

Immigration Cartoon, 1916

Introduction

This political cartoon appeared as the nation debated new restrictions on immigration. After 1917, immigrants entering the United States had to pass a literacy test. In the cartoon, the literacy test appears as an insurmountable barrier to a family of immigrants. Uncle Sam peers out over the barrier, a flag behind him ironically proclaiming “the land of the free.” The law foreshadowed the 1924 National Origins Act, which ended the years of mass immigration.

Questions for Discussion

Read the document introduction, examine the cartoon and apply your knowledge of American history in order to answer the questions that follow.

1. Examine all the images in the cartoon as well as the caption at the bottom. Make a list answering the following questions.

- Define the word “literacy.”
- Identify the man at the top of the wall.
- Who are the people in front of the wall? What do they have with them? Where are they standing?
- What does the flag say? Be familiar with the caption at the bottom.
- Identify the items at the top of the wall and the items coming out of the wall.

2. Use the words of Uncle Sam in the caption to identify the challenge facing the people in front of the wall.

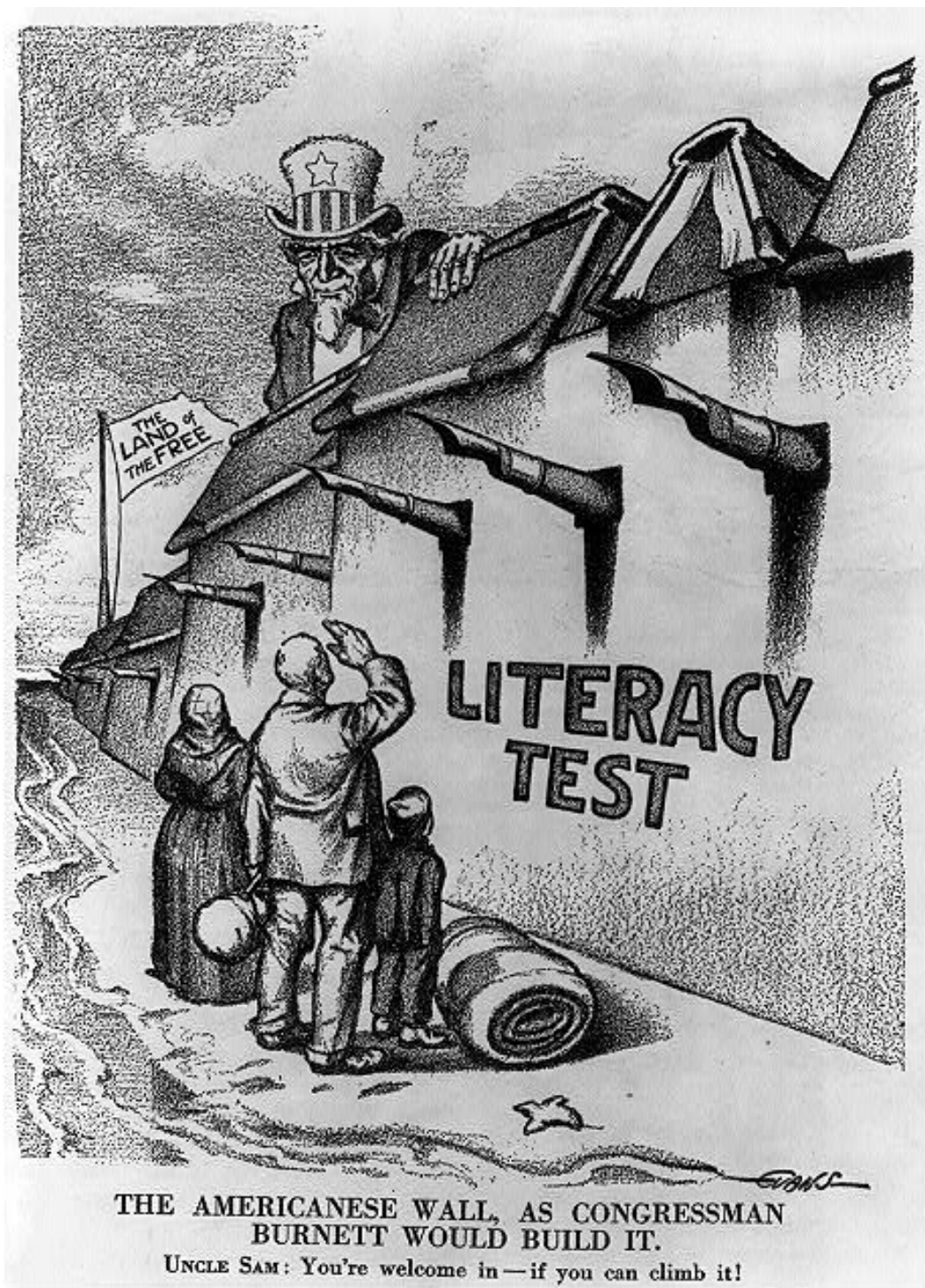
3. Note the information in the attribution at the bottom of the cartoon. How will that help us understand the meaning?

4. What audience would this cartoon be aimed at? Those in favor or those opposed to immigration? Why?

5. Use the information from this cartoon to describe the opinion of the cartoonist toward the 1917 literacy test for immigrants to the United States.

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Image



"The Americanese wall - as Congressman [John Lawson] Burnett would build it," 1916. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)