

# University professors talk Trump's immigration ban

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Contributor

In light of the Trump administration's recent travel restrictions and immigration-related executive orders, the University held an information seminar titled "Immigration Bans Past and Present: Communities, Contexts, Controversies." The seminar explored immigration bans in the past and how these bans could be connected to current policies. Professors Ron Frank, Bill Offutt, Barbara Blumberg, and Glenn Miller presented information and fielded questions.

Professor Frank began by discussing a case of discrimination in 1930s Germany. He outlined a series of laws passed that were designed to oppress people of non-Aryan descent. The first was the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service. It was passed in April 1933, when Adolf Hitler was the chancellor of Germany, and banned anyone from working in civil service jobs unless they could provide documentation that they were of the Aryan race. Passed four months later, the Law against the Overcrowding of German Schools and Universities limited the number of non-Aryan students that could attend these institutions. Next, the Reich Citizenship Law was passed in September 1935. It banned marriage between Aryan and non-Aryan people. These, and other laws, continued to be passed over the years, ultimately contributing to Hitler's ascent to Führer.

The discussion then transitioned to examples in American history, as explained by Professor Offutt. Offutt discussed two overarching themes of immigration restrictions: whom to allow into the country based on ethnicity or national origin, and the political or religious ideals of those being allowed in. He often stated that most immigration restrictions involve a juxtaposition of

these two themes. This juxtaposition is exemplified in the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was first passed in the 1880s to exclude immigration from China but was amended to also exclude anarchists in 1903. Offutt also presented statistics about immigration in the U.S. At the peak of immigration in 1910, 15 percent of the U.S. population and 41 percent of the New York City population was comprised of immigrants. Today, those figures are 13 percent and 37 percent, respectively.

Dr. Blumberg then provided more recent examples of U.S. immigration restrictions. She began by asserting that "unfortunately, our president and his advisors do not study history, know no history, don't want to learn any history, and the result has been that they have issued a whole series of orders that are cruel, that are ill-considered, that are unconstitutional." She compared the current immigration restriction placed on seven Muslim-majority countries and Syrian refugees to what she called "terrible mistakes that this country made with its immigration policies" in the past. The first of these policies was the United States' refusal to give asylum to Jewish refugees seeking to escape from the Hitler regime. Blumberg believes that this stemmed from both widespread anti-Semitism throughout the country at the time and the American citizens' fear that foreigners will create more competition in an already difficult job market.

Dr. Blumberg's next example took place directly after World War II. The years after the war were plagued by widespread hysteria about Japanese Americans' involvement in the Pearl Harbor bombing. In response, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order requiring all Japanese Americans, two-thirds of whom were American-born citizens, to sell their properties and businesses within one month, report to receiving areas carrying only what they could hold, and relocate to an

internment camp until the end of the war.

One of these men, Fred Korematsu, was arrested, jailed, and sent to one of the harshest internment camps for defying the order. With the help of legal counsel from the American Civil Liberties Union, Korematsu appealed this ruling to the Supreme Court but was unsuccessful as the court sided in favor of the order. Korematsu remained in prison until the 1980s, when a Federal District Court in San Francisco found the executive order to be unconstitutional and vacated his conviction.

Finally, Glenn Miller, an immigration lawyer and adjunct professor at the University, explained the legality of immigration restrictions by examining various government documents. He stated that the Constitution grants Congress the power to establish the "uniform rule of naturalization" but that Section 212f of the Immigration and Nationality Act allows the president to restrict immigration when there is a danger to national security. He also pointed out that, though the Secretary of State grants refugee status and the Attorney General grants terrorist status, these positions were both vacant when President Donald Trump issued his executive order.

When the discussion concluded, the panel took audience questions. One student asked whether any other groups besides the ACLU stepped in to help Korematsu fight his imprisonment. Dr. Blumberg replied, "If you get people scared enough, they will keep quiet. That's why [these restrictions are] such a danger to our constitutional rights. If you get people scared enough, they give them up." This implies that no other groups spoke up for fear that they might be targeted next.

Many see the state of our country as precarious, but they often do not know the full history of America and immigration. The panel offered insights to American history in order for students to form cognizant opinions.