*The New Immigrants*

Previous Immigrants had come mostly from Western and Northern Europe, but the “new immigrants” in th e1880s were from Eastern Europe and Southern Europe as well as Asia and Mexico. The reasons for both waves of immigration were mostly the same. Immigrants strived to escape the overcrowing, religious and political persecution, and economic problems of their homelands. They hoped for a better life in America.

*Ellis Island*

After immigrants completed the often treacherous journey to the US, they had one last hurdle to cross: the immigrant processing center, where their health, legal status and destination were confirmed. Many people had their names respelled, shortened, or otherwise “Americanized”. The most famous immigration processing center was Ellis Island in New York Harbor. Most of those who came through Ellis Island were European. Asians usually entered the US through the San Francisco Bay area’s Angel Island, and Mexican immigrants tended to arrive through an immigration center in El Paso, Texas. All immigrants were required to pass the inspections to be let into the United States. The Legal qualification were that an immigrant could not have been arrested, could not have a job already in the US, and that they needed to have at least $25. The labor needs of the US caused industrialists to recruit workers abroad and pay for their passage – in return, the immigrant would work for many years to pay back the cost of passage and exist in a state of indentured servitude. The medical exams began the moment the immigrant arrived on US soil, and doctors watched everything, the way they walked, talked, and followed directions. The doctors took a utilitarian approach to humanity- they wanted to know whether you would a good addition to the American work force. Doctors would ask those pulled aside for extra testing questions in English and observe how they responded. Now there are concerns that immigrants were turned away simply because they didn’t understand the direction, not because they suffered from psychiatric disorders. Every immigrant was also seen by the eye doctor, as they inspected the inside of the eyelids with a buttonhook or index finger to discover if the immigrant had trachoma, a highly contagious disease that caused blindness in many of those who became ill.

*The Statue of Liberty*

The Statue of Liberty, installed in New York harbor in 1886, was a gift to the US from France. The poem on the base of the statue includes the famous lines “Give me your tired, you poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free” from *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus. To many immigrants, the first sight of the statue represented a new beginning and the American dream.

*Becoming American*

Like previous immigrants, the new immigrants tended to settle in ethnic neighborhoods where they could continue speaking the language and practicing the religion, cuisine, and traditions form their homelands. However, the new immigrants were more recognizably different, and the diversity they brought to cities was often seen as negative. Some US citizens feared the immigrants would “take” jobs away from citizens by working for less, while others thought that the immigrants should assimilate, or blend, into American culture as quickly as possible. Nativism, an opposition to immigration, was on the rise again. Nativism is the belief that one’s home country is better than all others and encourages political policies that protect the country and the interests of the “native” inhabitants. As it turned out, many immigrants including women and children, ended up working in factories or sweatshops under harsh conditions for very low pay. Immigrant farmers could not afford to purchase their own land in America, so they had no choice but to accept the work. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned immigration from China for ten years (the act was renewed twice, for a total of 30 years). Congress also limited immigration from Japan and unsuccessfully attempted to restrict all immigration by illiterate persons. Convicts and people with certain illnesses were banned from coming to the US. Although immigrants were encouraged to Americanize, the notion of being American was difficult to define. As immigrants assimilated, they changed what it meant to be American. America was becoming a “melting pot”- a blending of cultures.

*Urbanization*

Most Immigrants moved to the cities. As machinery reduced the need for farm labor, those workers began coming to cities in the North for factory work as did many African Americans from the South. It was a time of great urbanization, or growth of cities.

*City Life*

Turn of the century cities were placed of innovation and excitement. The steel industry and invention of the elevator, patented by Elisha Otis, allowed buildings to be taller; building up rather than out conserved city space. The first sky scraper was a ten story building constructed in Chicago in 1884. Next time you’re in an elevator, look for a logo. The Otis elevator Company is still a major producer of elevators. Public transportation enabled travel. San Francisco installed in Cable Cars in 1873, and Richmond introduced trolleys, electric cars that would replace horse drawn streetcars. Boston opened up its subway system in 1897 and New York City’s followed in 1904. Construction of Central Park was completed in 1873. Designed by Frederick Law Olmsted, the park was built when NYC recognized the importance of having a green space; other major parks were built during this same time period. Others were still in need of development. The working class often lived in dangerous tenements that were unhygienic and overcrowded. Areas with many tenements became slums, which led to increased crime. City sewage systems were not equipped to handle so many people. Earthquakes and fires could destroy large sections of cities at a time because of unsafe building standard. These problems encouraged the growing middle class to move to the suburbs, no easier to reach because of better transportation.

*Reforming the Cities*

Local government did little to address the problems of the cities, especially for immigrants. However, individual activists tried to make a difference. Photojournalists Jacob Riis took photos of slums to expose their terrible conditions. Others set up settlement houses to provide social services to the poor. New York’s Neighborhood Guild, founded in 1886 by Charles Stover and Stanton Coit, was the first. The most famous settlement house was Chicago’s Hull House, founded in 1889 by Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr.

*Questions. Respond in complete sentences on a separate sheet of paper.*

1. *What was new about new immigrants?*
2. *Why did new immigrants make the trip to the US?*
3. *What was the point of immigration processing centers?*
4. *What were the three legal qualifications for immigrants?*
5. *What was a major problem with the medical exams?*
6. *Why did some people want to stop immigrants from coming to the US?*
7. *How does the concept of the “melting pot” apply to the assimilation of the immigrants in the US?*
8. *What were the causes of urbanization during the Second Industrial Revolution?*
9. *How did certain areas of American cities become slums?*
10. *What led to the growth of the suburbs?*
11. *Why did Jacob Riis take photographs of people in the slums?*
12. *Why were settlement houses necessary?*