

YOUR AMERICAN DREAM

To The Teachers:

Two years ago, my wife, Lilly, and I established the Merage Foundation for the American Dream. We believe its mission is important to the nation and its citizens. The Foundation is dedicated to promoting expanded opportunities for immigrants. It hopes to inspire young immigrants to achieve their American Dream. It hopes to help promising immigrant leaders contribute to their communities and to the nation. It hopes to encourage Americans to understand and celebrate the contributions of immigrants to America.

The Foundation's initiatives include:

- The development of award-winning DVDs and educational materials (The American Experience) concerning the history of immigration and the lives of successful American immigrants for use in high schools throughout the nation.
- The provision of stipends and the creation of a Merage Fellows program for outstanding graduating immigrant students nominated by 21 universities throughout the country.
- The development of occasional papers and the convening of Forums concerning the impact of immigration on America and issues concerning immigration.

We are delighted that you want to use the DVDs and educational materials in your classrooms. Paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson, the famous American author, the Merage Foundation hopes that the American Dream Experience will help students walk with their feet, work with their hands, speak their own minds and reach their own aspirations.

Paul Merage
President

To The Teachers:

The Merage Foundation for the American Dream is pleased to send you DVDs and related educational materials for The American Dream Experience. Both describe in vivid terms the history of immigration to America and the lives and contributions of living American immigrants. Both reflect an effort by the Merage Foundation to create a library of DVDs and educational materials for high school teachers and principals throughout the U.S. Based on use of both in over 1200 classrooms last year, the Foundation believes that the American Dream Experience will inspire students—including immigrant students and students from immigrant families—to define and achieve their American Dreams.

We hope that teachers will incorporate the DVDs and educational materials in their lesson plans over a period of several weeks. We encourage teachers to invite local immigrant leaders to watch the DVDs and discuss their content with students. We urge teachers to involve all students, whether immigrants or not, in the planned activities related to the DVDs. Students, if they are not immigrants or children of immigrant families, are likely to be able to trace their roots back to immigrant grandparents, great-grandparents or great-great-grandparents. The Foundation welcomes teacher feedback concerning the impact of the American Dream Experience in the classroom.

Marshall Kaplan
Executive Director
Merage Foundations

Elliott Rebhun
The New York Times
Upfront/Scholastic Inc.

Donna Dewey
Dewey Obenchain
Film Inc.

THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

BECOMING AN AMERICAN:

The Immigrant Experience



A panoramic photo of Hester Street, NY, a neighborhood of predominantly Jewish immigrants, circa 1902

SECURING THE MOST FROM THE AMERICAN DREAM EXPERIENCE

The Foundation suggests that teachers consider the following approaches to enrich *The American Dream Experience* for students.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION:

The American Dream Experience has been created for use with tenth- and eleventh-grade students. High-school students are mature enough to grant thoughtful attention to the important themes explored in the DVDs. History, government, and civic classes provide the best settings in which to initiate *The American Dream Experience*. But teachers may want to carry out the program in other classes and in larger school assemblies or forums. What is most important, given the content of *The American Dream Experience*, is that the chosen settings include a relatively large number of immigrant and first-generation students.

INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL LEADERS:

Students will benefit from the classroom participation of successful local government, business, and non-profit leaders who are immigrants. They should be invited to watch the DVDs and engage in classroom discussions. The guests should be asked to compare their experiences with the experiences of the individuals profiled in the DVDs. The Merage Foundation will

gladly assist you in identifying leaders who are immigrants if you need such assistance. Please call (949) 474-5882.

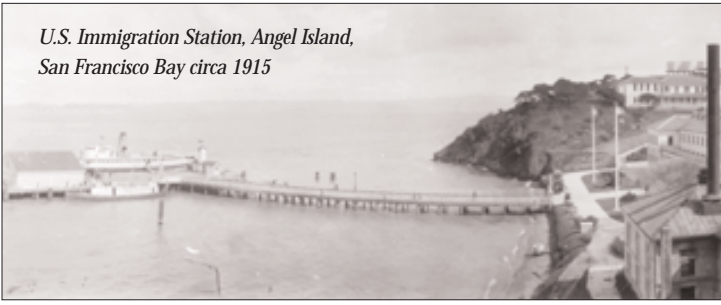
INCREASING STUDENT UNDERSTANDING OF PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY IMMIGRANTS:

The DVDs are each different. The content of each DVD reflects three similar themes. The Foundation suggests that teachers organize their proposed lesson plans around these three themes. The themes are: "Leaving Behind Memories and Places," "Building a New Life in the United States," and "Achieving the American Dream."

BECOMING AN AMERICAN: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

Background: *The American Spirit*. Immigration to America is a unique phenomenon in world history. No other country has ever absorbed so many people from so many different places. And no other country throughout world history has taken so much of its identity, energy, and spirit from immigrants. The American spirit is the immigrant spirit; the American Dream is the immigrant dream. It is no exaggeration to say that without immigrants, the United States could not exist. And it is no contradiction to acknowledge a tragic consequence of the immigration cele-

U.S. Immigration Station, Angel Island,
San Francisco Bay circa 1915



brated in *The American Dream Experience* series: the harm caused to Native Americans. They are the oldest immigrants, probably migrating from Asia during the last Ice Age, about 20,000 years ago. Native Americans occupied North America for thousands of years and developed rich, complex cultures, only to see them crumble after Europeans began settling here in the 1500s. Teachers should make sure students understand that the immigration of the past 500 years came at a great cost to Native Americans: They lost their American Dreams, and are today still struggling to regain them.

In the *Becoming an American: The Immigrant Experience* DVD, the history of U.S. immigration is told in the words of the people who lived it. A few of the speakers are modern-day immigrants—real people, recounting their own experiences. The “historical” immigrants are composite characters, not actual figures. But the narratives they tell are true, based upon actual immigrant stories.

Each of these composite characters represents a distinct period in the history of U.S. immigration. The periods are set off from one another by changes in the laws governing immigration, changes in the composition of the immigrant population (e.g., new countries of origin), and changes in the sheer numbers of immigrants.

Early Immigration

The first speaker, “Hannah Steiner,” helps us understand immigration during the **Colonial Era (1607-1775)**. Most colonial settlers came from northwestern Europe—England, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Poland. But at the same time, there were Hispanic colonies in present-day California, New Mexico, and Florida; the French controlled the Mississippi Valley and the Great Lakes region; and Russian ships patrolled the Pacific Coast from Alaska all the way south to California. So America has always been multilingual and multicultural.

Immigration changed little during the **post-Revolutionary period (1776-1820)**, with a small but steady influx of newcomers from northwestern Europe (primarily the British Isles and Germany). The **pre-Civil War Era (1821-1860)** brought a significant demographic shift. First, the numbers increased sharply: from about 15,000 new arrivals per year in the 1820s to an annual total of 250,000 in the 1850s. Second, the population was dominated by two countries of origin: Ireland and Germany. The former, as described by “Robert Casey,” suffered a devastating potato famine beginning in the mid-1840s. A million Irish died, and another 1.5 million fled to the United States—one of the single largest immigration episodes in U.S. history. Meanwhile, political and economic instability in Germany drove hundreds of thousands to the United States.

“Ernest Jackson” represents a unique but tragic group of immigrants: African slaves. Between 1619 and the Civil War, millions of Africans were brought to America in chains. Because they did not come here by choice, they represent a special category of immigrants. Teachers should discuss how the immigration experiences of slaves differed from those of immigrants who came voluntarily.

The “Golden Door”: Immigration At Its Height

Like the slaves, Chinese immigrants also encountered racism and discrimination in America, as “Chin Hou” attests. The first Asians to come here in large numbers, the Chinese began arriving in about 1850, most seeking refuge from the grinding poverty of the southern provinces of China. Many were recruited to lay track for the Central Pacific Railroad and other railroads, earning only a fraction of the wage paid to non-Chinese laborers.

Chin Hou speaks to an often-overlooked part of the immigrant story: the

settlement of the American West. The United States turned westward after the Civil War, and immigrants of the **post-Civil War period (1861-1890)** helped lead the way. Northwestern Europeans continued to make up the majority of immigrants during this era. They were heavily recruited by railroads—not to lay the tracks, but to settle alongside them. Mining companies, land brokers, town boosters, and various others also lured immigrants to Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and elsewhere in the interior West. The all-American small towns of “Main Street, USA” were, ironically enough, largely created by immigrants.

So, too, were America’s great cities. Their incredible growth in the late nineteenth century could not have occurred without that era’s heavy immigration. During the **early twentieth century (1891-1920)**, almost 30 million people came to America. “Maria Ricci” exemplifies this overwhelming immigration wave, which introduced not only larger numbers but also new nationalities into America’s social fabric. It included a high percentage of southern and eastern Europeans—Italians, Greeks, Russians, Polish, Hungarians, Slovaks—along with a significant number of Jewish peasants fleeing the pogroms of central and eastern Europe. Through its sheer size, breadth, and depth, this immigrant generation transformed the United States.

Immigration in the Twentieth Century

“Theodore Berger” discusses the relatively “closed-door” period of the **mid-20th century (1921-1965)**, when new laws sharply reduced the flow of immigrants into the United States. The National Origins Act of 1924 established country-by-country immigration quotas. The quotas were skewed to favor immigrants from western Europe, while severely limiting access to people from eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America. These laws represented a backlash against the previous generation’s great immigrant tide. They reflected an openly racist current in U.S. public opinion, one that held most immigrants in contempt but particularly Jews, Catholics, and Asians. The effect of these laws was dramatic. During the entire period between 1930 and 1950, the United States admitted only 1.5 million immigrants.

As a result of these restrictive laws, millions of American Dreams were snuffed out; individuals unable to reach the U.S. were left to other destinies, often tragic ones. As Theodore Berger’s story illustrates, the Holocaust posed a particular challenge to that era’s tight immigration policies. During the Nazis’ rise in the 1930s and 1940s, millions of European Jews tried desperately to get American entry visas, only to be denied by the U.S. government.

The strict quotas were reaffirmed by the McCarran-Walters Act of 1952 and remained in effect until 1965, when they were abolished by the Hart-Cellar Act. The new law greatly increased access to populations that had been discriminated against previously, particularly Mexicans and other Latinos, Asians (including the long-excluded Chinese), and Africans. The more liberal law helped give rise to a new wave of heavy immigration—one that is still ongoing, and that rivals the giant influx of 1890-1920. This **present-day wave (1966-present)** has brought more than 20 million legal immigrants to American shores.

Immigration in the Twenty-First Century

The *Becoming an American: The Immigrant Experience* DVD concludes with

Class Discussion Prompts:

The Merage Foundation assumes that teachers will view the *Becoming an American: The Immigrant Experience* DVD and read the related materials as part of their development of lesson plans. Before teachers show the DVD and begin the planned activities, they should:

1. discuss the history of immigration to the United States.
2. explain that while the numbers and origins of immigrants have shifted over time, the motivations behind immigration have remained surprisingly constant.
3. ask students if they can define their American Dream. If they cannot or are hesitant to do so, teachers should ask students about their hopes concerning their education, jobs and careers, marriage and children, family, and contributions to community. Teachers should explain that each student’s combined hopes constitutes their present American Dream. Teachers should ask students to watch for the American Dreams expressed in the DVD, and to note how they compare with their own.

brief remarks from several present-day immigrants—real people recounting their own experiences.

The United States today admits immigrants for one of four reasons. The most common, family reunification, enables immigrants who have gained U.S. citizenship to bring close relatives into the country. This category accounts for about two-thirds of all immigration today. The other three categories are: job-based immigrants, refugees, and diversity-based immigrants.

There is a fifth, unofficial category of immigrants: illegals. Because they are uncoun­ted, it is impossible to know exactly how many illegal immigrants there are, or whether they stay in this country permanently. In recent years an increasingly vocal minority of Americans has lobbied for tighter immigration restrictions. Some critics, seemingly relying more on ideology than on solid facts, accuse immigrants of taking jobs from American-born workers, lacking patriotism, and hurting the environment.

The notion that immigrants will “cost America its identity” is far from a consensus perspective, but it does have adherents. However, many would argue the opposite view. Immigrants are America’s identity. They, as much as any other group of Americans, exhibit the values—initiative, hard work, tolerance, freedom, faith—that the United States holds most dear.

Those values are reflected in the contributions, large and small, immigrants have made to this nation. Throughout U.S. history, immigrants and their descendants have fought in wars, served in high government office, made scientific breakthroughs, and achieved great triumphs in business and the arts. Steelmaker and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie was an immigrant; so was Alexander Graham Bell, the inventor of the telephone, as well as physicist Albert Einstein. In today’s America, immigrants have excelled in sports (Sammy Sosa, Dikembe Mutombo), the arts (Isabel Allende, Carlos Santana), public life (Arnold Schwarzenegger, Henry Kissinger), journalism (Jack Rosenthal), science (David Ho), and many other fields. And in your community today, there are immigrants who contribute by teaching, by holding government office, running a business, practicing medicine, and volunteering to help others.

Many immigrants struggle to overcome the barriers to the American Dream. Some struggle just to make a living; others do well economically but never feel truly American. The American Dream is a goal, not a guarantee; immigrants may achieve it to a greater or lesser degree, or they may never come close to it.

But one thing is for certain: Without immigrants, the United States could not be what it is today. And whatever it becomes tomorrow, it will become in large part because of what today’s immigrants have to offer.

THE IMMIGRANT JOURNEY

Symbolically, *Becoming an American: The Immigrant Experience* can be thought of as one immigrant’s story, told from shifting perspectives. The first two characters, Hannah Steiner and Robert Casey, dramatically narrate the first stage in the immigrant experience: *Leaving Behind Memories and Places*. The next three (Ernest Jackson, Chin Hou, and Maria Ricci) describe the next part of the journey: *Building a New Life in the United States*. And the last group (Theodore Berger, Carmen Rodriguez, Juan Guzman, Nam Pham, and Kujtim Latifi) talk about the culmination of the immigrant quest: *Achieving the American Dream*.

THEME ONE: LEAVING BEHIND MEMORIES AND PLACES

The dire conditions that drove Hannah Steiner from her homeland are the same that have caused immigrants throughout history to leave their homelands: economic hardship, political instability, and religious intolerance. To her, America represents a dream come true—an escape from all of these hardships, and an opportunity to live in peace, happiness, and prosperity. As Ms. Steiner illustrates, the American Dream begins abroad.

Robert Casey speaks to the hardships of the journey itself, as well as the sense of loss that often comes with leaving home. Immigrants throughout history have been willing to pay extraordinary costs and take enormous risks to get here. Just over a century ago, most immigrants arrived via a perilous sea journey—and often spent their life savings on the passage. Today’s immigrants often cross the desert, not the ocean—but the risk is the same, and the costs just as high.

PLANNED ACTIVITY:

All of the immigrants in the *Becoming an American: The Immigrant Experience* DVD mention one or more of the reasons that led them to leave their homeland, and many of them discuss the hurdles they had to clear in order to get to America. *What are the reasons that spur today’s immigrants, and what obstacles must they overcome?* Have each student create a diary for a present-day immigrant (either real or imagined) from one of the following countries: Mexico; Vietnam; Russia; China/Taiwan; India; Ethiopia.

The diary should be in the form of a narrative—a first-person account. It should begin with a description of the immigrant’s life abroad—family, income, political rights, religious freedoms, and so forth. It should make clear why the person came to America—what his or her “American Dream” was. The remainder of the diary should explain the steps required to get here (i.e., obtaining entry papers; financing the journey; moving possessions; saying goodbye to loved ones).

Have the students share their diaries with-in small groups. They should discuss the following key points about the immigrant they wrote about: *What motivated the immigrant to come to the United States? How do those motivations compare with the motivations of immigrants from earlier eras of U.S. history? What hurdles did the immigrant overcome in order to get here?*

How do those hurdles compare with the hurdles faced by immigrants in earlier times? After discussions are completed, ask group leaders to summarize their groups’ discussion before the class. Based on the group leaders’ presentations, engage the class in further discussions.



Mexican immigrants entering the United States in El Paso, TX.

THEME TWO: BUILDING A NEW LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

As “Chin Hou” describes, building a new life here has never been easy. Immigrants have faced obstacles and hardships that could only be met with great courage and determination. The first obstacle confronting all non-English-speaking immigrants has always been language: Until they gained the ability to communicate, immigrants have faced social isolation and limited job opportunities. Hou speaks of a hardship that most immigrants have faced to one degree or another: discrimination. Though few have encountered the violence Chin Hou describes here, many have experienced lesser forms of prejudice: being denied housing, facing stereotypes or racial slurs. For all these reasons, the experience of immigration has nearly always carried an element of loneliness.

To combat these effects, immigrants have often gathered in tight-knit ethnic communities. Chin Hou describes Chinatowns, but cities throughout the United States have spawned enclaves of Italians, Germans, Jews, Poles, and Irish. In many cities, the remnants of those communities are still in

Some of the students in the classroom will not be immigrants or from immigrant parents. These students should be involved in each planned activity. Their involvement will be meaningful to them and to other students in the classroom. Where relevant for each planned activity, teachers should ask students who are not immigrants or born of immigrant parents to imagine what it must be like to be an immigrant and, for purposes of planned activities, to assume the role of an immigrant to America. For example, these students could be asked to play the role of immigrants from China or Vietnam fleeing political persecution, Mexican immigrants seeking a better life in America, Ethiopian immigrants fleeing famine, or Russian immigrants looking for better educational opportunities for their children.



Depiction of "The Denver Riot" of 1880, an anti-Chinese riot.

evidence, while new enclaves of Mexicans, Vietnamese, Russians, and Africans have taken shape.

"Maria Ricci" describes the sense of excitement and purpose that comes with building a new life in America. She expresses feelings of liberation, of a new world opening up to her—she has finally arrived in a place that she has never seen but only heard about. Above all, Maria voices great optimism about the future.

There is also a strong current of pride in her words, as she describes the challenges that she and her family have met. Immigration has tested her, pushed her beyond her comfort zone, and she has discovered within herself

strengths and abilities that she never knew existed. "America," to her, is not only a place but also a project—one she is proud to be working on, a legacy to future generations.

Maria seems to have developed a strong "American" identity. Historically, many immigrants have achieved this transition smoothly, but others have not. Some have experienced tension between "assimilation" and cultural/ethnic pride—between gratitude for America's rewards, and loyalty to the homeland's traditions. In a broader, societal sense this tension has generally been healthy and creative, enriching and deepening American culture.

PLANNED ACTIVITY:

Nearly every American community bears immigrant "fingerprints." These may take the form of place-names (streets, parks, suburbs); clusters of neighborhoods, ethnic churches, restaurants, or shops; prominent businesses founded by immigrant families; annual festivals or fairs; a favorite local ethnic dish; or sections of town with distinct ethnic and cultural flavors.

Over time, a community's immigrant past often gets blurred; we take it for granted. Have students look for and identify three immigrant "fingerprints" from the local community and trace their origins. For example:

Fingerprint = southeast side of town has three old synagogues within five blocks

Origin = neighborhood was a Jewish enclave in the early 1900s

Fingerprint = local Oktoberfest draws large crowds every fall

Origin = large wave of German immigration to town in 1870s

Fingerprint = a cluster of Asian restaurants or grocery stores

Origin = enclave of Asian immigrants that formed in 1970s-1980s

In addition to identifying the immigrant roots of these fingerprints, students should describe how they helped earlier immigrants fulfill their American Dreams.

THEME THREE: ACHIEVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

The last phase of the immigrant journey, *Achieving the American Dream*, is sometimes the hardest to define. Theodore Berger sums it up in four words: *to live with dignity*. Some immigrants—those, for example, who have lived in extreme poverty—find dignity in having a decent home, clean clothes, a car, and well-fed children. Others find dignity in the form of freedom from oppression—the ability to act and to speak without fear. Still others achieve dignity by working for the benefit of others, or by excelling in their chosen profession. As an immigration lawyer, Theodore Berger creates opportunities for other immigrants to come to America and share in the good life he has found here. Theodore's words imply that achieving the American Dream isn't the end of the journey at all; it's actually a new beginning.

PLANNED ACTIVITY:

Students should write an essay that describes in detail what "achieving the American Dream" means to them. *How will they know when they have achieved the American Dream? What type of lives will they live?* In describing

this imagined life, students should touch upon the work they will do, the type of community they will live in, their family relationships, their recreations, and so forth. They should describe how achieving the American Dream will affect their sense of identity: how (and to what degree) will they become Americans, and how (and to what degree) will they retain identification with their culture of origin.

Students should also imagine what kind of contributions they would like to make to their community. *Will they be active in the arts, politics, education, and/or business? How will they share what they have gained and what they have learned with those who are still trying to achieve the American Dream?*

Each student should discuss his or her essay in a short presentation before the class.

U. S. IMMIGRATION BY DECADE

Years	Total	Top Countries of Origin
1820s	143,439	Ireland, England, France, Germany
1830s	599,125	Ireland, Germany, England, France
1840s	1,713,251	Ireland, Germany, England, France
1850s	2,598,214	Germany, Ireland, England, France
1860s	2,314,824	Germany, UK, Ireland, Canada
1870s	1,812,191	Germany, UK, Ireland, Canada
1880s	5,246,613	Germany, UK, Ireland, Sweden
1890s	3,687,564	Italy, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Germany
1900s	8,795,386	Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, UK
1910s	5,735,811	Italy, Russia, Austria-Hungary, Canada
1920s	4,107,209	Canada, Mexico, Italy, Germany
1930s	528,431	Germany, Canada, Italy
1940s	1,035,039	Germany, Canada, UK
1950s	2,515,479	Germany, Canada, Mexico, UK
1960s	3,321,677	Mexico, Canada, Italy, UK
1970s	4,493,314	Mexico, Philippines, Korea, Vietnam
1980s	7,338,062	Mexico, Philippines, Korea, Vietnam
1990s	9,095,417	Mexico, Philippines, former USSR, China
2001-2010*	10,577,857	

* (projected)

TOTAL U. S. IMMIGRATION, 1820-2002: 68,217,481

[Source: 2003 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) <http://uscis.gov>]

RESOURCES

Print

Made in America: Immigrant Students in Our Public Schools by Laurie Olsen (New Press, 1998)

The New Americans by Michael Barone (Regnery, 2001)

Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What it Means to Be American by Tamar Jacoby (Basic Books, 2004)

We Are Americans: Voices of the Immigrant Experience by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler (Scholastic Nonfiction, 2003)

Immigrant Voices: Twenty-four Narratives on Becoming an American edited by Gordon Hutner (Signet, 1999)

Ellis Island Interviews: In Their Own Words by Peter Morton Coan (Facts on File, 1997)

Immigration: From the founding of Virginia to the closing of Ellis Island by Dennis Wepman (Facts on File, 2002)

The Other Americans: How Immigrants Renew Our Country, Our Economy, and Our Values by Joel Millman (Viking, 1997)

Internet

U. S. Immigration Agency: <http://usimmigrationagency.org>

American Immigration Law Foundation: www.aifl.org

Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation: www.ellisland.org

Immigration History Research Center: www.ihrc.umn.edu

Center for Immigration Studies: www.cis.org

Center for Immigration Research: www.uh.edu/cir

The New Americans: www.pbs.org/independentlens/newamericans

National Immigration Forum: www.immigrationforum.org

Mexican Migration Project: <http://mmp.opr.princeton.edu>