



# *Culling the Masses*

## *The Democratic Origins of Racist Immigration Policy in the Americas*

David FitzGerald, UC San Diego

David Cook-Martin, Grinnell College

# What is the empirical relationship between democracy and racism?



Immigration inspection at  
Angel Island, California, c.1917

## Gunnar Myrdal (1944, p.23):

“Palpable conflict” between the segregated status of U.S. blacks and the ideals of the American Creed with its emphasis on liberty and equality.

John Higham (1988, p.157):

“race thinking was basically at odds with the values of democracy and Christianity”

## Christian Joppke (2005, p.91)

The end of ethnic selection in immigration law in liberal democracies like the United States is attributable to the “exigencies of liberal stateness as such”

## Gary Freeman (1995, p. 112)

The end of ethnic selection in immigration policy represented “the unfolding of the internal logic of the core values of liberal democracy”

## Our arguments:

1. Liberalism and democracy often have  
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1. Liberalism and democracy often have *promoted* racist immigration policies
2. Demise of racist immigration law began in the Global South, against political gravity
3. Geopolitical factors drove the sharp decline in ethnic selection in North America

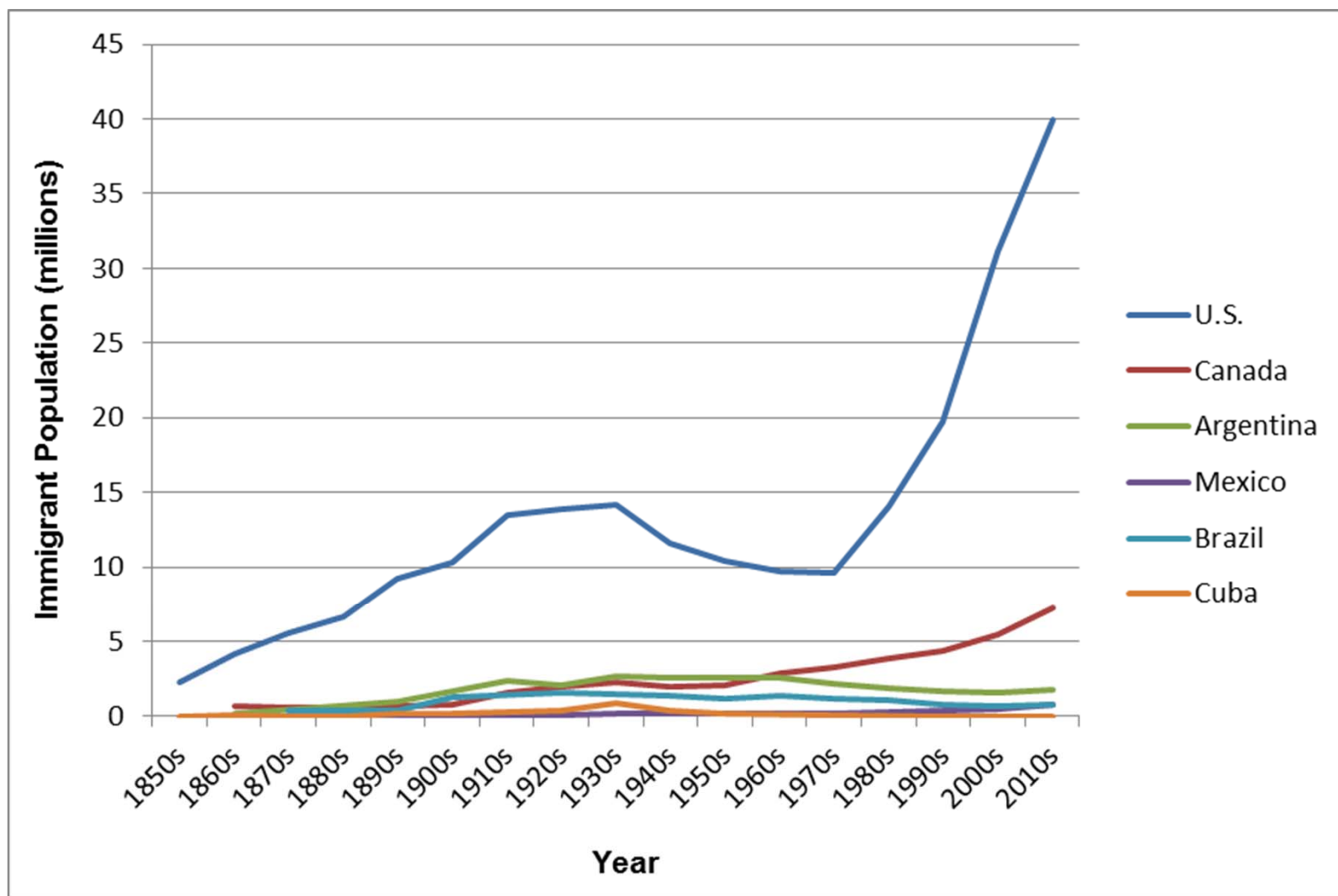
## Evidence:

- Coding of laws explicitly selecting immigrants by ethnic criteria in 22 countries in the Americas

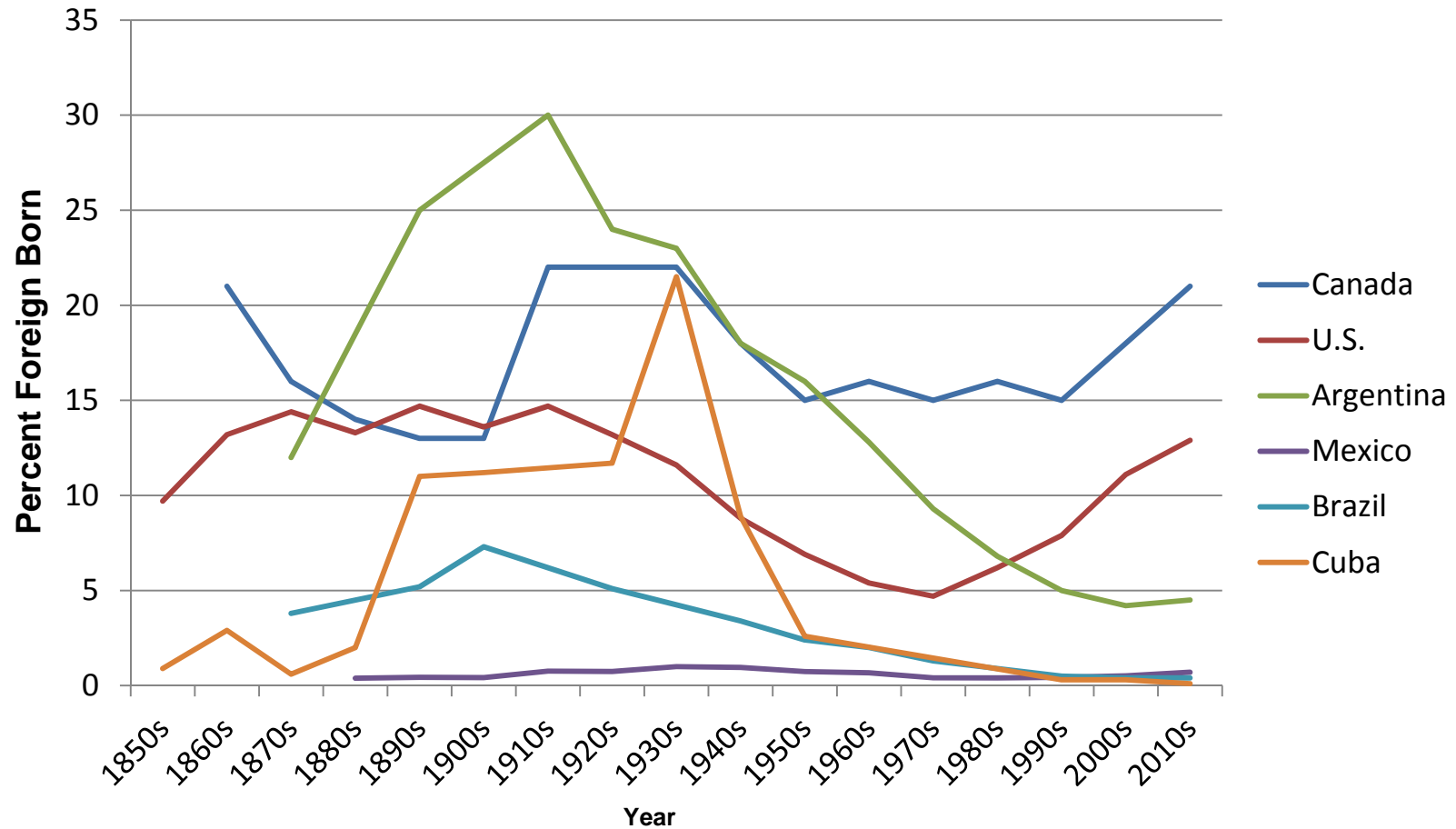
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- Case studies of the U.S., Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico

## Immigrant population in six countries, 1850-2010



## Percent foreign-born in six countries, 1850-2010



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- Coding of laws explicitly selecting immigrants by ethnic criteria in 22 countries in the Americas
- Case studies of the U.S., Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico
- Case study of regional and global organizations
- Summaries of ethnic selection law in the other 16 countries in the Americas

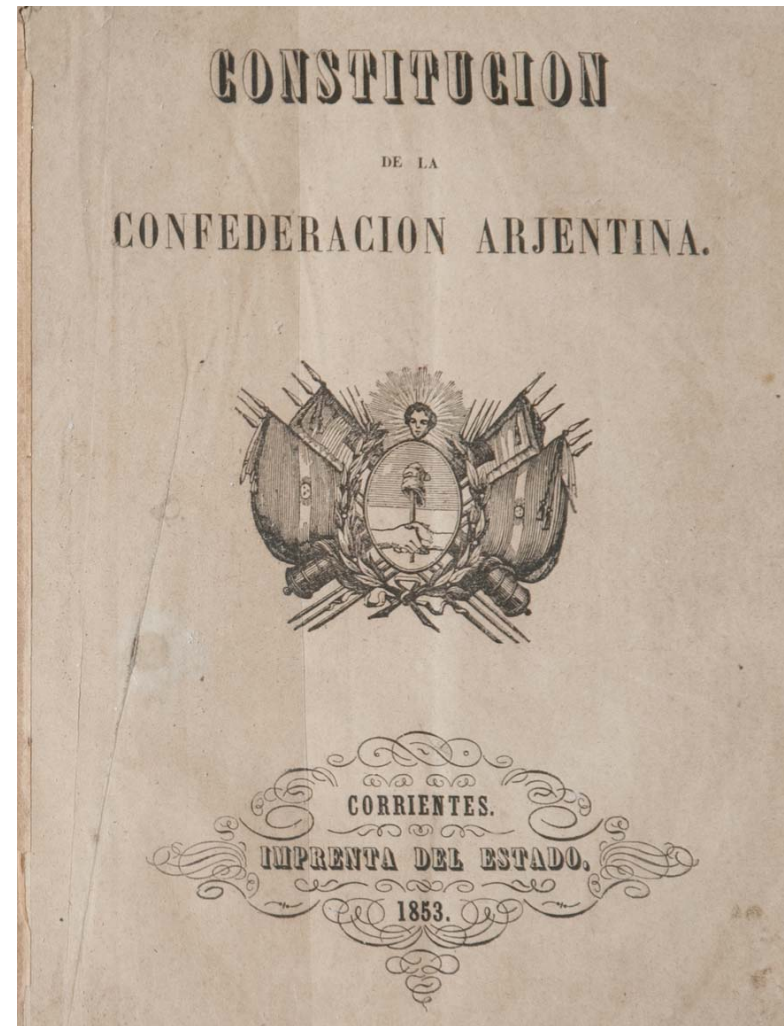


# Types of ethnic selection

- Positive preferences

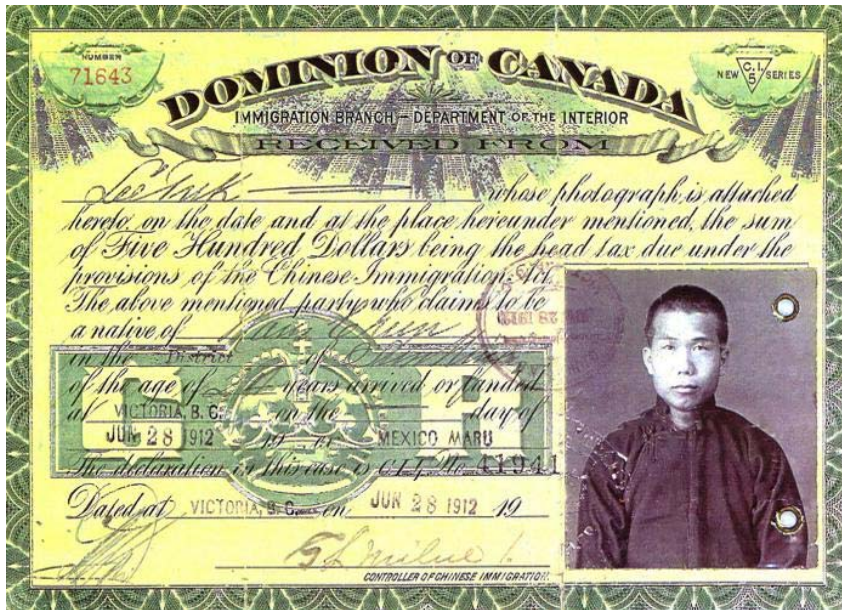


Article 25.  
“The Federal Government  
shall foster European immigration...”



# Types of ethnic selection

- Positive preferences
- Negative discrimination



# Types of ethnic selection

- Positive preferences
- Negative discrimination
- Immigration law
- Nationality law



# The “hidden transcripts” of ethnic selection

Al C. Jefe de la Oficina  
de Migración.

MIGRACION ESPECIVO. NO RESELECCION.  
México, D.F., a 23 de Junio de 1930  
POR AC. DEL SECREARIO,  
EL OFICIAL MAYOR.

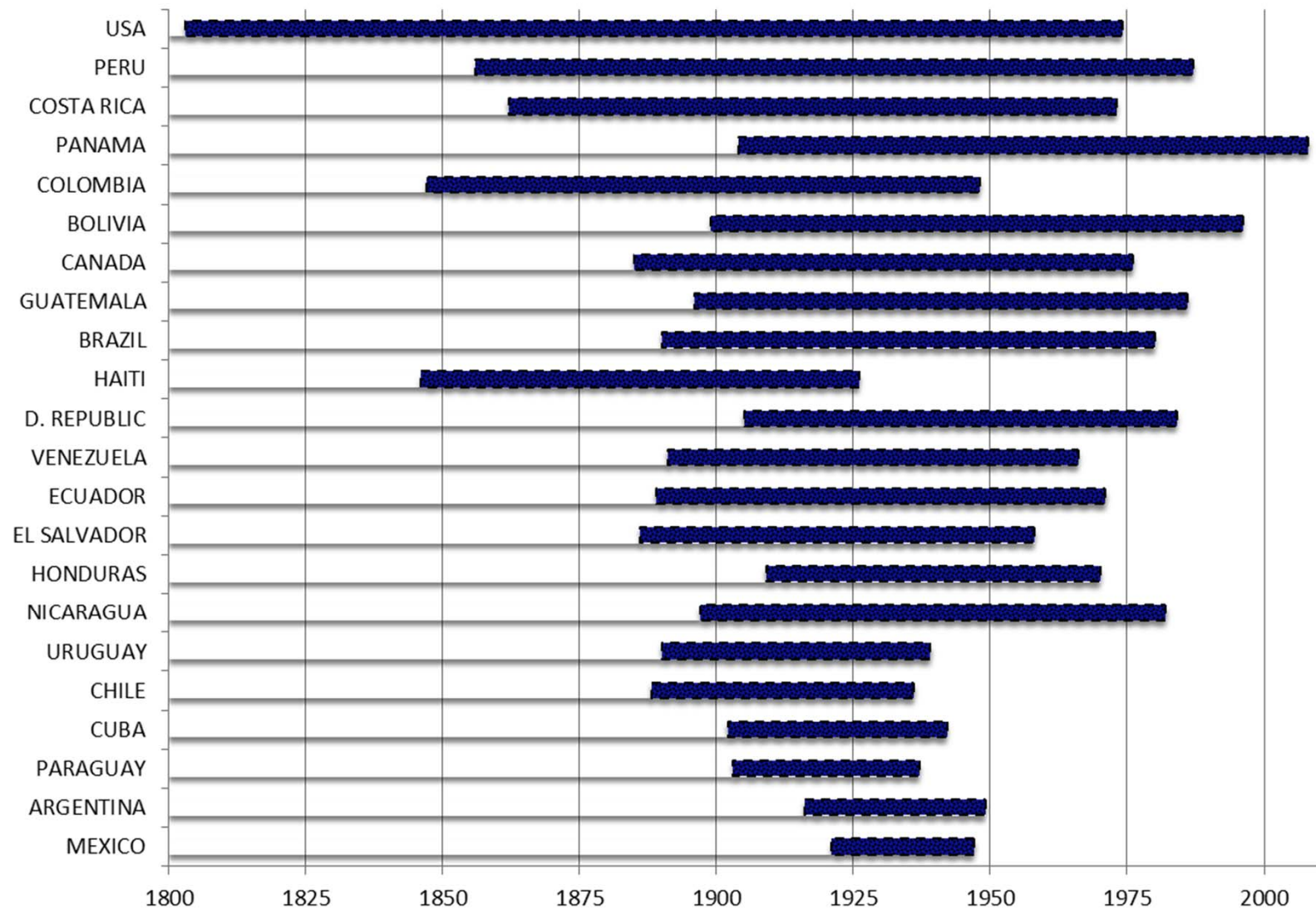
EXTRICTAMENTE CONFIDENCIAL.-36-33-32-21-16-28-19-14-  
17-15-28-26-17-36-21-21-24-10-17-14-15-10-23-35-29-25-32-17-21-22-  
14-17-21-31-35-23-36-10-32-23-21-30-27-33-25-33-21-15-29-33-15-10-  
29-25-25-36-13-15-23-14-27-13-21-15-23-14.

I.- Desde la fecha en que reciba la presente no se --  
expedirá en ningún caso a las personas a quienes se refiere esta --  
Circular, cuando pretendan salir del país, tarjeta de turista, sino  
la forma 5.

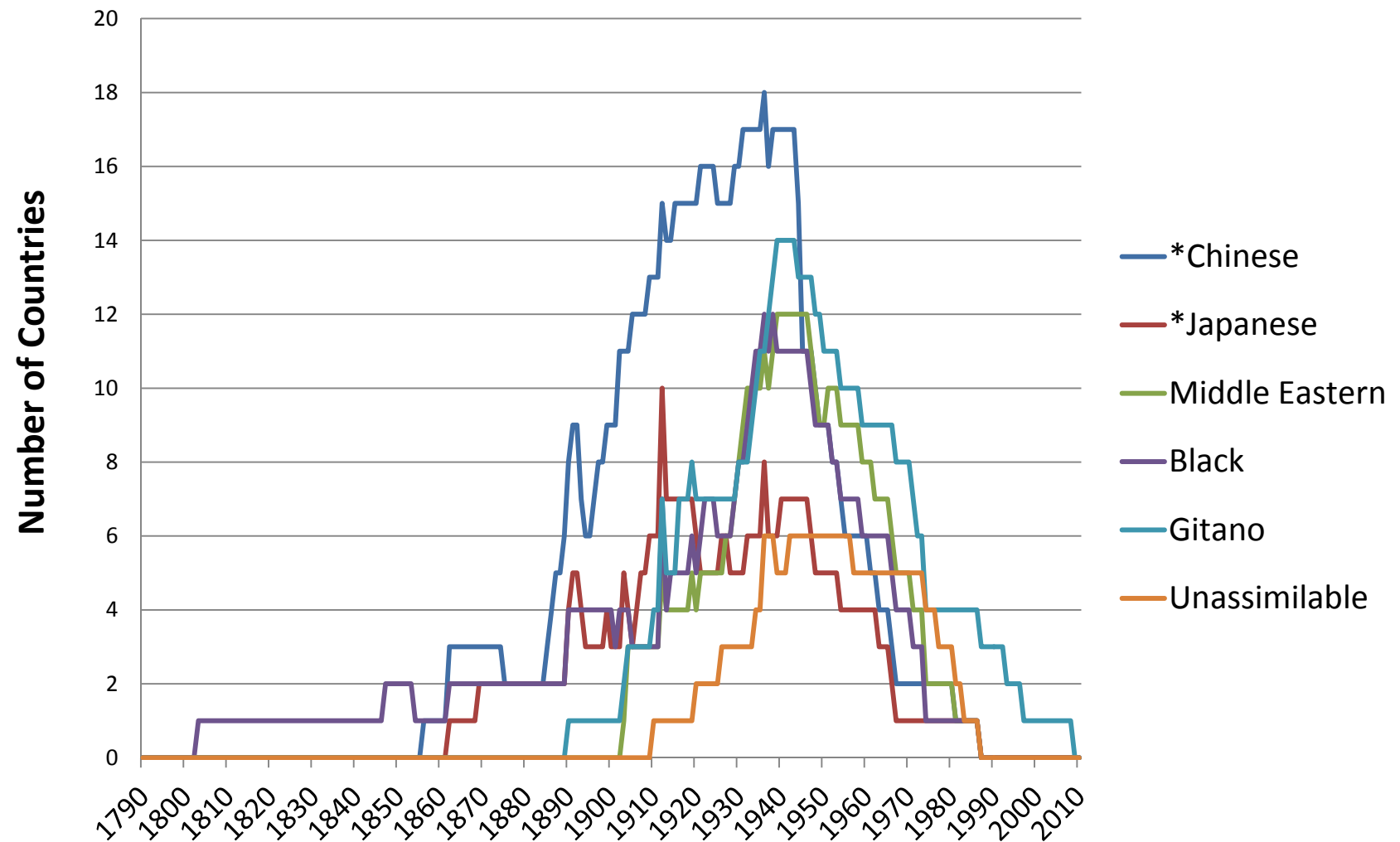
El primer párrafo cifrado de la primera de di--  
chas circulares, textualmente dice: "Las siguientes dis-  
posiciones son aplicables únicamente a ciudadanos chinos".

Confidential 1930 Mexican Ministry of the Interior circular restricting Chinese

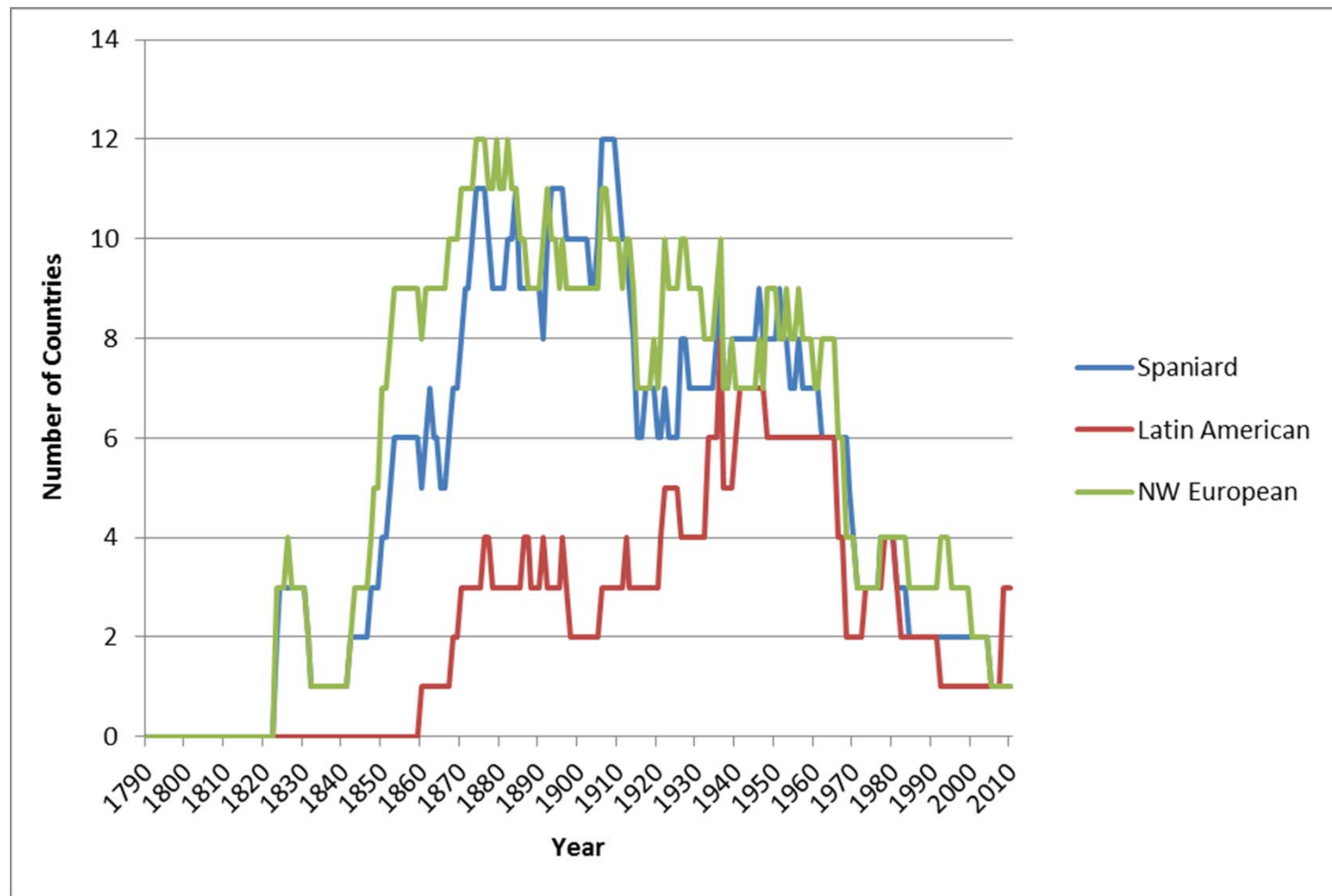
## First and last years of negative ethnic discrimination in immigration laws, 1790-2010



## Number of countries in the Americas with negative immigration discrimination against six groups, 1790-2010

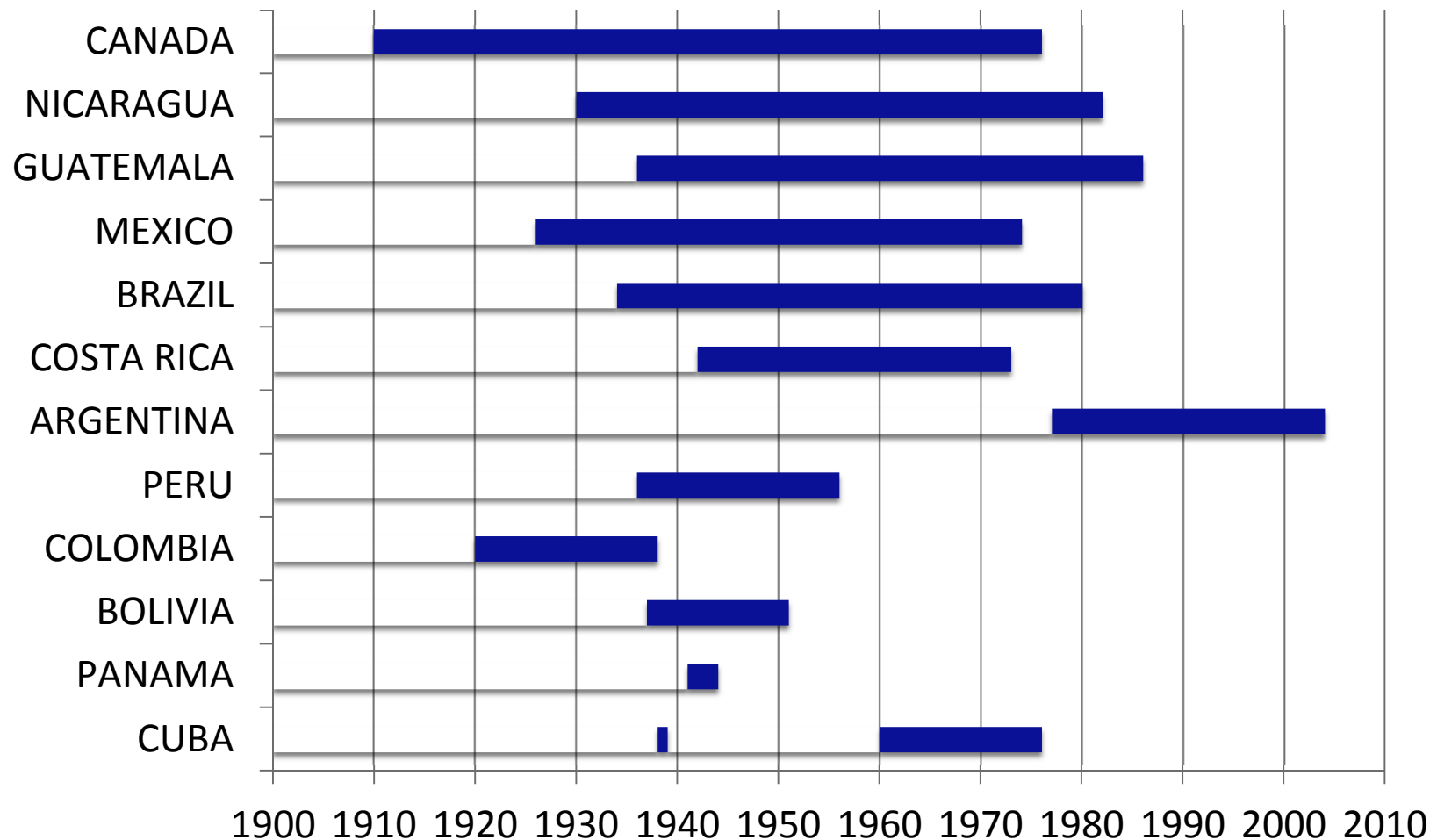


## Number of countries in the Americas with positive immigration preferences for Spaniards, Latin Americans, and Northwest Europeans, 1790-2010





## Countries in the Americas with “assimilability” requirements in their immigrant admissions statutes, 1910-2010



# Liberal-democracy promoted the onset of racial discrimination

- Liberal ideology promotes restriction of immigrants deemed “naturally unfit” for self-government

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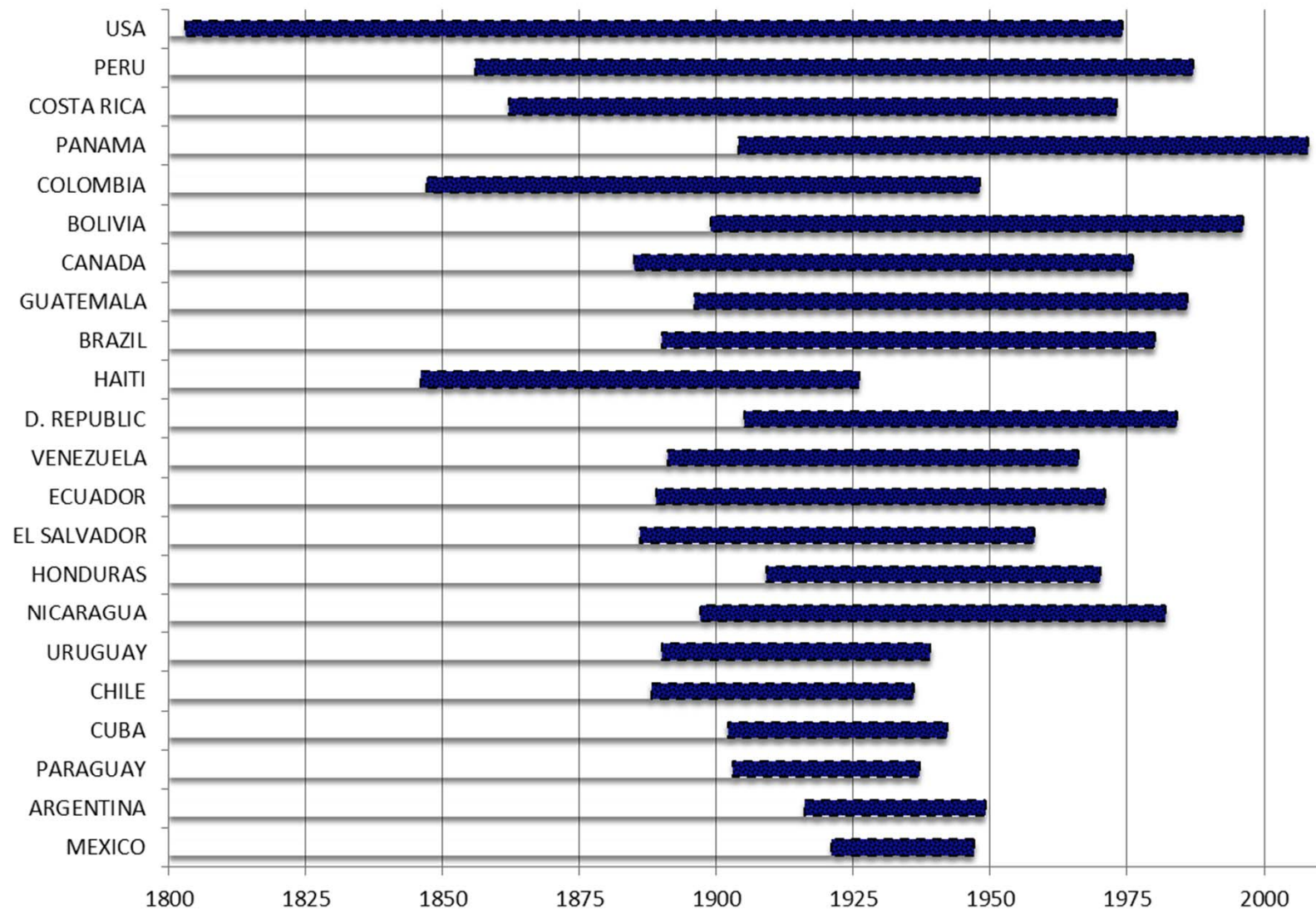
# Liberal-democracy promoted the onset of racial discrimination

- Liberal ideology promotes restriction of immigrants deemed “naturally unfit” for self-government
- Democratic institutions were avenues for demands from below for racial restriction
- Most consistently liberal-democratic country (U.S.) was the main policy leader in racial selection

# Decline of ethnic selection *not* driven by purification of liberal-democracy

- Decline in explicit ethnic selection began in undemocratic countries in Latin America in the late 1930s

## First and last years of negative ethnic discrimination in immigration laws, 1790-2010



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# Decline of ethnic selection *not* driven by purification of liberal-democracy

- Decline in explicit ethnic selection began in *undemocratic* countries in Latin America in the late 1930s
- Liberal-democratic Canada and the U.S. late to remove ethnic selection (1960s)
- All regime types eventually ended explicit ethnic discrimination

# Demise of racist immigration law began in the Global South

- *Eighth International Conference of American States* (1938) recommends immigration provisions that do not discriminate by nationality, creed or race
- *First Inter-American Demographic Congress* (1943) rejects all policies discriminating by race

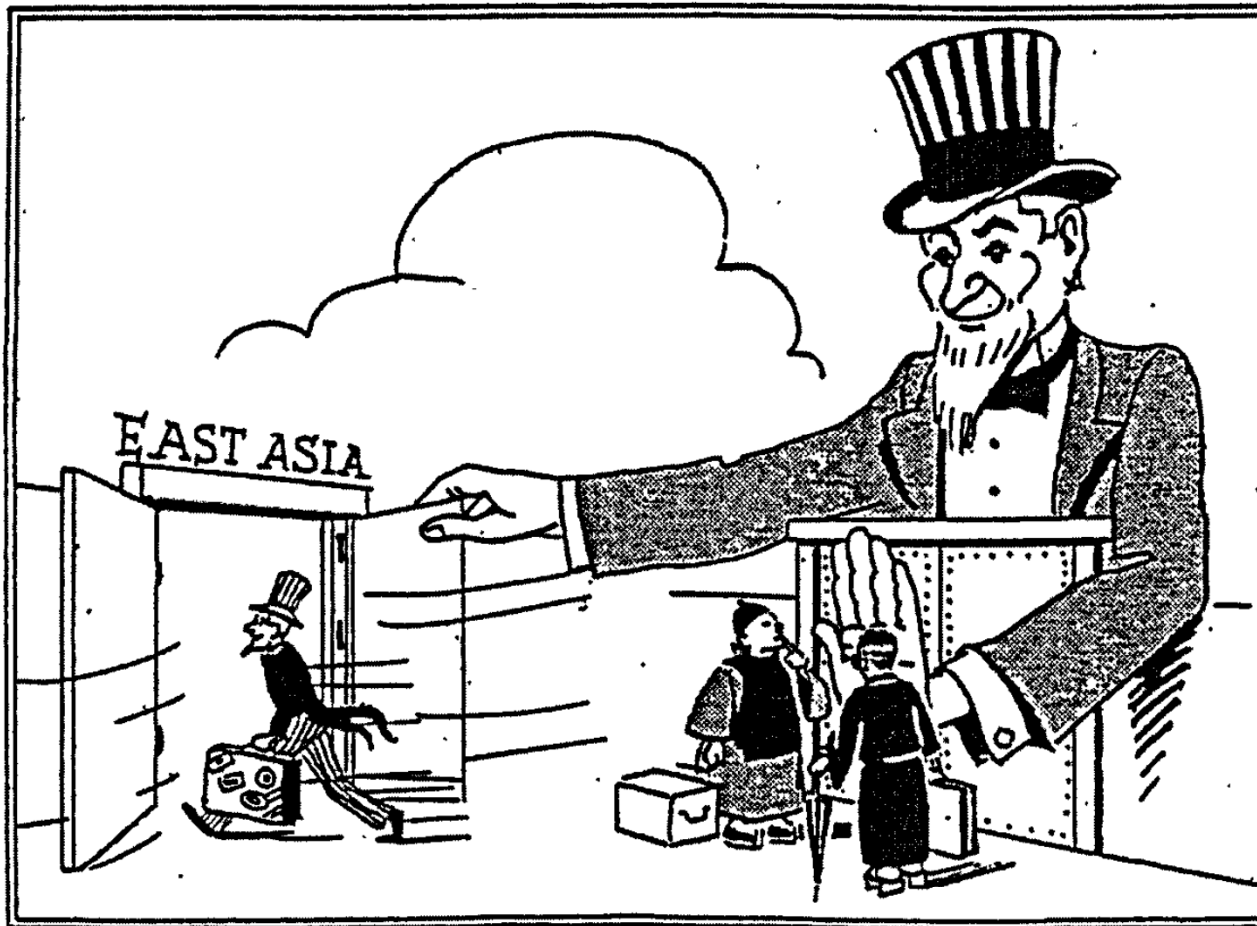


# Geopolitical factors drove the sharp decline in ethnic selection



U.S. WWII Bracero poster





UNCLE SAM: "OPEN DOOR FOR ME AND CLOSED DOOR FOR YOU"  
*American immigration policy is subtle in its hypocrisy.*

Figure 3 — Japanese cartoon — "American immigration policy is subtle in its hypocrisy" (*The Times Weekly*, July 5, 1943.)



# Year restrictions on Chinese ended

COUNTRY	YEAR
Costa Rica	1943
Cuba	1943
Ecuador	1944
El Salvador	1944
Honduras	1944
Nicaragua	1944

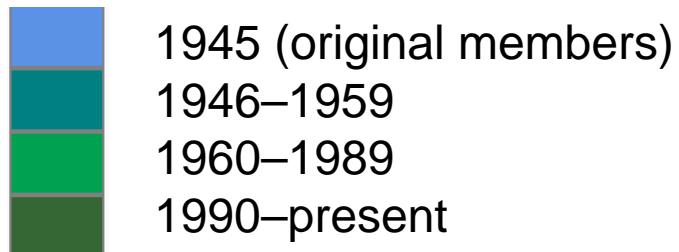
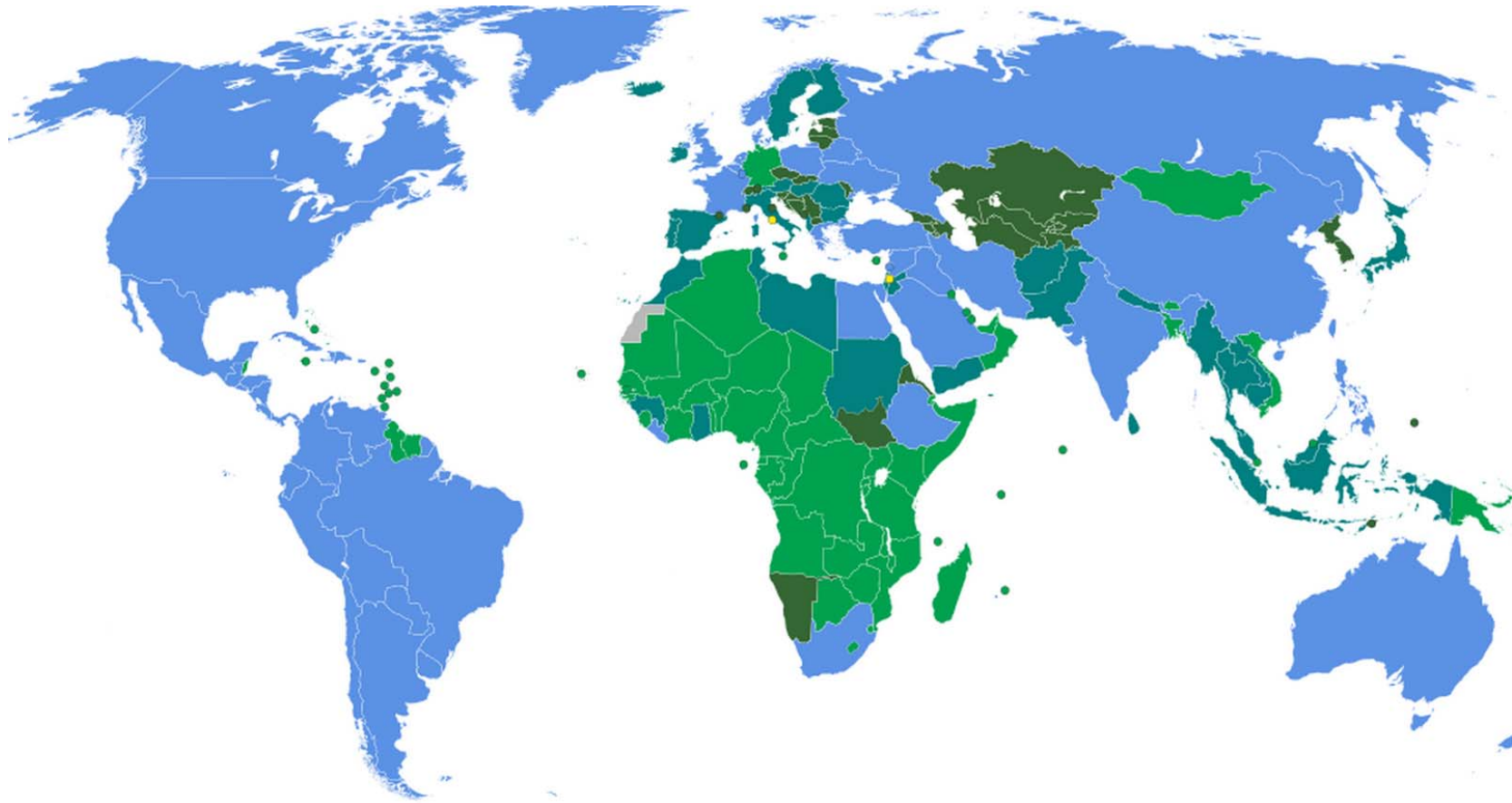
\*USA open symbolic quota & allow naturalization 1943

\*Canada open family reunification 1947

“The Soviet Union is today posing as the principle defender of the rights of coloured and colonial peoples...It would seem probable that, if the Western powers are unable to remove racial discrimination rapidly and to satisfy the demands of colonial peoples for self-government, the Western powers may have the great majority of the colonial and coloured peoples hostile or unfriendly to them in the event of war with the Soviet Union...”

- Canadian Department of External Affairs memo, 1947

# De-colonization drives UN enlargement





“What other peoples think about us plays an important role in the achievement of our foreign policies...More than a dozen foreign ministers have spoken to me in the last year alone, not about the practicalities of immigration from their country to ours, but about the principle which they interpret as discrimination against their particular countries...Even those [countries] who do not use their quotas...resent the fact that the quotas are there as a discriminatory measure.”

- U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk to House Committee on the Judiciary, 1964

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THE DEMOCRATIC ORIGINS OF  
RACIST IMMIGRATION POLICY  
➤ IN THE AMERICAS ◀



David Scott FitzGerald

David Cook-Martin

Comments welcomed

David FitzGerald  
[dfitzgerald@ucsd.edu](mailto:dfitzgerald@ucsd.edu)