

Island of tears - island of hope ellis island documentary essay examples

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



The first images that come to mind when people hear the words ' Ellis Island' are the Statue of Liberty and all the immigrants who came by ship to start a new life in the USA. The Ellis Island documentary Island of Tears - Island of Hope won many awards and clearly the awards are deserved. In about thirty minutes the filmmakers were able to synthesize the experience of approximately 12 million immigrants coming through Ellis Island. The experience of these unfortunate individuals was made real to viewers. Individuals and families were mainly leaving Eastern and Southern Europe but some also came from the Caribbean and other parts of the world. They were leaving bad conditions to find a good life in America. (Guggenheim, 1989)

Although the trip may have sounded like a romantic adventure instead it was a frightening and uncomfortable way to travel. People were fleeing terrible lives. During the years 1830 to 1930 approximately people fled Europe (Peopling, n. d. Chart). Life in Eastern and Southern Europe was dangerous at that time because of the political situation. The leaders of many countries from Germany to Russia and south through Italy were trying to enlarge their own territories with war. For example, young men were being forced to fight in armies. The documentary explains how if a son was taken for the army it was unlikely his mother would ever see him again. Also there was not enough food for people to eat; there were famines. (Guggenheim, 1989)

The strange thing about the documentary is that it brought to attention the similarities between these immigrants and kidnapped Africans being taken to America to be sold into slavery. The differences are large after arrival

because the European immigrants had freedom when they arrived but the Africans did not. But during the time of the highest immigration to Ellis Island there were unhappy comparisons. The documentary explained how European immigrants were moved like cattle or pigs into trains and steamships. They were crowded into the steamship steerage class which could comfortably accommodate one thousand people but thousands were packed into the space. The steamship owners knew that these passengers could not pay very much for their tickets; so the owners took money from as many people as they possibly could to make a bigger profit (Guggenheim, 1989).

If a person was in steerage class they would not be able to see the sky or breathe fresh air for the length of the trip. The air was bad from “spoiled food” and because people had nowhere to bathe. Some people ‘those who had blankets’ stayed on deck for the fresh air but that was crowded too. The worst part of being on the deck was that waves would wash over them. Enough toilet facilities were not available so it was filthy and smelled badly. (Guggenheim, 1989)

This documentary is good for everyone in the USA to watch because so many of our families came to America that way. Even if a person’s family was not one that came from Europe in that way this is an important film. Viewers learn to respect those who made the terrible journey and learn that they were leaving even more terrible times behind them in Europe.

Works Cited

' Peopling of America,' EllisIsland. org, The Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation, Inc., n. d. Web. .

Guggenheim, Charles. ' Immigration through Ellis Island' -An Award Winning Documentary Video, 1989, Web. .