Immigration: The Lifeblood of America

"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..."



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For much of America's history, leaders from both political parties recognized a simple truth: immigration has been one of the nation's greatest competitive advantages. Three Republican presidents—Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, and George H. W. Bush—each expressed that belief in different ways.

President Gerald Ford understood that America's strength came from people willing to leave everything behind in pursuit of freedom and opportunity. He viewed immigration as part of the American story itself—not a recent development, but a defining characteristic of the nation from its founding.

President Ronald Reagan made the case even more powerfully. He reminded Americans that ours is “a nation of immigrants” and argued that America’s strength comes from “our own immigrant heritage and our capacity to welcome those from other lands.” (The Immigration Coalition)

Near the end of his presidency, Reagan described immigration as one of “the most important sources of America’s greatness.” He observed that America continually renews itself because “we draw our people—our strength—from every country and every corner of the world.” He warned that if America ever closed its doors to new Americans, “our leadership in the world would soon be lost.” (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library)

President George H. W. Bush carried that philosophy into law when he signed the Immigration Act of 1990. In doing so, he declared:

“This Act recognizes the fundamental importance and historic contributions of immigrants to our country.”

He emphasized that immigration strengthens both American families and the nation’s economy while continuing our historic commitment to welcoming newcomers. (The American Presidency Project)

These presidents were not arguing for open borders. Each believed that a sovereign nation has both the right and the responsibility to enforce its immigration laws. But they also recognized that legal immigration is not a weakness—it is one of America’s greatest strengths.

Unlike most nations, America is not united by ethnicity or ancestry. We are united by shared ideals: liberty, opportunity, constitutional government, and the belief that anyone willing to embrace those principles can become an American.

Immigration has continually renewed our workforce, enriched our culture, strengthened our economy, and fueled our innovation. Every generation of immigrants has added another chapter to the American story.

America does not succeed despite immigration.

America succeeds because generation after generation, people from around the world have chosen to become Americans.