American civilisation

IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

An immigrant is somebody who leaves their country for several reasons and push-and-pull factors (economical, religious, political, starvation, etc.). Immigrants are not to be mistaken for settlers: settlers were part of the British colonial empire when they arrived to America, while immigrants changed nations. Also, slaves are not considered immigrants because they were taken by force.

At the time of the Civil War, about 20% of the population was considered immigrants.

There are several steps in the immigration process:

Old Immigration (1820-1882)

The US attracted people from other parts of the world, and at the same time the territory expanded thanks to the Westward expansion (‘The Frontier’). The country was also growing because of industrialisation → increase in size and in the economy. It was also easier to travel to the United States → building of roads, railroads, canals, etc.

After the discovery of gold in California, the Gold Rush attracted many males, immigrants and people already living in the East Coast, to the West. Concerning immigration, people came mainly for work and to have better standards of living. For example, many Irish and Chinese people came to work on railways.

1862: Homestead Act. It allowed the people who decided to migrate to the West to buy land for very cheap prices. It helped to年人ate the population and move people to the west of the territory (which was newly acquired, so less populated), and it made possible for more people to own land – as a democratic principle opposed to the privileges of the British aristocracy.

In the 19th century, there were two major famines in Europe:

– the Great Famine of Ireland (1845-1850): because of a parasite in potatoes, many people couldn't live properly and get food and money (it became impossible to grow potatoes even to sell). Many people died, and this famine was one of the reasons why many Irish decided to go to the US, even though Irish immigration had started before, because of poverty and bad living conditions.

– the Swedish Famine in 1868.

Moreover, the overall population in Europe was growing fast, so there were not enough jobs for everybody, and it became more and more difficult to find land and houses too.

Between 1820 and 1882, about 10 million people arrived in the US, on a population of 50 million (so 1/5 of the population was composed of immigrants). Most came from Northern and Western Europe, and were Protestant. They often spoke German or English, so they were closer to the settlers → culture not too unfamiliar for them.

But there were also people who were more different culturally than the Americans: the Irish were Catholics; the Chinese had a very different culture, different way of dressing, etc.; some Germans were also Catholics. This started criticism of immigration and the rise of nativism, which was praising 'true' Americans whose families were born in the US for several generations. It was a political movement against immigrants, because they were said to be too different from the original WASPs and could not fit in. They were thought to be a threat to the American values. To