

THE 16<sup>th</sup> LAW – THE 1965 IMMIGRATION AND NATIONALITY ACT

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The Laws That Shaped America  
February 16, 2017

## *Introduction*

Inscribed on the plaque at the base of the Statue of Liberty reads a poem titled “The New Colossus” by American poet Emma Lazarus, which was written and then donated to an auction raising money for the statue’s construction. The most well-known and oft-quoted line from this poem is near the end, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” Lazarus confessed that she was only convinced to write “The New Colossus” after being told to consider what the statue would mean to the thousands of immigrants who would see it as they arrived in New York<sup>1</sup>. George Washington himself famously said to recently arrived migrants from the United Kingdom in 1783, “The bosom of America is open to receive not only the opulent and respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions<sup>2</sup>.”

This virtuous rhetoric that was routinely expounded in America around the time of its founding would inevitably be contradicted by immigration laws enacted in different times, with different societal pressures, as is often the case with public policy. These laws range from the more egregious, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882<sup>3</sup>, to the practical, being the Immigration Act of 1864<sup>4</sup>. Public policy in a functioning democracy is inherently reactionary and fluid. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act is no exception. But there is also good reason that Lyndon B. Johnson

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<sup>1</sup> Deborah G. Felder and Diana L. Rosen, “Fifty Jewish Women Who Changed the World,” *Citadel*, 45.

<sup>2</sup> Founders, “From George Washington to Joshua Holmes, 2 December 1783,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, last modified February 21, 2017, Accessed February 23, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-12127>

<sup>3</sup> The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 placed a 10-year moratorium on Chinese immigration to the United States. It was the first major law restricting immigration in American history.

<sup>4</sup> The Immigration Act of 1864 was designed to encourage immigration to America in order to address labor shortages due to the ongoing Civil War.

chose the Statue of Liberty as the location for where he signed the Act into law, a walking distance away from Emma Lazarus' famous poem, written almost two-hundred years previous. As Johnson put it in his speech, "Now, under the monument which has welcomed so many to our shores, the American Nation returns to the finest of its traditions today."<sup>5</sup> The bill was the 20<sup>th</sup> century's answer to Lazarus' poem or Washington's speech, devised and intended to put an end to America's history of discriminatory exclusion.

This paper's purpose is to examine the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and all of the forces that went into this Act becoming law at this particular time in American history. I'll begin by briefly looking at American immigration policy in the decades preceding 1965 to provide some background perspective, before tackling the processes at work in the making of this Act. Who were the key players fighting for this law, and who were the major actors in fighting against it? I then plan to look at the repercussions and the profound changes that the 1965 Act has had on the demographic landscape of the United States.

### *Background*

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> through to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century's, immigration policy in America was deeply connected to race and ethnicity based exclusion<sup>6</sup>. The Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> LBJ Presidential Library, "Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson," *LBJ Presidential Library.com*, 1965. Volume II, Entry 546, 1037-1040, Accessed February 23, 2017, <http://www.lbjlibrary.org/lyndon-baines-johnson/timeline/lbj-on-immigration>

<sup>6</sup> Eithne Luibheid, "The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act: An "End" to Exclusion?" *Duke University Press*, 1997, 5 (2), 501-522, Accessed February 24, 2017, <http://positions.dukejournals.org/content/5/2/501>

Exclusion Act of 1882, the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, and the Immigration Act of 1924 all had strong racial and xenophobic themes to them.

The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 put in place what would be at the core of American immigration policy for the next forty years, that being the national origins quota system. The system was simple; a limit would be placed on the amount of immigrants allowed into America at 3 percent of the total number of foreign-born persons from that country according to data collected in the 1910 US Census. So hypothetically, if the Census recorded that there were 5000 foreign-born Serbian people in the United States as of 1910, then the annual allowable quota for Serbians let into the country would be capped at 150 people.

The Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, continued and furthered the isolationist direction that American immigration policy had been trending toward. It amended the quota rules established in 1921, decreasing the percentage from 3 to 2 percent, and changing the Census data used from the 1910 Census to the 1890 Census, the obvious intention being to further decrease the number of immigrants arriving from non-Western hemisphere countries<sup>7</sup>. The Act also decreased the annual limit on immigrants allowed into the country from 350,000 to 165,000 people, with a strong favor toward migration from Northern and Western European countries. This was combined with a limit placed on migration from Southern and Eastern European countries, and the continued barring of immigration from countries within the Asiatic Barred Zone<sup>8</sup>. These discriminatory

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<sup>7</sup> It's estimated that between 1891 and 1910, about 12.5 million people immigrated to the United States, with the majority of these people coming from Eastern Europe. Ipso facto, by changing the Census data used, the quotas would naturally decrease and less non-Western immigrants would be allowed into the country.

<sup>8</sup> Daniel Tichenor, "Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America." *Princeton University Press*, Princeton, N.J., 2002, Accessed February 24, 2017, <http://immigrationtounitedstates.org/362-asiatic-barred-zone.html>

policies were primarily made in an effort to return to the immigration patterns of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the vast majority of immigrants were English-speaking settlers from the British Isles. The American concerns about immigration trends at the time were twofold. They had concerns about the influx of Asian immigrants who had begun to arrive en masse in America seeking economic opportunity initially from The Gold Rush of 1849<sup>9</sup>, then later for other labor opportunities, such as agriculture or the building of the trans-continental railroad<sup>10</sup>. They also took issue with the wave of Eastern and Southern European immigrants that around the turn of the century had become the primary immigrants from Europe. These migrants were motivated in part by economic opportunity in America, but also in many cases were fleeing religious persecution<sup>11</sup>.

The 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act was the last major piece of immigration legislation passed prior to the 1965 Act. It's most notably well known for President Harry Truman veto of the bill, before both the House and the Senate overrode him, and passed it. Truman vetoed the bill on account of how isolationist he found it, in his speech saying, "In no other realm of our national life are we so hampered and stultified by the dead hand of the past, as we are in this field of immigration<sup>12</sup>." This quote describes the content of the bill rather accurately, as it was in many ways

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<sup>9</sup> Henry K. Norton, "The Story of California From the Earliest Days to the Present," 7th ed. Chicago, *A.C. McClurg & Co.*, 1924. Chapter 24, 283-296. Accessed February 24, 2017, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist6/chinhate.html>

<sup>10</sup> Office of the Historian, "Chinese Immigration and the Chinese Exclusion Acts," *History.state.gov*, Accessed February 27, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/chinese-immigration>

<sup>11</sup> Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "European Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute*, Accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/european-immigrants-united-states>

<sup>12</sup> Harry S. Truman, "Veto of Bill to Revise the Laws Relating to Immigration, Naturalization, and Nationality," June 25, 1952. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. Accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=14175>

similar to the 1924 act, most importantly in how it upheld the discriminatory national origins quota system for countries not in the Western Hemisphere. There were however a few main differences worthy of note. There was a removal of the total ban on Asian immigration that had been in place since 1917, while still doing little to prevent discrimination against them, allowing each Asian country a quota of 2000 visas annually. Another change of note was the creation of a system of preferences for the immigrants applying for visas from oversubscribed countries, prioritizing highly qualified professionals and the parents of current U.S. citizens<sup>1314</sup>.

### *The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act*

Lyndon B. Johnson's 1965 State of the Union address is rightly considered one of the most ambitious of all time. In it, he laid out his plans for the "Great Society," mentioning a number of programs that he wanted to see implemented during his presidency, a realistic proposition considering the landslide election and overwhelming majority that Democrats had in both the House and Senate after the 1964 election. Among them were a number of legislative proposals that continue to provide the framework for modern-day America, among them Medicare/Medicaid, the Voting Rights Act, and the Civil Rights Act. Snuck into these proposals, in the middle of a near 50-minute speech, was the following line: "Let a just nation throw open to them the city of promise... to those in other lands that are seeking the promise of America, through an immigration law based on the work a man can do and not

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<sup>13</sup> John Boyd, "Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952," *Immigration to the United States*, Accessed February 27, 2017, <http://immigrationtounitedstates.org/593-immigration-and-nationality-act-of-1952.html>

<sup>14</sup> Office of the Historian, "The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (The McCarran-Walter Act)," *History.state.gov*, Accessed February 27, 2017, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/immigration-act>

where he was born or how he spells his name<sup>15</sup>.” Johnson, with this line, kick-started a nine-month process that would end in him signing the bill into law on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1965, beneath the watchful eye of Lady Liberty.

Emanuel Celler (Democrat – New York) needed little motivation, as he had been fighting for immigration reform for a full forty years, ever since entering Congress in March of 1923, just prior to floor consideration and ultimately the enactment of the Immigration Act of 1924. Celler vehemently opposed the bill at the time, and would continue to oppose the national origins quota system as the basis of immigration policy throughout his time serving in the House<sup>16</sup>. Coming from a Jewish background, Celler took serious issue with the quota system and the discrimination upon Eastern and Southern European immigrants that it created, especially during a time of such horrific religious persecution for Jewish people during the early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Less than ten days after Johnson’s aforementioned State of the Union address on January 4<sup>th</sup>, Celler introduced bill H.R. 2580 to the House on January 13<sup>th</sup>. The primary purpose of H.R. 2580 was to abolish the national origins quota system that Celler was so opposed to, and had been at the core of American immigration policy since the 1920’s. Celler proposed to replace this quota system with one that established preferences based firstly on the immigrant’s professional skills and then secondly their familial ties to current US citizens.

The main opposition in the House to the bill came from Rep. Michael A. Feighan (Democrat – Ohio), the chairman of the House Subcommittee on Immigration and Nationality. Provisions and amendments to the bill were also proposed and supported

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<sup>15</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, “Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union,” January 4, 1965. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=26907>

<sup>16</sup> Jewish Virtual Library, “Emanuel Celler,” *Jewish Virtual Library*, Accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/emanuel-celler>

by Clark MacGregor (Republican – Minnesota) and William M. McCulloch (Republican – Ohio), among others<sup>17</sup>, the major one being an annual ceiling of 115,000 on immigrants from the Western Hemisphere, where there had previously been no ceiling on the amount of immigrants allowed in. The proposal lost out in a House vote narrowly by 218 to 189.

An amendment that was approved by the House came on the back of major lobbying by the AFL-CIO (The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations). The amendment required that the Secretary of Labor ensure that any job that an immigrant worker plans to fulfill once in America must first be offered to American workers, thus granting significant preference to Americans in the job market. Exceptions to this amendment would be made in the cases of immigrants with close family ties and refugees<sup>18</sup>. Other, smaller amendments that were passed in the House included a rising of the annual ceiling on Eastern Hemisphere immigration from 166,000 to 170,000, and a reduction in the transitional period between the passing of the law and it being in full operation from five to three years. Before passing H.R. 2580 on to the House floor to be voted on, House Judiciary Committee member Arch A. Moore Jr. (Republican – West Virginia) summarized the bill in a letter to a colleague by saying, “H.R. 2580 was completely rewritten by the subcommittee and can be described as a bi-partisan measure.”

On August 25<sup>th</sup>, over seven months after H.R. 2580 was first introduced, the bill was passed in the House with the amendments. There were 318 votes in favor, 95 in opposition, and 19 abstained.

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<sup>17</sup> Sidney Liskofsky, "United States Immigration Policy," *The American Jewish Year Book* 67 (1966): 169-70. Accessed February 27, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23604995>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid 169.



In the Senate, Celler's bill found its primary supporters in two prominent Senators. The first one being Philip A. Hart (Democrat – Michigan), and the second being Edward M. “Ted” Kennedy (Democrat – Massachusetts), the younger brother of John F. Kennedy, who'd been assassinated less than two years previous. Both Senators were members of the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization who added an amendment that placed an annual ceiling of 120,000 immigrants from the Western Hemisphere. Within the subcommittee, both Hart and Kennedy opposed the amendment, but presumably to appease Sam Ervin (Democrat – North Carolina), a Southern Democrat who proposed the amendment, it was ultimately agreed to. After a vote of 6 to 2 in the subcommittee, the bill was moved on to the Senate Committee of the Judiciary, where it was voted for by 14 to 2, allowing the bill to be moved on to the Senate floor.

The Senate floor discussion began on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, with the opposition largely coming from Southern Senators, led by James O. Eastland (Democrat – Mississippi) and John L. McClellan (Democrat – Arkansas). Those in opposition of the bill made a number of different arguments, of varying levels of persuasion. One such claim was that the national origins quota system was reasonable because it gave rightful preference to the countries whose people helped to build the United States<sup>19</sup>. They also made arguments against the preference system that was included in Celler's bill, arguing that the preferences discriminated against unskilled labor, and that the preference for skilled professionals would result in a “brain drain” in the immigrants home countries that required these highly skilled people more-so than the United States did at the time<sup>20</sup>. Another, less persuasive claim was made by Senators John B.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid 171.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid 172.

Towers (Republican – Texas) and Strom Thurmond (Republican – South Carolina), who both simply feared that the bill would allow in far too many immigrants<sup>21</sup>.

Despite this opposition, there were simply too many factors working in favor of the bill. There was the fact that the previous year, Lyndon B. Johnson had won the presidential election in a landslide over Republican candidate Barry Goldwater winning 61.1 percent of the vote and carrying all but six states. The Democratic Party held a supermajority in both chambers of Congress, making it significantly easier to pass legislation. Furthermore, there was outside pressure from lobbying groups to pass immigration reform, including those such as labor unions that hadn't previously been in favor of immigration<sup>22</sup>. The primary sources of this outside pressure were from the American Immigration and Citizenship Conference (AICC) and the National Committee for Immigration Reform<sup>23</sup>.

Even if the bill weren't so popular, there was a strong narrative being pushed, particularly by those in favor of the bill, that the effects of immigration reform would be marginal at the most. Senator Kennedy when speaking to the Subcommittee on Immigration and Naturalization said, "The bill will not flood our cities with immigrants. It will not upset the ethnic mix of our society. It will not relax the standards of admission. It will not cause American workers to lose their jobs<sup>24</sup>." Rep. Emanuel Celler, the original author of the bill, is quoted as saying "There will not be, comparatively, many Asians or Africans entering this country... Since the people of Africa and Asia have very few relatives here, comparatively few could immigrate

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid 172.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid 168.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid 168.

<sup>24</sup> CIS, "Three Decades of Mass Immigration: The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act." *Center for Immigration Studies*, September 1995, Accessed February 27, 2017, <http://cis.org/1965ImmigrationAct-MassImmigration>

from those countries because they have no family ties in the U.S.<sup>25</sup>.” It’s also important to acknowledge the historical context surrounding this bill. During the mid-1960’s as this bill was getting pushed through Congress, America was embroiled in a massive civil rights struggle that was dominating the public sphere of interest. There are no recorded major protests or displays either in favor of, or against this immigration bill. As much as a major piece of legislation can slip under the radar of the public consciousness, the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act did.

All of these factors combined contributed to the Senate voting in favor of the bill comfortably with 76 votes for, 18 votes against, and 6 abstaining. Eight days later the bill would be reported back to the house and was passed through by 320 votes to 70. Only three days later Lyndon B. Johnson signed the bill into law and U.S. immigration would be simultaneously freed from its discriminatory practices of the past and about to face an upheaval that very few anticipated.

The most noteworthy provisions of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that had the largest impact on immigration patterns in wake of the passing of the law were as follows<sup>26</sup>:

- An abolishment of the national origins quota system.
- The establishment of two categories of immigrants whom wouldn’t be subject to numerical restrictions. Those being relatives of either current US citizens or permanent residents and highly skilled and trained professionals in their field of work.
- An annual ceiling on Eastern Hemisphere immigration of 170,000 people, with a 20,000 per-country limit.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> ProCon, “What was the Hart-Celler Immigration Act?” *ProCon.org*, February 14, 2008. Accessed February 28, 2017, <http://immigration.procon.org/view.answers.php?questionID=000764>

- An annual ceiling on Western Hemisphere immigration of 120,000 people, with no per-country limit.

### *Aftermath*

When Lyndon B. Johnson affixed his signature to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, he was careful to quell fears surrounding the effects of more progressive immigration policy and consequently attempted to downplay the law's significance in his remarks. "This bill that we will sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly to either our wealth or our power<sup>27</sup>." With the benefit of hindsight, most would agree that this was an understatement. Immigration patterns in the United States changed drastically in the wake of this Act, in the process greatly affecting the diverse makeup of the country. In this final portion of the paper, I will first show how immigration patterns have changed in the past fifty years as a consequence of this act and then analyze and compare different theories as to why exactly the changes to immigration trends were so drastically different to those first anticipated in 1965.

The consensus among scholars is that the intention of the 1965 Act was not to acutely change immigration patterns into America, only that it simply intended to put into practice the newfound sense of egalitarianism that was pulsing through America

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<sup>27</sup> Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York, October 3, 1965," *LBJ Presidential Library*. Accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.lbjlibrary.net/collections/selected-speeches/1965/10-03-1965.html>

during the 1960's<sup>28</sup>. The quotes that I've provided earlier in this piece by Edward Kennedy, Emanuel Celler and Lyndon B. Johnson support this theory; they didn't anticipate the law to change the demographics of the country much at all, and if they did then it was well-disguised. The *Wall Street Journal* too, downplayed fears surrounding the move from the national origins system to one more focused on family unification, "This had more emotional appeal and, perhaps more to the point, insured that the new immigration would not stray radically from the old one<sup>29</sup>." The logic was simple. The families arriving in the country had to be related to current U.S. citizens or permanent residents, and after decades of such discriminatory policy, the same immigration trends would follow and the ethnic makeup of the country would hardly change at all.

In 1960, five years before the Act was signed into law, there were approximately 9.7 million immigrants living in the United States, and that constituted 5.4 percent of the population. As of 2015, there are approximately 43.3 million immigrants in the country and they make up 13.5 percent of the population<sup>30</sup>. Even more surprising than the striking uptick in the number of immigrants, was where those immigrants were coming from. In 1960, 75 percent of the foreign-born population of the United States were from Europe, while only 9.4 percent were from Latin America and 5.1 percent from Asia. Fast-forward to 2000, and the numbers are in stark contrast. Only 15.3 percent are from Europe, 51 percent are from Latin America, and 25.5 percent are

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<sup>28</sup> Acknowledging the context of the ever-growing Cold War during this time is important as well, it was important that America was seen as a beacon of democracy and morality throughout the world.

<sup>29</sup> David M. Reimers, "An Unintended Reform: The 1965 Immigration Act and Third World Immigration to the United States." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 3, no. 1 1983, 17. Accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27500293>.

<sup>30</sup> Migration Policy, "U.S. Immigrant Population and Share over Time, 1850-Present." *Migration Policy Institute*. Accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/immigrant-population-over-time?width=1000&height=850&iframe=true>

from Asia<sup>31</sup>. How did this happen? The data completely contradicts the seemingly sound logic of the family unification system.

In the years immediately after the law was enacted, immigration movements went roughly as expected. Eastern and Southern European nations such as Italy and Greece had notable increases in numbers of migrants, exceeding the 20,000 limit per year due to the family unification system<sup>32</sup>. However, by the mid-1970's, the backlog of awaiting visas had been eased and immigration from Europe began to slow. In 1965, Europe had sent 113,424 immigrants to America, by 1979, that number had decreased to 60,845<sup>33</sup>. Why were European people so much less inclined to travel to the United States? The European political climate holds clues. By 1965, World War II was twenty years in the past and after decades of violence and instability; Europe was experiencing a long-awaited period of relative peacefulness as well as a post-war economic boom. The Iron Curtain still loomed large, but after such destruction throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many people in Europe found themselves feeling less inclined to migrate to the United States, instead wanting to participate in the rebuilding of Europe. The European Union's formation in 1993 only furthered this sentiment, fostering and encouraging migration between member states, with less necessity to completely relocate to a new continent<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> Mary C. Waters, and Reed Ueda. "Harvard University Press Reference Library: The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration since 1965." *Harvard University Press*, 2007, p. 15. Accessed February 28, 2017,

<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/udenver/reader.action?docID=10312745&ppg=12>

<sup>32</sup> David M. Reimers, "An Unintended Reform: The 1965 Immigration Act and Third World Immigration to the United States." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 3, no. 1 1983, 19. Accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27500293>

<sup>33</sup> Ibid 20.

<sup>34</sup> Mary C. Waters, and Reed Ueda. "Harvard University Press Reference Library: The New Americans: A Guide to Immigration since 1965." *Harvard University Press*, 2007, p. 21. Accessed February 28, 2017, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/udenver/reader.action?docID=10312745&ppg=12>

The growth in the Latin American population in America since 1965 is difficult to grasp without first having an understanding of the Bracero Program. The Bracero Program was established in 1942 to compensate for American labor shortages in primarily agriculture during World War II. The idea was that America would allow Mexican workers to temporarily work as manual laborers and then return back to Mexico shortly after<sup>35</sup>. The program, initially intended to last only as long as the war, was expanded in 1951 and ultimately lasted up until 1964, with 4.6 million different Bracero contracts being signed in the twenty-two years that the program was in existence<sup>36</sup>. When the 1965 Act was signed into law, there resulted a drastic shift from previously having up to 450,000 guest worker visas available annually, and very few limits on resident visas due to their being a part of the Western Hemisphere, to there being no guest worker visas available and a 20,000 person cap on resident visas annually. In theory, this suggests a major decrease in Latin American migration, however this was not the case due to a number of push-pull factors sending Mexicans toward America. The principle among these factors is how the Bracero Program had created a circular flow of migration that was - after twenty-two years - deeply embedded in Mexican expectations and had also resulted in the creation of many widely accessible migrant networks<sup>37</sup>. These migrant networks, combined with a rapidly expanding market for low-skilled employment in the United States, were

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<sup>35</sup> Douglas S. Massey, and Karen A. Pren. "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America," *Population and Development Review*. 2012; 38(1). Accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3407978/>

<sup>36</sup> Marc R. Rosenblum, "Mexican Migration to the United States: Policy and Trends," *Congressional Research Service*. June 7, 2012, 7. Accessed March 1, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42560.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Douglas S. Massey, and Karen A. Pren. "Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America," *Population and Development Review*. 2012; 38(1). Accessed March 1, 2017, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3407978/>

major pull factors towards America. These same people were being pushed away from Mexico due to the privatization of the agriculture industry resulting in families being dislocated<sup>38</sup>. After the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act was passed which implemented legalization programs for illegal immigrants<sup>39</sup>, 2.1 million Mexicans were legalized, giving an idea of the sheer amount of people who had crossed the border illegally in the previous twenty years. Many of these 2.1 million people had family members that could now legally migrate to America due to the family reunification preferences, avoiding the tighter restrictions placed on illegal immigration by the Reagan administration.

The boom in Asian immigration to the United States post-1965 caught many experts unawares. This was predominantly because the number of Asians living in America prior to the 1965 Act were so low due to the discriminatory immigration policy toward Asian people throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, leaving so few Asians living in America that experts didn't foresee them being able to take advantage of the family unification policy. Robert Kennedy, the then Attorney General, told a congressional committee that he expected at most about 5,000 people to immigrate from Asia in the first year "but we do not expect that there would be any great influx after that"<sup>40</sup>. In reality, over 7 million Asian immigrants arrived in America between 1971 and 2002. The migration began with predominantly either highly skilled professionals or political refugees from South East Asia, which was

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<sup>38</sup> Marc R. Rosenblum, "Mexican Migration to the United States: Policy and Trends," *Congressional Research Service*. June 7, 2012, 7. Accessed March 1, 2017, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42560.pdf>

<sup>39</sup> Ibid 9.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriel J. Chin and Rose Cuison Villazor, *The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965: Legislating a New America* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 42.



facing political instability at the time<sup>41</sup>. These first immigrants began a process of chain migration, where one person would gain either citizenship or permanent residency and then sponsor their family and relatives who would then repeat the cycle.

The United States is at a crossroads in terms of immigration, and at the core of this crossroads is an ethical conundrum. The ethical conundrum for America lays in the inescapable fact that it was a nation formed, shaped, and made to prosper by immigrants, and yet so much of the nation's patriotic identity leaves it looking at shifting demographics with skepticism. This delicate balance only becomes more precarious as the partisan divide on immigration policy grows wider. As long as the country remains at this crossroads, so will the legacy of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act.

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<sup>41</sup> C.N. Le, "The 1965 Immigration Act," *Asian-Nation: The Landscape of Asian America*, Accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.asian-nation.org/1965-immigration-act.shtml>

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