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An act to limit the migration of aliens into the United States

"The annual quota of any nationality shall be 2 per centum of the number of foreign-born individuals of such nationality resident in continental United States as determined by the United States census of 1890, but the minimum quota of any nationality shall be 100."

In 1924, the U.S. Congress passed a law to limit immigration into the United States. The law—the Immigration Act of 1924 (also called the National Origins Act)—reflected worries that too many immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were flooding into the country. Many of these immigrants were Roman Catholics. Many Americans worried that the newcomers would change the nature of the population, which had long been made up of Protestants, whose ancestors came from northern Europe. The law brought to an end four decades of almost unlimited mass immigration.

The act required immigrants to obtain permission to come to the United States in advance of leaving their native countries. The law also specified how many immigrants would be allowed to come from each country. The effect of the law was to limit the number of immigrants from southern European countries like Italy, while allowing almost free immigration from northern European countries like Britain or Germany. The law also stopped all immigration from Japan. (Immigration from another Asian country, China, had been barred in 1882.)

U.S. senator David Reed (1880–1953) of Pennsylvania, who helped write the bill, wrote in the *New York Times* in 1925 that "there has come about a general realization of the fact that the races of men who have been coming to us in recent years are wholly dissimilar to the native-born Americans; that they are untrained in self-government—a faculty [ability] that it has taken the Northwestern Europeans many centuries to acquire. America was beginning also to smart [ache] under the irritation of her 'foreign colonies'—those groups of aliens [foreign-born citizens], either in city slums or in country districts, who speak a foreign language and live a foreign life, and who want neither to learn our common speech nor to share our common life. From all this has grown the conviction that it was best for America that our incoming immigrants should hereafter be of the same races as those of us who are already here, so that each year's immigration should so far as possible be a miniature America, resembling in national origins the persons who are already settled in our country."

Reed went on to say: "It is true that 75 per cent of our immigration will hereafter come from Northwestern Europe; but it is fair that it should do so, because 75 per cent of us who are now here owe our origin to immigrants from those same countries."

In order to achieve what Reed called "a miniature America," the 1924 law specified that the number of immigrants from any one country would be limited to the number equal to 2 percent of existing Americans from each country as of 1890. In practice, since most Americans in 1890 had ancestors from northern Europe, the law meant that far more immigrants would be permitted from England and Germany, for example, than from Italy, Greece, or other countries of southern and eastern Europe whose citizens had not come in large numbers before 1890.

Things to remember while reading an excerpt from the Immigration Act of 1924:

- The 1924 Immigration Act limited the total number of immigrants to 165,000 people a year, less than a fifth of the number who had immigrated each year in the years before World War I (1914–19). The total number

(Austria, Belgium, Britain, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Holland, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland) was 142,483, or 86 percent of the total. By contrast, the total number of quotas for southern and eastern Europe (including Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, and Yugoslavia) was 18,439, or 11 percent of the total. A third, tiny quota of 3,745 was set aside for people from the entire continent of Africa, the Middle East region, and countries in the Pacific, such as Australia and New Zealand.

- The quota for Italian immigrants under the 1924 law was 3,845. In the period from 1900 through 1910, an average of 200,000 Italians had emigrated to the United States each year.
- The 1924 Act was not the first effort to limit immigration. A 1917 immigration law had barred a broad range of people, including mentally handicapped adults, psychologically impaired individuals, alcoholics, homeless people, individuals with tuberculosis (an often fatal lung disease) or serious contagious diseases, convicted criminals, polygamists (those who have more than one wife at a time), and anarchists (those against a formal government and in favor of small voluntary associations). In 1921, a similar immigration law had limited immigrants from each country to the number equal to 3 percent of the number of people of that nationality living in the United States in 1900. The intent of the 1924 act was to limit immigration even further and, by basing quotas on the number of people living in the United States in 1890, to favor countries of northern Europe even more.

Excerpt from the Immigration Act of 1924

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act may be cited as the "Immigration Act of 1924."

Section 2.

(a) A consular officer upon the application of any immigrant (as defined in section 3) may (under the conditions hereinafter prescribed and subject to the limitations prescribed in this Act or regulations made thereunder as to the number of immigration visas which may be issued by such officer) issue to such immigrant an immigration visa which shall consist of one copy of the application provided for in section 7, visaed by such consular officer. Such visa shall specify (1) the nationality of the immigrant; (2) whether he is a quota immigrant [defined in an unexcerpted passage as, simply, "any immigrant who is not a non-quota immigrant"] ... or a non-quota immigrant (as defined in section 4); (3) the date on which the validity of the immigration visa shall expire; and such additional information necessary to the proper enforcement of the immigration laws and the naturalization laws as may be by regulations prescribed.

(b) The immigrant shall furnish two copies of his photograph to the consular officer. One copy shall be permanently attached by the consular officer to the immigration visa and the other copy shall be disposed of as may be by regulations prescribed.

(c) The validity of an immigration visa shall expire at the end of such period, specified in the immigration visa, not exceeding four months, as shall be by regulations prescribed. In the case of an immigrant arriving in the United States by water, or arriving by water in foreign contiguous territory on a continuous voyage to the United States, if the vessel, before the expiration of the validity of his immigration visa, departed from the last port outside the United States and outside foreign contiguous territory at which the immigrant embarked, and if the immigrant proceeds on a continuous voyage to the United States, then, regardless of the time of his arrival in the United States, the validity of his immigration visa shall not be considered to have expired.

(d) If an immigrant is required by any law, or regulations or orders made pursuant to law, to secure the visa of his passport by a consular officer before being permitted to enter the United States, such immigrant shall not be required to secure any other visa of his passport than the immigration visa issued under this Act, but a record of the number and date of his immigration visa shall be noted on his passport without charge therefor. This subdivision shall not apply to an immigrant who is relieved, under subdivision (b) of section 13, from obtaining an immigration visa.

the date, place of issuance, and number of the immigration visa of each immigrant. The immigrant shall surrender his immigration visa to the immigration officer at the port of inspection, who shall at the time of inspection indorse on the immigration visa the date, the port of entry, and the name of the vessel, if any, on which the immigrant arrived. The immigration visa shall be transmitted forthwith by the immigration officer in charge at the port of inspection to the Department of Labor under regulations prescribed by the Secretary of Labor.

(f) No immigration visa shall be issued to an immigrant if it appears to the consular officer, from statements in the application, or in the papers submitted therewith, that the immigrant is inadmissible to the United States under the immigration laws, nor shall such immigration visa be issued if the application fails to comply with the provisions of this Act, nor shall such immigration visa be issued if the consular officer knows or has reason to believe that the immigrant is inadmissible to the United States under the immigration laws.

(g) Nothing in this Act shall be construed to entitle an immigrant, to whom an immigration visa has been issued, to enter the United States, if, upon arrival in the United States, he is found to be inadmissible to the United States under the immigration laws. The substance of this subdivision shall be printed conspicuously upon every immigration visa.

(h) A fee of \$9 shall be charged for the issuance of each immigration visa, which shall be covered into the Treasury as miscellaneous receipts.

DEFINITION OF IMMIGRANT.

Section 3.

When used in this Act the term "immigrant" means an alien departing from any place outside the United States destined for the United States, except (1) a government official, his family, attendants, servants, and employees, (2) an alien visiting the United States temporarily as a tourist or temporarily for business or pleasure, (3) an alien in continuous transit through the United States, (4) an alien lawfully admitted to the United States who later goes in transit from one part of the United States to another through foreign contiguous territory, (5) a bona fide alien seaman serving as such on a vessel arriving at a port of the United States and seeking to enter temporarily the United States solely in the pursuit of his calling as a seaman, and (6) an alien entitled to enter the United States solely to carry on trade under and in pursuance of the provisions of a present existing treaty of commerce and navigation.

NON-QUOTA IMMIGRANTS.

Section 4.

When used in this Act the term "non-quota immigrant" means

(a) An immigrant who is the unmarried child under 18 years of age, or the wife, of a citizen of the United States who resides therein at the time of the filing of a petition under section 9;

(b) An immigrant previously lawfully admitted to the United States, who is returning from a temporary visit abroad;

(c) An immigrant who was born in the Dominion of Canada, Newfoundland, the Republic of Mexico, the Republic of Cuba, the Republic of Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Canal Zone, or an independent country of Central or South America, and his wife, and his unmarried children under 18 years of age, if accompanying or following to join him;

(d) An immigrant who continuously for at least two years immediately preceding the time of his application for admission to the United States has been, and who seeks to enter the United States solely for the purpose of, carrying on the vocation of minister of any religious denomination, or professor of a college, academy, seminary, or university; and his wife, and his unmarried children under 18 years of age, if accompanying or following to join

for the purpose of study at an accredited school, college, academy, seminary, or university, particularly designated by him and approved by the Secretary of Labor, which shall have agreed to report to the Secretary of Labor the termination of attendance of each immigrant student, and if any such institution of learning fails to make such reports promptly the approval shall be withdrawn....

Section 11.

(a) The annual quota of any nationality shall be 2 per centum of the number of foreign-born individuals of such nationality resident in continental United States as determined by the United States census of 1890, but the minimum quota of any nationality shall be 100.

(b) The annual quota of any nationality for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1927, and for each fiscal year thereafter, shall be a number which bears the same ratio to 150,000 as the number of inhabitants in continental United States in 1920 having that national origin (ascertained as hereinafter provided in this section) bears to the number of inhabitants in continental United States in 1920, but the minimum quota of any nationality shall be 100.

(c) For the purpose of subdivision (b) national origin shall be ascertained by determining as nearly as may be, in respect of each geographical area which under section 12 is to be treated as a separate country (except the geographical areas specified in subdivision (c) of section 4) the number of inhabitants in continental United States in 1920 whose origin by birth or ancestry is attributable to such geographical area. Such determination shall not be made by tracing the ancestors or descendants of particular individuals, but shall be based upon statistics of immigration and emigration, together with rates of increase of population as shown by successive decennial United States censuses, and such other data as may be found to be reliable.

(d) For the purpose of subdivisions (b) and (c) the term "inhabitants in continental United States in 1920" does not include (1) immigrants from the geographical areas specified in subdivision (c) of section 4 or their descendants, (2) aliens ineligible to citizenship or their descendants, (3) the descendants of slave immigrants, or (4) the descendants of American aborigines.

(e) The determination provided for in subdivision (c) of this section shall be made by the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Secretary of Labor, jointly. In making such determination such officials may call for information and expert assistance from the Bureau of the Census. Such officials shall, jointly, report to the President the quota of each nationality, determined as provided in subdivision (b), and the President shall proclaim and make known the quotas so reported. Such proclamation shall be made on or before April 1, 1927.

(f) There shall be issued to quota immigrants of any nationality (1) no more immigration visas in any fiscal year than the quota for such nationality, and (2) in any calendar month of any fiscal year no more immigration visas than 10 per centum of the quota for such nationality, except that if such quota is less than 300 the number to be issued in any calendar month shall be prescribed by the Commissioner General, with the approval of the Secretary of Labor, but the total number to be issued during the fiscal year shall not be in excess of the quota for such nationality.

(g) Nothing in this Act shall prevent the issuance (without increasing the total number of immigration visas which may be issued) of an immigration visa to an immigrant as a quota immigrant even though he is a non-quota immigrant.

NATIONALITY.

Section 12.

(a) For the purposes of this Act nationality shall be determined by country of birth, treating as separate countries the colonies, dependencies, or self-governing dominions, for which separate enumeration was made in the United States census of 1890; except that (1) the nationality of a child under twenty-one years of age not born in the United States, accompanied by its alien parent not born in the United States, shall be determined by the country of birth of such parent if such parent is entitled to an immigration visa, and the nationality of a child under twenty-

shall be determined by the country of birth of the father if the father is entitled to an immigration visa; and (2) if a wife is of a different nationality from her alien husband and the entire number of immigration visas which may be issued to quota immigrants of her nationality for the calendar month has already been issued, her nationality may be determined by the country of birth of her husband if she is accompanying him and he is entitled to an immigration visa, unless the total number of immigration visas which may be issued to quota immigrants of the nationality of the husband for the calendar month has already been issued. An immigrant born in the United States who has lost his United States citizenship shall be considered as having been born in the country of which he is a citizen or subject, or if he is not a citizen or subject of any country, then in the country from which he comes.

(b) The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Secretary of Labor, jointly, shall, as soon as feasible after the enactment of this Act, prepare a statement showing the number of individuals of the various nationalities resident in continental United States as determined by the United States census of 1890, which statement shall be the population basis for the purposes of subdivision (a) of section 11....

EXCLUSION FROM UNITED STATES.

Section 13.

(a) No immigrant shall be admitted to the United States unless he (1) has an unexpired immigration visa or was born subsequent to the issuance of the immigration visa of the accompanying parent, (2) is of the nationality specified in the visa in the immigration visa [sic], (3) is a non-quota immigrant if specified in the visa in the immigration visa [sic] as such, and (4) is otherwise admissible under the immigration laws.

(b) In such classes of cases and under such conditions as may be by regulations prescribed immigrants who have been legally admitted to the United States and who depart therefrom temporarily may be admitted to the United States without being required to obtain an immigration visa.

(c) No alien ineligible to citizenship shall be admitted to the United States unless such alien (1) is admissible as a non-quota immigrant under the provisions of subdivision (b), (d), or (e) of section 4, or (2) is the wife, or the unmarried child under 18 years of age, of an immigrant admissible under such subdivision (d), and is accompanying or following to join him, or (3) is not an immigrant as defined in section 3.

(d) The Secretary of Labor may admit to the United States any otherwise admissible immigrant not admissible under clause (2) or (3) of subdivision (a) of this section, if satisfied that such inadmissibility was not known to, and could not have been ascertained by the exercise of reasonable diligence by, such immigrant prior to the departure of the vessel from the last port outside the United States and outside foreign contiguous territory or, in the case of an immigrant coming from foreign contiguous territory, prior to the application of the immigrant for admission.

(e) No quota immigrant shall be admitted under subdivision (d) if the entire number of immigration visas which may be issued to quota immigrants of the same nationality for the fiscal year has already been issued. If such entire number of immigration visas has not been issued, then the Secretary of State, upon the admission of a quota immigrant under subdivision (d), shall reduce by one the number of immigration visas which may be issued to quota immigrants of the same nationality during the fiscal year in which such immigrant is admitted; but if the Secretary of State finds that it will not be practicable to make such reduction before the end of such fiscal year, then such immigrant shall not be admitted.

(f) Nothing in this section shall authorize the remission or refunding of a fine, liability to which has accrued under section 16.

DEPORTATION

Section 14.

under this Act to enter the United States, or to have remained therein for a longer time than permitted under this Act or regulations made thereunder, shall be taken into custody and deported in the same manner as provided for in sections 19 and 20 of the Immigration Act of 1917: Provided, That the Secretary of Labor may, under such conditions and restrictions as to support and care as he may deem necessary, permit permanently to remain in the United States, any alien child who, when under sixteen years of age was heretofore temporarily admitted to the United States and who is now within the United States and either of whose parents is a citizen of the United States....

What happened next ...

President Calvin Coolidge (1872–1933; served 1923–29) signed an order implementing the 1924 Act and laying out the specific quotas for each country. The quotas were:

Afghanistan	100
Albania	100
Andorra	100
Arabian peninsula	100
Armenia	124
Australia	121
Austria	785
Belgium	512
Bhutan	100
Bulgaria	100
Cameroon (British)	100
Cameroon (French)	100
China	100
Czechoslovakia	3,073
Danzig, Free City of	228
Denmark	2,789
Egypt	100
Estonia	124
Ethiopia (Abyssinia)	100
Finland	170
France	3,954
Germany	51,227
Great Britain and Northern Ireland	34,007
Greece	100
Hungary	473
Iceland	100
India	100
Iraq (Mesopotamia)	100
Irish Free State	28,567
Italy	3,845
Japan	100
Latvia	142
Liberia	100
Liechtenstein	100

Luxemburg	100
Monaco	100
Morocco	100
Muscat (Oman)	100
Nauru	100
Nepal	100
Netherlands	1,648
New Zealand	100
Norway	6,453
New Guinea	100
Palestine	100
Persia	100
Poland	5,982
Portugal	503
Ruanda and Urundi	100
Rumania	603
Russia, European and Asiatic	2,248
Samoa, Western	100
San Marino	100
Siam	100
South Africa, Union of	100
South West Africa	100
Spain	131
Sweden	9,561
Switzerland	2,081
Syria and The Lebanon	100
Tanganyika	100
Togoland (British)	100
Togoland (French)	100
Turkey	100
Yap	100
Yugoslavia	671

Did you know ...

- The Immigration Act of 1924 was especially offensive to Japan. The law did not permit anyone who was ineligible to become a citizen to move to the United States. This included anyone from Asia, since the nation's first immigration law, passed in 1790, had limited citizenship to "white" people. Asians had already been found not to be "white" by several court decisions. The government of Japan had voluntarily limited immigration to the United States under an informal "Gentleman's Agreement" in 1907 and felt offended that this agreement was canceled by barring all Japanese immigration without consultation.

For More Information

Books

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