Lesson 26: The Great Wave of Immigration

What was life like for immigrants in the early 1900s?

- Millions of Italians came to the United States to escape poverty.
- In the late 1800s, much of Italy, especially southern Italy, was unable support the country's rapidly growing population.
- Farmers struggled to make a living on worn-out, eroded land where crops too often failed, and there were few factories to provide other jobs.



- After almost two weeks, the travelers arrived at the immigration station on Ellis Island in New York Harbor.
- They were required to pass medical examinations and answer questions about how they intended to support themselves in the United States.
- People who failed these inspections could be forced to return home, even if other family members were allowed to enter.
- Because so many families were forced to separate, Italians started calling Ellis Island "The Island of Tears."



 By 1890, Italians made up 90 percent of New York's public works employees and 99 percent of Chicago's street workers.



- Many Italian immigrants were "birds of passage" young men who came to earn some money and return home.
- Italians who stayed often settled together in neighborhoods called "Little Italys"



- These mostly Italian neighborhoods bulged with residents who could afford only the cheapest tenement housing.
- Crowded together in tiny apartments, most families had no privacy.



- Above everything else, Italians valued family closeness.
- Some Italian parents refused to send their children to school because they feared that learning English would separate their children from the family.
- Besides, a child in school was not earning money to help the family. As a result, many immigrant children never learned the skills they needed for better jobs.



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- Because many Italian newcomers were poor and uneducated, Americans tended to look down on them.
- When a few Italians turned to crime and became notorious gangsters, some people started thinking of all Italians as criminals.
- As a group, however, Italian immigrants were generally more law-abiding than average Americans.



 For centuries, Russians had discriminated against Jews, who dressed, worshiped, and ate differently from their Christian neighbors.



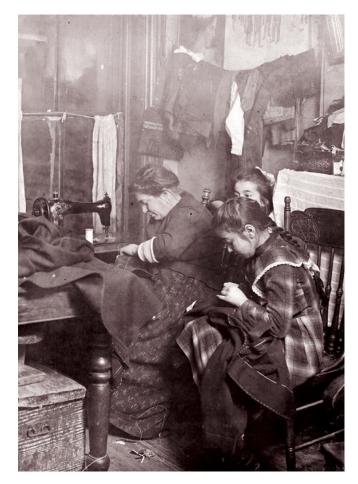
- In 1881, assassins killed the Russian monarch Czar Alexander II, and nervous government leaders subsequently blamed Jews for his murder, even though the assassin was not Jewish.
- Angry Russians raged through Jewish villages, burning, looting, and killing in attacks, called <u>pogroms</u>.



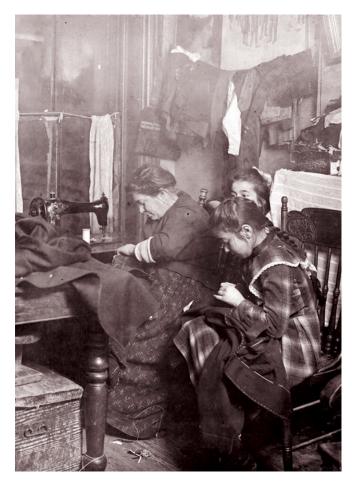
 Many Jews fled such persecution, hoping to find refuge in the United States.



- From Ellis Island, Jews often headed for New York City's Lower East Side neighborhood.
- There they established shops, newspapers, religious schools, and synagogues (community centers and places of worship).



- The Lower East Side became the most densely populated neighborhood in the city.
- People lived packed into cheap tenements, often sleeping three or four to a room.



- Some Jews worked as street vendors, using pushcarts to sell everything from coal to secondhand clothes.
- Pushcart vendors saved their money to buy horse drawn carts and eventually small stores.



- Although most Jews were poor, they arrived in the United States with a wide range of skills and were employed as cobblers, butchers, carpenters, and watchmakers.
- Almost half found jobs in the city's garment factories.



- Like other immigrant groups, Jews faced prejudice and discrimination.
- Most private schools and clubs refused to accept Jews.
- Hospitals refused to hire Jewish doctors, and the New York Bar Association would not admit Jews as lawyers.
- Many ads for jobs stated simply, "Christians only."



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