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Immigration

Japanese Immigration

The story of Japanese immigration to the US is a story of struggles, great accomplishments and success. Around the time of World War II, many people had to leave Japan because they couldn't pay the taxes that Japan needed to become a more modern country. Japanese people came to America for wealth. America had better farmland and more types of work for people to do. People in America were free to look for new opportunities for work. Although there were many struggles in America, the Japanese people who came here accomplished great things and many of their goals were fulfilled.

The primary reason why people left Japan was because Japan wanted to become more modern and needed to increase the taxes to get the money to do so. In 1854, Japan signed a treaty of trade, peace, and friendship with America. Before this treaty, Japan was separate from other countries, but this treaty made America allies with Japan. This treaty introduced Japan to new goods from America. Because of the treaty, Japan wanted to make their schools, businesses, and army more modern. To get the money, the Japanese people were charged high taxes and many people couldn't pay the taxes so they left.

Another reason people left Japan was because of industrialization. When Japan became more modern, people started to work in factories instead of the land. This affected people by leaving them without a job. Farmers did not have jobs anymore because everybody wanted to buy from factories. This was another reason why the Japanese people wanted to leave Japan.

Since the economy in Japan was poor and people heard about how good the economy was in America, many Japanese wanted to immigrate to the United States. They came to the US for jobs. In 1885, the first group of Japanese immigrants immigrated to Hawaii. They came to work on farms, like sugarcane and pineapple plantations. After some time, some people went back to Japan and others started their own businesses. Most of the immigrants who came were young men who wanted to make money and go back to their country. The Japanese government supported them.

In Hawaii, Japanese workers were not treated well by plantation owners. If they missed a day of work because they were sick, they would have to work two extra days to make it up. Also, workers were whipped for working too slowly or coming late. Workers were not allowed to take any breaks and their lives were controlled by the plantation owners. Life was really hard for the Japanese living on plantations in Hawaii. They were not only treated badly in their jobs, they were also treated badly in their everyday lives. Their housing was cramped and dirty. For some people, life was so hard they ran away from their jobs in Hawaii to the mainland. In the mainland Japanese immigration started more slowly than in Hawaii. From 1885-1924 about 180,000 Japanese immigrants immigrated to the mainland, mostly California. Before entering the mainland, they had to stop at Angel Island where they were kept in camps while they waited for the US government to decide if they would be allowed to stay.

Even though life was really hard for Japanese immigrants in Hawaii, they could hold onto their culture. They did not have to be afraid of being attacked for being Japanese. They kept their culture by building Buddhist temples on plantations, celebrating holidays, and getting a break once a year for the birthday of the emperor.

Once they were allowed in America, many of the Japanese immigrants found jobs as farm workers and some became railroad workers and miners. They were very successful farmers because they used successful methods from Japan. By 1920, they had more than 450,000 acres of land in California which was more than 10 percent of the money California made on crops. Eventually they started their own businesses. In the beginning they served the needs of their own community such as Japanese restaurants, boarding houses, and shops. Later they opened department stores and tailor chains for the general public.

One of the main challenges that the Japanese faced in California was discrimination and stereotyping. Many Americans did not like how the Japanese looked. They made fun of them and did not treat them fairly. Laws were passed so that they could not own land in California. In 1924, the US stopped all immigration from Japan.

During World War II, life became even more challenging for the Japanese in America. In 1941 Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii so the US entered into World War II. Just hours after the attack, the US rounded up and arrested Japanese American journalists, teachers, and civic officials because they thought they were a security risk. More than 2,000 Japanese people were put in prison. Most of the Japanese immigrants in the United States were forced to live in camps because the US was scared that some of the Japanese immigrants would help Japan during the war. Japanese immigrants were told to pack all their things in a week and were taken to camps with horrible conditions. The camps were like prisons surrounded by barbed wire and watchtowers. They had no running water or privacy. More than 125,000 immigrants, including children, went to these camps.

When World War II ended in 1945, all of the Japanese who were living in camps were

freed. Although, many of their homes, properties, and businesses were lost while they were in the camps. They were not allowed to become citizens until 1952 and it took them a long time to rebuild their lives. It was not until 1988, more than forty years later, that the US government decided to give \$20,000 to every Japanese American who had been trapped in the camps during WWII.

Nowadays there are about 769,000 Japanese Americans. Japanese Americans work very hard to help the U.S grow. They have added a lot of their culture to the American life, like sushi and teriyaki. They didn't only introduce food, they also introduced a sport of karate to the Americans.

The Japanese immigration story is a story about a lot of hardship. They came to America hoping for a better life and when they got here they faced a lot of challenges and fears. After they overcame those challenges and fears they started having a better life. After all of their hard work, they accomplished many things that helped improve their lives in America.