

America's Gateway

As industrialization in the northeastern states rapidly increased during the late 1800s, the demand for foreign labor grew also. People from all parts of the world, seeking economic opportunities as well as personal freedoms, arrived by the shipload to fill America's vacant jobs.

To better protect and regulate immigrant entry, the U.S. government established the immigration processing station on Ellis Island, New York, in 1892. During a span of nearly six decades, Ellis Island welcomed 71 percent of all immigrants to the United States. Consequently, nearly a quarter of all Americans can trace their ancestry by way of Ellis Island. By the time it closed in 1954, over 20 million immigrants passed through its gates. Today, Ellis Island has been transformed into a national monument and is the country's premiere museum of American immigration history.



Polish immigrant disembarks at Ellis Island, cir. 1910. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Immigrants on deck of steamer "Germanic." Frank Leslie's illustrated newspaper, 1887. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Immigrant landing station at Ellis Island, (1905)
Courtesy of the INS archives.