

# Project Overview

This website unmaskes how a deep history of racism is laced into the heart of the U.S. immigration system. It is anchored by the first-ever map to document every deportation from the United States, as recorded by federal immigration authorities. In 1895, federal immigration authorities began to publish annual reports of the number of deportations they conducted each year, including the countries to which they returned the nation's deportees. Collected and mapped, this data reveals that 96% of all recorded deportations from the United States have returned migrants to non-white majority countries, with Mexico and Central America receiving 88% of the 8M deportations reported by U.S. immigration authorities since 1895. Of course, the rules governing what conduct triggers deportation, what government action qualifies as a deportation, and even the appropriate term to use have shifted over time. But the underlying work of the immigration laws to engineer the racial composition of the United States has continued. See our [Data Methodology](#) page for more information about this data and how we mapped it.

The website is also anchored by a [timeline](#) that tracks the history of racism in U.S. immigration control. Since the story of racism in immigration control starts long before federal authorities began to keep an annual count of the migrants they deported each year, our timeline begins much earlier than our main map. We start a century earlier, in 1790, when Congress passed the nation's first naturalization law. That law restricted the right to naturalize to "free white persons." Tracking forward from the 1790 Naturalization Act, the timeline documents how the authorities tasked with immigration control have, in explicit and implicit ways, attempted to exclude, punish, and deport non-white immigrants. But, our timeline is not a comprehensive history of racism in U.S. immigration control. Instead, it focuses on three main areas: exclusion, punishment, and deportation. For those interested in learning more about racism and the U.S. immigration system, past and present, we have provided a [bibliography](#) of the major books and articles we referenced while developing the timeline.

In addition to the primary map and timeline, this website provides access to additional maps and data visualizations revealing trends and turning points in the history of race and U.S. immigration control. Importantly, these data visualizations address more than deportation. This is important because deportation is not the primary method used by immigration authorities to forcibly remove noncitizens from the United States. Most notably, in 1927, the U.S. Immigration Service authorized Border Patrol officers to offer Mexican and Canadian immigrants facing deportation the option to "voluntarily depart" to their home countries. By selecting "Voluntary Departure" (VD) instead of deportation, immigrants could avoid detention and a formal deportation hearing, and U.S. immigration officials saved the time and money they would have otherwise had to spend on detention and formal deportation proceedings. While the rules

surrounding Voluntary Departure have changed over the years, since 1927 over ninety percent of all forced removals out of the United States have occurred via the Voluntary Departure process. There are other forms of forced removal from the United States as well. Between March 2020 and May 2023, the government invoked Title 42, a 1944 public health law, to quickly expel immigrants in the border region and deny entry to asylum seekers.<sup>1</sup> In these years, Title 42 expulsions far outnumbered deportations and voluntary departures. In other words, formal deportation represents just a peek into the story of forced removal from the United States. See our additional data visualizations page to explore historical trends at these other intersections of racism and immigration control.

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<sup>1</sup> Control of Communicable Diseases; Foreign Quarantine: Suspension of Introduction of Persons into the United States from Designated Foreign Countries or Places for Public Health Purposes, 85 FR 16559 (Mar. 24, 2020).