

Wwii and immigration

Sociology, Immigration



Following decades of isolationist policy, World War II was an essential time in the United States history because it gradually opened up American society to once again receive immigrants who are in search of better opportunity and refuge. In the early 19th century, the United States began to re-think about its stance on immigration. As the numbers of immigrants increased, questions about the leniency of the American government on immigration were raised by the “ Progressive Movement”. Consequently, the United States began to employ a closed door policy of immigration.

Chinese male immigrants, who had been coming in masses, inspired the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which forbade further immigration of laborers of Chinese descent. This act forced prohibited Chinese males from bring over their families and destroyed possibilities of citizenship for Chinese immigrants by making them permanent aliens. Furthermore, in 1907, adding to the isolationist stance of the U. S. , the city of San Francisco attempted to remove Japanese students from white schools and put them in segregated schools with Chinese students.

The Japanese government was infuriated by with this comparison to the Chinese; this led to the establishment of the Gentleman’s Agreement. This was an informal agreement stating that the Japanese government would restrict further immigration of their people to the United States and, in return, Japanese children in San Francisco would be able to attend school with white children. Over the next half century, further restrictions on immigration were implemented, many based on racist assumptions that immigrants were inassimilable and could not be Americanized.

However, we see examples in *Nisei Daughter*, where the children like Monica and her siblings became Americanized and came to detest the strict Japanese culture their parents were raised in. This contradicts the assumption that immigrants would not assimilate. Continued pressure to limit immigration in the United States eventually led to the Immigration Act of 1917, which created the Asiatic Barred zone. This meant that people from the Asiatic zone, which included Japan, Korea, India, and Arabia were barred from coming to the United States. Furthermore, the Act restricted people who were illiterate and above the age of 16 from immigrating.

As a result of the 1917 Act, the immigration process included a literacy test that only allowed people of a certain educational background to enter the United States under the assumption that they would be able to assimilate better with America's progressive ideologies, provide skills for the work force, and contributing to the economy. Despite increased restrictions, in between the First and Second World War, immigration to the US was relatively high due to the scarcity of unskilled labor needed in mines and factories in the United States.

After WWI, The Immigration Act of 1924 was passed which set a quota of a 165 thousand immigrants per year allowed into the United States. While there had been restrictions placed on Asian immigrants before 1924, there were still ways for students to come into America. Thus, the Second Quota Act was passed which stated that no Asians were permitted to come to the United States. There was an exception of 50 people per country provided those who came were racially white, but just happened to be living in Asian countries.

This act made it easier for people from Germany, France, and Great Britain to migrate to the United States because they were white and as such were thought to be able to assimilate more easily into the American Culture. The only region these quota restrictions did not apply to was the western Hampshire. These limitations did not apply to Mexican immigrants because there was a high demand for their labor in the south, and employers made it difficult for congress to restrict that labor. Overall, Before World War II, it was extremely hard to immigrate to the United States unless there was demand the labor of immigrants.

By 1924, there was a clear racial hierarchy among immigrants in the United States based on skills as well as race. In *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*, Margaret Byington mentions the difficulties immigrant communities, such as the Slavs, faced as they tried to assimilate into the American culture. The government did not take any steps to address the hardships of these communities or help them assimilate into American culture. This is important because, after WWII, the United States went out of its way to welcome immigrants and develop programs to ease the adjustment process.

The United States was very dissatisfied with their involvement in WWI; thus when the Great Depression occurred, they dealt with it by further isolating themselves from the rest of the world. The United States government focused on solving its economic difficulties at home and dealing with the decade long depression. Even after WWII began in Europe, the United States stayed true to its isolationist policies and wanted nothing to do with the war. However, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 forced the United

States to enter WWII. Success in WWII made the United States the leading power in the world.

After the United States witnessed the devastation Hitler had caused in WWII, the American government vowed to never allow that to happen again. As a result, immediately after WWII, the lessons learned from Hitler were applied to Stalin in the cold war. Instead of turning away from communist Russia, the United States engaged in the Cold War. Their goal was to contain communism around the world. The United States began strengthening their relationship with their own allies by building programs that would help these countries with education and health in order to get their assistance in containing the spread of Communism.

After WWII though, Americans, especially those in the executive branch who dealt with foreign policy, increasingly saw immigration and naturalization policies as tools for shaping foreign relations and advancing American interest. One of the first acts passed in the interest of immigration reform was The McCarran Walter Act of 1952, which not only illuminated the category of aliens ineligible for citizenship. This was the category many of the Issei Parents in Nisei Daughter were placed in but now they were permitted to become American citizens like their Nisei children.

Also, the restrictions of The Asiatic Barred Zone, was lifted. Now, all Countries including China, who had previously was not been allowed to send any immigrants to the United States, unless they were white, now have a small quota to send people to the United States regardless of their racial background. Also, there was recognition among Americans that there were more people who wanted to come to the United States than the country

could accommodate. As a result priority was given to those who had family in the United States and needed to be reunified with them.

Although some of the restrictions on immigration were loosened with The McCarran Walter Act, the country still allowed only a small number of people to immigrate. President Truman was pushing for immigration reform for years and was not fully satisfied with the new policy so the United States government sought out ways to expand immigration while still keeping what was best for the country in mind. President Johnson, who succeeded Kennedy, signs in the passage of the immigration and nationalization act of 1965.

This act reforms the country and erases the old system of discriminatory and restrictive quotas based on national origin and race while replacing it with a much less racist system. It was a new way of thinking, not just about immigrant but toward the American society. To manage immigration now, the United States divided the world into western hemisphere which constituted North, Central and South America, and Eastern hemisphere which was everything else. Over 300 thousand immigrants are allowed to come to the United States yearly with this new cap.

Certain people were given preference with 80 percent of the groups under the new cap coming under different forms of family unification. Because of our involvement with different wars around the world and our efforts to end communism, the United States was increasingly allowing people to come above the set cap to find refuge in our country. These new loose policies on immigration coincided greatly with the civil rights movement. The movement

comes at the same time the US becomes conscious of its role as a world leader.

When the United States sought out to stop communism, they needed to show the world that their system was better but they could not do that when the world saw America as segregated and racist against some of their own people. Unequal treatment among Americans led some countries to want to turn to communism as a better policy. Immigration reform and the Civil Rights Movement reinforced one another and eventually left. In 1950s, more than half of immigrants came from Europe and there were more Canadians coming into the country than Mexicans but beginning with 1965, Asians and Mexicans have began to come in mass.

Congress did not understand when they passed act of 1965 was just how large the number of immigrants coming in would become. This unexpected increase in immigrants scared some Americans. There was especially great number of people coming from Mexico who many entering the country illegally and not being counted in the quota. The Mexican population in the US jumped from 60 thousand people in the 1940s to 1.6 million in the 1980s. Even though this high number of immigrants was brought up concerns about the current immigration policy, the country's new understanding after WWII would not allow them to close their doors once again.