

Immigration: Public Policy

A common feature of twentieth century life was the immigration line. It is considered quite normal for states to regulate movement across international borders and sometimes within them. Anyone expecting to cross an international border is expected to have a passport with all the necessary documentation. In many countries, an internal passport (or some sort of national registration document) is mandatory for everyday business and official transactions.

From a historical perspective, the issuance of passports and the regulation of international migration by states are modern phenomena (Torpey 2000, p. 7). Prior to the nineteenth century, international borders were only approximately known and rarely policed. The strict regulation of international migration followed from the creation of 'nation-states'—the very peculiar form of state organization that has proliferated around the globe over the past two centuries. In the twenty-first century, there is very likely to be a gradual crumbling of the rigid laws and restrictions about who can cross international boundaries and settle in other countries. In the closing decades of the twentieth century, quite a few countries liberalized their immigration laws to allow more immigration and more diversity among the immigrants admitted. The European Common Market allows citizens from any country in the association to move to (and work in) another. Although it is unlikely that there will be a complete end to immigration restrictions, the radical limitations on international movements that characterized much of the world in the mid-twentieth century are likely to fade.

1. Long Distance Migration in Historical Perspective

Long-distance migration is as old as humankind (Davis 1974, McNeill 1984). Although some views of human history paint a portrait of immobile communities, wedded to the land and local villages over the millennia only to be disrupted by modern civilizations and global capitalism, this is a very partial view. Local communities did persist over long stretches of human history, but the peoples who inhabited them were connected to frontier regions and cities through periodic waves of out-migration in times of population surplus. Moreover, local villages and communities were periodically subjected to conquest that led to displacement, enslavement, or absorption into dominant populations. Patterns of uneven population growth, environmental changes, and technological differences between populations inevitably made migration, voluntary and involuntary, a recurrent feature throughout history. These patterns of population movement, however, were rarely regulated by state policies.

Prior to the rise of nationalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the primary forms of state organization in the world were empires and kingdoms ruled by absolutist monarchs. Empires were defined by their centers—the city where the monarch ruled. The boundaries of empires were, however, ill defined and probably oscillated with the power of the center to extract taxes and conscript labor from the periphery. The cities of empires were invariably multiethnic and drew peoples from a variety of distant locations. The primary imperative for the openness of cities to migrations was survival. With the exception of Japan, concentrations of populations inevitably led to high levels of mortality far in excess of natural increase. Cities required a continuous influx of labor from rural areas just to maintain their population. Moreover, workers for various urban roles, including artisans, traders, slaves, and soldiers, were often imported or recruited from distant, culturally distinct peoples. These multiethnic cities were not necessarily harmonious or even tolerant, but social and cultural antagonisms were usually held in check because of common interests or by political force.

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the political map of the world was transformed with the dissolution of empires, the rise and fall of imperialism, and the emergence of many new states. In many cases, state formation was based on a claim of nationalism, which usually implied an ethnic homeland or a sense of belonging to a common people. Nationalism has proven to be an extremely potent ideology of state building in the modern era. Indeed, the boundaries of Europe were redrawn after World War One to give many nations their own state, a policy legitimized by the ideology of national self-determination.

Among the many problems created by nationalism was the uncertain political status of domestic minorities in modern 'nation states.' McNeill (1984, p. 17) notes that the 'barbarian ideal of an ethnically homogeneous nation is incompatible with the normal population dynamics of civilization.' According to McNeill, the European nineteenth-century ideology of nation building (based on a single people in one country) was only realized by the coincidence of rapid population growth and the incorporation of regional peoples into a national myth of a common language and culture. If other ethnic groups could not be absorbed in the national population, the alternatives were expulsion or the removal of the rights of citizenship. The logic of nationalism was expressed by Hobsbawm (1992, p. 134) as 'The homogeneous territorial nation could now be seen as a programme that could only be realized by barbarians, or at least by barbarian means.' Although there is no simple one-to-one correlation between nationalism and the tightening up of international boundaries to migration, the logic was similar. A country that wanted to preserve a homogeneous ethnic homeland would not want to open its borders to other peoples.

Just as nationalism was taking hold in Europe in the nineteenth century and beginning to spread around the globe, there were other forces that were expanding the numbers of the potential migrants and the feasibility of large scale, long distance population movements. The most important factors were the acceleration of population growth in many parts of the globe after 1750, opportunities for settlement in frontier societies, and the demand for labor in the emerging industrial economies. Population pressures, with growing numbers of people living at the margins of subsistence, were exacerbated with the commercialization of the agricultural economy and displacement of peasants from the land. In different countries, famines, persecution, and pogroms added to the reasons for exodus in the nineteenth century. These pressures combined with the cheapening costs of long distance travel increased the attractions of sparsely settled frontier areas, especially in the New World. All of these conditions led to massive waves of migrants, numbering in the millions, crossing the Atlantic (and the Pacific) over the later half of the nineteenth century.

In most areas of the New World, the initial reaction to the increasing numbers of immigrants in the nineteenth century was positive. Immigrants were thought to contribute to economic growth and the general concern was of too few, not too many newcomers. But as the decades passed, the numbers increased, and alarm bells began to ring.

2. The Closing of the Borders of the United States

The most open borders of the nineteenth century were those in the New World and Australasia. With the depopulation of the indigenous peoples through conquest and the spread of Old World diseases, the New World became the demographic and economic frontier that attracted long distance migrants from around the world, especially from Europe. The migration to the New World was monumental, both in its demographic size and the diversity of its origins. For the 75-year period from the mid-nineteenth century to the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century, almost 50 million Europeans went to the United States alone (Massey 1988). In spite of some frictions, immigrants were generally welcomed in the New World. Labor was scarce and the endless frontier needed to be settled. Land grants, subsidized passage, and labor recruitment were among the strategies used to induce migrants at various times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Not everyone came voluntarily. For decades, Great Britain would send English and Irish 'convicts' to its colonies in North America, and after the American Revolution, to Australia. It is estimated that more

than 10 million Africans were transported as slaves to the Caribbean and to North and South America (Klein 1999, pp. 208–11).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, some of the occasional fears and antagonisms against immigrants were beginning to coalesce into social movements. In the decades prior to the American Civil War, there was a substantial movement against Catholic immigrants, particularly from Ireland, in several American states. These antipathies crystallized in the 'Know Nothing Party' which in 1855 elected six governors and sent a number of representatives to Congress (Jones 1992, p. 134). The term preferred by party members was the American party, and their philosophy was simply that of 'Americanism,' which seemed to represent a fear of internal minorities because of their foreign connections (Higham 1988, p. 4). The Know Nothing movement collapsed before the Civil War, and did not have any lasting impact, except as a harbinger of the nativist trend that emerged in subsequent decades.

The first American effort to close the door to immigration was directed against Chinese on the West Coast in the 1870s (Saxton 1971). By 1882, the anti-Chinese coalition had become so strong that Congress passed, and the President Chester A. Arthur signed, a bill that was popularly known as the 'Chinese Exclusion Act' (Hutchinson 1981, pp. 77–84). Although the facts of immigration restriction are clear, the motivations for it are still debated. There is no doubt that the anti-Chinese sentiments (and later anti-Japanese) were thoroughly infused with racial ideology. Popular prejudices against Asians were openly expressed in newspapers and by most political leaders (Saxton 1971, Daniels 1977). The question is whether racism was the primary reason or just a convenient ideology for those who had genuine fears of economic competition with the new immigrants. In her theory of the 'split labor market,' Bonacich (1972, 1984) argued that much of the antagonism and discrimination against Asian immigrants by working class whites, who led the movement for immigration bars, was based on fears that Asian immigrants' willingness to work for very low wages undercut the incomes of white workers.

The movement to exclude Chinese (and other Asian) immigration to the United States was not a singular event. In his book, *The Great White Walls are Built*, Price (1974) describes how similar restrictive immigration laws were passed in Australia and Canada. Moreover, the restrictions on Asian immigration foreshadowed the movement to exclude immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe to the United States, which culminated with the 'national origins' quotas in the 1920s.

The movement to restrict European migration to the United States was a complex phenomenon that extended for several decades with strange political, economic, and ethnic alliances on both sides. The standard economic account posits capital and labor as the main protagonists with business and employer

groups advocating free immigration and workers arguing the opposite. There were, however, many other sides to the debate. Immigrant communities, particularly in big cities, were a strong political force against immigration restriction, while Congressional representatives from rural areas were generally opposed to open immigration.

Perhaps the most important force moving the United States toward limits on immigration was the rising tide of nativism—the fear of foreigners, which gradually became intertwined with racial ideology in the first two decades of the twentieth century. American nativism had deep roots in anti-Catholicism and a fear of foreign radicals, but the belief in the inherent superiority of the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ became the dominant element of the ideology in the late nineteenth century (Higham 1988, Chap. 1). These beliefs and the link to immigration restriction had widespread support among many well-educated elites. The Immigration Restriction League, founded by young Harvard-educated Boston Brahmins in 1894, advocated a literacy test to slow the tide of immigration (Bernard 1980, p. 492). It was thought that a literacy test would reduce immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, which was sending an ‘alarming number of illiterates, paupers, criminals, and madmen who endangered American character and citizenship’ (Higham 1988, p. 103).

For three decades, the battle over immigration restriction was waged in the courts of public opinion and in Congress. In 1910, the Dillingham Commission (a congressionally appointed commission named after Senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont) issued a 42-volume report, which assumed the racial inferiority of the new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe relative to the old stock immigrants from Northwestern Europe (Bernard 1980, p. 492). Social Darwinism and scientific racism were in full flower with many leading scholars warning against allowing further immigration of ‘beaten members of beaten breeds’ (Jones 1992, pp. 228–30).

When the passage of a literacy test in 1917 did not have the intended impact of slowing immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, Congress passed the Quota Act in 1921 to limit the number of annual immigrants from each country to three percent of the foreign-born of that nationality in the 1910 Census (Bernard 1980, pp. 492–3). These provisions were not strong enough for some restrictionists, who passed another immigration law in 1924 that pushed the quotas back to two percent of each nationality counted in the 1890 census, a date before the bulk of the new immigrants had arrived. The policy then led to the ‘national origins quotas,’ which were based on very dubious means of estimating the national origins of the American population (Higham 1988, pp. 316–24, Anderson 1988, pp. 140–9). There were no quotas allocated for Asian countries and no mention of any possible immigration from Africa.

Timmer and Williamson (1998) argue that the immigration restrictions that took hold in the United States and many other countries about the same time in the early decades of the twentieth century were primarily motivated by economic considerations and not by xenophobia or racism. There is some evidence that immigration from poorer areas might have slowed gains of domestic workers (Hatton and Williamson 1998; however, see Carter and Sutch 1998), and that the political alliances that did finally lead to immigration restriction were shaped, at least in part, by fears of competition with immigrant workers (Goldin 1994). Although restrictive policies were clearly formulated to address the fears of wage competition of American workers, the conclusion that this was the only causal variable seems to ignore the highly charged ideological climate of the era of immigration restriction.

Nationalism and racism were the reigning ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although not every political outcome was determined by these ideologies, they did shape the immigration policy agenda in fundamental ways. In the United States, racial arguments were used by politicians, scholars, and the mass media to convince the American public and the government that the historically open door of immigration should be closed (Higham 1988). This was not an easy case to make in a country whose identity was that of a ‘nation of immigrants.’ It took several decades of overt anti-immigrant rhetoric and a broad political coalition before the US Congress was able to pass restrictive immigration legislation that closed the door to mass immigration.

Another factor that probably helped to turn the tide against an open system of international migration was the increasing rate of population growth. For most of the nineteenth century, migration had been a necessity because of the high mortality in cities and a general shortage of labor to settle the frontier and to work in the factories of the new industrial age. With declining levels of mortality in the early twentieth century, most countries were generally able to meet their labor needs from natural increase. In such circumstances, the nationalist and racial impulses were, perhaps, given a freer hand to regulate immigration policies over the middle decades of the twentieth century.

3. *The Immigration Door Begins to Open*

The imposition of the national origins quotas in the 1920s, followed by the Great Depression and World War Two, lowered immigration to its lowest levels since the early decades of the nineteenth century. The ‘racial’ character of the national origins quotas was exemplified by the very limited numbers of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany who were allowed to enter the United States while the quotas for Great Britain were not utilized. After World War Two, US immigration policies came into conflict with America’s

new leadership role in the international system. If American political ideals were to influence other countries, the discriminatory character of the national origins quotas could be held up as an example of hypocrisy. In vetoing the McCarran–Walter Immigration Act of 1952 (which reaffirmed the national origins quota system), President Truman stated:

The quota system—always based upon assumptions at variance with our American ideals—is long since out of date... The greatest vice of the present system, however, is it discriminates, deliberately and intentionally, against many of the peoples of the world... It is incredible to me that, in this year of 1952, we should be enacting into law such a slur on the patriotism, the capacity, and the decency of a large part of our citizenry (quoted in Keely 1979, pp. 17–18).

Congress overrode Truman's veto, and the national origins quota remained the law of the land for another 13 years. The domestic and international pressures for immigration reform continued to grow with each passing year. The dam finally broke with the landslide 1964 election, which brought a reform minded Congress into office. Among the major pieces of Great Society legislation passed was the 1965 Immigration Act, which was championed by a number of senior members of Congress who were the children of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe.

The 1965 Immigration Act replaced the national origins quota system with a new preference system based on the principles of family reunification and skills. In the decades following the 1965 Immigration Act, there have been a series of new laws that have modified the numerical limits and procedures of immigration and the admission of refugees (Smith and Edmonston 1997, pp. 22–30). In general, these reforms have liberalized immigration to expand the numbers and to create more possibilities for admission.

The sponsors of the 1965 Immigration Act were primarily interested in allowing a freer flow of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, the countries hit hardest by the national origins quotas. The primary response, however, has been a major immigration flow from Asia. The first wave of Asian immigrants in the late 1960s and early 1970s were able to utilize the provisions allowing for those in skilled occupations of high demand (nurses, engineers, doctors, etc.) to enter. These early arrivals were then able to use the family reunification criterion to sponsor their relatives. At about the same time, there was a major new wave of immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico and Cuba.

The movement to a less restrictive policy of immigration to the United States has been paralleled by comparable reforms in other countries. In the early 1970s, Australia ended its 'White Australia' policy and allowed significant numbers of Asians to immigrate. In the early 1990s, the countries of the European Common Market loosened restrictions on interstate migration. Citizens of any country in the European

Common Market can move to any other country and are free to seek employment or attend schooling on equal terms with natives of the country. The appearance of these common patterns in a number of countries and regions suggests that the nationalist impulse, which sought to limit and control international migration, was waning during the last few decades of the twentieth century.

Underlying the change in immigration policies were broad economic and demographic forces. Population growth in advanced industrial countries had slowed, and there was a shortage of native-born persons who were willing to work in lowly paid positions in the economy, including seasonal agricultural labor. For the second half of the twentieth century, there was virtually an unlimited supply of immigrant labor, sometimes skilled and always highly motivated, from developing countries. The prejudices against immigrants and nativist fears have not entirely disappeared, but their open expression has been sharply reduced in most modern postindustrial societies. These changes in economics, demography, labor demand, and ideology have contributed to a much freer flow of international labor migration in the late twentieth century (Castles and Miller 1998, Massey et al. 1998).

In terms of policies of international migration, two distinct patterns emerged in Europe and the United States. Many European countries adopted 'guest worker' programs, which were intended to be temporary stays by workers from the labor surplus countries of Southern Europe and North Africa. Guest workers were generally not eligible for citizenship and were expected to return home when their contracts were completed. The United States maintained a formal immigration framework, whereby legal immigrants could apply for citizenship after five years, but also tolerated a parallel system of 'illegal immigration.' Both policies were reluctant to acknowledge the realities of international migration. Most temporary workers did not return home, and they often brought their families and became permanent residents of the host society. The relative openness of the US society to illegal or 'undocumented immigration,' has led to the conclusion that efforts to regulate immigration are primarily symbolic. Understanding the 'failure' of immigration policies requires looking beyond mistaken assumptions and inadequate enforcement to see how deeply embedded international migration has become in the modern world economy.

4. International Migration in the Twenty-first Century

The contradictions between tightly regulated international borders and the modern world economy are becoming increasingly clear. Most immigration policies, of whatever type, are residues of the first half of the twentieth century, when regulated borders were a

hallmark of modern statecraft. If the role of a state was to promote the welfare of the national population (a group defined by descent or membership), then a clear objective was to keep others (nonmembers of the nation) out, or to keep the numbers of immigrants to very modest levels. Policies of tightly regulated borders developed in nineteenth-century nation-building states, initially in Europe, and then spread around the globe in the twentieth century, including the traditional immigrant receiving societies in the New World and Oceania.

These policies 'worked' because domestic population growth in most countries was sufficient to meet labor demand. Indeed, population growth reached record levels everywhere in the twentieth century. Although rapid population growth created immense pressures in many labor surplus countries, there were few places that needed additional labor or allowed open migration. Passport controls were expensive and irksome to many, but they became accepted as normal features of modern states. Over the last few decades of the twentieth century, however, strains in the system of tight immigration policies were beginning to show.

The first sign was 'labor demand' in industrial countries that could not be met by domestic supply, at least not at the wages offered. Employers found it more desirable to import labor from abroad than to raise wages or to mechanize production. If this pattern were found in only one country or in only a few sectors, then it might be possible to consider a fairly narrow explanation in terms of political cultures or market rigidities. The demand for 'cheaper immigrant labor,' however, spans many sectors (agriculture, manufacturing, construction, repair services, restaurants, and childcare) in most industrial countries, including a growing number of rapidly growing developing countries. The increasingly global international economy seems to create recurrent needs for labor greater than that available from domestic population growth.

The demand for immigrant labor is not restricted to unskilled manual labor. The United States and other industrial countries have encountered a shortage of scientific and engineering workers, particularly in the high tech sector. This demand has been met, in part, by allowing many talented foreign students in American universities to convert their student visas to immigrant status. There has also been a gradual shift over the last few decades to more open immigration policies for a variety of reasons—refugees, agricultural workers, 'illegal' immigrants with long residences in the country, peoples in countries that have too few American citizen relatives to sponsor them, and workers in high demand by US employers.

These moves toward more liberal immigration policies in the United States are part of a broader international context with comparable patterns emerging in other countries. The policy of free movement of citizens in the European Common Market is the most

striking example, but there are trends toward generous policies of admitting refugees and temporary workers in many parts of the world. There are even a few examples of more generous citizenship policies, but these are halting, often facing a domestic backlash from nationalist sentiments that have been weakened, but not disappeared.

More liberal immigration policies appear to be highly functional in modern industrial and post-industrial societies. Standard economic theory posits that domestic migration is a functional response to wage differentials between areas. Migration allows for workers to benefit from higher wages in growing areas and stimulates the economy to operate more efficiently by creating larger and more porous labor and consumer markets. Indeed the logic for lessening barriers to migration is similar to that of international free trade. Economic theory suggests that all countries benefit from the free flows of capital, goods, and technology across international borders. International migration is often excluded from discussions about expanding international trade (such as in the NAFTA debate), largely because of political considerations rather than economic theory.

Globalization is the most powerful trend in the world today. There are few places on Earth that are not exposed to the presence of the international forces of the mass media, multinational corporations, and Hollywood images. Every commodity from fresh food to electronic products moves around the globe in such profusion that most persons are unaware of the nationality of the producers of the goods (and services) they consume. Although international trade has always created competition between businesses and workers in different countries, the current era with instantaneous communication and cheap transportation has created a qualitatively new international community. In this setting, barriers to international labor mobility are an anachronism of the earlier era. Just as most countries, regardless of political ideology, have striven to make passport lines more efficient in recent times to encourage the very profitable tourist sector, it seems that most twenty-first century societies will ease immigration barriers in order to profit from the increasingly globalized world economy.

See also: Immigrants: Economic Performance; Immigration and Migration: Cultural Concerns; Immigration: Consequences for Fiscal Developments in the Receiving Population; Migration, Economics of; Migration into the Americas and between American Countries; Migration: Sociological Aspects; Racism, History of; Racism, Sociology of

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Imperialism, History of

1. Introduction: The Problem of a Definition

‘Imperialism is not a word for scholars,’ Sir Keith Hancock remarked a long time ago, and he was right (see Wesseling 1997, p. 74). Scholars have to make clear what they mean when they use certain concepts or terms, and therefore have to give definitions. This, however, is impossible with the word ‘imperialism.’ The problem is not that there are no definitions of imperialism, rather the contrary. There are about as many definitions of imperialism as there are authors who have written on the subject. They vary from those that refer to one specific form of imperialism, mostly Europe’s nineteenth century colonial expansion, to others which give a very general meaning to the word, such as the one in Webster’s Dictionary: ‘any extension of power or authority or an advocacy of such extension.’ Clearly, such a definition can cover almost any situation. Not surprisingly therefore, the word has often simply been used as an invective in order to criticize the policy of another country.

So defined, imperialism is useless as a scholarly concept. However, in serious studies, the word has always had a more limited meaning. The problem is exactly how limited its meaning should be. Sometimes the word is used in a universal historical way in order to characterize the politics of a dominant power. Thus, some historians have spoken of Roman or even Assyrian imperialism, but this is highly exceptional. In historical studies, imperialism generally refers to the policy of European countries, and primarily of the UK during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, aiming at the expansion of their power and influence over other continents. It is in this context that the term imperialism originated and began to be used as a political and historical concept. Historically speaking, the word imperialism is therefore obviously closely associated with colonialism. While colonialism was only used to refer to one specific form of alien rule, namely the colonial one, imperialism acquired a wider meaning and included various other forms of influence over alien nations and states. For example, the financial influence of France and Germany in the Russian and Ottoman Empires, or such things as British ‘gunboat policy’ and American ‘dollar diplomacy.’