CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

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

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

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

The central puzzle to be addressed in this book is how and why these
decidedly expansive and restrictive policy regimes have emerged from
American immigration politics over time. That is, how do we explain why
the U.S. national state has been quite receptive to immigrants during
long stretches of its history, while it has pursued decisive restrictions on
the number and characteristics of newcomers in other periods? More
generally, why have certain ideas, social interests, and political actors tri-
umphed over others in periodic struggles over immigration policy in U.S.
history? These are the questions I attempt to parse in the pages that
follow. I do so by analyzing national immigration policymaking across
American political development. To truly understand the broad patterns
### Table 1.1
Overview of Major U.S. Immigration Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Period</th>
<th>Legislation/Year</th>
<th>Major Provisions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gilded Age</td>
<td>Immigration Act (1875)</td>
<td>Bars prostitutes and criminals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)</td>
<td>Makes Chinese laborers inadmissible</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Immigration Act (1882)</td>
<td>Bars convicts, “lunatics,” “idiots,” and those “likely to become a public charge” and establishes head tax on immigrants</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Contract Labor Act (1885)</td>
<td>Prohibits contract labor admissions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chinese Exclusion Act (1888)</td>
<td>Extends Chinese exclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration Act (1891)</td>
<td>Creates federal immigration bureaucracy; authorizes deportation of illegal aliens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Era and 1920s</td>
<td>Immigration Act (1903)</td>
<td>Bars polygamists and “anarchists”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gentlemen’s Agreement (1907)</td>
<td>Severely limits Japanese immigration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration Act (1907)</td>
<td>Creates Dillingham Commission; increases head tax; creates new exclusion categories</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration Act (1917)</td>
<td>Imposes literacy test for admission; bars virtually all Asians from entry</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>National Quota Law (1921)</td>
<td>Limits immigration of each nationality to 2% of the number of foreign-born of that nationality living in the U.S. in 1910</td>
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<td></td>
<td>National Origins Act (1924)</td>
<td>Sets annual quotas for each nationality at 2% of the number of persons of that nationality in the U.S. as determined by the 1890 census.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>National Quota Law (1929)</td>
<td>Apportions annual quotas of 1924 for each country according to each nationality’s percentage of 1920 census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Deal and World War II Years</td>
<td>Immigration Act (1940)</td>
<td>INS transferred from Labor to Justice Department as national security measure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical Period</td>
<td>Legislation/Year</td>
<td>Major Provisions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bracero Program</td>
<td>Bilateral agreements with Mexico, British Honduras, Barbados, and Jamaica provide for guestworkers</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1943)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Act of December</td>
<td>Repeals Chinese exclusion in favor of meager quotas</td>
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<td></td>
<td>17 (1943)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The 1940s and 1950s</td>
<td>War Brides Act</td>
<td>Allows for immigration of foreign-born spouses and children of U.S. military personnel</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1945)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Displaced Persons Act</td>
<td>Facilitates admission of European refugees</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1948)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Internal Security Act</td>
<td>Expands grounds for both exclusion and deportation; establishes alien registry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1950)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration and</td>
<td>Reaffirms national origins quota system; adds new grounds for exclusion based on political activities, ideology, and sexual preference</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Naturalization Act</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1952)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Refugee Relief Act</td>
<td>Grants permanent residence to 214,000 European refugees</td>
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<td>(1953)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Refugee-Escapee Act</td>
<td>Grants special status to refugees fleeing communist regimes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1957)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The 1960s and 1970s</td>
<td>Cuban Refugee Act</td>
<td>Begins Cuban Refugee Program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1960)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Refugee Assistance Act</td>
<td>Extends cash, medical, and educational support to refugees</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1963)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bracero Reauthorization</td>
<td>Terminates Bracero Program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1964)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hart-Celler Act</td>
<td>Dismantles national origins quotas; begins seven-category preference system with an emphasis on family reunification</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1965)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Indochina Refugee Act</td>
<td>Begins Indochinese resettlement program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1975)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INA Amendments (1976)</td>
<td>Sets per country limits (20K) for both the Eastern and Western Hemispheres</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Indochinese Refugee Act</td>
<td>Admits 174,988 refugees from Indochina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1977)</td>
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and transformations of this crucial policy area requires a long-term historical perspective that may illuminate causal processes often obscured by short time-frames.

This study places special emphasis on the powerful interactions between political institutions, ideological traditions, and organized social interests that have received scant attention in prevailing society-centered theories of the immigration policy process. As the noted sociologist and immigration scholar Alejandro Portes recently noted, there is a glaring absence of “systematic theoretical analysis of both the external pressures impinging on the state and the internal dynamics of the legislative and administrative bodies [and other governing institutions] dealing with immigration.” This book attempts to redress some of these important gaps. American immigration control over time can be explained as much by changes in how public policy is formulated and implemented—and more
generally by how politics is organized in the United States—as by economic, social, and cultural forces. Like other recent works of historical institutionalism, this volume attempts to offer new insights about state-society relations and the possibilities of policy innovation in an American polity replete with structural veto-points and a political culture hostile to centralized state authority.7

While my chief purpose is to explain policy patterns and variations, two additional concerns inform my investigation of immigration control across U.S. political development. First, I also hope to highlight the capacity of both restrictive and expansive immigration policies to transform the American political landscape. John Kingdon has recently joined Seymour Martin Lipset in arguing that early immigration helped send the United States along a particular developmental pathway;8 yet we should bear in mind that subsequent waves of immigration—especially in large volumes and from new sources—have had the potential to be disruptive forces that may unsettle existing orders and possibly encourage political turning points. In this vein, policies that advance “new” immigration introduce demographic shifts in the American population that may alter other facets of U.S. political life. As we shall see, new immigrants have proven capable of influencing the electoral calculations of party leaders
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and individual candidates, recasting how established interest groups define their policy goals, building new ethnic organizations to influence government actions, and even contributing directly to shifts in social science expertise with relevance to policymakers. Likewise, policies designed to restrict new immigration, although usually intended to preserve the socioeconomic and political status quo, have in fact routinely entailed the creation of new state structures and powers to enhance federal government regulation of aliens both at and within its borders. Government efforts to harness the disruptive force of immigration, however illusory as a goal, thus have produced significant national state-building in U.S. political history.

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

Chapter 2 provides a theoretical foundation for understanding immigration policymaking in American political development. I begin with a critique of various theories of public policy and American politics that attach special causal importance in the policy process to either economic conditions, the power of social interests, shared national values, public opinion, or electoral realignments. Each of these rubrics has some merit as an explanatory variable, but none adequately accounts for the evolu-
tion of American immigration policies. I advance instead a historical-institutionalist view that examines how the political activities of government officials and social groups are “conditioned” by distinct institutional and ideological orderings of the national state and political party systems.\textsuperscript{12} As such, I hope to address what Richard McCormick calls the “politics-policy puzzle”: the significant but oft-neglected connections between broad changes in the national polity and policy formulation in American history.\textsuperscript{13}

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

Second, I suggest that the dynamics of U.S. immigration policy have long been influenced by the making and remaking of distinctive political coalitions on this issue that cut across familiar partisan and ideological lines. At least since the late-nineteenth century, this policy domain has divided pro-immigration free marketeers and restrictionist cultural exclusionists on the American Right, and pro-immigration cosmopolitans and restrictionist economic protectionists on the American Left. As a result, it would be hard to think of an area of U.S. public policy that has engendered more incongruous political alliances in American history.\textsuperscript{15} And it is precisely the creation of these unstable yet powerful liberal-conservative
coalitions over the years that I argue has proven crucial to achieving major immigration reform in the United States. Significantly, the relative power of the pro-immigration and restrictionist coalitions has shifted over time as new interest groups and political actors have emerged and as older ones have redefined their policy goals. For example, the organization of new nationality groups in Washington (an important by-product of past immigration policies) and decisive shifts in organized labor’s immigration agenda have significantly affected the coalitional balance of power. Policy changes have been closely tied to the possibilities of rebuilding Left-Right coalitions to support new policies. But such coalitional breakthroughs have been anything but routine. To avoid the profoundly disorienting and acrimonious politics invited by immigration reform efforts, national political leaders often have attempted to frustrate major action on this issue. Likewise, the tremendous difficulties of building new liberal-conservative coalitions frequently have vexed policy reformers. Although these challenges to coalition building have tended to reinforce the policy patterns of a given period, the episodic rise of new groups and alliances in immigration politics have created opportunities for policy transformation.

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

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

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

Chapters 3 through 9 are chronological and developmental, intended
both to explain the broad patterns and transformations of American im-
migration policy in distinctive periods and to reveal how past political events may build on one another. Chapters 3 and 4 analyze the early nationalization of American immigration policy during the nineteenth century’s Gilded Age, a period that culminated in limited if not lax regulation of European immigration and sweeping exclusion of Chinese immigration. How do we explain these policy outcomes? Moreover, why were significant new capacities carved out for the U.S. national state to regulate immigration at a time when centralized government was in retreat? The answers, I suggest in chapters 3 and 4, lie within the operations of the nineteenth century U.S. “state of courts and parties.” Whereas “party procedures lent operational coherence to the disjointed institutions of the governmental apparatus,” Stephen Skowronek notes of this time, “court proceedings determined the meaning and the effect of the law itself.”

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

The politics of Chinese exclusion presented in chapter 4 offers a very different picture of the immigration policies produced by the early American “state of courts of parties.” During the Gilded Age, anti-Chinese activists of the Pacific Coast discovered that they could galvanize robust cross-party, Left-Right support for their proposals in Washington at a time of intense partisan competition for Western votes. Unlike their European counterparts, Chinese newcomers were essentially powerless to resist new exclusionary laws, given their lack of political access or leverage
in U.S. courts or partisan elections of the nineteenth century. A broad alliance of politicians and social groups converged behind an immigration narrative that portrayed Chinese sojourners as servile, racially inferior, and fundamentally unassimilable—an exception to virtuous mainstream immigration from traditional European sources. Finally, early presidential resistance to Chinese exclusion due to treaty obligations carried little weight in this isolationist era, and was easily subordinated to the pressing electoral calculations of party managers.

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

Yet restrictionists made the most of institutional changes within the national state that increasingly insulated immigration policymaking from political parties and mass publics, including immigrant voters. They came to dominate congressional immigration committees, a fact that assumed great importance as the strength of party leadership receded in the legislative branch after 1910–11. Like other reformers of the time, restrictionists took advantage of new structural openings for direct advocacy by organized interests in Washington. And nativists enjoyed special influence over the expert findings of two federal immigration commissions, bestowing scientific legitimacy on an essentially eugenicist narrative that portrayed southern and eastern Europeans as racially inferior to earlier immigrants and linked these newcomers to a host of new strains on an uneasy American society. This narrative had powerful resonance for a vital new Left-Right coalition comprised of organized labor, patriotic societies, the Brahmin Immigration Restriction League, Southern conserva-
tives, and reform-minded scholars. When the First World War and the Red Scare stoked nationalist anxieties to a new crescendo, pro-immigration nationality groups retreated, business interests reevaluated their policy goals, and an internationalist president lost the power to derail nativist reforms. Against this backdrop, restrictionists were well positioned to channel national security jitters into specific policy innovations that fused immigration control with racial hierarchy. The national origins quota system was born.

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

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

Chapter 7 examines the intense battles over alien admissions that reemerged in American national politics from the waning stages of the Second World War to the dismantlement of national origins quotas in 1965. Once again, we find that the dynamism of national government institutions, policy alliances, expertise, and international affairs are pivotal in
remaking American immigration policy. Postwar presidents and congres-
sional “committee barons” clashed over Cold War imperatives and their
significance for refugee admissions and the national origins quota system;
each used independent bases of institutional power to advance competing
policy goals in the late 1940s and the 1950s. But pro-immigration re-
formers enjoyed dramatically new institutional openings in the 1960s, as
conservative committee leaders were challenged in both houses of Con-
gress by a growing number of younger and more activist members and as
Kennedy and Johnson employed the ample resources of the modern pres-
idency to pursue ambitious policy agendas. Shifting policy alliances
among politically active social groups were also significant, most notably
organized labor’s decision to repudiate national origins quotas it had en-
dorsed for decades. In contrast to the Progressive Era, a new commission
and other forms of institutionalized expertise assailed ethnic and racial
distinctions in national immigration and refugee law. In 1965, a broad
Left-Right coalition of politicians and organized interests embraced a
fresh immigration narrative linking expansive policy initiatives to Cold
War competition and civil rights reform. These foreign policy and civil
rights concerns would make popular majoritarian views increasingly pe-
ripheral in an immigration policymaking process already dominated by
centralized state actors, organized social groups, and policy experts.

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

The politics of immigration reform during the past two decades is the
focus of chapter 9. Between 1980 and 1990, several major immigration
reforms established more generous terms of refugee relief, increased op-
portunities for legal immigration, and extended unparalleled amnesty
programs for undocumented aliens. Significantly, policymakers expected
these innovations to primarily benefit nonwhite newcomers from Asia
and Latin America. But this is only half of the contemporary immigration
control story. Many observers perceived a sharp turn against immigration
in the United States after the election of 1994, which yielded a controversial anti-immigrant initiative in California and a new Republican leadership in Congress open to restrictionist proposals. Within a few years, however, efforts to reduce alien admissions had lost all momentum. The restrictionist assault on alien welfare and due process rights proved far more successful, but many of these rights were restored by the turn of the millennium. The resilience of expansive immigration policies during the past decade is just as striking as their creation in the decade before. This chapter suggests that two contrasting kinds of politics have promoted expansive immigration policies in this period: one rooted in immigrant enfranchisement and competitive democratic elections and the other in the insulation of elite decisionmakers from ordinary citizens.

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