David Nasaw
Fall, 2018, Monday, 4:15 to 6:15

"Immigrants, refugees, and the ceaseless, sometimes futile quest for American citizenship"

There is nothing new in the current debates on immigration, refugees, and paths to citizenship or the rancor, the anger, the fear that envelops them. Every nation on earth is defined by its immigration and citizenship policies. Every nation on earth chooses, in one way or another, its future citizens. In a representative democracy, these decisions are made through the political process.

In this course we will examine how and why Americans have chosen to welcome or close this nation's mighty gates to those who sought to enter our nation and become our fellow citizens. While attentive to European migrations from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries, we will focus on twentieth and twenty-first century border crossings from Mexico, immigrations from Asia and the Chinese exclusion acts, and the discordant and unintended consequences of post-World War II legislation.

The readings will explore the separate but entwined historical literatures on “citizenship” and “immigration.” I have designed them to be global in reach and interdisciplinary in perspective. We will read works of history and sociology, as well as novels and memoirs written by authors who have immigrated to the United States in recent years, some with, some without their families.

Students may be asked to write short papers in the course of the semester and a major final paper in the form of a “lecture” to undergraduates or civic groups on the themes and issues discussed in the readings.

This is a seminar, not a lecture course.

Weekly assignments

I. Overviews

Aug. 27  Problems of definition, a bit of historiography.


II. Chinese Exclusion Act, Asian Immigrants and immigration


Beth Lew-Williams, “‘Chinamen’ and ‘Delinquent girls’: Intimacy, Exclusion, and a Search for California’s Color Line,” *Journal of American History* (December, 2017), 632-655


III. Illegals and the Making and Unmaking of Mexican Americans


IV. Fictional representations

Nov. 19 Novels by and about immigrants and immigration.
V. Refugees

Nov. 26  Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans At the Gate: The United States and Refugees during the Cold War*. Princeton University Press, 2008

VI. Immigration and Citizenship


