Groups from Eastern Europe and Southern Europe

Group E Members:
Lisa McCullah
Lynn Major
Jessica McLaughlin
David Deschamps

Narrative Overview

Peoples from Eastern and Southern Europe immigrated to the United States for a variety of reasons. The largest influx of people from this part of Europe occurred between the years 1900 and 1920. These groups immigrated to both industrial and agricultural settings. Political, economic and environmental factors, including World and other regional wars, agricultural depression and natural disasters, all contributed to emigration from this area. In the early 1920’s a restriction in United States immigration law, including the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Immigration Act of 1924, caused a decline in immigration from Italy, Greece, Poland and other Slavic territories. As Paul Spickard noted, not all immigrant groups came to the United States to stay. In 1919 the largest groups returning to their home land were from Southern and Eastern Europe.

Upon arrival in America these early immigrant groups found it difficult to assimilate into American society. Factors affecting their assimilation included religious differences, language barriers and cultural prejudice. These groups were often perceived as peasants who were unskilled laborers or small time merchants. Later generations assimilated into what Spickard calls “normative white culture” by breaking the language barrier and improving social and professional status through education. An exception would be recent immigrants from the former Yugoslavia who experience religious stereotyping and language barriers.

Most of the immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe were classified as hardworking unskilled laborers. They often took low paying industrial jobs such as in textiles mills, steel and glass mills, mining, and domestic help among other service jobs. More successful immigrants would start businesses based on the sale of traditional products. Some immigrants maintained an agricultural lifestyle such as Poles and Lithuanians who eventually became owners of their own farms. However the Italian and Greek groups suffered at the hands Pedrones, immigrant bosses who often exploited their fellow countrymen. Pedrones used a labor contract to bind the workers for years.

Immigrants fell into two groups: young single men who came for economic opportunity or entire families who came for the same reason. Most single men married within their ethnic groups from Eastern and Southern Europe. The experiences of first generation children were different from children born in this country due to the enactment of child labor laws. First generation children worked to contribute to the family’s welfare and to send money to the homeland from which they came. According to editor Shenton (see bibliography) in 1907 a Greek consul was indicted in Lowell, Massachusetts for importing boys from age 12 to 14 from Greece to work in the big cotton mills. Today this practice continues with the illegal sex trade from Eastern Europe. It is important to note that the second generation born to immigrants in the United States had often assimilated into “normative whiteness” and identified themselves as Americans.
Timeline
Immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe

• **1850-1900** - Steady immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe begins
• **1907-1908** - Mt. Vesuvius erupts and Mt. Etna earthquake (Italy)
• **1911** - Aegean Islands in liberated after Turkish occupation (Greece)
• **1911** - Dillingham Commission report warning against E. and So. Europeans
• **1914-1918** - World War I
• **1900-1920** - Largest wave of immigration from E. and So. Europe
• **1921-1924** - Emergency Quota Act/Immigration Act
• **1929** - United States Depression
• **1930’s-1945** - Invasion of Poland in Europe and World War II
• **1992-2001** - (Former Yugoslavia) Ethnic cleansing by Slobodan Milosevic in the Balkans

Key and Questions Issues

1. What were the employment opportunities for Eastern and Southern Europeans who immigrated to America?

2. How were these groups perceived by those in the United States?

3. How were the experiences of initial immigrants and second generation of immigrant different?

4. What caused immigration booms from Eastern and Southern Europe?

5. What is the modern experience for descendents of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe? How does “normative whiteness” play a role in their experience?

6. What is the experience for recent immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe today?

Ideas for Learning Activities

1. Students can write a compare and contrast essay using the first and second generation photos in the primary sources.

2. Students can read short story about an immigration experience of a Polish mill girl in the book, *America’s Immigrants Adventures in Eyewitness History* by Rhonda Hoff. After reading the short story students can answer the following questions:
   - How does her experience of life differ from yours?
   - Can you connect any of your own life experiences to her experiences?

After the students answer these questions the teacher can open up a classroom discussion.

3. Students visit website [http://history.utah.gov/experience_history/glimpses/tribes.html](http://history.utah.gov/experience_history/glimpses/tribes.html) and answer the following questions:
   - How could belonging to/living as a group be helpful for immigrants?
   - Describe a time when belonging to a group was a negative experience. Cite your sources.
4. Using the pictures, Figures 1, 2, and 3, students can write an essay describing the immigrant experience at the beginning of the 20th century.

5. Using the pictures, Figures 2 and 3, students can take on the role of one of the children in the photos and write a series of journal entries describing the feelings they might have while on the ship and being processed through Ellis Island. The following questions can be used as a guide.
   - What problems might be encountered on the ship?
   - How might the experiences of the man who is overlooking the deck where the immigrants are located be different from the experiences of the immigrants?
   - What if you or one of your parents had a condition that required being sent back to the country from which you came? Would you all go back? What factors might influence the decision?

6. Students go to Library of Congress American Memory website and input “Greek Immigrants” in the search box. Click on “All Whitesville Was Greek” and listen to the audio of the granddaughter of a Greek immigrant describing his experience.
   - What were you surprised to learn from this audio?
   - How was the experience the same or different from your family’s experience?

7. Students can go to Scholastic.com for the Immigration: Stories of Yesterday and Today web activity. They should explore the 3 views of immigrants from Ellis as well as Angel Islands. The students can investigate immigration through charts and graphs on the website.

8. Upper Elementary/Middle School students can participate in literature circles with immigration themed novels to compare and contrast the experiences of different immigrant groups. Examples of novels for literature circles might be Nory Ryan’s Song or Maggie’s Door and the Dear America/My America series.

Annotated Primary Sources


This book is a compilation of primary sources about the immigrant experience. There are several letters and stories from most immigrant groups who came to America in the late 1800's and early to mid 1900's. The story by Louis Adamic is short story he wrote about his time in America. He became a writer in his adult life which allowed him to get his story out to the masses. Adamic's story is one that follows the Ellis Island paradigm as mentioned in Spickard. It is a classic tale of landing in the land of opportunity.

http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/themes-dilingham.htm

This document can be used as a primary source in examining why there was a decline in the immigration movement from eastern and southern Europe. Teachers can uses this in the classroom as an example of U.S. policies and positions toward immigrants in the 1920’s. Students can reference this document when conducting research on U.S. immigration policies and the decline of immigration to the U.S. They may also want to reference the Emergency Quota Act of 1921.
IMMIGRATION ACT OF 1921

AN ACT
To limit the immigration of aliens into the United States.
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That as used in this Act—
The term "United States" means the United States, and any waters, territory, or other place subject to the jurisdiction thereof except the Canal Zone and the Philippine Islands; but if any alien leaves the Canal Zone or any insular possession of the United States and attempts to enter any other place under the jurisdiction of the United States nothing contained in this Act shall be construed as permitting him to enter under any other conditions than those applicable to all aliens.
The word "alien" includes any person not a native-born or naturalized citizen of the United States, but this definition shall not be held to include Indians of the United States not taxed nor citizens of the islands under the jurisdiction of the United States.
The term "Immigration Act" means the Act of February 5, 1917, entitled "An Act to regulate the immigration of aliens to, and the residence of aliens in, the United States"; and the term "immigration laws" includes such Act and all laws, conventions, and treaties of the United States relating to the immigration, exclusion, or expulsion of aliens.

Sec. 2. (a) That the number of aliens of any nationality who may be admitted under the immigration laws to the United States in any fiscal year shall be limited to 3 per centum of the number of foreign-born persons of such nationality resident in the United States as determined by the United States census of 1910. This provision shall not apply to the following, and they shall not be counted in reckoning any of the percentage limits provided in this Act: (1) Government officials, their families, attendants, servants, and employees; (2) aliens in continuous transit through the United States; (3) aliens lawfully admitted to the United States who later go in transit from one part of the United States to another through foreign contiguous territory; (4) aliens visiting the United States as tourists or temporarily for business or pleasure; (5) aliens from countries immigration from which is regulated in accordance with treaties or agreements relating solely to immigration; (6) aliens from the so-called Asiatic barred zone, as described in section 3 of the Immigration Act; (7) aliens who have resided continuously for at least one year immediately preceding the time of their admission of the United States in the Dominion of Canada, Newfoundland, the Republic of Cuba, the Republic of Mexico, countries of Central of South America, or adjacent islands; or (8) aliens under the age of eighteen who are children of citizens of the United States.
(b) For the purposes of this Act nationality shall be determined by country of birth, treating as separate countries the colonies or dependencies for which separate enumeration was made in the United States census of 1910.
(c) The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Secretary of Labor, jointly, shall, as soon as feasible after the enactment of this Act, prepare a statement showing the number of persons of the various nationalities resident in the United States as determined by the United States census of 1910, which statement shall be the population basis for the purposes of this Act. In case of changes in political boundaries in foreign countries occurring subsequent to 1910 and resulting (1) in the creation of new countries, the Governments of which are recognized by the United States, or (2) in the transfer of territory from one country to another, such transfer being recognized by the United States, such officials, jointly, shall estimate the number of persons resident in the United States in 1910 who were born within the area included in such new countries or in such territory so transferred, and revise the population basis as to each country involved in such change of political boundary. For the purpose of such revision and for the
purposes of this Act generally aliens born in the area included in any such new country shall be considered as having been born in such country, and aliens born in any territory so transferred shall be considered as having been born in the country to which such territory was transferred.

(d) When the maximum number of aliens of any nationality who may be admitted in any fiscal year under this Act shall have been admitted all other aliens of such nationality, except as otherwise provided in this Act, who may apply for admission during the same fiscal year shall be excluded: Provided, That the number of aliens of any nationality who may be admitted in any month shall not exceed 20 per centum of the total number of aliens of such nationality who are admissible in that fiscal year: Provided further, That aliens returning from a temporary visit abroad, aliens who are professional actors, artists, lecturers, singers, nurses, ministers of any religious denomination, professors for colleges or seminaries, aliens belonging to any recognized learned profession, or aliens employed as domestic servants, may, if otherwise admissible, be admitted notwithstanding the maximum number of aliens of the same nationality admissible in the same month or fiscal year, as the case may be, shall have entered the United States; but aliens of the classes included in this proviso who enter the United States before such maximum number shall have entered shall (unless excluded by subdivision (a) from being counted) be counted in reckoning the percentage limits provided in this Act: Provided further, That in the enforcement of this Act preference shall be given so far as possible to the wives, parents, brothers, sisters, children under eighteen years of age, and fiancées, (1) of citizens of the United States, (2) of aliens now in the United States who have applied for citizenship in the manner provided by law, or (3) of persons eligible to United States citizenship who served in the military or naval forces of the United States at any time between April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1918, both dates inclusive, and have been separated from such forces under honorable conditions.

Sec. 3. That the Commissioner General of Immigration, with the approval of the Secretary of Labor, shall, as soon as feasible after the enactment of this Act, and from time to time thereafter, prescribe rules and regulations necessary to carry the provisions of this Act into effect. He shall, as soon as feasible after the enactment of this Act, publish a statement showing the number of aliens of the various nationalities who may be admitted to the United States between the date this Act becomes effective and the end of the current fiscal year, and on June 30 thereafter he shall publish a statement showing the number of aliens of the various nationalities who may be admitted during the ensuing fiscal year. He shall also publish monthly statements during the time this Act remains in force showing the number of aliens of each nationality already admitted during the then current fiscal year and the number who may be admitted under the provisions of this Act during the remainder of such year, but when 75 per centum of the maximum number of any nationality admissible during the fiscal year shall have been admitted such statements shall be issued weekly thereafter. All statements shall be made available for general publication and shall be mailed to all transportation companies bringing aliens to the United States who shall request the same and shall file with the Department of Labor the address to which such statements shall be sent. The Secretary of Labor shall also submit such statements to the Secretary of State, who shall transmit the information contained therein to the proper diplomatic and consular officials of the United States, which officials shall make the same available to persons intending to emigrate to the United States and to others who may apply.

Sec. 4. That the provisions of this Act are in addition to and not in substitution for the provisions of the immigration laws.

Sec. 5. That this Act shall take effect and be enforced 15 days after its enactment (except sections 1 and 3 and subdivisions (b) and (c) of section 2, which shall take effect immediately upon the enactment of this Act), and shall continue in force until June 30, 1922, and the number of aliens of any nationality who may be admitted during the remaining period of the current fiscal year, from the date when this Act becomes effective to June 30, shall be limited in proportion to the number admissible during the fiscal year 1922.

Approved, May 19, 1921.
These two pictures represent first and second generation immigrants from Poland. In the first picture one can see a woman and her three children who have just emigrated from Poland to the United States. They would later settle in Illinois. The second picture shows the first and second generation born to that family, which is still residing in Illinois. It is a wonderful example of assimilation and the visual differences between the first and second generations. This can be used in the classroom, as a visual sample for students to look at.
First, type in “Greek immigrants” in the search box, then select “All Whitesville Was Greek” audio.

This is an oral history interview of a granddaughter of a Greek immigrant who arrived in New York in 1906 and was sent to West Virginia for work in coal mine. It is a humorous account of how the grandfather only lasted 5 weeks in the mine and decided he would rather be a butcher. Yet it illustrates the communication difficulties experienced by new immigrants as well as the sometimes arbitrary assignment of work for new immigrants without family. It includes a description of life on the boat during passage from Greece as well as before passage.


This is a firsthand account of a twelve year old Greek immigrant to Massachusetts in 1920. The story gives background for why the family left as well as continues the story of their life over fifty years in the U.S.

Photographs: Figures 1, 2 and 3 below.

Figure 1: This photograph shows an Italian family arriving at Ellis Island, New York, at the beginning of the twentieth century. The family members appear well dressed and ready to embark on a new life in America. As figure 3 demonstrates the family was required to undergo a medical check before being allowed to come into the United States. Is the package the father has on his shoulder all their worldly possessions? What would be an appropriate description of the mother’s facial expression? What concerns might the adults have about the screening process that the entire family had to undergo at Ellis Island before being admitted into the United States? Based on the photograph do the children appear concerned or apprehensive of what the future might hold?
Source: http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/italian-immigrants.htm

Figure 2: This photograph shows what daily life on board ship would have been like for immigrants making the sea voyage from Europe to America in the early part of the twentieth century. Immigrants, for the most part, booked passage in the steerage section of the ship. It was the cheapest way to travel but there were hardships involved. Privacy was virtually nonexistent in the cramped quarters far down in the ship. Does there appear to be many options available to the immigrants to engage in recreational activities? What possible activities might the children engage in such a confined space? Is the man standing above the immigrants different from the people on the deck below? In what ways might his experience sailing on the ship be different from the immigrants shown in the photograph?
Source: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?pp/PPALL:@field(NUMBER+@1(cph+3b06393))

Figure 3: This photograph shows United States inspectors examining eyes of immigrants entering Ellis Island, New York. All immigrants were medically screened for specific diseases and some were quarantined if they had these diseases. Other immigrants with chronic diseases were returned to the country from which they came. What concerns might the immigrants in line have about their impending inspection? Why might the woman in the left of the photograph appear so concerned? If the child on her lap did not pass the inspection what might happen to him? What decisions would the woman have to make if this were the case? How does the bundle at the feet of the women on the left side of the photograph compare with the bundle on the back of the man in Figure 1?
Source: http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?pp/PPALL:@field(NUMBER+@1(cph+a10036))
Annotated Bibliography


This book is a study of the Polish American culture, and how it has assimilated or lost much of its heritage over time. The author analyses the history of Polish Americans and why they would chose to immigrate to the United States. It follows their history from rural Poland to the second generations born in the United States. It also examines why some chose to immigrate back to Poland, as well as those that chose to stay. This book could be used as both a teacher reference and a student reference for research purposes.


This book captures the high points of Italian culture and heritage from the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492 to the present. The book has biographies of famous Italian-Americans and explores the contributions these people have made to America and its culture. Examples include: Amerigo Vespucci, Giovanni Caboto, Marconi, Saco and Vanzetti, and Al Capone. The authors illustrate a number of the famous (or infamous) Italians with inserted first hand documents into many entries. There is a copy of a birth certificate and passport of an
Italian immigrant, a copy of an alien registration card issued to an immigrant, and a copy of Al Capone’s jury conviction. It is a history through removable documents. The primary “removable” documents make this an excellent resource for middle-high school students to explore. The fact that these documents are removable makes them adaptable for group use in a classroom setting.


The author of this book provides an in depth study of Polish American history. It starts with the history of Poland and a study of its people. Then it looks at how their history affects integration into the United States. The book provides information on every aspect of the Polish Americans life, from social conditions, education, to working conditions and religious realignments. This book could be used as both a teacher reference and a student reference for research purposes.


The Authors of this book have examined many of the ethnic minorities that have immigrated to the United States starting in the 1850-1980. It is a study of various groups’ social structures as well as their ethnic-cultural characteristics. They address the various ways that the different ethnic groups have been accepted and adapted to mainstream Americanization. For the purposes of a study on Polish immigrants to the United States, this book devotes a chapter to the changes and development of the Polish American community within the United States in the 1850-1920. This book could be used as both a teacher reference and a student reference for research purposes.

Leo, Mabel R., *The Italian Dream*, MIBS Publishing, Phoenix, AZ.

This book consists of individual firsthand accounts of first and second generation Italian immigrants growing up in the United States. Topics include: Life in Chicago, Hard work and Persistence, Experiencing Discrimination, Overcoming Obstacles, Escaping to America, Being a Fighter and Winner. The firsthand accounts capture the struggles and success of various Italian Americans in their attempt to assimilate and become a part of the American culture while maintaining aspects of the Italian culture that they value. This is an excellent resource to to use with senior high school students. The firsthand accounts provides an excellent opportunity for students to explore “point of view” and to examine in detail the values held by the people highlighted in this work.


This book examines the value of the Polish immigrants and how they are connected to the history of the United States. It goes into depth the connection between Catholicism and nationalism within the Polish American communities. It also goes into the various movements and events with in the United States history, such as the Progressive Era, World War II and the Cold War and its effects on Polish Americans. This book could be used as both a teacher reference and a student reference for research purposes.

This book is a compilation of information about the migration of peoples from around the world. It is separated into many sections which makes it easy to identify information that you are looking for, or information that correlates to your topic. This text would be most useful for upper level high school and graduate students, or teachers. Although this book does not focus exclusively on information about immigration to the United States, it gives a great overview of the migration patterns of different peoples throughout the world and the reasons behind their decisions to leave their homelands.


This book is a wonderful resource for the classroom. It may be more useful for middle school and lower high school students, as well as for teachers. Coming from a series of books for students about the growing number of cultures and blending in North America, this book would certainly give valuable information about cultural and ethnic groups. Not all students in schools are exposed to people from different cultures and ethnicities. This would be a very valuable resource in a school library to help students understand the world and people both around, and far away from themselves.

**Annotated Websites**

Digital History:
http://www.digitalhistory.uh/historyonline

This website provides educators with primary source material in the form of pictures, narratives, recorded voices and visual images. This site is especially suited for teachers to use and would not be a particular productive site for students to access. Classroom handouts, learning modules and lesson plans are available using either a specific historical period in American history or a theme such as immigration.

Library of Congress:
http://www.memory.loc.gov/learn/

The LOC website is an excellent site for teachers. This site provides teachers with classroom materials, professional development and guidance in using primary sources. The site guides teachers through the use of primary sources including: why use them, how to site primary sources, copyright laws, how to find primary sources and teacher guides. Teachers can search for primary source sets, themed resources and teachers can browse by topic.

http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/immigration/themes-dilingham.htm

This website has a collection of primary and secondary sources on immigration to the U.S. It contains several immigration documents and pictures. It also contains a timeline of U.S. policies toward immigration and when the largest number of different immigrant groups came to the United States. Students and teachers can view the Dillingham Commissions (U.S. Immigration Commissions) formal reports on groups immigrating from Eastern and Southern Europe. The site contains additional links to related sites for research purposes.
This website contains a PowerPoint presentation that could be useful when addressing race and immigration restrictions in the contexts of U.S. history. The presentation uses a mixture of statistics, photographs and political cartoons to promote individual thinking and dynamic discussion. Teachers can use this also as a tool for teaching the Immigration Act of 1924 in the context of racial divisions.

This web site is an interactive site providing some insight into the experience of immigrants entering Ellis Island from Russia, Italy or Austria/Hungary in the early 1900’s. Students choose a persona and pack three items. A guide (an actress posing as a Turkish immigrant) describes the immigrants’ experience as she takes viewers to a tenement home etc. A 360 degree camera shows period furnishings etc.

Wonderful website that shows examples of groups in our country’s history as well as the feelings associated with belonging to a group. The article also points out the danger that belonging can bring when it is used to exclude others. This exclusion has led to discrimination and violence in our past. There is also an interview with a woman who works for unity among many groups living in Utah.

Anyone researching current immigration patterns and issues would enjoy the New York Times interactive website which allows you to click on a country and find out the occupations in the United States for immigrants from any country in the world. This website could be used by students and teachers, but should be discussed in the context of why these jobs are available for certain immigrant groups and not others, or why immigrants follow in the occupational footsteps of others before them. It was very fascinating, but also unsettling when you stumble upon two countries who are geographically close, but economically distinct in the United States.

This website was selected because it focused on another important section of the immigrant population in America which is the refugee population. The first page of this website contains many links to specific information about the resettlement of refugees in America. This would be a good web resource for high school and graduate students, or teachers. The information on the website may contain too many difficult words for elementary or lower middle school students to understand. Gaining an understanding of the refugee experience may help to educate people and allow them to think more about the traumatic experience of leaving your homeland unwillingly.