



One Mighty and Irresistible Tide: The Epic Struggle Over American Immigration, 1924-1965

by Jia Lynn Yang

About the Book

The idea of the United States as a nation of immigrants is at the core of the American narrative. But in 1924, Congress instituted a system of ethnic quotas so stringent that it choked off large-scale immigration for decades, sharply curtailing arrivals from southern and eastern Europe and outright banning those from nearly all of Asia. In a riveting narrative filled with a fascinating cast of characters, from the indefatigable congressman Emanuel Celler and senator Herbert Lehman to the bull-headed Nevada senator Pat McCarran, Jia Lynn Yang recounts how lawmakers, activists, and presidents from Truman through LBJ worked relentlessly to abolish the 1924 law.

Suggested Opening Prayer

Give Us Hearts

God of love and compassion: may we always recognize your spirit:
in the refugee family, seeking safety from violence;
in the migrant worker, bringing food to our tables;
in the asylum-seekers, seeking justice for their families;
in the unaccompanied child, traveling in a dangerous world.
Give us hearts that break open whenever our brothers and sisters turn to us.
Give us hearts that no longer turn deaf to their voices in times of need;
Give us eyes to recognize a moment for grace instead of a threat.
Give us voices that fail to remain silent but which decide instead to advocate prophetically.
Give us hands that reach out in welcome, but also in work, for a world of justice until all
homelands are safe and secure.
Bless us, O Lord...

- Fr. Dan Hartnett S.J.

Discussion Questions

These are some suggested questions to get your discussion started.

- What was one thing you learned from *One Mighty and Irresistible Tide*? Did anything in the book surprise you?
- Do you remember before or after the 1965 law was passed? How did or how do you think life in America changed as a result of the law?
- What do you think are the central ideas or issues that Yang discusses in the book?
- America once prided itself on being “a nation of immigrants.” How has the national view of immigrants and immigration changed since the founding of the nation, and especially over the past fifty years, since the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act? Do you believe that America is a nation of immigrants?
- What does it mean to be an American? What makes an individual a citizen? Who should get to choose who is allowed to become an American and live here and who is not?
- The ease of assimilation was noted as important for potential immigrants by factions that were against abolishing the quota system. What is the difference between assimilation and integration? Why do you think assimilation was seen as valuable by immigration reform opponents?
- Why were the reforms in the 1965 law so monumental? How do you think that law influenced the laws that America has in place now?
- Were there any passages in particular that you found to be informative or interesting?
- EMM was founded in the years after the end of World War II to meet the needs of refugees coming to America from Europe. Before reading this book, did you know about how America’s government responded to the refugee crisis during and after the Holocaust? Do you find any parallels from that period to how immigrants and refugees are viewed today?
- How has reading this book affected your opinion about immigration, migration, and the history of those things in America?

About the Author

Jia Lynn Yang is national editor at The New York Times. Before joining The Times in 2017, she was deputy national security editor at The Washington Post, where she was part of a team that won a Pulitzer Prize for coverage of Trump and Russia. Before becoming an editor, Jia Lynn wrote about business and economics at the Post and at Fortune magazine for over a decade.

Jia Lynn's family immigrated to the United States from Taiwan in the 1970s and was able to stay in the country thanks to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. *One Mighty and Irresistible Tide* is her effort to understand the people who fought to give her family a place in America.

About the Author Continued

- New York Times Review: [America's Immigration Paradox](#)
- New York Journal of Books: [One Mighty and Irresistible Tide: The Epic Struggle Over American Immigration, 1924–1965](#)
- Politics & Prose interview: Jia Lynn Yang, ["One Mighty and Irresistible Tide"](#)
Norton: Jia Lynn Yang and David K. Randall - A Norton Dialogue

Further Reading and Watching

Websites:

- [President Lyndon B. Johnson's Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill](#)
- Define American, [defineamerican.com](#)
- American Institute for Contemporary German Studies: ["The Dehumanization of Immigrants and the Rise of the Extreme Right," by Beverly Crawford Ames.](#)
- Pew Research Center: ["How U.S. immigration laws and rules have changed through history"](#)
- Georgetown Law Library: ["A Brief History of Civil Rights in the United States, Immigration"](#)
- MPI Webinar, ["A Bumpy Path to U.S. Citizenship: A Survey of Changing USCIS Practice"](#)
- MPI: [U.S. Immigration Trends](#)
- Reimagining Migration, [Understanding Migration](#)
- Episcopal Migration Ministries, [episcopalmigrationministries.org](#)

Books:

- [The Guarded Gate by Daniel Okrent](#)
- [They Called Us Enemy by George Takei, Justin Eisinger, Steven Scott, and Harmony Becker](#)
- [Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented Citizen by Jose Antonio Vargas](#)
- [Good Talk: A Memoir in Conversations by Mira Jacob](#)
- [The Other Americans by Laila Lalami](#)
- [America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States by Erika Lee](#)
- [Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs by David R. Roediger](#)