

Confronting Anti-Ellis Island Immigration

By Victor Davis Hanson

Between 1892 and 1954, approximately 12 million immigrants arrived at the now-iconic Ellis Island to enter the U.S.—or nearly 200,000 legal entries per year.



All were registered, documented, and given rudimentary health exams.

They arrived as rich and poor, white and non-white, and, without exception, legally.

With the gradual decline of such great influxes, Ellis Island finally ceased operating roughly 71 years ago.

Yet Ellis Island's successful tenure offers a sharp contrast to the failures of our recent open-border catastrophes.

Americans will never know how many immigrants swarmed the southern border between 2021 and 2025, when Joe Biden and his impeached Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas destroyed federal immigration law as we once knew it.

By design, they allowed between 10 and 12 million foreign

nationals to make a mockery of federal immigration laws by swarming the southern border.

Many crossers grew violent at any sign of even meek efforts by ICE officers to enforce the law. Border Patrol officers were often mocked, threatened, and assaulted by arriving illegal aliens.

Officers were unsure as to what was worse: the occasional violence from illegal immigrants or retaliation from the Biden administration if they sought to enforce federal law and block illegal entrants.

So the Biden administration pulled off the near impossible. In a mere four years, it had invited in almost as many illegal immigrants as had entered through Ellis Island legally over seven decades.

But unlike past immigrants, we now witness organized violence against ICE officials. We see Orwellian scenes of mobs burning the American flag—the flag of the country they demand to stay in—while waving the flags of the countries they have no desire or intention of returning to.

In sum, three generations ago, a smaller, poorer, but wiser America properly solved its immigration problem at Ellis Island—welcoming in immigrants orderly and legally with health and background screenings.

In contrast, during the Biden years, we, in our arrogance and affluence, engaged in a great experiment—or rather misadventure. Never in our history has the U.S. been home to roughly 53 million foreign-born residents.

Never have immigrants comprised nearly 16 percent of the population.

Never has California had 27 percent of its residents not born in the U.S.

Never have we allowed in up to 10,000 aliens a day, with little concern for whether they carried fentanyl, had criminal records, were sick, were unvaccinated, were traffickers, or belonged to violent gangs.

Worse still, the Biden administration made zero effort to acculturate, integrate, and assimilate this massive influx. In fact, they did the very opposite of Ellis Island's protocols, which fostered pro-American values, melting-pot integration, and respect for American history and culture. Once upon a time, new arrivals were all expected to become Americans—or why else had they come?

Now, the moment an illegal alien has entered the U.S., he likely senses that his ethnicity or race will be essential to his identity. In the minds of the ruling DEI commissariat, claiming a tribal identity offers an easy pathway to generous housing, food, healthcare, legal, and educational entitlements.

So, under Biden's immigration non-policy, almost all illegal immigrants were immediately categorized as victims in the Marxist binary ledger that now divides America into the oppressed vs. the oppressors.

If one devised a plan to damage America, he could not have done better than further dividing us by tribal chauvinism, overwhelming our fragile social services so essential to struggling Americans, and fueling the already dangerous neo-Confederate state and local nullifications of federal law and the growth of "sanctuary cities."

Daily, we witness performance-art mayors and governors boasting of how they "resist" federal law enforcement. These modern rebels pose as if they are our own era's versions of mini-Confederate states. They now brag of states' rights as they dare the federal government to protect its own property and enforce federal laws within their parochial jurisdictions.

Why did Biden—or whoever was making policy in his place—destroy the border?

What was his utterly mad intent?

To alter the nation's demography by importing future Democrat constituents dependent on state largesse?

To bow to the demands of his DEI base?

To mindlessly do the opposite of the prior Trump administration, which had closed the border and returned to legal-only immigration?

Virtue signaling while waving illegal aliens across an open border is easy.

But trying to close the border and return millions who entered unlawfully to their homelands is nearly impossible.

It is surreal that those who claimed moral superiority while systemically destroying federal law now condemn as immoral those striving to restore it.

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