

## Causes of Migration in an Interconnected World

*I would advise all my friends to quit Ireland—the country most dear to me; as long as they remain in it they will be in bondage and misery.*

—An Irish settler who had lived in Wisconsin for a year, in a letter to *The Times* of London, May 14, 1850

**Essential Question:** How did environmental and economic factors contribute to patterns of migration between 1750 and 1900?

**A**n increasingly global economy characterized by economic imperialism and the availability of different modes of transportation promoted a new era in migrations. As industrialization grew, populations moved to urban centers. Some workers who left their homelands, such as the Lebanese merchants in the United States or the Italian laborers in Argentina, could travel back to their native country for visits or to retire. Others, like the Irish settler quoted above, chose a permanent resettlement as relief from economic and political difficulties. Other movements of people were coerced. To meet the demands for workers, coerced and semi-coerced migration of people resulted in slavery, indentured servitude, and convict labor.

### Migration through Labor Systems

The desire for low-wage labor was linked to the exploitation of natural resources in the system of economic imperialism. Even though slavery was gradually being abolished in imperial territories in the 19th century, the demand for the agricultural goods that enslaved workers had produced was still increasing. European states recruited new laborers to work on plantations, where they produced enormous wealth that fueled industrial growth at home:

- Indian laborers migrated to British colonies in the Caribbean, South Africa, East Africa, and Fiji.
- Chinese laborers migrated to California and British Malaya to build railroads and serve as farmhands, gardeners, and domestics.
- Japanese laborers migrated to Hawaii, Peru, and Cuba to work on sugar plantations.



Source: Hawaii State Archives

Chinese contract workers on a sugar plantation in 19th-century Hawaii.

**Slavery** Most countries in the Americas abolished the African slave trade in the early 19th century. Slavery itself continued, but without a fresh supply of enslaved people, the institution declined. Only in the United States did the number of enslaved people increase after the abolition of the slave trade. The last countries to abolish slavery in the Americas were the United States (1865), Cuba (1886), and Brazil (1888).

In spite of prohibitions, Africans continued enslaving one another well into the 20th century. As slavery was being abolished, labor was still desired, so imperial countries turned to other forms of coerced labor.

**Indentured Servitude** People who worked for a set number of years before becoming free were **indentured servants**. Many people became indentured as a way to pay for their transportation from a desperately poor community to one with more opportunity. Others were forced to do so to pay off a debt.

Some of these servants intended to work temporarily, earning money for their family, and then return home. But many stayed in their new country. As a result, indentured laborers brought their home cultures to their new lands and altered the demographics of these lands. For example, the cultures of Mauritius (in the Indian Ocean off Southeast Africa), Fiji (in the South Pacific), and Trinidad (in the Caribbean) added a strong Indian influence.

**Asian Contract Laborers** Many Chinese and Indian workers were an early substitute for the slave trade. They were forced or tricked into

servitude. Britain first tried this form of labor after ending the slave trade in 1806. They imported 200 Chinese to Trinidad. Between 1847 and 1874, the British, French, Dutch, and Spanish had imported between 250,000 and 500,000 Chinese workers to their colonies in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. About 125,000 Chinese were sent to Cuba alone, where 80 percent worked the sugar plantations.

The life of an Asian contract workers was riddled with difficulty and unjust treatment. While they were not property, they were unskilled laborers or porters who were exploited as substitutes for slave labor, often working for subsistence wages. The media of the time brought the treatment of them to the attention of the public by criticizing the system as a new form of slavery. In 1855, Britain stopped its trade. In 1862 Congress banned the contract Asia labor trade in the United States, and in 1874, under international pressure, Portugal ended it. A treaty between China and Spain in 1877 terminated the contracts of Chinese workers still in Cuba.

**British Penal Colonies** In the late 1700s, Great Britain established a **penal colony** in Australia after losing its original one in Georgia as a result of the American Revolution. The British government shipped **convicts** from England, Scotland, and Ireland as well as British colonies such as India, to Australia. There, they performed hard labor and suffered harsh treatment. Actual imprisonment of the convicts was rare. Most performed labor for free settlers, worked for the government in record keeping, or worked on government projects such as road and railway building. The majority of convicts earned their freedom after a prescribed number of years of service.

Some people sent to penal colonies were never allowed to return to Great Britain. In addition, because transportation back home was expensive, the majority decided to stay in Australia. By 1850, the British government ended the transportation of convicts to Australia, largely because a stay in Australia was not considered much of a punishment.

Australia also attracted free settlers, especially after gold was discovered there in 1851. Some 50,000 Chinese came during this gold rush. Eventually Australia became one of Britain's most successful settler colonies.

**French Penal Colonies** The French also had penal colonies in Africa, New Caledonia, and French Guiana. New Caledonia, an island part of an archipelago in the southwest Pacific Ocean 750 miles from Australia, served as a penal colony from 1864 to 1897 for both convicts and political prisoners. The penal colony in French Guiana, which included Devil's Island, was notorious for its harsh treatment of convicts. Prisoners were underfed and forced to do hard labor. Although the French stopped transporting convicts in 1938, Devil's Island continued to hold prisoners until 1953. (Connect: Describe the changes in the supply and demand for labor from the Spanish *encomienda* system to that of European nations in the 19th century. See Topic 4.4.)

## Migration in the Face of Challenges

The word **diaspora** is often applied to mass emigrations from a country or region that may take place over a period of many years. The African slave trade was responsible for one of the biggest diasporas in history, the involuntary emigration of millions of people between the 16th and 19th centuries. Most diasporas, however, were the result of poverty, political conditions, or famine.

**India** Poverty was the principal reason that drove Indians to leave the subcontinent. In 1833, the British began sending Indians to Mauritius as indentured laborers to replace slaves on the sugar plantations. By 1878, Indians were working on plantations in British Guiana (Guyana), Dutch Guiana (Surinam), Natal (South Africa), Fiji, and British and French islands in the Caribbean. Most Indian laborers signed five-year contracts. Many renewed their contracts, and some decided to stay permanently, accepting a piece of land or a lump sum rather than their passage back to India. Over 1.5 million Indians were shipped to colonies in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and Oceania before Britain abolished the indenture system in 1916. Between 1880 and 1938, two systems recruited labor in Southeast Asia.

- The *kangani* (foreman who oversees workers) system in Ceylon and Malaya recruited from their own extended family.
- The *maistry* (supervisors) system in Burma recruited laborers within a structured system with defined hierarchies and sent them to plantations, usually in Southeast Asia. Conditions were highly exploitative.

**China** The Chinese diaspora did not begin in earnest until the middle of the 19th century, with the gold rushes in California, South Australia, and western Canada. However, most Chinese migrants were not engaged in mining. Despite prejudices toward Chinese immigrants, the Chinese were instrumental in the development of the U.S. Transcontinental Railroad. Some Chinese paid their own way, but many more left China as indentured laborers. The vast majority of Chinese emigrants were males who planned to return to China after their time abroad.

People left China for many reasons, some to escape poverty or famine, others for better opportunities. Beginning in the late 18th century, a population explosion in coastal cities and contacts through foreign trade led large numbers of Chinese to **emigrate** to Southeast Asia. Most of them were illiterate, landless peasants looking for opportunities abroad. However, most of the Chinese did not arrive in Southeast Asia until the mid-19th century, after the first Opium War made it easier for them to leave. Many people left as a result of the poverty and disorder brought on by the **Taiping Rebellion** (1850–1864). (See Topic 6.2.) After the middle of the century, most Chinese emigrated to the Americas, Europe, Australia, or New Zealand.

**Ireland** People emigrated from Ireland for many reasons. Some left for political reasons. Britain abolished the Irish Parliament in 1801 when Ireland

became part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Roman Catholics and Protestant dissenters faced religious discrimination from their British rulers. Evictions of tenant farmers increased after the 1846 repeal of the Corn Laws, which had regulated the import and export of grain. During the **Great Famine** (1845–1849) that destroyed the potato crop for four years, as many as 3 million people emigrated from Ireland. Most went to the United States, but many others went to England, Scotland, Canada, or Australia.

Emigration continued even after the famine ended; as many people left Ireland in the first four years after the famine was over as left during the height of the famine. The Irish had been going to Great Britain and the United States to build canals since the 18th century, and they continued to leave to help build railroads. During the 18th and 19th centuries, 300,000 free Irish emigrated to Australia, and 45,000 Irish convicts were transported there. In the second half of the 19th century, about 45,000 Irish went to Argentina, although only about 20,000 remained there. The rest moved on to the United States.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

This illustration by Irish artist James Mahoney (1810–1879) portrays people suffering in southwest Ireland during the Irish Great Famine.

**Italy** The first wave of Italian emigration began with the unification of Italy in 1861 and continued until 1900. More than 7 million people left Italy during those four decades. More than half of them went to other countries in Europe, with most of the rest going to North and South America, Australia, and New Zealand. The main reason for the Italian diaspora was poverty. Two-thirds of the emigrants during this period were men with traditional skills. Farmers had an increasingly difficult time making a living in harsh conditions, especially in a society where land was subdivided over generations. Some left for political reasons, while others left for economic reasons related to organized crime, especially in South Italy. Those who left often sent money back to family members, encouraging further emigration.

## Migration to Settler Colonies

Large numbers of British citizens lived in all the colonies of the British Empire. Most who moved abroad permanently went to settler colonies such as Canada, South Africa, Australia, or New Zealand. Those who went to other colonies such as India, Malaya, or Kenya, usually did so with no intention of staying permanently. Many went as officers or soldiers in the British army, as government officials in the **Colonial Service**, or as managers for plantations or other colonial enterprises.

**Technical Experts** Engineers and geologists migrated to South Asia and Africa. One was Andrew Geddes Bain, who emigrated to Cape Town, South Africa, in 1816. Bain initially worked on eight major roads and passes but moved on to a career in geological studies. Bain prepared the first comprehensive geological map of South Africa in 1852. In 1854, he reported back to the British government about the copper mines in Namaqualand.

British engineers were so numerous in the colonies that they formed a type of diaspora. They spread Western science and technology through the world. However, as they did, they blended their knowledge with the experience of engineers from the colonial lands. Together, people from Europe and the colonies collaborated on both public works and private industrial projects.

**Argentina** During the 19th century, Argentina was part of Britain's "informal" empire. Britain invested more in Argentina than it did in India, the so-called "Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire. Unlike most of the people who emigrated to make a new life for themselves, the British who settled in Argentina during the 19th century were not trying to escape poverty or persecution. They were primarily businessmen, traders, bankers, and engineers. They founded banks, developed the export trade in agricultural products, built railroads and other infrastructure, and imported luxuries that appealed to the growing Argentine middle class.

**Japan** Before 1868, Japan was closed to the rest of the world. However, by 1893, the Japanese government had decided that Japan should acquire an overseas empire and established the **Colonization Society**. Its aim was to export Japan's surplus population as well as commercial goods. In 1892 the

Society made an unsuccessful attempt to start an agricultural settler colony in Mexico. The failure of that attempt did not deter the society from sending 790 Japanese to Peru in 1899 for contract work. At the same time, many young Japanese men were leaving Japan to study in the United States, congregating mostly in such cities as San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle on the West Coast.

Tensions and anti-immigrant sentiment toward Japanese people intensified as immigrants assimilated to life in America. In 1907, the Gentlemen's Agreement between the United States and Japan was an informal agreement that the U.S. would not impose restrictions on Japanese immigration, and Japan would not allow further emigration to the U.S. The agreement was never ratified and was ultimately ended by the Immigration Act of 1924.

## Migration, Transportation, and Urbanization

Improvements in transportation technology allowed some who migrated for work reasons to return to their home societies, either for a period of time or permanently. For example, in 1885, an agreement between the governments of Japan and Hawaii allowed Japanese laborers to go to Hawaii to work on the sugar plantations under three-year contracts. Approximately 29,000 Japanese went to Hawaii over the next nine years. During that time, thousands more Japanese went to other destinations in the South Pacific, including Australia, New Caledonia, and Fiji, under similar contracts. Most planned to return home after a few years.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Italian immigrants were so important to the economic and cultural development of Argentina that the city of Mendoza erected a monument to them in what is known as the Plaza Italia.

Industrial workers from Italy had similar arrangements for working in Argentina and then returning home, though many Italians settled permanently in Argentina. Since most industry was located in urban areas, both internal and external migrants often settled in cities, which increased in size and influence around the globe.

<b>Voluntary Migration Patterns in the 19th Century</b>			
<b>Years</b>	<b>Home Country</b>	<b>Destination</b>	<b>Reasons for Migrating</b>
1880–1914	Italy	• Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Argentina had pro-immigration policies.</li> <li>• Argentina offered better wages.</li> </ul>
1868–1907	Japan	• Hawaii	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Japanese sought financial opportunities on sugar cane and pineapple plantations.</li> </ul>
1850–1880	China	• United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Chinese first sought work in gold mines, then agricultural and factory work.</li> <li>• There were opportunities to work on Transcontinental Railroad.</li> </ul>
1820–1910	Ireland	• United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irish were escaping the Irish Great Famine.</li> <li>• Irish sought labor opportunities in canal building, lumbering, and civil construction.</li> </ul>
<b>Coerced or Semi-Coerced Migration Patterns in the 19th Century</b>			
1500s–1800s	Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Americas</li> <li>• Europe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced slavery administered through triangular trade system.</li> <li>• Europeans needed slaves to work on plantations along the southern coast, in the Caribbean, and elsewhere, cultivating cash crops like cotton, rice, and tobacco.</li> </ul>
1788–1868	Britain (convicts)	• Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Britain transported convicts to penal colonies.</li> </ul>
1806–1877s	China and India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caribbean</li> <li>• Southeast Asia</li> <li>• Africa</li> <li>• Americas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The slave trade had been abolished (1806).</li> <li>• The contract labor system was instituted to replace slavery.</li> </ul>
1834–1916	India (indentured servants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Africa</li> <li>• Asia</li> <li>• Caribbean region</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slavery was abolished in the British Empire (1833).</li> <li>• The indentured servant system was instituted to replace slavery.</li> </ul>



## KEY TERMS BY THEME

**GOVERNMENT: Systems**  
Colonial Service

**GOVERNMENT: Wars and  
Rebellions**  
Taiping Rebellion

**ECONOMICS: Systems**  
slavery  
indentured servants  
contract laborers  
Colonization Society

**SOCIETY: Organization**  
penal colony  
convicts

**SOCIETY: Movement**  
diaspora  
emigrate  
Great Famine



Source: archive.org

A Chinese laborer in the Philippines, 1899