

# Term 1 Essay

## Immigration DBQ

Your task is to answer a document-based question on the “New Immigration” of the late 1800s and early 1900s. In a DBQ, you use your analysis of primary sources documents and your knowledge of history to write a brief essay answering the questions. Using all four sets of documents, answer this question...

“Despite a sometimes unfriendly welcome, immigrants in the late 1800s were lucky to have America’s cities as their new home.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_

***Essay Prompt:***

*“Despite a sometimes unfriendly welcome, immigrants in the late 1800s were lucky to have America’s cities as their new home.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?*

**Claim** (one sentence):

**Counter-claim:**

**Reason 1:** Name a reason/fact to support the claim (from the documents)

**Write an explanation of how this reason supports your claim:**

**Reason 2:** Name a reason/fact to support the claim (from the documents)

**Write an explanation of how this reason supports your claim:**

**Reason 3:** Name a reason/fact to support the claim (from the documents)

**Write an explanation of how this reason supports your claim:**

**Conclusion:**

## • Arrival: The Immigrant and the City •

Native-born Americans have often expressed two very different opinions about immigrants. One view is summed up by these words by Emma Lazarus at the base of the Statue of Liberty:

*Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to  
breathe free.*

The other view was expressed by Josiah Strong in 1891, when he said:

*[The] typical immigrant is a European peasant, whose horizon has been narrow, whose moral and religious training has been meager or false, and whose ideas of life are low.*

These attitudes—one welcoming, the other fearful—have long been at the heart of the nation's debates about immigration. From around 1880 to 1920, these views clashed perhaps more sharply than at any other time in our past. Why?

One part of the answer has to do with the size and nature of the huge wave of immigrants that came to America in these years. In the 75 years from 1815 to 1890, about 15 million immigrants arrived here, mainly from northwestern Europe (England, Ireland, Germany, etc.) Then in just 24 years (1890-1914), another 15 million came. Furthermore, this wave of newcomers was largely from southeastern Europe. They were Russians, Poles, Italians, Greeks. They were mainly Catholics, Jews or Eastern Orthodox Christians. Their languages and customs were strange to most native-born Protestant Americans. Could the nation absorb such large numbers of them? No one was sure.

The city was a second factor explaining the intensity of the immigration debate in these years. This latest immigrant wave swept ashore as the nation was building its huge urban-industrial centers. These immigrants

largely settled in the cities and helped build them. Americans reacted to the city and its problems with great anxiety, and these concerns often fed their fears about the new immigration.

Urban life was not easy for the immigrants. Many lived in dingy, overcrowded tenement houses and unsanitary neighborhoods. Often lacking indoor plumbing, residents were all too prone to cholera, typhus, tuberculosis, and other diseases. In many cases, a whole family lived, ate, and slept in a single room. During the day, family members might use that room to do work paid by the piece, such as sewing or assembling.

Many new immigrants were from rural settings where they knew only traditional forms of farm work. Most could only do the least skilled and most dangerous kinds of industrial labor—working on construction projects, digging ditches, sewers, or roads, selling goods out of vendor carts on the city streets, or working in unhealthy factories called sweatshops.

Some immigrants did migrate west and take up farming. Yet a large number sought work in factories in the cities. This meant they often competed with native-born workers for the lowest paying jobs. Those workers saw immigrants as willing to work for less, and this further fueled the resentment directed at these newcomers.

Immigrants may have taken up the bottom rungs of the ladder. They may have faced prejudice and harsh treatment from some already here—though certainly not from all. Yet vast numbers of them still preferred America over their home countries. Many continued to call the nation, despite its flaws, the land of the "golden door," as that Emma Lazarus poem put it. Were they right to do so? The primary source documents for this lesson will help you debate and decide this question for yourself.

## Immigration Time Line

1862

The Homestead Act encourages immigration by granting 160 acres to adult male citizens who will live on and improve these acres.

1880

Crop failures and political turmoil in Italy lead millions of Italians to leave for the United States over the next few decades.

1881-90

About five million immigrants enter the country.

1881-82

In the wake of the 1881 assassination of the Czar, pogroms against Jews and other troubles disrupt life in Russia. Several million Russians and Poles leave for the U. S. over the next three decades.

1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 suspends immigration of Chinese laborers due to native-born workers' fears that the Chinese are taking their jobs. The federal government also excludes ex-convicts, the insane, and others unable to take care of themselves. A tax is levied on newly arriving immigrants.

1891-1900

A little less than four million immigrants enter the country.

1892

Ellis Island replaces Castle Garden as the key immigration processing center in New York City.

1901-1910

Nearly nine million immigrants enter the country.

1907

Informal "Gentleman's agreement" between the U.S. and Japan restricts Japanese immigration to the United States. Also, the tax on new immigrants is increased.

1910-11

The U.S. Senate's Dillingham Commission blames the new pattern of supposedly "inferior" immigrants from southeastern Europe for the nation's deep social and economic problems. It recommends using literacy tests to keep out poor and uneducated immigrants.

1911-1920

About five million immigrants enter the country.

1914-1918

World War I reduces immigration. After the U.S. enters the war in 1917, anti-immigrant feelings rise, especially against German-Americans.

1917

Literacy tests introduced for immigrants 16 years of age or older. Also, virtually all Asian immigrants are banned.

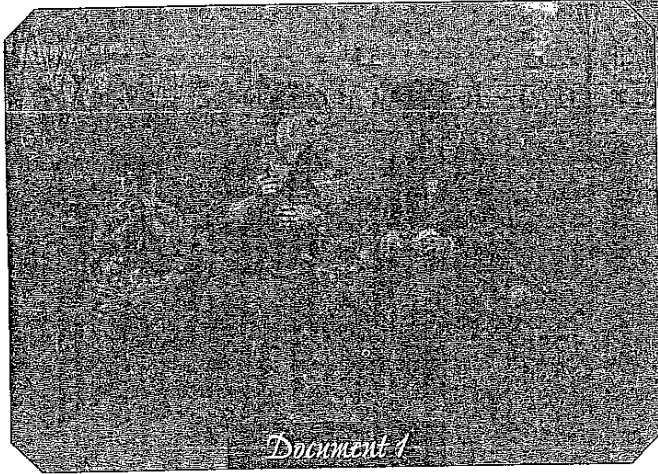
1921

The Quota Act sets an annual immigration ceiling of 350,000 and introduces nationality quotas. These limit admissions to 3 percent of each nationality group's share in the 1910 census. The aim is to restrict southeastern European immigration.

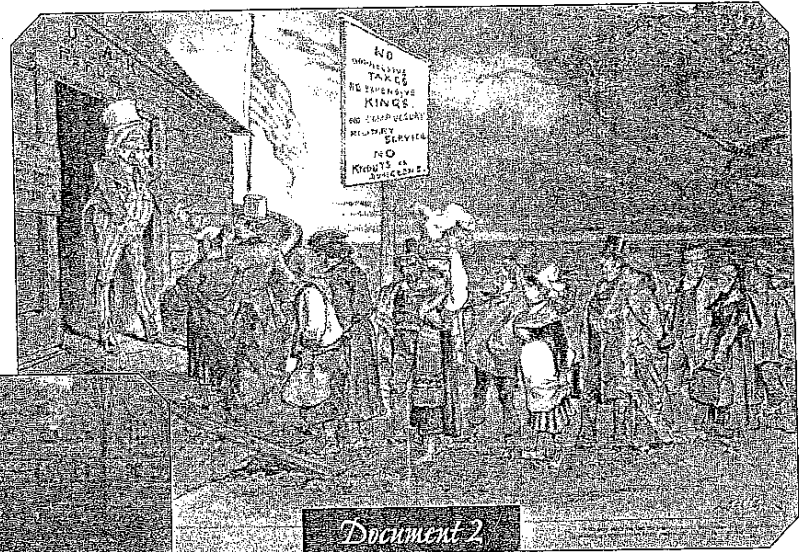
1924

National Origins Act reduces the annual immigration ceiling to 165,000 and lowers quotas to 2 percent of each nationality group's share in the 1890 census.

## Visual Primary Source Documents 1 & 2



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZ62-99401



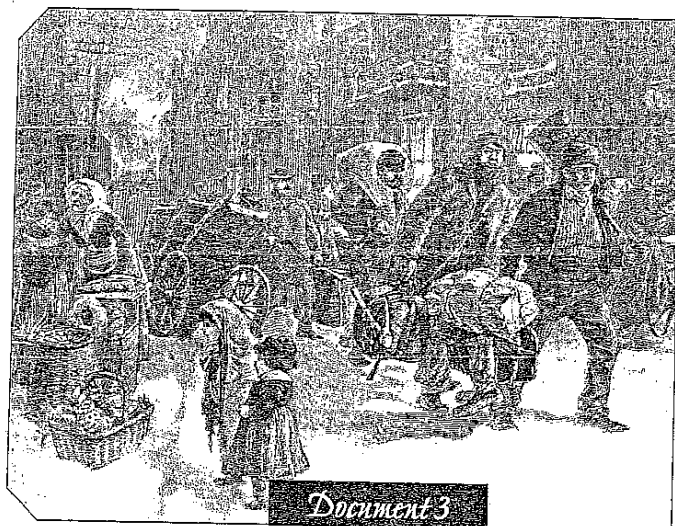
Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC4-954

### Information on Documents 1 & 2

**Document 1** is a wood engraving by William St. John. It appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on November 29, 1884. It shows an immigrant family eating on a picnic bench in New York City. The title of the engraving is "Castle Garden — their First Thanksgiving Dinner." From 1855 to 1890, Castle Garden was New York City's official immigration center where immigrants were processed. In 1892, Ellis Island took over that task.

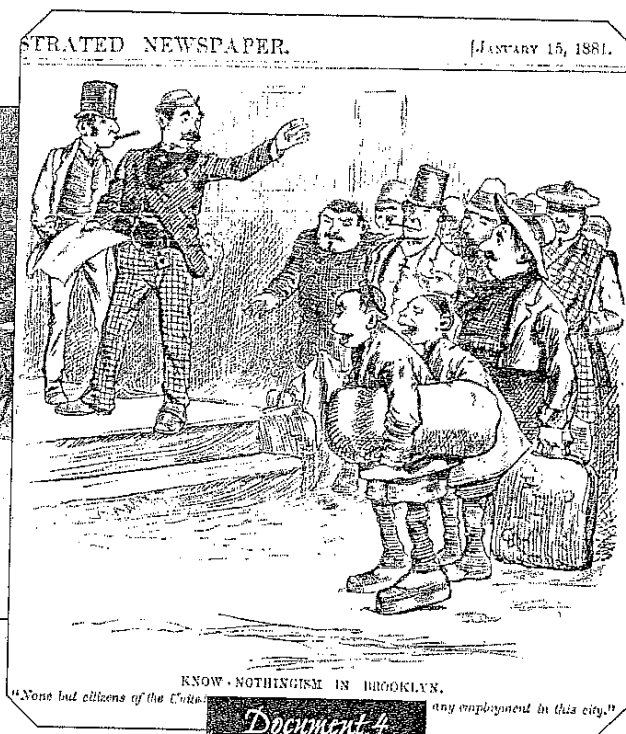
**Document 2** This lithograph by J. Keppler appeared in the magazine *Puck* on April 28, 1880. In it, Uncle Sam stands on a "U.S. Ark of Refuge," welcoming immigrants. These immigrants are fleeing Europe over which war clouds hang. A sign next to the Ark reads: "No oppressive taxes. No expensive kings. No compulsory military service. No knouts or dungeons."

## Visual Primary Source Documents 3 & 4



Document 3

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division,  
LC-USZ62-111151



Document 4

Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-USZC2-761

### Information on Documents 3 & 4

**Document 3** is a wood engraving by William Allen Rogers. It appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on October 18, 1890. It shows people carrying their belongings through the Italian Quarter, on Mulberry Street, on a winter evening in New York City.

**Document 4** This illustration appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* on January 15, 1881. Its title is "Know-Nothingism in Brooklyn." The term "Know-Nothing" comes from the anti-immigrant American Party of the 1850s, whose members vowed to say "I don't know" if asked certain questions about that party. Beneath this illustration's main title are the words of the Brooklyn Board of Alderman: "None but citizens of the United States can be licensed to engage in any employment in this city."

## Written Primary Source Document 1

### Information on Document 1

Mary Antin (1881-1949) was a Russian Jewish immigrant. She was a teenager when she came to America with her family in 1894. In 1912, she published an autobiography called *The Promised Land* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912). It describes her childhood in Russia, her family's journey to America and her new life in a strange land. The passage below is from that autobiography. It focuses on Mary's father Pinchus, who arrived in America three years before the rest of his family. He settled in Boston and began a long, difficult struggle to succeed enough to support his family. Pinchus had been educated, but mainly in order to become a religious scholar. As the passage suggests, this did little to prepare him for the practical challenges he faced in America.

### Document 1

During his three years of probation, my father had made a number of false starts in business. His history for that period is the history of thousands who come to America, like him, with pockets empty, hands untrained to the use of tools, minds cramped by centuries of repression in their native land. Dozens of these men pass under your eyes every day, my American friend, too absorbed in their honest affairs to notice the looks of suspicion which you cast at them, the repugnance with which you shrink from their touch. You see them shuffle from door to door with a basket of spools and buttons, or bending over the sizzling irons in a basement tailor shop; or rummaging in your ash can, or moving a pushcart from curb to curb, at the command of the burly policeman. "The Jew peddler!" you say, and dismiss him from your premises and from your thoughts, never dreaming that the sordid drama of his days may have a moral that concerns you. What if the creature with the untidy beard carries in his bosom his citizenship papers? What if the cross-legged tailor is supporting a boy in college who is one day going to mend your state

constitution for you? What if the ragpicker's daughters are hastening over the ocean to teach your children in the public schools? Think, every time you pass the greasy alien on the street, that he was born thousands of years before the oldest native American; and he may have something to communicate to you, when you two shall have learned a common language. Remember that his very physiognomy is a cipher the key to which it behooves you to search for most diligently....

Three years passed in sordid struggle and disappointment. He was not prepared to make a living even in America, where the day laborer eats wheat instead of rye. ... In business, nothing prospered with him. Some fault of hand or mind or temperament led him to failure where other men found success. Wherever the blame for his disabilities be placed, he reaped their bitter fruit. "Give me bread!" he cried to America. "What will you do to earn it?" the challenge came back. And he found that he was master of no art, of no trade; that even his precious learning was of no avail, because he had only the most antiquated methods of communicating it.

## Written Primary Source Document 2

### Information on Document 2

These passages are also from Mary Antin's autobiography. Yet the view of America they give us is quite different from the one suggested in Document 1. Mary and her family fled Russia during an upsurge of violence against Jews which made the family's economic difficulties almost unbearable. Their "Exodus," as she called it, was to a "Promised Land" of hope and freedom. In the passage below, she describes her first days in that land as she, her mother, her brother, and her two sisters joined her father in Boston. These passages are the memories of a woman in her thirties recalling her first impressions, thoughts, and feelings as a thirteen-year-old immigrant newly arrived in America.

### • Document 2 •

*Our initiation into American ways began with the first step on the new soil. My father found occasion to instruct or correct us even on the way from the pier to Wall Street, which journey we made crowded together in a rickety cab. He told us not to lean out of the windows, not to point, and explained the word "greenhorn." We did not want to be "greenhorns," and gave the strictest attention to my father's instructions....*

*There was no bathtub. So in the evening of the first day my father conducted us to the public baths. As we moved along in a little procession, I was delighted with the illumination of the streets. So many lamps, and they burned until morning, my father said, and so people did not need to carry lanterns. In America, then, everything was free, as we had heard in Russia. Light was free; the streets were as bright as a synagogue on a holy day. Music was free; we had been serenaded, to our gaping delight, by a brass band of many pieces, soon after our installation on Union Place.*

*Education was free. That subject my father had written about repeatedly, as comprising his chief hope for us children, the essence of American opportunity, the treasure that no thief could touch, not even misfortune or poverty. It was the one thing that he was able to promise us when he sent for us; surer, safer than bread or shelter....*

*We had to visit the stores and be dressed from head to foot in American clothing; we had to learn the mysteries of the iron stove, the washboard, and the speaking-tube; we had to learn to trade with the fruit peddler through the window, and not be afraid of the policeman; and above all, we had to learn English.*

*The kind people who assisted us in these important matters form a group by themselves in the gallery of my friends. If I had never seen them from those early days till now, I should still have remembered them with gratitude. When I enumerate the long list of my American teachers, I must begin with those who came to us on Wall Street and taught us our first steps. To my mother, in her perplexity over the cookstove, the woman who showed her how to make the fire was an angel of deliverance. A fairy godmother to us children was she who led us to a wonderful country called "uptown," where, in a dazzlingly beautiful palace called a "department store," we exchanged our hateful homemade European costumes, which pointed us out as "greenhorns" to the children on the street, for real American machine-made garments, and issued forth glorified in each other's eyes.*