

Post–War Immigration

Immigration policy in the 1950s was greatly influenced by the “Red Scare”, an anti-communism mentality. Most of the existing U.S. laws related to immigration were incorporated into the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952*, otherwise known as the *McCarran-Walter Act*. As a result, the *Asiatic Barred Zone*, which had banned most Asian immigrants since 1917, was abolished. Just as important, people from all nations of the world were given the opportunity to enter the United States, though with restrictions.

To remedy domestic labor shortages caused by WWII, the United States established an *Emergency Labor Program* in 1942, commonly known as the *Bracero Program*. “Braceros” were Mexican manual laborers allowed



Inspection line of “Bracero” workers, 1952. Courtesy of the INS archives.

to enter the United States to replace American workers who joined the armed forces. Many Mexicans who entered the United States under the *Bracero Program* remained in the country illegally. To curb illegal immigration from Mexico, the United States in 1954, began *Operation Wetback*, a program to find undocumented workers and return them to Mexico. During the 1950s, several million Mexicans were deported. But migrants continued to arrive, often to become low-paid laborers. One-third of Mexican Americans in the 1950s lived below the poverty line. The *Bracero Program* was eliminated in 1964.



Mexican migrant workers bid farewell to their families, 1952. Courtesy of the INS archives.

The McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act enacted by the U.S. Congress in 1952 removed racial barriers to immigration and empowered the Department of Justice to deport immigrants or naturalized citizens engaging in subversive activities.

● 1952

McCarran-Walter Act

- Established the basic structure of present immigration law
- An amendment in 1965 eliminated all remaining national origin quotas