

American Immigration Timeline

- 1492: Columbus reaches the Americas, followed by other European explorers.
- 1502: Africans are brought as slaves to the island of Hispanola (present-day Dominican Republic/Haiti) by the Spanish, with 10 million enslaved Africans to follow and arrive on American shores.
- 1607: First permanent English colony built in Jamestown, Virginia.
- 1619: First Africans arrive at Jamestown, Virginia, as indentured servants.
- 1700-1776: First big immigrant wave: Europeans, mostly English, arrive in large numbers.**
- 1750: Population reaches more than one million.
- 1790: Population reaches almost four million.
- 1808: Congress makes it illegal to bring slaves to the United States.
- 1820-1870: Second big immigrant wave: About 7.5 million arrive, mainly from northern and western Europe (especially Great Britain, Ireland, and western Germany).**
- 1840: Wave of Irish immigrants arrives, escaping famine because of potato crop failure.
- 1848: Discovery of gold results in Chinese and Latin American immigrants coming to the west coast.
- 1881-1920: Third big immigrant wave: Nearly 23.5 million arrive, mainly from southern and eastern Europe (especially Austro-Hungary, Italy, and Russia).**
- 1882: Chinese Exclusion Act is passed to prevent Chinese workers from immigrating.
- 1886: Statue of Liberty is unveiled.
- 1892: Ellis Island opens.
- 1900: Population reaches 76 million.
- 1907: One million immigrants pass through Ellis Island in one year.
- 1914: World War I inspires strong anti-immigration feelings.
- 1917: Congress requires immigrants to pass literacy tests.
- 1924: Congress limits number of immigrants by nationality, including southern and eastern Europe.
- 1930-1964: Immigration declines due to restrictive laws, the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War.
- 1945: Puerto Ricans begin to arrive in large numbers.
- 1954: Ellis Island closes, marking an end to mass immigration.
- 1965: Immigration Act of 1965 ends quotas (number limit) based on nationality. Immigration from Asia and West Indies increases.
- 1986: Immigration Reform and Control Act forbids hiring of illegal immigrants; helps them become legal immigrants.