

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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MISSION 4: "City of Immigrants"

"Immigration and the Public Health" article

Some Americans feared new immigrants, believing that the way they lived in crowded neighborhoods spread disease. In this 1904 article from a popular magazine, a doctor specifically blames the new immigrants—"Hebrews, Syrians, Greeks, and southern Italians"—for spreading disease and being a "menace to the public health."

Thousands of immigrants of poor physique (body type) are recorded as such by the medical inspectors at Ellis Island, and a card to this effect sent to the registry clerk or immigrant inspector with the immigrant, but this mere note of physical defect carries little significance under the present law, and the vast majority of them are admitted by the immigration authorities, because it does not appear that the physical defect noted will make the immigrant a public charge. . . .

The real danger to the public health from immigration lies in that class of immigrants whose physique is much below American standards, whose employment is in the sweat-shop, and whose residence is the East Side tenement in New York City. The Mediterranean races, Syrians, Greeks and southern Italians, who are unused to a cold climate, and who often have insufficient clothing, also establish in their crowded quarters [neighborhoods] splendid for the dissemination [spread] of disease. The Hebrews, Syrians, Greeks, and southern Italians invariably crowd the most unsanitary quarters of the great centers of population. And the various filthy and infected, though perhaps picturesque, foreign quarters constitute to-day the greatest existing menace to the public health.

Source: Dr. Allan McLaughlin, "Immigration and the Public Health," *Popular Science* (January 1904), 232, 236-237