

IMMIGRATION AND URBANIZATION

Viewpoints

In the early and mid-1800s, immigrants to the United States had come from Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland. The “new” immigrants from southern and eastern Europe caused Americans to reexamine many of the basic principles on which the nation had been founded. Freedom of religion for Protestants made sense to people who were mostly Protestants themselves—but for Catholics and Jews? Equality of all people was a lofty sentiment—but did that include people from southern and eastern Europe? As the newcomers poured into the country, debates raged about the effect this tidal wave of humanity would have on American values and institutions.

Directions: Read the following viewpoints on the “new” immigrants. Then answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper.

“New” Immigrants

“Only a short time ago, the immigrants from southern Italy, Hungary, Austria, and Russia together made up hardly more than one percent of our immigration. Today the proportion has risen to something like forty percent, and threatens soon to become fifty or sixty percent, or even more. . . . These people have no history behind them which is of a nature to give encouragement. They have none of the inherited instincts and tendencies which made it comparatively easy to deal with the immigration of the olden time. They are beaten men from beaten races; representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence. Centuries are against them, as centuries were on the side of those who formerly came to us.”

—Francis A. Walker, president,
Massachusetts Institute of
Technology, *The Atlantic Monthly*,
June 1896

“[W]e surely violate the Declaration [of Independence] when we attempt to exclude aliens on account of race, nationality, or economic status. ‘All men’ means yellow men as well as white men, men from the South of Europe as well as men from the North of Europe, men who hold kingdoms in pawn, and men who owe for their dinner. We shall have to recall officially the Declaration of Independence before we can lawfully limit the application of its principles to this or that group of men.”

—Mary Antin, *Russian immigrant
and writer*, *They Who Knock at
Our Gates*, 1914

Questions to Think About

1. Why might Mary Antin refer to the Declaration of Independence?
2. **Detect Point of View** For what reason does Francis Walker provide statistics on the numbers of immigrants coming to the United States from southern and eastern Europe? How does his language reveal his attitude toward these “new” immigrants?
3. **Draw Inferences** To what is Francis Walker referring when he notes that the new immigrants “have none of the inherited instincts and tendencies which made it comparatively easy to deal with the immigration of the olden time”?

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As more and more Chinese arrived in the West in the mid-19th century, some white Americans began to view them with suspicion and hostility. Anti-Chinese clubs were formed, and violence against Chinese immigrants flared. By the late 1800s, prominent citizens in California pressured Congress to pass a law preventing any more Chinese from entering the United States. A law was passed in 1879, but President Hayes vetoed it because it violated rights guaranteed to the Chinese in an 1868 treaty. The treaty was then revised to answer these objections. Believing itself freed from the constraints of the treaty, Congress passed the first exclusion act in 1882. Great controversy raged over this and subsequent exclusion acts passed in 1892 and 1902.

Directions: Read the following viewpoints on the Chinese Exclusion Act. Then answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper.

The Chinese Exclusion Act

"The law is barbarous [cruel], contrary to the spirit and genius of American institutions, and was passed in violation of solemn treaty stipulations. . . . It is to the interest of this country to maintain friendly relations with China. We want the trade of nearly one-fourth of the human race. . . . [W]e are losing the trade of China by pandering to the prejudices of the ignorant and cruel. . . . Our country is an asylum [refuge] for the oppressed of all nations—of all races. . . . Let us retrace our steps, repeal the law and accomplish what we justly desire by civilized means. Let us treat China as we would England; and, above all, let us respect the rights of men."

—Orator and lawyer Col. R.G. Ingersoll, *The North American Review*, July 1893

"The Chinese law . . . was justified by the circumstances prevailing in this country; it was in accordance with the treaties made between this Government and China; it imposed no undue or unjust hardship upon the Chinese people here, and was a proper and just exercise of power on the part of this country. . . . American interests in the far West, the maintenance of American civilization, and the just protection of American labor from Chinese competition, is of more consequence than the profits of the Chinese trade, or the maintenance of missionary stations in China."

—Representative Thomas Geary of California, *The North American Review*, July 1893

Questions to Think About

1. Is Colonel Ingersoll in support of or against the Chinese Exclusion Act? What is Representative Geary's position?
2. **Distinguish Relevant Information** What argument does Colonel Ingersoll offer to support his position that the United States should maintain a friendly relationship with China?
3. **Distinguish Verifiable Information** Colonel Ingersoll and Representative Geary have opposing views on many aspects of the Chinese Exclusion Act. One fact on which they disagree can be easily verified to find out which speaker is more accurate. Which fact would this be, and how might you verify the truth?