

The Transformation of American Society

PRIMARY SOURCE READING

An Immigrant's Story

*Italian American writer Constantine Panunzio (1884–1964) was one of thousands of immigrants who came to the United States during the early 1900s. Soon after his arrival in 1902, Panunzio decided to pursue an occupation that used his head instead of his hands. He attended several colleges, eventually earning a doctorate. He worked in settlement houses and for the YMCA in immigrant communities until 1920, when he became a university professor and writer. In his book *The Soul of an Immigrant* (1921), he recounts his experiences coming to America and assimilating into a new culture. In the following excerpt Panunzio, newly arrived in America, has befriended a Frenchman named Louis, who has been a sailor. Read the selection, and answer the questions that follow.*

The Soul of an Immigrant

Not far from the recreation pier on which [Louis and I] met is located the Italian colony of “North End,” Boston. To this Louis and I made our way, and to an Italian boarding house. . . . It was a “three-room apartment” and the landlady informed us that she was already “full,” but since we had no place to go, she would take us in. . . . Our coming made fourteen people. At night the floor of the kitchen and the dining table were turned into beds. . . .

We began to make inquiries about jobs and were promptly informed that there was plenty of work at “pick and shovel.” We were also given to understand by our fellow-boarders that “pick and shovel” was practically the only work available to Italians. . . . I practiced for a day until I could say “peek” and “shuvle” to perfection. Then I asked a fellow-boarder to take me to see what the work was like. He did. He led me to

Washington Street, . . . where some excavation work was going on, and there I did see, with my own eyes, what the “peek” and “shuvle” were all about. My heart sank within me, for I had thought it some form of office work. . . .

Now, though Louis and I had never done such work, because we were Italians we must needs adapt ourselves to it and go to work with “peek and shuvle.” (Louis, desiring to be like the Romans while living with them, for the time being passed for an Italian.)

So we went out to hunt for our first job in America. For several mornings Louis and I went to North Square, where there were generally a large number of men loitering in groups discussing all kinds of subjects, particularly the labor market. One morning . . . we saw a fat man coming toward us. “Buon giorno [good morning], padrone,” said one of the men. “Padrone?” said I to myself. Now the word “padrone” in Italy is applied to a proprietor, generally a respectable man, at least one whose dress and appearance distinguish him as a man of means. This man not only showed no signs of good breeding in his face, but he was unshaven and dirty and his clothes were shabby. . . .

The “padrone” came up to our group and began to wax eloquent and to gesticulate¹ (both in Sicilian dialect) about the advantages of a certain job. . . . “It is not very far, only twelve miles from Boston. . . . The company has a ‘shantee’ in which you can sleep, and a ‘storo’ where you can buy your ‘grosserie’ all very cheap. “Buona paga,” he continued, “(Good pay), \$1.25 per day, and you only have to pay me fifty cents a week for having gotten you this ‘gooda jobba.’ I only do it to help you and because you are my countrymen. . . .”

The magnanimity [generosity] of this man impressed Louis and I very profoundly; we looked at each other and said, “Wonderful!” We decided we would go. . . . On reaching our

destination, we were taken to the ‘shantee’ where we were introduced to two long open bunks filled with straw. These were to be our beds. The “storo” of which we had been told was at one end of the shanty. The next morning we were taken out to work. It was a sultry autumn day. The “peek” seemed to grow heavier at every stroke and the “shuvle” wider and larger in its capacity to hold the gravel. The second day was no better than the first, and the third day was worse than the second. . . . The “padrone” whose magnanimity had so stirred us was little better than a brute. We began to do some simple figuring and discovered that when we had paid for our gro-

ceries at the “storo,” for the privilege of sleeping in the shanty, and the fifty cents to the “padrone” for having been so condescending² as to employ us, we would have nothing left but sore arms and backs. So on the afternoon of the third day Louis and I held a solemn conclave [meeting] and decided to part company with “peek and shuvle,”—for ever. We left, without receiving a cent of pay, of course.

¹make gestures

²generous, but in a superior, haughty way

From *The Soul of an Immigrant* by Constantine Panunzio. The Macmillan Company, 1921.

■ UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. What housing conditions did the writer and his companion find upon their arrival in America?

2. In what ways did Panunzio try to adapt to life in America?

3. What jobs were available to Panunzio and Louis?

4. What kind of working conditions did the two friends find?

5. How did their new boss take advantage of their ignorance?

6. How could this account be used to support the progressives’ call for reform in America?

ACTIVITY

Write a brief essay about immigrating to another country. Base your essay on personal experience, stories of friends and family members, or information found in the reading. Include descriptions of the thoughts and feelings of the immigrant.

adjective *daemonic* to indicate a person who is highly inspired or motivated.

4. The doctrine of final utility is the price at which people will find it worthwhile to buy something. It does not account for the cost of production.
5. Wanamaker made a profit for himself and provided good deals for his customers, but he put smaller stores out of business.
6. Students may write that small stores might try to specialize, offering goods and services that department stores do not.

ACTIVITY

Advertisements should make the products appear attractive and essential.

BIOGRAPHY

1. He worked in retail stores and saw how well customers responded to bargain items.
2. They offered household goods at bargain prices—five cents and ten cents.
3. Customers began shopping at giant malls, outlet centers, large discount stores, and full-service supermarkets.
4. Students might mention certain discount stores that offer a variety of goods at discount prices.

ACTIVITY

Students' marketing strategies should reflect an understanding of the reading.

CHAPTER 16

LITERATURE

1. It may indicate that the neighborhood is going downhill when someone must take in boarders in order to afford to live there.
2. Mrs. Lapham is dressed in a conservative black silk dress that does not have the low-cut neckline of the dresses of the other women. Both she and her daughter seem to be overdressed for the occasion.
3. Lapham is unfamiliar with the custom of a man escorting a woman into dinner. He believes that since his wife was chosen by their host, they as a couple are being especially honored.

4. He thinks it will be much easier to copy the behavior of others.
5. He does not have the manners that the others do, and he has no idea of where they stand on issues. Because he wants to be a part of the group, he does not want to do anything that will set him apart. He thinks about turning down the wine but then allows the servant to fill the glasses. Then he drinks out of each glass. He thinks it would be polite to turn down some of the dishes, but instead he takes and eats everything.
6. Possible answer: A person could start with nothing and, in ten years, build a fortune that could make him or her equal to those who had been wealthy all their lives. Money and success are synonymous, and many choose to display both. Lapham seems to look down on those who do not make the best use of their opportunities.

ACTIVITY

Students' responses should reflect an understanding of the dinner party described in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. a crowded boarding house in which people were sleeping on the kitchen floor and on a dining table
2. He immediately learned the few words he needed in order to get a job, and he tried to find housing and work right away.
3. only manual labor, working with a pick and shovel
4. harsh and exploitative; The work was back-breaking; the workers received little pay and were forced to pay to sleep in a crowded shanty and to buy food and supplies at inflated prices at the company store.
5. by promising them a good job and making them pay him for finding it
6. The economic exploitation of the immigrants and their poor housing conditions could be used to support the progressives' call for worker protection, public-health programs, and regulation of slum housing.

ACTIVITY

Students' responses will vary, but should reflect an understanding of the selection.

BIOGRAPHY

1. He educated himself through personal studies and traveling throughout Europe studying park design and administration.
2. He designed a number of great city parks, park systems, and public grounds with a focus on beautiful landscaping.
3. He believed that public parks should be places where people could be restored by nature.
4. Possible answer: He might suggest that the inner cities could be made more attractive by creating beautiful parks and green space.

ACTIVITY

Students' park sketches and descriptions will vary.

CHAPTER 17

LITERATURE

1. He wrote that corruption comes from the fact that there is no one left over in a middle-class organization of business to watch the politician.
2. Possible answer: The nickname makes him sound unimportant and insubstantial.
3. He thought members of the electorate were tough, base, and coarse. He might find it difficult to put their interests first.
4. They have no ideas, but they do have votes. They are capable of violence.
5. He is a straight man, seemingly likable and trustworthy. He follows his own ideas of right and wrong. He is kind to his people.
6. He helps them when they are in trouble. He finds jobs for them and serves as an intermediary for them in the social structure. He protects wives and children. All of these helpful actions may be seen as political corruption because he does these things in return for their votes.

ACTIVITY

Advertisements will vary, but should stress the importance of eliminating corruption in the political arena.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. The nation is on the verge of moral, political, and economic ruin.
2. There is corruption in government and law, voters are bribed or intimidated, public opinion is silenced, business is affected, and the land is concentrated in the hands of the capitalists.
3. They are too involved in their battle for power to take into account the needs of the people.
4. They focus on the tariff issue to the exclusion of other important concerns.
5. The goal of the Populists was to restore government to the hands of the common people, where it originated.
6. Possible answer: The Democrats and Republicans came to realize the importance of the issues supported by the Populists, adopting them as their own in future party platforms.

ACTIVITY

Platforms should reflect an understanding of the Populist preamble.

BIOGRAPHY

1. They aroused northern patriotism and increased public support for the North.
2. His cartoons brought about the downfall of the corrupt political machine of William "Boss" Tweed.
3. His symbols for the Democratic and Republican parties are still used today, and his conception of Santa Claus is still popular.
4. Possible answer: They can portray the heart of an issue simply and directly.

ACTIVITY

Students' captions should reflect a clear understanding of the intended message of each cartoon.