



Ellis Island Background Information

1) Overview and Preface

a) Why were people coming to America?

- i) There were economic and political crises, mainly in Europe, that forced people to leave their native lands. Crop failures and subsequent famines, economic collapses, religious persecution, political upheaval and revolutions were just some of the reasons that people fled from their homes. Many simply left to live in a society where upward mobility was possible.

b) Who were these immigrants? Where were they coming from?

- i) Prior to Ellis Island, Irish people arrived in the mid-19th century during the time of the potato famines. Then, the Germans came in waves from the 1860s to the 1880s. From 1892 to 1924, however, Eastern and Southern Europeans arrived in huge numbers. During the height of immigration, 1892 to 1924, there were close to a million people coming to America every year. Immigration was not only from Europe; many people came from Africa, the Caribbean, Mexico and Central America.



U.S. Immigration Statistics: Immigration Station at Ellis Island, NY.

(Source: Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration, 1892-1924.)
Washington, D.C.

<u>Year</u>	<u># of Aliens</u>	<u>Leading Countries of Origin or Nationalities (Race)</u>
1892	445,987	Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Sweden
1893	343,422	Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Ireland, Russia, Sweden
1894	219,046	Germany, Italy, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Ireland, Sweden
1895	190,928	Ireland, Russia, Italy, Austria-Hungary, Germany, England
1896	263,709	Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Ireland, Germany, Sweden
1897	180,556	Italy, Austria-Hungary, Ireland, Russia, Germany, Sweden
1898	178,748	Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Ireland, Germany, Sweden
1899	242,573	Italian, Jewish, Polish, German, Scandinavian, Slovak, Croat
1900	341,712	Italian, Jewish, Polish, Irish, Scandinavian, German, Slovak
1901	388,931	Italian, Jewish, Polish, Scandinavian, German, Irish, Slovak
1902	493,262	Italian, Polish, Jewish, Scandinavian, German, Slovak, Croat
1903	631,835	Italian, Polish, Scandinavian, Jewish, German, Irish, Slovak
1904	606,019	Italian, Jewish, German, Polish, Scandinavian, English, Irish
1905	788,219	Italian, Jewish, Polish, German, Scandinavian, Slovak, English
1906	880,036	Italian, Jewish, Polish, German, Scandinavian, English, Croat
1907	1,004,756	Italian, Jewish, Polish, German, Magyar, Scandinavian, English
1908	585,970	Italian, Jewish, German, Polish, English, Irish, Scandinavian
1909	580,617	Italian, Polish, German, Jewish, English, Scandinavian, Magyar
1910	786,094	Italian, Polish, Jewish, German, English, Scandinavian, Croat
1911	637,003	Italian, Jewish, Polish, German, English, Scandinavian, Irish
1912	605,151	Italian, Polish, Jewish, German, English, Irish, Scandinavian
1913	892,653	Italian, Polish, Jewish, German, English, Russian, Croat/Slovene
1914	878,052	Italian, Jewish, Polish, German, English, Greek, Russian, Magyar
1915	178,416	Italian, English, Jewish, Scandinavian, Irish, German, Greek
1916	141,390	Italian, English, Greek, Irish, French, Scandinavian, Scottish
1917	129,446	Italian, English, Greek, French, Scandinavian, Irish, Jewish
1918	28,867	English, Scandinavian, Greek, Spanish, French, Italian, African
1919	26,731	English, French, Italian, Scandinavian, Irish, African, Spanish
1920	225,206	Italian, English, French, Spanish, Scottish, Irish, Scandinavian
1921	560,971	Italian, Jewish, English, Irish, Slovak, Greek, Spanish, Scan.
1922	209,778	Jewish, Italian, German, English, Irish, Scandinavian, Scottish
1923	295,473	German, English, Jewish, Italian, Scottish, Scandinavian, French
1924	315,587	German, English, Scottish, Italian, Jewish, French, Irish, Scan.

- c) Why was Ellis Island created?
- i) Prior to 1892, all immigration was handled independently by each state. There was no national immigration service nor any national immigration laws to regulate the process of immigration. Castle Garden at the Battery was the first New York State immigration facility.
 - ii) In 1892, the US government took over immigration and created the Immigration Service. Ellis Island was chosen as the new immigration facility.
- d) Why are there hospitals at Ellis Island?
- i) When an immigration facility admits close to a million people a year, there are going to be many people who are ill and require medical care. Immigrants would travel in the steerage of the ship in close proximity to each other for weeks. In close, poorly ventilated areas, germs could easily spread from person to person.
 - ii) The Immigration Law of 1903 required that every person entering the US be examined for loathsome, or contagious infectious disease.
 - iii) Some of these people were ill and needed immediate medical care, others had excluded conditions but were too sick to travel. There were appeals built into the law so that sometimes people could pay for the care of an excluded condition, get well and enter the US.
- e) Who was sent to the Hospital?
- i) Every person who arrived at Ellis Island was examined by a doctor. All the medical exams were administered by physicians who were employed by the U.S. Public Health Service.
 - ii) Because between 2,500 and 10,000 immigrants arrived at Ellis Island daily, the doctors were trained to look at each person who passed by in a line and see some outward sign of one of the excluded conditions. If they saw something wrong, they marked the immigrant's right shoulder with a chalk mark that corresponded to the 29 excluded conditions. If you were marked, you would be taken over to the hospitals where you would be re-examined. Then you would be treated and held until being deported or entering into the United States.
 - iii) Depending on what illness that the immigrant had, they would be taken to one of the hospitals. The hospital on Island 2 was for general medicine including broken bones, appendicitis, pregnancy or dental problems. If an immigrant had an infectious disease such as measles, trachoma, diphtheria, scarlet fever, or favus, they would be taken to the infectious disease hospital on Island 3.

- f) Who paid for all this? Did immigrants pay to be in the hospital?
- i) As part of the laws that created Ellis Island, the US government required that the steamship companies had to be responsible for every person on their boat. The companies were also assessed a head tax, paid to the US government for each immigrant on the boat.
 - ii) If a person arrived in America and did not pass the inspection, the steamship company had to pay the immigrants fare back to the point of origin. They had to pay for all the immigrant's care and stay at Ellis Island, if they were detained, which included room, board and medical treatments. The strictest part of the law was the \$100 fine the steamship companies were assessed if an immigrant failed the inspection at Ellis Island.
 - iii) As a result of these laws and penalties, every port where immigrants left for America had screening facilities.
 - iv) The effect of the policy meant that very few immigrants were now being deported. Of the 12 million immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island, only 2% were sent back. This is a small percentage, but that's 240,000 deportees.

Quick Ellis Island Fact Sheet –

2) The Facts:

a) Ellis Island

- i) Ellis Island Opened in 1892
- ii) In 1897, there was a fire that destroyed the whole facility. From 1897 to 1900, all immigration was conducted at the barge office in Manhattan.
- iii) The hospitals closed in 1951
- iv) Ellis Island closed for good in 1954
- v) 12 million immigrants came to Ellis Island.
- vi) 20% of people arriving each day were detained for medical or legal problems, but ultimately only 2% of the total were finally deported.
- vii) 40% of anyone living in the United State is descended from someone who came through Ellis Island
- viii) 25 million people immigrated to the United States from 1892-1954 73% entered through Ellis Island.

b) Ellis Island Hospitals

- i) The first general hospital opened in 1902, the second in 1906 and the hospital extension opened in 1910. The Infectious Disease hospital opened last in 1911.
- ii) 250,000 patients were treated in the hospitals, 4,000 patients died, a mortality rate of 1.6%.
- iii) The hospital is based on the Pavilion System created by Florence Nightingale. The hospital was divided into large open wards that were designed to treat one disease at a time. They all have large windows that let in fresh air and sunlight because prior to the invention and use of anti-biotics in the 1940's there were no drugs to treat infectious diseases. Ellis Island's Immigrant hospital was one of the most modern hospital's in the country.
- iv) From 1902 to 1925 almost all of the patients in the hospital were immigrants. After the National Origins Act was passed in 1924, establishing a quota system of 2%, immigration numbers were reduced to 10% of the levels of 1905-10. As a result of these restrictions, the numbers of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island went from over a million in 1907 to 135,000 in 1925. Although there were still immigrants arriving Ellis Island became Marine Hospital #43 and then began treating Beneficiaries - US government employees. From 1924-1951 80% of the patients were beneficiaries and 20% immigrants.