first passage of immigration enforcement legislation.

That's right folks, your ancestors didn't all come here aboard the Mayflower. They may very well have come here in the belly of a prison ship.

The Colonies fought against the English Parliamentary Law that allowed criminals to be sent over and passed their own laws against that practice. Ironically, these laws were passed by recent descendants of criminals that had been sent over previously.

With the creation of the United States, there was much debate over who were the "founding fathers". At the time the population was a combination of Europeans of all different nations and languages, Native Americans and African slaves.

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However, neither Native Americans nor African Slaves were even considered citizens. Isn't that fascinating? When history books tell us that our forefathers discovered the native Americans, can you imagine how the Indians felt when they heard this? "Hey! We were already here. If anything, we discovered you!"

It was a question of whether the United States was a country of one specific group; White, Anglo-Saxon and Protestant men and women or one that welcomed newcomers from different countries, different religions and who spoke different languages.

Difference of opinion on this point created the first political party, the Federalists.

The Federalist Party was fearful of French immigrants influenced by the French Revolution. They feared them coming to the United States and causing a political disturbance.

Their fear convinced Congress to pass a stricter Naturalization law in 1795. Immigrants were required to be a resident for 2 to 5 years to be considered a citizen.

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In 1798, Federalists took power and changed the law to **14 years of residence** and additionally passed the Alien Enemies Act, Friends Act and the Alien Sedition Act signed into law by John Adams.

These laws allowed the President to deport any immigrant who he believed posed a threat to national security. (again, this was 1798)

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In 1800, the new Democratic Party under Thomas Jefferson, took power and eliminated the Alien and Sedition Acts deeming them as unconstitutional and as violations of the First and Tenth Amendment. Furthermore, the Jefferson administration moved the citizenship requirement back to five years of permanent residence (where it is today).

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During the 19th century a huge wave of Europeans immigrated to the United States.

Several of the first European immigrants were Irish and German. The potato famine in Ireland and the loss of land from the British pushed the Irish to immigrate to other countries.

Likewise, Germany was under severe economic depression and religious intolerance that forced many Catholics to leave.

Immigrants chose the United States for several reasons, but two factors played a major role.

First, rapid industrialization increased the need for cheap labor.

Second, the United States was beginning to claim land from the Spanish and native people in the western half of the US.

Many people feared this massive number of immigrants coming into our country.

In a report from the Congressional Select Committee in July 1838 congressional members thought the increased immigration rate was a threat to the “peace and tranquility of our citizens” and classified immigrants as “paupers, vagrants, and malefactors...sent hither at the expense of foreign governments to relieve them from the burden of their maintenance”.

Does any of this sound familiar folks?

The anti-immigrant fears led to organized groups against European immigrants such as Order of the Star-Spangled Banner and the Know Nothing Party.

In 1875 Congress passed an exclusion law banning prostitutes and convicts from entering the United States.

Between 1860 and 1915 another wave of European immigrants entered the United States. Many came from Russia, Austria and Italy and a large portion of this new group were Jewish.

Congress now decided that immigrants should be required to pass a **medical exam and have no criminal record** in order to immigrate to the United States.

The 1891 Act **barred people having any contagious diseases or history of crime.**

Bear in mind, Title 42, enacted under President Trump, states that the law prohibits entry into the United States when the Director for Disease Control

believes “there is a serious danger to the introduction of [a communicable] disease into the United States.” Essentially, depending on the health situation, the U.S. is able to prohibit entry to anyone except U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and their spouses and children.

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In 1903, people in the United States were also **fearful of European radicals** entering the country and so the government added anarchists and subversives to the 1891 Act.

Fear was so widespread that Congress and President Theodore Roosevelt decided to establish the Dillingham Commission to report the effects of immigration on the country.

The Commission recommended that the United States no longer accept immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe and furthermore all immigrants were to pass a **literacy test**.

In 1917, under the Wilson administration (**Democrat**), Congress passed the first comprehensive immigration act which included a literacy test requirement.

Can you imagine what people would say if we tried to enact these same requirements today?

In 1924 the National Origins Act was passed putting a quota system on the number of immigrants who entered the United States. The law effectively stopped any more large flows of European immigration.

The Chinese also started immigrating to the United States in the 1800's after a population explosion and a food shortage in China.

When Chinese immigrants could be used for cheap labor they were instantly recruited (transcontinental RR) but the second an economic shift took place in the United States, immigrants were given the cold shoulder.

Initially, United States businesses recruited Chinese men to work as day laborers. The idea was that they would come and work temporarily, save money and return back to their families in China.

California in particular was supportive of Chinese immigration and lured a lot of immigrants to settle in the western half of the country.

However, priorities shifted when gold was discovered in California in 1848. California passed laws that **banned Chinese from mining**.

After the Civil War the Chinese were recruited again to build levees and the railroad. When all the projects were complete the Chinese did not return to their country because there weren't any economic opportunities for them there.

The welcoming of Chinese immigrants stopped abruptly as fear grew that they were taking over jobs and were a threat to society. The Chinese had now virtually taken over the fishing industry in California.

In 1882 the first of three **Chinese Exclusion Acts was passed**, The statute suspended Chinese immigration for ten years and declared the **Chinese as ineligible for citizenship**.

The act was renewed in 1892 for another ten years, and in **1902 Chinese immigration was made permanently illegal**.

The legislation proved very effective, and the Chinese population in the United States sharply declined.

It was not until 1943 that China and the United States became allies during World War II and the exclusion laws were repealed.

This brings us to our current situation with Chinese immigration.

The number of Chinese nationals entering the United States illegally has surged in recent times, with the latest data from the San Diego sector showing a staggering 500 percent surge so far this year compared to the same period a year ago.

There's been an exceptionally high increase in the number of Chinese nationals—especially military-aged men—who have unlawfully crossed the U.S.-Mexico border.

Some border patrol officials and others have warned this poses a national security risk because, among those simply seeking a better life, there may be those with links to the Chinese military.

And now, Jason Owens, the chief of the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP), has revealed that, so far this fiscal year, the San Diego sector has seen over

20,000 apprehensions of Chinese nationals, over five times the number in the comparable period last year.

Some analysts say that deteriorating economic conditions in China, as well as human rights abuses and policies such as strict COVID-19 lockdowns, are likely driving the sharp increase in the number of Chinese nationals entering the United States illegally.

China is designated a “country of particular concern” by the U.S. State Department, while the FBI says that economic espionage and counterintelligence efforts emanating from China’s communist regime are a “grave threat” to America’s economic security.

At the beginning of the current fiscal year, Chinese people were the fourth-highest nationality crossing the Darién Gap between Colombia and Panama and heading north toward the United States, after Venezuelans, Ecuadorians, and Haitians, according to The Associated Press.

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Now to the issue of Mexican Immigration.

After the Mexican War in 1849 the United States claimed the territory that now includes California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and parts of Colorado, Utah and Nevada.

The Mexicans in these areas had an option to return to Mexico or stay living in what was now considered the United States. Most did not return and the United States did not enforce any border laws. That’s right. No border laws!

Between 1900 and 1930, Mexican immigration into the United States rose dramatically as cheap U.S. labor was once again needed.

Employers recruited Mexicans to work in agriculture after Chinese and Japanese immigrants were excluded from working in the United States.

However Mexican workers were at a great disadvantage as they had no working rights. Anytime they organized a strike against abuse from employers they were simply deported.

In the 1930’s the United States suffered from the Great Depression, and the first campaign against Mexican immigration began.

Border patrol and police officers sent hundreds of thousands of people back to Mexico, some of whom were citizens of the United States. This was in the 1930's!

Once again during World War II there was a labor shortage and immigrants were needed to fill the gap.

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So, in 1942 the "Bracero" program was created. Temporary workers were brought in mainly from Mexico but also Barbados, the Bahamas, Canada and Jamaica to work in agriculture.

Working conditions were awful for immigrants. They were paid very little and their children were not allowed to attend schools.

When John F. Kennedy was elected President, he realized the need to reform the immigration laws.

Kennedy proposed a bill that created a system for allowing immigrants into the country based on family ties and special skills called the Immigration and Nationality Act also known as the Hart-Cellar Act. President Johnson signed the bill into law.

The new system had a major effect on countries in the Western hemisphere, especially Mexico. The 1965 Act allowed large masses of immigrants from Asia and Mexico to now enter the US.

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So, folks, there is a common theme throughout all of this. We have been taught that people come here solely because it is the land of opportunity. As you can see from our history, you can see it was anything but that.

If you know our history, how can you say that restrictions on immigration, "Is not America, that it is not who we are?"

If you find this topic interesting, please visit your local Camden County Library where we have pulled resources from our collection that can help you in furthering your knowledge of immigration in the United States.