Immigration in the USA

1890 to 1920’s

RESEARCH QUESTION:
“To what extent did immigration change the cultural landscape of East Cost America from 1890 to 1920’s?”

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Abstract

This extended essay sets the objective to explain how the USA was founded or at least influenced by immigrants in 1890 to 1920. A critical point in the history of the USA; in which immigrants were unfairly sold the “American Dream”, thus becoming the era of mayor immigration to the US in the 19th/20th. Immigrants would reach the American shores after living anarchy during 2 weeks in the lower docks (third class). They realize the deal they face; there are no free/cheap lands to buy, at least not in the cities and or nearby areas. Their only option? Labor work, for a cheap pay. Immigrants offered themselves this option. American idealists such as James Coxey, alarmed, rose against immigration. The numbers of jobs the government offered besides labor work were null, Coxey’s army found this unfair. Due to over production, and the bankruptcy of the rail road company, the American economy was compromised. The government decided to invest in public goods, buildings, bridges, such as the empire state; structures all built by immigrants
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Immigration has clearly affected the history of the United States (U.S.). Not only from an economical-industrial perspective, but culturally as well. It’s acceptance toward immigrants—since before its foundation in July 4, 1776—supports the idea that the most powerful country in the world is considered to be founded by immigrants. This statement is considered a slander for whoever feels threatened by immigrants, not to be confused with illegal immigrants. Even though one must understand that humans come from the same place where life was created, everyone takes different paths. It’s because of nomads that life spread through the globe about 3 million years ago. Eventually nomads settled in a place where they lived until they died, with the mission of building today’s cities. The purposes of immigrations vary, but the main reason is clear. It is to escape, to escape either a war in their country or perhaps the terrible economy. Problems bring a necessary change, a change to act and search for a new life. Why is it that some people see immigrants as a threat, while others see them as a favor to the United States? The Atlantic (a newspaper) made an article in which they argue how immigrants make the United States younger, fulfilled with objectives and strategies.

1 “Immigration is a big part of what distinguishes the U.S. from, say, the EU. Immigration makes us younger. That's what you see from the graph above. Immigration makes us smarter. Half of all Silicon Valley start ups have a co-founder no more than one generation separated from an immigrant. Immigration makes us work.”

While from another negative perspective: ²“We’re socializing ourselves into becoming a third-rate banana republic.” Words of Rick Y. -- Yuma, Ariz. The matter in fact is that the weak (immigrants) join the powerful (United States) hoping to become strong. While the powerful fear to become as weak as the immigrants. The 1890s - 1910s was a period in the United States history in which; immigration was at its highest peak, while the second industrialization was coming to an end. The United States would suffered changes during this period of time, changes which immigrants were to blame.

Expectations needed to be accomplished, foreign investors had built or developed the first banks, railroads, skyscrapers, farms. ³“The average annual income (after inflation) of non-farm workers grew by 75% from 1865 to 1900, and then grew another 33% by 1918”. This era was the beginning of today’s landscapes and aspirations. ⁴“At the start of the Civil war only one out of twelve Americans lived in a city of more than one hundred thousand inhabitants. By the start of the 1880s that figure stood at one in eight; by the turn of the century one in five. More American cities were big cities, and more Americans—many of them immigrants—called these cities home.” Over population in the cities became an issue, awakening other issues. Innovations were required to bring an order. ⁵“The escalating cost of urban lots in the late nineteenth century made high-rise buildings an attractive option for developers”. After the Civil war

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³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States (1976) series D726 and D736 pp 164-5. (The data is in constant 1914 dollars, taking out the effects of deflation and inflation, and takes unemployment into account).
a building in New York wouldn’t be taller than four or five stories high. Not offering
enough space for citizens, developers and architect would need to find the way to build
taller buildings (which offered more space). These buildings’ supportive structure were
their outside walls. Which depending on their thickness would depend in their height.
Constructing a building higher than five stories was physically impossible. Architects of
the 1880s resolved the dilemma by switching the supportive structure from the outside
to the inside of the building. Today the same method is still used. By first building the
“skeleton” of a building, a full metal structure. Developers would need to build enough
buildings to satisfy the population of New York in the 1890s (6\text{1,515,301}” citizens) or
Chicago (7\text{1,099,850” citizens}). Overpopulation not only brought housing issues but the
requirement of metal. 8\text{The United States is the top producer in the world of iron and
steel, making 9.3 million tons” (1890s). Which caused the creation of over a hundred
companies in charge of collecting, melting, forming and distributing metal, including
machinery companies. Some of these companies are still involved in the distribution of
metals in the United States such as Carnegie Steels. Carnegie Steel was the worlds
largest steelmaking business with a capitalization of twenty five million dollars \text{(9one
million dollars in the 1890 is now worth nineteen million dollars). The vastly production
of metal required railroads which collect the metal in mines, take it to the foundries and
then distribute it. Overpopulation caused the need of more buildings which caused the

\begin{itemize}
  \item[6] Gibson, Campbell. "Table 12." Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the
  \item[7] Gibson, Campbell. "Table 12." Population of the 100 Largest Cities and Other Urban Places in the
  \item[9] Sahr, Robert C. \textit{Summary of US Millionaire Data}. PDF. Corvallis: Oregon State University, October 6,
  2003
\end{itemize}
need of more metal production which caused the need of more railroads (to transport the metal). United States was growing and so the demand of workers. Mines, railroads, foundries, building developers required hours of work labor. In order to sustain the business the work labor needed to be cheap as possible. Which middle class American filled with hope and dreams of a fair work at an office would work 8 - 10 hours a day for 5 dollars? The demand of labor was increasing and immigration increased as well.

“Old” immigrants were generally from Northern and Western European countries (Germans, British, Irelands). They came to America during the 1820s - 1890s, seeking for land to farm. The industrialization era strike Europe, the governments bought all the farms from which they created larger ones without competition. Europeans had the option of staying and work in a factory with a little pay or move to “the new world” in where they could perhaps obtain land to build their own farm. Europeans who moved to United States had great expectations, but one would eventually labor if they weren’t well educated and/or lacked money. Another wave of migration impacted the United States during the 1890s - 1910s. The “new” immigrants came from Southern and Eastern Europe (Italians, Austria-Hungarians, Russians)

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10"Many were pulled here by contract labor agreements offered by recruiting agents, known as padrones to Italian and Greek laborers. Hungarians, Poles, Slovaks, Bohemians, and Italians flocked to the coal mines or steel mills, Greeks preferred the textile mills, Russian and Polish Jews worked the needle trades or pushcart markets of New York. Railroad companies advertised the availability of free or cheap farmland overseas in pamphlets distributed in many languages, bringing a handful of agricultural workers to western farmlands. But the vast majority of immigrants crowded into the growing cities, searching for their chance to make a better life for themselves."

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10 Immigration in the Early 1900s." Immigration in the Early 1900s. 
The second wave of immigration was based on different reasons and ideas than the first one. Southern and Eastern Europe were seduced by the “American dream”. Most found jobs in the city, largely in factories or industrial roles. In fact, new immigrants were over half the population in meatpacking and steelmaking companies. Their willingness to work for a cheap pay caused manifestations for those who didn’t, mainly Americans. In the next couple of years the “vile” circle of immigration would take over: More immigrants caused overpopulation which requires more buildings and transportation services which of course require more work labor and metal production requiring more immigrants (workers). It’s in this moment in history that developers could of thought it twice.

The period from 1880s - 1890s was the one with the fastest expansion of railroads. 11“More than 70,300 miles of new lines where opened that decade, bringing the total network up to 163,597 miles.” Even though the United States industrialization era required less railroads than the ones that were built. The great expenses of the railroad system couldn’t be paid. There were no independent business, they all depended in each other or in the railroad company. The economical situation of the railroad system affected many other companies. It stopped the economy which almost brought to an end the United States second industrialization. In order to reconstruct the economy and keep the development of industrialization, the government and developers needed cheap labor. “New” immigrants worked for a couple of dollars a day, while Americans aspired for a satisfactory pay. Developers fired whoever won’t work for a low

pay. While the government not only invited immigrants to the nation but as well arranged their transportation, hoping they would work for less. Business extended through the land but as well through the sea. Entrepreneurs saw business in offering the only method of overseas transportation. The White Star Line was founded in 1845, offering overseas transportation from United Kingdom to Australia, because of the discovery of gold. As miners drained Australia from its gold the White Star Line among other lines took advantage of immigration. The White Star Line among; Cunard, Hamburg-Amerika, and North German Lloyd, were considered the “prominent” shipping, back in the 1890s - 1910s. They took one of the most important roles of immigration, the transportation of such immigrants. Immigrants would usually travel in third class, with a limited number of 1000 third class passengers. Except boats such as the Cedric which could carry 2,000 or the Celtic offering third class to 2,353. By the end of the 1910s the White Star Line and other companies had at least transported little less than 1 million immigrants per year.

The government kept low restriction for immigrants. Before the 1880s there were truly no restrictions. One would arrive at the port—with the expectation of not being a convict or a prostitute—and be considered an American citizen. The immigrants were seen as possible voters. Political parties would give them a “special” treat—perhaps some food or money—with the promise of their vote. The immigration act of 1882 banned any mental defectiveness, authorized the Chinese exclusion act, and banned any pre-arranged work contracts. Asians were violently treated at such point that their entry became illegal (Chinese exclusion act). Companies who had the power and
money would send padrones to recruit immigrants. This immigrants would come to the United States with contracts offering them work. Companies which couldn’t sustain this system would eventually end in bankruptcy. The government managed to give equal opportunities to each company by creating the Foran act (1885). During the Pre-World War I, a negative sentiment was felt toward the system of immigration and immigrants. United States had their doors opened to any possible enemy. Which delivered to a minimal reform of laws. In the 1891 the government banned: polygamists (able of having more than one wife), and any immigrant which seemed to have a contagious disease, the steamships returned any unacceptable immigrants. The government’s convenience was not to stop the immigration process. It’s because of the cheap labor immigrants could offered and idealists as Jacob Coxey; that the panic of 1893 only lasted until 1897. Jacob Coxey begun an “army” of unemployed people, willing to work. Immigrants had taken most of the jobs in factories, mines and industries. They worked for a couple of bucks, while Coxey’s army and other manifesting movements—who where educated and capable of an office job—protested for a fair work and pay. The immigrants were not to blame. It was the government and society by only focusing on jobs which sustain in labor. The idealist Jacob Coxey offered the government the idea of creating jobs by focusing in building public goods, such as parks and roads. The idea was heard and people would work in the development of public areas and improving the public transportation. The depression was finally over, after four years of violent protests in which about a hundred people died. Americans and immigrants kept working on today’s landscapes, such as the Empire State (1930s) which required 12 million 7,000,000”

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hours of work. Re-building San Francisco (1906) after a terrible earthquake which destroyed over two hundred million dollars in goods, or the mass destruction by Galveston causing a destruction worth twenty million dollars. Bridges such as Brooklyn Bridge, the famous Opera in Brooklyn were all built to create jobs and power-up the American economy.

Immigrants were seduced by the “American Dream”, but what exactly is the American Dream. Maslink is a corporation which actually profits of selling the american dream to Chinese immigrants. 13 “Firms like Maslink, and the U.S. companies that pay them, promote EB-5 as a quick, easy way to gain legal entry to the United States -- and to make a potential profit in the bargain.” (EB-5 - immigration form). This immigrants would end-up working in factories for little pays. This is not the first time that the US history acknowledges an event similar to this one. In the 1890s companies would sell the american dream to European immigrants. 14 “Railroad companies advertised the availability of free or cheap farmland overseas in pamphlets distributed in many languages, bringing a handful of agricultural workers to western farmlands. But the vast majority of immigrants crowded into the growing cities, searching for their chance to make a better life for themselves.” Immigrants would be fulfilled with hope when they were promised land or a job in the “new world”. The “new” immigrants could now move to a new country in where: Jews came to achieve religious freedom, Italians and Asians for work and Russians to escape persecution. The reason did not matter, America was

http://history1900s.about.com/od/1930s/a/empirefacts.htm.
known to be “The Land of Opportunity”. Families or just the young and strong
adventured themselves in a trip of 2 - 4 weeks consisting in arriving to Liverpool or
Queens-town from where they would set sail to cross the Atlantic Ocean to finally arrive
to the promised land (New York, Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, etc.). However this
trip wasn’t easy at all, innocent souls were crushed by those seeking for power. About
60 steamship lines noticed how immigration could serve as a profit. This steamship
lines not only enlarged the occupancy of third class but also presumed their luxury.
They managed not to show off the 500 - 2000 immigrants that were in the lower docks,
and presume their invigorating style. High class people believed that such steamship
lines were built for them, but understand that the true business were the immigrants. For
example the Titanic. Price per person (in different classes):

15“First Class (parlor suite) £870/$4,350 ($83,200 today)
First Class (berth) £30/$150 ($2975 today)
Second Class £12/$60 ($1200 today)
Third Class £3 to £8/$40 ($298 to $793 today)”

The first class profit was about 1million dollars, which consisted of 337
passengers. While the third class profit was little more over half a million, consisting of
721 passengers. First class made more profit, but third class passengers didn’t drink
500 dollar scotch bottles, ate the finest food, or neither required the assistance of
stewards during the whole trip. They were confined to the lower docks, and accepted in
third class amenities. White Star Line was considered to have the best service for third
class passengers than any other steamship line. Anna Herkner an American agent who
worked for the American Immigration Commission brought to light the treatment of

immigrants in third class. While emigration to the United States was at its highest peak, Herkner disguised as a Bohemian immigrant would make three transatlantic trips. With the objective of investigating the conditions of steerage in secret, the lines which she investigated were kept as a secret, however Ellis Island records reveal she shipped in: North German Lloyd (1905), Hamburg Amerika (1907), and White Star (1909). Herkner strongly criticized the treatment immigrants received in the North German Lloyd and the Hamburg Amerika steamships. “Clean they are; but there is neither breathing space below nor deck room above, and the 900 steerage passengers crowded into the hold of so elegant and roomy a steamer as the Kaiser Wilhelm II, of the North German Lloyd line, are positively packed like cattle”. Herkner not only recalls the lack of space, or the miserable food. She reminds us of how life may be so vile against women.

16“Not one young woman in the steerage escaped attack. The writer herself was no exception. A hard, unexpected blow in the offender's face in the presence of a large crowd of men, an evident acquaintance with the stewardess, doctor, and other officers, general experience, and manner were all required to ward off further attacks. Some few of the women, perhaps, did not find these attentions so disagreeable; some resisted them for a time, then weakened; some fought with all their physical strength, which naturally was powerless against a man's. Others were continually fleeing to escape. Two more refined and very determined Polish girls fought the men with pins and teeth, but even they weakened under this continued warfare and needed some moral support about the ninth day.”

Herkner explains that such behavior wasn't presented in the Cedric (White Star Line). It is described to have the best accommodation for immigrants, having: separated rooms (for four people), a dining hall, a small space in the deck and even a cigar room. People were invited to write their families with the postcards provided by crew members such postcard were an act of publicity inviting travelers to the White Star line.

Immigrants would finally arrive Ellis Island after 2 - 4 weeks of abuses. However only third class passengers were examined in the Island. First and second class passengers were examined on the boat, from were they could leave as legalized citizens. The government would finally reach the conclusion of creating a system to control the flow of immigration in 1890s. However it wasn’t until the 1892 that Ellis island served as that system. Annie Moore, a 15 year old Irish girl would make history as she was the first immigrant to cross through Ellis Island. Immigrants would usually wait in lines until they would finally be examined by the American Immigration Commissioner. In were they would restrain the entry of any passenger with a mental disability, contagious disease, or anyone who seemed to be a convict, beggar or prostitute.

“Only two percent of the arriving immigrants were excluded from entry. The two main reasons why an immigrant would be excluded were if a doctor diagnosed that the immigrant had a contagious disease that would endanger the public health or if a legal inspector thought the immigrant was likely to become a public charge or an illegal contract laborer.” Any passenger who was restrained to enter the United States would be sent back in a steamship. In its highest rate Ellis Island would receive a max of 1 million immigrants per year, even though of the 63 years in operation it only received 12 million immigrants. As years went by, Ellis Island was modified. A dining hall was added and so rooms for immigrants. After World War I (1914 - 1918) Government made obligatory the requirement of Visas, because of the fear of enemies coming to the United States as immigrants. Such document would needed to be obtained in the country of residence. This weren’t easily obtainable. It was until the 1954 (63 years

later) that Ellis Island was closed. The government felt weak during war periods, having concerns toward the facility for enemies to enter the country they decided to improve the migration system in United States and by this the flow of immigrants would need to decrease.

After the period of 1890s - 1910s immigration would decrease drastically for the next decades. "Between 1860 and 1920, immigrants as a percentage of the total population fluctuated between 13.0 and 15.0 percent" After the 1930s the immigration population decreased to 11.6 percent (14.2 million immigrants) of the American population. The decrease of immigrant population in the United States was caused because of fear. The pre-World War I (1910s) concerned the public. However the government never closed the doors to immigration but did create more restrains. The use of Visas became necessarily and until today we use them. Peoples opinion related to immigration differ from others. Immigration in the 1890s - 1910s is not different from any other case. Some people were against it, because they felt threaten by immigrants. While others are deeply thankful of immigration, because perhaps thanks to it they are in America or even Americans. Only 1.37% of the American populations is a Native American, which are considered to be true Americans.

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Bibliography


U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States (1976) series D726 and D736 pp 164-5. (The data is in constant 1914 dollars, taking out the effects of deflation and inflation, and takes unemployment into account).