

“Here was the promised land”

Nineteenth century migration to the United States: a
comparative study of three ethnic groups

Master thesis

Comparative History

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Introduction

Thesis subject

During the nineteenth century the United States became the new home of many people from all over the world. The number of immigrants that arrived increased every year. Apparently, many people preferred to live in America instead of their home country. In this thesis, the factors involved with migration to the United States are investigated by studying three case studies: Irish, Italian and Chinese migrants. These three groups made up the larger part of foreign born in the United States. The migration of these groups has had its influence on American society. Nowadays, 10.8 percent of the Americans are of Irish origin, 5.6 percent has Italian ancestors and 0.8 percent are of Chinese descent.¹ The three groups shall be compared to obtain a general idea about the important factors in the migration process.

Migration is and has been an important factor in the history of the United States. It is often said that the United States is a nation of migrants. In his famous letter ‘What is an American?’, published in 1782, St. John de Crèvecoeur wrote about the nature of the American people: “They are a mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans and Swedes.”² This letter presented the idea that Americans merely had West-European ancestors who blended into one American identity. This is an influential concept that Israel Zangwill has named ‘the melting pot’ in a play of the same name.³ However, in the nineteenth century it were the Irish, the Italians and Chinese that made up the larger part of foreign born in the United States. Thus, two of the three largest migrants groups were not from Western Europe. Currently the American society is no longer thought of as a melting pot but as one of ‘cultural pluralism’, a term presented by Horace M. Kallen. It describes the United States as a society where multiple cultures live side by side but do not mix or form a new culture.⁴

¹ United States Census Bureau, Reproduction of the question on Ancestry from census 2000, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2004pubs/c2kbr-35.pdf> (July 2008).

² St. John de Crèvecoeur, ‘What is an American?’, letters from an American Farmer’, in: J.A. Leo Lemay ed., *An early American reader* (Washington DC; office of English language programs United States department of state 2005) 119.

³ W. Sollors, *Theories of ethnicity, a classical reader* (New York; New York University Press 1996) xxvi.

⁴ Sollors, *Theories of ethnicity*, xxvii.

The process of migration is an interesting field of study. The present interest in this phenomenon is evident from newspapers and political debates. Migration is an increasingly important aspect of everyday life for many people in the world. In the nineteenth century it was already an important phenomenon that shook the lives of many people who chose to or had to leave their homeland. By studying patterns of migration, we learn about the process itself as well as about the countries and people involved.

Migration to the United States in the nineteenth century is the subjects of many studies. Most of these discuss the migration of one ethnic group. For example, the American scholar Ronald Takaki discusses only the Asian migrants in his book *Strangers from a different shore* and Donna Gabbacia, who holds a chair in immigration history research at the University of Mineapolis, has written *Italy's many diaspora's*, a study on the migration of Italians.⁵ There are also studies that discuss several ethnic groups. An example is Roger Daniels' *Coming to America*.⁶ Although all of these studies are very informative, they do not give a comparison of the underlying factors for migration of several groups. This thesis hopes to do exactly this. The systematic comparative method used here may lead to new insights in the process of migration.

This thesis starts with an overview of factors in the United States involved with migration, mainly legislation, nativism and migration procedures. This chapter shows the American context of the migration process which all migrants encountered. The following chapters contain three case studies of Irish, Italian and Chinese migrants. Their cases are analyzed by using a theory of migration presented by E. G. Ravenstein. His theory and why it is useful in this thesis will be explained later. The last chapter is a comparison of the three case studies.

Research question

The aim of this thesis is to research the factors that contributed to the process of Irish, Chinese and Italian migration to the United States and compare these to find underlying patterns. The factors that contributed to the patterns of migration can be divided into *push* and *pull* factors. *Push factors* are those forces existing in the place of origin that encourage

⁵ R. Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore, a history of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) and Donna Gabbacia, *Italy's many diaspora's* (London; UCL press 2000).

⁶ Roger Daniels, *Coming to America, a history of immigration and ethnicity in American life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990) 18.

or impel a person to migrate. These can include catastrophic, political, economic or demographic reasons. Push factors include every possible reason to migrate including very personal ones. *Pull factors* are those attractive forces emanating from the migrant's goal, in this case the United States, that draw people there. These include economic- as well as non-economic reasons such as promises of political or religious freedom. Pull factors do not have to be factual correct or true, often they are based on a romanticized image of the other country.

To understand the push and pull factors, we have to know more about the circumstances in the country of origin as well as the situation in the United States. To investigate migration patterns E.G. Ravenstein has formulated a series of 'laws on migration' in three papers published in 1885. Even though Ravensteins' theory is more than a century old, modern researchers agree his ideas are still valid.⁷ Roger Daniels uses Ravensteins' theory as a guideline in his book *Coming to America*, and it is my intention to do so as well. Ravenstein states eleven laws of migration, which Daniels divides into three categories: characteristics of migrants, patterns of migration and volume of migration. Each chapter about a migrant group will be organized according to these three aspects. This systematic approach leads the way to the final chapter, the actual comparison.

One relevant point made by Ravenstein is that 'pull migrants' tend to be positively selected, while 'push migrants' are negatively selected.⁸ What Ravenstein means is that people for whom the conditions at home were not that bad migrated because they wished to. For example in the case of the Chinese migrants, the opportunities in the United States simply fitted the migrant's talents well. On the other hand, those who are pushed out of their homeland came involuntary and would never have left if it were not for the push factor(s). The Irish migrants, as described in chapter two, are an example of push migration.

The three categories Daniels discusses require some further explanation. The first, 'Characteristics of migrants', is about the kind of people that migrated. Migration is a selective process; normally only a minority of a population is likely to migrate. The kind of migrants from a given society will be determined by the conditions in that society. This aspect looks at factors like male/female balance, the age of the migrants and their social status.

⁷ Paul Boyne, Keith Halfacree and Vaughan Robinson, *Exploring contemporary migration* (Essex; Pearson education Limited 1998) 59-60.

⁸ Roger Daniels, *Coming to America, a history of immigration and ethnicity in American life*, 18.

The second category, examining the 'patterns of migration', looks at the way people migrate. Ravenstein stated that most migration takes place in well-defined streams: often people migrated from the same region to another specific place in the United States. Furthermore, this point includes the means for migration, by which we mean matters like money and ways of transportation. Ravenstein also pointed out that for every stream of migration, a counter stream emerges. Therefore, the return migration will also be described.

The last category, 'volume of migration' refers to the number of people that migrated. Ravenstein held that the volume of migration would vary according to the degree of diversity of the territory of the host country, with the degree of diversity in the people attracted to it.

Three case-studies

The Irish, Italians and Chinese together made up the majority of foreignborn in the United States in the nineteenth century. The migration of these groups to America took place roughly from the 1820s to the 1920s, although peaks in migration numbers differ per country. The three migrant groups have several similarities. For instance, most of the migrants in these groups settled in the large cities of the United States. However, each of these groups also has distinctive characteristics that make them interesting to study. These individual aspects have made me decide to study these particular cases.

Ireland, for example, shows a development over the nineteenth century that is not like any other West-European country in this period. This development was the dramatic fall of population numbers that Ireland experienced over the century. This is extraordinary because all other West-European countries saw an increase in population during the same period. Many scholars suggest that the cause for the decline of the Irish population was the great famine that Ireland suffered in the 1840s and that killed about a sixth of the population. Although this was in fact an important factor in the population decrease, in chapter two it is argued that migration was indeed the most important cause.

The Italian migrants have been selected as a case study because no other ethnic group in American history sent so many migrants in such a short time. Furthermore, the return migration was quite high among the Italians. For instance, the majority of all Irish migrants went to the United States, for the Italians on the contrary, other countries in Europe and South America were the main destination. At the peak of Italian migration from the 1870s onwards, only 31 percent of the Italians migrated to the United States while 44

percent migrated within Europe, the remaining lot went to other parts of the world.⁹ Clearly, the United States did not hold the same possibilities for the Italians as it did for the Irish. There is another contrast between the Irish and the Italians migrants, which makes it interesting to compare the two: while most Irish were forced to migrate against their will, the Italians chose to migrate voluntary. This matters because it means circumstances and thus push factors must have been different in Italy compared with Ireland.

Apart from the two European migrant groups a non-European group is the subject of the third case study: the Chinese migrants. Most Chinese migrants went to the United States intending not to stay there very long. Their plan was to make a lot of money in a short time and then return to their families in China. This means that, like the Italian, Chinese migration was voluntary of nature.

The choice of one West-European group of migrants, one Mediterranean group and one Asian group of migrants gives us a diverse and extensive description of migration patterns. By comparing these three different groups we will get a general idea about the factors involved in migration to the United States during the nineteenth century.

Comparative Method

Apart from the analysis of the case studies by using Ravensteins' theory on migration, we will use in the concluding chapter a comparative method. Charles Ragin presents comparative methods in his book: *The comparative method, moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies*. The benefits of using a case-oriented method, as explained by Ragin, are that it is both historically interpretive and causally analytic.

The method that Ragin discusses and suits this research best is the Boolean method. This is a method used to organize data in order to be able to compare them systematically. The Boolean method combines the best of quantitative and qualitative research. This is most valuable because it enables the researcher to make huge comparisons and keep an eye on the particularities of the cases. In other words, the method is holistic. The data are organized in a table in which the data are represented by a 1 or a 0, 1 meaning present and 0 absent in a particular case.

Another case-oriented method Ragin describes is John Stuart Mill's *method of agreement*. The argument to use the Boolean method is not complete without an explanation why this other method will not be used here. The method of agreement argues that "if two or

⁹ Donna Gabbacia, *Italy's many diaspora's*, 4.

more instances of a phenomenon under investigation have only one of several possible causes in common, then circumstance in which all the instances agree is the cause of the phenomenon of interest".¹⁰ However, there are some problems with this method that Mill himself has pointed out: the method of agreement cannot establish any necessary link between cause and effect. Furthermore, the method of agreement is completely incapacitated by multiple causation. Ragin points out that the use of this method is likely to yield incorrect results in situations of multiple causation. Therefore the method of agreement is not the best one for this research.

¹⁰ Charles Ragin, *The comparative method, moving beyond qualitative and quantitative strategies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 36.

Chapter 1: The United States and immigration

This chapter discusses the factors in American society that had an influence on, or were involved with migration. It is important to look at this context to understand the process of migration. First the American feelings towards migration are discussed. Secondly, legislation on migration will be examined. Finally the procedures for entering the United States are described.

In the nineteenth century the United States developed into an industrialized nation. People settled in new parts of the country as the frontier moved west. Cities emerged in the West and the infrastructure expanded. Furthermore, in the middle of the century, gold was found on the west coast. In the second half of the nineteenth century large railroads were built from the east to the west coast. The cities grew larger and more and more industries opened. All this meant that the country was in need of many workers. This was an important pull factor for migration to the United States.

At the same time, the young nation had to find its own identity. For many white Americans this meant that they cherished the typical American values of individual liberty and independence. This vision often conflicted with the new inhabitants from overseas. As a result laws on migration became stricter. In the middle of the nineteenth century many Americans saw the migrants as a threat to their idea of an ideal society. John Higham calls these anti-foreign feelings nativism.

“Nativism should be defined as intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American) connections” states John Higham in his book *Strangers in the land*.¹¹ Nativism, according to Higham, originated in the United States and evolved along with the rise of the number of migrants entering the country. Nativism has everything to do with modern nationalism and the search for a national identity. Higham uses the term ‘native Americans’ not for Indians but for white American citizens. The American Republican party, which was very successful in the first half of the 1850s, embodied the anti-foreign feelings.

Higham distinguishes three types of nativism: anti-Catholicism, anti-foreign radicals and an Anglo-Saxon tradition. The most characteristic objection of nativists against

¹¹ John Higham, *Strangers in the land, patterns of American nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University press, 1998) 4.

foreigners was that they were not loyal to America.¹² The first type, anti-Catholicism, is the oldest and most powerful anti-foreign tradition. Anti-Catholic feelings touch on the problem of the loyalty of the foreigner. The nativist would argue that a Catholic's loyalty lies with the pope and therefore not with the American nation. Furthermore, Catholic doctrine did not go with the American value of individual freedom because of the authoritative nature of the Catholic Church.¹³ The second type of nativism is a fear of foreign radicals. This fear, says Higham, stems from "the belief that violent and sweeping opposition to the status quo is characteristically European and profoundly un-American".¹⁴ Several laws on naturalization and foreigners passed are based on this type of nativism. The third type of nativism stems from the idea that the American society is part of an Anglo-Saxon tradition. Originally the Anglo-Saxon tradition was seen as the source of liberty and political freedom. However, it came to emphasise the whiteness of American society and therefore generated racism.

In the 1850s nativism was represented by the American Republican Party, also known as the 'Know-Nothing movement' because they did not talk about their activities. In 1854 and 1855 the party was very successful with seventy-five members in the Congress and much influence in several North-Eastern State governments.¹⁵ The Know-nothings were most of all anti-Catholic. Their political program focussed on the restriction of Catholic political influence, the assimilation of migrants and severing naturalization laws.¹⁶

In the 1880s another anti-foreign movement emerged in the United States called the American Protective Association (APA). The APA was founded by Harry F. Bowers, an anti-Catholic. The movement was foremost directed against Irish migrants. The members promised not to hire Irish workers, not to strike with them and not to vote for them. At the height of its success, in 1894, the APA had 2.5 million members. However, their political influence was minimal.¹⁷

The three migrant groups discussed in this thesis encountered prejudice and discrimination from nativists. For example, the Irish and Italian migrants were Catholics,

¹² Higham, *Strangers in the land*, 4.

¹³ Higham, *Strangers in the land*, 6. Higham explains this idea more extensively and in its historical context.

¹⁴ Higham, *Strangers in the land*, 8.

¹⁵ T. Archdeacon, *Becoming American, an ethnic history* (New York: The Free Press, 1983) 81.

¹⁶ T. Anbinder, 'The ideology of the Know Nothing Party' in: Gjerde ed., *Major problems in American immigration and ethnic history* (Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company) 159.

¹⁷ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 150.

and indeed one of the complaints about these groups was their disloyalty to the American society. Furthermore, the Irish migrants were sometimes portrayed as radicals because of their strong rejection of the British government. The Chinese migrants suffered from racial nativism. Many Americans found the Chinese migrants strange and unadjusted. The specific problems of the migrants are extensively discussed in the following case studies.

Legislation

Over time the American governments introduced laws that had an influence on migration to the country. The most important ones are described here. There is a distinction between acts on migration, acts on naturalization and acts that deal with foreigners. At first, legislation was intended to regulate internal problems, later legislation became more and more a restriction for migration. As the nineteenth century progressed, the United States closed its doors further and further.

The first legislation on naturalization was set up in 1790. In that year the American congress enacted a statute that stated that only "free white persons" could become American citizens. Nine years later four acts were passed that limited the political influence of migrant groups. The first, the Naturalization Act, ordered that a person should have lived fourteen years in the United States before he could be naturalized. The second was the Alien Enemies Act, this act "authorized, in time of war, invasion, or attack, the arrest, imprisonment, and deportation of migrant males from enemy nations who had passed their fourteenth birthday without taking up U.S. citizenship". Another Aliens Act gave the president the power to remove any foreigner suspected to be a danger to America's peace and safety.¹⁸ These laws did not stop migration to the United States, but it shows how much the loyalty of foreigners was doubted.

Then in 1819, the first legislation that dealt directly with migration was enacted. It stated that every vessel entering the United States should hand over a passenger list.¹⁹ This meant that there was now some control over those who entered the country.

In 1875 the government ordered that prostitutes and criminals were kept out of America. This law was misused to deny access to Chinese women. In 1882 the American Congress enforced the Chinese Exclusion Act. It was the first law that explicitly excluded certain ethnic groups from entering the United States. Therefore, it is seen as an important

¹⁸ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 60.

¹⁹ Daniels, *Guarding the golden door*, 9.

point in the history of American migration policy.²⁰ This law and its consequences will be further discussed in the chapter on Chinese migration.

Migration procedures

In 1855 the Barge office on Manhattan's battery was installed as the arrival office for migrants.²¹ The office became notorious for scandals involving theft from new arrivals. Later there were even rumours that corpses of migrants that had passed away in the nearby hospital were used for dissection. These rumours caused the federal government to enforce new laws on the migration process. Eventually, this also led to the removal of the arrival office to Ellis Island.

From 1892 about eighty percent of the European migrants arrived in the United States via Ellis Island, an island close to New York City. The migration office at Ellis Island opened on January 1, 1892. The island was 10 acres large. There were a handful of buildings, among which was a hospital and the registry room. The registry room was the central hall through which the migrants had to go. Upon arrival migrants were asked a series of questions and underwent a medical examination. When they got through the procedures they could move on to the mainland and enter the United States. For many migrants Ellis Island was the last but not the least obstacle of their migration because if they failed the procedures, they could not enter America.

Many people feared Ellis Island because it was here that they could be sent back after a long journey. These fears were unjustified; in fact, between 1892 and 1910 only one percent of all passing migrants was rejected.²²

The number of passengers on the average ship could all be examined in no more than three to four hours. There was a difference between steerage and non-steerage passengers. Steerage passengers received the medical examination on Ellis Island while first class passengers were examined on board.²³ When a person was found healthy he or she could enter the country. When a migrant was suspected of illness however, he had to stay on Ellis Island for further examination.²⁴ The migrants were checked for trachoma (a disease of

²⁰ Daniels, *Guarding the golden door*, 3.

²¹ J. Mangione and B. Morreale, *La storia, five centuries of the Italian American Experience* (New York: Harper, 1993) 110.

²² Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 146.

²³ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 111.

²⁴ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 111.

the eyes), lung diseases, several other illnesses as well as pregnancies. Those who were ill were marked with an X on their clothes with chalk. Afterwards they were further examined. Some people who had only a minor illness could stay in the Ellis Island hospital until they recovered and could then move on to the mainland. However, those who had serious conditions could not stay and had to go back where they came from.²⁵ Fiorello La Guardia worked as an interpreter on Ellis Island and told about the medical examinations:

[Many immigrants] were found to be suffering from trachoma, and their exclusion was mandatory. It was harrowing to see families separated... Sometimes, if it was a young child who suffered from trachoma, one of the parents had to return to the native country with the rejected member of the family. When they learned their fate they were stunned.²⁶

Migrants from Asia arrived on the West coast of the United States. Near the San Francisco shore was Angel Island, which was used, like Ellis Island in the East, as immigration office. The federal government started to plan the building of the immigration office in 1904. It was in use for this purpose from 1910 to 1940. The opening of Angel Island immigration office was a direct result of legislation against Asian migrants. Thousands of migrants from Asia passed the island.²⁷ However, because Angel Island was opened in 1910, and this thesis focuses on nineteenth century migration, it is not necessary to discuss the subject extensively.

Many migrants went to the United States hoping to find golden mountains. In reality, migration was a difficult process, not in the least because of the American attitude.

²⁵ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 112.

²⁶ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 273-274.

²⁷ Daniels, Roger. 1997. "No lamps were lit for them: Angel Island and the historiography of Asian American immigration." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 17, no. 1: 3. Academic Search Elite, EBSCOhost (accessed September 22, 2008).

Chapter 2: Irish migrants

On September 4, 1830 the New York Evening Post published the following advertisement: "Wanted. A cook or chambermaid... must be American, Scotch, Swiss or African - no Irish"²⁸ This little advertisement reflects the position of the Irish migrants in the United States as well as the presumptions of many Americans against them.

During the nineteenth century, about 4.3 million Irish migrated to the United States.²⁹ Irish migrants are an important group in the history of migration to the United States for two reasons. Firstly, the Irish migrants consistently made up the largest number of migrants in the United States in this period. Secondly, Ireland is an exceptional case because its population decreased dramatically, whereas most other European countries experienced population growth. This loss in population is directly related to the high numbers of migrants that left Ireland during the nineteenth century.

Irish movement to the United States during the early nineteenth century initiated the most important era of migration to America. Most of the Irish migrants were forced to migrate because of the economic problems in Ireland and the consequences of the famine. For many Irish, migration seemed like the only solution for their problems. Migration continued on a fairly consistent basis throughout the nineteenth century. It began rather hesitantly in the 1820s but grew with the passing of each decade until almost one million Irish made the journey over the 1850s. Between 1820 and 1860 the Irish migrants never constituted less than one third of all migrants in the United States, during the peak in the 1840s they made up almost half of all foreigners entering the country.³⁰ Although some revival took place throughout the 1870s and 1880s the percentage gradually declined from 1860 to 1920.³¹

The Irish migration to the United States was driven by push factors as well as pull factors. To understand what pushed the migrants out of Ireland and pulled them towards the United States, we need to look at the volume and pattern of migration as well as the

²⁸ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 131.

²⁹ P.J. Blessing, 'Irish emigration to the United States, 1800-1920: an overview', in: P.J. Drudy, *The Irish in America* (New York: University of Cambridge press 1985) 13.

³⁰ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 127.

³¹ Blessing, *Irish emigration*, 14. Blessing has used the U.S. immigration and Naturalization service' Annual Report 1975 to set up tables on migration numbers.

characteristics of the migrants. How many Irish migrated from Ireland to America? Which route did they follow and what were their means of transportation? Were they families or singles and of what age?

Ireland in the 19th century

From the last decade of the eighteenth century, the population of Ireland increased from 4.8 million in 1791 to 8.2 million fifty years later. In this period, the majority of people gained a living in agriculture. The largest city, Dublin, had only 200,000 inhabitants.³² Elite landowners who formed only 0.2 percent of the population possessed most of the land.³³ Traditionally, the nuclear family was the normal domestic unit in the Irish countryside. A family worked on a patch of land, which used to be owned by a landlord. Living standards for the majority of the Irish were very low. Gustave de Beaumont, who visited Ireland in the 1830s described the situation as “misery, naked and famishing, everywhere, and at every hour of the day.”³⁴

However, population growth changed into a decrease in population during the nineteenth century. In 1891 the Irish population stood at 4.7 million, about 57 percent of what it had been half a century before.³⁵ These high numbers of population loss were unusual compared to the rest of Europe; other European countries saw an increase of population during the same period. Clearly, something happened in Ireland that was different from other European countries. The reasons for the Irish population decline are twofold. On the one hand the country suffered a famine in the 1840s, which killed many Irish. On the other hand, millions of Irish migrated to other countries.

³² D.G. Boyce, *Nineteenth-Century Ireland, the search for stability* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan Ltd 1990) 6.

³³ Boyce, *Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, 6.

³⁴ R. Takaki, *A different mirror, a history of multicultural America*, (New York: Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Company, 1993) 142.

³⁵ Blessing, *Irish emigration*, 11.

Table 2.1: Occupations of Irish migrants prior to moving to the US in percentages³⁶

Year	Professional	Skilled	Farmers	Labourers / Farm servants / Unskilled
1820	20	20	35	20
1834	N / A	13	50	38
1837	N / A	31	3	65
1851	2	11	8	79
1855	0	11	1	87
1875	2	13	5	78
1880	1	8	6	85
1885	1	10	5	83
1890	2	8	5	85
1895	1	12	5	80
1900	2	6	1	91
1905	3	13	2	81
1910	3	18	4	73
1915	6	19	4	71
1920	8	26	6	61

Table 2.1 shows the occupation of Irish before migration to the United States. It is clear that the majority of people worked in agriculture. However, after a century there was less and less land available for the farmers. There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the land was subdivided by inheritance. When a son wedded he was provided a small plot of land, usually by subdividing the family holding. Secondly, many landowners started to clear their estates and replaced the tenants by cattle, a better economic investment. The combination of population growth and impoverishment led to several problems. Most importantly, the opportunities to earn a living were insufficient. Outside agriculture jobs were sparse and the agricultural sector had troubles of its own.³⁷ Ireland did not develop any serious industry until later in the century. The Irish manufacturers were not able to compete with the more

³⁶ P. Blessing, *Irish emigration*, 20. Blessing has used several sources: For 1820, 1834 and 1837: P. Blessing, *West Among Strangers: Irish Migration to California, 1850 to 1880*. Diss. 1977. 56 - 57; for 1851 and 1855: *Reports of Emigration Commissioners* [Great Britain]; for 1875 through 1920: U.S. Bureau of Statistics, Treasury Department, *Annual Report of the Commissioners General of Immigration*. Blessing notes that percentages for each year do not reach 100 as a result of rounding and unknown factors.

³⁷ Blessing, *Irish emigration*, 16.

advanced industries of England. The union with England laid down in the Act of the Union in 1801, which made Ireland more dependent on England, further impoverished the country. Because plots were smaller than before, many farmers depended on potatoes for survival. One and a half acre of land provided potatoes for six people.³⁸ However, in the 1840s a blight destroyed the potato crops several years in a row. Because potatoes were the common food in Ireland, shortage of it hit most of the population hard. One in six of Ireland's population died from hunger and disease during those years. People ate seaweed to survive and were ill with various fevers and dysentery. One English eyewitness described how desperate the situation was in the town he visited. He saw "... gaunt wanderers, sauntering to and fro with hopeless air and hunger - struck look," round the poorhouse he saw "a mob of starved, almost naked, women," "clamouring for soup tickets."³⁹ Many people felt the reaction of the British government was inadequate because there was no additional feeding of the hungry poor, or any other form of support. The government simply stated that the Irish had to work harder to be able to buy imported food, but there were almost no government jobs available.⁴⁰

Although it had a major impact on the personal life of the Irish, the deaths were not the most important effect of the famine and not the biggest contributor to the decline in population. Even though Ireland suffered the worst, other European countries also had crop failure because of the same potatoe blight that raged in Ireland, yet on the whole their populations continued to grow.⁴¹ The biggest effect on the fall in population numbers was the other effect of the famine: mass emigration.

More and more tenants' estates were cleared to make way for grasslands. Landowners even encouraged their tenants to migrate. This was the case even in the years before the potato crops started to rot.⁴² Because of the economic problems many Irish decided to leave the country in the hope of a better life somewhere else. Changes in social structures intensified the will to emigrate. Most migrants went to the United States, where they made up the largest part of all foreigners who entered the country.

³⁸ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 133.

³⁹ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 144.

⁴⁰ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 134.

⁴¹ Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Atlantic migration 1607-1860* (New York: Harper&Row 1961) 242.

⁴² P.J. Drudy, *The Irish in America* (New York: University of Cambridge press 1985) 3.

Characteristics of Irish migrants

The most important characteristic of Irish migrants that sets them apart from other ethnic groups in the United States is the fact that they tried very hard to integrate in American society. Whereas the Chinese and Italian migrants kept to themselves and lived in ethnic groups, the Irish did all of these things. They also had the advantage of speaking English, the other groups did not learn the language. Large numbers of Irish migrants gained American citizenship.⁴³ They did live together in the same areas of the cities, but were for instance, involved in local politics. In Jersey City for example, the Irish dominated the municipal institutions by 1870.⁴⁴

Another characteristic of the Irish migrants was their religion. The Catholic Church united Irish migrants in the United States. Ireland was a Catholic country, while England was protestant. In the United States, although there was a freedom of religion, society was dominated by protestant values.⁴⁵ This caused problems between the Irish migrants and American citizens, which will be further discussed in the last section of this chapter. The church had a central place in the Irish American communities. Many Irishmen were active in the parishes and attended mass every week.⁴⁶ Catholic organizations tried to emancipate the Irish and protect them from discrimination. The church supported all kinds of organizations: hospitals, orphanages, newspapers and schools.⁴⁷

Extensive migration went hand-in-hand with the appearance of a new generation of peasants who were literate in English. In the 1820s schools for the general public were established in Ireland. More people received an education now. While peasant pupils learned to read, calculate and received instruction in geography, their knowledge of the outside world increased. They could read newspapers and became targets for widespread advertising campaigns of shipping companies. Their knowledge of the outside world was usually more extensive than that of their parents, who were usually Irish speakers. These were the same youngsters that postponed marriage because of the shortage of land. As a

⁴³ T. Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 99.

⁴⁴ D. Shaw, 'Political Leadership in the industrial city: Irish development and nativist response in Jersey City', in: Ehrlich ed. *Immigrants in industrial America*, 85.

⁴⁵ J. S. Olson, *The ethnic dimension in American history* (New York: ST. Martin's Press, 1994) 33.

⁴⁶ Olson, *Ethnic dimensions*, 36.

⁴⁷ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 101.

result, from the late 1830s onwards the majority of Irish migrants in the United States came from the landless parts of the rural society.⁴⁸

Until the late 1830s the majority of migrants were young, unmarried men. 75 Percent were under 35 years of age and unskilled, although a sizable minority was drawn from skilled, professional and farming classes. This is reflected in table 2.2, which shows the occupation of Irish males in a suburb of New York in comparison to other migrants. The Irish migrants were pulled to the United States by the demand for labour. At the start of the nineteenth century, jobs were plentiful in the American cities. Most of the foreign labourers in New York were Irish. The majority of the Irish migrants worked in factories or as servants. In 1850 63.7 percent of Irish migrants worked in these two employments, in 1880 this was 49.6 percent.⁴⁹ However, as the number of migrants increased, their possibilities in the United States dropped. With more and more migrants arriving, there were not enough jobs anymore. In the middle of the century, many Irish were at the very bottom of the social structure. Irish labourers ended up in dangerous jobs. As a result, there were many accidents among Irish workers, as is shown in newspaper articles: "an Irishman drowned - an Irishman crushed by a beam - an Irishman suffocated in a pit - an Irishman blown to atoms by a steam engine - ten, twenty Irishmen buried alive in the sinking of a bank"⁵⁰ New arrivals who could not find work needed charity. To deal with this new situation, the Irish community formed the Shamrock Friendly Association, which provided temporary assistance and helped people to get a job.⁵¹

Table 2.2: Nativity by occupation, white males over twenty, Jersey City, 1860⁵²

	Native		Irish		British		German	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Non-manual	1180	42.1	168	6.6	236	25.7	110	13.6
Skilled	969	34.4	743	28.2	498	54.3	482	59.6
Unskilled	254	9.0	1472	55.9	106	11.5	109	13.4
Other	415	14.5	253	9.3	78	8.5	109	13.4
Total	2818	100.0	2636	100.0	918	100.0	810	100.0

⁴⁸ Blessing, *Irish emigration*, 16.

⁴⁹ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 137.

⁵⁰ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 147.

⁵¹ Hansen, *The Atlantic migration*, 85.

⁵² Shaw, *Political leadership*, 87. This table is based on Census data derived from the federal manuscript census schedule for Jersey City.

Volume of migration

Between 1820 and 1860 the Irish migrants always accounted for at least a third of all migrants in the United States. Table 1.3 shows the peak in Irish migration during the years of the famine. At the time nearly half of all migrants entering America were Irish. In the twenty years after the civil war, not the heaviest period of migration for the Irish, they still made up 15 percent of migrants. The census shows that in 1860 there were just over four million foreign born: 38.9 percent of them were Irish.⁵³

*Table 2.3: Irish immigration to the United States 1820-1920*⁵⁴

Period	Number	Percentage of total U.S. immigrants
1820-1830	54,338	35.8
1831-1840	207,381	34.6
1841-1850	780,719	45.6
1851-1860	914,119	35.2
1861-1870	435,778	18.8
1871-1880	436,871	15.5
1881-1890	665,482	12.5
1891-1900	338,416	10.5
1901-1910	339,065	3.9
1911-1920	146,181	2.5

Daniels defines three phases in Irish migration: pre famine, the famine years and the post famine period. The table shows that already before the famine the Irish made up a large part of all ethnic groups entering the United States. In the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, the numbers drop because of the increasing amount of other ethnic migrant groups.⁵⁵

From 1840 to 1893 the sexes were in rough balance. In comparison to other ethnic groups, the number of Irish women who migrated was very high. Irish women had always contributed to their families' incomes by working. Because of the famine there was less work and this affected all Irish workers, including women. Therefore, one of the reasons for

⁵³ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 127.

⁵⁴ Blessing, *Emigration to the United States*, 62-64. Roger Daniels presents the exact same numbers.

⁵⁵ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 140.

the high numbers of Irish women who migrated is the job possibilities in the United States.⁵⁶ Another reason was the fact that the Irish tended to marry relatively late because of the famine and the high death rates.⁵⁷ Between 1845 and 1914 the annual numbers of marriages in Ireland fell from seven to four per thousand.⁵⁸ This weakened women's socio-economic status and forced many of them to emigrate.

The Irish maid became a stereotype for Irish women in the United States. There is even an Irish folksong about it:

She being inclined to emigrate,
her wages did demand,
to seek a situation in America's free land.
This undaunted female hearing that a ship at
Dublin quay had advertised for servants to go to America,
she bid farewell to all her friends...⁵⁹

In the middle of the nineteenth century eighty percent of the household servants in New York City were Irish women.⁶⁰

Patterns of migration

Migration from Ireland to the United States was not very easy. It was expensive and dangerous. On arrival new problems faced the migrants, they had to find work and start a new life in their new home country. Although the United States did not turn out to be the land of plenty for all migrants, in Ireland people really believed that everything would be better overseas.

To migrate to the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, one needs the means to get there. Improvements in transportation made the decision to migrate easier, so did new regulations

⁵⁶ K. Miller, 'For love and liberty; Irish women, migration and domesticity in Ireland and America 1815-1920, in: P. O'Sullivan ed. *Irish women and Irish migration* (London, Leicester University press, 1995) 43.

⁵⁷ Olson, *Ethnic dimension*, 34.

⁵⁸ Miller, *For love and liberty*, 43.

⁵⁸ Olson, *Ethnic dimensions*, 42.

⁵⁹ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 155-56.

⁶⁰ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 156.

and kinship networks in which people supported each other made the decision to migrate easier. Most Irish people had the idea that anywhere was better than Ireland, and the United States still looked promising. Information about the possibilities in the United States provided by newspapers and relatives who already lived overseas encouraged people to move. Table 1.4 shows that the majority of Irish migrants settled in the North-eastern states of America. These were the industrialized regions where there was much work to be found.

Table 2.4: Regional distribution of Irish in the United States, percentages⁶¹

Year	Northeast	Central	South	West	Total
1850	75	15	9	0.4	961,719
1860	66	22	9	3	1,611,304
1870	65	24	6	4	1,855,827
1880	64	24	6	6	1,854,571
1890	65	32	5	7	1,871,509
1900	68	21	4	7	1,615,459
1910	69	19	4	9	1,352,251
1920	70	18	3	9	1,037,234

The regions where most of the Irish migrants originated differed throughout the century. During the early nineteenth century migrants came mainly from Ulster and along the east coast. Later, more people left from the centre and northwestern counties. The small farm economy in much of Ireland was incapable of supporting a relatively large number of dependants. This explains why during the famine, only a small part of the migrants came from Ulster and the region south of Mayo, the more industrialized regions where there were alternate sources of income. By the end of the century, however, migration on a considerable scale was prevalent throughout the country.

Like the rest of the country, the North-West of Ulster experienced rapid population growth at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, it did not experience the dramatic economic downfall as other parts of Ireland. Ulster was the most affluent as well as the most densely populated province of Ireland. These factors set the region apart from the rest of the country.

⁶¹ Blessing, *Emigration to the United States*, 22. Blessing has used several sources, which are: J.D.B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the United States*. Washington, D.C., 1854. p. 116; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of the Population*, 1950, II and *Characteristics of the Population*, Table 24 of respective state volume. Blessing notes that the regional areas are standard U.S. Census Bureau regions and that the percentages do not add to 100 because of roundings.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century Great Britain was the only country in Europe that had some sort of legislation on migration. The government stimulated migration to Canada, part of the Commonwealth, instead of the United States in several ways. The number of migrants on vessels travelling to the United States was therefore restricted. British passenger acts made it much more expensive to travel to the latter. A ticket to New York would cost four to five pounds, while a ticket to the Canadian Maritime Provinces would cost only fifteen shillings. Moreover, ships to Canada left from Ireland, while for the United States, the Irish migrants first had to travel to Liverpool. A substantial part of the Irish migrants who ended up in America travelled via Canada. The Irish port of Derry was the main departure point for the north western area of Ireland. Derry had commercial links with Canada which went back a long way. Migrants could easily travel on timber ships to Canada.⁶² However, economic opportunities in Canada were not as attractive as in the United States. As a result, many Irish bought a cheap ticket to Canada, only to travel on to the United States.⁶³

Most of the Irish migrants ended up in the city's of the Northeast coastal states. This is logical from a geographical as well as an economic point of view. The east coast of America lies directly opposite Ireland, so these were the first ports the Irish migrants arrived. For those migrants travelling via Canada this was the region where they entered the United States.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the north east of the United States was the most industrialized part of the country and it had the largest cities where there were more job opportunities. New England was a popular destination among the Irish migrants, about one fifth of all Irishborn lived there in 1850. In 1850 47,933 migrants lived in Boston, 35 percent of the total population of the city. About 74 percent of those foreignborn were Irish.⁶⁵ New York also had a large population of Irishborn. The majority of labourers in this city were Irish.

As migration to the United States became the way to escape the economic problems and worsening living standards in Ireland, kinship networks were set up to facilitate migration. It was uncommon that an Irish person would migrate alone. Large numbers of peasants travelled in groups related by blood or from the same area in Ireland. Furthermore, the development of prepaid tickets made it easier for the Irish migrants to bring relatives

⁶² Deirdre Mageean, 'Nineteenth century emigration', in P. Drudy, *The Irish in America*, 45.

⁶³ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 128.

⁶⁴ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 128.

⁶⁵ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 130.

over after them. This is called chain migration, and the Irish migrants were the first large group that did this.⁶⁶

How could these people on the edge of starvation finance the migration? The sources of their funds were many and varied. Often they had a little money saved for an emergency that had now come. Further money was made by the sale of furniture. Some people even begged for money. In many cases landlords encouraged their tenants to leave and did not press for the last years rent or even paid for the voyage. The landlord did this out of self-interest, not charity, because if they did not send the tenants away, they would become an everlasting burden upon the landlords' estate. Some landlords even organized migration in groups, they organized the journey, chartered a ship and even donated a small amount to start a new life overseas. Another important source was money sent from relatives who were already in the United States. Often, this money was meant as a relief in Ireland, but was spent on a passage.⁶⁷

During the years of the great famine in Ireland enormous numbers of Irish arrived in the United States. They travelled on ships where living conditions were often as poor as in Ireland itself. The journey from Liverpool to America was dramatic. Passengers had to sleep on "a shelf of coarse pinewood, situated in a noisome dungeon, airless and lightless, in which several hundred persons of both sexes and all ages are stowed away on shelves two feet one inch above the other, three feet wide and six feet long, still reeking from the in eradicable stench left by the emigrants of the last voyage," as *The Times* wrote.⁶⁸

Diseases broke out, and about six percent of the migrants died at sea. Physicians called it 'ship fever' though it was probably the same disease that raged in Ireland. Once a ship left an Irish port, it was immediately out on the Atlantic Ocean and did not come near other countries until it reached the United States. Because of this, passengers on Irish vessels could not be checked and placed in quarantine, something ships from the continent could do. Therefore, the Irish vessels had the highest numbers of deaths. Of the 89,738 migrants who embarked in 1847 for the St. Lawrence in Canada 5293 died during the voyage.⁶⁹ In February 1847 an act was passed by the American Congress to improve circumstances on the ships. The act stated a minimum of space for each passenger and prescribed the length and width of the beds and food requirements. Vessels arriving in the

⁶⁶ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 130.

⁶⁷ Hansen, *Atlantic migration*, 251.

⁶⁸ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 145.

⁶⁹ Hansen, *Atlantic migration*, 256.

United States which did not meet these requirements should be confiscated.⁷⁰ Despite these regulations conditions of ocean passage, the migrants still suffered on overcrowded ships.

It was not until 1882 that the federal government set up migration regulation. Until that date, legislation was set up per state or even per city. For example, New York City set up a body of six immigration commissioners in 1847 and passed an act that required the master of a vessel to pay a fee of one dollar for every passenger on his ship. In Baltimore, a quarantine ground was set up to protect the inhabitants from disease and Louisiana had authorized a tax on each passenger arriving from foreign ports.

In comparison to other ethnic groups the amount of return migration for the Irish migrants was very low. Only one in twelve Irish migrants returned.⁷¹ This can be explained by the nature of Irish migration. They had been forced to leave their country because of the economic situation, so there was simply nothing left for them in Ireland. Another reason why the Irish migrants did not return is the fact that they participated in the American society and, as said before, many Irishmen became naturalized. We will see that Italian migrants for instance, returned very often and at the same time did not integrate in American society.

Visions of Americans on Irish migrants

Unlike the Italian and Chinese migrants, who stayed together in closed ethnic groups, the Irish migrants were very much involved in American society. More than other ethnic groups they wanted to fit in. Of course, the fact that many spoke English helped. Furthermore, many Irish had always been highly politicized people in Ireland and continued to be so in the United States.⁷² However, the Irish had to endure discrimination and prejudices just like the Italian and Chinese immigrants.

One of the prejudices against Irish migrants was that they were lazy drunks. A newspaper editor in Jersey City spoke of Irish workers as "a mongrel mass of ignorance and crime and superstition, as utterly unfit for its duties, as they [were] for the common courtesies and decencies of civilized life."⁷³ Daniels states that "In the antebellum in the South it was widely believed that Irish should be employed in dangerous, high mortality

⁷⁰ Hansen, *Atlantic migration*, 253-254.

⁷¹ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 127.

⁷² Olson, *Ethnic dimensions*, 33.

⁷³ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 150.

jobs rather than risking the loss of valuable negro slaves."⁷⁴ Because of attitudes like these, many Irish in the United States became anti-black. As a result, the Irish insisted on their own white supremacy. It was a way to establish themselves as American citizens.⁷⁵

Some Americans felt threatened by the success of Irish migrants in gaining political influence. It was widely known that Irish people supported the Democratic Party, something conservative Americans did not approve of. In 1880, William R. Grace, became the first Irish Catholic mayor of New York City and in 1882 Irishman Hugh O'Brien was elected mayor of Boston.⁷⁶ Many newspapers in the late nineteenth century published articles about the social and political threat of the Irish. Cartoonist Thomas Nast for example "decried their violence, mocked their association with the Democratic Party, and repeatedly denounced their religion as a danger to the smooth functioning and survival to the public school system."⁷⁷

Nast pointed out another problem between American citizens and Irish immigrants in the United States, namely the religious differences between those groups. The Irish were Catholics and therefore the pope was an authority for them. This caused some Americans to question Irish loyalty to the American government, and made them wonder if they could become 'true Americans'.⁷⁸ In some cases anti-Catholic feelings resulted in violence against the Irish. In New York, mobs disrupted Catholic masses on Christmas day 1806. In 1844 there were riots in Philadelphia, because Catholics requested tax support for Catholic schools. Nuns and priests were attacked, Catholic churches damaged and homes were set on fire.⁷⁹

In spite of all these anti-Irish feelings the Irish immigrants were relatively successful. It is sometimes thought that the Irish migrant remained a poor group in American society. On the contrary, they steadily climbed the social ladder as the Irish networks stimulated social mobility.⁸⁰ However, the constant stream of new arrivals filled up the vacant low-paid jobs.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 136-37.

⁷⁵ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 151.

⁷⁶ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 99.

⁷⁷ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 101.

⁷⁸ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 75.

⁷⁹ Olson, *Ethnic dimensions*, 169.

⁸⁰ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 143.

⁸¹ Olson, *Ethnic dimensions*, 35.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the Irish migration to the United States. I have argued that the main cause for the dramatic drop in population numbers Ireland experienced in the nineteenth century has been migration. The majority of those leaving Ireland ended up in the United States. Most migrants thought America would bring them new opportunities and a hope for a better life. Although this was partly true, this chapter also shows the difficulties the migrants faced both during their voyage and upon arrival.

The patterns of migration of Irish migrants have been influenced by the economic situation in Ireland as well as the United States. By discussing the characteristics of migrants, the volume of migration and the patterns of migration I have shown that this was the case. Irish migrants were pushed out for economic reasons. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Ireland became very poor, at the same time the country experienced a population growth. There was less and less land available for small farmers because of estate clearances and the partition of land. As a consequence, many young men decided to emigrate. Then, in the middle of the century it was the devastating famine that pushed Irish people out of the country. I have also shown that for the Irish migrants, migration was often not voluntary. For many Irish in the nineteenth century, migration seemed like their only option. Migration has had a major influence on both Ireland and the United States.

Chapter 3: Italian Americans

When towards the end of the nineteenth century the Italian prime minister visited a village in the South of the country, the mayor greeted him by saying: “I welcome you in the name of the five thousand inhabitants of this town, three thousand of whom are in America and the other two thousand preparing to go.”⁸² This story may be exaggerated, it marks the situation in Italy in the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Between 1870 and 1920 about 4.1 million Italians went to United States in search of a better life. No other country sent so many migrants in such a short period of time. Nevertheless, there were also many Italians who returned to Italy. For every hundred Italians who migrated thirty seven went back to Italy. In fact, Italians had the highest numbers of return migration compared to other migrant groups in America. This chapter discusses the problems and context of the Italian migration to the United States as well as the return migration. It shows how developments in Italy as well as America created the factors that made people migrate.

The chapter starts with an account of Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century, the period in which vast numbers of Italians left their country. In the second part of this chapter, the characteristics of the Italian migrants are discussed. This part explains how political and economic factors have influenced Italian migration. It is followed by a third section, which discusses the volume of the Italian migration and a fourth section that tells about the patterns of migration. The chapter ends with the American vision on the Italian migrants. For life in the United States was not always as easy as the migrants had expected before leaving Italy. One of the reasons for this is, as we will see, the attitude of some Americans towards the Italians.

Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century

In the second half of the nineteenth century Italy saw major political changes. It altered from an assortment of regions and city-states to a newly unified kingdom. Italy at the start of the nineteenth century consisted of several city states and rural areas. These various regions did not have political or economic unity. The majority of Italians were agricultural labourers or peasant farmers. Italy’s industry at this time was underdeveloped and could not compete

⁸² M. Wynan, *Round - trip to America; the immigrants return to Europe, 1880 - 1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993) 15.

with the industrializing countries of Western Europe.⁸³ However, levels of agricultural productivity, the region's main income, were also low and most rural communities were poor.

Landlords owned the majority of the land and most farmers worked for them. The landlords charged high rents, paid low wages, provided unsteady employment and put little profit back into the soil. There were peasant revolts, but they were not very successful. Because of the population growth there were many others who would do the work. This was especially true from 1870 to 1900 when population growth outstripped the increase in the gross national product and produced a decline in per capita income.⁸⁴

From 1848 onwards, there was a strong movement for national unity called the *Risorgimento Nazionale*. The name of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) is inextricably linked to this movement. In 1860 Garibaldi liberated all regions south of Rome, called the *mezzogiorno*, from the Bourbons who had ruled them for ages. The struggle for national unity in 1871 led to the creation of Italy as we know it.

The nationalistic ideas of the *Risorgimento* movement were mostly shared by intellectuals and bourgeois inhabitants, but not by the peasants. It widened the gap between landowners and the peasants. Especially in the south the educated and bourgeois inhabitants hoped that a national state would protect them and their properties from the rebellious poor.⁸⁵ In the 1890s this contrast resulted in the creation of *Fasci*, organizations of Sicilian peasant farmers to force landowners to renegotiate leases that were widely felt to be ruinous.⁸⁶

Furthermore, the *Risorgimento* wanted a unified Italy with a central government. However, their nationalistic ideas did not correspond with the feelings of most Italians. Italy had been divided into many regions and city-states for centuries, therefore most inhabitants were very regionally orientated. The new regime did not leave much room for regionalism and imposed national taxes and compulsory military service. These measures further increased anti-governmental feelings among most Italians.⁸⁷

⁸³ J.A. Davis, 'Economy, society, and the state', in: J.A. Davis ed., *Italy in the nineteenth century 1796 - 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 236.

⁸⁴ L.J. Iorizzo and S. Mondello, *The Italian Americans* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980 Rev.ed.) 58.

⁸⁵ Gabaccia, *Italy's many diasporas*, 40.

⁸⁶ Davis, *Economy, society, and the state*, 239.

⁸⁷ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 60-61.

The new kingdom did not bring much improvement to the lives of the poor farmers. Many were disappointed in the new regime and decided to migrate in the hope of better economic opportunities abroad. In the second half of the nineteenth century, millions of Italians left their country. The average number per year of people who left was 117,596. At the end of the nineteenth century more than 5.3 million had left.⁸⁸ They went to France, Germany, Switzerland as well as Argentina and Brazil. More than 4 million went to the United States.⁸⁹

Characteristics of Italian migrants

This section discusses the characteristics of Italian migrants, these include factors like the social status of the migrants, their backgrounds and male/female balance. Furthermore, the areas in which they lived and the occupations they had in the United States are discussed. I start with a short history of Italian migration.

Already in the seventeenth century, a small number of Italians went to the United States. Most of them were artists, musicians and craftsmen. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Italian intellectuals entered the United States. One of them was Philip Mazzei (1730-1816), a physician and scholar who is said to have had political influence on his famous neighbours: Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine. Many Italians in this period played a part in the musical life of the United States. For example, Lorenzo da Ponte (1749-1838), who had been Mozart's librettist, came to the United States in 1805 and supervised the building of the first American Opera House. Furthermore, Italian artists decorated the U.S. Capitol in Washington and worked in the granite quarries of Vermont.

Another large part of Italians that came to the United States before the great migration of the late nineteenth century were priests and political exiles. Most notable among the former was Giuseppe Rosati (1749-1843) who became bishop of New Orleans and Saint Louis.⁹⁰ One of the political exiles was Guiseppe Garibaldi, who for some time worked in the United States as a candle maker. He later tried to use his claim of American citizenship to maintain his freedom.⁹¹ From time to time various Italian states captured suspected revolutionaries and banned them, many of them ended up in America. After 1849 there were so many Italians in New York that they had their own newspapers. By the time of

⁸⁸ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 69.

⁸⁹ Gabaccia, *Italy's many diasporas*, 5.

⁹⁰ R. Daniels, *Coming to America*, 192.

⁹¹ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 29.

the American Civil war Italians in America formed a 'Garibaldi Guard' some sort of International Brigade that joined the Union forces.⁹²

During the 1870s the character of Italian migration started to change. In the following decades millions of Italians left the country, the artists and intellectuals were replaced by the workmen. Already at the start of this decade the authorities noticed an increase in the numbers of people leaving the country. In the fall of 1870, Ercole Luardi of Lombardy, a member of the chamber of deputies stated that substantial numbers of people left "[n]ot only from the arid zone of the south but also from the fertile regions of Lombardy and Emilia in the North."⁹³

At first the Italian government did not react; the prime minister said in 1873 "[emigration is] a sign of vigour and energy that could enrich, not impoverish the nation."⁹⁴ However, with the increase of the number of people leaving, the government had to respond, and started to propagate against migration. Pamphlets were published in which letters of Italians in America told the people of the horrors of living overseas. "I am nailed to the cross," began one of these letters, "of the 100 *paesani* who came here, only 40 of us have survived. And who is here to protect us? We have neither priests nor *carabinieri* to look after our safety. The *signori* in Italy treat us badly, but we were better off in Italy."⁹⁵ Because this letter was used in a pamphlet published by the government, it is probably exaggerated and tells us more about the vision of the Italian government on migration than about the experience of the Italian Americans. The propaganda was not very effective, because no other ethnic group in American migration history sent so many people in such a short period of time.

Eighty percent of the Italian migrants came from the south. More males than females migrated. From way back Italian men left their families seasonally to work in other areas and even in the other countries surrounding Italy. Therefore, it was not unusual for them to do the same when going to America. Women stayed behind and followed later. In only a few cases they migrated as unmarried young workers.⁹⁶

⁹² Daniels, *Coming to America*, 192.

⁹³ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 68.

⁹⁴ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 69.

⁹⁵ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 70.

⁹⁶ V. Yans - McLaughlin, 'A flexible tradition: South Italian immigrant confront a new work experience'. In R.L. Ehrlich ed., *Immigrants in industrial America 1850 - 1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977) 69-71.

Many Italians returned to Italy after an average of four years in the United States. This return migration will be discussed later. However, there were of course still plenty Italians who did not return but settled in the United States. Most Italians settled in the cities, the majority lived in New York. The common Italian migrant lived in crowded urban apartments in the poorer areas of the cities, called 'little Italy's'. The change from the Italian countryside to the American cities was a culture shock for Bartolomeo Vanzetti, an Italian migrant who arrived in 1908:

"Until yesterday I was among folks who understood me. This morning I seemed to have awakened in a land where my language meant little more to the native (as far as meaning was concerned) than the pitiful noises of a dumb animal. Where was I to go? What was I to do? Here was the promised land. The elevated rattled by and did not answer. The automobiles and trolley sped by, heedless of me."⁹⁷

However, there were also rural colonies. For example over five hundred Italian families owned agricultural land in Texas and by the early twentieth century thousands of Italians had agricultural businesses in Vineland, New Jersey.⁹⁸

Counted by occupation, Italians in the United States were found largely in manual labour. They replaced the American citizens and migrants from northern and western Europe who used to do the unskilled jobs. Now that they had climbed up the industrial ladder, these jobs were open to Italians and other migrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. For instance, the Italians replaced the Irish in railroads and construction works. Every state in America came to depend upon them for menial labour.⁹⁹

Italians worked on railroads, waterways, construction work and in the mining industries. A minority of them ended up doing agricultural work. Table 3.1 shows the percentage of Italians in different occupations in San Francisco relative to non-Italians. Wages were quite low, about one to one and a half dollar per day at the start of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰ The Italians were second next to blacks in low income.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 130.

⁹⁸ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 193.

⁹⁹ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 68-70.

¹⁰⁰ D. Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco; the immigrant experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982) 94.

Table 3.1: Occupational Distribution of Migrants¹⁰²

Occupation	Italians	Non-Italians
Agriculture and food processing	4%	1%
Professions	6%	16%
Domestic and personal services	15%	17%
Trade and transportation	35%	15%
Manufacturing and mechanical	35%	50%
Fishing and fish processing	5%	1%

Many Italians, especially in the early years of mass migration, got their jobs through ethnic labour contractors called *padroni*. We will see that the Chinese used a similar system. The *padrone*, himself an Italian, often exploited his contractors, and could do so because he usually had the advantage of speaking better English. Some of the *padrones* even recruited young boys in Italy and brought them to the United States to work as street musicians and acrobats. Over time, the *padrone* system became less important. Both the Italians and the American government tried to put a stop to the abuse and at the same time Italians could now find jobs with the help of friends and relatives who already lived in America, because of increasing chain migration.¹⁰³

Italian children did not often attend school. This was to be expected because education was not highly valued by the farmers in Italy. Therefore, in the United States, Italian families rather sent their children to work than to school. In Italy, it was normal for all family members to work together to provide for the family. The Italian migrants continued this habit in the United States, even if factory owners objected to it. A typical example is the cannery factories. Until child labour legislation was enforced in this sector, children who assisted in domestic chores in Italy now helped their mother prepare crops for canning.¹⁰⁴ The children could also be handed over to a *padrone*. Americans found the Italian migrants very harsh on their children, they were referred to as “little white slaves, giving them in turn bad food, inhuman treatment, ragged clothes and not a particle of education”.¹⁰⁵ Some people tried to do something about this. A night school for Italian boys

¹⁰¹ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 138.

¹⁰² Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco*, 143.

¹⁰³ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 196.

¹⁰⁴ Yans - McLaughlin, *A flexible tradition*, 75.

¹⁰⁵ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 46.

and girls was set up where the children could attend evening classes. And Charles Summer introduced legislation that eventually ended this form of child labour.¹⁰⁶ From 1900 on, the children of Italian migrants were able to move upwards to do administrative work. However, they also continued to work in the mining and construction industries.¹⁰⁷

A typical characteristic of the Italian migrants is the fact that they were not very eager to integrate in American society. Because their intention was to stay just a couple of years in the United States, they did not have a great desire to become Americans. Italians often lived amongst other Italians and this did not create an ambition to integrate in American society or learn English. One Italian migrant said: "I have been down to America today," by which he meant that he had been to another part of the city, outside the Italian neighbourhood.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, attending citizenship classes or join American societies also seemed unnecessary. Their political participation was low.¹⁰⁹ As a result, old habits were preserved.

Volume of migration

From 1870 to 1920 more than 4.1 million Italians were recorded as entering the United States. Their reasons for migration were political as well as economic. In this section the volume of the Italian migration to the United States will be discussed. We will see that economic changes had a direct effect on migration.

The numbers of Italian migrants entering the United States increased over the years. Table 3.2 shows that from the period 1861-70 onwards the number of Italian migrants started to grow. This period, which started with Garibaldi's campaign in the South, was the time when the movement for national unity became really active. As argued before, the process of national unity in Italy caused many Italians to leave the country. The table supports this, because it shows the number of migrants increasing rapidly after the creation of the Italian kingdom in 1870. The new Italy seemed unable to create a feeling of unity or Italian citizenship among its inhabitants. Many people, the majority of them the same southern peasants that Garibaldi had liberated in 1860, rejected their new government, as we have seen in the section on Italy in the nineteenth century. For many of them, this was a factor that contributed to the decision to migrate.

¹⁰⁶ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 46.

¹⁰⁷ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 70.

¹⁰⁸ Mangione and Morreale, *La Storia*, 160.

¹⁰⁹ Wynan, *Round - trip to America*, 63.

Table 3.2: Italian migration to the United States 1820-1920¹¹⁰

Period	Number
1820-30	439
1831-40	2,253
1841-50	1,870
1851-60	9,231
1861-70	11,725
1871-80	55,759
1881-90	307,309
1891-1900	651,893
1901-10	2,045,877
1911-20	1,109,524
Total	4,195,880

The table shows an increase in the number of migrants from the 1870s onwards. In the following years the numbers rise every decade. For example, in just thirty years the number of Italian migrant in New York City increased from 2,749 in 1870¹¹¹ to 145,433 in 1900.¹¹² As argued before, the reason for the increase is found in the social unrest in Italy caused by the *Risorgimento*.

Of all Italian migrants a relative small portion were women, in general only a third.¹¹³ There were, however, regional differences. Women were much more likely to emigrate from Sicily than from parts of the north, like Veneto, as shown in table 3.3. The difference in the number of women who migrated is not just an expression of the difference between the North and the South. Northern females often migrated as unmarried young workers in search of employment while the women of the south typically migrated as wives following their husbands or children in family groups.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 189.

¹¹¹ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 193.

¹¹² Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 76-77.

¹¹³ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 195-195.

¹¹⁴ Gabaccia, *Italy's many diasporas*, 72.

Table 3.3: Females among migrants by region, 1876-1925¹¹⁵

Region	Percentage female
Piedmont	22
Liguria	29
Lombardy	17
Veneto	16
Emilia	19
Tuscany	21
Marches	21
Umbria	18
Lazio	14
Abruzzi-Molisse	19
Campania	27
Puglia	21
Basilicata	30
Calabria	19
Sicily	29
Sardinia	15

Apart from the economic and political push factors in Italy, in America there were pull factors that contributed to the mass migration. In the United States, cheap labour was greatly in demand. As we have seen, the Italians filled the low paid jobs which other ethnic groups had soared.

In the 1920s the mass migration of Italians to the United States succumbed. The reason for this was twofold. On the one hand, America introduced immigration laws in 1924, which put a stop to migration from East and Southern Europe, as well as Asian migration, this we will see in the next chapter. On the other hand, during this period a Fascist regime was established in Italy, which prohibited most Italians from leaving the country.¹¹⁶

In this part we have seen how the developments in both Italy and the United States have influenced the numbers of migration. The reasons for Italian migration were twofold. Firstly, political changes in Italy played an important role. Secondly, the Italian as well as the American economic situation had an influence on migration.

¹¹⁵ Gabaccia, *Italy's many diasporas*, 72. Gabaccia has used *Annuario statistico*, table V.

¹¹⁶ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 33.

Patterns of migration

This section discusses the ways in which the Italians travelled as well as the routes and kinds of transportation they used. Many Italian migrants intended to stay only a couple of years in the United States and return to Italy as a rich man afterwards. Some migrants were successful, while others returned to the United States to work there again. The migrants who went back and forth are often referred to as ‘birds of passage’.¹¹⁷ As transatlantic travel became faster and cheaper, more people chose to do this.¹¹⁸

At first most Italians migrated as seasonal labourers. From the late nineteenth century on however, more and more Italian communities settled together in the same area in the United States. They experienced a regional rather than a national loyalty. This process is called regionalism and it happened with migrants from other European countries as well. In the case of the Italian migrants there is an even stricter loyalty, that of *Campanilismo*, which is the sense of attachment to the traditions of one’s commune.¹¹⁹ A community often migrated on invitation by pioneering relatives who had already settled in America. People from the same Italian village even travelled together with the intent to establish Italian communities in the United States. These kinds of migrants settled mostly in rural areas of the United States, in contrast with the majority of Italians who settled in the big cities. For example, Charles Fornesi was the first Italian to settle in Seneca Falls, New York. He wrote to his relatives in Tuscany and invited them to join him. Many answered and because of that, the Italian community in Seneca Falls was born.¹²⁰

The journey to the United States started with the voyage to a port. When it was near enough the migrant would go on foot, this happened for distances as long as forty kilometres. Otherwise a migrant had to travel by carts or by train. One migrant who left Italy in 1900 with five other members of his family described the first part of their journey to Naples via Palermo:

We left in a two-wheeled cart that carried a big home made trunk, my mother, two of my brothers, my sister and also a cousin ... On our way to

¹¹⁷ D. Cinel, ‘The relationship between American money and Italian land in stimulating return migration, in: J. Gjerde ed., *Major problems in American immigration and ethnic history* (Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Company) 188.

¹¹⁸ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 89.

¹¹⁹ Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco*, 197.

¹²⁰ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 101.

Palermo, which was forty miles away, we had a horse and a driver. We stayed overnight in a small town where we slept in a stable; the horse slept on the hay. After we got to Palermo I remember that we hopped onto a small launch- there was no such thing as a dock. The Mediterranean way was very rough and we had to travel some distance to get to the ship. It took all night. And I remember so well that there was really a lot of crying going on because of the frightfulness of the Mediterranean. The boat was not a boat to come across the ocean. You had to go to Naples- and there you took the ship.¹²¹

Usually Italians departed from Naples or Genoa. Only later did Palermo become a port from which transatlantic ships departed. In 1901 laws were enacted to inform and protect travellers in the ports. Before, many different frauds and thieves were active around the docks. In addition, migrants now had a medical inspection before leaving.

Life on board of a transatlantic ship was very unpleasant. Ships were overcrowded and sanitary provisions were bad. Steerage was the cheapest ticket available and often the only one which migrants could afford. Steerage was below water level and these passengers were only allowed to use a small open-air deck. As a result, migrants spent most of the journey in the dirty cabins below.

Inevitably, the conditions on board caused diseases among the passengers. Some migrants even died during the journey. Cholera was a common disease, so was trachoma, a disease of the eyes. Upon arrival the ill migrants would be placed in quarantine on Swinburne or Hoffman Island, near Ellis Island and New York.¹²²

97 percent of the Italian migrants who entered the United States arrived in New York.¹²³ Upon arrival on Ellis Island, migrants had to pass the American authorities before they could enter the United States. There were several reasons to refuse a migrant entrance and sent him directly back. A person would be rejected when it was clear that he would not be able to support himself. Also women travelling alone were suspicious. If there was not a man that came to collect her, she could be a prostitute and was not allowed to enter the country.

¹²¹ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 101.

¹²² Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 78.

¹²³ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 195.

In 1890s the Italian government had opened an Italian Bureau at Ellis Island. The bureau tried to inform people about the *padrones* in order to put a stop to this system. They also helped Italians to find jobs in other ways. The Italian Bureau, however, was closed in 1899 because it interfered with the work of the commissioner of immigration. In 1901 the Italian government installed the Commissariat of Emigration. The goal of the commissariat was to protect Italian migrants worldwide. They tried to regulate transportation, inform passengers and gave them legal advice.¹²⁴

The American Italians set up several organizations. An example is the Italian society in San Francisco, founded as early as 1855. Over the years it became quite successful. In 1858 the *Societa Italiana di Mutua Beneficenza* followed. These societies tried to help the Italian community in San Francisco, for instance by taking care of the elderly and sick people. Sometimes, these people went back to Italy with the help of these organizations. The success of these organizations lay in the fact that they were regionally orientated. As said before, most Italians did not have a feeling of national unity and often people from the same village migrated to the same place in America. Other Italian societies established at the end of the nineteenth century also reinforced regionalism.¹²⁵

There were family members who stayed behind in Italy; most of them were women. They often did not hear from their husbands and sons overseas for months at a time. The men tried to send money, but this was usually not enough to sustain their families in Italy. A lot of women and children had to do the farm labour that the men had formerly done to earn enough money. What's more, regularly they even had to pay off the debts their husbands had made to afford the journey to the United States. When a woman received a letter asking her to join her husband in America it was seen as a hopeful sign. However, this also meant that she had to obtain the documents and money required for migration and that was not an easy task. In many cases, these women had not travelled beyond the region around her village.¹²⁶

Return migration

As pointed out before, many Italian Americans returned to Italy after staying a while in the United States. Records from the Trans-Atlantic Passenger Association for the period 1899-1910 show that during this period for every hundred Italian passengers who were shipped to

¹²⁴ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans* 159.

¹²⁵ Cinel, *From Italy to San Francisco*, 200-201.

¹²⁶ Mangione and Morreale, *La storia*, 94.

the United States, thirty-seven were brought back to Europe. From 1901 return migration became easier because an Emigration Law forced the Italian government to pay for the return journeys of Italians.¹²⁷ Italians made up the largest group of return migrants. For example, of the 823,311 returnees in the period 1908-10 308,900 were Italians.¹²⁸ There were varying reasons for migrants to decide to return to their homeland.

Dino Cinel points out that it was expected of Italian migrants to return, simply because they were in the habit of moving seasonally to other places. He even argues that Italians who did settle and stayed in the United States were stigmatized on moral grounds.¹²⁹ However, the causes for return migration are more complex than simply the tradition of seasonal labour.

One of the reasons for return migration was disappointment with American society. Beforehand, many migrants had the idea that in the United States the roads were paved with gold and opportunities were endless. Many migrants had gotten this impression by letters from relatives overseas who painted a bright picture of their new homeland. In reality most Italian migrants in the United States worked in menial, low paid jobs. Furthermore, many migrants had to live in overcrowded urban apartments. The harsh reality of American life made some people decide to go back to Italy.

Another reason for return migration was the variable economy in the United States. There is a visible connection between the numbers of return migration and the economic development of the United States. For example, Italian governmental statistics show Italian return migration in comparison with the economy in the United States. These show an average yearly return of 436 people going back to Italy for every thousand Italians that entered America from 1887 to 1907. These numbers rise sharply in 1894 and 1904, respectively to 848 and 765 return migrants. 1894 and 1904 were years of financial depression in the United States.¹³⁰ Nevertheless, many Italians who left the United States when the economy declined migrated again when the economic situation got better again, as their ancestors had always done in Europe. Better and faster transportation by steamship helped these 'birds of passage' to move back and forth with the economic changes.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Wynan, *Round - trip to America*, 93-94.

¹²⁸ D. Cinel, *The national integration of Italian return migration, 1870 - 1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 103-104.

¹²⁹ Cinel, *The national integration of Italian return migration*, 99.

¹³⁰ Wynan, *Round - trip to America*, 79.

¹³¹ Wynan, *Round - trip to America*, 82.

Other reasons for return migration were very personal factors such as homesickness, nostalgia, patriotism and family obligations. For instance, people had to go back to care for their aging parents or were called back to take care of the family farm in Italy. Older people also returned as some sort of retirement.¹³²

There were also success stories. The migrant had obtained his goals and expectation from American life. He could return to Italy with his savings. Three to five years was the general length of stay in the United States for the migrant to reach his goals. Back in Italy, the migrant could buy a piece of land and start a better life in Italy. It was a general pattern that Italians who returned, settled in the areas where land was for sale.¹³³

Visions of Americans on Italian migrants

With the increase of migrants in the second half of the nineteenth century, the prejudices Americans held against them increased as well. All migrant groups endured prejudices at one point. In the nineteenth century the Irishman had been the prototype of a criminal. However, in the first decades of the twentieth century the Italians replaced the Irish and became the main target.¹³⁴

Many Italians had romantic ideas about America before they left their homeland. It would be a land of plenty where wages were high and the people were kind. These images often existed because of the enthusiastic letters relatives in the United States wrote to them and from people who came back with success stories. The Italian Americans are supposed to have given these enthusiastic accounts because they wanted their relatives to join them in America and also because it was an embarrassment to tell of failure. Therefore, many Italians were really disappointed once in the United States, because life in fact, was very harsh. Apart from the dirty low paid jobs and bad living conditions many also faced discrimination and hate from the Americans.

It was said that Italy exported its criminals to the United States. Italians were infamous because of their supposed role in organized crime: the mafia. The idea of Italians as Mafiosi was a very persistent image in American society. The 1972 film *the Godfather* illustrates this stereotype. It is, however, untrue that Italians in America were unusually criminal. Iorizzo and Mondello point out that studies made already in the 1930s show that migrants “contributed no more and possibly less to crime in America than their native-born

¹³² Cinel, *The relationship between American money and Italian land*, 189-190.

¹³³ Cinel, *The relationship between American money and Italian land*, 191.

¹³⁴ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 194.

American neighbours".¹³⁵ This idea originated because most Italians lived at the bottom of American society, in areas with a lot of criminality. Furthermore, as described before, Italian migrants did not in any way, participate in American life. Consequently, in the eyes of many Americans, they remained foreigners.

Even though many Americans thought ill of Italians, they realized that they needed them to do the low paid dirty jobs that other migrant groups would no longer do. Furthermore, there were of course Americans that tried to improve the image of the Italian migrant. An example is George F. Johnson, cofounder and president of Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company. This man had many Italians working in his factories. He knew many of his employees personally and always referred to them as 'the new Americans'.¹³⁶

Conclusion

The main reasons for migration of Italians to the United States were political and economic. The push factors in Italy were the changing political regime because of the *Risorgimento* and the disappointment that followed because so little changed. Furthermore, the majority of the Italian migrants in the second half of the nineteenth century were the poor peasants from the South. The economic situation in Italy was disappointing and therefore these people left their country.

In the United States the pull factors were job opportunities as well as the expectation that life would get better. This idea was based on letters from relatives overseas and stories from return migrants. In reality, life in the United States was not always better, most Italians started in the lowest and dirtiest jobs available. Furthermore, they faced prejudices and discrimination from American native-born.

The most important characteristic of this migrant group is the intention with which they left their homeland. In contrast with other migrant groups, Italians did not intend to stay in the United States. They only came to work and make money for a short period of time, as they had done before in Europe, North Africa and South America. This characteristic explains the second distinctive feature of Italian migrants in the United States, their lack of interest in becoming naturalized.

¹³⁵ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 72.

¹³⁶ Iorizzo and Mondello, *The Italian Americans*, 73.

The main characteristic in the patterns of migration for Italians is the fact that they travelled back and forth. The majority of the Italian migrants came from Southern-Italy and went to New York.

As to volume of migration, the Italians were one of the largest migrant groups in the United States. They also had the highest number of return migration, which is because of the fact that they intended to migrate temporarily. Even so, the Italian migration had a major influence on American as well as Italian life.

Chapter 4: Chinese migration

After he had seen the richness of a man returning from the United States to his hometown in China, Lee Chew was very impressed and wanted to follow his example. Years later, he told about his experience:

“I worked on my father’s farm till I was about sixteen years of age, when a man of our tribe came back from America and took ground as large as four city blocks and made a paradise of it. He put a large stonewall around and led some streams through and built a palace and summer house and about twenty other structures with beautiful bridges over the streams and walks and roads. Trees and flowers, singing birds, waterfowl and curious animals were within the walls. [...] The wealth of this man filled my mind with the idea that I, too, would like to go to the country of the wizards and gain some of their wealth.”¹³⁷

Lee Chew became a laundryman in the United States, earning three dollars and fifty cents a week. Even though this was not such a bad profession, he, like many others, did not find the Golden Mountains he had expected to find in America.

Together with Lee Chew, over three hundred thousand Chinese went to the United States in search of a job between 1849 and 1882. Over ninety percent of the Chinese migrants came from Canton, a province in the South-West of China. This chapter discusses both the problems and context of the Chinese migration to the United States and the return migration. It shows how developments in China as well as in America created the factors that made people migrate.

The chapter starts with an account of China in the nineteenth century. In the second part of this chapter, the characteristics of the Chinese migrants will be discussed. This part explains how social and economic factors have influenced Chinese migration. It is followed by sections that will discuss the volume of Chinese migration and the patterns of migration. The chapter ends with the American view of these Chinese migrants.

¹³⁷ ‘Lee Chew, a Chinese immigrant, describes life in the United States and denounces anti-Chinese prejudice, 1882’ in: J. Gjerde ed., *Major problems in American immigration and ethnic history* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998) 172.

China in the nineteenth century

China had been a closed and stable society for thousands of years. This changed in the nineteenth century. China saw some major changes, for example population growth and foreign interference. Both brought instability and social unrest to China. Confucianism had been the state doctrine since the Han Dynasty (206 B.C - A.D. 220). It had led to a stable society where family and tribe were the most important elements. Families, society and politics were organized on a strictly hierarchical basis. Women, who were considered inferior to men, were expected to stay at home and serve their husbands.¹³⁸

China's population doubled between 1750 and 1850. During this period the population exploded from 215 million to 430 million people.¹³⁹ This population growth led to problems in the provinces. For example, more often than before, there was a shortage of food. An observer explained in 1852: "The population is extremely dense; the means of subsistence, in ordinary times, are seldom above the demand, and, consequently, the least failure of the rice crop produces wretchedness."¹⁴⁰

In 1839 the first Opium War between Britain and China started, which brought further disruption in China. The British had imported opium into China since the end of the eighteenth century. The Chinese tried to prevent it because of the addiction problems it caused. The first Opium War ended with the treaty of *Nanjing* in 1842, which was a disadvantage for China. Hong Kong, which had always been a British trade post, now became British property. At the same time the treaty ended the Chinese isolation because it forced China to allow more foreigners to enter the country.¹⁴¹

The Opium War had further consequences for the Chinese. The Chinese government imposed high taxes on the people. Many could not pay these taxes and lost their land because of it. However, there was no other employment for them, because China had but little industry, which in turn suffered from the opium wars, too.

¹³⁸ B. Zinzius, *Chinese America, stereotype and reality, history, present and future of the Chinese Americans* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2005) 1-2.

¹³⁹ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 120.

¹⁴⁰ R. Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore, a history of Asian Americans*, 33.

¹⁴¹ Zinzius, *Chinese America*, 4.

The Chinese government had always tried to prevent migration from China. Chinese who left the country were considered deserters, criminals and potential traitors.¹⁴² Illegal migrants risked the death penalty. Only in 1868 did the government legalize migration from China. However, these strict rules did not prevent thousands of Chinese leaving the country before it was legal to do so.¹⁴³

The emperor was weak and bureaucracy corrupt. This led to peasant rebellions throughout the country, such as, the *Tai ping* Rebellion (1850-1864) in Southern China and the *Kwangsi* uprising that started in 1850.¹⁴⁴ War, rebellion and impoverishment led to migration from China. Because Hong Kong was now British, it was easier for Chinese to leave the country. They went to many countries, one of which was the United States.

When in 1849 news about the discovery of gold in California reached China, many Chinese went there to make a fortune. A witness in China describes the excitement about the United States: "Letters from Chinese in San Francisco and further in the country have been circulated through this part of the province. The accounts of the successful adventures who have returned would, had the inhabitants possessed the means of paying their way across, have gone far to depopulate considerable towns."¹⁴⁵ It was the start of Chinese migration to the United States, which continued until 1882, when the American government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which put a stop to Chinese immigration.

Characteristics of Chinese migrants

The Chinese, like the Italians, had had a tradition of migration before the migration to the United States took place. Chinese labourers used to move around South-East Asia and from the beginning of the nineteenth century to Trinidad and the Caribbean to work on plantations. Halfway through the nineteenth century, they also went to Cuba and Peru. This was the 'coolie trade' in which Western entrepreneurs imported the Chinese labourers to these places, often treating them worse than slaves.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² S. Chan, 'The Chinese migration to the United States in the context of the larger Chinese Diaspora' in: J. Gjerde ed., *Major problems in American immigration and ethnic history* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company) 199.

¹⁴³ Zinzius, *Chinese America*, 6.

¹⁴⁴ P. Buckley Ebrey, *The Cambridge illustrated history of China* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1996) 240-241.

¹⁴⁵ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 34.

¹⁴⁶ R. Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 240.

Although the migration to the United States has often been compared with the coolie trade, it was a very different matter. In this case, the Chinese migrated voluntarily and could work for wages. The migration from China to America started after the Californian Gold Rush of 1849. Before this, very few Chinese had entered America. However, between 1849 and 1882, the year of the Chinese Exclusion Act, some three hundred thousand Chinese entered the United States.¹⁴⁷

The Chinese came to the United States as sojourners. They wanted to work there to make a fortune and to return to China after a short period of time. The majority of Chinese migrants in the United States worked in the mining industry and as railroad workers. In the 1860s approximately ten thousand Chinese worked on the Central Pacific Railroad. As many as 58 percent of Chinese migrants worked in these two occupations. A further 12.5 percent were merchants and the rest worked as factory workers, peasants and laundry owners.¹⁴⁸ Table 4.1 shows the occupation of Chinese people in California in 1868.

*Table 4.1: Chinese occupations in 1868 in California*¹⁴⁹

Occupation	Number
Merchants and traders	2,000
Engaged in manufacturing for themselves	2,000
In other occupations	1,000
Washhouses	1,800
Labourers in factories and in other capacities in cities and towns	3,500
Mechanics	1,000
House servants	3,000
Labourers on the Pacific railroad	10,000
Miners	13,084
Farm labourers	2,000
Fishermen	200
Total	39,584

The railroad companies preferred to hire Chinese workers because they were considered to be hard working, quiet, and very reliable.¹⁵⁰ Work on the railroad was attractive for the

¹⁴⁷ Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 239.

¹⁴⁸ Zinzius, *Chinese America*, 12.

¹⁴⁹ S. h. Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese in the United States, 1868-1911* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1983) 21.

Chinese migrants. They earned 35 dollars per month. Furthermore, the railroad provided shelter. Food costs are estimated at fifteen to eighteen dollars a month. Therefore, a railroad worker could save up some money.¹⁵¹ However, the work was dangerous and sometimes fatal. The railroad construction went on all year long. In winter, the workers had to dig in the snow to continue work. Sometimes the tunnels collapsed and people got buried under the snow. A company official reported: “The snow slides carried away our camps and we lost a good many men in those slides, many of them we did not find until the next season when the snow melted.”¹⁵²

Conditions were also harsh in the mining industry. A newspaper correspondent described the living conditions of some twenty to thirty Chinese miners: “Inhabiting close cabins, so small that one ... would not be of sufficient size to allow a couple of Americans to breathe in. Chinamen, stools, tables, cooking utensils, bunks etc., all huddled up together in indiscriminate confusion, and enwreathed with dense smoke, presented a spectacle.”¹⁵³

Chinese migrants worked in the agricultural sector as well. Many had a lot of expertise in the field because they had been farmers in the Pearl River Delta in China. These men taught their American employers how to plant, cultivate and harvest new plants. In California the Chinese transformed the wheat fields into fruit plantations by constructing irrigation systems. The land they worked on was owned by white Americans, who also provided the equipment. In return, the Chinese farmer could keep a small part of the profit.¹⁵⁴

There are examples of American employers who preferred Chinese workers to other ethnic groups. William Shanks wrote an article in *Scribner's Monthly* in which he compared Chinese and Irish workers. In this article, the latter are called *Crispins* after their labour organization: “[The Chinese] laboured regularly and constantly, losing no blue Mondays on account of Sunday's dissipation nor wasting hours on idle holidays. The quality of the work was found to be fully equal to that of the Crispins.”¹⁵⁵ And E.L. Godkin reported for *The Nation*: “In the factories of San Francisco they had none but Irish, paying them three dollars a day in gold. They struck, and demanded four dollars. Immediately their places,

¹⁵⁰ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 197.

¹⁵¹ Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 243.

¹⁵² Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 186.

¹⁵³ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 195.

¹⁵⁴ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 199.

¹⁵⁵ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 148.

numbering three hundred, were supplied by Chinamen at one dollar a day.”¹⁵⁶ These kinds of measures only increased Irish prejudices against the Chinese migrants.

Over the years, the discrimination of Chinese labourers in the mining industry increased, forcing thousands of Chinese migrants into self-employment. They started small businesses like laundries, restaurants and shops. A laundry was an appealing business, because it could be started with only a small investment. Furthermore, a laundryman did not need to speak much English. The work did not require literacy and many Chinese were illiterate. In fact, although it was originally women’s work both in the United States and China, the laundry business was the best way to self-employment.¹⁵⁷

The Chinese in the United States were almost exclusively males. According to the censuses of 1880 and 1890, males outnumbered females by almost twenty to one.¹⁵⁸ Of these migrants at least half had a wife and family in China and for that reason a portion of their earnings was sent back home.¹⁵⁹ Chinese women in the United States will be discussed in the next part.

The Chinese men were packed together in overcrowded ethnic enclaves, the ‘Chinatowns’ that still exist today.¹⁶⁰ These were bachelor societies with an economy of their own. Chinese people worked here as merchants and shopkeepers. They were united in *The Six Companies*, which represented the Chinese migrants in the United States. *The Six Companies* helped new arrivals to find a job and a place to live and they helped out when a Chinese migrant fell ill. Furthermore, their most important task was to defend Chinese migrants in legal cases and federal legislation.¹⁶¹

The Six Companies is one of many examples of Chinese social organizations. In China, the family had been the most important part of society. Because the family was usually absent in the United States, communal ties among Chinese were strong. Another example of a Chinese organization is the *fongs*. These were formed by family members, people from the same village and clans. The social centres of the *fongs* were clubhouses and

¹⁵⁶ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 29.

¹⁵⁷ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 201.

¹⁵⁸ Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 241.

¹⁵⁹ Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese*, 17.

¹⁶⁰ Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 240-242.

¹⁶¹ Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 244.

temples. *Fongs* helped with the communication with China and made sure bodies of dead migrants were transported back to their home villages.¹⁶²

Tongs were yet another kind of bond. These were secret societies that provided protection for their members. The first one, called the *Kwangtek-thong*, was formed in 1852 in California. Some *tongs* later controlled the opium trade and prostitution in the Chinese migrant communities.¹⁶³

Their strong communal ties characterized Chinese migrants in the United States. They set up all kinds of different societies based on relationships. It was a bachelor society with few women. At the same time, they lived together in the various China-towns. Therefore, there was only very little contact between the Chinese migrants and the rest of American society. They remained alien and unknown people.

Volume of migration

In the middle of the nineteenth century over two million Chinese people left their country. Over three hundred thousand of these entered the United States until 1882, when the Chinese Exclusion Act was enforced.¹⁶⁴ This part discusses the volume of Chinese migration. This, however, is not easy, because reliable numbers on the matter are hard to find.

There are numbers on Chinese migration to the United States. However, different sources give different numbers. Table 4.2 shows the number of Chinese entering the United States according to three governmental agencies. Table 4.3 is based on a statistical report from 1868 for Minister Ross Brown and Secretary William Seward, showing the numbers of males and females among Chinese migrants. Because these numbers differ, we cannot be sure about the actual numbers of migrants. For example, although table 4.2 suggests that there were Chinese migrants from 1852 onwards, it is known that there was a Chinese community in San Francisco as early as 1850.¹⁶⁵

The differences in numbers of registered Chinese according to these three agencies can be explained in various ways. The San Francisco Customs House counted all Chinese migrants, including those who passed San Francisco on their way to other countries. For example, the migration out of China is reflected in the year 1852. The San Francisco

¹⁶² Takaki, *A different mirror*, 217.

¹⁶³ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 216.

¹⁶⁴ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 32.

¹⁶⁵ Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 242.

Customs House counted 20,026 migrants in that year. However, these migrants did not stay in the United States, therefore they have not been listed by the two other companies. The other agencies only counted the Chinese who stayed in the United States. Another reason for these discrepancies is poor census practices. The first decennial census in California was held in 1850. At that time only three ethnic groups were counted: Whites, Blacks and Mulattos. This means that Chinese people or Asians in general were not considered to be a separate group and this accounts for the different numbers in this table.¹⁶⁶

What both tables do reflect, however, are the push and pull factors that had an influence on Chinese migration. Unrest in China was a push factor for Chinese emigration. The rebellions in China, for example, drove people out of the country. The tables reflect that, for example, during the years of the *Taiiping* rebellion from 1850 to 1864, the numbers of Chinese migrants were higher than after 1864.¹⁶⁷ Economic circumstances in the United States were a pull factor. The Chinese first went to America because of the Gold Rush in 1849. They found work in the mining industry as well as other employment like the railroad. The table shows an increase of Chinese migrants entering the United States over the years. In China, people spoke about the job opportunities in the United States and this stimulated other Chinamen to go and try their luck overseas.

¹⁶⁶ Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese*, 20.

¹⁶⁷ Archdeacon, *Becoming American*, 120.

Table 4.2: Chinese arrivals in the US 1852 - 1884¹⁶⁸

Year	Immigration Commission	Bureau of Immigration	San Francisco Customs House*
1852	0	0	20,026
1853	42	42	4,207
1854	13,100	13,100	16,084
1855	3,526	3,526	3,329
1856	4,733	4,733	4,807
1857	5,944	2,580	5,924
1858	5,128	7,183	5,427
1859	3,457	3,215	3,175
1860	5,467	6,117	7,341
1861	7,518	6,094	8,430
1862	3,633	4,174	8,175
1863	7,214	5,280	6,432
1864	2,975	5,240	2,682
1865	2,942	3,702	3,095
1866	2,385	1,872	2,242
1867	3,863	3,519	4,290
1868	5,157	6,707	11,081
1869	12,874	12,874	14,990
1870	15,740	15,740	10,870
1871	7,135	7,135	5,540
1872	7,788	7,788	9,770
1873	20,292	20,291	17,075
1874	13,776	13,776	16,085
1875	16,437	16,437	18,021
1876	22,781	22,781	15,481
1877	10,594	10,594	9,468
1878	8,992	8,992	6,675
1879	9,604	9,604	6,969
1880	5,802	5,802	5,050
1881	11,890	11,890	18,561
1882	39,579	39,579	26,902
1883	8,031	8,031	0
1884	279	4,009	0

¹⁶⁸ Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese*, 19.

Table 4.3: Male and Female Chinese migrants entering the United States¹⁶⁹

Year	Males	Females	Total
1848	2	1	3
1849	323	-	323
1850	447	-	447
1851	2,716	-	2,716
1852	18,384	50	18,434
1853	3,917	399	4,316
1854	14,450	513	15,063
1855	3,188	24	3,212
1856	4,935	95	5,030
1857	5,383	423	5,806
1858	5,358	323	5,681
1859	3,100	427	3,527
1860	7,312	308	7,620
1861	5,997	510	6,507
1862	5,583	442	6,025
1863	7,149	32	7,181
1864	2,756	175	2,931
1865	2,375	-	2,375
1866	2,350	1	2,351
1867	3,779	27	3,806
1868 (to July 1)	5,101	16	5,117
Total	104,705	3,766	108,471

As has been said above, the majority of the Chinese migrants in the United States were men. There is a cultural reason for the small numbers of Chinese women in the United States. In China, women were inferior to men. Women rarely left the village in which they lived and therefore it is not surprising that Chinese women did not come to the United States. Another reason is the price of migration, which was high. Because the men only intended to stay overseas for a short period of time, it was not worth the money to take their wife with them.¹⁷⁰

There were, however, some Chinese women who did go to the United States. Some of these were simply loyal wives who followed their husbands overseas, even against the will of their families. Others followed their husband after a couple of years, when he had

¹⁶⁹ Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 210.

become successful in America. Then there were Chinese women who worked in the United States as prostitutes. Of the 3,536 Chinese women registered in California, as many as 61 percent was listed as a 'prostitute' in the census of 1870.¹⁷¹ However, this percentage decreased in the following decade. In the census of 1880, only 24 percent of the 3,171 women living there at the time were prostitutes. These prostitutes lived a harsh life. They were exploited by their masters and often ill treated. Diseases were common amongst them and many prostitutes became addicted to opium.¹⁷²

In 1875 the government of the United States passed the Page Law. The law was meant to restrict the migration of prostitutes. However, this law was so strict that it meant that very few Chinese women could enter the country.¹⁷³ The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 put a stop to all immigration from China. Because of this act, the Chinese community was frozen and remained the same for most of the late nineteenth century. The Page Law and the Chinese Exclusion act together meant that the Chinese community remained a bachelor society.¹⁷⁴ The Exclusion Act of 1882 meant the end of Chinese migration to the United States.

As has been discussed above, social instability, shortage of food and economic problems were the main factors that pushed Chinese migrants out of China. There were, of course, many factors that made the United States an attractive destination. The most important pull factor in the United States was employment possibilities in that country. As we have seen in the other case studies, this was the main pull-factor for most migrant groups.

Patterns of migration

The majority of the Chinese in the United States came from the region of Canton. There were several factors that set Canton apart from other regions in China and have caused the migration from this area. Firstly, the population growth of the late eighteenth century was particularly severe in Canton. The region's population increased by 76 percent between 1787 and 1850.¹⁷⁵ Secondly, this region had always had more contact with foreigners than other parts of China, because of the trade in this area. Thirdly, the ports of Hong Kong and

¹⁷¹ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 211.

¹⁷² Takaki, *A different mirror*, 213.

¹⁷³ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 40.

¹⁷⁴ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 246.

¹⁷⁵ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 33.

Macao are part of this area and were an easy way out of the country. The majority of the migrants who left China travelled via those ports. Fourthly, there was already a shortage of food because of the population growth, but in Canton these shortages were worse because of floods, as the Pearl River Delta is part of the area.¹⁷⁶ One migrant gave his own account of living conditions before he decided to migrate:

There were four in our family, my mother, my father, my sister and me. We lived in a two room house. Our sleeping room and the other served as parlor, kitchen and dining room. We were not rich enough to keep pigs or fowls, otherwise, our small house would have been more than overcrowded. How can we live on six baskets of rice which were paid twice a year for my father's duty as a night watchman? Sometimes the peasants have a poor crop then we go hungry... Sometimes we went hungry for days. My mother and I would go over the harvested rice fields of the peasants to pick up the grains they dropped ... We had only salt and water to eat with the rice.¹⁷⁷

More than ninety percent of the Chinese people who went to California embarked in Hong Kong.¹⁷⁸ The migrants travelled to the ports over the rivers in the Pearl River Delta. Chinese authorities did not stop people from going to Hong Kong and the British authorities let them enter.¹⁷⁹ A migrant describes the journey from a Chinese village to Hong Kong: "After leaving the village I went to Hong Kong and stayed at a [firm] owned by people named Quan. I stayed there ten days to take care of the paper work for passage. At that time all I knew was that [travellers to the Golden Mountain] who came back were always rich."¹⁸⁰

From Hong Kong the Chinese migrants travelled by ships to San Francisco, a 7,000-mile voyage that took about three months. As with the European ships, the majority of Chinese migrants could only afford steerage tickets and had to live in crowded conditions during the passage. The passengers had to sleep in bunk beds with very little privacy. Sanitary conditions were poor and there was constant danger of epidemics on board.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 33.

¹⁷⁷ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 33.

¹⁷⁸ Zinzius, *Chinese America*, 11.

¹⁷⁹ Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese*, 14.

¹⁸⁰ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 193.

¹⁸¹ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 70.

Already life was different than it had been at home. A Chinese young man described his journey:

Everything was new to me. All my life I had been used to sleeping on a board bed with a wooden pillow, and I found the steamer's bunk very uncomfortable, because it was too soft. The food was different from that which I had been used to, and I did not like it at all. [...] When I got to San Francisco, which was before the passage of the Exclusion act, I was half starved, because I was afraid to eat provisions of the barbarians.¹⁸²

Financing migration was a problem. It was very expensive to travel from China to the United States. A ticket would cost about seventy dollars. There were several ways to obtain the money for migration. People could save up or sell their possessions when leaving. Some borrowed money from relatives. There was a Chinese credit-ticket system, which many Chinese migrants used. A Chinese moneylender would lend the money to cover the costs of the journey. The loan plus interest should be paid off out of the migrant's earnings in the United States. Interest rates were high: a British official reported in the early 1850s that some Chinese borrowed seventy dollars and had to pay back two hundred dollars.¹⁸³ The Chinese merchants, who provided the loans, recommended workers to certain companies in the United States. This was one of the reasons why so many Chinese migrants worked in the same sectors.¹⁸⁴

The Chinese migrants in the United States were concentrated on the West coast in general and in California in particular. For example, California had 49,277 Chinese in 1870 and Idaho, Montana and Oregon had several thousands, all the other States had less than a hundred. Although the numbers increased over the years, the image remains the same, as table 4.4 shows. Like the Irish and Italian migrants, the majority of the Chinese in the United States lived in the big cities. Traditionally San Francisco had the largest community of Chinese migrants. In 1860 2,719 Chinese lived in San Francisco, this number had risen to 21,745 in 1880. In 1890 the Chinese made up 35.7 percent of San Francisco's population.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Lee Chew, *a Chinese immigrant describes life in the United States*, 172-173.

¹⁸³ Daniels, *Coming to America*, 241.

¹⁸⁴ Zinzius, *Chinese America*, 12.

¹⁸⁵ Zinzius, *Chinese America*, 15.

Table 4.4: Chinese in the United States, 1870 - 1890¹⁸⁶

	1870	1880	1890
Alabama	-	4	48
Alaska	-	-	-
Arizona	20	1,630	1,170
Arkansas	98	133	92
California	49,277	75,132	72,472
Colorado	7	612	1,398
Columbia (Distr.)	3	13	91
Connecticut	2	123	272
Delaware	-	1	37
Florida	-	18	108
Georgia	1	17	108
Hawaii	-	-	-
Idaho	4,274	3,379	2,007
Illinois	1	209	740
Indiana	-	29	92
Iowa	3	33	64
Kansas	-	19	93
Kentucky	1	10	28
Louisiana	71	489	333
Maine	1	8	73
Maryland	2	5	189
Massachusetts	87	229	984
Michigan	1	27	120
Minnesota	-	24	94
Mississippi	16	51	147
Missouri	3	91	409
Montana	1,949	1,765	2,532
Nebraska	-	18	214
Nevada	3,152	5,416	2,833
New Hampshire	-	14	58
New Jersey	5	170	608
New Mexico	-	57	361
New York	29	909	2,935
North Carolina	-	-	32
North Dakota	-	8	28
Ohio	1	109	183

¹⁸⁶ Zinzius, *Chinese America*, 279. Based on U.S. bureau of the census.

Table 4.4 Continued

	1870	1880	1890
Oklahoma	-	-	38
Oregon	3,330	9,510	9,540
Pennsylvania	13	148	1,146
Rhode Island	-	27	69
South Carolina	1	9	34
South Dakota	-	230	195
Tennessee	-	25	51
Texas	25	136	710
Utah	445	501	806
Vermont	-	-	32
Virginia	4	6	55
Washington	234	3,186	3,260
West Virginia	-	5	15
Wisconsin	-	16	119
Wyoming	143	914	465
Totals	63,199	105,465	107,488

All authors writing about Chinese migration agree that they migrated as sojourners. It is, therefore, to be expected that many Chinese would ultimately return to China. However, there is almost no information about the actual process of Chinese return migration. And although it is agreed that return migration was high among the Chinese, there are very few statistics about Chinese return migration. The only statistics can be found in the same source from 1868 as table 4.3.¹⁸⁷ According to this table half of the Chinese migrants in the United States returned to China. However, it is assumed that Chinese migrants travelled back and forth.¹⁸⁸ This must also be kept in mind when studying table 4.5.

¹⁸⁷ Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese*, 22.

¹⁸⁸ Daniëls, *Coming to America*, 239.

Table 4.5: Emigration from, and immigration to, China to 1 July 1868¹⁸⁹

Year	Emigration from China Total	Immigration to China Total
1848	3	-
1849	323	-
1850	447	-
1851	2,716	261
1852	18,434	2,056
1853	4,316	4,405
1854	15,063	2,386
1855	3,212	3,328
1856	5,030	2,675
1857	5,806	2,675
1858	5,681	2,675
1859	3,527	2,907
1860	7,620	2,079
1861	6,507	2,151
1862	6,025	3,001
1863	7,181	2,510
1864	2,931	3,086
1865	2,375	1,945
1866	2,351	3,015
1867	3,806	4,167
1868 (to July 1)	5,117	565
Total	108,471	45,887

To conclude, we have seen that the majority of Chinese migrants came from the region of Canton. At first, they settled mostly in the West of the United States. Over the years they gradually scattered across the nation. Unfortunately, there is not much information about Chinese return migration. Like other migrant groups, the Chinese settled in the big cities. The Chinese faced prejudice and discrimination, as we will see in the next part.

Visions of Americans on Chinese migrants

Initially the Chinese were welcomed in the United States. The *Daily Alta California* reported in 1852: “Quite a large number of the Celestials have arrived among us of late,

¹⁸⁹ Tsai, *China and the overseas Chinese*, 22.

enticed thither by the golden romance that has filled the world. Scarcely a ship arrives that does not bring an increase to this worthy integer of our population.”¹⁹⁰

However, the attitude towards the Chinese migrants changed over the years. With the rise of nativism, the cry for protectionism got louder. At the Californian gold mines, Americans cried: “California for Americans.”¹⁹¹ More and more legislation was enforced on foreign workers. It started with a special tax of three dollars per month for foreign miners if they did not have the intention to become an American citizen. The Chinese had to pay this tax because even if they had wanted to become an American citizen, they could not do so because of their colour. A federal law from 1790 stated that naturalization was reserved for ‘white persons’ only.¹⁹²

According to Confucianism, communities were the most important unit in society. This clashed with the highly individualized society of the United States. Because of this, and because of the fact that the Chinese lived in the closed Chinatowns, integration was difficult. Furthermore, the Chinese were polytheistic, which was viewed with superstition by the Americans who were mostly monotheistic. Social prejudices existed about Chinese migrants, who were associated with prostitution, opium trade and gambling.¹⁹³

Chinese migrants endured discrimination and ill treatment. Chinese, like Afro-Americans, were treated as people of colour and were therefore considered inferior to others. The anti-Chinese feelings were intensified because of economic reasons. Especially workers feared the Chinese would take their jobs and thus leave them unemployed. In California protests of Chinese migrants against the discrimination at work led to clashes with white workers. In 1876 several Chinese houses were burned down by a mob in Truckee, California. Those Chinese who tried to flee were shot. And in San Francisco in 1877 riots destroyed thirty Chinese laundries.¹⁹⁴

Lee Chew, the Chinese migrant mentioned above, described the anti-Chinese prejudice he suffered: “The treatment of the Chinese in this country is all wrong and mean. [...] It was the jealousy of labouring men of other nationalities - especially the Irish – that raised all the outcry against the Chinese.”¹⁹⁵ And another migrant: “Chinese were treated

¹⁹⁰ Takaki, *Strangers from a different shore*, 80.

¹⁹¹ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 195.

¹⁹² Takaki, *A different mirror*, 195.

¹⁹³ Olson, *The ethnic dimension*, 75.

¹⁹⁴ Olson, *The ethnic dimension*, 76.

¹⁹⁵ Lee Chew, *a Chinese immigrant describes life in the United States*, 173.

worse than dog. Oh it was terrible, terrible. At that time all Chinese have queue and dress same as in China. The hoodlums, roughnecks and young boys pull your queue, slap your face, throw all kind of old vegetables and rotten eggs at you.”¹⁹⁶

Chinese were considered a “yellow proletariat” in the United States. This was a concept in which the Chinese formed a permanently degraded labour force. They could be temporarily used where necessary for a low price. In this way, the Chinese migrants became a politically restricted group. At the same time, this made sure they would never become American citizens.¹⁹⁷ This view set the Chinese migrants apart from other migrant groups. For example, although the Irish and Italian migrants were also badly treated and had to work in lowpaid jobs as well, they were at least recognized as American citizens.

In 1882 the United States put a stop to the immigration of Chinese. After years in which the number of Americans with anti-Chinese feelings had increased, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed. Because of this law, Chinese migrants could no longer freely enter the United States. Thus, the vision of the Americans on the Chinese migrants changed within only thirty years from welcome workers to an unwelcome ethnic group.

Conclusion

The most important factors for Chinese migration to the United States were economic and social. The push factors in China were the reduced economic opportunities caused by population growth at the end of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, people decided to migrate because of the many rebellions that caused social unrest in China.

The Chinese were pulled towards the United States because of the job opportunities. Chinese migration started because of rumours surrounding the California Gold Rush in 1849. Success stories from returning Chinese migrants and letters from relatives overseas encouraged more people to migrate.

The Chinese migrants were characterized by their communal ties and social societies. The Chinese community was turned inward. They lived together in the Chinatowns, where no other ethnic groups lived. Furthermore, the Chinese community in the United States was a bachelor society. Far fewer women than men migrated from China. Both these characteristics are linked to the Chinese values based in Confucianism.

¹⁹⁶ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 208.

¹⁹⁷ Takaki, *A different mirror*, 204.

The majority of Chinese migrants came from the region of Canton, as we have seen in the section on patterns of migration. As explained in this chapter, the circumstances in this region caused the inhabitants to migrate in great numbers. The Chinese in the United States were concentrated in the Western States, where the largest Chinese community could be found in San Francisco.

As to volume of migration, the Chinese were a large ethnic group in the United States, particularly in the Western States. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 put a stop to the Chinese immigration. Afterwards, the Chinese communities in the United States did not change much.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The goal of this thesis is to investigate the migration process of Irish, Italian and Chinese migrants who went to the United States in the nineteenth century. I have done this by using Ravensteins theory on migration and I have looked at the characteristics of the migrants as well as the pattern and volume of migration. The chapter starts with a comparison of the Irish, Italian and Chinese migrants on characteristics, volume and patterns of migration. Secondly, the push and pull factors are analysed with the use of the Boolean method as explained in chapter one.

Characteristics of migrants

When the characteristics of the three ethnic groups are compared, several aspects arise, differences as well as similarities. To start with the main difference, the most important characteristic of the Irish migrants is the fact that they did not have much choice but to migrate. The other two groups migrated because they wanted to, they had a choice. However, despite this fact, the Irish migrants were the only of the three groups that successfully integrated in American society. They spoke the language and participated in politics, while the Italian and Chinese migrants remained in closed ethnic social groups. The Irish migrants also had greater social mobility. They went on to better jobs relatively quick, while the other two groups remained in the lowpaid jobs for a longer period of time. An explanation for the Irish success on the social ladder could be the fact that the majority came as skilled, educated people, while most Italian and Chinese migrants were unskilled and uneducated.

Furthermore, there is a difference between the three migrant groups when it comes to the number of males and females who left their country. The Chinese were almost exclusively male, about two thirds of the Italian migrants were men. In the case of the Irish the balance between males and females was equal. The reason for this was the intention with which each group left: Irish migrated in families to stay in the United States, while the other two groups left their families behind because they expected to return to their home countries.

A pull factor for all three groups was the availability of jobs in the United States. All three groups started working in unskilled jobs. They worked mainly on the railroads, in the mining industry and in factories. This was not a coincidence because they did not have much choice. There were many of these unskilled jobs because American workers did not

want to do this kind of work anymore and one did not have to be educated to be able to do them. For the Italian and Chinese migrants this was an attractive factor in the United States because, as said, they were mostly uneducated. Furthermore, for the Italians this kind of work fitted their habit of working abroad, they had always had a tradition of seasonal work in other countries. Although most Irish migrants were more educated, they also worked in the low paid sector. However, they moved to better jobs more quickly than the Chinese and Italian migrants.

All migrants groups had their own social bonds in the United States; this helped them on arrival. The Irish migrants were bound by their Catholic faith. Almost all of them went to church and were members of some Irish organization. The Chinese migrants were bounded by kinship. Many of their social organizations were set up around families with the same surname. The Italians also had social societies though which they helped each other. They had the *padrone* system in which Italians were offered work in the United States. Italians even migrated as whole villages together and started new Italian communities in the United States.

Volume of migration

The three groups migrated at different times and in different numbers. Some push and pull factors are reflected in the statistics on migration. For instance, the peak in Irish migration was during the 1840s. The cause of this was the potato crop failure and the following famine. After the famine the Irish kept migrating to the United States, which can be explained by chain migration.

Between 1870 and 1920 about 4.1 million Italians migrated to the United States. The mass migration from Italy started at the time of the *Risorgimento*. The numbers of Italian migrants fluctuate along with the economic situation in the United States. For example, many Italians only worked there in the summer because there was more work and they went back in the winter. Furthermore, in years of less economic prosperity in the United States, less Italians entered the country.

The Chinese migration was triggered by the Californian Gold Rush in 1849. Furthermore, shortage of food and social unrest pushed the Chinese out of their country. The Chinese were pulled to the United States for economic reasons: they wanted to stay in the United States only a couple of years to become rich. The Chinese migration came to a stop with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Chinese were the only ethnic group who were explicitly excluded from the United States because of their ethnicity.

The most important difference between the three groups is the scale of the migration. Of the 8.2 million Irish in the middle of the nineteenth century, 4.3 million migrated to the United States, about 52 percent. Of the 22 million Italians in the middle of the nineteenth century, 4.2 million migrated to the United States, about 19 percent. Of the 430 million Chinese in the middle of the nineteenth century, 300,000 migrated to the United States, less than one percent. Thus, in the case of the Irish and the Italians there was mass migration to the United States, because a large part of the population migrated. In the case of the Chinese on the contrary, there was not mass migration to the United States because a very small percentage of the population migrated.

Patterns of migration

All three groups settled mainly in the big cities. Most of the Irish and Italian migrants lived in the North-Eastern States, while the majority of the Chinese lived in the Western States. This is logical from a geographical point of view, simply because the Chinese came from the west and entered the United States via San Francisco, while the other two groups came from the east and thus arrived on the East coast.

Better transportation, mainly steamships, enabled all migrant groups to go to the United States. For the Irish and Chinese migrants a system of pre-paid tickets also helped to undertake the journey. In the case of the Irish, the landlords often paid for the emigration of their tenants to get rid of them. The Chinese had a money-lending system that helped people to pay for a ticket and start a life in the United States.

Chain migration happened with all three groups. People in the countries of origin received news and letters from relatives overseas, this encouraged them to follow their example. In China there was an influence from returning migrants, whereas in Ireland there was hardly any effect.

The regions of origin for the three migrant groups and the circumstance in these regions reflect the push factors involved with their migration. For example, the Irish migrants came mainly from the poorest regions of Ireland that had been hit hardest by the famine. Relatively little people came from Ulster and the region south of Mayo, the more industrialized areas with more industry. Ninety percent of the Chinese migrants came from the province of Canton. In this area there was a lot of social unrest because of revolts which was a push factor for the Chinese to leave. The majority of Italian migrants came from the South, the poorest region of Italy.

Boolean analyses

Now we know how characteristics, volume and patterns of migration are related to push and pull factors, it is time to analyse these factors. I want to look at the role these factors played in the process of migration, more specifically if they led to mass migration, the main difference between the three groups. The following tables 5.1 and 5.2 show an overview of the most important push and pull factors. The different factors are organized in three types: economic, social en political factors. The factors used in the tables are marked with 1, meaning presence and 0 meaning absence.

The tables are based on the Boolean method, a systematic tool to compare several cases. The Boolean method helps to find decisive factors that need to be either present or absent to lead to a certain outcome. In this case the outcome is mass migration. All possible factors that can lead to mass migration are in the first column of the table. Usually, the Boolean method suggests the use of a truth table that shows all possible combinations of causes and their outcome. In this thesis, however, it is not feasible to make a real Boolean truth table because there are too little cases. Instead, the data are organized in the two following tables. In order to find the factor(s) that lead to the outcome of mass migration, I have compared the data of all cases that had mass migration and have looked at the necessary or sufficient presence or absence of each factor. This was repeated for the cases that did not have mass migration as the outcome.

Push factors migration

Table 5.1 reflects the push factors on migration. The table has been corrected for the Chinese: the factors (B) and (C) showed question marks because the case studies did not give evidence on these points. To be able to make a Boolean addition these have been replaced by the most plausible outcome.

Table 5.1: Push factors migration

	Irish	Italians	Chinese
Economic factors			
(A) Economic problems	1	1	1
(B) Unemployment	1	0	0
(C) Poverty	1	1	1
(D) Shortage of food	1	0	1
Social factors			
(E) Expectation of better life abroad	1	1	1
(F) Population growth	1	1	1
(G) Stimulated to leave	1	0	0
(H) Influence of returnees	0	1	1
Political factors			
(I) Political situation	1	1	0
(J) Revolt / war	0	1	1
Outcome Mass Migration	1	1	0
	ABCDEFgHj	AbCdEFgHIJ	AbCDEFgHiJ

The data of the Irish and Italian migrants show several differences, however, these are not relevant because the outcome is the same for both ethnic groups, namely mass migration. Therefore we only look at the similarities. To understand what makes the difference between a positive (1) and a negative (0) outcome for mass migration, we compare the similarities of the Italian and Irish migrants on the one hand with the Chinese migrants on the other hand.

Table 5.1 shows that A, C, E, F and I lead to mass migration because these factors are present for both the Irish and Italian migrants, while there are no factors that need to be absent. However A, C, E and F also appear in the case of the Chinese migrants. This leads to the conclusion that these four factors cannot have been decisive for mass migration. Therefore, there must be a cause that is present for the Italians and Irish while absent for the Chinese, the one that leads to mass migration. Looking at the table, only one factor meets these requirements, namely I (political situation). Therefore, this is the decisive factor for mass migration.

Pull factors migration

Table 5.2 shows the pull factors for migration.

Table 5.2: Pull factors migration

	Irish	Italians	Chinese
Economic factors			
(A) Economic growth in US	1	1	1
(B) Unskilled labour in US	0	1	1
(C) Gold in US	0	0	1
Social factors			
(D) Intention to return	0	1	1
(E) Chain migration	1	1	1
(F) Own organizations of labour	0	1	1
(G) Improved transportation	1	1	1
(H) Prepaid ticket	1	0	1
Political factors	-	-	-
Outcome mass migration	1	1	0
	AbcdEfGH	ABcDEFgh	ABCDEFgh

Again, we look at the similarities of the cases with the same outcome. This table shows that A E G and the absence of c are similar for both the Irish and Italian migrants. This would be causes of mass migration where it not that A E and G are also present for the Chinese group. Thus, it shows that these pull factors are irrelevant for causing mass migration. There is a striking difference between the Chinese migrants and the other two groups. The Chinese were pulled towards the United States by gold, the other two groups not.

In conclusion, it has been assumed that only the Irish were push migrants because of the Great Famine and that the other two groups were pull migrants, who chose to go to the United States. This is what Ravenstein, Daniels and many other scholars have said. However, looking at the Boolean analysis above, it is now clear that both the Irish and the Italian migrants were push migrants, because the analysis shows that pull factors did not have a decisive influence on their migration process. The Chinese on the other hand, were pull migrants.

The push and pull factors define the characteristics of the people that left their countries, why in a short period of time millions of people travelled thousands of miles to settle in the United States and the path they followed. All three groups went to the United

States in search of a better life. Although not everyone succeeded, all have contributed to the character of the United States. As, after them, many others did.

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