



The New Immigrants

MAIN IDEA

Immigration from Europe, Asia, the Caribbean, and Mexico reached a new high in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

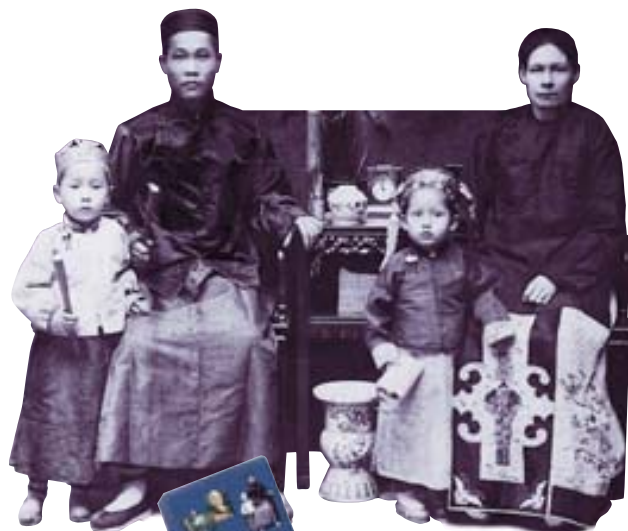
This wave of immigration helped make the United States the diverse society it is today.

Terms & Names

- Ellis Island
- Angel Island
- melting pot
- nativism
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Gentlemen's Agreement



In 1871, 14-year-old Fong See came from China to “Gold Mountain”—the United States. Fong See stayed, worked at menial jobs, and saved enough money to buy a business. Despite widespread restrictions against the Chinese, he became a very successful importer and was able to sponsor many other Chinese who wanted to enter the United States. Fong See had achieved the American dream. However, as his great-granddaughter Lisa See recalls, he was not satisfied.



A PERSONAL VOICE LISA SEE

“He had been trying to achieve success ever since he had first set foot on the Gold Mountain. His dream was very ‘American.’ He wanted to make money, have influence, be respected, have a wife and children who loved him. In 1919, when he traveled to China, he could look at his life and say he had achieved his dream. But once in China, he suddenly saw his life in a different context. In America, was he really rich? Could he live where he wanted? . . . Did *Americans* care what he thought? . . . The answers played in his head—no, no, no.”

—On Gold Mountain

Despite Fong See’s success, he could not, upon his death in 1957, be buried next to his Caucasian wife because California cemeteries were still segregated.

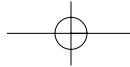
Through the “Golden Door”

Millions of immigrants like Fong See entered the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, lured by the promise of a better life. Some of these immigrants sought to escape difficult conditions—such as famine, land shortages, or religious or political persecution. Others, known as “birds of passage,” intended to immigrate temporarily to earn money, and then return to their homelands.



VIDEO

FROM CHINA TO CHINATOWN
Fong See's American Dream



Background

From 1815 to 1848, a wave of revolutions—mostly sparked by a desire for constitutional governments—shook Europe. In 1830, for example, the Polish people rose up against their Russian rulers.

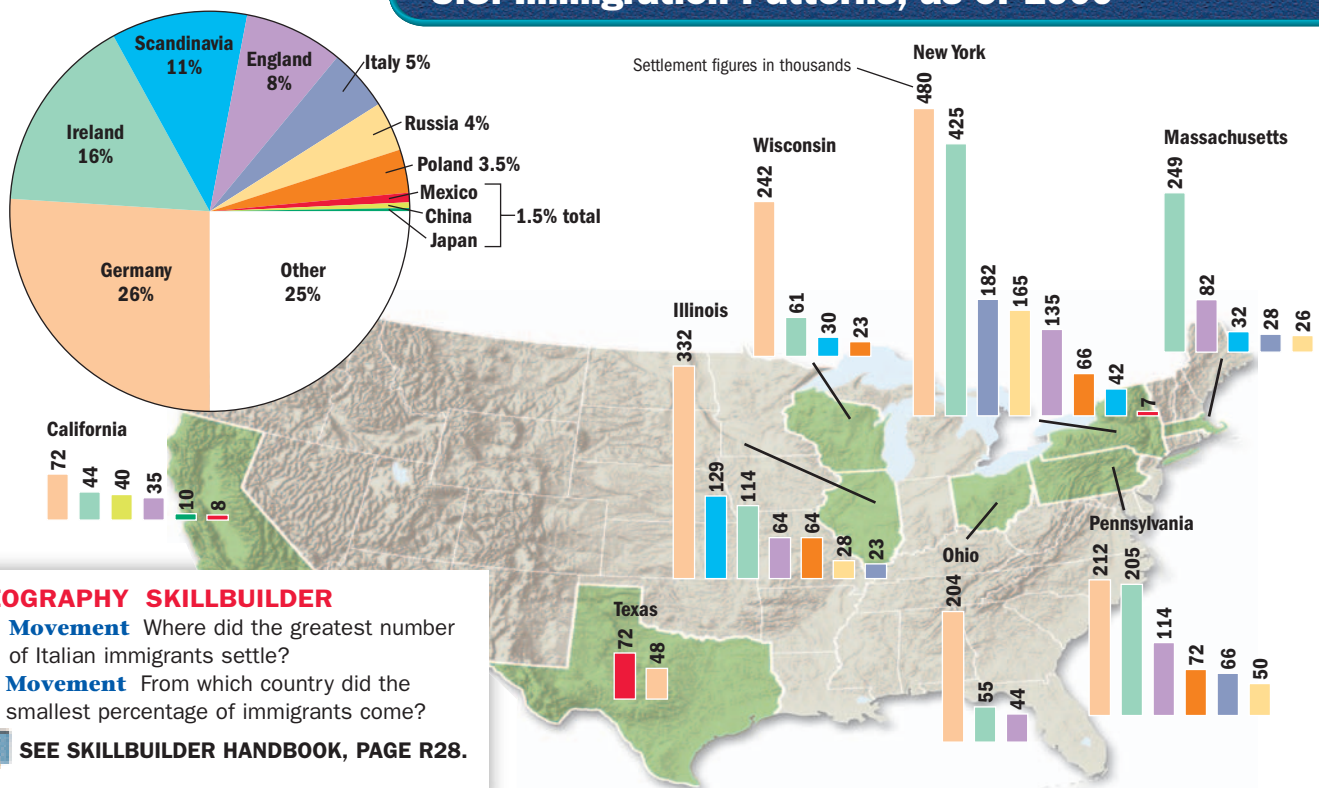
EUROPEANS Between 1870 and 1920, approximately 20 million Europeans arrived in the United States. Before 1890, most immigrants came from countries in western and northern Europe. Beginning in the 1890s, however, increasing numbers came from southern and eastern Europe. In 1907 alone, about a million people arrived from Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia.

Why did so many leave their homelands? Many of these new immigrants left to escape religious persecution. Whole villages of Jews were driven out of Russia by pogroms, organized attacks often encouraged by local authorities. Other Europeans left because of rising population. Between 1800 and 1900, the population in Europe doubled to nearly 400 million, resulting in a scarcity of land for farming. Farmers competed with laborers for too few industrial jobs. In the United States, jobs were supposedly plentiful. In addition, a spirit of reform and revolt had spread across Europe in the 19th century. Influenced by political movements at home, many young European men and women sought independent lives in America.

CHINESE AND JAPANESE While waves of Europeans arrived on the shores of the East Coast, Chinese immigrants came to the West Coast in smaller numbers. Between 1851 and 1883, about 300,000 Chinese arrived. Many came to seek their fortunes after the discovery of gold in 1848 sparked the California gold rush. Chinese immigrants helped build the nation’s railroads, including the first transcontinental line. When the railroads were completed, they turned to farming, mining, and domestic service. Some, like Fong See, started businesses. However, Chinese immigration was sharply limited by a congressional act in 1882.

In 1884, the Japanese government allowed Hawaiian planters to recruit Japanese workers, and a Japanese emigration boom began. The United States’ annexation of Hawaii in 1898 resulted in increased Japanese immigration to the West Coast. Immigration continued to increase as word of comparatively high American wages spread. The wave peaked in 1907, when 30,000 left Japan for the United States. By 1920, more than 200,000 Japanese lived on the West Coast.

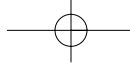
U.S. Immigration Patterns, as of 1900



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

- 1. Movement** Where did the greatest number of Italian immigrants settle?
- 2. Movement** From which country did the smallest percentage of immigrants come?

SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R28.



THE WEST INDIES AND MEXICO Between 1880 and 1920, about 260,000 immigrants arrived in the eastern and southeastern United States from the West Indies. They came from Jamaica, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other islands. Many West Indians left their homelands because jobs were scarce and the industrial boom in the United States seemed to promise work for everyone.

Mexicans, too, immigrated to the United States to find work, as well as to flee political turmoil. The 1902 National Reclamation Act, which encouraged the irrigation of arid land, created new farmland in Western states and drew Mexican farm workers northward. After 1910, political and social upheavals in Mexico prompted even more immigration. About 700,000 people—7 percent of the population of Mexico at the time—came to the U.S. over the next 20 years. **A**

MAIN IDEA

Analyzing Causes

A What reasons did people from other parts of the world have for immigrating to the United States?

Life in the New Land

No matter what part of the globe immigrants came from, they faced many adjustments to an alien—and often unfriendly—culture.

A DIFFICULT JOURNEY By the 1870s, almost all immigrants traveled by steamship. The trip across the Atlantic Ocean from Europe took approximately one week, while the Pacific crossing from Asia took nearly three weeks.

Many immigrants traveled in steerage, the cheapest accommodations in a ship’s cargo holds. Rarely allowed on deck, immigrants were crowded together in the gloom, unable to exercise or catch a breath of fresh air. They often had to sleep in louse-infested bunks and share toilets with many other passengers. Under these conditions, disease spread quickly, and some immigrants died before they reached their destination. For those who survived, the first glimpse of America could be breathtaking.

A PERSONAL VOICE ROSA CAVALLERI

“America! . . . We were so near it seemed too much to believe. Everyone stood silent—like in prayer. . . . Then we were entering the harbor. The land came so near we could almost reach out and touch it. . . . Everyone was holding their breath. Me too. . . . Some boats had bands playing on their decks and all of them were tooting their horns to us and leaving white trails in the water behind them.”

—quoted in *Rosa: The Life of an Italian Immigrant*

European governments used passports to control the number of professionals and young men of military age who left the country.

ELLIS ISLAND After initial moments of excitement, the immigrants faced the anxiety of not knowing whether they would be admitted to the United States. They had to pass inspection at immigration stations, such as the one at Castle Garden in New York, which was later moved to **Ellis Island** in New York Harbor.

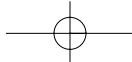
About 20 percent of the immigrants at Ellis Island were detained for a day or more before being inspected. However, only about 2 percent of those were denied entry.

The processing of immigrants on Ellis Island was an ordeal that might take five hours or more. First, they had to pass a physical examination by a doctor. Anyone with a serious health problem or a contagious disease, such as tuberculosis, was promptly sent home. Those who passed the medical exam then reported to a government inspector. The inspector checked documents and questioned immigrants

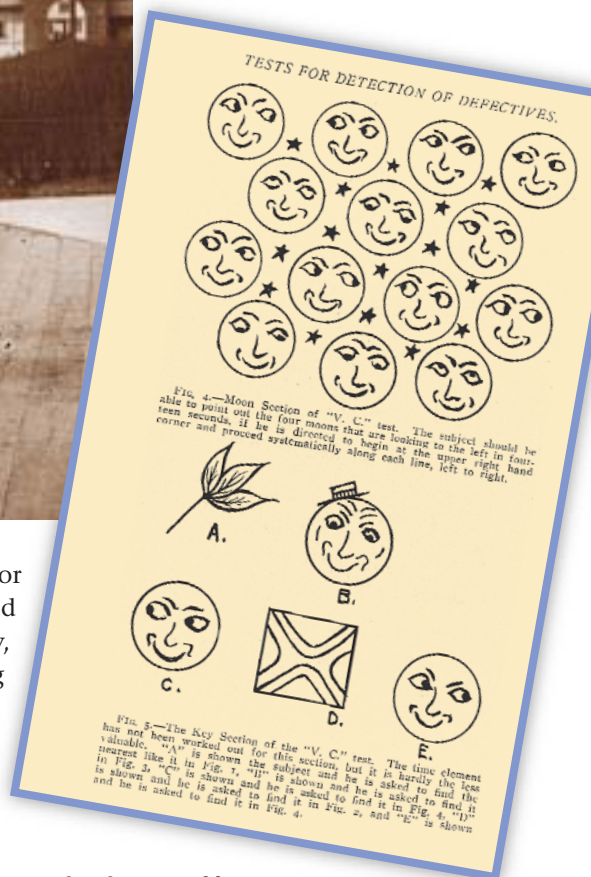
Vocabulary

tuberculosis: a bacterial infection, characterized by fever and coughing, that spreads easily





◀ Many immigrants, like these arriving at Ellis Island, were subjected to tests such as the one below. To prove their mental competence, they had to identify the four faces looking left in 14 seconds. Can you do it?



Vocabulary

felony: any one of the most serious crimes under the law, including murder, rape, and burglary

to determine whether they met the legal requirements for entering the United States. The requirements included proving they had never been convicted of a felony, demonstrating that they were able to work, and showing that they had some money (at least \$25 after 1909). One inspector, Edward Ferro, an Italian immigrant himself, gave this glimpse of the process.

A PERSONAL VOICE EDWARD FERRO

“The language was a problem of course, but it was overcome by the use of interpreters. . . . It would happen sometimes that these interpreters—some of them—were really softhearted people and hated to see people being deported, and they would, at times, help the aliens by interpreting in such a manner as to benefit the alien and not the government.”

—quoted in *I Was Dreaming to Come to America*

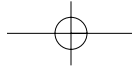
From 1892 to 1924, Ellis Island was the chief immigration station in the United States. An estimated 17 million immigrants passed through its noisy, bustling facilities.

ANGEL ISLAND While European immigrants arriving on the East Coast passed through Ellis Island, Asians—primarily Chinese—arriving on the West Coast gained admission at **Angel Island** in San Francisco Bay. Between 1910 and 1940, about 50,000 Chinese immigrants entered the United States through Angel Island. Processing at Angel Island stood in contrast to the procedure at Ellis Island. Immigrants endured harsh questioning and a long detention in filthy, ramshackle buildings while they waited to find out whether they would be admitted or rejected. **B**


COOPERATION FOR SURVIVAL Once admitted to the country, immigrants faced the challenges of finding a place to live, getting a job, and getting along in daily life while trying to understand an unfamiliar language and culture. Many immigrants sought out people who shared their cultural values, practiced their religion,

MAIN IDEA
Identifying Problems

B What difficulties did immigrants face in gaining admission to the United States?



and spoke their native language. The ethnic communities were life rafts for immigrants. People pooled their money to build churches or synagogues. They formed social clubs and aid societies. They founded orphanages and old people's homes, and established cemeteries. They even published newspapers in their own languages.


Committed to their own cultures but also trying hard to grow into their new identities, many immigrants came to think of themselves as “hyphenated” Americans. As hard as they tried to fit in, these new Polish- and Italian- and Chinese-Americans felt increasing friction as they rubbed shoulders with people born and raised in the United States. Native-born people often disliked the immigrants’ unfamiliar customs and languages, and viewed them as a threat to the American way of life. 

Vocabulary

synagogue: place of meeting for worship and religious instruction in the Jewish faith

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

 How did immigrants deal with challenges they faced?

Immigration Restrictions

Many native-born Americans thought of their country as a **melting pot**, a mixture of people of different cultures and races who blended together by abandoning their native languages and customs. Many new immigrants, however, did not wish to give up their cultural identities. As immigration increased, strong anti-immigrant feelings emerged.

THE RISE OF NATIVISM One response to the growth in immigration was **nativism**, or overt favoritism toward native-born Americans. Nativism gave rise to anti-immigrant groups and led to a demand for immigration restrictions.

Many nativists believed that Anglo-Saxons—the Germanic ancestors of the English—were superior to other ethnic groups. These nativists did not object to immigrants from the “right” countries. Prescott F. Hall, a founder in 1894 of the Immigration Restriction League, identified desirable immigrants as “British, German, and Scandinavian stock, historically free, energetic, progressive.” Nativists thought that problems were caused by immigrants from the “wrong” countries—“Slav, Latin, and Asiatic races, historically down-trodden . . . and stagnant.”

Nativists sometimes objected more to immigrants’ religious beliefs than to their ethnic backgrounds. Many native-born Americans were Protestants and thought that Roman Catholic and Jewish immigrants would undermine the

democratic institutions established by the country’s Protestant founders. The American Protective Association, a nativist group founded in 1887, launched vicious anti-Catholic attacks, and many colleges, businesses, and social clubs refused to admit Jews.

In 1897, Congress—influenced by the Immigration Restriction League—passed a bill requiring a literacy test for immigrants. Those who could not read 40 words in English or their native language would be refused entry. Although President Cleveland vetoed the bill, it was a powerful statement of public sentiment. In 1917, a similar bill would be passed into law in spite of President Woodrow Wilson’s veto.

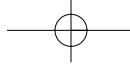
ANTI-ASIAN SENTIMENT Nativism also found a foothold in the labor movement, particularly in the West, where native-born workers feared that jobs would go to Chinese

Chinese immigrants wait outside the hospital on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay, 1910.



Vocabulary

progressive: favoring advancement toward better conditions or new ideas



immigrants, who would accept lower wages. The depression of 1873 intensified anti-Chinese sentiment in California. Work was scarce, and labor groups exerted political pressure on the government to restrict Asian immigration. The founder of the Workingmen's Party, Denis Kearney, headed the anti-Chinese movement in California. He made hundreds of speeches throughout the state, each ending with the message, "The Chinese must go!"

In 1882, Congress slammed the door on Chinese immigration for ten years by passing the **Chinese Exclusion Act**. This act banned entry to all Chinese except students, teachers, merchants, tourists, and government officials. In 1892, Congress extended the law for another ten years. In 1902, Chinese immigration was restricted indefinitely; the law was not repealed until 1943.

THE GENTLEMEN'S AGREEMENT The fears that had led to anti-Chinese agitation were extended to Japanese and other Asian people in the early 1900s. In 1906, the local board of education in San Francisco segregated Japanese children by putting them in separate schools. When Japan raised an angry protest at this treatment of its emigrants, President Theodore Roosevelt worked out a deal. Under the **Gentlemen's Agreement** of 1907–1908, Japan's government agreed to limit emigration of unskilled workers to the United States in exchange for the repeal of the San Francisco segregation order.

Although doorways for immigrants had been all but closed to Asians on the West Coast, cities in the East and the Midwest teemed with European immigrants—and with urban opportunities and challenges.



▲ Fear and resentment of Chinese immigrants sometimes resulted in mob attacks, like the one shown here.



ASSESSMENT

1. TERMS & NAMES For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Ellis Island
- Angel Island
- melting pot
- nativism
- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Gentlemen's Agreement

MAIN IDEA

2. TAKING NOTES

Create a diagram such as the one below. List two or more causes of each effect.

Causes	→	Effects
1. 2. 3.		Immigrants leave their home countries.
1. 2. 3.		Immigrants face hardships in the United States.
1. 2. 3.		Some nativists want to restrict immigration.

CRITICAL THINKING

3. IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS

Which group of immigrants do you think faced the greatest challenges in the United States? Why?

4. ANALYZING EFFECTS

What were the effects of the massive influx of immigrants to the U.S. in the late 1800s?

5. EVALUATING

What arguments can you make against nativism and anti-immigrant feeling? **Think About:**

- the personal qualities of immigrants
- the reasons for anti-immigrant feeling
- the contributions of immigrants to the United States