"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore." Once that was true, but no longer. Emma Lazarus' beautiful and memorable words we've all heard many times and know well are facing into memory. If we're honest, they should be removed from "Lady Liberty" and be replaced with something like: We'll take your Anglos, especially well-off ones, and the ones we choose with needed skills; you keep the rest, especially your poor, dark-skinned and desperate. We needed 'em once for our homegrown sweatshops. No longer. We've got plenty all around the world. It now looks like we'll make an exception though for the menial or toughest low pay, no benefits, no security jobs no one else wants. We're still debating it and will let you know.

Think they'll ever affix anything like that to the Lady's pedestal? Fat chance. Whatever may emerge from the Congress, how would they ever explain the hypocracy of our once warm welcome and now cold shoulder and callous rejection of immigrants. The fact is there are now fewer decent jobs to go around for a growing population. We thus need to curb the foreign inflow, and most wanting to come here don't have the right skills or connections and aren't the "right" color. We don't say that publicly, but honesty isn't a trait this country is noted for. Neither is honor, integrity or practicing the high principles we espouse. Strip off the mask, look hard at the cold, ugly face beneath and uncaring eyes and see a heart of stone and not a sign of a soul.

Long ago we were building a new nation, needed lots of labor and threw open our doors. Now we can be as picky as we choose and even slam the door and bolt it, except for the special skills we need or the few privileged we always welcome who can jump the queue to get in. We still need lots of help to pick strawberries and cabbages, make beds and clean commodes and so far have allowed the undocumented ones who make it here to stay for that kind of work few others want. But racist and far-right lawmakers in the Congress with a pathological desire to guard our borders like Fort Knox and close them to people with dark skins we denigrate or label potential terrorists are in a dog fight now with less extreme but hardly moderate voices there. So far we don't know who'll win or if it will be a draw to be replayed at a future time. We do know that if even the best of the current proposals now being debated becomes law, future immigrants, those wishing to come, and the undocumented already here will be the losers.

We also know that quality job opportunities for most working people in the country including high-paying manufacturing jobs have been disappearing for years as well as many other good ones we now export to low wage countries. These jobs are routinely shipped abroad to exploit the sweatshop labor there where live bodies, desperate for any work and having to endure terrible on-the-job abuse, can be hired for pennies on the dollar and no benefits or pesky unions compared to manufacturing and labor rates here and what goes with them. So are many other lower level white collar service jobs that can be done anywhere. Even the higher paying ones aren't immune like those in high tech where skilled professionals can be hired in "all you can eat numbers" in countries like India at quarters on the dollar. What corporation hungry for profit could pass up a deal like that. Never mind that doing it hollows out our economy and puts us on the road to third world status just like those other nations whose workers are replacing ours.

Besides well-paying construction jobs and some others, what's left here are mostly lots of low-wage service jobs. These are the unexportable kind at Walmart (the nation's largest employer), McDonald's or minimal hotel or restaurant services (plus those strawberry and cabbage pickers) with few or no benefits and often little chance to organize in unions for higher pay, better benefits and worker protection. Other than those, our message now is keep your people at home. We can use 'em right where they are. No need to pay 'em much, pennies an hour will do, forget any social benefits and no need to worry about those annoying unions. None allowed in sweatshop countries like China, Bangladesh, El Salvador or Haiti. When any do spring up in places like Colombia, all you need is a corporate friendly, anti-union president willing to sell out his people to US interests, make the country friendly to giant US transnationals like big oil, and allow paramilitary hired killers free reign to have at as many socially-minded "troublemakers" as possible "eliminating" them and intimidating the rest.
way you can get all the cheap labor you want there practically for nothing. Can't beat a deal like that, so why let 'em in here. We're trying to hold down the number of "undesirables" we've now got so there aren't too many around to become restive and cause trouble. It helps when we can recruit a lot of them to go fight and die for us in our imperial wars. But we're handling the surplus by locking up as many as we can in prison cells for any reasons we can justify passing new laws to allow it. With 2.1+ million already behind bars (the largest prison population in the world - two thirds of them black and Latino) and adding about 900 more a week it seems to be working very well thank you very much. At least so far. I've written at length about this horror under the radar in my article titled "The US Gulag Prison System" - the one at home.

Unlike long ago, the land that once welcomed your tired, poor and huddled masses now has hung out a "no vacancy" sign, is hostile to the undocumented forced to come here because of our destructive trade policies impoverishing them, the many legitimate arrivals already here and contributing more than they get back, and is pretty nasty to the least advantaged who were born here, especially if they're dark-skinned. As things now stand, what's ahead is only likely to get worse.

Once we welcomed those huddled masses

For well over a century we were a growing nation thriving on the influx of welcomed immigrants. At Ellis Island alone (where my ancestors passed through a century ago) over 12 million of them entered the country between 1892 (when it opened) and 1954 (when it closed). This country was founded and built by immigrants - from Plymouth Rock and Jamestown in the 17th century to Ellis Island up to a half century ago. The numbers were impressive and came in three great waves:

1. About 5 million from 1815 - 1860, mainly English (on my father's side), Irish, German, Scandinavian and northwestern Europe.

2. About 10 million between 1865 (post Civil War) - 1890, again mainly from northwestern Europe.

3. About 15 million from 1890 - 1914, many from Austro-Hungary, Turkey, Lithuania (on my mother's side), Russia, Greece, Italy and Romania. Many Eastern European Jews fleeing religious persecution like my maternal ancestors came in this wave. Thankfully they did and made it. Otherwise it's likely they'd have met their fate either at the hands of Stalin or Hitler.

Many immigrants came to America to escape war, political turmoil, famine, or religious persecution. Others came against their will as chattel. Most, however, came for economic reasons seeking a better life in a land they saw as one offering better opportunity than the one they left. Some found it, others were disappointed and had to wait for their second and third generation offspring to finally reap some of what they themselves never achieved. Still they kept coming en masse as 19th century America was young and growing and needed a plentiful supply of skilled and unskilled workers. After the 1880s the need was almost entirely for the unskilled to fill the growing number of factory jobs.

Restrictive and exclusionary immigration legislation

The Naturalization Act of 1790 established the rules for naturalized citizenship as required by Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution. Until 1882, almost anyone could move here and qualify, but thereafter the government began to impose controls. Extreme racism was always in our DNA, and it's surfaced and thrived throughout our history. It was evident in the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act that made immigration from China illegal. It didn't matter that it was Chinese labor (first hired in 1865) mainly that helped build the transcontinental railroad, did the most dangerous work in some of the most treacherous areas like the high Sierras, and worked for less than a dollar a day. On May 10, 1869 when the final golden spike was driven at
Promontory, Utah to symbolize the connection of the transcontinental system from east to west, ocean to ocean, it was mainly Chinese coolie labor that raced to build the final 10 miles of track in 12 hours to be done in time for the ceremony. We showed our gratitude by excluding them when they were no longer needed. Theodore Roosevelt, a known racist and noted imperialist and war hawk recipient of the Nobel Peace prize, treated the Japanese with equal disdain in the 1905 "Gentleman's Agreement" that allowed the US the right to exclude Japanese immigrants. The result was all Asians couldn't emigrate here until the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 that established quotas restricting Southern and Eastern European immigration as well as allowing some token numbers in from Asia and other "less preferred" countries.

Through the years the immigration issue would resurface on occasion as it has again today and generally reflected the political bias of the times over any notion of fairness to all those in other countries wishing to come here and those who'd already arrived. We've always had our favored countries and world regions with Anglo Europeans being at the head of the queue followed by Northwestern Europeans overall. People of color from Latin America, Africa and Asia have always been least preferred, except for the 300 years when we forcibly brought black Africans here against their will as chattel or allowed a few million Mexicans the privilege to come and be exploited by the agribusiness of an earlier era. But besides that disgraceful past, our racist heritage was there from the first time a settler met a native Indian. All 18 million of them or so were only "in the way" and had to be removed or first used before we did it - through mass murder, forced resettlement or neglect. Racism was also a major factor in the Mexican War in the 1840s when following our imperial "manifest destiny" we stole half the country from our southern neighbor. We didn't take it all because most of the population was in the southern half, and we didn't want all those dark-skinned people diluting our white Anglo majority.

Asians overall have been relative newcomers to the US because they were either excluded entirely or greatly restricted by discriminatory quotas. When the National Origins Formula was established in 1929, total annual immigration was capped at 150,000, but, beyond some token numbers the "no Asians allowed" sign was still official policy. The important Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (the McCarran-Walter Act) opened the door a crack to Asians, but in that McCarthy era time also increased the power of government to deport illegal immigrants suspected of communist sympathies. The INA ended racial restrictions but retained a quota system with a preference to our more favored countries. Eventually the INA established a system of ethnic preferences and also placed great importance on labor qualifications. But the Act was overturned in 1990 when Congress made it illegal to deny anyone entry because of their beliefs, statements or associations. By then the times were a-changing, the cold war over and the "red scare" of the 1950s was an anachronism. That window of relief with no real enemies would be short-lived.

No legislation is ever written in stone, and in the Immigration Act of 1965 quotas based on national origin were ended and preference instead was given to those having US relatives. This enabled many more Asians to emigrate here, and they along with Hispanics now comprise the fastest growing segments of our population aided by their numbers entering the country legally or illegally. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 granted amnesty to illegal immigrants who had been in the country before 1982 (for many it could be hard to prove) but made it a crime to hire an illegal immigrant.

Immigration law becomes more oppressive

Major changes in immigration law were enacted in 1996 when the 104th Republican Congress enacted and Bill ("I feel your pain") Clinton signed into law the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA). These were repressive laws supposedly intended mainly to control illegal immigration and combat "terrorism." They did neither most often. Instead, their provisions affect American families, legal immigrants and others seeking to emigrate legally.

Under the 1996 statutes, legal immigrants are routinely detained without bond, deported without consideration for discretionary relief, restricted in their access to counsel, and barred...
from appealing to the courts. The laws also allow additional grounds for deportation and can subject long-term immigrants to mandatory detention and automatic deportation for even minor offenses like shoplifting, disturbing the peace or having a "joint" in their pocket. Low-level immigration officials act as judge and jury (no jury of their peers is allowed), and the federal courts are allowed no power to review most deportation decisions and INS activities. These laws can also be applied retroactively. As a result, many law-abiding immigrants living here for many years can now be deported for minor offenses and youthful indiscretions that may have occurred many years ago. These laws literally show no mercy. They allow no second chances, they can change the rules if so desired, and they deny the targetted immigrant due process in a court of law. The result has been families unjustly torn apart and made to suffer. Where are you when we need you Emma Lazarus?

Our leadership before and under George Bush never seemed or seems to miss an opportunity to fail to miss an opportunity to do the right thing. During Bill Clinton's second term Congress passed more immigration legislation in 1997 that spurned most Central American refugee claims and again in 2000 that offered only modest relief for some undocumented immigrants. It was better than nothing but not by much.

Post 9/11 the gloves came off along with the mask, and it's a new ball game - not one any immigrant of color or Muslim wants to play

Everything changed after 9/11, as if we didn't know by now. Start with the passage of the repressive and now infamous USA Patriot Act in 2001. It provided funding for more border guards and technologies to spot and detain/arrest possible "terrorists" trying to enter the country. It also authorized the indefinite detention of any noncitizen suspected of engaging in "terrorist" activities. It gave the Attorney General complete discretion to decide who was a suspected "terrorist" and do it based on no evidence. Those of us paying attention know how things have turned out. But not enough of us have, and that's why this bill passed almost without debate allowing the government to move us dangerously closer to a full-blown national security police state and get away with it - so far.

This act, only a tyrant could love, stripped all legal protection of liberty and justice for Muslims and Arabs in the US or those wishing to come. It sanctioned their being monitored without notification as well as their NGOs, civic, charitable and religious organizations. The American Bar Association calls this unconstitutional, but just try to get redress. It allowed the Justice Department the right to round up and detain an unknown number of "suspects" from the Middle East and South Asia overall including at least 5,000 Muslim men only three of whom were charged with a crime. Federal immigration courts are allowed to hold secret hearings on their status, and those thought to be in the country illegally or who had some immigration violation were ordered deported even when going back to their home country risked their being arrested and tortured. It also gave the government authority to freeze the assets of any organization it deems suspect for any reason. It's since been open season making it legal for the government to conduct a witch-hunt which has gone on ever since including allowing several federal agencies to raid the homes and offices of the national Muslim leadership in Northern Virginia. It all amounts to a war on Muslims and Islam, especially targeted at Muslim immigrants of color or from the Middle East and South Asia.

A new climate to silence dissent, destroy civil liberties and discourage immigration

The post 9/11 climate cast a pall of fear over the nation that especially affects our immigrant population, particularly Muslims and especially those from 25 designated countries (all but one majority Muslim). It also includes poor and desperate Latinos mostly from Mexico and Central America who come here undocumented (an estimated 60% of all Latinos are coming from Mexico) or wish to when they can't do it legally. They practically have no other choice because of the economic devastation caused them by the exploitative US instituted so-called "neoliberal free trade agreements" that have destroyed their ability to earn a living at home.
It's resulted in a mass witch-hunt roundup and secret detention of thousands. Also many individuals were targeted for deportation and in their removal proceedings were under gag orders and prevented from talking to anyone. In addition, all foreign students were tracked as potential terrorists. Recent Muslim immigrants were asked to voluntarily submit to law enforcement agency interviews and hospitals were required to collect information on immigrant status before providing Medicaid. Also repressive and restrictive regulations were established governing the granting of visas including requiring face-to-face interviews never before needed and withholding visas for certain categories of people until the FBI conducts name checks to assure they're not a terrorist threat. Fingerprinting of all visa-bearing travelers is also required either when they get them or when arriving at airports and seaports. After October 26, 2004 the law required this be done by collecting biometric identifiers at US visa-issuing offices abroad.

How long will it be before all immigrants and those needing visas to visit will be required to have an implanted computer chip for ID and tracking. Think I'm kidding? The FDA has already approved such an experimental chip for use on 1,000 test subjects. Wanna volunteer? They'll even know when you go to the "john." If they're pleased with the results from these "lab rats," it's not far-fetched to imagine a new repressive law one day requiring all of us - citizens, immigrants and visa holders - to be so-implanted so they can monitor every move we make and maybe even one day know what we think.

The new Department of Homeland Security (aka "Big Brother") now controls this Orwellian nightmare system. It's run by an undetected war criminal, John Negroponte, US ambassador to Honduras from 1981 - 1985 where he was our point man overseeing the infamous Contra wars in Nicaragua and death squad activities and human rights abuses throughout the region. He then briefly served as our "ambassador to the new Iraq" post illegal invasion where he likely introduced the "Salvador death squad option" now being used intensively in a crazed attempt to foment a real civil war to divide the country. It's modeled after the one he was in charge of in El Salvador against that country's freedom-fighting resistance combating the brutal US supported right wing government in the early 80s.

DHS makes the visa rules, decides who can or cannot get them and be allowed into the country. In the past the State Department handled this. It was simpler then which encouraged foreigners to visit, attend school here or emigrate. Now with a maze of hostile regulations, many foreigners are dissuaded from coming at all or prevented from doing so. This has adversely affected US corporations, the travel industry and also many universities heavily reliant on foreign students and scholars. It's caused leaders and officials in business, science and education as well as civil libertarians to be concerned enough to warn this can only be detrimental to the strength of the nation and our precious freedoms fast disappearing.

Blame the Congress for this mess. With immigration a hot issue, they passed the Homeland Security Act in 2002 which abolished the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and moved its functions from the Justice Department to the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Within the DHS the Bureau of Border Security now has authority over our borders and enforcement of our immigration laws. The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services was given responsibility over visas, citizenship, asylum, and refugee status. Look for more repressive and restrictive rules ahead in a post 9/11 climate hostile to people whether they already live here legally, wish to visit, and especially if they want to emigrate and happen to have a darker complexion than most of us.

A nation addicted to the need for enemies - real or invented

With the end of the cold war and along with it the great "red scare" and evil empire of that period, the US was desperate to find new enemies. How else could we justify a high level of military spending and homeland security and readiness unless we could scare the public enough to accept it. It's happened so often before you'd think people would have caught on by to it by now - but you'd be wrong. When our political leaders need an excuse to pursue some awful public-unfriendly agenda for their own private reasons and benefit, they need a good excuse to convince us to go along. They've found the best way most often is by inventing a threat, hyping it to scare us to death, and then declaring war on it. It seems to work every time.
so why not keep doing it. We’ve had a “war on drugs” for over 30 years, and in the 1980s Ronald Reagan “fought” that one, the "cold war" and made it a trilectica by declaring a war on "international terrorism." In the 1990s the "cold war" was just a memory, the "war on drugs" continued to lock up mainly our poor and black population, the "war on international terrorism" was shortened to a "war on terrorism" and we added a new war to keep it in threes - the one on immigrants which this essay is about and is very much connected to our so-called but phony "war on terrorism."

First some numbers based on Census Bureau data. That bureau estimates the nation’s foreign-born immigrant population (legal and illegal) reached a record high of 35 million in March, 2005. Their data also indicate the first half of the current decade has been the highest five year period of immigration in our history. Between January, 2000 and March, 2005 they estimate 7.9 million new immigrants (legal and illegal) entered the country, 3.7 million of whom they believe came illegally. Their data also shows that between March, 1995 and March, 2000 the foreign-born population grew by 5.7 million or about 1.1 million a year and between 2000 and 2005 an additional 5.2 million immigrated here or about 1 million + a year. Census 2000 also estimates between 8 - 11 million immigrants were living in the country illegally. It's likely up around the higher number now or even more.

Hispanics now are the single largest and fastest growing ethnic or minority group in the country according to the Census Bureau. They number over 41 million or nearly 14% of the population surpassing blacks at about 40 million or 13.4%. The Bureau projects that by 2050 the Hispanic population of the US will reach 102.6 million or 24% of the total. In large and dominant states like California and Texas the totals are even more dramatic with Hispanics numbering about one third of the population and rising. And in no other major city is this trend more prominent than in Los Angeles which is now or shortly will be a majority Hispanic city.

The war on immigrants on three fronts now being waged in the Congress

The current legislation that’s now passed the House and a different version so far unpassed in the Senate promises to wage an unholy war against three classes of immigrants primarily - the undocumented ones already here, (especially those of color), those coming or wishing to from Mexico from where they can walk or wade across the border plus their Central American cousins, and all Muslims (again especially those of color) from anywhere including those from Arab countries who aren’t white enough. Since 9/11 all Muslims, including the ones living here legally, are clearly public enemy number one. But those dark-skinned Latinos desperate to escape the catastrophic poverty from US imposed “neoliberal free market” trade policies aren’t far behind. If anything passes close to its current House form, it will create a legalized racially stereotyped underclass of Untermenschen (subhumans) subject to legalized felony scapegoating. The result will be a living hell for the millions affected and be as far-removed as can be imagined from the 1960s civil rights legislation that tried undo centuries of injustice and persecution of black people and all others long denied their equal rights.

It’s unclear how the latest incarnation of immigration legislation will finally emerge or if in an election year whether any will. The compromise Senate bill stalled as the Congress adjourned for their Easter brake. Debate will resume when Congress returns, and if the Senate bill passes, which appears likely but not certain, it will then have to be reconciled in conference committee with the House. It won’t be easy and may not happen this year. The debate was heated in both Houses, and when the conference committee meets to produce a final bill, it’ll resume again for sure. In the end the current “reform” (always code language for annulling our rights) effort may emerge stillborn. The 109th Congress may just kick it down the road to the 110th and let them deal with a very contentious issue that could easily be solved if we had enough legislators who believed in equity and justice instead of politics as usual liberally seasoned with race hate, demonization and blame the victim.

It’s very clear what the new law would look like if the so-called House Sensenbrenner bill ever makes it on the books - HR 4437, The Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. I love the sweet-sounding language they always use that usually conceals a horror beneath it. In the case of HR 4437 it’s even worse than that. For me and at my age, it’s hard to believe anything like it could be passed by even a single branch of the Congress.
But I said the same thing about the USA Patriot Act that passed both Houses quickly and overwhelmingly (only one honorable senator voted against it) and was signed into law about as fast as you could say bombs away. No one in Congress had time to read it or likely even skim it.

Like its Patriot Act cousin, HR 4437 is a bill out of the bowels of hell that only tyrants, racists and hatemongers of all stripes could love. It criminalizes anyone in the country without documentation. Under current law that's a simple civil violation and often or generally ignored when those affected work for agribusiness that wants them or the Walmarts of the world that do as well. Under the neofascist House bill, 11 million or so undocumented workers already here would be legal felons and subject to immediate detention and deportation with little if any recourse through the courts. It would break up and destroy families. The children born here are US citizens and could stay (supposedly, but don't count on it). Their undocumented parent or parents could not. And should those deported decide to return and get caught, it would impose mandatory minimum prison sentences for them and anyone else judged to be promoting illegal entry.

The bill would also make it a felony subject to five years in prison for anyone giving aid and comfort to the undocumented like food and water or desperately needed medical care. There's a whole lot longer list of nightmarish provisions in this monstrosity including building 698 miles of five double-layer apartheid wall segments along the Mexican border with California and Arizona (shades of Israel in the Occupied Territories where the intent is to steal Palestinian land and destroy innocent lives or the Berlin Wall). The Senate bill would pass on a physical barrier and impose a virtual one instead consisting of surveillance cameras, sensors and other monitoring equipment. Both bills call for measures to increase border security. The House version would do it by increasing the size of a Gestapo-like Border Control force 60-fold to 663,546 (that's one third larger than the active duty US Army excluding reservists and National Guard). These "border guards" will be little more than armed thugs legally mandated to do about anything they want because acting tough and terrorizing are terrific deterrents, and they'd only be doing it to poor dark-skinned folks we don't want who don't count for anything anyway.

This huge army, if it's created, already has a volunteer border force in place called the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps (MCDC) or "Minutemen" for short. Their name is sacrilegiously borrowed from those "ready in a minute men" that go back in our history to the mid-1600s and were trained to be first on the scene to defend us in a conflict. All this force wants to defend is white supremacy and race hate. It's an ultra-right neofascist group possibly numbering in the thousands of Nazi-like paramilitary street thugs now terrorizing anyone they catch trying to cross our borders and enter the country illegally, primarily in the Southwest. Other organizations are just as extremist like the National Policy Institute that believes the rights of white people come first, "diversity" and "multiculturalism" are practically sinful, Affirmative Action should be abolished and mass deportation is the solution to our "illegal immigrant problem." These groups and organizations are being tacitly supported by our elected officials through their silence or in too many cases their complicity. Let's be clear and call all these groups and their members what they are - white supremacist racist nationalists or simply hatemongers for short.

In the US today, this is what's going on to compound the existing horror from the sort of domestic equivalent of this bill, the USA Patriot Act, for those of us here legally. There's a sinister idea behind all this legislation, other oppressive laws already on the books and a government in charge that believes it can do whatever it wants about anything to anyone, law or no law. We have a president who believes and has said he's "above the law" and the "Constitution is just a goddamned piece of paper." With that kind of attitude, should it surprise anyone that what's now happening is a full-scale effort to create a repressive national security police state with the consent of the public that's scared of its shadow and willing to sacrifice its freedom for the illusion of security. In reality, the Bush administration is trying to "keep the legal and illegal rabble in line" while their quest for empire goes on unobstructed and unabated by waging permanent war on all parts of the world we haven't yet conquered and colonized.

George Bush's temporary (guest) worker program - a return of the "braceros" if it becomes law

http://www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=10077&sectionID=30

2/13/2007
George Bush has proposed and the Senate may pass its version of a temporary or guest worker program as part of their immigration legislation when they return from spring break. Shades of the infamous Bracero Program that was in force from 1942-1964 and gave employers license to exploit over three million Mexican migrant farm workers, deny them their rights and subject them to severe harassment and oppression from extremist groups and racist authorities. Whether or not we enact a new version of that old program, we’re currently moving toward establishing a police state as I’ve already alluded to above to control and restrain the home population from resisting or interfering with their global empire project. The easy targets are those we label possible or likely “terrorists” followed by anyone with dark skin living here, wishing to, already arrived undocumented or others we may allow in to be used, abused and then discarded when no longer needed.

We have a tainted history in our treatment of immigrants going back many years. I discussed earlier what we did to the Chinese who built our transcontinental railroad in the 19th century. It was no different in the 1930s when in the desperation of the Great Depression, Latinos were viewed as taking jobs and getting government benefits from “real Americans.” As a result, up to two million Mexicans were “relocated” to Mexico during that decade even though 1.2 million of them were born in the US and were US citizens. In California alone, 400,000 Latino US citizens or legal residents were forced to leave. This virulent racism resurfaced in 1954 when under “Operation Wetback” (the name alone wreaks of race hate) and in a national reaction against illegal immigrants, over one million here illegally were deported back to Mexico by trucks, buses, trains and even ships. In some cases even their US born children were sent with them even though they were US citizens. It’s a wonder we didn’t put them all on forced marches and make them go back the hard way.

The stalled compromise Senate bill, endorsed by George Bush, is little more than an election year politicking to win the Hispanic vote. In addition, it would create a permanently legal underclass of low-paid workers, allow employers the right to exploit them and put added pressure on US workers so as to restrain their wage and benefit demands.

The Senate bill divides illegal immigrants into three groups. Those who arrived after April 1, 2001 could stay permanently if they pass background checks and pay back taxes and a $2,000 fine (no easy task for them); worked at least three of the past five years; work another six years and get in the queue behind other applicants already in it. Immigrants who arrived between April 1, 2001 and January, 2004 would have to return to a US port of entry and re-enter the country legally with a temporary work permit. They would also have to pass background checks and pay back taxes. Finally, illegals who arrived after January, 2004 would be required to leave the country. They could only return on temporary work permits.

Any immigration bill, if passed, will create an overwhelming burden of documentation and verification on millions of immigrants as well as the federal bureaucracy and employers. Immigrants going through the process would be forced to give up their right to privacy protection, asylum and due process. If an Employment Verification System is part of a final resolution, they would also have to get a federal agency’s permission to work. In addition, it would require them to learn English and would subject them to overwhelming bureaucratic red tape that under the best of conditions likely would be rife with errors and delays that would be nightmarish to resolve. And to boot it would create an easily accessed database that would make all those in it easy pickings for identity thieves.

Employers under the Senate plan would be required to verify that their new workers are in the country legally. They now only need to ask for worker documents showing those they hire are allowed to be here. The plan envisions a tamper-proof means of ID, such as a driver’s license with a picture, a fingerprint or an iris scan. If that provision becomes law, it’s step one on the road to a national identity card for everyone, possibly to include an embedded chip so Homeland Security, the NSA and other snoop agencies could keep tabs on all our moves and whereabouts. “Big Brother” is alive and well and “In our face.”

The immigration service would also have its hands full under this plan. It would have to cope with the overwhelming burden of doing background checks and verifying the identity, work history, tax obligations and English language competency of 11 million or more people. This is on top of their already enormous burden handling the influx of immigrants into the country. The IRS and Social Security Administration would also be obligated along with employers to help
immigrants calculate what back taxes they owe and what they had paid into Social Security accounts. Employers would have to report these earnings and would be in violation of the law if they didn't.

A comparison of current proposed immigration legislation to Hitler's Nuremberg race laws of 1935

What's on the table being debated in the Congress is not as extreme as Hitler's infamous Nuremberg Race Laws, but there are some ominous comparisons. Early on in Nazi Germany Hitler wanted to assert the superiority of the "Aryan race." He hoped to create a Master Race of pure blue-eyed, blond Aryan Caucasian Nordic types, and even though the notion of Aryan has no racial meaning he inferred that it did in what he preached and the laws he had enacted. The chosen ones were the Herrenvolk and all others were called Untermenschen or subhumans. In the US today Caucasian Judeo-Christians are our Herrenvolk and all others are the Untermenschen, especially people of color and Muslims.

We don't say that openly, write our laws with overtly denigrating or restrictive racist language in them or practice a policy of extermination today to create a "racially" pure society. But we did just that for 300 years to our native population and in the process slaughtered about 18 million of them as we built the nation we now have. Hitler, in fact, used what we did as a model for his own plan to exterminate the Jews and other undesirables he wanted eliminated.

We also used black Africans as slaves over the same period we eliminated our native population and then after freeing them held them in the bondage of Jim Crow laws and racist attitudes that exist to this day despite the landmark civil rights legislation of the 1960s. We never accepted black people or any others of color as co-equals even though we piously say we do and enacted laws that codify it.

The current immigration legislation now being debated is only the latest chapter in white America's attempt to put its oppressive boot on the neck of people of color we see as inferior or now label "terrorists." And we created a new public enemy number one after 9/11, Muslims, and have persecuted them with a vengeance. Just like the saying that "history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes", attributed to Mark Twain, what the US has practiced in recent years is not like Nazi Germany at its worst, but there's similarity enough to be very disturbing and we're heading in the wrong direction.

Hitler, too, began slowly and moderately after being named German Chancellor in January, 1933 (about one month before Franklin Roosevelt became our 32nd President). He needed time to consolidate power and at first didn't want to scare the voters before they lost their franchise or moderate politicians before they no longer had any say. What began modestly gradually became more extreme and isn't too dissimilar to what's happening here now. Bill Clinton's signing into law the 1996 immigration reform act (IIIRA) and anti-terrorism act (AEDPA) discussed earlier can be seen as the first shot across the bow in the current war against immigrants. Then after 9/11 the gloves came off, and it was off to the races with the infamous Patriot Act, mass witch-hunt roundups of those labeled potential terrorists and now an extreme and hostile attempted crackdown on those immigrant groups we've targeted - those of color, especially Latinos and Muslims. What's next? Unless the current mass public protest uproar continues, gets stronger and makes the lawmakers nervous enough to believe we really mean business and won't stand for this, you can bet it will only get worse until we're all targeted and become potential victims. That's about how Hitler did it, and we seem headed in the same dangerous direction. Good Germans back then didn't complain as long as it happened to others until one day many discovered it could happen to them too. By then it was too late. That's how tyranny works.

Mass outrage in the streets nationwide in protest - a new civil rights struggle

In recent weeks millions of people have gone to the streets in cities nationwide to protest en
masse against the current immigration legislation in the Congress. These protests have the potential to spread and grow enough to become the new civil rights struggle of our time. Hostile and denigrating legislation in the Congress has lit the fuse, and all the immigrant rights movement may need to combat it is a few Martin Luther King type figures to lead the effort for real justice against a government intent on denying it to them.

The protests are continuing, and at least 60 cities are scheduling more events and demonstrations that include candlelight vigils in Los Angeles, a mass rally at the Washington monument and a "day without Hispanics" in Telluride, CO intended as a work stoppage. In addition, immigration rights activists are planning a national action, student walkout and boycott they call The Great American Boycott of 2006 on May 1 of no work, no school, no shopping and a demand for amnesty and full and equal rights for all working people. Adding overall impact to these mass protests is the presence of Hispanics from Mexico and almost every Central and South American country including Venezuela whose twice democratically elected President, Hugo Chavez, is also a target of US hostility and possible future illegal aggression to oust him. But other immigrant ethnic groups are well represented as well - especially large numbers from the Korean and Chinese communities.

Joshua Hoyt, Executive Director of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights, a 120-member coalition of organizations, said: "There has never been this kind of mobilization in the immigrant community ever. They have kicked the sleeping giant. It’s the beginning of a massive immigrant civil rights struggle." And it’s gone beyond just the rights of legal and illegal immigrants to include working people of all races who’ve seen their jobs exported, unions weakened or destroyed, wages stagnated and essential benefits reduced, lost or never gotten. It’s seen permanent high-paying jobs replaced by temporary ones at much lower pay and often no benefits. It’s seen the oppressive power of big corporations aided by their allies in government wreak havoc over ordinary working people including legal immigrants and the undocumented in a vicious downward cycle of exploitation and repression. The voices in the streets are saying "no mas/no more." I make no bones where I stand - four-square with all those in the streets, and I was born here and am one of the privileged. That could never have happened if my ancestors had been denied entry or had been deported after they arrived.

Look at the impressive numbers in cities around the country. In my city of Chicago alone, from 300,000 - 500,000 protested downtown near where I live in the largest ever protest in the city’s history for any reason. In Los Angeles it was the same thing with somewhere between 1 - 1.5 million in the streets, again historic. In New York, tens of thousands marched across the Brooklyn Bridge carrying the flags of their native countries. And those in the streets included more than immigrants - the unions brought out their members, there were young people and students who walked out of class in defiance of school authorities to join in (40,000 alone in Los Angeles). It’s hard to tell where this will lead or what effect it will have, but never underestimate the power of organized people. When enough of them speak out, politicians listen, especially when those people are voters or in the case of young people when they have parents who are. Famed Chicago community organizer Sol Linowitz understood it when he once said “the way to beat organized money is with organized people." Social activist Arundhati Roy also understands and she’s said "we are many and they are few." And I suggest we all together do a good imitation of Howard Beale, the news anchor from the 1976 movie Network, who one day got fed up yelled out "I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore." Any Howards out there? Come on, let me hear you. I start you off and say what I said before - I’m past made as hell, I won’t take it anymore, and I intend to fight back to save my civil liberties and the republic and to help the disadvantaged and oppressed achieve the justice they deserve. But I can’t do it alone. I need a lot of you with me.

Today’s war on immigrants and “terrorists” will be tomorrow a war against us all - it’s already begun.

I’ve written now a number of times before that I believe the country is approaching a dangerous watershed. The scenario I paint is a gloomy one in which the situation is grave, the stakes are immense and the time is short. It’s a battle to save the republic and our sacred Constitutional rights. I’m desperately trying to sound the alarm against an out-of-control imperial state engaged in a permanent war abroad for empire along with a "second front" at
home against all working people (that's most everyone) and especially the ones most easily
targeted who comprise the subject of this essay - vulnerable legal and undocumented
immigrants. It's a life and death struggle to save us from descending into the hell of tyranny,
the repressive police state being created to control it and an endless war on the world. That's
not a world I want to live in or pass on to my children or grandchildren. I hope you feel as I do
and are willing to do something about it. Unless you do and together we can find a way to
reverse course and do it quickly, we'll awaken one day sooner than we may think and find out
it's already too late, we've crossed "The Rubicon", and there's no way back. The sad lesson of
history will have been repeated again, but this time to us. It can happen here, make no
mistake. Will you now head out to the mall complacently with what's at stake? Will you let this
happen without a fight? I won't. Are you with me?

An important note of dedication:

I've never before dedicated one of my articles to anyone, but this time feel I must. I wish to
dedicate this one to the wonderful and redoubtable staff at US based Pacifica Radio KPFA's
Flashpoints Radio in Berkeley, CA for their courageous, tireless and unrelenting efforts on
behalf of the immigrant communities of my country and for their overall work and commitment
in the unending fight for humanity and equal justice for all. They inspired me to write this article
and several others as well. I'm deeply grateful to them.

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