

Urban Immigration

I. Immigration

A. Early as the 1870s-1880s, changes beginning to become visible: Chinese immigrants

1. 1890 census claims 2000 Chinese people in NY alone, but actual numbers are probably more like 6000.
2. Chinatown: Not actually a particularly large concentration of Chinese immigrants: only around 15-20% of Chinese in NY live there—most live throughout NY, in buildings behind small hand-laundries. But Chinatown nonetheless remains the center of the Chinese community in NY—very visible, with lots of stores carrying Chinese wares.
3. America's response, largely due to labor unions' opposition to cheap Chinese labor: Chinese Exclusion Act, which denies Chinese right to vote, citizenship, right to enter the country (after 1892).
4. Creates "Bachelor Society"—men cannot bring over their wives—as a result, no women. By 1900, dozens, possibly hundreds of Chinese men, compared to relatively few Chinese women.

B. Also, lots of Europeans coming in late 19th and early 20th century. New immigrants

1. Basic distinctions: Race, skill distinctions, religion, language, area (northern and western Europe vs. southern and eastern Europe)
1. Chinese kind of hard case—most people consider them the first wave of new immigrants, a wave that is cut short.
2. Other new immigrants a little clearer: basically eastern Europe and southern Europe.
3. Usually simplify this into Italian and Jewish immigrants, esp. in NY, where those are in fact the two most prominent groups.

II. Jewish immigrants

A. Like the Chinese, long history

1. 1600s—Jews from western Europe migrate, in relatively small #s.

2. Small #s deserves to be emphasized: 1820s, still around 400 Jews in New York City, as opposed to 35,000 Catholics.
3. Sizable increase when German immigrants had come over in large #s starting in 1840s-1850s, lots of German Jews come with them. By 1859, 40,000 Jews (now 200,000 Catholics).

B. German Jews

1. Very strongly assimilationist: determination to blend in.
2. Observers at the time have a very hard time distinguishing them from German immigrants—eventually stop bothering.
3. *Very* little anti-semitic action against these immigrants.

C. Then, in 1880s, Eastern European Jews start to come to U.S.

1. But eventually cross the ocean. 1870s, 40,000 Eastern European Jews come to the U.S.
2. 1880s—200,000 come.
3. 1890s, 300,000 more.
4. Pretty much always settle in large cities, most important NY and Chicago.
5. Lower East Side of New York now becomes a massive Jewish community.

III. Italian Immigrants

1. Something like 30,000 Italian immigrants between 1880 and 1890, and something like 65,000 Italian immigrants every year between 1890 and 1900.
2. “Birds of passage”—about 2/5 of them go back after a year or two.

III. Immigrants’ lives in the cities

A. Working conditions

1. 10-12 hour days.
2. Very low pay: piecework and homework.

C. Homes--Tenements--Slums

1. No running water--often there's a pump outside. Imagine living in the fifth floor. Every time you want water, you have to go to the pump.
2. Often very dirty--dead horses lying in the street.
3. VERY crowded.
4. Diseases--TB ravages these communities.
5. BIG RESPONSE from upper class (homework).

C. Leisure time--

1. Movies--Before Chaplin still, but there are motion picture houses, and young people in particular go to the movies.
2. Vaudeville--Popular theater circuit, often Rockettes-style stuff. Also stand-up comedy, singers, some minstrelsy.
3. Amusement parks--Coney Island is a *huge* part of these workers' lives. Lower East Side or in Brooklyn, Coney Island is a really short ride.
4. Dance halls--Mixed sex leisure time. VERY IMPORTANT

IV. Responses (1): Other immigrants

D. Between the German Jews and the Russian Jews, for one thing:

1. Anti-semites distinguish between the German Jews and the Russian Jews
2. German Jews encourage this: Temple Emanu-El begins meeting to condemn the "loud ways and awkward gesticulations, naturally repulsive and repugnant to the refined American."
3. Emma Lazarus, who came from an older and relatively wealthy Jewish household, is in fact the author of the "New Colossus," the poem written to be put on the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor—your huddled masses yearning to breathe free/ The wretched refuse of your teeming shore."
4. Hi, garbage!
5. Other examples equally contradictory: United Hebrew Charities extended direct aid to new Jewish immigrants, along with advice on how to blend in.

6. Hebrew Educational Alliance, opened in 1891 (dropped the word “Hebrew”) almost immediately, taught religion (Hebrew school) as well as hygiene, morality, and Americanization.
7. Also big fight over Yiddish, which German Jews regard as jabber and un-American—apparently unlike German.
8. Similar problems for Italian immigrants. Italian Catholicism very different: 1884—Italians way up in East Harlem, establish a festival that quickly becomes a combination of a religious observance and a neighborhood festival: games, bands, food, dancing, costumes, and parades—very different from pre-Italian Catholicism.
9. 1887—Archbishop Michael Corrigan, longtime leader of NY’s Catholic community, tries to take steps, contacting Rome and asking that Italian priests be sent over to try to control this sort of behavior.
10. Under his leadership, eight more Catholic churches are opened, most of them in the Italian neighborhoods.
11. Also refers the issue of the Mt. Carmel festival to the Pope, asking the Pope to step in and declare the festival an unacceptable form of Catholicism.
12. Problem is, of course, the Pope is in Rome, and has been trying to limit the influence of the Irish Catholics over the Church.
13. Doesn’t respond to Corrigan’s demand. However, in 1903, at the request of a local Italian priest, the Pope issues an order that the Madonna of 115th Street is now a holy site.

V. Responses (2) from upper class: Progressivism

A. Definition:

1. Different things to different people
2. Strong belief in rational thinking; application of scientific methods to solving social problems.
3. Also enforced Protestant and middle-class morality: means of child rearing, breast feeding, etc.
4. Centered at least initially around settlement houses--upper- and middle-class women move into houses in working-class

neighborhoods. Jane Addams, Hull House; Lillian Wald, Henry Street Settlement House.

5. Working-class people, esp. women, perceive them as very nosy, troublemakers.

B. Progressives on leisure time:

1. Crack down on dance halls--Public Recreation Commission--sent chaperones to all dance halls and amusement parks.

C. Working-class politics also attacked:

1. Big attack on political corruption: political machine.
2. Women should get the vote, because they're kinder, more caring--will make government kinder and more caring as well.

D. Housing reform:

1. Tenement Commission--regulations for housing.
2. Social workers & home relief. Social workers go into working-class homes, observe, attempt to "train" working-class mothers in more scientific ways of keeping their house running.

VII. Islands and Immigrants

A. Immigration Act of 1882

1. "convicts (except those convicted of political offences), lunatics, idiots and persons likely to become public charges."
2. Also a 50 cent tax on immigrants. (Rarely enforced.)

B. Immigration Act of 1891

1. Not much harder to get into the country: add contagious diseases and moral turpitude to the list.
2. But, for NY, much more importantly: now require "name, nationality, last residence, and destination of all immigrants."
3. Federal government now has to start interviewing immigrants

C. Luckily, they have a spot in which to do so: Ellis Island.

VIII. The point is . . .

- A. Assimilation means what?
- B. Uprooted (Oscar Handlin, 1951) vs. transplanted (John Bodnar, 1985) argument.