

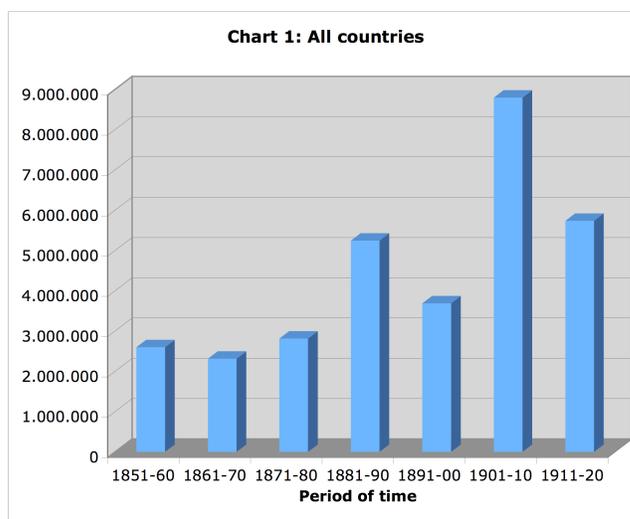
Statistical Analysis: US Immigration 1851 – 1920

Imagine, my dear friend, if you can, a society formed of all the nations of the world... people having different languages, beliefs, opinions: in a word, a society without roots, without memories, without prejudices, without routines, without common ideas, without a national character, yet hundred times happier than our own.

Alexis de Tocqueville, 1830

The source of the data used for this statistical analysis is provided by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, published in 1991, and can be found in Tindall and Shi (2004, Appendix). It is primary data, however, the figures go back to different observations. From 1851 to 1867 the figures represent alien passengers arrived at seaports, and from 1868 to 1891 and 1895 to 1897, immigrant aliens arrived. Furthermore, figures from 1892 to 1894 and 1898 to 1920 represent immigrants admitted for permanent residence. Thereby it has to be considered, that aliens entering by cabin class between 1892 and 1903 were not counted as immigrants. Besides, until 1908 land arrivals were not completely enumerated (Tindall and Shi, 2004). It has also to be taken into consideration that illegal immigrants are not included in the provided figures. Thus, these figures do not represent absolutely reliable data, yet they still provide an excellent basis for deeper insights into American immigration history.

A first impression of the significance of the data can be gained when having a look at the overall numbers of immigration in the period from 1851 to 1920 (see Chart 1).

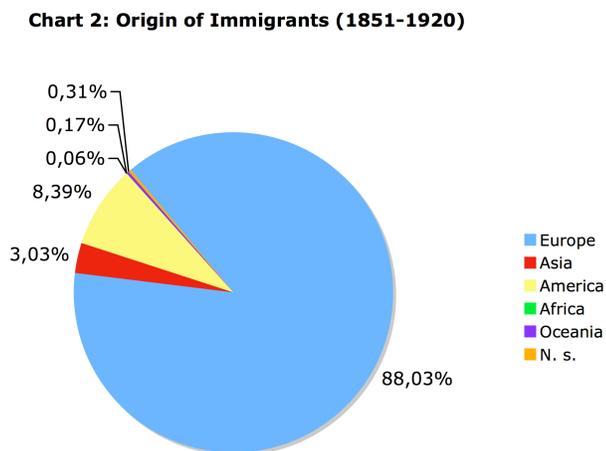


From 1851 to 1880 the total number of immigrants has increased only slightly, with a small setback in the 1860s. Then the numbers almost doubled between 1881 and 1890, followed by another setback towards the end of the century.

The period from 1901 to 1910 saw the biggest flow of immigrants with numbers reaching almost 8.8 million people. This was followed by a decade of significantly lower immigration but numbers were still high with more than 5.7 million.

This huge and increasing number of immigrants from all different parts of the world led to an alteration of the country. This conclusion cannot only be drawn from the data provided but is also underpinned, among others, by the census of 1890 which had shown that the number of foreign-born element in the population accounted for more than 9 million of a total population of 63 million (Brogan, 1999, p. 393).

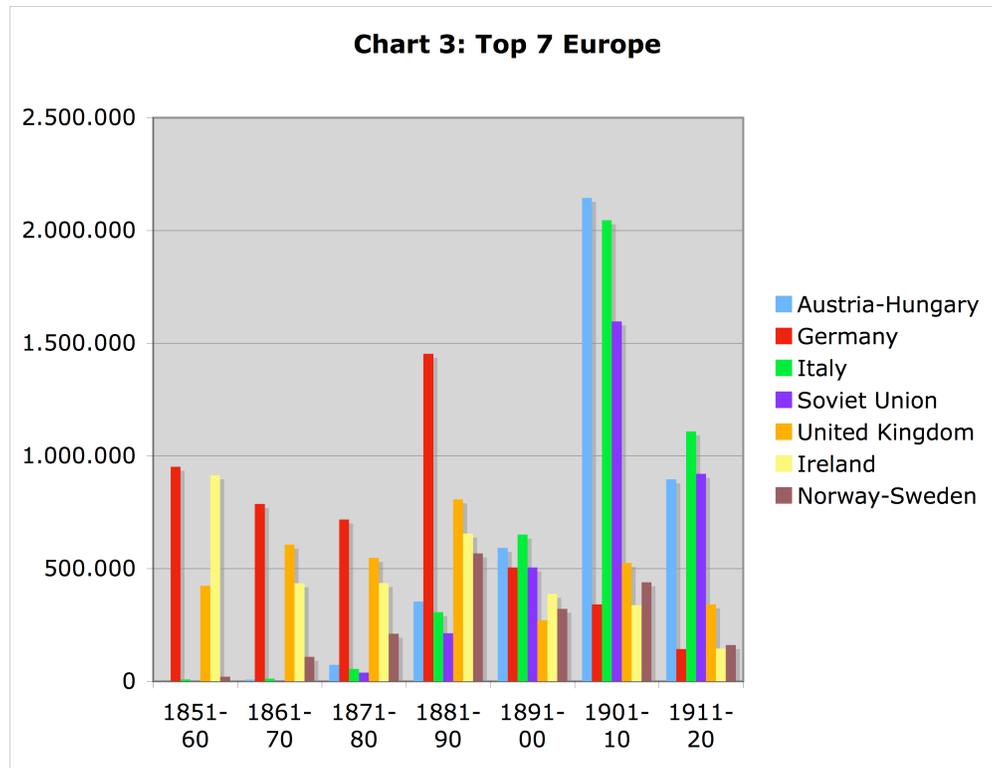
Where did the immigrants come from? In the period from 1851 to 1920 an overwhelming portion of more than 88 per cent (almost 27.5 million) emigrated from Europe to the United States (see Chart 2). Slightly more than 8 per cent of the immigrants (2.6 million)



came from America (i.e. Canada, Mexico, Caribbean and South America) while only about 3 per cent (barely 1 million) originated from Asia. The rest accounts for about 0,5 per cent, divided into Africa (0,06 %), Oceania (0,17 %) and non-specified countries (0,31 %).

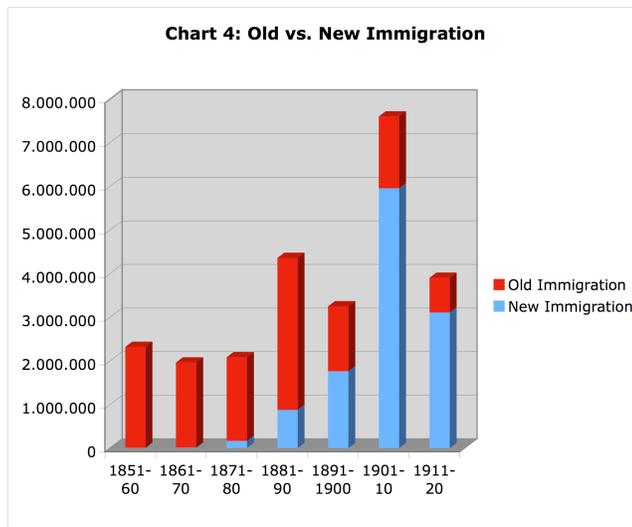
There are several factors that led to these huge numbers of immigrants and obviously the causes varied from country to country. As Tindall and Shi (2004) put it: “Immigrants took flight from famine, cholera, or the lack of economic opportunity in their native lands. They fled racial, religious, and political persecution and compulsory military service” (p. 683). However, as Tindall and Shi correctly state, “more immigrants probably were pulled by America’s opportunities than were pushed out by conditions at home” (ibid).

As Europe was obviously the biggest contributor to US immigration in this period of time, it is worth having a closer look at the origins and the development of European emigrants (see Chart 3).

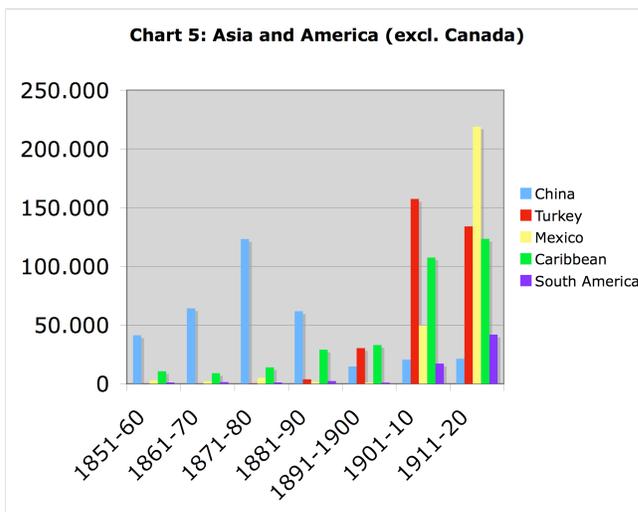


The chart shows very clearly that the immigration from 1851 to 1920 can be divided into two main stages: old and new immigration (see also Chart 4). The United Kingdom, Ireland and Germany were the main sources for “old immigration” which took place until 1890. In 1860, the Irish were the largest group among the immigrants with 1.6 million, followed by the Germans with 1.2 million and 588.000 British (mostly English) while America’s total population was 31 million at that time (Tindall and Shi, 2004). Apart from the general causes, there was a particular reason for the high emigration of Irish people to the US in the late 1840s and the beginning of the 1850s. A million Irish died of starvation or disease due to a terrible potato famine, which forced many to leave the country (Brogan, 1999). Many Germans fled their country because the liberal revolution of 1848 failed, however, a majority emigrated for purely economic reasons (ibid). New immigration, especially from Austria-Hungary and Italy, reached its peak before World War I but was notably reduced during the war.

Zinn (2003) states that in the 1880s and 1890s, “immigrants were pouring in from Europe at a faster rate than before” (p. 265). However, he continues, “now there were not so many Irish and German immigrants as Italians, Russians, Greeks—people from Southern and Eastern Europe” (ibid). This can be regarded as

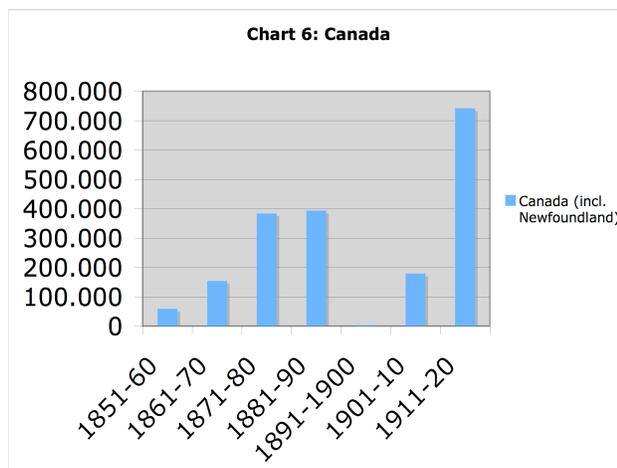


the turning point from old to new immigration. Yet, one has to bear in mind, that immigration from Britain remained relatively stable while numbers of Irish and German emigrants decreased more significantly.



An interesting case is the Chinese emigration to the United States. Chinese immigration increased drastically after the discovery of gold in California (“Gold Rush”). However, in 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was introduced, which suspended Chinese immigration for a certain period of time (Tindall and Shi, 2004).

Last but not least the Canadians (incl. Newfoundland; see Chart 6), who contributed highly to US immigration, especially in the period from 1911 to 1920 when almost 750.000 crossed the border from Canada to the United States.



Although the data provided does not reflect the exact amount of immigrants entering the US in this particular period of time, the data is very convincing and clearly indicates different trends. Therefore the data is very useful and represents a unique and reliable source for historians and statisticians.

Most obviously, the biggest contributor of immigrants to the US in this period of time was Europe whereby there is a clear distinction between old and new immigration. However, as outlined earlier, it has to be taken into consideration that although old immigration was followed by a new wave of immigrants from countries like Austria-Hungary, Italy, or the Soviet Union in the 1890s, the original contributors (the United Kingdom in particular) remained to be important.

De Tocqueville's observation was clearly too optimistic, however, it has to be acknowledged that nowadays the United States is the most powerful nation on this planet, not least because it is *a nation of nations*.

References:

Brogan, Hugh (1999), *The Penguin History of the United States of America*, Penguin, London.

De Tocqueville, Alexis (2003), *Democracy in America*, Penguin, London.

Tindall, George B. and Shi, David E. (2004), *America: A Narrative History* (Brief 6th ed.), Norton, New York.

Zinn, Howard (2003), *A People's History of the United States: 1492 – Present* (3rd ed.), Pearson, Harlow.