Challenges to the American Dream for Immigrants in the 19th century

For years, immigrants from across the globe have come to the United States with hope for the better tomorrow and leaving their dark past behind. This hope for the chance of improving their lives is generally known as the American Dream, and it is the phenomenon existing due to the active immigration during the late 19th century. However, regardless of the supposed romanticism of American Dream, it was not that simple. In fact, it was associated with numerous challenges to the immigrants and their families.

To begin with, even though the American Dream was synonymous with the opportunity of the family reunion in the future – bringing all relatives to the United States, – initially, it was connected with the family breakup. The very first challenge any immigrant faced was the expensiveness of a ticket to the new life. More than that, together with the ticket to the new life, immigrant commonly obtained new knowledge, which was not always favored, “The food was different from that which I had been used to, and I did not like it at all” (recollections of Lee Chew). Except for some discomfort and the fear of leaving home, most of the immigrants faced the fear of the novelties in the land of wealthy wizards that might eat them alive. They were afraid of the technologies and the need for embracing new lifestyles and professions.

Nevertheless, regardless of the fear of being eaten alive, those, who actually came to the United States and started to get used to the new life, would soon face another significant challenge – inequality. Either based on the so-called supremacy or the fact that a particular country is “not a fighting country” (memories of Lee Chew), some immigrants were treated more unequally compared to others. This inequality affected the ability to integrate adequately and comprehensively into the new environment, so it motivated people to create the whole districts bringing their past to the new life (for instance, China towns or Latin American districts). In this way, regardless of the initial promise of the opportunity to build something new and forget about the dark sides of the yesterday, immigrants could not be easily admitted to the new life. Somehow, they would find themselves locked in their past. In some cases, they were luckier because they could actually enjoy family reunion (for instance, memories of Josephine Garzieri Calloway, whose family of emigrants from Italy managed to settle down in New Jersey). However, in the majority of cases, people with the similar cultural background would become the only way of escaping from the monstrosity of the country of wizards.

Eventually, most of the immigrants would find out that the good wizards they hoped to meet, in fact, were evil ones. Driven by the forces of capitalism and the strive for wealth, the wizards’ desire is to command “influence in the world’s future, but the exact nature of that influence is, as yet, undetermined” (the United States in view of Josiah Strong). From this perspective, one more significant challenge faced by the immigrants was the fact that supreme nation (Christians and Anglo-Saxons) imposed their worldview, thus trying to expand their impact on determining life values. Either materialism and atheism like in case of Anglo-Saxons (according to Josiah Strong) or protestant paranoia (like in the instance of the growth of the American Protective Association). That being said, even though the American Dream was actually brought to life by numerous immigrants because the foundation of this Dream was to become wealthier than in the home country, the price of this relative wealth is too high – inequality, moral pressure, and the inability to reunite with the families.