

IMMIGRATION POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES

HISTORY AND PUBLIC POLICY BRIEFING PROGRAM
NATIONAL HISTORY CENTER



"Landing at Ellis Island," 1902. Image Courtesy of Library of Congress.

[Institution]
[Course Name, Number]
[Instructor Name]
[Semester, Year]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Topic Overview	3
Assignments and Deadlines	5
Primary Sources	7
Secondary Sources	8
Grading Rubrics	9

INTRODUCTION

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program is designed to show students how to bring historical perspectives to contemporary policy issues. It provides a curricular model that educators can apply to their existing history classes to better illuminate the myriad ways we can learn from the past.

Understanding history is essential to all policymaking. Every issue has a history and we make better policy decisions when we understand that history. Designed to be adaptable to many courses and teaching styles, the History and Public Policy Briefing Program provides a guide for history educators to develop and host briefings about the historical dimensions of current policy questions.

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program Overview

The History and Public Policy Briefing Program provides a guide to enable educators and students to craft a briefing on the historical background of a policy question at the local, state, or national level, following the National History Center's model.

At these briefings, students work as a team to (1) identify a specific issue relating to immigration confronting policymakers at the local, state, or national level; (2) research the historical roots of the issue or some closely related issue that arose in the past; (3) prepare a briefing paper and presentation to an invited audience (from parents to local policymakers) that highlight the insights we can gain from an historical perspective on the present. Working both individually and collaboratively, students will engage in historical inquiry, research, and analysis as they investigate particular policy questions. They will also develop written and oral presentation skills as they prepare for and present the public briefing. Finally, they will deepen their civic knowledge and engagement as they grapple with the roots of issues that are relevant to their own lives.

The program is designed to be integrated by educators into existing history classes at the college or high school level. The policy briefings will not drive the course but rather will provide a fresh framework for addressing topics that already relate to the course material. Educators can integrate the program into their classrooms in several ways: from start to finish, it can serve as a capstone research project; broken into its component parts, it can be used to spur discussion or encourage student debate; if a wider audience is invited, it can be a way for student-historians to showcase the value of their history education.

Learning Outcomes

- Developing a methodological practice of gathering, sifting, analyzing, ordering, synthesizing, and interpreting evidence.
- Exploring the complexity of the human experience by evaluating a variety of historical sources for their credibility and perspective.
- Learning to value the study of the past for its contribution to lifelong learning and critical habits of the mind that are essential for effective and engaged citizenship.
- Engaging a diversity of viewpoints in a civil and constructive fashion as students apply historical knowledge and analysis to contemporary policy conversations.
- Building and improving upon oral and written skills essential to academic success.

HISTORY OF IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES OVERVIEW

Summary

The history of immigration to the United States dates back to the then-British controlled colonies in the 1600s. In the early colonial period, European men indentured themselves in exchange for passage to North American colonies, where they sought job opportunities, land, and wealth. English Puritans, discontented with the practices of the Church of England, also comprised a large group of immigrants who traveled to the British colonies, where they founded the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies. New Amsterdam, a Dutch colony that eventually became the British New York, also attracted immigrants. Dutch, German, French and English citizens ventured to New Amsterdam during the second half of the seventeenth century.

Immigration rates rose steadily during the eighteenth century, and, in conjunction with high birth rates and longevity, caused a major increase in the colonial population in British North America. After the end of the Seven Years' War, as population grew rapidly, the British government struggled to prevent its white colonists from attempting to settle in regions controlled by adjacent Native American tribes. The Proclamation of 1763 and pricey quartering of British troops along western colonial borders contributed to colonial dissatisfaction with the Empire, frustration that culminated in the American Revolution of the 1770s and 80s.

A young United States, consisting largely of northern and western European immigrants, continued to welcome large numbers of European immigrants. A large wave of immigration to America occurred during the 1840s, when the Irish potato famine caused millions of Irish citizens to migrate to America. The post-famine years witnessed even more Irish immigration to America, due to the shrinking sizes of Irish farms, poverty and low wages. Between 1820 to 1930, an estimated 4.5 million Irish citizens migrated to America. In the United States, Irish immigrants faced anti-Catholic and ethnically-based discrimination, especially in urban areas. Also during the mid-nineteenth century, a significant number of northern and central European immigrants took advantage of federal policies rewarding individuals and families with loosely claimed territorial lands at low prices. These policies and a steady influx of job- and land-seeking European immigrants prompted the United States to both exploit immigrant labor as well as treaty-protected lands, allowing for the expansion of national borders.

The Chinese made up another large immigrant group in America. Gold rushes in the continental west brought thousands of Chinese immigrants to the West Coast and Rocky Mountains. Anti-Chinese sentiments developed, resulting in local and national nativist organizations that fed anti-Chinese sentiment among white Americans. Rampant racism directed toward Chinese immigrants ultimately led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, prohibiting the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States.

The 1890s ushered in the period of new immigration in America, made up of Eastern and Southern European immigrants, namely from Italy, Russia, and Slavic states. Most fled their home countries due to inaccessibility to food, religious persecution, or poor socioeconomic opportunity. Trans-Atlantic transportation via steamship made travel from Europe to the United States cheaper and quicker. Immigrants arriving in New York after 1892 were processed at Ellis Island, cementing the island as a symbol of opportunity in immigration history. Many remained in New York City and the increasingly urbanized mid-Atlantic region, where European immigrants carved out cultural caches for themselves as portions of the white American population discriminated against them on the basis of language, religion, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

As anti-immigrant sentiment grew, so did legal restrictions and harmful rhetoric. The 1921 Emergency Quota Act restricted the number of immigrants a year to three percent of the number of residents from that country at the time. Similarly, the National Origins Act of 1924 created a quota-based system of immigration that decreased immigration to the United States by over 90 percent, allowing only 150,000 immigrants to the United States per year. This law stayed in effect until 1965, when the Hart-Cellar Act ended the national origins quota system, raising the number of immigrants allowed per year from 150,000 to 290,000 and exempting spouses, children and parents of American citizens from this quota.

Since the 1970s, immigration levels from Central and South American countries have consistently risen; many individuals, families, and sometimes entire communities have emigrated to the United States by way of its southern border in order to escape political or social unrest in their home countries. Though demographics have changed, anti-immigrant sentiment has remained consistent among large portions of the American public that have adopted the legal/illegal immigrant binary rhetoric. As a result, immigration remains a highly contested issue.

Contemporary Application

Since the 1980s, with the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act, much of the focus of immigration has shifted to that of “illegal immigration,” with a greater emphasis paid to border security and sanctioning employers who hire unauthorized immigrants. The topic of illegal immigration has dominated presidential and congressional campaigns of the last decades, as candidates have differed on policies related to issues such as amnesty and deportation. Most recently, the Trump Administration has resorted to aggressive methods of immigration control and restriction, employing strong border policies and anti-immigrant rhetoric popular in the 1920s and earlier. Historical contextualization can help policymakers make more informed decisions on effective, constructive immigration policy that assists and protects asylum seekers, refugees, and other immigrants who enter the United States in search of freedom and safety.

Historiographical Objectives

Often, the history of immigration and immigration policy in the United States has coincided with major economic, social, political, and racial landmarks, movements, and patterns in American history. This project allows students to explore how immigration policies have influenced or been influenced by other political forces, and how these influences inform immigration policy today.

Historical Questions to Consider

How did the notion of an “illegal” immigrant develop? How does the history of immigration and immigration policy inform current anti-immigrant rhetoric and discourse?

How has the United States’ 300-year immigration history shaped the social, cultural, and political makeup of the country?

How has the process of immigration to the United States changed over time?

ASSIGNMENTS AND DEADLINES

This sample schedule, drawn from the NHC's [History and Policy Education Program Guidebook](#), can help instructors in creating a syllabus and schedule designed specifically for their own class(es).

UNIT 1 | Getting Started

Week 1

Familiarize students with National History Center's Congressional Briefing program. Have them watch one of the NHC's briefing videos and read a summary of the one of the NHC's briefings. Videos of NHC briefings can be found [here](#); summaries of NHC briefings can be found [here](#)

Weeks 2 – 3

Students may begin conducting individual research at local institutions to refine research approach.

UNIT 2 | Individual Research

Weeks 4 – 5

Have each student prepare and submit a **2-3 page paper** on the selected topic that outlines the history of some aspect of the issue.

Week 6

Have students research which committee or subcommittee of the legislature or municipal government has jurisdiction over the legislative issue the class is considering. Have them identify which legislators sit on the committee and make initial contact with those policymakers' offices. In addition, students should draw up a list of other interested parties, such as representatives of non-profit organizations and journalists, to invite to the briefing (see page 8-9 of the [HPEP Guidebook](#)). If the instructor would like to hold the briefing in a room in a state legislative or municipal office building, the instructor and/or students should begin arranging for a room this week (see page 10 of the [HPEP Guidebook](#)).

UNIT 3 | Individual Presentations

Week 7 – 8

Have students present on their individually researched subtopics. Presentations need not exceed five minutes. Students should be prepared to give a brief history of the subtopic and how it influences the larger legislative issue today.

UNIT 4 | Preparing for the Class Briefing

Weeks 9 – 10

Working collaboratively in small groups, students prepare for the formal briefing. The three presenters coordinate and hone their presentations with feedback from other students. Different groups work on: crafting a **one-page briefing handout** that offers a succinct synopsis of the history

of the topic; crafting and issuing **formal invitations**; pursuing a **social media campaign** to promote the briefing; and **arranging logistics** such as videography and audio-video equipment as needed.

Week 11

Dress rehearsal for formal briefing. The three presenters practice their presentations to the class. The other students stand in as audience members, asking questions during the question-and-answer portion.

UNIT 5 | The Briefing

Week 12

Formal briefing to state or local policymakers, journalists, student leaders, etc.

UNIT 6 | Reflection and Follow-Up

Week 13

Students submit a **1-to 2-page reflection** on the questions audience members raised at the briefing. In considering the discussion at the briefing, they may draw on material from weeks 4 - 5 and 7 - 8 that was not presented at the formal briefing.

You may submit a video recording of the event and/or a blog post about your experience with the History and Public Policy Briefing Program for possible inclusion in the National History Center's or American Historical Association's online or print publications.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Finding Primary Sources

The Library of Congress offers [primary source sets](#) with photographs, maps, documents and other primary sources.

The Digital Public Library of America has primary resources related to Immigration and Americanization, available on its [website](#).

Sample Primary Sources

“Curated Document Sets” related to Irish immigrants on Moving Beyond “Rags to Riches” website by Tyler Anbinder, <http://beyondragstoriches.org/curated/document/sets>

Primary source collection from the University of Minnesota’s Immigration History Research Center, <https://www.lib.umn.edu/ihrca>

Historical materials from the “Immigration to the United States, 1789-1930” collection at Harvard University Library, <http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/>

The [Bracero History Archive](#) contains oral histories and artifacts related to the U.S.’s Bracero program from 1942-1964 that brought Mexican agricultural workers to America.

The Dillingham Commission Reports of the early 1900s on immigration are available [online](#).

The Ellis Island Foundation’s website allows individuals to search through [records](#) of passenger’s who were processed at Ellis Island upon arrival in New York.

The Library of Congress’s Local History & Genealogy Reference Services contains a [guide](#) to published primary sources on immigrant arrivals

A collection of [personal accounts](#) from individuals who immigrated to the United States.

The North American Immigrant Letters, Diaries and Oral Histories collection is available on the ProQuest database, through your school library.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Finding Secondary Sources

There are a number of academic journals relating to immigration history. Students are encouraged to consult any of the following for scholarly articles:

- [Journal of Migration History](#)
- [Journal of Ethnic American History](#)
- [Immigrants and Minorities](#)

There are a number of academic journals relating to immigration policy and law. Students seeking to learn more about past and contemporary immigration policy from a legal perspective are encouraged to consult any of the following for scholarly articles:

- [Citizenship Studies](#)
 - [Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies](#)
 - [Journal of Migration and Human Security](#)
 - [Migration Policy Institute](#)
-

Sample Secondary Sources

Coan, Peter. [*Toward A Better Life: America's New Immigrants in Their Own Words From Ellis Island to the Present*](#). New York, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011.

Daniels, Roger. [*Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882*](#). New York, NY: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2004.

Howe, Irving. [*World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made*](#). New York, NY: New York University Press, 1976.

Miller, Kerby. [*Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*](#). New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Ngai, Mae. [*Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*](#). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014.

GRADING RUBRIC(S)

Final Presentation Rubric:

Mock Policy Components	Excellent 4	Good 3	Fair 2	Poor 1	Students Score	Comments
Visual Aids						
Was the handout clear and concise?						
Was the PowerPoint (or other presentation aid) easy to follow?						
Presentation Delivery						
Did presenters organize and present information clearly and effectively?						
Did presenters speak clearly?						
Were speakers engaging?						
Historical Content						
Did the historical content help the audience understand the current issue?						
Question and Answer Session						
Did presenters answer questions clearly?						
Did presenters demonstrate knowledge about the history?						
Did presenters manage the session effectively?						