In Immigration and American Unionism, Vernon Briggs, Jr. details the development of labor unions and immigration policies in the U.S. The saga begins in the 18th and continues into the 21st century. Historical events related to the growth and decline of union membership are portrayed alongside changes in U.S. immigration policies. It is proposed that during periods of restrictive immigration policies there were fewer immigrant workers, which made it easier for labor unions to increase their membership. However, during periods of open immigration policies there were more immigrant workers which made it more difficult for unions to organize workers. It is concluded that the AFL-CIO's historic opposition to open immigration has been in their best interest. However, their recent endorsement of more rights for immigrant workers is criticized as being contrary to the interest of labor unions, American workers, and the country as a whole.

Chapters 1 and 2 set the stage for the growth of labor unions and immigration into the U.S. during the early 1800s. Prior to 1800 there were neither unions nor large numbers of immigrants. In that era, union organizing spurted and sputtered as unions tended to reflect the skilled trade guilds of their European ancestors. However, unions did not have legal standing and were often branded illegal conspiracies. Most immigrants to the U.S. were not employees as we know them today. Rather, they were farmers, skilled tradesmen, or slaves. In the early 1800s the first wave of mass immigration began. Most of those workers were manual laborers in agriculture.

Chapter 3 recounts how the Civil War was the catalyst that changed the U.S. from an agricultural to industrial economy. Unions established a foothold, and the AFL consolidated efforts on the national level. The second wave of mass immigration was linked to significant growth in blue-collar jobs in manufacturing between 1861 and 1890. Western European immigrants entered industries on the east coast, and Chinese immigrants entered the labor force through California. However, immigration from China was outlawed in 1882 and remained illegal until 1943 when an annual token of 105 Chinese immigrants was permitted. It was not until 1965 that the limit on Chinese immigration was significantly raised.

Chapter 4 describes the third wave of mass immigration beginning in 1891 and lasting until 1920. Craft unions dominated the scene during this period but industrial, CIO-type unions and socialistic movements among workers also emerged. Sometimes violent clashes resulted, and both police and militia forces were used to forcefully repress massive strikes (e.g., Pullman, Homestead).

Chapter 5 notes a significant turning point in 1921 when the first ceiling on immigration from the Eastern hemisphere was established. Limitations on immigration based on an individual's national origin were set and preserved in subsequent legislation between 1952 and 1965. During this period immigration numbers began to drop. Union membership continued to grow, and legislation was enacted that established the rights of workers to form and join unions. Mass
production proliferated and the demand for workers in manufacturing industries grew substantially.

The Mexican Labor Program (a.k.a. the Bracero Program) began in 1942. Ostensibly, it was a temporary measure that allowed Mexicans to come into the U.S. to work during labor shortages caused by WWII. However, strong agricultural lobbyists convinced Congress to continue the program after the war. It continued until 1964 when the AFL-CIO finally persuaded Congress to close it down.

Chapter 6 describes how an era of mass immigration returned in 1965 when Congress ended the overt discrimination inherent in the national origins system of immigration. Supported by both the AFL-CIO and President Lyndon Johnson, the new law supported the concept of family reunification. The so-called "Texas Proviso" was in effect for much of this period (1952 to 1986). Essentially, this immigration regulation provided that employers were not subject to sanctions for harboring or hiring illegal aliens. From 1965 to the present, the annual number of apprehensions of illegal immigrants exploded from a low of 100,000 to the current rate of over 1 million per year. Several pieces of congressional legislation in 1980, 1986, 1990, and 1996 attempted to achieve multiple policy objectives of protecting refugees, regulating employment of immigrants in the workplace, raising limits on the number of immigrant admissions, etc. The National Research Council concluded that immigration lowers wages in some sectors resulting in reduced prices for goods and services and a yearly net economic benefit of $1 to $10 billion. It is suggested that the AFL-CIO's recent support for immigrant workers may stem from a nearly desperate desire to increase their membership.

Chapter 7 illustrates how the percentage of foreign-born persons in the population appears to have an inverse relationship with the percentage of the labor force that is unionized. The widening income disparity between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is attributed to larger numbers of immigrant workers flooding the labor pool. The chapter also illustrates how employers have used immigrant (primarily Mexican) laborers and paid them lower wages. This provided employers with bargaining leverage in dealing with unions demanding higher wages and better benefits. The AFL-CIO is beginning to shift away from their historic opposition to immigration and towards accommodation and amnesty for illegal immigrants. The author proposes stiffened enforcement of both immigration and labor relations laws to protect workers and avoid exploitation of immigrants.

One of the best features of this work is the juxtaposition of two areas of academic inquiry: labor history and immigration. The reader can see what happens when the laws of economics come into conflict with the laws of nations. The result has been that the push and pull of labor market supply and demand has moved workers into the U.S. regardless of the government's immigration regulations.

This work presents the very plausible hypothesis that immigration policies are related to the growth and decline of union membership. The data presented suggest that there might be a bivariate relationship between these two factors. Yet, other factors provide alternative explanations for this proposed relationship. These include changes in labor laws protecting or regulating unions, management resistance to unions, changing industry mix (less manufacturing and more service), employee involvement and communication in decision making, and other factors. These may be more than "temporary or quixotic short-run influences" as the text implies. Rather, they may be the primary reasons for the rise and fall of union membership.

Statistical methods might have been used to estimate the influences of these alternative explanations (e.g., mathematical models, multiple regression analysis, structural equation modeling, etc.). However, those methods are not reported in this work. Their absence may please