*Ellis Island Museum*

STEVE INSKEEP, HOST:

There is no place to learn about immigration to the United States quite like Ellis Island.

Every day, tourists arrive by ferry on the island where 12 million immigrants arrived around the early 20th century. Today, the museum there opens a new exhibition about more recent immigrants. Here's NPR's Hansi Lo Wang.

(SOUNDBITE OF BOAT HORN)

HANSI LO WANG, BYLINE: It's been more than 60 years since Ellis Island closed as station for inspecting and detaining immigrants. But you can still cross the Hudson River.

And that's Ellis Island right there.

STEPHEN BRIGANTI: There it is. You're sailing in just the way a 1920s immigrant sailed in, only on a little better vessel. And you'll go up the walkway that they went up.

WANG: Stephen Briganti is a son of an Ellis Island immigrant from Italy. He leads the foundation that worked with the National Park Service to restore the island's main building. It reopened as a museum in 1990, and it was recently renamed the Ellis Island National Immigration Museum to tell immigrant stories beyond the Ellis Island years.

BRIGANTI: If we didn't talk about the people who have come since Ellis Island, we wouldn't be relevant to new Americans.

WANG: Mae Ngai, who teaches history at Columbia University, says there's one main reason why immigration today looks a lot different than it did at the turn of the century - the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

MAE NGAI: That's the biggest reason why we have a much more diverse and multicultural society since the late 20th century.

WANG: The 1965 law got rid of immigration quotas that favored Northern and Western Europeans. Instead, it created a system that gives each country the same number of visas to the U.S. every year.