

Space and exchanges

Introduction :

This year in class, we talked about space and exchanges and especially illustrated these ideas with the example of New Americans, that designates the immigrants coming to the USA.

Link :

Talking about immigration in the USA is particularly relevant regarding the topic of space and exchanges since immigration definitely involves the idea of space as immigrants are moving across countries: they leave their home land to get a new start in America. Thus, it also involves exchange: immigrants come with their own share of cultural background that gets melt into a whole new lifestyle in their arrival country: the interaction between these two different ways of living defines multi-cultural exchange.

Plan :

So let's take a closer look at immigration in the USA:

1. America was built upon immigration

America started out as a nation of European immigrants, starting in 1492 with Christopher Columbus. Due to America's natural resources, the slave trade brought later another kind of immigrants: slaves from Africa, who influenced the American culture to some extent. At the time of the Gold rush, many Europeans tried and took their chances to have a better living by immigrating to the USA.

Across the centuries, immigrants from all around the world came to America, seeking a better life, and each one of them bringing their own contribution to what defines America nowadays. So both space and exchanges were deeply involved in the constitution of America as we know it today.

2. Still an attractive country for immigration

As of today, it appears that the USA remains a very attractive country: many people all around the world are willing to take their chances there as they believe in the American Dream: that America holds the opportunities to arise socially and provide a better life by working hard. This is why there are, for instance, so many Mexicans trying to cross the US border in order to get a job and work around their way through living in order to give themselves or their children the opportunity of making proper studies and thus reach a better and more comfortable life. All around the world, America is seen as a country of opportunities for newcomers: the entrepreneur spirit, still alive in many ways, for instance in the Silicon Valley near San Francisco (for technology), gives anyone the chance to start out a new business from scratch and bring out new ideas to the market. Since America is a capitalist country, competition is the market rule, so anyone has a chance of finding their way if their product is far superior than competitors. Generally speaking, the main goal of the immigrants is the pursuit of happiness, by seeking a better life. This involves space and exchanges since immigrants come with their expertise and some specific ways of working, that mix with the American way of working.

3. A multi-cultural country

The USA is commonly referred to as the “melting pot”, which is a metaphor highlighting what a multi-cultural country America is. As a matter of fact, American culture is defined as a whole composed of many aspects that come from different communities, thus creating a cultural exchange between these different cultures and resulting in a “melting pot”. Jazz is for instance an example of such a cultural exchange that took place in the US, with the black community bringing African rhythms, mixed with European-specific music. Jazz has thus become part of the American culture.

Aside culture, other elements also reveal the multi-cultural aspect of the country, such as language. Not only English is widely spoken: Spanish is commonly used in many parts of America, due to the many Spanish and Mexican immigrants who settled there.

From a geographical point of view, we can remark that there are often different neighborhoods with a specific ethnic origin, such as the many Chinatowns all over America. Such neighborhoods highlight the diversity of the cultures that compose the American “melting pot”. So the multi-cultural aspect of America definitely deals with both space and exchanges as it takes place all over the country, and consists in a cultural exchange between people from various origins.

Conclusion :

Even though the USA was for long a country of immigrants, the country's policy towards immigration evolved over time and became more and more restrictive. In the XIXth and XXth centuries, immigrants were carefully checked at Ellis Island, with medical inspections. Restrictive laws made it harder and harder to match the required profile to enter the country legally: this is why clandestine immigration rose up, especially with the Mexican border. Nowadays, to gain access to citizenship, one must comply to a set of requirements, such as having knowledge of the constitution, being able to speak and understand English correctly. Citizenship comes with the “green card”, that is the official paper according permanent residence in the USA.

Personal conclusion :

I found this subject particularly interesting as I learned a lot about the history of immigration in the USA, especially with Ellis Island. Understanding the reasons why America is seen as such an attractive country was very enriching too.

Seeing how diverse the American culture is made me realize that the USA really is a multi-cultural country! Finally, what struck me the most was the testimonies of the many immigrants who explained what motivated their choice to move to the USA: that was really moving.