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THE FIGHT OVER IMMIGRATION

The presidential race has highlighted the long debate over immigration in the U.S. Why are we so divided? BY BRYAN BROWN

At Donald Trump rallies, the call can come at any moment: “Build the wall! Build the wall!” the crowd chants. “We will build it,” the Republican nominee for president replies. “And who’s going to pay for the wall?” he prompts his audience. “Mexico!” the people roar.

Trump has promised to build a wall along the entire 2,000-mile border between the U.S. and Mexico. And that’s struck a chord with many Americans. They say the estimated 11 million undocumented

immigrants living in the U.S.—many of them from Mexico—are taking American jobs. They also blame them for costing the U.S. billions of dollars annually in social services. Last year, in response to ISIS-inspired terrorist attacks in the U.S., Trump also called for a temporary ban on foreign Muslims entering the country. He argued that there might be terrorists among them. More recently, Trump said he would ban immigrants from any nation that has been “compromised by terrorism.”

Yet many Americans disagree with

Trump’s proposals. They say immigrants help grow the economy. They also argue that undocumented immigrants take low-paying jobs that no one else wants. Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton has pledged to fight for immigration reform. She wants to give undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship. And many Democrats and Republicans believe, as Clinton has said, that a ban on Muslims “goes against everything we stand for as a country.”

Such arguments may be making headlines. But none of them are new, says Roger Daniels, author of several books

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on immigration. He says Americans have had “a love and hate relationship” with immigrants since the nation’s founding (see *Timeline*, p. 20).

George Washington & Ben Franklin

America’s battle over immigration dates back to the Declaration of Independence. Thomas Jefferson wrote it in 1776. Among the document’s complaints against Britain’s King George III was that he was “obstructing the laws for the naturalization of foreigners.” In other words, American colonists thought the king was preventing them from attracting immigrants.

Naturalizing new arrivals was also on George Washington’s mind. He addressed a group of Irish immigrants in 1783, and said the U.S. was open to “the oppressed and persecuted of all nations and religions, whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges.”

This was not just a matter of principle: It was necessary to America’s survival. “The Founding Fathers had a big, vacant country,” says Daniels. “Immigration was vital to help fill it up.”

Even from the beginning, however,

some Americans were suspicious of immigrants. In 1751, Benjamin Franklin warned fellow Pennsylvanians that German immigrants were “a colony of aliens [who] will never adopt our language or customs.” He complained that “few of their children in the country learn English.”

Franklin came to embrace immigration. But his words show that the question of who qualifies as an American has always been a subject for debate.

The nation’s first census, in 1790, counted nearly 4 million people. They were mostly Protestant Christians of English, Welsh, or Scottish heritage. In the 1830s, newcomers began to arrive in great numbers. Nearly 5 million people immigrated within 30 years. About a third of them were Irish—poor and Catholic. Nearly another third were Catholic Germans.

This alarmed some Protestants, who considered themselves the real Americans. Mobs occasionally attacked Catholic churches or schools. Pamphlets circulated claiming that the Pope, head of the Roman Catholic Church, was trying to undermine American democracy. In 1856, the anti-immigrant “Know

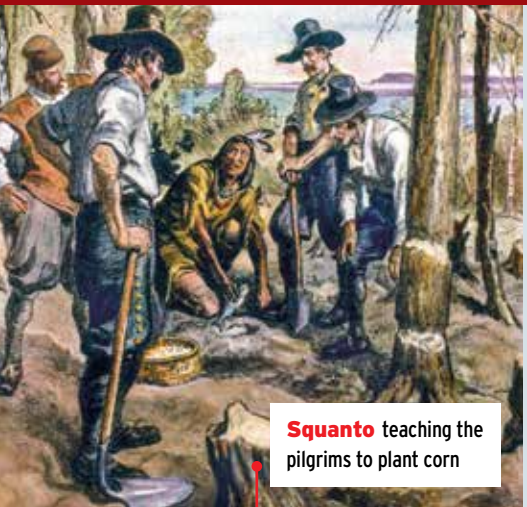
Nothing” party had a presidential candidate who won 20 percent of the vote.

For most of the 19th century, the U.S. government continued to encourage immigrants to fill the country’s great spaces. In 1862, Congress passed the Homestead Act. It opened up huge territories west of the Mississippi River. Settlers were promised a plot of land if they lived on it for five years. Thousands of German, Scandinavian, and Irish families took advantage of the opportunity. “That’s the way the Midwest got populated,” says Daniels. It’s also how Germans and Irish became accepted as Americans.

Chinese Exclusion

The Chinese had a harder time. In the mid-19th century, about 300,000 Chinese came to America. Many of them settled in California. There, they were eventually recruited to help build America’s first transcontinental railroad. This influx of strangers inspired protests and local laws to “protect free white labor,” as an 1862 California law put it. The backlash led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This was Congress’s

Timeline IMMIGRATION IN THE U.S.



Squanto teaching the pilgrims to plant corn



Chinese gold miners, California, 1852

Pre-1776

Colonial Period

In the century and a half before independence, most settlers are from the British Isles; German immigrants settle mainly in Pennsylvania.



Benjamin Franklin feared that German immigrants were “a colony of aliens [who] will never adopt our customs.”

first attempt to regulate immigration along racial lines.

By the 20th century, the tide of newcomers only grew stronger. More than 27 million people entered the U.S. from 1880 to 1930. Many of them were Poles, Jews, Greeks, and Italians from Eastern and Southern Europe. They were seen as having strange new customs and languages.

This sparked growing, often racist, concerns about foreigners driving down wages or breeding crime. In 1921,

1845

The Potato Famine

Widespread starvation in Ireland prompts massive emigration; 2 million Irish head to the U.S. in a decade.

1849

The Chinese

The California Gold Rush attracts Chinese immigrants who later help build the first transcontinental railroad. In 1882, Congress bars Chinese immigration.

1860s-1880s

Italians, Poles & Jews

Poverty and religious discrimination in Eastern and Southern Europe spur an influx of Polish, Russian, Jewish, and Italian immigrants.

Washington set the first immigration quotas. These restrictions were designed to maintain the country’s ethnic mix. They sharply reduced the number of immigrants allowed into the country, favoring Northern and Western Europeans.

It wasn’t until the civil rights movement in the 1960s that many Americans recognized the quotas as discriminatory. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 officially ended the old quotas. It “reclaimed the idea that

America was a nation that welcomed immigrants,” according to historian Mae Ngai of Columbia University in New York. Since then, about 59 million people have come to the U.S., according to the Pew Research Center. Many of them emigrated from Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Today, about 14 percent of the U.S. population was born in a foreign country.

Anxieties Old & New

According to Ellen Percy Kraly, a geographer at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, the worries many Americans have about immigrants haven’t changed much from a century ago. Then, as now, “concerns had to do with sovereignty, jobs, issues of security, the loss of ‘traditional American values,’” she says.

Recent disputes between Clinton and Trump highlight how the immigration debate continues. Many Americans agree that the U.S. needs immigration reform. But they are divided over how to do so.

One of the fiercest battles has been over the 11 million undocumented people living

WHERE THEY’RE FROM

Top countries of origin of undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

1. Mexico 6,194,000
2. Guatemala 704,000
3. El Salvador 436,000
4. Honduras 317,000
5. China 285,000

Top countries of origin of immigrants in the U.S. legally

1. Mexico 6,879,000
2. China 2,365,000
3. India 2,021,000
4. Philippines 1,840,000
5. Vietnam 1,237,000

SOURCE: MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE (2013 ESTIMATES FOR UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS; 2014 FIGURES FOR IMMIGRANTS IN THE U.S. LEGALLY)

GRANGER, NYC/THE GRANGER COLLECTION (SQANTO); FOTORESEARCH/GETTY IMAGES (THE CHINESE); PHOTO RESEARCHERS/GETTY IMAGES (BENJAMIN FRANKLIN)



Immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in New York around 1880



The Supreme Court rejected some of President Obama's attempts to protect undocumented immigrants from deportation.

1892

Ellis Island

Ellis Island opens in New York Harbor, the main entry point into the U.S. In 1907, a million immigrants pass through. It closes in 1954.

1921

Quotas by Nationality

Congress imposes immigration quotas that favor the admission of Northern Europeans over Southern and Eastern Europeans.

1965

Quotas Abolished

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 abolishes quotas. The U.S. sees an influx of Asians and Latin Americans over the next 40 years.

2001

9/11 Attacks

In response to the September 11 terrorist attacks, the USA Patriot Act tightens immigration with stricter border security.

2016

A Divided Congress

A sharply divided Congress is unable to agree on immigration reform—and what to do about the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the U.S.

in the U.S. Most of them are from Mexico and Central America (*see chart, p. 20*). After surging for two decades, the total number of undocumented immigrants has remained stable since about 2009. That means fewer undocumented people are entering the U.S. And some are even leaving. That's because of tougher border security and an improving Mexican economy. But lawmakers are divided over what to do about undocumented people currently in the U.S.

In 2013, a bipartisan bill setting a 13-year path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants passed in the Senate. But the House of Representatives refused to consider it, and the bill died.

President Obama's attempts to protect undocumented immigrants from deportation have had mixed success. In 2012, he issued an executive order. It was to temporarily protect more than 1 million undocumented young people brought to the U.S. before age 16. He then issued

an order to extend the protection to their parents. But it was rejected by the Supreme Court in June.

Meanwhile, there have been a series of ISIS-inspired attacks by Muslims in the U.S. They include the shootings in San Bernardino, California, last December, and in Orlando in June. These attacks have left some Americans wondering whether legal residents from Muslim countries can represent a national security threat.

Of particular concern have been refugees from Syria's brutal civil war. Last October, the Obama administration agreed to accept 10,000 Syrians within a year. But 31 state governors said they'd refuse to allow any of the refugees in their state. (So far, courts have said states must accept them.)

How such issues are handled may depend on the outcome of the election this November. Clinton promises to push for immigration reform. She says she will fight for a path to citizenship for undocu-

mented immigrants. She's also promised to accept up to 65,000 Syrian refugees. Trump has said he would ban foreign Muslims from entering the U.S. and build a wall with Mexico. He's also said he'll deport undocumented immigrants who have criminal records. But he says he'll be "fair but firm" with those who don't. (During the primaries and up until recently, Trump had called for deporting all undocumented immigrants.) Whoever wins is likely to face stiff opposition on immigration, and a divided Congress.

Whatever the case, the U.S. will continue to be a nation of immigrants. Research organizations like Pew estimate that future immigrants and their descendants will make up a growing percentage of the U.S. population.

Kraly, the geography professor, says that just as in the past, these immigrants will likely become as fully American as past generations have. As for those age-old worries about new arrivals—like the kind Ben Franklin had—she isn't worried.

"After all," she says, "we're not speaking German." •

What should happen to millions of immigrants living in the U.S. illegally?