The Immigrant in America

Part A. The following eight quotes are taken from oral histories of early twentieth-century immigrants. The question asked in each case was “Why did you immigrate to the United States?”

a. The main reason was bread. There was always bread in America.
b. Life in America was better. There was always work in America.
c. I never went to an American school, but I insisted that my children attend university in the United States where they would have more chance.¹
d. I still have a scar on my thigh where the Cossack [Russian soldier] struck me with his sword. I was three years old and my mother tried to protect me with her body, but he got to me.
e. During the pogrom [government-sponsored, anti-Jewish demonstration] in Vitebsk around 1905, my collarbone was broken and the back of my head still bears the scar of a dagger.
f. I wanted to go to America for freedom of speech. I was always afraid to express myself in Europe.
g. It did not seem reasonable for me to serve the Czar [in the army] for four years under the conditions that existed.
h. I thought of America as a wonderful place. There was no royalty—everyone was equal and had political freedom.²

1. Categorize the reasons for immigration to America in three groups. Head each column with a reason for immigration and categorize the reasons given above.

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²Jewish Women’s Federation, *Pittsburgh Sections By Myself, I’m a Book!* (Waltham, MA: American Jewish Historical Society).

2. Develop a one-sentence generalization explaining the reasons for immigration to the United States in the early twentieth century.

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Part B.
The chart is taken from Margaret F. Byington's *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*. The book is one volume of the extensive 1910 Pittsburgh Survey. Using the chart as your source, circle the correct answer for each statement in the items at the bottom.

**AVERAGE WEEKLY EXPENDITURE OF 90 BUDGET FAMILIES FOR VARIOUS ITEMS.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Group</th>
<th>Number of Families</th>
<th>Average Weekly Expenditure (dollars)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $12.00</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>$9.97 $1.88 $4.16 $0.38 $0.94 $0.94 $0.15 $0.70 $0.07 $0.20 $0.10 $0.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>$12.00–$14.99</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$13.32 $2.29 $5.86 $0.77 $1.57 $0.20 $0.23 $0.51 $0.05 $0.14 $0.47 $1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15.00–$19.99</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>$17.59 $2.73 $7.11 $0.66 $2.10 $0.36 $0.58 $1.05 $0.05 $0.63 $0.48 $1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20.00 and over</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$25.56 $3.73 $9.38 $0.90 $3.36 $0.80 $0.66 $1.86 $0.08 $0.11 $0.58 $4.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.16  Margaret F. Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (Bala Cynwyd, PA: Ayer Company, 1970), 98.

**Note:**
- For $8.00 a month, one could rent a two-room tenement without running water.
- The minimum for which a skillful housekeeper could provide food enough to maintain the health of an adult was 22¢ per day.

1. The $15.00–$19.99 group spent more money on liquor and tobacco than on fuel.
   - True  False

2. The chart suggests that alcohol was least important to the highest income group.
   - True  False

3. The low expenditure for medicine in the lowest income group suggests that the poorest families were also the healthiest.
   - True  False
4. A family in the lowest income group could adequately feed two adults and two teenaged 
sons.
   True  False

5. The average annual expenditure of the poorest group is about:
   A. $200—$300,  B. $500—600,  C. $750—800,  D. $1000

6. The only item the lowest income group seemed able to afford is:
   A. Education for the children,  B. A down payment on a house,  
   C. Liquor and tobacco.  D. A vacation

7. Even the poorest families considered insurance a necessity.
   True  False

Part C. The following quotes are taken from oral histories of immigrants who responded to 
the question, "How did you adjust to your life in America?" List at the end of the handout 
four sources of satisfaction the immigrants found in their new life in America.

   a. We achieved our goal. We made a home for our parents.
   b. Nothing disappointed me because I came from a country where we had no right to say 
       what we wanted, no right to vote; one didn't dare say anything against the Russian 
       government. Here in America I could go anywhere and say anything. I had achieved my 
       goal of freedom.
   c. I had very little schooling but all my children went through college. I went to work as a 
       child. My children went only after their schooling was complete.
   d. I love my country and the American flag. It gave me everything I ever dreamed of or 
       wanted. I was an American citizen, I had made a living, raised my son, given him an 
       education, and I saw him successful. 3
   e. In Italy we were poor—always on the verge of starvation. We were not poor in America; 
       we just had a little less than the others.4
   f. We lived in the little Russian town of Pliscov. My mother's parents and my father's 
       parents, and all their brothers and sisters all lived close together. We never met anyone 
       but our own family, and do you know what? It was almost the same thing here in 
       America. We all lived together down in the Hill District and never really mingled with the 
       others. So every Sunday morning my brother would take me and we would walk over the 
       bridge to church. That's where we met people; that's how we socialized. 5

3 Jewish Women's Federation, Pittsburgh Section's By Myself, I'm a Book! (Waltham, MA: American Jewish 
   Historical Society).
5 Corinne Azen Krause, "Urbanization Without Breakdown: Italian, Jewish, and Slavic Immigrant Women in 
Sources of satisfaction:

1.

2.

3.

4.