

The Immigrant Experience

New Challenges

Once the immigrants passed through Ellis Island they began their new lives in the U.S. They had left their homelands for many reasons, all of which they wanted to leave behind them once their new lives had begun. But for most immigrants, there were new challenges they may not have expected. In some cases, the conditions that met the immigrants in the new world were not much better than what they had left. The families lived in small homes and apartments called **tenements**, sometimes cramming entire families into one room. They worked long hours in difficult jobs that required a lot of physical labor, for very little money. Often children worked as well, sometimes selling newspapers.

Inside a Tenement



Immigrants often lived in small apartments called tenements. These apartments sometimes housed up to 20 people in just two rooms! In some cases the tenements had no running water (which meant no bathrooms!) and no electricity.

A Chance for a Better Life

But what the immigrants had in the new world that they did not have in the country from which they came was hope of a better life. In their homeland, the life they were born into was the same life they would experience forever. Those that were born to poor parents remained poor. Often, people were forced to take the same jobs their parents had, and there was little hope of ever being more than a peasant. In America, even if they arrived poor, they had the hope of becoming whatever they wanted to become. The life of an immigrant was difficult, and often unfair, but they came to America because there was a chance for immigrants, and their families, to create whatever life they envisioned.

Review Questions

1. What were some of the new challenges that immigrants faced when they came to America?
2. Why was life better for immigrants in America?