



DANIEL K. INOUE
INSTITUTE

September 05, 1986

Oahu Conference on Immigrants & Refugees

My father and my paternal and maternal grandparents were immigrants. They began life in this new land as laborers in the sugar fields. Thousands of my fellow citizens in Hawaii trace their beginnings to similar circumstances. For that matter, over 80% of the population of Hawaii trace their beginnings to immigration.

For the most part, most of us of immigrant beginnings have fared reasonably well.

Therefore, I am personally saddened to relate to you about the receipt of hundreds of letters during the past 5 years from constituents who have complained about the rising number of immigrants. These letters advocate the halting of immigration and the facilitated deportation of aliens. Many of these letters are signed by persons with Asian surnames.

This negative attitude is now reflected in the policies of the United States congress. Although not prohibited by statute, members of the House of Representatives very seldom, if ever, introduce special legislation for immigrants. And if they do introduce these special bills, the chances for passage are almost nil. This same policy is now being followed in the United States senate. I am one of the very few senators who continue to submit special bills to assist those having problems with the immigration and naturalization service.

These measures are always introduced at the request of constituents and constituent organizations, I have always felt that every constituent of mine is entitled to his or her day in court and to be given the opportunity to petition and advocate his or her cause. By refusing to introduce these measures, I would be assuming the multiple position of judge and jury, and oftentimes, prosecutor. Needless to say, my policy has been sorely criticized by many of my constituents.

But I wish to remind those who are critical that this is a nation of immigrants. This is the nation that just observed the centennial of miss liberty with glittering fanfare, speeches, and

music the most costly extravaganza in American history. It will be well to remind ourselves of the inscription that appears at the base of Miss Liberty. Because if these words are meaningless, and if these words do not represent America, they should be erased. These are the words:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

If it weren't for our open immigration policy, Albert Einstein would not have been here. Nor would Seiji Ozawa and Zubin Mehta, the brilliant maestros of the Boston and New York symphonies. Nor would we have the dramatic buildings designed by I.M. Pei. Mario Cuomo would not be the governor of New York. Tip O'Neill would not be speaker of the House of Representatives. Ronald Reagan would not be president of the United States. And I, most humbly, would not be a United States senator. But more importantly, than these names of prominence are the millions upon millions of immigrants and their descendants who have built America -- the farms, the factories, the great theaters, the universities and colleges. Men and women who have given us much joy and pleasure. Men and women who have sacrificed their lives to defend their adopted land in four major wars during this century.

We have nothing to fear of immigrants. And so on this day, I wish to, as a United States senator and a citizen of the United States. Extend to you my welcome and to thank you for your many contributions this day and many more you will be making in your lifetime.