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Immigration Timeline

1. (National) 1493 First European settlers/colonists, the Spanish, arrive in North America.

(National) 1607 English settlers/colonists arrive in North America.

(National) 1846-48 Mexican War – U.S. gains territory including California, New Mexico, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, Wyoming, Colorado, and Texas.

(Ethnic) 1848 Gold is discovered at Sutter’s Mill, CA, drawing Chinese immigrants to the state.

(Ethnic) 1865 Chinese Laborers are hired to work on the Transcontinental Railroad. *People v. Hall*, California Supreme Court – Ruled that the testimony of a Chinese man who witnessed a murder by a white man was inadmissible.

(Ethnic) 1868 First Japanese immigrants are recruited to work in Hawaii as contract laborers.

(Ethnic) 1869 First group of Japanese immigrants arrive in California and establish the Wakamatsu Colony at Gold Hill.

(National) 1882 Congress passes Chinese Exclusion Act, ending immigration from China and barring Chinese from U.S. citizenship.

(Ethnic) 1882 Loss of new immigrant Chinese workers results in increased demand of labor, causing an increase in Japanese immigration to Pacific Coast.

10. (National) 1898 Spanish American War: The U.S. annexes Hawaii.

(National) 1899 Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico annexed by U.S.

(Ethnic) 1906 (November) – The San Francisco School Board removes children of Japanese and others of “Mongoloid” ancestry from regular schools and places them in a segregated school.

(National) 1907 The Gentleman’s Agreement is signed between the U.S. and Japan. In this agreement, Japan volunteers to halt labor immigration to the U.S.

(Ethnic) 1909 Angel Island, an immigration facility in San Francisco Bay, opens in order to examine Asian Pacific Islander immigrants upon their arrival to the West Coast.

(Ethnic) 1913 California law prohibits all aliens who are ineligible for citizenship from owning land. Only “white persons” are eligible for naturalization. Leasing of land limited to three years. Similar laws eventually adopted in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, and Minnesota.

(National) 1917 U.S. enters World War I (WWI).



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(National) 1922 *Ozawa v. U.S.* – U.S. Supreme Court rules that naturalization is limited to “white persons and aliens of African nativity,” thus legalizing previous practice of excluding Asians from citizenship.

(Ethnic) 1922 *Ozawa v. U.S.* – U.S. Supreme Court rules that naturalization is limited to “white persons and aliens of African nativity.” Congress passes Cable Act, which provides that any woman marrying an alien ineligible for citizenship shall cease to be an American citizen. (In practice, this means that anyone marrying an Issei [a Japanese immigrant in the U.S.] would automatically lost citizenship. In marriages terminated by death or divorce, a Caucasian woman could regain citizenship, whereas a Nisei woman could not. Act is amended in 1931.

(Ethnic) 1924 Congress passes the Immigration Exclusion Act, ending all Asian immigration to the U.S., except for Filipinos who are subjects of the U.S.

20. (National) 1934 The Tydings-McDuffie Act declares the Philippines a commonwealth, guarantees independence in ten years.

(Ethnic) 1934 A section of the Tydings-McDuffie Act declares all Philippine-born Filipinos “aliens,” and restricts their immigration to 50 Filipinos a year, separating many families.

(National) 1939 Britain and France declare war on Germany; World War II (WWII) begins.

(National) 1941 – U.S. enters WWII. (December 7) – Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. (December 8) – U.S Congress declares war on Japan. (December 11) – U.S declares war on Germany and Italy.

(Ethnic) 1942 (February 19) President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066, forcing over 120,000 Japanese American citizens (Nisei) and immigrant parents (Issei) into internment camps during WWII solely based upon their ancestry. Today, the day is commemorated in Japanese American communities as a “Day of Remembrance.”

(National) 1943 (January 28) – U.S. War Department announces plans to organize all-Japanese American combat unit. As a result of a wartime alliance with China, the U.S. Congress repeals the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The immigration quota for Chinese will remain low until the passage of the 1965 Immigration Act.

(National) 1945 U.S. drops atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Japan). Germany and Japan surrender. WWII ends.

(National) 1946 President Harry S. Truman signs the Filipino Naturalization Acts allowing Filipinos to become citizens. The Philippines gains full independence.

(Ethnic) 1946 Congress passes and President Truman signs the Rescission Act of 1946, which denies Filipino soldiers who fought under the U.S. Armed Forces of the Far East the same rights given to other WWII Veterans.

(Untold Stories) 1949 After the Communist Party take over, the parents of John Suey immigrate from mainland China to Hong Kong.

30. (National) 1950-53 Korean War



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(National) 1952 Asian immigrants gain right to become citizens with the passage of the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act.

(Ethnic) 1952 (April 17) – California Supreme Court declares “alien land laws” in violation of the 14th Amendment by being racially discriminatory (*Fujii v. California*)

(Ethnic) 1952 (June 11) – McCarran-Walter Immigration and Naturalization Act is passed by Congress. Although restrictive, this law allows Japanese and other Asian immigrants to become naturalized citizens for the first time.

(National) 1960-1965 Civil Rights Movement

(National (1960-75) Vietnam War

(Untold Stories) 1963 John Suey and his family emigrate from Hong Kong to San Francisco, California; John is seven years old.

(National) 1965 U.S. Congress passes the Immigration and Nationality Act, which abolishes “national origins” as basis for immigration and allows more immigration from Asia.

(Ethnic) 1965 Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC) begins strike against grape growers in Delano. The National Farm Workers Association (NFWA), primarily made up of Mexican Americans, joins the AWOC. The Delano grape strike will last five years and receives national attention.

(Ethnic) 1966 The NFWA and AWC merge, forming the United Farm Workers (UFW), which becomes an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Cesar Chavez leads march in CA, from Delano to Sacramento, focusing national attention on the plight of farm works.

40. (Untold Stories) 1967-71 Bill Ong Hing attends undergraduate school in Berkeley, California.

(Ethnic) 1968 (April 4) – Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated. His Poor People’s Campaign proceeds but fails to achieve its goals.

(Ethnic) 1974 *Lau v. Nichols*: U.S. Supreme Court ruled that schools should provide students instruction in their native language. This ruling gave bilingual-bicultural education in the U.S. a tremendous boost.

(Untold Stories) 1974 The Cabral family emigrates from Mexico to San Jose, California. A few years later, they are arrested by *la migra*, or federal immigration agents.

(Untold Stories) 1971-74 Bill Ong Hing graduates from law school. Hing becomes an immigration attorney.

(Ethnic) 1976 Two Mexican Americans, Jerry Apodaca and Raul Castro, are elected governors of New Mexico and Arizona respectively; first Latinx governors since the early years of New Mexico state-hood.



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(Untold Stories) 1981-84 John Suey is placed in deportation proceedings because of his criminal records.

(Ethnic) 1982 *Plyler v. Doe*: The U.S. Supreme Court reviews a Texas statute that withheld funds for the education of children who were not “legally admitted” into the U.S.; the Court strikes down the statute as a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

(Untold Stories) 1984 On April 14, Many Uch and his family arrive in the United States as refugees. The family is scared and alone.

(Untold Stories) 1985 John Suey is granted a waiver of deportation by a stern immigration judge by establishing his rehabilitation and the likely hardship to himself and his family if he was deported. He is given a second chance to stay in the U.S.

50. (National) 1986 President Ronald Reagan signs Immigration Reform Control Act (IRCA). Effort to discourage illegal immigration while providing a pathway for legalization for some who had been continuously in the U.S. since January 1, 1982.

(Untold Stories) 1986 IRCA helps the Cabral family stay in the U.S.

(Ethnic) 1989 Lawrence Douglas Wilder is elected governor of the state of Virginia, first African American to be elected a governor of a U.S. State.

(National) 1990-91 Gulf War – U.S. declares war on Iraq.

(National) 1990 Congress passes the Immigration Act of 1990, granting U.S. citizenship and limited veteran benefits to certain Filipino veterans who fought for the U.S. during WWII. 25,000 Filipino veterans were naturalized as U.S. citizens.

(National) 1996 Congress passes the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA). The Act increases criminal penalties for immigration-related offenses and takes away Judicial Review, or second chances, in cases including minor crimes. As a result, immigrants with a history of criminal activity, including shoplifting committed a decade earlier, are put on deportation proceedings.

(National) 1999 Taiwan-born U.S. citizen Wen Ho Lee, who worked at the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratories, is arrested and imprisoned on false allegations of giving U.S. nuclear secrets to China; the original charges are later dropped and the judge in the case apologizes to Lee.

(Ethnic) 1999 Wen Ho Lee case becomes a rallying point for Asian Americans who seek justice for unfair accusations of spying for China.

(Ethnic) 2000 Twenty-two Asian American veterans were finally recognized for heroism and are awarded the nation’s highest military award – The Medal of Honor. Many were Japanese Americans who volunteered for service from internment camps where their families had been relocated during WWII.

(Ethnic) 2001 Elaine Chao is appointed as Secretary of Labor; she is the first Chinese American and the first Asian American woman to be appointed to a President’s cabinet in U.S. history.

60. (National) 2001 (September 11) – “9/11” Attacks on World Trade Center and U.S. Pentagon. President George W. Bush declares “War on Terror.” U.S. and Britain targets Afghanistan in search for Osama bin Laden.



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(Untold Stories) 2001-03 U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft authorized the immediate detention of 1,500 to 2,000 as “suspected terrorists,” although none were ever charged with a terrorist act. The affected communities included Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians.

(Untold Stories) 2002 U.S. forces Cambodia to sign a repatriation agreement; the U.S. government deports seeks to deport many refugee youth like Many. Many Uch still awaits deportation.

(National) 2008 The U.S. suffers disastrous economic downturn in all major sectors. The economic crisis is felt world-wide.

(Ethnic) 2008 Barack Obama, Democratic Senator from Illinois (IL), is elected to be the United States’ 44th President; making him the first president of African American descent in the history of the U.S.

(National) 2010 Congress fails to pass the Federal DREAM Act (Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors); Act would provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. while strengthening the border.

(Ethnic) 2012 President Obama uses executive power to create Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA allows specific undocumented students to receive two-year work permits and protection from deportation.

65. (National) 2016 Donald Trump becomes the official Republican Presidential nominee; promises to build a wall that will keep all immigrants out. He openly refers to Mexicans as criminals and rapists; negatively targets other minorities including African Americans, Muslims, and Arabs.

