

## CHAPITRE 7

## L'immigration aux États-Unis – Les lois

As immigration became the main source of the population increase in the USA, the States wanted to keep a watch on who came and whence. Thus, many decisions were enforced since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## MILESTONES

- 1798: Naturalization Act – increase the residency requirement for citizenship from 5 to 14 years
- 1819: Steerage Act – First act limiting the number of immigrants
- 1862: Homestead Act – boosting immigration by offering free land
- 1864: Contract Labor Law – encourage employers to hire more immigrants
- 1882: Chinese Exclusion Act – First prohibition act targeting a specific community
- 1924: Johnson-Reed Act – favoring immigration from Western and Northern Europe
- 1986: Immigration Reform – amnestying of many undocumented workers
- 1990: Immigration Act favoring the Brain Drain
- 2001: Patriot Act – strengthen security control by tightening admission requirements



In 1790, Congress established rules for the 13 States that authorized all free white persons to apply for citizenship after two years of residency. Faced with the threat of war against France, the 1798 Naturalization Act reduced the rights of unnaturalized immigrants.

The Steerage Act of 1819 is the first consequential law on immigration that limited the number of immigrants on arriving ships. During the 1840s, the anti-immigration feeling gathered momentum, leading the creation of the Know-Nothing Party, whose goal was to reduce the political influence of Catholics and immigrants.

Even if some acts favored immigration, like the 1862 Homestead Act that enhanced it by offering free land, many communities suffered from the prohibition of immigration. This is the case of the Chinese community aimed by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. Japanese, Korean and later India were also targeted by Immigration Acts in order to prevent the arrival of laborers with their families.

In 1921, the Emergency federal legislation imposed limited immigration through the establishment of quotas. Furthermore, first signs of chosen immigration appeared in 1924 with the Johnson-Reed Act, favoring immigrants from Northern and Western Europe, discriminating against immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and the rest of the world.

From 1946 to 1987, the USA accepted more than two million legal immigrants and the 1986 Immigration Reform amnestied many undocumented workers. The 1990 Immigration Act reserved 140,000 places to highly-qualified professional people and 10,000 for those who accept to invest more than \$500,000 in the USA. After 9/11, the 2001 Patriot Act (also known as the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) tightened the admission requirements. More and more states have also passed laws that curtail the rights of potential illegal immigrants.