

## Immigration

**Main Idea** After the Civil War, millions of immigrants from Europe and Asia settled in the United States.

**Reading Connection** Think about the ethnic composition of your community. What groups are represented? Read on to learn about the neighborhoods in which immigrants to the United States settled in the late 1800s.

By 1900, more than half of all immigrants in the United States were eastern and southern Europeans, including Italians, Greeks, Poles, Slavs, Slovaks, Russians, and Armenians.

### ★ An American Story ★

Samuel Goldwyn was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1879. His family lived in a tiny two-room apartment. As Jews the Goldwyn family feared the pogroms—anti-Jewish riots—that often erupted in the city. At age 16, Goldwyn set out for America, first walking 500 miles to the port of Hamburg, Germany. When he arrived in the United States, Goldwyn worked as a floor sweeper and then as a cutter in a glove factory, putting in 13-hour days. At night, he went to school. Within two years he was a foreman in the factory, and soon after he became a successful glove salesman.

In 1913 Goldwyn visited a nickelodeon, an early movie theater. As he watched the film, he became convinced that this new industry would grow into something big. He used his savings to set up a film company, and in 1914 he released his first movie. The film was an instant success. During his career, Goldwyn helped found three film companies: Paramount Studios, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), and United Artists. All three companies still make movies today. Looking back on his rise from poverty to wealth, Goldwyn commented:

“When I was a kid . . . the only place I wanted to go was America. I had heard them talking about America, about how free people were in America. . . . Even then America, actually only the name of a faraway country, was a vision of paradise.”

—adapted from *Goldwyn: A Biography*

Many of the 14 million immigrants who came to the United States between 1860 and 1900 were eastern

European Jews. Like Samuel Goldwyn, they came to make a new life for themselves.

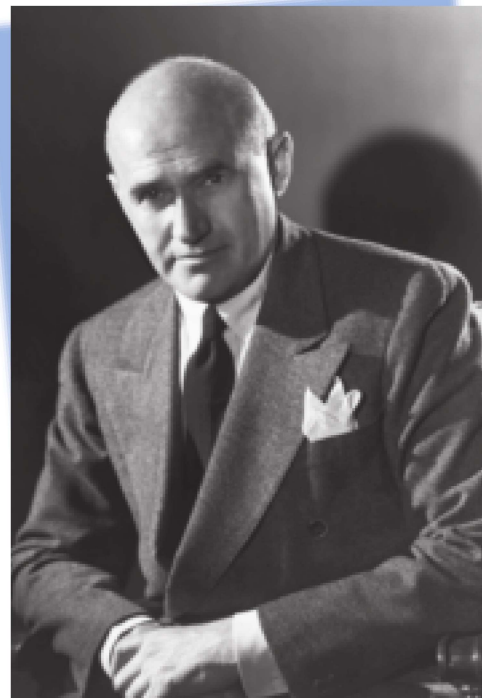
### Europeans Flood Into the United States

Europeans abandoned their homelands and headed to the United States for many reasons. Many poor rural farmers came simply because the United States had plenty of jobs available and few immigration restrictions. Others moved to avoid forced military service, which in some nations could last for many years. Some, especially Jews living in Poland and Russia, fled to avoid religious persecution.

By the late 1800s, most European governments had made moving to the United States easy. Immigrants were allowed to take their savings with them, and most countries had repealed old laws that had forced peasants to stay in their villages and had banned skilled workers from leaving the country.

Getting to the United States was often very difficult. Most immigrants booked passage in steerage, the most basic and cheapest accommodations on a steamship. In steerage, passengers faced “crowds everywhere, ill smelling bunks, [and] uninviting washrooms,” as one observer put it. At the end of a 14-day journey, the passengers usually disembarked at **Ellis Island** in New York Harbor, which served as the processing center for many immigrants arriving on the East Coast after 1892. Most immigrants passed through Ellis Island in about a day. In Ellis Island’s

Samuel Goldwyn ▼



# "Old" and "New" Immigrants, 1870–1900



enormous hall, crowds of immigrants filed past doctors for an initial inspection. "Whenever a case aroused suspicion," an inspector wrote, "the alien was set aside in a cage apart from the rest . . . and his coat lapel or shirt marked with colored chalk" to indicate the reason for the isolation. Newcomers who failed the inspection might be separated from their families and returned to Europe.

Those immigrants who stayed often settled in larger cities. By the 1890s, they made up significant percentages of some of the country's largest cities, including New York, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Detroit. In the cities, immigrants lived in neighborhoods that were often separated into ethnic groups, such as "Little Italy" or the Jewish "Lower East Side" in New York City. There they spoke their native languages and re-created the churches, synagogues, clubs, and newspapers of their homelands. Jacob Riis, a Danish-born journalist, observed in 1890 that a map

**Geography Skills**

- Analyzing Maps** From which region did the majority of U.S. immigrants come?
- Applying Geography Skills** In what year did immigration from northern and western Europe peak?

of New York City, "colored to designate nationalities, would show more stripes than on the skin of a zebra."

How well immigrants adjusted depended partly on how quickly they learned English and adapted to American culture. Immigrants also tended to adjust well if they had marketable skills or money, or if they settled among members of their own ethnic group.

As many as one in three immigrants returned to Europe shortly after coming to the United States. Some had never planned to stay and had come simply to make a little money before returning home.

**Asian Immigration to America** Chinese immigrants began crossing the Pacific to arrive in the United States in the mid-1800s. By that time, China's population had reached 430 million, and the



country was suffering from severe unemployment, poverty, and famine.

The 1848 discovery of gold in California began to lure Chinese immigrants to the United States. Then, in 1850, the Taiping Rebellion erupted in their homeland. This insurrection against the Chinese government took some 20 million lives and caused such suffering that thousands of Chinese left for the United States. In the early 1860s, as the Central Pacific Railroad began construction of its portion of the transcontinental railroad, the demand for railroad workers further increased Chinese immigration.

Chinese immigrants settled mainly in western cities, where they often worked as laborers or servants or in skilled trades. Others worked as merchants. Because native-born Americans kept them out of many businesses, some Chinese immigrants opened their own.

Another group of Asians, the Japanese, also immigrated to the United States. Until 1910, however, their numbers remained small. Between 1900 and 1908, this number increased. Large numbers of Japanese migrated to the United States as Japan began building both an industrial economy and an empire. Both developments disrupted the economy of Japan and caused hardships for its people, thus stimulating emigration.

Until 1910 Asian immigrants arriving in San Francisco first stopped at a two-story shed at the wharf. As many as 500 people at a time were often squeezed into this structure, which Chinese immigrants from Canton called *muk uk*, or “wooden house.”

In January 1910, California opened barracks on **Angel Island** to house and process the Asian immigrants. Most of the immigrants were young males in their teens or twenties, who nervously awaited the results of their immigration hearings in dormitories packed with double or triple tiers of bunks. This unpleasant delay could last for months. On the walls of the detention barracks, the immigrants wrote anonymous poems in pencil or ink. Some even carved their verse into the wood.

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**Angel Island** Over 200,000 immigrants from Japan and China arrived on the West Coast during the late 1800s.

**The Resurgence of Nativism** Eventually, the wave of immigration led to increased feelings of nativism on the part of many Americans. **Nativism** is a preference for native-born people and a desire to limit immigration. In the 1840s and 1850s, it had focused primarily on Irish immigrants. Now anti-immigrant feelings focused on Asians, Jews, and eastern Europeans.

Nativists opposed immigration for various reasons. Some feared that the influx of Catholics from Ireland and southern and eastern Europe would swamp the mostly Protestant United States and give the Catholic Church too much power in the American government. Many labor unions also opposed immigration, arguing that immigrants would work for low wages or accept work as strikebreakers, thus undermining American-born workers.

In the Northeast and Midwest, increased feelings of nativism led to the founding of two major anti-immigrant organizations. The American Protective Association was formed in 1887 to stop Catholic immigration. Its membership declined after the economic recession of 1893 ended. In the West, Denis Kearney—himself an Irish immigrant—organized the Workingman’s Party of California in the 1870s to fight Chinese immigration. The party won seats in California’s legislature and made opposition to Chinese immigration a national issue.

Such concern over unchecked immigration stimulated the passage of a new federal law. Enacted in 1882, the law banned convicts, paupers, and the mentally disabled from immigrating to the United States. The new law also placed a 50¢ head tax on each



# Different Viewpoints

## Two Views of Immigration

The history of immigration to the United States has been both celebrated and criticized. Many millions of immigrants arrived in the United States in the late 1800s. The newcomers sought opportunity, enriched American culture, and caused concerns. Here, two political cartoons address the immigration issue.

### Pro-Immigration

Uncle Sam plays the role of Noah in this cartoon. As immigrants file two by two into the safety of the ark, they leave behind the dangers of Europe that are darkening the sky. A sign lists some reasons people came to the United States to begin a new life.



### Anti-Immigration

"Columbia's Unwelcome Guests" shows another view of immigration. In this 1885 cartoon, the figure of Columbia bars entry to anarchists, Socialists, and Communists who enter from the sewers of Europe's darker society. Some of the inscriptions on the column pedestal beside Columbia read "Anarchy is not liberty," and "When a Man's Rights End, His Neighbor's Begin."



### Learning From History

1. **Historical Analysis** According to the cartoon, why were people concerned about immigrants coming to the United States? **CA CS3; HI1; HI3**
2. Which cartoon best expresses your own views on immigration today? Why?

newcomer. That same year, Congress passed the **Chinese Exclusion Act**. This law barred Chinese immigration for 10 years and prevented the Chinese already in the country from becoming citizens. The Chinese in the United States protested that white Americans did not oppose immigration by Italians, Irish, or Germans. Some Chinese organized letter-writing campaigns, petitioned the president, and even filed suit in federal court.

All efforts proved fruitless. Congress renewed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1892 and then made it permanent in 1902. In 1890 the number of Chinese living in the United States totaled 105,000. By 1900 that number had dropped to just above 74,000. In the 40 years after the passage of the act, the Chinese population in the United States continued to decrease. The act was not repealed until 1943.

**Reading Check** **Explaining** Why did nativists oppose immigration?

## Urbanization

**Main Idea** **During the three decades following the Civil War, the United States transformed rapidly from a rural nation to a more urban one.**

**Reading Connection** Do you currently live in an urban, rural, or suburban area? In which of these kinds of areas do you hope to live 10 years from now? Why? Read on to learn what life was like in the late 1800s for residents of urban communities in the United States.

During the three decades after the Civil War, the urban population of the United States—those living in towns with a population of 2,500 or more—grew from around 10 million in 1870 to more than