

# Immigrant – college essay



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Written on side of one of America's most notable landmark, The Statue of Liberty is the iconic line " Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses yearning to breath free"(Carnes 640). The message that " Lady Liberty" conveys is one of acceptance and embracement of immigrants no matter how poor, outcaste, or unwanted, because America was the " Land of Opportunity. " The cartoon in Puck Magazine depicts the United States as a US Ark Refuge with Uncle Sam opening his arms to the poor and decrepit immigrants looking for freedom.

Shortly after this cartoon was made America's open door policy began to diminish replaced by nativist legislature. America's welcoming nature had throughout its history been selective to whom it applied, whether it be the Irish and German immigrants during the early 1800s who experienced racial discrimination upon arrival (Carnes 492). During the time period between 1880 to 1925 America's open arms to immigrants became even more selective in the wake of WWI, when a new flow of immigrants from Europe among other places arrived on American soil looking for a new life (Carnes 640).

Instead of a " Land of Opportunity" they arrived in a hostile climate fueled by nativist, who believed in White American superiority, and feared cheap immigrant labor was a threat to their livelihood (Carnes 641). The United States government during this time period did protect America's status as a " Land of Opportunity," but instead made life as an immigrant more difficult with nativist legislature such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and Immigration Act of 1917 (Carnes 436).

Both social and economic issues led to the tension between Americans and immigrants resulting in a major cultural divide between the two camps. One major source of tension people during the late 19th century and early 20th century was the issue of job stealing. During the early 1800s government supported American manufacturing to the point that they became lenient on immigration policies in order to provide American factories with a cheap labor force (Carnes 577). Immigrants who were escaping poor living situation tended to work for a lesser pay than the typical American citizen.

This created a growing anti-immigrant sentiment that led to the creation of the Nation People's Party (543). In the Nation People's Party Expression of Sentiment in 1892 they stated " We condemn the fallacy of protecting American labor under the present system, which opens our ports to the pauper and criminal classes of the world and crowds out our wage-earners. "(Doc C). The American working class tended to be the most inclined to nativist beliefs, because their livelihood was directly affected by immigrant labor.

Along with the white-American working class the African American community too felt the financial pressures of cheap immigrant labor. Prominent African American leader, Booker T. Washington advocated African Americans taking the jobs that these immigrants were occupying claiming " As we have proved our loyalty to you in the past,...we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach... "(Doc D). Both the white and black working class resented the ambitious and cheap immigrants who they believed flooded the work place with competitive unfair wages depriving them of jobs.

Judging by America's history of immigrants climbing the social ladder working class American's fear of immigrants taking jobs was not baseless. After decades of being on the receiving again of nativist hatred the Irish community rose above and found prominence in cities such as Boston (Carnes 492). In an article by Edward A. Ross in the Century Magazine, it stated " At the City Hall they found the sons of Irish exiles and immigrants administering the affairs of the metropolis of New England. " (Doc F). Fear of success in the workplace and beyond caused the majority of the resent of immigrants in America.

Social prejudices such as Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race*, which stated " no other human stock which has come to this country is there displayed the unanimity of heart, mind, and action which is now being displayed by the descendents of the blue-eyed, fair haired, peoples of the north of Europe" (Doc G). White supremacy witnessed a revival during this time period with the reestablishment of the Ku Klux Klan, who were not only anti-black and anti-catholic, but would attack Eastern European neighborhood in the hopes to discourage their immigration to America (Carnes 639).

Anti-Semitism was also rampant after WWI in American with the influx of Jewish immigrants from Easter Europe coming to America (Carnes 641). The federal government up until 1880 was largely accepting of immigrants regardless of the anti-immigrant sentiment of the general public. This however changed due to the growing social pressures and the presence of the Populist Party and labor unions resulting in the first law, The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, to deny immigration by race (Carnes 436). This act

started a domino effect of anti-immigrant legislature that greatly impacted immigrants' ability to enter the US.

Whether it be the Immigration Act of 1917, which required literacy test and banned any person born in the Asiatic Barred Zone, or the Basic Naturalization Act, which established the Immigration and Naturalization Service, or even the "Gentlemen's Agreement," which persuaded Japan discourage emigration to the United States (Carnes 603). The Commissioner General of Immigration's report described the "Gentlemen's Agreement" stating "An understanding was reached with Japan that the existing policy of discouraging emigration of its subjects of the laboring classes to continental United States. (Doc E).

During this time period the federal government enforced anti-Asian legislature in order to protect American jobs as well as making it clear that their laboring class was not a welcome facet of America's society. Furthermore the federal government also enacted Anti-European legislature in the wake of WWI (Carnes 640). The government established a quota system, which greatly reduced the amount of immigrants that could enter the US from a particular country (Carnes 640).

In The Literary Digest cartoon Uncle Sam is depicted monitoring a funnel attempting to consolidate the swarming masses of Europe trying to enter the United States. The funnel served as a metaphor for United State's quotas system, trying to do whatever possible to lessen to large pool of immigrants attempting to immigrate to the United States. As the travesties of WWI were

still fresh in the minds of the American public isolationism was a very popular ideal at the time.

Isolationism's by product happened to be nativism, which resulted in tensions between the American work force and migrant labor and eventually nativist legislature. America's standing as a " Land of Opportunity" weakened during the time period between 1880 and 1925, due to a growing anti-immigrant sentiment as well nativist laws. The " American Dream" of coming to America and finding prosperity has never been just handed to any group of people, but during this time the American people as well as the federal government attempted to discourage the pursuit of this dream by immigrants in order to protect their own interests.