

Immigration Case Studies

Directions:

See if your predictions on the push and pull factors are correct. Also see if their ideas of America are similar to how you thought they would have described it. What does their description tell you of who they were?

1. Rene Dubos came from France with this is mind:

In the small village where I was brought up, I read with passion, until the age of fourteen, stories about Buffalo Bill and the Wild West, that were then published in a French weekly magazine. I could not imagine any better life than roaming on horseback over the Great Plains and the Rockies. Then, while a student in Patois, I read everything available about American life and became intoxicated with the phrase 'America the land of unlimited possibilities.' I had no clear vision of what these possibilities were, but I wanted to experience them nevertheless.

From Rhoda Hoff, *America's Immigrants: Adventures in Eyewitness History* (New York: Henry Z. Walck, Inc., 1967) pp. 149-150.

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2. A Swedish minister wrote this letter in the 1860s:

You should see our settlement out here. It is a beautiful sight. Prairie and still more prairie. Here and there a line of green trees on both sides of the winding Smokey Hill River or in the small valleys where water seeks an outlet.... Many who come, overwhelmed by this dreary prairie, do not take time to dig a hole in order to observe the rich soil, which nourishes the luxuriant grass. They turn back immediately, or devote themselves to idle sorrow. The only thing they do is write long lamentations to Sweden.... It has been wonderful this summer to see the large seeded fields, which a few years ago belonged to the buffalo and Indians. The crop in Kansas has really been excellent this year, although our settlement has not profited much from it, since all of us have just arrived....

We do not dig gold with pocket knives, we do not expect to become bountifully rich in a few days or in a few years, but what we aim at is to own our own homes, where each one has his own property, which with God's blessings will provide him with the sustenance which he and his family need.... The advantage which America offers is not to make everyone rich at once without toil and trouble, but the advantage is that the poor, who will and are able to work, secure a large piece of good land almost without cost, that they can work up little by little....

From Albert Robbins, *Coming to America: Immigrants from Northern Europe* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1981), pp. 96-97.

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3. From an advertisement found in China in the mid 1800s:

Americans are very rich people. They want the Chinaman to come and will make him very welcome. There you will have great pay, large houses, and food and clothing of the finest description. You can write to your friends and send them money at any time, and we will be responsible for the safe delivery.... There are a great many Chinamen there now, and it will not be a strange country. Chinagod is there, and the agents of this house. Never fear and you will be lucky. Come to Hong Kong, or to the sign of this house in Canton, and we will instruct you.

Money is in great plenty and to spare in America.

From Linda Perrin, *Coming to America: Immigrants from the Far East*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co. Inc., 1980), pp.7-8.

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4. An Englishman wrote this letter to his wife:

It is a foolish idea that some people have, that there too many people come here, it is quite the reverse; there was more than 1000 emigrants came in the day after I landed, and there is four ships have arrived since with emigrants. But there is plenty of room yet, and will for a thousand years to come.

My dear Sukey, all that I want now is to see you, and the dear children here, and then I shall be happy, and not before. You know very well that I should not have left you behind me, if I had money to have took you with me. It was sore against me to do it. But I do not repent of coming, for you know that there was nothing but poverty before me, and to see you and the dear children want was what I could not bear. I would rather cross the Atlantic ten times than hear my children cry for victuals once. Now, my dear, if you can get the Parish to pay for your passage, come directly; for I have not a doubt in my mind I shall be able to keep you in credit. You will find a few inconveniences in crossing the Atlantic, but it will not be long, and when that is over, all is over, for I know that you will like America.

America is not like England, for here no man thinks himself your superior... This is a country where a man can stand as a man, and where he can enjoy the fruits of his own exertions, with rational liberty to its fullest extent.

From Rhoda Hoff, *America's Immigrants: Adventures in Eyewitness History*, p. 24.

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5. Greeks read the following advertisement for travel to the United States:

Why remain here to struggle for a piece of bread without any security for the future, without honor and independence? Why not open your eyes and see the good that awaits you; harden your heart and seek your fortune abroad, where so many of your countrymen already have made theirs? Why linger? To protect your parents? Today or tomorrow, whether their children are here or abroad, they will close their eyes for ever. It will be better for you to leave home and send a little money to provide for them in their advancing years.

Or are you waiting to cultivate the barren lands with the ploughshare and dig in the fields? Have you seen how much progress you have made thus far?

From Gladys Nadler Rips, *Coming to America: Immigrants from Southern Europe* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1981), pp. 66-67.

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6. Russian Jews also came to America:

When Alexander II became czar in 1855, he initiated a number of mild reforms. But in 1881 he was assassinated by a terrorist bomb and the regime that succeeded stepped up hostilities against Jews. It passed anti-Semitic laws and virtually endorsed a series of pogroms - more than 200 in 1881 and 1882. The horror of the pogroms was described by the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky (himself a Jew, though by no means a religious one) in his account of atypical brute intoxicated by the thrill of violence:

If he wants to, he can throw an old woman out of a third-floor window together with a grand piano, he can smash a chair against a baby's head... hammer a nail into a living human body.... He exterminates whole families, he pours petrol over a house, transforms it into a mass of flames, and if anyone attempts to escape, he finishes him off with a cudgel.

Faced with such terrorism, over a third of Russia's Jews departed in hordes--more than 90 percent of them bound for America, the land of promise.

From Howard Muggamin, *The Jewish American* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), p. 39.

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7. Another Swede chose America for these reasons:

Forty years ago my father came over to this country from Sweden. He had a small business and a large family. In Europe business does not grow as fast as children come, and poverty over there is an inheritance. He heard that North America was peopled and governed by working men, and the care of the states was mainly engaged in the welfare and prosperity of labor. That moved him, and so I came to be born here. He, and millions like him, made this country their home, and their homes have mainly made this country what it is... .

From Albert Robbins, *Coming to America: Immigrants from Northern Europe*, p. 134-135.

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8. As a boy, this Italian knew what he wanted to do:

I played with the idea of going to America when I was but eight or nine. My notion of the United States then was that it was a grand, amazing, somewhat fantastic place--the Golden Country--a sort of Paradise--the Land of Promise in more ways than one--huge beyond conception, thousands of miles across the ocean, untellably exciting, explosive, quite incomparable to the tiny, quite, lovely Carniola; a place full of movement and turmoil, wherein things that were unimaginable and impossible in Blato happened daily as a matter of course.

In America one could make pots of money in a short time, acquire immense holdings, wear a shirt collar, and have polish on one's boots like a gospod--one of the gentry--and eat white bread, soup, and meat on week-days as well as on Sundays, even if one were but an ordinary workman to begin with. In Blato no one ate white bread or soup and meat, except on Sundays and holidays and very few then.

In America one did not have to remain an ordinary workman. There, it seemed, one man was as good as the next. There were dozens, perhaps scores, or even hundreds of immigrants in the United States, one-time peasants and workers from the Balkans and from Poland, Slovakia, Bohemia and elsewhere, who, in two or three years, had earned and saved enough money working in the Pennsylvania, Ohio, or Illinois coal-mines or steel-mills to go to regions called Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Nebraska, and there buy sections of land each of which was larger than the whole area owned by peasants in Blato.... Oh, America was immense-- immense!

I heard a returned Amerikanec tell of regions known as Texas and Oklahoma where single farms-- renche (ranches), he called them--were larger than the entire province of Carniola! It took a man days to ride on horseback from one end of such a ranch to the other. At that time I accepted as truth nearly everything I heard about America. I believed that a single cattleman in Texas owned more cattle than there were in the entire Balkans. And my credulity was not strained when I heard that there were gold-mines in California, and trees more than a thousand years old with trunks so enormous that it required a dozen men, clasping each other's hands to encircle them with their arms.

In America everything was possible. There even the common people were 'citizens,' not 'subjects,' as they were in Austria and in most other European countries. A citizen, or even a non-citizen foreigner, could walk up to the President of the United States and pump his hand.