

## The Changing Patterns of Immigration

### Introduction

The United States of America is a “Melting Pot” of many different ethnic backgrounds. The first to reach the continent were the Native Americans whose ancestors crossed the frozen Bering Sea landbridge thousands of years ago. Over time, these hunters became tribal people who nomadically followed the migratory herds of buffalo. Then, especially in the northeast, tribal settlements were formed. These same people also traveled south and became the populations of Central and South America<sup>1</sup>.

The Vikings are credited as being the first to colonize the continent. Leif Ericson founded a small community in present day Nova Scotia but this community only lasted a short while. Most became home-sick for their lands in Scandinavia. The Americans became the “New World” with the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the Spanish in 1492.<sup>2</sup>

By the 17<sup>th</sup> century, thousands of European settlers began arriving on these shores. Prior to the nation’s independence in 1776, certain characteristics of these immigrants emerged:<sup>3</sup>

- Settlers from England made up the largest number of these immigrants
- Scotch-Irish, Germans, Swedish and Dutch settlers also immigrated in significant numbers
- Africans became part of the forced migration to the Atlantic colonies

During these years, many European governments had official state religions. This led to the persecution of other sects.

Country or Region	State Religion	Persecuted People
England	Protestant	Catholics and Quakers
Germany	Lutheran and Calvinist	Mennonites, Baptists and Jews
France	Protestant	Huguenots
Spain and Portugal	Catholic	Jews
Scandinavia	Catholic	Catholics and Non-Lutheran Protestants
	Lutheran Protestants	

- English, German and Scots-Irish dissenters (an example being the Puritans), fled due to religious oppression and civil wars.
- Famines and other wars across Western Europe caused many to flee due to displacement and economic hardship.

<sup>1</sup> See map Hunters Reach America

<sup>2</sup> Recently a map was found which may change history and credit the Chinese mariner Zheng He with the discovery of America.

<sup>3</sup> See map Early Settlements in North America 1600s.

Not all of these European immigrants came to the colonies as free and independent citizens. Once the settlements and plantations had taken root there was a great demand for manual labor in the New World.

The poor people became the backbone of the colonial labor force. **Indentured Servitude** was the method of bringing these people to America. This was a contractual agreement where these people would work for four to seven years (sometimes longer) in return for the payment of their passage across the Atlantic Ocean.

Poor Swiss and German immigrants became known as **redemptioners**, they agreed to have their services sold in the New World to pay for their fare. They were basically shipped C.O.D. – Cash Upon Delivery.<sup>4</sup>

The commerce between the Mother Countries and these Colonies became known as **Mercantilism**. The colonies supplied the raw materials exclusively for the Mother Country and in return, the Mother Country supplied on an exclusive basis, the Finished Goods needed for these colonial settlers.<sup>5</sup>

The rapid agricultural practice of growing **Plantation Crops** changed the face of American immigration once again. After 1670, the labor shortage was alleviated by the importation of African slaves. This gave birth to the “**Triangular Trade Routes**” and the “**Middle Passage**”. By the 1800s, there were approximately a half a million slaves in the United States, mostly located in the South.<sup>6</sup>

### **The “Old Immigration Period” – 1776 to 1880**

This era in American history took place from the Revolutionary War or War of Independence through to the end of the Civil War. During these years these new immigrants came from different areas of Europe and for different reasons.

Many of the immigrants during this period came from **Germany** and **Scandinavia** due to revolutions and political upheavals and because of their Anglo-Saxon cultures, easily assimilated into the “New Society”.

On the opposite end of the scale, the majority of these immigrants were from Ireland and were forced out of their native lands by the **Irish Potato Famine** and British persecution.

In addition, there were close to a quarter of a million **Chinese**, mostly men, arriving in the United States between 1860 and 1900 as contract laborers. They came as contract laborers.

Each of these groups of people will be studied in depth during this course.

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<sup>4</sup> Suggested Reading is my article “Why did they come to America? The story behind the early pilgrims”.

<sup>5</sup> For a better understanding, please see my document “Mercantilism in North America”

<sup>6</sup> Refresh your memory by looking at the map “Triangle Trade,”[Colonial Triangle Trade Routes]

There was a great deal of resentment towards these new immigrants by Nativists. In fact, the political party called the American Party or the “Know Nothing” Party was formed to prevent Catholics from Ireland and Germany entering the country. They wanted strict immigration laws and mandate that all office-holding people be naturalized citizens. Their fear was that these new immigrants would corrupt American society and take away valuable jobs from the “True Americans.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Conquest and Annexation**

When Thomas Jefferson acquired the Louisiana Territory, French-speaking people became part of the population. With the territorial acquisitions of Florida, Texas, the Mexican Cession, and the Gadsden Purchase, Hispanic people became an integral part of the population in the West and Southwest.<sup>8</sup>

#### **ETHNIC AND GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION CIRCA 1870**

- Total Continental Population – 39,818,440
- Almost even male to female population (there were slightly more men than women)
- Almost 5 million were non-whites (4.8 million were either Africa-Americans, American Indians and Chinese)
- 12.3 million lived in the Northeast
- 13 million in the North Central states
- 12.3 million in the South
- 1.0 million (approx.) lived in the West
- Approximately 82% of the nation was of Northern and Western European descent

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<sup>7</sup> There will be in-depth studies of these people and the political unrest within the nation

<sup>8</sup> We will be studying a primary source document Nuestra Plataforma - Hispanics Protest Anglo Encroachment in New Mexico (1890) “The White Caps” that tells about Hispanics rejecting white expansion

## The “New Immigration” Period – 1890 to 1924

A large part of this course will be related to this period in American history. During the late 1800s, there was an influx of **Southern and Eastern Europeans**. There were three main reasons why these people immigrated:

1. For most of the Europeans it was very hard to make a decent living due to the high taxes, high lands rents and poor soil.
2. Many Polish people came to America during this period as their country was besieged by wars and political actions that led to Poland being swallowed up and divided as property of foreign powers.
3. Eastern European Jews fled their homelands to avoid religious, economic and political persecution

In addition, the **Industrial Revolution** in America created a stream of immigrants who supplied the needed cheap labor to work in the factory systems.

For those immigrants who dreamed of owning farmland in America rarely came true. They found themselves living in the sprawling urban areas. Instead, they were living in ethnic neighborhoods and enclaves which soon became ghetto areas such as “**Little Italy**”, “**Little Poland**”, and “**Chinatown**”.<sup>9</sup>

Over time, these ethnic groups would become citizens. This was made possible by daily street life, factory work, night schools, public and private schools for the children, immigrant newspapers, and various ethnic organizations. The immigrant was also the target of the mighty political machines that had begun to rule the cities. Perhaps the most famous is **Tammany Hall** and **William “Boss” Tweed**.<sup>10</sup> In return for favors such as finding jobs, apartments and food donations, the “new” immigrant gave his political loyalty to the party that helped him establish a home in that city.

Every immigrant contributed to the growth of the American nation. Each group of immigrants had unique special skills that were fully utilized.

### **Examples of Immigrant Contributions**

Transport Systems (road, rail, canals)	Chinese, Irish, Italians, Slavs
Mining	Welsh, Poles, Slavs, Chinese
Textiles/Garment Industry	English, Jews
Optical Equipment	Germans
Chemical Industry	French
Stone masons/sculptors	Italians

Similar to early waves of immigration, there was reemergence of Nativist movements.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> We will be examining many primary source documents of immigrant experiences in the ghetto areas of American cities

<sup>10</sup> See separate lesson on “Boss” Tweed in this section

<sup>11</sup> Covering the nativists I have added two primary documents, the first is about the formation of *The Immigrant Restriction League*, and then *The Ku Klux Klan’s Perspective*

In conclusion, I would like to end with what is known as the “**Theories of Americanization**” Which one of the theories below do you recognize as the “correct” theory for America? Over the months of this course you might find that your original answer, made during the first week of school, is not really correct and that another theory better describes our immigration practices.

### **Theories of Americanization**

**Homogeneous Culture Theory** is based on newcomers being changed into English-speaking and English-acting Americans

**Melting Pot Theory** holds that all immigrants are different, but are transformed (melted) into a new, homogeneous, yet ever-changing society

**Cultural Pluralism Theory** emphasizes the diversity of the inhabitants of the United States, but recognizes a common center of political and economic institutions, including language. Synonyms include: cultural symphony, cultural mosaic, and “salad bowl.”

I trust that you, the student, will find this course as interesting as I did while I was putting it all together. I learnt a great deal, and I trust, so will you. Thank you.