

Unit 6: A Nation in Transition

DBQ 12: The Nativist Response to Immigration

Historical Context:

The Statue of Liberty stands on a small island in New York harbor. This statue is a symbol of America's historic role as a haven for immigrants from all over the world, "yearning to breathe free." In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the numbers of immigrants seeking a new life in the United States increased greatly. Between 1885 and 1915, almost 20 million immigrants looked up at the Statue as they arrived in America.

In earlier times, immigrants had generally been welcomed. But by the late 1900's, with such huge numbers arriving, many Americans began to grow anxious. Many people began to wonder if the presence of so many foreigners might somehow weaken our society. They worried that it would be impossible to assimilate (absorb) so many immigrants into American society. Few of the new immigrants could speak English. The fact that most of the immigrants were Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, or Jewish at a time when the vast majority of Americans were Protestant, was troubling for many.

People began to speak out against our liberal immigration policies, arguing that we needed laws that would limit immigration. Many people and groups discriminated against immigrants in various ways. And some groups began to openly express their hatred and fear of immigrants. The people who opposed immigration were called "nativists," and their anti-immigrant beliefs were referred to as "nativism."

◆ **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents (1–7). As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:

1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: *Why did American nativist groups oppose free, unrestricted immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?*

◆ **Part A:** The following documents are examples of the various nativist statements and arguments for more restrictive immigration laws. Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

(continued)



DBQ 12: The Nativist Response to Immigration *(continued)*

Document 1

This excerpt is from a resolution by the American Federation of Labor to Congress, "Some Reasons For Chinese Exclusion, Meat vs. Rice: American Manhood Against Asiatic Coolieism," (1902).

The Chinese, if permitted freely to enter this country, would create race antagonisms which would ultimately result in great public disturbance. The Caucasians will not tolerate the Mongolian. . . . But this is not alone a race, labor, and political question. It is one which involves our civilization. . . .

What nativist arguments are stated in this document? _____

Consider the source of the statement. What unstated concern do you suspect is the primary reason why this group opposed Chinese immigration? _____

Document 2

This excerpt is from *Our Country*, by Rev. Josiah Strong (1885).

. . . immigration not only furnishes the greater portion of our criminals, it is also seriously affecting the morals of the native population. It is disease and not health which is contagious. Most foreigners bring with them continental ideas of the Sabbath, and the result is sadly manifest in all our cities, where it is being transformed from a holy day into a holiday. But by far the most effective instrumentality for debauching [corrupting] popular morals is the liquor traffic, and this is chiefly carried on by foreigners. . . ."

What "diseases" did Strong blame on immigrants? _____

(continued)



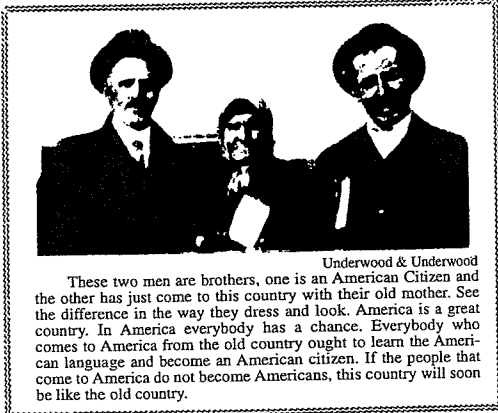
DBQ 12: The Nativist Response to Immigration *(continued)*

Document 3

Many towns, cities, and states sponsored night schools where recent immigrants could learn American customs and how to speak English.

GRANITE CITY AMERICANIZATION SCHOOLS

Monday
and
Thursday
Evenings
7:30 p. m.



Underwood & Underwood
These two men are brothers, one is an American Citizen and the other has just come to this country with their old mother. See the difference in the way they dress and look. America is a great country. In America everybody has a chance. Everybody who comes to America from the old country ought to learn the American language and become an American citizen. If the people that come to America do not become Americans, this country will soon be like the old country.

Beginning
Monday,
September
the 27th,
1920

SCHOOLS:

**HIGH SCHOOL, 20TH AND D STREETS
LINCOLN PLACE, 917 PACIFIC AVENUE**

**LIBERTY SCHOOL, 20TH AND O STREETS
MADISON SCHOOL, 1322 MADISON AVENUE**

Keep America Great.

**Become an American
Citizen**

Learn The Language.

Press-Record Publishing Co. 1834 D St. Granite City, Ill

According to this advertisement, why should immigrants learn the "American language"?

(continued)



Document-Based Assessment
Activities for U.S. History Classes

DBQ 12: The Nativist Response to Immigration *(continued)*

Document 4

Here is an excerpt from a popular book, *The Passing of the Great Race*, by Madison Grant, published in 1916 by Charles Scribner's Sons.

These new immigrants were no longer exclusively members of the Nordic race as were the earlier ones who came . . . the new immigrants [contain] a large . . . number of the weak, the broken and the mentally crippled of all races drawn from the lowest [levels] of the Mediterranean basin and the Balkans, together with hordes of the wretched, submerged populations of the Polish Ghettos. Our jails, insane asylums and almshouses are filled with this human flotsam [wreckage] and the whole tone of American life, social, moral, and political has been lowered and vulgarized by them.

According to Grant, how were the new immigrants (those who came to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) different from earlier immigrant groups?

How did Grant see these newer immigrant groups endangering America? _____

Document 5

During the 1880's and 1890's, many Americans became alarmed over the number of strikes and riots involving labor unions and the many immigrant workers who were union members. This short excerpt comes from "The Age of Steel," a business magazine article that was published soon after the Haymarket Square riot of 1886.

. . . if the master race of this continent is subordinated to or overrun with the communistic and revolutionary races, it will be in grave danger of social disaster.

According to the author of this article, what was the greatest danger of unrestricted immigration to the United States? _____

(continued)



DBQ 12: The Nativist Response to Immigration *(continued)***Document 6**

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts made this statement in 1891. The occasion was a debate in the U.S. Senate over a proposed Literacy Act that would restrict future American immigration to those who could read and write.

. . . the qualities of the American people . . . are moral far more than intellectual, and it is on the moral qualities of the English-speaking race that our history, our victories, and all our future rest. There is only one way in which you can lower those qualities or weaken those characteristics, and that is by breeding them out. If a lower race mixes with a higher in sufficient numbers, history teaches us that the lower race will prevail. The lower race will absorb the higher. . . .

[We] are exposed to but a single danger, and that is by changing the quality of our race and citizenship through the wholesale infusion of races whose traditions and inheritances, whose thoughts and whose beliefs are wholly alien to ours. . . . There lies the peril at the portals [gates] of our land; there is pressing in the tide of unrestricted immigration. The time has certainly come, if not to stop, at least to check, to sift, and to restrict those immigrants.

What, according to Senator Lodge, was the danger of unrestricted immigration?

Document 7

E. A. Ross was a prominent sociologist early in the twentieth century. This is an excerpt from a magazine article Ross wrote in 1914. (From "Immigrants in Politics," *Century Magazine*, 1914.)

In every American city with a large, foreign vote have appeared the boss, the machine, and the Tammany way [Tammany Hall was the corrupt city government of New York City]. Once the machine gets a grip on the situation, it broadens and intrenches its power by intimidation at the polls, ballot frauds, vote purchases, saloon influence, and the support of the vicious and criminal. But its tap-root is the simple-minded foreigner . . .

According to Ross, what was the influence of immigrants on American politics and government?

◆ Part B—Essay

Why did American nativist groups oppose free, unrestricted immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries?

