

Ted Robert Gurr, Professor of Political Science at the University of Maryland - College Park, is editor of the two volume *Violence in America: The History of Crime*, briefly reviewed on page 223. We lead off this issue of *The Social Contract* with a reprint of Professor Gurr's op-ed on crime from *The New York Times* in which he tells us that "the United States is in the grip of the third of three great crime waves. They began about 50 years apart - approximately 1850, 1900 and 1960 - and each has lasted for 20 to 30 years." He goes on to state that "America's three great crime waves can be linked to immigration, economic deprivation and war, which all interfere with the civilizing process." Further, that "the first and second episodes of violent crime wound down as immigrants were incorporated into the expanding economy." To address the current wave, Dr. Gurr calls for measures combatting poverty, better law enforcement, etc.

He does not however say anything about the role that curtailing immigration might play. This was very important in breaking the first two crime waves. After the one beginning in 1850, immigration dropped off from more or less natural causes in the 1870s and '80s, and crime subsided for this — and no doubt other — reasons. Immigration picked up again in the 1890s, reaching peaks of one million a year after the turn of the century, and a new crime wave began in 1900. This, along with other factors, generated the intense opposition which led to the immigration control Act of 1924 which cut immigration to about 300,000 a year. This was followed by other "natural causes" — the Great Depression and WW II — which further cut it to the vanishing point: as low as 23,000 in 1933. Thus deprived of part of its "fuel," and coupled with other efforts, including strong assimilative pressures, the crime wave of 1900 subsided as had that of 1850.

Here we have one of those delicious paradoxes of history. The people who in the 1910s and '20s argued for restricting immigration raised questions about the immigrants' innate criminality and assimilability, for which they earned epithets that are still with us today: nativistic, jingoistic, and that all-time scrabble winner: xenophobic. (See an essay by Roy Beck on xenophobia in the Spring 1992 issue of *The Social Contract*, Vol. II, No. 3, pp. 144-149.)

Nonetheless they carried the day; immigration was reduced, the civilizing process (to borrow Gurr's term) of assimilation occurred, and the crime rate fell for this — and other — reasons. Had the other side won, we can theorize that immigration would have remained at high levels, that crime and other problems complained of would have grown, and the limitationists would have been vindicated. Too bad that in history, unlike science, we cannot run parallel

experiments and see how the alternative would have actually turned out!

Saul Alinsky, the late, well-known community organizer and author of *Rules for Radicals*, had some insights on this point. He wrote that people often do the right things for the wrong reasons. Certainly that is better than doing the wrong things for the "right" reasons, so common among today's poseurs. Whether the reasons of the immigration reformers of the turn of the century were actually wrong is a matter for debate. They certainly had the right remedy for the problems then at hand: cut immigration. Perhaps that validates them? (Incidentally, the corollary to Alinsky's dictum is that people often do the right things for reasons different from yours; that's o.k. too — for other than the ideologue.)

But back to the present. Is there justification for limiting immigration, as one approach among many to curb our current crime wave? We certainly think so, and believe you will agree after reading our feature essay on page 159. There are those who now come to the U.S. specifically for criminal purposes, as do the members of the gangs essayed upon. Reducing their numbers at the border is certainly one way to help the crime problem.

If one has a problem, the first line of defense should be to limit its size, especially if the same actions will help address other difficulties such as unemployment, social discord and population-induced environmental decline.

Thus, the crime wave of 1960 to the present provides one more reason to do the right thing: declare a moratorium on immigration, until we can get our house in order.

John Tanton, Editor and Publisher