

# Old immigrants vs new immigrants in the 1800s



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During the Gilded Age when America was becoming more industrialized, the U. S was seen as the land of opportunity to many people in Europe and Asia. During the mid to late 1800s, “ Old immigrants” from Western Europe had originally come to America to dig in the goldfields and help build the transcontinental railroads in the West. After them, came the “ new immigrants”, from Southern and Eastern Europe. Although both were very culturally different, they had the same intents when coming to America and got the same negative responses from nativists.

By 1880, 75, 000 Asian newcomers were counted, more than 9 percent of its entire population. After saving up enough money, roughly half of those newcomers returned to their homelands. Those who stayed received much criticism and hardships. They worked very low-status jobs as cooks, laundrymen, or domestic servants. Without women or families, they had time coming accustomed to American Lifestyle, unlike other immigrant communities whose children were exposed to the English language and American customs in school.

Many nativists resented the Chinese, arguing that they took jobs away from unemployed Americans. Another group that disliked the Chinese was the Irish, who came to America before the Chinese. The Irish acted negatively toward the Chinese and regarded them as menaces because of the competition they faced for cheap labor. In San Francisco, Irish- born troublemaker Denis Kearney pushed other Irishmen to act violently towards the Chinese. These Kearneyites terrorized the Chinese by cutting off their hair, and some were murdered outright.

In result of all these incidents and the negativity towards the Chinese, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, which forbid any further immigration from China. Some people even tried to take away citizenship of native- born Chinese Americans, but failed when the Supreme Court ruled that the fourteenth amendment guaranteed citizenship to people born the United States. The doors stayed shut to the Chinese until 1943. By the last decade of the century, many of the “ old immigrants” had adjusted well to American Society, and even became largely accepted as “ American” by nativists.

Once that was settled, a new wave of immigrants, known as the “ new immigrants”, came from Southern and Eastern Europe. Among these immigrants were Italians, Jews, Croats, Slovaks, Greeks, and Poles. Many also worshipped Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. They came from countries with little history of Democratic Government and many were, like the Chinese, were impoverished and illiterate. With Europe’s population growing rapidly, there seemed to be very little room for them, causing many to come to America.

Many came together in big cities such as New York and Chicago, and sprang up immigrant communities, like “ Little Italy” and “ Little Poland”. Just as the Irish and Chinese had, the new immigrants faced much of the same criticism when coming to America. There were fears that the new immigrants would not, or could not, grow accustomed to the American lifestyle and they were very skeptical. The growing industrialization of America brought thousands of immigrants to the U. S. Both the “ old immigrants” and the “ new

immigrants” faced the same troubles when coming to America, although both groups were very different.