

◀ Two young Polish women at Ellis Island around 1910

WITNESS HISTORY AUDIO

Looking Forward and Back

Life was difficult for many immigrants in the United States during the late 1800s, but it also offered freedoms they had never known in their homelands.

“Not the looking forward made me go, but the looking backward made me search a new life and struggle a hard battle. . . . [I]t is hard still now to bear the homesickness, loneliness, among strange people not knowing the language doing hard [work] without a minute of joy. But when I look back into my childhood . . . , always under a terrible fear . . . I think that there is not anything harder. . . . America means for an Immigrant a fairy promised land that came out true, a land that gives all they need for their work, a land which gives them human rights, a land that gives morality through her churches and education through her free schools and libraries.”

—young Russian Jewish woman

The New Immigrants

Objectives

- Compare the “new immigration” of the late 1800s to earlier immigration.
- Explain the push and pull factors leading immigrants to America.
- Describe the challenges that immigrants faced in traveling to America.
- Analyze how immigrants adapted to American life while trying to maintain familiar cultural practices.

Terms and People

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|-----------------|-----------------------|
| “new” immigrant | Americanization |
| steerage | “melting pot” |
| Ellis Island | nativism |
| Angel Island | Chinese Exclusion Act |

NoteTaking

Reading Skill: Identify Main Ideas Record the main ideas of each section in an outline.

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| <p>I. New Immigrants Come to America</p> <p>A.</p> <p>B.</p> <p>II. Immigrants Decide to Leave Home</p> |
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Why It Matters Immigration has been a central theme in American history. However, when the foreign-born population of the United States nearly doubled between 1870 and 1900, some Americans feared that the newcomers would destroy American culture. Instead, Americans adopted parts of immigrant cultures, while immigrants adopted parts of American culture. **Section Focus Question:** Why did immigrants come to the United States, and what impact did they have upon society?

New Immigrants Come to America

Immigrants had always come to America for economic opportunity and religious freedom. Until the 1870s, the majority had been Protestants from northern and western Europe. They came as families to settle in the United States, often on farms with family or friends who had come before. Many had saved some money for the journey, had a skill or trade, or were educated.

Many German and Irish Catholics had immigrated in the 1840s and 1850s, and more arrived after the Civil War. Some Americans had prejudices against Catholics, but the Irish spoke English and the German Catholics benefited from the good reputation of their Protestant countrymen. Although they lacked skills and money, the children of these immigrants were often able to blend into American society. Beginning in the 1870s, Irish and Germans were joined by “new” immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. They arrived in increasing numbers until the outbreak of World War I.

In contrast to “old” immigrants who had come before the Irish and Germans, “new” immigrants were often unskilled, poor, Catholic or Jewish, and likely to settle in cities rather than on farms. Many came alone, planning to save some money in the United States and return home to live. They came from Italy, Greece, Poland, Hungary, and Russia. After 1900, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe made up more than 70 percent of all immigrants, up from about 1 percent at midcentury. Many native-born Americans felt threatened by these newcomers with different cultures and languages.

✓ **Checkpoint** Describe the “new” immigrants.

Immigrants Decide to Leave Home

Two types of factors lead to immigration. Push factors are those that compel people to leave their homes, such as famine, war, or persecution. Pull factors are those that draw people to a new place, such as economic opportunity or religious freedom. Many immigrants in the late nineteenth century had both push and pull factors that helped them decide to leave the familiar for the unknown.

Push Factors In the 1880s, farmers had a difficult time. In Mexico, Poland, and China, land reform and low prices forced many farmers off their land. Some chose to come to America to get a new start. Beginning in the 1840s, China and eastern Europe experienced repeated wars and political revolutions. These events disrupted economies and left political refugees. One of the largest groups to settle in America were Russian and eastern European Jews. Beginning in the 1880s, they fled religious persecution and came to the United States to achieve a better life.

Pull Factors In addition to a vague hope for opportunity, the United States offered special attractions, including plentiful land and employment. The 1862 Homestead Act and aid from railroad companies made western farmland inexpensive. The railroads even offered reduced fares to get there because they needed customers in the west for their own business to succeed. Until 1885, immigrants were recruited from their homelands to build railroads, dig in mines, work in oil fields, harvest produce, or toil in factories. Others hoped to strike it rich by finding gold.

Many others were “chain immigrants,” joining family or friends who had already settled in America. The earlier arriving immigrants promised to help the newcomers find work and housing, and sometimes they even sent them tickets for the journey. Immigrants may have lured their families and friends with the promise of religious and political freedom. In America, one could worship and vote as one chose without fear of persecution by the government.

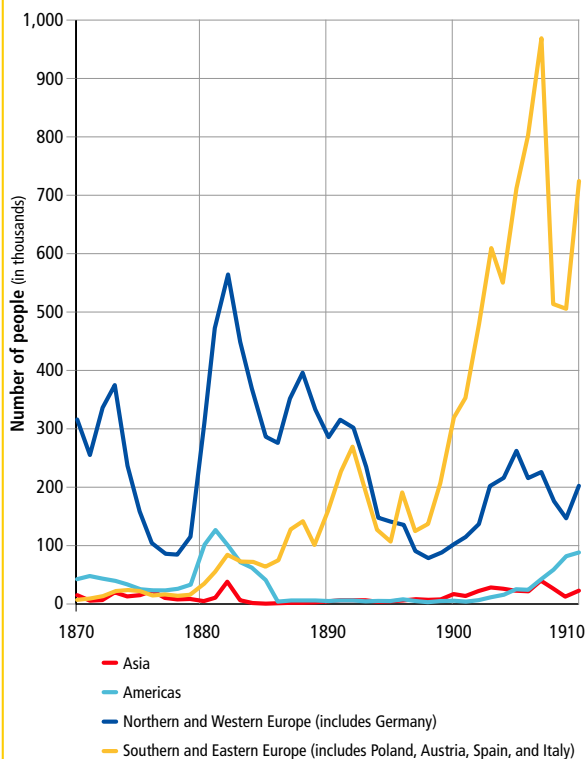
✓ **Checkpoint** List the push and pull factors for immigrants.

Reminders of Home

Immigrants often brought items of special significance, such as this Jewish prayer shawl from Russia. ▼



Immigration, 1870–1910



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau



The Immigrant Experience

Immigrant experiences varied greatly. However, there were common themes: a tough decision to leave home and family, a hard and costly journey with an uncertain end, and the difficulties of learning a new language and adjusting to a foreign culture. Millions of people decided that the possibilities outweighed the risks and set out for the United States.

The Long Journey Coming to America was a big task. Travelers needed money for passage and to make a new start, although some had only enough for a ticket. The immigrants' first task was to pack the items that would help them start a new life. Usually, they brought only what they could carry: clothes, maybe a photograph of loved ones, a cherished musical instrument, or the tools of their trade. Next, they made their way to a port of departure, hoping that a ship would be leaving soon. In war-torn areas, just getting to the ship could be dangerous.

By the 1870s, steamships made the trip across the Atlantic safer and faster than ever before. However, it could be an awful voyage. Most immigrants traveled in **steerage**, the worst accommodations on the ship. Located on the lower decks with no private cabins, steerage was crowded and dirty. Illness spread quickly, while rough weather could force seasick passengers to stay in cramped quarters for days at a time. Under these conditions, even healthy immigrants fell ill, while frail passengers sometimes died. Passengers on other voyages were fortunate to have beautiful weather and no illness onboard.

Immigrants Arrive at American Ports The first stop for ships at American ports was a processing station where immigration officials decided who could stay in the United States. To enter, immigrants had to be healthy and show that they had money, a skill, or a sponsor to provide for them. Most European immigrants arrived in New York Harbor. Beginning in 1892, they were processed at **Ellis Island**.

First- and second-class passengers were inspected on the ship and released, unless they had obvious medical problems. All third-class, or steerage, passengers were sent to Ellis Island. There, immigration officers conducted legal and medical inspections. Since the shipowners did a preliminary screening before passengers boarded, only about 2 percent of immigrants were denied entry; the rest took a ferry to New York City. In 1907, 10-year-old Edward Corsi arrived with his family from Italy. Years later, when he had become an immigration official, he remembered his first impressions:

Arriving in America

Immigrants wait on the deck of the S.S. *Prince Frederick Wilhelm*. Look at the passengers' faces. *What thoughts and feelings might they have been experiencing? Why?*

Vocabulary Builder

preliminary—(pree LIHM uh ner ee) *adj.* happening before and leading up to something; initial

Primary Source

“I realized that Ellis Island could inspire both hope and fear. Some of the passengers were afraid . . . ; others were impatient, anxious to get through the inspection and be off to their destinations.”

—Edward Corsi, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, 1935

Chinese and other Asian immigrants crossed the Pacific Ocean, arriving in San Francisco Bay. They were processed at **Angel Island**, which opened in 1910. If Ellis Island was welcoming to some, Angel Island was always formidable and seemingly designed to filter out Chinese immigrants. After 1882, Chinese travelers were turned away unless they could prove that they were American citizens or had relatives living in America. Officials often assumed that Chinese newcomers would misrepresent themselves in order to gain entry. While most immigrants left Ellis Island within hours, Chinese immigrants at Angel Island were often held for weeks or even months in poor conditions.



Checkpoint Describe what happened to immigrants when they arrived.

Opportunities and Challenges in America

Passing immigration inspections was just the first step. Once in America, immigrants immediately faced tough decisions such as where to settle and how to find work. On top of that, most had to learn a new language and new customs. Sometimes, immigrants worked with an agent who spoke their language for help finding work and housing, but many agents took advantage of the newcomers to make money. Lucky immigrants had contacts through family and friends who could help them navigate a new and strange world.

Immigrants Assimilate Into Society Most new immigrants stayed in cities, close to industrial jobs in factories. There, they often lived in ethnic neighborhoods, called ghettos, with people who shared their native language, religion, and culture. Neighbors might have come from the same country, region, or even village.



Angel Island Poetry

Detained Chinese immigrants might have spent weeks or months waiting to find out if they would be allowed to stay in the United States. To pass the time and express their frustrations, many carved poems into the walls at Angel Island. What does the poem below tell you about the author?

Primary Source

“Lin, upon arriving in America,
Was arrested, put in a wooden building,
And made a prisoner.
I was here for one autumn.
The Americans did not allow me to land.
I was ordered to be deported.”

—*Taoist From the Town of Iron*  AUDIO



Analyzing Political Cartoons

Keeping Foreigners Out The caption for this cartoon entitled “Looking Backward” says, “They would close to the newcomer the bridge that carried them and their fathers over.”

1. What groups of people are represented in this picture?
2. What point was the artist trying to make?

as the Polish National Alliance and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. These organizations, based on ethnic or religious identity, provided social services and financial assistance. Settlement workers and immigrants alike believed that American society was a “**melting pot**” in which white people of all different nationalities blended to create a single culture. The term came from the name of a play that opened in 1908. This model excluded Asian immigrants, who became targets of social and legal discrimination.

Despite the hopes of settlement workers, immigrants often held on to their traditions. Their children, however, became more Americanized, without memories of homes and families left behind. Some adults dreamed of returning to their homelands, but few did. Instead, they established fraternal lodges and religious institutions that made them feel more comfortable in their new surroundings. Catholics, in particular, established churches and parochial schools. In many cities, Irish Catholic churches stood side by side with Italian Catholic churches—each built to serve the needs of its own community. The immigrants’ churches, schools, and institutions reminded native-born Americans that new cultures were changing American society.

New Immigrants Face Hostility Accepting immigrants into American society was not always easy. Newcomers often faced **nativism**, which was a belief that native-born white Americans were superior to newcomers. During the economic recessions of the late nineteenth century, competition for jobs and housing fueled resentment, while religious and cultural differences sparked suspicion between native-born workers and immigrants, as well as between ethnic groups. Many workers worried that immigrants would work for lower pay.

Religion was also a big problem. Protestants were suspicious of Catholicism, the religion of many Irish, German, Italian, and Polish people. Some native-born white Protestants would not hire, vote for, or work with Catholics or Jews. Some Americans even signed restrictive contracts agreeing not to rent or sell property to Catholics, Jews, African Americans, or other groups they considered “non-native.”


Nativist intellectuals backed up their prejudices with dubious scientific rhetoric that linked immigrants’ physical characteristics to criminal tendencies or lower intellectual abilities. Extreme hostility toward Chinese laborers led Congress to pass the **Chinese Exclusion Act** in 1882. The act prohibited immigration by Chinese laborers,

By 1890, many cities had huge immigrant populations. In San Francisco and Chicago, they made up more than 40 percent of the population. Four out of five inhabitants of New York City were foreign born or had foreign-born parents. While exclusionist policies forced some people to live in ghettos, these neighborhoods also provided familiarity. Specialty shops, grocers, and clothing stores provided a taste of the food and culture that immigrants had left behind.

In many cities, volunteer institutions known as settlement houses ran **Americanization** programs, helping newcomers learn English and adopt American dress and diet. At the same time, immigrants helped one another through fraternal associations, such

limited the civil rights of Chinese immigrants already in the United States, and forbade the naturalization of Chinese residents. Many Chinese dared not visit their families in China, fearing they would not be permitted to return. In 1898, a court case established that Chinese people born in America were United States citizens and could, therefore, come and go freely. However, many immigration officials ignored this ruling.


In the same year, Congress passed another act that prohibited the entry of anyone who was a criminal, immoral, a pauper, or likely to need public assistance. In practice, the law was used to bar many poor or handicapped immigrants. These acts marked the beginning of immigration restriction into the United States. Until then, everyone had been welcomed. Immigration became a constant topic of conversation throughout America.

 **Checkpoint** Why did some Americans want to restrict immigration?

Immigrants Change America

Despite opposition, immigrants transformed American society. They fueled industrial growth, acquired citizenship, elected politicians, and made their traditions part of American culture. Mexican Americans in the Southwest developed effective ranching techniques, while Chinese, Irish, and Mexican laborers built the railroads. Equally as important, immigrants labored in coal mines, steel mills, textile mills, and factories. Immigrant women worked in factories, as seamstresses, as laundresses, and doing piecework. Others became domestic servants. Though the conditions were harsh and they received few benefits, immigrants' labor helped the United States become a world power.

Increasingly, immigrants demanded a voice, becoming active in labor unions and politics. They lobbied for policies to protect the poor and powerless and used their votes to elect favorable governments. The political leaders they supported became powerful. Union leaders demanded reforms that helped immigrants as well as all laborers. Immigrants expanded the definition of *American*.

 **Checkpoint** How did immigrants assimilate to and change American culture?



Immigrant Contributions

Immigrants made many contributions to American culture. Composer Irving Berlin immigrated in 1893 and later wrote "God Bless America" and many other well-known songs. *Can you name any other famous immigrants?*

SECTION

1

Assessment

Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice
Web Code: nca-1402

Comprehension

1. Terms and People What do the terms below have in common?

- "new" immigrant
- steerage
- Ellis Island
- Angel Island
- Americanization
- "melting pot"
- nativism
- Chinese Exclusion Act

2. NoteTaking Reading Skill: Main Ideas Use your outline to answer the Section Focus Question: Why did immigrants come to the United States, and what impact did they have upon society?

Writing About History

3. Quick Write: Outline a Proposal Outline a plan for helping immigrants adjust to life in America. Consider cultural and language differences.

Critical Thinking

- 4. Make Comparisons** How did new immigrants differ from old immigrants?
- 5. Express Problems Clearly** What problems did immigrants face in coming to America?
- 6. Draw Conclusions** In what ways did immigrants affect the American economy and culture?