

## AFD Ep 374 Links and Notes - Emergency Quota Act of 1921 [Bill/Kelley] - Recording May 16

May 21: [Emergency Quota Act](#) - [Intro] The Emergency Quota Act, enacted on May 21, 1921 under President Harding after being blocked the previous year by Woodrow Wilson, restricted the number of immigrants admitted from any country annually to 3% of the number of residents from that country living in the United States as of the 1910 Census. (Note the use of 1910, NOT 1920.) Residents of one of the [approximately](#) 27 newly created or significantly expanded countries after WWI were to be counted on the basis of the new country's quotas, as adjusted for estimates of population in 1910 from those geographical areas (which must have been quite difficult since the 1910 census [presumably](#) ("If of foreign birth, give the country" not subdivision) didn't ask that level of detail (unlike the 1920 census).

Political factors:

<https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/04/22/trump-emergency-suspend-immigration-history-200406>

- End of WW1 = unemployment rates of 20% and soaring consumer prices (105% of pre-war prices)
- In 1919 Unions staged a series of strikes in order to bring wages up with the cost of consumer goods
- Mailbombs from anarchists were sent to a series of politicians and on June 2nd, bombs were detonated in 8 cities (More on this in our August 2019 episode: <http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2019/08/13/lend-lease-11-american-anarchy-part-2-the-extremism-debate-and-state-violence/> )
- The rise of scientific racism - including the 1911 US Immigration Commission, which found that the world could be divided into a five-tier race system
- "The unrest of 1919 led to a "Red Scare" that saw thousands of immigrant radicals deported and many more arrested and imprisoned. Louis Post, the assistant secretary of Labor, deemed the reaction a "deportation delirium," and that delirium expressed itself in ugly ways."
- "In this environment, immigrants were an easy target. Roughly 14.5 million newcomers—most of them Catholics and Jews from southern and Eastern Europe—had arrived in the United States since 1900, transforming overnight the nation's ethnocultural identity. In 1910, almost 15 percent of all residents were foreign-born, a figure that didn't account for their American-born children. The influx created a powerful backlash. As ordinary people felt themselves stripped of economic and political autonomy in a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing nation, it was all too tempting to seek out scapegoats. As early as the 1890s, the Immigration Restriction League, powered by wealthy Boston businessmen and political elites, clamored for restrictions. Prescott Hall, the IRL's co-founder, asked whether the U.S., historically "peopled by British, German and Scandinavian stock, historically free, energetic, progressive," be overrun by "Slav, Latin and Asiatic races historically down-trodden, atavistic and stagnant."

Here's the full 2.5 page text of the legislation:

<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/67th-congress/Session%201/c67s1ch8.pdf>

- Interestingly, the EQA doesn't restrict immigration from "aliens who have resided continuously for at least one year immediately preceding the time of their admission to the United States in the Dominion of Canada, Newfoundland, the Republic of Cuba, the Republic of Mexico, countries of Central or South America, or adjacent islands"
- As is still the case today, the southern border was hard to regulate and labor from these countries was cheap.

The level of freakout over immigration, especially from southern and eastern Europe (or the Middle East) is quite astonishing, given the actual numbers. Let's look at some highlights from [the 1910 and 1920 censuses by first language of foreign-born population](#):

- The number of Turkish-speaking immigrants grew from less than 5000 to less than 7000 and the number of Arabic-speaking immigrants grew from 33,000 to 58,000. Even the purported Armenian surge was really a change from 24,000 to 38,000.
- The number of Hungarian-speaking immigrants grew from 229,000 to 290,000
- The number of Yiddish-speaking immigrants grew from 1.05 to 1.09 million.
- The number of Italian-speaking immigrants grew from 1.4 to 1.6 million
- The number of Polish-speaking immigrants grew from 944k to 1.08 million
- The number of Greek-speaking immigrants grew from 118,000 to 175,000
- The number of Albanian-speaking immigrants grew from 2,300 to 5,500.
- The number of Bulgarian speakers actually declined from 18,000. The number of Slovenian-speaking immigrants also declined from 123,000.
- Serbo-Croatians barely increased to 126,000
- Russian speakers did not crack 400,000 and Ukrainians reached 55,000
- Czechs and Slovaks together barely exceeded half a million
- Romanians reached 62,000.
- Bear in mind that:
  - the total US population in 1910 was 92 million and in 1920 was 106 million.
  - Of the fewer than 14 million immigrants still in the US in 1920, i.e. after some people cycled back home, 3 million were English-speakers from the British Empire countries, 2.3 million were German-speakers, 1.2 million were various Scandinavian speakers, and nearly half a million were French speakers.
  - Very few people in the whole US were interacting with these small numbers of post-WW1 immigrants except for Poles, probably Italians, and maybe eastern European Jews. Even if you were to add together all the different Slavic-speaking immigrant groups, it would probably have been around 2 million.
- But there are some additional caveats:
  - Many xenophobic politicians did not really distinguish between immigrants and their children, thus inflating the numbers or perceptions.
  - We have the 1920 Census data now but they were whipping up a frenzy in the absence of the actual numbers being available at that point, imagining what they were going to be.
  - It seems especially notable that some traditionally larger immigration source countries that the US seemed to have familiarized itself with had not only declined in relative terms but actually the immigrants from those countries declined over the 1910-1920 period in absolute terms, either through attrition or returning home. Scandinavian countries, Germanic countries, the British Isles, and the French all had declines in the numbers of foreign-born immigrants when broken down by native language (including English for the British Empire countries). This fact, as much as the perceived increase in other "new" groups of immigrants from other parts of Europe (further South or East) must have upended the sense of what was normal and led to the idea that immigration wasn't per se a problem but only if it came from certain countries. We eventually see the further quota revisions later in the 1920s roll back from 1910 to the 1890 Census to really try to cut back on "wrong country" immigration (especially Italian immigration)
  - Also - the Latin America question?

Overall timeline before and after:

- <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/immigration-act>
  - President Wilson opposed the quota act through pocket veto, but Harding called an emergency session to pass the legislation in 1921
  - In 1922 the act was renewed for another two years
  - By 1924, nobody questioned the quota system and the Immigration Act of 1924 made it permanent
  
- <https://www.nps.gov/articles/closing-the-door-on-immigration.htm>
  - 1855 - First inspection of immigrants as Irish came fleeing the potato famine
  - 1882 - Chinese Exclusion Act
  - 1907 - "Gentleman's Agreement" with Japan
  - 1917 - Immigration Act further curtailed immigration from Japan
  - 1921- Emergency Quota act established first numerical limits on number of immigrants
  - 1924 - Immigration Act (National Origins Act) made the quotas stricter and permanent by basing quota figures on 1890 - before second big wave of immigration by folks from Southern and Eastern Europe
  - Immigration Act of 1924 instituted visa process that we know today and Ellis Island was no longer used as a detention center
  - Quota system stayed in place until 1965
  
- [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/daca-the-1924-immigration-act-and-american-exclusion\\_b\\_59b1650ee4b0bef3378cde32](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/daca-the-1924-immigration-act-and-american-exclusion_b_59b1650ee4b0bef3378cde32)
  - Jeff Sessions cites the 1924 act as a "model"
  - After 1924, for example, arrivals from Germany had an annual quota of over 51,000 and those from Great Britain just over 34,000; while Italy had a quota of less than 4000, and nations such as Greece, Turkey, and Syria had the minimum of 100 annual "legal" arrivals.

Zoning & the Newton connection: Pioneering of exclusionary zoning codes, explicitly linked to the EQA of 1921. Newton Graphic Letter to the Editor April 14 1922: "As a country we are shutting the doors against undesirable immigrants. We are shutting out certain people from the country for the country's good. Has a city on a small scale to do as far as it can what the nation is attempting to at a larger scale?"