

Background Essay on Immigration Policy

National Origins Quota Act of 1924

The United States has debated immigration policy all the way back to its founding days. During periods of fear and tension the nation has often resorted to restricting immigration. One such example was the **Immigration Act of 1924**, which was signed into law on May 26, 1924 by President Calvin Coolidge. The aftermath of WWI featured both an economic recession and fears of communism. Restricting immigration seemed to make sense during this time of uncertainty.



This law also established the principle of **immigration quotas** based upon a person's nationality. It restricted the number of immigrants to the United States from a given country to 2% of that group's population in the nation. The new quota system was based on records from the 1890 census instead of current population numbers. This calculation favored those people from North-Western Europe, ensuring that the majority of immigration visas would be issued to immigrants from Britain, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia, instead of those from Eastern Europe or other areas of the world. The law completely excluded Arab and Asian immigrants, which infuriated the nation of Japan. It also frustrated many American citizens, such as Representative Robert H. Clancy, a Congressman from Detroit, Michigan, who called the Quota Act, "a racially discriminatory and un-American" policy.

Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act)

Immigration policy wasn't closely examined again until after WWII. New legislation was introduced in 1952 by Democrats Pat McCarran and Francis Walter. This McCarran-Walter Act was officially named the **Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952** and had several provisions. Perhaps most importantly, the Act continued the quota system put in place in 1924, this time basing quotas on the 1920 census. These quotas continued preferences for immigrants from Northern and Eastern European nations while greatly limiting immigrants from other parts of the world. The 1952 Act also encouraged immigrants who had special skills or who were relatives of American citizens.

The 1952 bill was passed during a time of anxiety in the United States. Since the end of WWII, the US had already become engaged in an ideological conflict with the Soviet Union. By 1952, Joseph McCarthy had launched his crusade against communists in the US government, Truman's loyalty program had been in effect for five years, and Truman and McCarran had already sparred with each other over the 1950 McCarran Internal Security Act. An essential goal of the proposed immigration law was to ensure that un-American or subversive individuals did not enter the United States. Under this new law, all immigrants would be screened for past participation in communist organizations.

Truman's Decision

The bill passed both houses of Congress during the spring of 1952. President Truman received considerable feedback over the next few weeks from American citizens on both sides of the immigration debate. Like today, diverse groups of Americans held widely different beliefs about the topic, some focused on concerns about national security and others motivated by humanitarian crises across the world in the wake of World War II. Truman had a tough decision to make, knowing that he would upset citizens no matter what stance he took. Look at the documents gathered and make your own conclusion. **Did the benefits of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 outweigh the costs for the American people?**

Year	Event/ Legislation	Impact
1882	Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882	1st federal immigration law suspended Chinese immigration for 10 years and barred Chinese in U.S. from citizenship.
1885	Contract Labor Law	Unlawful to import unskilled aliens from overseas as laborers. Regulations did not pertain to those crossing land borders.
1891	Bureau of Immigration established	Established under the Treasury Department, more classes of alien restricted including those who were monetarily assisted by others for their passage.
1892	Opening of Ellis Island	Open to screen immigrants entering on the East Coast. (Angel Island open in 1910, West Coast)
1917	U.S. Enters World War I	April 1917, U.S. enters World War I in response to the Zimmerman Note & violation of Sussex Pledge.
1917	Immigration Act of 1917	Literacy Test for individuals 16 or older, established "Asiatic Barred Zone," barring all immigrants from Asia.
1919	Red Scare/Palmer Raids	Social unrest after WWI led to the Palmer Raids of 1919 and 1920. This was took place during the Red Scare, an attempt to arrest foreign communists, leftists, and radicals, many of whom were subsequently deported.
1924	National Origins Quota Act of 1924	It established the principle of immigration quotas based upon a person's nationality. The new law restricted the number of immigrants from a given country to 2% of the number of residents from that same country living in the United States using the 1890 census. It restricted immigration from Southern Europe, Eastern Europe and from Asia.
1929	Stock Market Crash	Crash of the Stock Market on Wall Street, one of the causes of the Great Depression.
1939	World War II begins	Germany invades Poland, Sept, 1, 1939, beginning World War II. The U.S. will enter officially Dec. 8, 1941.
1940	Alien Regulatory Act	Required immigrants 14 or older to register with the federal government and be fingerprinted.
1945	End of World War II	The unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan.
1948	Displaced Persons Act	Open the emigration of 205,000 refugees over 2 years with priority to Baltic State refugees. Accepted as quota immigrants status.

1949	China falls to Communism	The People's Republic of China (PRC) was created on Oct. 1, 1949 thus ending the civil war between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party which broke out immediately following World War II. This led to the U.S. suspending diplomatic ties with China.
1950	Internal Security Act	Permits the deportation of immigrants who have shown to been a member of the Communist Party at any time of their life.
1952	Immigration & Nationality Act	Eliminated race as a barrier to immigration or citizenship.
1961	Berlin Wall	The Berlin Wall was a guarded concrete barrier that divided Berlin from 1961 to 1989. The Berlin Wall was the defining symbol of the Cold War, separating families and keeping the people from jobs and opportunity in the west
1965	Hart-Celler Act	Abolish national origins quotas, and established separate ceilings for the Eastern & Western Hemisphere. Categories: Family ties, Critical skills, artistic excellence, and refugee status.
1986	Immigration Reform & Control Act	Amnesty for many illegal aliens and sanctions for employers hiring illegals.
1990	Immigration Act of 1990	Limited unskilled workers to 10,000 a year, skilled labor requirements and immediate family reunify was a major goal.