

Encountering Ellis Island: How European Immigrants Entered America.

By Ronald H. Bayor.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.

184 pages.

Part of a series called “How Things Worked,” Ronald Bayor’s *Encountering Ellis Island* tackles questions that scholars, students, and others interested in European immigration often ask: What was the journey from Europe like? How was the processing of millions of immigrants achieved when they reached New York’s Ellis Island? What were the reactions of the newly arrived to the process of inspection, hospitalization, delays, detention, and, for some, deportation? What happened to people who failed the screening process? How did the immigrants who passed the inspections feel about their admission to the United States? Bayor compellingly weaves together the stories of immigrants, inspectors, translators, and aid workers, among others, to describe the journey to Ellis Island, to reveal the workings of the bureaucratic apparatus that allowed immigration officials to process an average of five thousand arrivals a day, and to shed light on the emotions and attitudes of the officials and the immigrants with whom they dealt when they encountered one another. Throughout, the book also chronicles the history and uses of the island itself, the rise of immigration restriction in the United States, and the birth of an American immigration bureaucracy.

The main contribution of the book is to dispel several common assumptions about the immigrants who traveled through Ellis Island, specifically the inspections they underwent and the lore of how terrible the experience was. Bayor begins the story by examining the countries people left, and he cogently demonstrates that “immigrants who decided to move were not the dregs of Europe or Asia” (7) but rather entrepreneurial individuals who could afford to take advantage of global political and social changes to flee persecution, oppression, or stagnant local economies. He reminds us that the vast majority of those who entered the United States through Ellis Island passed inspection relatively unscathed, notwithstanding the uncertainty, chaos, and fear that often characterized the process. Despite the superior odds of immigrants being admitted, Bayor challenges readers to rethink the history of illegality in the United States by showing how many European immigrants at Ellis Island, fearing rejection, tried on a regular basis to circumvent the law. Nonetheless, one wishes the author had dispensed with calling them “illegal immigrants” in this discussion given the contested nature of such terminology today. *Encountering Ellis Island* also reminds us that immigrants were not completely safe even after they passed inspection. Through a powerful discussion of the deportation of 249 individuals

suspected of radical and anarchist activities in 1929, he demonstrates that “once in the country, immigrants could still be deported for violating U.S. laws” (81).

Bayor enhances his coverage of the rise of immigration screening through a systematic comparison of Ellis Island with California’s Angel Island—another useful aspect of the book. The two immigration stations overlapped for quite some time. While Ellis Island was in existence from 1882 to 1954, Angel Island ran from 1910 to 1940. This contrast allows the reader to take note of the differences between the two immigration stations, not only in terms of the immigrants who arrived there but also in terms of organization, physical structure, administration, and the immigrants’ experiences. Opened in 1892, Ellis Island processed more than 14 million immigrants until the rise of a restrictionist politics that, by 1924, excluded most immigrants from Asia, restricted immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe with punitive yearly quotas, and created the conditions for the rise of a spiral of illegality later in the century. Nonetheless, as Bayor shows, the overall impact of this emerging restrictionist turn was hardly uniform. During the peak years of European immigration from 1882 to 1924, officials on Ellis Island rejected 250,000 immigrants, or less than 2 percent. By comparison, authorities processed 340,000 Asian immigrants on Angel Island from 1910 to 1940 but detained and deported a much higher proportion than on Ellis Island. Through this comparison, *Encountering Ellis Island* powerfully demonstrates the racialized nature of inspection, detention, and deportation at the height of mass immigration.

Through meticulously reconstructed descriptions, Bayor brings the inspection process to life, vividly capturing the Ellis Island experience, from the work of overwhelmed medical officers to the industrious cultural brokers (especially interpreters) who sought to bridge gaps between officials and immigrants. Viewing the new arrivals as potential citizens, U.S. immigration authorities screened first and foremost for immigrants with limited means, poor health, and “questionable” moral character, but inspectors also harbored preconceived notions of what a “good immigrant” should look like. Those who came from Northern Europe, fit the desirable categories created by racial scientists and eugenicists, and “looked like they had some money and were dressed that way” (28), as a Polish migrant put it, had a much better chance of getting through the process quickly and having a more positive experience entering the United States. Everyone else faced three inspections along their journey prior to their arrival on Ellis Island, where they underwent one final inspection. Throughout the book, Bayor pays close attention to the emotional toll the inspection took on everyone involved, the gendered nature of the immigrant experience on arrival, and the unpredictability of the outcome of inspections given officials’ ever-changing concerns over nationality, race, and class.

This interesting and compelling account does at times leave the reader wanting more. Beginning the discussion in Europe effectively frames the migration process in a transnational sphere, but it would have been helpful to hear more about how leaving represented a carefully negotiated and orchestrated family strategy that affected both those who left and those who stayed behind. Similarly, the governments of the sending nations also played a key role in the nascent regime of global immigration restriction. The inspection process on Ellis Island evolved partly in response to the American frustration with the resistance of sending countries to immigration regulations because they viewed U.S. requests for help in establishing a system of monitoring and medical inspections at the emigrants' point of departure as a violation of national sovereignty. Lastly, Bayor might have more closely explored the long-term effects of the Ellis Island experience on today's immigration system with a more detailed comparison between the admission process then and now in order to understand both change and continuity.

Aside from these minor quibbles, *Encountering Ellis Island* is an accessible, succinct, and easy-to-read book. It speaks to several fields of study and can easily be adopted in courses focusing on U.S. immigration history and the immigrant experience and those dealing with progressivism, the Gilded Age, and the social and cultural history of the United States in the twentieth century.

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Al Dente: A History of Food in Italy.

By Fabio Parasecoli.

London: Reaktion Books, 2014.

332 pages.

Al Dente is one of two books launching the Reaktion Books' "Foods and Nations" series (the other is *Beyond Bratwurst: A History of Food in Germany*) designed to appeal to a popular audience. *Al Dente* has the appearance of a cookbook: It is a heavy tome, with lavish color illustrations throughout and even a ribbon bookmark for keeping one's place. It is likely that Fabio Parasecoli, a professor of food studies at The New School, had to work within specific editorial parameters for the series. More important, perhaps, the author had to believe in the organizing idea of a national cuisine and a national food history. On the one hand, this idea seems unremarkable; almost everyone thinks they