

Free at Last?

Civil Rights in the USA

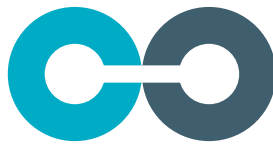
1918–1968



Alec Jessop

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Introduction

‘Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!’

Martin Luther King concluded his famous ‘I have a dream’ speech with these lines, expressing his dream that one day *all* Americans would enjoy an equality of freedom. ‘Free at last!’ was also a reference to the centuries-long struggle for freedom and equality for black Americans. This struggle had begun in 1619 when the first enslaved Africans were brought to what is now the United States of America. As the Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted in recent years, it is a struggle that continues to this day.

The struggle for freedom and equality from 1918 to 1968 is the focus of this textbook. During this time the USA rose as a global superpower, playing a crucial role in the outcome of both world wars and claiming to be the land of the free.

However, not all Americans were truly free. White Americans of northern European descent and of Protestant faith, sometimes referred to as WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) Americans, tended to enjoy the greatest freedom and the greatest power socially, economically and politically.

Black Americans, the majority of whom could trace their ancestry to enslaved Africans, faced widespread racism, prejudice and discrimination. Black Americans were denied many basic freedoms and civil rights such as the right to vote and fair treatment from the law. Racially motivated violence was common and attacks on black Americans frequently went unpunished.

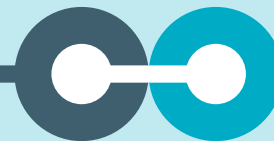
Immigrants from non-WASP backgrounds also faced discrimination and prejudice, particularly in the 1920s. We will begin in Chapter 1 by investigating why the USA, a nation founded on immigration, came to view immigrants with hostility and suspicion in the 1920s.

The remainder of the book deals with the struggle of black Americans to gain civil rights. In Chapter 2 we will investigate the ways in which black Americans were denied these civil rights. Chapters 3 and 4 will focus on the development of the civil rights movement. In Chapter 3 we will look at the growth of the non-violent civil rights campaign in which Martin Luther King was a key leader. Chapter 4 will assess the more radical civil rights campaigns led by the likes of Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael.

Whether revising for an N4 or N5 assessment, or deepening your understanding of a particular area, this book will help you.

Each chapter covers a specific issue that could appear as an N4/5 assessment item, and the information contained in the following pages will support you in writing a powerful response.

Good luck!



Chapter 1

The 'open door' policy and immigration, to 1928

For this chapter, it is important to understand the experiences of immigrant groups in the United States of America in the early twentieth century. In order to do so, we will first investigate the reasons why the USA experienced high levels of immigration before the 1920s. We will then look at what life in America was like for immigrant groups in terms of their living and working conditions, and their political impact.

This chapter will also discuss the reasons why the 1920s saw the open door close as anti-immigrant views became more popular among Americans.

Link to the assessment

National 4 and 5

Key issue 1: The 'open door' policy and immigration, to 1928.

This will allow learners to understand:

- The reasons for mass migration to the USA
- The immigrant experience – arrival, living and working conditions, and political participation
- Changing attitudes towards immigrants
- Government policy and the closure of the open door

Background

In the nineteenth century, the United States of America was commonly viewed as a land of freedom and opportunity. Immigrants from a wide variety of backgrounds, nationalities and religions were attracted to the USA in pursuit of the **American Dream**. Up until 1921 the USA had an 'open door' policy towards immigration. This meant there were virtually no restrictions. Immigrants were generally welcomed and viewed as vital to helping the country grow and develop. The two dominant sources of immigration to the USA during this time were Europe and Asia. However, it should be noted that the 'open door' policy only truly applied to European immigrants.

In the nineteenth century, immigrants from Asia mainly came from Japan and China, and people from both countries were initially welcomed as



a source of cheap labour. However, both faced racist and discriminatory reactions from white Americans. In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed, effectively banning all Chinese immigration. In 1907 the Gentlemen's Agreement was negotiated between the USA and Japan. This meant that Japan would no longer issue passports for any Japanese citizen attempting to travel to America, greatly restricting the numbers of Japanese migrants arriving in the USA. It is clear that in reality, the 'open door' policy applied only to certain types of immigrant.

This chapter will, therefore, mostly focus on the experiences of European migrants who were not faced with any real immigration restrictions until the 1920s. Between 1850 and 1914 over 40 million Europeans migrated to the USA. However, it is important to be aware of distinctions within European immigrant groups.

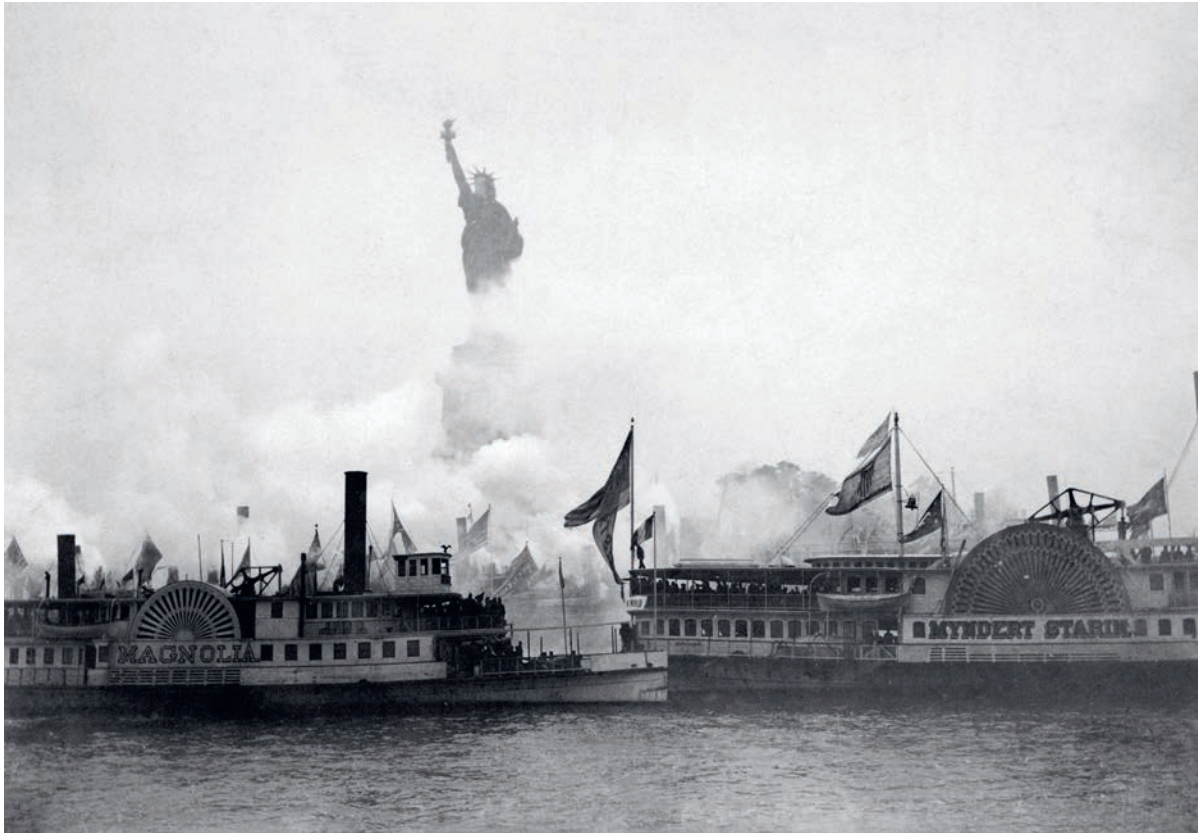


Figure 1.1 The opening of the Statue of Liberty on 28 October 1886. The statue came to represent America as a land of freedom and opportunity. For many European immigrants, the statue was their first glimpse of the USA.

In this time period Americans spoke of 'old' and 'new' immigrants. 'Old' immigrants came from places like Britain, Germany and Scandinavia, and were typically of Protestant faith. As these areas had been the dominant sources of immigration to the USA since the seventeenth century, 'old' immigrants had a strong sense of shared culture, language and identity. 'Old' immigrants and their descendants were collectively referred to as White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, or **WASPs**. Since the USA had been established following the Declaration of Independence in 1776, WASPs had dominated the country culturally, politically and economically.

The 'new' immigrants came from southern and eastern Europe, and included Italians, Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Croats, Russians, Romanians and Greeks. They were visibly different from WASP Americans in their religion, culture and language. Most were Jews or Catholics and came from economically poorer backgrounds than WASP migrants. The experiences of these 'new' immigrants were very different from those of their WASP counterparts. Due to their different languages, customs and religions, these groups were increasingly regarded by WASPs as a threat to American identity and culture.

Irish Catholic immigrants

Irish Catholic immigrants came to the United States in large numbers throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their Catholicism meant that they faced **discrimination** and were treated with suspicion. However, because they had a longer presence in the USA, Irish Catholic immigrants were viewed as distinct from the 'new' immigrants.

By the late nineteenth century their economic and political status in the USA was improving. For instance, many Irish Catholic immigrants benefited from the Homestead Acts (see page 5) and they had played a key role in establishing Tammany Hall (see page 16).

From 1886 a European immigrant's first view of America was of the Statue of Liberty (see Figure 1.1). The statue is inscribed with a literal welcome to immigrants from the most impoverished and oppressed backgrounds: 'Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!' The statue came to symbolise the USA as a land of hope and freedom.

For the purposes of assessment, it is important to have an understanding of both what the experience was like for immigrants to America, and why attitudes to immigrants changed during the 1920s. To do this, we will first look at the factors which attracted immigrants to the USA in the early twentieth century. We will develop our understanding of the immigrant experience in terms of their arrival, their living and working conditions, and their political involvement. Secondly, we will look at the factors that led to many WASP Americans changing their attitudes towards immigration and how this led to the US government closing the open door by severely restricting all types of immigration.

Note

This chapter will refer to many geographical terms used to describe areas of the USA. The map in Figure 1.2 will help you to understand these terms.

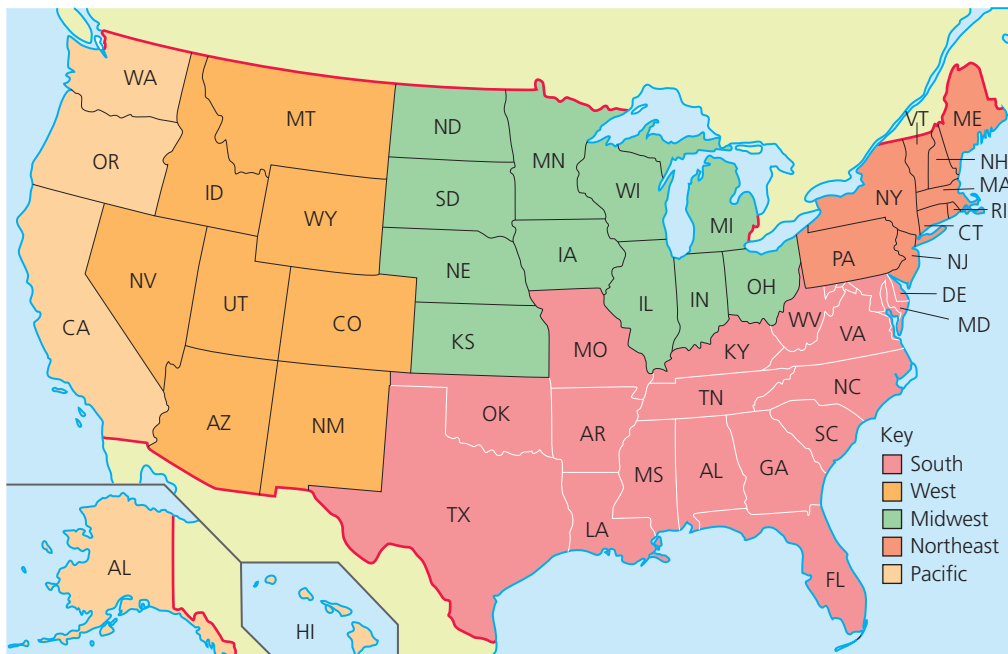


Figure 1.2 Map of the USA showing state borders and key geographic areas

1.1 The reasons for mass migration to the USA

From 1880 to 1920 the USA experienced one of its most intense periods of mass migration. Nearly 25 million immigrants arrived during this time. This is a figure which would have been even higher had migration patterns not been interrupted by the First World War of 1914–18. The scale of immigration to the USA was highlighted by the 1920 census, which revealed that first- and second-generation immigrants made up over a third of the total population of 105 million.

Between 1901 and 1920 over 14 million immigrants arrived in the United States. As we can see from Figure 1.3, most of these were Europeans. WASPs from Britain, Germany and Scandinavia had formed the majority of arrivals before 1900. One of the main attractions for these immigrants was cheap or free land. However, from 1900 southern and eastern Europeans made up the greater number of newcomers to the United States. These 'new' immigrants tended to be from poorer and less educated backgrounds than the 'old' immigrants. The factors that led to their immigration were therefore different from those of earlier periods of immigration to the USA.

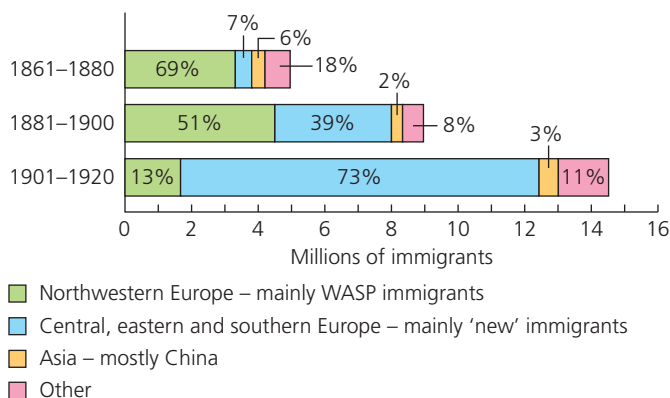


Figure 1.3 Bar chart showing the changing sources of immigration to the USA from 1861 to 1920

Source: *Historical Statistics of the United States*

Often factors influencing immigration are sorted into push and pull factors:

- Push factors are ones that encourage or force a person to leave their home.
- Pull factors are ones that encourage a person to move to another country.

We will investigate some of the more common push and pull factors below. However, it should be noted that individual immigrants would have had a variety of motivations for choosing to move to the USA that might not fit with these.

1.1.1 Pull factors

The American Dream – the idea that anyone, regardless of their background, could prosper and succeed in the USA – acted as a strong pull factor to the USA. As we can see from Source 1, many Europeans had extravagant ideas of what the USA had to offer. America was seen as a modern, confident, prosperous place. In addition to this perception of the USA, a number of more practical and more concrete 'pulls' to the USA also existed. The opportunity to obtain cheap or free land, as well as increased employment opportunities, improved wages and greater religious and political freedoms, enticed many a European to move.

Source 1.1

My notion of the United States was that it was a grand, amazing, somewhat fantastic place – the Golden country ... In America one could make pots of money in a short time, acquire immense holdings, wear a white collar and have polish on one's boots – and eat white bread and meat on weekdays ... even if one were but an ordinary workman to begin with. I heard ... of regions known as Texas and Oklahoma where single farms were larger than a whole province of Slovenia. In America even the common people were 'citizens' not 'subjects', as they were in the Austrian Empire and in most European countries.

L. Adamic, *Laughing in the Jungle*, 1932. Adamic emigrated from Austria-Hungary to the USA in 1913.

Land

The opportunity to acquire cheap or free land had long been an attraction for immigrants moving from Europe to America. For most poor Europeans, it was all but impossible to become a landowner in their home country. However, even by the 1900s there were still opportunities to acquire cheap or free land in the USA.

One way was through purchasing a **homestead**. A homestead refers to an area of state-owned land (usually of 160 acres) that was granted to a settler either free of charge or for the payment of a small registration fee. Settlers had to live on this land for five years and show evidence of having made improvements to the land before the homestead officially became theirs.

The Homestead Act of 1862 had first introduced this policy as a way of encouraging settlers to move to new states and territories in the west. From 1904 to 1916, four further Homestead Acts were passed, offering virtually free land in the **Great Plains** to settlers. The opportunity to purchase a homestead was a powerful attraction to European immigrants, particularly those with farming experience.

It should be noted that all Homestead Acts contributed to US Government policies that were aimed at forcing Native Americans away from their tribal lands. As such, many believe that '**settler-colonists**' is a more accurate term to describe the settlers who benefited from the acts.

Another opportunity to gain free land arose in Oklahoma (marked 'OK' in Figure 1.2, page 3). In 1889 the first Oklahoma land rush occurred. The US government announced that land which had previously been granted to the indigenous Creek and Seminole Indians would be made available for settler-colonists to claim for free.

At 12 noon on 22 April 1889, a gun was fired to signal the start of the land rush. Thousands of individuals and families who had lined up at the border to the territory rushed onto the land to try to claim the best plots. By the end of a frenzied and chaotic day, over 2 million acres had been claimed.

As with the Homestead Act, plots of 160 acres were available and claimants had to live on the land for five years and show signs of improving the land before it was officially theirs. However, this was still an enticing deal for many immigrants and six further land rushes took place, with the last in 1895.

RICH FARMING LANDS!

ON THE LINE OF THE
Union Pacific Railroad!

Located in the GREAT CENTRAL BELT of POPULATION, COMMERCE and WEALTH, and adjoining the WORLD'S HIGHWAY from OCEAN TO OCEAN.

12,000,000 ACRES!

3,000,000 Acres in Central and Eastern Nebraska, in the Platte Valley, now for sale!

We invite the attention of all parties seeking a HOME, to the LANDS offered for sale by this Company.

The Vast Quantity of Land from which to select, enables every one to secure such a location as he desires, suitable to any branch of farming or stock raising.

The Prices are Extremely Low. The amount of land owned by the Company is so large that they are determined to sell at the cheapest possible rates, ranging from \$1.50 to \$8.00 per acre.

The Terms of Payment are Easy. Ten years' credit at six per cent interest. A deduction of ten per cent for cash.

The Location is Central, along the 41st parallel, the favorite latitude of America. Equally well adapted to corn or wheat, free from the long, cold winters of the Northern, and the hot, unhealthy influences of the Southern States.

The Face of the Country is diversified with hill and dale, grain land and meadow, rich bottoms, low bluffs, and undulating tables, all covered with a thick growth of sweet nutritious grasses.

The Soil is a dark loam, slightly impregnated with lime, free from stone and gravel, and eminently adapted to grain and root crops; the subsoil is usually light and porous, retaining moisture with wonderful tenacity.

The Climate is mild and healthful; the atmosphere dry and pure. Epidemic diseases never prevail; Fever and Ague are unknown. The greatest amount of rain falls between March and October. The Winters are dry with but little snow.

The Productions are wheat, corn, oats, barley, rye and root crops, and vegetables generally. Flax, sweet potatoes, sorghum, etc., etc., do well and yield largely.

Fruits, both Wild and Cultivated, do remarkably well. The freedom from frosts in May and September, in connection with the dry Winters and warm soil, renders this State eminently adapted to fruit culture.

Stock Raising in all its branches, is particularly profitable on the wide ranges of rich pasturage. Cattle and sheep

feed with avidity and fatten upon the nutritious grasses without grain; hogs thrive well, and wool growing is exceedingly remunerative.

Timber is found on the streams and grows rapidly.

Coal of excellent quality, exists in vast quantities on the line of the road in Wyoming, and is furnished to settlers at reduced rates.

Market Facilities are the best in the West; the great mining regions of Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Nevada, are supplied by the farmers of Platte Valley.

The Title given the purchaser is absolute, in fee simple, and free from all incumbrances, derived directly from the United States.

Soldiers of the Late War are entitled to a Homestead of one hundred and sixty acres, within Railroad limits, which is equal to a bounty of \$400.

Persons of Foreign Birth are also entitled to the benefits of the Free Homestead Law, on declaring their intention of becoming citizens of the United States; this they may do immediately on their arrival in this country.

For Colonies, the lands on the line of the Union Pacific Railroad afford the best locations in the West.

TOWN LOTS FOR SALE VERY CHEAP in the most important towns on the line of the Road, affording excellent opportunities for business or investments.

Full information in regard to lands, prices, terms of sale, &c., together with pamphlets, circulars and maps, may be obtained from all the Agents of the Department, also the

"PIONEER."

A handsome ILLUSTRATED PAPER, with maps, etc., and containing the HOMESTEAD LAW. Mailed free to all applicants. Address

O. F. DAVIS,
Land Commissioner, U. P. R. R.
OMAHA, NEB.

Figure 1.4 Advert produced by the Union Pacific Railroad Company advertising cheap farming land. One section of the advert is specifically aimed at 'persons of foreign birth'.

Cheap land could also be gained through railroad companies such as Union Pacific and Central Pacific. As part of the deals struck to build railroads, both state and federal governments granted these companies land to sell. By the 1890s the 'railroad boom' had connected states in the west and midwest to the cities of the east. This made it easier for European settlers to travel further west into the USA, and agents would sell cheap railroad tickets to immigrants as they arrived in New York.

Railroad companies were eager to increase passenger numbers and business on their lines and so advertised very cheap plots of land along their railroad networks (see Figure 1.4, page 5). Adverts and propaganda were published by railroad companies in a variety of different languages, promoting not just cheap land but an improved way of life. These helped to attract migrants from all across Europe.

Employment opportunities

By 1900 the USA had become both the largest and quickest-growing global economy. This economic growth had been based on a period of rapid **industrialisation** and meant jobs were easily available in a wide variety of growing industries across American cities. As American industries and businesses grew, they often advertised for workers in European newspapers. Some industries even sent recruiting agents to Europe. For instance, there were recruitment agents working for US coal mines operating in Scandinavia, Germany and Britain. Furthermore, the state of Michigan employed its own agents between 1840 and 1880 who recruited heavily from Prussia. This spread awareness of job opportunities in the USA and encouraged many to move.

US cities had grown rapidly in the 1890s as America switched from an **agrarian** to an industrial nation. The growth of industries such as coal mining, iron and steel manufacturing, textiles and crude oil production created an abundance of factory-based jobs. Most factory work was unskilled, with production tasks divided among workers. While this led to repetitive and monotonous work, it meant that most factory jobs required no real training. This meant that immigrants from all backgrounds were easily able to take up employment in American factories. The ease with which jobs could be found in these factories was another factor that encouraged people to move.

Wages in US industries, although still low, tended to be higher than the wages a working-class or peasant migrant from southern or eastern Europe would have received in their home country. Improved wages, combined with a belief in the American Dream, helped to attract many immigrants to the USA who believed they would be able to gain financial security, or even riches, through their own hard work and determination.



Figure 1.5 Delmonicos – a New York restaurant established by Italian-Swiss immigrants – pictured in 1893. This business was successful enough to expand into a chain of four restaurants.

By 1900, first- and second-generation immigrants made up nearly 75 per cent of the population of cities like New York and Chicago. Large migrant communities developed within areas of cities often named after the dominant group living in that area, for example, Little Italy or Chinatown. These communities also offered employment opportunities to new settlers. Many newcomers chose to establish their own businesses, such as cafés, restaurants, grocers and bars (see Figure 1.5, page 6). In New York, Katz's Delicatessen was established by Jewish immigrants in 1903 and remains one of the most famous New York restaurants. Businesses like these were often aimed at migrant communities, providing traditional food, drink and culture from their homelands.

Immigrants accounted for over half of the growth in general merchandise, food and apparel stores from 1880 to 1920. Immigrant merchants showed success in creating new markets and in extending credit to people without savings. Thus, there were many stories of successful migrant-owned businesses, which in turn encouraged others to establish their own business.

Freedom

In 1791 the American Bill of Rights had guaranteed freedom of religion, freedom of speech and freedom of the press for American citizens. The belief that the USA was a place where religious worship could be practised free from discrimination was a strong attraction for religious minorities in Europe, who often faced persecution. Jews living in the Russian Empire and religious minorities from Norway and Sweden emigrated to the USA in large numbers in the 1880s and 1890s.

America was viewed as a place of political freedom. It should be noted, however, that in this period, political freedom only really existed for white American men. In theory, all male US citizens over the age of 21 had the right to vote. In contrast, most European countries were still monarchies or empires where individuals, particularly from the lower classes, had very limited political rights. As evidenced in Source 1.2, the belief that immigrants would be treated in the USA as citizens with freedom of speech and the right to vote attracted many Europeans who did not have access to these rights or freedoms at home.

Source 1.2

... here I am free. In Germany I cannot say at all how I shall be governed. They govern people with soldiers. They tried to make me a soldier too, but I ran away.

A German immigrant to the USA speaking in the second half of the nineteenth century; from *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 2 November, 1857.

Improved transportation

By the late nineteenth century, the introduction of ocean-crossing steamships had cut the journey time from Europe to America. Even from eastern Europe, people could make the journey in around two weeks. As steamships could also make more frequent journeys, the cost of tickets was reduced significantly too. These improvements in transportation made immigration to the USA a far more attractive prospect, by reducing the time, cost and risk for immigrants.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, chain migration became increasingly common. This was when one immigrant family member, usually a male worker, would immigrate first. Once they had secured employment and saved enough, money would be sent home to pay for tickets for other family members to follow suit.

It is also worth considering the impact of improved transportation within the USA. The railroad network not only encouraged immigration through the sale of cheap land, but also meant that it was far more feasible for immigrants to take up employment opportunities beyond the east coast of the USA. As Figure 1.6 shows, by 1890 the railroad network had expanded to connect every American state.



Figure 1.6 Map showing how railroads had expanded significantly from 1870 to 1890.

Source: *America, A Concise History*, 3rd edition

1.1.2 Push factors

For all America's attractions, many immigrants would have felt they had been pushed, rather than pulled, to the USA. Growing populations in Europe had created pressures on land, housing and jobs, forcing many into emigration as a last resort. For victims of persecution like minority groups within the Russian Empire, emigration to America was arguably more motivated by escape rather than by any opportunities the USA presented.

Escaping a class-based society

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Europe was still a class-based society. The upper classes owned the land and held most of the influence over governments. The middle classes, particularly middle-class business owners, were becoming more politically influential. The lower classes still lacked any real political power or influence. While in some countries political reform was slowly beginning, for most lower-class Europeans, emigration to the USA presented the best prospect of gaining greater political power.

Economically, working-class Europeans had little prospect of improving their lot. Home or land ownership was virtually impossible for a lower-class European to achieve. Upper-class elites owned most of the countryside, while in towns and cities middle-class landlords owned most of the housing. Population growth meant that in many European cities, rents were increasing for the working classes, but the quality of housing was deteriorating. For lower-class Europeans trapped in cycles of poverty by low pay and high rents, emigration to America appeared to present an opportunity for a fresh and fairer start.

In addition to a lack of political and economic power, many working-class European men were faced with the prospect of compulsory military service. Many European nations had **conscription** policies. In the Russian Empire, men over the age of 21 were liable for conscription for a period of three to four years of active service. This was followed by a period of 15 years as a **reserve**.

Conscription rules also varied greatly by **national minority**. For instance, Finns were exempt from conscription, but for Lithuanians, conscription had no time limit. Conscription policies also existed in Germany and France. For many young men, particularly those faced with the lengthiest periods of service, emigration to the USA represented the safest escape from compulsory conscription.



Figure 1.7 Young Russian conscripts in 1914

Discrimination and persecution

In eastern Europe, two empires dominated – the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Within these empires, national minorities were discriminated against and had their cultures and their religions suppressed. In the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Slavic ethnic groups like Bosnians were unhappy with Austrian rule. Within both empires, nationalist movements developed, fighting for greater independence, but emigration to America was also viewed as a way of escaping injustice.

In the Russian Empire, a policy of **Russification** discriminated against non-Russian languages, cultures and religious beliefs. Russification saw the censoring of non-Russian newspapers, the appointment of Russians to positions of local government, and in some cases, led to schools only teaching in the Russian language. Latvians, Finns, Poles and Lithuanians were among the national minority groups who faced discrimination under Russification. For many national minorities, emigration offered a simple way to avoid these injustices.

In the Russian Empire, Jewish people faced the most severe levels of persecution and discrimination. In the 1880s and 1890s a series of violent **pogroms** were carried out against the empire's Jewish population. These were deliberate and violent attacks on Jewish communities. Between 1881 and 1920 there were more than 1300 pogroms in Ukraine alone, leaving half a million people homeless and resulting in the deaths of up to a quarter of a million Jewish men and women. Over 2 million Jews fled the Russian Empire in this period, the vast majority emigrating to the USA.

Overcrowding

In the nineteenth century the total population of Europe doubled from roughly 200 million to 400 million. This population growth happened against a backdrop of industrialisation, agricultural change and urbanisation. The combined effect of these put great pressure on resources like land, housing and jobs.

Agricultural changes saw many peasant or tenant farmers replaced by modern machinery and technology. In many cases these agricultural workers lost both their jobs and their homes. Often this loss of security and purpose led to emigration.

Agricultural workers who were not immediately forced into emigration through the loss of their jobs would typically move to urban areas and seek industrial jobs. Industrialisation had created low-skilled jobs and attracted families to growing towns and cities. However, these growing towns and cities often could not cope with the rising population, and this led to shocking living conditions where disease was easily spread. Many European towns and cities faced severe problems of poor housing, overcrowding and poverty. For many workers who faced these continued hardships, emigration to the USA was an attractive alternative.

Unemployment

The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation spread from western Europe to eastern and southern Europe as the nineteenth century progressed. Skilled traditional trades like weaving could not compete with the ability of industries to mass-produce goods. As a result, many skilled workers felt forced into emigration.

Industrialisation had produced economic growth in most European countries, however the pace of this growth remained slow, and European economies were often faced with downturns. The period of 1873–1900 became known as the Long Depression in western Europe as economic growth slowed. Many workers experienced bouts of unemployment during this period, and without the savings or support networks to survive, they saw emigration to the USA as their best option.

Most working-class Europeans had few rights to protect them in the workplace and were faced with long shifts, dangerous working conditions and low pay. In addition, there was no real system of comprehensive social security for workers, meaning illness, unemployment or low wages could plunge workers into poverty. In this context of continued hardship, many felt forced to look to the USA for new opportunities. While it is true to say that many of these problems also existed in the USA, emigration at least presented European workers with the opportunity of a fresh start, and many felt they had little to lose by taking the risk to migrate.

Key fact summary

Reasons for mass migration to the USA

Many immigrants were motivated by opportunities to acquire cheap or free land. For poorer Europeans this would have been virtually impossible to do in their home country.

Many immigrants were attracted to the USA by the promise of work. For example, many US industries advertised positions in European newspapers or even employed agents to recruit workers directly from Europe.

Many workers came to the USA as they had a chance to earn higher wages in unskilled industrial jobs compared to their wages in Europe.

Religious minorities were attracted to the USA by the belief that they would be free from persecution and discrimination. For example, millions of Jewish people fled from persecution under Russian pogroms.

Overcrowding and a lack of resources in Europe also contributed. Many Europeans felt they were forced out of their home country due to unemployment or being trapped in cycles of poverty by low wages and high rents.

Improved transportation also made emigration to America more attractive. Journey times to the USA were reduced and fares were relatively affordable.

Activities

- 1 Define each of the following terms in your own words:
 - a) WASP American
 - b) 'new' immigrant
 - c) push factor
 - d) pull factor
- 2 Using Figure 1.3 to help, describe the changes in immigration to the USA between 1880 and 1920.
- 3 Copy and complete the table below, showing what you believe were the three strongest push and three strongest pull factors for immigrants to the USA. For each push/pull factor give a one-sentence summary of its impact.

Three strongest push factors	Three strongest pull factors

- 4 Create a series of diary entries for a fictional immigrant to the USA. These entries should cover:
 - a) reasons for wanting to leave their homeland
 - b) reasons they wish to move to America

1.2 The immigrant experience

While we must be careful not to make generalisations about immigrants, a 'typical' immigrant to the USA during the peak years of immigration was lower class, young and single. Roughly 70 per cent of migrants to the USA at this time were aged between 18 and 40. They tended to settle in the rapidly growing cities of the northeast and midwest (see Figure 1.2, page 3).

In cities like New York, Chicago, Boston, San Francisco and Milwaukee, immigrants and their children made up about 75 per cent of the population. The typical experience of immigrants to the USA in this time period was therefore an urban one. However, it is important to bear in mind that individual migrants had a wide variety of experiences, ranging from those who achieved the American Dream and made successful lives for themselves, to those who faced lives of continued poverty and struggle.

In order to further our understanding of the immigrant experience in the USA, we will consider their arrival, their living and working conditions, and their political participation in more detail below.

1.2.1 Arrival

From 1886 onwards, the Statue of Liberty was the first glimpse of the USA for the vast majority of newcomers arriving from Europe. As Edward Corsi, a former interpreter at the Ellis Island immigration processing centre reveals in Source 1.3, many immigrants were overcome with emotion at the sight of the statue.

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What does the cover photo show?

A photograph of mainly black American women protesting during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom that took place on 28 August 1963. Black American women played a significant, but often underappreciated, role in the civil rights movement, particularly through their grassroots organisation and campaigning.

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