

# Early Immigration Laws



The signing of the Declaration of Independence, by Currier & Ives. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

## *The Alien Act of 1798*

### *An Act Respecting Alien Enemies*

*SECTION 1. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That whenever there shall be a declared war between the United States and any foreign nation or government, or any invasion or predatory incursion shall be perpetrated, attempted, or threatened against the territory of the United States, by any foreign nation or government, and the President of the United States shall make public proclamation of the event, all natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects of the hostile nation or government, being males of the age of fourteen years and upwards, who shall be within the United States, and not actually naturalized, shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured and removed, as alien enemies.*

During the following century the promise of wealth and land in America maintained a constant flow of immigration to the colonies. In 1795, the first *Naturalization Act* was created to restrict citizenship to “free white persons” who resided in the United States and renounced their allegiance to their former country.

The *Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798* authorized the President to expel any alien he deemed dangerous. Sadly, thousands of foreigners who fought so courageously for American independence were viewed as suspicious and a possible threat to national security. Within two years public support for these acts dwindled and they expired soon after. For the next fifty years there were no significant changes in U.S. immigration policy.

● 1776

**Open Door** • Unimpeded Immigration

● 1798

**Alien & Sedition Acts**

- Authorized the president to expel any alien he deemed dangerous
- Expired after two years due to unpopularity