A Brief History of Immigration in the United States

Please note: U.S. immigration policies are shown in these charts. Red suggests the main intent of the policy is to restrict immigration. Yellow denotes neither or both. Feel free to disagree.

Please note: Numbers have been rounded for ease of comprehension. ~72 Million is easier to make than 71,960,614. If you prefer more specific numbers, please refer yourself to the original source. http://www.fas.org/sgp/legis/lc/immigration-research-mar12-29

Finally, immigration laws do not tell the whole story about immigration. Consider what other effects on immigration World War I, World War II, the Great Depression, hyperinflation in foreign countries, or relative differences in per capita income may have.

Total immigration over 187 years

-72 Million
-32 Million
-12.5 Million
-2 Million
150 Thousand
~5.2 Million
~3.7 Million
~2.6 Million
~500 Thousand
~8.8 Million
~3.7 Million
~2.6 Million
~150 Thousand

1790—Uniform rule for naturalization sets residence requirements at two years.
1820—Congress enacted first significant federal legislation relating specifically to immigration.

~12.5 Million
~32 Million
~2 Million

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1819—Congress enacted legislation relating first significant federal legislation relating specifically to immigration.
1864—Congress consolidated control over immigration. Improvements in contract labor laws were legitimized.
1875—Law prohibited entry of prostitutes and convicts.
1876—Border Patrol was established.
1882—Head tax placed on immigrants who were Chinese, consisted of political offenders, bastards, idiots, and persons likely to become public charges.
1888—Provisions were adopted to provide for expulsion of aliens.
1891—Bureau of Immigration established.
1893—Immigration law consolidated. Polygamists and political radicals added to the exclusion list.
1895—First quantitative immigration law adopted. It set temporary annual quotas according to nationality.
1902—Permits for immigration were limited.
1903—Law passed in 1906 increased to admit more refugees.
1904—Refugees removed as a preference category. Clear criteria and procedures established for three admission: World-wide ceiling for immigrants reduced.
1905—Eastern and Western Hemisphere immigration ceilings were combined.
1906—Legalized previously illegal aliens residing in the United States. Prohibited employers from hiring, recruiting, or referring for a fee, unauthorized aliens. Provided for the legalization of certain workers as temporary agricultural workers. Established a visa waiver pilot program allowing the admission of certain non-immigrants without visas. Immigrants whose status was based on a marriage required to apply for permanent status within 90 days after their two-year anniversary.
1907—Immigration ceilings and preference system applied to Western Hemisphere countries. Separate Hemispheric ceilings maintained.
1908—Eastern and Western Hemisphere immigration ceilings were combined.
1910—First law passed in 1917—Eliminates, pursuits of psychopathic inferiority, men and women entering for immoral purposes, anarchists, socialists, and vagrants added to the exclusion list.
1913—Law passed in 1913 increased to admit more refugees.
1914—Provisions were adopted to provide for expulsion of aliens.
1917—Provisions were adopted to provide for expulsion of aliens.
1918—Provisions were adopted to provide for expulsion of aliens.
1919—Provisions were adopted to provide for expulsion of aliens.
1920—Provisions were adopted to provide for expulsion of aliens.
1921—First permanent immigration quota law established.
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1925—Law passed in 1924 increased to admit more refugees.
1926—Law passed in 1926 increased to admit more refugees.
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