Remarks of Judge LaDoris H. Cordell (Ret.): BPFNA-Bautistas Por La Paz
29 August 2020

The history of immigration in America is one of exclusion and discrimination, despite the welcoming words engraved on the Statue of Liberty: “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-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

The United States has enacted nearly 30 immigration laws since the first one was passed in 1875. That year Congress enacted the Page Act of 1875 that prohibited the entry of immigrants considered to be “undesirable,” and was aimed at immigrants from China who were coming to this country as contract laborers.

Here is a sampling of other of America’s exclusionary and racist immigration laws:
In 1882, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted and was not repealed for 61 years, until 1943. This law restricted the immigration of Chinese laborers in response to racist attitudes and anxiety of white workers who feared the cheaper labor from China.

In 1903 and 1907, two immigration laws banned beggars, people with epilepsy, and diseased and disabled individuals from entering the United States. Federal officials rounded up and deported more than 400,000, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the 1930s, most of whom were here legally. Once again, racism and anxiety about threats to white workers were the motives.

Most immigrants were impelled to relocate to America because prevailing conditions in their homelands had rendered their native countries difficult or even impossible to remain. Climatic crises, devastating poverty, and political upheavals were all contributing factors to their discontent. In Ireland, the potato famine proved devastating to vast numbers of Irish. Jews had no alternative but to leave their European lands when Hitler came to power. Latinx from Mexico, Central and South Americas saw little hope of finding paid work in their lands where unemployment and crime ran unchecked. America beckoned to them all.
That was not the case for those who were forced to immigrate to America as the enslaved---10 million Africans, the first of whom arrived here in 1619. This forced immigration had but one purpose---the provision of free labor to whites that enabled them to build and control the economic foundation of this country. White supremacy which is the legacy of the forced immigration of Africans and the 401 years of oppression of African Americans that have followed, along with the hostility and hatred directed against immigrants by the Trump Administration have given rise to the Black Lives Matter movement that has gained traction throughout the world.

It is imperative that we know our history, and with that knowledge, in the words of the late John Lewis, the Conscience of the U.S. Congress, “continue to build union between movements stretching across the globe . . . Walk with the wind, and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide.”

Thank you.