

European Immigrants



<http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed311/kafai/Team%204/USAEireland2.jpg>

European Immigrants

In one sense, everyone living in North and South America is descended from immigrants. First the Spanish, then the French, Dutch, English, and Portuguese sent explorers, soldiers, missionaries, merchants, and colonists to the New World. The movement of Europeans to America is one of the largest human migrations in history.

Abraham Lincoln was born in 1809. As a young adult and politician he was well acquainted with immigrant families. Like his family, many immigrants were moving west in search of land and economic opportunity.

One of the largest influxes of Europeans occurred from 1840 to 1860. Over 3 million people, mostly from Ireland and Germany, came to America. Many of these immigrants were victims of the potato famine. Many of the Irish and Germans moved into older eastern cities; some moved to newer western cities (such as Cincinnati and St. Louis). Men, women and children worked in the burgeoning factories. This displaced previously arrived

Americans and contributed to the rapid growth of squalid living conditions in the nation's urban areas. Cities became overcrowded; crime, pollution, and disease spread quickly.

This increase in foreigners also ignited strong anti-immigrant sentiments among some elements of the American-born population. These "nativists," eventually organized the Know-Nothing Party, a discriminatory organization that disliked Irish, Germans, Africans, Catholics, Jews, Indians, and anybody else that was not white, protestant Christian, and of English descent.

Abraham Lincoln abhorred (disliked) the members of the Know-Nothing party. He could not understand how people, especially northerners who claimed to dislike slavery, could participate in the denigration of other white people. As president, Lincoln would encourage immigration as the country's economy needed workers in the factories, on the farms, and in the mines.