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Chapter I

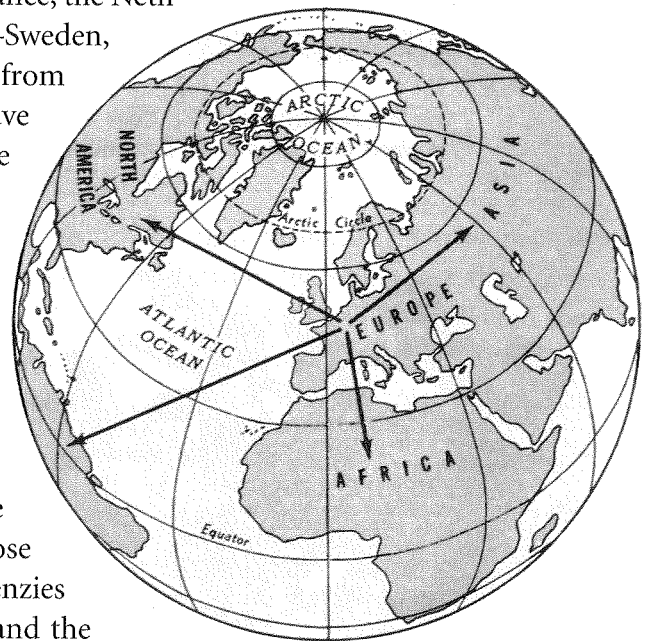
WHY STUDY ABOUT THE MIDDLE AGES?

WHERE DID AMERICANS COME FROM?

Are there any boys and girls reading this book who were not born in America? How many of you have parents who were born in some other country? Many of us have grandparents and great-grandparents who are natives of the United States, but few of us can trace our family histories back for more than two or three hundred years without finding that our ancestors came to America from other lands.

There are more than two hundred and eighty million of us now, but many of us are the descendants of immigrants who came to the New World from beyond the Atlantic or Pacific Oceans. Many of us look back to the pleasant fields of England, to the hills of Scotland, or to the green shores of Ireland as "Our Old Home." In addition to these English-speaking people, the citizens of every land in Europe have come to help make our country—especially Germany, Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Others hail from Scandinavia—Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. While most of our people came from European ancestors, about thirty million of them, who have dark skin, are descended from Negro slaves who were brought against their wills from the continent of Africa. It is loyalty to our Constitution and to our ideals, however, that makes people who come to the United States good citizens, whether they hail from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, or Latin America.

In many cases our family names suggest the countries from which our people came. The Browns and the Clarks, the Robinsons and the Taylors, as well as the Bingham and the Washingtons and all other families whose names end in "ham" or "ton" are from England. The Mackenzies and the Buchanans are of Scottish descent. The Kellys and the O'Connors once called Ireland their home. The first Petersons and Carlsons came from Sweden. The Schmidts hail from Germany, the Lamonts from France, and the Giovannis from Italy. The Garcias came from Mexico, the Romanovs from Russia, the Wongs from China, the Patels from India, and the Wah'abis from Egypt. But whatever our names or the lands of our ancestors, if we love liberty and godly virtue we are true Americans.



The continent of Europe was on center stage during the Middle Ages.

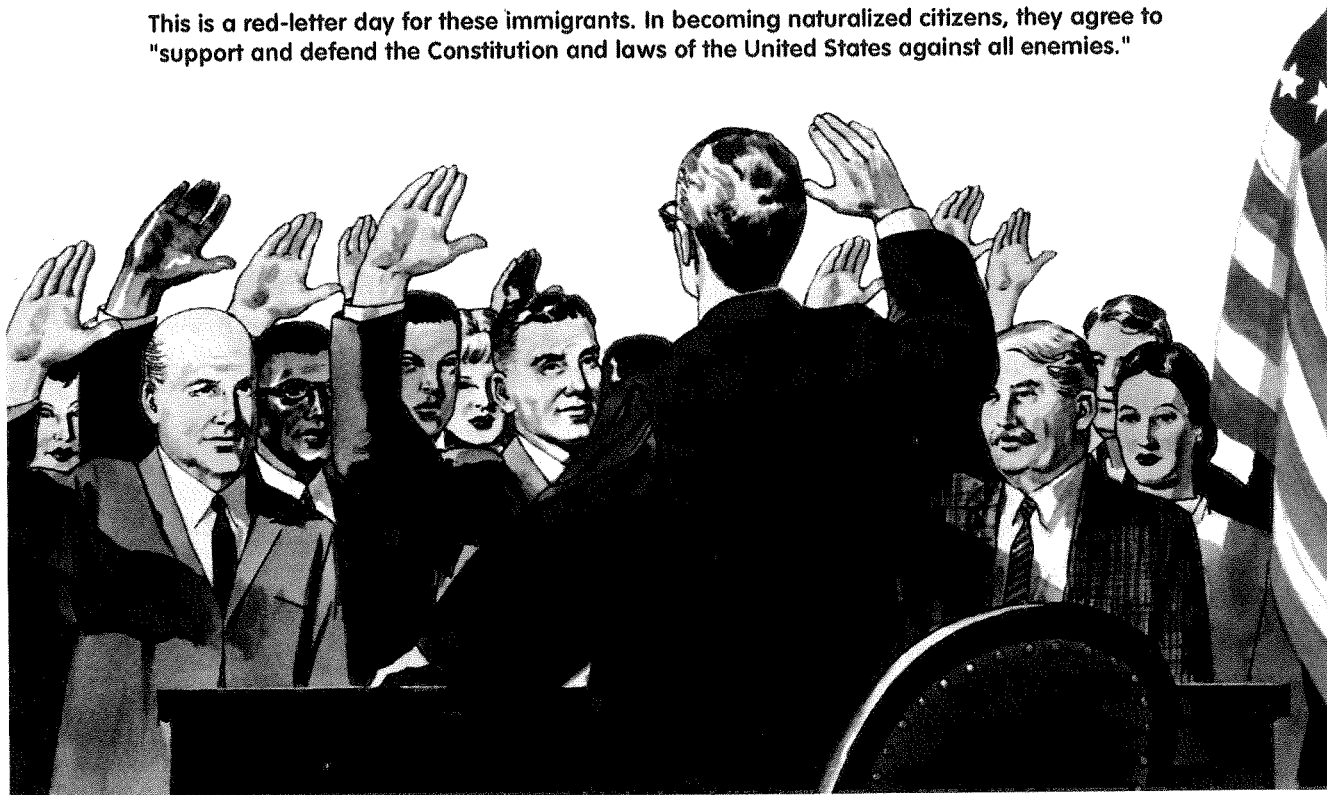
Where there is much heavy work to be done, as in the coal mines of West Virginia, the steel mills of Gary, Indiana, or the building of skyscrapers in Chicago, we find many newcomers from other places around the world. Many recent immigrants are building and repairing our transportation system, working in our mills and factories, and helping grow our economy in every way. Loyal newcomers and their children, as much as those whose ancestors have been long in the land, are the Americans of the future. All loyal citizens can say, "This is our country."

Why Europeans Came to America

It is more than four hundred years since the first Europeans began to establish permanent settlements in the country we now call America. From the beginning, those who came have been writing back to their relatives and friends about the opportunities in their new homes. In this way, the few who came first have been enticing larger and larger numbers every year to come to America, the land of promise. The number of immigrants has often varied over the years up to the present time. Recently, however, as many as a million new immigrants have landed on our shores in a single year, and many of these newcomers came from Asia and Latin America, not from Europe. For a long time everyone who came was welcomed. Now we have laws shutting out paupers, criminals, and those who have dangerous diseases.

Nearly all the people who have come to America—from the nation's earliest history to the present time—came because they wanted to be free, or because they wanted a better chance to make a living than the Old World could give them. Some of them fled from the tyranny of oppressive governments, others came to win the right to worship God in their own way, while many were driven out by the poverty in the overcrowded lands of their old homes. America has been the land of liberty and of opportunity to one and all from the earliest to the latest comer.

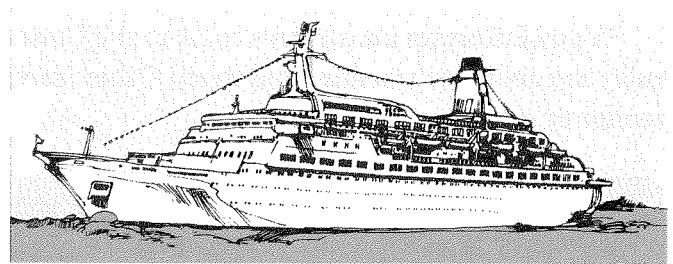
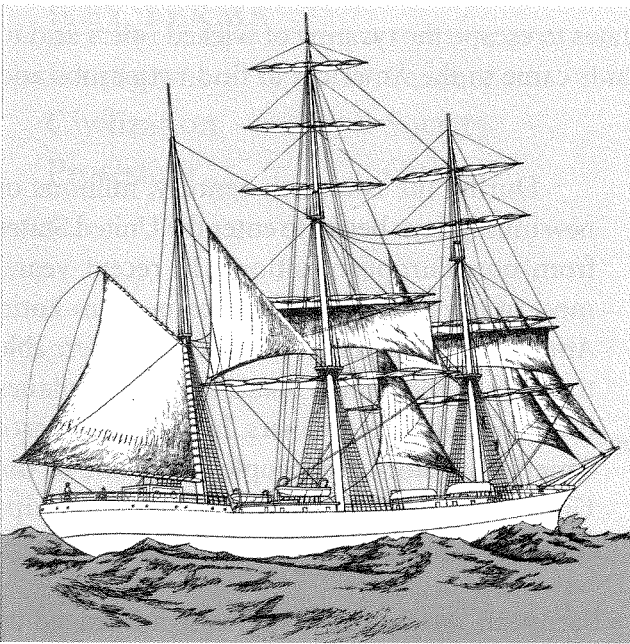
This is a red-letter day for these immigrants. In becoming naturalized citizens, they agree to "support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States against all enemies."



How Our Ancestors Crossed the Atlantic

Many millions of immigrants have come to America in large ocean liners. Their voyage lasted only a few days and was made without great hardship. It was not so with the earlier settlers who came to our country. Their passage across the Atlantic was a long and dangerous one, sometimes lasting many weeks. It was made in small sailing vessels where the passengers often suffered greatly because of crowded quarters and poor food. Disease frequently broke out on shipboard and many died. In one example, about three hundred years ago a shipload of one hundred and fifty settlers started out for America. One hundred of them died on the voyage. A little later there was another ship in which, out of the four hundred who sailed, only one hundred and five lived to reach America.

In many cases, only the strong were able to survive the awful hardships of the old-time voyage from Europe to America. Of those who reached the new land, only the most courageous could long withstand the exposure, the diseases, and the Indian fighting which they faced as they cleared the land and built their new homes in the wilderness. The hardy and vigorous men and women who lived through the trying experience of those early days were the ancestors of many Americans today. We may well sing of our country as—“The land of the free and the home of the brave.”



What Americans Brought from the Old World

The Europeans who came to be Americans were civilized people. They brought their manners, their customs, and their ideals with them. They planted the civilization of their homelands in America. Our American life and civilization have grown from what was planted by our forefathers.

Civilization is a long, hard word, but we shall not find it difficult to understand what it means. By civilized people, we mean people who have laws that reflect a knowledge of God and a government that enforces obedience to these laws. They are people who cultivate the soil; who carry on commerce; who own property, houses, cars, and businesses; who attend schools, churches, and civic events; who enjoy books, art, and music. In a word, people who live very much as we do now.

The settlers in America often brought with them, from their past experiences in Europe, the knowledge of how God's law and the Christian faith could help them live a good life. They brought with them, therefore, many ideas and biblical beliefs about right and wrong and about their duties to God and to other men. These ideas and beliefs were at the foundation of their civilization or culture.

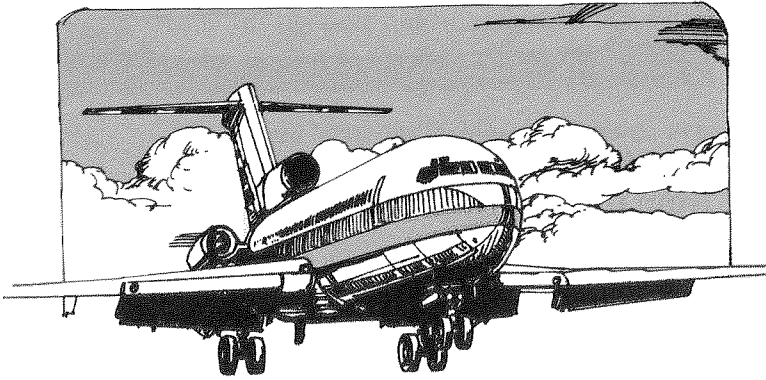
The noble ways of doing things and the time-honored ideals of hard work, self-sacrifice and the Golden Rule which make up what we call civilization, have recently come under attack in America, yet some of them have been wonderfully developed. The origin of our Western civilization flows primarily from the spring of a European culture that was shaped by Christianity in general, and the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation in particular. It is important, therefore, that all students gain an understanding of the influence of European civilization upon the formation of the United States.

It had taken men thousands of years to learn what they knew when they first began to come from Europe to America hundreds of years ago. The story of the way civilized ideas of living grew up in the Old World is as much a part of our history as the story of the way the European peoples first brought these ideas to the shores of America. This book will permit students to read about both of these stories.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Most of the early immigrants to the United States came from the continent of Europe. For this reason, many of the cultural traditions, legal standards, and religious beliefs of the United States reflect the values that were held by the people who lived in Europe centuries ago.

Many European immigrants came to the United States to escape the tyranny of wicked rulers and to enjoy the ability to worship God freely. Other immigrants came to the Americas to find better jobs and economic opportunity.



During the twentieth century, millions of new immigrants began to enter the United States from non-European nations. In recent years, most of the immigrants have come from Latin America and Asia. These newer citizens were able to travel to the United States by swift airplanes or comfortable ocean liners. In the early days of American history, the people who came to the United States often suffered great hardships coming to our shores.

The foundation of American culture sprang from a European society that was greatly influenced by biblical Christianity in general, and the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation in particular. Most of the laws and social traditions of early American society clearly reflected the dynamic influence of Christianity upon this period of history. ■

CHAPTER QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Locate on a map of Europe all the countries named in this chapter.
2. What is your own mother country?
3. Why did your ancestors come to America?
4. Find out all you can about how your ancestors lived in their Old World homes.
5. Talk with a recent immigrant about his journey to America.
6. Ask a recent immigrant how America differs from his homeland.
7. Should the U.S. government further restrict immigration? If so, why?
8. What can we do to help the newcomers in our country to become virtuous Americans?
9. What was the primary “spring” that shaped the flow of Western civilization?

KEY TERMS

Immigrant	Culture
Civilization	Society
Protestant	Citizen