

Our 'Traditional' Immigration Policy

To hear the administration tell it, it might be thought that overnight America had changed from an open-armed to a hardhearted nation on immigration, especially Asian immigration. But that's not telling it like it is—or has been.

In explaining why he was "damn mad" about widespread opposition to his resettlement plans for 150,000 Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees, President Ford said, "I am primarily very upset because the United States has had a long tradition of opening its doors to immigrants of all countries."

The President needs a new and better briefing about U.S. immigration policy in general and, in particular, its application to Asians. If Mr. Ford believes America has had a long tradition of welcoming *all* immigrants, regardless of origin, he has another thing coming.

For most of its history, this republic has consistently discriminated against Orientals in the most bigoted way, culminating in "Yellow Peril" scares that led to legislation excluding or severely restricting the entry of Asians into the United States.

In legislation enacted in 1862 and 1875, Congress specifically prohibited the importation of "Oriental slave labor," and this was capped in 1882 by passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act and a variety of other restrictions.

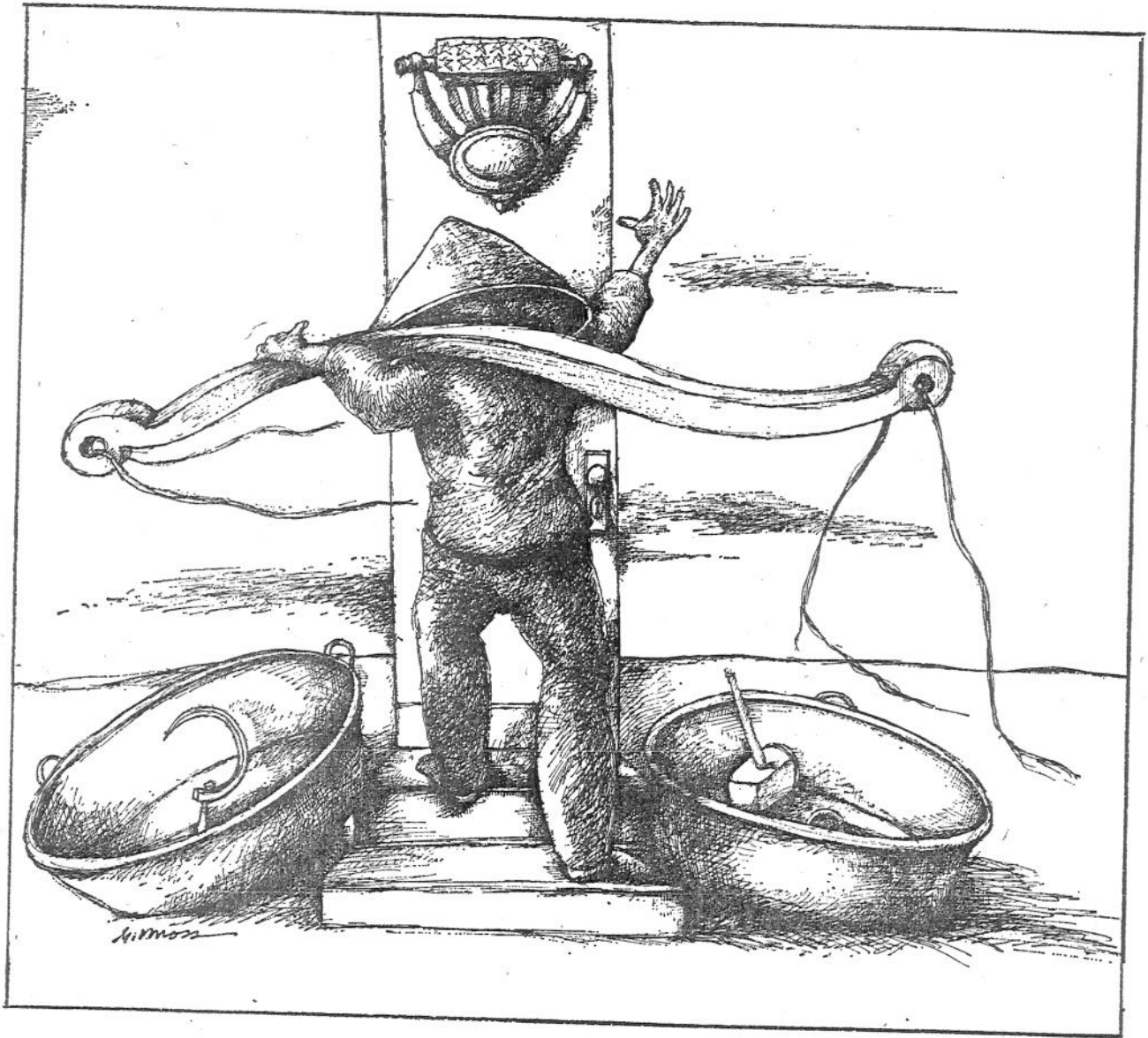
Under the controversial McCarran-Walter Act of 1952, race was supposedly eliminated as a complete bar to immigration, yet Asians, no matter where they are born, must enter the United States on the basis of small racial quotas. Non-Asians come in on much larger national quotas designed to favor "Nordic" immigrants.

Of total immigration to the United States of 41 million persons, admitted from 1820 to 1960, more than 34 million (or 83 per cent) were from European countries. Although Asia has most of the world's population, there are now only about 2 million Asians and Asian-Americans, living in the United States, largely in California.

So it is readily apparent that, contrary to the administration, there is nothing new or surprising about the present lack of enthusiasm for embracing 150,000 Asian refugees.

The United States is simply doing what has always come naturally. If anything, it is surprising that the grumbling has not been louder. All signs indicate that the U.S. public is going to accept this extraordinary burden without much more fuss, which is an improvement on the past.

The White House likes to talk about the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of our "traditional" immigration policy,



By Geoffrey Moss for The Washington Post

notably those poetic lines of Emma Lazarus inscribed on the base of the statue: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses . . ."

Well, in the first place, the idea of the statue came from France, and so did the money for its cost. That was in 1886, when, for a few brief decades, the masters of America welcomed mass immigration because they needed cheap labor to carry on the transformation of the United States from a rural to an industrial society.

They came by the tens of millions (mostly from Europe) between 1890 and 1910, but then industry discovered it had all the common labor it needed,

and by 1917 Congress was passing legislation to stem the tide.

Incidentally, most of the immigration laws of this century have been so mean and narrow that they've had to be passed over presidential vetoes, including the prevailing 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which was vainly vetoed by former President Harry Truman.

It provides annual quotas for various nations, with each area given an annual quota equivalent to one-sixth of 1 per cent of the inhabitants in the United States in 1920 attributable to that area. In short, the spigot was turned off.

It is foolish and unfair for the administration to liken the Vietnamese exodus to that of Hungary and Cuba. The refugees from those countries came in gradually over a period of years, and after public opinion had been conditioned to accept them.

There is no precedent for the Vietnam crisis, with 150,000 refugees suddenly and unexpectedly pouring into the United States within a week or two. Moreover, the public's alarm was originally triggered by the fear that U.S. troops would become involved in a new war while protecting the evacuation.