



Legislation from 1790 - 1900



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1 Act of March 26, 1790 (1 Statutes-at-Large 103)

The first federal activity in an area previously under the control of the individual states, this act established a uniform rule for naturalization by setting the residence requirement at two years.

2 Act of January 29, 1795 (1 Statutes-at-Large 414)

Repealed the 1790 act, raised the residence requirement to five years and required a declaration of intention to seek citizenship at least three years before naturalization.

3 Naturalization Act of June 18, 1798 (1 Statutes-at-Large 566)

Provisions:

- a. Clerks of court must furnish information about each record of naturalization to the Secretary of State.
- b. Registry of each alien residing in the United States at that time, as well as those arriving thereafter.
- c. Raised the residence requirement for naturalization to fourteen years.

4 Aliens Act of June 25, 1798 (1 Statutes-at-Large 570)

Represented the first Federal law pertinent to immigration rather than naturalization. Provisions:

- a. Authorized the President to arrest and/or deport any alien whom he deemed dangerous to the United States.
- b. Required the captain of any vessel to report the arrival of aliens on board such vessel to the Collector, or other chief officer, of the Customs of the Port.

This law expired two years after its enactment.

5 Alien Enemy Act of July 6, 1798 (1 Statutes-at-Large 577)

Provided that in the case of declared war or invasion the President shall have the power to restrain or remove alien enemy males of fourteen years and upwards, but with due protection of their property rights as stipulated by treaty.

6 Naturalization Act of April 14, 1802 (2 Statutes-at-Large 153)

Provisions:

- a. Reduced the residence period for naturalization from fourteen to five years.
- b. Established basic requirements for naturalization, including good moral character, allegiance to the Constitution, a formal declaration of intention, and witnesses.

7 Steerage Act of March 2, 1819 (3 Statutes-at-Large 488)

First significant Federal law relating to immigration. Provisions:

- a. Established the continuing reporting of immigration to the United States by requiring that passenger lists or manifests of all arriving vessels be delivered to the local Collector of Customs, copies transmitted to the Secretary of State, and the information reported to Congress.
- b. Set specific sustenance rules for passengers of ships leaving U.S. ports for Europe.
- c. Somewhat restricted the number of passengers on all vessels either coming to or leaving the United States.

8 Act of May 26, 1824 (4 Statutes-at-Large 36)

Facilitated the naturalization of certain aliens who had entered the United States as minors, by setting a two-year instead of a three-year interval between declaration of intention and admission to citizenship.

9 Act of February 22, 1847 (9 Statutes-at-Large 127)

“Passenger Acts,” provided specific regulations to safeguard passengers on merchant vessels. Subsequently amended by the Act of March 2, 1847 expanding the allowance of passenger space.

10 Passenger Act of March 3, 1855 (10 Statutes-at-Large 715)

Provisions:

- a. Repealed the Passenger Acts (see the 1847 act) and combined their provisions in a codified form.
- b. Reaffirmed the duty of the captain of any vessel to report the arrival of alien passengers.
- c. Established separate reporting to the Secretary of State distinguishing permanent and temporary immigration.

11 Act of February 19, 1862 (12 Statutes-at-Large 340)

Prohibited the transportation of Chinese “coolies” on American vessels.

12 Act of July 4, 1864 (13 Statutes-at-Large 385)

First Congressional attempt to centralize control of immigration. Provisions:

- a. A Commissioner of Immigration was appointed by the President to serve under the authority of the Secretary of State.
- b. Authorized immigrant labor contracts whereby would-be immigrants would pledge their wages to pay for transportation.

On March 30, 1868, the Act of July 4, 1864 was repealed.

13 Naturalization Act of July 14, 1870 (16 Statutes-at-Large 254)

Provisions:

- a. Established a system of controls on the naturalization process and penalties for fraudulent practices.
- b. Extended the naturalization laws to aliens of African nativity and to persons of African descent.

14 Act of March 3, 1875 (18 Statutes-at-Large 477)

Established the policy of direct federal regulation of immigration by prohibiting for the first time entry to undesirable immigrants. Provisions:

- a. Excluded criminals and prostitutes from admission.
- b. Prohibited the bringing of any Oriental persons without their free and voluntary consent; declared the contracting to supply “coolie” labor a felony.
- c. Entrusted the inspection of immigrants to collectors of the ports.

15 Chinese Exclusion Act of May 6, 1882 (22 Statutes-at-Large 58)

Provisions:

- a. Suspended immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States for ten years.
- b. Permitted Chinese laborers already in the United States to remain in the country after a temporary absence.
- c. Provided for deportation of Chinese illegally in the United States.
- d. Barred Chinese from naturalization.
- e. Permitted the entry of Chinese students, teachers, merchants, or those “proceeding to the United States ... from curiosity.”

On December 17, 1943, the Chinese exclusion laws were repealed.

16 Immigration Act of August 3, 1882 (22 Statutes-at-Large 214)

First general immigration law, established a system of central control of immigration through State Boards under the Secretary of the Treasury. Provisions:

- a. Broadened restrictions on immigration by adding to the classes of inadmissible aliens, including persons likely to become a public charge.
- b. Introduced a tax of 50 cents on each passenger brought to the United States.

17 Act of February 26, 1885 (23 Statutes-at-Large 332)

The first “Contract Labor Law,” made it unlawful to import aliens into the United States under contract for the performance of labor or services of any kind. Exceptions were for aliens temporarily in the United States engaging other foreigners as secretaries, servants, or domestics;

actors, artists, lecturers, and domestic servants; and skilled aliens working in an industry not yet established in the United States.

18 Act of February 23, 1887 (24 Statutes-at-Large 414)

Amended the Contract Labor Law to render it enforceable by charging the Secretary of the Treasury with enforcement of the act and providing that prohibited persons be sent back on arrival.

19 Act of March 3, 1887 (24 Statutes-at-Large 476)

Restricted the ownership of real estate in the United States to American citizens and those who have lawfully declared their intentions to become citizens, with certain specific exceptions.

20 Act of October 19, 1888 (25 Statutes-at-Large 566)

First measure since the Aliens Act of 1798 to provide for expulsion of aliens—directed the return within one year after entry of any immigrant who had landed in violation of the contract labor laws (see acts of February 26, 1885 and February 23, 1887).

21 Immigration Act of March 3, 1891 (26 Statutes-at-Large 1084)

The first comprehensive law for national control of immigration. Provisions:

- a. Established the Bureau of Immigration under the Treasury Department to administer all immigration laws (except the Chinese Exclusion Act).
- b. Further restricted immigration by adding to the inadmissible classes persons likely to become public charges, persons suffering from certain contagious disease, felons, persons convicted of other crimes or misdemeanors, polygamists, aliens assisted by others by payment of passage, and forbade the encouragement of immigration by means of advertisement.
- c. Allowed the Secretary of the Treasury to prescribe rules for inspection along the borders of Canada, British Columbia, and Mexico so as not to obstruct or unnecessarily delay, impede, or annoy passengers in ordinary travel between these countries and the United States.
- d. Directed the deportation of any alien who entered the United States unlawfully.

22 Act of March 3, 1893 (27 Statutes-at-Large 570)

Provisions:

- a. Added to the reporting requirements regarding alien arrivals to the United States such new information as occupation, marital status, ability to read or write, amount of money in possession, and facts regarding physical and mental health. This information was needed to determine admissibility according to the expanding list of grounds for exclusion.
- b. Established boards of special inquiry to decide the admissibility of alien arrivals.