

## Immigration

The United States of America has long been the world's chief receiving nation for immigrants. An immigrant is a person who leaves his or her country to settle and live in another country. Over the years, many millions of people have uprooted and left family and friends to move to America. Some felt forced to leave because they feared for their lives due to dangers present in their home countries. For example, many immigrants left countries that were at war or that didn't give them the freedom to practice their faith. Immigrants also left their native lands if they couldn't find work or enough food to live. Whatever the reason, immigrants usually have had to sacrifice a life that is familiar for one that is unknown.

The United States was founded by immigrants. From the 1600s through 1775, European colonists settled in the land that is now the United States. Most of these immigrants were from England. Others arrived from France, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, and Spain. Many of these colonists came here looking for economic opportunity. They wanted better land to farm or better work. Others came to escape religious **persecution**.<sup>1</sup> Some were even **convicts**<sup>2</sup> brought over from English jails. West Africans also immigrated to the American colonies, but they came against their will. They were captured, sold into slavery, and shipped to the colonies.

Since the United States was established in the late 1700s, it has seen three waves of immigration. The first wave of American immigration took place from 1820 to 1870. Over seven million people made the voyage to America, mostly from northern and western Europe. About a third of these immigrants were Irish people trying to escape a **famine**<sup>3</sup> that plagued Ireland in the mid-1840s. Another third of the immigrants from this wave were German. The Chinese also began to immigrate to America during this time. They got word of the Gold Rush in California. They came to work in the mines and get rich.

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<sup>1</sup> **persecution** – the act of continually treating someone cruelly and unfairly

<sup>2</sup> **convicts** – persons serving a prison sentence

<sup>3</sup> **famine** – a serious lack of food in a place

This flood of immigrants wasn't always welcome by those already in America. Some feared these newcomers would take away their jobs. Others didn't like the politics, customs, and/or religions the new immigrants brought with them. For example, many Irish people were **discriminated**<sup>4</sup> against for being Roman Catholic. The Chinese also suffered greatly from discrimination.

The next wave of U.S. immigration was by far the greatest. It started in 1881 and ended in 1920. Over 23 million people immigrated to the United States during this period, most of whom came from southern and eastern Europe. But by this time, anti-immigration sentiments had become so strong that a growing number of people demanded laws to make it harder for foreigners to become American citizens. In 1875, Congress passed its first immigration law intended to limit immigration. It kept people who were viewed as undesirable out, including convicts. In 1882, Congress also passed the Chinese **Exclusion**<sup>5</sup> Act. It prohibited Chinese workers from coming to the United States. A few years later, other laws were passed. One required adult immigrants to have literacy skills. Another limited the number of immigrants from countries outside the Western Hemisphere. However, one of the greatest blows to immigration was the Great Depression of the 1930s. Immigration sharply declined. In fact, there were more people leaving America than coming to America during this time.

The third wave of immigration began in 1965 and continues today. Most immigrants in this wave have come from Asian countries as well as South American countries, Caribbean countries, and Mexico. A large number of these immigrants have settled in the East and Midwest. However, many others have moved to California.

Most immigrants have come to America with the hope of building a better life. However, they were sometimes met with hatred by the people already living in the country who feared the economic and cultural impacts of these newcomers. While this discrimination and the economic downfall of the Great Depression had a negative effect on immigration, American immigration has managed to survive.

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<sup>4</sup> **discriminated** – treated differently or unfairly based on the group, category, or class a person belongs to

<sup>5</sup> **exclusion** – the state of being kept out or shut out

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many waves of immigration to the United States does the text describe?
  - a. two
  - b. three
  - c. four
  - d. five
  
2. According to the text, there were strong anti-immigration sentiments in America by the late 1800s. One cause of this was that people already living in America feared the newcomers would take away their jobs. What was one effect of this anti-immigration sentiment?
  - a. United States immigration increased.
  - b. The United States government passed laws making it easier for immigrants to become American citizens.
  - c. The United States government passed laws intended to limit immigration.
  - d. The economy became very bad and the Great Depression started.
  
3. Sometimes there were cultural differences between the people already living in America and immigrants who had moved to America. What information from the text best supports this information?
  - a. Some immigrants left their native lands if they couldn't find work or enough food to live.
  - b. Some people in America didn't like the politics, customs, and/or religions the new immigrants brought with them.
  - c. Over seven million people came to America during its first wave of immigration.
  - d. One of the greatest blows to immigration was the Great Depression of the 1930s.
  
4. How can the United States' attitude toward immigrants during the late 1800's best be described?
  - a. accepting
  - b. unfriendly
  - c. ambivalent
  - d. tolerant
  
5. What is the text mainly about?
  - a. the waves of immigration to America
  - b. how views on immigration have changed in America
  - c. the impact of immigration on the economy and culture of America
  - d. discrimination against immigrants in America

6. Read the following sentences from the text:

“In 1875, Congress passed its first immigration law intended to **limit** immigration. It kept people who were viewed as undesirable out, including convicts. In 1882, Congress also passed the Chinese Exclusion Act. It prohibited Chinese workers from coming to the United States.”

Based on the text, what does “**limit**” most nearly mean?

- a. restrict
- b. increase
- c. spike
- d. widen

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

In the late 1800s, America passed laws intended to keep certain people from coming into the United States. \_\_\_\_\_, Congress passed a law in 1882 preventing Chinese workers from coming to the United States.

- a. Although
- b. As a result
- c. For example
- d. However

8. According to the text, what might be one reason an immigrant would move to the United States?

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9. Describe two of the laws mentioned in the text. Make sure to address why these laws were passed.

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10. Explain at least one factor that influenced the American people’s opinion about immigration in the late 1800s. Use information from the text to support your answer.

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