

Chapter 4 Lesson 1

Immigration

From 1865 to 1914, America experienced a wave of immigration. During this period around 25 million European immigrants entered the United States. The period after 1890, known as the “new” immigration, was made up mostly of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe as opposed to the earlier period of immigration, known as “old” immigration, with immigrants mostly from northern and western Europe.

Immigrants came for a variety of reasons.

- 1) American industries had plenty of jobs.
- 2) The immigrants had special skills to offer.
- 3) To escape poverty and social class restrictions.
- 4) To avoid forced military service
- 5) Over population in the home country.
- 6) Religious persecution in the home country (predominantly Jews)

Although America had an abundance of land, most immigrants did not have ample resources to buy the land, therefore they often moved to the cities and became unskilled laborers.

The journey to the United States was very difficult. Most immigrants had virtually no resources and traveled steerage, which is the lowest level of accommodations. The immigrants were crowded into small spaces with no outside air, inadequate sanitation and poor food. Most immigrants (1892-1954) entered America via Ellis Island. Ellis Island is located in New York Harbor. Upon their entry, immigrants (third class or steerage) were given a medical and legal inspection. Some were turned back or quarantined due to the existence of a contagious disease. Most, however, were through the inspection within a few hours.

By the 1890's, immigrants made up large percentages of the populations of many major cities. Immigrants often lived in neighborhoods divided by ethnicity. Within these neighborhoods they would create lives reminiscent of their homelands. They would speak their native languages, eat traditional ethnic foods and recreate the social and cultural traditions (religion/churches or synagogues, clubs, newspapers, etc.) of their native lands.

Asian Immigration

Chinese immigration increased in the mid 1800's for a variety of reasons. China was struggling with a growing population, unemployment, extreme poverty, famine and a rebellion. Chinese immigrants began to journey to America in larger and larger numbers. They came to work the gold mines of California but were often forced into menial labor jobs by active discrimination against them. They laid most of the tracks for the Central Pacific Railroad.

Japanese immigration increased between 1900 and 1910. Many Japanese left Japan as industrialization created economic problems. In 1910, Angel Island was opened as an entry point for Asian immigrants. The wait was often very long to enter the country and many Asians were denied. As immigration policies changed the purpose of Angel Island became to keep Asian immigrants out of the United States.

The Rise of Nativism

Nativism is an extreme dislike of immigrants by native-born people. As the wave of immigration increased so did nativism. There were many reasons behind nativism.

- 1) Fear that Catholicism (immigrants from Ireland, Italy, Poland) would overwhelm Protestantism
- 2) Belief that immigrants hurt Americans' job opportunities
- 3) Immigrants hurt Americans' work for labor improvements because they would work as strikebreakers
- 4) Fear of new cultural and social traditions

Nativism led to discrimination and violence against immigrants. The American Protective Association was founded in 1887 by Henry Bowers. This organization's members agreed to not hire or vote for Irish Catholics (they later added all Catholics). At its' peak the APA had over 2 million members but was not truly ever a political party itself. The APA would circulate ballots ahead of an election with candidates marked "C"=Catholic, "c"=catholic sympathizer or "P"=Protestant, so that voters would be informed. The APA also printed their own newspapers to influence the public against Catholics. The APA was most prominent in the West and Midwest and was dissolved in 1911.

Throughout the period, there was racial violence against the various immigrant groups. Vigilante groups in California often hunted down and injured or killed immigrants under the guise of fighting crime.

Political groups in California were formed expressly to stop Chinese immigration. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. This law banned Chinese immigration for 10 years and denied citizenship to any Chinese already in the United States. The Chinese tried to stop the law but it became permanent in 1902 and was not repealed until 1943.

In 1906, in response to rising Asian immigration (especially Japanese), San Francisco, California created and "Oriental School" for all Asian students. The Japanese government responded to this action, considering it an insult and a humiliation. An international incident was brewing, because Japan had already agreed to slow immigration to the US. Some Japanese were coming to other nations and then migrating to the US, to avoid the restrictions on immigration. The order to segregate the school upset the delicate balance between nations. President Teddy Roosevelt suggested a limit on Japanese immigration and in return the SF school district would do away with the segregated school. The Japanese government agreed to the deal and it was known as the Gentlemen's Agreement. The agreement stayed in effect until the Immigration Act of 1924.