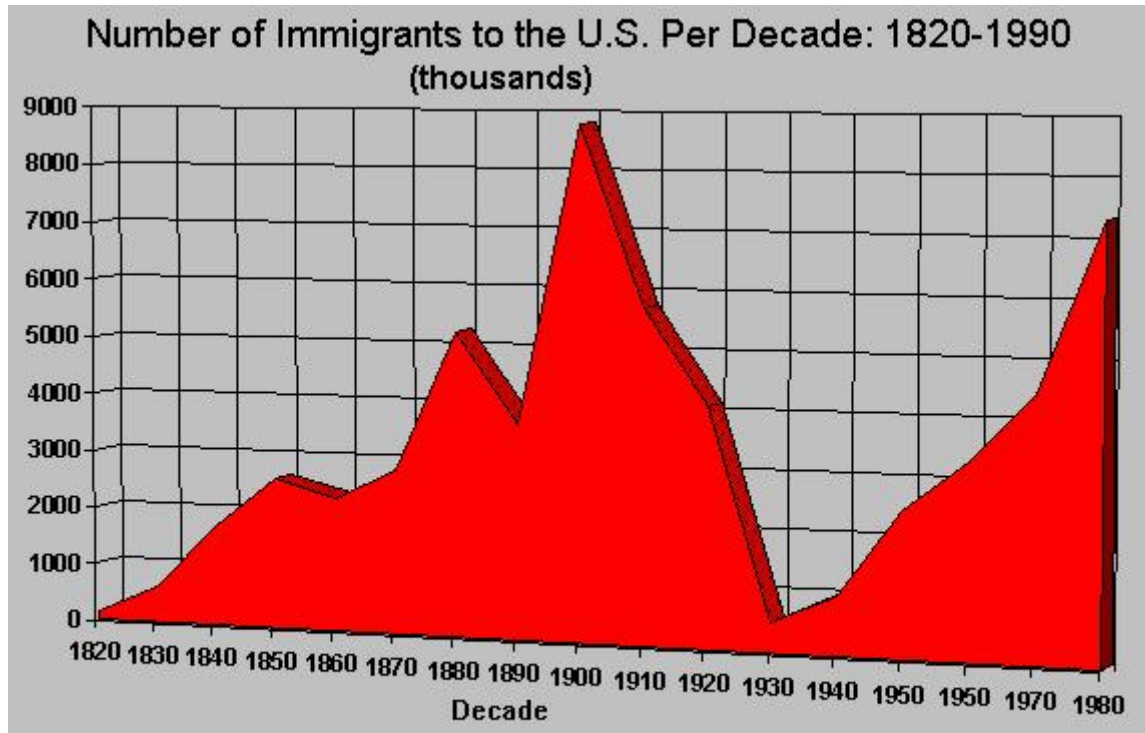


A HISTORICAL LOOK AT U.S. IMMIGRATION



Source: U.S. Census (1990)

The Statue of Liberty symbolizes the willingness of the United States to open its doors to immigrants. As the Statue was taking shape the U.S. was experiencing a long period of increased immigration. This trend and policies supporting it continued until immigration reached a peak in the decade between 1900 and 1910 during which almost 1 million immigrants per year entered the country. However, the composition of immigrants began shifting after the American Civil War. Before the war, most immigrants were from western Europe and the British Isles. During the 1870s immigrants from southern and eastern Europe became much more common. Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans were also coming to the U.S., particularly the West Coast.

The "older immigrants" from Protestant western Europe felt threatened by the rising tide of immigrants from the more Catholic southern and eastern European countries and the immigrants from Asia. Organizations were formed urging laws to restrict immigration. A succession of laws were passed adding restrictions to immigration policy. A literacy test for immigrants was passed and became law over the veto of President Woodrow Wilson. Emergency legislation in 1921 imposed a quota system, limiting the number of immigrants from Europe to 3 percent of the number of foreign-born members of that same nationality in the U.S. during the 1910 census. Then in 1924 the U.S. passed the National Origins Act. This act further limited immigration by reducing the allowable number of entries to 2 percent and by using the 1890 census as the base, further discriminating against the newer immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, favoring immigration from northwestern Europe, and barring immigration from the Far East. This law prevented many eastern Europeans from immigrating to the United States during World War II. It was only repealed in 1965.

Since the Great Depression of the 1930s and World War II, immigration has steadily risen again in the U.S. In the 1980s and 1990s the number of immigrants is once again over 700,000 per year and continues to rise. Of course, the population in the U.S. is much larger now than in 1900 so the percent of our population that is foreign born continues to get smaller.