

Immigration to America

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United States, of which 1.2 million were slaves and 186,768 free blacks. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing slaves in areas of the nation which were in rebellion. Slavery was completely abolished in 1865, with the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution. Some blacks had gained their freedom before this time. Today, black Americans compose about 12 per cent of the total population.

The Golden Door

Between 1840 and 1860, the United States received its largest wave of immigrants to date. In Europe, famine, poor crops, rising populations and political unrest caused an estimated five million people to leave their homelands each year. Between 1845 and 1850, the Irish people faced famine. The potato crop, upon which the Irish depended for subsistence, suffered blight for five years, and about 750,000 Irish starved to death. Many of those who survived left Ireland for the United States. In one year alone — 1847 — 118,120 Irish people emigrated to the United States. By 1860, one of every four people in New York City had been born in Ireland. Today in the United States there are more than 13 million Americans of Irish ancestry.

During the Civil War, the federal government encouraged immigration from Europe, especially from the German states, by offering grants of land to those immigrants who would serve as troops in the armies of the North. In 1865, about one in five Northern soldiers was a wartime immigrant. Today, fully one-third of Americans have German ancestors.

Until about 1880, most immigrants came from northern and western Europe. Then a great change occurred. More and more immigrants began coming from countries in eastern and southern Europe. They were Poles, Italians, Greeks, Russians, Hungarians and Czechs. By 1896, more than half of all immigrants were from eastern or southern Europe.

One group of people who came to the United States during this period were Jews. The first Jewish people actually settled in North America as early as 1654, but Jews did not move to the United States in great numbers until the 1880s. During the 1880s, Jews suffered fierce pogroms (massacres)

throughout eastern Europe. Many thousands of Jews escaped an almost certain death by coming to the United States. Between 1880 and 1925, about two million Jews immigrated here. Today, there are about 5.7 million Jewish Americans living in the United States, comprising about 2.2 per cent of the total population. In certain states, such as New York, a state along the mid-Atlantic coast, their numbers are higher, and they account for more than 10 per cent of the population.

During the late 1800s, so many people were entering the United States that the government was having trouble keeping records on all of these people. To solve this problem, the government opened a special port of entry in New York harbor. This port was called Ellis Island. Between 1892, when Ellis Island was opened, and 1954, when it closed, more than 20 million immigrants entered the United States through this port of entry. During its busiest days, almost 2,000 immigrants a day passed through. Today, about half of all Americans have ancestors who entered the United States by way of Ellis Island.

The United States was becoming known throughout the world as a refuge and a welcoming place for people of many

nations. In 1886, as a gesture of friendship, France gave the United States the Statue of Liberty, which stands on an island in the harbor of New York City, near Ellis Island. Since that time, the Statue of Liberty has been one of the first sights many immigrants to the United States see. It is a symbol of the hope and freedom that the country offers. The words etched on the base of the statue have been the inspiration for people in many lands who hope to come to the United States: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Ellis Island is now a national park and historical museum. In the first year that it was open, more than a million people visited — many of them to see the place where their ancestors entered the United States. Visitors enter the museum through the baggage room, just as their ancestors did. Then they walk upstairs and sit on the benches where new arrivals waited their turn to fill out forms and undergo medical examinations.

The Statue of Liberty began lighting the way for new arrivals just at a time when native-born Americans began

from northern Europe, set limits on how many people from each foreign country would be permitted to immigrate to the United States. The number of people allowed from each country was based on the number of people already living here. This system was designed primarily to limit immigration from southern and eastern Europe. For example, 87 per cent of the immigration permits went to immigrants from Great Britain, Ireland, Germany and Scandinavia.

The mix of American people today reflects this old system. For example, until the 1970s, almost 81 per cent of all newcomers to the United States emigrated from 10 nations: 14.8 per cent came from Germany; 11.1 per cent came from Italy; 10.3 per cent came from Great Britain; 10 per cent came from Ireland; 9.2 per cent came from Austria and Hungary; 8.6 per cent came from Canada; 7.1 per cent came from Russia; 4.1 per cent came from Mexico; 3 per cent came from the West Indies; and 2.7 per cent came from Sweden.

Immigration was slow during the "Great Depression" years of the 1930s. This was a time when one out of four Americans was without a job. In fact, more people moved out of the United States during these years than



The United States is a nation of immigrants and their descendants. Many came to start a new life or to escape oppressive conditions in their native lands. These World War II refugees from Europe observe the Statue of Liberty as their ship approaches the United States. — Courtesy: The New York Times

worrying that the United States was being overrun by immigrants. In the 30 years between 1890 and 1920, more than 18.2 million immigrants flooded America's shores. By 1910, 14.5 per cent of all residents were foreign-born; today, about 6.2 per cent of all American residents are foreign-born.

How could the United States absorb so many foreigners? Many citizens worried that these new Americans would take away their jobs. Citizens began demanding that the Congress limit the number of immigrants.

Limits on Newcomers

Gradually, responding to the demands of American citizens, Congress began to pass laws barring the entry of certain types of immigrants. The United States refused to accept immigrants who were prostitutes, convicts, insane, mentally retarded, beggars, revolutionaries, persons suffering from serious diseases and children without at least one parent.

These rules only held back one percent of all immigrants. So Congress tried to deny entry to immigrants who could not read or write. However, President Grover Cleveland, who was then president of the United States, refused to give his approval. Some people protested that the United States was being overrun by "inferior" races. But President Cleveland wrote: "Within recent memory... the same thing was said of immigrants who, with their descendants, are now numbered among our best citizens."

In 1924, Congress passed the Reed-Johnson Immigration Act. This law, which reflected the fears and prejudices of an "older" wave of immigrants

Earlier, laws had been passed specifically to exclude Asian immigrants. Citizens in the American West were afraid that the Chinese and other Asians would take away jobs building railroads, and there was much animosity toward them. In 1882, the United States banned most Chinese immigration. Other Asians were refused entry as well. By 1924, no Asian immigrants were permitted into the United States.

The law that kept out Chinese immigrants was changed in 1949, and thereafter, Chinese were once again allowed to enter and to become American citizens. Other Asians have been permitted to become American citizens since 1952. Today, Asian-Americans are one of the fastest-growing ethnic groups in the United States. About 6.5 million Asians live in the United States, comprising about 2.5 per cent of the population. Asian immigrants come from many very different countries, including the People's Republic of China, Japan, The Lao People's Democratic Republic, the Philippines, Vietnam, South Korea, Cambodia and Thailand.

Although most Asians in the United States emigrated relatively recently, they have become one of the most successful immigrant groups in the country. Large numbers of them study in the best American universities. They also have a higher average income than many other ethnic groups.

Refugees

After World War II, the United States began accepting refugees as a special group. The first refugees to the United States were Europeans who were uprooted by the horrors of war. Since then, the United States has taken in refugees from many places in the world. In 1956, thousands of Hungarians sought refuge in the United States after the Soviet Union crushed the attempt to establish a non-communist government in Hungary. After Fidel Castro took control of Cuba in 1959, the United States accepted 700,000 Cuban refugees. Many of these people settled together in communities around Miami, Florida. Again, in 1980, the United States accepted a special group of more than 110,000 Cuban refugees who came in crowded boats.

The United States has also accepted other groups of special political refugees. These include Southeast Asians, who were fleeing persecution after the end of the Vietnam War. Since 1975, the United States has accepted 750,000 refugees from Vietnam, Cambodia and The Lao People's Democratic Republic.

Who Immigrates?

The year 1965 marked a most important change in American immigration law. A new law signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson ended the old system of immigration that had favoured northern and western Europeans. Under the new law, there is no consideration of people's country of origin, just as there have never been legal bars based on their race or their beliefs. Since 1965, the United States has accepted immigrants strictly on the basis of who applies first, within overall annual limits.

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American Business and Industry

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Meanwhile, the ways in which businesses in the United States organised their work were changing. In 1913, the automaker Henry Ford introduced the "moving assembly" line. This was a variation on the earlier practice of continuous assembly. By improving efficiency, it made possible a major saving in labour costs. A new breed of industrial managers began the careful study of factory operations with the aim of finding the most efficient ways of organising tasks. Their concepts of "scientific management" helped to lower the costs of production still further.

Lower costs made possible both higher wages for workers and lower prices for consumers. More and more Americans were gaining the ability to purchase products made in the United States. During the first half of the 20th century, mass production of consumer goods such as cars, refrigerators and kitchen ranges helped to revolutionise the ways in which Americans lived.

The century's two world wars spared the United States the devastation suffered by Europe and Asia, and American industries proved capable of great production increases to meet war needs. By the time World War II ended in 1945, the United States had the greatest productive capacity of any of the world's nations.

The 20th century has seen the rise and decline of a succession of industries in the United States. The auto industry, long the centerpiece of the American economy, has had to struggle to meet the challenge of foreign competition. But over the years many new industries have appeared. Their products range from airplanes to televisions sets; from microchips to space satellites; from microwave ovens to ultra-high speed computers. Many of the currently rising industries are among what are known as high-tech industries because of their dependence on the latest developments in technology.

High-tech industries tend to be highly automated and thus to need fewer workers than traditional industries such as steel-making. As high-tech industries have grown and older industries have declined in recent years, the proportion of American workers employed in manufacturing has declined. Service industries — industries that sell a service rather than make a product — now dominate the economy. Service industries range from banking to telecommunications to the provision of meals in restaurants.

It is sometimes said that the United States has moved into a "post-industrial era."

Themes in American Business Life

A number of recurrent themes weave themselves through the fabric of American business life. A few are:

• What role for government? For more than two centuries, the theory of laissez-faire has dominated government policy toward American business. Laissez-faire ("leave it alone") allows private interests to have virtual free rein in operating business. The great prophet of laissez-faire was the 18th century Scottish philosopher Adam Smith, whose economic ideas had a strong influence on the development of capitalism. Smith argued that the actions of private individuals, motivated by self-interest, worked together for the greater good of society, as if individuals were guided by "an invisible hand."

Smith did favour some forms of government intervention, mainly to establish the ground rules for free enterprise. But it was Smith's criticisms of mercantilism and his advocacy of laissez-faire that spurred his popularity among Americans.

Devotion to laissez-faire has not prevented private interests in the United States from turning to the government for help on numerous occasions. Railroad builders accepted grants of land and public subsidies. Industries facing strong competition from abroad have appealed for a greater degree of protectionism in trade policy. Farmers, manufacturers, labour unions, bankers and others have sought government assistance in many forms, from tax breaks to outright subsidies.

Thus, there has been a constant give-and-take between the theory of laissez-faire and concrete demands for government help for a specific economic purpose. The American public has often split into two groups, usually called conservatives and liberals, on the issue of laissez-faire. In contemporary American politics, a conservative is one who generally favours private initiative and opposes government intervention; a liberal is one who, while generally supporting private enterprise, is more willing to embrace government intervention.

• Protectionism or free trade? A second recurrent theme has been the debate over trade policy. Protectionist measures, such as those advocated by Alexander Hamilton, have often held sway. As a rule, manufacturers and industrial workers have been the strongest

supporters of protectionism. The United States had generally high tariffs from the 1790s to the 1830s, from the 1860s to 1913 and from 1921 to 1934. In response to complaints that high tariffs were making the Great Depression of the 1930s worse, a period of trade liberalisation began with Congress' adoption of the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act of 1934. In the 1970s and 1980s renewed economic stress has evoked calls for a return to protectionism.

• Big business or small business? Since about the time of the Civil War (1861-1865), the United States has experienced several waves of business concentration. One was from 1897 to 1904, when such giant manufacturing firms as United States Steel came into existence. Another was in the 1960s, when large corporations became even larger conglomerates by taking over companies in unrelated lines of business.

Supporters of concentration have argued that only large enterprises can benefit from the advantages of scale that accompany modern industrial methods. The larger a business grows, the lower its overhead costs per unit tend to be. If American businesses had not grown bigger, they would have been unable to compete with large foreign competitors, supporters of concentration say.

Few if any Americans believe that complete return to small-scale enterprise would be either possible or desirable. But many have criticised the ways in which concentration has occurred and the degree of economic power that some of the largest corporations have come to wield. A few have argued for a government takeover of major industries under a system of democratic socialism. Others have argued, to greater effect, for vigorous enforcement of laws designed to preserve competition. Such laws include the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 and the Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914, which seek to block business concentrations (or "trusts") deemed to be "in restraint of trade," and the Federal Trade Commission Act of 1914, which set up a government organisation to guard against unfair competition.

In recent years, growing competition from foreign companies has added a new element to the debate. By one count, some 75 per cent of American products currently face foreign competition within markets in the United States. Nowadays, when government antitrust enforcers consider the effects of a corporate merger, they are less likely to assume that mere bigness is going to be harmful. In-

stead, they are likely to judge the merger according to whether or not it promotes "economic efficiency" — that is, more efficient operation for United States-based industry.

• Relations between management and labour. Still another contentious issue has been the relative rights and responsibilities of management and labour. While management has usually held the upper hand in management-labour disputes in the United States, organised labour, promising higher wages and improved benefits, made major gains under laws adopted by Congress in the 1930s. Those laws established a legal framework for worker representation and for the collective bargaining process. However, support for unions in the United States has always been sporadic and lacking an ideological or even specifically political component. In recent years, labour unions have seemed to be losing ground. Their bargaining power declined — and management's strengthened — during the economic downturns of the 1970s and 1980s.

International Business

There have been times when the United States followed an isolationist foreign policy, but in business matters the United States has been strongly internationalist. Ever since the 1790s, when American entrepreneurs began shipping furs to China, American firms have sought markets in other countries. The American business presence abroad has been a source both of strength and of controversy for many decades.

American diplomacy has often helped to open doors for American business abroad. That is what happened in China after 1899 when the American government adopted what became known as the "Open Door" policy. (At the time, other industrial nations were carving out spheres of influence in China and trying to shut out foreign competitors.) But the relation between business interests and diplomacy has worked both ways. American political leaders have often encouraged American businesses to invest abroad as a way of strengthening the American diplomatic hand. Early in the 20th century, for example, the policy known as "Dollar Diplomacy" favoured American investments in parts of the world.

Not surprisingly, the American business presence has received a mixed welcome in the rest of the world. Many people — especially those who are critical of United States foreign policy — see American business activities as an extension of its diplomacy.

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