

Restriction of Immigration

(1)

About the Author

*Francis Amasa Walker, born in 1840, lived only 56 years. In this short span, he was a Civil War general, economist, advocate of the **free-enterprise** system and statistician. During the 1880s, Walker “grew more conservative” as he reacted to changes that threatened the position of old-line Americans, specifically outbreaks of labor unrest and the arrival of large numbers of eastern and southern Europeans.*

*Published in 1896, the article below focuses on a theory Walker developed during his later years. This theory showed feelings of racial **nativism**.*

(2)

From the beginning, it has been the policy of the United States ... to tolerate, to welcome, and to encourage immigration ... For generations, it was the settled opinion of our people, which found no challenge anywhere, that immigration was a source of both strength and wealth ... It is, therefore, natural to ask, Is it possible that our fathers and our grandfathers were so far wrong in this matter? ... Does it not sometimes happen, in the course of national development, that great and permanent changes in condition require corresponding changes of opinion and of policy? ...

(3)

Foreign immigration prior to 1860 was necessary in order to supply the country with a laboring class which should be able and willing to perform the lowest kind of work required in the building up of our industrial and social structure, especially the making of railroads and canals ... But when the country was flooded with ignorant and unskilled foreigners, who could do nothing but the lowest kind of labor, Americans instinctively shrank from the contact and the competition thus offered to them. So long as manual labor, in whatever field, was to be done by all, each in his place, there was no revolt at it; but when working on railroads and canals became the sign of a want of education and of a low social condition, our own people gave it up, and left it to those who were able to do that, and nothing better ...

What's going on?

(4)

Fifty, even thirty years ago, there was a rightful presumption regarding the average immigrant that he was among the most enterprising, thrifty, alert, adventurous, and courageous of the community from which he came ... Today the presumption is completely reversed. So thoroughly has the continent of Europe been crossed by railways, so effectively has the business of emigration there been exploited, so much have the rates of railroad fares and ocean passage been reduced, that it is now among the least thrifty and prosperous members of any European community that the emigration agent finds his best recruiting-ground ...

(5)

Their habits of life, again, are of the most revolting kind. Read the description ... of the police driving from the garbage dumps the miserable beings who try to burrow in those depths of unutterable filth and slime in order that they may eat and sleep there! ... What effects must be produced upon our social standards, and upon the ambitions and aspirations of our people, by a contact so foul and loathsome? The influence upon the American rate of wages ... cannot fail to be ... disastrous ...

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

(6)

Charity begins at home; and while the people of the United States have gladly offered an asylum to millions upon millions of the distressed and unfortunate of other lands and climes, they have no right to carry their hospitality one step beyond the line where American institutions, the American rate of wages, the American standard of living, are brought into serious peril ... For one, I believe it is time that we should take a rest, and give our social, political, and industrial system some chance to recuperate. The problems which so sternly confront us to-day are serious

enough without being complicated and aggravated by the addition of some millions of Hungarians, Bohemians, Poles, south Italians, and Russian Jews.

Adapted from Walker, F.A. (1896). Restriction of immigration. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 77(464), 822–829.

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

What is the overall message of the passage?

What questions do you have?