

Description

This exercise asks participants to trace their immigration history on a timeline, and then view their family's immigration in the context of past laws on immigration. This exercise was developed by Eli Il Yong Lee.

Objectives

1. To have participants share their immigration history and analyze the history of immigration law in this country.

Time

02 hours

Participants

8-30 participants

Materials

- Immigration Timeline
- Definitions on butcher paper
- Notecards
- Tape
- Markers
- Paper
- Pens

Steps

- On butcher paper, write the following, and have participants match the word with the definition. Mix them up so they are not across from each other.

Immigrant:	A person born outside of the US who has been allowed to live in the US permanently by the government.
Refugee:	A person who is outside of the US who is looking for protection because they fear danger in their own country.
Undocumented	
Immigrant:	A person who is in the US without the permission of the government.

- Show people the immigration timeline.
Please take a notecard, marker and tape, and put up on the timeline when your family immigrated to the United States. Put up another card with your name on it for when you were born.
Make some general observations about commonalities about the group's immigration history.

- Have everyone sit down, and then go up and place the Immigration Timeline Notecards on the timeline.
- *Now go up to the timeline with a piece of paper and a pen, and answer the following questions.*

Have these questions printed on butcher paper and also read them aloud:

- *What were the laws that came right before, and right after your family immigrated?*
- *What are 2 laws that would have affected your family if you had immigrated at the time of that law? Explain how those laws would have affected your family.*
- *Which laws are interesting to you, either because they surprise you, they make you happy or they make you angry? Please explain.*
- Have participants share when their family immigrated and the answers to the questions.
- Debrief:
 - *Who makes Immigration laws?*
 - *The United States Congress.*
 - *Why do you think immigration laws have often been racist?*
 - *Because lawmakers, who for the most part have been White, have often tried to keep entire races out of the US because either they felt like certain races were inferior or to exclude or promote certain races as a pool for labor.*
 - *What type of immigration laws would you like to see?*

Write down responses on butcher paper:

- *Immigration, like many things in this country, has often been a racist system. That is why we need organizations to fight for our rights as immigrants, young people and people of color.*

Put each of these events on notecards. You will tape them to a timeline during the exercise. This timeline is borrowed from Documents Center at the University of Michigan Library, and from the Immigration Forum and American Friends Service Committee-Texas/Arkansas/Oklahoma.

- 1795** - A law was passed saying that you have to live in the United States for at least five years before you can become a citizen.
- 1798** - A law was passed saying that you have to live in the United States for at least 14 years before you can become a citizen.
- 1802** - A law was passed bringing the time period back down to five years of living in the US before you could become a citizen.
- 1875** - For the first time, a law banned certain groups of immigrants from coming to the US. This law banned prostitutes, criminals and "involuntarily traveling orientals," by which was meant Chinese contract workers, negatively called "Coolies."
- 1885** - With the support of the labor unions, a new law banned contract laborers from immigrating. Domestic servants, doctors and certain hard-to-get workers were still allowed in.
- 1891** - Another law was passed that banned criminals, mentally ill people, people with epilepsy and people who were not able to earn a living. For the first time, every immigrant had to pay a tax of fifty cents. This fee was raised to \$2 in 1903 and to \$4 in 1907.
- 1896** - A literacy test in the immigrant's original language passed Congress but was vetoed by President Grover Cleveland.
- 1903** - A new law banned anarchists, pimps, and prostitutes from immigration.
- 1907** - Under American pressure, the Japanese government made an agreement not to issue any more sailing permits for Japanese workers.
- 1913** - The California legislature limited the right of Japanese immigrants to buy land.
- 1917** - A literacy test for immigrants over 16 years passed Congress with a 2/3 majority.

- 1918** - A new law banned immigrants who supported the violent overthrow of the American government.
- 1920** - A new law allowed for the deportation of citizens of countries with which the United States was at war.
- 1921** - The first quota law was passed. It limited the annual number of immigrants to a total of 357,803, permitting about 200,000 from northwestern Europe (including Germany), and about 155,000 from eastern and southern Europe. For the whole of Asia and Africa, only 1,000 permits were available.
- 1924** - A second quota law dropped the number down to 164,667 immigrants per year.
- 1929** - A third quota law dropped the number even further to 53,714 immigrants per year.
- 1940** - A new law forced all foreigners to be fingerprinted.
- 1946-7** - Two war bride laws allowed 180,000 foreign-born women and their children to immigrate above and beyond the quota system.
- 1948** - The Displaced Persons Act allowed over 400,000 Europeans to enter the country. Congress also began allowing exceptions to the immigrant quota for refugees in trouble.
- 1952** - The McCarran-Walter Act lifted the ban on Japanese and other Asian immigrants.
- 1953** - The Refugee Relief Act allowed for the immigration of about 210,000 people who had been persecuted by communist governments.
- 1956-7** - The US President lifted the quota for 38,000 Hungarian refugees following their unsuccessful uprising against the Soviet-backed government.
- 1965** - A new immigration law created quotas based on the part of the world you were from. For example, it said that no more than 170,000 immigrant could come from countries outside of the Western Hemisphere, with a maximum of 20,000 immigrants from one single country.
- 1980** - A new law said that no more than 50,000 refugees and 320,000 immigrants could come to the US every year. From 1946 to 1987 the United States accepted over two

refugees. The largest group was 473,000 from Cuba, and 411,000 from Vietnam.

- 1986** - An immigration reform law lowered the annual immigration limit to 270,000 people.
- 1990** - For the first time since 1965, the annual quota for immigrants was drastically raised to 700,000. Of these, 140,000 were reserved for professional people (engineers, etc.) and 10,000 for those willing to invest at least \$500,000 in the United States. The words "communist" and "homosexual" as grounds for exclusion were taken out of the law.
- 1996** - The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Act gave more power to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), eliminated basic rights for immigrants and limited the ways for immigrants to legalize their status.
- 1996** - The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (known as "welfare reform") ended many forms of financial and medical assistance to legal immigrants.