



THE DEMOCRACY PROJECT

IV. IMMIGRATION

“Immigration has for decades, even centuries, created a temporal paradox in American discourse: pride in the country’s history of immigration coming up against fears of its present and future.” – Derek Thompson

“Immigration needs to be thought of as a system, not a symbol.”
– David Frum

“The celebration of immigration has become core to the political beliefs of many Americans, on both the left and the right. Immigrants are underdogs, heroes, and—for most of us—ancestors. Many opponents of immigration are xenophobes. In the 21st century, the contours of the immigration debate can seem binary: Somebody is either in favor of immigration or opposed to it.” – David Leohardt

Topic Overview: Immigration

Immigration has been one of the most politically polarizing issues of the past 25 years, and multiple surveys suggest that it is one of the top issues of concern for voters in 2024.

Despite efforts to balance economic, security, and humanitarian concerns, America’s immigration system has struggled for years, and like many of the issues covered in *The Democracy Project*, it serves as a symbol in the larger

culture wars—keeping politicians from effectively pursuing reasonable and compassionate remedies to the crises produced by a failed system.

In his piece, ["Americans Are Thinking About Immigration All Wrong"](#), Derek Thompson captures the political situation as follows: "In a perfect world, the brokenness of America's immigration system would inspire Congress to swiftly pass new legislation convincing voters that the U.S. controls whom we let in and keep out of the country. The basic contours of this grand bargain have been fairly clear for decades. In exchange for expanded opportunities for legal immigration—more visas, more green cards, and targeted policies to increase immigration in technology and science—liberals would agree to stricter enforcement and control at the border. But major immigration reform is stuck."

David Frum echoes Thompson's call for political action in his article ["If Liberals Won't Enforce Borders Fascists Will,"](#) stating: "This massive new wave of immigration has brought many benefits to the United States. But large-scale immigration comes with considerable social and political costs, and those must be accounted for." Thompson and Frum agree that the cycle of partisan-driven crisis responses must give way to a long-term plan that is responsive to the economic, social, and cultural effects of immigration.

At a moment when immigration has returned to political prominence, [David Leonhardt](#) encourages us to consider three empirical questions: How have the immigrants fared in this country? What have been the economic effects for people who were already in the United States? And how has the immigration wave altered American politics?

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Teachers may wish to use the frames below to build a free-speech unit or select a few key activities and sources to complement an existing lesson plan. Others may simply want to use a specific article or set of quotations for inspiration as they design new lessons. (Note that frames are organized by increasing sophistication of ideas and resources.)

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1. CONTOURS OF DEBATE: SOURCES ON IMMIGRATION

The sources below offer teachers and students some foundational information, as well as new ways of exploring the topic of immigration. Teachers may wish to use one or more of these sources to better orient themselves to the full range of debate and/or to introduce their students to the basic principles and definitions related to the topic. Teachers and students alike will benefit from familiarizing themselves with the contours of the debate and exploring new ways of thinking about the many implications of immigration for our society.

We recommend introducing [Level Questions](#) to your students along with one or more of the sources below. This is not only a valuable annotation tool, it helps students generate analytical questions for class discussion and writing.

Note that those sources preceded by a ■ include an abbreviated version, along with three discussion questions, to make the content more accessible for students and/or to reduce the time required for teachers to review and prep.

Immigration History

[Timeline of Immigration Policy in the U.S.](#): From the Nationality Act of 1790 to the Muslim Travel Ban of 2017.

Gallup

[Immigration Surges to Top of Most Important Problem List](#): First time immigration has been the single most important problem since 2019.

Center for American Progress

[“Restoring the Rule of Law Through a Fair, Humane, and Workable Immigration System”](#): Policymakers must break free of the false dichotomy of America as either a nation of immigrants or a nation of laws, and advance an immigration system that is fair, humane, and actually works.

A Free Press Debate (video)

[Should the U.S. Shut Its Borders?](#): Should the United States close its borders? Author Ann Coulter and Sohrab Ahmari, founder and editor of Compact, argued yes. They faced off against Nick Gillespie, editor-at-large for Reason magazine, and Cenk Uygur, founder of The Young Turks.

Cato Institute

[“The \(Selfish\) Case for Immigration”](#): Immigrants work, start businesses, and contribute to scientific innovation, often at higher rates than native-born citizens.

Derek Thompson

[“Americans are Thinking About Immigration All Wrong”](#): Population growth, economic growth, and income growth can be mutually reinforcing.

■ David Frum

[“If Liberals Won't Enforce Borders Fascists Will”](#): We need to make hard decisions now about what will truly benefit current and future Americans. [Abbreviated Source with Questions](#)

■ David Leonhardt

[“The Hard Truth About Immigration”](#) If the United States wants to reduce inequality, it's going to need to take an honest look at a contentious issue. [Abbreviated Source with Questions](#)

Council on Foreign Relations

[The U.S. Immigration Debate](#): Comprehensive immigration reform has eluded Congress for decades, and presidents have increasingly turned to executive action to reshape asylum and border policy.

Edmund L. Andrews, HAI

[“How Have Attitudes Towards U.S. Immigration Changed?”](#): Using AI, scholars track political speech on immigration over decades to find more positive attitudes than at any point in history, but with more partisan divide.

2. CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS

The four categories of analysis below (social, political, economic, and cultural) offer disciplinary lenses through which students may consider and analyze immigration. The categories may be used collectively to address a range of complex issues—or teachers may wish to focus on a single category with specific relevance to their course/discipline.

If these categories, or this kind of analysis, is new to students, the questions, sources, and examples may provide useful scaffolding for your preparation and the students' introduction. For more advanced students, you may wish to simply provide the categories and allow them to generate questions and examples—or engage in some directed research.

Suggestions for student activities include:

- **Level Questions:** These categories lend themselves to using [Level Questions](#), a valuable tool for annotating text and encouraging analysis through the generation of thoughtful discussion questions.
- **Research:** Divide students into four groups—each responsible for one category of analysis. Have each group research their topic and prepare a presentation for the class.
- **Essay:** Have students write a five-paragraph essay utilizing three of the four categories (or two categories coupled with a synthesis paragraph) of their choice to take a position on immigration.
- **Writing Activity:** Have students write an [Op-Ed](#) or [Letter to the Editor](#) on the issue of immigration, drawing on data from one or more of the categories and sources above.

SOCIAL <i>(Race, Class, Gender)</i>	POLITICAL <i>(Structures and mechanism of our political system)</i>	ECONOMIC <i>(Structures and impact of the American economy)</i>	CULTURAL <i>(Norms, traditions, and institutions unique to America)</i>
What role does race play in U.S. immigration policy and Americans' attitudes about immigration? (Consider: US Immigration: A Classic, Unappreciated Example of Structural Racism and Race, Ethnicity, and American Views of Immigration and Diversity) What are some of the unique features of immigration policy and experience for immigrant women in the U.S.? (Consider: A Snapshot of Immigrant Women in the United States) and Gender Bias and Immigration Policy)	How has political rhetoric on immigration shifted over the years? (Consider: Computational Analysis of 140 Years of U.S. Political Speeches) What have been some of the most consequential immigration laws in the U.S.? (Consider: The 100th Anniversary of One of America's Worst Laws: the 1924 Immigration Act and The Disastrous, Forgotten 1996 Law That Created Today's Immigration Problem and To Fix Today's Border Problem, Update Reagan's 1986 Amnesty)	How do immigrants impact the American Economy? (Consider: What Emma Lazarus Got Wrong About Immigration) How do employment and earnings of immigrant women differ from American women? (Consider: The Employment and Earnings of Immigrant Women) What are some of the characteristics of the immigrant workforce? (Consider: Data on Foreign-Born Workers and the Labor Force)	What are some of the issues that animate Americans' current attitudes about immigration? (Consider: Americans Still Value Immigration, But Have Concerns and Debunking the Myth of the Migrant Crime Wave) How do Mexicans and Americans view each other and their governments' handling of the border? (Consider: PEW Survey on How Mexicans and Americans View Each Other) How do American attitudes about immigrants vary by age, race, and religion? (Consider: How

			Americans View Immigrants")
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3. WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO CHANGE YOUR MIND?

This activity from [Peter Boghassian's "What Would It Take To Change Your Mind?"](#) asks students to consider what information or evidence would encourage them to rethink their position on a contentious topic.

"This strategy is effective because asking the question, 'What evidence would it take to change your mind?' creates openings or spaces in someone's belief where they challenge themselves to reflect upon whether or not their confidence in a belief is justified. You're not telling them anything. You're simply asking questions. And every time you ask it's another opportunity for people to reevaluate and revise their beliefs. Every claim can be viewed as such, an opportunity to habituate people to seek disconfirming evidence.

If we don't place defeasibility front and center, we're jeopardizing peoples' epistemic situation by unwittingly helping them artificially inflate the confidence they place in their beliefs. **We're creating less humility because they're convincing themselves they're responsible believers and thus that their beliefs are more likely to be true.** That's the pedagogical solution. It's the easy part."

-Peter Boghassian

After your students have done some reading and discussion on the topic of immigration, we suggest the Dividing Line activity. This activity is flexible and can be used for a range of purposes, from a quick, 10-minute anticipatory set all the way to establishing the basis for a full class discussion.

Activity: Dividing Line

The following can be done as an anticipatory activity or following some reading and discussion on the topic of immigration provided above.

Directions:

1. Draw a horizontal line across the board to create a spectrum and mark the line from #1 - #10. Cross off #5.
2. Ask students to place themselves on a spectrum from 1-10, with **"1" representing a belief that there should be no restrictions on immigration (open borders)** and **"10" representing the most restrictive**

immigration policy (closed borders). (Note that crossing off the “5” will allow you to see which side of the issue students are leaning—the value of which will be revealed below.)

(Option: You can have students do this independently on a piece of paper—without students ever revealing their numbers to the group—or have students share their numbers and populate the spectrum on the board.)

3. Once students have selected their number, ask students with a “6” or above what evidence they would need to move to a “4” or below. For students with a “4” or below, ask them what evidence they would need to move to a “6” or higher? Provide students with some time to generate ideas/questions and then ask them to share the kind of evidence that might inspire a shift on the spectrum.
4. Put all the evidence/information requests on the board and have students work in small groups to find some answers to the questions.
5. Choose one of the following options for presenting their research to the class:
 - a. Option 1: Assign small groups to do corresponding research and have student groups share their findings with the class as a presentation.
 - b. Option 2: Have each group populate a shared class document—from which students can retrieve the relevant information they are seeking to influence their position.
6. Once students are presented with new information, assign one of the following:
 - a. A **reflective journal** on the value of changing one’s mind in the face of new evidence.
 - b. Write a **thesis** on the topic of immigration with relevant evidence from the group research to substantiate their position on the spectrum.

4. PERSPECTIVES ON IMMIGRATION

This section includes a collection of quotes, each offering a new way of looking at the role of immigration in building the American nation and identity. Underneath the quotes are questions for students to consider as they complete the suggested student activity options. You may choose to use one of these options or a combination of all three.

Suggestions for student activities include:

- **Thesis:** Have students distill each author’s excerpt into a thesis.

- **Personal Response:** Ask students which author's view on immigration they find most compelling and why. Students may respond:
 - In **writing**
 - In small or large group **discussion**
 - Through a **Dividing Line** activity that distributes the positions of Frum, Reeves, Coates, Jones, and Leonhardt on a spectrum from 1-10. Directions for this activity are located in the [What Would It Take To Change Your Mind?](#) frame.
- **Relationship ID:** Have students select two authors and write a Relationship ID that explores the points of convergence and divergence in their ideas. Here are examples of Relationship IDs created for the topics of [Free Speech](#) and [Abortion](#), along with a [grading rubric](#).

DAVID FRUM: *"More than any other area of government, U.S. immigration policy is driven by nostalgia—by ancestral memories of a world long gone. Give me your tired, your poor ...This is no way to think about the problems of today. These are new times, calling for new thinking."*

RICHARD REEVES: *"Immigrants generate more dynamism and aspiration, but they are also unsettling and challenging. Where this debate ends will therefore tell us a great deal about the trajectory of the nation. An America that closes its doors will be an America that has chosen to settle rather than grow, that has allowed security to trump dynamism."*

TAREK HASSAN: *"On average, the people who are most scared of immigration are typically the people who don't actually live in very ethnically diverse places...Long-term exposure to people with a given ethnic background makes you more informed about them, maybe makes you like them more. It also increases political support for concerns these minorities might have. It traces a lot of xenophobia to people who don't interact with people with foreign ancestry."*

RUSSELL COATES: *Skeptics may argue that an influx of immigrants will strain local resources and diminish opportunities for native citizens. However, history tells a different tale. From the Ellis Island immigrants who helped build America to the wave of entrepreneurs and skilled workers shaping Silicon Valley, countless examples demonstrate that immigration is not a zero-sum game. Instead, it represents a powerful force for economic growth, job creation, and cultural enrichment.*

BENJAMIN F. JONES: *"The tension between economic self-interest and humanitarian ideals continues to define our immigration debates. And yet, in a crucial way, both perspectives share the same flawed premise. A growing body*

of research suggests that immigrants are primarily neither job stealers nor a call upon our charity. Rather, they are overwhelmingly job creators.”

DAVID LEONHARDT: *If the United States wanted to keep immigration high and ameliorate the effects on inequality, it could do so—say, by cutting taxes for low-earning workers and raising taxes on high-earning professionals. The problem is that the country has not used government policy to reverse the growth of inequality; the tax system has instead exacerbated inequality. For all the benefits of the post-1965 immigration wave, American workers are not delusional to think that it has had costs—and that they, rather than more affluent Americans, have borne those costs.”*

Questions to Consider:

1. Several passages above address the tensions that exist in America’s attitudes and policies regarding immigration. What are some of these tensions?
2. What, if any, policy remedies are suggested (implicitly or explicitly) by some of the excerpts above?
3. If immigrants are, indeed, job creators, how does this disrupt some of the more pervasive narratives around the threat of immigration?
4. Reeves highlights the “dynamism and aspiration” that immigration generates, while acknowledging that immigrants can be “unsettling and challenging.” Explore 1-2 examples of the former and the latter—and then consider which are assumptions and which can be substantiated with data.
5. Where do you see points of convergence between the authors? Where do you see divergence?

5. STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY (SAC)

What is a Structured Academic Controversy?

A Structured Academic Controversy (SAC) is a framework for discussion that moves students beyond “either/or” debates to a more nuanced historical, social, political and/or cultural synthesis.

Rationale

By the time students reach adolescence, many believe that every issue comes neatly packaged in a “pro/con” format, and that the goal of classroom discussion is to defeat, rather than to understand, your opponent. The SAC method provides an

alternative to the "debate mindset" by shifting the goal from winning classroom discussions to understanding alternative positions and formulating historical syntheses. The SAC's structure demands that students listen to each other in new ways and helps guide them into a world of complex and controversial ideas.

Description

The SAC was developed by cooperative learning researchers David and Roger Johnson of the University of Minnesota as a way to provide structure and focus to classroom discussions. Working in pairs and then coming together in four-person teams, students explore a question by reading about and then presenting contrasting positions. Afterwards, they engage in discussion to reach consensus. (Note that consensus need not always be the goal when engaging with contentious topics. But the *pursuit* of consensus can be a valuable skill for students to develop.)

Below you'll find directions for preparing the SAC, classroom instructions for students, and two sample sources on the topic of immigration.

SAC: Teacher Preparation

1. Develop a Question that lends itself to contrasting viewpoints. Some question examples include:

- Provocative: "Is Abraham Lincoln worthy of the title "The Great Emancipator"?"
- Contestable: "Was dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki necessary to defeat the Japanese?"
- Hypothetical: "Could the Constitution have been ratified if slavery had been abolished?"

We illustrate the SAC below with the question "Is America better served by more or less immigration?" But many other questions included in *The Democracy Project* lend themselves to this technique.

2. Resource Selection Select 2-4 documents (primary or secondary) that include compelling arguments/evidence for each side. To get started, we suggest using the following documents:

- a. [Abbreviated Version](#) of David Frum's "[If Liberals Won't Enforce Borders Fascists Will](#)"
- b. [Abbreviated Version](#) of David Leonhardt's "[The Hard Truth About Immigration](#)"

Note: There are a number of valuable sources in [Contours of the Debate: Sources on Immigration](#). These excerpts are from two sources in that section.

3. Timing The time you will need for a SAC that uses about four documents will depend on the amount of experience your students have with sourcing/annotating documents, using this type of structure and the

sophistication and complexity of the documents. An introduction (or review) of analyzing documents can be a helpful starting point. Plan on using 1-2 class periods, depending on the variables above.

In the Classroom

While the SAC has been modified and adapted countless times by researchers and teachers, the technique has five basic steps ([Handout 1 & 2](#)):

I. Partners Prepare

1. Present the topic and question. Organize students into four-person teams comprised of two dyads. Inform students that each dyad will assume one side of the argument.
2. Distribute document packet to each dyad for review.
3. Instruct each dyad to prepare their position using the best evidence. They are not required to use every document—and may, in fact, find multiple pieces of evidence in a single document. See Handout 2, which will help students track their analysis and prepare their positions.

II. Position Presentation

4. Dyads come together as a four-person team and present their evidence to one another, with one dyad acting as the presenters and the other as listeners.
5. After presenters are finished, the listening dyad repeats back to presenters what they understood. Listeners are not refuting or debating the other side's position at this time. Presenters must be fully satisfied that the listeners have demonstrated an understanding of their position before continuing.
6. Switch roles: the listeners become the presenters and repeat Steps 4 and 5.

III. Build Consensus

7. After each side presents, the dyads abandon their original positions and work to reach consensus based on the most compelling evidence. If consensus proves unattainable, the team clarifies where their differences lie.

Helpful Tips

Students' tendencies towards argument and debate start early and run deep. Even when told that they need to understand—not contest—an opposing position, students will try to find holes in their opponent's positions and aim to refute them. Our recommendations:

- Introduce (or review) the skill of "[active listening](#)" and have students practice in their dyads for a few minutes. Students may use such sentence frames as:
 - "Let me make sure I heard you correctly. Did you say..."

- “What I heard was...”
- Establish the following rule: “Do not interrupt the presenters; jot down notes when the argument requires clarity.”
- Post the procedures or distribute as handouts for easy reference.
- As students start to see other perspectives and nuances in the materials, *the absence of a certain answer may confuse them*. Reassure students that uncertainty and complexity are expected during this activity. Encourage them to make notes that specify their confusion, new ideas, or questions.

The [two handouts](#) will help you introduce and set up this activity, along with your selected source documents. Each dyad should get all of the documents.

Acknowledgments: The SAC was developed by cooperative learning researchers David and Roger Johnson of the University of Minnesota. Thank you also to Daisy Martin and teachinghistory.org

6. COMPLEXITIES OF THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE (RELATIONSHIP ID)

A Relationship ID is a brief piece of writing that provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate their understanding of two terms by synthesizing and analyzing—rather than summarizing. This activity prompts students to identify each author’s position and then explore points of divergence and convergence between the two positions. Students then form a sophisticated thesis, a body paragraph with evidence and analysis, and a short conclusion explaining the broader significance of their argument to fully demonstrate their understanding.

RELATIONSHIP ID: David Frum and David Leonhardt

Below are two articles exploring the complexity of the debate on immigration. (If you want to have your students work with a document analysis worksheet, [here is a sample](#).)

After reviewing student responses and discussing some of the points of convergence and divergence between the two authors, introduce the Relationship ID. Relationship IDs can be used as an informal opportunity for students to demonstrate their analytical skills, as a graded piece of writing to demonstrate understanding of the material and the ability to translate that understanding into a persuasive argument bolstered by evidence, or as a building block (body paragraph) for a future essay.

- David Frum: ["If Liberals Won't Enforce Borders Fascists Will"](#)

- David Leonhardt: [“The Hard Truth About Immigration”](#)

Here are examples of Relationship IDs created for the topics of [Free Speech](#) and [Abortion](#), along with a [grading rubric](#). Note that the Free Speech example illustrates analysis of *competing ideas*, while the Abortion example demonstrates a more nuanced analysis between *two authors whose ideas largely converge*.

7. REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION ON IMMIGRATION

The debate over immigration in America generally focuses on the **oversimplified** “closed” versus “open” border positions--neither of which captures the complexities of this issue. But there are other lenses that get us beyond these oversimplified terms.

We'll offer some entry points into each of these lenses You may choose to use each of them--or select one or two. Remember, the purpose of these lenses is not to be prescriptive but to inspire ideas and help you explore new questions. There is no wrong way to implement these sources. We simply encourage you to integrate them in a way that disrupts some of the conventional partisan positions--allowing your students to develop new ways of thinking about this long-standing and deeply polarizing debate.

Below you'll find three sections that offer new ways to approach the topic of immigration:

- Compelling Questions
- George Packer: Four American Narratives
- Steven Pinker: The Better Angels of Our Nature

COMPELLING QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions that offer new ways of looking at immigration. You may use these questions for research projects, discussions, essays, or other classroom activities.

- What, if any, are the ethical complexities of Congress being empowered to make laws concerning aliens that would be unconstitutional if applied to citizens?

- How might recent data expose some of the myths on both sides of the immigration debate? (Note: For valuable examples of recent data, you may refer to Myths and Assumptions About Immigration)
- What kind of policy remedies hold promise for optimizing the value that immigrants bring to the U.S., while minimizing the costs?
- What are some of the current social, political, economic and cultural factors that need to be considered in the immigration debate? (Refer to the [Contours of Debate: Sources on Immigration](#) and [Categories of Analysis](#) frames for suggestions.)
- Are open borders, or poorly enforced borders, necessarily more compassionate than strict regulation?
- What role, if any, should compassion play in our non-asylum immigration policies?
- How should we balance our obligations to current citizens with those aspiring to citizenship?

GEORGE PACKER'S FOUR AMERICAS

In his book, *Last Best Hope: America in Crisis and Renewal*, George Packer explores four narratives that dominate American life—none of which can sustain a democracy. These can serve as valuable categories for students to explore some of the competing values and perspectives of Americans on many of our most contentious issues.

These narratives also offer an opportunity for students to examine the limits of reducing Americans to four groups. In short, they serve as a valuable *tool*—not an established truth. But you and your students may note some interesting, if not paradoxical, relationships between the group narratives and their positions on immigration.

Below you'll find suggestions for student activities. Additionally, we've provided some extension prompts for discussions, essays, or projects following the descriptions of the four narratives.

Suggestions for student activities include:

- **Four Americas**
 - **Define:** Provide the category titles to students and have students develop descriptions for each category. Share descriptions with the

class to compare how commonly used terms (e.g. “Free”) generate multiple interpretations.

- **Evaluate:** Present Packer’s established categories and definitions (along with an [article](#) that provides the history and context). Analyze the value and limits of these categories.
- **Essay:** Use the George Packer quotation as an essay prompt.
- **Relationship ID:** Assign these narratives as a Relationship ID. For example: *Real America* and *Just America* OR *Free America* and *Smart America*. Here are examples of Relationship IDs for the topics of [Abortion](#) and [Free Speech](#).

George Packer’s *Four Americas*

“Nations, like individuals, tell stories in order to understand what they are, where they come from, and what they want to be. National narratives, like personal ones, are prone to sentimentality, grievance, pride, shame, self-blindness. There is never just one—they compete and constantly change. The most durable narratives are not the ones that stand up best to fact-checking. They’re the ones that address our deepest needs and desires. Americans know by now that democracy depends on a baseline of shared reality—when facts become fungible, we’re lost. But just as no one can live a happy and productive life in nonstop self-criticism, nations require more than facts—they need stories that convey a moral identity. The long gaze in the mirror has to end in self-respect or it will swallow us up.”

-George Packer

Free America: In the past half century it’s been the most politically powerful of the four. Free America draws on libertarian ideas, which it installs in the high-powered engine of consumer capitalism. The freedom it champions is very different from Alexis de Tocqueville’s art of self-government. It’s personal freedom, without other people—the negative liberty of “Don’t tread on me,” promoting individualism and deregulation of government.

What might the underlined words above suggest about Free America’s attitudes on immigration—as well as the other three narratives?

Smart America: An educated elite that believes in credentials and expertise. Like *Free America* they embrace capitalism and the principle of meritocracy: the belief that talent and effort should determine your reward. But they also believe

that some government interventions are necessary for everyone to have an equal chance to move up. The winners in Smart America have little contact with fellow citizens outside their way of life.

What might the underlined words above suggest about Smart America's relationship to immigration—and Free America?

Real America: From its beginnings, Real America has been religious, and in a particular way: evangelical and fundamentalist, hostile to modern ideas and intellectual authority. The truth will enter every simple heart, and it doesn't come in shades of gray. It is overwhelmingly white, working class, traditionally Christian Americans in the heartland, with a strong nationalist character.

What might the underlined words above suggest about Real America's relationship to immigration—and Smart America?

Just America: Like *Real America*, it is another rebellion from below. An embrace of identity that inverts the old hierarchy of power. This fixed lens on power makes true equality, based on common humanity, impossible. It is oftentimes animated by a spirit of attack, rather than aspiration. Just America looks not to reason or universal values but to the authority of identity, the "lived experience."

What might the underlined words above suggest about Just America's relationship to immigration—as well as Real America?

Extension Prompts

- **Competing Perspectives** Have students identify some competing groups of Americans on the issue of immigration and present their findings to the class. Follow with a discussion on how these groups contribute and/or distract from constructive debate on immigration.
- **Clashing Narratives** Of the four narratives, *Real America* and *Just America* clash most frequently—and most vehemently. Explore the consequences of the relationships between these competing narratives for a sensible response to immigration. What kind of response has the best chance of reflecting at least some of the interests or concerns of each group?*

**Note: This refers to speech outside of First Amendment protection.*

STEVEN PINKER'S *THE BETTER ANGELS OF OUR NATURE*

In *The Better Angels of our Nature*, Steven Pinker examines four motives that can orient humans away from conflict and towards cooperation and a commitment to the common good. Below you will find a brief description of each motive.

Suggestions for student activities include:

- **Discussion:** After reading the descriptions for each motive, conduct a small or large group discussion to analyze how each of these might help inform a responsible response to the issue of immigration.
- **Video Pairing:** Pair one or more of these discussion questions with another Pinker resource such as [this video](#) before launching a class discussion about immigration.

EMPATHY: Prompts us to feel the pain of others and to align their interests with our own.

Questions to consider:

- *In what ways has a lack of empathy expressed itself in the opposition to immigration?*
- *In what ways might a call for open borders lack empathy?*

SELF-CONTROL: Allows us to anticipate the consequences of acting on our impulses and to inhibit them accordingly.

Questions to consider:

- *What are some of the impulsive/reflexive responses to immigration?*
- *How might greater self-control change the style and/or substance of the debate over immigration?*
- *What are some of the impulsive/reflexive responses to the call for tighter regulation of our borders?*
- *What might a more restrained and/or reasoned response look like?*
- *How, if at all, might a greater commitment to self-control by both sides change the nature of the immigration debate?*

THE MORAL SENSE: Sanctifies a set of norms and taboos that govern the interactions among people in a culture. These sometimes decrease conflict but can also increase it when the norms are tribal, authoritarian, or puritanical.

Questions to consider:

- *How does each side of the immigration debate use morality and/or tribalism to bolster its position?*

- Overall, have moral claims furthered or hindered meaningful discussion on immigration policy? Explain.
- Is one side of the immigration debate on firmer moral ground than the other?
- What might a new “moral vision” look like in the context of this conflict?

REASON: Allows us to extract ourselves from our parochial vantage points.

Questions to consider:

- Like many of the most contentious topics, our responses are often grounded more in emotion than reason and evidence. What, if any, opportunities do you see for the role of logic and rationality when it comes to making a substantive contribution to the immigration debate?

8. MYTHS AND ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT IMMIGRATION

Below you will find a series of myths and assumptions regarding immigration paired with explanations that either debunk or uncover the complexity of each myth. A related question for each assumption is also included.

Suggestions for student activities include:

- **Discussion:** Use the myths and questions to hold small or large group discussion. You may also use the Dividing Line activity to spark discussion. Directions for this activity are located in the [What Would It Take To Change Your Mind?](#) frame.
- **Research:** Use the questions underneath each assumption to conduct a small or large group discussion or as prompts for research projects.
- **Written Reflection:** Ask students to write a reflection about how their own thinking has evolved regarding immigration.

Assumption #1: “We are the most generous nation in the world for legal immigration.”

Although the U.S. has accepted the most immigrants in *absolute* terms compared to other independent countries, fewer immigrants reside in the U.S. as a share of its population than in 55 other countries. In fact, the U.S. ranks in the bottom third among wealthy countries for the foreign-born share of its population. (The Cato Institute and Chicago Policy Review)

Question: *Should the U.S. aspire to increase its number of foreign-born citizens to achieve a more comparable position with other wealthy countries? Explain.*

Assumption #2: “Immigrants are taking the low-skilled jobs and suppressing the wages of Americans.”

Alessandro Caiumi and Giovanni Peri [published](#) a paper concluding that, from 2000 to 2019, immigration had a “positive and significant effect” on wage growth for less educated native workers. (Simulations for the most recent 2019-2022 period suggest small positive effects on wages of non-college natives and no significant crowding out effects on employment.)

Question: *To what extent, if any, should this data influence immigration policy? Explain.*

Assumption #3: “If immigrants would simply follow the law many of these problems would be remedied.”

“The myth that legal immigration is relatively easy or a matter of simply waiting a few years persists. The focus then becomes solely on how to deal with the symptom of the restrictions — people crossing illegally — rather than the restrictions themselves, and legal immigration reforms fall to the wayside. Legal immigration is a labyrinth that few can navigate.” (The Cato Institute and Center for American Progress)

Question: *If, indeed, the complexity of our legal immigration system is what drives illegal immigration, how should this inform the immigration debate—which largely centers on illegal immigration?*

Assumption #4: “The majority of immigrants in the U.S. are here illegally.”

Most immigrants (77%) are in the country legally. As of 2022: 49% were naturalized U.S. citizens; 24% were lawful permanent residents; 4% were legal temporary residents; and 23% were unauthorized immigrants. (PEW Research Center and Public Policy Institute of California)

Question: *As a matter of proportion, with unauthorized immigrants representing 23% of immigrants in the country, are we having the right conversation(s) about immigration reform?*

Assumption #5: “Immigrants are responsible for increases in crime.”

Substantial research has assessed the relationship between immigration and crime, and numerous studies show that immigration is not linked to higher levels of crime, but rather the opposite. Studies have also examined the impact of the concentration of immigrants in a community on crime patterns, finding that immigration is associated with lower crime rates and an increase in structural factors — such as social connection and economic opportunity — that are linked to neighborhood safety. (The Brennan Center for Justice and Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research)

Question: *Despite compelling data to the contrary, why do so many Americans continue to believe that immigrants are more likely to commit crime than native-born citizens? What is the source of this assumption?*

Assumption #6: “Immigrants increase economic inequality.”

Maybe. The evidence on how immigration affects economic inequality in the United States is mixed — some research finds relatively small effects, and some finds substantial ones. The standard of living is much more important than is the income distribution.” (Carnegie Corporation of New York)

Question: *If immigration does indeed increase inequality in the U.S., what kinds of programs or policies might serve to mitigate this effect?*

9. IMMIGRATION AND THE CONSTITUTION

What is the extent of Congress’s Immigration Powers?

Supreme Court precedent recognizes Congress as having plenary power over immigration, giving it almost complete authority to decide whether foreign nationals may enter or remain in the United States. However, while Congress’s power over immigration is well established, defining its constitutional underpinnings is more difficult.

Below you will find the following:

- An **explanation** of the broad powers given to Congress regarding immigration.
- A **set of questions** about immigration and the Constitution. These questions may serve as overarching essential questions, discussion questions, prompts for essays, or other useful springboards to frame a lesson or unit.

How does the Constitution discuss immigration?

The Constitution does not mention immigration, but parts of the Constitution address related subjects.

What power does Congress have over immigration?

Here is a brief overview of Congress’ Immigration Powers provided by [Constitution Annotated](#).

Article I, Section 8, Clause 18:

[The Congress shall have Power . . .] To make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof.

In exercising its power over immigration, **Congress can make laws concerning aliens that would be unconstitutional if applied to citizens.** The Supreme Court has interpreted that power to apply with most force to the admission and exclusion of nonresident aliens abroad seeking to enter the United States. The Court has further upheld laws excluding aliens from entry on the basis of ethnicity, gender and legitimacy, and political belief. It has also upheld an Executive Branch exclusion policy, premised on a broad statutory delegation of authority, that some evidence suggested was motivated by religious animus. **But the immigration power has proven less than absolute when directed at aliens already physically present within the United States.** Even so, the Supreme Court's jurisprudence reflects that **Congress retains broad power to regulate immigration and that the Court will accord substantial deference to the government's immigration policies, particularly those that implicate matters of national security.**

Questions about Immigration and the Constitution:

- How are America's founding documents (The Constitution, Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence) relevant and valuable to this debate—and what are the limits to how they might inform a response?
- What makes the immigration debate particularly unique when it comes to the question of constitutional rights? In what way is this similar to the constitutional debate on [abortion](#)? (Note: neither are mentioned in the Constitution.)
- What are the potential benefits and limitations of granting Congress such broad power over immigration policy?
- What are some new ways of framing the debate on immigration that might be more responsive to current social, political, economic and/or cultural realities? (Refer to the [Categories of Analysis](#) and [Reframing the Conversation](#) frames for suggestions.)

