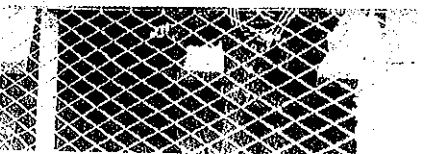


23 More About Immigrants



"How could it be," an immigrant recalled, "that after having been so impatient to get there, I suddenly seemed almost frightened...now that we had arrived?"

The immigrants knew the Declaration of Independence well. It was part of what inspired them to come to America. Most of them knew these words by heart: *We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*

Many Americans whose families had been here longer knew those words, too, and believed them and lived by them. But,

people being people, there were some who were selfish, or confused, or ignorant, and they ignored that message of fairness.

Some Americans didn't want newcomers in the country; and—this may surprise you—some of the newcomers, as soon as they got settled, didn't want any other immigrants to come. Usually the newest immigrants were poor, and willing to work hard and for less money than those who had arrived earlier. So some people wanted to stop immigration because they feared competition for jobs.

There were other reasons. Because the newcomers were poor and couldn't speak the language, they needed extra help in school. That cost money—tax money. The cities where many newcomers lived were overcrowded and filled with crime, so there was a need for extra police and extra city services. That cost money—tax money. Some people said, "Why should we have to pay for the problems of those poor people?"



This cartoon reflected the attitude of many workers, who saw new immigrants as cheap competition for their labor.



Eleven excited, newly arrived Dutch immigrants—and their exhausted mother.

The Ku Klux Klan began in Pulaski, Tennessee, as a social club for Civil War veterans. It soon changed its focus. The KKK became dedicated to the idea of white supremacy. White-robed Klansmen, riding out at night, used terror tactics to intimidate blacks and whites who believed in Reconstruction.

sons and daughters of poor immigrants would become some of the most productive citizens any country has ever known. This nation of ours was still young and had a lot of growing up to do. And growing up means making mistakes and learning. Americans made some big mistakes.

There was one mistake that was hateful, hurtful, pernicious, and obnoxious (you get the idea—it was awful). It was the mistake of prejudice. Some Americans faced discrimination—sometimes vicious discrimination—because they were Catholic, Jewish, black, Irish, or Asian.

One group of prejudiced people actually formed a political party. Officially it was named the American Party, but most people called it the "Know-Nothing Party." (What do you think of that name?) The Know-Nothings were anti-Catholic and anti-foreign. They even managed to destroy a stone block sent from Rome by the Catholic Pope. It was intended as part of the Washington Monument.

Another group of haters, the Ku Klux Klan, was anti-black and anti-Semitic (which means they hated Jews). On the West Coast, the Workingmen's Party had as its slogan THE CHINESE MUST GO. Its members hated Asians.

Between 1849 (when gold was discovered in California) and 1882, about 300,000 Chinese emigrated to America. In 1882 there were just over 50 million people in the United States, so 300,000 was a small percentage of the total (what percentage?), but that didn't matter to the haters.

Like many other immigrants, the Chinese were coming to the United States



Out West, fire fighting was important and teams held competitions. In 1888 the winning team in Deadwood, S.D., was Chinatown.

THE MAGIC WASHER

Manufactured by
GEO. DEE, Dixon, Illinois



DON'T USE THIS
IF YOU WANT TO BE DIRTY

to make money. American workers wanted high wages to work in the fields or build railroads. Some employers discovered that Chinese men were willing to work for one dollar a day. Now that doesn't sound like much, and it wasn't, but in China times were hard. You had to work several days to earn as much as a dollar—when you could find a job. If a Chinese man came to America and saved \$500, he could go home and be prosperous. If he saved \$1,000 he went home very rich. Some Chinese did just that. But many found life difficult in America. So the Chinese, too, began asking for more than one dollar a day.

Then some employers sent boats to Japan and got Japanese workers to come and work for low wages. When the Japanese started asking for more money, the employers sent boats to India.

Some said that the employers were exploiting the workers—taking advantage of them. But the process worked both ways. When the Asians took their earnings and went home, they were exploiting the land of opportunity. Many immigrants to the East Coast did that, too. They came, worked hard, saved money, and went back to Greece, or Italy, or Poland—where their American earnings made them seem rich.

It was all right. America had opportunities to share. Besides, most took more than money back to their old worlds. They took American ideas with them, too. Ideas of individual dignity, of liberty, and of a government founded to help people pursue happiness. Almost everyone understood those ideals—and they also understood that, although there were haters and bad apples around, most people were good. So people from China kept coming to the land they called the Golden Mountain—as long as they could.

The Chinese come from an ancient, proud civilization. When Columbus was a boy, Chinese goods and inventions were the wonder of the world. A Chinese

Advertisements could be racist, too—this one urged patriotic Americans to get along without Chinese labor and buy Magic Washer soap.

Talk about going to the land of
the flowery flag made my face
fill with happiness.
With hard work pieces of gold
were gathered together.
Words of farewell were said to the
parents, and my throat choked up.
Parting from the wife, many
tears flowed face to face.

—A VOYAGER NAMED XU
(WHO WENT FROM XIANGSHAN TO SAN FRANCISCO)



Japanese immigrants arrive in San Francisco.

A **depression** is a pit or sunken area. "Depression" also describes an emotional state of deep sadness and melancholy. But neither of those meanings has much to do with U.S. history. The *economic* meaning of depression does. A depression is a time when the nation's economy goes into drastic decline and there is much unemployment, low prices, and not much business activity.

"Welcome to the United States, the temple of liberty," said this cartoon—"unless you are Chinese."

philosopher named K'ung-fu-tzu (Confucius), who lived from 551 to 479 B.C.E., taught ideas about honesty, fairness, and loyalty that were similar to the ideas most Americans believed in. He also taught about the need for balance in life: between work and pleasure, between consideration of oneself and consideration of others. This led the Chinese to respect learning (especially the study of the past and its lessons), and to have strong family ties.

Now you might think they would be welcomed when they arrived in California, especially since they came seeking opportunity (which meant jobs). The same reason brought others to California, too.

But in the 1860s and '70s, when times were difficult in China, it happened that they were difficult in the United States, too. There was a depression, and during depressions there usually aren't enough jobs to go around. Since the Chinese were willing to work hard for very low wages, they usually found work. That angered many white workingmen. Mobs attacked and killed Chinese people; hoodlums burned Chinese homes and laundries.

The Workingmen's Party demanded a law to end Chinese immigration. Congressmen in the East, needing political support from Californians, helped pass that law. Most Americans on the East Coast didn't know any Chinese. They had heard terrible—and untrue—stories of Asians; many people believed the stories because they didn't know any better.

Most Chinese men braided their hair into a long pigtail. That seemed strange to people who weren't Chinese. Prejudice against those who look different from you is *racism*. Racism is found in almost every nation in the world, and it always leads to evil action. In 1882, American racists got a Chinese Exclusion Act passed. It stopped most Chinese immigration into the United States. It was an especially unfair act considering that it came after Chinese had toiled and died to build railroads and dig mines and labor on farms. Asian immigration was restricted until the 1950s.

