

## **Chronology: Changes in Immigration and Naturalization Laws (From the National Immigration Forum) and other sources**

1790 – Naturalization was authorized for "free white persons" who had resided in the United States for at least two years and swore loyalty to the U.S. Constitution.

1798 – The Alien and Sedition Acts allowed the President to deport any foreigner deemed dangerous. Imposed 14–year residency requirement for prospective citizens.

1802 – Residency requirement for prospective citizens set at 5 years.

1882 – The Chinese Exclusion Act suspended immigration by Chinese laborers for ten years. This was the first time the U.S. restricted immigration on the basis of race or national origin.

1891 - The Immigration Act of 1891 created the Immigration and Naturalization Service to administer the federal laws relating to the admission, exclusion and deportation of aliens and to provide for the naturalization of aliens lawfully residing in the U.S.

1906 - First language requirement was adopted for naturalization: ability to speak and understand English.

1917 - Literacy requirement for all new immigrants: ability to read 40 words in some language. Prohibited immigration from Asia, except Japan and the Philippines.

1921 - National-origins quota system was born. Admissions from each European country were limited to 3% of each foreign-born nationality in the 1910 census. The effect was to favor Northern Europeans at the expense of Southern and Eastern Europeans. Most Asians continued to be excluded.

1924 - Johnson-Reed Act preserved America's "racial" composition. Immigration was based on the ethnic makeup of the U.S. population as a whole in 1920.

1950 - The Internal Security Act barred admission to any foreigner who might engage in activities that would be prejudicial to the public interest or would endanger the welfare or safety of the United States. It permitted deportation of non-citizens who belong to the U.S. Communist Party or whose future activities might be "subversive to the national security."

1952 - The McCarran-Walter Act opened the door to numerous nationalities previously kept out on racial grounds. Naturalization required ability to read and write, as well as speak and understand English.

1965 - For the first time, Congress eliminated racial criteria from immigration laws, abolishing the national origins quota system and establishing a seven-category preference system based on family unification and skills. Each country, regardless of ethnicity, received an annual quota of 20,000.

1980 - The Refugee Act of 1980 set up the first permanent and systematic procedure for admitting refugees.

1986 - The Immigration Reform and Control Act gave amnesty to about three million undocumented residents but punished employers who hire persons who were here illegally. The purpose was to make it difficult for the undocumented to find a job. One side effect was employment discrimination against those who look or sound "foreign."

1990 - The Immigration Act of 1990 raised the limit for legal immigration to 700,000 people a year.

1996 - The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act toughened border enforcement, closed opportunities for undocumented immigrants to adjust their status, made it more difficult to gain asylum, expanded grounds for deporting immigrants, stripped immigrants of many due process rights and their access to the courts.

1996 - The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act made citizenship a condition of eligibility for public benefits for most immigrants; previously, legal immigrants had been eligible for benefits on terms similar to those of native-born citizens.

1998 - Some of the provisions of the previous law were withdrawn. Some public benefits were restored for some elderly and disabled immigrants.

2000 - The Legal Immigration Family Equity Act permitted some immigrants with family or employer sponsors to gain legal status. Congress also let severely disabled immigrants become citizens even if they could not understand the Oath of Allegiance.

2002 - President Bush's Fiscal Year 2003 Budget restored food stamp eligibility to documented immigrants who had been in the country for five years.

2002 - The Patriot Act amended the entrance criteria for all foreign nationals to include security and terrorist concerns, health-related grounds, criminal history, indigence, and previous removal.

