



IN HISTORY: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

Time Line

Restrictive Legislation: Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

As a response to the wave of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a new series of federal laws were enacted that severely restricted settlement in the United States. By the 1890s companies were forbidden to recruit workers from other countries. Even if an immigrant arrived in this country with a guarantee of work, with a note from a relative or a prospective employer who had recruited them in their home country, they could be deported with no right of appeal. Bills were also passed that required adult males to be able to read and write in their native languages, although many of these laws failed to become law until 1917.

Many of the anti-immigration laws targeted specific ethnic communities. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act suspended the immigration of Chinese laborers, who had played a major role in constructing a national railroad. This act was made permanent by Congress in 1902. In 1921 Congress passed the Emergency Immigration Act that established a complex quota system where “immigrants from any country could not exceed 3 percent of the number of persons of their nationality who had been in the United States in 1910.” This drastically reduced the number of new settlers from 800,000 in 1921 to approximately 300,000 in 1922. The law also clearly

avored immigration from northern Europe. By 1924 the National Origins Act was passed, banning the immigration of East Asians and restricting the number of immigrants, especially those from eastern European and Mediterranean countries, who were considered “undesirables.”

By 1925 there seemed to be an overwhelming public animosity toward immigration and a great deal of hostility toward newcomers themselves, especially those from Central America, and South America, Asia, Africa, and southern Europe.

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