
Immigration, Politics and Elections

— MIT “Black Matters” class —
24.912, Spring 2017

Takeaways

- Immigration: Social, Economical, Political
 - Cultural Clash
 - Civil rights & the people
 - Multiculturalism
 - The American backlash

Immigration in the United States

- America → Land of Opportunity
 - Pursuit of the “American Dream”
- Resistance to immigration
 - Fear of multiculturalism
 - “Resistance to immigration grows more voluble during times of economic stress” -John Tirman

<http://news.mit.edu/2015/book-immigration-debates-0504>

Cultural Clash

- Justification for tightly controlled immigration
 - Cultural difference / Exclusion vs. Economics / Politics
- Cultural clash
 - Loss of U.S. identity
 - Culture, language, norms, etc.
 - Tucson, AZ: Mexican-American Studies
(“MAS”)

Image removed due to copyright restrictions. Quote “... a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States” – Donald Trump

Resistance to Immigration

“If somebody comes along who is charismatic and honest this country is in real trouble because of the frustration, disillusionment, the justified anger and the absence of any coherent response. What are people supposed to think if someone says ‘I have got an answer, we have an enemy’? There it was the Jews. Here it will be the illegal immigrants and the blacks.... We will be told we have to defend ourselves and the honor of the nation... This could become an overwhelming force. And if it happens it will be more dangerous than Germany.”

-Noam Chomsky (April, 2010)

“Immigration, civil rights & the evolution of the people” (Cristina M. Rodríguez)

- Immigration → Civil rights matter?
- Multiculturalism → Lays claims to special rights
- Two frameworks for analysis:
 - a. Personhood & Protection
 - b. Incorporation into “The People”

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The legal production of Mexican/migrant “illegality” (Nicholas de Genova, *Latino Studies*, 2004)

- US has had a long and complicated relationship with Mexican immigration
 - 19th c.: open border
 - Immigration quotas to maintain racial purity of national identity
 - 1920s-1965: Entry denial & deportation based on “qualitative features”
 - 1920s-30s: mass deportations
 - WWII: mass importation through Bracero Program
 - 1950s: “revolving door” immigration and deportation
 - 1965: national quantitative restrictions on immigration, preference for some skills and value
 - 1976: fixed numerical quota instated for all nations, value-based preference system
 - 1978: universal immigrant quota
 - 1980: universal quota reduced → national quotas reduced
 - 1986: selective “amnesty” for undocumented immigrants; federal sanctions against employers of illegal immigrants
 - 1990: expand grounds for deportation

The legal production of Mexican/migrant “illegality” (Nicholas de Genova, *Latino Studies*, 2004)

- US has had a complicated relationship with Mexican immigration

“Nobody knew immigration could be so complicated”

- fixed numerical quota
- 1978: universal immigrant quota
- 1980: universal quota reduced → national quotas reduced
- 1986: selective “amnesty” for undocumented immigrants; federal sanctions against employers of illegal immigrants
- 1990: expand grounds for deportation

“Illegality”, cont’d

- Illegal status depends on mindset & conditions in U.S., NOT a “matter of fact”
- Continuous fluctuation of illegal status creates instability

A_Legal_immigrant

May 4, 2015

"The way the reaction to illegal immigration has manifested indicates most clearly that the resistance is mainly one of cultural difference and exclusion ... rather than economics or politics," writes Tirman.... No..... It's not a matter cultural difference and exclusionor economics or politics . Its a simple matter of the shared sense of right and wrong

America has always been a nation of laws. To say that some groups can blatantly disregard those laws with no consequence is highly disrespectful of all of us that followed the process, waited our turn, learned the history (... and answered correctly when questioned by the judge) and assimilated into the "melting pot" culture.

If you do not respect our laws enough to think that it is OK to " jump the fence" then you are not welcome. But if you are willing to do all that is required to follow the process - Then YES, you are more than welcome to come and contribute to America.

Opponents to the current state of immigration are opposed to the lack of action and apparent DELIBERATE disregarding of law and process by the past SEVERAL administrations.

No other nation has been so willing to accept the refugees from all the other failed systems as the United States. All that we ask is that do so in accordance to our laws.

Nicholas De Genova, on the mid 1960s:

“...few expressed blatantly racist attitudes, and the restriction for the Americas was notably defended in a more apparently liberal idiom, out of a **concern with ‘fairness’ for ‘our traditional friends and allies in Western Europe’.**”

Immigration & the American Backlash (John Tirman)

- “That any Americans were caught in a system of oppression was a heresy and could never be acknowledged...”
-) Strawman fallacy: Mexican-American Studies attempt to racialize society and promote resentment of specific groups
-) Emphasis of the individual in American idealism
- Viewing “ethnic solidarity” as dangerous



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Discussion

- ‘Civil rights’ is itself a term with multiple meanings. In attempting to treat immigration as a ‘civil rights’ matter, we must first establish an understanding of the true meaning of civil rights. How do we guarantee a universal meaning & understanding of such a broad term?
- What mobilizes anti-immigrant attitudes, and how do we ensure that our thoughts and perspective aren’t clouded by such negative stereotypes and generalizations?

Discussion (cont'd)

- How can we continue to support programs like Mexican-American Studies in the face of vehement political opposition? Is it possible to tailor such programs so that they are seen as less of a threat to currently-taught doctrine?

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