FEAR of FOREIGNERS

On the campaign trail, Trump made some pretty dramatic statements about immigrants:

Some find his rhetoric and actions alarming, but it follows a long tradition of nativist public discourse.

Immigration is a big part of almost every American family's story (except Native Americans). But there's always been a tendency among established residents - Democrats and Republicans alike - to blame newcomers for big national problems, especially in response to tough economic times and national security threats.

Keep Out!

Throughout U.S. history, there have been intermittent outbreaks of **nativism** – the belief that the American way of life should be vigilantly protected against foreign influence.

In 1755, before America even gained its independence, Benjamin Franklin warned:

A Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them and will never adopt our Language or Customs any more than they can acquire our Complexion.

Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc., 1755

1850s: Germans and Irish

NATIVE.AMERICANS.

BEWARE OF

FOREIGN.INFLUENCE

A century later, a new wave of Irish and German immigration gave rise to the short-lived "Native American Party."

Popularly dubbed the "Know Nothings," the party capitalized on growing anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant sentiment by promising to crack down on the newcomers.

In the mid-1850s, the party won six governorships (including in California) and gained control of multiple state legislatures before dividing over the issue of slavery and eventually fizzling out.

During an economic downturn in the early 1880s, Chinese immigrants became the newest scapegoats.

For decades, a steady stream of them traveled West to work as cheap laborers in the mines and railroads.

But amid an economic downturn in the early 1880s, jobs grew scarce and tensions arose.

In response, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, halting Chinese immigration and blocking those already here from gaining citizenship.

The first law preventing a specific ethnic group entering the U.S., it wasn't officially repealed until 1943.

1880s: Chinese

MUST GO!

1890s – 1930s: Italians
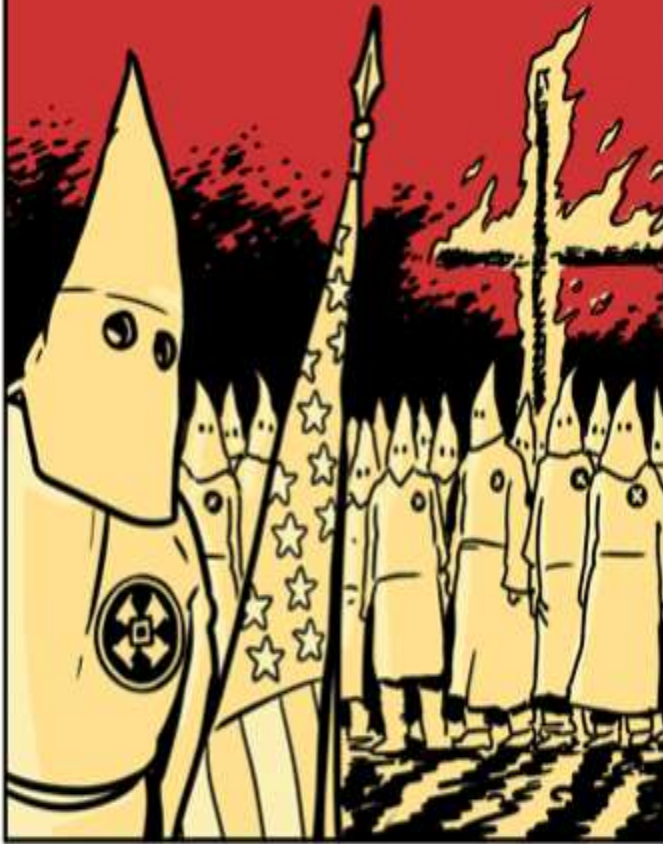
Starting in the late 1800s, Italian immigrants escaped economic hardship by moving to East Coast cities.

In response, anti-Catholic groups proliferated, including the Ku Klux Klan, which recruited millions of members in its efforts to scare off minority communities.

In an effort to further preserve the ideal of U.S. homogeneity, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924, which sharply limited entry from Southern and Eastern Europe, and placed an outright ban on Asian immigration. These quotas remained in place until 1965.
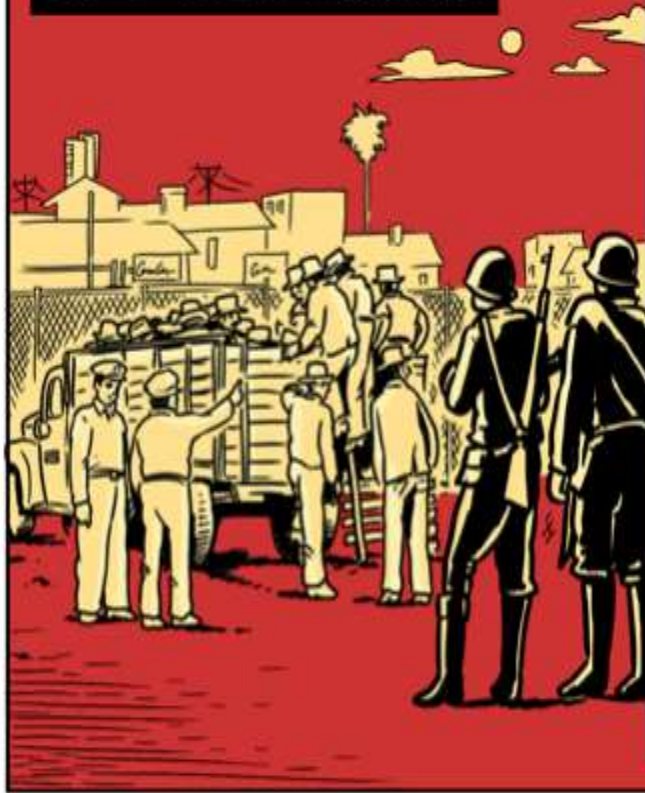
Around the same time, large numbers of Eastern European and Russian Jews escaping persecution and poverty began making their way to America. They were not often greeted warmly, frequently targeted by anti-Semitic groups like the KKK. Under the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt, the U.S. also turned away whole boatloads of Jews fleeing the Nazi regime during World War II, sending them back to Europe where many died in concentration camps.

Anti-Semitic sentiment was further spread by influential public figures like auto magnate Henry Ford, who purchased his hometown newspaper and used it to rail against "the Jewish plan to control the world."

Legendary aviator Charles Lindbergh also famously disparaged American Jews, and later became a mouthpiece for a large nativist, isolationist group called America First.

The Ford International Weekly
THE DEARBORN
INDEPENDENT

The International Jew:
The World's Problem

1929 – 1936: Mexicans

As millions of Americans struggled to find work during the Great Depression, some leaders - including President Herbert Hoover - accused low-wage Mexican laborers of taking away precious jobs.
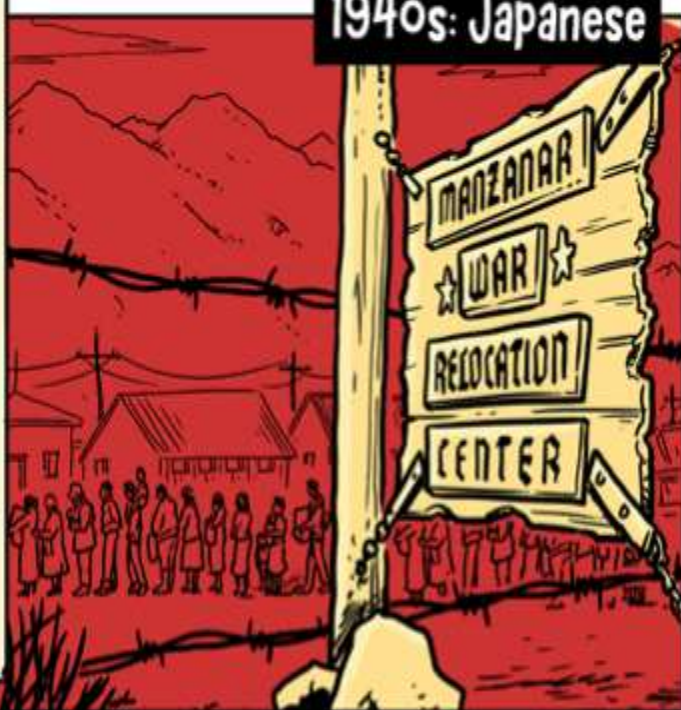
Between 1929 and 1936, as many as 2 million people of Mexican descent, many of whom were U.S. citizens, were forcibly "repatriated" to Mexico.

In 2005, California became the only state to officially apologize for its role in violating the civil liberties of Mexican-Americans during this period.

1940s: Japanese

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Japanese-Americans on the West Coast were demonized by the government and labeled a security risk.

On orders from President Franklin Roosevelt, more than 100,000 of them, the majority citizens who had lived here for generations, were rounded up and forced to live in internment camps until the end of World War II.

MANZANAR
WAR
RELOCATION
CENTER

1994: The Undocumented

They keep coming!

Wilson Sending More Guard Troops to Border

Even as recently as 1994, in the wake of an economic slowdown, California voters overwhelmingly approved Proposition 187, an effort to deny most state services, including public education, to undocumented immigrants.

Called the "Save Our State" initiative, it also required public service workers and teachers to verify the legal status of their clients and report anyone without documentation.

Ultimately, though, a federal court ruled the measure unconstitutional, and it never went into effect.

In 2010, Arizona passed a similarly restrictive anti-immigrant law, but much of it was struck down by the Supreme Court.

Today, as millions of Americans still struggle economically and the nation remains on edge after recent ISIS-inspired attacks, it's not surprising that Mexican immigrants and Muslim communities have been targeted.

But if history is any guide, it's worth remembering that the anti-immigrant fervor of the moment usually fades.

And, more often than not, those targeted newcomers are eventually woven into the patchwork quilt of American society.

Sources:

Bennett, David Harry. *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History*. New York: Vintage, 1995.