

Does History Repeat Itself? Comparing 19th Century and Contemporary American Attitudes Towards Immigrants

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Abstract

Immigration has been a topic of controversy in the United States, and has led to national discussions on tightening border control. The United States continues to be a place where immigrants seek a better life or refuge from their own country. Today, a large number of Hispanic immigrants seek to start a new life in the United States, much as Chinese and Irish immigrants did in the early 1900s. By studying the struggles immigrants faced during the 19th century and comparing them to obstacles faced by present day Hispanic immigrants, it is possible to see there are many parallels. Attitudes of US citizens today towards new immigrants are similar to those held in the 1800s and 1900s. Historically, many American citizens have not recognized immigrants as equals in the workplace, an attitude that seems to persist today. This study examines the historic immigration of the Irish and the Chinese during the nineteenth century, specifically focusing on their assimilation into early American society. The ways that these groups were treated can be compared to the treatment of Hispanic immigrants that are living and working in the United States today. Factors that will be examined include conditions that precipitated the migration of the immigrants from their homeland, and living and working conditions that the groups endured before, during, and after their immigration. The difference in languages and how it can influence one's perception of another person will also be reviewed. To supplement this analysis, a questionnaire will be completed by both Hispanic immigrants in the United States and non-Hispanic Americans. This will allow for a comparison of how the two groups view themselves and each other in modern day society, thus providing additional viewpoints for the study.

Keywords: Immigration, United States, Immigrants

1. Introduction

The United States, often referred to as a "melting pot", has been a place that has offered immigrants a new start and provided them hope for a brighter, better future long before it was even a country. Consider some of the first settlers in America, religious groups that came to seek religious freedom and refuge from persecution in their home country. The United States is a nation that was founded by people looking for freedom from oppression and opportunities for a new future. These same people do not always grant later immigrants these same graces. Events that encourage a desire for emigration from one's homeland, and the experiences that immigrants face in America have been similar across multiple ethnicities throughout the centuries. By examining the attitudes and the conditions faced by the Irish and Chinese immigrants that entered the United States in the nineteenth century, and comparing them to contemporary Hispanic immigrants, it is possible to see how the immigrant experience in America has changed during the last two centuries. American attitudes towards immigrants, as well as work and educational opportunities afforded to immigrants are continuing to improve as demonstrated by answers to an immigrant questionnaire. Changes in

legislation appear to have led to a decrease in discrimination against immigrants as a whole, while racial and ethnic prejudice against new groups of immigrants continues to haunt American society.

2. Methods

In order to sample some of the most recent views on immigration, an online survey was created for this research project. Often the terms ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Latino’ are used interchangeably in the United States to label groups of Spanish-speaking people. The term ‘Hispanic’ was used in the survey because it was open to any Spanish-speaking person who had worked in the United States, including people from Spain and Central and South America. Three separate groups were surveyed: non-Hispanic Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Hispanic immigrant workers (who completed a survey in Spanish). The surveys consisted of both open ended questions and multiple choice questions. The non-Hispanic American survey consisted of 32 questions and there were 41 questions for both the Hispanic-American and Hispanic immigrant workers. The questions covered topics such as family origins, education, employment, workplace treatment, views on Hispanic versus non-Hispanic groups, and stereotypes that are often associated with each group.

Most Americans cannot distinguish between the different ethnicities of Spanish-speaking peoples, and often group them together as “Mexican” or “Puerto Rican.” This is also commonly done with Asian groups being referred to only as “Chinese.” With this in mind, and because there are over 20 different Spanish-speaking countries, or U.S. territories, this paper will focus on three populations that have the most historic relationship with the United States: Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans. Utilizing both a literature study, and results from the online survey, a comparison of these three population groups will be made to the Irish and Chinese groups of the nineteenth century.

3. Why Leave

The Irish were one of the most populous groups that immigrated to the United States in the nineteenth century. The mass emigration was precipitated by a number of factors in Ireland, both political and environmental. Oliver Cromwell’s conquering of Ireland in the seventeenth century forced the majority of the Irish to become tenants on their own land, and pay rent to an English landlord. During this time, the Irish population increased and a need for land followed. Many of the land holdings were thus broken into smaller plots to accommodate the population surplus.¹ As the demand for land increased, so did the cost that the Irish tenant had to pay. In order to pay their rent, peasants “concentrated on rent-paying crops . . . grain and cattle were raised for the market, [and] the potato met the need for food.”² In hopes of finding a better life, many Irish paupers migrated to England, thus increasing English poor-rates. In order to try to counteract the migration, the Irish Poor Law of 1838 was passed. This Law forced the landowners to pay a high tax to support the workhouses that were erected for the Irish. Landowners soon encouraged their tenants to leave. Many were evicted, and either entered a workhouse or emigrated. Unfortunately for the Irish peasants, in 1846, after the Napoleonic wars, the Corn Laws were repealed. The Corn Laws placed tariffs on imported grains, so that Irish grains were cheaper to purchase. With the Corn Laws no longer in place, the price of grain fell, and the English landlords found that pasturage was more profitable, often resulting in the eviction of the peasants.^{3,1} One account states that “in late February and March 1847 nearly 3,000 were dying every week in Ireland’s workhouses.⁴ The repeal accompanied the beginning of the potato rot of 1845, which lasted five years. The peasants often died faster than they could be buried. The hungry, destitute Irish, unable to pay rent and no longer beneficial to their landlords, were evicted from their homes in droves. The number of evicted continued to increase “from 2,510 in 1847, [...and] the evictions of 1849, 1850, and 1851 alone involved some million persons.”⁵ About 2,500,000 Irish left Ireland, as they tried to escape the horrors of their homelands. Many travelled to America.⁶

The Chinese, like the Irish, faced many environmental problems that only worsened their already existing economic problems and encouraged immigration. The Henan province experienced a drought in 1847. In 1849, the Guangxi province experienced a famine, and the Yangtze River flooded several provinces.⁷ These natural catastrophes helped to bring about the Taiping Rebellion which lasted from about 1851 to 1866. Deaths from the Taiping Rebellion alone have been estimated at 20-30 million people.⁸ Around the same time as the Rebellion, a large famine hit China, killing between 9.5 to 13 million people in northern China.⁹ These problems were coupled in the mid-1800s, with a defeat in both the First and Second Opium Wars. The First Opium War forced China to open up more ports for trade. In 1848, “more than 10 million taels of silver [left China], which exacerbated the already grave economic dislocation and

copper-silver exchange rate.¹⁰ Perhaps the trade port that was most injured was the oldest - Canton. Unsurprisingly, many of the Chinese in California originated from the district of Canton, China.^{11,12}

Accounts of China were brought back to the United States with the return of American travelers. Living conditions of the peasants in China were said to be very primitive and those living in the cities were tightly crowded.¹³ Numerous accounts state that the Chinese cities were dirty, poor, and had horrible living conditions. One such description by a traveler states that “in the center of the two cities reputed to be the cleanest in China he had himself seen cholera corpses decomposing, dogs eating the bodies of babies, and snakes crawling about among the masses of filth of every kind.”¹⁴ In Shanghai, buckets filled with sewage were sometimes said to have accidentally spilled into the people’s drinking water, causing outbreaks.¹⁵ With such devastating losses in China, many left for the West Coast of the United States in hopes of a better life.

Unlike the Irish immigrants who were concentrated in the East Coast ports of Boston and New York, and the Chinese immigrants who were focused in California, the Hispanic immigrants of contemporary America are found throughout the country. Due to the current ease of traveling, and because there are so many different ethnicities that comprise the Spanish-speaking world, immigrants have dispersed throughout the United States. It can be argued that Spanish-speaking peoples compose the immigrant group most frequently discussed in contemporary United States.

In 1959, Fidel Castro established a dictatorship in Cuba. As a result, people started fleeing Cuba as refugees. Many entered the United States, as the southernmost part of Florida is only about 50 miles away from Cuba. By the year 2000, there were already about 900,000 Cubans admitted into the United States.¹⁶ Throughout the past fifty years, there have been three major groups that left Cuba. The first group to leave contained mostly the upper class, especially people who had ties to the old regime, or those that would be most adversely affected by the new regime. If they had stayed, these people would have lost their positions in the government, their land, and possibly their lives, because Castro and the new communist government would see them as a threat against the revolution. The next group to leave was the middle class, including professionals such as merchants and doctors. The last was the lower class, many of which left for economic reasons.¹⁷ In order to leave the country legally, Cubans had to apply and receive an exit permit from the Cuban Interior Ministry. By being forced to apply for a permit to leave, Castro was able to prevent too many trained professionals from leaving the country, as well as anyone considered a threat and acting against the revolution.¹⁸

As Puerto Rico is a United States territory, anyone traveling to the mainland United States from Puerto Rico is not considered an immigrant. Puerto Rico will still be included in this discussion because of its interesting history with the United States, and because the majority of Puerto Ricans are Latino and are considered “Spanish-speaking” immigrants by many United States citizens.

Puerto Rico was acquired from Spain by the United States after the Spanish-American War and its citizens were granted U.S. citizenship in 1917. Puerto Rico was in a miserable state under Spanish rule. Diseases were rampant, inhabitants had poor diets, and were forced into hard plantation work.¹⁹ After years under United States’ control, conditions gradually improved so that Puerto Rico’s death rate, malnutrition, and diseases decreased. Unfortunately, even after conditions started to improve, most of the population did not work. Many lived in poverty and were starving.²⁰ Puerto Rico today, while much improved from 1917, is still facing economic problems as it is “more than \$70 billion in debt, [and its] high unemployment, and shrinking economy are causing Puerto Ricans to leave the island in droves in search of stability.”²¹

The United States purchased and annexed parts of Mexico starting in 1848. As the land entered into the United States’ possession, the Mexicans that were living in those areas also became part of the United States. Mexico and Mexican-Americans have been an integral part of the United States’ history. In the contemporary United States, Mexicans are still entering the country with the hope of a brighter future. In the 1980s and 1994, Mexico experienced economic crises “exacerbating unemployment and triggering massive rural-to-urban and Mexico-to-U.S. moves.”²² The idea that the United States can offer an immigrant a better opportunity, is also supported by the answers given in the online survey from two migrant Mexican workers. One stated that he sought work in the United States “por una mejor oportunidad de vida” and the other “para poder realizar mi casa y ayudar mi familia” (For a better opportunity in life and in order to make my home and help my family). These opportunities are granted to the immigrant workers primarily as a result of the higher wages that they can earn here. One immigrant stated that he can earn up to three times more in the United States than in Mexico.

Each of these groups of immigrants entered the United States in hopes of finding better life opportunities, safety from political instability, more plentiful food, sanitary living conditions and steady employment opportunities. What has changed, and will continue to change, is how immigrants are treated in American society and how readily they are permitted to assimilate into their new homeland.

4. Working

In today's industrialized world, many immigrants are lured to the United States with the hope of securing a decent paying job. In 19th century America, this was true as well. While the Irish immigrants entered the United States more as refugees than immigrants seeking fortune like the Chinese, they, nonetheless, set out seeking a way to support themselves and their families.

In the nineteenth century, the United States did not have standardized rules and regulations put in place to prevent workers from working long hours in menial jobs and essentially being paid slave wages. Most of the Irish were servants, one of the least preferable jobs.²³ The hours that they worked were not kind, as "Boston Irishmen frequently labored 15 hours a day, 7 days a week. Servant girls faced a workday of 16 to 18 hours in order to earn \$1.50 a week."²⁴ When considering that most rents were \$1.50 a week, and that it was not uncommon for Irish girls and women to enter America alone, the hardships they faced were bountiful. Another difficulty they faced was that the Irish and their employers did not speak the same language and there was a fierce prejudice against the Irish Catholic. Some places included "No Irish need apply" in their advertisements such as "WOMAN WANTED – To do general housework ... English, Scotch, Welsh, German, or any country or color except Irish."²⁵ Sometimes the great need for workers outweighed these prejudices, so that many Irish women did work, but usually as domestic servants or as seamstresses. Irish men, on the other hand, most commonly found work as laborers. Oftentimes Irish men were employed as longshoremen, who moved heavy freight in and out of ships,²⁶ or built structures such as tunnels, canals, and railroads.²⁷ Many of the men who left to complete such projects were typically gone from their families for a year, during which it was not uncommon for the men to be cheated out of their expected pay by their employers, especially if they recruited too large a workforce or if fights broke out in the camps.^{27,28}

The Chinese began entering the West Coast of America, California in particular, in the 1850s, primarily to earn their fortunes in the Gold Rush, and then return to China. Many others were attracted by the high wages and abundant opportunities to work in the mines, construct railroads or farm. When the need for work decreased during the 1870s, a feeling of dislike and competition arose between the Chinese and other Californian workers.²⁹ It was during this time that the popular stereotype of the Chinese laundryman originated. It is believed that the Chinese were able to gain such a strong foothold in the laundry business because of the shortage of women (who would typically wash the clothes) in California, and the West in general.³⁰ While the Chinese may have had a monopoly in the laundry business, they competed with white workers in every other industry for work, especially mining, undoubtedly fueling a dislike for the Chinese.

Cuban immigration is slightly different than the other groups because of the three different waves of refugees leaving Cuba.³¹ The first wave contained many highly skilled and educated people including doctors, lawyers, and politicians. The second contained many middle class citizens, while the third wave contained many unskilled workers. Almost all of the Cuban refugees in the United States are underemployed, mostly because of the language differences, but also because of the difficulties in achieving citizenship status.³² Special treatment has been granted to the Cubans as special training was offered to help retrain Cuban doctors and lawyers so that they can practice in the United States or be educated for another career.³³

Many other immigrant groups that are entering into the United States are unskilled workers who are looking for better work opportunities rather than highly trained professionals. One Hispanic survey responder, for example, stated that "the people who move to the United States look for work have no opportunities in their home country [sic]." When examining the results of the online survey, the question: "What are the typical jobs that you see Hispanics working?" was asked and answers were analyzed from all groups. Non-Hispanic respondents reported that 22 out of 28 typically see Hispanic people as blue collar workers while 6 included Hispanic people working white collar jobs as well. When questioned why they associated these jobs with Hispanic workers, common answers included: that these jobs were "easy, [the workers had a] lack of education, [and were willing to work for] lower wages but more work." Hispanic survey respondents were asked the same questions and their responses were also examined. Six out of eight replied that they saw Hispanic people working as blue collar workers, while two included white collar fields in their responses. It was also interesting to note that all eight Hispanic responders worked in blue collar jobs. When the Hispanic respondents were questioned as to why they thought they saw the Hispanic population working the jobs they did, they commonly replied that they: "work hard, [are] brilliant [and can have any job they desire], [the jobs are] easy, [they are willing to] settle for less than they deserve, [and their] lack of education." While the survey responses do show that job opportunities are becoming more diverse, many lower-paying, blue collar jobs are still filled by many immigrant groups. Fortunately, there are laws in place today in the United States to enforce a minimum wage, so it helps to alleviate some of the pressure of immigrants competing for low wage positions like the Irish and the Chinese

did. Equal Employment Opportunity laws, put in place by the Civil Rights Act help to ensure that immigrants are not discriminated against like the early Irish and Chinese workers often were. As education is becoming more readily available for minority and immigrant groups, it should be possible for equal representation of all immigrant groups in white collar jobs.

5. Violence/Extortion

When faced with unfair circumstances, and acting out of desperation, individuals may turn to other means to gain an advantage, such as extortion and violence. Not only did the immigrants have to face difficulties in finding work and housing and grow accustomed to living in a strange land, they had to face the horrors of mankind as well - some before they even disembarked their ships. The Irish immigrants were often victims of extortion. It was common for an Irishman to be sold a faulty ticket to a different city or part of the country, only to find that it was not honored and he or she would be forced to pay large sums of money. In boardinghouses, the Irish were charged ridiculously high prices after their first day as well as being charged for stored luggage. If the payment could not be procured, the immigrant was put out into the street and his belongings were kept until payment was found or the items were "stolen."³⁴ Fortunately, in 1848, regulations were put in place that resulted in some improvements. The reputation the Irish had for drunkenness and criminality stemmed from this time period, as hardships and the miserable state in which they lived, could be forgotten with the help of the local bartender. Not many Irishmen, however, were accused of anything greater than a misdemeanor, despite the rumors.^{35,36}

The Chinese were not so fortunate. Instead of extortion, they were the victims of many acts of violence and discrimination. The state of California was even the author of some of the discrimination acts. The state "levied a heavy foreign-miners tax collected almost exclusively from Chinese."³⁷ Unfortunately for the Chinese miners, the mines that they worked in were in the mountains; consequently, there were very few witnesses around to see any forceful removals of the Chinese miners by the white miners. In 1887 at Snake River, 33 Chinese miners were shot or beaten to death and then robbed. No investigations were ever made, which perhaps demonstrated the "general low regard in which Chinese life was held."³⁸ There were often accounts of fires in Chinese settlements, which may have been started accidentally or on purpose, and were often not put out by locals unless their own town buildings were under the threat of joining the blaze.³⁹ Examples of arson include a Fourth of July raid on a Chinatown in Vellejo, California with firecrackers, resulting in the looting of shops and the death of a young girl, the burning of 60 houses in Madeira, and also in Bakersfield where the Chinese were "beaten and robbed" while fleeing their burning homes.⁴⁰ There are dozens of accounts of similar occurrences that happened all along the West Coast.

Current immigrants do not face the same violence and extortion that the Irish and Chinese experienced. Thankfully, the United States now has severe laws against those activities. Many Hispanic/Latino immigrants, however, are now facing severe prejudice instead. Many of these immigrants have darker skin tones than Americans of European heritage. Puerto Ricans, especially, are known as a mixed-race and because of this, there have been some "psychological impact[s] on individuals, [and] the anxiety it created, was perhaps greater than any objective difference of treatment on the basis of it would warrant."⁴¹ One of the respondents from the online survey confirmed this when he said that sometimes people looked at him badly for being a dark-skinned Hispanic. When the Hispanic groups were asked if they had ever felt discriminated against, one out of eight respondents stated that she did. As the United States is becoming more accepting towards different groups of immigrants, one can see that interracial and interethnic relationships are becoming much more common, leading to "mixed-race" children gracing the next generation. As cultural groups continue to blend, future generations should grow less sensitive to differences in physical appearance, and prejudice and the resulting discrimination should continue to decrease.

6. Legal Rulings

In the early United States, there was not a true legal system in place for immigration control. The New York State Passenger Act of 1824 required every captain of a passenger ship to give to the mayor "the name, birthplace, last legal settlement, age, and occupation of each passenger; the master's endorsement of this report, with the signature of two sureties, constituted a bond up to \$300 for each alien passenger to indemnify the city in case such immigrants or their children became public charges within two years."⁴² This Act may have worked for a few years, but with the influx of over a million Irish immigrants, a more efficient procedure was necessary. This immigration procedure was updated with a law enacted on May 5, 1847 and led to the creation of the Board of Commissioners of Emigration.⁴³ The law

also required that the head of the ship complete paperwork for each of his passengers or face a fine for each passenger he did not report as well as paying a bond, or having the passengers themselves pay a fee.

The dislike for the Chinese immigrants was so strong that it helped to bring about the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This Act stated that no Chinese laborers or their wives could enter the United States or become citizens. The Chinese Exclusion Act lasted for ten years, and was extended another ten years in 1892 by the Geary Act. The Geary Act not only prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the United States, it also required that any Chinese laborers already in the United States get a certificate of residence by May 1893 or they would be deported.⁴⁴

Today there are many laws and acts to prevent a mass immigration like 19th century America experienced with the Irish and the Chinese immigrants. Immigration is now controlled by the United States government, and all immigrants are required to have a “green card” or visa to live or work legally in the United States. In order for anyone who is not an American citizen to enter the United States to work, one needs to go through the process of filling out paperwork. For many years after Castro gained control of Cuba, the United States was sending boats and planes to Cuba to pick up refugees and bring them to the United States. These trips eventually stopped and, in 1995, a change was made to the Cuban policy, commonly called ‘wet foot, dry foot’. This policy essentially states that if a Cuban is found crossing the water then he or she will be returned to Cuba. If the Cuban does not get caught and can make it to land, then he or she is allowed to stay in the United States.⁴⁵

As more and more immigrants entered the United States, Americans felt like they were being invaded by foreigners that they were forced to compete with for jobs. As laws were put in place to regulate immigrants and prevent future massive influxes (even for the Cuban refugees that the government favored), United States citizens felt like they were gaining control of immigration. They no longer had to fear the unhealthy, overpopulated cities common in the 19th century. Americans seem more willing to accept what they do not fear, perhaps attributing to a greater acceptance of today’s immigrants compared to the early Chinese and Irish immigrants.

7. Living Conditions

Some of the Irish immigrants were able to afford rent after finding a job, or they found a place to stay with fellow kinsmen. Unfortunately, the living conditions that the Irish were subjected to only added to the horrors that they faced after leaving Ireland. Rent, often for attics or basements, ranged from \$1.00 to \$2.00 per week. However, the “attics, [were] often no more than 3 feet high... [so that] basements were even more coveted [...] by 1850 the 586 inhabited in Boston contained from 5 to 15 persons in each, with at least one holding 39 every night.”⁴⁶ In New York, the conditions were no different, as one account of a dwelling stated that ten people, making up two different families, were found living in a cellar that measured “ten feet by seven feet high, and only had one window.”⁴⁷ Landlords found no profit in improvements so basement dwellings often did not have inside light or ventilation except that which came in through the door. The dwellings had no plumbing and oftentimes had a few feet of water that accumulated from floods or the backwater from drains.⁴⁸ If that was not gruesome enough, waste often mixed with leakage from the outdoor privies and flowed inside.⁴⁷ The number of immigrants coming into the city was astounding and as each attempted to find a place to live; the immigrant communities grew more and more crowded. In New York’s Tenth Ward, “the average block density rose from 54.5 persons per acre in 1820 to 170.9 in 1840.”⁴⁷

The areas in which the Chinese usually lived were jointly called “Chinatown”, a term still commonly used today. Those visiting Chinatown frequently used terms such as “reeking ... foul ... nauseous odors vomited from black cellars ... [and] rank and filthy.”⁴⁹ Another visitor stated that the smells emitted from Chinatown, San Francisco were due to the fact that the living conditions were overcrowded, due to city restrictions and the inability to expand into more housing. In fact, many of the dwellings had “the worst characteristics of ghettos.”⁵⁰ Some people made a point to describe Chinatown on completely different, positive, terms by stating that the Chinese did their best with what living areas they had by painting, maintaining repairs, and decorating with lanterns and flowers.⁵¹

Living conditions in the contemporary United States depend on the area and income. When questioned whether or not the Hispanic/Latino Americans believed that they had the same living opportunities as non-Hispanic Americans, they all answered that they did have the same opportunities. One of the surveyed migrant workers answered that in the United States he could buy more things with less money than in Mexico, and that the United States is very safe. Another migrant worker agreed that the conditions in the United States are better because in Mexico he receives a lower salary and it is more difficult to buy what he can afford with his wages in the United States.

Today laws and regulations have been put in place to prevent discrimination in housing against a certain race or ethnicity of a people. There are also standards that must be met in order for a building to pass inspection prior to having tenants. As technology becomes more advanced, many of the problems that ravaged early immigrants, such as

sewage overflow, have been eradicated. Today, as long as an immigrant has a reliable income, most do not have to fear the horrid living conditions that early immigrant groups faced.

8. Disease

The two month trip to America by ship was not easy for the Irish immigrants, as diseases were common, “hundreds being seriously weakened or dying of “ship fever” (typhus), cholera, smallpox, and dysentery.”⁵² Ill and without money, many of the Irish who arrived between 1835 and 1865 had to remain in the cities that they landed in, usually Boston or New York.²⁴

Once in America, with such an enormous group of people living in such dirty, cramped spaces, it should not come as a surprise that diseases were very common. Typhoid fever, typhus, cholera, tuberculosis, pneumonia, bronchitis, and scrofula were common occurrences in the nineteenth century among the immigrants.⁵³ The diseases were not quarantined in one city. For example, cholera spread from Philadelphia to Boston and “thrived best in places ‘least perfect in drainage, the worst ventilated and the most crowded,’” that is, in the Irish districts. In all, more than 500 of the 700 fatalities were Irish, or the children of Irishmen.⁵⁴ Death was so common among the Irish immigrants that in 1850 one out of every seventeen Irishmen on Broad Street died. In fact, it was stated that once reaching America, the average Irish immigrant only survived fourteen years in Boston.⁵⁵

Unlike the Irish, the Chinese immigrants did not experience such high death rates due to diseases, perhaps due, in part, to their medicine men. In fact, even doctors from the East Coast recommended that their patients travel to California in hopes that Chinese medicine could cure them, which it often did.⁵⁶ Another account stated that the Chinese miners did not get dyspepsia like the white miners did, most likely due to their use of ginger. When one of the ill miners turned to the Chinese for help, it was said that he felt better, and others soon followed.⁵⁷ Despite their herbs and remedies, there were still diseases among the Chinese due to their very crowded living quarters and rudimentary sewage systems⁵⁸ that were often left open to the air.

One very notable difference between 19th century America and contemporary American society is the difference in healthcare practices. Many diseases that were common among the immigrant groups of the 1800s are no longer heard of, and smallpox has even been eradicated. A major determinant of an individual’s level of healthcare in the United States is his or her ability to access the healthcare system and to pay for services – whether through healthcare insurance or out of pocket. If an immigrant is capable of paying, he or she can be treated and expect to survive most diseases or illnesses. In fact, one of the surveyed migrant workers even included that he has access to health insurance at his job in the United States as opposed to in Mexico; something he viewed as a benefit - a benefit that would have not been available for the Chinese and Irish immigrants of the 19th century.

9. Aid

There were some societies and groups that tried to help the early immigrants. One of these groups was the Catholic Church, as the majority of the Irish were Catholic. Unfortunately, due to the large number of immigrants compared to the resources that these groups had at their disposal, many of the immigrants were left to fend for themselves or they turned to their kinsmen for help.⁵⁹ The Irish immigrants were not ones to forget their kinsmen back in Ireland, and sent money back to assist. In 1846, during the potato famine, the non-Irish of America were not hesitant to lend a hand either. They donated \$170,000 in cash and \$70,000 in food. The Irish, of course, donated the most, giving \$19,680,000, from 1848 to 1858.⁶⁰

Unlike the Irish, many of the Chinese were viewed as heathens. Because of this, they were often forced to create their own aid groups. The most well-known of these groups is Huiguan. This group functioned as a type of aid society which provided assistance in almost every aspect of a Chinese immigrant’s life including: “aid[ing] laborers with their passage [...] and maintaining correspondence between American Chinatowns and families in China.”⁶¹ The Huiguan eventually became known as the Chinese Six Companies followed by the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) after the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was enacted. This group served as the Chinese immigrants’ voice against the oppressive American government.

As previously mentioned, the United States sent planes and ships to Cuba to bring refugees and their families to the United States. These services came at no small cost for the United States, as one week of using the Coast Guard during the Mariel patrol cost about \$650,000. The Cubans also received public assistance once they were in the United States. For example, in Florida, a destitute non-Cuban citizen could expect to receive \$66 a month if she or he were single or

\$81 in aid as a family, while a single Cuban could expect \$71, or \$100 for a family.⁶² This created some resentment toward the Cuban immigrants, as the United States played favorites, “also help[ing] [to] finance shelters, schools, and relocation centers” all in order to show “the advantages of American capitalism over Caribbean communism.”⁶³ Today, it is troubling to consider how Puerto Rico (still a United States territory) will handle its \$70 billion debt, and how that will affect the United States economy in the coming years. One study performed by the Center for Immigration Studies showed that “households headed by immigrants from Central America and Mexico (73 percent), and the Caribbean (51 percent) have the highest overall welfare use.”⁶⁴ As aid groups continue their work, all immigrant groups in the United States will benefit as future generations gain better educational opportunities and thus better career opportunities.

10. Education

The lack of education kept many of the Irish apart, not only from Americans, but from other immigrants. “The ability to read was by no means commonplace [among the Irish].”⁶⁵ Most children were sent to public schools, and the Irish feared that “compulsory education drew their children into the common schools, endangering Catholic souls.” In order to remedy this, many Catholic schools were established. Despite the creation of new Catholic schools, at the end of the 1860s, 9,000 out of 43,000 Boston children were not in school. Almost all were Irish.⁶⁶ The most beneficial educational programs were night classes that were available to teach English and vocational training to Irish immigrants, many of whom were handicapped in their occupations by lack of education.⁶⁷

Many of the Chinese immigrants were seen as heathens because they were not Christian. There was a large movement with hopes of converting the immigrants to Christianity. A large controversy erupted over whether the Chinese should be taught by white American girls in the Sunday schools that were set up. When American girls began marrying Chinese immigrants, Christians of that time believed that “it was not worth the ‘corruption’ of white girls in order to save the soul of a ‘heathen.’”⁶⁸ It is important to note, however, that there were immigrant students entering America in order to study in the universities. With the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, those entering the United States for the purpose of studying were not hindered. Unlike the Irish, most Chinese immigrants did not bring their families; just the males came for work. Therefore, there was not a great need for a school system like in the case of the Irish children.

The quality of education in the United States today depends not only on the location of the schools that are attended, but also the local income level and scholarship availability for those desiring higher education. Of the Hispanic groups questioned in the online survey, all those that are American citizens completed high school, 2 were in possession of an Associate’s Degree, and 3 held a Bachelor’s Degree. As for the immigrant workers: only one finished high school, while the other finished the United States’ equivalent of middle school. When questioned if they thought that children have the same educational opportunities regardless of race, 12 of the non-Hispanic Americans answered yes while 15 answered no. For the Hispanic groups, 4 answered yes and 3 answered no. While the surveyed group is a minute part of the United States as a whole, it is interesting to see how the United States is changing. Children from all minority groups have the opportunity to attend school and college, something that is very evident as classrooms become more diversified.

11. Changes

The start of the Civil War in 1861 both helped and hindered the Irish immigrants. When thousands of men began to leave their home to fight in the War, new job opportunities finally opened in fields that were previously unavailable to the Irish. Death always accompanies war. Soon the war demanded more men and the Irish were called upon. Once in the battlefield, the Irish “lost the sense of inferiority and acquired the sense of belonging.”⁶⁹ As they were forced to live with each other, “they insensibly drew closer together.”⁶⁹ In Boston, too, some of the hatred towards the Irish diminished, at least for a while. There was a seed that was planted, a reminder that they could once again unite to form one society. The war brought the Irish competition from a new source. Their hatred for the freed Negroes only increased after the War. The Negroes were seen as competition for their occupations, as they were often used as strikebreakers, though race prejudice often favored the Irish workers.⁷⁰

As time progressed, many immigrants found adjustment to life in the United States difficult. The older people, especially, often stayed in the Irish wards throughout their lives. They did not desire to adapt to American customs, and preferred the Old World ways of their native Ireland. The younger immigrants were different. They were willing

to adapt to the new conditions and “became naturalized citizens, grew politically conscious, acquired native handicraft techniques and Yankee business methods, banded together for mutual improvement, and sent their children to the public schools.”⁷¹ As the generations of Irish living in America increased, the Irish became an integral part of American society.

Changing views towards the Chinese began with the Geary Act, as many Americans felt they were no longer being bombarded with Chinese immigrants. Americans also recognized a desire to have Chinese workers because they were reliable. An insight into Chinese labor from the *Yale Review* stated: although the Chinese initially worked for much lower wages, “as soon as the Chinese had mastered a skill they charged all they could get”, sometimes even twice as much as other immigrants.⁷² It was also realized that the Chinese immigrants were not any worse than any of the other immigrant groups, especially the Japanese, but they were still seen as inferior. Perhaps one of the greatest influences upon Americans to accept the Chinese was their desire to send missionaries to China to save their heathen souls and also to have a hand in the Chinese market believing that they had a paternal duty to ‘Americanize’ and thus ‘civilize’ China.^{73,74} Today, the Chinese are also an integral part of American society.

As time passes, perhaps the Hispanic immigrants will become accustomed to living in the United States and will no longer be seen as ‘new’ despite being a part of America before the United States was formed. It remains to be seen if the United States continues as a cultural “melting pot” and offers the hope of a better life to countless immigrants and their families. Perhaps the United States’ focus will change to providing aid to the immigrants in their own countries?

When examining the major causes of immigration and some of the experiences of immigrant groups as they entered the United States, one can see similarities and differences in the treatment of these groups. As immigration laws, anti-discrimination laws, and attitudes evolve, the immigrant experience has improved in the United States. In a few decades, it would be interesting to question the experience of new immigrant groups, such as the Muslims or Syrian refugees to see if they experience the same patterns of discrimination that other immigrants have faced upon entering the United States. The news media, social media and politics are having a large influence on how Americans perceive immigrants, and other cultures. Will changing laws continue to drive social reform leading to less discrimination against immigrants, and will attitudes and prejudices against the immigrants improve as a result?

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