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Daniel J. Tichenor: Dividing Lines

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Introduction

THIS STUDY IS an inquiry into the politics of American immigration control over more than two centuries. The revered historian Oscar Handlin once observed that any adequate treatment of “the course and effects of immigration” on our country “involved no less a task than to set down the whole history of the United States.”¹ Fortunately, my purposes here are much more modest. Few of the leaders of the early republic could have guessed how profoundly immigration would influence U.S. national development. Yet almost every subsequent generation has readily understood the capacity of newcomers to dramatically alter the American society that received them. Each has had at its disposal ample evidence that the demographic transformations introduced by robust immigration often translate into important economic, social, and political change. Given these high stakes, it is little wonder that U.S. policies governing immigrant admissions and rights have been the object of significant political struggle throughout American history. My chief aim in this volume is to provide a fresh analytic account of these pivotal struggles, of the immigration policies that prevailed, and of the recurrent and emergent processes that shaped both over time—processes not easily revealed in the short time horizons of most contemporary social science research. It is a story of contested change in a country celebrated and reviled for its political inertia.

Nations define themselves through the official selection and control of foreigners seeking permanent residence on their soil.² Immigration policy involves not only regulating the size and diversity of the population, but also the privileging of certain visions of nationhood, social order, and international engagement. For Americans who have traditionally disagreed over whether theirs is truly “a nation of immigrants,” to borrow the memorable phrase of John F. Kennedy (or more precisely, that of his ghostwriter), these regulatory decisions have been especially difficult.³ In nearly every era of U.S. history, there has been fierce debate on the economic, social, cultural, and national security consequences of new immigration. Whereas native-born citizens and leaders tend to mythologize their sojourner past (the slave trade is conveniently excised from this iconography), they have often clashed over whether the latest arrivals compare favorably with those who came before.

For all of the conflict that this issue has inspired in American national

politics, it is striking how many of these struggles have culminated in dramatic policy innovations that set distinctive regulatory patterns for extended periods of U.S. history. Table 1.1 helps capture the scope of historical policy change by providing an overview of major federal immigration legislation since the Gilded Age. Later chapters also highlight significant judicial and administrative policy activism during the same periods. Figure 1.1 presents a picture of the changing shape of legal immigration to the United States since the 1820s (when official immigration statistics were first kept). The development of federal immigration policy reflects important patterns and variations over time, including long-term shifts between restricting and expanding immigration opportunities. Save for the fleeting Alien and Sedition Acts, the national government embraced an essentially laissez-faire approach to immigration for many decades after the founding.⁴ Immigration reforms of the late-nineteenth century brought both sweeping Chinese exclusion policies and limited screening of other immigrant groups; entry for most white European newcomers remained unfettered at the close of the Gilded Age. During the Progressive Era and the 1920s, immigration opponents fought successfully for increasingly draconian restrictions targeted at southern and eastern Europeans as well as nonwhites. The result was a fiercely restrictionist policy regime based on national origins quotas and racial exclusions that endured well after the Second World War. During the 1960s, national origins quotas were dismantled in favor of a new preference system that reserved most annual visas for immigrants with family connections to U.S. citizens and permanent residents. In subsequent years, economic uneasiness and unprecedented levels of Asian, Latin American, and Caribbean immigration contributed to a surge of popular anti-immigrant views in the country. Nevertheless, national policymakers adopted several major reforms in recent decades that significantly expanded immigrant admissions and rights. Although many scholars point to a “new nativism” emerging in American politics during the past decade,⁵ the policy impact of modern restrictionists has been remarkably meager.

The central puzzle to be addressed in this book is how and why these decidedly expansive and restrictive policy regimes have emerged from American immigration politics over time. That is, how do we explain why the U.S. national state has been quite receptive to immigrants during long stretches of its history, while it has pursued decisive restrictions on the number and characteristics of newcomers in other periods? More generally, why have certain ideas, social interests, and political actors triumphed over others in periodic struggles over immigration policy in U.S. history? These are the questions I attempt to parse in the pages that follow. I do so by analyzing national immigration policymaking *across* American political development. To truly understand the broad patterns

TABLE 1.1
Overview of Major U.S. Immigration Legislation

<i>Historical Period</i>	<i>Legislation/Year</i>	<i>Major Provisions</i>
Gilded Age	Immigration Act (1875)	Bars prostitutes and criminals
	Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)	Makes Chinese laborers inadmissible
	Immigration Act (1882)	Bars convicts, “lunatics,” “idiots,” and those “likely to become a public charge” and establishes head tax on immigrants
	Contract Labor Act (1885)	Prohibits contract labor admissions
	Chinese Exclusion Act (1888)	Extends Chinese exclusion
	Immigration Act (1891)	Creates federal immigration bureaucracy; authorizes deportation of illegal aliens
	Progressive Era and 1920s	Immigration Act (1903)
Gentlemen’s Agreement (1907)		Severely limits Japanese immigration
Immigration Act (1907)		Creates Dillingham Commission; increases head tax; creates new exclusion categories
Immigration Act (1917)		Imposes literacy test for admission; bars virtually all Asians from entry
National Quota Law (1921)		Limits immigration of each nationality to 3% of the number of foreign-born of that nationality living in the U.S. in 1910
National Origins Act (1924)		Sets annual quotas for each nationality at 2% of the number of persons of that nationality in the U.S. as determined by the 1890 census.
National Quota Law (1929)		Apportions annual quotas of 1924 for each country according to each nationality’s percentage of 1920 census
New Deal and World War II Years	Immigration Act (1940)	INS transferred from Labor to Justice Department as national security measure

TABLE 1.1 (*cont.*)

<i>Historical Period</i>	<i>Legislation/Year</i>	<i>Major Provisions</i>
The 1940s and 1950s	Bracero Program (1943)	Bilateral agreements with Mexico, British Honduras, Barbados, and Jamaica provide for guestworkers
	Act of December 17 (1943)	Repeals Chinese exclusion in favor of meager quotas
	War Brides Act (1945)	Allows for immigration of foreign-born spouses and children of U.S. military personnel
	Displaced Persons Act (1948)	Facilitates admission of European refugees
	Internal Security Act (1950)	Expands grounds for both exclusion and deportation; establishes alien registry
	Immigration and Naturalization Act (1952)	Reaffirms national origins quota system; adds new grounds for exclusion based on political activities, ideology, and sexual preference
	Refugee Relief Act (1953)	Grants permanent residence to 214,000 European refugees
The 1960s and 1970s	Refugee-Escapee Act (1957)	Grants special status to refugees fleeing communist regimes
	Cuban Refugee Act (1960)	Begins Cuban Refugee Program
	Refugee Assis- tance Act (1963)	Extends cash, medical, and educational support to refugees
	Bracero Reauthor- ization (1964)	Terminates Bracero Program
	Hart-Celler Act (1965)	Dismantles national origins quotas; begins seven-category preference system with an emphasis on family reunification
	Indochina Refu- gee Act (1975)	Begins Indochinese resettlement program
	INA Amendments (1976)	Sets per country limits (20K) for both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres
Indochinese Refu- gee Act (1977)	Admits 174,988 refugees from Indochina	

TABLE 1.1 (*cont.*)

<i>Historical Period</i>	<i>Legislation/Year</i>	<i>Major Provisions</i>
	INA Amendments (1978)	Establishes worldwide ceiling of 290,000 on annual immigrant admissions
The 1980s and 1990s	Refugee Act (1980)	Adopts UN definition of “refugee”; expands annual refugee admissions
	Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986)	Grants amnesty/permanent residence to 3 million undocumented aliens; imposes watered-down employer sanctions; establishes immigrant antidiscrimination agency in Justice Dept.; initiates special agricultural worker program
	Immigration Act (1990)	Increases annual immigration cap to 675,000; reaffirms family reunification preferences but adds employment-based and “diversity” visas
	Personal Responsibility Act (1996)	Limits immigrant access of noncitizens to public welfare benefits
	Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act (1996)	Strengthens border enforcement and employer sanctions; expedites the deportation process; establishes exceptions for noncitizen access to public benefits

and transformations of this crucial policy area requires a long-term historical perspective that may illuminate causal processes often obscured by short time-frames.

This study places special emphasis on the powerful interactions between political institutions, ideological traditions, and organized social interests that have received scant attention in prevailing society-centered theories of the immigration policy process. As the noted sociologist and immigration scholar Alejandro Portes recently noted, there is a glaring absence of “systematic theoretical analysis of both the external pressures impinging on the state and the internal dynamics of the legislative and administrative bodies [and other governing institutions] dealing with immigration.”⁶ This book attempts to redress some of these important gaps. American immigration control over time can be explained as much by changes in how public policy is formulated and implemented—and more

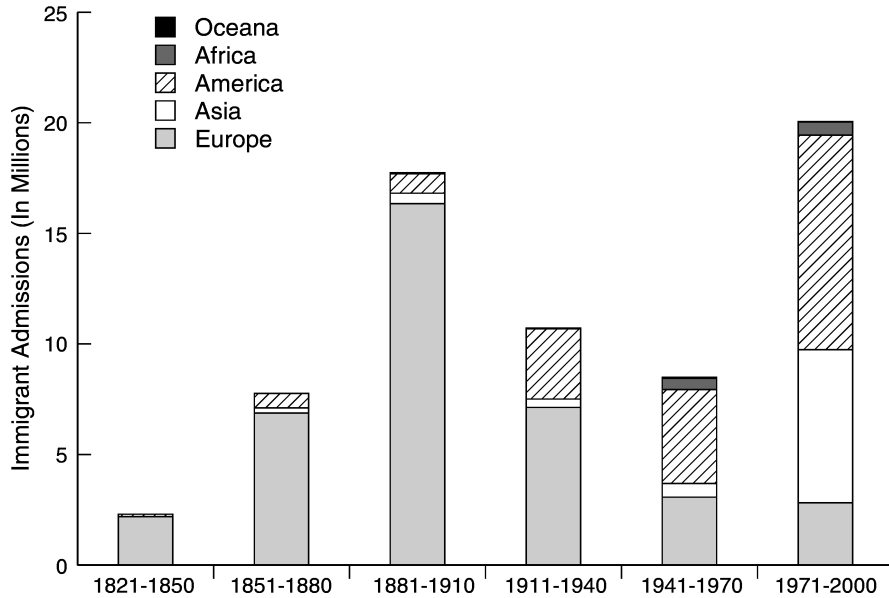


Fig. 1.1. U.S. Immigration by Region of Origin, 1820–2000 (Source: *INS Statistical Yearbook, 2001* [Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2001])

generally by how politics is organized in the United States—as by economic, social, and cultural forces. Like other recent works of historical institutionalism, this volume attempts to offer new insights about state-society relations and the possibilities of policy innovation in an American polity replete with structural veto-points and a political culture hostile to centralized state authority.⁷

While my chief purpose is to explain policy patterns and variations, two additional concerns inform my investigation of immigration control across U.S. political development. First, I also hope to highlight the capacity of both restrictive and expansive immigration policies to transform the American political landscape. John Kingdon has recently joined Seymour Martin Lipset in arguing that early immigration helped send the United States along a particular developmental pathway;⁸ yet we should bear in mind that subsequent waves of immigration—especially in large volumes and from new sources—have had the potential to be disruptive forces that may unsettle existing orders and possibly encourage political turning points. In this vein, policies that advance “new” immigration introduce demographic shifts in the American population that may alter other facets of U.S. political life. As we shall see, new immigrants have proven capable of influencing the electoral calculations of party leaders

and individual candidates, recasting how established interest groups define their policy goals, building new ethnic organizations to influence government actions, and even contributing directly to shifts in social science expertise with relevance to policymakers. Likewise, policies designed to restrict new immigration, although usually intended to preserve the socioeconomic and political status quo, have in fact routinely entailed the creation of new state structures and powers to enhance federal government regulation of aliens both at and within its borders. Government efforts to harness the disruptive force of immigration, however illusory as a goal, thus have produced significant national state-building in U.S. political history.

A second related concern of this book is to consider what immigration policymaking in American political development reveals about how different generations of government officials have interpreted the demands of liberal democracy and political community in the United States. Whether the product of what Rogers Smith views as contending traditions of liberal democracy and ascriptive inequality or what Ira Katznelson identifies as a liberal tradition whose “principled thinness” leaves it “vulnerable to illiberal temptations,” exclusionary visions of ethnic, racial, and religious hierarchy have found more than fleeting expression in government efforts to regulate immigrant admissions.⁹ Yet a rich variety of other ideological commitments also have influenced national immigration policy, including official decisions to advance expansive opportunities for alien admissions at times of popular animus toward aliens. Whereas commentators from A. Lawrence Lowell to Peter Brimelow have insisted that immigration controls reflect “the need for homogeneity in a democracy,” others, from Jane Addams to Hubert Humphrey, have countered that “American democracy has no genealogy.”¹⁰ Immigration policymaking over the long haul unveils a powerful rivalry of liberal, republican, and inegalitarian traditions in American political history, one that belies the hegemonic liberal consensus or solidifying “American Creed” described by scholars from Louis Hartz to Samuel Huntington.¹¹ But whereas many studies have examined these respective traditions in isolation of one another, this work explores the political and institutional processes that have influenced competition between these ideological streams and have translated them into concrete policies.

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical foundation for understanding immigration policymaking in American political development. I begin with a critique of various theories of public policy and American politics that attach special causal importance in the policy process to either economic conditions, the power of social interests, shared national values, public opinion, or electoral realignments. Each of these rubrics has some merit as an explanatory variable, but none adequately accounts for the evolu-

tion of American immigration policies. I advance instead a historical-institutionalist view that examines how the political activities of government officials and social groups are “conditioned” by distinct institutional and ideological orderings of the national state and political party systems.¹² As such, I hope to address what Richard McCormick calls the “politics-policy puzzle”: the significant but oft-neglected connections between broad changes in the national polity and policy formulation in American history.¹³

The analytical framework I present in chapter 2 places special emphasis on four interlocking processes that illuminate key patterns and transformations of U.S. immigration policy across American political history. First, I argue that the exceptional fragmentation of power in the American governmental system has long unleashed an institutional dynamism that presents social groups and other policy activists with changing structural opportunities and constraints to pursue their policy goals. Following in the tradition of political scientists like E. E. Schattschneider, I assume that political institutions are not neutral but in fact provide unequal access and leverage to distinct actors and social groups.¹⁴ Individuals and groups who have secured favorable policy outcomes in national struggles over immigration typically have enjoyed special structural advantages over their opponents under given institutional arrangements of the national state and party system. As much as other policy domains, decisive triumphs and nonincremental immigration reforms have been hard to achieve due to the abundance of “veto-points” in American government, thus often biasing the process in favor of existing policy patterns. At the same time, a fragmented American constitutional structure and ever-changing political institutions have meant that dominant political actors and structures may be displaced over time. To understand the possibilities of major policy innovation requires knowledge of how immigration activists have exploited new institutional openings in American governing institutions. Equally striking is the extent to which the guardians of existing immigration policies have consciously built and actively maintained institutional supports for their policy regimes.

Second, I suggest that the dynamics of U.S. immigration policy have long been influenced by the making and *remaking* of distinctive political coalitions on this issue that cut across familiar partisan and ideological lines. At least since the late-nineteenth century, this policy domain has divided pro-immigration free marketeers and restrictionist cultural exclusionists on the American Right, and pro-immigration cosmopolitans and restrictionist economic protectionists on the American Left. As a result, it would be hard to think of an area of U.S. public policy that has engendered more incongruous political alliances in American history.¹⁵ And it is precisely the creation of these unstable yet powerful liberal-conservative

coalitions over the years that I argue has proven crucial to achieving major immigration reform in the United States. Significantly, the relative power of the pro-immigration and restrictionist coalitions have shifted over time as new interest groups and political actors have emerged and as older ones have redefined their policy goals. For example, the organization of new nationality groups in Washington (an important by-product of past immigration policies) and decisive shifts in organized labor's immigration agenda have significantly affected the coalitional balance of power. Policy changes have been closely tied to the possibilities of rebuilding Left-Right coalitions to support new policies. But such coalitional breakthroughs have been anything but routine. To avoid the profoundly disorienting and acrimonious politics invited by immigration reform efforts, national political leaders often have attempted to frustrate major action on this issue. Likewise, the tremendous difficulties of building new liberal-conservative coalitions frequently have vexed policy reformers. Although these challenges to coalition building have tended to reinforce the policy patterns of a given period, the episodic rise of new groups and alliances in immigration politics have created opportunities for policy transformation.

A third process that I shall examine is the significant role played by professional expertise in immigration policy making at least since the Progressive Era. At key junctures in each period of political struggle over immigration control, the national state has privileged certain kinds of immigration expertise or social knowledge in the investigations of congressional committees, federal bureaucracies, and special commissions. Privileged expertise has long influenced the very framing of immigration as a national political issue, breathing life into a dominant immigration narrative that resolves competing "causal stories" and helps shape concrete policy responses.¹⁶ Tellingly, competing actors and social groups have understood the importance of causal stories and expert ideas in national immigration politics, recognizing that "the definition of alternatives is the supreme instrument of power."¹⁷ Social science expertise on immigration, as we shall see, has tended to intertwine empirical and normative elements, reflecting historically embedded interests, values, and cultural predispositions. Nonincremental policy change has relied on the privileging of fresh expertise by the national state and on the construction of a newly dominant immigration narrative to rationalize major policy departures. In turn, because prevailing immigration narratives and policy experts have been hard to dislodge, their persistence has fortified existing policy patterns.

Finally, new international crises or threats episodically have served as important catalysts for major immigration reform, altering the incentives and capacities of political actors to break policy stalemates. This is hardly

surprising given the fact that immigration control represents a realm of government action that intersects domestic and foreign policy. International strains sometimes have fueled a traditional American impulse toward isolationism and a more modern and inward-looking nationalism that views a homogeneous population as the foundation of a strong state. Heightened animus toward foreign elements in these periods of isolationist fervor have extended naturally to immigrants and other aliens, especially those deemed most threatening to national uniformity. And immigration restrictionists at times have skillfully channeled these xenophobic energies into decisive shifts favoring a particular immigration narrative and attendant policy innovations. Yet other global pressures, such as Cold War competition with the Soviet Union or competitive world trade, have triggered transitions from isolationist to internationalist conceptions of the nation's global role, with the effect of expanding political openings for pro-immigration initiatives. Indeed, initiatives perceived as responsive to international pressures on the United States frequently have drawn cross-party support in government and steeled officials to advance initiatives opposed by key organized interests and mass publics. Whether producing isolationist and internationalist reactions, new global threats or imperatives have proven to be a significant impetus for major immigration reform. Interestingly, specific policy responses often have been formulated by immigration activists before a crisis emerges, with adroit immigration reformers exploiting global strains to achieve long-desired policy outcomes.

As chapter 2 elucidates, the four processes just described do not operate in isolation of each other. Social scientists often have a penchant for separating causal forces from one another, seeking to disaggregate variables for the laudable purpose of determining which are most influential. However, such efforts typically have proven insufficient, if not quixotic, when applied to the daunting puzzles of immigration policymaking in America; noble designs for parsimonious explanation too often have culminated in an unsatisfying reductionism. Disaggregation routinely obscures crucial interlocking processes that lie at the heart of government actions. Indeed, I argue that the dynamic interplay of historically changing political institutions, policy alliances, privileged expertise, and international pressures has profoundly shaped American immigration policies over time. Together these four processes illuminate the enormous challenges and complexities of achieving major policy innovation in a fragmented political system replete with veto-points. Yet they also capture the possibilities of innovation in a U.S. polity whose governing institutions, social interests, and dominant political ideals are often changing.

Chapters 3 through 9 are chronological and developmental, intended both to explain the broad patterns and transformations of American im-

migration policy in distinctive periods and to reveal how past political events may build on one another. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze the early nationalization of American immigration policy during the nineteenth century's Gilded Age, a period that culminated in limited if not lax regulation of European immigration and sweeping exclusion of Chinese immigration. How do we explain these policy outcomes? Moreover, why were significant new capacities carved out for the U.S. national state to regulate immigration at a time when centralized government was in retreat? The answers, I suggest in chapters 3 and 4, lie within the operations of the nineteenth century U.S. "state of courts and parties." Whereas "party procedures lent operational coherence to the disjointed institutions of the governmental apparatus," Stephen Skowronek notes of this time, "court proceedings determined the meaning and the effect of the law itself."¹⁸

These institutional arrangements were pivotal to the politics of European immigration control from the nation's founding to the end of the nineteenth century, playing a prominent role in frustrating nativist assaults on Irish, German, and other European admissions. Chapter 3 offers a "path dependence" argument to account for the steady expansion of European inflows of this century even after several momentous judicial rulings hastened the nationalization of U.S. immigration policy. At a time of low immigration, plentiful land, and labor scarcity, the nation's early political leaders established easy naturalization for European immigrants while eschewing federal controls over their admission. The rise of mass-based parties and universal white male suffrage in the Jacksonian era reinforced broad opportunities for European immigration. The Democratic party almost from its inception courted immigrant voters by opposing nativist policy goals. Although the Republican party was sometimes prone to anti-immigrant nationalism, it also was attentive to pro-immigration constituents and eager to prod national economic development through immigrant labor. Judicial activism of the 1870s ultimately led to limited federal regulation of European admissions, but the vibrant partisan and electoral politics was routinely inhospitable to nativist policy designs throughout the nineteenth century. As a result, national restrictions on European inflows were quite modest for more than a century.

The politics of Chinese exclusion presented in chapter 4 offers a very different picture of the immigration policies produced by the early American "state of courts of parties." During the Gilded Age, anti-Chinese activists of the Pacific Coast discovered that they could galvanize robust cross-party, Left-Right support for their proposals in Washington at a time of intense partisan competition for Western votes. Unlike their European counterparts, Chinese newcomers were essentially powerless to resist new exclusionary laws, given their lack of political access or leverage

in U.S. courts or partisan elections of the nineteenth century. A broad alliance of politicians and social groups converged behind an immigration narrative that portrayed Chinese sojourners as servile, racially inferior, and fundamentally unassimilable—an exception to virtuous mainstream immigration from traditional European sources. Finally, early presidential resistance to Chinese exclusion due to treaty obligations carried little weight in this isolationist era, and was easily subordinated to the pressing electoral calculations of party managers.

The policy patterns that emerged in the 1880s and 1890s—sweeping Chinese exclusion and very mild regulation of European admissions—became the subject of renewed political conflict in the early-twentieth century. In chapter 5, I examine the monumental struggle between immigration defenders and restrictionists in the first three decades of this century, and address why the latter ultimately triumphed so decisively despite many formidable impediments. During the Progressive Era, opponents of immigration noted with dread that the national origins of most newcomers to the United States were shifting steadily from northern and western to southern and eastern European sources. New activists called for policy innovations that targeted this “new” European immigration for sharp restriction. But these reformers encountered stiff resistance from an unlikely coalition of xenophiles, including various nationality groups, liberal social reformers devoted to cultural pluralism, and business organizations like the National Association of Manufacturers, which hoped to maintain cheap immigrant labor. Opposing camps also formed in the legislative and executive branches, with congressional party leaders and presidents often derailing restrictionist designs. Moreover, champions of existing policies offered compelling pro-immigration narratives that challenged nativist accounts.

Yet restrictionists made the most of institutional changes within the national state that increasingly insulated immigration policymaking from political parties and mass publics, including immigrant voters. They came to dominate congressional immigration committees, a fact that assumed great importance as the strength of party leadership receded in the legislative branch after 1910–11. Like other reformers of the time, restrictionists took advantage of new structural openings for direct advocacy by organized interests in Washington. And nativists enjoyed special influence over the expert findings of two federal immigration commissions, bestowing scientific legitimacy on an essentially eugenicist narrative that portrayed southern and eastern Europeans as *racially* inferior to earlier immigrants and linked these newcomers to a host of new strains on an uneasy American society. This narrative had powerful resonance for a vital new Left-Right coalition comprised of organized labor, patriotic societies, the Brahmin Immigration Restriction League, Southern conserva-

tives, and reform-minded scholars. When the First World War and the Red Scare stoked nationalist anxieties to a new crescendo, pro-immigration nationality groups retreated, business interests reevaluated their policy goals, and an internationalist president lost the power to derail nativist reforms. Against this backdrop, restrictionists were well positioned to channel national security jitters into specific policy innovations that fused immigration control with racial hierarchy. The national origins quota system was born.

Compared to the ambitious immigration lawmaking of earlier years, the 1930s and 1940s are striking for their relative legislative quietude on immigration questions. As chapter 6 discusses, daunting political and structural barriers stood in the way of immigration reform. Eager to avoid issues that might polarize a fragile New Deal coalition, Franklin D. Roosevelt and his lieutenants worked to keep immigration and refugee initiatives off the public agenda. On those rare occasions when immigration reform proposals did receive legislative consideration, they were derailed by hostile congressional immigration committees, which zealously guarded the national origins quota system.

Beyond the legislative arena, however, a two-tiered regulatory regime emerged in these years with fateful consequences for two migrant groups: Jewish refugees and Mexican farmworkers. Frustrated by uneven enforcement at stateside immigration stations like Ellis Island, restrictionists empowered new State Department agencies to control immigrant inspections overseas. Using broad discretion, State Department officials took steps during the Second World War to deny admission to Jewish refugees. A very different regulatory tier dealt with Mexican guestworkers. During this period, an “iron triangle” of Southwestern employers (especially agricultural growers), Western and Southern chairs of congressional immigration committees, and federal immigration bureaucrats supported the legal and illicit importation of Mexican labor. Under pressure from growers to secure cheap Mexican labor, Southern and Western congressmen reasoned that unlike Asians and new European immigrants, Mexican farmworkers were easily “returnable” and thus posed no threat of becoming permanent members of the political community. A formal guest-worker program and lax enforcement along the United States–Mexican border ensured that Southwestern employers had a steady supply of cheap labor. This chapter makes clear that the details of administration can have profound policy implications.

Chapter 7 examines the intense battles over alien admissions that re-emerged in American national politics from the waning stages of the Second World War to the dismantlement of national origins quotas in 1965. Once again, we find that the dynamism of national government institutions, policy alliances, expertise, and international affairs are pivotal in

remaking American immigration policy. Postwar presidents and congressional “committee barons” clashed over Cold War imperatives and their significance for refugee admissions and the national origins quota system; each used independent bases of institutional power to advance competing policy goals in the late 1940s and the 1950s. But pro-immigration reformers enjoyed dramatically new institutional openings in the 1960s, as conservative committee leaders were challenged in both houses of Congress by a growing number of younger and more activist members and as Kennedy and Johnson employed the ample resources of the modern presidency to pursue ambitious policy agendas. Shifting policy alliances among politically active social groups were also significant, most notably organized labor’s decision to repudiate national origins quotas it had endorsed for decades. In contrast to the Progressive Era, a new commission and other forms of institutionalized expertise assailed ethnic and racial distinctions in national immigration and refugee law. In 1965, a broad Left-Right coalition of politicians and organized interests embraced a fresh immigration narrative linking expansive policy initiatives to Cold War competition and civil rights reform. These foreign policy and civil rights concerns would make popular majoritarian views increasingly peripheral in an immigration policymaking process already dominated by centralized state actors, organized social groups, and policy experts.

Chapters 8 and 9 focus on the patterns and reforms of American immigration policy during the past three decades, a period in which the general public and a new restrictionist movement grew increasingly uneasy about unprecedented Third World immigration, large-scale illegal immigration, and crises of mass asylum. Opinion polls conducted throughout the period indicated that ordinary citizens favored reductions in nearly all forms of immigrant admissions. Chapter 8 discusses the politics of immigration control during the 1970s, a period that saw significant changes in the volume and regional origin of newcomers settling in the United States. This chapter examines the rise of a modern restrictionist movement and the response of national policymakers, which included the establishment of a respected bipartisan commission that advanced pro-immigration expertise. As we shall see, this period served as an important prelude to significant policy changes in the decade that followed.

The politics of immigration reform during the past two decades is the focus of chapter 9. Between 1980 and 1990, several major immigration reforms established more generous terms of refugee relief, increased opportunities for legal immigration, and extended unparalleled amnesty programs for undocumented aliens. Significantly, policymakers expected these innovations to primarily benefit nonwhite newcomers from Asia and Latin America. But this is only half of the contemporary immigration control story. Many observers perceived a sharp turn against immigration

in the United States after the election of 1994, which yielded a controversial anti-immigrant initiative in California and a new Republican leadership in Congress open to restrictionist proposals. Within a few years, however, efforts to reduce alien admissions had lost all momentum. The restrictionist assault on alien welfare and due process rights proved far more successful, but many of these rights were restored by the turn of the millennium. The resilience of expansive immigration policies during the past decade is just as striking as their creation in the decade before. This chapter suggests that two contrasting kinds of politics have promoted expansive immigration policies in this period: one rooted in immigrant enfranchisement and competitive democratic elections and the other in the insulation of elite decisionmakers from ordinary citizens.

I hope the pages that follow offer a fresh view of both immigration control and American political development. Neither can be fully understood without taking stock of the other. This is especially true of the broad patterns and transformations of U.S. immigration policy over time, which have been shaped considerably by processes of national political development. It is a story of the rich variety of institutional and ideological orderings that have emerged in American political history, and their surprising capacity to give form and substance to new policy regimes.