

Parsing the Ocean Voyage:

Tracking Emigrants From Europe to the USA

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Using passenger manifests from Europe, Canada and the United States, this session will track travelers from ports of embarkation to ocean voyage to immigration. We will look not only at individual passenger manifest contents, but also compare and correlated contents between and among different passenger lists. While some records have been lost, those that remain may be gathered and analyzed as pieces of a puzzle. They can help us understand and reconstruct several portions of immigrants' journeys: both overland and over the seas. We will also explore alternate strategies for finding your people when existing indexes fail you.

Prior to steam ships, travel across the Atlantic Ocean took about five weeks. Harnessing steam in the second half of the nineteenth century enabled faster and more efficient travel both on land and across the sea. Initially, steam ships took ten days to two weeks to cross to the United States or Canada. In 1900, an immigrant might have expected to complete the journey from shtetl to New York in about three weeks. Sailing time was usually about 10 days. Before the start of World War I, some ships made the ocean voyage in as little as a week.

Shipping companies started to embrace passenger travel when they realized the value of traveling with "freight" on both legs of their trans-Atlantic voyages. Typically, they would travel from the U.S. with holds filled with timber and other goods for European consumers. They carried less voluminous goods back the other way. Selling space to steerage passengers filled the ships' holds and the companies' coffers. At first steerage accommodations were miserable (dormitory-style metal bunks with 100 to a room). But over time, social reformers, politicians, and commercial competition led to improvements: more comfort, privacy (cabins with 2-8 people), and better food.

The age of steamships roughly corresponded to the age of railway development. As emigrant traffic increased, steamship companies either developed or contracted with railroad companies to ease emigrant overland travel from emigrant homes to ports. This was particularly true for Hamburg-America and North German Lloyd - German shipping lines that operated, respectively, out of Hamburg and Bremen. They accounted for about 60 percent of immigrant traffic before World War I. At some point, most eastern European emigrants were going to have to cross Prussia to get to departure ports. Fares for steamship travel across the Atlantic Ocean often included fees for railway journeys to ports of embarkation and room and board in port communities before boarding ships.

Depending on the ports from which ships sailed, some ships made stops at other ports before heading across the ocean. Ships from Libau, Russia (today, Liepaja, Latvia), usually stopped in British ports before heading to the U.S. or South Africa. Larger ships from Hamburg would sometimes stop in British ports, but often headed directly across the ocean. Hamburg and Bremen, Germany, departures on smaller steamers might stop in Grimsby or Hull, England. Usually, these passengers (called transmigrants) crossed England by rail and departed for the United States and/or Canada on trans-Atlantic steam ships from Liverpool or Glasgow. Ships that left from Belgian, Dutch, or French ports might head immediately to sea or stop first in nearby British ports, such as Southampton, London, Hull or Grimsby.

Ports

Once steerage emigrants arrived at their ports of embarkation, they would likely have experienced several days to one or more weeks awaiting the arrival and departure of the ships on which they had purchased tickets for their voyage. As emigration exploded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, ports began to expand and greatly improve accommodations, food, and services. Many did consider and include the dietary restrictions of their Jewish passengers.

It was typical for emigrants to be delivered by rail directly to port communities. Emigrants were required to bathe, and their belongings were disinfected. Doctors inspected each emigrant for disease upon their arrival and on their day of departure. Those who were ill or suspected to be ill were quarantined and restricted from boarding ships until they were free of disease. At many ports doctors checked emigrants daily while they waited for their ships to arrive and prepare for departure. Often, teams of at least three doctors would inspect emigrants as they boarded ships. In Antwerp, for example, a trio of doctors represented the Red Star Line, the Belgian government, and the vessel. Often, United States inspectors observed.

In most port communities waiting emigrants resided in boarding houses (emigrant hostelrys) sponsored or contracted by shipping lines.¹ Overall, the facilities were clean and comfortable, and the food was ample and satisfying.² Most importantly from the government's perspective,

¹ The Holland America Line in Rotterdam took a unique approach. Instead of boarding houses, they created a hotel outfitted to look like steerage accommodations. The goal was to acclimate emigrants to what they would soon experience upon embarkation.

² In 1906, Powderly visited more than eight port cities (including Antwerp, Rotterdam, Hamburg, Bremen, Liverpool, Hull, Marseille, and Trieste) and, except for Marseilles, felt that emigrants were well-treated in satisfactory accommodations. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor. "Powderly Report," 18 July 1906; images, "Powderly Reports 1, 2, and 3, JewishGen.org (<https://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/#Immigration>); citing "Subject and Policy Files, 1906-

the emigrants were safe. They were unlikely to be contacted by those who might try to cheat or scam them. Emigrants were not generally allowed free reign to visit local communities. In most cases, these facilities and their temporary residents were strictly controlled. Lodging was protected by police in Liverpool, Hull, Antwerp, Rotterdam and Hamburg.

Local communities of these port cities often developed charitable organizations to help emigrants complete their journeys. If emigrants could not sail, charitable organizations might finance their return to their places of origin. Neither the national governments nor the local communities wanted emigrants to settle in port cities.

German Ports (Hamburg and Bremen)

The German ports of Hamburg and Bremen were the most popular ports of embarkation in Europe between 1880 and 1914. Depending on where an emigrant crossed the border into Germany, it would have been a 24-48 hour train journey to one of the German ports.

In 1891, Hamburg-America line housed travelers in Veddel, an island on the outskirts of Hamburg, in shelters that could house up to 1400. The shelters offered Kosher food.

Ten year later, Germans opened Auswanderer-halle – ultimately a facility with 30 buildings located on a 55,000 square meter (13.6 acres) campus that could accommodate 5000 emigrants. The Auswanderer-halle was located across the river and far from the city. It was considered a model of cleanliness. It was also a model for keeping emigrants from visiting the local community.

Emigrants were identified by nationality (and what was then considered “race”) and quartered separately. The stay in Hamburg (accommodations and meals) was included in passenger ticket prices. Facilities included dining halls (and Kosher food) and assembly halls where dances were held. Three chapels (a synagogue, a Roman Catholic church, and a Lutheran church) were available on campus. Families were accommodated in separate own rooms.

Compared to the Hamburg American Line, North German Lloyd took a hands-off approach in Bremen. Emigrant stays were in boarding houses and were not long. Emigrant arrivals in

1957,” National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 85, file 51411/51, NARA identifier 559947.

Bremen were timed to occur shortly before embarkation. Emigrants had the opportunity to visit Bremen.

Passenger Manifests

Passenger lists, whether for departure or arrival, were typically developed from information collected at ports of departure by shipping companies. The information required was usually determined by the laws in place at ports of arrival. Therefore, the contents of U.S. arrival manifests, for example, reflect U.S. government requirements at the time of ship arrival and the data collected by the shipping company to meet those requirements.³ U.S. passenger arrival manifests changed quite a bit over time as U.S. public and political desires for more restrictive immigration increased.

Some genealogists are disappointed to see that comparatively little information may have been required by foreign governments on their departure and arrival manifests. But sometimes the information that was required is different than what the U.S. required and, combined with what we know from U.S. arrival manifests, may add to our understanding. If a subject immigrant accessed two or more ports, with currently surviving passenger records, it pays to check all available passenger manifests created during that person's journey. For further information about extant passenger manifests documenting arrivals and departures, see Figure 1. Passenger List Timeline.

RESOURCES

Ancestry. "Major U.S. Immigration Ports,"

<https://www.ancestrycdn.com/support/us/2016/11/majorusports.pdf>

Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor. "Powderly Report," 18 July 1906; images, "Powderly Reports 1, 2, and 3, *JewishGen.org*

(<https://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/#Immigration>); citing "Subject and Policy Files, 1906-1957,"

National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 85, file 51411/51, NARA identifier 559947.

Vincent Cannato. *American Passage: The History of Ellis Island* (New York: Harper, 2009).

Sharon DeBartolo Carmack. *The Family Tree Guide to Finding Your Ellis Island Ancestors* (Cincinnati: Family Tree Books, 2005).

John P. Colletta. *They Came in Ships* (Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2002).

³ See, "Increasing Information on Ship Passenger Manifests, as Required by Law," table on the last page of this syllabus.

Stuart C. Einbinder, "How to Interpret Index to Passenger Arrivals List #T-621 (Soundex)," *JewishGen* InfoFile: <https://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/passndx.txt>

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(<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/21533369.2001.9668313>)

"Find the U.S. Immigration Ports Your Ancestors Used," *FamilySearch Blog*, posted 22 July 2023:
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/blog/find-the-u-s-immigration-ports-your-ancestors-used>

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"Lloyd's Register of Ships Online," *Lloyd's Register Foundation*, Heritage & Education Centre
(<https://hec.lrfoundation.org.uk/archive-library/lloyds-register-of-ships-online>). Links to access Lloyd's registers by year on *Internet Archive*, *Google Books*, and *Wikimedia Commons*.

Morton Allan. *Directory of European Passenger Steamship Arrivals* (New York: Bernard Publishing Company, 1931); images, *FamilySearch.org*
(<https://www.familysearch.org/library/books/records/item/265922-morton-allan-directory-of-european-passenger-steamship-arrivals-for-the-years-1890-to-1930-at-the-port-of-new-york-and-for-the-years-1904-to-1926-at-the-ports-of-new-york-philadelphia-boston-and-baltimore?offset=3>).

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<http://www.cimorelli.com/safe/shipmenu.htm>

Aubrey Newman. "Trains and Shelters and Ships," Paper presented for the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, April 2000; <http://ronaldimiller.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/PDF-trains-shelters-ships.pdf>

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<https://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests/>

"Steamship Ticket Purchase Ledgers," *Temple University Libraries*;
<https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p16002coll16>

"Transmigration via British Ports," *The Ships List*
(<https://www.theshipslist.com/ships/lines/transmigration.shtml>).

United States Senate. *Reports of the Immigration Commission* [aka Dillingham Commission Reports], Volume 37: Steerage Conditions, Importation and Harboring Women for Immoral Purposes, Immigrant Homes and Aid Societies, Immigrant Banks (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911); images, *GoogleBooks*
(https://www.google.com/books/edition/Steerage_conditions_Importation_and_harb/-W4TAAAYAAJ?hl=en).

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<https://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/degradedmanifests.html>

Joel Weinraub, "Finding Difficult Passengers on Ellis Island Manifests," *YouTube.com*
(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dzaug6_pdo&t=11s)

Late 19th and early 20th Century Manifests (collections may also be available via *Ancestry* and *MyHeritage*)

"Emigration and Immigration Records and Resources," *GermanRoots*
<<https://www.germanroots.com/ei.html>>

"Jewish Emigration and Immigration," *FamilySearch* <
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Jewish_Emigration_and_Immigration >.

Germany - Bremen Departure Lists (Index cards: 1907/08 & 1913/14), (Fully indexed passenger lists: 1920-1929)

In 1832, Bremen law required shipowners to maintain passenger lists. By 1851 they required that captains had to provide the lists to the Bremen Chamber of Commerce. Lists from 1875-1908 older than three years were destroyed due to lack of storage space. Most lists did not survive Allied bombing during WWII. Over 690,000 passengers are documented in lists that remain. Most are from 1920-1939 (these lists were stowed in a German salt mine and, at the end of WWII, taken by the Moscow Archives). Only a few lists from the 19th century have survived.⁴

"Bremen Emigration/Immigration," *FamilySearch*
<https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Bremen_Emigration/Immigration> wiki article

"Bremen Passenger Lists," *Staats Archiv Bremen* < <http://www.passengerlists.de/>>

Germany - Hamburg, 1850-1934, Departure

Departure lists for direct (those who did not stop in intermediary European ports) and indirect (those who stopped in other European or British ports during their journey) passengers.

⁴ "Bremen Passenger Lists," *Die Maus* and *Staatsarchiv Bremen* (<http://www.passengerlists.de/>).

"Hamburg Passenger Lists," *FamilySearch Wiki*

<https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Hamburg_Passenger_Lists> wiki article

"Hamburg Passenger List Terminology," *FamilySearch Wiki* <

https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Hamburg_Passenger_List_Terminology > wiki article

"Hamburg Passenger Lists, 1850-1934," *Ancestry* <<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1068/>> passenger list images

"Hamburg Passenger Lists, Handwritten Indexes, 1855-1934," *Ancestry*

<<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1166/>> Collection not indexed. Browse.

"Auswandererlisten, 1850-1934," *FamilySearch*

<<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/43289?availability=Family%20History%20Library>>

Includes direct and indirect passenger list indexes.

Netherlands (Holland-America Line), Rotterdam, 1900-1920, Departures & Arrivals

"Netherlands Passenger Lists Holland-America Line," *FamilySearch*

<https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Netherlands_Passenger_Lists_Holland-America_Line_-_FamilySearch_Historical_Records> wiki article.

Capt. Albert Schoonderbeek, "HAL History and it's ships Past and Present," *Captain Albert's Website and Blog* (<https://www.captainalbert.com/holland-line-ships-past-and-present/>).

Images of original records:

Holland-America Line Passenger Lists, *Stadsarchief Rotterdam*, 1900-1920 available online

<https://stadsarchief.rotterdam.nl/english/search/passengers_HAL/?mivast=184&mizig=231&miadt=184&milang=en&miview=tbl>

"Rotterdam, Netherlands, Passenger Lists of the Holand-America Line, 1900-1969," *Ancestry.com*

<<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/62808/>>

France - Le Havre, Departure

These are *only* for *French* vessels registered at Le Havre that returned to Le Havre at the end of each voyage. These are a challenge to search and use.

Le désarmement Havrais <<http://desarmementshavrais.free.fr/accueil.php>>

United Kingdom

"UK and Ireland, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1878-1960," *Ancestry*

<<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1518/>> ships arriving from foreign ports *outside of Europe and the Mediterranean*. Most of records are from 1900 and after.

"UK and Ireland, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890-1960," *Ancestry* <

<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2997/> > ships leaving for destinations *outside Europe*.

"U.K. Outward (1890-1960) and Incoming (1878-1960) Passenger Lists," *FamilySearch*

<https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/England_Emigration_and_Immigration>

Canada

"Passenger Lists," *Library and Archives of Canada* <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/immigration-records/passenger-lists/Pages/introduction.aspx>

"U.S., Border Crossings from Canada to U.S., 1895-1960," *Ancestry* <
<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1075/> >

"Canada, Border Crossings from U.S. to Canada, 1908-1935," *Ancestry*
<<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1344/> >

"Canada, Incoming Passenger Lists, 1865-1935," *Ancestry*
<<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1263/> >

Mexico

"US Immigration Mexico Border Crossings," *FamilySearch.org* <
https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/US_Immigration_Mexican_Border_Crossings >

"United States Border Crossings from Mexico to United States, 1903-1957," index, *FamilySearch* <
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1803932> >; from a variety of NARA records, RG 85.

"U.S., Border Crossings from Mexico to U.S., 1895-1964," index and manifest cards, *Ancestry*
<<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1082/> >; from a variety of NARA records.

United States, Arrival and Departure Manifests (a sampling)⁵

The Steerage Act of 1819 required ships landing in United States ports to submit lists of passengers. The act was enacted on 2 March 1819 and effective as of 1 January 1820. Although individual states were administrators of immigration within their boundaries, the lists were collected by the U.S. Customs Service. The act did not impose any limitations on immigration to the United States. The goal was to regulate travel conditions and prevent overcrowding on ships. The customs lists were to include names, gender and occupation of all passengers, as well as reports on the number of passengers who had died during the voyage.

Over the years there were national laws promulgated to protect immigrants during their journeys to the USA. These had some, albeit small, effect on immigration and customs lists. In 1876 however, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that, based upon the concept of federal control of commerce (a power the Constitution vested in Congress), that control of ports was to be controlled by federal law (i.e., by Congress).

The huge increase in immigration led to increasing public and political sentiment to curb immigration. Several laws were passed in the 1880s aimed at controlling immigration by restricting entry of contract laborers, convicts, lunatics, idiots, and people likely to become public charges. The Immigration Act of 1891 formally established federal control of immigration. This and subsequent laws added required information for shipping line to include on passenger lists they provided on arrival in US ports. For

⁵ It has not been possible to include all online databases and archival collections for all ports. Since New York was the most popular immigration port, most listings are for New York. However, many online databases are compilations of one or more archival collections and websites mix and match collections in a variety of manners and formats.

required passenger list information see Figure 2: “Increasing Information on Ship Passenger Manifests as Required by Law.”

In general, Customs lists from 1820 to 1891 all required the same information of passengers. Starting in 1891, passenger lists replaced customs lists.⁶ While passenger lists were still one page on 1 October 1906, authorities tacked on a section providing physical descriptions of passengers. Two-page passenger lists started on 1 July 1907.

NY Passenger Lists

“New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists, 1820-1957,” images, *Ancestry* (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/7488/>). For other ports, see Ancestry’s card catalog.

“Ellis Island and Other New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957,” Images, *MyHeritage* (<https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-10512/ellis-island-other-new-york-passenger-lists-1820-1957>)

“New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1891,” images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1849782>). Free access.

“New York Passenger Arrival Lists (Ellis Island), 1891-1924” images, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/1368704>). Free access.

Other Indexes

“Book Indexes to New York Passenger Lists, 1906-1942,” images of indexes, *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/collection/2299396>); citing NARA, RG85, microfilm publication T612.

“New York, Passenger List Book Indexes 1906-1942,” images and indexes, *MyHeritage* (<https://www.myheritage.com/research/collection-20801/new-york-passenger-list-book-indexes-1906-1942?s=OYYV7HRUUMKFSZCJILVTGAU4GLVDAOA>); citing NARA microfilm publication T612.

“Passenger and crew lists of vessels arriving at New York, 1897-1942; index to passenger lists of vessels arriving at New York, June 16, 1897- June 30, 1902; index (soundex) to passenger lists of vessels arriving at New York, July 1, 1902-July 1, 1948 : NARA publications T519, T621, T715, and M1417,” *FamilySearch.org* (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/341057?availability=Family%20History%20Library>).

“New York, New York, index to passengers lists of vessels: Collection Record, 1897-1902,” <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3031525>; citing NARA series T519.

⁶ Although immigration laws required additional information on passenger lists starting in 1891, those new lists are not included among New York records. On 15 June 1897, Ellis Island burned. All records from 1855 through 14 June 1897 were destroyed. As a result, the records included in NY passenger online databases for that period are Customs Lists.

David Rosen, compiler, "The Boston HIAS Database, 1882-1929," *JewishGen*

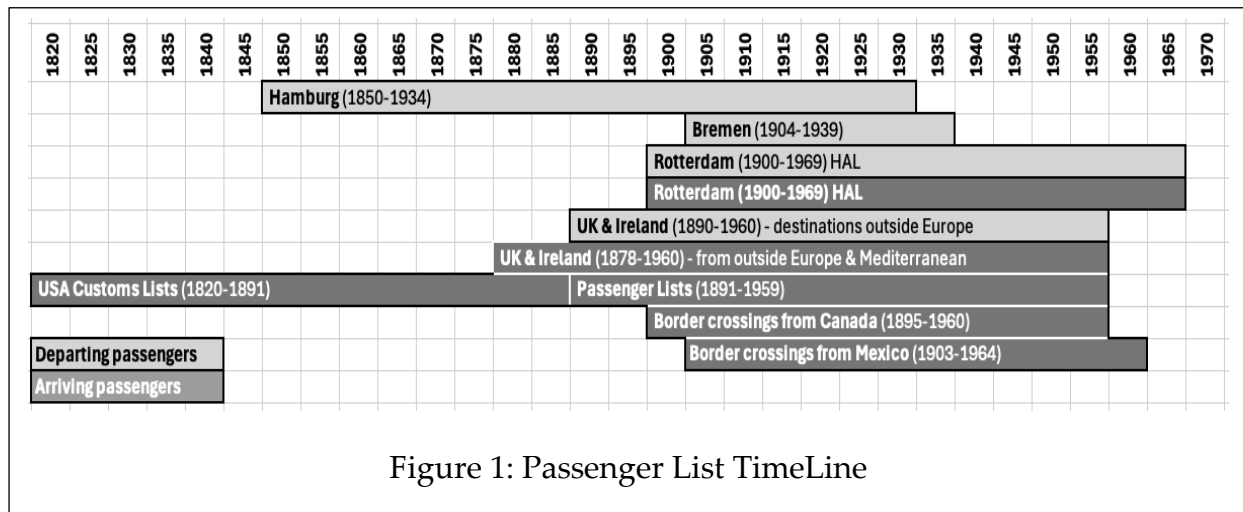
<<https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/usa/bostonhias.htm>>

"Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Card File I-96, 1882-1929," images, *FamilySearch*

<<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1050948?availability=Family%20History%20Library>>; citing the American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

"U.S. Departing Passenger and Crew Lists, 1914-1966," *Ancestry*

<<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60882/>> Most of these are from the mid 20th Century and many are airplane departures.



Increasing Information on Ship Passenger Manifests, as Required by Law

Data compiled and formatted by Marian L. Smith

	3/3/1891	3/3/1893	3/3/1903	6/29/06 (Natz Act)	2/20/07	2/5/17	1924	[1935]
Section	§8	§1	§12		§12	§12		
Age	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Date of Arrival	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Destination	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Last residence	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Name	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Name of Vessel	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Nationality	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Occupation	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Sex/Gender	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Funds in possession		\$30	\$50		\$50	\$50	\$50	X
Contract labor?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Destination Port of Entry		X	X		X	X	X	X
Ever institutionalized?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Health condition		X	X		X	X	X	X
In US before?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Intended residence/destination		X	X		X	X	X	X
Literacy		X	X		X	X	X	X
Marital status		X	X		X	X	X	X
Physical deformities?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Polygamist?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Relative in US (name & address)		X	X		X	X	X	X
Ticketed through?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Who paid passage?		X	X		X	X	X	X
Anarchist?			X		X	X	X	X
Race or People			X		X	X	X	X
Arrested & deported at any time				X	X	X	X	X
Coming for temp. labor?				X	X	X	X	X
Complexion				X	X	X	X	X
Excluded/deported within 1 year				X	X	X	X	X
Eye color & Hair color				X	X	X	X	X
Head Tax status					X	X	X	X
Height						X	X	X
How long intending to stay?						X	X	X
Intend to become a USC?						X	X	X
Intending to return to home country?						X	X	X
Literacy Language						X	X	X
Marks of identification						X	X	X
Opposition to organized gov't?						X	X	X
Place of birth						X	X	
Previously deported within 1 year?							X	X
Relative in home country					x		X	X
Travel Doc issuance date & place							X	X
Visa or Travel Doc number							X	X
Verification data								X