

Immigration and Migration Defined

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The meaning of immigration, and who are immigrants and migrants, is vaguer than I had imagined. I find that these words and their role in our notion depends on how each person sees their meaning from a perspective of valid/invalid history; whether they are for or against immigration, and how close or far removed they might feel about it. From a contemporary point of view, people of color feel much closer to the dynamics of it for the issue has not changed over the years. Conversely, Anglos feel less close to it since immigration of their people is now also a nominal issue.

I present this additional chapter to further help in clarifying the terms and issue of immigration from a basic historical view and why it is an issue that will never leave the national scene--that immigrants will always need the U.S. and that the U.S. will always need the immigrants.

An immigrant is a person who willingly or unwilling leaves his/her native land and comes to reside in one not native to him/her. An immigrant may come here legally under a visa to work for an understood term of time, or come undocumented (without papers).



(H-2A) workers in their ranks.

A migrant is a person who is probably a U.S. citizen, and who leaves his home or state to migrate from state to state, county to county and town to town to do farm field labor in the many seasonal jobs in agriculture, nurseries, fruits, packing plants/canneries, beef and poultry products, etc. There are often undocumented and documented

“Native” people were here in this continent we now call America for thousands of years before the coming of immigrants. Their status will never change--nor will the status of the immigrants.

Immigrants your forefathers may have been--immigrants you still are. Your citizenship does not change that. Those of you of other countries, not of the U.S., will always be natives to said nations. Once you accept the reality that you yourself are an immigrant, you will find it illogical, even inhumane, to be anti-immigrant. How can you be anti-you? If you accept that you and/or your ancestors were/are racists and that is why you may be anti-immigrant, you then have to question why they forced people of color--Blacks--to be brought here as forced immigrants?

The answer is: Because they were needed--needed to do work they didn't want to do, and to do it for little or no pay. This was true then for immigrants and it is true now.

However, before the coming of immigrants to today's America, the natives in "America" did not need them, be it the Spanish and Portuguese that first came or the Anglo-Saxons who followed. It is now that immigrants are needed. Be honest. If our industries didn't need them, they would not hire them!! But they come desperate and are exploited with measly wages, just as many of the Anglo forefathers. And if your last defense is that too many come undocumented (without papers), well so did the original immigrants.

One other defense that is currently made about the contemporary immigrants is that they are dangerous, drug users/sellers, murderers and not law-abiding. Records show that they are more law-abiding than the general U.S. citizens. As to "dangerous", let's recall the history of this relating to the first immigrants (our forefathers) who came to this continent following Columbus (1492).

Archaeologist and ethno-historian Henry E. Dobyns ascertains that pre-Columbus "America" had a population of over 112 million native people. Almost overnight, the genocidal diminution of America's native people began. They were receptive of the invaders, not resistive. Records and diaries of clergy declare that they were friendly and helpful; happy, resourceful, family-oriented and societally structured. They had ample arable land and mineral resources for the taking, including gold. However, some practiced human sacrifice and could resort to cannibalism.

All else was forgotten. Christianity--already reeking with a history of barbarism, cruel crusades and then the Inquisition--found it logical to label the natives as savage, uncivilized, heathen, etc. They saw these "indians" as having no respect for human life. This justified their short-term plan of genocide by any means necessary. They did not see genocide as the extreme of human disregard.

Once they agreed to deny the natives human equality, they enslaved them via sheer brutality. Within this frame of time, the Indians began to die from diseases unknown to them, such as

measles, chicken pox, syphilis and the common cold. War assured loss of land and removal. In what became the U.S. of North America, the Indians were placed "on reserve" in Reservations so time could offer some form of humane resolution. They are still "on reserve." Clearly, the invaders were more dangerous than the invaded.

The Indians did not fare any better under the Spanish. During the Spanish Catholic mission system from San Diego up to San Francisco (1769-1836), the Indian population declined from 310,000 to a mere 18,000. The Gold Rush rushed them almost out of existence! As for North America of today, the Indian population declined from 18 million in 1492 to 350,000 by the beginning of the 20th century. By 1776, the U.S. independence year, the American continent had eliminated over 60 million Indians, leaving about 52 million--about 400,000 of those in the area now the U.S.A.

Every state in the U.S. has its genocidal history of the Indians. Minnesota's first wave of immigration (1860-1870) was primarily from Germany and Ireland. Scandinavians followed; Duluth and the Iron Range also attracted eastern Europeans. The Hmong and other Southeast Asians started to arrive in the early 1970s. This new start of immigrants coming was because of war and political unrest in their countries and of danger to their life and property. By the 1990s Somali immigrants began to arrive, and now there are some 50,000 of them in the state.

You can see by now that we are just as much immigrants as those more recently coming here. We came no less undocumented, no less unwanted, no less in need. We have contributed to the nation no more than they have and will do so in the future.

Above all, we must remain committed to what we promise to immigrants by the torch of light and hope and the call of our Statue of Liberty:

"...Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...Send these, the homeless...I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

This is the real, not mythical--American Dream.

The next chapter will cover the dilemma of immigration, the push for deportation and a rationale for retainment.