DBQ 12: SHOULD FURTHER IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BE RESTRICTED?

This DBQ asks you to be part of history. It asks you to experience an episode in our history from the viewpoints of the people who took part in it. As you complete this DBQ essay, imagine that you are living in the 1890s. Those who actually lived at that time and who took part in this episode of history didn’t know how it would all turn out. Imagine that you don’t know, either. Use only information from the documents and from your outside learning about this subject up to the year 1900.

Historical Background

All of us who call ourselves Americans are either immigrants or the descendents of immigrants. People from Europe first came to North and South America about 500 years ago. They found Native Americans living here, whom they called Indians. But scientists tell us that even the Indians were the descendents of prehistoric Asian immigrants. They were hunters who walked to North America about 20,000 years ago. They used an ancient land bridge that connected North America and Asia at that time. (Other prehistoric Americans may have crossed the ocean to get here.) Most immigrants came to America of their own free will, many eagerly. Some, including all African slaves, were forced to come. But our ancestors all came here from other lands. The United States is a land of immigrants.

Through most of U.S. history, new immigrants have been welcomed. In fact, they often have been actively recruited. This was because of a simple ratio that has characterized the United States through most of its history. The nation had a lot of empty land and a chronic shortage of workers. This has typically made land cheap and labor expensive. It’s no wonder that colonial tobacco farmers were so eager to acquire indentured servants from England or slaves from Africa. Or that colonial governments advertised for settlers, providing inexpensive or free lands. Or that the builders of the transcontinental railroad hired so many Chinese and Irish workers. Or that the Homestead Act of 1862 purposefully applied to U.S. citizens and to noncitizens alike. (As you remember, this law gave away millions of acres of free farmland in the West.) In fact, as the years passed, the United States became known and respected as a nation that welcomed new immigrants.

In the 1880s, the people of France wanted to honor the one-hundredth anniversary of both American independence and of their own revolution. They gave the American people the Statue of Liberty. It came to symbolize America’s open door to the world’s immigrants. At the statue’s dedication ceremony in 1886, a plaque was laid at its base. On that plaque is engraved a poem by Emma Lazarus. She herself was an American immigrant from Russia. It reads:

(continued)
“...Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

At times in U.S. history, however, our “golden door” has not been so welcoming. At times, Americans have feared and opposed immigration. At these times nativism (anti-immigrant feelings) becomes widespread. Nativist groups organize to try to limit immigration. Nativist feelings have often been strong when the pace of immigration has been especially fast. Strong nativism has also arisen when new immigrants seemed different, more foreign and alien than before. Nativism has often also flourished during economic bad times. Unemployed American workers have become resentful of competition from immigrants. The 1890s was one of those times when public opposition to immigration became especially strong.

Nativists in the 1890s worked to limit the number of immigrants entering the United States. They lobbied Congress for laws that would forbid all nonliterate immigrants from entering. (A nonliterate person is someone who cannot read or write.) Those who were uneducated would be denied entry. Immigrants are typically poor people. They are seeking better lives and greater chances for themselves and their children. In the 1890s, many came from countries where they had no opportunity for education. A great many of them could neither read nor write. So a literacy law would bar many immigrants from entering the United States.

Imagine that you are a newspaper editor. You’re planning an editorial on the topic of future immigration. Should the U.S. “golden door” remain open? Or should the United States begin to restrict and limit future immigration by allowing entry only to those who are educated?
DBQ 12: SHOULD FURTHER IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BE RESTRICTED? CONTINUED

Directions: The following question is based on the documents (1–7) that follow. Before reading these documents, be sure to

1. Carefully read and think about the document-based question that follows these directions.

2. Ask yourself: What do I already know about this question and its topic? What did I learn from reading the Historical Background section? If I had to answer the document-based question without reading any of the documents, what would I say?

3. Take a few minutes to jot down the major things you already know about this topic and question. What important names, dates, events, and major ideas do you already know?

4. Now read each document carefully. Ask yourself: How does this document help to answer the document-based question? Underline things of special importance and jot notes in the margins. If you’re confused by or don’t understand a document, go on to the next one. Later, if you have time, you can go back.

5. Develop a thesis statement that directly answers the document-based question. You’ll want to state this thesis early in your essay.

6. Briefly outline your entire essay. Make sure that what you say in it supports and proves your thesis statement. In your essay, plan how you’ll use the information found in the documents and what you know already about this topic.

7. Carefully write your essay. As you include supportive information from documents, be sure to cite the sources of this information. This will add authority and credibility to what you’re saying.

Question: Should the U.S. “golden door” remain open? Or should the United States restrict and limit future immigration by allowing entry only to those who are educated?

PART A

The following documents address various arguments made in support of, or in opposition to, restricting immigration in the late 1800s. Examine each document carefully, and answer the question or questions that follow.

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DBQ 12: SHOULD FURTHER IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BE RESTRICTED? CONTINUED

Document 1

The nature of immigration to the United States changed greatly during the second half of the 1800s. The pace of immigration grew rapidly. The total number of immigrants arriving during any ten-year period didn’t rise above one million until the 1840s. Four decades later, that number was over five million. By the 1890s, poor immigrants were crowding into the rapidly growing cities of the United States, creating slums. Italians made up 75 percent of New York City’s construction workers. Polish and Russian Jews dominated that city’s garment trades. By the 1890s, Chicago was the third largest “German city” in the world. (Only Berlin and Hamburg, in Germany, had more Germans.) Chicago was also the third largest “Norwegian city” in the world. (Only Oslo and Bergen, in Norway, had more Norwegians.) Sixty percent of Pennsylvania’s coal miners were foreign-born. Immigrant populations were very large, especially in cities. Many Americans began to feel like strangers in their own country.

Not only did the pace of immigration change but so did the nature of the immigration. Earlier immigrants to the United States had come mostly from western and northern Europe. Most of those people had been English-speaking and Protestant. But by the late 1800s huge numbers of immigrants were arriving from countries in eastern and southern Europe. This included nations such as Russia, Poland, and Italy. Many other immigrants were coming from Asia, especially from China. Few of these new immigrants spoke English. Many were members of Catholic, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, or members of other non-Protestant religions. These other faiths seemed strange and threatening to many Americans.

The following charts and tables show these changes to American immigration

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<tr>
<th>U.S. Immigration by Decade</th>
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<th>Foreign-Born U.S. Population by Year</th>
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<td>Years</td>
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Document-Based Assessment for U.S. History
Sources of U.S. Immigration, 1820–1840

- Ireland: 43%
- Britain: 18%
- Germany: 27%
- Other Northern European: 11%
- All others: 1%

Sources of U.S. Immigration, 1860–1900

- Germany: 28%
- Britain: 18%
- Scandinavia: 11%
- Central Europe: 10%
- Italy: 8%
- Eastern Europe: 6%
- All others: 4%

(continued)
What do these tables and charts tell you about how American immigration changed in the late 1800s?
Document 2

Reverend Josiah Strong was a very popular speaker and writer in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was also a Protestant minister. His most famous book, *Our Country*, was published in 1885. It quickly became a best-seller. The following excerpts are from that book. (*Conspicuous* means “clearly visible.”)

... our ... foreign [population] ... is sadly conspicuous in our criminal records. This element constituted in 1870 twenty per cent of the population of New England, and furnishes seventy-five per cent of the crime.

... our safety demands the assimilation of these strange populations, and the process of assimilation will become slower and more difficult as the population of foreigners increases.


Why did Josiah Strong fear and oppose unrestricted immigration? 


Document 3

In the years right after the Civil War, many people on the West Coast grew fearful about the large influx of immigrants from China. Before the war, hardly any Asians lived in the United States. By 1880, the nation had over 100,000 Asian immigrants. Anti-Chinese public opinion grew. It led Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This law ended further immigration from China for ten years. Nine years later, the law was about to expire. Congress appointed a committee to study the issue and to give advice about whether to extend the law. The following are excerpts from that committee's report. (*Inimical* means “hostile.”)

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DBQ 12: SHOULD FURTHER IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BE RESTRICTED? CONTINUED

"U.S. Congress—House of Representatives—Report of the Select Committee on Immigration"

There is urgent necessity for prompt legislation on the subject of Chinese immigration . . . [If we fail to re-enact the Chinese Exclusion Act] there will be no law to prevent the Chinese hordes from invading our country.

Their [Chinese immigrants'] presence here is inimical to our institutions and is deemed injurious and a source of danger. They are a distinct race . . . they have no attachment to our country, its laws or its institutions, nor are they interested in its prosperity. They never assimilate with our people, our manners, tastes, religion, or ideas. With us they have nothing in common.


As you can probably tell, the committee recommended making the law permanent. What reasons did it cite for doing this? ________________________________

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Document 4

Many labor union leaders feared immigration. They believed that it was forcing down wages for all workers. But some labor leaders spoke out against restricting immigration. Joseph McDonnell, himself an Irish immigrant, was one of these leaders. Here are excerpts from a newspaper editorial he wrote defending Chinese immigration. (Tocsin means “alarm.”)

The cry that “the Chinese must go” is both narrow and unjust . . . . It is merely a repetition of the cry that was raised years ago by . . . Americans against the immigration of Irishmen, Englishmen, Germans and others . . . . It now ill becomes those, or the descendants of those, against whom this cry was raised in past years, to raise a similar tocsin against a class of foreigners who have been degraded by ages of oppression.


(continued)
Why did McDonnell criticize those who were demanding that "the Chinese must go"?

Document 5

Henry Cabot Lodge represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Congress for thirty-seven years. He served in the House of Representatives from 1887 to 1893. Then he served in the Senate from 1893 until his death in 1924. He was a Republican party leader and a close friend of Theodore Roosevelt. He was also a direct descendent of early Puritan founders of New England. Lodge feared that the large immigration threatened the United States and the purity of "the American race." He was especially concerned about immigrants from Italy, Poland, and other eastern and southern European countries. Here are some excerpts from a speech he made in Congress in 1896. In it, he called for laws restricting future immigration. (Kindred people means "people like us." Peril means "danger." Portals means "doorways.")

The injury of unrestricted immigration to American wages and American standards of living is sufficiently plain and is bad enough, but the danger which this immigration threatens to the quality of our citizenship is far worse.

The additions in this country until the present time have been from kindred people or from those with whom we have been long allied and who speak the same language.

... it is on the moral qualities of the English-speaking race that our history, our victories, and all of our future rest. ... If a lower race mixes with a higher in sufficient numbers, history teaches us that the lower race will prevail. ... The lowering of a great race means not only its own decline but that of human civilization.

There lies the peril at the portals of our land; there is pressing the tide of unrestricted immigration.

Why did Senator Lodge oppose and fear unrestricted immigration?

(continued)
DBQ 12: SHOULD FURTHER IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BE RESTRICTED? CONTINUED

Document 6

Several large nativist organizations were popular in the 1890s. One was the American Protective Association. Another was the Immigration Restriction League. Both groups attracted thousands of members. Many were affluent, educated, and prominent citizens. Many who joined these groups feared that immigrants were to blame for labor union strikes and violence. They feared that immigrants brought with them from Europe dangerous ideas about socialism and communism. Many also feared the large numbers of Catholic immigrants who were arriving from Italy, Poland, and Germany. Nativists feared Catholics would blindly follow the orders of the pope, the head of their church. So nativists saw Catholics as a danger to democracy.

Here are excerpts from the oath of membership that was required of those who joined the American Protective Association.

I do most solemnly promise and swear ... that I will use my utmost power to strike the shackles and chains of blind obedience to the Roman Catholic church from the ... consciences of a priest-ridden and church-oppressed people. . . .

I furthermore promise and swear that . . . I will not vote for . . . any Roman Catholic, but will vote only for a Protestant.

The members of the American Protective Association were probably most opposed to immigration from which European countries? Why?

Document 7

In 1897, Congress passed a law limiting future immigration. This law stated that only prospective immigrants who could read and write would be allowed to come to the United States. All others would be refused. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge sponsored this law. He said:

If we care for the welfare, the wages, or the standard of life of American workingmen, we should take immediate steps to limit foreign immigration. There is no danger . . . from the coming of skilled workers or of trained and educated men. But there is a serious danger from the flood of unskilled, ignorant foreign labor.

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DBQ 12: SHOULD FURTHER IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BE RESTRICTED? CONTINUED

President Grover Cleveland vetoed the literacy clause of the immigration act of 1897. He believed that it unfairly discriminated against poor immigrants who never had the opportunity to go to school. He felt that these were the same kinds of immigrants who many Americans descended from. Here is an excerpt from Cleveland's veto message to Congress on March 2, 1897. (Domain means "land.")

A radical departure from our national policy relating to immigrants is here presented. [In the past] we have welcomed all who come to us from other lands except those whose moral or physical condition or history threatened danger to our national welfare and safety. We have encouraged those coming from foreign countries to . . . join in the development of our vast domain, securing in return a share in the blessings of American citizenship. A century's stupendous growth, largely due to the assimilation and thrift of millions of sturdy and patriotic adopted citizens, attests the success of this generous and free-handed policy . . .

Why did President Cleveland veto the immigration literacy clause?

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Note: Two days after President Cleveland issued this veto, his term in office ended. Many in Congress were confident that they would quickly pass the literacy-test clause again. They also hoped that the new president, William McKinley, would sign it.

PART B

Essay: Imagine that you are writing a newspaper editorial on the topic of future immigration. Should the U.S. "golden door" remain open? Or should the United States begin to restrict and limit future immigration by allowing entry only to those who are educated?