

The Story of Immigration

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book

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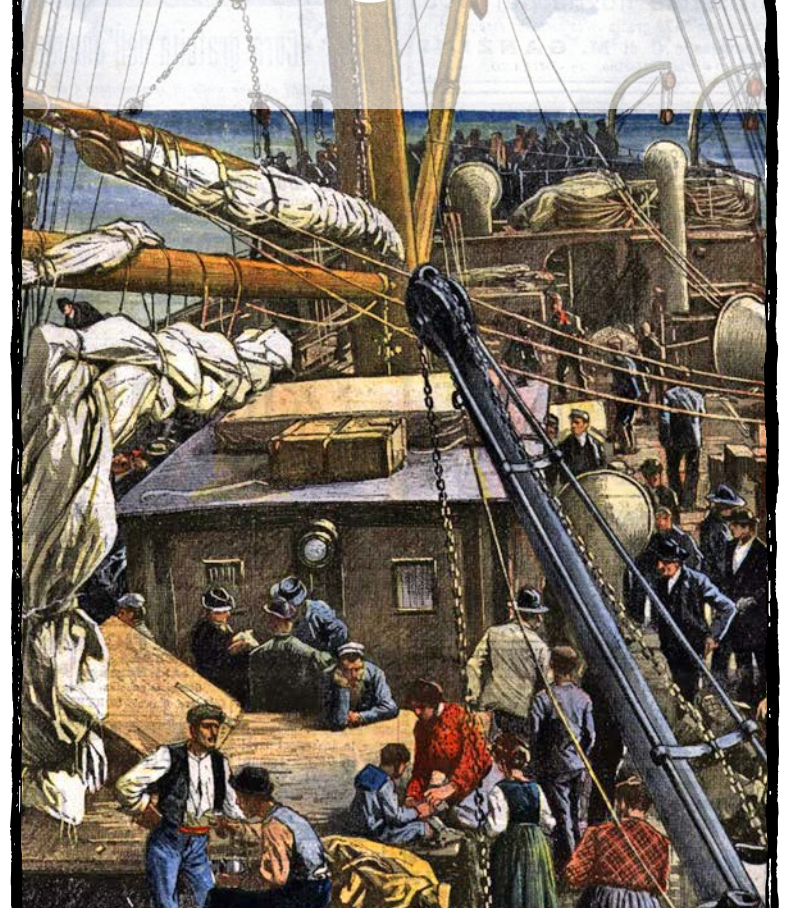


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Written by Robert Charles

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Correlation

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Starting a new life

Introduction

Throughout history, humans have moved around the Earth. Even before there were countries with borders, humans moved from region to region seeking a better life. Later, as nations were established, people continued to move. But in order for people to enter a country, they had to seek permission from the government of the country they were entering. These people came to be known as **immigrants**. Their movement was called **immigration**.

This book focuses mainly on people who have immigrated to the United States from many different parts of the world. Since the United States is, in many ways, a nation built by immigrants, it is a good country to study for immigration. But it should be noted that people also immigrate to other countries. In fact, when some Europeans were coming to the United States, many others were going to other areas. Parts of Africa and Australia, regions of Asia, and certain countries in South America were other popular immigrant **destinations**.

During the history of U.S. immigration, there have been several major waves of human movement. This book is about some of those major waves. It is also about some of the main points of interest concerning immigration. As you read, you will learn about the people who immigrated to the United States.



New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty



Immigrants to the United States recite the Pledge of Allegiance after they take their oath of citizenship.

Kinds of Immigration

There are two major kinds of immigration—voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary immigrants have moved on the basis of their own willingness and desire to move. They may have done so to escape religious or political **persecution**. Or they may have left their **native** country simply to seek a better life and/or fortune in another land.

The two types of voluntary immigration are legal and illegal. Illegal immigrants often sneak into or are smuggled into a country. Or they may enter legally as visitors, but then they refuse to leave.

Involuntary immigration is when the movement is forced upon a person by someone else. For example, the Africans who were captured and placed on boats headed for North America or Europe did not choose to leave their native land. They were forced against their will to become slaves and work for people.

Refugees fleeing from war wait to board buses at a camp on the border of Serbia and Macedonia in 1999.



Do You Know?

There is a special group of immigrants known as refugees. These are people who have left their homeland but have nowhere to go. Each year, the United States government allows a certain number of political refugees into the U.S. There are an estimated 15 million refugees in the world today.

Waves of Immigration

Some historians have identified four major waves of immigration to the United States. The earliest wave occurred before the United States was a country. People came to the New World seeking religious freedom and to start a new life in a location offering many opportunities. This wave lasted from the early 1600s until about 1830. Most of the immigrants were from Western Europe. They settled in the northeastern part of the country. But there were pockets of Spanish immigrants who settled in Florida, and many French immigrants settled north in Canada in the area of present-day Quebec.



Pilgrims landing at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts, 1620



Thousands of Chinese immigrants helped build the Central Pacific Railroad in the 1860s.

This was a time of enormous growth in the United States. Workers were needed to help tend crops. It was during this time that many Africans were involuntarily brought to the United States as slaves. In many ways, the United States was built on the sweat and toil of these people. By the time of the American Revolution, more than 500,000 Africans had arrived in what was to become the United States.

Another wave of immigration took place from 1870 until 1890. This wave included a continuation of immigrants from areas similar to the first wave. It also saw many people from Northern Europe, in an area known as Scandinavia, come to America. Asians, especially people from China, were part of this wave. Chinese workers were instrumental in building railroads that led to the settlement of the West.

Land was plentiful and cheap, and workers were needed in the industries that were popping up across the United States.

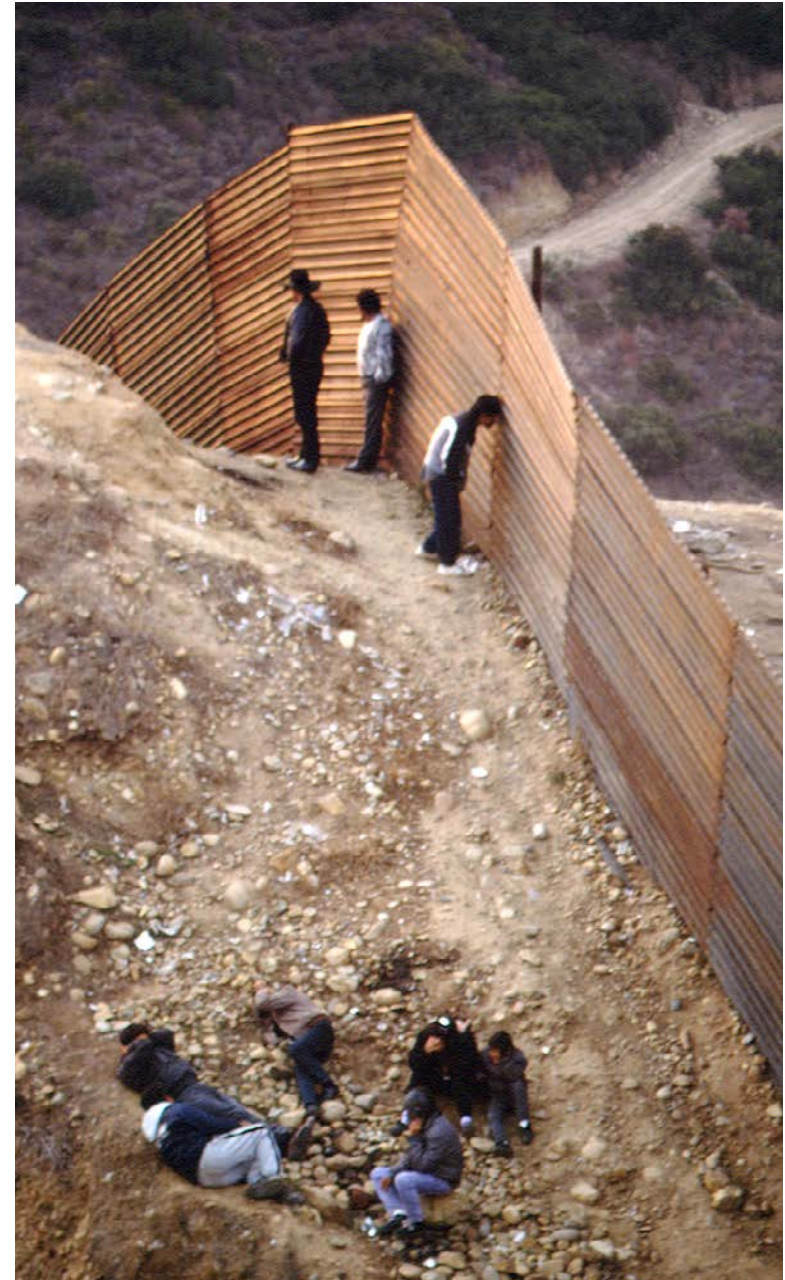
The next wave, which lasted from 1890 to 1930, saw the biggest **influx** of immigrants to the United States. Their reasons for coming were much the same as those who came during the previous wave. During the peak of this immigration wave, just after 1900, close to a million people came to the U.S. each year. Many of these people came from southern Europe, particularly Italy, and Eastern European countries such as Austria, Hungary, Poland, and Russia.



European immigrants arrive in New York just after 1900.

The last wave started in the mid-1960s and is still going on today. This modern-time immigration wave can be linked to civil strife, political upheaval, and war in other parts of the world. The wave consists of many mini-waves. For example, from the 1960s through the 1990s, many Cubans left Cuba to escape the repressive government of Fidel Castro. From about 1965 to 1975, more than 250,000 Cubans were airlifted to the United States.

The wars in Southeast Asia brought many people from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam to the United States. The fall of the Shah's government in Iran resulted in an influx of Iranians. The breakup of the Soviet Union and the war in Yugoslavia were followed by mini-waves of immigration from these regions. This current wave of immigration has seen many Spanish-speaking people from Mexico and Central and South America coming to the United States, as well as people from Caribbean nations. These people are looking to escape a life of poverty in their native countries. But not all of them are legal immigrants. In fact, the flow of illegal immigrants across the Mexican border has presented a serious problem.



Mexicans wait to cross the border to the United States near the city of Tijuana.



Origins of United States Immigrants, 1880 – 1990

Immigration Laws

Prior to the U.S. Revolution, most of the immigrants to the United States came from the western part of Europe. Many had the same religious and **ethnic** background. Few restrictions were in place at that time. Individual colonies controlled the admission of immigrants. Some colonies even gave away land to encourage people from Europe to settle. After the Revolutionary War, laws were passed stating how long an immigrant was required to live in the U.S. before citizenship was allowed.



Conditions on ships were difficult and uncomfortable for immigrants.



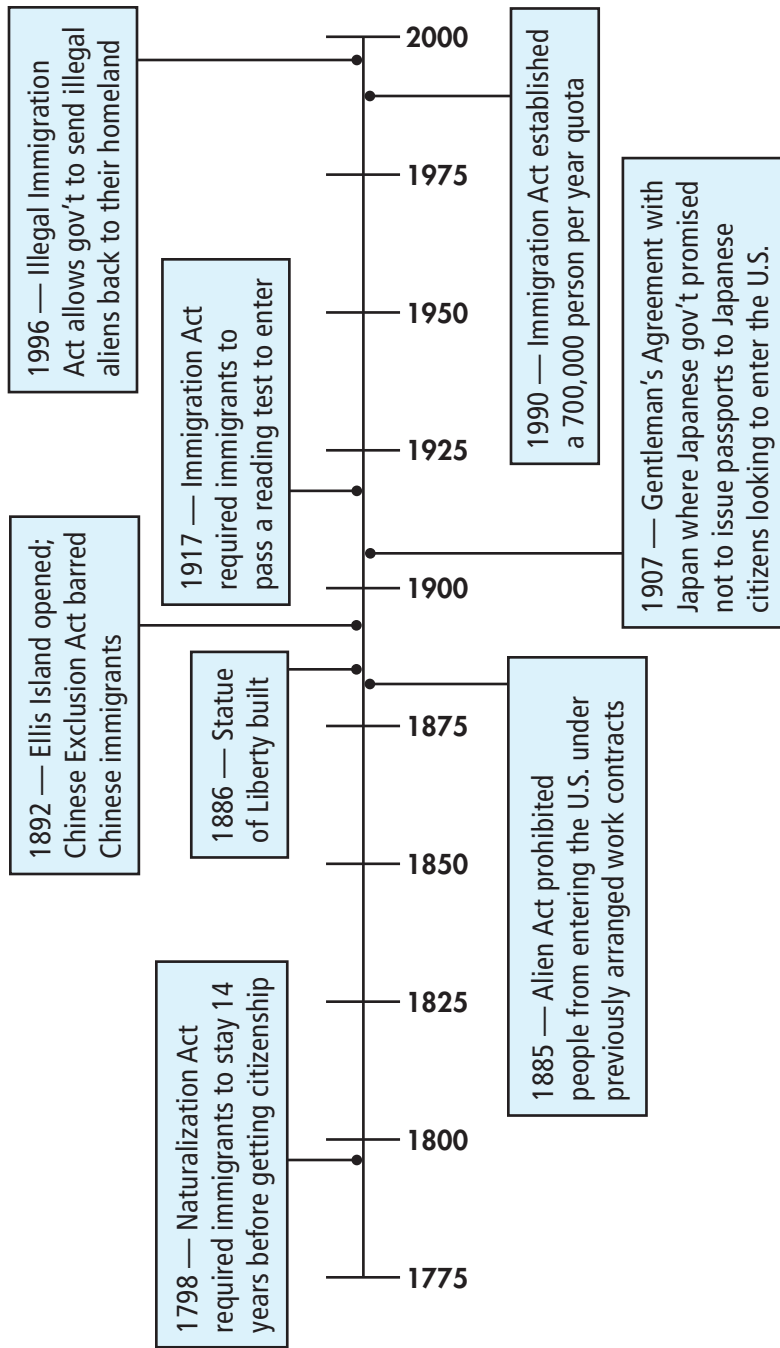
Chinese butcher and grocery shop, Chinatown, San Francisco, around 1905

After the U.S. Revolution, people from other parts of the world began to arrive. At first they came from other parts of Europe, such as Eastern Europe, Italy, and Russia. In addition, immigrants began to arrive from Asia, particularly from China and Japan. They brought in different cultures and religions. These new immigrants from other regions of the world were not welcomed by those who had already settled in the United States. As a result, people put pressure on the government to pass laws to keep immigrants from these countries out of the United States.

One such law was the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1892. This act was designed to keep Chinese immigrants from settling in the United States. Another law, passed in 1917, excluded certain groups of people and required immigrants to pass a reading test. In 1921, the first **quota** law was **imposed**. This law was designed to put a quota, or limit, on the number of people who could enter the United States from any one nation. The first quota law limited immigrants from Europe to 3 percent of the number of people from a given area living in the United States.

Even today, there are attempts to pass laws that would restrict immigration to the United States. Some propose to reduce immigration to fewer than 20,000 people per year. In 1990, a law set a quota of 700,000 immigrants per year through 1993. In 1996, another law was passed to permit illegal immigrants to be returned to their homeland.

Immigrants to United States, 1821–1995			
1821–30.....	143,439	1921–30.....	4,107,209
1831–40.....	599,125	1931–40.....	528,431
1841–50.....	1,713,251	1941–50.....	1,035,039
1851–60.....	2,598,214	1951–60.....	2,515,479
1861–70.....	2,314,824	1961–70.....	3,321,677
1871–80.....	2,812,191	1971–80.....	4,493,314
1881–90.....	5,246,613	1981–90.....	7,338,062
1891–00.....	3,687,564	1991–95.....	5,230,313
1901–10.....	8,795,386		
1911–20.....	5,735,811	TOTAL	62,215,942



Symbols of Immigration

Most of the people who came to the United States during the early peaks of immigration came through New York City on the East Coast and San Francisco on the West Coast. Three major symbols of immigration emerged: Ellis Island, Angel Island, and the Statue of Liberty.

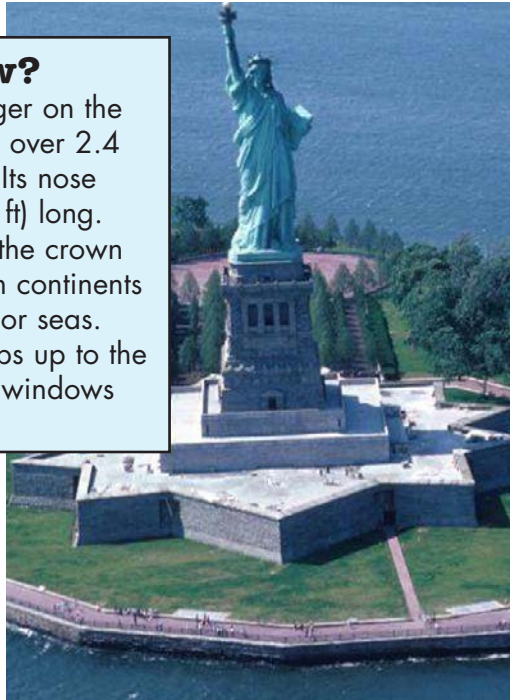
Before immigration centers were established, immigrants were often simply dumped onto a wharf and left to fend for themselves. Many brought disease into the country. To keep track of those entering the country, centers were built to process records for immigrants.

Immigrants entering through New York City went to an immigration center called Ellis Island. Located in New York Harbor, it was the place where most immigrants first set foot on U.S. soil. Immigrants were given a routine medical exam by a doctor. An official record was made of who they were, where they were from, and where they were going. Sometimes immigrants were held in a center for days or even weeks. Ellis Island was an immigration center from 1892 until 1943, and it symbolized immigration to the United States.

Do You Know?

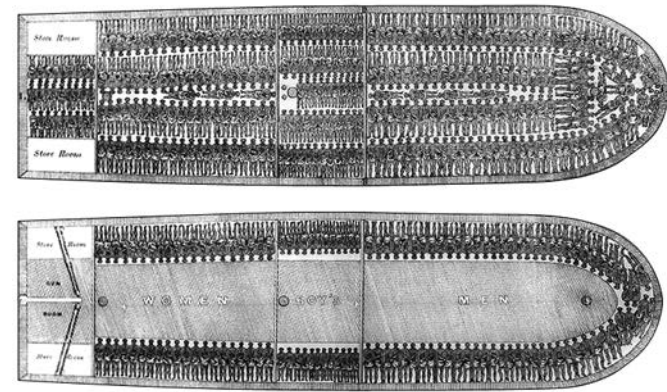
One index finger on the Statue of Liberty is over 2.4 meters (8 ft) long. Its nose is 1.4 meters (4.6 ft) long. The seven rays in the crown stand for the seven continents and the seven major seas. There are 354 steps up to the crown, which has windows for looking out.

The Statue of Liberty stands inside the courtyard of the star-shaped walls of Fort Wood, on what is now called Liberty Island.



On the West Coast, a less well-known center was established on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. This became the major processing center for immigrants coming to the U.S. from Asia.

Perhaps the best-known symbol of immigration in the world is the Statue of Liberty. It was a gift from the people of France to the people of the United States. The Statue of Liberty symbolizes freedom and hope to all those entering the United States. It stands more than 46 meters (300 ft) tall from the ground to the tip of its torch.



Plan of how slaves were stowed on a 1700s British slave ship

How They Arrived

Most immigrants during the first three immigration waves arrived in the United States by boat. The trip over the ocean was long and often unpleasant. Slaves experienced the worst conditions. They were packed tightly into the cargo holds of wooden boats and given little food and water. Fresh air was scarce. It is not surprising that many did not survive the trip.

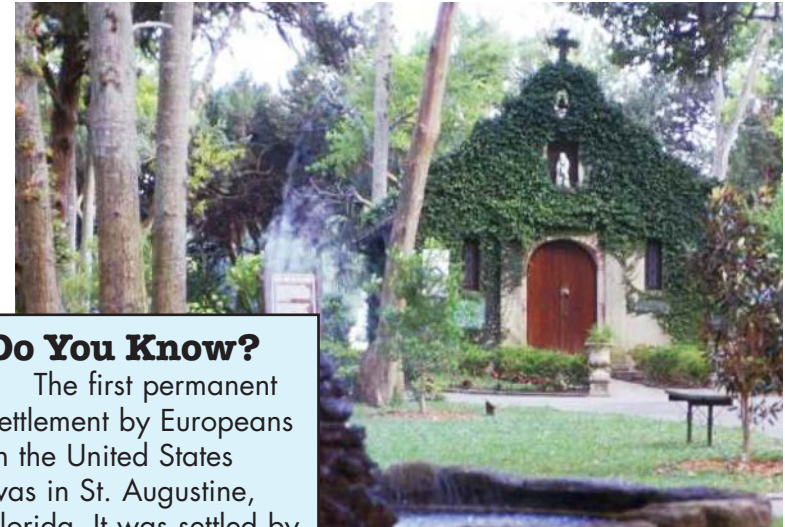
Many of the early European immigrants signed on with captains of ships. They worked for free passage to the New World. Once they arrived, the captains sold them as **indentured servants**. This means that they had to work for several years for the person who paid for them. They worked until their debt was paid, and then they were set free.

Even in modern times, many immigrants arrive by boat. People from various Caribbean nations, including Cuba, have come on small boats. Others from China have been smuggled in on large ships. Many Mexican immigrants cross the border on foot and by swimming across the Rio Grande River. In most of these cases, the immigration is illegal.

Today, airplanes are a common way for legal immigrants to get to the United States. Family members living in the United States or agencies who sponsor immigrants often provide airfare.



In 1994 tens of thousands of Cubans escaped their country for political reasons using small boats or makeshift rafts.



Do You Know?

The first permanent settlement by Europeans in the United States was in St. Augustine, Florida. It was settled by Spanish immigrants.

Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche, St. Augustine, Florida

Conclusion

Throughout history, people of the world have been on the move. Many leave their country of birth and go to a new country. These immigrants move for many reasons. Some move for religious and political reasons. Others move simply for the hope of a better life. Others move to be reunited with family members.

The United States is a popular destination for many immigrants. They came before the United States was a country and continue to arrive today. Immigration continues to offer the chance of a better life to millions of people around the world.

Explore More

On the Web:

- 1 In the address window, type: *www.google.com*
- 2 Then type: *immigration*. Click on “Google Search.”
 - Read the colored links. Click on one that looks interesting.
 - To explore other links, click the “back” arrow on the top left until you get back to the page with the links that Google found.
 - Then try searching using other words from this Quick Reader, such as: *Ellis Island, Angel Island, Statue of Liberty, refugees, indentured servants, illegal immigrants, and quota*.

Try This

- Get a world map. Do research on popular immigration routes. Draw these routes on your map. Compare your map with others in class.
- Imagine you are an immigrant to the United States and are discriminated against by other immigrants. Write a letter to someone back home telling how you feel about that.

Glossary

- destination** (*n.*) the place toward which someone or something is going or sent (p. 5)
- ethnic** (*adj.*) designating a group of people with a common cultural heritage or nationality, distinguished by customs, characteristics, language, and common history (p. 14)
- immigrant** (*n.*) a person who comes to live in a new country, region, or environment (p. 4)
- immigration** (*n.*) an act or instance of immigrating; also, the number of immigrants entering a country or region at a particular time (p. 4)
- imposed** (*v.*) required by an authority (p. 16)
- indentured servants** (*n.*) people bound by contracts to work for others for a given period of time (p. 20)
- influx** (*n.*) a continual coming in of people or things (p. 10)
- native** (*adj.*) belonging to a country or location by birth (p. 6)
- persecution** (*n.*) cruel oppression or harassment, especially for reasons of religion, politics, or race (p. 6)
- quota** (*n.*) a set number that limits the amount of something or that serves as a goal (p. 16)