

Center for Constitutional Rights

Discrimination, Detention, and Deportation: Immigration & Refugees

<https://ccrjustice.org/home/press-center/ccr-news/commemorating-howard-zinn-his-birthday-no-human-being-illegal>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

This article is adapted from the introduction Zinn wrote to Deepa Fernandess book, Targeted: Homeland Security and the Business of Immigration. Entirely relevant today.

Vigilantes sit at the border, guns on their laps, looking for those who might cross over. President Bush promises to send 6,000 National Guardsmen there and to build a wall. Archconservatives threaten to make felons out of the undocumented and those who help them. But immigrants from south of the border, along with their supporters, have been demonstrating, by the hundreds of thousands, for the rights of foreign-born people, whether here legally or illegally. There is a persistent sign: No Human Being Is Illegal.

Discrimination against the foreign born has a long history, going back to the beginning of the nation.

Ironically, having just gone through its own revolution, the United States was fearful of having revolutionaries in its midst. France had recently overthrown its monarchy. Irish rebels were protesting against British rule, and the new U.S. government was conscious of dangerous foreigners Irish and French in the country. In 1798, Congress passed legislation lengthening the residence requirement for becoming a citizen from five to fourteen years. It also authorized the President to deport any alien he regarded as dangerous to the public safety.

There was virulent anti-Irish sentiment in the 1840s and 50s, especially after the failure of the potato crop in Ireland, which killed a million people and drove millions abroad, most of them to the United States. No Irish Need Apply symbolized this prejudice. It was part of that long train of irrational fear in which one generation of immigrants, now partly assimilated, reacts with hatred to the next. Take Irish-born Dennis Kearney, who became a spokesman for anti-Chinese prejudice. His political ambitions led him and the California Workingmens Party to adopt the slogan The Chinese Must Go.

[Read the full piece here.](#)

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