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**Deportation as a Mechanism of Racial Discrimination and Social Control: Analyzing
Effects of Border Patrol and INS from the 1920s to 2000s.**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL SATISFACTION OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE
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Abbreviations

BIA - Board of Immigration Appeals

DHS - Department of Homeland Security

DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

DREAM - Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors

FDR - Franklin Delano Roosevelt

ICE - Immigration and Naturalization Service

IIRIRA - Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (1996)

INS - Immigration and Naturalization Service

IRCA - Immigration Reform and Control Act (1986)

SAW - Special Agricultural Workers Program

Abstract

Deportation as a Mechanism of Policing: Analyzing The Foundations of Immigration
Service from the 1920s to 2000s

By Grace Medecky

The authority of the police to regulate entry and deport immigrants in the US today is very questionable given its highly unconstitutional actions and problematic enforcement methods. While in the limelight of American news and politics today, the unconstitutional and violent nature of law enforcement to dictate and act on regulations as applicable to immigration has existed throughout the 20th century. The establishment of the Border Patrol and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) in the 20th century established a precedent for an unregulated police power to demonize immigrants for the purposes of racial exclusion and social control. In this paper, I explore how the Border Patrol and the INS has formed its criteria for entry and enforcement of deportation based upon a white supremacist foundation. In the first two chapters, I focus on analyzing the establishment of these two entities to understand how the federal government granted enforcement powers to regulate immigration beyond immigration ports. In my last two chapters, I focus on the effects of designating these powers to a law enforcement agency in the latter half of the 20th century, and how the federal government reinforced their power to act without limitations.

I've focused my research on five specific time periods in congressional history in the 20th century that I argue held the most significant weight in shaping immigration policy today.

My research starts with the establishment of Border Patrol in 1924, the first land-border patrol created under federal law to enforce entry and deportation beyond designated immigration ports. Through analyzing the violence enacted by Border Patrol on communities namely across the Southern Border, I argue this held great influence in creating the INS in 1933, given similar broadly outlined powers to enforce and police the country's interior. After grappling with the establishment of two federally empowered agencies that exerted an unprecedented level of surveillance in the name of protecting national security, I demonstrate the affects these had in enacting the Bracero Program and large scale deportation of Mexican-Americans and citizens in the 1950s and 1960s. Lastly, I contrasted former President Ronald Reagan's amnesty program named the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 with former President Bill Clinton's punitive Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act in 1996. By analyzing these two pieces of legislation in the late 20th century, I argue that it laid the foundations for an uncontrollable, violent police power today, known as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In reconstructing this history, I demonstrate how the enumerated powers of law enforcement to regulate all instances of immigration and deportation has become greater over time, and with no limits placed on its authority.

I have incorporated various primary and secondary sources dealing in congressional legislation, written or verbal testimonies of those who were a victim of the violent tactics enacted by enforcement agents, newspaper articles, letters between federal representatives and enforcement officers, and historical accounts of America's immigration policy in the 20th century to put together this reconstruction of history and to make my argument. I utilized source material from the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Digital Public Library of

America to gather specific legislation, courtroom testimonies of leaders within these enforcement bureaus, and presidential speeches. I employed data recorded by Border Patrol, the INS, and the DHS and fact checked it against various newspaper accounts and historian records throughout the 20th century to provide specific numbers of rates of deportation and detention throughout this changing period. Lastly, I incorporated information from local libraries including the Escondido Public Library and relied on first hand accounts from historians such as Kelly Lytle Hernandez to highlight the testimonies of victims to the deportation system, whose voices have often been left out of historical accounts and federal policy.

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Thank you to all the people who have supported me in the process of completing this milestone in my academic career. As this thesis marks the last project in earning my degree for History of Public Policy, this would not have been possible if not for the people within the History Department and those in my personal life. Through your support and feedback, I have been able to submit my first published material in academia that I am excited to share with a broader audience.

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I would also like to thank our department instructor Professor Debra Blumenthal. Thank you for taking the time to carefully look through my paper and learn with me. Through revision after revision, you have provided me with valuable knowledge about how to tell this story with care and detail. You have kept me on track even when I was feeling overwhelmed or unsure of the direction I was heading in. Thank you for your strong encouragement in completing this paper, even when I was pushing the deadlines on completing my installments.

To my partner, my mom, my family and my friends, thank you for embracing my passion for knowledge and helping me expand it. Thank you for reading the early drafts of this project, for listening to me talk through my ideas before I began typing out the words, and supporting me through my anxiety to finish by the deadlines. This project is what I have been most proud of throughout my entire time at UCSB, but it truly would not have been completed without your encouragement to keep going. Before submitting my application to partake in this seminar, my intention to learn about this topic was a mere thought and I never thought I would make it into a ~70 page paper. Your perspectives and experiences have inspired me to publish, and I thank you all for helping with this.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge those who continue to fight against the injustices that hundreds of thousands of immigrants experience at the hands of ICE, Border Patrol, and a federal government that enables these actions. To the activists in the legal sector, greater academia, social workers, non-profit organizations and to all those that stand in solidarity with immigrants, your work is and continues to be immensely important in reuniting families and helping immigrants find home and community here. The fight for justice has been long but unwavering, and I hope to continue in the fight to end the human rights violations that are happening in detention centers and to continue to highlight the contributions that immigrants make in our communities everywhere. Our country is a nation of immigrants, and we would not be where we are today without them.

Introduction: How Did We Get Here?

“To preserve American standards for all our inhabitants, whether they were the descendants of former generations residing here or the most recent arrivals, restrictive immigration laws were passed. Restricted immigration is not an offensive but a purely defensive action. We cast no aspersions on any race or creed, but we must remember that every object of our institutions of society and Government will fail unless America be kept American.”- *President Calvin Coolidge’s Acceptance of the Republican Nomination for the American Presidency*

On January 7, 2026, 37-year-old Renee Nicole Macklin Good in Minneapolis, Minnesota dropped off her 6 year old son at daycare just before ICE agents confronted her hours later and accused her of attempting a hit and run. Videos of Good by witnesses on the scene show her being shot for arguing with ICE agents, yet she did not say or do anything threatening to these officers¹. In an aggressive response, the ICE agent immediately resorted to pulling his gun on her and shooting into her vehicle three times. These ICE agents fatally shot and killed her. They had killed a civilian in broad daylight in front of multiple cameras. Minnesota was outraged at Good’s murder, and immediately took to the streets of Minneapolis to protest. The videos quickly spread online and across news outlets, demonstrating the blatant injustice done to Good. People across the nation have followed suit to Minneapolis by organizing and protesting ICE’s inhumane methods. ICE killed a mother, a poet, and a wife. Yet, the federal administration has sided with and encouraged ICE. In an interview with New York Times reporters regarding Good’s murder, President Donald Trump stated “She behaved horribly, and then she ran him

¹ Stein, Robin; Lim, Devon; Khavin, Dmitriy; Cardia, Alexander; Toler, Aric; Bernier, Jeff. Video Analysis of ICE Shooting Sheds Light on Contested Moments. *The New York Times* (2026)
<https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000010648638/ice-shooting-renee-good-minneapolis-videos-analysis.html>

over.”² Then-Secretary of DHS Kristi Noem further solidified their support of ICE after the murder, stating that Good’s actions were “an act of domestic terrorism,” and the agent was acting in pure self defense³. Good is only one of the many killed by ICE agents this year, who have ramped up enforcement efforts since President Trump has reinstated its zero tolerance policy on immigration to prosecute and deport as many undocumented immigrants as possible⁴.

Renee Good’s murder has once again sparked discussion on the unconstitutionality of the power and practices of immigration enforcement in the United States. While news outlets have focused their news coverage on ICE’s atrocious methods on white Americans, these are the same methods that are used on immigrants every day. Through racial profiling, warrant-less searches in homes, and keeping individuals in detention centers for months on in separated from families, immigrants have been unjustly targeted, surveilled and detained by law enforcement through the puppeteering of the federal government. In a land that once welcomed many immigrants with open arms to cultivate new thought and ideas, the US government has increasingly placed more scrutiny over those who are permitted entry and those who must be expelled. The current executive administration under President Donald Trump has promised to implement the largest deportation removal program for whom the president deems “illegal,” and allowing immigration officials full authority to remove individuals they view as fitting within that category.

² Kanno-Youngs, Zolan. We Pressed Trump on His Conclusion About the ICE Shooting. Here’s What He Said. *New York Times* (2026) <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/08/us/politics/trump-minnesota-ice-shooting-video.html>

³ Ramirez-Urbe, Maria; Sherman, Amy. Experts question Noem calling Good a 'domestic terrorist.' Here's what the term means (2026)

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/experts-question-noem-calling-good-a-domestic-terrorist-heres-what-the-term-means>

⁴ Kandel, William A. The Trump Administration’s “Zero Tolerance” Immigration Enforcement Policy <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45266>

While curtailing immigration based on criteria of legal status has been a core tenant of the current president's political agenda, this process of granting authority to a police power to execute removals is not a new process. The legal process that granted law enforcement the authority to regulate what individuals could be excluded from entry and barred from returning can be traced back to the establishment of Border Patrol, when exclusion in the context of immigration became an enforceable power of a police entity. In this thesis, I trace this discussion to the federal government's purpose in establishing the Border Patrol and the INS in the early 20th century. I argue that these law enforcement entities have been built on a system of white supremacy designed to disfavor non-white immigrants, and that their main purpose is social control and racial exclusion. Furthermore, I argue that the federal government has granted and reinforced these powers in a law enforcement entity for the purpose of ethnic cleansing and making anti-immigrant, nativist sentiments an enforceable power. In my thesis, I deconstruct five historical events that I argue are most relevant to understanding immigration policy in the 20th century.

In my first chapter, I analyze the establishment of the US Border Patrol as the first police entity with designated powers to patrol along the border beyond immigration ports. I first employ letters from Frank Walton Berkshire, a former immigration officer within the Bureau of Immigration who proposed the idea of Border Patrol to the federal government as a necessary force to supplement entry officers. Through analysis of these letters contents and Berkshire's background in immigration of Chinese citizens, I argue that the original plan for establishing the Border Patrol had always been to enforce restrictions on non-white citizens. These letters act as a precursor to the 1924 Labor Appropriations Act that granted \$1 million and 450 patrol officers to Border Patrol. The Labor Act did not outline any specific powers that this new task force would

have, leading the entity to establish its own rules as it attempted to gain legitimacy. To understand its completely unregulated beginnings, I analyze how leadership in Border Patrol scouted young, white male recruits that had no background in enforcement or immigration. Further, most of these recruits came from the Texas Rangers, a federally unsanctioned, white supremacist policing entity. The characteristics of these recruits and their undesignated powers allowed the Border Patrol to racially profile, harass and enact violence on non-white immigrants crossing the border and residents who lived in the region.

In the second chapter, I reconstruct the merging of the Bureau of Immigration and Bureau of Naturalization into one entity, known as the INS. For FDR's presidential administration, the merger was meant to alleviate economic stress during the Great Depression. For immigration officials that were part of Border Patrol and federal immigration enforcement, the INS was meant to help legitimize Border Patrol's powers and extend them well into the country's interior. Whereas the Border Patrol could only surveil from approximately 50 miles from the US border, Executive Order 6166 allowed the INS to patrol within the country at any place and any time. This allowed deportation raids to occur more frequently in areas well beyond the border, such as the La Placita raid in Los Angeles in 1930. Additionally, the emergence of the INS in the 1930s restarted the process of voluntary departures and repatriation. These types of removals, while classified as voluntary, were enacted through the INS's fear-mongering tactics that if undocumented immigrants did not leave the country by their own means, they would increase the amount and severity of raids in public settings. These tactics led to one of the largest voluntary departure programs, known as the 1930s Mexican Repatriation program. The INS cited these tactics as necessary to curtail undocumented immigrants from entering or staying in the US,

regulations that were only ever enforced on non-white immigrants. These tactics were done in public spaces to humiliate and instill fear.

Third, I analyze how the INS and Border Patrol worked with the federal government to facilitate the Bracero Program and President Eisenhower's deportation program against Mexican Americans and citizens in the 1950s. Established during wartime, the Bracero Program exploited the labor of Mexican workers in the agriculture industry through a promise of the American dream. The federal government made short-term contracts with laborers, providing housing, pay and temporary visas in exchange for work. Once wartime ended, the federal government made Mexican laborers and families the scapegoats for the consequences of exploitation. In the 1950s, Eisenhower's administration employed the Border Patrol and the INS to enforce wide-scale detention and deportation of Mexican immigrants. Eisenhower gave the operation an intrinsically racist name to demonstrate deportation was a matter of racial exclusion, not just regulating immigration. Through analysis of testimonies of Bracero workers that lived through this period and public reactions to the program, I argue this program the federal government's weaponized deportation for the purpose of ethnic cleansing.

In my last chapter, I contrast two pieces of legislation in the late 20th century that re-shaped the future of immigration enforcement. I analyze President Reagan's IRCA, an Act that was meant to grant amnesty to undocumented immigrants living in America. It prioritized sanctions on employers who knowingly hired undocumented workers or didn't conduct thorough background checks before hiring. Although this program was meant to be a reform measure, its purpose in curtailing all "illegal immigration" advanced nativist sentiment. The structure of IRCA made sure that not all immigrants eligible for the program could be granted a pathway to

citizenship. In contrast to amnesty, I analyze the 1996 IIRIRA, an Act signed into law under President Clinton to place punitive measures on undocumented immigrants living in the US. Although these policy approaches differed from each other, they both further solidified the power of law enforcement to deport by any means necessary. Immigration policy in the late 20th century evidently shows that punitive measures and attempts at reform had the same effect in strengthening the authority of the Border Patrol and the INS. The federal government never penalized law enforcement for their unconstitutional methods, but continued to encourage it.

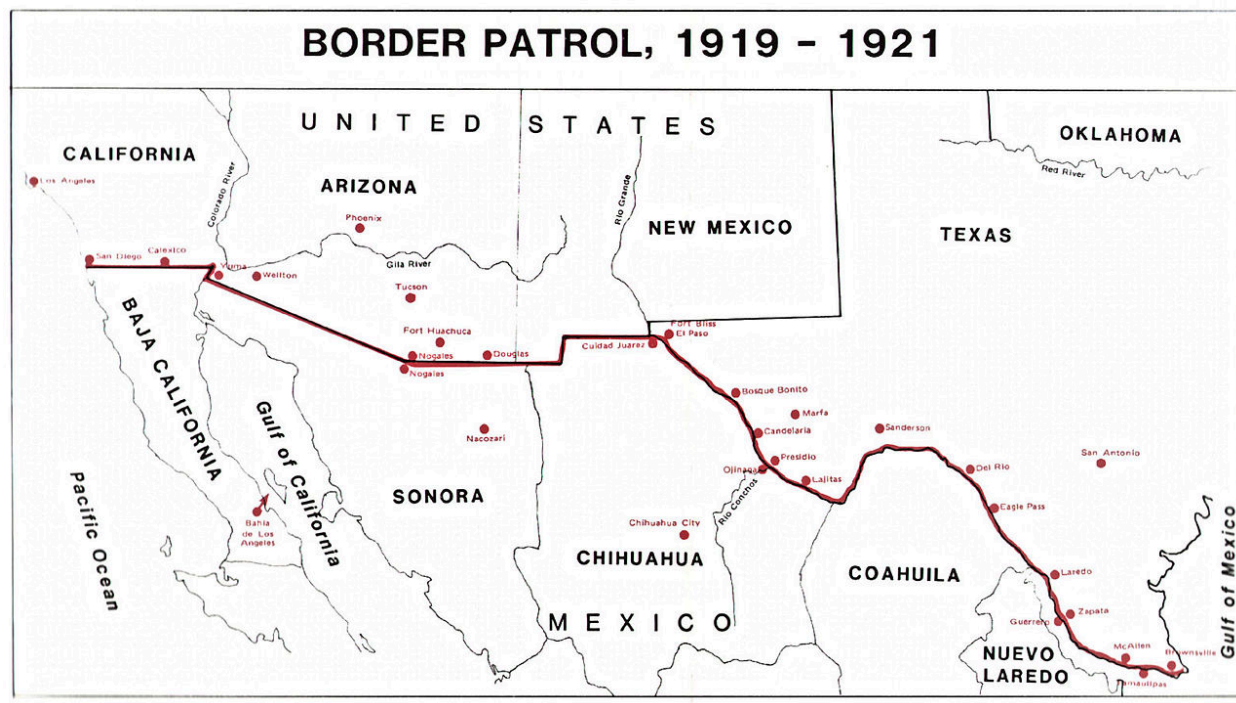
I acknowledge that the scope of this paper is limited because it only focuses on the 20th century and its central focus is the impact of exclusionist policy on Mexican immigrants. The history of exclusion in America extends well beyond the 20th century, and has been enacted on various ethnic and social groups. The history of deportation extends to events including but not limited to the assimilation of Native Americans, slave patrols against Black individuals, and exclusion of Chinese immigrants in the late 19th century. These effects certainly do have an impact on the establishment and cultivation of law enforcement to regulate immigration in the 20th century. However, I narrow the scope of my thesis for the following two reasons. One, the history of exclusion in America is too vast to thoughtfully and thoroughly explain in roughly 70 pages. All these impacts are important and have equally shaped immigration policy over the last two centuries, but requires a lengthier paper to explain these events in careful detail.

Second, I narrow my scope to focus on Mexican-Americans and Mexican citizens because these agencies were established for the primary purpose of regulating the Southern border. This is evident in the way that enforcement agents were tasked by leadership within these entities to prioritize surveillance on the US-Mexico border rather than Canadian border. In the

same vein, INS was directly responsible for exclusionist operations such as Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s and the Eisenhower administration's largest deportation program in American history, both of which are discussed in this paper. Enforcement on Mexican-Americans and citizens has also been a focal point of the current presidential administration, which is an additional reason for why I narrow my scope. While Border Patrol and the INS have been responsible for enforcing exclusionary policies on other non-white immigrant groups as well, of which some examples I have attempted to include in this thesis as well, I focus my scope on Mexican Americans and citizens because the federal government established these entities with enforcing these methods this group in particular. For these reasons, I narrow the scope of exclusion and enforcement but acknowledge the greater complexities that come with the history of immigration.

What happened to Renee Good has happened to citizens and non-citizens alike. Whether it is in public streets or behind closed doors in detention centers, ICE agents continue to commit egregious human rights violations everyday. Parents are ripped apart from their children, have been refused meals while in detention centers, or have not received medical services in emergencies. Due to the purposefully careless actions of ICE, undocumented immigrants have suffered severe physical and emotional trauma. In many of these cases, people have died while being detained or while in custody. These egregious actions are not just the product of the current administration's stance on immigration, but rather the accumulation of bad policy that has put undocumented immigrants in harm's way. My thesis analyzes how the federal government transferred the power to regulate entry and to deport to a law enforcement entity, which has been built upon a system of racial exclusion and social control.

The 1924 Labor Appropriations Act: The Beginnings of Policing Deportation



Map of US Border Patrol in 1920s (Figure 1)⁵

In 1924, the Labor Appropriations Act established the US Border Patrol as a formalized police power to police immigration. Prior to 1924, the federal government passed several exclusion acts directed at specific groups, namely, Chinese and Japanese immigrants. The federal government used deportation previously to expel immigrants during this time, but all deportations went through the court system. There was no physical policing institution that enforced deportation. Removals were in the hands of the federal government to send unwanted immigrants away, or allow them to self-deport. Immigration officers argued that a border patrol could actively enforce deportations without the lengthy process of the court system. After several exchanges with supporters for this border patrol, the Labor Appropriations Act authorized disbursement of funding and officers to start this land patrol. The Labor Appropriations Act was

⁵ Maurer, Mauer (1987), *Aviation in the US. Army, 1919- 1939*, United States Air Force Historical Research Center, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

coupled with the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, which further intended to limit the immigrant groups the government deemed ‘undesirable,’ or those likely to become a public charge⁶. The federal government often classified undesirable immigrants by conflated non-white migration with increased risk of becoming a public charge. The Labor Appropriations Act stated nothing about specific powers or limitations on Border Patrol, giving it unlimited authority to regulate who could cross into the US and who it could turn away. The Border Patrol’s main goal enforced a nativist, racially biased criteria primarily modeled after anti-Asian sentiments and anxieties of Mexican migration after the Mexican-American War.

The establishment of a police power to regulate the border sparked the idea that certain members of society who were seen as “undesirable” could be forcibly removed on the grounds of protecting national security. However, the Border Patrol employed race as a regulating factor for who was threatening and who was not. This police force was built upon decades of exclusion and racism against racial and ethnic groups that the federal government saw as a threat to national security. Throughout the 1920s, the Border Patrol was tasked by the federal government and leadership within the Bureau of Immigration to primarily enforce these restrictions on the Southern Border rather than the Northern Border, demonstrating deeper racial motivations behind exclusion. The federal government saw the Border Patrol as a way to enforce nativist removal policies on the basis that individuals were not white, Anglo-Saxon immigrants.

Through Border Patrol, the federal government granted the power of removal to this police force with broad, unlimited authority. It transferred the justice system’s authority to enact due process measures for deportation to an unskilled police entity. This change marked a new era for immigration, one that sought to close America’s relatively open borders only to white

⁶ Canaday, Margot. *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. STU-Student edition. Princeton University Press, 2009. <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.ucsb.edu/stable/j.ctt7t3vw>.

immigrants through any means necessary. While the power to deport was not specifically outlined in the Labor Appropriations Act, the Border Patrol granted this power to itself through creating its own rules and acting on removals throughout the 20th century. As the federal government sought to enhance strict scrutiny over the border, it gave Border Patrol police powers to “detain and search vehicles based only on a belief that someone was undocumented,” and they could operate on “a much lower standard of evidence compared to other police.”⁷ Whether the powers of Border Patrol was poorly outlined in the Labor Appropriations Act intentionally or not, the lack of restriction gave officers the justification to enact violence for the purpose of racial exclusion and social control. It was no accident that the Border Patrol pushed the limits of its authority to enforce restrictions on immigrants based on racial categories. As I analyze in the following chapter, this institution grew out of formalized white supremacist organizations such as the KKK and Texas Rangers. This establishment of police power to regulate began an era of legitimizing white immigration and formalizing deportation as a means to exclude non-white immigrant groups.

The Making of the Labor Appropriations Act of 1924



Frank Walton Berkshire, “The Godfather of Border Patrol” (Figure 2)⁸

⁷ Reece Jones. *Nobody is Protected: How the Border Patrol Became the Most Dangerous Police Force in the United States*. New York. Highbridge Audio and Blackstone Publishing. July 5, 2022. Pp. 47.

⁸ Immigration and Naturalization Service Official Frank W. Berkshire, 1933. *Los Angeles Times*, 1933.

Frank Walton Berkshire, a former inspector of Chinese citizens entering the United States, created a proposal to the federal government that would eventually lead to the Labor Appropriations Act of 1924. In 1918, he was placed as the Supervising Inspector of the Mexican Border District⁹. During his time as a patrolman along the Southern Border, he believed there was a problem with ‘enemy immigrants’ who evaded entry ports to enter the US¹⁰. He also believed that entry ports were severely understaffed with immigration officers, causing more people to cross ‘illegally’. He proposed to create an entirely new task force to solve these issues. His plan, titled “Control of Persons Coming to the United States During the War,” focused on limiting immigration along the US-Mexico border by centralizing officers in Texas and Arizona. The original plan did not include any active enforcement of the US-Canadian border, classifying Mexican and some European immigrants as “enemy immigrants” that caused these problems¹¹. Between 1918 and 1920, Berkshire wrote three memorandums to the Commissioner-General of the Bureau of Immigration to create this land-patrol. In one letter on February 5, 1918, he included reports from multiple immigration officers stationed across Texas and Arizona that cited various reasons why the establishment of a land-border patrol was necessary. The reports included concerns of staffing shortages, inadequate coordination, and a lack of central authority figures, which Berkshire argued interfered with the Border Patrol’s ability to prevent “illegal crossings” of “enemy aliens” crossing the border from Mexico. He even suggested that the US Army be used for further assistance “to more carefully guard against the surreptitious entry and

⁹ Department of Commerce and Labor. Official Register (1918), p. 74
<https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2018-May/Pages%20from%201911%20Official%20Register.pdf>

¹⁰ US Department of Labor. Letter from Frank Walton Berkshire to Commissioner-General of Immigration. (1918)
<https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2018-May/February%205%2C%201918%20Berkshire%20memorandum%20to%20the%20Commissioner%20General.pdf>

¹¹ US Department of Labor. Letter from Frank Walton Berkshire to Commissioner-General of Immigration.

departure of enemy aliens and agents.”¹² In 1920, Berkshire overtly connected his nativist fears over border crossings of Mexican citizens to what he classified as lawless behavior to emphasize the immediate need to establish a land patrol. He wrote the following to the Commissioner-General:

*Renegades crossing the border from Mexico in raids on peaceful communities or cattle stealing expeditions are usually aliens – Mexicans; persons clandestinely carrying contagion are in the same class. The same may be said of those who surreptitiously introduce cotton or cotton seed carrying boll weevil infection. Liquor smugglers are in the same class. The illustrations might be carried out ad infinitum.*¹³

Berkshire’s proposal to the Commissioner-General became law six years later. On May 28, 1924, the US Congress convened for the appropriation of funding from the Department of Labor to establish the Border Patrol. It reallocated \$4,500,000 to be spent under the Secretary of Labor for salary, expenses, and maintenance costs within the Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Naturalization¹⁴. The purpose of the funding was outlined as the following:

For enforcement of the laws regulating immigration of aliens into the United States, including the contract labors laws {...]; enforcement of the provisions of the Act of February 5, 1917, entitled ‘An Act to regulate the immigration of aliens to and the

¹² Frank Walton Berkshire. Letter from Frank Walton Berkshire to the Commissioner-General of Immigration. 5 Feb. 1918. Washington DC National Archives Records.

¹³ US Department of Labor. Letter from Frank Walton Berkshire to Commissioner General of Immigration (1920)<https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2018-May/August%204%2C%201920%20Berkshire%20memorandum%20to%20the%20Commissioner%20General.pdf>

¹⁴ Public Law 68-153, 43 Stat. 784 (1925).

*residence of aliens in the United States, and Acts amendatory thereof; preventing the unlawful entry of aliens into the United States, by the appointment of suitable officers to enforce the laws in relation thereto.*¹⁵

Congress appropriated \$1,000,000 of this funding to the first land-border patrol. All 450 patrol officers were given a \$1,300 starting salary. \$100,000 from the budget was made immediately available to the Border Patrol to begin organizing and recruiting officers. The Border Patrol leadership envisioned this force to act as mounted guards, patrolling the border on horseback. 24% of these new recruits had worked under Berkshire in the Bureau of Immigration¹⁶. Berkshire became one of the primary leaders of Border Patrol, where he continued to oversee immigration along the US-Mexico Border before serving as chief inspector of the US-Canada Border starting in 1932¹⁷.

The formation of the Border Patrol supplemented the passage of the 1924 Immigration Act, which implemented a quota system on immigrant entry based on national origin. The federal government authorized the Secretary of Labor to take unauthorized immigrants into custody and deport them if “found to have been at the time of entry not entitled under this Act to enter the United States.”¹⁸ Two months later, pursuant to Section 23 of the Immigration Act of 1924¹⁹, Border Patrol could officially enforce removals against those who violated entry or quota requirements by policing along the Border. With a new physical task force to act on these

¹⁵ Public Law 68-153, 43 Stat. 784 (1925).

¹⁶ James Dupree. *The Roots of the Border Patrol: Line Riders and the Bureaucratization of US-Mexican Border Policing, 1894-1924*. University of Texas Press (2020). Pp. 122.

¹⁷ Border Patrol Museum. Chiefs of the Border Patrol (n.d.)
<https://borderpatrolmuseum.com/chiefs-of-the-border-patrol/>

¹⁸ Immigration Act of 1924, Pub. L. No. 68-139, 43 Stat. 153 (1924).

¹⁹ Immigration Act of 1924, 43 Stat. 153.

powers, Border Patrol enacted sweeping removals throughout the US. Whereas total deportations stood at 24,280 in 1923, these numbers jumped to 36,693 in 1924.²⁰

The federal government placed enhanced scrutiny on the southern borders, turning to a more punitive immigration system. It targeted specific racial groups that the government deemed undesirable. At the time, the 1924 Immigration Act did not have quota limits on Mexican citizens. The federal government primarily enforced scrutiny on the southern border primarily because many European immigrants attempted to evade quota limits by crossing through these entry ports. However, the federal government began placing scrutiny over Mexicans immigrants who moved to the US as war refugees following the Mexican Revolution.²¹ Border Patrol's focus on immigration through Mexico reinforced racial stereotypes against Mexican citizens eventually led to the organization's federally sanctioned violent outbursts on innocent civilians in the decade to come.

The Border Patrol acted on white supremacist beliefs to regulate immigration. It was the manifestation of racist and nativist ideas throughout the previous century. The Labor Appropriations Act was heavily influenced by racial exclusion on non-white immigrants, including a specific clause that appropriated money for "expenses of returning to China all Chinese persons found to be unlawfully in the United States."²² The strong focus on a Border Patrol dedicated to surveilling the southern border also demonstrated white fears over migration from Mexico. The Border Patrol portrayed Mexican citizens as lawless and justified violence against them. The Border Patrol's deportation mechanisms were built on instilling white superiority, which were only fueled by legitimized power granted by the federal government to

²⁰ Table 39. *Aliens Removed or Returned: Fiscal Years 1892 to 2019*. OHSS. <https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/yearbook/2019/table39>.

²¹ Steinhauer, Jason. History of Mexican Immigration to the U.S. in the Early 20th Century. (2015) <https://blogs.loc.gov/kluge/2015/03/the-history-of-mexican-immigration-to-the-u-s-in-the-early-20th-century/>

²² Public Law 68-153, 43 Stat. 784 (1925).

physically enact these measures. Instead of open borders with little governmental regulation, Congress turned to policing as a way to effectively control who was allowed entrance and those who could be deported based on racial categories.

The 1924 Border Patrol: Who Were They and What Power Did They Have?

The makeup of the 1924 Border Patrol were young, white males with little to no skill in immigration enforcement. These service men consisted of “former cowboys, skilled workers, and small ranchers” to take up law enforcement positions.²³ These men tended to engage in drinking and in-group socializing which bred a culture of toxic masculinity and prejudice against non-white immigrants. Additionally, the Border Patrol officers were not given any training by their leadership, and often trained through first hand experience²⁴. The characteristics of these new recruits, their vices, and the lack of structure encouraged destructive behaviors that terrorized non-white groups, specifically against Mexican citizens. Tasked with patrolling the US-Mexico border, these officers made the borderlands an unsafe territory where violence ran rampant against Mexican citizens with no repercussions.

Most of the Border Patrol recruits were descendants of the Texas Rangers, a state-initiated task force that harassed Indigenous groups, Black runaway slaves, and Mexican citizens that it saw as undesirables.²⁵ After the Mexican American War of 1846 to 1848, the Texas Rangers primarily focused their task force on the Southern US border. In 1901, the Texas Governor granted the Rangers with complete jurisdictional policing powers. The state

²³ Mae M Ngai. “The Strange Career of the Illegal Alien: Immigration Restriction and Deportation Policy in the United States, 1921–1965.” *Law and History Review* 21, no. 1 (2003): 69–108. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3595069>.

²⁴ Kelly Lytle Hernández. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnfhs>. Pp. 19-20.

²⁵ Kelly Lytle Hernández. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnfhs>. Pp. 19-20.

government's goal was that the Rangers "protect the frontier against marauders and thieves, and to suppress lawlessness and crime."²⁶ This assignment led the Texas Rangers to commit various brutal killings of Mexican citizens along the border, including shootings of unarmed civilians in one-off instances of suspected crime or to justify violence regarding political tension in the region. The case of Gregorio Cortez was one of the most infamous of the Rangers' bloodshed. After Cortez had killed a sheriff who attempted to arrest him with no evidence or grounds, the Rangers went on a rampage throughout Southern Texas to take revenge²⁷. They targeted Mexican individuals as the scapegoat for this violence. In instances where towns with primarily Mexicano populations rose up to defend these unjust killings, they were met with horrific shootings and public massacres. Once recruiting for the Border Patrol opened in 1924, these same men signed up to continue the legacy of racial violence along the US-Mexico Border.



Photograph of Texas Rangers (Figure 3)²⁸

²⁶ Charles H Harris III and Louis R. Sadler. *Texas Rangers and the Mexican Revolution, The Bloodiest Decade 1910-1920*. University of New Mexico Press (2004), Albuquerque. Pp. 17.

²⁷ Kelly Lytle Hernández. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnfhs>. Pp. 20.

²⁸ Texas Rangers. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph43196/>. (Accessed March 18, 2026.)

These initial officers were not given any specific uniforms while on the job. The government only provided their badges and guns, along with the \$1,680 yearly salary that amounts to \$30,648 today when adjusting for inflation costs.²⁹ These men rode on horseback, where they were made to provide their own furnishings and saddles. They did not have any formalized uniform until December 1924, when funding was approved.³⁰ These uniforms were fully green, with gold buttoned coats, slacks, wide brimmed hats, thick black belts and a case for revolvers.

The whiteness of Border Patrol is the most significant factor that shaped the behaviors of immigration patrolling. The majority of Border Patrol officers were single, Anglo-Saxon white men who came from working class backgrounds³¹. They did not own land and often worked in similar fields as other non-white immigrant workers. Job competition fueled xenophobic and racist sentiments, as these white workers viewed immigrants as a threat to economic security and job stability. Border Patrol officers harbored these sentiments, justifying exclusion of non-white workers through revenge tactics throughout the late 1920s. The whiteness of Border Patrol extended racial violence against all non-white immigrants, especially on Mexicanos living along the southern border.

The new recruits of the 1924 Border Patrol were economically and racially motivated to police immigration. The intertwining of white supremacist ideas and lack of skilled immigration enforcement allowed this Border Patrol to act on the powers laid out by the 1924 Immigration Acts without accountability. It entrenched ideas that non-white immigrants were threats to

²⁹ Border Patrol History, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, last modified September 25, 2025. <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/history>

³⁰ *Exhibitions: Uniforms of the Border Patrol*. Border Patrol Museum (2024). Accessed November 22nd, 2025. <https://borderpatrolmuseum.com/exhibits/uniforms-of-the-border-patrol/>

³¹ Kelly Lytle Hernández. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnfhs>. Pp. 20.

Anglo-Saxon economy and social life. The federal government authorized the Border Patrol to enforce entry restrictions and deportation so long as it protected the nation from undesirables. It allowed Border Patrol to enact gruesome attacks on immigrant populations, especially on those who resisted the infiltration of these officers in their towns. Border Patrol enacted terror across its jurisdictional fields and ingrained racism as a legitimate factor for enforcement.

Public Reaction to Border Patrol



Marfa Headquarters of Border Patrol (Figure 4)³²

The establishment of Border Patrol has perpetuated cycles of violence against non-white immigrants through a more physically enhanced mechanism of deportation. By staffing a police entity with individuals tied to white supremacist organizations and no limitations on their authority, Border Patrol enacted senseless violence on immigrants. The criteria for deportation

³² Marfa Headquarters of the U.S. Border Patrol. 1924~. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph87538/>. (Accessed March 18, 2026.)

had always been tied to exclusion based on national origin, but the establishment of Border Patrol made removals a much more racialized and violent process.

In 1926, a patrol inspector named Lon Parker³³ was fatally shot after a mission to track two liquor smugglers in the mountain, in the middle of the Prohibition years. Patrol officers found the body of Narciso Ochoa, one of the suspects, in the mountains. The other suspect, his brother Domitilio, fled. Other patrol officers in his district soon heard of this news, and decided to enact revenge. Parker's partner Albert Gatlin rounded up other officers within the district to avenge his partner through wreaking violence on Mexican citizens. He told the other officers, "All I've got to say, men, is if you see anybody comin' toward the line tonight, yell at 'em in English. And if he don't answer you in English, shoot!"³⁴ The Border Patrol detained him, and Domitilio was sentenced to hanging. Parker's death demonstrated the violent brotherhood of Border Patrol officers that mirrored that of the Texas Rangers. They sought revenge on all who defied their enforcement.

In 1930, members of the House of Representatives raised their concerns over Border Patrol's actions. They cited that use of excessive violence and arrests without judicial warrants was unconstitutional, and questioned why the Border Patrol's immigration extended their policing well-beyond the 100 miles limit set from the border. The Commissioner General of the Bureau of Immigration Harry E. Hull testified before Congress on January 15, 1930, defending Border Patrol's authority to police. When asked by the Chairman about what powers gave them the right to act without (a) warrant, Hull responded, "I doubt very much whether there is any legal sanction for this, but they find under the general law that an officer has the right to arrest a

³³ Kelly Lytle Hernández. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnfhs>. Pp. 60-61.

³⁴ Kelly Lytle Hernández. *Migra!: A History of the U.S. Border Patrol*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2010. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pnfhs>. Pp. 60-61.

lawbreaker.”³⁵ The Assistant Commissioner General of Immigration supported Hull’s claim, but arguing it was an inherent right given by Congress. He answered in the following:

Referring to the matter of arrest, generally speaking, the soundness of any contention that a patrol inspector may not pursue an alien who has smuggled across the line, and especially when he is following a hot trail leading from the border, or has reasonable grounds for believing that he is following such a trail, or following such aliens who make no trail, but who are upon information believed to be proceeding into the interior, seems to be questionable. ... Entry is a continuing offense and is not completed until the alien attains his objective.

Border Patrol not only pushed the limits of violence it could enact on border residents, but persuaded the federal government to increase staffing, funding, and authority of the southern border by portraying Mexican citizens as lawless. Offenses such as drug and liquor smuggling were crimes Border Patrol believed were occurring most frequently along the Southern Border, and argued were pressing enough to justify their tactics. Those who fought back against Border Patrol were severely punished, while the officers were not penalized for their actions.

By the end of the 1920s, Border Patrol expanded their operations with the help of Congressional approval. The fear-mongering tactics of Border Patrol had worked in the eyes of Congress to preserve an Anglo-Saxon, American society. Calvin Coolidge’s slogan, “Let America Be American,” grew more deeply entrenched in everyday life. What started off as a 450

³⁵ Hearings before the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization House of Representatives. 75th Congress (1930). (testimony of Harry E. Hull and George J. Harris).

person task force grew into one of the largest immigration patrolling forces, and its power continued to grow exponentially well into the 1930s.

Conclusion: The Border Patrol of the 1920s

The establishment of Border Patrol marked the beginning of white supremacist policing of immigration. The Border Patrol acted in ways that defied constitutional means, yet justified their actions as necessary for removing undocumented immigrants they perceived as threats. They employed race as its primary factor in determining who was a threat to national security. While racism and nativist exclusionary acts had targeted specific ethnic groups prior to the 1920s, Congress had a physical institution to punish those that violated these policies. As Border Patrol rose in numbers, they laid the foundation for the decade to come in justifying their expansion. The Border Patrol's policing of the Southern border enforced terror mechanisms against Mexican citizens, and reinforced the idea of border crossings being "illegal" and criminal acts.

Once Border Patrol established itself in the 1920s, it slowly took on the powers of deportation that the federal government had prior been responsible for. Congress envisioned that Border Patrol could expand these operations to enforce at ports of entry, along borders, and operate towards the interior. With no specified powers on the limitations of Border Patrol, it could enforce removals through any means necessary based on their own criteria of what they believed was an illegal act of entry. These removals had clear connection with racial profiling, especially of Mexican immigrants along the southern border, and Chinese and Japanese immigrants at ports of entry. As new waves of immigration came in throughout the 1920s and

1930s, Border Patrol's successes in deporting "undesirable" immigrants laid the foundation for the expansion of immigration policing, with increased violent methods for removal.

The Birth of the Immigration and Naturalization Service

By the end of the 1920s, Border Patrol was in the midst of legitimizing its authority as a policing authority. In the eyes of the federal government, it had reached this goal to an extent. An organization that originally started with 450 patrol officers and 35 immigration districts, or field offices, swelled to 850 along the Mexican and Canadian Border alone by 1930³⁶. Border Patrol had undergone several structural changes, including introducing two chiefs to oversee facilities along the northern and southern borders respectively. Between 1926 and 1933, Ruel L. Davenport and George J. Harris were appointed during Calvin Coolidge and Herbert Hoover's administrations to these chief positions. Both men strongly urged for the expansion of resources within the department, even amidst pushback from community members on the role of law enforcement. In a memo to the Commissioner General of Immigration in December 1927, Officer Davenport told the following:

“In the past considerable antipathy was shown in certain sections of the country toward our officers, by persons who were not fully acquainted with their mission. By striving constantly to correct this impression both by words and by improving certain faulty methods of operation, the Bureau has succeeded until this antipathy has practically disappeared and instead there is being shown a real spirit of cooperation.”

³⁶ Border Patrol. Hearing Before the Committee on Commerce United States Senate, 74th Congress, 3rd Session. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015053246040&seq=13>

After several exchanges between high-ranking Border Patrol officers to the Bureau of Immigration and Congress, the organization was able to prove itself as a necessary task force for dealing with immigration. To the communities that Border Patrol operated in, however, Border Patrol raised serious problems to safety. As a result of increased Border Patrol presence in these communities, violence ensued against immigrants and those caught in its crosshairs. The Prohibition Crisis directed officers to tackle suspected drug and liquor smugglers in the US-Mexico region, where they believed liquor business were booming. While it was an American-born problem as US citizens set up saloons and alcoholic establishments along that region, Border Patrol only attributed these offenses to Mexican citizens. While observing the region between Texas and Juarez, Border Patrol officers stereotyped that “the liquor runner most frequently caught was the poor illiterate Mexican, who was paid five pesos for a night’s work.”³⁷ They persecuted Mexican citizens who crossed the border because officers suspected they “would trade [their] smuggling service for transportation inland.” Gradually, Border Patrol criminalized Mexican citizens for crossing the previously undefined border, even through violent measures. The agency reported 238 gun fights that broke out between 1924 and 1933. It was no surprise that locals were rightly angry with untrained Border Patrol officers that had entered their communities without permission and disturbed their once peaceful towns.

Mistrust from the community and the still relatively limited funding that Border Patrol had capped their authority to regulate immigration. They were also given a strict zone to operate in by Congress, only patrolling 100 miles along the border.³⁸ While this contained their warrant-less operations for several years, immigration authorities wanted more. In 1933,

³⁷ Langston, Edward Lonnie. *The Impact of Prohibition on the Mexican-United States Border: The El Paso-Ciudad Juarez Case*. Texas Tech University. (1974). file:///Users/gracemedeckki/Downloads/31295004254636%20(1).pdf

³⁸ NGAI, M. M. (2004). *Deportation Policy and the Making and Unmaking of Illegal Aliens*. In *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America - Updated Edition* (REV-Revised, pp. 56–90). Princeton University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhr9r.11>

President Franklin D. Roosevelt passed an executive order that would create an entirely new task force that surpassed this 100 mile radius, named the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). To counter Border Patrol's limitations, Executive Order 6166 provided a solution for an immigration police force to operate well into the interior of the country. In this chapter, I will explore the consequences of Executive Order 6166, such as how it modeled its new task force after Border Patrol without accounting for its serious flaws. The presidential order legitimized deportation as a necessary police power to protect national security, allowing removal through any means necessary. The nativist attitudes that plagued Border Patrol was further substantiated by the 1930s era of policing, and would continue to justify white supremacy through deportation of non-white immigrants.

Immigration and Naturalization Services: Exterior to Interior

The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization had been long established since before the 20th century handling matters of entry and citizenship. The Bureau of Immigration, established in 1891, was tasked with handling entry and exclusions for immigrants hoping to immigrate to the US. Exclusions included enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Act and barring entry of “polygamists, persons convicted of crimes of moral turpitude, and those suffering loathsome or contagious diseases.”³⁹ The Bureau of Naturalization, formally established in 1913, dealt with all measures under the Basic Naturalization Act of 1906. Its powers included handling and issuing all naturalization forms, as well as encouraging greater jurisdiction over state and local immigration courts.⁴⁰ These bureaus co-existed for nearly three decades within the Department

³⁹ US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Origins of the Federal Immigration Service (n.d.) <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/explore-agency-history/overview-of-agency-history/origins-of-the-federal-immigration-service>

⁴⁰ US Citizenship and Immigration Services. Origins of the Federal Naturalization Service. (n.d) <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/explore-agency-history/overview-of-agency-history/origins-of-the-federal-naturalization-service>

of Labor, which was the same Department that Border Patrol had been established under. While some of these powers within the Bureaus had overlapped, neither Bureau enforced removal as a police power. Officers had been stationed at major immigration ports, including but not limited to Ellis Island in New York, Angel Island in San Francisco, and El Paso in Texas. These officers stood guard at these ports to allow or bar entry, but were not tasked to act with force outside of these ports of entry. After seeing the establishment of the Border Patrol as America's first land police force that acted over long strips of land beyond its stations, officials within the Bureaus used Border Patrol as an example for its own consolidation.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt consolidated these two Bureaus into one on June 10, 1933 with Executive Order 6166. To enhance the efficacy of multiple departments within the federal government, the merger of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization was the most important of the consolidations within the Order's long laundry list. It also restructured the hierarchy of the Bureaus, granting one Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization to oversee all operations. To FDR, the Executive Order was part of a band-aid solution to the Great Depression, hoping that "there will be effected under these orders a saving of at least \$25,000,000."⁴¹ To the newly established INS, it was part of a greater operation to expand the police powers of immigration from the exterior and well into the country's interior.

The INS decreased its task force substantially after the two Bureaus merged. Whereas 58 immigration and naturalization districts had existed prior to the executive order, this number shrunk to 22.⁴² However, the amount of money appropriated to this new 'efficient' policing department exceeded what had been originally given to Border Patrol in 1924. An annual report

⁴¹ Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Message to Congress Transmitting Executive Order 6166. (1933) <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-congress-transmitting-executive-order-6166>

⁴² Department of Labor. Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor (1934) <https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo125470/1934/GetDoc.pdf>

from 1934 on Immigration and Naturalization Services accounted for \$8,277,000 that was appropriated by Congress for salaries and other expenses to be spent under the Bureau.⁴³ This amount was appropriated after a \$1,500,000 cut had already been made as a result of the two Bureaus merging.⁴⁴ The Bureau's prior work in Immigration and Naturalization made the justification easy for a large sum of money to be distributed to the INS.

Another notable change from the establishment of Border Patrol was the officers picked to be part of this newly consolidated Bureau. Whereas members picked to join the Border Patrol in 1924 were white men with no experience in immigration or policing, these INS officers underwent several training sessions. Frances Perkins, the US Secretary of Labor, included in her annual report the following information.

For their better training a series of 20 printed lectures covering various phases of immigration and naturalization was prepared by experts in the Department and distributed weekly during the spring of 1934. In the introductory lecture of the first series stress was laid on the necessity for uniform courtesy, first as an obligation to the public, but also as a method for promoting the smooth and rapid transaction of routine business⁴⁵.

⁴³ Department of Labor. Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor (1934)
<https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo125470/1934/GetDoc.pdf>

⁴⁴ Department of Labor. Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor (1934)
<https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo125470/1934/GetDoc.pdf>

⁴⁵ Monthly Catalog United States Public Documents (1934)
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-GP3-54e6e01fc68b302c4600eb4380d566c3/pdf/GOVPUB-GP3-54e6e01fc68b302c4600eb4380d566c3.pdf>

The INS wanted to build a better image for themselves than what Border Patrol had presented in the decade prior. They had no standardized uniform, but carried a badge on them to mark their identity. They also wanted to address the unconstitutional practices that previous Border Patrol and other immigration officers enacted on civilians. The Secretary of Labor reported that it had wanted to get rid of the practice of arresting undocumented immigrants without warrants. In this period, the Secretary of Labor recommended a new standard of evaluations for enforcement of entry, deportations, and due process that fell in line with constitutional protections.

While all of these recommendations were perceived to be made in good faith, not much had changed from the original Border Patrol. In this new model, the structure of the INS legitimized the police power and practices of immigration task forces even greater than in 1924. By November of 1933, founder of the Border Patrol Frank W. Berkshire became the new Director of the INS. Under his authority, the INS proposed a new agenda for tackling immigration that gave authority to the INS to act on orders by high ranking officials rather than by Congress itself. The Secretary of Labor had urged Congress that the Secretary of Labor should be allowed to distribute warrants to deport suspected undocumented immigrants rather than waiting for a warrant to be executed by a judge.⁴⁶ The INS followed similar guidelines for deportation to what the Bureau of Immigration had acted on in the late 19th century:

If he is of good moral character, has not been convicted of a crime involving moral turpitude, and has not engaged in subversive political agitation or conduct, provided that he (1) has lived

⁴⁶Department of Labor. Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Secretary of Labor (1934) <https://permanent.fdlp.gov/gpo125470/1934/GetDoc.pdf>

continuously in the United States for a period of not less than 10 years, or (2) has living in the United States a near relative who has been lawfully admitted for permanent residence, or is a citizen of the United States. Aliens so permitted to remain shall be charged against the annual quotas of their respective countries.

The problem with the INS's guidelines was that it has been entirely complicated by the nativist and exclusionary immigration laws of years prior. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, which had established a quota on immigrants depending on nationality, was still in full effect during this time. Additionally, border crossing was criminalized and enforced on non-white immigrants, specifically Mexican citizens. Blease's Law was enacted in 1929 by a white supremacist law-maker from South Carolina named Coleman Blease, who argued that Mexican citizens were undesirable and un-American⁴⁷. Citing that no quota restrictions on Mexican immigrants increased unauthorized entries, Blease's law criminalized undocumented immigration. It stated that entering the US without documentation or inspection by immigration officers was a felony, subjecting them to a fine of up to \$1,000, imprisonment, and no deportation until prison time was served.⁴⁸ . By the end of the 1930s, U.S. attorneys had prosecuted more than 44,000 cases of unlawful entry almost entirely against Mexicans.⁴⁹ The INS did not merely create a new set of guidelines, but rather it gave authority to itself to act on nativist, exclusionary laws of the

⁴⁷ Gonzalez O'Brien, Benjamin. "A Very Great Penalty": Mexican Immigration, Race and 8 U.S.C. § 1326. Maryland Journal of International Law (2022)

<https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1729&context=mjil>

⁴⁸ Immigration History. "Undesirable Aliens Act of 1929 (Blease's Law). (n.d.)

<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/undesirable-aliens-act-of-1929-bleases-law/>

⁴⁹ Immigration History. "Undesirable Aliens Act of 1929 (Blease's Law). (n.d.)

<https://immigrationhistory.org/item/undesirable-aliens-act-of-1929-bleases-law/>

previous decades with full force. It implemented a fear tactic, allowing immigrants to self deport to avoid punishment, or face consequences of a hefty fine and jail time. Without federal oversight, the INS began to run rampant in its enforcement tactics, prioritizing its enforcement against non-white immigrants rather than white individuals. The 1930s INS was not the reform measure that it painted itself out to be, but rather an even more threatening policing power.

The Era of Targeted Removals: Mexican Repatriation through the 1930s

Executive 6166 impacted Mexican Americans and immigrants most severely. After the stock market crash in 1929, the US drew out one of the largest forced removal operations against Mexican laborers and migrants. It blamed Mexican immigrants for the lack of jobs for white blue collar workers. Mexican laborers in the 1920s had been employed in various fields, including agriculture, railroad, mining, and factories.⁵⁰ Various local governments coerced Mexican migrants to voluntarily deport themselves from the US to alleviate economic turmoil. Local governments bought bus tickets for many Mexican migrants to cross the border⁵¹. Social workers and health care professionals that were in contact with immigrants with underlying financial and health issues even encouraged them to take the bus tickets. The wide scale operation that local governments used to force deportations displays how nativist sentiment snowballed into a movement to forcibly remove non-white immigrants from the US through the guise of repatriation. In total, between 500,000 to 1.8 million⁵² Mexican-Americans and Mexican

⁵⁰ Vargas, Zaragoza. *Armies in the Fields and Factories: The Mexican Working Classes in the Midwest in the 1920s. Mexican Studies, Vol 7, No. 1 (1991)*

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/1052027.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3A627453b116f1cfc8200bfe3c04b91fae&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1

⁵¹ California Migration Museum. *From Deportation to Repatriation*. (n.d.)

<https://www.calmigration.org/learn-chapter/deportation-to-repatriation>

⁵² Little, Becky. *The Deportation Campaigns of the Great Depression*. History (2019)

<https://www.history.com/articles/great-depression-repatriation-drives-mexico-deportation>

migrants were repatriated in Mexico⁵³. The coercion tactics utilized by the INS in partnership with local governments to remove Mexican citizens was an intentional operation.

Immigration raids were common throughout the 1930s, especially in areas with a predominantly high Mexican population. On February 26, 1931, immigration agents worked with the Los Angeles Police Department to raid La Placita, a park in Los Angeles that welcomed various ethnic immigrant residents.⁵⁴ Approximately 400 individuals were taken into custody that day to be deported. Moisés Gonzalez, an immigrant who entered the US legally through El Paso with proper documentation was arrested by immigration agents, even while having with proof of legal residency⁵⁵. Immigration raids like La Placita were spreading throughout the country, signally increasing enforcement efforts and severity.

⁵³ Gratton, Brian, and Emily Merchant. "Immigration, Repatriation, and Deportation: The Mexican-Origin Population in the United States, 1920-1950." *The International Migration Review* (Hoboken, NJ) 47, no. 4 (2013): 944-75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imre.12054>.

⁵⁴ Olivo, Antonio. "Ghosts of a 1931 Raid; A Random INS Roundup Set the Tone for Decades of Ethnic Tension: [Home Edition]." *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 25, 2001. <https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/ghosts-1931-raid-random-ins-roundup-set-tone/docview/421742985/se-2>.

⁵⁵ Balderrama, Francisco E., and Rodríguez, Raymond. *Decade of Betrayal : Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s, Revised Edition*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. Accessed March 19, 2026. ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsb-ebooks/reader.action?docID=4401392&query=&c=RVBVQg&ppg=87>



La Placita Farmers Market (Figure 5)⁵⁶

The new rules that the INS established for itself gave it more powers to act on deportation. It contributed to fear tactics used during Mexican repatriation to force removals. Immigration agents could show up at any place, any time. Local governments could utilize a weaponized police force to their advantage and push policy agendas that forced Mexican-Americans and migrants out of their homes. With the establishment of the INS under Executive Order 6166, deportation was an increased risk for undocumented immigrants living in the US.

INS officers invaded several community spaces that Mexican-Americans and their family members belonged to, often using fear tactics to get individuals to self deport. As fears of Communist involvement were also running rampant, INS agents targeted left-leaning organizations that were led by Mexican immigrants. Various Chicano activists were threatened

⁵⁶ [La Placita Farmers Market]. 1987-07. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph222582/>. (Accessed March 18, 2026.)

by INS officers into quieting their advocacy, especially for labor rights. Several members of the Liga Obrera de Habla Español, a group that advocated for labor rights for Mexican migrants and their families, were targeted by INS agents. Several members of the league participated in organizing efforts during the 1933 miners strike in Gallup, New Mexico, in which miners had threatened to retaliate against immigrant workers for striking.⁵⁷ Founding member of *Liga Obrera*, Jesus Pallares, was charged with subversion and deported on criminal charges in 1936. Another member of the union, Julio Herrera, was targeted by the INS because of unauthorized entry in 1908. These two members, along with 100 other Mexican mineworkers, were deported for speaking out against their employers.

INS agents and Border Patrolmen intended to humiliate deportees by conducting immigration raids in a publicly intimidating manner. La Placita was one of the first times that immigration officers conducted raids in a daytime setting in front of crowds. Bystanders that attempted to help were blocked by immigration officers that surrounded the area. In the aftermath of deportation raids, immigration officers often took personal belongings that were valued for thousands of dollars. An local Idaho newspaper *The Lewiston Morning Tribune* reported in December 1936 that three automobiles had been turned over to Lynden Immigration patrolmen⁵⁸. The cars ranged from \$300 to \$950, which would be valued at approximately \$7,000 and \$22,152 today. Most personal property and belongings that were confiscated by immigration officers often never got back to their original owners. Immigration officers used their raids as an example to those who entered the US undocumented, or those who tried to stand with people who were being targeted for deportation. By stopping and detaining people in public

⁵⁷Rubenstein, Harry R.. "The Great Gallup Coal Strike of 1933." *New Mexico Historical Review* 52, 3 (2021). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/nmhr/vol52/iss3/9>

⁵⁸ *The Lewiston Morning Tribune*. Aliens are Taken By Border Patrol. Washington State University (1937) <https://content.libraries.wsu.edu/digital/collection/clipping/id/150090>

spaces, in front of friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers, immigration officers wanted to keep people silent.

While the INS did not recognize Mexican Repatriation as a federally sanctioned operation, the multi-facted relationships between these immigration officers and government workers proves otherwise. Applying the term ‘repatriation’ to this operation ignores the fact that these removals were forced, and attempts to wipe away the historical trauma it caused. Vicious methods of putting immigrants in an economic squeeze, conducting public immigration raids, and withholding necessary welfare benefits was an intentional operation against Mexican citizens and migrants. The takeaway of repatriation as it relates to immigration policing as a whole demonstrates how INS and Border Patrol officers attempted to subtly seize control and power over non-white immigration, by testing its own limits of how far they could take it.

Conclusion: INS in the 1930s

Executive Order 6166, whether intentional or not, allowed law enforcement to become more oppressive. FDR’s oversight in consolidating the Bureau of Immigration and Bureau of Naturalization into one gave the agency greater centralized power. Nativist policy stances on immigration during Hebert Hoover presidential administration prior to FDR had infected the process of immigration oversight. While FDR attempted to invest in welfare programs that helped Latin American immigrants, such as the Civillian Conservation Corps and the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration⁵⁹, it neglected the systemic issues within policing itself. Instead of addressing the flaws within pre-exisiting immigration policing agencies, it only

⁵⁹ Living New Deal. Latino/Hispanic Americans and the New Deal (n.d.)
<https://livingnewdeal.org/racism-and-beyond/new-deal-inclusion/hispanic-americans-and-the-new-deal/>

reinforced the powers that Border Patrol had granted itself in the decade prior. This time with INS, these powers were legitimately recognized by Border Patrol.

The INS had greater authority to police immigration because of the rules that the Border Patrol broke to get there. While the 1920s Border Patrol were known as unskilled officers, their violent tactics to enforce deportations demonstrated to the next generation of immigration officers that it could take it even further. The federal government not only allowed INS agents in the 1930s to conduct deportation raids, they encouraged it. In the weeks leading up to the La Placita raids, INS agents were posting flyers around the neighborhood, threatening that undocumented immigrants should leave before the raids took place.⁶⁰

While the INS worked in tandem with federal and local government to target Mexican-Americans and immigrants, their fear tactics were part of a larger attack on all non-white immigrants. Other non-white immigrants from China, Italy (who at the time were known as ‘ethnic whites’), Filipinos, and others also resided in these same neighborhoods. As racial exclusionary policies against various ethnic immigrant groups persisted throughout the early 20th century, Mexican repatriation was part of a larger plan to destroy vibrantly diverse communities. Immigration officers staged various deportations throughout the country to make non-white immigrants fearful of their control. With officers that could regulate immigration along America’s borders and well into the country’s interior, INS officers continued to enforce immigrant communities as a police state.

⁶⁰ Balderrama, Francisco E., and Rodríguez, Raymond. *Decade of Betrayal : Mexican Repatriation in the 1930s, Revised Edition*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. Accessed March 19, 2026. ProQuest Ebook Central. <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ucsb-ebooks/reader.action?docID=4401392&query=&c=RVBVQg&ppg=87>

Exploitation and Deportation during the 1950s through 1980s

The US's participation in World War II marked a paradox in immigration policy. Not only did the federal government enforce removals on immigrants of racial categories it did not find desirable, it utilized them for exploitation of their labor. Shortly after the establishment of the INS in 1933, the US government faced two national crises. One, the US was still deep in economic troubles due to the Great Depression. Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal plan hoped to be a remedy for unemployment and job market loss. Through this legislation, the New Deal also gave workers new rights and protections to ensure better economic security in the job market. The National Recovery Act granted workers the rights to collective bargaining if they were being subject to unfair labor practices in the workplace⁶¹. Workers could protest violations to minimum wage standards, over-burdening hours, or discrimination at work⁶². These protections would be instrumental to helping immigrants throughout the 20th century organize against unfair labor practices. The federal government exhausted its funding to alleviate economic stress for American workers, but did not prioritize public benefits to be distributed to non-citizens. The US still needed to look for cheap labor sources to employ several industries, especially in agriculture and manufacturing.

Second, the US was preparing to join the war in the 1940s. Although the US did not formally join until the bombing at Pearl Harbor by the Japanese government, the US kickstarted manufacturing to help supply its allies with weapons and transportation. This era helped propel the US out of economic turmoil, giving US residents more opportunities to be employed in

⁶¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt. National Industrial Recovery Act. National Archives (1933)
<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/national-industrial-recovery-act>

⁶² Franklin D. Roosevelt. National Industrial Recovery Act. National Archives (1933)
<https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/national-industrial-recovery-act>

profitable industries. As men in the US joined the war effort by volunteering themselves or being subjected to drafts in 1942, entire industries were left vacant again. As the US prioritized manufacturing fields, the agriculture industry in particular needed workers. Food had to be tended to for distribution abroad but also for American citizens across the nation. In a telegram to the INS Commissioner Earl G. Harrison, the Yuma County Water Users Association in Arizona wrote, “This farming area raising alfalfa flax and other vital war crops could be relieved if Mexicans from allowed to help in Harvest.”⁶³ As the agriculture industry was known for its hard labor conditions, the US turned to immigrant labor as a way to keep agriculture regulated. In response, Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the Bracero Program to employ Mexican immigrants in short-term contracts to employ the agriculture industry. While benefits from the New Deal era supported basic labor rights such as organizing, these Mexican laborers were still left vulnerable to unfair labor practices and standards. Viewing Mexican workers as an essential source of employment, US agricultural industries continued to rely on Mexican labor well into the 1950s.

After war-time ended, anti-immigrant sentiment rose again. White workers blamed Mexican immigrants for taking jobs and demanded the federal government stop migration flows. In the 1950s, President Dwight D. Eisenhower relied on the INS and Border Patrol to carry out some of the largest deportation programs the US had ever seen during the mid 20th century, which I refer to as the 1954 Mexican Deportation Operation in lieu of its racist nickname given to describe Mexican immigrants. While the INS and Border Patrol had used racial control in its methods before, Dwight D. Eisenhower made his intention for racial exclusion publicly known. The federal government could not display its racism more clearly with policies enacted under

⁶³ Kratz, Jessie. The Bracero Program: Prelude to Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement. National Archives (2023)
<https://prologue.blogs.archives.gov/2023/09/27/the-bracero-program-prelude-to-cesar-chavez-and-the-farm-worker-movement/>

Roosevelt and Eisenhower that exploited non-white immigrants and removed them if they did not see them as an economic benefit. Japanese internment during the war demonstrated how law enforcement deported undesirable, non-white immigrants because their race and ethnicity was deemed a national security to white America. This was a sentiment that reinforced law enforcement's methods of racial exclusion and social control in the mid-20th century. It allowed law enforcement's methods to turn more aggressive on a larger scale. The INS and Border Patrol's intentional carelessness and disregard for those they detained led to poor health conditions, traumatic family separations, permanent physical scarring from violence, and emotional distress.

In this chapter, I will explore how the US created a paradox in its immigration policy to intentionally disfavor non-white Americans. While Roosevelt's government viewed the Bracero Program as quid pro quo to establish jobs and make migration easier for Mexican workers, it only led to a cycle of exploitation which would be taken advantage of for decades. During Eisenhower's administration, he made race the center of immigration policy. The racialized term that characterized the 1954 Mexican Deportation Operation exemplifies how the federal government wanted to remove Mexican immigrants for being a threat to the US economy. Political agendas amongst the federal administration were heavily intertwined with the work of INS and Border Patrol. Entry requirements and deportation were racialized not only by the INS and the Border Patrol, but were the focal point of the federal government's agenda for exclusion. The paradox in both presidential administrations played a central role in cultivating the culture of immigration policing. These policy agendas presented race and ethnicity as a main determinant for enforcing deportations in a way that previous decades had not done before.

World War II and Deportation

In the midst of World War II, the United States began rolling out federal deportation policies and programs targeted at specific immigrant groups. Prior to World War II, the US was still struggling with the question of how to regulate immigration, demonstrating how weak the INS and Border Patrol initiatives were in the 1920s and 1930s. In the late 1930s, the United States observed the war time events occurring overseas in Europe. As the Nazi party in Germany expanded its dictatorship overseas, the US took note of the danger that Germany and its allies posed to national security at home. Once the US entered the war in 1942, the US racialized threats to national security against Japanese immigrants and Japanese-Americans. Whereas before the national government had enacted deportation policies primarily to make the economy more prosperous for white Americans, the federal government justified internment of Japanese citizens because their race was an active danger to white American citizens.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched a series of executive orders that sought to punish individuals of Japanese descent for the attack. Organized by the Department of Justice, approximately 27 internment camps were set up across the country that detained over 7,000 Japanese citizens and Japanese-Americans⁶⁴. Individuals were forced to give up their homes and personal property under Executive Order 9066⁶⁵, and were put into rooms that averaged sizes between 9' by 12'⁶⁶ to 20' x 24'⁶⁷. Many of these rooms held families with small children, with no private restrooms or protective housing insulation from extreme weather conditions. Steve Okamoto was a 5 year old boy at the time of his and his family's

⁶⁴ National Park Service. War Relocation Centers. (n.d.) <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/war-relocation-centers.htm>

⁶⁵ National Archives. Executive Order 9066: Resulting in Japanese-American Incarceration (1942) <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/executive-order-9066>

⁶⁶ Tanforan Memorial. What Was Tanforan. (n.d.) <http://www.tanforanmemorial.org/history.html>

⁶⁷ CLPEF. List of Detention Camps, Temporary Detention Centers, and Department of Justice Internment Camps <http://www.momomedia.com/CLPEF/camps.html>

forced relocation to the Tanforan detention center in San Francisco⁶⁸. He along with other detainees forced onto buses to detention centers had the same questions about their future. “We didn’t know where we were going, how long we would be away and would we ever come back,” he said.⁶⁹ All detainees were forced to live in these detention centers throughout the rest of the war, enduring physical violence and emotional trauma within the detention centers. The federal government facilitated racial exclusion on an international scope as well. The US Department of Justice also took 2,210 individuals of Japanese descent through agreements with 12 Latin American countries. President Harry S. Truman issued Proclamation 2655 and 2685 that allowed deportation for individuals that were classified as enemy aliens⁷⁰. In a confidential letter from the American Embassy to Secretary of State Sumner Welles, the following was described about Peruvian President Manuel Prado Ugarteche calling for the removal of Japanese individuals residing in Peru:

The second matter in which the President is very much interested is the possibility of getting rid of the Japanese in Peru. He would like to settle this problem permanently, which means that he is thinking in terms of repatriating thousands of Japanese. He asked Colonel Lord to let him know about the prospects of additional shipping facilities from the United States.

⁶⁸ Tanforan Memorial. What Was Tanforan. (n.d.) <http://www.tanforanmemorial.org/history.html>

⁶⁹ Tanforan Memorial. What Was Tanforan. (n.d.) <http://www.tanforanmemorial.org/history.html>

⁷⁰ National Archives. World War II Japanese American Incarceration: Post-War Legacy. (n.d.) <https://www.archives.gov/research/aapi/ww2/legacy>

Concerns over Marxism and communism abroad also sparked nativist fears of a national security threat within America's borders. The Red Scare that took place over the course of 6 months between 1919 and 1920, implemented deportation tactics that continued into wartime and after. Radicals that were deemed as communist threats to America's booming capitalist society and structure were sent to detention centers such as Angel Island⁷¹ and Ellis Island, where they were sentenced for several months in prison under charges such as engaging in "radical and anarchist activity."⁷² The Immigrants Protective League organized press releases and news stories to call attention to the hypocrisy of detention by the federal government. In a press release by Dean Abbott, a writer for the League, they wrote the following:

In proportion to their respective numbers the foreign born commit considerably fewer crimes than the native born; that the foreign born approach the record of the native born most closely in the commission of crimes involving personal violence, and that in crimes for gain the native born greatly exceed the foreign born.

Economic depression from previous decades along with the war contributed to continuing nativist sentiments against immigrants. While the US government restricted entry for many Italian, German, and Japanese immigrants, the federal government turned to Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans and contracted many as essential workers during the war. Known as The Bracero program, over 4.6 million temporary contracts were signed by Mexican workers.

⁷¹ Sakovich, Maria. When the "Enemy" Landed at Angel Island. National Archives (2009)
<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2009/summer/angel.html>

⁷² Sakovich, Maria. When the "Enemy" Landed at Angel Island. National Archives (2009)
<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2009/summer/angel.html>

The government's primary purpose for these contracts was to fill jobs in the agriculture industry for low pay. These contracts usually consisted of housing security, entry to the US, and free transportation to Mexico once one's contract had ended.⁷³ Wages were calculated 50 cents per hour of work⁷⁴, which would be equivalent to approximately \$10.45 today.



Braceros (Figure 6)⁷⁵

Even with worker protections and anti-discrimination enacted by the federal government, these workers were exploited heavily for their labor. Their wages were often deflated. The US purported an agreement made with the Mexican government to store 10% of their wages into

⁷³ Bracero History Archive (n.d.) <https://braceroarchive.org/about>

⁷⁴ Macias, Jorge. Time is running out for braceros. Cal Matters (2020) <https://calmatters.org/california-divide/2019/11/time-is-running-out-for-the-braceros/>

⁷⁵ Dorothea Lange. Braceros. ca. 1942. Retrieved from the Digital Public Library of America, <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft496nb08h>. (Accessed March 18, 2026.)

savings accounts by the federal government. Workers were told that after their contract had ended, this 10% of their wages would be available for distribution upon their return from Mexico. The Mexican government has since stated that they never received these funds and could therefore not distribute them to participants in the Bracero Program. The US government has no record of where these funds have been placed, citing that the Mexican government is the only entity with access and control of these funds. Throughout the course of the Bracero Program, workers also experienced harsh working conditions that impacted them physically and emotionally⁷⁶. Bracero workers often worked in scorching hot weather, especially in California. In the Sonoran desert, where temperatures would often grow from 90 to 100 degrees in May and June, 8 workers had died from heat exhaustion.⁷⁷ Housing for Bracero workers was also poorly adapted. Workers were made to sleep on metal beds and only provided with one blanket for sleeping.⁷⁸ Many of these workers also received surcharges on their room and board expenses.⁷⁹ This exploitative process of contracting laborers from Mexico lasted approximately 22 years. Its end kickstarted one of the most exclusionary deportation programs in US history. The program contributed to a broken immigration system, in which the US government took away its promise to these workers to start a new life in America through detention, removal and no compensation.

The exploitation of Mexican laborers are imperative for understanding the US government's plan for implementing deportation programs. The federal government looked to

⁷⁶ Santa Clara University Digital Exhibits. Worker Condition (n.d.)
<https://dh.scu.edu/exhibits/exhibits/show/california-s-bracero-program/human-rights-concerns/labor-practices/worker-condition>

⁷⁷ Loza, Mireya. "Yo Era Indígena: Race, Modernity, and the Transformational Politics of Transnational Labor." In *The Border Reader*, edited by Mireya Loza and Gilberto Rosas. Duke University Press, 2023.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478027195-022>.

⁷⁸ Nadel, Leonard. his drafty barn was hastily converted into housing facilities for braceros near Stockton, Calif. One dirty mattress and one blanket was all that was provided for bedding. Bracero Archives (1956)
<https://braceroarchive.org/items/show/1904>

⁷⁹ Hagley Museum, The PRR Bracero Program Records at Hagley. (n.d.)
<https://www.hagley.org/librarynews/prr-bracero-program-records-hagley>

immigrant work for cheap labor, yet made them to be the scapegoats for increasing migratory flows in the late 1940s and 1950s. For years, INS and Border Patrol were trying to legitimize their authority while being relatively new agencies, but with no proven purpose. With increased migration, protecting national security became the central focus and reasoning of both agencies to enact violent removals of non-white immigrants from the US. With the approval from the federal government, anti-immigrant sentiments during the war's aftermath provided the INS and Border Patrol with full authority to enact deportation to secure the US borders for white Americans.

The Eisenhower Administration

The post-war period marked a shift in immigration policy that prioritized white Europeans earning citizenship in America and the drastic removal of all other non-white immigrants. In the post war period, the US government focused on removals of Mexican-American and Mexican citizens living in America. Once soldiers had arrived back from World War II and returned back to their jobs, US-born farmers actively opposed the employment of Mexican farm workers in the agricultural industry. These farmers argued that employing Mexican farmworkers depressed wages for US farm workers who worked for higher wages⁸⁰. These workers also complained about that the program caused an influx of undocumented immigrants from Mexico into the agriculture industry, which reached over 4 million people entering with documentation as guest workers over the course of the program⁸¹. Government officials were also strongly opposed to the impacts of the Bracero Program because of its impact on white American farmworkers, with

⁸⁰ Report on the bracero program. Accessed March 19, 2026.
<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2023R1/Downloads/PublicTestimonyDocument/90329>.

⁸¹ University of California. "The Bracero Program." (2005)
<https://calisphere.org/exhibitions/36/the-bracero-program/>

little regard to its exploitative nature on Mexican farmworkers. In a telegram from the Chairman of the American GI Forum of Texas, Chairman Eduardo Idar⁸² wrote:

“The Forum has always opposed [Mexican] labor because it depresses wages, forcing native citizens to seek employment elsewhere over the state and nation. The [Mexican] has no recourse to law either in this country or in Mexico. He is here illegally and is exploited, regardless of what Valley ranchers, farmers, and the News say.”

Complaints from white Americans pressured the federal government into taking a stance on Mexican immigration. On June 3, 1950, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 10129, creating the Commission on Migratory Labor to gather data on the effect of undocumented immigration in the United States in the social, economic, health, and educational sectors⁸³. On the same day, the White House issued a statement naming Mexican farmworkers as a principle reason for the executive order going into effect. The statement noted, “thousands of illegal entrants are now being deported by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, but no means has yet been found for completely sealing the border against further illegal entries.”⁸⁴ The Commission made recommendations to penalize employers that knowingly hired undocumented

⁸²Idar, Eduardo, Jr. [Press statement and telegram from Ed Idar, Jr., to E. M. Dealey - 1951], text, 1951; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph250183/m1/2/>; accessed March 19, 2026), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting Houston History Research Center at Houston Public Library. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph250183/m1/2/>

⁸³ Truman, Harry S. Executive Order 10129—Establishing the President's Commission on Migratory Labor (1950) <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/executive-order-10129-establishing-the-presidents-commission-migratory-labor>

⁸⁴ Truman, Harry S. White House Statement Announcing the Establishment of the President's Commission on Migratory Labor. Harry S. Truman Archives. (1950) <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/153/white-house-statement-announcing-establishment-presidents-commission>

immigrants to their program. These recommendations, however, exempted employers from fines and jail time with the Texas proviso under the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act⁸⁵. The Bracero Program was effectively terminated on December 31, 1964 due to this ongoing pressure from white laborers and farmworkers.

A year into President Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency, he enacted the 1954 Mexican Deportation Operation, known as one of the largest deportation acts against Mexican-American and Mexican citizens living in the US. In 1953, Attorney General Herbert Brownell visited various California cities, surveying Mexican immigration to the US. He made several recommendations to Eisenhower and Congress that would shape the federal operation targeted at removing Mexican immigrants from the US. The year after his visit, under joint effort of the Border Patrol and the INS, immigration officers deported up to 200,000 people under Eisenhower's intrinsically racist operation. Most federal documents and newspapers refer to these raids as "round-ups" of undocumented immigration, disregarding the traumatic nature in which people were forcibly removed and incarcerated in detention centers. In orchestrated raids and upon receipts of calls reporting suspected undocumented immigrants, agents took people from their work, homes, and places of employment. INS and Border Patrol did not go through constitutional procedures in checking immigration status, but rather detained people with Hispanic last names or darker skin. As a result, hundreds of US citizens were also detained and deported by the INS and Border Patrol, although the exact number remains unclear⁸⁶.

The methods by which INS and Border Patrol detained Mexican citizens and immigrants during this time draw similar parallels to how Japanese internment camps were set up in the

⁸⁵ Rural Migration News. Barceros: History, Compensation (2006). <https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=1112>

⁸⁶ Astor, Avi. "Unauthorized Immigration, Securitization and the Making of Operation Wetback." *Latino Studies* (London) 7, no. 1 (2009): 5–29. <https://doi.org/10.1057/lst.2008.56>.

1940s. INS and Border Patrol agents utilized barbed wire fences to close off detention centers⁸⁷. Those who were detained often had to wait for months in detention centers before being formally deported. INS and Border Patrol agents forced immigrants to pay for their own bus fees while being deported, or face a jail sentence in the US. Many immigrants, especially in the upper North of the US, were crammed into planes heading towards Mexico. Many Mexican immigrants were often dropped into the very interior of the country in primarily city areas.⁸⁸ Many of these deportees had to use their own means of transportation to reunite with family beyond these drop off points. The INS and historians estimate up to approximately 1.3 million Mexican immigrants deported by law enforcement, in which 60% of these people were US-born citizens⁸⁹.

⁸⁷ Cresswell, Stephen. U.S. Government Program Begins Deporting Mexican Workers. EBSCO. (N.D.)
<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/us-government-program-begins-deporting-mexican-workers>

⁸⁸ Grossman, R. (2017). *The 1954 deportation of mexican migrants and the 'wetback airlift' in chicago*. Chicago: Tribune Publishing Company, LLC. Retrieved from
<https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/1954-deportation-mexican-migrants-wetback-airlift/docview/1881801228/se-2>

⁸⁹ Blakemore, Erin. The Largest Mass Deportation in American History. History (2018)
<https://www.history.com/articles/operation-wetback-eisenhower-1954-deportation>



Figure x⁹⁰

The operation only lasted a year, but had a significant impact on immigration policy. This policy co-existed with the Bracero Program in the 1950s, which still allowed documentation for many laborers as ‘guest workers’ while still enforcing mass deportations. While recommendations were made by government officials to penalize employers, no concrete laws enforced any of these recommendations. The blame was entirely put on Mexican laborers, who paid the cost of incarceration, stolen wages, and family separation. It uprooted the lives of thousands of immigrants, and contributed to an ongoing overreach of police power in the immigration sector.

⁹⁰ Whitney, Fitzgerald. Fence enclosure in a warehouse used for detaining immigrants, Los Angeles, 1977 University of California, Los Angeles. Library. Department of Special Collections <https://digital.library.ucla.edu/catalog/ark:/21198/zz0002r4xx>

Conclusion

The exploitation and deportation of Mexican workers and their families in the 1950s has been regarded as one of the most egregious human rights violations in US history. Adequate compensation has never been granted for Mexican workers for wages that were taken from them by the US government. After several farmworkers sued the US and Mexican government in 2001 for stolen wages⁹¹, the Mexican government began reparations where farmworkers could receive financial compensations for up to \$3,500 if they could prove with documentation they worked during the Bracero Program.⁹² However, this number falls very short from the millions of dollars owed to farmworkers, many of whom never even received compensation if they could not prove employment or had passed away prior. The US government nor any US state has issued a formal apology or has issued reparations for the Bracero Program.

The massive deportation of Mexican immigrants in the 1950s has created the most consequentially harmful stereotypes and trauma for Mexican immigrants that persist to this day. The racist name that characterized Dwight D. Eisenhower's legislation for deportation reinforced racial bias in immigration policing and legitimized racism as a method for removal. The inhumane methods in which people were forcibly uprooted out of their daily lives, incarcerated in cramped spaces, and forced to pay for their own deportation have ingrained deep emotional and physical trauma for those who endured deportation. There were several reported deaths as a result of deportation. In 1948, 28 deportees had been killed in a plane crash in the Los Gatos mountains, along with 4 additional flight crew members⁹³. The majority of news coverage

⁹¹ Belluck, Pam. MEXICAN LABORERS IN U.S. DURING WAR SUE FOR BACK PAY. New York Times (2001)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2001/04/29/us/mexican-laborers-in-us-during-war-sue-for-back-pay.html>

⁹² Rural Migration News. Braceros: History, Compensation (2006).

<https://migration.ucdavis.edu/rmn/more.php?id=1112>

⁹³ 32 KILLED IN CRASH OF CHARTER PLANE; California Victims Include 28 Mexican Workers Who Were Being Deported. New York Times (1948)

on the crash had publicized names of flight crew members, but the 28 individuals who were forcibly taken and died were not recognized. Their deaths sparked outrage for various civil rights groups and allies. Singer Woody Guthrie published the song “Deportee” in honor of the victims of the tragedy and to highlight the atrocities of deportation. The city of Fresno established a memorial in 2024 to recognize the deportees killed in the crash, listing their names and a title named “Forever We Will Call You By Your Name.”⁹⁴



Memorial of Los Gatos Plane Crash Victims (Figure x)⁹⁵

Deportation operations and the tactics used during the 1950s have been replicated in several removal programs by the INS and Border Patrol throughout the later half of the 20th

<https://www.nytimes.com/1948/01/29/archives/32-killed-in-crash-of-charter-plane-california-victims-include-28.html>

⁹⁴ Quintanilla, Esther. ‘Still a lot to learn.’ Once nameless, victims of 1948 Fresno County plane crash remembered <https://www.kvpr.org/community/2024-09-30/still-a-lot-to-learn-once-nameless-victims-of-1948-fresno-county-plane-crash-remembered>

⁹⁵ Quintanilla, Esther. ‘Still a lot to learn.’ Once nameless, victims of 1948 Fresno County plane crash remembered <https://www.kvpr.org/community/2024-09-30/still-a-lot-to-learn-once-nameless-victims-of-1948-fresno-county-plane-crash-remembered>

century. Operation Blockade, also known as Hold the Line, was enacted in El Paso, Texas to limit unauthorized entry. The operation ran between September 1993 and April 1994, with 400 agents patrolling along 20 miles to detain suspected undocumented immigrants from Mexico⁹⁶. Mexican citizens and El Paso residents were furious with the racial profiling enacted through the program. The mayor of Juarez, Francisco Villarreal, shared in an interview his frustrations with the racist program, stating “you can’t associate crime with Mexican crossers, whether it’s true or not.”⁹⁷ A year later Operation Gatekeeper, enacted by the Department of Justice in San Diego, militarized the southern border with 200 agents who patrolled through the mountains to the riverbanks in the county. Most detainees were subjected to incarceration and transportation to the Calexico-Mexicali crossing over 120 miles away⁹⁸. The North County Times had that agents had tampered records and intelligence reports that exaggerated the effectiveness of Operation Gatekeeper⁹⁹.

Prior to the 1950s, Border Patrol and the INS had been working to establish themselves as legitimate policing entities. At that time, the US government had never formally employed either agency to conduct targeted removal programs on a national level. With the Bracero

⁹⁶ Frank D. Bean, Roland Chanove, Robert G. Cushing, Rodolfo de la Garza, Gary P. Freeman, Charles W. Haynes, David Spener *Illegal Mexican Migration & the United States/Mexico Border: The Effects of Operation Hold the Line on El Paso/Juárez*. U.S. COMMISSION ON IMMIGRATION REFORM (1990) https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rodolfo-De-La-Garza/publication/268257213_US_COMMISSION_ON_IMMIGRATION_REFORM_Illegal_Mexican_Migration_the_United_StatesMexico_Border_The_Effects_of_Operation_Hold_the_Line_on_El_PasoJuarez/links/563ce4ca08ae8d65c0117485/US-COMMISSION-ON-IMMIGRATION-REFORM-Illegal-Mexican-Migration-the-United-States-Mexico-Border-The-Effects-of-Operation-Hold-the-Line-on-El-Paso-Juarez.pdf

⁹⁷ Frank D. Bean, Roland Chanove, Robert G. Cushing, Rodolfo de la Garza, Gary P. Freeman, Charles W. Haynes, David Spener *Illegal Mexican Migration & the United States/Mexico Border: The Effects of Operation Hold the Line on El Paso/Juárez*. U.S. COMMISSION ON IMMIGRATION REFORM (1990) https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rodolfo-De-La-Garza/publication/268257213_US_COMMISSION_ON_IMMIGRATION_REFORM_Illegal_Mexican_Migration_the_United_StatesMexico_Border_The_Effects_of_Operation_Hold_the_Line_on_El_PasoJuarez/links/563ce4ca08ae8d65c0117485/US-COMMISSION-ON-IMMIGRATION-REFORM-Illegal-Mexican-Migration-the-United-States-Mexico-Border-The-Effects-of-Operation-Hold-the-Line-on-El-Paso-Juarez.pdf

⁹⁸ Sebastian Rotella. Agents Begin Massive Sweep Along Border. *Los Angeles Times*. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1994-10-02-mn-45664-story.html>

⁹⁹ Department of Justice. Background to the Office of the Inspector General Investigation. (n.d.) <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/archive/special/9807/gkp01.htm>

Program and Eisenhower's removal operation, the US government had made clear its intention and powers to prosecute non-immigrants on the basis of border crossing. It also made clear that immigrants would be subjected to removal based on ethnicity and race. The Hart-Cellar Act of 1965 officially ended immigration quotas that were enacted in 1924 to expand European immigration. Immigration of non-European immigration, on the other hand, was severely restricted. After 1950, deportation had only been a concern for non-white immigration, especially along the US-Mexico border. The US government continued to form its legislation on immigration that increased the power of law enforcement and authorized extreme enforcement tactics as justified removal efforts. The US government was no longer shy about its employment of Border Patrol and the INS. Instead, they actively endorsed it.

Balancing Amnesty and Punishment: Analyzing the Effects of Reagan’s 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and Clinton’s 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA)

Immigration had become a hot-button issue during the 1984 presidential election. Dictatorships in various countries in Central and South America had forced many to flee as refugees to the US. Immigrants from Cuba, Nicaragua and El Salvador were among some of the highest number of people who had declared asylum in the United States due to political violence¹⁰⁰. However, the US government prioritized thousands of European applicants for establishing residency, while only hundreds of applicants at a time from Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries were granted residency. The Department of Justice also reported that Mexican immigrants made up 1,104,429 of 1,140,466 total ‘deportable aliens,’ meaning those most at risk for deportation¹⁰¹. The US government enacted strict scrutiny over deportation of immigrants primarily from Latin America, but did not give refugees or immigrants the adequate opportunity to become naturalized citizens.



Raid at Escondido Swap Meet (Figure x)¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰Garcia, Maria Cristina. “The Wars in Central America and the Refugee Crisis.” In *Seeking Refuge*. University of California Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520939431-004>.

¹⁰¹ Department of Justice. 1984 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. (1984) https://cis.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/INS_Yearbook_1984.pdf

¹⁰² Times Advocate. Border Patrol Fills its buses at swap meet. Escondido Public Library (1986)

Using tactics during raids such as La Placita, INS and Border Patrol officers entered homes and workspaces to find and detain undocumented immigrants. These types of raids were common throughout the 1980s, especially throughout the Central and Southern Californian coast. In the tight knit community in Escondido, Border Patrol conducted a large-scale raid at the town's Swap Meet in the midst of talks for amnesty. Located in North County right above San Diego, the Escondido Swap Meet marked the spot for a historic outdoor market to take place where local vendors sold various goods. Open for the past 40 years, the Swap Meet has been organized primarily by Latin American immigrants to sell items such as clothes, hygiene and cleaning products to the community for inexpensive prices. Its roots lie in creating a vibrant community that promotes economic prosperity as vendors set up every Wednesday, Friday and weekends. On June 23, 1986, Border Patrol officers invaded the Swap Meet, arresting 280 undocumented immigrants. All 280 individuals were taken into custody, being crowded into three buses and four vans all before 10 a.m.¹⁰³. Border Patrol officer told the San Diego Times Advocate Newspaper the following:

“Next time we go there, we will bring up more buses, more vans and more agents. There is no other place in North County where you could get that many people in that short of a period.”

With the debate on immigration being at the forefront of many voters' minds, President Elect Ronald Reagan began working with Congress on legislation to address. On November 6, 1986, he took his desk at the Roosevelt Room in the White House to formally enact the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). Its contents contained powers that meant to grant

¹⁰³ Times Advocate. Border Patrol Fills its buses at swap meet. Escondido Public Library (1986)

amnesty for those who entered the US without documentation. It also placed punitive measures on employers who knowingly hired undocumented immigrants. Reagan's intention with IRCA was to curb the amount of undocumented immigrants residing in the US, but with an open door to citizenship. Over the course of the year, immigration offices across the nation saw an overwhelming amount of applicants with hopes of becoming a naturalized citizen. While IRCA did have great contributions in making citizenship a reality for more people, the program was only a temporary solution that had its own flaws in actually granting citizenship. When the door to amnesty closed in 1987, many undocumented immigrants were left shut out and citizenship once again became a far out dream.

The US began to contradict its policies in the 1990s, when it shifted its stance to punitive measures again. In 1996, Bill Clinton signed the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) that would completely undo all the work that amnesty in the decade prior granted. With the IIRIRA, deportation numbers not only rose, but undocumented immigrants were also barred from re-entering the United States for several years based on length of unauthorized stay. Clinton had established a zero-tolerance policy that did not achieve the federal government's goal in curtailing immigration, but rather made immigration more dangerous and racially targeted. Clinton's implementation of the IIRIRA completely reimaged the police powers of immigration, shaping its successor establishment, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, under the Department of Homeland Security in 2001.

In this final chapter, I will discuss the paradox of amnesty and punishment during the last two decades of the 20th century and its effects on the police powers of immigration. This era of legislation has direct impacts on the way in which immigration is regulated. The building blocks that Border Patrol and the INS have cemented into real legislation have been an intentional

process that prioritizes exclusion. The Border Patrol and the INS became a pawn of the US government to enact ethnic cleansing into enforceable actions against non-white immigrants.

The Workings of the 1986 IRCA

Before President Ronald Reagan effectively signed IRCA into federal law, the Act had undergone several changes and rejections. Authored by the Republican Senator of Wyoming, Alan K. Simpson and sponsored by Democratic Senator Romano Mazzoli, the original versions of the bill were completely different from its revised version passed in 1986. The 1983 version had focused almost entirely on punitive measures for employers that hired undocumented immigrants knowingly. It included penalties to those who hired undocumented immigrants, continued their employment, or those who had falsely reported that it has complied with these employment requirements¹⁰⁴. The bill introduced specific types of employment verification records that employers needed to obtain from prospective employees to verify status, such as Social Security cards, US passports, visas that established work eligibility, a US state verified driver's license, or identification document issued by the resident's state of residence¹⁰⁵. Most importantly of this version of IRCA, the bill would have introduced civil punishments for employers who violated these provisions. Employers who violated this bill would be subject to two formal notices of violations. If employers continued these violations, the following would occur:

A person or entity which violates [these provisions] shall be subject

¹⁰⁴ Congressional Record 129 S6970 to S699

https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=congreg&handle=hein.congreg/crd1290068&id=164&men_tab=srchresults

¹⁰⁵ Congressional Record 129 S6970 to S699

https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=congreg&handle=hein.congreg/crd1290068&id=164&men_tab=srchresults

to a civil penalty of \$500 for each individual with respect to which such violation occurred. [...] If the person or entity against whom a civil penalty is assessed fails to pay the penalty within the time prescribed In such order, the Attorney General shall file a suit to collect the amount In any appropriate district court.

The bill passed in the Senate, but had failed in the House. Many Congress members and civil rights groups strongly opposed the adoption of the bill. Most arguments focused on the fact that the state of this bill would discriminate against immigrants in employers' hiring practices. They expressed how these new provisions would only increase intimidation tactics utilized by the INS, and force local businesses to shut down. Michael Kantor, co-chairman for Democratic Presidential candidate Walter F. Mondale in 1984, believed "The bill's use of employer sanctions and a worker identification system is the anathema to the coalition we are trying to create."¹⁰⁶ Especially at a time where many were fleeing their home country for safer conditions and more profitable jobs, the bill would have severely affected their economic mobility. With limited pathways to establishing temporary or permanent residency status, many immigrants relied on employer sponsorship in order to stay in the United States. If businesses were found hiring undocumented immigrants, this pathway would be completely shut off. The California Teamsters Freight Drivers Union lobbied to California Congressman Peter Rodino asking him to oppose the early version of IRCA, arguing that "it is difficult to define this legislation as anything but anti-labor, and thus truly not to the benefit of the majority of Americans and residents."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Robert Pear. BILL ON ALIENS A DIVISIVE ISSUE FOR DEMOCRATS. New York Times (1984) <https://www.nytimes.com/1984/04/22/us/bill-on-aliens-a-divisive-issue-for-democrats.html#:~:text=There%20has%20always%20been%20some,because%20they%20can%20be%20exploited.>

¹⁰⁷ Letter to Congressman Peter Rodino. University of California, Santa Diego. (1982) https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb16054022/_1.pdf

The Simpson-Mazzoli bill's extreme harshness made it hard to reach a majority yes vote for several years. Senator Simpson continued to work on the bill over the next three years. In total, he presented nearly four different versions of the bill. Simpson presented another version of the bill in 1984 to Congress, which failed again in the House. He presented it again the next year, in which it failed again. Due to its challenges, Simpson found it hard to receive the same sponsorship. In 1985, it received the nick-name "The Simpson-Nobody Bill" after Senator Mazzoli dropped his sponsorship of the bill.¹⁰⁸ While the majority of conservative Congress members approved of the bill, Simpson knew he would have to persuade Democrats in passing the bill. Although there was heavy congressional and constituent disapproval of IRCA, Simpson and other Senate allies kept revising amended versions of the bill that they would bring to the Congressional floor in 1986.

1986: The Age of Compromise and Amnesty

After various changes to the original legislation, Senator Simpson reintroduced IRCA to the Senate on May 23, 1985. After listening to concerns from Congress members and immigrant activist groups, Simpson included provisions that would protect undocumented immigrants through granting temporary residency for specific immigrant categories. Drawing on concerns that punitive measures alone would make hiring practices more unfair for those who were undocumented, advocates of amnesty agreed that these opportunities to extend amnesty for vulnerable and working class groups would provide more sufficient protections for immigrants. The two goals of IRCA appealed to both advocacy groups for protecting immigrant rights, and those in Congress and the House of Commerce who were concerned for its effects on US

¹⁰⁸ The Simpson-Nobody Bill. New York Times (1985)
<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/24/opinion/the-simpson-nobody-bill.html>

economy. For advocacy groups, it was one of the first pieces of legislation that prioritized amnesty besides the repealing of the national origins quota with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. IRCA was a promise that undocumented immigrants would have an actual chance towards citizenship once arriving and establishing roots on American soil. For Congress, they saw voting constituents who blamed a failing job market on employment of undocumented immigrant workers. IRCA supporters argued that this reformist legislation was necessary to alleviate economic stress and curtail the increased number of migrants coming to the US. As Alan K. Simpson wrote on behalf of the Center for Migration Studies, “Those who continue to look toward their own short-term self interest by supporting the status quo are doing the nation a profound long-term disservice.”¹⁰⁹ After being amended between the Senate and the House nearly 4 times, the finalized version signed by Reagan included seven provisions balancing punitive measures with amnesty.

The punitive provisions of IRCA included making the hiring of undocumented immigrants illegal, instituting employment verifications, and implementing federal sanctions on employers who are found hiring undocumented immigrants. In various states, employers were more inclined to hire undocumented immigrants for work because it was more affordable than paying US workers. The federal government previously protected employers from it, seeing how it boosted economic growth for the entire US economy. The Texas Proviso, implemented under the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, established that employment of undocumented immigrants did not constitute as harboring immigrants from federal immigration authorities, and was therefore legal¹¹⁰. The proviso was problematic from various perspectives, including

¹⁰⁹ Alan K. Simpson. The Politics of Immigration Reform. *The International Migration Review*, Vol. 18, No. 3, Special Issue: Irregular Migration: An International Perspective (Autumn, 1984), pp. 486-504
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2545882>

¹¹⁰ Public Law 414. Statute 66. P. 183
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-66/pdf/STATUTE-66-Pg163.pdf>

continuous effects of the exploitative Bracero Program and employer reliance on undocumented immigration. IRCA completely reversed this provision and spelled out consequences for those that broke the rules. It first established federal authentication methods that employers had to verify their workers were authorized to work and reside in the US. If employers did hire undocumented immigrants either knowingly or did not administer proper background checks, employers could be subject to investigations and sanctions. After that, they could be subjected to civil penalties and put on probation until the employer has reached a good standing with issuing background checks. Many critics of IRCA within Congress still feared placing hefty punishments on employers for hiring undocumented immigrants. They had seen that immigrants were a major contributing force to the economy, and punishing employers did not align with their goals for immigration reform. However, the federal government saw employer punishments as the only way to stop undocumented immigration. One New York Times columnist summarized Congress's goals to this: "To turn the tide, turn off the magnet; make it illegal to hire aliens."¹¹¹

The amnesty provisions of IRCA focused on expanding more direct pathways towards legalized residency for agricultural workers and families. The provision stated that as long as an immigrant came to the US prior to January 1, 1982, they could be granted temporary residency status¹¹². The filing window ran between May 1987 to 1988, where applicants were instructed to pay a filing fee and verify that they did not commit a felony or take part in any sort of persecution¹¹³. The first type of legal categorization of immigrants eligible for the program were temporary agricultural workers through the H-2A visa. Also known as the Special Agricultural Workers Program (SAW), this visa category allowed for workers in the farm labor sector to apply

¹¹¹ The Simpson-Nobody Bill. New York Times (1985)
<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/24/opinion/the-simpson-nobody-bill.html>

¹¹² U.S. Congress. House. *Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986*. Pub. L. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359. 99th Cong., 2d sess., November 6, 1986. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/senate-bill/1200/summary/48>

¹¹³ U.S. Congress. House. *Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986*. Pub. L. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359. 99th Cong., 2d sess., November 6, 1986. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/senate-bill/1200/summary/48>

for temporary residency so long as they ensured with their employer that they were eligible under labor law requirements. Workers were required to file an application with the Secretary of Labor and maintain continuous adherence to admission requirements. This type of visa, which is still available today, helped approximately 1 million farm workers obtain temporary residency status¹¹⁴.

The other amnesty provision implemented under IRCA was for family units. Family separation had been a recurring issue under INS and Border Patrol surveillance, especially for immigrants coming from Central America. Immigration enforcement agents who detained individuals that were undocumented would often take children away from their parents, and were incarcerated separately. Since individuals detained by ICE had to await a hearing in immigration court to see whether they were authorized entry and stay in the United States, the length of custody was long and tumultuous. The process could take up to several months before being given a hearing. During custody, they couldn't see their family and were exposed to inhumane treatment by officers. In 1985, USC lawyers found that children in a detention center in Chula Vista reported being subjected to strip searches and placed in freezing cold rooms if they did not follow the agents' orders¹¹⁵. Being alone awaiting status of entry was a strenuous and stressful process for young children to go through alone, especially when many of them were fleeing political violence in their birth country. While reform efforts were made on local levels, federal solutions were needed to stop family separation. IRCA waived quotas and exclusionary grounds that had been cited for minors prior to 1986, and was included to ensure families could be offered pathways to citizenship together.

¹¹⁴Committee on the Judiciary. Serial No. 71 (1999)

https://commdocs.house.gov/committees/judiciary/hju59871.000/hju59871_0.HTM?utm_source=chatgpt.com

¹¹⁵ Philip G. Schrag. *Baby Jails: The Fight to End the Incarceration of Refugee Children in America*. Jenny Flores 1985–1988. University of California Press.

https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/j.ctvs09qvc.6.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Aab86c07b07bca7b4a599311fd76834f6&ab_segments=&initiator=&acceptTC=1



“Richard Dixon, Legalization Assistant, explains to Carlos Hernandez [...] of what additional papers Carlos needs to complete his application” (Figure x)¹¹⁶

IRCA was instrumental in its impact and the promise it gave to immigrants. Approximately 3 million people were accepted for temporary residency through IRCA through employment, asylum-seeking efforts, and family unification¹¹⁷. Due to the nature of its bipartisan efforts, it easily passed in Congress because it was able to satisfy both sides of the immigration debate. Many advocacy groups and those on the left celebrated the wins that IRCA provided through granting amnesty to a group that the federal government had previously shut its doors to. For Republicans and those concerned with the economic impact of immigration, they believed

¹¹⁶ Rios, Dan. Raid at the Escondido Swap Meet (1983)

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/#search/escondido+public+p/FMfcgzQfBGftbgwKrwcVTCzjxnrxKbbb?projector=1&messagePartId=0.2>

¹¹⁷ “Research Guides: A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States: 1986: Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986.” 1986: Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 - A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States - Research Guides at Library of Congress. Accessed March 18, 2026. <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/irca>.

sanctions on employers was the necessary step towards curbing the larger problem they believed undocumented immigration presented.

The Inevitable Consequences of IRCA and Its Policies in Practice

While Reagan and congressional efforts in passing IRCA made pathways to citizenship easier to see in peripheral view, by no means was the federal government pro-immigrant. Reagan's administration had made it clear to American citizens and undocumented immigrants living in the US that it wanted to curb what it called "illegal immigration" as much as possible and by any means necessary. In Reagan's address when signing IRCA, he remarked "Future generations of Americans will be thankful for our efforts to [...] preserve the value of one of the most sacred possessions of our people: American citizenship."¹¹⁸ The heart of immigration legislation had been and would continue to be on stopping undocumented immigration.

First, IRCA certainly did not make deportation less common. In fact, some provisions within IRCA only strengthened the power of immigration enforcement agencies. As far as funding was concerned, IRCA authorized increases to INS and Border Patrol budgets for the 1987 and 1988 fiscal year by reappropriating funds from the Department of Justice. This appropriated funding was justified by Congress to enhance "community outreach and in-service personnel training."¹¹⁹ In practice, this funding would allow INS enforcement officers to continue hiring on an exponential level. Officers began going nation-wide in their recruitment efforts, focusing extensively on recruiting young men. In 1987, 14 San Diego State University students

¹¹⁸ Reagan, Ronald. Statement on Signing the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum. (1986)

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/statement-signing-immigration-reform-and-control-act-1986>

¹¹⁹ U.S. Congress. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Pub. L. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359 (November 6, 1986). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/senate-bill/1200>

accepted jobs to work in INS officers after graduation¹²⁰. No funds were directed towards social service oriented programs or expanding federal financial benefits for undocumented immigrants. IRCA included a clause that explicitly excluded legalized immigrants from receiving federal financial assistance, Medicaid, or food stamps for five years after being declared temporary resident and five years after being declared a permanent resident¹²¹. Congress had been vocal about not wanting to expand federal financial assistance to immigrants, whether they had been undocumented or received permanent residency status. Concerned that financial assistance would increase undocumented immigration, it enhanced IRCA with punitive measures through empowering the policing sector of immigration. It added a \$35,000,000 emergency fund through the US Treasury to be used for “necessary enforcement activities and related State and local reimbursements.”¹²² The financial empowerment of the INS and Border Patrol was a very intentional measure that Congress granted. To achieve its goal of curtailing unauthorized immigration, IRCA gave INS and Border Patrol to continue enforcement on a larger scale with a continually increasing budget.

Second, the short time span that IRCA actually allowed relevant applicants to apply for temporary residency was not sufficient enough to support everyone who could sign up for the program. Legalization offices, where applicants went to apply for citizenship or specific visas, were overcrowded and short staffed. As the program was expected to close in 1988, the INS reported over 1 million farm-workers lining up outside of legalization offices until the last day to make last-minute applications, hoping to be accepted for temporary residency status¹²³. Most

¹²⁰ PATRICK McDONNELL. INS Turns to College Recruits : 14 SDSU Students Become Part-Time Agents in New Program to Fill Ranks. Los Angeles Times. (1987)

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1987-10-15-me-14142-story.html>

¹²¹ U.S. Congress. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Pub. L. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359 (November 6, 1986). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/senate-bill/1200>

¹²² U.S. Congress. Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Pub. L. 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359 (November 6, 1986). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/99th-congress/senate-bill/1200>

¹²³ Times Advocate. Aliens Make Last minute residency applications. Escondido Public Library. (1988)

immigration offices did not have the bandwidth to process the volume of applications, leading them to be open until midnight on the last day of the program. Catalina Gonzalez, a high school junior at Vista High School, rushed to the office and filed her application before midnight when she learned that the program was supposed to end on the same day¹²⁴. While these 1 million applications were filed before the program deadline, state governments and INS officials suspected many of these applications of fraud. Officers reported that they believed many applicants forged documents in order to meet the program deadline. Some believed various applicants were not qualified at all, and tried to apply with fraudulent documents. In Arizona, the INS recommended up to 60% of the applications be denied¹²⁵. While IRCA was advertised as a program that could grant amnesty to any qualified applicants, the requirements and deadlines that the program expected applicants to meet made it purposefully hard to grant temporary and permanent status to all.

The misconception with IRCA is that it was meant to reform the immigration system by making pathways to citizenship easier. The effects of IRCA has helped achieve this goal to some extent, in which it has helped grant temporary and permanent residency to over 3 million individuals. Congress has built upon IRCA foundations well into the 2000s to continue opening doors for immigrants through other programs, such as the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). However, pathways to citizenship were far from Reagan's or Congress's goal in 1986. The government maintained its stance in curtailing undocumented immigration because they believed it was an illegal activity. These policymakers intentionally shortened IRCA's open application timeline because it did not want all qualified applicants with temporary or permanent residency. Instead,

¹²⁴ Times Advocate. Aliens Make Last minute residency applications. Escondido Public Library. (1988)

¹²⁵ Times Advocate. Aliens Make Last minute residency applications. Escondido Public Library. (1988)

they believed that by granting a very small portion of applicants with citizenship, it would signal to future or unqualified applicants that this pathway would not be opened again. Increases to the INS's budget and an additional emergency fund demonstrate this, as the INS continued conducting raids and detaining individuals even throughout IRCA. IRCA was not a completely reformist effort. It was an intentional process to curtail immigration that was primarily enforced on non-white immigrants, and would set the stage for more punitive efforts by the end of the 20th century.

The Final Stage of the INS and the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act

The consequences of IRCA caused the Clinton administration to respond with the Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) in 1996. In contrast to IRCA, IIRIRA was more blatant about its intention to curtail undocumented immigration. As opposed to the veil of amnesty that IRCA granted for certain immigrant groups, Clinton and Congress made it very clear that it would create lasting consequences for those who were undocumented. It utilized the INS to force undocumented immigrants out of the US if they violated the new rules set by IIRIRA. The INS ramped up enforcement efforts and raids after its hiatus during the 80s, and the doors to citizenships grew increasingly out of sight.

The first major change with IIRIRA is it expanded the types of crimes that undocumented immigrants could be deported for, if they were caught by enforcement officers and found guilty in court. Prior to 1996, being undocumented was a regularly enforced offense, but still went through due process channels. In most cases individuals were only deported for committing prior criminal offenses. Some of these offenses included murder, previous drug charges, and weapons

trafficking¹²⁶. All those subject to deportation still had an immigration hearing before a judge, in which they could plead their case. With IIRIRA, these constitutional protections were virtually erased while lists of punitive offenses and deportable crimes were expanded. Employing language under the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1990, the list of aggravated felony charges that constituted a deportable crime expanded to include non-violent drug trafficking, theft, money laundering, crimes of violence, violations committed within the US and those committed in violation of foreign law¹²⁷. Furthermore, it expanded the list of criminal offenses related to deportation including “high speed flight” if it put enforcement officers in danger, smuggling and harboring undocumented immigrants, committing document fraud of residency papers, and voting in federal elections¹²⁸. Anyone who violated these criminal provisions could be subject to imprisonment between 10 to 25 years, depending on the type of violation that was committed¹²⁹. IIRIRA applied all violations retroactively, meaning that undocumented immigrants could be tried and found guilty of these aggravated felonies if committed prior to IIRIRA’s enactment. IIRIRA established that minors, asylum seekers, women and children who were victims of domestic violence, beneficiaries of family units, and those admitted lawfully to the US without prior committed offenses would be exempted from IIRIRA’s punishments. However, it still had major implications on family separation and increased risk of deportation for undocumented immigrants across the board, even for those in previously protected categories under IRCA.

¹²⁶Kerwin, Donald. “From IIRIRA to Trump: Connecting the Dots to the Current US Immigration Policy Crisis.” *Journal on Migration and Human Security* (Los Angeles, CA) 6, no. 3 (2018): 192–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502418786718>.

¹²⁷ Immigration Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101–649, 104 Stat. 4978 (Nov. 29, 1990). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/358>

¹²⁸ Public Law 104-208. Stat 3009. (1996) <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-104publ208/pdf/PLAW-104publ208.pdf>

¹²⁹ Public Law 104-208. Stat 3009. (1996) <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-104publ208/pdf/PLAW-104publ208.pdf>

The second major change made under the IIRIRA was the implementation of time bans for re-entry. IIRIRA had pressured undocumented immigrants that could be subject to deportation under this Act to voluntarily depart from the US to be granted permanent residency. Based on the time that an undocumented immigrant had resided unlawfully in the US, they could be subject to either a 3 or 10 year time ban for re-entry if they wanted to be granted lawful status. If an undocumented immigrant was present in the US for more than 180 days but less than 1 year, they would not be authorized to re-enter and file for legal status until after 3 years¹³⁰. If someone was present in the US for longer than 365 days, they would be unauthorized to re-enter for 10 years¹³¹. IIRIRA established exceptions to the time ban for certain groups. Those exceptions included minors, asylum seekers, women and children who are victims of domestic violence, beneficiaries of family units, and those admitted lawfully to the US without prior committed offenses. These exceptions helped specific categories of undocumented immigrants, but it still facilitated family separation and made it harder to afford living in the US. The stipulation for those who were classified as beneficiaries of a family unit had to be married to or the child of a legalized alien living as a temporary or permanent resident in the US¹³². Extended family members were not included in this definition, even though there were immigrant families present in the US who lived with non-immediate relatives in the same household. Family members such as grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles therefore had no legal basis for declaring an exemption from deportation. For households that relied on extended family members to be caretakers or provide additional income, it added extra strain when those members would be subject to a ban that would not let them return back to their family for several

¹³⁰ Public Law 104-208. Stat 3009. (1996) p. 577

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-104publ208/pdf/PLAW-104publ208.pdf>

¹³¹ Public Law 104-208. Stat 3009. (1996) p. 577

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-104publ208/pdf/PLAW-104publ208.pdf>

¹³² Immigration Act of 1990. Public Law 101-649, U.S. Statutes at Large 104 (1990): 4978.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/senate-bill/358>

years. While exemptions were made for some, it was a strict standard that was meant to facilitate more removals rather than support legal ways towards citizenship.

IIRIRA received immediate backlash from the American public. Members of Congress and immigrant-amnesty advocates expressed the same sentiments around punitive measures that the IRCA had received almost 10 years prior. House of Representative Lamar Smith directed his concerns to Attorney General Janet Reno, who had facilitated IIRIRA's implementation, arguing that the Act's scope unfairly punished lawful citizens. In a letter to Reno signed by 27 other members in House of Representatives, Smith wrote the following:

“There has been widespread agreement that some deportations were unfair and resulted in unjustifiable hardship. Many people believe that you have the discretion to alleviate some of the hardships, and we wish to solicit your views as to why you have been unwilling to exercise such authority.”¹³³”

Legal groups also pointed to the unconstitutionality of such laws that violated one's right to due process and collection of evidence. Expedited removals, established by IIRIRA, allowed immigrants to be detained and deported without a hearing or review by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)¹³⁴. ACLU Legislative Counsel Gregory T. Nojeim shared his frustrations with the blatant denial of these protections in testimony to the National Commission on Terrorism. He stated, “The Supreme Court has said time and again that deportation is a severe deprivation of liberty - one that can separate a person from home, family, career, and “all that makes like worth

¹³³ Allen Kay. Guidelines for Use of Prosecutorial Discretion in Removal Proceedings. (1999)
https://big.assets.huffingtonpost.com/Smith_to_Reno_1999.pdf

¹³⁴ NAFSA. DHS Expands Expedited Removal Policy. (2025)
<https://www.nafsa.org/regulatory-information/dhs-expands-expedited-removal-policy>

living¹³⁵. ””While some Congress members and immigrant advocate organizations focused on different consequences of the IIRIRA, both agreed that it was a severe violation of rights in a country where constitutional protections are supposed to be afforded to all.



Figure x¹³⁶

The 1996 IIRIRA was one of the last pieces of legislation in the 20th century that reshaped the future of this police power. It established complete control and authority for enforcement agents to increase surveillance efforts. Through increasing funding and personnel of Border Patrol officers, IIRIRA placed them under the direct control of the INS to mobilize throughout the country. By the end of the 20th century, 8,000 Border Patrol officers were dispersed along 33 district offices, of which 93% were placed along the US-Mexico border.¹³⁷ IIRIRA set the foundation for a new era of enforcing deportations and supplying police power with unprecedented powers of surveillance. It focused on its enforcement efforts on racialized lines, demonstrated through the majority of Border Patrol officers being stationed along the

¹³⁵ GREGORY T. NOJEIM. Testimony of Legislative Counsel Gregory T. Nojeim on the Civil Liberties Implications of Counterterrorism Measures Before the National Commission on Terrorism. American Civil Liberties Union. (2000)

<https://www.aclu.org/documents/testimony-legislative-counsel-gregory-t-nojeim-civil-liberties-implications-counterterrorism>

¹³⁶ Cartoon for Council opposing police-border patrol. University of California, Santa Diego. (1993)

https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb16054022/_1.pdf

¹³⁷ United States General Accounting Office. Illegal Immigration: Status of Southwest Border Strategy Implementation. (1999). <https://www.gao.gov/assets/ggd-99-44.pdf>

Southern Border. Knowing that opportunities for citizenship could never be afforded, the majority of undocumented immigrants continued living in the US under the government's radar. With a government that didn't give them the tools to establish residency, many undocumented immigrants turned to under-the-table jobs as a way to continue living in the US, which opened them up to greater vulnerabilities like physical harm or wage theft. In the end, IIRIRA didn't stop undocumented immigrants from residing in the US, it only made life economically and emotionally more burdensome.

Conclusion

The interplay between the 1986 IRCA and 1996 IIRIRA should not be thought of as mutually exclusive actions to regulate deportation. While their implementation models directly opposed each other, the intention behind each one had always been to curtail undocumented immigration. Nativist sentiments that immigrants were a threat to national security, worsened the US economy, and took public benefits away from American citizens were false fears that were still incorporated under each model. Neither IRCA or the IIRIRA were meant to make pathways to citizenship easier. IRCA only gave this opportunity to a select number of people who had to compete against the clock to apply for residency, while the IIRIRA amplified these effects. Instead, both IRCA and the IIRIRA gave enforcement agents the tools to enact complete control over entry and residency. These models were designed to set undocumented immigrants up for failure, exponentially increasing deportation rates. Between 1996 and 1999, the INS reported an increase from 69,680 removals to 183,114¹³⁸. IRCA and the IIRIRA were directly responsible for

¹³⁸Table 39. *Aliens Removed or Returned: Fiscal Years 1892 to 2019*. OHSS.

<https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/yearbook/2019/table39>.

increasing these deportation rates by making pathways to citizenship an intentionally difficult process.

At the turn of the century, Congress began laying a new groundwork for police power to regulate immigration. After 9/11, the INS shut down and was rebranded to become the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The goal of this new agency was to prevent, reduce, and minimize the damage of terrorist attacks against the United States¹³⁹. The DHS absorbed all powers and authorities granted to the INS, including the power of deportation. In 2003, a new version of the INS was created, named Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE's mission was to “protect America through criminal investigations and enforcing immigrations laws to preserve national security and public safety¹⁴⁰.” ICE had come off the heels of a decade with the highest levels of deportation in comparison to any other presidential administration. The powers for ICE had been laid out with this decade of removals, giving it the recognizability and status to continue policing immigration. In the early years of ICE, the department did not nearly have the same troubles in establishing its legitimacy as Border Patrol and the INS did. The public saw how immigrants were legally classified and controlled by a federal police entity as a result of IRCA and the IIRIRA, and they feared it. Congress weaponized this fear to push the limits of constitutional authority, and allowed it the opportunity to overstep its authority for decades to come.

¹³⁹ PUBLIC LAW 107–296 116 STAT. 2135 (2002)
https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/03_0116_hr_5005_enr.pdf

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (n.d.)
<https://www.ice.gov/mission>

Conclusion: Understanding the Consequences of Deportation Through Today's Policies

It makes no sense to expel talented young people, who, for all intents and purposes, are Americans -- they've been raised as Americans; understand themselves to be part of this country -- to expel these young people who want to staff our labs, or start new businesses, or defend our country simply because of the actions of their parents -- or because of the inaction of politicians.¹⁴¹ - *President Barack Obama on signing DACA*

The purpose of reconstructing the history of Border Patrol and the INS is to draw parallels to the deportation system that governs US immigration policy today. It is no accident that enforcement agents actively employ methods of fear, violence, racism and exploitation to deprive immigrants of the chance of citizenship. These methods have been legitimized by its predecessors and the federal government, who has reaffirmed its authority to police immigration. The police power of immigration was created in direct response to white nativist fears that non-white individuals would have equal opportunity to participate in American society in social, political, and economic contexts. As explored in the first chapter and second chapters, Border Patrol and the INS were built from established white supremacist groups like the Texas Rangers. Immigration officials promoted racial exclusion as a necessary enforcement effort to protect national security. Although the federal government was originally hesitant to create a police force with no prior skill\ in enforcement, its intention from the very start was to preserve racial purity and to "keep America American." It established the building blocks for surveillance and

¹⁴¹ "Remarks by the President on Immigration." National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed March 19, 2026.

<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/06/15/remarks-president-immigration#:~:text=As%20I%20said%20in%20my,or%20start%20new%20businesses%2C%20or.>

removals of primarily non-white immigrants, and gradually gave this police power uncontrolled power to do so. Enforcement officers in today's context have not implemented new methods for social control, but are simply repeating the foundation that was laid out for them.

Deportation has become a power in the hands of a tainted police entity. Given that this policing system has been built off a culture of white supremacist beliefs, reform for the immigration system is not possible. The federal government has created a narrative that illustrates immigrants as costly, un-American, and taking up financial resources from US citizens. Yet at the same time, events such as the Bracero Program demonstrate how the federal government has exploited immigrants for their labor when it was an advantage to alleviate stresses of economic turmoil. This same federal government blamed and punished immigrants for these exploitative programs, demonstrated through President Eisenhower's deportation program in the 1950s that caused over 300,000 Mexican-Americans and citizens to be removed. At the same time that non-white immigrants were being exploited and incarcerated by the federal government, it cut back on entry limitations for white immigrants. Although the federal government repealed the exclusionary quota system with the Hart Cellar Act in 1965, officers enforced entry requirements and restrictions more often on non-white immigrants than on white individuals. The deportation operations initiated by federal policy demonstrates how the federal government was willing to tolerate white immigration, but unable to accommodate non-white immigrants into American society.

Reform measures have been attempted, but it is not enough. As I articulate in analyzing the paradox between Reagan's IRCA amnesty program in the 1980s and Clinton's punitive IIRIRA introduced a decade after, governmental regulations on immigration have not been a matter of political ideology alone. Throughout the 20th century, presidential administrations have

worked together with Congress to create and enhance exclusionary policies that characterize immigrants as a threat to the safety of the American public, and should be completely removed. Conservative and liberal policymakers have both had their hand in pushing deportation and amnesty measures to curtail undocumented immigration. The main objective of both political parties has always been to curtail undocumented immigration based on social control and racial exclusion. The consequences of such legislation has made immigrants live in fear, and live without equitable opportunities to succeed.

By examining the federal government's employment of a police power to control immigration, I argue that this system has been inherently tainted with white supremacy since Border Patrol was established. Reform does not make adequate changes to a system that was inherently unequal to begin with. This disregard for the systemic issues arising out of policing immigration have caused history to repeat itself, and for the same human rights violations to occur time after time. Immigration policies must be created on the basis of recognizing our rich history as a nation built on the work of immigrants which should be embraced, not punished. If not, we are doomed to repeat our horrific history again.

While we continue through a tumultuous time of unconstitutional methods and human rights violations committed by ICE and Border Patrol officers in the country today, we cannot chalk up these problems as the sole responsibility of the current administration. The administration has set unprecedented levels of deportation and family separation, but these issues were not non-existent before. This entire system has been intentionally shaped in this manner. To address this, we must continue to critique America's horrific past of exclusion, and completely dismantle the system so we can return to a nation that promotes its cultural diversity.

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