

“I have not told the worst by any means. It
could not be put in print”:
The Transatlantic Voyage of
Euro-Immigrants to the United States,
1841-1900

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Considering this old type of steerage as a whole, it is a congestion so intense, so injurious to health and morals that there is nothing on land to equal it. That people live in it only temporarily is no justification of its existence. The experience of a single crossing is enough to change bad standards of living to worse...to weaken the body and implant there germs of disease to develop later. It is more than a physical and moral test; it is a strain.¹

Nearly thirty million immigrants left Europe and came to the United States in the period from 1841 to 1900. Most of these immigrants were escaping massive poverty, starvation, ethnic discrimination, or other hardships in their native lands. Yet before they could reach the U.S., the “the Land of Liberty,” immigrants underwent the transatlantic voyage, the vast majority of them traveling in steerage class. The journey in steerage is nearly universally described as miserable. Passengers experienced overcrowding, foul air, filth, intense seasickness, and inedible food. Many were treated like animals by officers and crewmembers, swindled out of their money, and deprived of basic human needs. Shipping companies regarded immigrants as human freight, and thus provided steerage passengers with the fewest accommodations possible in order to maximize profit while just keeping them alive. It was under such conditions that immigrants left their homelands and undertook the risk of starting over in an unfamiliar land.

While the conditions in steerage are certainly described negatively by primary observers, their reports provoke the question of just how bad steerage conditions were. How did they compare, for instance, to the transatlantic passage of slave ships from Africa?² Alternatively, how

¹ U.S. Congress. Senate. Immigration Commission. *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Steerage Conditions*. 61st Cong., 3d sess., 1911. S. Doc. 753.

² Most immigrants had greater agency in the decision to undertake the passage than African slaves did and likewise were not enchained. At least one historian has argued, however, that the Irish traveled in conditions no better than slaves, while another has claimed that slave ships suffered less crowding than immigrant vessels, because captains on immigrant ships had less regard for their passengers than captains on slave ships, who earned commissions according to the value of the slaves onboard. Edward Laxton, *The Famine Ships: The Irish Exodus to America* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 6; David Eltis, "Free and Coerced Transatlantic Migrations," in *Emigration and Immigration: The Old World Confronts the New*, ed. by George E. Pozzetta (New York: Garland Pub, 1991), 222.

did conditions onboard compare to their standard of living in their native lands? Contemporaries and modern historians alike have posited that the conditions onboard were not any worse than the conditions in which immigrants lived in their native lands. If this is in fact true, we must consider if immigrants actually suffered onboard. Additionally, steerage class often consisted of passengers of different ethnicities, which raises questions regarding their interactions: did passengers stick to their own people, or did shared experiences lead to unity between different groups? What, if any, forces buttressed passengers' native identities, or were there ways in which immigrants began to abandon their native identities? Finally, there are several positive accounts of the journey, which describe the feeling of a community onboard, singing and dancing on deck, and benevolent captains and crewmembers. How can such accounts exist alongside horrifying accounts? These issues complicate the study of the transatlantic passage but in doing so lead historians to a greater understanding of the voyage.

Immigration history is an enormous field in American history, with sub-topics including the causes of immigration, nativism, immigration legislation, and ethnic history. *The Uprooted* by Oscar Handlin is often cited as one of the most important books influencing and legitimizing the field of immigration history. Handlin focused on immigration from immigrants' perspectives, arguing that immigrants were unable to resist the forces of assimilation and preserve their native identities upon arrival to the U.S. In reaction to this hypothesis, John Bodnar's *The Transplanted* argued that although immigrants were forced to adjust to a new economic system, they did in fact maintain cultural and ethnic ties. Others, including David Roediger (*Working towards Whiteness*) and Matthew Frye Jacobson (*Whiteness of a Different Color*), have discussed how immigrants were treated upon their arrival to the United States and how they slowly became part

Also note Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007). This book examines slave ships and the various experiences of those onboard. Rediker's focus on historically marginalized people and the ocean as a historical setting influenced the approach to this paper.

of white America. A number of historians have focused on the immigration experience of specific ethnic groups, including how conditions in their native countries caused immigration and how these groups fared in the U.S.³ Thus, immigration history has primarily focused on how conditions in Europe and North America fostered transatlantic immigration, immigrants' arrival and settlement in the cities, how immigrants adapted to cultural changes, and how American society and legislation reacted to the great influx of foreigners. These pieces are necessary in explaining what happened before and after the Europeans immigrated to the U.S., but few address what the process of immigrating was like for immigrants.

This process, the transatlantic voyage, has been under-addressed in immigration history. Existing works can be categorized into three sub-topics: causes of improvements in conditions, mortality rates, and studies of individual ethnic groups. Perhaps the most prevalent subject surrounds the improvements which occurred over the course of this period. Most historians, including Terry Coleman, Edwin Clarence Guillet, and Phillip Taylor, attribute the changes to the introduction of steam technology, which surpassed sailing as the dominant passenger ship

³ Today, most historians favor Bodnar's argument, but *The Uprooted* is still considered an enormously important piece and a necessary read for anyone studying immigration to the U.S. All pieces support this paper because they explore the changes that immigrants experienced as a result of immigrating, and thus contribute to the question of a possible rite of passage. Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted, The Epic Story of The Great Migrations That Made The American People* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co, 1951); John E. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey From Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of A Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1999). Other great sources include: Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2000); Robert Anthony Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Pamela Kilian, *Ellis Island: Gateway to the American Dream* (New York: Crescent Books, 1991). In addition, the American Historical Review developed a forum about immigration in 1999.

from 1865-1870.⁴ Steam meant that ships were larger, ran more regularly (so passengers had a selection of ships to choose from), the duration of the journey was shorter (down from an average of six weeks to two weeks), and steamship companies took direct control over ticketing (which cut out runners who boosted prices). Several historians offer alternative explanations. Günter Moltmann emphasizes that other factors worked in conjunction with steam technology to produce change, including competition between steamship lines, various routes of migration, and legislation in Europe and North America, whereas Maldwyn A. Jones argues that U.S. laws were completely ineffective and that improvements were instead a result of improvements in epidemiology and shipbuilding. In his book, Marcus Lee Hansen focuses on an earlier period, describing how the passage changed from the 1810s to the 1830s due to increased commercial activity between North America and Europe.⁵ These sources provide information about legislation and changes in technology during this period and how these changes affected steerage conditions. Apart from Taylor and Guillet, however, they do not refer to how immigrants experienced the conditions. And remarkably, despite the changes that these pieces describe, conditions were still extraordinarily bad, another point that is minimized in these works. Steam

⁴ Of historians of this persuasion, Taylor makes the most convincing argument, because he explains it as a *gradual* process that resulted from steam technology and subsequent changes. He also does the best job of incorporating information about the conditions as they were on both sailing and steamships. While Guillet's book is very detailed, I believe he misplaces blame on the sailing ships themselves, rather than on the shipping lines that controlled how the ships were used. Coleman's book is (problematically) very detached from the immigrants themselves. Terry Coleman, *The Liners: A History of the North Atlantic Crossing* (New York: Putnam, 1977); Philip A. M. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Edwin Clarence Guillet, *The Great Migration; The Atlantic Crossing by Sailing-Ship Since 1770* (Toronto: T. Nelson and Sons, 1937).

⁵Moltmann makes the most convincing argument; like Taylor, he describes a gradual process of improvement and studies how a number of different factors contributed to it. Jones does a thorough examination of British and American legislation and what aspects of the voyage they affected, but like Coleman does not directly address the immigrants themselves. Marcus Lee Hansen and Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Atlantic Migration, 1607-1860: A History of the Continuing Settlement of the United States* (New York: Harper, 1961); Maldwyn A. Jones, "Aspects of North Atlantic Migration: Steerage Conditions and American Law, 1819-1909," in *Maritime Aspects of Migration*, ed. by Klaus Friedland (Cologne: Bohlau, 1989); Günter Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Emigrants from Europe to the United States, 1850-1914." in *Maritime Aspects of Migration*, ed. by Klaus Friedland, 321-331 (Cologne: Bohlau, 1989).

technology made the journey shorter (thereby shortening the period of the immigrants' trials onboard) and decreased mortality rates (because ill passengers could receive proper treatment on land sooner), but the poor conditions including crowding, inadequate washing facilities, poor food, and exploitation by the officers and crew members, persisted. Passengers on steamships thus suffered similarly to passengers on sailing ships, but just for a shorter amount of time.

The second category, mortality rates, addresses how steerage conditions and immigrants' health were interconnected. Ira A. Glazier, Dierdre Mageean, and Barnabus Okeke conclude that the living conditions in Ireland and onboard conditions, like exposure to bad weather conditions and crowding, affected the death rates on Irish famine ships.⁶ David Eltis and Raymond L. Cohn, in discussing mortality, describe disease and crowding onboard immigrants ships but do not discuss other, non-life threatening but distressing conditions.⁷ While mortality is extremely important in considering the difficulty of the voyage, many other factors caused suffering, if not mortality, among the passengers, and such conditions must be considered to understand what the journey felt like for immigrants.

The final category encompasses historians who focused on specific immigrant groups. These pieces typically address immigrants' motivations for emigrating, the way that they experienced the voyage, and how they made out in the U.S. Edwin C. Guillet provides a thorough investigation of the transatlantic voyage in *The Great Migration: The Atlantic Crossing by*

⁶ They do a thorough job relating the rates of immigration, demographic information about those who immigrated, and mortality rates according to the different stages of the famine, but do not address the other bad conditions. Ira A. Glazier, Dierdre Mageean, and Barnabus Okeke, "Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Irish Immigrants, 1846-185," in *Maritime Aspects of Migration*, ed. by Klaus Friedland, 243-278 (Cologne: Bohlau, 1989).

⁷ Both Cohn and Eltis discuss how mortality rates on immigrant ships compare to those on African slave ships, both citing differing diseases and contagions on slave ships and immigrant ships and overcrowding as reasons for higher rates on slave ships. Eltis, "Free and Coerced Transatlantic Migrations," 222; Raymond L Cohn, "Mortality on Immigrant Voyages to New York, 1836-1853," in *Emigration & Immigration: The Old World Confronts the New*, ed. by George E. Pozzetta (New York: Garland Pub, 1991).

Sailing-Ship Since 1770, however, as suggested by the title, his piece is limited to sailing ships from Great Britain, and thus offers little information about the more abused immigrants from Ireland and Southern and Eastern Europe. *Shores of Refuge* by Ronald Sanders is a comprehensive study of Jewish immigration from Central and Eastern Europe beginning with the assassination of Tsar Alexander II of Russia in 1881. Edward Laxton focuses on Irish immigrants who traveled on Irish-owned passenger ships, which represents approximately twenty five percent of all Irish immigrants during the Great Famine. Laxton framed his narrative using ships as case studies, focusing on the physical layout of the ship rather than how the layout and other conditions affected passengers.⁸

The greatest shortcomings of this field are the absence of a dialog between historians (whether in agreement or disagreement) and the tendency to ignore the effect that the voyage had on immigrants. Historians of this topic have not addressed each other in their works, even when discussing the same issues. This action fails to push the field forward; such a dialog would allow future historians to take advantage of comparative work. In addition, most historians have failed to consider how the journey affected immigrants, both immediately and upon arrival. Current studies have done little to connect to the immigrants as individuals, using primarily quantitative data to form their hypotheses. Sanders did the best job of incorporating qualitative data by including quotes from immigrants, but his book targeted a niche group that is not reflective of the typical immigrant experience. This field needs to incorporate more qualitative data that explains what the passage was like for individuals.

⁸ Sanders's book is detailed and includes primary accounts but focuses only on Jewish immigrants who traveled through Jewish philanthropic organizations, and fails to consider individuals who immigrated independently. Ronald Sanders, *Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration* (New York: Holt, 1988); Laxton, *The Famine Ships*; Guillet, *The Great Migration*.

There is a variety of primary source material that addresses the transatlantic voyage during this period. Immigrants' accounts, in the form of diaries, letters, memoirs, and oral histories, demonstrate how immigrants from various backgrounds experienced the journey.⁹ Sources also include emigrant guide books, written to advise prospective immigrants on the decision to emigrate, what and how to pack, what to expect on the ship, and what to do upon arrival in North America. The large volume and variety of guide books available suggest that they were widely read.¹⁰ Guide books were written by former immigrants trying to assist their fellow nationals in Europe and by publishing companies attempting to promote immigration (and encourage patronage of specific lines with which they had business arrangements). Their descriptions, although biased because of their various agendas, demonstrate how immigrants were forced to adapt to conditions onboard, thus revealing what those conditions were like.¹¹ Additionally, several investigators, many disguised as immigrants in steerage, wrote reports that describe the onboard experience, criticize its faults, and gave recommendations for improvement. However, it is important to note that the investigators, who came from higher classes than the immigrants, had different standards of living, and thus had a different perspective of the journey.

⁹ Because most of the immigrants were from the lower classes, many were illiterate and thus unable to record their thoughts, and did not write memoirs or give oral testimony until much later in their lives.

¹⁰ Remarkably, there are no secondary sources focusing specifically on guide books. A simple bibliographic search yields hundreds of titles in English published from the 1830s to the 1860s. More were published in Italian, Polish, and other languages after the turn of the century. Guide books were written for immigrants coming from different parts of Europe and for those planning on settling in specific regions of North America.

¹¹ Father O'Hanlon's guide book, for instance, aimed to maintain the morality of Irish immigrants, whereas those wanting to promote immigration underplayed the miseries onboard. John O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide for the United States* (Boston: P. Donahoe, 1851), 32; *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide : Comprising Advice and Instruction in Every Stage of the Voyage to America: ... also, Information which the Emigrant Needs on Arrival*..(London: Wiley & Putnam, 1845), 33.

Of important note are the accounts provided by Edward Steiner, Broughton Brandenburg, and the Immigration Commission.¹² Steiner wrote several books about immigration, two of which directly discuss the transatlantic voyage. An immigrant from Hungary, Steiner underwent the transatlantic journey over ten times, and thus his account should be regarded as highly reliable. Broughton Brandenburg's book is also notable because he was a private American citizen who, according to him, investigated steerage out of his own curiosity.¹³ The report of the Immigration Commission, whose investigations were carried out in 1908, also provides very helpful information. This report consists of several separate investigations performed by a commission of investigators, many who traveled on multiple voyages.¹⁴ Thus the Immigration Commission report actually represents several separate investigations published in the same report.

Assembling the information provided by these sources, it is apparent that the conditions in steerage fashioned the transatlantic voyage as a rite of passage, particularly when considering the voyage as a period of liminality. Rites of passage, as described by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, the two most influential scholars in this field, constitute transitions between states, a state being any relatively fixed or stable condition that is culturally recognized. Its purpose is to remove subjects from their old state and prepare them for entrance into a new

¹²Edward Alfred Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen; the story of my life in America* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914); Edward Alfred Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant* (New York: Revell, 1906). Broughton Brandenburg, *Imported Americans; the Story of the Experiences of a Disguised American & His Wife Studying the Immigration Question* (New York: Stokes, 1903); U.S. Congress, Senate, Immigration Commission.

¹³He claimed to have no ulterior purpose; however, a piece that he later wrote appeared in a publication of the Immigration Restriction League, whose stated goal was "stricter regulation of immigration, but not the exclusion of any immigrant whose character and standards fit them to become citizens." It is unclear if he belonged to the League and if so if he joined before or after his investigation, but either way the purpose of the organization was related to immigration policy and thus would have had little effect on his description of the voyage itself. Several comments that he made regarding the Italian authorities certainly support the League's ideology, but the conditions in steerage were not relevant to the League's goals.

¹⁴ Investigators traveled on different ships, some with old-style steerage and some with new-style steerage. However, they come to most of the same conclusions about the different conditions.

state. A rite consists of three phases: the separation, liminality, and aggregation. This paradigm applies to immigrants because the process of immigrating involved the transition from being a native in one's native land to being an immigrant in a foreign land. Separation consisted of the departure from Europe, liminality was the period onboard the ship, and aggregation the arrival in North America. During liminality, the subject, also called a neophyte, is in an ambiguous state, existing in a sphere that is dissimilar from the state which he/she left and that which he/she is entering. Because of neophytes' structural ambiguity, deprivation and vulnerability are inherent of this period. In considering how immigrants were stripped of power and subject to accommodations that challenged them physically and emotionally, it is evident that the voyage acted as a liminal state.¹⁵

Immigrants' identities did not fully change following immigration, but a rite of passage does not necessarily entail a complete transformation. In fact, elements of a subject's past state are still a part of their being following the completion of a rite.¹⁶ Many immigrants continued identifying with their native cultures and even lived in neighborhoods that resembled their native communities. There are, however, many indications that immigrants did change in some respects. Most obviously, immigrants would not have come to the United States if their lives were to continue as they had been in Europe. In addition, multiple travelers explain that prospective immigrants gravitated toward those who had already been to America, looking for advice and information. For reasons unexplained, there was a noticeable difference among those that had been to America, indicating that some change occurred through immigration. The change of setting and the change of legal status, while not necessarily altering immigrants' personal identities, certainly altered immigrants' futures and the futures of their descendants.

¹⁵ Victor Witter Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967); Arnold van Gennep *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

¹⁶ Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 37.

The transatlantic journey was a necessary step in achieving this new status, and thus acted as a rite of passage. The rite paradigm can also contribute to an understanding of how shipping companies, governments, and immigrants themselves permitted terrible conditions to continue as they did for so long: they viewed steerage as part of the immigration experience, not as an entity requiring reform.

The transatlantic voyage was a period of deprivation and vulnerability for immigrants. They could not afford to pay for better conditions in second or third class, nor did they have the political power or education to fight some of the unjust, unavoidable costs that arose along the journey. When mistreated by officers or crewmembers, many were unaware that they could ask for redress, afraid to jeopardize their admittance to the U.S., or unable to do so because of language barriers. Additionally, several forces worked to slowly challenge immigrants' native identities before they even reached the U.S. The two to six weeks spent in a passenger ship was a period of physical and emotional strain suffered by most European immigrants during this period. However, the immigrants, desperate to leave their native countries and to look for a better life overseas, had no choice but to endure terrible conditions. From this state, immigrants began the process of adapting to a new land and new cultures in the United States.

In order to understand how the voyage acted as a liminal period, one must consider passengers' vulnerability and the conditions that they endured, as well as the forces that pressured them to slowly shed elements of their native cultures. As we will see, immigrants were compelled to give up cultural belongings and forced to withstand oppressive physical conditions that diminished them and challenged their former identities. As the shipping companies, officers, and crew members mistreated them, immigrants found that they could resist certain abuses with knowledge and status, but even these factors could not prevent much of the mistreatment. The

journey also introduced immigrants to the multiethnic community that they would encounter in the U.S. and promoted cooperation between these future fellow U.S. citizens.

Framework of the Journey

One must understand the general picture of immigration during this era before looking at the physical and social conditions of the transatlantic voyage. In the period of 1841 to 1900, immigrants from Europe constituted the vast majority of immigrants to the U.S. There was a variety of reasons for their immigration, but most commonly, these immigrants were escaping poverty in their native lands.¹⁷ Many were also targets of discrimination from their governments. Irish farmers in the early nineteenth century faced a number of hardships, including penal laws, absentee landlordism, antiquated farming methods, and high taxes from the British government. They were also entirely dependent on the potato for their subsistence, and when the potato blight hit in 1844, the Irish lost their only source of income and faced starvation.¹⁸ As a result, the Irish were the largest immigrant group in the 1840s and 1850s, with the volume of Irish immigration first decreasing and then stabilizing after this period.¹⁹

Conditions were somewhat similar in Southern and Eastern Europe. Southern Italians faced similar difficulties as the Irish. In addition to being viewed as inferior to Northern Italians, most were tenant farmers, forced to give most of their earnings to their landowner, to the

¹⁷ A factor that contributed to their vulnerability during the voyage, because they did not have the financial clout with which to demand better treatment. Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 85.

¹⁸ O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*; Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 20-22; Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 20.

¹⁹ See Figure 1 and Figure 2. The charts are broken into decades, and give the number of immigrants for the following categories: Total all countries, Total Europe, Great Britain, Ireland, Scandinavia, Other Northern Europe, Germany, Poland, Other Central Europe, Russia and Baltic States, Other Eastern Europe, Italy, Other Southern, Males, Children, Adults, Seniors, Unemployed, Farmers, Laborers. Based on information from US Census. Also see Donna R. Gabaccia and Vicki Ruiz, *American Dreaming, Global Realities: Rethinking U.S. Immigration History*, Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial series (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

government, and to the Church.²⁰ Likewise, immigrants from Eastern Europe were poor farmers using antiquated farming methods and making little profit.²¹ Jews faced enormous discrimination in Eastern Europe; many emigrated in order to escape poverty, unjust laws, and pogroms, which broke out across the region following the assassination of Russian Tsar Alexander II in 1881.²² Industrialization moved many to emigrate, because factories forced craftsmen out of business and large farms replaced small, family-owned farms.²³ Because of these factors, immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe began increasing in the 1870s and peaked in the first decade of the twentieth century. Immigration from Great Britain and Germany peaked at the end of the nineteenth century, but the range was smaller than that of other regions. Most immigrants left for reasons related to wealth; however, there were some who fled to escape dishonor or indiscretions committed in their native lands.²⁴ Many Greek and Italian men emigrated in order to escape compulsory military duty.²⁵ Immigrants' occupations also reflect their positions in society. A large portion of immigrants were unemployed, and those who had jobs were primarily farmers, laborers, or servants. These facts about immigrants' origins must be considered when judging immigrants' experience of the journey. Their poverty contributed to their vulnerability and subsequently how shipping companies, officers, and crew members took advantage of them. Additionally, their low standard of living could have affected their perception of the conditions onboard.

Ethnic groups also exhibit different immigration patterns that reflect their different circumstances and also contributed to how they experienced the voyage. The majority of

²⁰ Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 87; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 99.

²¹ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 19.

²² Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, 15-25; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 20; Stave 38

²³ Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 82.

²⁴ Stephen Graham, *With Poor Immigrants to America* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 22; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 26, 53, 56.

²⁵ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 37, 100.

Figure 1													
Year	Total All Countries	Total Europe	Great Britain	Ireland	Scandinavia	Other Northwestern	Germany	Poland	Other Central	Russia and Baltic States	Other Eastern	Italy	Other Southern
1841-1850	1,713,251	1,597,501	266,044	790,719	14,392	95,231	572,626	105		551	59	1,870	2,854
1851-1860	2,598,214	2,452,860	423,974	916,114	24,680	121,896	951,667	1,164		457	83	9,251	10,389
1861-1870	2,314,819	2,065,270	606,796	435,783	126,122	75,108	787,468	2,247	7,800	2,512	129	11,725	9,485
1871-1880	2,812,191	2,747,217	1,012,993	436,871	243,021	124,261	718,182	17,970	72,969	39,284	348	60,759	20,559
1881-1890	5,246,613	4,744,046	807,317	655,482	656,644	206,330	1,452,971	56,806	363,719	213,302	7,910	307,309	26,171
1891-1900	3,707,614	3,559,478	271,538	388,416	371,512	106,874	505,152	96,720	592,707	505,290	16,536	651,898	52,340
1901-1910	8,795,386	8,136,016	525,950	339,065	505,324	198,198	341,498		2,145,266	1,597,306	172,764	2,045,877	265,269
1911-1920	3,735,811	3,320,709	341,408	146,181	203,452	162,452	143,945		901,656	932,957	91,031	1,109,524	345,655

Figure 2												
Year	Total All Countries	Males	Children*	Adults^	Seniors~	Unemployed	Farmers	Laborers				
1841-1850	1,713,251	1,011,790	397,224	1,139,266	169,641	986,716	248,276	268,101				
1851-1860	2,598,214	1,653,560	602,888	1,922,081	295,724	1,585,534	413,316	540,767				
1861-1870	2,314,819	1,052,575	397,224	1,139,266	148,821	1,415,765	216,862	526,256				
1871-1880	2,812,191	1,725,158	571,184	1,884,743	355,674	1,384,093	233,143	602,959				
1881-1890	5,246,613	3,205,911	1,121,499	3,572,274	552,841	2,600,061	367,711	1,332,277				
1891-1900	3,707,614	2,308,330	545,724	2,702,732	286,434	1,469,883	239,364	1,067,227				
1901-1910	8,795,386	7,142,367	1,058,541	7,300,980	435,865	1,314,141	110,788	3,897,103				
1911-1920	3,735,811	3,643,385	814,447	4,522,173	399,291	1,697,028	84,825	2,091,173				
*Considered under 16 years 1918-1920; under 14 1899-1917; Under 15 Prior												
^14,15,16-44 Years												
~44 years and older												

immigrants were consistently males.²⁶ Some ethnic groups tended to immigrate as families, particularly Jews. In other groups, specifically the Italians, men often traveled alone in order to send money back to their families and planned to eventually return to their native lands.²⁷ It was also common for the head of household or oldest son to first emigrate alone in order to earn money for the passage of the rest of the family, especially among Irish immigrants, so many immigrants were going to meet family members who had already immigrated to the U.S.²⁸ Immigrating with family or friends could be more stressful in certain ways: there were more people and more luggage to look after, there was a chance of being separated at some point during the journey, and it was more expensive to pay for an entire family than for the father or oldest son alone. However, considering the severe homesickness described by immigrants onboard, traveling with relatives and friends could have emotional advantages.

Many contemporaries were concerned that immigrants' high and unrealistic expectations for the U.S. engendered hasty decisions to immigrate.²⁹ Some of these expectations resulted from stories told by friends or neighbors who had already moved to the U.S. and had returned

²⁶ The only exception was 1861-1870, when there were slightly more females than males. The percentage of males was lowest in 1841-1850 and increased over the period, but this may also be due to the influx of male laborers from East Asia.

²⁷ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 32. Italians did in fact repatriate at a much higher rate than other immigrant groups, approximately 65%. Russian Jews exhibited the opposite trend; very few returned to Europe after immigrating to the U.S. Herbert S. Klein, "The Integration of Italian Immigrants into the United States and Argentina: A Comparative Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 2 (1983): 306-329.

²⁸ Rose Cohen, *Out of the Shadow: A Russian Jewish Girlhood on the Lower East Side*, Documents in American Social History (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1995), 32; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 36.

²⁹ Although Hansen asserted that these perceptions were not the primary cause of immigration, he explained that "not only did agents attend to the mechanics of emigration, but they stimulated the movement to their own private gain, printing letters in the newspapers, distributing circulars and conversing in the public houses and market places." Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration*, 198; O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 10; Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Immigrants," 316; *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 15; George Nettle, *A Practical Guide for Emigrants to North America ... With a correct map of the United States, etc* (London: Simpkin Marshall & Co, 1850), 7.

for a visit or wrote letters back. Most of them reported positive stories of success that convinced Europeans that they too could find success in America.³⁰ One immigrant explained that the returned immigrants acted as effectively as agents or advertisements in convincing people to emigrate.³¹ Others were enticed by advertisements issued by ship companies or agents, which were “of a very alluring sort.”³² Such factors caused a “rage for emigration and a restless longing to try their luck and perhaps make a fortune beyond the seas” that “attained a height bordering on frenzy.”³³ The most common pull factor was the belief that they could find better paying jobs in the U.S.³⁴ According to Brandenburg, one little boy from Italy claimed that he was going to return to the U.S. as soon as he was old enough (he was living in the U.S. but was forced to return to Italy when his father contracted consumption) “because he could make more money selling papers after school than he could working all day in the fields in Gualtieri, and here [in Italy] he ‘never had time for no fun.’” Others expected to find more freedoms in the U.S.; as the poor and persecuted classes of their native countries, they were eager to immigrate to what they perceived as “the Model Republic, where all men are as nearly on an equality as the present diversified structure of society can well admit.”³⁵

³⁰ Wiley & Putnam’s Guide promised work and land in America. *Wiley & Putnam’s Emigrant’s Guide*, v; Stave 28, 32; O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, 254; Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 247; Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, 65.

³¹ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 21.

³² Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 18, 38. These ads were printed in newspapers, on posters posted in cities, and in guide books. Guide books could also recommend specific lines to their readers. Prospective immigrants could also find information about specific lines and departure schedules in circulars and newspapers in port cities Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 108; O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, 43; *Wiley & Putnam’s Emigrant’s Guide*, 17.

³³ Dietrich, and Mme. Clara de Pontigny de Chatelain, *The German emigrants; or, Frederick Wohlgemuth’s voyage to California* (Guben: Printed by F. Fechner, 1850s), 3.

³⁴ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 30; Rebecca Burlend and Edward Burlend, *A True Picture of Emigration* (New York: Citadel Press, 1968), 8; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 18; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 20.

³⁵ This is O’Hanlon’s description of immigrants’ perception of the U.S. O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, 11. Other information is included Steiner, *On the Trail*, 23, 60; Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 21.

Although traveling in steerage class was the least expensive (legal) mode of immigrating, it was a major cost for European peasants.³⁶ A number of different variables affected fares at each port, at different times of year, and throughout the period, but overall fares seemed to decrease over time.³⁷ Prices dropped from ten to twelve pounds in the 1810s to four to six pounds in the 1830s, and had dropped even further (three pounds ten shillings to five pounds) by the 1850s.³⁸ There are different claims regarding how much more first-class tickets were, but the estimates range from twice as much to four times as much as steerage.³⁹ For those unable to afford steerage tickets, agents in the U.S. sold prepaid tickets to friends and family in the U.S., who could fund their trip.⁴⁰ Many immigrants, however, paid more than the shipping lines actually charged. In the early period of immigration, runners in port cities (also called brokers)

³⁶ One modern source estimates that the weekly income for Irish farmers in 1850 was 6 shillings, just over 15 pounds a year. J.R. Bellerby, "National and Agricultural Income," *The Economic Journal* 69, no. 273 (1959) 95-104. A contemporary report estimated that Irish laborers earned nine to eleven shillings a week in 1850, about 26 pounds a year. Nettle, *A Practical Guide*, iv. Considering that immigrants paid several pounds for each individual's ticket, plus provisions, lodging, and other unanticipated costs, it is not surprising that immigration was considered very expensive for the lower-classes.

In addition to steerage, there were a number of illegal means of immigrating to the U.S. Common methods included stowing away on a ship, or joining a ship's crew and deserting upon arrival to the U.S. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 248, 263; Lewis R. Fischer, "The Sea as Highway: Maritime Service as a Means of International Migration, 1863-1913," in *Maritime Aspects of Migration*, ed. by Klaus Friedland, 293-308 (Cologne: Bohlau, 1989). Others immigrated to Canada and then snuck across the border Robert Whyte and James J. Mangan, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary: The Journey of an Irish Coffin ship* (Cork, Ireland: Mercier Press, 1994), June 1. [Electronic copy was used: citations will indicate date of entry].

³⁷ Commercial activity in a port typically lowered passenger fares, because immigrants took the place of freight on the westbound journey (eastbound this space was used to carry tobacco, grain, cotton, or lumber). Tickets were also cheaper at larger ports, where competition between different lines drove down prices. Costs also fell directly before the departure of a ship. Other factors worked to raise fares, including legislation designed to improve steerage conditions: when passengers were allotted more space and shipping lines were required to provide more services to steerage passengers, lines increased fares in order to maintain their profits. Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration*, 179, 197, Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 235, Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Immigrants," 315, Jones, "Aspects of North Atlantic Migration," 330.

³⁸ Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration*, 198; Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 235.

³⁹ Brandenburg and Moltmann estimated that first class was twice as much as steerage, Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 175, Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Immigrants," 311; Steiner claimed that first class was three times as much as steerage, Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 38; Nettle reported that first class was four times as much as steerage, Nettle, *A Practical Guide*, 9.

⁴⁰ Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Immigrants," 315; Hansen, *The Atlantic Migration*, 184.

took passengers to the captain, who sold tickets directly to the passengers. Later, captains sold tickets to the runners, who then sold the tickets to the immigrants. In this system, runners could charge as much as they wanted, and thus usually exploited the immigrants. Runners sometimes even traveled along routes to meet immigrants on their way to the port city, and eventually set up offices in foreign cities. This was especially dangerous for the immigrants, because agents, removed from any competition, could charge very high prices, and the immigrants did not know that they were being overcharged. Immigrants, therefore, were susceptible to abuse before they even boarded the ship.⁴¹

Immigrants were subject to a number of additional, unavoidable costs over the course of the journey.⁴² They often had to purchase passports and birth certificates before they were able to board the ship or, for those departing from a foreign country, before they were able to even travel to the port city.⁴³ Many, especially persecuted groups like Russian Jews, also had to pay agents to smuggle them across the border.⁴⁴ There were the additional costs of lodging houses and provisions at port while waiting for the departure of one's ship. Sometimes immigrants were forced to pay additional, unexpected fares in order to get on the passenger ship. For instance, passengers could be forced to pay for a ferry ride in order to reach their ship.⁴⁵ This was an unavoidable cost that tapped into immigrants' already limited budgets. A group of Russian and Polish Jews, upon arriving in Liverpool, was told that the steerage was full, and they would either

⁴¹ The most important European ports were Liverpool, Hamburg, Bremen, Le Havre, and Antwerp. The majority of Irish immigrants left from Liverpool (in 1846, an estimated 93.5%, down to 69% in 1849), which, as a larger port, offered immigrants more options. In general, immigrants from Russia, Poland, Slovakia, Bohemia, Hungary, Romania, traveled through German ports; Scandinavians went through Germany or England; the Swiss and Italians went through Le Havre, France. Others took cheaper voyages to Canada and then immigrated (usually illegally) to the U.S. by ship or by walking. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 131; Glazier, "Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Irish Immigrants," 250; Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Immigrants," 314; Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 26.

⁴² Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 50; O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 21.

⁴³ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 31; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 138; *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 28.

⁴⁴ Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 47.

⁴⁵ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 134.

have to wait an additional ten days for another steamer, which meant paying for lodging and food for ten more days, or pay an additional thirty marks to travel third class.⁴⁶ Whichever choice they made, immigrants needed to pay additional costs. Despite the high cost of travel, the price of steerage covered passage to the U.S. and little else.⁴⁷ Space, food, and facilities were provided according to regulations and were meant to sustain the passengers, not to provide comfort or pleasure.

The construction of the ships contributed in large part to the limited accommodations available to steerage passengers. Irish immigrants often traveled in ships that transported goods from the U.S. to Europe on their eastbound journey, and then converted the cargo area into sleeping quarters for immigrants, whom they carried on their westbound trip to pick up more goods.⁴⁸ Thus the area below deck “could be used for cargo and cattle, or for steerage passengers.”⁴⁹ Other Irish immigrants traveled on former slave ships.⁵⁰ Steamships emerged in the 1860s, and initially were built similarly to sailing vessels. On average, they carried 150-300 first class passengers and 1,000 to 1,500 passengers in steerage.⁵¹ Steamships took about two weeks to complete the journey, whereas sailing ships had taken six to eight weeks.⁵² Sailing ships continued to make the trip until around 1870 when steam completely overtook sailing power. By

⁴⁶ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3, “The Old and New Type Steerage in the Same Ship”], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 31.

⁴⁷ Although not even arrival in the U.S. was guaranteed: many ships that were reportedly going to the U.S. ended up in Canada or South America.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 107, 134; Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 7.

⁴⁹ Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 61. The expression “fitted up in the most comfortable manner” usually signified that the passenger space was actually cargo space with wooden bunks set up for the westbound journey. All in all, Irish immigrant ships carried an average of 238 steerage passengers. Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 106; Glazier, “Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Irish Immigrants,” 247.

⁵⁰ Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 8, 224.

⁵¹ Larger ships were typically less comfortable and also slower than smaller vessels. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 150.

⁵² The length of the journey also depended on the region of Europe from which immigrants were departing. Stave 25; U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1, “A Typical Old Steerage”], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 20; O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, 30; Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 18; Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 151; Moltmann, “Steamship Transport of Immigrants,” 312.

the 1880s, shipping companies were building larger passenger ships, probably to accommodate the increasing volume of immigrants.⁵³ Although these ships were slower and less luxurious, they could carry more steerage passengers, which according to Brandenburg's estimate, was the greatest source of profit for shipping lines.⁵⁴

Physical Conditions

The odor of strong disinfectants, mingling with that of various vegetables, the smell of sheepskin coats and of booted and unbooted feet, the cries of many children, the rough answers of sailors and stewards and the babel of guttural languages are all waymarks, if any are needed. When one has slid down two and sometimes three flights of iron stairs, located at the narrowest point of fore or aft, and sees a crowded space which may hold from sixty to six hundred passengers who are tucking themselves away on a series of narrow shelves—then he is in the steerage.⁵⁵

Considering the physical conditions and maltreatment faced by immigrants, the transatlantic voyage can be considered a liminal state. As in any liminal period, the physical conditions in steerage were appalling. Immigrants were forced to live in a state of deprivation and severe discomfort, stripped of cultural and material amenities just when they had anticipated finding a better life.⁵⁶ Most were unable to afford upper-class accommodations and lacked the political and economic power necessary to protest the bad conditions. Their vulnerability is exemplified by the ways that the shipping companies and crew members exploited them. There were few ways of resisting vulnerability: knowledge could, at times, empower an immigrant to avoid mistreatment. Status, which could include having extra money to spend or American citizenship, could also afford one better accommodations. However, not even these factors could preclude some of the abuses. Just as in liminality, immigrants became equals in steerage,

⁵³ Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 150.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 150, Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 175. Brandenburg came to this conclusion because first class cost only twice as much as steerage, but received many more amenities. Thus the fares for steerage were disproportionately high and lines made the greatest profit from steerage.

⁵⁵ Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 37.

⁵⁶ Immigrants, having made the decision to emigrate, were probably shocked and disappointed that they first had to endure the torments of steerage.

not necessarily uniform, but of the same denigrative status. This is not to say that shipping companies designed steerage to be a liminal space or that officers and crew members thought of immigrants as neophytes. Rather, the nature of the transatlantic voyage in steerage exhibits the same qualities found in liminality, a fact that indicates that immigration was a rite of passage.

Elements of liminality first appeared as immigrants were discouraged from packing some of their belongings—the artifacts from their native lands—and thus forced to abandon parts of their identity. Various investigative reports and guide books describe how immigrants sought to bring an “excessive” amount of clothing and household goods as well as furniture and other cumbersome items to America.⁵⁷ Wiley & Putnam’s *Emigrant’s Guide* explained “we have often seen emigrants carrying with them old furniture, wagons, pots, kettles, wash-tubs, and the like; the trouble and expense of transporting which, were far greater than the value of the goods.”⁵⁸ This suggests that immigrants attempted to bring so much luggage in order to save the expense of purchasing new goods in the U.S. However, it is likely that many immigrants were also moved to bring goods because of goods’ personal value. Brandenburg described seeing devastated families holding impromptu sales in the port city upon realizing that they would be unable to bring all of their belongings onboard.⁵⁹ One immigrant from Scotland explained how his family packed items “such as dishes and bric-a-brac of various kinds...that my mother could not bring herself to leave behind us in Scotland.” This involved carrying large, awkward packages throughout the journey, but it was important that his mother keep these mementos from their

⁵⁷ Such reports appear throughout the entire period, for immigrants traveling on sailing ships and on steamships. Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, 66; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 116, 160; Wiley & Putnam’s *Emigrant’s Guide*, 33; O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, 32.

⁵⁸ Wiley & Putnam’s *Emigrant’s Guide*, 35.

⁵⁹ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 160.

former lives.⁶⁰ Immigrants' belongings could be of enormous personal importance. Material goods could have historical, familial, or cultural value and thus represent part of individuals' identities. However, during the liminal state, neophytes are "ground down to be fashioned anew."⁶¹ In order for them to effectively learn the circumstances of their upcoming state, neophytes are dispossessed of belongings of their former identities. Along these lines, immigrants were discouraged from bringing personally valuable but impractical goods on the voyage.

The protocol of passenger ships and the advice of guide books contributed to the abandonment of immigrants' personally significant possessions. Ships permitted passengers to pack luggage to be stored in the hold as well as some hand luggage to be kept with them.⁶² However, hand luggage was typically stored in the berth in which one slept, so it was unwise to pack too much.⁶³ Additionally, guide books were very specific in advising immigrants about what they should and should not pack. Suggested items to pack included old clothing, boots, a coat, and depending on the facilities of the ship, extra food, soap, eating utensils, and blankets.⁶⁴ Guide books emphasized the folly of over packing, explaining that the hassle and cost of bringing "extra" items outweighed the value of the goods.⁶⁵ It was also costly to transport a large amount of luggage over the course of the entire journey (from one's home to the port city, from

⁶⁰ Bruce M. Stave, John F. Sutherland, and Aldo Salerno, *From the Old Country: An Oral History of European Migration to America* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 32.

⁶¹ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 98, 101.

⁶² O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 32.

⁶³ Immigrants most likely did not learn of the limited space until after arriving in the port city, hence why Brandenburg noticed families selling some of their possessions in the city just before departure. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 7, 14, 15; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 160.

⁶⁴ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 32; O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 32

⁶⁵ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 33, O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 43; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 130; Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 155.

the lodging house to the ship, etc.).⁶⁶ Such luggage was heavy and cumbersome, had to be guarded from potential thieves, could get mixed up with the baggage of others, and, as happened to one investigator, could be lost.⁶⁷ Limiting their amount of luggage meant that immigrants' belongings were reduced to their practicality and monetary value. Items that only served to represent immigrants' former identities were rejected as unnecessary, because immigrants were expected to give up belongings from their old identity in favor of objects of their new state.⁶⁸

Immigrants were likewise encouraged to abandon their former clothing styles in order to adopt that of the U.S., their new state. Guide books and observers alike commented that immigrants should avoid shopping for new clothing before the voyage. Not only was it more sensible to wear cheap clothing on the ship (clothing which could be disposed of upon arrival), but the styles that one found in Europe would not match styles of the U.S., and, as one guide book explained, one would not want to wear such items in the U.S.⁶⁹ Brandenburg confirmed this hypothesis: he explained that the family with whom he was traveling wasted money buying new Italian clothes that they planned to wear in the U.S. He did not say that the clothing was ill fit for the American climate or that it was too bulky to pack. Instead, according to him, their actions were senseless because Italian clothing simply should not be worn in the U.S. Apparently this pressure to conform did later affect the family: he claimed that the family members only wore this new clothing for a few days after their arrival.⁷⁰ One guide book advised immigrants to

⁶⁶ Immigrants often had to hire a horse and cart to transport their luggage to the port cities. With less luggage, immigrants could get by with just a hand cart or barrow. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 155; Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 47.

⁶⁷ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 130.

⁶⁸ There is a great deal of secondary material on immigrants, consumerism, and American identity. See Andrew Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance: Jewish Immigrants, Mass Consumption, and the Search for American Identity*, Columbia history of Urban Life (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Marilyn Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000).

⁶⁹ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 32, 35; O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 32; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 116.

⁷⁰ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 116.

keep their clothing clean, even though it was “of inferior worth,” explaining that “the Irish small clothes [sic] are not worn in the United States; [but] still, cleanliness is always preferred.”⁷¹ This statement exemplifies how conformity to American norms was emphasized to immigrants before they reached the U.S., indeed, before they left Europe. Another investigator commented that not only did the cost of transporting many items outweigh their value, but most of these items were replaced upon arrival to the U.S. anyway.⁷² There is no explanation of why such items were replaced. Were they offered in a better quality in the U.S.? Was this an attempt to encourage immigrants to assimilate, by buying American goods? Regardless of whether or not the intent was to encourage assimilation, immigrants were advised to cede their belongings from Europe in favor of items bought in the U.S. In doing so they began to give up their former identities and become American.

Guide books’ disregard for immigrants’ personal belongings is also exhibited by their suggestion that immigrants throw “much worn clothing, bedding, and the like” overboard before arriving in the U.S. Certain items from immigrants’ native lands were allowed onboard because of their practicality, but as soon as immigrants had the opportunity to replace the items with goods from the U.S., guide books encouraged immigrants to fully abandon any remaining artifacts from Europe. Immigrants would thus adhere to liminality’s purpose of stripping away elements of immigrants’ old identities.⁷³

In addition to what they packed, there is evidence that immigrants began to shed their native styles while onboard. One observer noticed that upon boarding, passengers cast off their decorative clothing, which he described as “cast[ing] off clothing of their civilization” for more

⁷¹ O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, 54.

⁷² Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 116.

⁷³ *Wiley & Putnam’s Emigrant’s Guide*, 65, Stephen de Vere, “Stephen De Vere’s Report on an 1847 Voyage,” in *The Elgin-Grey Papers, 1846-1852, 1339-1347* (Ottawa: King’s Printer., 1937), 1342.

somber styles.⁷⁴ The swift removal of their ethnic clothing suggests that passengers immediately began to shed elements of their old identities.⁷⁵ Another passenger noted that the Russian peasants onboard were dressed in decorative clothing, the men with “new shiny bowlers...bowlers which they had evidently purchased from German hawkers who had come on board at some point in the journey.”⁷⁶ Although the passengers were dressed distinctively in this description, they likewise discarded the styles of their homeland in favor of new and more expensive-looking clothing that they bought along their journey. According to social activist Sophonisba Breckenridge, many immigrants gave up their native styles because to “follow the Old-World practice, and show who you are and where you come from, and the result is that you remain alien,” so many immigrants may have shed their old styles in order to avoid standing out as immigrants.⁷⁷ Additionally, considering liminality’s stipulation that neophytes shed possessions that are representative of their old state, it is logical that immigrants would be encouraged to give up their personal belongings and native styles, aspects of their old identities, in order to learn the American identity.

The steerage space itself exemplified the bad conditions faced by immigrants and their vulnerability to the shipping companies.⁷⁸ In liminality, neophytes are between states, and thus are considered structurally invisible or dead. They may, in turn, be treated as if they are actually dead or may be regarded as polluting. Because of their profane nature, neophytes may be secluded from ordered, non-liminal states. As such, immigrants were separated from the upper-

⁷⁴ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 30.

⁷⁵ The wearing of somber clothing indicates that passengers did not immediately adopt any specific identity, but perhaps felt void of an identity, which mirrors neophytes’ position in between states.

⁷⁶ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 3.

⁷⁷ She further explains that “in the United States, dress serves to conceal one’s origin and relationships.” Sophonisba Preston Breckinridge, *New Homes for Old* (New York and London: Harper & brothers, 1921), 137.

⁷⁸ More information about the layouts of ships can be found in Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, (chapters 7 and 8), Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, (chapter 5) and Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, (chapter 9).

classes in steerage, which was located below the first and second class sections, usually the first or second fully enclosed decks.⁷⁹ This position was the least desirable area of the ship, because it meant poor ventilation—many passengers described the air as unbearably foul—and also exacerbated symptoms of seasickness, which plagued most steerage passengers.⁸⁰ Ships typically had three separate sleeping quarters: one for men, one for women and children, and one for single women.⁸¹ Less commonly, steerage passengers were separated according to ethnicity, typically with less respected ethnicities receiving lodging in the least desirable quarters.⁸² Sleeping quarters might hold 300 passengers or more. Mary Strokonos, who left Lithuania as late as 1915, described that “downstairs [in steerage], many, many people down there, very crowded. Everybody very sick. I am so sick I cry and cry, I think I die, then I wish I back on farm.”⁸³ Immigrants were thus treated like neophytes, separated from the order and structure of the upper-classes and made to feel close to death. The bad conditions afforded to immigrants were thereby inherent in the physical position of steerage and were further exacerbated by the insufficient accommodations provided to them.

As Strokonos described, crowding caused enormous discomfort in steerage, depriving passengers of personal space, quiet, and privacy, and contributing to foul odors, filth, and

⁷⁹ First and second class passengers stayed in private cabins, had private, better located deck space, and were provided with superior food and services. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 134, 155; U.S. Congress, “The New Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 11; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 34; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 195.

⁸⁰ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 7; *Ibid.*, “The New Steerage,” 11; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 1], 23; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 35; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 180; Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 37.

⁸¹ This system was the norm on both sailing ships and steamships. U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 6; *Ibid.*, “The New Steerage,” 11; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 2, “A Typical New Steerage”], 25.

⁸² One traveler reported that “the dirtiest cabins in the ship were allotted to the Russians and the Jews.” Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 23; U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 14.

⁸³ Stave 28.

disease transmission.⁸⁴ The Irish famine ships, most of which were cargo ships or old slave ships and thus ill designed for comfort, were enormously overcrowded. One immigrant described how “300 souls confined [were] below, breathing the close, polluted, and unhealthy atmosphere constantly in all ships, especially immigrant ships, where large numbers of human being are crowded together in a small space.”⁸⁵ Even with the development of steamship, crowding remained a major problem in steerage. Extreme crowding, combined with poor lighting and poor ventilation, made steerage extraordinarily uncomfortable. One investigator described how “the sleeping quarters were always a dismal, damp, dirty, and most unwholesome place. The air was heavy, foul, and deadening to the spirit and the mind.”⁸⁶ Strong odors also plagued the steerage passengers. On most ships it was up to individual passengers to maintain cleanliness of the berths, although the failure to do so could affect the comfort of all surrounding passengers.⁸⁷ Foul odors, heat, the noises from other passengers (one investigator noted that in addition to the normal sounds of passengers preparing for bed and sleeping, those passengers who could not sleep often took out musical instruments or sang to entertain themselves), and, in the women’s

⁸⁴ Crowding was a constant issue plaguing passengers throughout the period. Captains were paid according to the tonnage that they transported, and thus preferred to carry as many passengers as possible. O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, [xi]. Crowding did vary depending on the volume of immigration. For instance, ships were extremely crowded during the 1840s when large numbers of Irish sought to escape the potato famine. On the other hand, 1908 was a slow year for immigration, and ships were less crowded. O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, [xi]; U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 6. In comparing the voyage of crowded ships and less crowded ships, it is clear that crowding contributed enormously to many of the discomforts experienced by passengers. One investigator traveling in 1908 explained that “we were not crowded and there was better air and fewer odors. The vacant berths could be used as clothes racks and storage space for hand baggage.” In addition, when sleeping quarters were not full, the space might be converted into a dining room or mess hall. However, it was rare for ships to travel with vacancies, so crowding was almost always a problem. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 14.

⁸⁵ Smith, *An Emigrant’s Narrative*, 8. Similar conditions were described by Nettle, *A Practical Guide for Emigrants*, and Whyte, *Robert Whyte’s 1847 Famine Ship Diary*.

⁸⁶ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 35.

⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 15.

compartment, the sound of crying babies made it difficult for many passengers to pass the entire night in their beds.⁸⁸

Likewise, because shipping companies sought to carry as many passengers as possible, immigrants were subject to an insufficient amount of personal space. Various passenger laws from the U.S. and other European nations prescribed the minimum amount of space that had to be provided to passengers, which, by the turn of the century, was still only one hundred cubic feet.⁸⁹ Although some ships did provide passengers with this minimum amount of space, it was not uncommon for ships to outright disregard the regulations.⁹⁰ Even when steamships replaced sailing ships, passengers were still deprived of the legal amount of space allotted to them. One investigator reported that the women's quarters had bunks for 195 passengers, but actually hosted 214 women and children.⁹¹ Another claimed that an agent assured them that there would be approximately 350 in steerage, but when they boarded three days later, there were 750 passengers in steerage.⁹² In such a case, passengers were unaware of the crowding that they would face until they boarded the ship. By this time, it was too late to patronize another line or to contact the authorities for redress. Instead, immigrants had to endure the long and crowded journey.

The limited space that shipping companies allotted to steerage passengers meant that they spent a large amount of time in their small, crowded, and dirty berths. Sleeping quarters in

⁸⁸ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 136, 180; U.S. Congress, "The New Steerage," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 11.

⁸⁹ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 15. Another investigator of the commission (1908) reported that passengers on his/her ship were only allotted thirty cubic feet.

⁹⁰ In his guide book, O'Hanlon warned passengers that lines did not comply with regulations. O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 30. Jones argued that poorly written regulations, issues of jurisdiction, and the failure to follow through with enforcement for the ineffectiveness of the Passenger Acts until 1908.

⁹¹ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 175.

⁹² Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 27.

steerage were filled with hundreds of these double-tiered iron berths. In addition to use as a bed, berths were used as storage space for passengers' hand luggage. As one investigator explained,

When the steerage is full, each passenger's space is limited to his berth, which then serves as bed, clothes and towel rack, cupboard, and baggage space. There are no accommodations to encourage the steerage passenger to be clean and orderly. There was no hook on which to hang a garment, no receptacle for refuse, no cuspidor, no cans for use in case of seasickness.⁹³

Despite its many functions, a British emigrant guide book described berths as “nothing more than a sort of shelf, made of unpainted deals [fir or pine wood], with a strip of deal at the outside to keep the occupant from rolling out.” This guide book also warned that passengers may be forced to share berths with other passengers.⁹⁴ On most ships, passengers were provided with mattresses and bedding, although they were of very poor quality. Passengers were also usually provided with a blanket, but it was made of a coarse material and was usually too small and light weight. Some ships offered pillows, but sometimes these were only life preservers, and on other ships immigrants were often given no pillow at all.⁹⁵ One steerage passenger described trying to sleep in steerage: “the air in the room was so foul and thick that it felt as if it could be touched. From every corner came sounds of groaning and snoring. But worst of all were the insects in the cot.”⁹⁶ Given how small, crowded, and dirty berths were, in conjunction with passengers' seasickness, one can imagine that steerage passengers spent a great deal of time lying motionless in their berths, which, according to Turner, is typical of liminality. Instructors of a rite may force neophytes to lie motionless like a corpse to signify neophytes' structural death.⁹⁷

While shipping companies were thinking about profits when designing steerage and not of

⁹³ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 15.

⁹⁴ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 31.

⁹⁵ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 175; U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 7; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 1], 14. One commissioner claimed that the blanket was too light weight “even in the summer.”

⁹⁶ Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 57.

⁹⁷ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*, 97.

immigrants' structural death, understanding this connection highlights how immigrants were regarded as inferior beings undeserving of space.

There were, however, small ways that immigrants could reduce their suffering in steerage, apparent in the process of boarding the ship and claiming berths. Knowledge of the ship and the conditions advised immigrants to seek more comfortable berths near sources of light and ventilation.⁹⁸ This advice could be obtained from guide books or from people who had already been to America; those who traveled with such "Americans" benefitted greatly from their friends' experiences. In addition, traveling with any type of group offered emotional and practical advantages. Women traveling with men usually had an advantage in securing a berth, because their partners were able to more actively assert a claim to a particular berth.⁹⁹ Having extra money could also serve this end; it was not uncommon for immigrants to bribe crew members to allow them to secure the most desirable berths.¹⁰⁰ Although this was a way for immigrants to obtain slightly better conditions, immigrants were still participating in a system which made them subservient to the shipping companies and crew and did nothing to improve overall conditions.

The poor conditions below deck in steerage also made immigrants susceptible to disease and even death.¹⁰¹ The most common diseases were typhus, cholera, and smallpox, and eye diseases like trachoma.¹⁰² The frequency of epidemics and mortality rates in steerage decreased

⁹⁸ Groups of immigrants traveling together would also try to find berths near one another. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 29, 174; Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 37.

⁹⁹ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 29.

¹⁰⁰ Brandenburg was even able to secure two berths in the hospital for him and his wife. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 29, 174.

¹⁰¹ For additional information, see Glazier, "Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Irish Immigrants," Eltis, "Free and Coerced Transatlantic Migrations," or Cohn, "Mortality on Immigrant Voyages."

¹⁰² Eltis, "Free and Coerced Transatlantic Migrations," 226.

over time, but in the middle of the nineteenth century, they were a great threat.¹⁰³ Historians have called Irish famine ships “coffin ships,” signifying their high death rates: death rates varied from 2.3 to 4.8 percent during the Famine years, although many historians are convinced that the rates were even higher.¹⁰⁴ Typhus, a contagious disease, found ideal breeding conditions in Ireland and onboard immigrant ships. Typhus was also called “ship fever,” and could affect otherwise healthy people.¹⁰⁵ The cholera epidemic in London in 1853-1854 also affected passenger ships: in the final four months of 1853, the average mortality rate was two percent.¹⁰⁶ Mortality rates curtailed after the end of the Great Famine and further decreased with the development of steam technology. On average, the mortality rates on sailing ships was one death for every 184 passengers, and on steamers, the average was one death to every 2195 passengers.¹⁰⁷ Even though mortality decreased with the introduction of the steamship, widespread illness continued to make the voyage miserable. Symptoms were exacerbated by the motion of the ship, the poor food and the lack of fresh air. Illness and death also caused psychological distress: passengers were devastated in seeing their friends and family fall ill and feared for their own lives as well:

Our forlorn hope being thus nearly destroyed, the passengers gave themselves up to despair, and gloomy, sullen silence pervaded the captain and sailors...I gave up all as lost, and wished I never had been born; the scenes I witnessed daily were indeed awful...¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Historians attribute the decrease in mortality rates to a variety of factors, but most believe that the steamship (with the shortened length of journey) was the greatest factor. Moltmann, “Steamship Transport of Immigrants,” 311.

¹⁰⁴ Glazier, “Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Irish Immigrants,” 255, Cohn, “Mortality on Immigrant Voyages,” 290. The deaths rates on slave ships were approximately 5 percent. Cohn, “Mortality on Immigrant Voyages,” 114. Other great sources on the Irish famine ships are Laxton and Miller.

¹⁰⁵ Typhus had this nickname by the period of the Great Famine. Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 38.

¹⁰⁶ Considering that the illnesses onboard were also those ravaging Europe suggests that many immigrants boarded the ship with the diseases and spread it to previously healthy individuals. Jones, “Aspects of North Atlantic Migration,” 325; Cohn, “Mortality on Immigrant Voyages,” 110.

¹⁰⁷ Moltmann, “Steamship Transport of Immigrants,” 312.

¹⁰⁸ William Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative, or, A Voice From the Steerage* (New-York: W. Smith, 1850), 14.

Many sick immigrants held the perception that they would be fine if they could just reach America before dying.¹⁰⁹ This idea indicates that America was viewed as a land of salvation where immigrants could get a second chance, like the new state provided in a rite of passage.

The perception that immigrants, as neophytes, were polluting, and the subsequent treatment afforded to them was manifested in the inspection process.¹¹⁰ The inspection usually involved a general check of the body and face, a scalp check and almost always an eye exam. Inspections usually took place before departure, periodically throughout the journey, the day before arrival, and upon arrival.¹¹¹ Health inspections were perfunctory, ineffective, and impersonal, performed in the style of an assembly line: immigrants, standing in a line, passed in front of a doctor, who occasionally glanced at the line.¹¹² One inspector reported that individuals with suspicious conditions were marked with chalk on their clothing, like a defective object.¹¹³ Notably, only steerage passengers were required to undergo medical inspections, and only non-

¹⁰⁹ There was a perception that if they could just make it to America, they could find the treatment to get better. Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, July 28.

¹¹⁰ Inspections were required by U.S. regulations in 1847 and became more thorough and required more frequently with subsequent laws Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 126. Ports had reputations for having more or less strict inspections, so ill passengers concerned with failing inspections often traveled to ports known to have less strict inspections. Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Immigrants," 314. In 1924, the primary health inspections were moved to Europe, so that fewer immigrants would have to be sent back after already reaching the U.S. Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 113. First and second class passengers were not required to undergo medical inspections. Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 11. See chapter six of Taylor for a thorough study of changing health regulations. Kilian does extensive work on the inspections at Ellis Island.

¹¹¹ In Liverpool during the Great Famine, there were two inspections before departure, one by a government medical officer to prevent epidemics onboard, the second by the shipping company to ensure that no passenger who would be denied entry to the U.S. boarded (in which case shipping companies would have to pay for the return trip). Laxton, *The Famine Ships*, 235, 239; Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 113; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 195, 204, 254, 271.

¹¹² Taylor explained that "thoroughness...was impossible. London doctors were said to be examining, at times, at the rate of two hundred people an hour." Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 113. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 20. On some ships, the crew held less than the required number of inspections, but just stamped or punched holes in passengers' inspection cards as if they had. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 20; Ibid., [Investigation 3], 38; Brandenburg 198.

¹¹³ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 217.

American citizens had to receive vaccinations.¹¹⁴ This fact and the objectifying nature of the inspections indicate that immigrants were targeted specifically because of their backgrounds, not because of the risks involved in the long journey, and thus prove that immigrants were truly perceived as inferior by shipping companies.

Inspections, especially those held upon arrival, were not limited to medical inspections. Before admitting the immigrants, immigration officials sought information to ensure that immigrants were of good moral quality. One inspector noted that a female inspector was in charge of picking out women who appeared to have questionable moral character.¹¹⁵ Immigrants were asked questions about their age, employment in Europe, friends residing in the U.S., how much money they were carrying, whether they had a job in the U.S., their criminal records, and some questions about their political beliefs.¹¹⁶

Many immigrants used a combination of money and knowledge to reduce the stress of the inspections and ensure their passing. If aware of the technique, immigrants could suck out a vaccine directly after receiving it and reduce the pain associated with the shot.¹¹⁷ Immigrants could also pay for treatments to hide contagious diseases: Brandenburg discovered that there was a treatment that could clear up the symptoms of trachoma for the duration of the journey, although after the fact it could cause the condition to worsen or cause blindness.¹¹⁸ It was also possible to buy counterfeit seals and labels to avoid the fumigation station. Likewise, the

¹¹⁴ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 14; Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 55; Moltmann, "Steamship Transport of Immigrants," 312.

¹¹⁵ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 218.

¹¹⁶ This type of inspection into the personal background of immigrants began in 1882 with the opening of Ellis Island. Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 35; U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 31; Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 46.

¹¹⁷ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 37; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 164; U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 14; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 38. A counterfeiter with whom Brandenburg did business gave him this advice. Graham does not explain why people thought to do this. One immigration commission inspector reported that he did not actually receive any of the three required vaccines (what these vaccines were for is unclear).

¹¹⁸ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 162, 167.

interview portion of the inspection relied almost entirely on the honesty of the immigrants and his or her party. Immigrants could learn how to properly answer the questions based on advice from friends or neighbors who had already immigrated or pay agents to instruct them on how to do so.¹¹⁹ Thus, it was very common for immigrants to lie in order to ensure their admission, and officials had no way of holding them accountable for their answers.¹²⁰ The use of counterfeited papers was also common and went unnoticed: one investigator used what she considered an obviously counterfeited passport, but passed through inspection without any problems.¹²¹ Factors such as criminal record, employment, and the health of incoming immigrants were supposedly regulated, but if immigrants were knowledgeable about the process, it was not difficult to evade them.

In this manner, immigrants could begin creating a new identity while they were onboard. As they hid facts about their pasts, plans for their futures, and provided false identification, they shed their old identities and created new ones for officials and fellow passengers. However, some felt that these personal inspections should be conducted before the immigrant left his or her homeland so that a more thorough investigation into the truth of immigrants' testimonies could be conducted and to prevent the annoyance and heartbreak of deportation.¹²² Conducting the interview in Europe would have sustained immigrants' native identities, because it was this

¹¹⁹ Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 31; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 40, 274.

¹²⁰ One of the most common deceptions was in avoiding contract labor laws, which prohibited immigrants from obtaining jobs prior to their arrival in the U.S. Contract labor laws were put into effect in 1885, largely in response to the large influx of Chinese immigrants in the West. Immigrants knew to lie when asked if they had a job lined up in the U.S. and were thereby permitted to enter the country in spite of the law. Another way of evading this law was by using a third party; corporations, instead of importing the immigrants themselves, had friends or relatives bring the immigrants over. Thus, immigrants had a position promised to them, but were not yet contracted. Stave 38; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 112, 222.

¹²¹ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 14. Some immigrants, aware that they would be unable to pass inspection in the U.S., immigrated through Canada. This was a method utilized by many attempting to escape contract labor laws. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 207, 257, 263.

¹²² Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 274.

identity that they would provide to officials.¹²³ Doing so in the U.S. further constructed the journey as a liminal period, because immigrants began to re-fashion their identities while onboard.

Like the extreme crowding, the severity of filth in steerage threatened passengers' physical and emotional well being, but they were largely powerless to counter it.¹²⁴ The officers and crew members did little to establish or enforce rules about cleaning, leaving the passengers responsible for coordinating cleaning responsibilities, a task that was nearly impossible given the limited facilities and communication barriers between passengers. Depending on the materials used, the floors were either continually damp (if constructed of iron) or smelly (if constructed of wood).¹²⁵ Even once ships began employing stewards and stewardesses around the turn of the century, who looked after passengers' needs and were in charge of cleaning, the floors were regularly swept but rarely washed or disinfected during the voyage.¹²⁶ The absence of waste cans and receptacles for seasickness meant that such material inevitably collected on the unwashed floors.¹²⁷ One upper-class passenger described the ship as "a floating mass of filthy straw, the refuse of foul beds, barrels containing the vilest matter, old rags and tattered clothes, etc."¹²⁸

Considering how the officers and crew members regarded immigrants as animals (as will be elaborated on in the following section), they likely thought that steerage passengers were dirty

¹²³ This change in policy did finally occur in 1924, when quota laws stifled immigration anyway. Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 113.

¹²⁴ Reports of extreme dirtiness and insufficient washing facilities appeared during the period of the Irish Famine and continued through the period of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe. Conditions only began to improve with the development of new steerage.

¹²⁵ De Vere, "Stephen de Vere's Report," 1342; U.S. Congress, "The Old Steerage," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 7.

¹²⁶ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 15.

¹²⁷ U.S. Congress, "The Old Steerage," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 7; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 2], 25; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 34.

¹²⁸ Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, July 28.

by nature.¹²⁹ This attitude towards neophytes is common; Turner explained that, because of their structural ambiguity, neophytes are considered polluting. As a result, neophytes are allowed to be covered in filth during liminality, just like the officers and crew members deprived immigrants of the necessary facilities to wash, thus allowing or causing them to become dirty. Washrooms were insufficient in number and size and were themselves dirty and unkempt.¹³⁰ One investigator explained that the washrooms were constructed poorly and with cheap materials, making them inconvenient to use and difficult to clean. As she explained, “floors of both washrooms and water-closets are damp and often filthy until the last day of the voyage, when they are cleaned in preparation for the inspection at the port of entry.”¹³¹ Wash basins were in short supply, so passengers were only given a few minutes of use, which made it impossible to wash dishes, clothing, sheets, children, and oneself regularly. Additionally, these basins were not properly cleaned between each use; a passenger could use a basin for washing dishes after another passenger used it for seasickness.¹³² In describing the process of washing one’s dishes, one investigator explained that “Here, as in the toilet and washrooms, it would require persons of very superior intelligence, skill, and ingenuity to maintain order with the given accommodations.”¹³³ In addition, passengers were usually forced to use cold salt water for washing. Sometimes one warm water faucet was available, but using it meant waiting a long time for a short period of use, so most resigned themselves to the use of cold water. The lack of

¹²⁹ Many contemporaries also used steerage’s dirtiness as evidence of immigrants’ inferiority. This served to perpetuate policies that ignored cleanliness in steerage. De Vere, “Stephen de Vere’s Report,” 1342; U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 9; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 37.

¹³⁰ On one ship with a capacity of approximately 500, there were two washrooms for both men and women. One washroom had 10 faucets and 10 basins, the other six faucets and six basins. There were six toilets for women and five for men. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 16.

¹³¹ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 8.

¹³² U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 15.

¹³³ Given this investigator’s other comments, it is unlikely that he was trying to suggest that immigrants were unintelligent; rather, he was simply emphasizing the difficulty of remaining clean for the average passenger. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 17.

towels meant that surfaces were damp and dishes and eating utensils became rusty. Toilets were also described as “filthy and difficult to use.”¹³⁴

In such conditions, many passengers abandoned efforts of remaining clean. One investigator explained that after only the first meal, passengers “began doing what is the bane of life in the steerage; throwing the refuse from their meal on the deck instead of over the side or into the scuppers.”¹³⁵ Investigators insisted that immigrants’ resignation to dirtiness resulted not from laziness on their part, rather, from enormously inadequate facilities.¹³⁶ One explained:

People, both men and women, who were ordinarily cleanly about their person complained that it was totally impossible to keep clean with the given accommodations...It was really no wonder to me when some finally gave up trying to keep clean. In such filthy surroundings it was necessary to wash often, and keeping even comparatively clean would have meant a perpetual struggle to get a basin.¹³⁷

Two investigators reported that women tried to use drinking water to wash themselves, but on one ship were forced to stop when the stewards discovered them.¹³⁸ These descriptions reveal that passengers were concerned with cleanliness, but the circumstances on the ship made it nearly impossible to be clean.¹³⁹

In discussing cleanliness, it is important to recognize that the investigators, who were usually of a different ethnicity and from a different class, would have had different conceptions

¹³⁴ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 8; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 1], 15, 17

¹³⁵ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 180

¹³⁶ The Immigration Commission also made the point that immigrants in third class kept their quarters clean, which demonstrated that dirtiness resulted from steerage conditions, not from immigrants’ nature. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 39.

¹³⁷ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 37.

¹³⁸ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 16; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 184.

¹³⁹ Notably, immigrants rarely described the filth themselves. The Immigration Commission, Whyte, Dickens, Brandenburg, Graham, de Vere, Nettle, O’Hanlon, and Wiley and Putnam—all investigators, authors of guide books and upper-class passengers—commented on the dirtiness. Steiner was the only immigrant who described filth, but he might also be considered an investigator. This fact might indicate that immigrants were ashamed of the filthy conditions in which they lived and felt that their dignity was threatened by conditions.

of what constituted dirtiness than those of the passengers. One might argue that investigators' description of steerage as dirty does not necessarily indicate that passengers felt it was dirty or suffered because of the filth. However, the investigators insisted that, given the opportunity, immigrants would have kept clean, and that they did such things as sacrificing water in such an attempt. It is impossible to know more than the sources reveal, and the sources indicate that the cleanliness onboard was below the standards of both the investigators and the immigrants, and that when given better facilities in third class, immigrants proved that they wanted to and could keep clean.

In contrast with the rest of the journey, the crew and passengers alike worked hard to clean up the steerage and themselves as much as possible during the last few days before arriving in the U.S., which marked the end of the journey and thus the end of liminality. One investigator described how the steerage area was dirty and smelly “until the day before arrival at Quarantine when all hands are required to ‘scrub up,’ and put on a fair face for the Doctor and Government Inspector.”¹⁴⁰ The Captain was more concerned with the cleanliness of the steerage on the morning of the arrival than at any other point in the trip because there was the possibility that he could be charged fines if the ship violated any regulations.¹⁴¹ Passengers who had given up on washing once again attempted to wash and dressed themselves in their best clothing in order to make a better impression on immigration officials.¹⁴² One guide book actually claimed that clean

¹⁴⁰ De Vere, “Stephen de Vere’s Report,” 1342.

¹⁴¹ Immigration 16. Although customs officials did inspect the ships and there were cases in which captains were fined, inspections were perfunctory. Inspectors did not have the time or adequate information about each ship to perform a thorough inspection. As one inspector explained: “The time devoted to the inspection suffices only for a passing glance at the steerage, and the method employed does not tend to give any real information, much less to disclose any violations.” U.S. Congress, “The New Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 12.

¹⁴² Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 200.

passengers would be kept in quarantine for a shorter period of time.¹⁴³ As one observer explained, given the poor facilities, “they were truly heroic efforts at cleanliness in the face of every obstacle.”¹⁴⁴ Passengers, officers and crew members thereby recognized that the arrival in the U.S. marked a new stage with different standards. We can recognize this as neophytes’ aggregation into their new state, which required them to abandon the habits of liminality and fulfill the norms of their new state.

Providing substandard food and dining services was another way that shipping companies abused immigrants and took advantage of their vulnerability. On earlier ships departing from England and Ireland, passengers packed and prepared most of their own food.¹⁴⁵ Cooking areas, which were sometimes as primitive as an open fire, were typically small, crowded, and exposed to weather conditions.¹⁴⁶ On some ships, facilities were shared by the crew, and cabin and steerage passengers; in such cases, steerage passengers had final access to the facilities.¹⁴⁷ Most guide books recommended that passengers form small groups to share the responsibilities of cooking (or assign one to cook every day and pay him to do so). This system also organized dishwashing and often helped ensure that sick passengers would be cared for by their group members. The formation of these small groups fostered the development of a community in steerage. Passengers from different backgrounds worked collectively on their daily obligations. If one was traveling with friends or neighbors, they would typically stick with their

¹⁴³ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 65.

¹⁴⁴ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 37.

¹⁴⁵ The shipping companies provided them with a small amount of food each day, but this was not enough to survive. Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 20; Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 135; Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, June 3.

¹⁴⁶ The poor facilities made it difficult for immigrants to prepare food. Whyte explained that “when baked [their cakes] were encased in a burnt crust coated with smoke, being actually raw in the centre.” Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, June 3, 18.

¹⁴⁷ Burlend, *A True Picture*, 17; *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 19.

countrymen, as was recommended by guide books, but for those traveling alone, this system promoted cooperation and unity between different people.¹⁴⁸

By the 1850s, the shipping companies provided food to the passengers, but this was not described as a favorable change.¹⁴⁹ The menus for steerage passengers depended on the shipping company, but staples like meat, or meat soup, bread, and coffee were featured on most menus. Many passengers complained that the ingredients were decent, but were ruined by poor preparation.¹⁵⁰ Others complained about the way that the food was served, charging it unappetizing.¹⁵¹ The meat was described as rotten or suspicious, and the bread as moldy and doughy.¹⁵² Passengers on Irish famine ships complained that the water was contaminated: one passenger described it as “quite foul, muddy and bitter.”¹⁵³ One Russian immigrant explained:

Mugs half-full of celery soup were whisked along the tables; not a chunk of bread on the platters was less than an inch thick; the hash of gristly beef and warm potato was what would not have been tolerated in the poorest restaurant, but we set ourselves to eat it, knowing that trials in plenty awaited us and that the time might come when we should have worse things than these to bear.¹⁵⁴

Even impoverished passengers who presumably did not eat well in their native lands thought that the food was inadequate. They were, however, powerless to address it.

¹⁴⁸ Guide books suggested traveling with friends and neighbors because they would offer more loyalty and trust. Wiley and Putnam explained that, if traveling alone, forming groups with strangers offered a more regular schedule, a greater variety of foods, and “besides this, it would be more social than for each individual to live by himself.” Forming such groups thus acted as a way for immigrants to socialize with one another. *Wiley & Putnam’s Emigrant’s Guide*, 52; O’Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant’s Guide*, 50.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 135.

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 9; *Ibid.*, “The New Steerage,” 12; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 36; De Vere, “Stephen de Vere’s Report,” 1342.

¹⁵¹ Brandenburg, traveling from Italy, explained that the food was as “good as the average Italian gets at home, but the manner in which it was messed into one heap in the big pan was nothing short of nauseating.” Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 179. An Immigration Commissioner claimed that, because of its poor quality, more than half of the food was thrown into the sea. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 18.

¹⁵² Steiner, *On the Trail*, 11; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 184; De Vere, “Stephen de Vere’s Report,” 1342.

¹⁵³ Whyte, *Robert Whyte’s 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, June 13; Smith, *An Emigrant’s Narrative*, 18.

¹⁵⁴ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 16

Steerage passengers were entirely vulnerable to the shipping companies and the ship's officers and crew in regards to food and water: immigrants needed both to survive, but the company, officers, and crew had the power to grant and withhold the provisions. It was not uncommon for ships to give immigrants less food and water than was required by regulations. One investigator claimed that the ship on which he traveled purposely mis-measured the food, giving passengers less than they were allotted.¹⁵⁵ Even a guidebook, whose primary purpose was not reform, reported that regulations were often unfulfilled.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, it was not uncommon for ships to drastically reduce passengers' food and water each day when the trip was taking longer than expected and supplies were running low.¹⁵⁷ Immigrants could also have their water restricted as punishment for transgressions. This severe punishment made passengers extremely vulnerable to the crew and officers, requiring that the immigrants be careful not to antagonize them and cause unnecessary punishment.¹⁵⁸ Immigrants also had to tolerate disgusting food and water. One steerage passenger explained that the water was "in such a state of decomposition, that no human being could drink it, until forced by being placed in similar circumstances with ourselves."¹⁵⁹ This statement demonstrates how desperation drove passengers to accept water that would normally be considered intolerable. When they boarded the ships, immigrants relinquished their well being to the shipping companies, officers and crew.

¹⁵⁵ De Vere, "Stephen de Vere's Report," 1342.

¹⁵⁶ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 23.

¹⁵⁷ Smith suggested that the deprivation weakened passengers and contributed to widespread illness. Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative*, 12, 18; Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, June 16. While it makes sense that the captain would try to pace their use of food and water, considering that this was a common problem, shipping companies should have been more careful about how much food and water was packed and made sure that it was protected from being spoiled, and thereby prevent the need for such strict rationing.

¹⁵⁸ Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative*, 15, Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, June 5.

¹⁵⁹ Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative*, 17.

Most immigrants, needing food and water and having no other way of obtaining it, had no choice but to submit to the inadequate food and water provided by the ship.

Passengers who had extra money, however, had an enormous advantage, in that they could purchase additional food from canteens, which existed on most passenger ships. Some stewards also illegally sold the leftover food from the upper-classes to passengers.¹⁶⁰ Others sold alcohol to the passengers, which was both illegal and, according to one investigator, caused trouble between passengers and abuse towards female passengers.¹⁶¹ Brandenburg explained that “A very good source of revenue to the cooks and stewards was the secret sale of food to the third-class passengers who had money.”¹⁶² Although having extra spending money allowed a few immigrants to resist bad conditions like inadequate provisions, their resistance only perpetuated the bad conditions. Some passengers’ ability to pay for better services might appear as a way that immigrants resisted mistreatment, however, considering that they were deprived of basic necessities and were forced to pay for such items, this system appears more like extortion.¹⁶³

Officers and crew members had equally little concern in serving the food in a civilized fashion. The distribution of food was described as disorderly and unappetizing: according to Steiner, “the food is served *à la mob*. A bell rings, the crowd rushes with its tin pails, and after being pushed and jammed the prize is carried off, to be eaten if possible.”¹⁶⁴ Because of limited seating areas and limited food, it was important to arrive promptly as dinner was served. One

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 9; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 37.

¹⁶¹ De Vere, “Stephen de Vere’s Report,” 1342.

¹⁶² Brandenburg was most likely referring to steerage passengers here; there is no mention of a separate third class on his ship at any other point in the book. He mistakenly used the terms interchangeably: third class—also called new steerage—was a new system introduced around the turn of the century. It is also unclear from where the cooks procured this food; it may have been taken out of the steerage stores. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 190.

¹⁶³ Immigrants were also overcharged for supplementary provisions, a fact that was even recognized by Terence Powderly, the commissioner of the Bureau of Immigration in Washington, who admitted that immigrants were overcharged for food and cheated in money exchanges. Kilian, *Ellis Island*, 40.

¹⁶⁴ Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 38. Sanders explained that meals were served as they would be in a prison. Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, 68.

investigator explained that meals were consistently served early, so passengers had to constantly be conscious of preparations for meals, because “more than one learned that to be a trifle late was to be too late.”¹⁶⁵ Another explained that “if the steerage passengers act like cattle at meals, it is undoubtedly because they are treated as such...As long as no systematic order is observed in serving food in the steerage, the passengers will resort to the only effective method they know. Each will rush to get his share.”¹⁶⁶ Brandenburg explained how there was no system for distributing food on his ship, which caused chaos; in turn, a crew member, angered by the passengers’ confusion, continually yelled “avanti,” the only word he knew in Italian, and proceeded to mistreat them.¹⁶⁷ The food could be served in various ways, out of large kettles, by passengers moving along through a line, or passed from steward to steward like in a bucket brigade.¹⁶⁸ When stewards were present, one of the duties often assigned to them was to set and clear the table; although it may have seemed more sophisticated to do so, even this system was flawed, because dishware and eating utensils were often inadequately washed.¹⁶⁹ During these abrasive proceedings, immigrants were treated more like animals or prisoners than paying passengers.¹⁷⁰

Consuming the substandard food was also a denigrating experience. Unless the ship was empty enough to allow a sleeping quarter to be converted into one, most ships with old steerage accommodations did not have dining rooms. In such a case, passengers were forced to find any free space to sit or stand to eat. Sometimes the sleeping quarters and passageways contained shelves along the walls that could act as benches or tables for dining. At other times, unused

¹⁶⁵ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 36.

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 18.

¹⁶⁷ I would venture to guess that there was a system on his ship, but it was just not well executed. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 193.

¹⁶⁸ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 36; U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 36.

¹⁶⁹ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 35.

¹⁷⁰ An attitude that mirrors attitudes towards neophytes during liminality.

space in sleeping quarters was used as a dining area. This arrangement meant that the dining area was odorous and unpleasant for eating; many passengers preferred eating on the open deck than in such conditions.¹⁷¹ Even when there were dining rooms, there was often insufficient seating for all steerage passengers.¹⁷²

The poor quality of the food, along with steerage's position below deck, poor ventilation, and foul smells, exacerbated the symptoms of seasickness, which affected nearly all steerage passengers throughout this entire period.¹⁷³ Despite the frequency of seasickness, little effort was made to help seasick passengers.¹⁷⁴ Crew members reportedly did not assist passengers who were too sick to cook for themselves.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, seasickness did not merit admission to the hospital, so seasick passengers remained in the regular sleeping quarters with the rest of the passengers.¹⁷⁶ This not only made the conditions wretched for other passengers, who had to constantly listen and watch people get sick, but the berths were extremely uncomfortable for the ill. One steerage passenger explained that he "had to use all the little strength I had to prevent being thrown out of bed by the heaving of the ship."¹⁷⁷ In spite of how common seasickness was, passengers were expected to take care of themselves. Guide books advised that, in order to avoid seasickness, passengers should spend as much time as possible on the open deck and

¹⁷¹ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 17.

¹⁷² U.S. Congress, "The Old Steerage," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 8; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 35.

¹⁷³ Burlend, *A True Picture*, 18; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 186; Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 24; *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 39. Brandenburg claimed that the poor quality of the food could actually have the reverse effect of decreasing the symptoms, if passengers ate less because of it, and therefore had less in their stomachs with which to get sick. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 36.

¹⁷⁴ A serious sign of neglect that reiterates officers' and crew members' hostility towards the immigrants.

¹⁷⁵ Guide books suggested that immigrants pack certain foods that they could eat when they were too ill to cook. This suggestion indicates that seasickness was understood as inevitable, which begs the question, why did shipping companies do nothing about it? *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 38; O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 36. It wasn't until after the turn of the century (when there were stricter regulations), some ships employed stewardesses or matrons, who cared for the sick and brought food to them in their berths. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 2], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 27.

¹⁷⁶ U.S. Congress, "The Old Steerage," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 9.

¹⁷⁷ Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative*, 18.

should also keep their persons, clothing, and berths clean by washing themselves and airing their beds regularly.¹⁷⁸ Of course, doing so was very difficult; therefore, even those who knew ways of preventing seasickness were unable to do so, making seasickness a nearly unavoidable component of traveling in steerage. Guide books also tried to assure passengers that seasickness was not a serious condition; one reported that seasickness could actually assist passengers to adjust to the new foods of North America.¹⁷⁹ Such an idea suggests that immigrants had to experience seasickness, and by extension, steerage, in order to prepare for their arrival in the U.S. As immigrants had to undergo cultural bereavement so that they could learn norms of their new state, their stomachs had to likewise be emptied in order to adjust to the foods of their new state.

However, for passengers ignorant of the cause of their violent symptoms, seasickness was a terrifying experience. Some were comforted by passengers who had made the journey in the past, which was more typical on ships traveling from countries where men returned to their native countries to bring the rest of their families to the U.S. However, in storms and other rough conditions, even experienced travelers were frightened by the severe symptoms.¹⁸⁰ Many thought that they were dying.¹⁸¹ Antonio Almeida, who emigrated from Portugal in 1919, explained:

When the ship start go up and down, ev'rybody lay in bunk too sick to get out, just stick chin over side and puke. Best on top bunk; somebody on below get sick, stick out head, fellas on top puke on him too. First day out, ev'rybody happy out on deck in the sun. Somebody play the accordion, somebody play the guitar, ev'rybody sing, dance, laugh, pitch the horseshoe; but second day, ungh! then she start...¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 51; *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 39.

¹⁷⁹ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 39.

¹⁸⁰ Burlend, *A True Picture*, 18; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 36.

¹⁸¹ Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 62; Stave 28.

¹⁸² Stave 34.

During storms, when the ship rocked most violently and thus caused the worst seasickness, immigrants were forced below deck—the roughest section of the ship—with the hatchway closed, causing intense heat, foul smells, alarming sounds, and overall horrific conditions. One steerage passenger explained:

The passengers being seasick, were vomiting in all parts of the vessel; the heat became intense in consequence of the hatchways being closed down, and the passengers, 300 in number, being thus kept below, we were unable to breathe the pure air or see the light of heaven but a few hours at a time. The scent arising from the matter vomited up, and from other causes, became intolerable.¹⁸³

Many passengers also related seasickness to feelings of homesickness. In a fictional story about a family emigrating from Germany written by Dietrich, himself an immigrant, the main character Fred feels intense homesickness, wishing he was back home as he sits among the sounds and smells of people getting sick in steerage.¹⁸⁴ Seasickness was physically debilitating and emotionally straining and affected everyone in steerage. It was another manner in which immigrants were torn down and reduced to extreme vulnerability, an effect that shipping companies made no effort to prevent.

The maltreatment of the steerage passengers is more startling when compared with the conditions in third class. Third class—also called new steerage—emerged around the turn of the century because of reforms enacted by the U.S. and European governments as well as competition between different shipping companies.¹⁸⁵ Third class did not replace steerage, but

¹⁸³ Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative*, 7.

¹⁸⁴ Dietrich, *The German Emigrants*, 7.

¹⁸⁵ Stave 25. However, by 1908, the majority of vessels still had old steerage, and most of the ships with new steerage were traveling from northern Europe. The Immigration Commission reported that this was due to a lack of competition in southern Europe, which in turn gave shipping companies no reason to improve conditions on southern lines. It is also possible that immigrants from northern Europe were better off financially than those from Southern and Eastern Europe, and thus they were able to pay slightly more expensive fares, or perhaps it was because shipping lines were older and more established in northern Europe. Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 264; U.S. Congress, "The New Steerage," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 10.

was added as an option between second class and old-style steerage. It was not much more expensive than steerage (one investigator reported that the difference was \$7.50), but the difference in accommodations was great. Passengers slept in private cabins cleaned by stewards, enjoyed better food, had a private and better located open deck, dining rooms and improved hospitals, and had more entertainment and activities.¹⁸⁶ Third class was “an idealized steerage,” serving the same demographic but providing them with all of their basic needs and treating them with respect.¹⁸⁷ According to one investigator:

...the third class does no more than to provide decently for the simplest human physical needs. The white napkins are the only nonessentials that might be omitted. Every other provision is essential to decency, propriety, health, and the preservation of self-respect. To travel in anything worse than what is offered in the third class is to arrive at the journey's end with a mind unfit for the hardships that are involved in the beginning of life in a new land.¹⁸⁸

Old style steerage took advantage of immigrants' vulnerability by depriving them of their needs and dignity, but the third class finally addressed these problems.

To many, the existence of third class demonstrated that it was possible for ships to provide better conditions for the lower classes. A member of the Immigration Commission commented:

The common plea that better accommodations cannot be maintained because they would be beyond the appreciation of the emigrant and because they would leave too small a margin of profit carry no weight in view of the fact that the desired kind of steerage already exists on some of the lines and is not conducted as either a philanthropy or a charity.¹⁸⁹

Another member of the Commission traveled on a ship that was undergoing the transition to new steerage, and thus had both old and new steerage accommodations onboard. This

¹⁸⁶ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 32, 33, 36; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 190; Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 38

¹⁸⁷ A description that suggests that steerage provided less than basic human needs.

¹⁸⁸ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 37.

¹⁸⁹ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 10.

investigator pronounced it illogical for a line to maintain old steerage when new steerage was clearly superior.¹⁹⁰ Reformers felt that the success that many shipping companies had experienced with new steerage demonstrated the feasibility of providing better conditions for all lower-class passengers. The fact that steerage continued after the introduction of third class indicates that shipping companies recognized that old steerage conditions were deficient but continued to exploit the poor for their own profit.

Exploitation was an intrinsic part of steerage: through officers' and crew members' control over berths, food and water, and other essentials, they had control over the immigrants' survival and could thus mistreat them or abuse them. Immigrants were vulnerable for a number of reasons. Because of language barriers, immigrants were often unable to report abuses to the captain or immigration officials.¹⁹¹ Others feared that, if antagonized, the crew would use their influence to deny entry to defiant passengers.¹⁹² Officers and crew members could also threaten to withhold passengers' provisions if the passengers did not comply with their orders.¹⁹³ Thus, crew members were able, for the most part, to do what they wanted with passengers without punishment. Brandenburg described how, in boarding the ship, "here began the blows, the jerking about and the hustling, which never ceased throughout the whole process till the poor, ignorant people, driven and herded like cattle, were in the shelter of Ellis Island."¹⁹⁴ Stewards, chefs, and sailors, unable to communicate with the immigrants, yelled, pushed, and hit

¹⁹⁰ U.S. Congress, "The Old Steerage," *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 6, 12; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 2], 26; *Ibid.*, "A Seaman's Statement," 42.

¹⁹¹ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 22.

¹⁹² Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 142, 161, 188.

¹⁹³ Orders that could threaten passengers' dignity and self-respect. Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative*, 15; Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, June 5.

¹⁹⁴ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 135.

passengers who got in their way.¹⁹⁵ It appears that they physically and verbally assaulted passengers not in order to punish misconduct, but rather to intimidate passengers and to assert their own power. Brandenburg described how he received “a heavy raking blow on the bridge of [his] nose and up on [his] forehead”:

It partly stunned and dazed me, and I was merely conscious of stumbling on and of having the spectacles...hanging by the hook over one ear...the German doctor had struck me, and, turning to look at him, saw he was looking after me with a sneer on his face...having uncovered my head, as is the rule in passing the doctor, I had replaced my hat a second too soon...and the German doctor had reached over her head and struck me with the back of his wrist, inflicting a heavy blow under the pretense of brushing my hat from my head.¹⁹⁶

Brandenburg’s mistake did not merit such a strike, but it gave the doctor pleasure to be able to hit Brandenburg without retribution. On some ships, the captain or stewards were helpful and did not bother the passengers, but this appears to have been the exception.¹⁹⁷ In general, officers and crew members used their power over the steerage passengers to abuse them.

Women experienced the worst abuse from crew members. Although women were placed in separate quarters for their protection, this actually allowed crew members to molest them without repercussions from male passengers.¹⁹⁸ The lack of privacy within the women’s quarters and in washrooms made women more defenseless to voyeurism from the crew. Male crew members passing through the women’s sleeping quarters or wash rooms would watch them undress, sometimes physically molesting them. One investigator claimed that the chief steerage

¹⁹⁵ Crew members were not required to know any specific languages, so they often did not speak the same language as the passengers they were serving. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 188, 193, 208.

¹⁹⁶ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 204.

¹⁹⁷ The officers and crew were described favorably by Burlend and one Immigration Commission investigator. This may be related to the fact that Burlend was British (a generally more respected ethnicity) and the Immigration Commission performed its investigations in 1908, when the introduction of new steerage improved the passage experience. Brandenburg actually suggested that the crew members took cues from their superiors in abusing the passengers. Burlend, *A True Picture*, 20; U.S. Congress, [Investigation 2], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 25; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 33; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 189.

¹⁹⁸ Men, single women, and women with their children were in separate quarters. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 135.

steward tried to take advantage of a Polish girl alone in the compartment (the investigator was sick in bed and saw it). Other passengers entered and stopped it, but it concerned the writer because this man was supposed to be their “highest protector.”¹⁹⁹ On another ship, the steward in charge was strict in expelling men who entered women’s quarters without permission, but he and the chief officer of the steerage also molested the women.²⁰⁰ Although it was not explicitly stated, several writers suggest that crew members sexually assaulted and raped women in steerage. Brandenburg reported that three stewards got drunk with Spanish female passengers and had a “small orgy,” despite the protests of the other passengers.²⁰¹ Crew members “took all manner of liberties with the women,” and many women, ignorant that they were entitled to protection and frustrated with the continuous molestations, gave up resisting the advances of the male crew members after several days.²⁰² Female passengers simply had to endure severe abuse without the opportunity of remonstrance. While it is logical, given the liminality model, that officers and crew members would disparage and mistreat steerage passengers, this type of abuse indicates a much more serious and evil form of exploitation. It points to psychological and emotional abuse that threatened more than passengers’ cultural identity, but also women’s self-respect, a wound that would last beyond the end of liminality.

Social Experience

“He will feel that he is parting from his associates and friends, and from those endearing ties and circumstances of his childhood, the comforts and enjoyments of which he was

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 21.

²⁰⁰ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 38.

²⁰¹ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 198.

²⁰² U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 22. Brandenburg’s wife hit a cook after he pushed several women, inciting shock from fellow passengers. One woman asked “what manner of woman she was to imperil her chances for admission to the United States by striking one in authority.” This demonstrates how passengers were fearful to challenge abuse. Brandenburg explained “I soon realized that what makes the emigrant so meek in the face of outrageous brutalities, so open to the wiles of sharpers, so thoroughly disconcerted and bewildered in the face of an examination, is his terrible dread of not being allowed to enter America, he would as soon think of cutting off a hand as doing anything that ‘would get him into trouble.’” 188, 142.

not before aware of...these observations are not designed to intimidate or to create unpleasant feelings, but merely to forewarn the emigrant of what will occur before he leaves his country, that he may not regret his departure, as thousands have done when it has been too late.”²⁰³

Steerage passengers were exploited and mistreated because of the disparaging attitude afforded to them by the officers, crew, and other classes. This attitude is present in an animal motif appearing in many of the primary sources, which described how the crew treated the steerage passengers as beasts.²⁰⁴ Anthony Tapogna, who emigrated from Italy in 1920, explained that they traveled “in the poorest type of accommodations; just like cattle in the hold of the ship, with no privacy, no nothing. Everyone just huddled together. Animals, I think, travel better today than we did in those days coming across.”²⁰⁵ Passengers in the other classes also described the steerage passengers as animals. Brandenburg overheard a conversation amongst first-class passengers in which they described steerage passengers as “dirty little imps,” calling it “terrible to think of admitting such people wholesale into the United States.”²⁰⁶ Steiner opened one of his books with an anecdote of a woman traveling in first class viewing the steerage passengers from her first class deck. She pitied the passengers, but “above all you pitied...you said you pitied your own country for having to receive such a conglomerate of human beings, so near to the level of beasts.” It was not until Steiner introduced her to some of them that “they began to look to you like men, women and children, and not like beasts.”²⁰⁷ Steiner also describes how cabin passengers would sometimes throw food or pennies at the steerage passengers for amusement. An investigator with the Immigration Commission suggested that the failure to provide for their

²⁰³ Nettle, *A Practical Guide*, 10.

²⁰⁴ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 35, 37, U.S. Congress, [Investigation 1], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 18; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 135.

²⁰⁵ Stave 25.

²⁰⁶ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 192.

²⁰⁷ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 10.

basic human needs caused steerage passengers to develop animalistic propensities.²⁰⁸ Although he also described immigrants as acting brutishly, his attitude differs from that of the crew or the upper-class passengers. He asserted that the *conditions* caused this temporary state of being, not that immigrants were naturally susceptible to this type of behavior.²⁰⁹ The latter attitude—that immigrants were of an uncivilized nature—was based on the belief that immigrants lived in this state in their native lands as well as onboard.

Steiner and other contemporaries argued that steerage conditions were relatively tolerable because peasants were not accustomed to much better conditions in their native lands.²¹⁰ Moreover, Steiner claimed that steerage passengers were largely unaffected by the condescension of the upper classes, since it only reinforced the same social system that they experienced in their homelands.²¹¹ If this is the case, did passengers really feel dehumanized, or was the experience in steerage only an extension of their standard of living in their native countries?²¹² While inspectors and guide books may have described conditions unfavorably, how did the immigrants themselves experience the journey? When considering how immigrants reacted to the passage themselves, it is apparent that they regarded the passage as distinct from their lives in their native homes, and likewise found the steerage conditions deplorable.

Admittedly, there are a number of similarities between immigrants' lives as peasants in Europe and their experiences in steerage: they were disparaged by the upper classes in both and may have lived in crowded dwellings, were forced to defer to the rules of their superiors (the government, landlords, or religious institutions in Europe, and the captain, crew, and

²⁰⁸ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 37.

²⁰⁹ And by extension, that anyone would be reduced to this state in such conditions.

²¹⁰ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 37.

²¹¹ Taylor, *The Distant Magnet*, 154; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 40.

²¹² This question is related to a debate among historians regarding whether or not peasants felt dehumanized by their lifestyle and lack of material goods. This question is not within the scope of this paper, but it is not essential to understanding how immigrants experienced the voyage.

immigration officials onboard), and lacked nonessential, luxury items. But in steerage, immigrants were removed from everything that they were familiar with—friends and family, institutions, the land, and social norms—and were in the midst of the journey to begin a new life. According to investigators and guide books, immigrants felt intense homesickness and regret as a result of the hardships onboard.²¹³ Such emotions indicate that immigrants experienced greater suffering in steerage than they did in their homelands. There are other factors that probably exacerbated immigrants' forlorn attitude onboard, including sadness upon leaving their homes and anxiety about starting over in the U.S., but the fact remains that immigrants *perceived* the steerage conditions as worse than the conditions in their native lands. Others felt extreme loneliness and demoralization, the weight of which incapacitated them.²¹⁴

According to an investigator:

Before the Emigrant has been a week at sea he is an altered man. How can it be otherwise? Hundreds of poor people...huddled together without light, without air, wallowing in filth and breathing a fœtid atmosphere; sick in body, dispirited in heart.²¹⁵

Despite the melancholy onboard, many passengers were still hopeful of a better life waiting for them at the end of their journey. Steiner described it in religious terms, as if reaching the U.S. was salvation from immigrants' lives in Europe and in steerage.²¹⁶ This pattern, with the U.S. as the promising new state following a period of suffering in steerage, offers further evidence that immigration was a rite of passage.

As has been described, during liminality, neophytes are withdrawn from the norms of their former society and learn about those of the society which they are entering. Several

²¹³ Dietrich, *The German Emigrants*, 9; *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 39, 43; Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 36; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 38; Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 31; Nettle, *A Practical Guide*, 10; Burlend, *A True Picture*, 22, 24, 25; O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 252.

²¹⁴ De Vere, "Stephen de Vere's Report," 1343; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 41.

²¹⁵ De Vere, "Stephen de Vere's Report," 1341.

²¹⁶ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 46, 58.

members of the Immigration Commission as well as Steiner expressed just this concern: they believed that steerage did indeed inform immigrants about their new state, and as such worried that the bad conditions onboard would give immigrants a bad impression of the U.S. Steiner explained that the immigrants should understand that “the standard of living in America is higher than it is abroad” as soon as they boarded the ship.²¹⁷ One member of the Immigration Commission reported that “such surroundings could not produce the frame of mind with which it is desirable that newcomers approach our land and receive their first impressions of it.”²¹⁸ Another member of the Commission was concerned with the ways in which passage altered the well being of immigrants. He suggested:

The experience of a single crossing is enough to change bad standards of living to worse. It is abundant opportunity to weaken the body and implant there germs of disease to develop later. It is more than a physical and moral test; it is a strain. And surely it is not the introduction to American institutions that will tend to make them respected.²¹⁹

In addition to affecting passengers’ wellness and morals, this inspector was concerned with how steerage would affect immigrants’ perceptions of the U.S., a concern shared by other investigators as well.²²⁰ Why was this so important? Could not immigrants change their perceptions upon arriving in the U.S.? According to the rite paradigm, they could not. Neophytes are passive and malleable, and the liminal period onboard taught them the norms of the U.S.; thus what they saw onboard is what they were taught they would find in the U.S. Additionally, perhaps these reformers were worried that the ways in which steerage “change[d]

²¹⁷ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 37.

²¹⁸ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 35.

²¹⁹ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 10.

²²⁰ U.S. Congress, “The Old Steerage,” *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 6; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 35. One investigator explained how the lack of privacy in steerage made it impossible for immigrants to wash, because a “self-respecting person” would require privacy to do so. Although European immigrants had different standards of privacy, and thus the lack of privacy and the concept of self-respect probably did not deter immigrants from washing, this concern demonstrates how investigators thought it was impossible to live respectfully and morally in steerage.

bad standards to worse” would inform immigrants’ behavior in the U.S. If the passage was part of immigrants’ experience of the U.S., their living habits onboard, generated by the poor conditions of steerage, would continue upon arriving in the U.S., thus introducing a class of peoples living below the standard of living of the U.S. Passage, therefore, was not about the lives that immigrants left behind, but instead instructed their new lives in the U.S.

The voyage also introduced immigrants to the multiethnic community that they would encounter in the U.S. Ships traveling from Germany, Italy, and even the British Isles, carried passengers of a number of ethnicities.²²¹ There was some socio-economic diversity, but steerage lacked a social hierarchy as it existed in Europe.²²² In addition, all immigrants, despite their backgrounds, faced mistreatment from the officers and crew members. This type of equality is characteristic of a rite of passage. The subjects in a liminal state are made completely equal: there is no rank, and comradeship transcends distinctions of age, kinship, and position. The only individuals afforded status are the instructors, who are given “complete authority and complete submission” over the neophytes, who, being structurally dead, are regarded as inferior and polluting. In the transatlantic voyage, the instructors were the officers and crew members, who certainly held authority over the passengers.²²³ Passengers’ equality and common subservience to the officers and crew members gave them shared experiences that, in turn, engendered a sense of community.

²²¹ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 10 (traveling from Liverpool); Stave 32 (traveling from Scotland).

²²² Socio-economic diversity was slight; all passengers were poor, but some were poorer than others. This is apparent in the fact that a guide book advised passengers to be generous with the especially poor passengers in steerage and that some passengers were able to afford supplementary food or had the money to bribe officials. However, the latter is not necessarily an accurate depiction of socio-economic status, as one must also factor in that some passengers were more or less comfortable spending their money. *Wiley & Putnam’s Emigrant’s Guide*, 59; U.S. Congress, [Investigation 3], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 33.

²²³ Brandenburg’s assertion he and his wife received better treatment when the crew discovered that they were American re-affirms the existence of this social system. As Americans, Brandenburg and his wife were not neophytes undergoing a rite of passage, and thus were not disparaged as neophytes are Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 210.

Passengers' common experiences led to empathy which in turn caused mutual cooperation. For instance, nearly all passengers, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, suffered from seasickness. Because they understood what their fellow passengers were going through, some offered assistance to strangers: one passenger, struck with seasickness, was given an orange by a foreign stranger (oranges were thought to help with seasickness).²²⁴ On earlier ships in which they cooked for themselves, passengers often formed small groups to share the responsibilities of cooking and cleaning.²²⁵ Even when this was not the case, passengers reportedly helped each other cook.²²⁶ One immigrant auctioned off a dead man's clothing to raise money for the deceased man's young children.²²⁷ The terrors of seasickness and the subsequent homesickness caused Mary Strokonos, traveling from Lithuania in 1915, to seek the company of her future husband.²²⁸ Immigrants' shared miseries allowed them to relate to one another, even when from different backgrounds.

The sense of community was also fostered by some of the activities that passengers participated in onboard. When there was sufficient room on the open deck, which was more likely in third-class or new steerage, it was common for passengers to play music, sing, dance, or play games.²²⁹ On some ships, the dining rooms were made available between meals to be used as mess-rooms, where passengers could play games, write letters and, when available, play the

²²⁴ Cohen, *Out of the Shadow*, 62; Smith, *An Emigrant's Narrative*, 15. The sense of a community onboard was stifled by many of the changes induced by third class and new steerage. Third class and new steerage usually consisted of staterooms or cabins, which were assigned to put families and friends together, and then by nationality. While old style steerage give passengers exposure to other ethnicities, staterooms, as Steiner explained, destroyed the fellowship developed within steerage. U.S. Congress, [Investigation 2], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 24; *Ibid.*, [Investigation 3], 32; Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 011; Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 39.

²²⁵ *Wiley & Putnam's Emigrant's Guide*, 52; O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 50.

²²⁶ Burlend, *A True Picture*, 25.

²²⁷ Whyte, *Robert Whyte's 1847 Famine Ship Diary*, July 9.

²²⁸ Stave 28.

²²⁹ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 135, 185; Stave 43; Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 19. One man recalled that "we danced so much on the boat that I wore out a pair of shoes." Stave 36.

piano.²³⁰ Rebecca Burlend reported that a community with “neighborhoods” (meaning sub-communities) was formed, based not on one’s origin, but rather on one’s interests.²³¹ Graham also explained that the Am Olam movement (a Jewish agricultural movement) promoted unity within the Jewish community onboard, but during recreation time, Jewish passengers would play music as the non-Jews danced.²³² This suggests that immigrants did not segregate themselves based on ethnicity, and therefore, that ethnic identity lost some importance in steerage, or immigrants at least began interacting with new and formerly unknown ethnicities. However, the presence of such festivities should not detract from the very poor conditions experienced by the passengers. Sometimes the captain sent the ship’s band to play for the steerage passengers not solely to entertain them, but because the passengers were demoralized and sickly; Brandenburg suspected that the captain was only concerned that they “were beginning to look very badly” and it is more profitable for shipping companies to arrive to the U.S. with healthy-looking passengers.²³³

Remarkably, this community emerged despite cultural and language barriers between passengers. A man traveling from Scotland, who claimed that there was “a mixture of every nationality in the world” on his ship, explained that “for the most part they were kindly people trying hard to help each other out and to make the best of a trying trip, even though they could not understand a word the other said.”²³⁴ Steiner shared this sentiment, explaining that although the various languages sounded like “strange sounds” to different ethnic groups, they were still

²³⁰ U.S. Congress, [Investigation 2], *Reports of the Immigration Commission*, 28.

²³¹ Burlend, *A True Picture*, 25.

²³² Am Olam was a movement that sought to re-connect Russian Jews to the earth by forming agricultural communities in the U.S. Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, 69.

²³³ This also suggests that the captain was concerned with his own well being, not that of the steerage passengers. Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 198.

²³⁴ The date of his immigration is unclear, but it was most likely near the turn of the century. Stave 32.

able to “laugh at another’s antics,” and in doing so, entered into a fellowship.²³⁵ According to Graham, a Russian immigrant, sitting down for the wretched meals was nonetheless “a wonderful religious ceremony, a very real first communion service...All these people will come nearer and nearer to one another, and drift farther and farther from the old nations to which they belonged.”²³⁶ According to this line of thinking, a new identity, an American identity, developed as immigrants traveled further away from their native countries and became familiar with fellow future Americans from other nations. Graham also described how all immigrants sat down together to eat, as equals, to form a community, “a Little America.”²³⁷ He discussed at length the differences between various ethnic groups—their reasons for immigrating, their dress, and their behavior—but how despite their different backgrounds, immigrants’ shared experiences and similar goals fostered a community. However, Graham also provides some surprising evidence; he described how the “more respectable passengers” occupied the mess room, where they played the piano and sang songs. The “hooligans” and “wild couples” passed time on the deck, making love in dark corners, dancing, and playing cards.²³⁸ These divisions were not ethnically based, and despite their different behaviors, Graham recognized them as equals.

There were, however, some tensions between ethnic groups. Brandenburg reported that a Northern Italian woman complained of how the Southern Italian women conducted themselves and allowed their children to behave.²³⁹ It is not surprising that, given their traditional animosity towards each other, Northern and Southern Italians would have some conflict onboard. But all things considered, there was a significant amount of positive interactions

²³⁵ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 43.

²³⁶ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 17.

²³⁷ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 14.

²³⁸ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 19.

²³⁹ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 32.

between different ethnicities. Most immigrants had little interaction with other ethnicities previously, and although passengers may have spent more time with their own ethnic groups onboard, situations such as cooking, cleaning, and even just living together in such cramped quarters, gave immigrants exposure to people they would have never met before. Although many, upon arriving in the U.S., settled in neighborhoods and interacted primarily with others of their own ethnicity, their interaction with other ethnic groups onboard represented their first exposure to the multiethnic community that they would encounter in the U.S. Such exposure could reduce the shock of the diversity found upon arrival in the cities (the scene upon arriving at Ellis Island is described similarly to steerage, regarding the multiplicity of languages and different looking people). Additionally, as Lizabeth Cohen discussed in *Making a New Deal*, the ethnic identities of laborers in Chicago slowly diminished in importance as they united during the labor movement. While the interactions in steerage did not lead to immediate unity between different ethnic groups, their exposure to one another laid the foundation for those who interacted with other ethnicities at work, at school, and in other organizations.

There was one group within the community that stood out: several claimed that people who had been to the U.S. before were recognizable, and that these individuals usually had a group of people gathered around them asking them questions about the U.S. or advice for the voyage.²⁴⁰ How were these individuals distinguishable: in dress, general appearance, attitude, or some other factor? Does this then suggest that some sort of transformation took place upon reaching the U.S., one that made them somehow different than the people of their native lands? Brandenburg explained how Antonio Squadrito, an Italian man with whom Brandenburg was traveling, was eager to prove his success back in Italy, and worried that the people in his village would not believe him. He was pleased to invite Brandenburg and his wife to his home so that

²⁴⁰ Graham, *With Poor Immigrant*, 20; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 48; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 172.

they could verify his stories and “show the people there that all the wonderful stories they had been hearing about him were true.” Brandenburg suggested that descriptions of the U.S. would be “beyond the comprehension, even belief” of “the simple-minded ‘folks at home.’”²⁴¹ The idea that Squadrito experienced things inconceivable to the people of his native village reinforces the idea that immigrants were changed by immigration.²⁴² Their knowledge distinguished them from the other immigrants and also gave them more tools to reduce their suffering in steerage—hence why so many others flocked to them for advice. These individuals thus served the same purposes as guidebooks.

Immigrants’ knowledge as well as their expectations of the voyage and the U.S. affected their experience of the journey. Despite the melancholy onboard, many passengers remained hopeful of a better life waiting for them at the end of their journey—the end of their rite of passage. This is, of course, one of the greatest differences between slave ships and immigrant ships. Most immigrants left Europe by choice and had reason to hope that things would improve upon their arrival, whereas slaves were coerced into leaving and were generally deeply concerned about what would happen to them. Immigrants, like other neophytes, were diminished during the voyage, but were offered acceptance into the new state in return for their endurance. Steiner described how immigrants overcame the lack of room, lack of air, and lack of food and maintained their faith that God would grant them favor.²⁴³ Additionally, he explained that “down in the steerage there is a faith in the future, and in the despair which often overwhelms them, I needed but to whisper: ‘Be patient, this seems like Hell, but it will soon seem to you like Heaven.’”²⁴⁴ These descriptions suggest that immigrants’ sense of hope was a

²⁴¹ Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 44.

²⁴² Because they had experienced things unimaginable to people in their native lands.

²⁴³ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 58.

²⁴⁴ Steiner, *On the Trail*, 46.

necessary coping strategy: because of the anguish they experienced onboard, they looked to the U.S. as a place of salvation, the fruit of the trials they underwent onboard. Two Russian Jews traveling together described their transatlantic voyage in very different ways. One described the “dreadful, salty, suffocating smell of the cellar called ‘steerage,’” filled with “shallow wooden boxes that they called beds.” The other found that his hope overpowered the vices onboard:

In our imagination, we already saw ourselves as landowning farmers dwelling on our plots in the western part of the country...we began to debate which kind of community institutions we would build, which books we would introduce into our library, whether or not we would build a synagogue and so forth...We danced and sang overcome with joyous expectations of what America held in store for us. In spite of our seasickness, storms, and tempests which visited us on our journey, we were happy and lighthearted.²⁴⁵

These simultaneous descriptions demonstrate that immigrants had extraordinarily high expectations that allowed many of them to tolerate the journey. While both recognized the unpleasantness of the journey, the latter also recognized that their final destination encouraged their persistence in the face of hardship.

Conclusion: The Arrival

The day of arrival was one of great excitement and nervousness for immigrants. Many felt great joy in reaching their destination where they believed they would find a better life; others were fearful at the prospect of the unknown and anxious about going through inspections.²⁴⁶ Either way, the arrival marked the end of immigrants’ passage—the end of liminality—and the beginning of their new lives in the U.S. In theory, the extreme suffering faced by immigrants was not necessary to become American. However, considering that steerage was the only way that most could afford to travel, in reality, the voyage in steerage was a fundamental part of immigration. In spite of the terrible conditions that they faced, immigrants

²⁴⁵ Sanders, *Shores of Refuge*, 66.

²⁴⁶ Graham, *With Poor Immigrants*, 41; Brandenburg, *Imported Americans*, 200, 206; Steiner, *On the Trail*, 48, 60; Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, 43.

remained confident that their trials would be rewarded with a better life in the U.S. Many, however, found that they continued to be disparaged as they had been onboard. While forces onboard attempted to gradually strip them of their native cultures, immigrants would face opposing pressures to maintain their native identities or assimilate upon arrival. The transatlantic voyage thus acted as a liminal state, a transitory period that bridged immigrants' lives between the Old and New Worlds.

Although most maintained strong ties to their native identities after arriving in the U.S., there were certainly changes incurred as a result of their immigration. But even this opposition embodies the rite of passage paradigm. Van Gennep explained that a person in a liminal state “finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds.”²⁴⁷ Additionally, Van Gennep recognized that a traveler’s departure would not completely separate him from the society to which he originally belonged.²⁴⁸ Thus, even though immigrants underwent a rite of passage in immigrating to the U.S., their identities were often still connected to their homelands.

While past historians have identified changes in legislation, technology, and mortality rates for transatlantic immigration in steerage, few have discussed the specific conditions in steerage and how they affected passengers. Although the voyage was only six to eight weeks on a sailing ship or approximately two weeks on a steamship, this was a life altering period in an individual’s life, as he or she left his or her homeland and was additionally forced to endure trying conditions in steerage. In addition, most have failed to recognize the degree to which the miserable conditions persisted after the introduction of the steamship. Despite the shorter duration of the journey, new regulations, and lower mortality rates, factors such as the food,

²⁴⁷ Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 18.

²⁴⁸ Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 36.

washing facilities, illness, and mistreatment at the hands of the officers and crew members continued to plague steerage passengers. This paper sought to fill these voids by describing how deprivation and exploitation worked to diminish immigrants throughout the period, even during the shorter voyage on a steamship, and, additionally, how this process mirrored a rite of passage. The limits of this project precluded extensive research on the degree to which this rite of passage altered immigrants' identities after they arrived, but there are certainly indications of change. Immigrants' native identities were challenged by pressures to cede culturally significant objects and clothing. Immigrants who returned to Europe were also recognized as different, suggesting that a change was incurred through the process of immigrating. The voyage also gave passengers exposure to the multiethnic community that they would encounter in the U.S.

Notably, immigrant authors and guide books, in describing the passage, also sought to inform immigrants about life in the U.S., including American norms and customs as well as how to succeed financially in various regions. In his guide book, O'Hanlon explained that as an "adopted citizen, [an immigrant] must endeavor to assimilate himself, in a great measure, to those traits of national habits, manners, and character" and offered extensive advice regarding how Irish immigrants could adapt.²⁴⁹ Rebecca Burlend described American manners, conduct, and what a typical American house looked like to warn her readers of what to expect.²⁵⁰ O'Hanlon, Wiley and Putnam, Nettle, and most other guide book authors of the mid-nineteenth century, recommended that immigrants have a plan of action (where they would settle, what type of occupation they would pursue, etc.) before departing from Europe. To assist with this, most guide books provided information about specific regions in the United States, including what crops one could grow, the quality of the soil, the climate, and other information pertinent to

²⁴⁹ O'Hanlon, *The Irish Emigrant's Guide*, 224.

²⁵⁰ Rebecca Burlend, *A True Picture of Emigration*, 47.

settling in a new region.²⁵¹ Thus, immigrants were already learning about the U.S.—how to act, how to fit in, and how to succeed—before even leaving Europe. Historians studying assimilation in the U.S. should recognize how the journey (and preparation for the journey, including the reading of guide books) affected immigrants' assimilation upon arrival. Sources that describe this period in the immigration experience hold meaningful information that historians have often failed to notice.

In describing the accommodations provided to steerage passengers, Terry Coleman explained that liners were only concerned with making a profit by attracting passengers and avoiding massive illness or starvation. As a result, in the period of 1841-1900, which saw a great increase in the volume of immigrants from Ireland and Southern and Eastern Europe, conditions in the steerage class were abominable. The accommodations provided to steerage passengers and the manner in which they were treated were horrible, even given the conditions from which these groups came. Through the assistance that passengers provided to one another and their relentless hope in the future, steerage passengers made the journey more tolerable. However, the two to six week journey was a period of distress and fear; yet tens of millions underwent this process in order to become part of the U.S.

²⁵¹ A bibliographic search yields a number of guide books that offer advice about settling in specific territories.

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