

The first immigrants to the territory now the United States were from Western Europe. The first great migration began early in the 19th century when large numbers of Europeans left their homelands to escape the economic hardships resulting from the transformation of industry by the factory system and the simultaneous shift from small-scale to large-scale farming. At the same time, conflict, political oppression, and religious persecution caused a great many Europeans to seek freedom and security in the U.S.

The century following 1820 may be divided into three periods of immigration to the U.S. During the first period, from 1820 to 1860, most of the immigrants came from Great Britain, Ireland, and western Germany. In the second period, from 1860 to 1890, those countries continued to supply a majority of the immigrants; the Scandinavian nations provided a substantial minority. Afterwards the proportion of immigrants from northern and Western Europe declined rapidly. In the final period, from 1890 to 1910, fewer than one-third of the immigrants came from these areas. The majority of the immigrants were natives of Southern and Eastern Europe, with immigrants from Austria, Hungary, Italy, and Russia constituting more than half of the total. Until World War I, immigration had generally increased in volume every year. From 1905 to 1914 an average of more than a million immigrants entered the U.S. every year. With the start of the war, the volume declined sharply, and the annual average from 1915 to 1918 was little more than 250,000. In 1921 the number again rose; 800,000 immigrants were admitted. Thereafter the number declined in response to new conditions in Europe and to the limitations established by U.S. law.

The first measure restricting immigration enacted by Congress was a law in 1862 banning American vessels from transporting Chinese immigrants to the U.S.; 20 years later Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act excluding Chinese immigrants. (Immigration) In 1875, 1882, and 1892, acts passed by Congress provided for the examination of immigrants and for the exclusion from the U.S. of convicts, polygamists, prostitutes, persons suffering from contagious diseases, and persons liable to become public charges. The Alien Contract Labor Laws of 1885, 1887, 1888, and 1891 prohibited the immigration to the U.S. of persons entering the country to work under contracts made before their arrival; professional actors, artists, singers, lecturers, educators, ministers, and personal and domestic servants were exempt from this provision. (Immigration) Immigrant skilled laborers, under these laws, were permitted to enter the U.S. to work in new industries. A diplomatic agreement made in 1907 by the U.S. and Japan provided that the Japanese government would not issue passports to Japanese laborers intending to enter the U.S.; under the terms of this agreement, the U.S. government refrained until 1924 from enacting laws excluding Japanese aliens.

In 1917 Congress passed an immigration law that enlarged the classes of aliens excludable from the U.S.; its basic provisions were, with some changes, retained in later revisions of the immigration law. It imposed a literacy test and included an Asiatic Barred Zone to shut out Asians. Aliens unable to meet minimum mental, moral, physical, and economic standards were excluded, as were anarchists and other so-called "subversives". The Anarchist Act of 1918 expanded the provisions for the exclusion of subversive aliens. (Immigration)

After World War I, a marked increase in racism and the growth of isolationist sentiment in the U.S. led to demands for further restrictive legislation. In 1921 a congressional statute provided for a quota system for immigrants, whereby the number of aliens of any nationality admitted to the U.S. in a year could not exceed 3 percent of the number of foreign-born residents of that nationality living in the U.S. in 1910. The law applied to nations of Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Asian Russia, and certain islands in the Atlantic and Pacific.

In 1924, the basic immigration quotas were changed; the new law provided for annual immigration quotas for all countries from which immigrants might be admitted. Quotas were based on the desirability of various nationalities; aliens from

northern and Western Europe were considered more desirable than those from southern and Eastern Europe. Immigrants who fulfilled lawful residence requirements were exempt from quotas, as were alien wives, children, and some husbands of U.S. citizens.

In 1941 Congress passed an act providing for the denial of visas to aliens whose presence in the U.S. would endanger public safety. Immigration legislation passed after 1941 included repealing the laws barring Chinese from entering the U.S. and allowing their admission to the country in accordance with an annual quota. A federal law passed in 1945 authorized (for a limited time) the admission to the U.S., without regard to quota and physical and other standards, the wives and children of citizens serving in or honorably discharged from the armed forces of the U.S. during World War II.

A federal law of 1946 authorized the admission to the U.S., under annual quota, of immigrants from India. Legislation was enacted by Congress in 1948 to permit the immigration before July 1, 1950, of 202,000 European people driven from their homes in the years preceding World War II as a result of political or racial persecution and those forcibly transported from their homes during World War II.

Most of the laws relating to immigration were enacted by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. The Refugee Relief Act of 1953 made an additional allocation of places for the victims of war and disaster. The 1965 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act abolished the national-origin quotas and established an annual limitation of 170,000 visas for immigrants from eastern hemisphere countries. (Immigration) Another law, effective in 1968, provided for an annual limit of 120,000 immigrants from the western hemisphere, with visas available on a first-come, first-served basis. In 1977 an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act changed the quota to 290,000 immigrants worldwide, with a maximum of 20,000 for any particular country, thus abolishing separate limitations for each hemisphere. At the same time, a system was set up for western hemisphere immigrants, giving preference to those who are related to U.S. citizens or permanent resident aliens and to workers whose skills were needed in the U.S. The Refugee Act of 1980 reduced the worldwide quota to 270,000 persons, while retaining the preference system. Spouses, children, and parents of U.S. citizens are exempt from limitation, as are certain categories of special immigrants. In 1992 alone about 700,000 newcomers were accepted in the United States (The New Americans, 17)

In the 1980s concern about the surge of illegal aliens into the U.S. has led Congress to pass legislation aimed at curtailing illegal immigration. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 allows most illegal aliens who have resided in the U.S. continuously since January 1, 1982, to apply for legal status. In addition, the law prohibits employers from hiring illegal aliens and mandates penalties for violations.

Despite our long history of immigration and constant population flux, many Americans believe that it is time to curtail immigration to the U.S.. The increase in foreign born citizens is too large to ignore. Immigration generates 39 percent of the total population growth (Mandel, 114). Due to this increase, many Americans are becoming uneasy about new immigrants to the U.S.. In a Roper poll conducted by the organization Negative Population Growth, 83 percent of those interviewed favored a lower level of immigration; 70 percent of the people supported a level of 300,000 per year. (Pending Legislation) The largest cause for concern for most Americans appears to be the problem of illegal immigration.

Illegal immigration has become the scapegoat for increased unemployment. Almost two-thirds of Americans believe that "new immigrants joining the labor force drive down the wages." (Mandel, 119) However, entry of new immigrants has been shown to increase native wages, sustain the pace of economic growth, and revive some declining sectors. (Rumbaut, 615) Those most likely to benefit from this situation are also those most supportive of more restrictive measures. Higher than average support for a "zero immigration" policy was expressed by those without a high school diploma and incomes below \$15,000 per year. (Pending Legislation) Also, curiously enough, the highest level of support for tougher measures against illegal

aliens came from Midwesterners (85%). (Pending Legislation) Another popular misconception is that immigrants consume a disproportionate amount of social services. The difference in percentages consumed by natives and immigrants was less than 1% and immigrants actually generated a surplus of \$25 to \$30 billion (Rumbaut, 617).

Despite evidence to the contrary, many Americans still believe immigration to be harmful. This is simply not the case. As stated, legal immigrants provide a benefit not only to themselves, but also to native people. Though the problem of illegal immigration must be addressed, it should be done in such a way as not to discourage legal immigration. America was founded and populated by people from other countries. We must continue this if we expect to survive in the 21st century.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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