

The Social Contract

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The Social Contract

is published quarterly

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A Note from the Editor

The 1965 Immigration Act Intent and Consequences 50 Years On

October 3, 2015, marks the 50th anniversary of the signing into law of the Immigration Reform and Nationality Act of 1965. This was the height of the Civil Rights Era. The legislation eliminated our immigration system's traditional tilt toward Europeans and shifted the selection preference from applicants with special skills to family members of those already here. The legislation went forward with little opposition and was signed into law—at a ceremony at the Statue of Liberty—just twelve weeks after it was introduced.

In this issue of *The Social Contract*, our contributors review the historical, political, and policy significance of the legislation, which is the foundation of today's legal immigration system. They explain how legislation as sweeping as the 1965 Immigration Act was understood at the time it was enacted.

The lead article is by the late Lawrence Auster. It is the first of eleven chapters of a major book he had written critiquing multiculturalism and outlining a way forward for Americans. The weekend before he died, he sent me his first four chapters. In what he dubs “the Accidental Revolution,” Auster reiterates that the bill's supporters claimed, “they did not want or expect their bill to result in a huge increase in immigration or in a fundamental change in the growth rate and ethnic make-up of the U.S. population. But that is exactly what happened.” Auster concludes that “the 1965 Act was passed through a combination of thoughtlessness and deceit.”

Otis Graham, Jr., a distinguished professor of American history, points out that the 1924 Immigration Act was instrumental in creating “a forty-year breathing space of relatively low immigration, with effects favorable to assimilation.” About the “Great Society” legislation, of which the Immigration Act was a key component, Professor Graham discloses, “There was emerging on the immigration question a pattern in public debate that could be found on many issues: elite opinion-makers selected a problem and a liberal policy solution, while grassroots opinion, unfocused and marginalized, ran strongly the other way.... The 1965 law, and subsequent policy changes consistent with its expansionist goals, shifted the nation from a population-stabilization to a population-growth path, with far-reaching and worrisome consequences.”

Edwin Rubenstein notes that it “may be the most regressive public policy ever enacted by the federal government.... So gargantuan is America's post-1965 immigration disaster that there is now an immigration dimension to every public policy issue—government deficits, health care, the housing bubble, crime, school overcrowding.”

Former Colorado Gov. Richard Lamm reminds us that “one of the great challenges to public policy is knowing when and how to change a successful policy grown obsolete.” The articles in this issue will help readers understand how we got where we are today. ■

Wayne Lutton, Ph.D.