

Asylum and Immigration Policy  
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There is a current disconnect between the poem on the Statue of Liberty (Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free) that represents American values at their most empathetic, and our current President who secured the votes of his "base" on the backs of demonized immigrants. To him there was no difference between those entering our country illegally by land (Mexico or Canada), or those fleeing horrors in their homelands and begging for asylum.

The United States has a long history of ambiguity about immigration. Our earliest immigrants were British and some German, which concerned Benjamin Franklin that our native tongue could become German instead of English. It did not. The English were either upper class aspiring land owners, or poor young people exchanging temporary bond service for ultimate citizenship.

The early years of the 19th century brought us French Protestants, fleeing the horror of the French Revolution. These people, the Huguenots, were few but noteworthy; among them were the Dupont family, which played an important role in our industrialization.

Increasing turmoil during the century brought starving Irish refugees of the potato famine, German refugees from the mid-century revolutions, Scandinavians fleeing hunger, Jews fleeing worsening persecutions, and the poorest of the poor from Southern Italy, both starving and fleeing from the Mafias. The only Asian refugees were Chinese, who were recruited with slave wages for the most dangerous work, along with the Irish, to build the transcontinental railway.

The Irish were treated the most badly among all refugee groups (except for the Chinese), until they became an urban population, entering the police, firefighters, and political power. The Irish morphed from demonized Catholics to charming, amusing city people.

Black people did not flee Africa; they were captured and brought as a permanent slave caste.

The overall history of American immigration is that waves of people fleeing misery arrived, found work, and were then hated by the lower class White population which believed that they were competing for work. Over time, the immigrants became American, with the exception of the Chinese, who were expelled after the railroads were built and citizenship was not offered until the mid-20th century.

As turmoil increased at the end of World War I, asylum, not need to work, motivated flight. Middle East Christian populations (Syrian, Armenian, Lebanese) fled newly militant Islam. Russians fled the Russian Revolution and were reluctantly admitted. However, as Nazism took its poisonous hold in Europe, Jews fled, but because of the global Depression, their need for asylum became a third rail politically. Anti-Semitism was on the rise in Europe and in the US, costing many Jews their lives as they were denied admittance and sent back to Europe.

The postwar period in the US was one of our most generous. We were the world's richest superpower, the only winner of World War II with no damage to our infrastructure. Public shame after the concentration camps were unmasked opened the doors to Jewish immigration.

Our immigration policy continued to be generous, until the election of Donald Trump, who spoke for his "base" that immigration was bringing us too many brown people. Trump publicly announced that immigrants he favored would be Scandinavians, a group not seeking asylum from their thriving countries. Mexicans and Central Americans seeking work and safety now faced increasingly hostile laws and untrue demonization by the President.

Refugees from Muslim countries were barred, regardless of whether they were Iranians fleeing their Islamist government, Arab Christians fleeing persecution by Muslim governments, or the desperate victims of conflicts from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Yemen. All were potential "terrorists" in Trump's propaganda campaigns. Saudi Arabia was not designated as terrorist, even though the majority of the 9-11 murderers were Saudis.

One of the most contentious issues in our immigration policy is the plight of women. Women comprise a miniscule number of asylum seekers, although they have the most pressing cases. Few have the financial means to fly here. The desperate plight of

Central American women who need asylum from battering husbands and murderous governments is behind their flight to our borders. What's happened to our good hearts?

686 words

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