

Immigration TIMELINE

Immigration Act Is Passed

→ 1819 →

The first significant federal immigration law sets standards for ships bringing immigrants to the U.S. Ship captains have to provide customs officials with a list of immigrants describing where they came from, where they are going, and their age, sex, and occupation. A year later, 120,000 immigrants arrive from Europe.

Irish family displaced by the potato famine, *Illustrated London News*, 1849

Photo: Wikimedia Commons



A Wave of Newcomers

→ 1840s →

Immigrants from around the world land in the United States. Poor crop harvests in Germany, political unrest in Europe and the Irish potato famine (1845-51) force them to leave their homes. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) ends the Mexican-American War and extends citizenship to the 80,000 Mexicans in Texas, California, and the Southwest. The California gold rush (1849) attracts immigrants from Europe, Australia, Latin America and China.

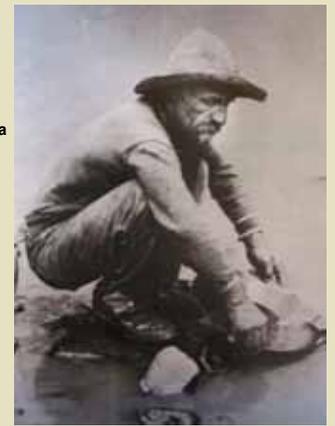
U.S.-Born Residents Are Citizens

→ 1868 →

The 14th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, making clear that all people born in the U.S., including former slaves, are citizens. The amendment voids the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision in which the Supreme Court said slaves were not citizens.

Panning for gold in California, 1849

Photo: Wikimedia Commons



Restrictions Imposed on Immigration

→ 1880s →

The U.S. population is 50 million at the start of the decade. More than 5.2 million immigrants enter the country through 1890. A large influx from China prompts the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which denies Chinese laborers entry into the U.S. and citizenship. The Immigration Act of 1882 levies a 50-cent tax on immigrants landing at U.S. ports and makes several categories of immigrants, including “lunatics,” ineligible for citizenship. Over time, the banned list includes, among others, convicts, prostitutes and polygamists. In 1886, France gives the Statue of Liberty to the U.S.

Ellis Island Immigration Center Opens

→ 1892 →

The New York center will process 12 million immigrants by the time it closes in 1954. On the West Coast, in 1910, the Angel Island Immigration Station opens in San Francisco Bay to control the flow of Asians into the country. These centers are run by the Bureau of Immigration, created in 1891 under the Treasury Department.



Dillingham Report Warns of Subversion

→ 1911 →

The Dillingham Commission publishes a 42-volume report warning that the “new” immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe threatens to subvert American society. Its recommendations pave the way for the Quota Acts of the 1920s. The first act, the National Origins Act of 1921, limits immigrants to 3 percent of each nationality present in the U.S. in 1910. The second act in 1924 changes the quota to 2 percent of each nationality based on numbers in the U.S. in 1890. The Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924 prohibits most immigrants from Asia.



Immigration stations at Ellis Island and Angel Island

Photos: Library of Congress

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The U.S. Border Patrol Established

1924

The U.S. Border Patrol is created, in large part to control Chinese immigration to the U.S. across the U.S.-Mexico border. Also, the Immigration and Naturalization Act imposes the first permanent numeric limits on immigration.



Logo of the U.S. Border Patrol
Photo: Library of Congress

Alien Registration Act Is Passed

1940

The federal law requires all immigrants over the age of 14 to be fingerprinted and registered. A decade later, all immigrants are required to report their addresses annually.

War Influences Immigration Laws

Mid-1940s

In the interest of unity among the allies in World War II, the Chinese Exclusion Laws are repealed. In 1946, new procedures ease the immigration of foreign-born wives, husbands and children of U.S. military personnel. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 allows 205,000 European refugees over two years, giving priority to those from the Baltic states. The law is intended to help victims of Nazi persecution or those fleeing persecution based on race, religion or politics. Later, 200,000 more refugees will be allowed in the country.



Satirical 1905 cartoon illustrating Chinese immigrants attempting to enter the U.S. using various disguises.

Photo: Library of Congress

Quota System Is Revised

1952

The Immigration and Nationalist Act, known as the McCarran-Walker Act, eliminates all race-based quotas and replaces them with purely nationality-based quotas. To enforce the quotas, the law creates the Immigration and Naturalization Service. However, the Immigration Act of 1965, known as the Hart-Celler Act, abolishes national origins quotas, establishing separate ceilings for the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. Categories of preference are based on family ties, critical skills, artistic excellence, and refugee status.

Immigrants Escape Unrest in Their Countries

1956-79

Refugees flee to the United States after upheaval in their countries: the failed 1956 Hungarian revolution against the Soviet Union; the 1959 Cuban revolution; the fall of Saigon in 1975, ending the Vietnam War; and in 1978, the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the fall of the Communist Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia.



Skulls of Khmer Rouge victims.

Photo: Adam Carr/
Wikimedia
Commons

Crackdown on Illegal Immigrants

1986

As pressure grows to curtail illegal immigration, Congress enacts the Immigration Control and Reform Act, supported by President Ronald Reagan. The sweeping reforms are supposed to tighten the border with Mexico, toughen criminal sanctions for employers who hire illegal immigrants, deny illegal immigrants federally funded welfare benefits, and offer amnesty to any immigrant who entered the country before 1982. The effort was viewed as a failure since the U.S. did not regain control of the border and the amnesty incentive drew more illegal immigrants.

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Diversity in America

→ 2000

The U.S. Census reports that the top ten countries of birth for America's foreign-born population are (in order): Mexico, China, Philippines, India, Vietnam, Cuba, Korea, Canada, El Salvador and Germany. In 2005, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that almost 15 million naturalized citizens and more than 20 million foreign-born noncitizens live in the U.S.

Terrorist Attacks Prompt Tougher Restrictions

→ 2001

After the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, the U.S. Patriot Act amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to broaden the scope of immigrants ineligible for admission or deportable because of terrorist activities. The new Department of Homeland Security replaces the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The Struggle Over Illegal Immigrants

→ 2004

President George W. Bush calls for an overhaul of the immigration laws, proposing a guest worker program that would "match willing foreign workers with willing American employers, when no Americans can be found to fill the jobs." Immigrants would be authorized as guest workers for three years, then required to return home. The legislation goes nowhere. The Secure Fence Act of 2006 authorizes construction of hundreds of miles of additional fencing along the southern border, more vehicle barriers, checkpoints and lighting, and increased use of advanced technology, such as cameras and satellites, to prevent illegal border crossings.



Image from the U.S. National Park Service of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

States Enact Tough Laws

→ 2010

Republicans and Democrats agree on the need for a sweeping change in federal immigration laws, but little is achieved on the controversial issue. In the absence of federal laws, state legislatures begin to combat illegal immigration with their own tough laws, such as restricting access to public benefits and driver's licenses and cracking down on human smuggling.



Peaceful demonstration against Arizona's proposed tougher immigration laws. Washington, D.C., May 1, 2010.

Photo: Arasmus Photo/Wikimedia Commons