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Immigration in New York and Its Impact on Society

New York is known to be a city of career opportunities, new living, and its historical creations. Many individuals come to New York for a better living. Some of those individuals are known to be immigrants. Immigrants have changed society in various ways. From the development of diversity to conflict with racism, the population of immigrants is increasing and continues to increase within the years.

Immigration dates as far back as the beginning of America; it would be nearly impossible to pinpoint its origin. However, it experienced a major boost during the 19th century due to the establishment and prosperity of the colonies. According to a book called, *Beyond the Gateway,*  Elizbeta M. Godziack and Susan F. Martin, “ From the colonial period to the first decades of the 20th century, European immigrants arriving in the United States followed well-establishment settlement patterns. Most immigrants settled in major port cities such as New York, Boston, and Chicago…” (3). This only increased the rate at which people traveled to America. People relocated for several reasons: natural disasters, political unrest, job opportunities, etc. While some came over in hopes of finding jobs, some had their travel expenses paid for so that they could work. Immigrants generally took the jobs that no one else would; those with better options avoided jobs that required manual labor and unsafe working conditions (3)

New York City specifically experienced an increase in immigration. Even today, it is considered a cultural ‘melting pot’. According Hector R. Cordero Guzman’s, “Community-Based Organizations and Migration in New York City”, “New York has always been an important centre for migration” (890). Despite this, the general reaction to immigrants was not always pleasant. An article by Nancy Foner called, “Then and Now or Then to Now: Immigration to New York in Contemporary and Historical Perspective”, exclaims; immigrants depended on the support of their own kind to help with finding homes and job opportunities, and because they came to New York with little or no English they were comfortable to communicate in their native tongue. Because they were considered newcomers, it was difficult for them to establish a home in the city of New York. This was because many New Yorkers were prejudice of immigrants. Foner states, “ Cluster in ethnic groups and neighborhoods with their compatriots, partly owing to economic constraints and prejudice from established New Yorkers” (35).

The federal government took over the process of immigration in the late 19th century. A book by, Carol von Pressentin Wright, called, *Blue Guide New York,*  “Ellis Island was designated as the site of the main receiving station, and an immigrant station opened in 1892” (39). Wright, mentions the first immigrant to be admitted in the station was named Annie Moore. She and her two brothers were born in Cork, Ireland, and they arrived as steerage passengers on the SS Nevada (39). According to Foner, the immigrants that arrived to New York were primarily White, Blacks, Hispanic and Asians (43). In 1855, the station was burnt down and although no lives were lost, the records of many immigrants were destroyed. In 1898 the construction of a new station began in the same location and in the 1900 it reopened. According to Wright, “Federal inspectors processed the immigrants, detained those who would be unable to earn a living and weeding out paupers, criminals, prostitutes, the insane, and those suffering from contagious diseases or professing beliefs such as anarchy or polygamy” (39).

As the years went by, immigration became an issue. Under the command of William Williams, who was appointed Commissioner of Immigration, by President Theodore Roosevelt in, 1902 many immigrants were being abused and robbed. There was also an overcrowding of the immigrants who entered. Wright states, “In 1907, the peak year of immigration, 1,004,756 people entered the U.S through Ellis Island, approximately twice the number the station was designed to handle” (39). In 1915 during World War I, the transatlantic shipping was closed and due the National Origins Act, which began in 1924, “Immigrants were processed in their own countries and thereafter Ellis Island became under-used and increasingly expensive to maintain. According to Foner, this is primarily because of discrimination due to the Red Scare, which took place previous to the 1920’s. Other reasons for strict rules about immigration were occurrences such as the Great Depression and World War II. Pearl Harbor specifically caused a severe decrease in the amount of Jewish and Italian immigrants, due to perceived threats from the nation (43).

Guzman exclaims, During the 1960s, there were 57,555 immigrants entering New York per year and 112,598 entered by the early 1990s. Changes begin to occur in the late 1990s due to, “Significant changes in immigration and welfare laws in 1996, the number of legal immigrants in New York City decreased to around 89,000 per year but the volume of immigration has remained high (890). A lot of changes occurred after the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001; An article by Richard Boswell, “Racism and US immigration Law; Prospects for Reform after 9/11”, “Prior to the events of September 11, 2001, modern reform consisted of incremental legislative efforts designed to address problems that had garnered sufficient political traction within Congress and Executive Branch” (331). At this time it was even harder for immigrants to come to New York as there was an increase in National Security. President Bush and Congress stated all immigrants needed documented papers before entering New York (331).

Today New York is still known as one of the most migrating cities in the United States and according to Foner, “Today’s Asian, Latin, American, and Caribbean immigrant New Yorkers are, once again, changing the city’s ethno-racial landscape and the very way that race is constructed” (41). Immigrants are still finding it hard to find jobs due to no documentation and racism still remains. I myself come from a family who were once immigrants. Both my parents came from international countries (El Salvador and Colombia), and they too had a hard getting to New York. My mother was a maid and my dad was a mechanic. Both not speaking any English, they were still able to manage their way into getting to New York. It was incredible learning about how immigrants migrated to New York. Although New York was not the only City where immigrants migrated it was one of the cities known for its job opportunities and different way of living.

Overall the population of immigrants migrating in New York is increasing every year, and the diversity as well. As stated before New York has been and always will remain a major city where immigrants migrate and also the city of opportunities. Immigrants have impacted society in bringing diversity to the community and have allowed the people of America to recognize the hard work and dedication it is to get into this city. Although racism still remains there is a hope for a change to occur.

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