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The Second Wave (1820–1870)

European Immigrants

Nearly 7.5 million immigrants came to the United States between 1820 and 1870. Most of these new residents came from Europe. About 2.5 million, one-third of the immigrants, were poor people from Ireland. Most of them were trying to escape a severe famine in Ireland that left millions of its citizens starving or dead. These immigrants from Ireland were totally impoverished and usually settled in whatever city they arrived in and tried to get work at any wage they could.

German Immigrants Want Land

Another 2.5 million people were Germans who came to America seeking a better life and, especially, cheap land for farming. They were sometimes able to afford the voyage across the ocean and the railroad fare to the West where they intended to buy cheap land from states, the federal government, or the railroad companies, which had been given huge amounts of land as payment for building the railroads.



Other Immigrants and Sojourners

Chinese immigrants came to find gold in California and to work on the railroads or in mining. French Canadians moved across the Canadian border to find work in the New England states.

Some foreigners, especially those from Asia, came only to find wealth or work and intended to return to their native lands once they had succeeded. They were called *sojourners*, which means *travelers*.

The Irish Potato Famine

Sir Walter Raleigh introduced the potato, a plant native to Peru, to Ireland when he was given large land grants there in the late 1500s by Queen Elizabeth. It became the basic food grown, especially by poor tenant farmers. In 1845, virtually the entire potato crop in Ireland was destroyed by a blight that turned the potato black, stinking, and inedible. Thousands died and millions suffered from starvation in 1845. The blight returned the next year in even worse form, and the British authorities who ruled Ireland and controlled most of the land were unwilling to help. More than a million Irish died from starvation and more than a million immigrated to the United States during the years of famine in search of work. They hoped to find better economic opportunities and to avoid religious persecution in Ireland from the ruling Protestant authorities in England.



The Second Wave (1820–1870) *(cont.)*

Anti-Immigrant Anger

The seemingly endless stream of new arrivals to the United States eventually created a protest movement against immigrants. Wealthy manufacturers liked having a source of cheap labor, but American workers believed correctly that the wave of immigrants kept wages depressed and made organizing unions very difficult. The Know-Nothing Party in the 1850s arose as a reaction to immigrants and Roman Catholics who were predominant among the new immigrants. So many Irish had immigrated to the U.S. that they often encountered hostility and signs in businesses reading, “No Irish need apply.”

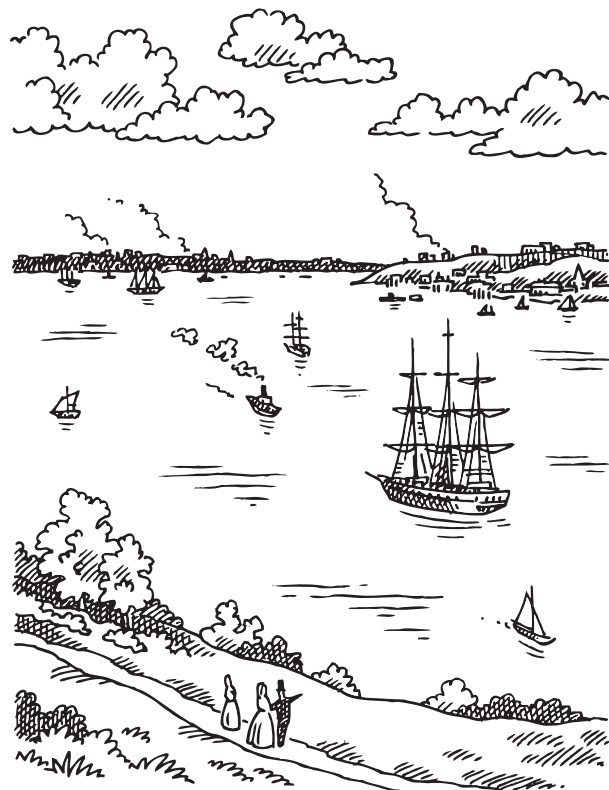


Ports of Entry

Philadelphia had been the major port of entry for most immigrants in the first two centuries of the nation’s history. Castle Garden, the nation’s first immigration station, opened in New York in 1855—just before the Civil War. Many immigrants came to California in the late 1840s during the California Gold Rush. Immigrants from all over the world, including China, were lured by the hope for finding gold. Most entered near San Francisco because it was near the goldfields.

New York City

Between 1820 and 1839, nearly 500,000 immigrants entered through the port of New York. Between 1839 and 1860, another 4.5 million immigrants entered primarily through New York. In the 1840s, about forty passenger ships a day arrived in Manhattan carrying as many as a thousand poverty-stricken immigrants in steerage. Most of the European immigrants who arrived between 1840 and 1850 were poor and settled in New York City. The city had 200,000 residents in 1830. By 1860, it had over a million residents, and over half of them were immigrants. The Irish and other extremely poor immigrants tended to settle into the first city where they arrived. By the 1850s, the working class in New York City would be three-fourths immigrants.





The Second Wave (1820–1870) *(cont.)*

Steerage Passengers

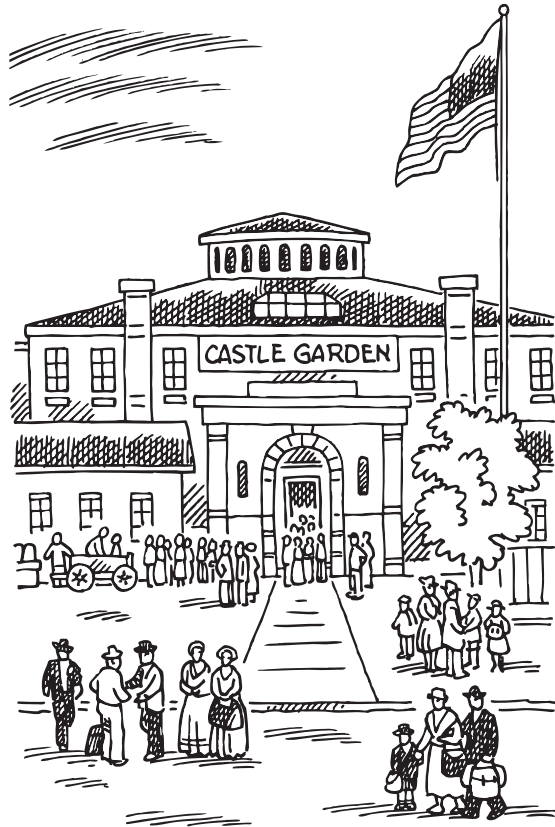
The immigrants arriving in New York City came out of ships where they had suffered terribly during the voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. With luck, these ships might take five weeks to reach port, but they could take months, and the passengers were in desperate straits. They often suffered from contagious diseases contracted from close contact with as many as a thousand other people cramped below decks in steerage compartments, which provided rotten food; clothing and bedding covered with lice, housing mice, rats, and roaches; and little opportunity for personal hygiene. Once ships unloaded, many immigrants were taken advantage of by con men who cheated them by promising jobs and housing for a fee and then vanishing with the cash.

Castle Garden

Reformers and concerned political leaders convinced the New York State Legislature to systematically help the immigrants and organize the immigration process in the city. In 1855, Castle Garden, an old fort on a tiny island at the foot of Manhattan Island, became the nation's first official immigrant reception center. It was run by the state and reduced the abuse of immigrants by thieves and con men. Ships were inspected on arrival, especially for disease, and emergency medical aid was offered to the ill and the utterly destitute (people with no money or valuables). Food, clothing, and shelter were arranged for the destitute, as well.

Clerks steered passengers traveling to other parts of the country to legitimate railroad and steamship companies. A labor official helped workers find jobs with construction companies,

farms, mines, factories, businesses, and in private homes. Medical officials checked passengers for serious illnesses and quarantined those who were contagious.



West to Farm

Many Germans and other immigrants with money had been lured to America by the promise of cheap land for farming. They often headed to the Midwest, where cheap land was available from railroads and the federal government under the Homestead Act. The Act granted 160 acres to a family if they lived on the land and farmed it for five years. Germans also settled in Midwestern cities, such as Milwaukee, Chicago, Cincinnati, and St. Louis.



The Second Wave (1820–1870) *(cont.)*

Asian Immigrants

The Chinese were the first major group of Asian people to immigrate to the United States. The discovery of gold in California encouraged 25,000 Chinese to immigrate to California between 1848 and 1851. Another 30,000 worked as laborers or in service businesses, such as laundries, in other Western states. More than 28,000 Japanese immigrated to Hawaii in the ten years between 1885 and 1895 to work in the sugar industry, and another 26,000 Japanese were hired to work on sugar plantations by 1899.

Building the Transcontinental Railroad

One of the major employers of Chinese laborers in the 1860s was the Central Pacific Railroad. With many Californian men away fighting during the Civil War and others still seeking gold, the owners of the Central Pacific Railroad were desperate for manpower and decided to hire fifty Chinese laborers on a trial basis. The owners were afraid that the relatively small build of the Chinese men would be a liability on the backbreaking work of digging and grading the land for laying track. However, the Chinese had already earned a good reputation as workers in the community. They were soon so valued that the railroad hired all they could find and requested more men from China.

In digging a tunnel through a solid rock mountain, the Chinese were tested against professional miners from other countries and outperformed them at every week's measurement. Ten thousand men built the Central Pacific Railroad. Nine thousand of them were Chinese laborers.



Working Too Hard

Although they were sometimes accused of being slaves by their white counterparts, most Chinese laborers, especially on the railroads, made about the same pay as other workers. Chinese laborers needed fewer overseers and worked longer hours than some other laborers. This led to complaints against them and a desire to exclude them, just as the Irish were unintentionally creating political opposition in the eastern United States.

The Chinese also held some jobs, such as farm workers, domestic servants, and laundrymen, which white workers would not do. The Chinese work ethic was so strong that it sometimes hurt their image in the community.

The Second Wave (1820–1870) Quiz

Directions: Read pages 10–13 about the second wave of immigration to America. Answer these questions based on the information in the selection. Circle the correct answer to each question below. Underline the sentences in the reading selection where the answers are found.

- Which was the major port of entry into the United States for immigrants coming between 1820 and 1870?
 - Philadelphia
 - New York
 - Chicago
 - Los Angeles
- Who would sell cheap land to immigrants?
 - railroads
 - the federal government
 - New York City
 - both a and b
- What is the meaning of the word “sojourners”?
 - starvation
 - persecution
 - famine
 - travelers
- How many Irish immigrated to the United States during the years of the potato famine?
 - more than 7.5 million
 - more than one million
 - less than 500,000
 - less than 200,000
- What was Castle Garden?
 - a state immigration center
 - a model farm
 - a millionaire’s garden
 - an amusement park
- Where did steerage passengers travel on the ship?
 - on the top deck
 - in the crew’s quarters
 - below deck
 - all of the above
- Which of the following problems affected steerage passengers?
 - rotten food
 - poor opportunities for hygiene
 - contagious diseases
 - all of the above
- Which word describes people with no money or valuables?
 - destitute
 - sojourners
 - official
 - famine
- Where did the Chinese usually immigrate to in America?
 - Wisconsin
 - California
 - New York
 - New England
- Which two countries were each the source of 2.5 million immigrants between 1820 and 1870?
 - Ireland and Poland
 - Canada and China
 - Germany and Scotland
 - Ireland and Germany