



American Immigration: A Very Short Introduction

David A. Gerber

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Americans have come from every corner of the globe, and they have been brought together by a variety of historical processes--conquest, colonialism, the slave trade, territorial acquisition, and voluntary immigration. A thoughtful look at immigration, anti-immigration sentiments, and the motivations and experiences of the migrants themselves, this book offers a compact but wide-ranging look at one of America's persistent hot-button issues.

Historian David Gerber begins by examining the many legal efforts to curb immigration and to define who is and is not an American, ranging from the Naturalization Law of 1795 (which applied only to "free-born white persons") to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Emergency Quota Act of 1921, and the reform-minded Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which opened the door to millions of newcomers, the vast majority from Asia and Latin America. The book also looks at immigration from the perspective of the migrant--farmers and industrial workers, mechanics and domestics, highly trained professionals and small-business owners--who willingly pulled up stakes for the promise of a better life. Throughout, the book sheds light on the relationships between race and ethnicity in the life of these groups and in the formation of American society, and it stresses the marked continuities across waves of immigration and across different racial and ethnic groups.

A fascinating and even-handed historical account, this book puts into perspective the longer history of calls for stronger immigration laws and the on-going debates over the place of immigrants in American society.

About the Series: Combining authority with wit, accessibility, and style, Very Short Introductions offer an introduction to some of life's most interesting topics. Written by experts for the newcomer, they demonstrate the finest contemporary thinking about the central problems and issues in hundreds of key topics, from philosophy to Freud, quantum theory to Islam.

American Immigration: A Very Short Introduction Details

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J.J. Richardson says

This book is a good overview on the subject of American Immigration over the years. It attempts to be neutral in tone but the biases of the author do seep through at times. Nevertheless, it provides a pretty balanced view on the difficulties and positive aspects surrounding both legal and illegal immigration in the United States. It does fail to point out that immigration in America has turned out better for us than most other places in the world. Although I should point out that the author seems to see virtually all change as "evolving progress", which can be debatable - especially in other societies where such sharp change has led to war. I'd still give this book a recommendation for anyone wanting a quick scholarly overview of the subject.

Hotavio says

This book is a quick introduction to the topic of immigration. It covers history of American immigration law, trends in immigration, and implications of immigration. I read the book for my History of American Immigration as a primer on the subject. The book served it's purpose well.

Diana Yassin says

Ahhh. The title really says it all. I don't know whether I can really be mad at it given the sheer volume of information it glances over- this book DOES certainly leave you feeling like you need more context for the information and events it references. My main problem is however, that the writer proves a bit preachy at times despite obvious efforts to remain objective (I relate though), which is validating at the moment being read because the author and I seem to get upset at the same things (so sorta high five?) but I really wanted to get perspectives and opinions that were different than mine presented, even if the author gets angry about them too because I want to know if I am truly being objective when I present my perspectives on immigration. I don't think validation is what I need to truly understand a topic I care deeply about. All this considered, I appreciated the structure of the novel, it really illustrated the evolution of immigration laws and the popular opinions and circumstances surrounding them during specific points in history, which I found very necessary to understanding how some laws worked. I also appreciated the fact that the book delves into how specific groups of immigrants are impacted by immigration differently to prove his points. Overall, I'd say this is a good read if you'd like to gain an understanding of the evolution of immigration laws and the perspectives that decorate them.

Sandy says

Exactly as advertised: a very brief but useful introduction that gives some much needed historical context to our current political conflicts over immigration. Hint: these conflicts are nothing new. The questions regarding who'll be let in, who counts as an American, and how many different immigrant cultures can be

absorbed by our national fabric, have been with us since the founding of the nation.

Spencer Riehl says

An enjoyable and readable presentation of the facts and trends of American immigration. Before you can understand if the facts of contemporary immigration, you have to understand the context. My sense is that my understanding of that history is much more fleshed out. There have been three broad periods of immigration, and while the forces facing today's immigrants are moderately different than those of the past, I feel confident in American society's ability to withstand the storm.

Alec Lurie says

May it burn in hell.

Navaneeta says

Concise and to the point Gerber tries to give a balanced view regarding immigration and immigrants in USA. There is no attempt at analysis, but that can be hardly termed a flaw since the book describes itself as a very short introduction. Internal migration though has been completely overlooked as well as the beginnings of African-American community. These shortcomings apart, it is a good basic book on American immigration.

William says

A basic and useful introduction to the issues involved in American immigration. The author begins with an often forgotten insight into the founding of our nation: America was not founded on a common genealogy, but on a common allegiance to a constitution, and American love of country is inspired by Jefferson's words about 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' Immigrants come here often seeking those same ideals that hold Americans together. There have been three waves of mass immigration: (1) in the 1840s and 1850s; (2) 1890s to World War I; (3) 1965 to present. American response to immigrants has varied widely, depending on American labor needs, attitudes toward race, and security concerns. The author concludes on an optimistic note that, messy as it is, America has constructed a society that is global in origin.

David Webber says

I felt the need for a good review of the history of immigration to America was in order, since it's been such a political issue lately and likely will be in the upcoming election. This book is an excellent introduction (as it claims in the title) to this topic. It covers immigration policy and our nation's attitudes from colonial times to present day, and reviews legislative, economic and social topics. It discusses the three massive waves of immigration - the 1840's and 1850's, from the late 1890's to WW1, and since the change in American immigration law in 1965. Also reviewed is the birthright citizenship that was given as a result of the 14th

Amendment and the issues surrounding that in our history. It succeeds in a balanced approach to the history and facts.

Similarly, it discusses attempts to limit immigration, such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which was in effect until 1943 in various forms and barred immigration of all Chinese laborers. In 1891, the Immigration Act unambiguously put the federal government in charge of assessment of immigrants for entrance into the U.S, and set up the transition to a carefully constructed system to control and prioritize entrance "based largely on racialized concepts of acceptability." It also fairly points out that many other countries including Canada and Australia were developing similar systems.

The passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act redefined the process again, led by its principal spokesman Senator Edward Kennedy from Massachusetts, and abolished national origin quotas, removed race as a selection principle and made family reunification easier. It goes on to discuss some of this law's unplanned consequences as well, such as a doubling of immigration from 1965 to 1970, until by the 1990's when "60% of American population growth was accounted for by immigration."

The book finishes by discussing assimilation of immigrants and their attitudes toward assimilation, social and economic impacts of immigration, and illegal immigration. Overall this was an excellent and quick read to reveal our country's complex history on this topic.

Alyssa says

A solid, well-rounded introduction.

Cara Byrne says

"The issue ultimately is, 'Who are we?' In a world in which nation-states have come to be imagined as communities providing definitions of identity for millions of unrelated, unacquainted individuals, for many that question ultimately presents the existential problem: 'Who am I?'" (5). While Gerber had some smart insights and indeed provides a concise introduction to hundreds of years of American immigration, this book is wanting of more information about American Indians/Native Americans and African Americans.

Daniel Wright says

Introduction: mass immigration, past and present

Part I: The law of immigration and the legal construction of citizenship

Chapter 1: Unregulated immigration and its opponents from Colonial America to the mid-nineteenth century

Chapter 2: Regulation and exclusion

Chapter 3: Removing barriers and debating consequences in the mid-twentieth century

Part II: Emigration and immigration from international migrants' perspectives

Chapter 4: Mass population movements and and resettlement, 1820-1924

Chapter 5: Mass population movements and resettlement, 1965 to the present

Part III: The dialogue of ethnicity and assimilation

Chapter 6: The widening mainstream

Chapter 7: The future of assimilation

Conclusion
