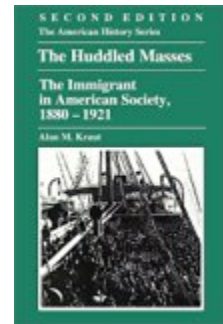


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Alan M. Kraut. *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921* (American History Series (Arlington Heights, Ill.)). Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2001. xiii + 267 pp. \$18.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-88295-934-4.

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Updating Immigration History

Updating Immigration History

One of the most respected scholars of ethnic and immigration history, Alan M. Kraut, has updated his 1982 scholarly survey of U.S. immigration during its turn-of-the-century boom years. Now in its second edition, *The Huddled Masses* remains a thorough and useful composite of scholarship on the experiences of immigrants coming to the United States between 1880 and 1921. Kraut's goal in the second edition is to incorporate the latest historiographic trends, which include placing U.S. immigration within a transnational context and increasing emphasis upon individual agency even as the book retains its focus on understanding "the collective or group dimension of the immigrant experience" (13).

Rather than discussing immigrant ethnic group experiences in distinct chapters, Kraut organizes his book around the shared stages, choices, and issues of immigration faced by those who came to the United States. Within each chapter, he compares and contrasts immigrant groups, accounting for similarities and differences. For example, in Chapter One, Kraut discusses the various transnational push and pull factors driving immigration and what led some to choose the United States as their destination. Kraut emphasizes that, contrary to popular myth, immigrants were not drawn to this country by some magnetic force but rather made rational practical choices, often as part of a group strategy for life improvement. In chapter Two, Kraut focuses on the admission procedures and experiences of immigrants processed at

centers like Ellis and Angel Islands. Major choices faced by new immigrants are dealt with in chapter three, such as where to live, how long to stay, and what jobs to pursue. Kraut stresses the critical role played by the immigrant's native culture, values, and old world experiences in making decisions between available options. This included different priorities and visions of success. The fourth chapter explores how immigrants dealt with inducements to assimilate generated by schools, reformers, charity groups and political parties. Kraut makes clear that most immigrants were reluctant to give up core aspects of their cultures and made adaptations only as deemed necessary. Nativism and the restrictive laws motivated by it are covered in chapter five. Kraut concludes the book by summarizing the impact and benefits of U.S. immigration as well as changes related to immigration from 1921 to 2000.

Designed for classroom use, Kraut succeeds in synthesizing a large, diverse body of scholarship in a cogent and accessible way. Graduate students will find Kraut's bibliographic essay especially helpful because it lays out the evolution of immigration historiography as well as organizes a vast array of sources by type and focus. The book also counters popular myths and stereotypes about U.S. immigration that students frequently bring to college and touches upon the experiences of immigrants from all regions of the world, giving attention to those often ignored by other texts (such as French Canadians).

The Huddled Masses is accessibly written and short

enough for easy inclusion on a course reading list. However the book reads like a textbook in that it relays scholarly conclusions with sparse integration of personal narratives that help keep students engaged.

The narrative really resides in the book's overall organization. Pairing it with a biographical book or film may help fuel student interest in and empathy for Kraut's subject matter.

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