



△ 1965 The Immigration and Nationality Act abolishes quotas based on national origins, giving preference to skilled workers and professionals. An influx of Asian and Latin American immigrants arrives over the next 40 years.

1921 Congress passes the National Origins Act setting immigration quotas according to nationality. It allows larger quotas for Northern Europeans and smaller ones for Southern and Eastern Europeans.

1986 The Immigration Reform and Control Act makes it illegal to knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

2001 In response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the USA Patriot Act tightens immigration, putting it under the control of the Department of Homeland Security.

△ 2007 Hostility toward immigrants increases in post-9/11 America. Congress fails to pass a bill that would have put many illegal immigrants on a path to citizenship. Washington authorizes the construction of 700 miles of additional border fence, bringing the total to about 800 miles of fence along the 2,000-mile U.S.-Mexico border.

2008 During his presidential campaign, Barack Obama says he favors a path to citizenship that includes learning English and paying fines for entering the county illegally. Obama also supports a guest-worker program and increased penalties for employers who hire illegal immigrants.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: 'THE IMMIGRANTS,' PAINTING BY ELLEN BERNARD THOMPSON VIA GRANGER COLLECTION; ART RESOURCE, NY.; JACOB RIIS VIA GRANGER COLLECTION; GRANGER COLLECTION; DAVID MCNEWE/BETTY IMAGES; KAREN KASMAUSKI/CORBIS

had spread in Europe, particularly after the Russian Revolution in 1917. Many Americans also feared that a large pool of immigrant workers would drive down wages.

Immediately following World War I, “there was just this fear that millions of people were going to pour in,” says Mae Ngai, a historian at Columbia University in New York. “You could read the discussion from the 1910s and think you were looking at something from today—if you just took out ‘Italians’ and put in ‘Mexicans.’”

IMMIGRATION QUOTAS

In the 1920s, Congress imposed quotas that sharply reduced the number of immigrants allowed in, and gave preference to Northern Europeans in an attempt to re-create the ethnic profile of 19th-century America. Quotas worked against Southern and Eastern Europeans, and during World War II, prevented millions of Jews and other refugees from escaping the Nazis.

In 1965, spurred in part by the civil rights movement, the U.S. eliminated quotas altogether, leading to an influx of Asian and Latin American immigrants.

Today, the U.S. is in the midst of its fourth great wave of immigration. (The first three occurred in roughly the 1850s, the 1880s, and the early 1900s.) And this could turn out to be the largest one of all: The Pew Research Center projects that foreign-born Americans will exceed 15 percent of the

population by 2025, breaking a century-old record.

According to the Census report, the oldest foreign-born Americans today are from Europe, with a median age of about 60; Somalis, with a median age of about 27, are the youngest.

Indians are the best-educated newcomers—74 percent have bachelor’s degrees. They are also the highest earners among immigrants, with a median household income of about \$91,000.

Immigrants from Somalia and the Dominican Republic have the lowest household incomes. (The overall median income for the foreign born was \$47,000 compared with \$51,000 for the total U.S. population.)

About 52 percent of foreign-born residents speak English less than very well. Ninety-seven percent of immigrants from Mexico and the Dominican Republic do not speak English at home.

As with the immigrants who arrived more than a century ago, it is usually the second generation that becomes more assimilated. A recent decade-long study of adult children of immigrants in New York found that they are overwhelmingly fluent in English, are entering the mainstream, and are doing better than their parents in terms of education and earning.

The study, by sociologists at Harvard and the City University of New York, found that even poor, uneducated immigrants have “shown that they have the drive, ambition, courage, and strength to move from one nation to another”—and they pass that strength and determination on to their children. ●