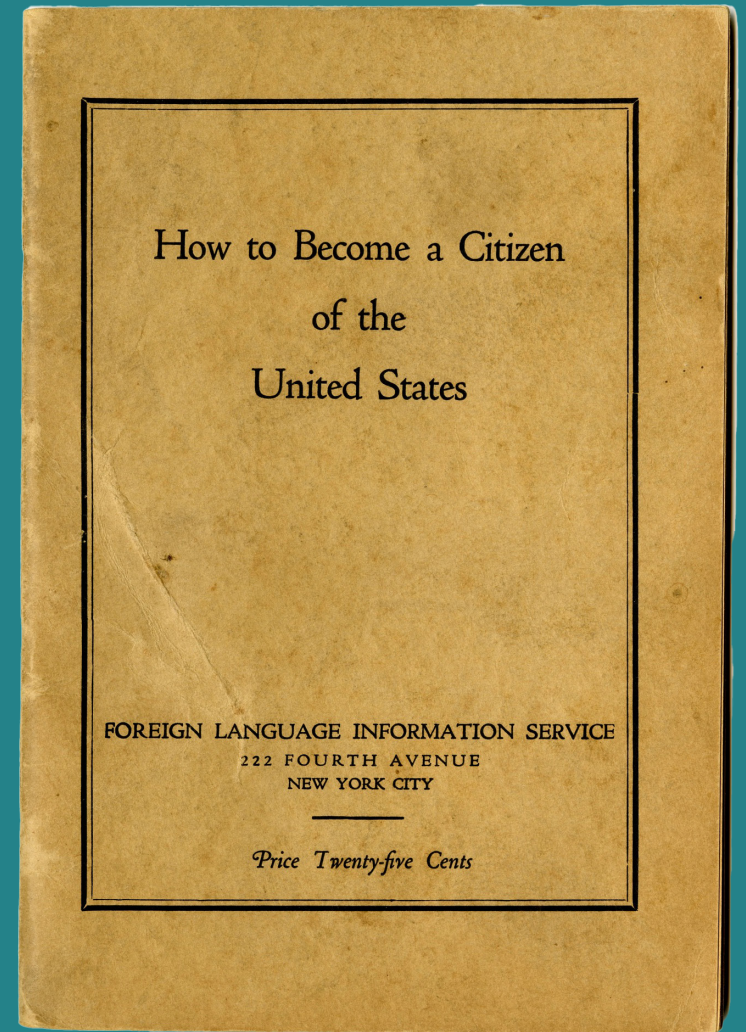


# BECOMING US

## A BROKEN SYSTEM

### WHAT WOULD A FAIR IMMIGRATION SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?

Student Deliberation Guide



# A BROKEN SYSTEM

## WHAT WOULD A FAIR IMMIGRATION SYSTEM LOOK LIKE?

### Getting Started

**This guide asks you to imagine that you are living in a different time. The time is not so long ago. But it is a time when things were different than they are today.**

**You will be asked to consider and make recommendations concerning an important issue that faced Americans of that time.**

**Let's set the scene.**

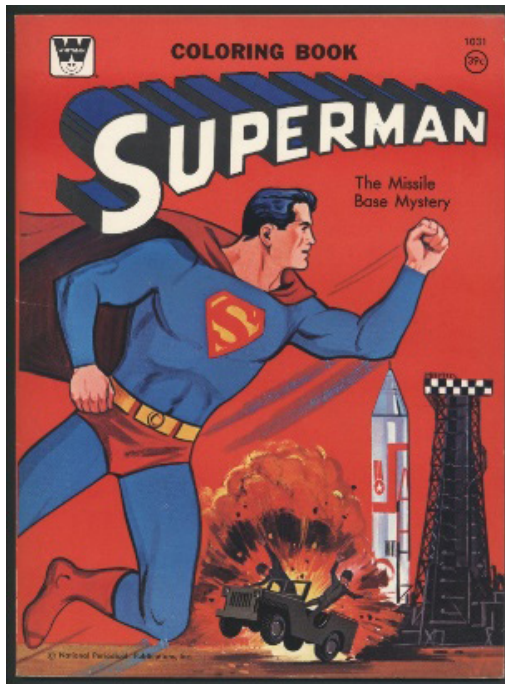
The year is 1965. Lyndon B. Johnson is president. It is just two decades after the end of World War II, and we in the United States are thinking about what kind of country we want to be. People are thinking about issues of basic fairness at home, especially how to secure equality for all Americans. People are also thinking about what role the United States should play on a world stage that includes the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR, or Soviet Union).

One important way we can tell the rest of the world what kind of country we want to be is through our immigration laws—the laws that say who is allowed to move here and become eligible for citizenship. The United States is a rich nation with lots of room and opportunity, so a lot of people want to move here. However, under current immigration laws, millions of people around the world are barred from doing so.

You will be asked to participate in a conversation about whether and how we should change immigration laws that have been in place for decades. But first, let's consider some of the big issues that Americans are thinking about in 1965 that may affect their viewpoints on immigration.

## A Changing World

Ever since World War II ended, the United States and the USSR have been locked in a struggle for worldwide influence. The USSR is using diplomacy and force to get other countries to adopt communism. The United States wants to prevent this. Because the United States and USSR are not openly fighting each other, this struggle is known as the Cold War.



*Coloring Book, Superman: The Missile Base Mystery. The book's narrative of sabotage by Soviet agents at a U.S. Army base would have been especially resonant to children at the height of the Cold War, when many Americans felt anxious about the possibility of conflict with the USSR. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*



*The Bendix kit was one of the first commercially available radiation detection devices designed for home use. It was available in the 1960s, when families were encouraged to build fallout shelters and prepare for the possibility of nuclear war. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

Both countries have nuclear weapons, so the stakes are high. Just a few years ago, in 1962, the United States and the USSR came dangerously close to nuclear war during an incident called the Cuban Missile Crisis. Many Americans fear that nuclear war could erupt at any moment. Schools prepare students with drills on what to do in case of a nuclear attack. A couple of years ago, then-President John F. Kennedy advised Americans to build backyard bomb shelters.

The United States has also recently become involved in a “hot” war in Vietnam. There, communist fighters are being backed by the USSR and China, another communist nation. There are already more than 15,000 U.S. soldiers in Vietnam. Just last year, Congress gave President Johnson authority to greatly expand our involvement in this war.

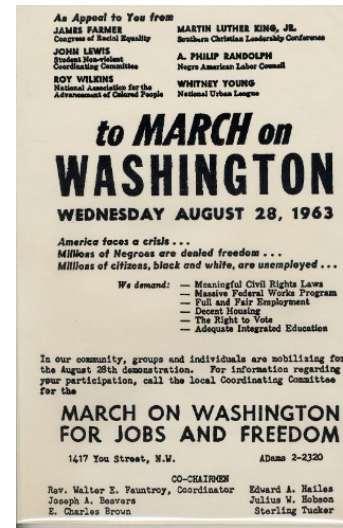
## Change at Home

Here at home, one of the biggest issues facing Americans in 1965 is the African American struggle for equality. Newspapers show pictures of demonstrations and violent police responses. People calling for equal access to voting, schools, employment, and protection under the law for Americans of all races have been arrested and even murdered.



*The Beating, a black-and-white photograph of the March 7, 1965, assault on civil rights marchers by Alabama state police officers termed "Bloody Sunday." The troopers, wearing gas masks and brandishing nightsticks, set upon marchers along U.S. Highway 80. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

Among many other civil rights demonstrations, the March on Washington—where the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech to more than 250,000 people—was just two years ago. More and more Americans seem sympathetic to the idea of equal rights for all.



*March on Washington Handbill, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

There are also more younger Americans than at any time in history. Almost 40 percent of Americans alive in 1965 have been born since the end of World War II, a massive population explosion known as the Baby Boom. The first of these postwar babies are now entering the workforce. The economy is growing quickly in the hands of a highly educated workforce, there is no shortage of housing, and strong unions represent more than a third of American workers.

The economic picture is not perfect, however. Although there is significant job growth, much of it is in white-collar jobs that require a college degree. But factory and other blue-collar workers are rapidly losing their jobs to automation—in 1962, as many as 25,000 workers were being replaced by machines each week. The unemployment rate in the United States is 4.5 percent. That's not the highest the unemployment rate has been, but it is a lot higher than the current unemployment rates of our trading partners: Canada, 3.6 percent; Japan, 1.2 percent; France, 1.6 percent; and Germany, 0.3 percent. The number of Americans receiving welfare has grown 12 percent since 1962.

## Who Should Get to Immigrate to the United States?

Some of the most important questions facing the United States in 1965 concern its relationship with the rest of the world. Having established ourselves as a global power in World War II and now locked in a battle of ideas with the Soviet Union, we face important questions about what role to play on the world stage. One of these questions—the one you will be discussing today—is whom we should allow to immigrate to the United States.

From 1880 to 1914, the United States let in an average of 650,000 immigrants a year. Today, in 1965, we are only accepting about 250,000 a year.

**IMMIGRANT:** Someone who has entered a country to take up residence there. People moving into the United States are called immigrants.

**REFUGEE:** A person who has been forced to run away from war, unfair treatment, or natural disaster. Refugees are often allowed to enter the country through special programs outside of the official immigration system because of the urgency of their circumstances.

**QUOTA:** A maximum or minimum number of something. In immigration policy, quotas refer to the maximum number of a specific category of people who are allowed to immigrate.

**IMMIGRATION POLICY:** A country's laws and regulations governing who may move to that country and take up residence there.



*Suitcases like this one dating from the 1930s were carried by immigrants coming in search of better lives in the United States. Suitcase, 1930s, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

The reason for this decrease is because, since the 1920s, U.S. laws have included quotas, or limits, on the number of people allowed to immigrate from each country. These quotas are based on the number of people from each country who are already living in the United States.

Because the quota system has historically benefitted immigrants from northern and western Europe, the largest immigration quotas today are for people from countries such as England, France, and Germany. The quotas for immigrants from southern and eastern European countries such as Italy, Greece, and Hungary are much smaller. And very few people are allowed to immigrate from Asia and Africa.

Annual National Quota	Act of 1921		Act of 1924		Act of 1952	
	1922	%	1925	%	1965	%
<b>Total from all Countries</b>	357,803	100.00	164,667	100.00	158,561	100.00
<b>Europe (all)</b>	356,13	99.53	161,546	98.10	149,697	94.41
<b>Asia (all)</b>	1,066	0.3	1,300	0.79	3,690	2.33
<b>Australia &amp; New Zealand</b>	359	0.10	221	0.13	700	0.44
<b>Africa (all)</b>	122	0.03	1,200	0.7	4,274	2.70
<b>Western Hemisphere</b>	No limit					

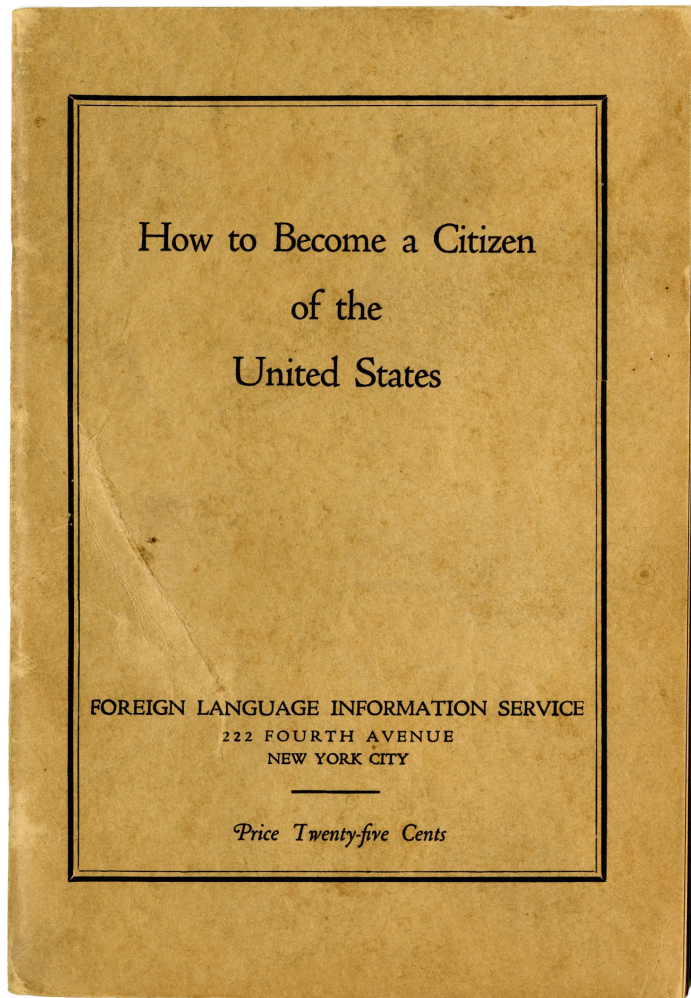
By contrast, there is no limit on the number of people who can immigrate here from most Western Hemisphere countries, including Canada, Mexico, Cuba, and Central and South American countries.

## Seasonal Migration on the Southern Border

**In 1965, the southern border of the United States is not highly secured, and it is relatively easy to pass back and forth. One reason for this is because there is no limit on immigration from North and South America, so there is little urgency about tracking who enters this way.**

**One result is a pattern of seasonal migration back and forth across the U.S./Mexico border. Many people enter the United States on labor contracts each year to pick crops and perform other work on farms. Then they return home when the work is finished. Mexicans constitute the largest group of these temporary immigrants. The U.S. agriculture industry has come to rely heavily on this practice of seasonal cross-border migration.**

**As Americans discuss possible changes to the country's immigration laws, one question is how this seasonal pattern might be affected. Many U.S. farmers hope that—whatever other changes are made—they will retain access to these workers.**



Brochure, "How To Become A Citizen of the United States," 1926,  
National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

Some people say the U.S. immigration system is broken, because Congress is increasingly passing laws making exceptions to it. During the 1950s, for example, about two-thirds of all immigrants to the United States were admitted outside of the quota system, especially refugees fleeing communism or natural disasters. If the law was working, critics say, we wouldn't need to make so many exceptions to it.

The quota system also seems unfair to some people. Americans of southern and eastern European descent don't understand why more people from their home countries aren't allowed to come to the United States. Some of these Americans feel unwelcome here as a result. There are also people who wonder how we can claim to support the cause of equality among Americans while restricting immigration in ways that feel arbitrary and unfair.

Other people argue we should be careful about relaxing our current immigration policies. They worry that if too many people move to the United States too quickly, we could lose our vital sense of national unity. Our country could change in ways we might not like if there were suddenly many new arrivals who didn't agree with the beliefs and values enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. And many Americans in 1965 worry that careless changes to our immigration rules could let Soviet agents, posing as immigrants, slip into the country.

A practical question in all this concerns whether we should start restricting immigration from other countries in the Western Hemisphere. The United States has a history of extending special consideration to these neighbors, and President Johnson doesn't want to change this. He argues that we shouldn't do anything that might cause countries in the Americas to shift allegiance to the USSR.

# WHAT ARE OUR OPTIONS?

You are part of a group of advisors who have been asked to make recommendations concerning what sort of immigration policy is best for the United States. As you can see, there are no simple answers to this question. Certainly, it won't be possible to satisfy everyone.

You will have to grapple with questions such as: Can we be more open without taking needless risks? What is the best way to help people around the world while still protecting the jobs and safety of American families? Who, exactly, should get to immigrate to America?

This guide presents three possible options for addressing the problem. These options are explained in detail in the sections that follow. Each option has possible benefits, but each also has significant drawbacks. There is no right or wrong answer. We will need to discuss these options together before we can decide which of them—if any—to recommend to Congress.



# OPTION 1: BE A BEACON OF FREEDOM



"Speaking of national origins —" This cartoon, by the political cartoonist Herbert Block ("Herblock"), shows President Johnson, who supported eliminating the national-origins quota system, pointing to a painting showing Thomas Jefferson drafting a document titled "Democracy." Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-hlb-06239.

We need to be as welcoming as possible to all immigrants. If we are to live up to the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, we must be willing to share what we are so lucky to have by greatly increasing the number of people we allow to immigrate to our country each year.

Most Americans alive today are either immigrants or descended from immigrants. The United States has been successful not *despite* immigrants, but *because* of them. The energy and creativity that immigrants have brought to our shores have helped us become a world leader with a booming economy, an educated workforce, and more than enough opportunity to go around.

Our immigration policy should give special consideration to circumstances like poverty and political unrest—true need, in other words—in deciding who is allowed join our nation. To be true to the spirit in which the United States was founded, we should make every effort to admit refugees, poor people, and—in the famous words inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty—"your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

In the early 1900s, we accepted vastly more immigrants than we do today. Back then, about 15 percent of Americans had been born in another country. Today, it's only about 5 percent. The restrictive immigration policy that has been in place since the 1920s is cutting us off from the new arrivals who have always been one of this country's most important resources.



Statue of Liberty souvenir, New York, New York, 1885,  
National Museum of American History,  
Smithsonian Institution

Recent history shows us what can happen when the United States turns its back on people seeking to come here from bad situations in their home countries. Less than three decades ago, we turned away tens of thousands of Jewish people who attempted to come to the United States to escape discrimination and violence in Nazi Germany. Many of them were among the millions who died in Hitler’s concentration camps. We could have saved some of these people. Our decision to turn away from these refugees in their time of need should shame us—and harden our resolve never to behave this way again.

Although some people have concerns about who might come here under a more open immigration policy, this option holds that the vast majority of new arrivals will wholeheartedly embrace their new homeland. Dr. Filindo B. Masino, a Philadelphia attorney, criticized what he described as “a stigma and aura of suspicion attached to people who come from abroad” in remarks before Congress this year.

“I think our country is big and great enough to absorb and assimilate any foreigner who comes here,” said Dr. Masino. “I don’t think we should be afraid of any communists coming here. Maybe they can learn something from us.”

*Things we could try:*

- **Increase the total number of immigrants we let in each year by greatly easing restrictions on who may immigrate.**

*Drawback:* Our country is different from how it was in the early 1900s and it will be risky or even overwhelming to allow such a dramatic increase in immigration.

- **Aid refugees and other immigrants once they are here by providing financial support and assistance with finding work.**

*Drawback:* This will stoke resentment among some Americans who also need assistance and may encourage more immigration than would otherwise occur.

- **Give the president authority and flexibility to designate and admit immigrants based on refugee status.**

*Drawback:* Because it is hard to predict where refugee situations might arise, this will undermine efforts to fairly distribute immigration opportunities among our allies. It also gives the president the ability to make these decisions for political benefit.

# OPTION 2: TREAT EVERY COUNTRY EQUALLY

Current U.S. immigration policies make our country appear hypocritical by favoring immigrants from some countries over others. To help stop the international spread of communism, we must counter this appearance and strengthen our reputation for fairness both overseas and at home. The United States needs immigration rules that emphasize equal treatment of all immigrants so that we can both encourage Americans to remain loyal at home and strengthen the U.S. position in the Cold War around the world.

One reason our immigration policies are hurting our reputation is because they stand in contrast to big changes taking place in the United States. Just last year, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act, which ended racial segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The Johnson administration—along with civil rights leaders and organized labor—is now calling for a similar approach to the question of immigration so that we cannot be accused of inconsistency.

“We have removed all elements of second-class citizenship from our laws by the Civil Rights Act,” Vice President Hubert Humphrey said recently. “We must in 1965 remove all elements in our immigration law which suggest there are second-class people.”

The fact is that the current uneven restrictions do make some Americans feel like “second-class people” here at home. Americans who are descended from British or German immigrants would have little problem bringing their relatives to this country, and there is currently no limit on immigration from Western Hemisphere countries. It is much more difficult for Americans of eastern or southern European descent, not to mention those whose families are from Asia or Africa, to bring their families to the United States. Some people worry that this kind of discrimination could lead some Americans to feel angry and resentful enough to grow sympathetic to the Soviet Union.

Our inconsistent immigration policy is also hurting us in our war of ideas with the USSR. American politicians and diplomats want to be able to say to the world that the United States is freer, fairer, and more open than the USSR. Right now, the Soviets can correctly say that our immigration policy is inconsistent with these claims. For example, the United States says it wants countries like Greece and Italy as allies against communism. Why then—the Soviets ask—do we admit so few immigrants from those countries compared to other allies like Britain or Germany?



This cartoon illustrates perceptions of unfairness in the United States. Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, LC-DIG-hlb-06374.

Even as we strive to treat all countries equally, we must also maintain a practical approach. Immigration presents challenges and is not always the best solution for either immigrants or this country. To make sure we are not overwhelmed by immigrants, we should treat all countries equally while also trying to reduce the factors that influence people to come here. This could be done by helping other countries reduce poverty, improve living conditions, and recover from disasters.



Margarita Lora's dress. Between 1960 and 1962, over 14,000 children, including Margarita Lora, traveled from Cuba to the United States for an exodus that is now known as Operation Pedro Pan. After the Cuban revolution, some Cuban parents feared for their children's futures under the new Communist regime. They entrusted the Catholic Church, aid societies, and the U.S. State Department to connect their children with waiting relatives and friends in the United States. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

*Things we could try:*

- **For a stronger appearance of fairness, keep immigration around the current overall annual total but let in an equal number of immigrants from each country—including Western Hemisphere countries—each year.**

*Drawback:* This will impose immigration limits on Western Hemisphere countries for the first time in U.S. history, which may reduce the number of Mexican seasonal workers and cause labor shortages for U.S. agriculture and industry. Also, countries with small populations may not use their entire quotas, while larger countries may quickly exhaust theirs.

- **To reduce pressure to immigrate to the United States, we should support pro-democracy groups in other nations and send money to countries experiencing, poverty, natural disasters, and other problems.**

*Drawback:* Other countries may resent us for meddling in their internal affairs. Some Americans in poverty or facing other disadvantages will feel these funds should have been used to help people here at home.

- **Make exceptions to annual limits for professionals and skilled laborers whose skills are in short supply here.**

*Drawbacks:* We will be seen as turning our backs on other would-be immigrants who, because of their lower education levels and employability, are in even more desperate circumstances than the people we are letting in.

# OPTION 3: PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY AND SECURITY



*Migrant workers have long played a significant role in the U.S. agricultural industry, with travel between Mexico and the United States made easier prior to 1965 by the fact that there were no limits on immigration to the United States from the Western Hemisphere. Here, migrants temporarily allowed to enter the United States under the Bracero program use short-handled hoes in a field in California. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution*

Although the United States has benefitted from immigration in the past, we no longer need as many new arrivals as we once did. Because of the real danger of infiltration by Soviet agents and to avoid creating too much competition for jobs, we should tighten our restrictions.

One of the biggest problems with our current system is that Congress has little oversight over refugee exceptions being made by unaccountable bureaucrats. This fact, combined with the lack of any limits on immigration from Western Hemisphere countries, means there is effectively no cap on worldwide immigration to our country. Meanwhile, migrant farm labor from Mexico is driving down wages for U.S. workers.

We should eliminate these loopholes and continue to do our best to ensure that the immigrants we do let in have backgrounds and cultures similar to those already represented in our country. We should admit refugees only under the same procedures as any other immigrants, with no allowance for special exceptions by the executive branch.

“The [current quota system] does not predicate the quotas upon the race, culture, morality, intelligence, health, physical attributes, or any other characteristics of the people in any foreign country,” said John B. Trevor, a representative of the American Coalition of Patriotic Societies, in testimony before Congress in 1965. “The quotas are based upon our own people. [They] are like a mirror held up before the American people and reflecting the proportions of their various foreign national origins.”

It is these traditional proportions of nationalities that have enabled Americans to establish values in common, build belief systems and cultural practices that bind us together, and establish a strong sense of national identity. “By having immigration reflect our total population, the trend for individual foreign groups to isolate themselves from the mainstream of our national life has been reduced,” Trevor said.



"The Mortar of Assimilation," printed in Puck Magazine in 1889. Although the ideal of Americanization was to welcome all foreigners, some groups were viewed as too disruptive for the rest of the pot. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution

If we loosen our immigration restrictions, we risk losing the sense of national unity that holds us together. People are much more willing to sacrifice for and help people they feel are similar to them. If we allow in too many people who do not share our background and values, we may find more and more Americans questioning what "our" values really are. For example, if we admit too many people with no experience of democracy, isn't there a risk that the United States might eventually cease to be one?

Besides, before we can reach out to other nations, we have problems to address here at home. While many people in the United States are experiencing prosperity, things are not rosy for everyone. For example, the threats of unemployment and increasing competition for jobs are a growing concern for some workers. Admitting large numbers of immigrants could set the country up for economic failure.

In short, this is not the time for a freehanded immigration policy. Although some small changes might be warranted, we must otherwise preserve the approach that has helped us build such a strong sense of unity and common cause.

*Things we could try:*

- **Keep permanent immigration at current levels and do not make exceptions for refugees. They should be treated the same as other immigrants.**

*Drawback:* Eliminating the category of refugee will be seen as heartless to many and will damage our relationship with other countries.

- **Continue to prioritize admitting relatives of American citizens ahead of other categories of immigrants.**

*Drawback:* Even if someone isn't related to an American citizen, he or she might still be able to make a valuable contribution to our society.

- **Close our borders to seasonal agricultural workers from the Western Hemisphere.**

*Drawback:* This will raise costs for U.S. farmers and consumers.

# OPTION 1: BE A BEACON OF FREEDOM

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## MAIN ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR

In its early years, the United States placed no restrictions on immigration and was very open to immigrants. We must return to this approach now. After all, most Americans are either immigrants or descended from immigrants. Immigration is not something to be feared; it is the engine of our success. Our current restrictive policies are choking off that engine. To use our wealth and power to do the most good in the world, we must dramatically change course and adopt a much more open immigration policy as quickly as possible.

## EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

Increase the total number of immigrants we let in each year by greatly easing restrictions on who may immigrate.

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Aid refugees and other immigrants once they are here by providing financial support and assistance with finding work.

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Give the president authority and flexibility to designate and admit immigrants based on refugee status.

## CONSEQUENCES AND TRADE-OFFS

Our country is different from how it was in the early 1900s and it will be risky or even overwhelming to allow such a dramatic increase in immigration.

This will stoke resentment among some Americans who also need assistance and may encourage more immigration than would otherwise occur.

Because it is hard to predict where refugee situations might arise, this will undermine efforts to fairly distribute immigration opportunities among our allies. It also gives the president the ability to make these decisions for political benefit.



# OPTION 2: TREAT EVERY COUNTRY EQUALLY

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## MAIN ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR

We must change our immigration policy so that we stop appearing hypocritical on the world stage. How can we argue that we are more free, fair, and open than the USSR when our immigration policy is so obviously unfair and restrictive? Our unbalanced restrictions make some Americans feel like second-class citizens and could even lead them to feel sympathy toward the USSR. We must change our policies to eliminate this perception of unfairness.

## EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

For a stronger appearance of fairness, keep immigration around the current overall annual level but let in an equal number of immigrants from each country—including Western Hemisphere countries—each year.

## CONSEQUENCES AND TRADE-OFFS

This will impose immigration limits on Western Hemisphere countries for the first time in U.S. history, which may reduce the number of Mexican seasonal workers and cause labor shortages for U.S. agriculture and industry. Also, countries with small populations may not use their entire quotas, while larger countries may quickly exhaust theirs.

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To reduce pressure to immigrate to the United States, we should support pro-democracy groups in other nations and send money to countries experiencing poverty, natural disasters, and other problems.

Other countries may resent us for meddling in their internal affairs. Some Americans in poverty or facing other disadvantages will feel these funds should have been used to help people here at home.

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Make exceptions to annual limits for professionals and skilled laborers whose skills are in short supply here.

We will be seen as turning our backs on other would-be immigrants who, because of their lower education levels and employability, are in even more desperate circumstances than the people we are letting in.

# OPTION 3:

## PROMOTE NATIONAL UNITY AND SECURITY

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### MAIN ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR

Although the United States has benefitted from immigration in the past, we simply no longer need as many new arrivals as we once did. Because of the real danger of infiltration by Soviet agents and to avoid creating too much competition for jobs against current U.S. residents, we should not significantly loosen our current immigration restrictions. Many Americans are already looking for work, and poverty is increasing. If we grow weak at home, we will be unable to play an effective role on the world stage. We should let in only a limited number of people, with the highest priority going to the family members of people who are already here.

### EXAMPLES OF WHAT MIGHT BE DONE

Keep permanent immigration at current levels and do not make exceptions for refugees. They should be treated the same as other immigrants.

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Continue to prioritize admitting relatives of American citizens ahead of other categories of immigrants.

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Close our borders to seasonal agricultural workers from the Western Hemisphere.

### CONSEQUENCES AND TRADE-OFFS

Eliminating the category of refugee will be seen as heartless to many and will damage our relationship with other countries.

Even if someone isn't related to an American citizen, he or she might still be able to make a valuable contribution to our society.

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This will raise costs for U.S. farmers and consumers.