

# 22 Immigrants Speak



Uncle Sam promised immigrants "no oppressive taxes, no expensive kings, no compulsory military service, no dungeons."

Back in 1608—not long after the first settlers arrived in Jamestown—John Smith wrote to his bosses in the London Company and told them the kind of settlers to send to America:

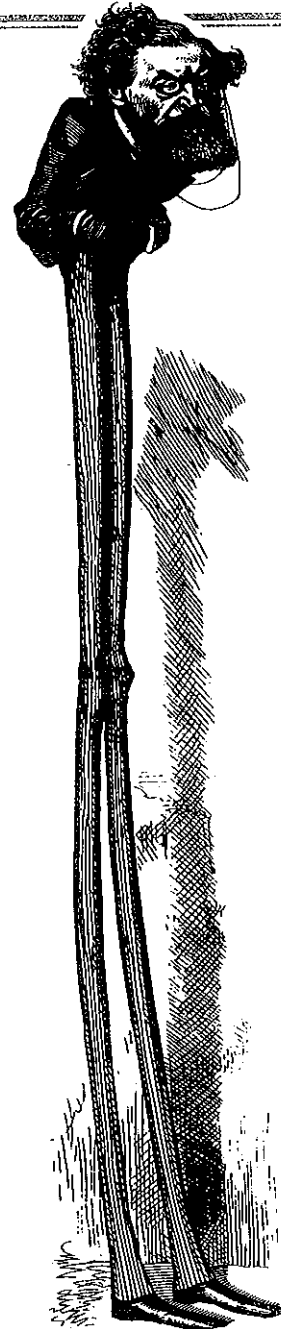
*When you send again I entreat you rather send but thirty carpenters, husbandmen,*

*gardeners, fishermen, blacksmiths, masons, and diggers up of trees, roots, well provided; than a thousand of such as we have: for except we be able both to lodge them, and feed them, the most will consume with want of necessaries before they can be made good for anything.*

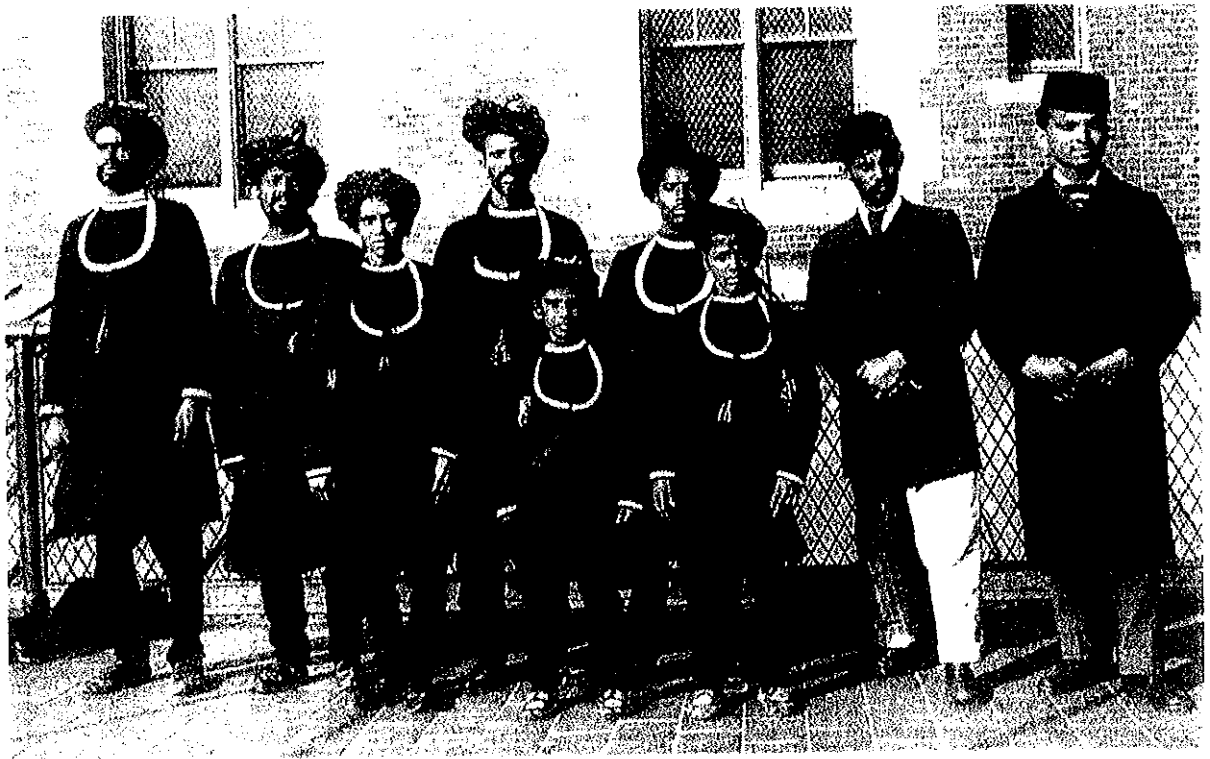
During the 19th century, the kind of people John Smith wanted—working people who could build and farm and invent—came to America in ship after ship after ship. And just in time; with all the new technology there was plenty for them to do. They were needed to work in the new factories, to settle land, and to invent things. Immigrants did all that.

Germans made up the largest single group of 19th-century immigrants. Carl Schurz was one of them, and he went, with remarkable speed, from immigrant to national leader. Here are Schurz's own words telling his story:

*It is one of the earliest recollections of my boyhood....One of our neighboring families was moving far away across a great water, and it was said that they would never again return. And I saw silent tears trickling down weather-beaten cheeks, and the hands of rough peasants firmly pressing each other, and some of the men and*



Carl Schurz as drawn by Thomas Nast. In a speech to the Senate in 1872, Schurz said, "Our country, right or wrong. When right, to be kept right; when wrong, to be put right."



Sometimes the men of the family (like these Sikhs from North India) came over first and sent for the women later. "The great majority are young men and young women, between 17 and 30," wrote one observer in New York, "good, youthful, hopeful, peasant stock."

It is an old dodge of the advocates of despotism throughout the world, that the people who are not experienced in self-government are not fit for the exercise of self-government...[but] liberty is the best school for liberty, and self-government cannot be learned but by practicing it. This, sir, is a truly American idea; this is true Americanism, and to this I pay the tribute of my devotion.

---CARL SCHURZ

women hardly able to speak when they nodded to one another a last farewell. At last the train started into motion, they gave three cheers for America, and then in the first gray dawn of the morning I saw them wending their way over the hill until they disappeared in the shadow of the forest. And I heard many a man say, how happy he would be if he could go with them to that great and free country, where a man could be himself.

Carl continued:

*That was the first time that I heard of America, and my childish imagination took possession of a land covered partly with majestic trees, partly with flowery prairies, immeasurable to the eye, and intersected with large rivers and broad lakes—a land where everybody could do what he thought best, and where nobody need be poor, because everybody was free.*

Schurz fought in a freedom movement in Germany (in 1848), but, when the freedom fighters lost, he was in trouble and had to flee to Switzerland. Then, being uncommonly brave, he went back into Germany to help his college

professor escape from jail. But he knew if he stayed in Germany, he, too, would be jailed. Schurz was 23, and he set out for the land of freedom.

When Schurz arrived in America, before the Civil War, he found that some people weren't free. He wasn't the kind of person who kept quiet about something he thought was wrong. After all, he'd been a freedom fighter. He hated slavery, and he spoke out and said so. He reminded people that there was no freedom of speech in the slave states. Without free speech, said Schurz, no one is free, neither slave nor master.

"I am an anti-slavery man, and I have a right to my opinion in South Carolina just as well as in Massachusetts... If you want to be free, there is but one way," said Schurz. "It is to guarantee an equally full measure of liberty to all your neighbors."

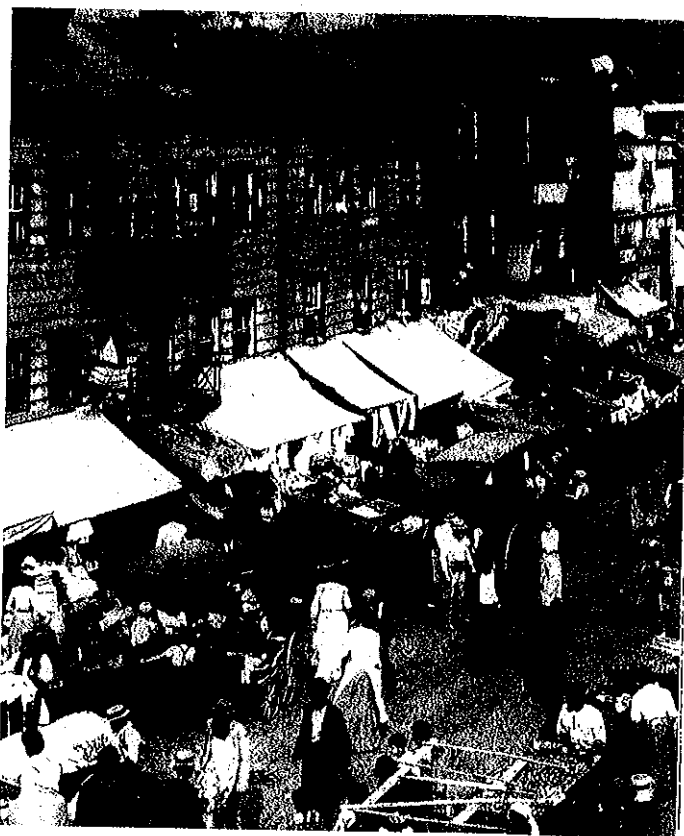
In his new country Carl Schurz found the opportunity he had dreamed of in Europe. He studied law, moved to Missouri, and became active in politics. Just 10 years after he arrived in the United States, President Abraham Lincoln named him American minister to Spain. But he soon came home to serve as a general in the Union army. He became a newspaper correspondent, an editor, a U.S. senator from Missouri, and secretary of the interior. He was a public official who talked of conservation of the wilderness and fairness to Indians when hardly anyone else thought of those things.

Like so many other immigrants, Carl Schurz had fallen in love with the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the guarantees of the Constitution.

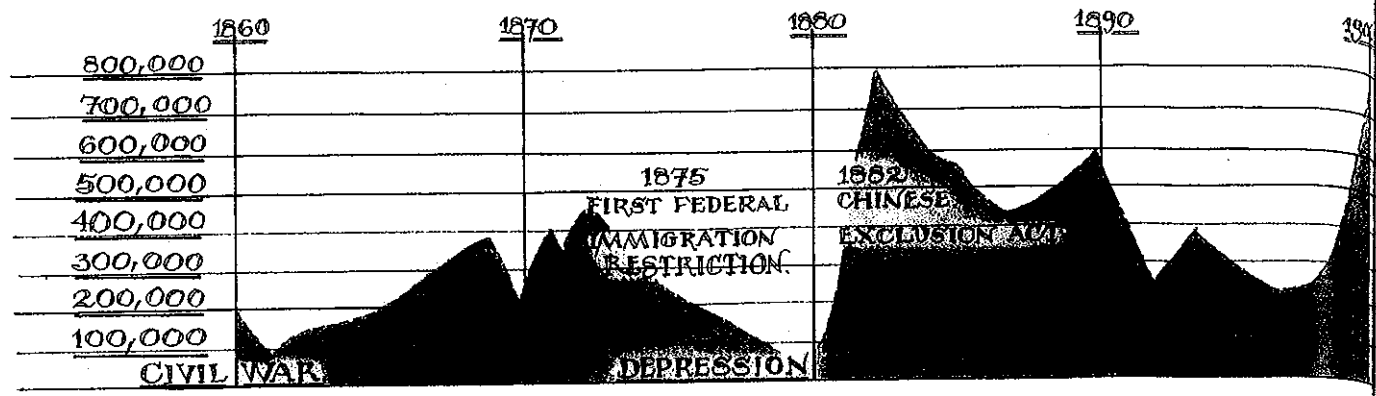
Next to the Germans, the Irish were the largest immigrant group. Before the Civil War, one-fourth of the whole population of Ireland came to America. (That was 1.7 million Irish men, women, and children.) They kept coming, during and after the war. The Irish were desperate because in Ireland crops had failed, especially the potato crop. There was a famine. More than 1 million people died of starvation in

## Mathilde Franziska Anneke

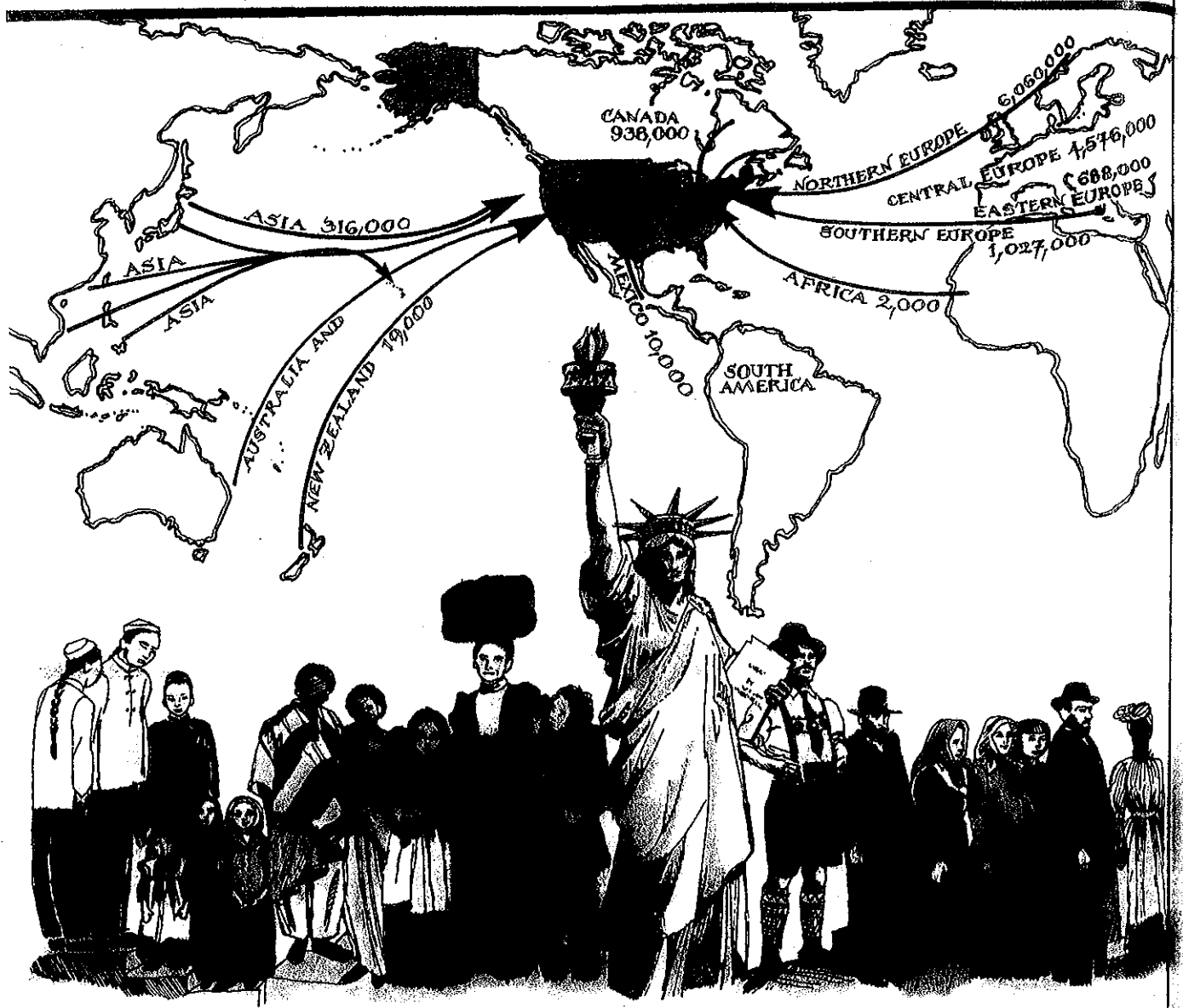
**M**athilde Franziska Anneke published a liberal newspaper in Germany. The newspaper criticized the government. It was 1848, and some Germans tried to lead a freedom revolution, as Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry had done in America. Mathilde and her husband were among them. But the revolution was squashed. Like Carl Schurz, the Annekes had to flee Germany. They made it to the United States—and freedom. In New York, Mathilde Anneke began publishing a woman's journal. Then she moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where she taught at a school for women and worked for women's rights.



Street life on New York's Lower East Side was noisy, dirty, sometimes dangerous. But it was better to be outside than stuck in a dark, filthy, airless tenement.



## IMMIGRATION 1860-1900



### A Land of Naked Indians

In Yugoslavia, Michael Pupin sold his warm sheepskin coat to raise money to go to the New World. "Why should anyone going to New York bother about warm clothes?" he said. "Was not New York much farther south than Pancevo [PAN-chuh-vuh], where I had been raised? And when one thinks of the pictures of naked Indians so often seen, does not America suggest a hot climate? These thoughts consoled me when I parted with my sheepskin coat."

Ireland. The Irish spoke an ancient language called Gaelic (GAY-lick), although most were bilingual: they could speak English, too.

Many other immigrants didn't know a word of English. But America's free public schools, which developed in the 19th century, soon taught their children to speak the language. People were now coming from countries that had not sent many people to America before: countries such as Russia, Italy, Poland, Denmark, Sweden, and Hungary.

The population of Europe doubled between 1750 and 1850. All those extra people needed food, homes, and jobs—and there just didn't seem to be enough of them in Europe. Many Europeans came to America to find work and to avoid hunger.

Others came for religious freedom. Religious dissenters came from Holland, and Jews (who were often persecuted for their beliefs) came from Germany, Poland, and Russia. Still others came to escape political wars that were leaving parts of Europe in turmoil.

In the half century after the Civil War, some 26 million immigrants arrived in the United States. Think about that—26 million is a whole lot of people. Many of the newcomers began life in the cities—in overcrowded apartment buildings called "tenements." Sometimes eight families shared one bathroom. (City codes make that illegal today.)

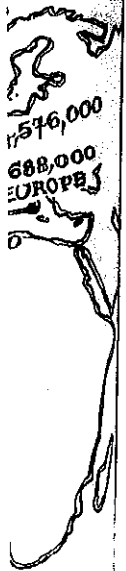
Imagine that you are a 19th-century immigrant. (Maybe some of your ancestors were.) You don't know the English language, and everything in this land seems different and strange. At school almost everyone speaks English. How do you like it here?

Most of the immigrants knew very little about America except that it was a land of freedom. But that's what they wanted: freedom and a chance to work.

They came on steamships. If they were poor, they were crowded into belowdecks areas called the "hold" or "steerage." It wasn't pleasant down there, but the trip cost \$30 and now took just 10 days. Most of the immigrants came into New York harbor, to a place called Castle Garden, and after 1892 to Ellis Island (where the early Dutch settlers had picnicked). There they were checked before they could enter the United States. If they had a disease, or if the papers they



"Are you healthy?" the doctor asked. "Do you have any rashes? Have you ever had tuberculosis?" If he suspected anything, he scrawled a letter in chalk on your jacket.



**Abysmal** (uh-BIZ-mul) means "awful." The word comes from *abyss*, which is a bottomless pit. Something abysmal is so bad there seems to be no end in sight, no bottom to the problem, no way out. *Abyssal* is a related word. It means: "of, or pertaining to, the great depths of the ocean."



Jacob Riis arrived at Castle Garden in New York in 1870.

**We don't know** exactly why Europe's population increased so fast in the 18th and 19th centuries. Some reasons were the growth of industry and cities, and improvements in public health and nutrition, but they don't account completely for such a big jump. Historians are still trying to figure this out.

brought from their former country were not right, they might be sent back where they came from.

So they were frightened when they arrived.

Bianca de Carli sailed from Italy. Conditions for poor people in Italy were abysmal (especially on the island of Sicily). Some Italians were forced to live in straw shacks and even caves. Many were starving. No wonder America seemed appealing. Still, it took courage to emigrate. Bianca wrote about how she felt when she arrived at Ellis Island:

*A thousand times during the last day or two I put my hands on my passport and papers which I kept wrapped in a handkerchief under the front of my dress. This was just to make sure they were still there.*

*One of my companions said, "Signora, you are very foolish! When you keep your hand inside your dress...you are telling everyone that your papers and money are there! Maybe a bad person will see. Take your hands away."*

*Now, years later, I know it was foolish and silly, but we heard so many stories about others who were turned back because their papers were not in order....No one trusted their pockets even, because...crowded together most of the time it would be easy to have our pockets picked.*

*One woman had sewed her papers and money into the folds of her seventeen skirts! Yes, seventeen; I know I am right in remembering, and she wore them all. She came from a Hungarian province [where]...she told me that a woman's wealth was proved by the number of skirts she could wear.*

Jacob Riis was a boy who sailed from Denmark. He had read books about America, and he thought he knew something about the country. What he had read in Denmark were cowboy books.

He expected to find buffaloes and cowboys in New York. The first thing he did when he arrived

Cities did not yet build public playgrounds. Children had the street — and anything in it (like a dead horse).



### Hurrah for America, My Free Country!

When 18-year-old Léon Charles Fouquet (foo-kay) headed for America he kept a journal of his adventures. He never did say why he left his home in France, but it is a good guess that if he stayed he would have been drafted into the army. His mother urged him to go to Kansas, where he had some relatives. But first he had to get across the ocean—in steerage, which means the cheapest passage—and the trip was awful. Here are his words to tell you about it:

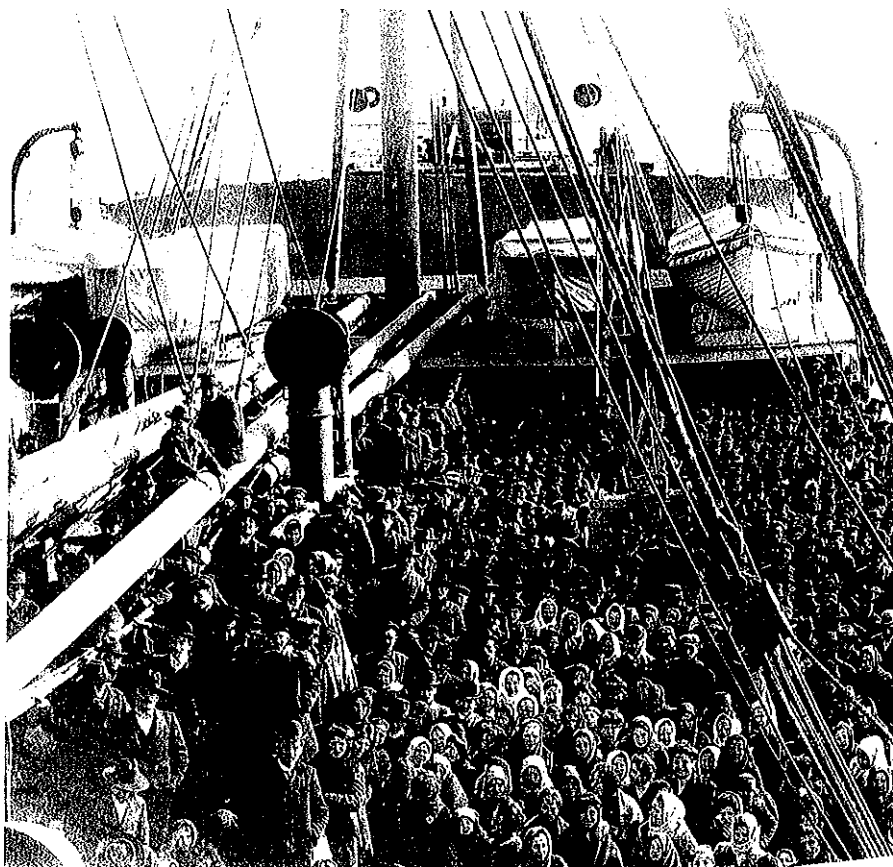
**W**hen our ship left Liverpool, there were many nationalities aboard, but I was the only Frenchman. When the ship anchored at Queenstown, the Irish seaport, it took on a large number of Irish immigrants. They came to the ship in little boats and the waves had such an influence on the little vessels that all those Irishmen got seasick.... [The seasick Irish came crowding into the dorm-like room where Léon slept.] So offended were my senses that I realized I must rush up on deck to the open air. I had to wait as the little narrow stairway was crowded.... At last the stairs were empty and I started up. At the same time a sick man started down. The poor fellow could not control his stomach and out and down it came...right down on me... [It was an awful start for the voyage and things didn't get much better for Léon.] The food on the ship was very poor. The bulk of it was like hardtack, hard as rocks, but not too hard for the worms. They were alive in that hardtack and I could not eat.

*Ships were overcrowded. It was almost impossible to wash yourself, let alone your clothes. Everyone was very glad to see America at last.*

I felt sick. We poor immigrants were treated shabbily.... [At last the 16-day voyage was over.] Land! Land! Hurrah! Hurrah for America, my free country! I was jubilant. Everyone on board was jubilant. Oh, how relieved I was as our ship, the *Tariffa*, entered the port of New York during the night on 15 June 1868.

**L**éon's mother and aunt had told him exciting stories about cowboys and Indians and the "great wonders of the West," and his Uncle Gaillard had sent him \$100 to come to Leavenworth, Kansas, and join him. So he bought a train ticket in New York and headed for St. Louis. But when he got to St. Louis the conductor asked him questions in English, and Léon

could answer only in French. Things got tense until a man came who spoke perfect French. He was a former slave, from New Orleans, on his way west with his family. Léon was happy to find a friend. But he wanted to see Indians and to ride a horse—and soon he did those things. And, finally, at his uncle's house there was good food: in the center of the table was a golden roasted possum. He thought it a very fine meal indeed. It was the beginning of his life in this free country. Léon married, raised seven children, and became a ferryman, a buffalo hunter, a homesteader, a postmaster, and a justice of the peace. He became an American.



## A HISTORY OF US

Like Bianca de Carli, this family came from Italy to seek a better life. They stayed in New York and opened a grocery in Little Italy. If you visit New York, you will see that much has changed in the last century—but there are parts of Little Italy that still look a bit like this.

was to take half his money and buy a gun. Later he said he was surprised to find New York "paved, and lighted with electric lights, and quite as civilized as Copenhagen." A friendly policeman saw his pistol tucked in his belt and advised him to leave it home. "I took his advice and put the revolver away, secretly relieved to get rid of it. It was quite heavy to carry around." Riis was very poor for his first seven years in America. Then he got a job as a newspaper reporter and wrote about the difficulties of life for the poor in America's cities. He learned photography. Most photographers took pictures of beautiful scenery or prosperous people. No one was taking pictures of the poor. Riis did. He showed exactly how some people had to live. His books helped get laws passed that made things better. Jacob Riis and Carl Schurz were reformers (and they knew each other). Some Americans, who had been in this country for a long time, had forgotten the nation's founding ideals. But the immigrants had come here to find freedom and opportunity in a land that said *all men are created equal*. They cherished America's ideals.

"Equality of rights...is the great moral element of true democracy," wrote Carl Schurz, who understood exactly what that means. Do you?



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