

KEY FACTS ABOUT TWENTY ACTS OF CONGRESS





Navigation Acts, 1651

- Put mercantilism into practice
 - Colonial products that could be shipped only to England were listed
 - Designed to subordinate the colonial economy to that of the mother country



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Sugar Act, 1764

- First law passed by Parliament to raise revenue for the British Crown
- Designed to tighten enforcement of English customs laws in America
- Following bitter protests from the colonists, British officials lowered the duties



Stamp Act, 1765

- Primary purpose was to raise revenue to support British troops stationed in America
- Issue raised:
 - Does Parliament have the right to tax the colonies without their consent?
- Repealed because colonial boycotts of English goods were hurting British merchants



Stamp Act, 1765

- Importance:

- Revealed that many colonists believed they were entitled to all the rights and privileges of British subjects
- Demonstrated the willingness of colonists to use violence rather than legal means to frustrate British policy
- The British maintained that the colonies had no right to independence from parliamentary authority
- Patriot leaders claimed that the act denied them their British birthrights



Coercive Acts, 1774

- British response to the Boston Tea Party
- Widely known in the colonies as the Intolerable Acts
- Parliament closed the port of Boston and drastically reduced the power of self-government in the Massachusetts colony
- Provided for the quartering of troops in the colonists' barns and empty houses



Kansas-Nebraska Act, 1854

- Repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, thus heightening the sectional crisis
- Applied the principle of popular sovereignty to the territories
- Permitted the expansion of slavery beyond the Southern states
- Sparked the formation of the Republican Party



Homestead Act, 1862

- Permitted any citizen or prospective citizen to claim 160 acres of public land and to purchase it for a small fee after living on it for five years
- Played a role in encouraging the settlement of the Western frontier





Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

- First law to exclude a group from America because of ethnic background
- Prohibited the immigration of Chinese to America
- Strongly supported by working-class Americans
- Reflected anti-immigration sentiment in California




Dawes Act, 1887

- Divided Native American tribal lands into individual holdings
- Purpose was to assimilate American Indians into the mainstream of American culture
- Reflecting the forced-civilization views of the reformers, the act:
 - Dissolved many tribes as legal entities
 - Wiped out tribal ownership of land
 - Set up individual Indian family heads with 160 acres



Sherman Antitrust Act, 1890

- Forbade unreasonable combinations or contracts in restraint of trade
 - Had little immediate impact on the regulation of large corporations
 - Primarily used to curb labor unions during the last decade of the 19th century
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Pure Food and Drug Act, 1906

- Example of Progressive Era legislation
- Prompted by public outrage unleashed by the publication of Upton Sinclair's novel, *The Jungle*



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Federal Reserve Act of 1913

- Created a central Federal Reserve Board appointed by the President
- Established a national system of 12 district banks, coordinated by a central board
- Federal Reserve System made currency and credit more elastic



National Origins Act, 1924

- Primary purpose was to restrict the flow of newcomers from Southern and Eastern Europe
- Established immigrant quotas that discriminated against Southern and Eastern Europeans
- Was the primary reason for the decrease in the numbers of Europeans immigrating to the U.S. in the 1920s



National Industrial Recovery Act, 1933

- NRA sought to combat the Great Depression by fostering government-business cooperation
- Allowed businesses to regulate themselves through codes of fair competition
- Did not succeed




Neutrality Acts, 1930s

- Expressions of a commitment to isolation
- During the 1930s, isolationists drew support for their position from Washington's Farewell Address



Social Security Act, 1935

- Part of the New Deal program of reforms
 - Created a federal pension system funded by taxes on a worker's wages and by an equivalent contribution by employers
 - The aging of America since the 1970s is widely seen as threatening the long-term solvency of the Social Security system
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Wagner Act, 1935

- Also known as the National Labor Relations Act of 1935
- Known as the Magna Carta of Labor because it ensured workers the right to organize and bargain collectively
- Led to a rapid rise in labor union membership



Lend-Lease Act, 1941

- Purpose was to provide military supplies to the Allies
- Used primarily to help Great Britain and the Soviet Union resist Nazi Germany



Taft-Hartley Act, 1947

- Primary purpose was to curb the power of labor unions
- Supporters believed that unions were abusing their powers and that widespread strikes would endanger national defense industries
- Opposed by organized labor



Federal Highway Act of 1956

- Created the Interstate Highway System
- Played a key role in supporting suburban growth




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United States Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

- National Origins Act of the 1920s severely restricted immigration into the U.S.
- Abolished the national-origins quota system