

LIMEN

Journal of the International Network for Immigration Research

9 (2024/1)



mrⁱ

MIGRATION
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

LIMEN

Journal of the International Network
for Immigration Research
published by the Hungarian Migration Research Institute

9 (2024/1)



MIGRATION
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

LIMEN

Limen is the biannual journal of the International Network for Immigration Research published by the Migration Research Institute.



Editorial Board:

Tamás DEZSŐ, Dominika GYÖRGYI, Sára KMECZKÓ, Viktor MARSAL,
Árpád PÁRDUCZ, Omar SAYFO, Meszár TÁRIK,
Márk VARGHA

International Advisory Board:

Maxime AYMAR (Observatoire de l'immigration et de la démographie),
Nicolas POUVREAU-MONTI (Observatoire de l'immigration et de la
démographie), Mark KRİKORIAN (CIS), Jim ROBB (Numbers USA),
Eric RUARK (Numbers USA), Nayla RUSH (CIS)

Publisher:

Tamás DEZSŐ (Director General, Migration Research Institute)

P. O. Box 155, H-1518 Budapest, Hungary
info@migraciokutato.hu

©Migration Research Institute

Frontispiece: Newly arrived irregular immigrants waiting outside Yuma for Border Patrol agents to take them to the processing center.

ISSN: 2732-0200

Table of Contents

Roy H. BECK The Emancipation Reclamation: The Forgotten Story of the Immigration Act of 1924 and How It Propelled Black Americans into the Middle Class	4
Nayla RUSH The Biden-Harris Administration's Makeover of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program	23
Nicolas POUVREAU-MONTI Immigration and Islam in France: how do they interact?	46
Árpád PÁRDUCZ Non-Interlocking Pieces: The Migration Policy Puzzle of the Scholz Government	55
Book review by Ildikó KAPOSÍ <i>Guarding the Gates of Europe: The Hungarian Approach to Migration</i> Migration Research Institute, Budapest 2024	75
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	80

The Emancipation Reclamation: The Forgotten Story of the Immigration Act of 1924 and How It Propelled Black Americans into the Middle Class

Roy H. Beck

Abstract

The Immigration Act of 1924 ended the so-called Great Wave of immigration that brought over 20 million Europeans to America's shores. It also spurred the Great Migration, the movement of over six million African Americans from rural southern states to the industrialized north, and into jobs that otherwise would have gone to immigrant workers. Even many critics of the 1924 law recognize that it was instrumental in the formation of the Black middle class. In 1965, Congress began a second great wave of immigration that continues to this day, to the disproportionate disadvantage of Black Americans.

Keywords: Immigration Act, Black Americans, emancipation

Introduction

In my 2021 book, *Back of the Hiring Line: A 200-Year History of Immigration Surges, Employer Bias, and Depression of Black Wealth*, I explored a topic that is rarely acknowledged in the contemporary debates about U.S. immigration policy – that for two centuries, periodic immigration surges have effectively sabotaged Black incomes in the hiring lines of America. This isn't a story that hasn't been told before. But it is one that has been forgotten, or, rather, pushed aside by the narrative that mass immigration has always been the default policy pursued by the United States government, supported by the American people, and has had little to no negative effects on those already residing in the country.¹

¹ "Mass immigration" is used under the definition of Cornell labor economist Vernon Briggs in his book, *Mass Immigration and the National Interest*: a policy of high annual volume without regard to "prevailing economic trends and social stresses" within a nation.

After completing *Back of the Hiring Line* and reflecting on the 100th anniversary of the Immigration Act of 1924, I realized that most Americans also are unaware of how important that piece of legislation was in the making of the Black middle class, setting the groundwork for the Civil Rights movement that transformed America and that finally began to fulfill the promise of racial equality first made following the end of the Civil War a century earlier.

What follows are excerpts taken from *Emancipation Reclamation: The 1924-65 immigration reductions that propelled African Americans into the Great Migration and the middle class*, my monograph that NumbersUSA Education and Research Foundation published in September 2024. It details how the Immigration Act of 1924 reclaimed the earlier emancipation promises by doing one simple thing: It made it more difficult over the next four decades for employers to import foreign workers instead of recruiting Black U.S. citizens.

The Immigration Act of 1924 dramatically reduced annual entries into the United States for four decades. In so doing, it was the greatest federal action in U.S. history – other than the Civil War Constitutional Amendments – in advancing the *economic* interests of the descendants of American slavery, and perhaps of all American workers.

The evidence for such a sweeping declaration is strong. But few would know it because most internet – and even more-credible – sources suggest the law was tainted by racism, if not outright White supremacy. Therefore, few in recent decades have dared hold up the law as something to be emulated as a way to alleviate rising inequality and social unrest in the country. Immigration flows remain large in the United States in large part because of the success of immigration expansionists in shutting down debate by labeling restrictions as racist. This has kept most of the public from knowing the incredible benefits of the country's only long-term, deeply restrictionist immigration policy.

But the story of the 41 years in which the 1924 law was in effect provides solid evidence for a superlative conclusion: the results from the deep reductions in annual immigration should be considered on balance as supremely *anti-racist*; it helped African American citizens more than any other group of Americans, and more than at any other time of history. And the most disproportionately economically weak members of U.S. society certainly deserved that consideration ahead of all the rest of the people in the world who wanted to come. That is, if

the United States was indeed a self-determining national community and not a “colony of the world,” as former U.S. Senator from Minnesota and candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968 Eugene McCarthy entitled his provocative 1992 book.²

The Law That Transformed Black America

In early 1923, ambitious Black workers in the South were scrambling to catch trains to the North before a whole new wave of foreign workers arrived. “Negro migration is on again. It is in full swing,” Black labor activist A. Philip Randolph told his magazine’s national readership: “The revival of industry and the restrictions against immigration are making openings in the North and West for the Negro workers heretofore undreamed of.”³

The economy was heating up after a recession. Factory gates of the north had rarely opened like this for Black workers since the end of Reconstruction in the previous century. More importantly, Congress had for the first time dramatically reduced immigration numbers. But the restrictions were only temporary. If only immigration could stay low all the time, it stood to reason that economic opportunities for Black workers would continue to improve. For over a half-century, African Americans had been denied the rights they had been promised in the 1860s Civil War Emancipation, in part because few could earn incomes outside the South.⁴ No federal action since Emancipation had done more to deprive Black citizens of economic advancement than the government’s mass immigration policies. Now, a small percentage of Black southerners were able to leave homes and families fast enough to try to liberate themselves, starting at the train stations.

During the first year after passage of the short-term immigration restrictions, arrivals of foreign workers and family members had plummeted from 805,000 to 310,000. But in this second year, the law was proving inadequate to hold the numbers that low – too many loopholes.⁵ Later in 1923, ever-larger flotillas of ships would again be unloading their cargo of immigrant workers. Without

² McCARTHY 1992.

³ RANDOLPH – OWEN 1923/5.

⁴ The “Civil War Emancipation” was a collection of actions far greater than Lincoln’s Proclamation which began it. It was purchased and broadened by the blood, sacrifice, and victory of two million Union soldiers. The emancipation was then broadened further and the promises ratified in three Constitutional Amendments.

⁵ All immigration numbers in this book are from the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

a new law, immigration was headed back toward old peaks. Randolph wrote of the frenetic Jobs Rush in the early months of the year:

[Northern] labor agents are active in the South. They are securing Negro laborers so rapidly that the stations in Atlanta and large Southern cities are crowded with Negroes going through to Northern cities.⁶

Black editors and other leaders across the country urgently called for deeper and permanent restrictions on foreign workers. *The Messenger*, Randolph's Black labor advocacy magazine, reported:

The Negro papers are opposing any let-down in the immigration restrictions. They are pooh-poohing any liberal sentimentality. They say self-preservation is the highest interest and they will give no quarter to 'foreigners.'⁷

The editors dared to think of a country where the gates to the entire national job market would be open to African Americans permanently – not just in rare short-term scrambles.

The editors of the Black newspapers got their wish the next year with passage of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. The reduction had no expiration. It didn't slash annual numbers of foreign workers as low as many of the Black editors and other leaders had desired. But the cuts were enough to give them high hopes about the future they believed the law would enable for all African Americans.

Few of the editors, however, were likely to have imagined just how dramatically the 1924 law would transform the lives of most descendants of American slavery over the next four decades. And, really, for the country as a whole. For that reason, July 1, 1924, may be the most important date in American history you've never heard of. Federal bureaucrats on that Tuesday began implementing the new permanent immigration-reduction law that reactivated the promises of the Civil War Emancipation of the 1860s. The new law kept the factory gates outside the South propped open for the descendants of slavery. Black southerners responded spectacularly in what came to be known as the Great Migration, one of the most transformative epochs in United States history. It was a triumphant moment for African American leaders who had railed against immigration's unfair competition to Black workers since Frederick Douglass lamented:

⁶ RANDOLPH – OWEN 1923/5.

⁷ Ibid.

The old avocations, by which colored men obtained a livelihood, are rapidly, unceasingly and inevitably passing into other hands; every hour sees the black man elbowed out of employment by some newly arrived emigrant, whose hunger and whose color are thought to give him a better title to the place.⁸

The 1924 law's steep reduction in annual immigration started a steady and astounding series of employment changes over the next four decades that radically changed the United States, particularly by freeing African Americans from living under the bondage of Jim Crow laws. The results were what Black leaders had for a century hoped and predicted would happen if the government stopped allowing immigration to undercut African American workers. Only a year after the 1924 law's enactment, *The Messenger* explained:

Immigration from Europe has been materially cut, which means that the yearly supply of labor is much less than it formerly was. This gives the organized workers an advantage, greater bargaining power by virtue of this limited supply.

It also gives the negro worker a strategic position. It gives him the power to exact a higher wage ... on the one hand, and to compel organized labor to let down the bars of discrimination against him, the other.⁹

Under those and other influences of the 1924 Immigration Act over the next four decades, economists and historians agree:¹⁰

- The United States became a middle-class country;
- The sustained tighter labor markets were instrumental in the fastest income growth for workers in U.S. history;
- Inequality among classes and races shrank as workers shared in the fruits of their labor as never before;
- The increased incomes nurtured the rise of a new class of Black professionals who opened the political gates for the passage of the civil rights acts of the 1960s.

The Power of Lower Numbers

The 1924 Immigration Act was the first long-term restriction on the annual level of immigration ever enacted. Foreign immigration immediately dropped by nearly

⁸ FONER 1950.

⁹ RANDOLPH – OWEN 1925/7.

¹⁰ SMITH – WELCH 1993.

60% from 707,000 in 1924 to 294,000 in 1925. Over the next four decades, it averaged less than 200,000 per year.¹¹

That led to a powerful chain of events:¹²

- 1) The labor market tightened and forced open the gates of the nation's factories to Black southerners;
- 2) Black workers and their families hit the rails and roads in the historical phenomenon known as the Great Migration in which an estimated 6 million of them left the South (Most Americans are well aware of the Migration's enormous impact. But histories have tended to omit the support of Black leaders for the immigration reductions necessary for the Migration to really take off.);
- 3) Labor unions, without the constant flow of new waves of immigrant members, began to *open* up and even seek Black members, them access to better-paying jobs previously barred to them;
- 4) In the tight-labor markets, the "real" (inflation-adjusted) incomes of White men expanded two-and-one-half-fold between 1940 and 1980. The "real" incomes of Black men expanded even faster (four-fold.);
- 5) The number of middle-class African Americans more than tripled so that nearly three-fourths of families enjoyed the independence of a middle-class lifestyle;
- 6) Eventually, nearly half of African Americans were outside the South with markedly increased incomes. And their departures from the South tightened the southern labor market enough for those remaining to see steady improvements in *their* wages and civil rights.

Black leaders were immediately impressed. Within five years of the 1924 Act's enactment, W.E.B. DuBois was writing in *The Crisis* magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that, "The stopping of the importing of cheap white labor on any terms has been the economic salvation of American black labor."¹³ By 1924, some 25 million new immigrants had arrived since 1880. They had provided more than enough manpower for an expanding economy. Industrialists of the North and West felt they had little need of the labor of the country's 11 million Black citizens. On Tuesday, July 1, 1924, that began to change in earnest. President Calvin Coolidge had issued an Executive Proclamation

¹¹ The years in immigration data from the Immigration and Naturalization Service end on June 30 of the named year and start on July 1 of the previous year. Thus, the 707,000 immigrants who are listed as coming in 1924 entered between July 1, 1923 and June 30, 1924.

¹² SMITH – WELCH 1993.

¹³ DuBois 1929.

with instructions for starting to implement the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 on that day.

The overwhelming bi-partisan congressional majorities which passed the law in May had several reasons for doing so. Black support, however, was laser-focused on just one – a major reduction in the number of new foreign workers each year. Keeping annual immigration at a low level eventually helped reclaim, restore, and reassert many of the rights and advantages that the Civil War Emancipation had intended and promised.

Progress was often slow. The continuing racism of many Americans and systems greatly inhibited reaching goals of full political and economic liberty over ensuing decades. But the 1924 Immigration Act liberated millions of African Americans to use their freedom of movement to pursue their own economic destinies and the political and social freedoms that could follow.

Booker T. Washington, a former slave and later famous educator and orator, and many other Black leaders at the time were contending with doubts of many Americans whether Freedmen had the natural abilities and intelligence to compete in the modern industrial economy.¹⁴ What most doubters likely didn't know was something that in-depth researchers have further established in recent decades: the ancestors of Black Americans in Africa included those with advanced skills in steelmaking, textiles, trade, and other areas that were on a par or even superior to that of European industry at the time the two continents began to interact.

That research has confirmed Washington's and others' steadfast belief that former slaves and their children did indeed have the innate abilities to compete with any European-descent Americans or new immigrants in industrial trades. Once Congress slashed immigration numbers, Freedmen were able to prove the point on their own: America didn't need European immigrants to do that work. It was the importance of Black labor and consumption to the U.S. economy during low immigration that helped create space for the rise to prominence and subsequent successes of Martin Luther King Jr. and other mid-century civil rights leaders.

¹⁴ FISCHER (1998). In-depth research into industry in West and Central Africa before contact with Europeans has found skilled African ironworkers producing steel in the 1600s sometimes superior to the technologies in Europe. Advanced textiles at the time competed on the international market. Many of the enslaved Africans came from societies with centuries of experience in complex trade systems on their own continent and with other continents. In the 1700s, Philadelphia Quaker abolitionist leader Anthony Benezet studied the cultures of local slaves and found many came from self-governing villages and small kingdoms, and were "highly skilled and industrious" with a strong educational system teaching students to read and write in Arabic.

The Great Migration and the resulting rapid rise in Black incomes spurred the increased enrollment at Historic Black Colleges and the elevated numbers of Black lawyers, physicians, clergy, and other professionals whose ranks produced the leaders of the civil rights movement. The Great Depression of the 1930s *slowed* the momentum for a while. But on July 1, 1924, it was all set in motion. Seemingly nothing could *stop* the progress -- that is, not until Congress restarted mass immigration in 1965 and quadrupled the annual flow by the 1990s.

The Track to Civil Rights

The historic 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom came near the end of the greatest era for African American *advancements* in United States history – begun and enabled by the 1924 Immigration Act. An aging A. Philip Randolph – who led the historic event he helped conceive – was the first to speak to the quarter-million marchers gathered at the Lincoln Memorial. Randolph had been on the tracks of the phenomenal economic and social changes for Black citizens through the entire period of low immigration.

At the beginning of the era, he had risen to a new prominence when he successfully organized railroad porters into the first major Black labor union in 1925. That was a year after he called for annual immigration numbers to be reduced to “nothing,” and when Congress did cut them two-thirds of the way. Randolph’s preference for low immigration was part of his lifetime strategy for building Black worker power and then leveraging it for more economic and political freedom. Over the next four decades of low immigration, his hand was constantly on the throttle of the civil rights “freedom train.” It was a slow train coming. But in the 1963 March on Washington, the movement was getting close to a prime destination: a federal guarantee of the political and social freedom that had been promised a century earlier by the Civil War Emancipation.

With the statue of the Great Emancipator in the background along with top national African American leaders, Randolph stepped to the microphone and delivered the opening speech as a revered elder statesman – some say “father” – of the modern civil rights movement.¹⁵ The historic event is widely credited with hastening the passage of the landmark civil rights acts in 1964 and 1965.

For Randolph, jobs and freedom were always linked. The Black leaders on that journey from 1924 to the 1960s had navigated through and around constant racially

¹⁵ WOODS 2013.

discriminatory obstacles. But Congress had cleared the track of one enormous barrier with its long-term reduction of annual flows of foreign labor. Mass immigration no longer was making Black labor optional. As a result, historians say, the Great Migration of Black southerners soared in volume, and pushed the civil rights cause forward. The 1924 Immigration Act slowed the immigration boats. It opened the jobs gates. It crowded the southern railroad stations and re-started the Great Migration after a couple of pilot runs. Another estimated five and a half million African Americans moved out of the South after 1924. Stanford's Gavin Wright concluded that the Great Migration so radically changed the South economically and socially that, "This change in the fundamentals of southern society ultimately made possible the success of the civil rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s."¹⁶

By re-starting the Great Migration that had its pilot run during World War One, the 1924 Immigration Act changed the country in the grand sweep of history captured by Isabel Wilkerson in her Pulitzer-Prize book, *The Warmth of Other Suns*:

The Great Migration would become a turning point in history. It would transform urban America and recast the social and political order of every city it touched. It would force the South to search its soul and finally to lay aside a feudal caste system. It grew out of the unmet promises made after the Civil War and, through the sheer weight of it, helped push the country toward the civil rights revolutions of the 1960s.¹⁷

Just a few years before 1924, none of that appeared to be around the bend in the nation's future. The young Randolph was convinced that African Americans would have to gain a lot more economic power before achieving major civil rights gains. It did not seem inevitable at the time that Congress would renew the Great Migration by legislating a halt to the mass importing of foreign workers. How much of that would have happened *without* the 1924 Act putting a lid on annual immigration of foreign workers? History provides a fairly clear answer: the American economy would still have boomed during and after World War Two. But African Americans would not have been likely to share in the prosperity. We can assume that scenario because during every period of high U.S. economic growth *before* the 1924 Immigration Act:¹⁸

- Immigration surged;
- Employers preferred to fill their expanding number of jobs from the overflowing pool of foreign workers instead of hiring African Americans;
- Former slaves and their descendants always were left out of most benefits of the "good times;"

¹⁶ WRIGHT 1996.

¹⁷ WILKERSON 2011.

¹⁸ SPIEVACK 2019.

- Racial apartheid in the South remained secure;
- Inequality between classes and races grew.

Because of the immigration restrictions in the 1924 Act:

- Foreign immigration did *not* surge during the industrial/defense buildup of World War Two or the booming post-war economy of the 1950s. Immigration remained low;
- Expanding industries throughout the North and West could not ignore the underemployed Black labor of the South. They opened their job gates;
- The Great Migration of Black southerners quickly rose to its highest levels throughout the 1940s and 1950s;
- The South lost most of its surplus labor. (That included large numbers of underemployed White workers, as well, who joined the northward migration when they didn't have to compete with masses of new foreign workers;)
- Southern businesses could no longer rely on a loose supply of under-educated, under-skilled U.S. citizen workers in those tight mechanize, modernize, and improve education, working conditions, productivity, and wages for both Black and White workers who remained.

Southern employers watched wage rates in the North and tried to match them enough to slow down their workers deciding to leave.¹⁹ And the growing economic and political power of the remaining southern Black Americans convinced more and more owners and employers to shun segregation as “bad for business.” Meanwhile, the growing Black population in the North and West began to organize politically in ways never possible in the South. Not only did Black northerners protest their own conditions of discrimination but they also applied pressure on northern lawmakers to cease support for the southern system of racial apartheid. The change in the labor economics of the country was putting pressure on both federal lawmakers and southern businesses to end racial segregation in the South. In the changing new economy of the South, a complete domination of Black Americans based on terror no longer was essential to the ruling class, concluded sociologists Piven and Cloward: “[E]conomic modernization had made the South susceptible to *political* modernization.”²⁰

That progress was greatly delayed by the huge nationwide labor surplus caused by the Great Depression. In 1940, leaders in the South were still organizing their state governments largely around protecting White supremacy. But thirty years later, because of the economic changes wrought by the Great Migration, the southern

¹⁹ REICH 2014; ANDERSON – STEWART 2004.

²⁰ PIVEN – CLOWARD 1979.

governments were primarily focused on development as part of a national economy. To the extent that segregation policies retarded industrial development and outside investment, business leaders were open to appeals to break down racial barriers.

When Black Americans finally got federal protection for voting rights in 1965, they had already enjoyed decades of rapidly rising wages. On average, their incomes still remained well below those of White Americans. But over that period leading up to the new civil rights laws, Black workers' real wages rose almost twice as fast as the rapidly rising wages of those White workers.²¹ The 1924 Immigration Act and the Great Migration that followed had achieved far-reaching consequences, wrote historian Gavin Wright:

The out-migration of Blacks from the South after 1940 was the greatest single economic step forward in Black history, and a major advance toward the integration of Blacks into the mainstream of American life.²²

The 1924 law didn't legislate or directly create all the positive economic and political outcomes for African Americans. But it cleared immigration out of the way so that it wasn't a factor that continued to block the track toward those outcomes.

Emancipation Setback

In September of 1965, Congress terminated the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924. The new Hart-Cellar Immigration Act of 1965 restarted the mass worldwide migration of foreign workers into the United States. The era of protecting American workers' employment, wages, and incomes from unfair foreign labor competition was over. Just as all trends had seemed to be in the right direction for the nation's 20 million African Americans, Congress got rid of the law that had done so much to help make those trends possible.

For the next six decades after 1965, the federal government has allowed more than 70 million additional immigrants. (That contrasts with one-tenth as many immigrants – 7 million – who were allowed in the 1925-65 period.) As a result, nearly every aspect of life for the Black working class has been different – and not in a good direction. Annual immigration numbers doubled by 1978 and quadrupled by the 1990s. That influx is at the levels that had kept most descendants of American slavery trapped in a violent economic bondage just before passage of the 1924 Immigration Act. Employer behavior *after* 1965 imitated employer

²¹ RANDOLPH – OWEN 1925/8.

²² WRIGHT 1986.

behavior *before* 1924. Provided with overflowing pools of foreign labor, employers tended to hire the immigrants ahead of African Americans. The accumulating impact of the higher and higher annual immigrant admissions took hold by the late 1970s. Employment rates and inflation-adjusted incomes for all groups of Americans without a college degree began to stagnate and then fall. And just as Black Americans' incomes *rose* the fastest during low-immigration, their income *fell* the fastest during high-immigration.

While all Americans in the economic bottom enjoyed the biggest boosts under the Act of 1924, they have been hammered most mercilessly after the Act of 1965. For example, the Labor Department reported that the employment rate of all working-age Black men with a high school diploma was a robust 91% in 1967. But by the year 2000, the rate with jobs had plummeted to under 71%. (It has continued to fall since then.)²³ Anti-discrimination laws and policies have helped to substantially narrow the racial *wage* gap within occupations. But the overall *income* gap has grown much larger because of many trends, including the increase in Black Americans having no job income at all.

In their magisterial 2016 history of inequality, economists Peter Lindert and Jeffrey Williamson identified a handful of worldwide trends that have been key in *stopping* the wonderful narrowing of inequality most industrial nations enjoyed during the middle of the 20th century. But they found that in only a few countries has inequality gotten *worse*: the countries with high immigration. Most of the key factors they identified as having stopped the improvement in inequality worldwide – such as global financial, technological, and trade trends – are difficult to change, especially by a country on its own. The key factor of high immigration, though, is a self-inflicted wound that nations like the United States, Canada, and Australia could easily fix, as Congress did in 1924. High immigration was also a key factor in widening income disparity during the Ellis Island-era of mass immigration a century earlier. In both eras, the constant supply of new foreign workers left most American employers with little need to recruit Black labor and gave employers easy space to exercise any bias. In the 21st century, they can even meet all kinds of diversity goals with most immigrants without ever hiring an actual descendant of American slavery. Lindert and Williamson stated:

Immigration has thus been part of the story of rising U.S. inequality since the 1970s, much as rising immigration was also part of the inequality story between the 1860s and World War I.²⁴

²³ HUDSON INSTITUTE 1987.

²⁴ LINDERT – WILLIAMSON 2016.

Given the negative global trends the last several decades, Congress in 1965 certainly picked a terribly inappropriate period to be increasing the U.S. labor supply through immigration. Sixty years later, no Congress had fixed the mistake of 1965. And it *had* been a mistake. No evidence has ever suggested that the sponsors of the 1965 Immigration Act intended to restart mass immigration. They most certainly had not thought their law would erase the gains Black workers had accomplished in the previous four decades. But rising immigration and falling economic conditions for Black workers was becoming obvious just four years later when a bipartisan joint federal commission began studying the results.

The flaws in the 1965 Act could have been fixed long before much damage was done. Multiple high-level commissions and researchers over the next decades warned politicians of the declining employment rates and real wages of most African Americans. They told Congress that immigration levels needed to be much lower. Each Congress and President ignored the warnings and recommendations. Mass immigration may have originally been an unintended mistake. But from the mid-1970s onward, it was the federal government's clearly intended priority. Given a choice between helping struggling Black Americans by tightening the labor market through lower immigration or helping businesses lower labor costs through mass immigration, each Congress for the last half-century has always chosen the same priority. And it wasn't Black Americans. The sad irony of all of this was that it all began by trying to do the right thing to combat racism in how the country chose who got to immigrate here.

In 1972, the first federal commission delivered its review of the 1965 Act.²⁵ Known as the Rockefeller Commission, it did not criticize Congress for the intent behind its termination of the 1924 Act. The intent had been about ending the "WHO" portion of that 1924 immigration policy. Immigration policies in every country are primarily about two things:

- HOW MANY new workers and family members will be admitted each year?
- WHO will get the allowed visas?

No leader for the 1965 Act advocated significant increases over the HOW MANY portion of the 1924 Act. It was the WHO portion that prompted replacing the 1924 Act. The 1924 law's WHO provision was racist. Although no potential individual immigrant was blocked on the basis of their race or ethnicity, the 1924 law contained a per-country quota system that was apportioned on a racist formula

²⁵ U.S. COMMISSION ON POPULATION GROWTH AND THE AMERICAN FUTURE 1972.

that violated what its authors claimed to be trying to do. The main promoters of the quota system said they wanted the national-origin makeup of future immigration to be the same as the very diverse national-origin makeup of the country found in the 1920 Census. The purpose was to avoid radical shifts in the nation's culture. To do that, the government had to look through Census records and estimate what percentage of the population was from each country in the world or had ancestors from them.

Glaringly, though, the baseline of the apportionment of the quotas did not include the nation's 10.5 million citizens with African origins who had been counted in the 1920 Census! Nor did the baseline include the relatively small number of Americans from Asia. That was a blatantly racist violation of the stated intent of the quota system. It pretended Black citizens weren't Americans at all, even though the culture of the United States had been profoundly affected by their large-scale presence from well before the beginning of the country.

The 1965 Congress killed that WHO portion when it terminated the entire 1924 Act. In the spirit of the nation's new civil rights laws, the racism of the 1924 quotas had to be ended. Black leaders over the decades had uniformly condemned the WHO conditions of the Act before and after it became law. A. Philip Randolph was still fighting to remove the national-origins quotas in the 1950s. He urged the abolition of the "intolerable exclusion of American Negroes from the census for quota determination purposes."²⁶ But Black leaders from the 1920s onward did learn to live with the quotas about WHO could *come* because the restrictions in the HOW MANY portion of the 1924 law soon provided such great progress for the Black Americans already *here*.

Unfortunately, while appropriately killing the WHO portion of the 1924 Act, the 1965 Congress also killed the HOW MANY portion of the 1924 Act when it terminated the entire law. The HOW MANY part had been working just fine. It was the cause of all the improvements cited earlier. Because of the HOW MANY portion, the 1924 Immigration Act could be considered on balance as supremely *anti-racist*; it had helped African American citizens more than any other group of Americans, and more than at any other time of history.

The sponsors of the 1965 Act did not disagree. They repeatedly promised before its passage that they were creating a new law that would barely change the HOW MANY of the 1924 Act. Nobody argued for changing the law to allow *more* foreign workers each year. Polling showed U.S. citizens overwhelmingly agreed

²⁶ RANDOLPH 1952.

that they didn't want higher immigration.²⁷ When annual numbers started rising immediately, the Rockefeller Commission recommended that Congress make changes to stop that from continuing. The HOW MANY portion of the 1965 law needed to be modified to be supportive of the nation's priorities for economic, environmental, and racial justice.²⁸ The congressional leaders' response? Nothing. They ignored the already accumulating losses to working-age Black men (age 18 through 64) that were especially deep. Their rate of employment fell by 16% just between 1967 and 1980 alone. (The rate would continue to fall over the next 40+ years of Congress running mass immigration programs.)

In 1978, many Members of Congress were ready to take another look. Total immigration had gone from under 300,000 to over 600,000. Wage stagnation was becoming apparent. The long African American march into the middle class had stalled. Having decided to ignore the Rockefeller Commission, Congress created the "Hesburgh Commission," chaired by Theodore M. Hesburgh, president of the University of Notre Dame and a previous chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. The 16-member, blue-ribbon panel worked three years and reached much the same conclusions in 1981 as the Rockefeller Commission did in 1972. Furthermore, the new panel stated that immigration was now "out of control" and that the nation could not avoid dealing with "the reality of limitations."

Black workers without college degrees who were seeing their occupations increasingly flooded by foreign workers could take some satisfaction that leaders at the highest level of the nation were identifying what their daily lives were becoming. The commission urged Congress to guarantee an annual numerical cap on admissions. It suggested 350,000 a year (the Rockefeller Commission had suggested 400,000). Polls showed that a large majority of Americans agreed with the recommendation to reduce legal immigration.²⁹

Hesburgh himself warned Congress that two highly influential lobbies had gained so much money and/or influence from the unintended increases of immigration since 1965 that the nation was in danger of them having enough power to overturn the will of the American people. Congress proved him right by ignoring the second commission's recommendations.

²⁷ Despite all the promises that immigration numbers would not rise, the legislation did not enjoy popular support. A Harris Poll before the vote in 1965 found the public was opposed by a 2-to-1 margin. WAGNER 1986.

²⁸ U.S. COMMISSION ON POPULATION GROWTH AND THE AMERICAN FUTURE 1972.

²⁹ GALLUP 2024.

Barbara Jordan's Immigration Blueprint for Today

In the mid-1990s, nearly 30 years after Congress re-started mass immigration, Barbara Jordan presented the nation with a blueprint for limiting immigration for the sake of the nation's underemployed and undercompensated. The Black former congresswoman from Texas emerged into the thick of the debate with a voice, a delivery, and a message of economic justice as distinctive as that of Randolph's seven decades earlier. She told Congress:

Immigration policy must protect U.S. workers against unfair competition from foreign workers, with an appropriately higher level of protection to the most vulnerable in our society.³⁰

President Bill Clinton had appointed her as chair of yet another bipartisan federal commission on immigration. She had given the keynote address at the 1992 Democratic convention. There, she called for an economy "where a young Black woman or man from the Fifth Ward in Houston or South Central Los Angeles" could go to public schools and gain employment that would "enable her or him to prosper." That was more likely to happen in a time of more moderate immigration, Jordan concluded in the last act of an illustrious life of public service, with groundbreaking roles as a southern Black woman in state politics, Congress, law, and civil rights. In simplest form, the Jordan Blueprint combines the principles of the WHO portion in the 1965 Act (getting rid of de facto racist criteria for admissions) and the HOW MANY portion of the 1924 Act (keeping numbers low enough to raise workers).

Jordan died a few weeks before Congress voted on the recommendations of her commission. Many lawmakers – and the President – felt released by her death from honoring their promises to Jordan and switched their positions. Publicly and privately, they gave in to the groups that sought more money or influence by continuing high legal and illegal immigration. The 1996 Congress somewhat narrowly turned down the Jordan Blueprint to fix immigration policies back to what the 1965 sponsors had promised their legislation would do, even though it did the opposite.

Since 1996, an additional 30+ million foreign workers and family members have been allowed into the labor and housing markets of American communities. As usual, descendants of Americans who suffered under slavery and Jim Crow have suffered disproportionately from the flooded labor markets. But the Jordan

³⁰ JORDAN 1995.

Blueprint remains just as valid today as three decades ago to serve as a North Star to a more equitable future for millions of left-behind Black workers – as well as other similarly disadvantaged Americans.

For all her toughness in defense of American workers, however, Jordan reflected the generally kindly attitudes that Black leaders displayed toward immigrants a century ago. She championed programs to fully integrate immigrants into all aspects of American society. And she decried “hostility and discrimination against immigrants.” Such behavior is antithetical to the traditions and interests of the country,” she said. But kindness toward immigrants and toward those who wish to immigrate does not mean it is wrong or unkind for a country to set limits for the sake of the members of its own community, Jordan insisted:

[W]e disagree with those who would label efforts to control immigration as being inherently anti-immigrant. Rather, it is both a right and a responsibility of a democratic society to manage immigration so that it serves the national interest.³¹

Like Black leaders in the 1920s, Jordan was not going to be distracted or deterred by the fact that some supporters of lower-immigration policies had racist attitudes (just as many supporters of *high* immigration have always been motivated by racist desires to protect employers from having to depend on Black workers). Whatever might be the motivations of others for lower immigration, Barbara Jordan knew this was *her* blueprint based on *her* intentions. And the Great Migration had already proved that these policies would be supremely *anti-racist* in their benefits for Black citizens and could be supported with the highest American principles.

We *don't* know what kind of “great migration” might occur if a version of the 1924 Act's reductions were tried again. Perhaps it would be a migration of capital to communities with large pools of unengaged workers – or a migration of jobs, training programs, work facilities. Or maybe a flurry of recruiting agents just like the last time. At the very least, the Jordan Blueprint could reactivate the arc toward economic and political justice of the 1924 Immigration Act era that was so thoughtlessly bent backwards by passing the 1965 and 1990 Immigration Acts. The Black newspaper editors of the 1920s did not know exactly how or how much, but they knew for certain that deep cuts in immigration would re-open gates to major economic and social advancement because they had seen a pilot episode. As have we.

³¹ JORDAN 1994.

Bibliography

- ANDERSON, Talmadge – STEWART, James Benjamin (2007): *Introduction to African American Studies: Transdisciplinary Approaches and Implications*. Baltimore: Imprint Editions.
- DUBOIS, W.E.B. (1929): Immigration Quota. *The Crisis*, Aug. 1929.
- FISCHER, David Hackett (1998): African Founders: How Enslaved People Expanded American Ideals, In John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800: Studies in Comparative World History*, 2nd ed. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- FONER, Eric (1950): *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 2. New York: International Publishers.
- GALLUP (2024) Immigration. Source: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1660/immigration.aspx>. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- HUDSON INSTITUTE (1987): *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the Twenty-first Century*. Indianapolis: Hudson Institute. Source: <https://archive.org/details/workforce2000wor00will/page/n3/mode/2up>. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- JORDAN, Barbara (1994): Testimony of Barbara Jordan, Chair, U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform Before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Refugee Affairs August 3, 1994. Source: <https://archive.org/details/workforce2000wor00will/page/n3/mode/2up>. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- JORDAN, Barbara (1995): Testimony of Barbara Jordan Chair, U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform Before a Joint U.S. House of Representatives Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration and Claims and U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration June 28, 1995. Source: https://www.numbersusa.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Testimony-of-Barbara-Jordan_1995_June-28.pdf. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- LINDERT, Peter H. – WILLIAMSON, Jeffrey G. (2016): *Unequal Gains: American Growth and Inequality Since 1700*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- MCCARTHY, Eugene (1992): *A Colony of the World: The United States Today: America's Senior Statesman Warns His Countrymen*. New York: Hippocrene Books.
- PIVEN, Frances Fox – CLOWARD, Richard A. (1979): The Civil Rights Movement, In *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Vintage Books.

- RANDOLPH, A. Phillip – OWEN, Chandler (1923): Editorial. *The Messenger* 1 (1923/5). Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/messenger/index.htm>. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- RANDOLPH, A. Phillip – OWEN, Chandler (1925): Editorial. *The Messenger* 7 (1925/7). Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/messenger/index.htm>. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- RANDOLPH, A. Phillip – OWEN, Chandler (1925): Editorial. *The Messenger* 5 (1925/8). Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/messenger/index.htm>. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- RANDOLPH, A. Phillip (1952): Letter to President Harry Truman. 29 May 1952. Source: <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/randolph-truman>. Accessed on 6 Oct. 2024.
- REICH, Steven A., ed. (2014): *The Great Black Migration: A Historical Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic*. Santa Barbara, Calif: Greenwood Press.
- SMITH, James P. – WELCH, Finis R (1993): Black Economic Progress After Myrdal. *Journal of Economic Literature* 27 (1993/2).
- SPIEVACK, Natalie (2019): Can labor unions help close the black-white wage gap? Urban Institute, 1 Feb. 2019. Source: <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/can-labor-unions-help-close-black-white-wage-gap>. Accessed on 5 Oct. 2024.
- U.S. COMMISSION ON POPULATION GROWTH AND THE AMERICAN FUTURE (1972): Population and the American Future. Source: https://population-security.org/rockefeller/001_population_growth_and_the_american_future.htm#Preface. Accessed on 5 Oct. 2024.
- WAGNER, Stephen T. (1986): *The Lingering Death of the National Origins Quota System: A Political History of United States Immigration Policy, 1952–1965*. Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University.
- WILKERSON, Isabel (2011): *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*. New York: Vintage Books.
- WOODS, Mark (2013): Asa Philip Randolph's 1963 March on Washington speech. *The St. Augustine Record*, Aug. 2013.
- WRIGHT, Gavin (1986): *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy Since the Civil War*. New York: Basic Books.

