

# Gate-crashing the Party: the Story of American Immigration

## Life-Long Learning Course

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## Quotations

### Class 1, Spanish (1492~1850)

They . . . brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned. . . . They are well-built, with good bodies and handsome features. . . . They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane. . . . They would make fine servants. . . . With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want."

Christopher Columbus meeting the Arawaks in the Bahamas, ship's log, Oct 1492

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Endless testimonies . . . prove the mild and pacific temperament of the natives. . . . but our work was to exasperate, ravage, kill, mangle and destroy; small wonder, then, if they tried to kill one of us now and then. . . . The admiral, it is true, was blind as those who came after him, and he was so anxious to please the King that he committed irreparable crimes against the Indians. . . ."

Bartolomé de las Casas (a priest serving under Columbus) *History of the Indies*

### English (1585~1787)

Jamestown, winter of 1609~10, the people were "driven thru insufferable hunger to eat those things which nature most abhorred, the flesh and excrements of man as well as of our own nation as of an indian, digged by some out of his grave after he had lain buried three days and wholly devoured him;" others, envying the better state of body of any whom hunger has not yet so much wasted as their own, lay wait and threatened to kill and eat them; one among them slew his wife as she slept in his bosom, cut her in pieces, salted her and fed upon her till he had clean devoured all parts saving her head"

*journals* of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619, describing the "starving time"

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"Ask of me, and I shall give thee, the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." Psalms 2:8

"Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Romans 13:2

"It was supposed that no less than 600 Pequot souls were brought down to hell that day."

Cotton Mather on an English attack on a Pequot village.

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The bulk of persons coming from England were the refuse of an English society happy to ship them off as indentured servants or laborers, crammed into ships almost as tightly as slaves for maximum profit. Forcibly shipped from England were “rogues & vagabonds” which included orphans, ragged children off the streets, and “All persons calling themselves Schollers going about begging, all Seafaring men pretending losses of their Shippes or goods on the sea going about the Country begging, all idle persons going about in any Country either begging or using any subtile crafte or unlawful Games . . . comon Players of Interludes and Minstrells wandring abroade . . . all wandering persons and common Labourers being persons able in bodye using loitering and refusing to worke for such reasonable wages as is taxed for commonly given. . . .”

English ordinance, 17<sup>th</sup> C

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“Whoever is well off in Europe better remain there. Here is misery and distress, same as everywhere, and for certain persons and conditions incomparably more than in Europe.”

letter home from an indentured servant

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“The height, sometimes, between decks, was only eighteen inches, so that the unfortunate human beings could not turn around, nor even on their sides, the elevation being less than the breadth of their shoulders; and there they are usually chained to the decks by the neck and legs. In such a place the sense of misery and suffocation is so great, that the Negroes . . . are driven to frenzy.”

contemporary account of a slave ship

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In the Year of Our Lord 1682, To ye aged and beloved, Mr. John Higginson:

There be now at sea a ship called *Welcome*, which has on board 100 or more of the heretics and malignants called Quakers, with W. Penn, who is the chief scamp, at the head of them. The General Court has accordingly given sacred orders to Master Malachi Huscott, of the brig *Porpoise*, to waylay the said *Welcome* slyly as near the Cape of Cop as may be, and make captive the said Penn and his ungodly crew, so that the Lord may be glorified and not mocked on the soil of this new country with the heathen worship of these people. Much spoil can be made of selling the whole lot to Barbadoes, where slaves fetch good prices in rum and sugar and we shall not only do the Lord great good by punishing the wicked, but we shall make great good for His Minister and people.

Yours in the bowels of Christ, Cotton Mather

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“The scarcity and dearness of provisions still increases in the North. Many have eaten the oats they should have sowed their lands with. . . . The humor of going to America still continues . . . if we knew how to strip them, as most of them can get neither victuals nor work, it would be cruel to do it. . . . We have had three bad harvests together. . . . Above 4,200 men, women and children have been shipped off from home. . . . The humor has spread like a contagious distemper, and the people will hardly hear anybody that tries to cure them of their madness. The worst is, that it affects only Protestant, and reigns chiefly in the North, which is the seat of our linen manufacture”

Anglican Archbishop of Ireland, 1720s on the passion to emigrate to America

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“Why should the Palatine Boors [Germans from the Rhineland] be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours? Why should

Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs. . . .

"Which leads me to add one Remark: That the Number of purely white People in the World is proportionably very small. All *Africa* is black or tawny. *Asia* chiefly tawny. *America* (exclusive of the new Comers) wholly so. And in *Europe*, the *Spaniards*, *Italians*, *French*, *Russians* and *Swedes*, are generally of what we call a swarthy Complexion; as are the *Germans* also, the *Saxons* only excepted, who with the *English*, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth. I could wish their Numbers were increased. And while we are, as I may call it, *Scouring* our Planet, by clearing *America* of Woods, and so making this Side of our Globe reflect a brighter Light to the Eyes of Inhabitants in *Mars* or *Venus*, why should we in the Sight of Superior Beings, darken its People? why increase the Sons of *Africa*, by Planting them in *America*, where we have so fair an Opportunity, by excluding all Blacks and Tawneys, of increasing the lovely White and Red? But perhaps I am partial to the Complexion of my Country, for such Kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind".

Benjamin Franklin, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind*, 1751

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"What then is the American, this new man? He is either an European or the descendant of an European, hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations. *He* is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our *Alma Mater*. Here individuals of all races are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world."

*Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) by Michael-Guillaume-Jean de Crèvecoeur

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"Intermingled with Anglo-Americans, are the Dutch, Scotch-Irish, French, Germans, Swedes, and Jews; all these, except the Scotch and Irish, retain, in a greater or lesser degree, their native language, in which they perform their public worship, converse and transact business with each other. The time, however, is anticipated . . . when the language, manners, customs, political and religious sentiments of the mixed mass of people who inhabit the United States, shall have become so assimilated as that all nominal distinctions shall be lost in the general and honourable names of Americans."

Jedidiah Morse, American geographer, 1789

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"Providence [had] been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs." Jay, himself knew this was nonsense, living in polyglot NY and being of Huguenot ancestry, but he thought it necessary to propagandize an ideal (as Morse above)

John Jay, *Federalist Papers*, 1788

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At the parade celebrating Pennsylvania's ratification of the Constitution: "Pains were taken to connect ministers of the most dissimilar religious principles together, thereby to show the influence of a free government in promoting Christian charity. The Rabbi of the Jews, locked in the arms of two ministers of the gospel, was a most delightful sight".

Benjamin Rush, signer of Declaration of Independence,

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"the people are nothing but a great beast. . . . I have learned to hold popular opinion of no value."

Alexander Hamilton

## Class 2, Growth & Expansion (1787~1860)

"If any class deserves to be protected and assisted by the government, it is that class who are banished from their native land in search of the bare means of subsistence. . . . The law is bound, at least on the English side . . . to put an end to that system by which a firm of traders in emigrants purchase of the owners the whole 'tween decks of a ship, and send on board as many wretched peoples as they can get hold of on any terms they can get, without the smallest reference to the convenience of the steerage . . . or anything but their own immediate profit. . . ."

Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, after his visit to NYC

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"We thought we couldn't be worse off than we war. But now to our sorrow we know the differ; for sure supposing we war dying of starvation, or if the sickness overtuk us. We had a chance of a doctor, and if he could do not good for our bodies, sure the priest could for our souls, and then we'd be buried along wid our people, in the ould churchyard, with the green sod over us instead of lying like rotten sheep thrown in a pit, and the minit the breath is out of our bodies, flung into the sea to be eaten by them horrid sharks."

Irish cottier emigrating to America on the British ship *Mersey*, 1847

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"You have stated that, after getting to sea, the two privies on deck were destroyed?"

"Yes . . . they were only put up temporarily . . . the day before we sailed. . . ."

"And there were none below?"

"Yes. None below."

"What was the remedy?"

"There was no remedy."

"In consequences of that there was a very bad smell below."

"You could not stand below."

Testimony of Mr. Delany Finch, Minutes of Evidence Taken  
Before the [British] Select Committee on Emigrant ships, 1854,  
concerning transporting the Famine Irish to America

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"One got used to it—it was nothing but splash, splash, all day long—first one, then another. There was one Martin on board, I remember, with a wife and nine children. . . . Well, first his wife died, and they threw *her* into the sea, then the children, one after t'other, till only two were left alive; the eldest, a girl about thirteen who had nursed them all, one after another, and seen them die—well, *she* died, and then there was only the little fellow left. . . . He went back [to Ireland], as I heard, in the same ship with the captain.

PL 231, from Irish Folklore Dept

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The emigrant should consider that no important benefits can be had without toil, trouble and trial. If he would find a better home beyond the sea, he must encounter the difficulties of the passage, and the pangs of regret at turning his steps away from the places he has so long known. . . . The richest man in the United States at this time is an emigrant: Mr. John Jacob Astor, of New York.

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“Is it not murder when, compelled by want, people are forced to fester in squalid, germ-filled tenements, where the sunlight never enters and where disease finds a prolific breeding-place? Untold thousands went to their deaths in these unspeakable places. Yet, so far as the Law was concerned, the rents collected by the Astors, as well as by other landlords, were honestly made. The whole institution of Law . . . did not represent the ethics or ideals of advanced humanity; it exactly reflected, as a pool reflects the sky, the demands and self-interest of the growing propertied classes. . . .”

Gustavus Myers, *History of the Great American Fortunes* (1936)

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“There is a certain poor-smell in all the streets, in Beacon Street and Mount Vernon, as well as in the lawyer’s offices, and the wharves, and the same meanness and sterility, and leave-all-hope-behind, as one finds in a boot manufacturer’s premises”

Ralph W. Emerson

### **Class 3: Industry and Labor Unrest (1860~1880s)**

On the eve of the presidential election in 1884, won by Grover Cleveland, a time of rampant corruption and fraud, massive immigration, and spiraling farmer and industrial labor unrest, Henry Adams comments: “We are here plunged in politics funnier than words can express. Very great issues are involved. . . . But the amusing thing is that no one talks about real interests. By common consent they agree to let these alone. We are afraid to discuss them. Instead of this the press is engaged in a most amusing dispute whether Mr. Cleveland had an illegitimate child or did not live with more than one mistress.”

### **Class 4: Darker-skinned masses yearning to earn a paycheck (1880s~1917)**

We meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot box, the legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized. . . . The newspapers are subsidized and muzzled; public opinion silenced; business prostrate, our homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. . . . The urban workmen are denied the right of organization for self-protection; imported pauperized labor beats down their wages; a hireling standing army . . . established to shoot them down. . . . The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes. . . . From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed two classes—paupers and millionaires.

preamble to the platform of the People’s Party national convention in St. Louis, 1892

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“The old immigration movement was essentially one of permanence. The new immigration is very largely one of individuals, a considerable proportion of whom apparently have no intention of permanently changing their residence, their own purpose in coming to America being to temporarily take advantage of the greater wages paid for industrial labor in this country.”

Teddy Roosevelt’s Dillingham Commission on Immigration report, 1910

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What people from American write to Poland is all bluster; there is not a word of truth. For in America Poles work like cattle. Where a dog does not want to sit, there the Pole is made to sit, and the poor wretch works because he wants to eat.”

anonymous letter, early 20C.

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“If the workers of the world want to win, all they have to do is recognize their own solidarity. They have nothing to do but fold their arms and the world will stop. The workers are more powerful with their hands in their pockets than all the property of the capitalists”

Joseph Ettor, I.W.W. organizer

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"I came to America because I heard the streets were paved with gold. When I got here, I found out three things: first, the streets weren't paved with gold; second, they weren't paved at all; and third, I was expected to pave them."

Italian immigrant to Ellis Island

### **Class 5: Age of Restriction & flight from fascism (1917~1946)**

“The alien who comes here from Europe is not the raw material that Americans suppose him to be. He is not a blank sheet to be written on as you see fit. He has not sprung out of nowhere. Quiet the contrary. He brings with him a deep-rooted tradition, a system of culture and tastes and habits—a point of view which is as ancient as his national experience and which has been engendered in him by his race and his environment. And it is this thing—this entire Old World soul of his—that comes into conflict with America as soon as he has landed.”

*An American in the making: The life story of an immigrant* (1917),  
Marcus Eli Ravage, immigrant from Romania

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“Today, instead of a well-knit homogeneous citizenry, we have a body politic made up of all and every diverse element. Today, instead of a nation descended from generations of freemen bred to a knowledge of the principles and practice of self-government, of liberty under law, we have a heterogeneous population no small proportion of which is spring from races that, through the centuries, have known no liberty at all. . . . In other words, our capacity to maintain our cherished institutions stands diluted by a stream of alien blood, with all its inherited misconceptions respecting the relations of the governing power to the governed. . . . It is no wonder, therefore, that the myth of the melting pot has been discredited. . . . The United States is our land. . . . We intend to maintain it so. The day of unalloyed welcome to all peoples, the day of indiscriminate acceptance of all races, has definitely ended.”

Congressman Albert Jackson (Rep, Wash),  
author of 1924 Immigration [Quota] Act

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“When more and more people are thrown out of work, unemployment results”

President Calvin Coolidge

### **Class 6: refugees and economic immigrants (1946~now)**

No quotations about the situation today. The din of shouting on all sides of the debate overwhelms any attempt to select sane quotations.