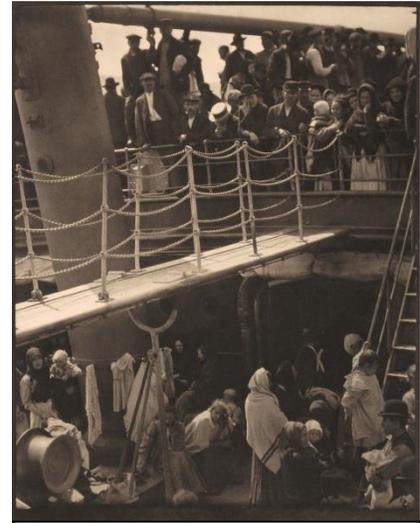


## Immigration in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century

At the time Everett Shinn created *Eviction (Lower East Side)* in 1904 the United States had undergone decades of accelerating immigration. Unprecedented numbers of immigrants flocked to our shores, dreaming of a life of freedom and prosperity. Between 1820 and 1920, approximately 34 million immigrants came to this country, and New York City was by the far the most popular destination. By 1910, immigrants and their American-born children accounted for more than 70 percent New York City's population. As steamships sailed to Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty greeted them, her inscription calling out, "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Immigrants flocking to this country saw Lady Liberty as a symbol of a new life, a new beginning.



[\*The Steerage\*](#), 1907, printed 1915, Alfred Stieglitz, photogravure, Smithsonian American Art Museum

Like most immigrants that came before them, early 20<sup>th</sup> century immigrants came to better their lives. In Europe, many left their homelands in search of economic prosperity and religious freedom. Living conditions in Europe were degraded, as poverty and an exploding European population led to food shortages. One immigrant would later state that, "Hunger brought me . .

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*"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."*

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. . here [and] hunger is the cause of European immigration to this country." Religious persecution of Eastern European Jews became significantly more pronounced after 1881, following the assassination of Czar Alexander II in that same year.

Government sponsored **pogroms** were organized and laws were passed that severely restricted Jewish residency, along with educational and occupational mobility. The outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904 (the same year *Eviction* was created) forced many Jews to leave Europe to avoid conscription into the army. New York's *Evening Post* wrote in 1905 that, "Russia, while denying her Jewish subjects all civil rights, does not object to sending them to Manchuria [Northeast China] to stop Japanese bullets." These many reasons propelled Jewish people to seek refuge in a new country. In 1906 alone, nearly 150,000 Jewish immigrants came to America from Russia. Nearly 7 in 10 Jewish immigrants settled in New York's Lower East Side. Advances in steam engine technology allowed ships to travel faster to America, carrying greater numbers of people than ever before.

Everett Shinn's *Eviction* and Childe Hassam's *Tanagra* provide us with two different views of the changing face of New York in the early twentieth century. Everett Shinn was part of the ground-

breaking Ashcan School of art, a group of eight artists that sought subjects in the everyday, common-place and even ugly aspects of daily life. Everett Shinn's images of tenement life on the Lower East Side provided some of the most compelling depictions of the struggles faced by immigrant communities. On the other side of the artistic and social spectrum, Childe Hassam's genteel views of uptown city life rarely showed the city in a negative manner. Even bustling crowds were made to look as elegant as possible through his Impressionist style. Hassam, more established in New York's art world and seventeen years older than Shinn, disregarded the plight of the immigrants living in squalor downtown and instead focused on the beauty of the civilized and enlightened world found uptown where, not coincidentally, he found his patrons.

The artists themselves explained their compositions, providing us with insight into the artworks. Writing in a hand written note, Shinn confirmed that the individuals depicted in *Eviction* were Jewish immigrants on the Lower East Side. The artist recalled, "The Eviction on Hester Street: This, I saw and felt. I was then two months in arrears with my own rent. I saw the cop as he might be serving me, sunk in a clutter of canvases waiting to be flushed along to the city dump." Hassam described his composition in an interview stating that, "Tanagra – the blond Aryan girl [is] intended to typify and symbolize growth – the growth of a great city." Additionally, the construction of the high-rise building seen through the apartment window in *Tanagra* serves to personify the growth and greatness of America. By including representative objects of bygone great civilizations, including the Asian screen, the Chinese lilies perched on the windowsill and the Greek Hellenistic **Tanagra figurine** held by the woman, Hassam has effectively positioned the United States as the cultural successor to these exalted ancient civilizations.

## Glossary

**Pogroms:** The organized killing of many helpless people usually because of their race or religion; comes from the Yiddish (from Russian) word meaning *devastation*.

**Tanagra figurine:** Made of terracotta, these figurines originated from the 4th century B.C. in the city of Tanagra located in central Greece. The discovery of these ancient figurines in the 1870s produced an immediate vogue for the wealthy to acquire them for their art collection.