



# Celebrate America's 250th

# and Our Migration History

## #250UStogether

As the United States marks its 250th birthday, it's a perfect time for the Forum to share a timeline of some of the most consequential moments in U.S. immigration history and how the Forum continues to innovate and respond to challenges and opportunities. While it's always the right time to learn from history, it's especially important now as we work towards a modern immigration solution that's fair, firm, compassionate, and supported by most people in our nation.



1776-1798

# Foundations of a New Nation

The birth of the United States and the first legislative steps taken to define American citizenship and governance.

**1776**

## Signing of the Declaration of Independence

Birth of a nation and its common American values of "truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Source: [Declaration of Independence](#)

**1787**

## Adoption of the U.S. Constitution

Provides Congress with the explicit power "to establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization" throughout the United States, centralizing immigration policy.

Source: [ArtI.S8.C4.1.1 Overview of Naturalization Clause](#)

**1789**

## First Congress

Almost 10% of members of Congress in the House and Senate are foreign-born in 1789.

Source: [The Changing Face of Congress](#)

**1790**

## Naturalization Act of 1790

Creates a short and uniform path to citizenship, requiring two years of residence in the U.S. and "good character." But the bill excludes non-white people from eligibility. In 1795, a new Naturalization Act increases the residency requirement from two to five years.

Source: [Mt. Vernon: Naturalization Acts of 1790 and 1795](#)

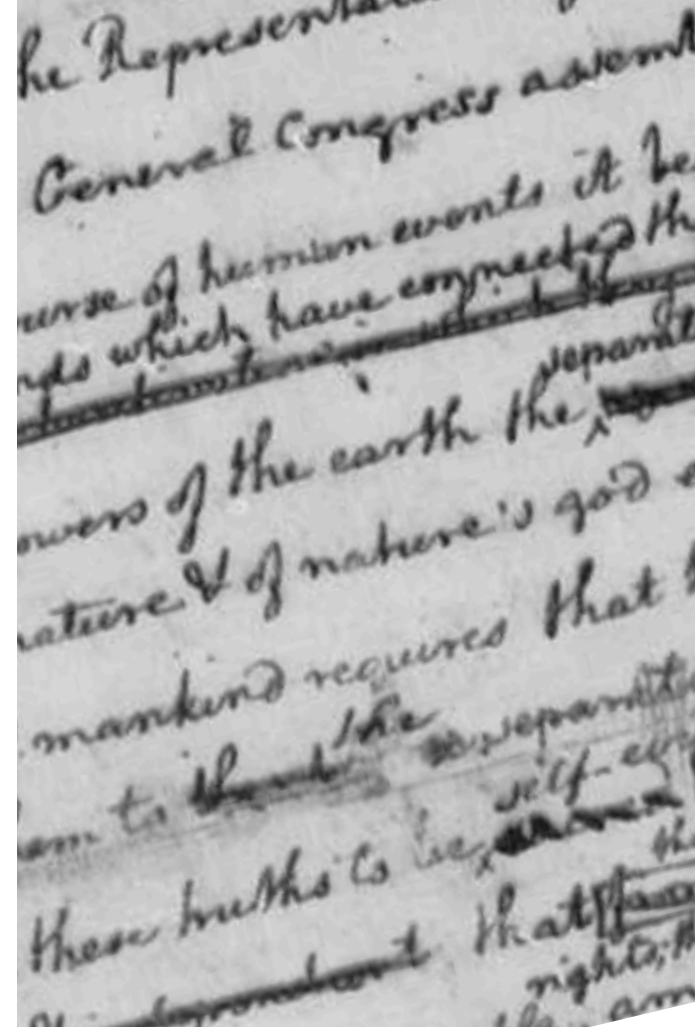
**1798**

## Alien and Sedition Acts

Federalist Party members of Congress pass the Alien and Sedition Acts, a series of bills to limit political dissent and subject immigrants to surveillance and arbitrary arrest. These controversial bills provide President John Adams with authority to deport immigrants by decree.

President Adams' Federalists, who favor a strong central government, advance the legislation in a direct attempt to target Democratic-Republicans, the party generally favored by newcomers.

Source: [National Archives: Alien and Sedition Acts 1789](#)





1815–1898

# Industrial Demands & Early Exclusion

The tension between the country's growing need for immigrant labor and the rise of nativist backlashes and legal exclusions.

**1815**

## Antebellum Period Begins

Rising numbers of German, Irish, English, Canadian, and French arrivals fuel nativist political parties. Widespread anti-Catholic sentiment grows over fears that immigrants oppose slavery.

Source: [Cato - A brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy from the Colonial Period to the Present Day: Antebellum period](#), [Aristide R. Zolberg: A Nation by Design, p 151](#)

**1819**

## Steerage Act

Driven by economic depression and anxiety over British migration, Congress passes a maritime safety rule to indirectly regulate and limit passenger capacities.

Source: [Cato - A brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy from the Colonial Period to the Present Day: Post- Ratification Period](#)

**1861**

## The Civil War Era

War increases labor demands. Congress responds with the Homestead Act of 1862 (land grants for citizens/immigrants) and the Contract Labor Act of 1864 (recruiting foreign workers)

Source: [National Archives: Homestead Act of 1962](#), [Immigration Act of 1864](#)

**1868**

## The 14th Amendment

The 14th Amendment is ratified, guaranteeing birthright citizenship to virtually every person born in the U.S., excluding children of diplomats and certain Native Americans.

Source: [14th Amendment Equal Protection and Other Rights](#)

**1882**

## Chinese Exclusion Act

Fueled by growing racism and xenophobia, this act suspends the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years, marking the first of many targeted federal restrictions.

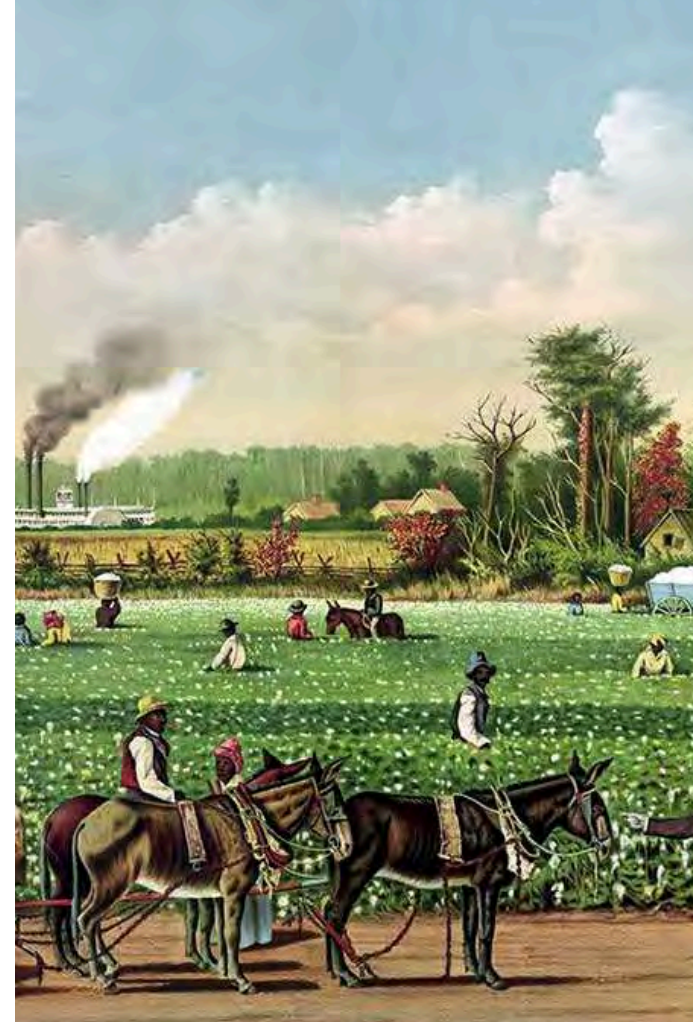
Source: [State Department: Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts](#)

**1898**

## U.S. vs. Wong Kim Ark

The Supreme Court rules 6-2 to uphold birthright citizenship under the 14th Amendment, declaring a child born in San Francisco to Chinese parents is automatically a citizen.

Source: [Oyez: United States v. Wong Kim Ark](#)





1907-1996

# Bethlehem Steel Welcomes Immigrants as Congress Tightens Immigration

For nearly a century, local communities, industries, and emerging advocacy groups navigated an ever-shifting landscape of federal restrictions, wartime crises, and landmark policy reforms.

**1907**

## Dillingham Commission

A restrictionist congressional commission used flawed, cherry-picked data to falsely claim that newer immigrants from Eastern Europe were more likely to use welfare and were inferior to earlier immigrants.

Source: [Cato - A brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy from the Colonial Period to the Present Day: Antebellum period](#), [Aristide R. Zolberg: A Nation by Design, p 151](#)

**1915**

## National Americanization Committee and the Americanization Movement

The "Americanization" movement promotes English and civics education for immigrants, drawing support from both nativists and pro-integration reformers.

Source: [Virginia Commonwealth University - Americanization](#), [Digital History 511: Theory and Practice Committees and Organization who Promoted Americanization](#), [Americanization Now and Then: The "Nation of Immigrants" in the Early Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries](#)

## Immigrant Integration Takes Hold

Industrial giant Bethlehem Steel is one of the first corporations in the nation to provide English training for its immigrant workforce. Bethlehem Steel understood a skilled immigrant workforce was critical to their bottom line.

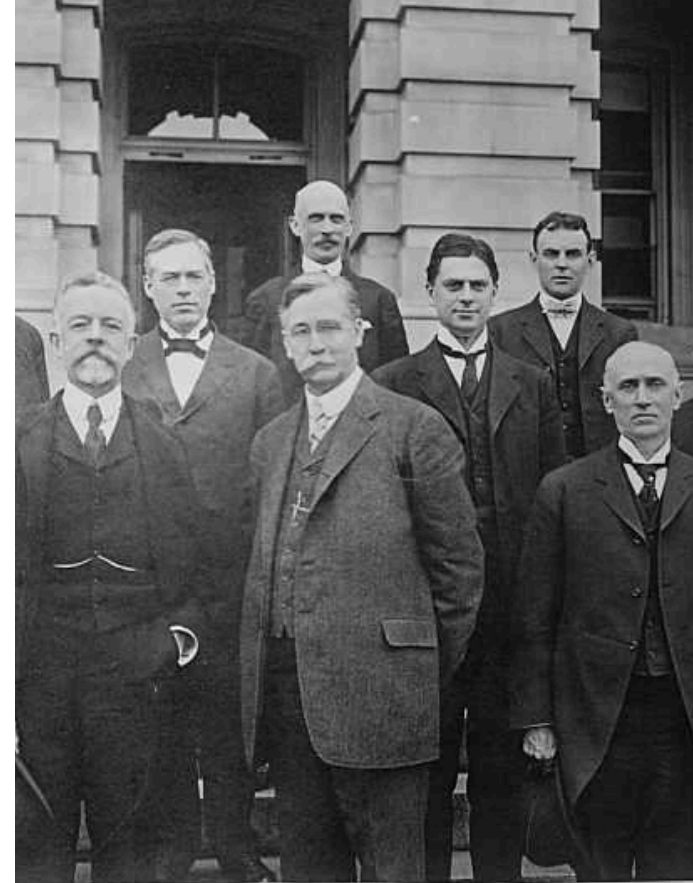
Source: [Jeb Bush and Robert D. Putnam - A better welcome for our nation's immigrants](#)

**1919**

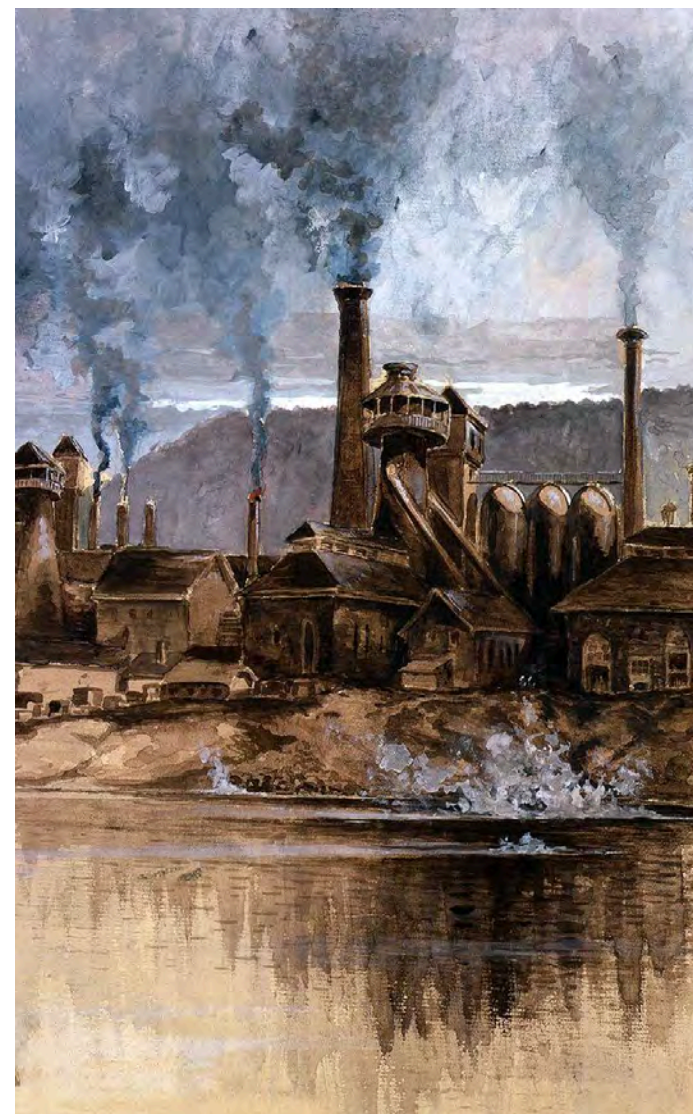
## Palmer Raids

Under U.S. Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, the U.S. Department of Justice conducts raids that result in the arrest of an estimated ten thousand immigrants and the deportation of nearly 250 people, amid public fears of radicalism and communism.

Source: [Britannica - Palmer Raids When America Tried to Deport Its Radicals, When America Tried to Deport its Radicals](#)



The new Immigration Commission.  
From left to right: J. L. Jenks, M. E. Crane, W. S. Bennet, W. W. Husband, J. L. Sen. H. C. Lodge, Sen. W. P. Dillingham, E. F. Howell.





**1921**

## Emergency Quota Act

Emergency Quota Act favors Northern and Western European family-based visas, increasing immigration from Canada and Mexico. This Act was the first federal law in the U.S. that set numerical limits on immigration — implementing caps on nationalities and total numbers.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Dillingham Commission](#)

**1924**

## Immigration Act of 1924

Establishes the strict national origin quota system, based on the 1890 population census to limit the number of immigrants allowed from each country, prioritizing Northern and Western European countries. The bill excludes all immigrants from Asia and aimed to reduce Jewish and Eastern and Southern European migration.

Source: [Migration Policy Institute: Immigration Has Been a Defining, Often Contentious, Element Throughout U.S. History](#), [U.S. House Office of the Historian: The Immigration Act of 1924 \(The Johnson-Reed Act\)](#)

**1929**

## Great Depression

In response to the Great Depression, Hoover administration Labor Secretary William N. Doak carries out deportations of Mexican workers in an effort to increase the number of jobs available to native-born citizens. The U.S. deports over a million people to Mexico, about 60% of whom are U.S. citizens born to Mexican immigrants.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Great Depression, WWII, Post War Recovery](#)



**1930**

## Key Forum Moment

Origin of the National Immigration Forum: The National Council on Naturalization and Citizenship, an association of organizations and individuals who seek to reform naturalization laws and regulations, is formed.

Source: [American Immigration and Citizenship Conference records](#)

**1933**

## WWII and Refugee Crisis

Congress actively avoids measures to support migrants fleeing Nazi Germany, Eastern Europe, and Russia. Congress defeats a 1939 proposal that would have facilitated the migration of 20,000 children from Nazi Germany who had family sponsors in the U.S.

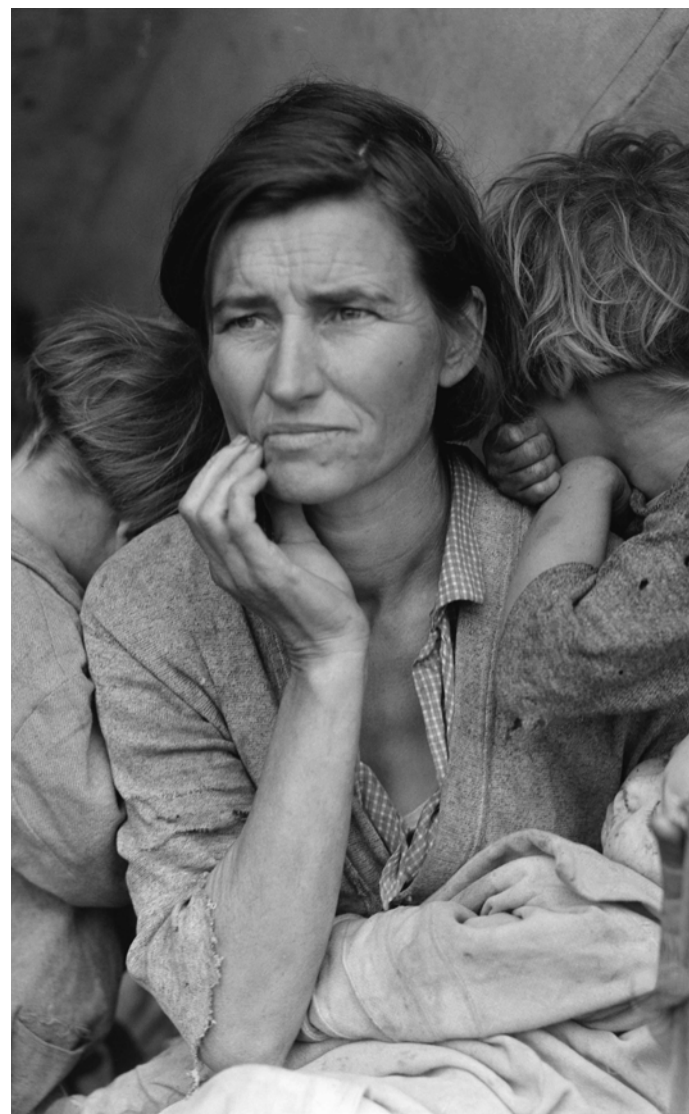
Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Great Depression, WWII, Post War Recovery](#)

**1942**

## Japanese Internment

In response to Pearl Harbor, 120,000 Japanese Americans, mostly U.S. citizens, are forcibly separated from their land and incarcerated in internment camps. News media normalizes vitriolic and hateful rhetoric.

Source: [Stories of Fourth Amendment Disrespect: From Elian to the Internment](#)





**1945**

## United Nations Founded

The UN adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Refugee Convention (1951), establishing the right to asylum and protections for refugees.

Source: [Immigration History: 1951 Refugee Convention](#), [United Nations: Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

**1947**

## Bracero Program

The U.S. creates the WWII-era Bracero Program to meet labor shortages. Many employers violate wage, housing, and sanitation standards. Congress ends the program without replacing it, contributing to increased unauthorized migration.

Source: [Bracero Family Archive](#)

**1948**

## Displaced Persons Act of 1948

Postwar reckoning on the Holocaust leads the Truman White House and State Department to pressure Congress to authorize admissions for European refugees and create pathways for asylum seekers in the U.S. to regularize their status. The temporary measure deliberately disfavors Jewish refugees.

Source: [Immigration History: Displaced Persons Act \(1948\)](#)

**1952**

## Immigration and Nationality Act

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) modernizes U.S. immigration law, ends racial restrictions on naturalization, and allows limited Asian immigration, but retains national origins quotas favoring Northern and Western Europeans. Truman vetoes the bill, but Congress overrides him.

Source: [Pew: Chapter 1: The Nation's Immigration Laws, 1920 to Today](#), [Immigration History: The Immigration And Nationality Act of 1952](#)

**1953**

## Refugee Relief Act of 1953

The Refugee Relief Act addresses gaps in the Displaced Persons Act by expanding protections for Asian refugees. Eisenhower frames it as a contrast to Communist oppression.

Source: [The American Presidency Project: Statement by the President Upon Signing the Refugee Relief Act of 1953](#), [U.S. House History, Art & Archives: Immigrants and Refugees](#)

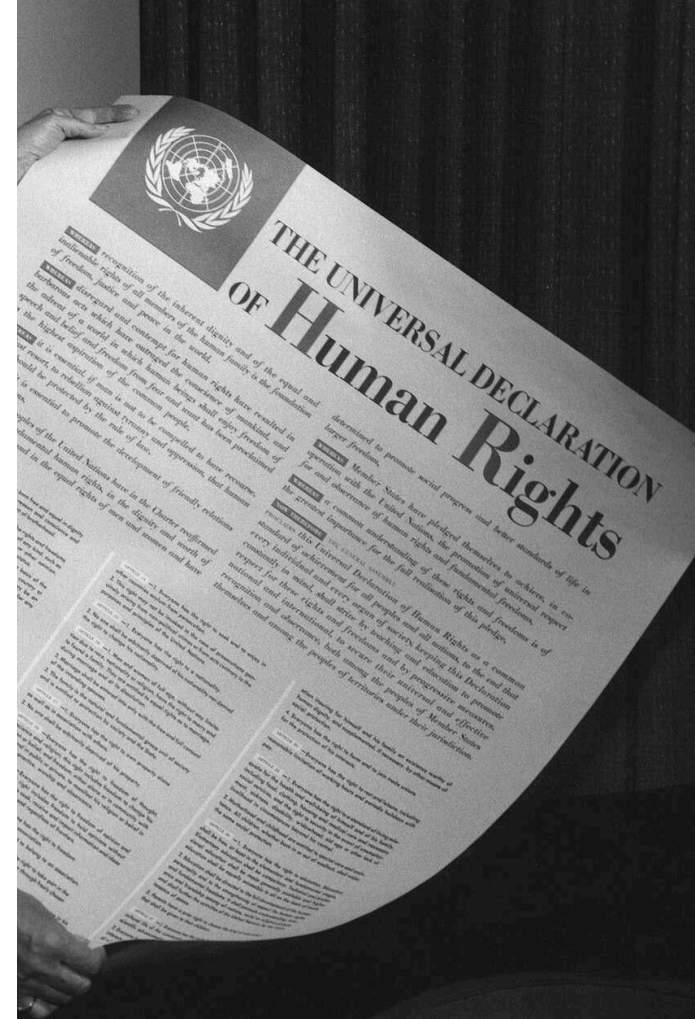


**1954**

## Key Forum Moment

The American Immigration Conference, a foundational organization of today's Forum, is formed by representatives of 31 immigration-related organizations and agencies who sought a more humane, nondiscriminatory alternative to the national origins quota system.

Source: [American Immigration and Citizenship Conference records](#)







**1960**

## Key Forum Moment

The American Immigration Conference and National Council on Naturalization and Citizenship merge to form the American Immigration and Citizenship Conference (AICC), whose advocacy helps shape the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

Source: [American Immigration and Citizenship Conference records](#)



**1965**

## Immigration & Nationality Act of 1965

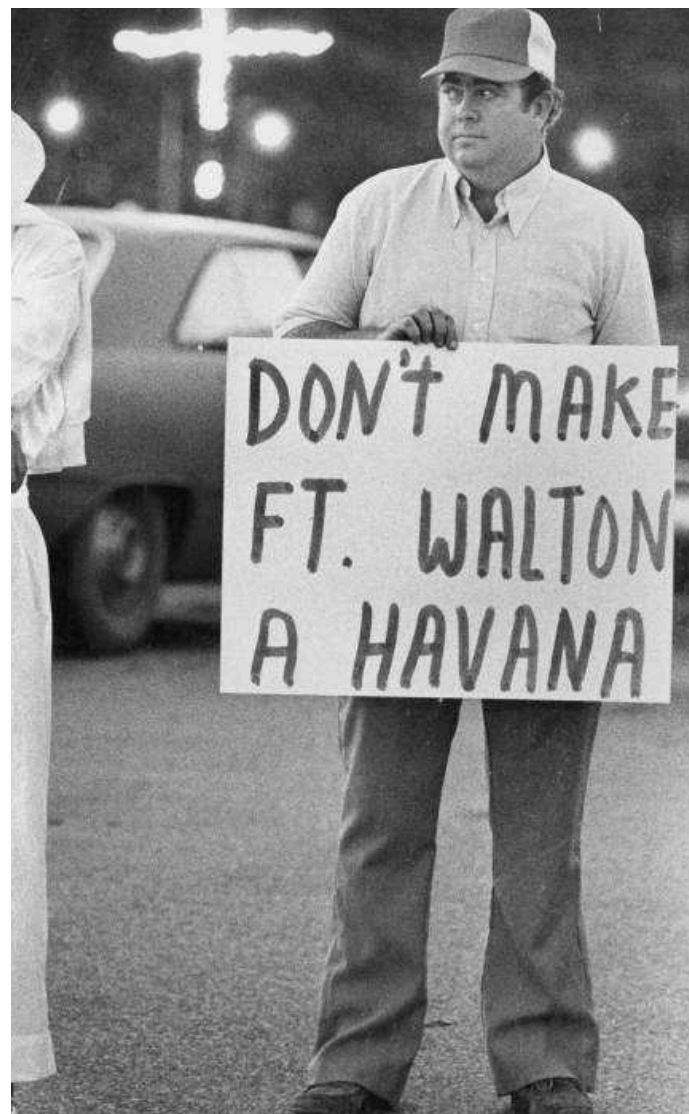
The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 establishes the foundation of today's immigration system by replacing national origins quotas with family- and skills-based immigration, boosting migration from Latin America and Asia.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Shifting Perceptions and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952](#), [From the archives: In '60s, Americans gave thumbs-up to immigration law that changed the nation](#)

## Delano Grape Strike and Boycott

Over 800 Filipino farmworkers launch the Delano Grape Strike, joined by Mexican farmworkers. Though it fails to win higher wages, it fuels the farmworker rights movement.

Source: [National Park Service: Workers United: The Delano Grape Strike and Boycott](#)



**1980**

## Mariel Boatlift

Cuba lifts its emigration ban, prompting 125,000 Cubans to flee to the U.S. Castro uses the exodus to expel "undesirables," while the U.S. welcomes migrants to showcase its opposition to communism.

Source: [Immigration History: Mariel Boatlift of 1980](#)

## Refugee Act of 1980

The Refugee Act creates a permanent asylum system for people fleeing persecution, defining refugee protections and eligibility based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. It also authorizes the president to set annual refugee admissions.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965](#)



**1982**

## Key Forum Moment

AICC and the National Forum on Immigration and Refugee Policy merge to form the National Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Forum (later the National Immigration Forum), which promotes immigration as central to American identity and relocates to WDC.

Source: [About the Forum](#)





**1986**

## Key Forum Moment: Immigration Reform and Control Act

President Reagan signs the Forum-backed Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), granting legal status to nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants while creating the I-9 employment verification system to deter unauthorized hiring.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Immigration Reform and Control Act](#), [About the Forum](#)



**1990**

## Immigration Act of 1990

The law liberalizes immigration of skilled workers, adds certain nonimmigrant visas such as H-1Bs, legalizes family members previously not covered under IRCA, and creates Diversity Visa Program.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - The Reforms of the 1990s](#)



**1990s**

## Key Forum Moment

The Forum and partners, including the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, persuade the Clinton administration to end the interception and return of Haitian refugees, allowing them to apply for asylum.



**1994**

## California's Proposition 187

California voters pass Proposition 187 to deny undocumented immigrants public services. Though struck down as unconstitutional, it inspires similar state measures and contributes to California's shift toward the Democratic Party.

Source: [Library of Congress: 1994: California's Proposition 187](#), [Cato: Proposition 187 Turned California Blue](#)

## Prevention Through Deterrence

U.S. Border Patrol adopts "Prevention Through Deterrence," concentrating enforcement at traditional crossings to push unauthorized migration into harsher terrain.

Source: [Border Patrol Strategic Plan 1994 and Beyond: National Strategy](#)



**1996**

## Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act

IRAIRA expands deportable offenses and imposes 3- and 10-year reentry bars for many undocumented immigrants. Combined with increased border enforcement, it contributes to growth in the undocumented population by discouraging circular migration.

Source: [The disastrous, forgotten 1996 law that created today's immigration problem](#), [Explainer: The Need to Reform or End the 3- and 10- year bans](#)



2001-2026

# Calls for Fair, Firm, Compassionate Immigration Solutions

Through decades of legislative gridlock and bitter legal battles, a growing national consensus looks past partisan divides toward common-sense solutions that honor both the rule of law and human dignity.

**2001**

## DREAM Act Introduced

The DREAM Act would have provided a pathway to citizenship for many undocumented Dreamers. It was introduced in 2001 and has been reintroduced every Congress since initial introduction. It came the closest to passing in 2010.

Source: [Politico: Dream Act dies in Senate](#), [Sen. Durbin Press Release](#)

**2006**

## Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act Fails

With support of the George W. Bush administration, this failed legislative effort would have legalized undocumented people and expanded channels for legal immigration. The measure is passed by the Republican-led Senate, but not by the House. Subsequent Bush-era efforts at reform in 2007 and 2008 fall short of passage.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Immigration Policy in the 21st Century](#), [Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act](#)



**2006**

## Key Forum Moment

The Forum launches Keepers of the American Dream award to celebrate leaders and organizations that advocate for immigrants or who embody the spirit of immigrant achievement and the American dream.

**2012**

## Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)

Introduced as a stopgap measure by the Obama administration, DACA grants work permits and protection from deportation in 2-year increments to certain immigrants brought to the U.S. as children.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Immigration Policy in the 21st Century](#)





★  
**2012**

## Key Forum Moment

1. The Forum supports founding of Evangelical Immigration Table, which encourages dialogue on immigration reforms rooted in biblical principles.
2. The Forum launches the Bethlehem Project, partnering with employers to provide workplace English and citizenship support for immigrant workers.

Source: [The Bethlehem Project Expands in Los Angeles - National Immigration Forum](#)

★  
**2013**

## Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act (S.744)

A bipartisan immigration reform bill proposes a pathway to citizenship, legal immigration reforms, and stronger border security, with legalization tied to security benchmarks. It passes the Senate 68–32 but **dies after the House takes no action**.

Source: [Vox: The Summer 2014 Death of Immigration Reform in Congress](#)

★  
**2013**

## Key Forum Moment

The Forum creates Bibles, Badges and Business, a network of moderate conservative faith, law enforcement and business (and other) leaders working toward a shared consensus on the value of immigrants and immigration to America.

★  
**2015**

## Key Forum Moment

The Forum officially launches the Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force, a coalition of police chiefs, sheriffs, and other law enforcement leaders across the country to advocate for common-sense immigration reform and build trust between police and immigrant communities

Source: [South Bend police chief helps launch immigration task force](#)

★  
**2016**

## Key Forum Moment

Founded during the Syrian refugee crisis, We Choose Welcome grew from a World Relief campaign into a Forum-led grassroots movement advocating for refugees, asylum seekers, Dreamers, and immigrants. It mobilizes Christians to advocate with compassion.

Source: [About — We Choose Welcome](#)

## 2016 Presidential Campaign

Running on a platform that is highly critical of immigrants and immigration, Donald Trump wins the U.S. presidency.

Source: [Immigration, Race, and Political Polarization](#)





**2017**

## Travel Ban

President Trump issues travel bans targeting several Muslim-majority countries. After revisions, the U.S. Supreme Court upholds the policy.

Source: [Cato - A Brief History of U.S. Immigration Policy - Immigration Policy in the 21st Century](#)



  
**2017**

## Key Forum Moment

1. The Forum Daily launches, highlighting and offering context for the latest and most important news related to immigration.
2. Inaugural convening of the Forum's Leading the Way: A New Approach to American Immigration, which advances constructive immigration policy solutions that serve the interests of American workers and their families.
3. The Forum helps launch Women of Welcome as a collaborative partnership with World Relief. Women of Welcome is a community of Christian women dedicated to viewing immigration through the lens of Christianity.

Source: [About Us — Women of Welcome](#)

**2018**

## Family Separation

In spring 2018, the Trump administration adopts a policy to deliberately separate children from their parents at the U.S. Mexico border, leading to significant public outcry.

Source: [The Atlantic: The Secret History of Family Separation](#)



  
**2019**

## Key Forum Moment

The Forum officially launches the Corporate Roundtable for the New American Workforce to advocate for policies and integration programs to support foreign-born workers.

Source: [Businesses Support Immigrants and Integration via New Roundtable - National Immigration Forum](#)

**2020**

## COVID-19 Response

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) invokes Title 42 to expel migrants on public health grounds. The policy is used over 2.8 million times under the Trump and Biden administrations before ending in May 2023.

Source: [Explainer: Title 42 and What Comes Next at the Border](#)



  
**2021**

## Key Forum Moment

The Forum launches the Council on National Security and Immigration, uniting national security leaders to advocate for immigration reform as essential to U.S. security and global leadership.

Source: [National Security Leaders Launch Council on National Security and Immigration](#)



## Biden Era Border Influx

The Biden administration faces record southern border migration, straining asylum processing and reducing public support. After bipartisan reforms stall, border crossings decline following a June 2024 asylum restriction.

Source: [Explainer: Governors Transporting Migrants to Other States](#), [Border Security and Asylum Reform in the Emergency National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024: Bill Explainer](#), [Q&A: The Biden Border Proclamation](#)

## Operation Allies Welcome

Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Operation Allies Welcome resettles tens of thousands of vetted Afghan allies under humanitarian parole. Without congressional action, many continue to face uncertain legal status.

Source: [DHS Press Release: Operation Allies Welcome](#), [Bill Summary: Afghan Adjustment Legislation](#)



**2022**

## Uniting for Ukraine

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration announced Uniting for Ukraine (U4U), a streamlined process to admit up to 100,000 Ukrainians and others impacted by the conflict.

Source: [DHS Press Release: President Biden to Announce Uniting for Ukraine](#)



**2024**

## Key Forum Moment

The Forum launches Students of Welcome, a nonpartisan national movement empowering students to promote informed, compassionate, and solutions-driven immigration dialogue through education and service.

Source: [Students of Welcome - National Immigration Forum](#)

**2025**

## Focus on Enforcement and Mass Deportation

After campaigning on border security and mass deportations, the second Trump administration rapidly expands immigration enforcement, with widespread social and economic impacts on immigrant communities.

Source: [Forum Analysis: President Trump's Executive Actions on Border Security](#), [Forum Analysis: President Trump's Executive Actions Relating to Immigration Enforcement and Mass Deportation](#), [Mass Deportation in the U.S.: Explainer](#)

## New Laws

Congress passes the bipartisan Laken Riley Act, expanding mandatory detention. President Trump later signs the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, boosting funding for immigration enforcement and DHS.

Source: [One Big Beautiful Bill Act: Immigration Provisions](#), [S.5 - Laken Riley Act](#)





## Interior Immigration Enforcement Operations and Arrest Quotas

Large-scale U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) operations spark nationwide protests as the Trump administration expands interior enforcement, mandatory detention, and expedited removal.

Source: [Trump administration sets quota to arrest 3,000 people a day in anti-immigration agenda](#), [Minneapolis left to decide future of streetside memorials to 2 people killed by federal officers](#), [Reclassifying 'Applicants for Admission': How the Second Trump Administration is Reshaping Mandatory Detention](#), [Fact Sheet: Expanded Expedited Removal](#)

## Undermining Humanitarian Immigration Programs

The Trump administration pauses refugee admissions, cuts the refugee cap, restricts asylum and work authorization, and ends many Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and parole programs.

Source: [Reshaping Refuge: The New Era of United States Refugee Admissions](#), [Forum Analysis: President Trump's Executive Order on the U.S. Refugee Program](#), [Forum Analysis: President Trump's Executive Actions on Border Security](#), [Explainer: Asylum Work Authorization Rulemaking](#), [Temporary Protected Status \(TPS\): Fact Sheet](#), [Explainer: Temporary Immigration Statuses](#)

## Attacks on Legal Immigration Programs and Work Authorization

The Trump administration restricts legal immigration by limiting H-1B and other visas, tightening green card rules, and threatening student visas and Optional Practical Training (OPT).

Source: [Explainer: The Trump Administration's New Rules Restricting H-1B Workers](#), [Explainer: H-1B Rule Replaces Random Lottery System with a Weighted Selection Lottery](#), [Federal Court Blocks Sweeping Pause on Legal Immigration for Nationals of 39 Countries](#), [Explainer: USCIS Memorandum on Adjustment of Status Within the United States](#), [Fragoman: DHS Submits F/I Duration of Status Termination Rule for Federal Review](#)



2026

## Trump v. Barbara: Birthright Citizenship Litigation

On June 30, 2026, the Supreme Court held in [Trump v. Barbara](#) that the Fourteenth Amendment's [Citizenship Clause](#) guarantees U.S. citizenship to nearly all individuals born in the United States, regardless of their parents' immigration status.

Source: [Birthright citizenship: oral argument highlights](#), [Q&A: Birthright Citizenship](#)

## Modern-Day Compassionate Immigration Solutions

Polling indicates that more than 70% of American voters would support a restitution-based immigration solution that would include consequences for having broken the law followed by a chance to earn lawful status.

Source: [Birthright citizenship: oral argument highlights](#), [Q&A: Birthright Citizenship](#)

