

national origin, immigrants congregated in overcrowded slums in ghettos Drawn by factories, cheap tenements and the presence of others of their own

### The impact of immigrants on urban life

- 'Old' Americans resented the impact of immigrants upon urban life.
- Contributed to lower wages and unemployment for American-born workers.
- Immigrant willingness to accept lower pay and work as strike-breakers laws; He thought different peoples could not 'mix or blend' beneficially.
- Europeans were at the top. President Coolidge subscribed to these 'biological stock. Many Americans believed in a racial hierarchy in which North the general feeling that 'inferior' aliens would damage 'superior' American illiterate peasants rather than basically unintelligent, but this contributed to Europeans. The lower test scores were because most 'new' immigrants were and Eastern Europeans were less intelligent than Northern and Western
- Social scientists claimed that wartime army intelligence tests proved Southern helped inspire the revival of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915 (see page 21).
- in Communism and Catholics might bring in papal despotism. Such fears 'new' immigrants threatened national values: Russian Jews might bring
- Most 'old' Americans were Protestant. They thought Catholic and Jewish because they feared the impact of the new immigrants:

By the 1910s, most 'old' Americans advocated ending unrestricted immigration

### The response of 'old' Americans to 'new' immigrants

Southern and Eastern Europe.

centuries, when most of the millions who arrived were 'new' immigrants from Northern and Western Europe until the late nineteenth and early twentieth The United States had always been a nation of immigrants. Most came from

### The nature of and response to immigration in the 1920s

Clearly, the Roaring Twenties had a limited social, economic and political impact upon most women.

- entertaining.
- hair, wear slacks or ride a horse, and insisted she focus upon White House
- President Coolidge would not allow his wife to drive, dance in public, bob her interests and responsibilities, motherhood and the home.
- said Vassar should provide 'education for women along the lines of their chief said they felt unprepared for employment, and a female administrator there
- 90 per cent of young women polled at prestigious Vassar Women's College they married.
- 89 per cent of girls in Middletown said they would like to work but not after had had premarital sex.
- One survey found that only 7 per cent of 2000 middle-class women surveyed

However, only a small minority of urban women were 'flappers':

in big cities. One third of Chicago's 2.7 million population was foreign born. Ghettos had more violent crime, drunkenness and prostitution than other parts of America, so immigrants were blamed for urban problems such as disease, crime and corrupt **political machines**. 'Old' Americans perceived every Jewish ghetto, Little Italy or Little Poland as an un-American enclave whose inhabitants read newspapers and heard radio broadcasts and church services in their native language.

### 'I am a good American'

From 1914, automobile manufacturer Henry Ford ran a compulsory 'Americanisation' school for his primarily Eastern European immigrant workers. The first thing they were taught to say was, 'I am a good American.' In their 'graduation' ceremony they would dress up in clothes characteristic of their homeland, walk into a huge **'melting pot'**, then come out wearing American suits and carrying a little American flag. Many were happy to do so because they had come to America in pursuit of the American Dream.

### Increased opposition to immigrants after 1917

Anti-immigrant feeling increased greatly after 1917 for several reasons. The First World War had intensified nationalism and generated a general desire for less contact with Europeans. The brief post-war economic depression aroused resentment of immigrants as competitors for jobs. Revolutionary risings in European countries in the years 1917–23 increased American fears that immigrants would bring in un-American ideologies such as anarchism, socialism and Communism. Their fears were confirmed by the participation of many first-generation immigrants in strikes (see page 7), the Red Scare (see page 7) and the Sacco and Vanzetti case in 1920.

Italian-born labourers Sacco and Vanzetti were charged with murder and robbery. They were tried in the middle of the Red Scare and quickly found guilty and sentenced to death. Some people considered them not guilty but punished for their ethnic immigrant background and anarchist beliefs (they had previously declared their hatred of capitalism and the American political system). Judge Webster Thayer was reported to have privately called them 'dagos', 'sons of bitches' and 'those anarchist bastards'. He publicly declared that although Vanzetti 'may not actually have committed the crime attributed to him he is nevertheless morally culpable because he is the enemy of our existing institutions.'

### Restrictions on immigration

Immigration was increasingly restricted:

- 1 Wartime tensions assisted the passage of the Literacy Test Act (1917), which said immigrants had to prove they could read a 40-word document before being allowed into America.

### KEY TERMS

**Political machines** Early twentieth-century cities were often dominated by a political 'boss' whose organisation, invariably Democrat, would welcome and help immigrants in order to gain their votes.

**Melting pot** Term used to describe the way in which the United States became a cohesive nation forged out of numerous immigrants willing to assimilate into American society.

### The influence of popular culture and news media, 1917–33

In 1931, Frederick Lewis Allen's *Only Yesterday* emphasised that Americans unprecedented attention to and participation in **popular culture** in the 1920s was a result of the disillusionment that followed the First World War. Within

over one million immigrants arrived in the USA annually. In 1929, it was only 150,000. Few criticised immigration restrictions, although Congressmen Fiorello La Guardia, who represented a poor district in New York City, pointed out that his dog had 'a distinguished family tree' but was still 'only a son of a bitch'; President Hoover thought La Guardia 'a little out of your class in presuming to criticize the President... You should go back to where you belong and advise Mussolini on how to make good honest citizens in Italy. The Italians are predominantly [sic] our murderers and bootleggers... Like a lot of the foreign spawn, you do not appreciate the country which supports and tolerates you';

The immigration policies of the 1920s dominated American immigration policy until 1964. Their immediate impact was great. Between 1901 and 1910, entering the USA. also unlimited. Hoover said he disliked 'undersized Latins' from Puerto Rico Immigration from US possessions such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines was low-paid jobs, religion and race encouraged **Anglos** to treat them as inferior. running water and indoor plumbing, and their lifestyles, poverty, illiteracy, to pick their crops. Mexican labourers were accustomed to living without remained unlimited because Californian farmers wanted cheap Mexican labour However, there were anomalies. Immigration from the Western hemisphere

- 2 A 1918 Immigration Act excluded immigrants who advocated revolution, assassination or the seizure of private property.
- 3 Amid talk of alien indigestion, the 1921 Emergency Immigration Act cut overall immigration to 350,000 and specifically aimed to decrease the number of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe.
- 4 The 1924 Johnson–Reed Immigration Act cut the total number of immigrants to 150,000 per annum. It totally excluded the Japanese, further reduced the number of Southern and Eastern European immigrants, but allowed considerable numbers of Northern and Western Europeans to enter. Republican congressman Albert Johnson of Washington State, chief author of the Act, explained that while 'old' Americans were 'descended from generations of freemen bred to a knowledge of the principles and practice of self-government', the 'new' immigrants usually had no understanding of democracy and therefore threatened 'our cherished institutions'. President Coolidge said, 'America must be kept American... Those who do not want to be partakers of the American spirit ought not to settle in America.'
- 5 Further immigration legislation in 1929 was designed to favour North European immigrants.

**Anglos** Hispanic term for white, English-speaking Americans of whatever ancestry.

**Popular culture** The culture of the masses as seen in their beliefs and the literature they read, the movies and television they watch, and the music to which they listen.

#### KEY TERMS