

Comparison of Asian Populations during the Exclusion Years

Years and Laws	Chinese	Japanese	Koreans	Asian Indians	Filipinos
1790 Nationality Act		n/a			
1850	4,018	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1860	34,933	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1870	64,199	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1880	105,465	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
1882 Chinese Exclusion Act				n/a	
1890	107,488		n/a	n/a	n/a
1900	118,746	85,716	n/a	n/a	n/a
1907-8 Gentleman's Agreement					
1910	94,414	152,745	5,008	5,424	2,767
1913 Alien Land Law/1917 Barred Zone Act					
1920	85,202	220,596	6,181	n/a	26,634
1920 Alien Land Law/1924 Immigration Act					
1930	102,159	278,743	8,332	3,130	108,424
1930s Great Depression/1934 Tydings-McDuffie Act					
1940	106,334	285,115	8,568	2,405	98,535
1943 Repeal of Exclusion					
1950	150,005	326,379	7,030	n/a	122,707
1952 McCarran-Walter Act					
1960	237,292	464,332	11,000	12,296	176,310
1965 Immigration Act					
1970	436,062	591,290	69,150	7,250	343,606
1980	812,178	716,331	357,393	387,223	781,894
1990	1,645,472	847,562	798,849	815,447	1,406,770
2000*	2,734,841#	1,148,932	1,228,427	1,899,599	2,364,815

* These figures include individuals claiming mixed heritage. The Vietnamese population is now the fifth largest Asian population at 1,223,736 surpassing that of Japanese. The Census 2000 data can be retrieved at <www.census.gov>

This figure does not include Taiwanese who numbered 144,795.

SUMMARY OF KEY LAWS REGARDING THE IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP OF ASIANS IN THE UNITED STATES:

1790 Nationality Act: The right of citizenship by naturalization was limited to “free white persons.” In practice, only white male property owners were allowed to naturalize. This law was the basis for the discriminatory category “aliens ineligible for citizenship” which would apply to Asians until passage of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act.

1875 Page Act: Banned the importation of women for “immoral purposes” and punished those caught doing so. Impact felt most heavily by Chinese women attempting to enter the U.S.

1882 Chinese Exclusion Act: Restricted the entry of Chinese to the United States to six exempt categories: merchants, merchant family members, diplomats, tourists, students, returning laborers.

1892 Geary Act: Extended the Chinese Exclusion Law for ten more years and required that Chinese in the U.S. carry a Certificate of Residence, a precursor to the current green card system.

1898 Wong Kim Ark: Supreme Court case affirming that any person born in the United States, regardless of race, was a citizen by birth according to the 14th Amendment.

1907 Gentlemen’s Agreement: Compromise between President Theodore Roosevelt and the Japanese government whereby Japan would restrict the emigration of Japanese laborers traveling to the U.S. Japanese already in the U.S., however, retained the right to bring family members giving rise to the picture brides practice.

1913 and 1920 Alien Land Laws: State laws passed in many western states but especially in California restricting the ownership and leasing of agricultural land by “aliens ineligible for citizenship.” These laws targeted Japanese, but affected all Asians.

1917 Barred Zone Act: Creation of a “barred zone” extending from the Middle East to Southeast Asia from which no persons would be allowed to enter the United States.

1922 Ozawa v. U.S.: The Supreme Court affirmed that Japanese were ineligible for citizenship by naturalization.

1923 Bhagat Singh Thind v. U.S.: The U.S. Supreme Court reversed previous definitions of white, which had included Asian Indians as being of Aryan ancestry. Instead, the Court determined that racial definitions were based on perceptions of the “common man” to deny Thind citizenship by naturalization and also to revoke the citizenship previously granted to about 70 other Asian Indian residents of the United States.

1924 Immigration Act: An attempt to preserve the racial and ethnic composition of the United States in which Congress set immigration quotas based on national origins. The numbers of immigrants from each country were derived from percentages of that population already in the U.S. Potential immigrants from “undesirable” origins faced highly restrictive quotas whereas those from “compatible” origins had large ones. “Aliens ineligible for citizenship” were banned from entering, ending the picture brides system.

1935 Tydings-McDuffie Act: The final law to restrict Asian immigration targeted Filipinos who had been able to travel freely to the United States as colonial “nationals.” This law granted

the Philippines eventual independence, thereby giving Congress the right to restrict Filipino immigration to 50 persons per year.

1942 EO 9066: The presidential order authorizing the military to exclude “enemy aliens” from the western coast of the United States and southern Arizona on the grounds of “military necessity” leading to the mass internment of over 120,000 aliens and American citizens of Japanese ancestry.

1943 Repeal of Exclusion: To give face to its World War II ally, China, Congress agreed to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Laws. In its place, Chinese received an annual quota of 105 and gained the right to citizenship by naturalization.

1945 War Brides Act: This law improved the gender imbalance in Asian American communities by allowing men who had served in the military during World War II to bring wives and fiancées to the U.S.

1946 Luce-Celler Act: Filipinos and Asian Indians also gained the right to citizenship by naturalization in recognition of their wartime service to the United States.

1952 McCarran Walter Act: Against the wishes of President Harry Truman, this revised immigration act retain the discriminatory quota system but permitted all persons, regardless of race, to naturalize in the U.S.

1965 Immigration Act: Transformed the racial and ethnic landscape of America by abolishing the discriminatory national origins quota system and granting 20,000 immigration spots per country in the eastern hemisphere. This immigration system privileged family reunification—family members could enter as non-quota immigrants—and the entry of immigrants with needed educational and professional skills and encouraged extensive chain migration networking.

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