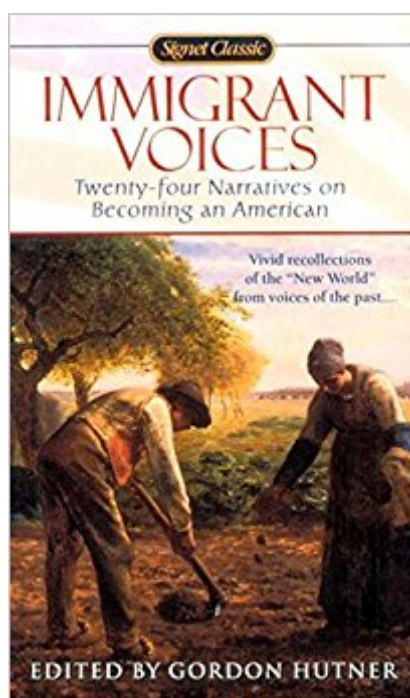


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# Immigrant Voices: Twenty-Four Narratives On Becoming An American



## Synopsis

With narratives from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, this anthology provides a historical and uniquely personal perspective on the immigrant experience and illuminates the often difficult dream of becoming an American citizen. From Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's defining statement of Americanism to Harlem Renaissance figure Claude McKay's observations on race, here are both rousing and heartbreaking impressions of those who departed from their homelands in the hopes of making a new life. Reconciling their old traditions with their new land, these immigrants faced such adversity as assimilation, prejudice, poverty, homesickness, and identity. Filled with inspiring stories of immigrants who traveled from Mexico, India, China, Korea, Syria, and beyond, *Immigrant Voices* reveals in their own words how these newcomers were able to persevere and make their mark on the "New World."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Editor Gordon Hutner is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and the editor of the journal *American Literary History*.

Great book

This is a wonderful anthology of autobiographical writings, spanning the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Beginning with Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's famous defining statement of cultural

identity, 'What is an American' the collection captures the 'outsider' American becoming whatever an 'American' is...it's a superbly apt paradox and a fascinating problematic and one that is full of dramatic axis: the immigrant looking back to his or her old country while negotiating the new. One can't help feeling a certain exhilaration at the complexity of the 'American experience' and the focus on first impressions of America is the compelling aspect--the just off the boat wonderment, the gradual disillusionment, and the afterthought or reflection from many years on--- a multitude of newcomers trying to figure out first hand how the society works, what its values are, how each new arrival hopes to carve his or her own world, the constant need for adaptation and improvisation, the sense in which loss and gain function as a necessary interchange, the bleaker moments of crisis and frustration, and, ultimately, survival, though of the tempered, reflective rather than triumphant or grandiose kind. The accounts feel so personal and immediate, full of sights and sounds and textures. It's a bit like reading historical fiction, because the sense of character and individual struggle is so strong. This first person quality is what really brings the history to life for me. Each letter or autobiographical extract seems to deliver such minute and particular documentary detail and one learns a tremendous amount of domestic and social history in the process. My favorites are probably a Norwegian frontier mother's account of her hard lowland farming life, full of the stoically endured pains of leaving familiar life behind and her level headed grappling with the differences that bombard her as she and her husband try to build their farm; an extract from the memoirs of Henry Villard, describing his vigorous, heady engagement with American politics in the 1850s; Andrew Carnegie's robust and unromanticized account of his early immigrant days in Pittsburg; a young Syrian intellectual's memories of agonizing loneliness, struggle with the English language and determination to succeed in academic life at the turn of the century...and so it goes on, though I confess that my weakness is for the earlier accounts, with all their strange modernity (Crevecoeur seems so timelessly on the nail about American types and the mingling of different religions and European ethnicities throughout the land). I wish there were more volumes. The introduction, by the way, is first-rate. Hutner is clearly a scholar of great integrity. But there is no reason this book should be limited to a student readership--it is so full of life and would be a great resource for all kinds of writers, and anyone with an interest in their own immigrant roots. It also has a wonderful feeling of landscape and customs, revealing an America of regions, urban and metropolitan. A great strength of the selection is that it offers a full array of experiences from many different countries--India, China, Korea, Syria, and Mexico--as well as European. New York figures prominently but does not dominate. All the usual cliches of the immigration account (Ellis Island, the immigrant as uneducated and backward) are avoided because each voice is so distinguished, so

full of opinion and views and fully formed ideological outlook. All the voices are those of thinkers, and that's what makes this gem of an anthology such a great read.

I just started the book, definitely worth reading. A great accomplishment by Gordon Hutner! I give this book five stars because it's taking me where I need to be!

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