

Immigration Reform In The 1990s

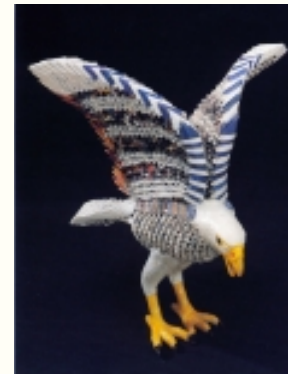
The military assault by the Chinese government on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in Beijing on June 4, 1989 inspired the *Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992*. The law permitted Chinese nationals temporarily residing in the United States who had arrived prior to April 1990 to adjust to permanent resident status. 26,915 Chinese persons were admitted under this provision.

The story of the *Golden Venture* is reminiscent of the voyage of the *St. Louis*. When a ship carrying 134 Chinese refugees seeking political asylum ran aground in New York in 1993, the INS placed them in detention. The refugees aboard the *Golden Venture* came to America with the hope of living in a country that supported democracy and religious freedom. Not until 1997 did the U.S. government order the release of the remaining refugees, those who had not voluntarily returned to their country of origin.

The *Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996* imposed strict penalties against illegal immigration. The law severely limited the power of immigration judges in making decisions regarding the deportation of individuals by expanding the definition of what constituted a deportable offense. The effects of the 1996 reform are still being felt today as many individuals discover themselves in deportation proceedings for minor offenses.



"Cesen Deportación." Illustration, 1990. Courtesy of the Center for the Study of Political Graphics.



Photos courtesy of the Museum of Chinese in the Americas.

While incarcerated, survivors of the Golden Venture shipwreck created thousands of intricate works of art made of paper.

● 1990

Immigration Act

- Established categories of employment based immigration
- Placed an overall cap on the number of nonimmigrant workers

● 1992

Chinese Student Protection Act

- Allowed adjustment of status of nationals from China who arrived before 1990

● 1996

Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act

- Imposed strict penalties against illegal immigration
- Expanded the definition of deportable offenses