

Throughout history, mass migrations have brought different populations to the United States, from the Chinese in California, to the Irish in the Northeast. Along with these immigrants came new culture, and many times, conflict. In looking at the current dilemma of Mexican immigration, we must be careful not to forget out past and the factors that have shaped the immigrant culture of today.

### **Becoming an 'American'**

The immigrant identity is stuck in between two worlds—between a home country and the United States. Although we generally think of ourselves as a nation of immigrants, it is hard for most Americans to understand what their ancestors went through, or what their home country was truly like. These images are powerfully distorted by the media and by a desire to be 'American'. Foremost, we should understand that each immigrant population faces difficulty in establishing a novel culture in the US, one that is a blend of old traditions and new opportunities. The Chinese, for example, originally faced enormous hostility from Americans and government discrimination. Eventually, however, the Chinese in America adapted to American culture; Americanized Chinese goods became popular and Chinese medicine was held in high regard. Today, the Chinese in America have become Chinese Americans, with their own niche in American society.

Mexican immigrants, however, face a somewhat different dilemma. Mexico's proximity to the United States makes Mexican culture less adaptable to the United States. Mexican immigrants tend to keep in touch with friends and family in Mexico and as a result, many Mexican immigrants promote their culture and language in the United States. This unfamiliar culture has likely sparked the recent vehement protests against Mexican immigrants. In order for Mexican immigrants to truly become Mexican Americans, their culture must change to fit with the 'American' culture ? a process that may not be forthcoming.

### **Where are we left today?**

Immigrant culture has become intertwined with American society. The 'immigrant story' has become an optimistic tale of the American Dream - hard work by anyone can bring prosperity. Still today, however, debates continue over the exclusivity of American immigration.

Mexican immigration is a hotly debated topic, but one that has been repeated each generation. The ideas that immigrants have stolen jobs, are invading American culture, or are in some way unfit to live here, are far from novel. Just as Mexican workers are now being deported, Irish immigrants were met with job postings saying, “No Irish Need Apply,” and Chinese products were boycotted while immigrants were quarantined. In defining our immigration policy, we must remember the mistakes of our past—of demonizing and demeaning immigrants—and that as our nation struggles with immigrants, immigrants, too, struggle with adapting to the United States.