

'A Nation of Immigrants'

Five years ago the Junior Senator from Massachusetts wrote an eloquent plea for a change in the restrictive immigration policy of the United States. In a pamphlet called "A Nation of Immigrants,"* he sharply criticized the quota system—the system of admitting immigrants on the basis of fixed annual quotas for different races and nationalities. The system is heavily weighted in favor of Northern Europeans.

Now, as President, John F. Kennedy has acted to carry out the ideas of "A Nation of Immigrants." He has called on Congress to abolish the quota system. Under his proposed law, 165,000 immigrants (the present ceiling is 156,700) would be allowed in each year without regard to racial or national origins.

Here are excerpts from Mr. Kennedy's story of immigration to America.

By JOHN F. KENNEDY

SINCE the first settlers reached the New World, some 40 million people have migrated to America. This is the greatest migration of people in all recorded history. It is hard to imagine how many people 40 million is. It is all of the people in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Dela-

ware, Idaho, Kansas, Maine, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Wyoming—two and one-half times over!

Another way of measuring the importance of immigration to America is to say that every American who ever lived, with the exception of one group, was either an immigrant himself, or a descendant of immigrants.

The exception? Will Rogers, part Cherokee Indian, said that his ancestors were at the dock to meet the Mayflower.

This means that in just over 300 years, a nation of 175 million people has grown up, populated by persons who came from other lands and their descendants. It was the literal truth when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt greeted a convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution with the words, "Fellow immigrants."

Any great social movement must leave its mark. The great migration of peoples to the New World did just that. It made America a nation different from all others. The effects of immigration—to put it another way—the contributions of immigrants—can be seen in every aspect of our national life. We see it in religion, in politics, in business, in the arts, in education, in athletics and in entertainment. There is no part of America that has not been touched by our immigrant back-

ground.

Immigration to America can be pictured as ocean waves breaking on the shoreline. We can clearly see the crest of each successive wave, but if we look closer we can see that the waves are not really separate but continuous. Even at the moment that one wave is reaching its crest, the next is gathering force and building momentum.

THE first wave began with the [Virginia] settlers in 1607 and the Puritans and Pilgrims in 1620. The first wave was predominantly, but not solely, English in origin. The urge for greater economic opportunity mixed with the desire for religious freedom impelled these people to leave their homes. Of all of the groups that have come to America, these English settlers had perhaps the most difficult physical environment to master, but the easiest social adjustment to make. They mastered a rugged land and that was hard, but they built a society in their own image and never knew the hostility of old toward new that succeeding groups would meet.

By 1820, Ireland began to replace England as the chief source of new settlers. Indeed, in the century between 1820 and 1920, some four and a quarter million Irish came to America—most of these between 1820 and 1860. Most of the Irish settled in the great cities of the North and provided

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THREE WAVES OF IMMIGRATION—They brought 40,000,000 to America.

The Irish wave (emigrants await departure) reached its peak with the famine of the eighteen-forties.

a laboring force to meet the needs of a rapidly expanding industrial economy. Many worked in factories and many others left Ireland when offered jobs by the builders of the new American railroads and canals.

The Irish were among the first to meet the hostility of an already established group of "Americans." It was not long before employment circulars included the phrase "No Irish need apply."

It is not unusual for people to fear and distrust that which they are not familiar with. Every new group coming to America found this fear and suspicion facing them. And, in their turn, members of these groups met their successors with more of the same. The Irish are perhaps the only people in our history with the distinction of having a political party, the Know-Nothings, formed against them. No party based on bigotry and hatred could be successful in America and the Know-Nothings, after a vigorous start, died an ignominious death in the mid-1800's.

The wave of German immigration began to rise in the middle of the 19th century as Irish immigration began slowly to recede. For the rest of the century the two overlapped. By 1910, there were eight million Americans either themselves born in Germany or whose parents were born there.

FOR the most part, these new Americans were farmers and artisans. They were instrumental in opening the West

to settlement. Lured by the promise of free land, these people were among the first to cultivate the fertile soil of the Mississippi Valley. Their skill as craftsmen, too, found ready acceptance in the developing American industry.

Toward the end of the 19th century, immigration to America underwent a significant change. For the first time the major sources of settlers became Southern and Eastern Europe rather than Northern Europe and the British Isles. Large numbers of Italians, Russians and Poles came to this country and their coming created new problems and gave rise to new tensions.

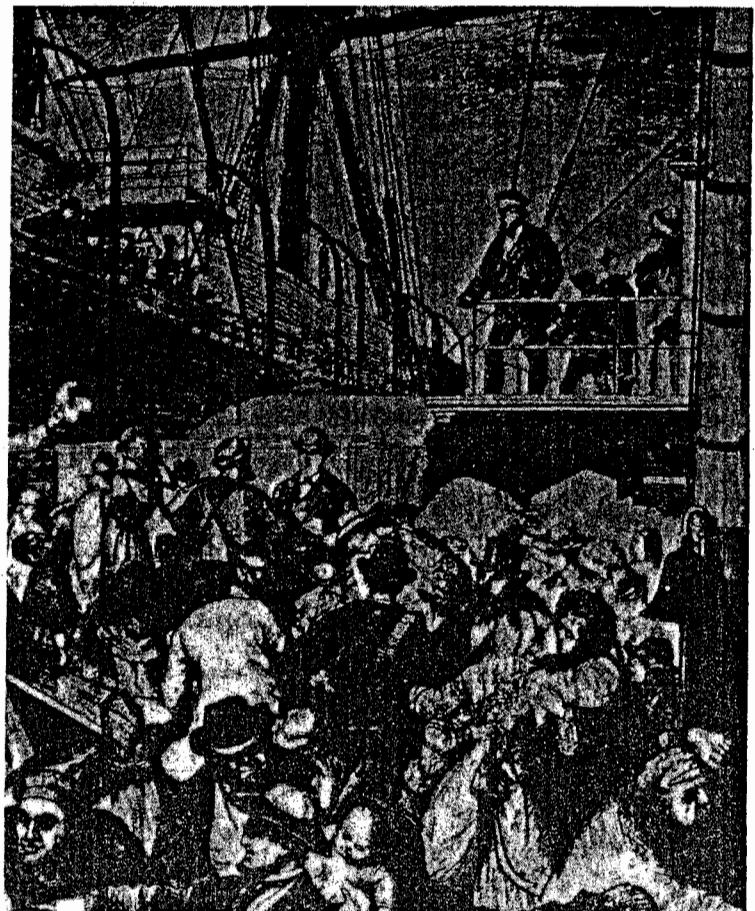
In the 1930 census, New York City had more people of Italian birth or parentage than did Rome, Italy. Most large cities had well defined "Little Italys," or "Little Polands" by 1910, and walking through them one might well imagine himself in Italy or Poland.

The history of cities shows that when conditions become overcrowded, when people are poor, and when living conditions are bad, tensions run high and crime flourishes. This is a situation that feeds on itself—poverty and crime in one group breed fear and hostility in others and this, in turn, impedes the acceptance and progress of the first group, thus perpetuating its depressed condition. This was the dismal situation that faced many of the Southern and Eastern European immigrants just as it had faced some of the earlier waves of immigrants. Indeed, one New York newspaper had these

intemperate words for the newly arrived Italians: "The floodgates are open. The bars are down. The sally-ports are unguarded. The dam is washed away. The sewer is choked . . . the scum of immigration is viscerating upon our shores. The horde of \$9.80 steerage slime is being siphoned upon us from Continental mud tanks."

AS it had been with their predecessors, the struggle to establish themselves in the New World was a hard one for the newcomers from Southern and Eastern Europe. Indeed, for many, the struggle continues to this day. Fear, bigotry, hatred—these do not die easily and since they are not based on fact and logic, they do not yield to the evidence of fact and logic. The history of new peoples in America shows clearly, however, that given time and opportunity, virtually every group has found its way up the economic and social ladder—if not the original settlers then their children or grandchildren. There is no reason to believe that this process has ended now.

Each new group was met by the groups already in America and adjustment was often difficult and painful. The early English settlers had to find ways to get along with the Indians; the Irish who followed were met by these "Yankees"; German immigrants faced both Yankees and Irish; and so it has gone down to the latest group of Hungarian refugees. Somehow, the diffi-



Then came Germans (shown embarking at Hamburg) and Scandinavians. The third wave, late in the 19th century, flowed from Eastern and Southern Europe.



Above, newly arrived Italians.

cult adjustments are made and people get down to the tasks of earning a living, raising a family, living with their new neighbors, and in the process, building a nation.

THERE has always been public sentiment against immigration, or, more accurately, against immigrants. At times this sentiment was only latent, at times, it has been manifest, indeed, crudely so. Most often it has been unorganized, but in some periods it has been most effectively organized. The usual term for this sentiment is "nativism," which has been defined as "the fear of and hostility toward new immigrant groups."

Yet it is a remarkable fact that in spite of this agitation there was at first no official governmental response. The forces favoring free and open immigration were clearly dominant. The sense of America as a refuge for oppressed and down-trodden people was never far from the consciousness of Americans. Thus, for almost 100 years of the Republic's history, even through the period of Know-Nothingism,

there were no Federal laws of any consequence dealing with immigration. Not only were new settlers allowed to enter freely, but they were positively sought after in some periods.

Inevitably, though, this mass movement of people presented problems which the Federal Government was forced to recognize. In 1882, recognizing the need for a national immigration policy, Congress enacted the first general legislation on the subject. The most important aspect of this law was that, for the first time, the Government undertook to exclude certain classes of undesirable, such as lunatics, idiots, convicts and people likely to become public charges. In 1891, certain health standards were added as well as a provision excluding polygamists.

By the turn of the 20th century the opinion was becoming widespread that the amount of new immigration should be limited. Those who believed sincerely, and with some basis in fact, that America's capacity to absorb immigration was limited were joined by those who were opposed to all immigration and to all "foreigners." Anti-immi-

gration sentiment was heightened by World War I and the aftermath of disillusion with the way peace was settled, which brought on a strong wave of isolationism. In 1921, Congress passed and the President signed the first major law in our country's history severely limiting new immigration. An era in American history had ended and we were committed to a radically new policy toward the peopling of the nation.

The [restriction] was based on . . . the so-called "national-origin" system [which] limited numbers of each nationality to a certain percentage of the number of foreign born individuals of such nationality residing in the United States. . . . The effect was to cut drastically the amount of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and from Asia.

The famous words of Emma Lazarus on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty read: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Under present law it is suggested that there should be added: "as long as

they come from Northern Europe, are not too tired or too poor or slightly ill, never stole a loaf of bread, never joined any questionable organization, and can document their activities for the past two years."

A new, enlightened policy of immigration need not provide for unlimited immigration but simply for so much immigration as our country could absorb and which would be in the national interest—the most serious defect in the present law is not that it is restrictive but that many of the restrictions are based on false or unjust premises. We must avoid what the Massachusetts poet John Boyle O'Reilly once called:

*Organized charity, scrimped and iced,
In the name of a cautious,
statistical Christ.*

Such a policy should be generous; it should be fair; it should be flexible. With such a policy we could turn to the world with clean hands and a clear conscience.

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