

Bill Clinton's 1995 State of the Union is Going Viral

A friend shared a video on Facebook a few days ago that featured Bill Clinton's 1995 State of the Union Address. My eyes popped when I saw that it had been viewed nearly 100 million times (according to Facebook), and then it occurred to me that a different friend had emailed me the same clip the day before.

I had to see what the fuss was about. After watching the clip, I began to understand. Here is an excerpt of [Clinton's speech](#), which drew a standing ovation:

All Americans, not only in the states most heavily affected but in every place in this country, are rightly disturbed by the large numbers of illegal aliens entering our country. The jobs they hold might otherwise be held by citizens or legal immigrants. The public service they use impose burdens on our taxpayers. That's why our administration has moved aggressively to secure our borders more by hiring a record number of new border guards, by deporting twice as many criminal aliens as ever before, by cracking down on illegal hiring, by barring welfare benefits to illegal aliens. In the budget I will present to you, we will try to do more to speed the deportation of illegal aliens who are arrested for crimes, to better identify illegal aliens in the workplace as recommended by the commission headed by former Congresswoman Barbara Jordan. We are a nation of immigrants. But we are also a nation of laws. It is wrong and ultimately self-defeating for a nation of immigrants to permit the kind of abuse of our immigration laws we have seen in recent years, and we must do more to stop it.

The language is surprisingly hawkish on immigration; in fact, it's almost jarring to our more enlightened ears. Clinton talks about securing the border, doubling criminal deportations, cracking down on illegal hiring, and barring "illegal aliens"—a phrase he uses four times in less than a minute—from welfare.

I suspect it would be difficult to find a presidential address of the last half century more hawkish on illegal immigration. The language is closer to that of the current occupant of the White House than his two predecessors.

Why is it going viral now? The speech, I think, shows just how much the world has changed in 20 years. Clinton would be condemned by most of his party today simply for using the phrase "illegal alien"; his message would be described as nativist and xenophobic.

It made me wonder: Is immigration still a political question or has it become primarily a moral one? Thoughts?