

Refugees & Undocumented Workers

The next major reforms in U.S. immigration policy occurred with the passage of amendments to the *Immigration and Nationality Act* in 1965. National origin quotas were abolished, and an annual limit of visas for immigrants from both hemispheres was established. Coincidentally, that same year, thousands of Cuban refugees began fleeing to the U.S. to escape Cuba's oppressive regime.



Raft used by Cuban refugees, 1968. Courtesy of the INS archives.

The Vietnam War created a similar refugee crisis for America. When U.S. troops withdrew from Vietnam in 1975, many Vietnamese who had fought with the Americans sought refuge from political persecution in the United States. In order to accommodate the large number of displaced refugees seeking protection, Congress introduced the *Refugee Act of 1980* to increase overall refugee quotas. Because many people began their journey from Vietnam by boat, Vietnamese refugees were often referred to as "boat people." Not all of these refugees settled in the United States.



Vietnamese refugees, often referred to as "boat people," 1978. Courtesy of the INS archives.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 granted lawful permanent residency to more than 2.7 million undocumented immigrants who had entered the United States before 1982. After 19 months as permanent residents, the law permitted them to apply for citizenship. Also included in the act was a provision to penalize employers for knowingly hiring unauthorized workers. The law also prohibited discrimination on the basis of nationality or race.

● 1980

Refugee Act

- Increased the number of refugees admitted to the U.S.

● 1986

Immigration Reform and Control Act

- Established sanctions against employers for hiring persons unauthorized to work in the U.S.
- Granted legal status to long-term undocumented immigrants