

# Now: Immigration to the U.S.

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will focus on immigration as a contemporary issue rooted in history. Given how controversial and divisive immigration has become, it is easy to forget that the immigration that exists today fits within a larger historical context. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Immigration to the U.S.

*"This is our immigrant experience. Some of us came here not by choice, while some came with purpose."*

Sophia Lee, Immigrant



## BEFORE YOU START

Why is immigration a debated topic in the United States?

## 1. Immigration to the U.S.

Throughout human history, including in the archeological record, people have tended to move only when they are forced to do so. This can include a lack of access to necessary resources or the presence of political/geopolitical insecurity. Today, these movements take several forms. They usually include people moving from rural areas to urban centers -- usually within a country -- or they can include people moving from one country to another. When this movement happens across borders, just as it does within them, the movement tends to be from places with economic/political insecurity to places with economic/political security.

When we talk about movement in general and movement within a country, we are referring to **migration**. **Immigration** is movement into a country and **emigration** is movement out of a country.

While movement for security is perhaps the most common reason people migrate, it is not the only reason people migrate across borders. People migrate across borders to be reunited with their families and to receive an education that they couldn't receive without migrating. In the United States today, there are immigrants who have moved here so they can have a secure job and provide for themselves and their families. Others have immigrated here to be reunited with their families. Still others have immigrated here, to receive an education. Some are even here to retire. This is just a very partial list of reasons people have immigrated to the United States in recent years.

Perhaps the most common way most people see immigrants in the United States today is in the news. Headlines tell of crowds of immigrants at the border. Raids to arrest undocumented immigrants are happening

in cities both close to and far from the nation's borders. Immigration policy features prominently in political campaigns, and debates about policy are fierce, sometimes taking the form of activism through social media or protests in the streets.

Immigration isn't a major issue in just the United States; in recent years there has been an international increase in migration, or movement from one region to another. There are many reasons for this, including poverty, war, and the effects of climate change. The circumstances immigrants faced in their home countries, and the kind of life they hoped to find in the United States, provide the context that helps us understand their decisions to migrate from one place to another. In general, the most common reason people take on the challenges and risks of migrating from one country to another is to find more security.

People who favor stronger border protections point to the dangers of drug trafficking and other crimes, and the need to protect American jobs by enforcing existing immigration laws. Those in favor of loosening restrictions on immigration point to the economic benefits that immigrants bring to this country, and to the United States' legacy as a refuge for people needing a new start. Both sides of the debate use evidence to support their opinions, ranging from stories about individual immigrants to statistics about economic effects.

The stories of immigrants make up the fabric of the history of the United States. Not only that, but immigrants' experiences are part of the American ideal—the country's reputation as a place where people come to find freedom and make a better life for themselves. However, disagreement about immigration and policies to restrict it have been part of U.S. history almost as long as immigration itself. Immigration may often appear in today's headlines, but controversy over it isn't new.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Migration**

Movement within a country.

##### **Immigration**

Movement into a country.

##### **Emigration**

Movement out of a country.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned key terms and concepts related to immigration in general, and to **immigration to the U.S.** more specifically. You learned that the search for adequate resources and for political or economic security is the basis for most immigration throughout history. Immigration is a hotly debated topic in the U.S. today, although its legacy stretches back to the very beginning of the nation.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: Strategic Education, Inc. 2020. Learn from the Past, Prepare for the Future.



#### TERMS TO KNOW

##### **Emigration**

Movement out of a country.

**Immigration**

Movement into a country.

**Migration**

Movement within a country.