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Who were the American Colonists?

In colonial times, there were multiple groups of people setting sail to America for the first time. Not everyone knew what to expect. There were some people that had much excitement coming to the new world, but then there were others that were not enthused in the slightest. Not everyone that came to America, even wanted to go. No matter of personal opinions or reasons for travel that came from these various groups, one thing is for certain: each group that was in America gained new experiences in their own lives.

One of these various groups that came to America were immigrants seeking new beginnings. The largest immigration group during the eighteenth century was the Germans.¹ They were eager to make the journey for a couple of reasons: (1) escape from religious persecution, and (2) the search for fertile and available land.² Johannes Hänner, “a German-speaking emigrant from Switzerland to Pennsylvania,” was just one of the European immigrants that wrote about his travels and experience in America.³ He was excited and thankful that he came to America because he went on about the plethora of land and freedom to settle anywhere when he was writing to his family.⁴ He missed his family, but his relationships with other colonists seemed to be fair.⁵ In his letter, he was in awe of how settling worked and how he could buy a pair of shoes cheaper than back home, showing his respect and appreciation of how things were run.⁶ He admitted it cost a lot to come to America, but justified it by saying, “the journey is long and it costs much to stay away for one year.”⁷ He wanted his family to come but was overall content with living in and being a part of the colonies.⁸

Not everyone was excited about immigrants coming to America, including an anonymous English settler that wrote about his disdain. The unknown author did not like immigrants from other countries, and he wanted immigration from countries other than England to stop: “a general provision against all foreigners may be necessary.”⁹ The immigrants resided in their own communities within the colonies; they had weapons and spoke their own languages.¹⁰ For these reasons, the author did not trust the new-comers, “on any quarrel with his Majesties [sic] natural subjects, could on a sudden rising with the arms they now have subdued that whole Province.”¹¹ The author felt he was superior to the immigrants because he had come from the great country of England, and the others, from other countries, were invading the King’s territory.¹² The anonymous colonist was unsatisfied.

However, not all those that left their home-country wanted to take that voyage. One example is Olaudah Equiano, a slave that was captured and forced to work.¹³ Equiano was captured, and therefore, afraid of those who looked different from him.¹⁴ He was angry and resentful towards those white men that took him from his family: “this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress, and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery.”¹⁵ He did not understand the inhumane actions of those capturers around him having the audacity to take a person such as himself and separate him from his family for their own selfish motives¹⁶

In the 1700’s, millions were traveling overseas. Of these millions involved with the process, three were Johannes Hanner, an anonymous English person, and Olaudah Equiano. Each had very different stories, backgrounds, and home countries. These differences, and their various experiences brought them together. Their individualism kept them connected.

Endnotes

¹ Johannes Hänner: “*Letter by an Immigrant to Pennsylvania, 1769*,” Unpublished Documents on Emigration from the Archives of Switzerland, *Albert B. Faust*, Deutsch-Amerikanische Geschichtsblätter, *Vols. 18-19, pp. 37-39. Translation by Volker Berghahn. Reprinted by permission of Volker Berghahn.*

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Author unknown. “Memorial against Non-English Immigration, 1727 ” *Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Based on typescript by Rachel Moloshok.*

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Olaudah Equinano. “Olaudah Equinano on Slavery, 1789,” *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equinano, or Gustavas Vassa, (London 1789), Vol. 1, pp. 46-49, 69-72, 83-88.*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.