

Wartime Rules

During World War I, a marked increase in racism and isolationism in the United States led to demands for further restrictions on immigration. The *Immigration Act of 1917* expanded the classes of foreigners excluded from the United States. It imposed a literacy test and designated an *Asiatic Barred Zone*, a geographic region encompassing much of eastern Asia and the Pacific islands, from which immigrants would not be admitted to the United States. In 1921, Congress established the first quota system for immigrants.

Following World War I, the *National Origins Act of 1924* further reduced quotas of immigrants deemed less desirable. Quotas for countries such as Russia, the source of most Jewish immigrants, and Italy were cut back. In 1941, Congress passed an act that refused visas to foreigners whose presence in the United States might endanger public safety. These laws, coupled with the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II, prevented many immigrants from coming to the United States.

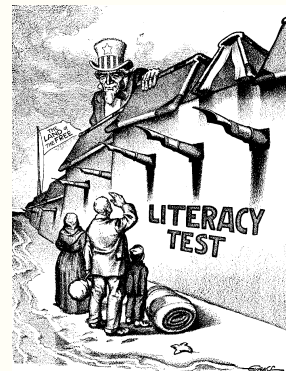
As the war ended, however, Congress classified people escaping from their homelands for political reasons as refugees. Those who had survived Nazi persecution in Europe during World War II and people fleeing communism in Eastern Europe after the war were also granted entrance. The *Displaced Persons Acts of 1948 and 1950* and the *Refugee Relief Act of 1953* authorized the admission of over 500,000 people.

● 1924

National Origins Act • Created a quota to control the amount of immigrants entering the U.S. following World War I



Foreign born soldiers are sworn in as citizens, 1918. Courtesy of the INS archives.



"Literacy Test," cir. 1920. Courtesy of the INS archives.



Jewish immigrants arrive in New York harbor, 1943. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Perhaps one of the most tragic stories of World War II is the voyage of the *St. Louis*, a German transatlantic liner. The *St. Louis*, a ship of 937 Jewish refugees, escaped persecution in Nazi Germany anxious to find safety in the United States. When the liner reached the US, authorities ordered the ship to return to Europe where, shortly after, half of the original refugees died in concentration camps.