

## Immigrants Flock to America

**FL SS.912.A.3.7** Compare the experience of European immigrants in the east to that of Asian immigrants in the west (the Chinese Exclusion Act, Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan).

**Vocabulary Builder:** *preliminary* (pree LIM uh ner ee) *adj.* happening before and leading up to something

Different periods of history brought immigrants from different areas of the world. Their individual reasons for coming to America varied, although all were generally seeking freedom and better lives for their families.

WHEN	WHO	WHY
Prior to 1871	Northern and Western Europeans from Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Norway, Sweden	To better their economic circumstances; to gain religious freedom
1871 to 1921	Southern and Eastern Europeans from Italy, Greece, Poland, Russia, and present-day Hungary and Yugoslavia and Asians from China and Japan	To better their economic circumstances; to avoid religious persecution (maltreatment because of religious beliefs); to escape wars/political refugees; to respond to businesses in the West calling for workers

### Where Immigrants Arrived

European immigrants crossed the Atlantic on ships and most often arrived at Ellis Island in New York harbor. It is estimated that 40 percent of Americans have an ancestor who came through Ellis Island. After 1886, immigrants' first view of the United States was the Statue of Liberty welcoming them to America. They were processed through Ellis Island and put through various steps to make sure they were acceptable. Thanks to preliminary screenings held before sailing, most were accepted through to New York City.

On the West Coast, Asian immigrants crossed the Pacific to Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. Though it was often called the "Ellis Island of the West," the mostly Chinese immigrants who came through Angel Island were often kept there for long periods of time. Unlike at Ellis Island, many persons at Angel Island were ultimately denied entry.

## **Immigrants Flock to America (continued)**

### **The American Melting Pot**

Though many immigrants settled together in neighborhoods, attended churches, and formed lodges that reflected their own ethnic backgrounds, immigrants and their families worked hard to be Americans. They learned English, adopted American customs, and became citizens. Public schools played a major role in immigrant assimilation, the process of becoming part of American culture, as immigrant children brought American society home to their families. In turn, some of the immigrants' customs became part of mainstream American society. This process gave rise to the term "the American melting pot."

Many immigrants were willing to do the back-breaking, dangerous, low-paying work that marked the Industrial Revolution years. In the process, they changed the face of the United States and helped to make it a major economic world player. Chinese and Irish workers built the trans-continental railroad, which helped Americans move easily about the entire width of the country. In the East, immigrants worked in factories, steel mills, and textile mills, as well as the clothing industry in New York City. Some immigrants labored in the dangerous coal mines. The harsh working conditions immigrants faced eventually gave rise to labor reforms, making work a better place for their descendants, just as they had dreamed.

### **Resentment Toward Immigrants**

Because immigrants were willing to do the hardest work for low pay, Americans looked upon them with distrust. They were seen as intruders who had come to steal American jobs. Additionally, many of the new immigrants were Catholic or Jewish, which raised the suspicions of Protestants. Many Americans even refused to hire people of a certain ethnicity or religion.

Particular resentment toward the Chinese led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This act banned the immigration of Chinese laborers for ten years and forbade Chinese immigrants from being naturalized as U.S. citizens. In 1921, Congress was called back by President Warren Harding to pass a law limiting the number of immigrants who could enter the United States. This law grew into the Immigration Act of 1924, which limited the number of immigrants according to their country of origin. The law was an effort to stem the tide that some Americans feared would drown them. Although these laws effectively slowed immigration to America for several decades, the immigrants of this period continued to make significant contributions to American society.

### **Gentlemen's Agreement with Japan**

Japanese immigrants also faced discrimination, particularly in California. In San Francisco, following the 1906 earthquake and fire, the city's school board required Japanese students to attend an all-Asian school. This led to an uproar among both the Japanese in California and in Japan. In order to end the escalating anger on both sides of the Pacific, President Roosevelt arranged for the San Francisco school board to end segregation of Japanese students. The Japanese government, in return, promised to stop issuing passports for Japanese laborers to emigrate to the United States. This was called the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907.

**Check for Understanding** Why were immigrants so important to the growth of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

## The Social Gospel Movement



**SS.912.A.3.8** Examine the importance of social change and reform in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (class system, migration from farms to cities, Social Gospel movement, role of settlement houses and churches in providing services to the poor).

**Vocabulary Builder:** **affluent** (a FLOO ent) *adj.* having an abundance of material wealth

The second half of the nineteenth century saw huge changes in the fabric of American society. When the era began, the nation was largely agrarian but when it ended, the United States was an industrial giant. This industrial growth was powered by a shift in population from farms to the cities and by a flood of immigrants, particularly from southern and eastern Europe. These immigrants were primarily Catholic and Jewish, which kept them from blending quickly with the Anglo-Saxon Protestants who had made up previous waves of immigration.

### Growth of Class System

The cities were unable to keep up with the needs of their swelling populations. In addition, jobs in the industrial cities paid little and the people who worked in these new factories could not afford the comforts enjoyed by more **affluent** Americans. Class separations grew clearer during this time period. The bottom rung of the social ladder was occupied by the very poor who lived in overcrowded cities and lacked basic water and sanitation needs. There was a growing middle class of bankers, shopkeepers, office workers, accountants and other "white collar" workers. These Americans were able to afford some of the luxuries that industry was beginning to provide such as bicycles, periodicals and books, sewing machines, canned food, and comfortable homes. The top of the social ladder was occupied by the very rich, the capitalists who reaped huge profits from growing industries. These wealthy few built extravagant homes and lived in luxury.

### Social Gospel

It was members of the affluent middle class who began taking an interest in the poor immigrants of the cities. Many were motivated by a desire to put biblical principles into practice. These Christians wanted to follow the teachings of the Bible in a practical manner and hoped to end the injustice they saw in the poor working class. Walter Rauschenbusch, a German immigrant and Baptist minister, melded the German socialism of his home country with the Progressivism of his new country in his book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*. He called on Christians to work together to give their time and money to bring justice to the needy. This movement, called the Social Gospel movement, was political as well as social. The people involved advocated such progressive ideas as ending child labor, establishing a shorter work week, and limiting the power of big business.

### Settlement Houses

Settlement houses were another means for middle class Americans to help the poor. Jane Addams is probably the best known figure in this form of social work. During a visit to Europe in 1888, she was impressed by a settlement house in London. This motivated her to found Hull House in Chicago the following year. Settlement houses provided an assortment of services to the urban poor, including classes in English, childcare, nutrition, and vocational training. Settlement houses also provided nursery schools and kindergartens. The settlement houses were generally run by young, college educated Americans like Jane Addams who wanted to be involved in improving the living and working conditions of the urban poor. By 1911, there were more than four hundred settlement houses in America's cities.

**Check for Understanding** In what ways did the religiously motivated middle class work to help poor immigrants in America's industrial cities?

## Political Machines



**SS.912.A.3.11** Analyze the impact of political machines in United States cities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Vocabulary Builder:** endorse (en DORS) *v.* to give formal approval or permission

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While young idealists like Jane Addams lived in urban slums and tried to improve life for poor immigrants through education and political change, another group of people provided immediate assistance to the immigrants in exchange for political support. These were the political bosses who ran the political machines in American cities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

### Political Bosses

Political bosses and other corrupt city officials ran the large industrial cities during this time period. Their wealth was funded by the industrial revolution. Most of the bosses had their roots in the immigrant slums and had climbed out of them by knowing and rewarding the “right” people. Whether officially elected to the office of mayor or alderman, or simply the head of the machine that ran the elected officials, the bosses controlled city politics.

Much of the power of these political bosses was based on the disorder in the cities that came about through industrialization. New immigrants could count on assistance and protection from their local politician. Sometimes this took the form of food; sometimes it was in the form of government jobs or services. These were given in exchange for votes. Securely in office, corrupt officials funded their machine from the businesses and corporations doing business in their cities. If a city had outgrown its water system and a new one was planned, businesses that wanted the contract would bribe city officials. If there was a city contract for expanding the streetcar system, the business providing the biggest bribe in the “right” place was awarded the contract. Not surprisingly, the services provided by this method were not the best. City corruption also took the form of “kickbacks.” Contractors were encouraged to pad their bills to the city. A portion of this extra money would be returned to the city official who endorsed it.

Another source of graft and income for city bosses was industry itself. Corporations that wanted to establish themselves in a city needed to pay a corrupt official in order to get necessary permits. The result was wealth for those who controlled the political machine.

Although there were sometimes taxpayer revolts and attempts to clean up city government, many political machines kept their power and influence for years. Eventually, Progressive reforms curbed the power of political bosses. Restructuring city government along the Galveston plan, with a commission and a city manager, helped some cities. Reform governments also purchased and ran the city utilities so that taxpayers would not be forced to pay the bribes and kickbacks of earlier days.

**Check for Understanding** Why were political bosses able to stay in power?