

Why Do Immigrants Come to America?

From 1820 to 2001, more than 67 million people entered this country from many lands. Some paid their own way. Some came as indentured servants. Some signed up as contract laborers to work on American railroads, canals, farms, and factories. Others came as refugees or entered the United States illegally. Millions abandoned their homes to become part of the greatest mass migration of people in the history of the world. Why did they do this, and why do they still come?

As in most cases of human migration, there are “push” and “pull” factors at work. “Push” factors are conditions that encourage people to leave their homelands. They include such things as famine, unemployment, and poverty. Also, crippling taxes, wars, the military draft, and religious and political persecution have forced people to abandon their native countries.

Immigrants coming to this country have not only been “pushed” from their homelands. They have also been “pulled” by the seemingly limitless opportunities of America. There was land to farm. There were forests to cut down and railroads to build. The Gold Rush of 1849 stirred the imaginations of the adventurous. Those trapped in poverty saw a way out by getting jobs as farm laborers or in the industrial cities of America. Still others were drawn by the American ideals of freedom and equality. Millions of immigrants have pulled up their

roots and journeyed to America. Immigrants are still coming. They are coming for the same reason that most immigrants came in the past: for hope and a chance for a better life.

