

Turn of the century immigration

Business



When one mentions early 20th century immigration, it brings forth an image filled with poverty, refugees, and low living standards. Families fled their home countries in search of a better life in a far off country with streets that were said to be paved with gold. The people who endured these conditions to get better opportunities for themselves and their families were incredibly brave, but unfortunately their suffering didn't end there.

In turn of the century America, immigrants suffered economic, social, and political hardships. In the late nineteenth to early twentieth century United States, people immigrating from Europe, Mexico, and Asia suffered economically. Immigrants who didn't meet the requirements of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, or "WASP" culture found it very difficult to get jobs. In the west, Eastern Asian immigrants worked long hours of hard labor to lay rail road tracks. They were severely underpaid and had little to no socioeconomic mobility.

In New York, Russian Jews worked long hours in various shops, peddled on street corners, and relied on their young daughters to work in sweat shops to help provide for their families. In southern US border states, Mexican immigrants worked as migrant laborers in agriculture, spending long days in the fields. These three groups made up a significant portion of the immigrant population in turn of the century America; taking on hard-working jobs that provided necessities for everyday American life. Even though the jobs they performed were needed to maintain the lifestyle that Americans enjoyed at the time, immigrant workers weren't given the opportunities they had braved so much and worked so hard for. These people lived in incredible poverty. People working on the rail roads sometimes lived in dugouts on

sight, and immigrants working in sweat shops in cities often lived in very overcrowded, very small apartments.

Their terrible living conditions and constant insufficient funds lead to an unhealthy lifestyle. Immigrants were discriminated against and kept from moving up in the socioeconomic classes because of where they were born, regardless of the work and effort they were putting out. Turn of the century American immigrants also dealt with social discrimination. As in the case of the Russian Jewish immigrants in the New York area, men that spent their time peddling on the streets for lack of a better job were harassed and made fun of for doing what they could to provide for their families. Under very few circumstances was it easy for immigrants to integrate themselves in the dominant culture.

People who spoke English with a heavy accent, or didn't speak English at all were much more likely to be discriminated against, even if they did meet the physical characteristics of WASP culture. As a result of this, different ethnic groups often formed neighborhoods so as to keep some sense of normalcy from where they once lived, and to make it easier to keep some of their traditions alive. Often times, immigrants would change their names, clothes, and traditions so as to best assimilate, and blend into America. Children of immigrants were discriminated against by other children and even passers-by on the street. Innocent hardworking people were submitted to bigotry and intolerance simply because of where they were from, what religion they practiced, and which language they learned to speak first. Lastly, turn of the century immigrants to the United States underwent political struggles.

The first challenge presented to people immigrating to the United States was the regulations of Ellis and Angel Island, the two major immigration stations into the United States. Immigrants were asked a series of questions which were used to determine if they were a threat to the American way of life. If the immigrants weren't very fluent in English, innocent people were sometimes sent back to their country of origin because they were unable to provide suitable responses. Even if immigrants were allowed into the country, people of certain nationalities weren't allowed to become naturalized citizens. Under the Immigration Act of 1882, all immigrants who arrived on US ports were charged \$0.50 to pay for the regulation of immigration.

Ironically, that very regulation gave authorities the right to deny access to anyone that was a convict, or that the authorities determined to be insane, mentally incompetent, or likely to become a public charge. Political discrimination was not just evident against individuals, but against entire races. Ethnic groups were denied access to the United States, simply because of their country of origin. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 banned Chinese immigration to the United States, with the penalties of deportation or imprisonment. The United States Government then followed up on this legislation with the Immigration Act of 1924, which restricted Southern and Eastern European immigration, and banned Middle Eastern, East Asian, and Indian immigration.

The Immigration Act of 1924 restricted the number of people that immigrated from each country to two percent of the number of people from that country that were already living in the United States. These laws were <https://assignbuster.com/turn-of-the-century-immigration/>

put in place to protect WASP culture, and to make sure that Northern and Western European genes were still predominant in America. Prospective immigrants were discriminated against and denied access to our country simply based on their country of origin, with no regards to the nature of their beings. People who had spent life savings in an effort to give their families a new start, only to be turned away on our door step. These political injustices marked the beginning of the discrimination immigrants experienced in America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Turn of the century America was a very difficult place to be an immigrant. People who made the journey to our soil faced incredible amounts of social, economic, and political discrimination. They came to our country in search of freedom and opportunities, and instead found thinly masked oppression and intense bigotry.