

VIDEO CONVERSATION GUIDE

GOALS:

- ❑ Participants will compare racist language in past and current immigration policy debates and how it often lead to racist anti-immigrant policies that hurt people of color most.
- ❑ Participants will discuss how racist anti-immigrant language violates basic values and progress toward just and humane immigration reform.
- ❑ Participants will explore ways to challenge anti-immigrant racism and advance just and humane policy reform.

INTRODUCTION:

Americans are proud of our history of bringing together diverse cultures and peoples to create a rich and vibrant, uniquely American culture. Throughout history, however, there have been movements to isolate people of color, including immigrants, and prevent them from sharing in the nation's prosperity. Today's debate about immigration is nothing new – the same themes, even the same statements—are echoes of debates going back to our nation's founding. This video recalls some of that past, and questions whether we really want to repeat that history.

SHOW VIDEO (10 MINUTES):

Show the video.

LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION (20 MINUTES):

The speakers in the video did not stop at saying racist and anti-immigrant things. They used their words to build political power and enacted policies that had adverse racial impacts. Here are some examples:

- ❑ In 1924, following the testimony about Japanese immigrants quoted in the video, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924. The Act barred immigrants from Asia from coming to the US. An earlier law prevented non-white immigrants from becoming citizens, and Asians were considered non-white. The 1924 Act also favored immigrants from Northern and Western Europe and kept out people from Southern Europe with darker Mediterranean complexions.
- ❑ After September 11, 2001, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created and immigration enforcement was moved there. Now, immigrants are automatically treated as security threats and terrorists suspects. This disproportionately harms people of color, who are more likely to be the targets of racial profiling, unfair treatment, discrimination, deportation raids, employment loss, family separation, lack of due process, and human rights violations.
- ❑ In 2005, Representative Virgil Goode, the first speaker in the video, voted for HR 4437, also known as the Sensenbrenner bill. That bill, which passed in the House of Representatives, would among other things have made undocumented immigrants and anyone who helped them, including friends, family, churches and social services, into criminals. It would also have required the Department of Homeland Security to send all non-citizens held at the border to a detention center, jail, or prison. The bill never made it into law, in large part because millions of people across the country participated in protest marches.

Discussion questions

- How did the speakers in the video use anti-immigrant language to increase their power, and decrease other people's power? How were statements from the past and present similar?
- What have been some negative policies and impacts that have resulted from anti-immigrant statements? Which racial or ethnic groups get hurt most?
- Do you think the anti-immigrant statements are racist?
- What negative policies are anti-immigrant speakers supporting today? How would these policies hurt different communities and which communities would be hurt most?
- What can we do today to challenge anti-immigrant racism and to achieve positive reforms based on the ideals of dignity, respect, fair treatment and human rights?

ACTION STEPS:

Summary Points

- Many anti-immigrant statements are coded statements about race. If these statements result in policies and actions that cause the most harm to people of color, the statements are racist. Regardless of the spokesperson's intentions, it's the impacts that are racist
- These racist anti-immigrant statements echo the debates about race and immigration in our past.
- As a nation, we have managed to achieve progressive reform—ending slavery, passing Civil Rights laws, and ending race-based immigration barriers—despite racist opposition.
- We can achieve just and humane immigration reform by calling out the racism in today's debate and moving the conversation back to our core national values of justice, and fair treatment for all people.