

Timeline of US-Mexico Immigration Policies

United States

During the late 1800's and early 1900's, the United States followed a policy of laissez faire immigration concerning Mexico. This was due to the need for migrant agricultural

During World War I, the United States exempted Mexican workers from new laws that restricted immigration from other areas of the world. This set up the first guest worker program. It last until 1920.

During the 1920's, the United States began to place restrictions on the visa guidelines for entering the country. For the first time, Mexican immigrants were included. Mexican immigration dropped by 75%. During the 1930's, thousands of Mexicans were deported in what was known as the Mexican Repatriation.

Mexico

During the late 1800's and early 1900's, Mexico also followed a policy of laissez faire immigration. They saw migration to the United States as a safety valve to political problems in their country.

From 1910 to 1920, Mexico discouraged migration to the United States because they needed a work force in their own country to help develop rural areas that had been devastated by the revolution.

During the 1920's, Mexico began to require that migrant workers receive permission to leave the country. Angered by US policies, they began a program during the 1930's and early 1940's to pay migrants to return to Mexico and to receive free land.

In 1942, the United States and Mexico signed an immigration agreement which became known as the Bracero Program. Mexican workers could freely enter the country and were promised certain rights. Over time, both countries became unhappy with the program and it ended in 1964.

In 1965, the United States, for the first time, set a limit on the number of immigrants who could enter from Mexico. US businesses who relied on cheap, unskilled labor ignored these restrictions and continued to use both documented and undocumented workers. During the 1970's and 1980's, spending increased to halt the tide of increasing illegal immigration.

With the end of the Bracero Program, Mexico's government adopted a "policy of no policy" concerning migration to the United States. Failure of their own economic policies led the government to believe they would benefit more from the money sent home by migrants to the United States. As a result, Mexico rejected all offers to work on a resolution to the illegal migration issue with the United States government during the 1970's and 1980's.

In the 1990's, both the United States and Mexico began to see the need to work together. The passage of NAFTA required addressing the issue of both legal and illegal immigration. As the United States began to expand its efforts to secure the border with more border patrol agents, lighting, and fences, Mexico formed the Grupo Beta to inform migrants of the dangers of crossing the border illegally. Discussions were held to address the issues of immigration and how to work together. Just as things looked to be coming together, September 11, 2001 took place.

After 9/11, the United States and Mexico focused their efforts on border security. The United States worked on fortifying the border and the flow of arms south. Mexico worked in illegal immigration and the drug trade.

Beginning in 2010, various US states began to pass their own immigration laws in response to what they felt was the failure of the federal government to secure the border.

In response to the new state legislation in the United States, the government of Mexico declares the laws will lead to civil rights violations of Hispanic Americans living legally and illegally in the United States.

Question: Where do the United States and Mexico go from here?

Source: Rosenblum, Marc R., "Obstacles and Opportunities For Regional Cooperation: The US-Mexico Case", Migration Policy Institute, April, 2011