

#2 Do Not Restrict Immigration: Mary Antin

Antin was born in Polotsk, Russia, on 13th June, 1881. She arrived in the United States in 1894. She wrote about her early experiences in her book, *Promised Land*, that was published in 1912. Antin was one of the leading campaigners against restrictive immigration legislation. Mary Antin died in New York on 15th May, 1949.

In the evening of the first day my father conducted us to the public baths. As we moved along in a little procession, I was delighted with the illumination of the streets. So many lamps, and they burned until morning, my father said, and so people did not need to carry lanterns. In America everything was free. Light was free; the streets were as bright as a synagogue on a holy day. Music was free; we had been serenaded, to our gaping delight, by a brass band of many pieces.

Education was free. The subject my father had written about repeatedly, as comprising his chief hope for us children, the essence of American opportunity, the treasure that no thief could touch, not even misfortune or poverty. It was the one thing that he was able to promise us when he sent for us; surer, safer than bread or shelter.

He had very little opportunity to prosecute his education, which, in truth, had never been begun. His struggle for a bare living left him no time to take advantage of the public evening school. In time he learned to read, to follow a conversation or lecture; but he never learned to write correctly; and his pronunciation remains extremely foreign to this day.

Almost his first act on landing on American soil, three years before, had been his application for naturalization. He had taken the remaining steps in the process with eager promptness, and at the earliest moment allowed by the law, he became a citizen of the United States.

The boasted freedom of the New World meant to him far more than the right to reside, travel, and work wherever he pleased; it meant the freedom to speak his thoughts, to throw off the shackles of superstition, to test his own fate, unhindered by political or religious tyranny.