

IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION IN U.S. HISTORY

- 1798 Alien & Sedition Act authorized the expulsion of foreigners considered a threat to the U.S. the act also extended residence requirements for naturalization from 5 to 14 years
- 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act suspended immigration of all Chinese laborers for a period of 10 years and forbade the naturalization of Chinese; in 1902 a new law excluded Chinese indefinitely; not until 1943 was the ban lifted.
- 1882 Federal Immigration Law forbade the immigration of criminals, paupers, and the insane; required an immigrant to prove to officials that he/she would not become a "public charge;" those who could not support themselves (ie. children or the aged) had to produce a statement by a friend or relative promising support
- 1885 Contract Labor Law prohibited the importation of workmen under contract from overseas - usually for substandard wages
- ***In later years, other federal laws lengthened the list of undesirables by adding such categories as the insane, polygamists, prostitutes, alcoholics, anarchists, and persons afflicted with contagious diseases. The first really broad effort to reduce immigration came in 1897 when Congress proposed a literacy test bill for adult immigrants. The bill would have required immigrants over 16 years of age to read "not less than 30 nor more than 80 words in ordinary use." President Cleveland vetoed it. Presidents Taft and Wilson vetoed similar bills in 1913, 1915, and 1917.
- 1908 Gentleman's Agreement agreement made by President Teddy Roosevelt and Japan, which agreed to deny passports to laborers wishing to come to the U.S. In return, Californians were expected to repeal an offensive school ordinance which in effect had tried to place Japanese students in segregated schools.
- 1917 Immigration Act of 1917 required a literacy test for new immigrants entering the U.S. and barred immigration from most of the Asian-Pacific area. This law was passed over Wilson's veto.
- 1921 Emergency Quota Act (Immigration Act of 1921) limited the number of immigrants entering the U.S. in any one year to 3 percent of the size of each nationality group which was living in the U.S. in 1910. The maximum annual quota was set at 357,802. Of this total, approximately 56 percent was allotted to immigrants from northern and western Europe. Eastern and southern European immigrants received a quota of about 44%. This system drastically limited the immigration from southern and eastern Europe which had been running four times greater than that from the rest of Europe.
- 1924 Immigration Act of 1924 1) created a permanent quota system; 2) chopped the 1921 annual quota from 358,000 to 164,000; 3) reduced the immigration limit from 3% to 2% of each foreign born nationality living in the U.S. in 1890 (rather than 1910); 4) provided for a future reduction of the quota to 154,000. This law cut the quota for northern and western European

countries by 29%, but slashed the quota for southern and eastern Europe by 87%. Italy's quota, for example, was reduced from 42,057 persons per year to 3,845 persons per year. It also prohibited Japanese immigration to the U.S. thereby ending the Gentleman's Agreement.

- 1929 National Origins Act This act used 1920 as the quota base. It virtually cut immigration in half by limiting the total to 152, 574 persons per year. Relatively high quotas for such nations as England, Ireland, and Germany were usually half-filled, while thousands from nations like Italy and Poland waited for years in the tiny quota set for southern and eastern Europe.
- 1948 Displaced Persons Act made it possible for some 400,000 World War II refugees to come to America.
- 1952 Immigration & Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act) law which did little more than restate the old national origins quota system. The act codified and slightly amended existing immigration laws. It permitted the naturalization of Asians, previously ineligible. Perhaps reflecting the anti-Communist hysteria of the 1950s the act also gave the Attorney General authority to expel aliens considered "subversive" regardless of citizenship. This act became law over Truman's veto.
- 1953 Refugee Relief Act act which came to the rescue of some 214,000 people who had fled from the Communist countries of eastern Europe. Under this law 21,500 Hungarians fleeing their homeland after the failure of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution were admitted to the U.S.
- 1961 Cuban Refugee Program established by Pres. Kennedy, it paved the way for thousands of Cuban refugees from Communist Cuba to find asylum in the U.S.
- 1965 Immigration & Nationality Act of 1965
- 1) ordered elimination of the national origins quota system in favor of a world-wide quota blind to national origin. Immigration was redistributed by pooling unused quotas and making them available to oversubscribed nations on a first come, first served basis;
 - 2) a ceiling of 170,000 persons from outside the western hemisphere, and 120,000 for nations in the western hemisphere (these figures did not include dependents and close relatives);
 - 3) no more than 20,000 visas per year to any one nation;
 - 4) established an admissions system with 4 ranks of preference:
 - a) persons whose special skills should be "especially advantageous to the U.S.;"
 - b) unmarried children over 21 years of age of American citizens;
 - c) spouses and unmarried children of aliens living permanently in the U.S.;
 - d) other relatives of persons living in the U.S. and workers with "lesser skills" who could fill special labor needs.

*** An immigrant without relatives in the U.S. still had to prove that he would take a job that in no way

conflicted with American workers.

By the early 1970s the last traces of the national origins quota system had vanished. For the first time in U.S. history, a person from an Asian or African nation received the same consideration as a person from France or Germany.

- 1980 Refugee Act of 1980
- As countless refugees fled from their native countries - such as Cuba, Haiti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Afghanistan, and Vietnam - Congress enacted this act. It 1) defined refugees as people outside their native countries who are unwilling to return because of fear of persecution (this definition did not limit refugees to Communist-led nations only); 2) increased the number of refugees to be admitted annually to 50,000 - in addition to special programs for Indochinese and Cuban refugees; 3) empowered the President to admit additional refugees in emergency situations; 4) established the position of U.S. Coordinator of Refugee Affairs to administer the law.
- 1986 Immigration Reform & Control Act of 1986
- a) barred employers from hiring illegal immigrants; b) made it illegal for an employer to discriminate against legal immigrants; c) offered legal status, or amnesty, to immigrants who could prove that they had entered the U.S. illegally before January 1, 1982, and had resided here continuously since that time. For 5 years, such people (with certain exceptions based on age, disability, and pregnancy) would not be eligible for welfare, food stamps, and many other government benefits; d) offered amnesty to illegal immigrants who had worked in the U.S. for at least 90 days between May 1985 and May 1986; e) opened the way for people who benefited from the amnesties to become U.S. citizens; f) provided for the admission of up to 350,000 immigrants for seasonal farm work in the fiscal years 1990 to 1993, if a shortage of seasonal workers existed. Such immigrants could qualify for permanent residence status after 3 years; g) set aside \$1 billion/year for four years to help state governments provide public assistance, health care, and education to people who benefited from the amnesties.
- 1990 Immigration Act of 1990
- a) raised the overall maximum of legal immigrants from 500,000 to 700,000/year, dropping to 675,000 in 1995; b) The number of visas offered to immigrants with special skills (for example scientists, ministers, engineers, nurses, physical therapists, and athletes) was more than doubled to 130,000; c) The number of visas for low skilled workers was reduced from about 18,000 to 10,000/year; d) Each year 10,000 visas will be made available to immigrants who have large sums of money to invest in new businesses that provide jobs for ten or more Americans; e) Each year 40,000 "diversity visas" will be set aside for people from 35 countries (mainly in Europe) seen as adversely affected by the 1965 law. Of these visas, 40 percent are specifically for Irish immigrants; f) Each year 55,000 family members of those who gained legal status under the 1986 amnesty may be

admitted; g) The bill eased restrictions dating to the 1950s that barred entry to people such as Communists, homosexuals, and people with serious diseases; h) People from war torn El Salvador who were in the U.S. before the law passed could receive work permits and temporary "safe haven" status for 18 months; I) The bill allowed Filipino military veterans of WW II to become U.S. citizens. (The Philippines, an American commonwealth at the time of the war, became independent In 1947.); j) Beginning in 1995, the law provided for a total of 675,000 visas apportioned as follows: 480,000 to relatives of citizens and permanent resident aliens, 140,000 to workers with special skills, and 55,000 to people from nations that have sent relatively few immigrants to the U.S. in recent years.