

The question has been asked: Is a politician ever justified in goin' back on his district leader? I answer: "No; as long as the leader hustles around and gets all the jobs possible for his constituents." When the voters elect a man leader, they make a sort of a contract with him. They say, although it ain't written out: "We've put you here to look out for our interests. You want to see that this district gets all the jobs that's comin' to it. Be faithful to us, and we'll be faithful to you."

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## 18.5 The Other Immigrant Experience: Rural Immigrants in the Midwest

Jon Gjerde

The "New Immigration" and the urban immigrant experience were the dominant patterns in the decades between 1880 and 1920. But significant numbers of immigrants continued to arrive from Northern and Western Europe (see Doc. 18.1), and for millions of these people and their children, home was not a city tenement but a farmhouse in the Midwest. This selection is taken from Jon Gjerde's innovative study of the mass migration of residents from a community in southern Norway to Wisconsin and Minnesota. It describes how this rural group of "older" immigrants adapted and became more "American" in the late nineteenth century. Gjerde's study suggests that there were sharp differences between the lives of these rural immigrants and the lives of "New Immigrants" in the cities.

### *Consider:*

1. *The most significant changes in the cultural patterns of the Norwegian immigrants;*
2. *Whether it was easier for immigrants living in rural areas or those living in urban areas to retain a sense of ethnic community in America;*
3. *Why these Norwegian immigrants seemed to adapt more easily than the "New Immigrants" to American social patterns.*

Immigrants from Balestrand experienced a similar . . . transition. Moving from an area with extremely high rates of illegitimacy . . . [these] immigrants lived in settlements that by the turn of the century rarely saw either illegitimate or prenuptially conceived births. . . .

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SOURCE: Jon Gjerde, *From Peasants to Farmers: The Migration from Balestrand, Norway, to the Upper Middle West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 202, 204-5, 277-31. Copyright © Cambridge University Press. Reprinted with permission.