



IN HISTORY: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

Time Line

Immigration Laws: Why These Matter

Immigration history is all about you. Laws passed more than two hundred years ago still have an impact on your life, your family, your hometown. How much do you know about your state's history? What do you know about your family's history? Where would you go to find some answers?

Immigration has been an important and contentious political issue since the founding of the United States. In the eighteenth century, federal law did not restrict the admission of most aliens, especially those from northern Europe. Some in government, however, were unhappy with this kind of open immigration policy. They responded by legislating a ban on importing slaves in order to discourage immigration from Africa and the Caribbean. The presence of other non-English-speaking groups also caused concern. For example, Benjamin Franklin was one of several politicians who reacted to the number of German-speaking immigrants then living in the eastern United States.

As the "open immigration policy" became increasingly unpopular in the eighteenth century, the federal government passed the Alien Act in 1798, the first national attempt to regulate immigration. This law allowed the president to deport any non-citizen who might be considered dangerous to the

United States for any reason. The law was abused, however, and some settlers were deported without just cause. The act was replaced by new legislation in 1800.

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