

# ★ GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY ACTIVITY 1



**UNIT 1**

## Cities Within Cities: Ethnic Enclaves

### FROM FARMS TO CITIES

At the time of the Civil War, most people in the United States worked on farms. As industrialization grew, people moved to the cities where new jobs were available. Just 50 years after the Civil War, more people worked in factories or in other urban workplaces than on farms. This change had begun in the northeastern United States where the first water-powered textile mills were located. Industrialization eventually spread to the Midwest, where Chicago became an important manufacturing city.

In addition to people migrating from farms to cities, immigrants from many countries came to the United States to work

in the factories. Between 1860 and 1880, about 5 million immigrants, which included many Chinese and French Canadians, came to the United States. That figure increased to 9 million between 1880 and 1900. Many of the immigrants during those years were from Eastern Europe. (See Table 1.)

### IMMIGRANT NEIGHBORHOODS

When they arrived in the United States, many immigrants settled in cities because jobs were more abundant there. Their experiences in large cities such as New York, Boston, or Chicago were similar. Immigrants were often financially poor and lived in overcrowded neighborhoods under bad



**Table 1—Immigrants Entering United States From Selected European Countries, 1820–1900**

	1820	1830	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1890	1900
<b>Millions of immigrants</b>	0.1	0.5	1.4	2.7	2.1	2.7	5.2	3.7	8.2
<b>% of total from:</b>									
<b>Ireland</b>	40.2	31.7	46	36.9	24.4	15.4	12.8	11	4.2
<b>Germany*</b>	4.5	23.2	27	34.8	35.2	27.4	27.5	15.7	4
<b>United Kingdom</b>	19.5	13.8	15.3	13.5	14.9	21.1	15.5	8.9	5.7
<b>Scandinavia</b>	0.2	0.4	0.9	0.9	5.5	7.6	12.7	10.5	5.9
<b>Russia*</b>					0.2	1.3	3.5	12.2	18.3
<b>Austria-Hungary*</b>					0.2	2.2	6	14.5	24.4
<b>Italy</b>					0.5	1.7	5.1	16.3	23.5

\*Continental European boundaries prior to 1919.

SOURCES: *Ellis Island and the Peopling of America*, NY: The New Press. U.S. Bureau of the Census.

*The first row shows the total number of immigrants from Europe for each decade. For example, between 1820 and 1829, .1 million Europeans immigrated to the United States. The rows below the total show the percentages of immigrants from each country listed.*

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conditions. Usually these neighborhoods were in industrial areas where jobs could be found.

In addition, new immigrants often settled in areas of the city where other people from their home country lived. These neighborhoods were called ethnic enclaves. *Ethnic* describes a group of people with common customs, characteristics, and language. In geography, an *enclave* describes a small country or territory surrounded by a larger country or territory. Ethnic enclaves were like small foreign cities within the larger cities. People followed the same customs as they had in their homeland. Their language, dress, food, houses of worship, newspapers, and even games were from the old country. The churches and synagogues in the immigrant neighborhoods were very important not only as places to worship, but also for education, social activities, and ties to their homeland.

### CHICAGO'S WEST SIDE

An example of an ethnic enclave on Chicago's West Side was at South Halsted and Maxwell Streets, south of West 12th Street. In the 1880s, large numbers of Eastern European Jews, mostly from Russia, began living around Maxwell Street. The area became the center of Jewish life on the West Side. People spoke Yiddish and read newspapers printed in Yiddish. The food sold at the markets and bakeries included the familiar meats and breads of their ancestors. Peddlers pushing carts and selling goods, a common practice in Eastern Europe, could be seen in the neighborhood streets. Over 40 synagogues—or Jewish houses of worship—were within walking distance of the corner of Halsted and Maxwell Streets.

Around 1900, most Jews living on the West Side worked as peddlers or in the garment industry. The working conditions in

the garment industry were unsanitary and overcrowded, and workers toiled long hours for low pay. Some people produced clothing in factories, but many others worked in what were called "sweatshops." The sweatshops made products for the garment factories, but they were located in unventilated apartment buildings in the neighborhood.

### MAXWELL STREET MARKET

Jewish peddlers sold a variety of household items, including food, clothing, thread, and dishes. Some Jewish peddlers carried heavy loads of goods to other parts of the city, while others stayed in the neighborhood and sold goods from their pushcarts. Between 1880 and 1900, Maxwell Street evolved into an open-air marketplace. Local



*This photograph shows a portion of Maxwell Street and the types of buildings in which immigrants lived in the late 1800s.*

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markets were important to the people in poor neighborhoods because transportation was often too expensive or unavailable. Every morning, Maxwell Street was busy with people buying and selling goods. It eventually became a place where people from the surrounding ethnic enclaves came together to shop, bargain, visit, and even work side by side.

By the 1920s, most of the Eastern European Jews had moved from the West Side tenements to better neighborhoods. Maxwell Street Market continued to grow, however, as new waves of immigrants arrived. Jewish, Polish, Lithuanian, Bohemian, African American, and Latino merchants all sold their products at the Maxwell Street Market.

In the 1950s, the market was a huge tourist attraction. Thousands of people gathered every Sunday to listen to music, look for bargains, and eat at the ethnic food stands. The city of Chicago closed the market in 1994 to make way for new construction. The tradition that was started by Jewish immigrants in one of Chicago's

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- ▷ Unsanitary conditions in the tenements were largely due to lack of plumbing and clean water. In the 1890s, over a quarter of a million people in Chicago had no bathing facilities.
- ▷ By 1910 the garment industry had become Chicago's largest employer with a workforce of 38,000 people.
- ▷ The fire that destroyed most of Chicago in 1871 started on De Koven Street on the West Side. Because of a northeasterly wind, much of the West Side was not burned.
- ▷ In the late 1800s, the unpaved streets in Chicago were like seas of mud during rainy weather.

poorest neighborhoods had brought people of many countries and backgrounds together for more than 100 years.

## APPLYING GEOGRAPHY TO HISTORY

**Directions:** Write the answer to each question in the space provided.

**Recalling Information**

1. What are ethnic enclaves?  
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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. During which decade shown on the table did the most Russians immigrate to the United States?  
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3. Why did immigrants move into neighborhoods that had poor living conditions?  
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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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