

AMERICAN COLONIZATION AND IMMIGRATION

By the time Columbus **discovered** the New World in 1492, about one million Native Americans probably lived in the area now called the United States.

European immigration began in the 16th century with the establishment of Spanish outposts in Florida. British **settlers founded** Jamestown in Virginia in 1607 and the colony of Plymouth in Massachusetts in 1620. Although people from various countries in northern and western Europe came to **settle** in communities along the Atlantic coast, the British soon controlled this eastern stretch of the continent. Finally, there were 13 separate colonies, which were governed by Parliament in London. When the colonies **declared their independence** in 1776, three out of four of the two million colonists claimed Britain or Ireland as their or their families' country of origin, and English was the main language.

The time between 1815 and 1915 **is regarded** as the period of classical immigration, when ever-increasing numbers of Europeans landed in **veritable waves** on America's east coast. The first and second of these waves of immigrants (1815-1860 and 1860-1880) came chiefly from Germany, Ireland, Britain and Scandinavia. Many of the newcomers of the third wave (1880-1900) and the **majority** of the fourth (1900-1915) were from countries in southern and eastern Europe. The only group that came unwillingly for nearly 200 years were Africans. Between 1619 and 1808 about half a million black people were brought to the South as slaves.

While the first colonists settled along the Atlantic seaboard, later immigrants moved further and further west, slowly turning **wilderness** into cultivated land. Between 1790 and 1850 these **pioneers** pushed the border between settled and **unsettled land**, the **frontier** from the Appalachians to, and then beyond, the Mississippi River. The Westward Movement finally came to its end about 1890, after the settlement of the West had been completed. Since the continuous territorial conflicts between whites and Indians were usually settled by force, the Native Americans had to give up almost all their land. Their numbers **were decimated** by **violence**, hunger and **disease** until in 1990, there were only about 200,000 left.

Faced with growing numbers of immigrants from all sorts of ethnic backgrounds and with the problem of **assimilating** them to the basically Anglo-American culture, the US government **felt compelled to** introduce **various restrictions on** immigration. There was, for example, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, then the National Origins Act of 1924, which ended mass immigration. The latter only admitted only a fixed "quota" of immigrants from any foreign country. It was **prejudiced against** eastern and southern Europeans. This system was brought to an end in 1965 by the last major immigration act. Since then immigration from non-European nations has **increased** sharply, reaching about 85 per cent of the total number of new arrivals in the 1980s. The bulk of this new immigration is from Asian and Latin American countries shaken by wars and political economic crisis.

Today the USA accepts a maximum of one million newcomers per year. Of these, 48% were the immediate relatives of United States citizens, 20% were family-sponsored, 13% were **refugees** or asylum seekers. In addition to that, there have also been many illegal immigrants, especially from Mexico. Immigrants may **apply for** US citizenship after **five years of residence** in the country.

The 50 million foreign-born who made the United States their home in the course of history all **expected** to live a better and happier life in their **country of adoption**. They hoped to find **political or religious freedom, justice or social equality**, cheap land or better economic opportunities. This American Dream has not, of course, **come true** for all of them. While some ethnic groups, e.g. African-Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics have often **suffered due to** prejudice and discrimination, others have quite easily **fitted in** and been given the **opportunities** they needed to **succeed**. Although to all immigrants becoming American meant giving up certain traditions and **adopting** new customs, many have tried to **retain** elements of their ethnic heritage. Thus, America **is still considered** a "melting pot" by some while others prefer to describe it as a "salad bowls" or "rainbow."