

# How did this get to be OK in the U.S. of A.?

## **Author**

**ANDREA COPELAND**, Co-Editor *ENGAGE!*

It seems every day there is another headline about immigration or the refugee crisis. Some leaders in the Republican Party have managed to turn a global humanitarian crisis into a political football here at home. Humans moving around the globe are in desperate situations trying to find food and safe harbor for their families. They are not wanting to harm others; they are wanting only to move themselves away from harm.

Sadly, the cultural wars in the United States are keeping political leaders from truly addressing issues that need to be studied and understood as if people's lives depended on it, because they do. Mostly, we have narratives promoting political agendas rather than an understanding of the economic, environmental, and cultural systems that are at work to create this period, a period in which we have more displaced persons than ever before. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2022) estimated that persecution, conflict, and human rights violations displaced 89.3 million persons in 2021.

How did a nation of immigrants become so divided on the issue of immigration?

In 2015, presidential candidate Donald J. Trump said this on the campaign trail: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best ... they're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (Ye Hee Lee, 2015). He was elected thanks to the outdated electoral college, not the majority

of voters. The fact that he could be elected by any means is deeply disturbing to me and numerous others.

Trump did not start the division, but rather tapped into existing xenophobia and racism already firmly rooted in our soil (Perea, 2020).

The inhumanity continues, in step with the 2022 midterm election cycle. In April 2022, the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, started busing migrants from Texas to D.C. and NYC. In September 2022, Governor of Florida Ron DeSantis used taxpayer dollars meant to support human beings during a time of need (the pandemic) to fly 48 migrants to Martha's Vineyard. All for the optics of *Owning the Libs*. (Note: DeSantis is currently under investigation by the US Treasury for misuse of federal funds for his stunt.) What does "Owning the Libs" mean, and why is it so important? It means ridiculing or frustrating others that do not agree with a far-right conservative agenda that often includes white supremacy as a point of pride. It's a making fun of, a bullying, a tearing down, in such a way as to quash serious conversation or debate by turning any disagreement into an opportunity to reduce or devalue another human being's perspective. It's so important because it's easier to tap into people's fear of difference than it is to do the hard work of finding solutions that make a difference in people's lives.

Who benefits from the cultural wars? It's a question we should be asking of ourselves and our politicians. It's certainly not the quickly advancing non-white majority in this country. You might be inclined to think White

nationalism is only a fringe element until you see that voting rights are being suppressed and gerrymandered into the hands of the White electorate (Li & Rudensky, 2022; Olumhense, 2022).

More Asians (28%) than Hispanics (25%) have migrated to the U.S. since 2009 (Budiman, 2020). Yet what are we hearing about every day? The Southern Border. The top 5 countries from which people are migrating to the US are overwhelming non-white. Why did Trump attack people from Mexico instead of India? What's happening here? Why does a country of immigrants embrace such political grandstanding? As of this writing, DeSantis is ahead of his rival in the polls for re-election this November by almost 10 points. How did this get to be OK in the U.S. of A.? Did immigration become more concerning to Americans as the ethnicities changed from European (my ancestors) to South and Central American, Caribbean, Arab and Asian?

With this issue of ENGAGE!, we are asking people to pause and think about those human beings in pursuit of a better a life, no matter the path they've taken to find it. In addition to research articles, we've included some other features that we hope will help you engage critically with the issue of immigration. An interview with Dr. Mamadou Sy from Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area (LSSNCA) discusses how important it is to work with local communities to create welcoming spaces for immigrants to thrive. Organizations like LSSNCA provide vital infrastructures of support for persons arriving in the US from just about every life circumstance one can imagine: real people dealing with real life.

Additionally, we have two features that are designed to counter, or at least balance, the narrative that migrants are unwelcome and threatening: Notes of Compassion and Annotated Bibliography. Immediately following this editorial is Notes of Compassion. These are headlines

that were not promoted as breaking news or subjects of federal investigations. These headlines link to stories about communities embracing their new neighbors and welcoming the good these individuals can bring to the further development of the US. I invite you to click through them.

Next, there is Annotated Bibliography, which is a sampling of the types of thoughtful exploration that exists regarding the forced movement of humans around the globe. The Bibliography includes works for adults as well as younger readers. These lengthier works provide readers with the opportunity to delve more deeply into the worlds of displaced individuals and the challenges they face.

Graduate student in library and information science Jad Rea curated both items. Librarians, as professionals, are committed to promoting access to a diversity of viewpoints and encouraging the development of multiple literacies, including media literacy. Media literacy is defined as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication. In its simplest terms, media literacy builds upon the foundation of traditional literacy and offers new forms of reading and writing. Media literacy empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators, and active citizens.” (United States Media Literacy Week, 2022).

Public and school librarians, along with K-12 educators, have been under attack lately for promoting access to diverse viewpoints and encouraging critical thinking about issues in the media like racial justice, climate change, immigration, abortion and reproductive rights, gender identity, and sexual orientation (Corsillo, 2022). There is a growing demand to ban books in our schools, and these demands are increasingly at the organization level tied to either proposed or enacted legislation. Those seeking bans rely heavily on social media to

amplify their voices. Not surprisingly, most of the bans involve characters or issues related to LGBTQ+ individuals and persons of color (Friedman & Johnson, 2022).

Why is knowledge so dangerous? How did differences become so threatening? How did questioning those in power become so dangerous? Under whose authority did this get to be OK in the U.S. of A.?

In early October 2022, the Right to Read Act was introduced by U.S. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) and U.S. Representative Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ-03). This act, if passed, would address equity of access issues related to school libraries and librarians. Additionally, it would reaffirm that First Amendment rights apply to school libraries.

A Right to Read Act, in the 21st Century, in the country that refers to itself as the leader of the free world? Clearly, there's work to be done. Let's do it learning together through listening to and caring for each other, as fellow humans.

These words and the opinions they present are mine alone and do not speak from my position of employment at Indiana University.

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