

Name: _____ Date: _____



Coming to America: Narrative—Part I



Directions: Read the narrative to find the answers to these questions:

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- a. Who are the immigrants?
- b. Why do they come?
- c. From what countries do they come?
- d. What is the significance of immigration to you?

America is a nation of **immigrants**. At one point in our history, this land was empty of human inhabitants. The first immigrants, ancestors of the Native Americans, crossed a land bridge that once joined Alaska and Northeastern Siberia. They spread southwest and east through the Americas. During colonial times, people came to this country in search of land, freedom, and adventure. In the early days of the Industrial Revolution, immigrants came in large numbers from Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, and other countries. Many Jews came to escape persecution, while Africans came involuntarily as slaves. The Chinese and Japanese came to find gold and good jobs. Since the time of the first immigrants, millions of people have come to the United States in search of a better life. Because of this huge **migration** of people to the United States over the centuries, every American is either an immigrant or a descendant of one.

People **migrate** to America for different reasons. Economic concerns motivate some immigrants. They are searching for a better life or a better job. Others, like the early settlers, come seeking religious tolerance or political freedom. In the early 1800s, thousands of Germans left Germany for the United States because of the land grants being offered in Pennsylvania. Thousands of French came to seek their fortunes and to explore the land. In the 1840s, thousands of Irish **emigrants** left their country to come to the United States to escape the hunger and poverty of the potato famine. Italians came seeking to own land; Cubans came to find relief from an oppressive government; and Chinese came to work in the gold mines and to work for the Transcontinental Railroad. From Indochina (i.e., Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos), people emigrated to escape political oppression. "Old" immigrants and "new" immigrants alike came to America to live a more comfortable life than they could in their homelands.

Because many immigrants come from very poor countries, native-born Americans believe that all immigrants are poor and uneducated. Most native-born Americans believe that immigrants come to the United States to escape from hunger, want, and persecution. While some immigrants are poor and uneducated, and some do come to escape hunger and persecution, data kept by the **INS** does not support these beliefs. The very poor and the unemployed seldom migrate either legally or illegally. **Emigration** from one's homeland to a foreign country

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Coming to America: Narrative—Part I (cont.)

is not an easy task. It requires elaborate planning, extensive expenses, and giving up family and personal relationships. Often immigrants must learn a new language and culture. **Authorized immigrants** tend to have above-average levels of education and occupational skills in comparison to their homeland population. In fact, the proportion of professionals and managers among occupationally active immigrants consistently exceeds the average among U.S. workers (immigrants: 33%; native-born: 20%). More important, however, is the fact that immigrants tend to be more ambitious and more willing to work than those who don't **emigrate**.

Most people who come to the United States to live do so willingly. These are **legal immigrants** who have **visas** and/or **green cards** and who apply for **permanent resident** status and/or **citizenship**. These immigrants generally emigrate for economic reasons and are especially attracted to the American culture and lifestyle. **Refugees** are immigrants who come reluctantly to the United States. They have been forced out of their homes or flee their countries in fear for their lives. They'd rather stay in their homes and in their country of birth, but they believe that by doing so, it will result in starvation, imprisonment, and/or death. Refugees have been accepted in the United States from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Germany, Russia, Bosnia, Somalia, and many other countries; the United States accepts thousands of refugees each year.

Another type of immigrant to the United States came involuntarily as slaves; they were forced to come. Many thousands of Africans entered the United States on slave ships—one of the largest group migrations in our history. They were sold as property to plantation and business owners and others; however, not all Africans came as slaves. In the original group of settlers of the Jamestown colony, there were 20 Africans. Later, a number of Africans came, like many poor Europeans, as **indentured servants**. Indentured servants promised their labor and allegiance to another person for an agreed period of time (usually 4—7 years) in return for travel and living expenses.

Yet another group of immigrants are the **illegal** or **undocumented immigrants**. These are people who enter the United States without proper authorization. Many native-born Americans believe that the majority of illegal immigrants enter this country across its southern border. However, INS data reveals that most undocumented **aliens** enter this country legally and overstay their welcome. They come by airplane and simply never return home when their visas expire.

People move to other countries for many reasons, but most are economic reasons. They want a better life for themselves and their families and believe that emigrating to another country will give them the opportunity. America is a land of diversity—a land of people from many lands. It becomes a stronger country when all of its citizens respect the different opinions, cultures, ethnic groups, and religions found within its borders. Tolerance for differences is the responsibility of every American citizen and is the foundation upon which this country was built.



Ports of Entry (POEs)



A **port of entry**, as defined by the INS, is any location in the United States or its territories that is designated as a point of entry for aliens and U.S. citizens. Today, there are over 300 ports of entry (POEs) in the United States, including international airports, land border ports, and seaports. Persons seeking entry to the United States are inspected to determine admissibility at the ports of entry. INS officers interview immigrants for admission, examine and process entry into the country, and take action against immigration violators.

Some of the more famous ports of entry are described briefly below.

ELLIS ISLAND

Ellis Island was an immigration center located in New York Harbor. It opened in 1892 and closed in 1954; during this time, over 12 million immigrants entered the United States through the center. The island is a small piece of land located in the upper bay just off the New Jersey coast. It stands, poetically, in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty.

The millions of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island were examined by doctors and legal inspectors. Some were allowed to enter the United States right away; some were held for a while; and some were rejected and sent back. Though the island earned the reputation as an "Island of Tears," the vast majority of immigrants were treated courteously and respectfully and allowed to begin their lives in America after the three-to-five-hour detention at the center. Only two percent of arriving immigrants were rejected; the two main reasons for rejection were if a doctor diagnosed the newcomer with a contagious disease that would endanger the public health or if a legal inspector thought the immigrant was likely to become a "welfare" recipient or an illegal worker.

ANGEL ISLAND

Not all immigrants entered the United States through Ellis Island, of course. Many, particularly Asian immigrants, arrived in California rather than in New York. San Francisco was the location of another famous immigration center, Angel Island. Known as the "Ellis Island of the West," this immigration center was put into operation, despite much public controversy, in 1910. The immigration center was officially known as "The Guardian of the Western Gate" and was designed to control the flow of Chinese immigrants into the country.

The facility was primarily used as a detention center; a series of restrictive laws had prohibited the immigration of certain nationalities and social classes of Asians. Although all Asians were affected, the targeted group were the Chinese. The center included buildings to house and care for detainees, a pier, and a regular boat service to the mainland. During the next 30 years, Angel Island was the port of entry for the nearly 175,000 Chinese immigrants who came to America. The average detention was two to three weeks, but many stayed for several months, and a few were forced to remain on the island for nearly two years.

In 1940, the government decided to abandon the immigration station on Angel Island and it closed. Today, like Ellis Island, the immigration station is a national historic landmark.

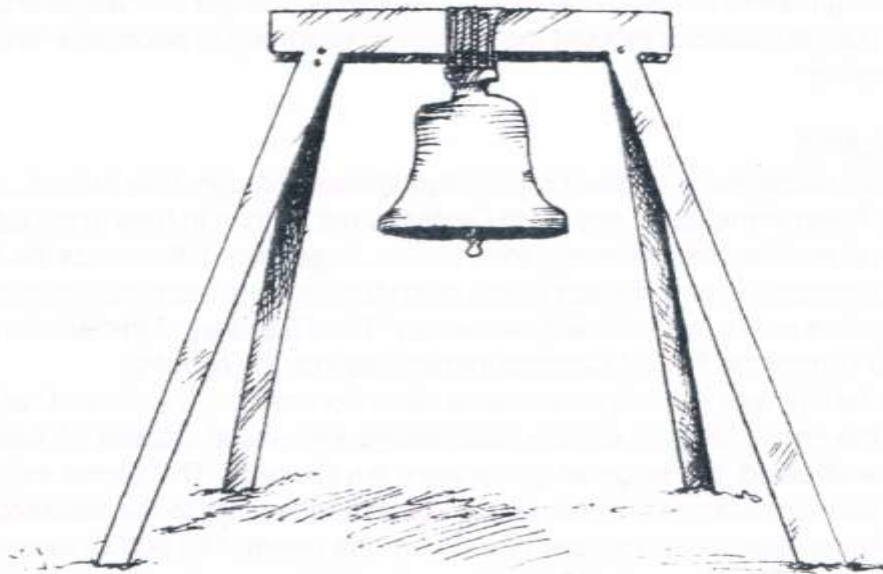


Ports of Entry (POEs) (cont.)



OTHER PORTS OF ENTRY

Not all immigrants passed through Ellis Island or Angel Island. Many entered through other ports in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, Galveston, and Savannah. Not all of those who did enter the country at New York and San Francisco were inspected at the immigration centers. First- and second-class passengers were not required to undergo the inspection process. Instead, these passengers underwent a quick inspection aboard the ship before they docked in the harbor. If you passed the inspection, you were free to enter the country when the ship docked. Officials reasoned that the "richer" passengers would not end up in hospitals, institutions, or become burdens for the government. If first- or second-class passengers were sick or had legal problems, however, they were sent to the immigration station. The poor who traveled in third class or steerage (the cheapest way to travel) were taken to the immigration stations for processing.



Immigration Station Bell at Angel Island