



SHGAPE Bibliographical Essays: Immigration in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

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Immigration reached its historical peak in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era (GAPE), as almost twelve million immigrants entered the U.S. between 1890 and 1910. Most historians of immigration refer to the years including the GAPE as the years of "the new immigration," distinguishing this migration of southern and eastern Europeans (and, to much lesser extent, Mexicans and Asians) from the "old immigration" of northern and western Europeans and Chinese of the years 1850-1880. Laws severely restricting immigration cut off this new immigration between 1917 and 1924. Even today's immigration--which developed after revision of U.S. policy in 1965--has not surpassed the relative, absolute, or demographic impact of the new immigration of the GAPE. Thus, any student of the GAPE, and any teacher of GAPE surveys or specialized topics, needs to keep the theme of immigration within her purview.

Relatively few introductory studies of the new immigrants focus exclusively on the Gilded and Progressive Era. One student-friendly survey for the GAPE is Alan Kraut, *The Huddled Masses*. More generally, John Bodnar, *The Transplanted* focuses on immigrants to urban America 1840-1820 while Donna Gabaccia's *From The Other Side* interprets the lives of immigrant women by collapsing old and new immigrations together and comparing them to today's immigrant women. Because the new immigration involved large numbers of sojourners, Mark Wyman's *Round-trip to America* is a necessary corrective to U.S.-centered views that assume all new arrivals are immigrants. The particular problems faced by Asians under exclusionary laws during this period are best explored in Sucheng Chan's *Entry Denied*. These five books might be considered the core library for GAPE specialists interested in expanding their knowledge of the new immigrants, and viewing their lives in broader historical context.

The new immigrants' initial contacts with American life, and the country's responses to them, make immigration history central to our understanding of a number of main themes of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. On education, for example, see Perlmann's *Ethnic Differences*; on labor, Dirk Hoerder's edited collection, *"Struggle a Hard Battle"*. The burgeoning literature on the social settlement movement, and to a lesser extent on social welfare, portray gendered relations between native-born women reformers and working-class, often immigrant women clients (see, for example, Crocker's *Social Work and Social Order* and Lissak's *Pluralism & Progressives*.) Studies of

GAPE radicalism, often focused on Yiddish-speaking activists (e.g. Sorin's *Prophetic Minority*) also shed light on immigrant life, as do most interpretations of the prohibition and Americanization movements of this period. John Higham's *Strangers in the Land* remains the best introduction to nativist political movements aimed to curtail the new immigration of these years.

For those interested in integrating materials on the new immigrants into GAPE surveys, a good starting place is a syllabus exchange sponsored by the Newberry Library and the Immigration History Society, *Teaching the History of Immigration and Ethnicity*, compiled by Donna Gabaccia and James Grossman. The publication, which is available from the Newberry Library, demonstrates how historians of immigration approach GAPE as well as providing suggestions for readings, film, and student assignments focused on immigrant life during and after this time period.

Those GAPE specialists who wish to move beyond basic competence, will want to explore the histories of particular immigrant groups and to get a sense of the diverging methodologies characteristic of immigration history for this period. The largest groups of immigrants, 1899-1924, include Italians (3,8 million), Eastern European Jews (1,8 million), Germans (1,3 million) and Poles (1,5 million). During the same period more than 500,000 Scandinavians, British, Irish, Anglo-Canadian, Slovak, Mexican, Croatian/Slovenian and Hungarian migrations fell just under this volume. Huge literatures exist on the three largest groups, and the Mexican migrations of this period are also increasingly studied. For introductions to single groups, *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* remains the best starting place. More recent literature is accessible through Roger Daniels' *Coming to America*.

The rather rich literature on particular immigrant groups in particular locations reflects the predominance of the community case study in social history of the 1970s and 1980s. Students of GAPE immigration should know, however, that immigration history's approach to the study of the new, and other, immigrations to the U.S. are evolving in new directions. Generally, historians of immigration find in the GAPE ideal opportunities to focus on human mobility, on ethnic group formation, and on tensions between national unity and cultural diversity in American history. Increasingly, however, students of this era are adopting comparative, global and international approaches. A useful survey that puts U.S. immigration history for this period in comparative perspective is Walter Nugent, *Crossings*. Readers willing can further explore methodological issues, should consult Hoerder (1985); Vecoli (1991) and Yans-McLaughlin (1990). While not limited to studies of GAPE, all three volumes highlight possibilities for comparative and global approaches that incorporate U.S. immigration of this period.

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