

# Immigration Act of 1924

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The **Immigration Act of 1924**, or **Johnson–Reed Act**, including the **National Origins Act**, and **Asian Exclusion Act** (Pub.L. 68-139, 43 Stat. 153, enacted May 26, 1924), was a United States federal law that limited the annual number of immigrants who could be admitted from any country to 2% of the number of people from that country who were already living in the United States in 1890, down from the 3% cap set by the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921, according to the Census of 1890. It superseded the 1921 Emergency Quota Act. The law was aimed at further restricting the Southern and Eastern Europeans, mainly Jews fleeing persecution in Poland and Russia, who were immigrating in large numbers starting in the 1890s, as well as prohibiting the immigration of Middle Easterners, East Asians and Indians. According to the U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian, "In all its parts, the most basic purpose of the 1924 Immigration Act was to preserve the ideal of American homogeneity."<sup>[1]</sup> Congressional opposition was minimal.



President Coolidge signs the immigration act on the White House South Lawn along with appropriation bills for the Veterans Bureau. John J. Pershing is on the President's right.

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## Provisions

The Immigration Act made permanent the basic limitations on immigration into the United States established in 1921 and modified the National Origins Formula established then. In conjunction with the Immigration Act of 1917, it governed American immigration policy until the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which revised it completely.

For the next three years, until June 30, 1927, the 1924 Act set the annual quota of any nationality at 2% of the number of foreign-born persons of such nationality resident in the United States in 1890. That revised formula reduced total immigration from 357,803 in 1923–24 to 164,667 in 1924–25. The law's impact varied widely by country. Immigration from Great Britain and Ireland fell 19%, while immigration from Italy fell more than 90%.<sup>[2]</sup>

The Act provided that beginning July 1, 1927, the formula would no longer use a percentage. As of that date, total immigration would be limited to 150,000, with the proportion of the total admitted from any country based on that country's representation in the U.S. population according to the 1920 Census. The change from 2% to 150,000 planned for 1927 was later postponed to July 1, 1929.

The Act established preferences under the quota system for certain relatives of U.S. residents, including their unmarried children under 21, their parents, and spouses aged 21 and over. It also preferred immigrants aged 21 and

over who were skilled in agriculture, as well as their wives and dependent children under age 16. Non-quota status was accorded to: wives and unmarried children under 18 of U.S. citizens; natives of Western Hemisphere countries, with their families; non-immigrants; and certain others. Subsequent amendments eliminated certain elements of this law's inherent discrimination against women.

The 1924 Act also established the "consular control system" of immigration, which divided responsibility for immigration between the State Department and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. It mandated that no alien should be allowed to enter the United States without a valid immigration visa issued by an American consular officer abroad.

It provided that no alien ineligible to become a citizen could be admitted to the United States as an immigrant. This was aimed primarily at Japanese and Chinese aliens.

It imposed fines on transportation companies who landed aliens in violation of U.S. immigration laws.

It defined the term "immigrant" and designated all other alien entries into the United States as "non-immigrant", that is, temporary visitors. It established classes of admission for such non-immigrants.

## History

Restriction of Southern and Eastern European immigration was first proposed in 1909 by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge.<sup>[3]</sup> Congressman Albert Johnson and Senator David Reed were the two main architects. In the wake of intense lobbying, the Act passed with strong congressional support.<sup>[4]</sup> There were nine dissenting votes in the Senate<sup>[5]</sup> and a handful of opponents in the House, the most vigorous of whom was freshman Brooklyn Representative Emanuel Celler. Over the succeeding four decades, Celler made the repeal of the Act his personal crusade.

Proponents of the Act sought to establish a distinct American identity by favoring native-born Americans over Southern and Eastern Europeans in order to "maintain the racial preponderance of the basic strain on our people and thereby to stabilize the ethnic composition of the population".<sup>[6][7]</sup> Reed told the Senate that earlier legislation "disregards entirely those of us who are interested in keeping American stock up to the highest standard – that is, the people who were born here".<sup>[8]</sup> Southern and Eastern Europeans, he believed, arrive sick and starving and therefore less capable of contributing to the American economy, and unable to adapt to American culture.<sup>[6]</sup>

Some of the law's strongest supporters were influenced by Madison Grant and his 1916 book, *The Passing of the Great Race*. Grant was a eugenicist and an advocate of the racial hygiene theory. His data purported to show the superiority of the founding Northern European races. Most proponents of the law were rather concerned with upholding an ethnic status quo and avoiding competition with foreign workers.<sup>[9]</sup> Samuel Gompers, a Jewish immigrant and founder of the AFL, supported the Act because he opposed the cheap labor that immigration represented, despite the fact that the Act would sharply reduce Jewish immigration.<sup>[10]</sup>

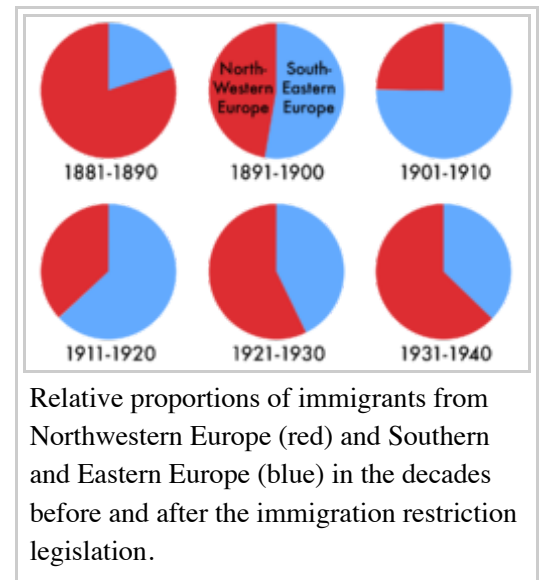
Though the law's quota system targeted immigrants based on their nation of origin rather than ethnicity or religion, Jewish immigration was a central concern. Hearings about the legislation cited the radical Jewish population of New York's Lower East Side as the prototype of immigrants who could never be assimilated.<sup>[11]</sup> The law sharply curtailed immigration from those countries that were the homelands of the vast majority of the Jews in America, almost 75% of whom came from Russia alone.<sup>[12]</sup> Because Eastern European immigration only became substantial in the final decades of the 19th century, the law's use of the population of the U.S. in 1890 as the basis for calculating quotas effectively made mass migration from Eastern Europe, the home of the vast majority of the world's Jews, impossible.<sup>[13]</sup>

# Results

The Act controlled "undesirable" immigration by establishing quotas. The Act barred specific origins from the Asia-Pacific Triangle, which included Japan, China, the Philippines (then under U.S. control), Siam (Thailand), French Indochina (Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia), Singapore (then a British colony), Korea, Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Burma, India, Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Malaya (mainland part of Malaysia).<sup>[14]</sup> Based on the Naturalization Act of 1790, these immigrants, being non-white, were not eligible for naturalization, and the Act forbade further immigration of any persons ineligible to be naturalized.<sup>[14]</sup> The Act set no limits on immigration from the Latin American countries.<sup>[15]</sup>

In the 10 years following 1900, about 200,000 Italians immigrated annually. With the imposition of the 1924 quota, 4,000 per year were allowed. By contrast, the annual quota for Germany after the passage of the Act was over 57,000. Some 86% of the 155,000 permitted to enter under the Act were from Northern European countries, with Germany, Britain, and Ireland having the highest quotas. So restrictive were the new quotas for immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe, that in 1924 more Italians, Czechs, Yugoslavs, Greeks, Lithuanians, Hungarians, Poles, Portuguese, Romanians, Spaniards, Chinese, and Japanese left the U.S. than arrived as immigrants.<sup>[16]</sup>

The quotas remained in place with minor alterations until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.



## See also

- Anti-Italianism
- Eugenics in the United States
- History of laws concerning immigration and naturalization in the United States
- Leslie Charteris, specifically exempted from the provisions of the Act
- List of United States Immigration Acts
- Racial equality proposal
- White Australia policy
- Yellow Peril

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## External links

- Statistics of who was allowed in after the Immigration Act of 1924 (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5078/>)
- "'Shut the Door': A Senator Speaks for Immigration Restriction" (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5080>) – transcript of speech given before Congress by Sen. Ellison D. Smith, April 9, 1924
- Eugenics Laws Restricting Immigration (<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay9text.html>)
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Categories: 1924 in international relations | 1924 in law | 1924 in the United States | 68th United States Congress | Anti-Asian sentiment | Antisemitism in the United States | Discrimination law in the United States | History of immigration to the United States | History of the United States (1918–1945) | United States federal immigration and nationality legislation | United States repealed legislation

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