

Chronology of Immigration Laws

May 17, 6:20 PM EDT

Brief chronology of U.S. immigration laws:

-1882 Chinese Exclusion Act: Barred the entry of any Chinese for 10 years, made permanent in 1904 until it was rescinded in 1943.

-1921 Quota Act: Established first immigration quotas.

-1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act: Enacted by Congress overriding a veto by President Truman. Established the basic body of immigration law used today. Reaffirmed a quota system for new immigrants based on their national origins; established preferences for immigrants based on education, skills and relatives already living in U.S.

-1965 Hart-Celler Act: Replaced immigration system based on national origins and in place since 1920s with system designed to unite families. The change shifted the origin of most immigrants from Europe to Asia and Latin America. Limited available visas.

-1980 Refugee Act: Established U.S. policy on admission of refugees and defined refugees according to U.N norms.

-1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act: Provided amnesty and temporary status to all illegal aliens who had lived in the United States continuously since before Jan. 1, 1982; extended a separate, more lenient amnesty to farmworkers; imposed sanctions on employers who knowingly hire illegal aliens; increased inspection and enforcement at U.S. borders.

-1990 Immigration Act: Established limits on immigration but also increased available visas; continued reunification of families as a goal of immigration policy; increased the number of immigrants admitted for employment; gave higher preference to professionals and highly skilled immigrants; provided for admission to U.S. of immigrants from "underrepresented" countries.

-1996 Illegal Immigration and Immigrant Responsibility Act: Mainly an enforcement measure. Doubled the size of the Border Patrol to 10,000 agents over five years; required construction of 14 miles of fencing at key points on the U.S.-Mexico border; toughened penalties for smuggling and document fraud; tightened sanctions on employers of illegal immigrants; denied government benefits to non-citizens; toughened refugee and asylum provisions; gave immigration officials authority for expedited removal to immediately deport a foreigner at a port of entry; denied public benefits to non-citizens.

-2000 Legal Immigration Family Equity Act: Allowed illegal immigrants married to a U.S. citizen and in the country before Dec. 21, 2000, to apply for legal permanent residency after paying a \$1,000 fine.

-2006 Secure Fence Act - Requires construction of at least 700 miles of fencing along U.S. Mexico border.

