

## IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE

- Immigration in the first half of the nineteenth century was evidenced to the greatest extent in the North.
- Irish and German immigration after 1845 – 3 million immigrants in all by 1855 – resulted in the growth of anti-foreign and anti-Catholic attitudes.
- Immigration opponents exploited concerns about cheap immigrant labor and blamed Catholics increases in urban poverty, property crime, and public intoxication.
- The “Know-Nothing” party arose from prejudices against immigrants and reached such heights of power that it nearly supplanted the Whig Party.
- Lincoln argued that the “Know-Nothings” violated the principles of American government as laid down by the Founders.

Consider Lincoln’s words in a letter to Joshua Speed, a close friend of Lincoln’s in 1855. Speed had inquired if Lincoln was a Know-Nothing, a somewhat radical alternative political party.

I am not a Know-Nothing. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of Negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me pretty rapid. As a nation we began by declaring "all men are created equal." We now practically read it, "all men are created equal, except Negroes." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except Negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics." When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty—to Russia, for example, where despotism can be taken pure and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.

- German immigrants voted overwhelmingly for Abraham Lincoln.
- In his fourth State of the Union Address, Lincoln described immigration as “one of the principal replenishing streams which are appointed by Providence to repair the ravages of internal war and its wastes of national strength and health.”
- As national policy, he proposed, “ All that is necessary is to secure the flow of that stream in its present fullness, and to that end the Government must in every way make it manifest that it neither needs nor designs to impose involuntary military service upon those who come from other lands to cast their lot in our country.”
- President Lincoln appointed General Franz Sigel, a hero of the German Revolution of 1848, commander of the First Army Corps of the Army of Virginia.
- America’s first Jewish Reform Congregation arose in Charleston, South Carolina, in response to Christian proselytizing efforts among the Jewish community. One of the significant reforms was the use of English in the synagogue.
- Anti-Semitism flared during the years before and during the Civil War despite the fact that Jews fought on both sides of the conflict.
- Lincoln lent his voice to Jews lobbying for Jewish chaplains in the Union army.

- On December 17, 1862, Gen. Grant issued an order ejecting all Jews from his military department, but President Lincoln revoked the order by January 4, 1863.
- Pogroms in Russia motivated Jewish immigration to America, despite the fears of losing their Jewish identity.

In Abraham Lincoln's Fourth State of the Union Address, he had these remarks regarding immigrants.

The act passed at the last session for the encouragement of immigration has so far as was possible been put into operation. It seems to need amendment which will enable the officers of the Government to prevent the practice of frauds against the immigrants while on their way and on their arrival in the ports, so as to secure them here a free choice of avocations and places of settlement. A liberal disposition toward this great national policy is manifested by most of the European States, and ought to be reciprocated on our part by giving the immigrants effective national protection. I regard our immigrants as one of the principal replenishing streams which are appointed by Providence to repair the ravages of internal war and its wastes of national strength and health. All that is necessary is to secure the flow of that stream in its present fullness, and to that end the Government must in every way make it manifest that it neither needs nor designs to impose involuntary military service upon those who come from other lands to cast their lot in our country.

To read the entire address, click on the following link.

<http://www.thisnation.com/library/sotu/1864al.html>