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"Today, the annual tidal wave of over a million immigrants...is endangering our American way of life."

—Americans for Immigration Control

"Immigration is not undermining the American experiment; it is an integral part of it."

—Daniel T. Griswold

Between 1790 and 1920 the population of the United States grew from 4 million to 106 million. About 1 million new immigrants—most of them European—had arrived each year, and by the 1920 census, the foreign-born comprised more than 13 percent of the U.S. population. Responding to public anxieties about this large influx of newcomers, Congress passed the Quota Act in 1921, which set a cap of 360,000 new immigrants per year. This act also established a national-origins preference that favored immigrants from England, Scandinavia, Germany, and France over those from southern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Coupled with the impact of the Depression and World War n, these regulations dramatically reduced immigration to the United States. Between 1930 and 1950 only 4 million newcomers became American citizens— less than half the number of immigrants that had arrived during the first decade of the twentieth century.

In the 1960s significant policy revisions again changed the makeup and number of immigrants coming to the United States. Prompted by the successes of the civil rights movement, Congress chose to end racially restrictive immigration quotas by passing the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. This act, which took effect in 1968, set an annual immigration cap of 290,000—170,000 from the Eastern Hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere. In addition, this new law established a "family preference" rule, which granted favor to the close relatives of immigrants already living in the United States. In effect, relatives of immigrants who were U.S. citizens were exempt from the quota system. During the mid-1960s Latin American and Asian countries still had a relatively low proportion of visas available to immigrants, but due to the family preference system, it was not long before these countries contributed a substantial portion of America's new immigrants. By 1990, 44 percent of America's legal immigrants were from Latin America and the Caribbean, and 36 percent came from Asia. Less than 15 percent were from Europe.

The new quota system and family preference policy were not the only factors affecting the numbers and demographics of U.S. immigrants. Illegal immigration of migrant workers increased dramatically after the 1965 Immigration Act cancelled the Bracero program, which since the 1940s had-allowed foreigners—mostly Mexicans—to take temporary agricultural jobs in California and Texas. In one of its first serious attempts to control illegal immigration, Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986. The act had two parts: It provided amnesty to illegal immigrants who could prove they met certain requirements for living and working in the United States, and it sanctioned employers for hiring undocumented workers. Most analysts agree, however, that the IRCA had little effect in reducing illegal immigration. According to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, about 200,000 to 300,000 illegal immigrants enter the United States annually.

Not only did restrictions on illegal immigration fail to significantly reduce the total number of immigrants entering the country, but new policies led to overall increases. Higher immigration caps that took effect in 1990 now allow 700,000 to one million legal immigrants into America each year. Out of a current total U.S. population of 284 million, immigrants comprise 10 percent of American residents— 28.4 million. By the year 2050 the U.S. population is projected to increase to 400 million, with immigrants contributing to two-thirds of that growth.

For many Americans, such a large number of newcomers—and the prospect of millions more—is unsettling. Some experts are concerned that the accelerated population growth resulting from immigration could overtax the country's municipal, natural, and economic resources. Sociologist Christopher Jencks, for example, maintains that cities will become grossly overcrowded, resulting in gridlocked traffic, suburban sprawl, increased pollution, and dwindling power and water supplies. A similar premise—that continued immigration means fewer or lower-quality resources for current residents—underlies economic arguments for immigration restrictions. For instance, some economists contend that because immigrants are often poor and uneducated, they take jobs that otherwise would have gone to low-skilled native-born workers. And since newcomers are willing to work for low pay, they depress wages across the nation. As Federation for American Immigration Reform director Dan Stein argues, "All we're doing is importing a huge pool of cheap labor, which helps employers but keeps wages low for Americans." In addition, critics maintain, poverty rates are high among new immigrants, so they make disproportionate use of welfare and other social services. This places even more economic burdens on ordinary Americans, who must support welfare by paying taxes.

Still other analysts fear that a steady stream of immigrants could undermine the nation's ability to absorb and integrate recent arrivals into American society. Large blocs of unassimilated immigrants, they claim, could divide the nation along ethnic lines. The fact that most of today's immigrants are from Latin America or Asia is particularly troublesome for commentators like Patrick Buchanan, who contends that too many of these newcomers have "no desire to learn English or become citizens." *National Review* editor John O'Sullivan agrees, arguing that immigration must be restricted to give schools and other institutions time to teach current immigrants English and American values. "In order to work together effectively we must maximize our common cultural sympathies," O'Sullivan asserts. "If every ethnic group retains its own cultural sympathies, it will be hard for us to work together as one people."

Immigration supporters, however, believe that most of the economic and cultural concerns voiced by restrictionists are unfounded. For example, many experts refute the assertion that foreign-born workers take jobs from Americans. They point out that cities with the largest immigrant populations have always had faster economic growth and lower unemployment than cities that do not draw immigrants. Moreover, highly skilled immigrants as well as uneducated newcomers are motivated, hardworking people who close gaps in the U.S. job market. Maintains Daniel Griswold of the Cato Institute, "Immigrants tend to fill jobs that Americans cannot or will not fill, mostly at the high and low ends of the skill spectrum. Immigrants are disproportionately represented in such high-skilled fields as medicine, physics and computer science, but also in lower-skilled sectors such as hotels and restaurants, domestic service, construction and light manufacturing." Immigrants also start more small businesses than native-born Americans do, which creates employment opportunities that help to lessen the effects of economic recessions, analysts point out.

Immigration proponents also discount restrictionists' concerns about the assimilation of large numbers of newcomers. The vast majority of immigrants want very much to become American citizens, argues immigration expert Bronwyn Lance. "Very few would run the gauntlet to get here unless they wanted to become part of this country," Lance points out. Furthermore, as author Tamar Jacoby maintains, it is simply untrue that immigrants refuse to learn English: "Many more than in previous eras come with a working knowledge of the language—it is hard to avoid in the world today." Griswold, Lance, Jacoby, and other experts contend that new immigrants will likely follow in the footsteps of their predecessors, who worked hard to become a part of American society while retaining ties to their cultural heritage.

Since its founding in 1776, the United States has been a nation of immigrants; the image of America welcoming the huddled masses to its shores is an integral part of how Americans view themselves and their country. *Immigration: Opposing Viewpoints* examines the issues pertaining to legal and illegal immigration in the following chapters: Historical Debate: Should Immigration Be Restricted? Is Immigration a Serious Problem? How Should the United States Address Illegal Immigration? How Should U.S. Immigration Policy Be Reformed? The authors in this anthology

explore the continuing ambivalence about immigration and America's vision of itself as the land of freedom and opportunity.