

## CHRONOLOGY OF U.S. IMMIGRATION LAWS, 1789-1989

**1789** U.S. Constitution gives Congress the sole power to encourage or limit immigration.

**1790** Congress passes a law to limit citizenship by naturalization to free, white persons.

**1870** Congress passes a law allowing people born in Africa or of African descent to become U.S. citizens. Asians can't become citizens.

**1882** Congress passes the Chinese Exclusion Act, which denies citizenship by naturalization to the Chinese.

**1907** President Theodore Roosevelt signs the "Gentlemen's Agreement" with Japan to limit Japanese immigration to the United States.

**1924** Congress passes the Immigration Act, which sets immigration quotas based on the number of people from a given country living in the United States in 1890. This law – combined with the law of 1870 – effectively halts immigration of nonwhites to the United States. It also prevents large numbers of Jews from fleeing Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.

**1943** Congress repeals the Chinese Exclusion Act.

**1952** Congress passes the McCarran-Walter Act, which gives the right of citizenship to all immigrants, including Asians. It also establishes a rigid quota system in which most Asian and Middle Eastern countries are allowed only 100 immigrants per. country per year. European countries, on the other hand, are given more

liberal quotas. Germany, for instance, is allowed about 2,500 immigrants per year; Italy is allowed about 6,000 and France about 3,000.

**1965** Congress passes another immigration act called Public Law 89-236, which eliminates the quota system established in 1952. Under this law, 20,000 immigrants per country per year are allowed to immigrate from most Asian, African and Middle Eastern nations. The law also establishes a new system of preferences for selecting who from each country can come to the United States. For example, first preference is given to a son or daughter of an American citizen; last preference is given to a refugee.

**1980** Congress passes the Refugee Act of 1980, which allows more refugees to enter the country. It also gives the president the power to admit additional refugees in an emergency.

**1986** Congress passes the Immigration Reform and Control Act to try to decrease the number of illegal immigrants entering the United States. It grants amnesty to illegal aliens who have been in the United States since January 1982, and establishes fines to employers who hire illegal immigrants.

**1990** Congress passes a new immigration bill that increases the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States and gives greater preference to professionals, investors, skilled workers and immigrants from Europe and Africa.

Sources: Tricia Knoll, *Becoming Americans: Asian Sojourners, Immigrants, and Refugees in the Western United States* (Portland, OR: Coast to Coast Books, 1982); Myron Weiner, "Immigration Perspectives from Receiving Countries", *Third World Quarterly* 12(1) January 1990, pp. 140-165