Immigration to the U.S.: Proud to Be Americans

Basic Information

Grade Level: 6–8
Subject Area: Visual Arts, Social Studies, U.S. History
Time Required: 3 sessions
Student Skills Developed: Making inferences and drawing conclusions, comparison and contrast, narrative writing, evidence-based learning, decision making, interpreting written information

Artworks

Newark Museum Collection
Jerome Myers
Italian Procession, ca. 1925
oil on canvas,
25 1/4 x 30 in.,
Gift of Mrs. Felix Fuld,
Newark Museum Collection 1925 25.1155

National Endowment for the Humanities, *Picturing America Collection*
Childe Hassam (1859–1935)
Allies Day, May 1917, 1917.
oil on canvas,
36 ½ x 30 ¼ in. (92.7 x 76.8 cm.). Gift of Ethelyn McKinney in memory of her brother, Glenn Ford McKinney.
Image © 2006 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, European immigration reached unprecedented peaks. African Americans from the South poured into Harlem, while eastern and southern Europeans settled in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In this lesson, students compare and contrast two early twentieth-century processions. American Impressionist Childe Hassam painted America's patriotic exuberance on Allies Day soon after the country entered World War I. Jerome Myers, an American Realist, often associated

with New York's Ashcan School artists, painted an Italian immigrant procession. Students read Russian immigrant Elias Lieberman's patriotic poem "I Am an American" before writing an imagined immigrant's feelings in an "I Am" poem.

Guiding Questions

+ How do artists Jerome Myers and Childe Hassam convey the spirit of patriotic American street scenes?

+ What was life like for early twentieth-century immigrants in America's large cities?

Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

+ Compare and contrast Childe Hassam's and Jerome Myers's paintings of early twentieth-century street scenes.

+ Explain the meaning of Elias Lieberman's poem "I Am an American."

+ Write an "I Am" poem that shows an understanding of immigrant life in large American cities in the early twentieth century.

Background Information for the Teacher

Immigration 1880–1920

As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, immigrants crowded into the large coastal cities of the United States. Previously, northern Europeans made up the bulk of new arrivals, but by 1920 southern and eastern Europeans were pouring through the Ellis Island immigration station, in New York harbor. Although these newcomers fanned out into the rest of the nation, many packed into New York City's tenements. The Lower East Side of Manhattan became an enclave of Greek, Polish, Italian, and other nationalities, where neighbors shared the same language, religion, food, and celebrations. During the same time, Japanese and other Asian immigrants settled West Coast cities.

As immigration numbers swelled, Americans whose families had arrived in the U.S. a few generations previously became anxious about economic, political, and religious changes occurring in the nation. Congress passed a series of increasingly restrictive immigration bills. The Immigration Act of 1924 slowed the flood of eastern and southern European immigration to a trickle. By the 1950s, less than twenty percent of New Yorkers were immigrants.

For more information see:

American Hall Museum Online
American Centuries—view from New England
Turn of the Centuries Exhibit
Newcomers 1880–1920
http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/home.html

National Park Service—Ellis Island
http://www.nps.gov/elis/historyculture/index.htm

U.S. History
The Rush of Immigrants
http://www.ushistory.org/us/38c.asp

Jerome Myers (1867–1940)

Artist Jerome Myers was born into a very poor family, in Virginia, in 1867. He lived in Philadelphia and Baltimore before moving to New York City, where he painted theatrical scenes and theater interiors. He studied art in the evenings at Cooper Union and then at the Art Students League. In 1895, he began working in the *New York Herald Tribune* newspaper's art department. He married artist Ethel Klink in 1905.

Jerome Myers was an urban Realist who often sketched and painted idealized scenes of Lower East Side immigrants. His subjects included religious processions, children playing, and marketplaces. His visions of happy, clean, everyday life in New York's slums were far from the harsh reality shown in contemporary photographs. Myers was considered a Progressive because he chose to paint these impoverished subjects.

He is often associated with the Ashcan School, an early twentieth-century group of American artists who painted common street scenes and the underside of city life. But Myers began painting his urban vision more than a decade before Ashcan artists influenced American art. His muted color compositions of soft forms were an optimistic view of city life. He was one of the original organizers of the influential 1913 Armory Show, which introduced contemporary European art to America. As a respected artist, he became a full member of the National Academy in 1929.

Learn more about Jerome Myers and his art at:
Seeing America: Jerome Myers's *Sunday Morning*, 1907.
http://mag.rochester.edu/seeingAmerica/pdfs/35.pdf

Childe Hassam (1859–1935)

Frederick Childe Hassam was born in Massachusetts in 1859. At seventeen, he was apprenticed to a wood engraver, but soon became a freelance illustrator. He studied art in Boston before traveling to Paris, where he studied art and exhibited in the Paris salons. When he returned to the United States, he lived in New York City. He painted street scenes of New York, Boston, and Paris. He spent summers painting New England scenes infused

with light and executed with visible brushstrokes, reminiscent of French Impressionism. Twelve of his artworks appeared in the 1913 Armory Show.

Hassam painted a series of variations of *Allies Day, May 1917*. The United States had entered World War I along with her allies, France and Britain. Flags of all three nations, along with a Canadian flag, line the street as a huge parade fills the Manhattan street below. Hassam painted this scene from a balcony at Fifth Avenue and Fifty-second Street. He dedicated this painting "to the coming together of [our] three peoples in the fight for democracy."

See the Teachers Resource Book on the Picturing America website for further information and discussion ideas.
Learn more about this painting at:
Picturing America Teachers Resource Book, 12b, Allies Day, May 1917, 1917.

Exhibitions—National Gallery of Art
American Impressionism and Realism
Biography: Childe Hassam
http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/horo_hassam.shtm

Elias Lieberman
When Elias Lieberman was seven, his family immigrated from Russia to the United States. They settled in New York City. In 1903, Lieberman graduated from City College and then earned a doctorate from New York University in 1911. This poet and educator taught elementary and high school before becoming principal of New York's Thomas Jefferson High School and then associate superintendent of schools. He was an editor of *Puck Magazine* and literary editor of the *American Hebrew Journal*. Lieberman's most famous poem, "I Am an American," was published in 1916 in *Everybody's Magazine*.

Preparing to Teach This Lesson

+ Review the lesson plan and the websites used throughout.
+ Locate and bookmark suggested materials and websites.
+ Download and print out documents you will use, and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing.
+ Students can access the primary source materials and some of the activity materials via the EDSITEment LaunchPad.

Lesson Plan Activities

1. Analyze two artworks through comparison and contrast.

2. Read a primary source poem, and write a poem
3. Create a family heritage banner

Lesson Activity 1

Painting Analysis
Childe Hassam

Students will analyze Childe Hassam's painting *Allies Day, May, 1917*, 1917, through three short exercises.

+ After students have studied the painting for a few minutes, suggest that they write a few words or phrases that come to mind as they look at it. Let students share their words with the rest of the class.

+ Have students watch a short video about Hassam's *Allies Day,* : "*Allies Day," May 1917*, 1917, Childe Hassam
  http://www.nga.gov/
  or
  Picturing America on Screen
  Childe Hassam
  http://www.thirteen.org/picturing-america/childe-hassam-allies-day/#.Uh9o4xZu_A4

+ Have students describe the mood of this painting. Ask them how Hassam created this mood. *He created an exuberant, cheerful, patriotic mood or spirit with light, bright colors and the American flag colors, red, white, and blue.*

Students then compare this artwork to Jerome Myers's painting *Italian Procession,* using a Venn diagram

+ Show students Jerome Myers's *Italian Procession*. Place it or project it next to Childe Hassam's *Allies Day*.

+ Ask students what seems to be happening in this painting. Encourage them to look for symbols. People in this crowd are carrying religious banners, holding candles, and an American flag's stripes are near the lower left. A small cross tops a shape that might be a reliquary or enclosure for a religious statue. Garland swags, rosettes, and lights decorate the building.

+ Tell students that Myers painted an Italian community's religious procession. This was one of the first Italian street festivals held in New York. It may have been like the San Gennaro festival that is still held each year in lower Manhattan, which you can see online. (In addition to the official site, Feast of San Gennaro—NYC, www.sangennaro.org, there are many YouTube videos.)

+ Although both Hassam's and Myers's street scenes take place on New York City's Manhattan island, the Allies Day parade is in a wealthy part of town, while the Italian procession is in the Lower East Side—a slum crowded with recent southern and eastern European immigrants. Show students an interactive map of Manhattan.

Have students complete the Venn diagram on the next page. Sample answers are given in the table below.

***Allies Day, May, 1917*, 1917**	**Shared similarities**	***Italian Procession*, 1925**	**Comments**
Light colors		Dark colors	Note how this sets a mood
Sun	Light source	Candles, electric lights	Notice how each artist has suggested these light sources and the mood created by the light in each painting.
Lots of American flags and French and British flags. Large, brightly colored flags are in foreground; very important part of the painting. American flag is highest in composition.	Flags, banners [flags, banners continued]	Only one American flag, other banners present; some are religious. Flags are in muted colors, but stand out due to light/dark value contrast.	Even though titled *Italian Procession,* an American flag is in the celebration and suggests Italian American patriotism
Figures are very small, black lines in street. They are less important than the flags.	People	Heads and bodies fill the foreground; people are on the balconies, hanging out the windows. People are most important in this painting.	
Many buildings are in background	Outdoor city street scene, city buildings	Viewer is much closer to a single façade that fills the composition. A muted city	

		building is in the upper right.	
Great depth	Indication of depth	Not so much depth	Note diagonal perspective lines in each painting and relative size of objects and people.
Looking down at parade from higher viewpoint.	Elevated viewpoint	Only slightly higher than the scene.	Hassam painted his scene from a balcony. The buildings are identifiable.
Poor neighborhood		Rich neighborhood	Students might not know this from looking at the paintings.
Painted 1917 as U.S. entered World War I.	Indication of time period or historical events	Painted in 1925 following 1924 passage of restrictive Immigration Act and much criticism of southern European immigrants.	Students may notice this if there has been prior discussion about immigration quotas and World War I.

PROUD TO BE AMERICANS
COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Name: _____ Date: _____

Write words and phrases describing each artwork in the circle for that painting.
Write similarities for both paintings in the center of the overlapping area.

***Allies Day, May 1917*, by Childe Hassam**

***Italian Procession*, by Jerome Myers**

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Lesson Activity 2

Primary Source Document and Writing Poems

Provide each student with a copy of Elias Lieberman's poem "I Am an American," and follow-up discussion questions.

+ You may project a colorful image of the poem from:
  Elias Lieberman's patriotic poem "I Am an American."
  http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Lieberman_I-Am-an-American1.pdf

After students read the poem and consider the thought questions, discuss their responses to this poem. Remind them that this was written in 1916, as millions of immigrants were entering America. There was growing criticism of these immigrants as racism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism became uglier.

+ Find background information on 1910–20 feelings toward immigrants and questions about what to label these newcomers in census reports at
  Government: 1910s–1920s
  European Immigration and Defining Whiteness
  Race—Are We So Different?
  http://www.understandingrace.org/history/gov/eastern_southern_immigration.html

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT
I AM AN AMERICAN BY ELIAS LIEBERMAN, 1916

I Am an American, by Elias Lieberman, 1916, *Everybody's Magazine*

I am an American.
My father belongs to the Sons of the Revolution;
My mother, to the Colonial Dames.
One of my ancestors pitched tea overboard in Boston Harbor;
Another stood his ground with Warren;
Another hungered with Washington at Valley Forge.
My forefathers were America in the making:

They spoke in her council halls;
They died on her battlefields;
They commanded her ships;
They cleared her forests.

Dawns reddened and paled.
Stanch hearts of mine beat fast at each new star In the nation's flag.
Keen eyes of mine foresaw her greater glory:
The sweep of her seas, The plenty of her plains,
The man-hives in her billion-wired cities.
Every drop of blood in me holds a heritage of patriotism.
I am an American.

I am an American.
My father was an atom of dust,
My mother a straw in the wind,
To his serene majesty.
One of my ancestors died in the mines of Siberia;
Another was crippled for life by twenty blows of the knout;
Another was killed defending his home during the massacres.
The history of my ancestors is a trail of blood
To the palace gate of the Great White Czar.

But then the dream came
The dream of America.
In the light of the Liberty torch
The atom of dust became a man
And the straw in the wind became a woman
For the first time.

"See," said my father, pointing to the flag that fluttered near,
"That flag of stars and stripes is yours;
It is the emblem of the promised land,
It means, my son, the hope of humanity.Live for it—die for it!"

Under the open sky of my new country I swore to do so;
And every drop of blood in me will keep that vow.
I am proud of my future. I am an American.

PRIMARY SOURCE DOCUMENT
I AM AN AMERICAN BY ELIAS LIEBERMAN, 1916

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is the ethnic heritage or family history of the speaker in the first verse of the poem?

2. What is the ethnic heritage or family history of the speaker in the second verse of the poem?

3. Could it be that the same person is speaking in both verses? _____ If so, how could one person have such different family backgrounds?

4. What does the father mean when he says that the American flag is “the emblem of a promised land”?

5. What is Lieberman’s main message in this poem?

6. What does the American flag mean to you? Do you identify with the first verse or the second verse of this poem? Why?

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PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN
CREATING AN "I AM" POEM

Name: _____

Date: _____

+ Imagine that you are a recent immigrant in Jerome Myers's painting, *Italian Procession*.

+ Follow the *Writing an "I Am" Poem* guide sheet to write an "I Am" poem like this new American could have written it.

+ Use information you have learned about these immigrants as you write this immigrant's poem.

+ Show that you understand what life was like for early twentieth-century immigrants. Remember that this immigrant probably faced some of these experiences:
    escaping poverty or danger in their original homeland;
    leaving family and friends;
    traveling thousands of miles in a crowded boat across a rough ocean;
    the excitement of finally seeing the new land;
    facing the uncertainty of entry through the Ellis Island immigration station;
    meeting long-forgotten relatives;
    discovering that only those in your immediate neighborhood speak your language, eat the same food, and worship the same way you do;
    living in a crowded, unhealthy tenement;
    facing racial discrimination; and
    working very hard to earn money for food.

PROUD TO BE
CREATING A FAMILY HERITAGE BANNER

Name: _____

In this lesson, you will design a banner that shows your ethnic heritage. Use these questions and activities to get started.

1. What countries did your great-grandparents (or even farther back) come from?

2. What does that country's flag look like? You might have more than one country in your background.

3. What festivals did your ancestors celebrate in their country of origin?

4. What traditions and objects are associated with this?

5. Which of these festivals does your family still celebrate?

Research symbols associated with this festival or your ancestor's original country or countries. This may be as simple as flag colors. You might try combining symbols from the old culture(s) with those of their new homeland. Design a banner or flag that could be carried in a procession or displayed at a festival.

Draw a series of quick, small thumbnail sketches of possible designs for your banner.

On the back of this page or another paper enlarge one or two of these to about a fourth of a sheet of notebook paper. Try arranging shapes and areas of colors in different ways.

Create a larger banner using colored paper. Cut large areas of color from colored paper. Use markers for smaller areas. Write a brief description of the symbolism in your banner. Attach this to your design.

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Extending the Lesson

+ Encourage students to research festivals and symbols that are part of their cultural heritage. They may use the Library of Congress's interactive Immigration presentation to explore their heritage and where their ancestors entered the United States http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/

+ Have students analyze Italian Procession by looking for all the candles in the artwork. Show students the three-dimensional image of a candle mold from the Newark Museum's teaching collection. Ask students by looking at the object, how were candles made? What was the process for making them? How does the candle light contribute or change the artwork.

+ How has U.S. immigration changed since the 1920s? Students may learn more about immigration at: Immigration to New York, 1900–2000 http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/newyork-immigration/

+ Immigration continues to be a hot topic in Congress and in the news. Start a bulletin board or webspace where students can post immigration news.

Resources

Selected NEH EDSITEment Websites

Picturing America
Picturing America Teachers Resource Book, 12b, Allies Day, May 1917, 1917.
http://picturingamerica.neh.gov

Short Videos about Hassam's *Allies Day*
Picturing America on Screen
Childe Hassam
http://www.thirteen.org/picturing-america/childe-hassam-allies-day/#.Uh9o4xZu_A4

"*Allies Day," May 1917*, 1917, Childe Hassam
http://www.nga.gov/

Government: 1910s–1920s
European Immigration and Defining Whiteness
Race—Are We So Different?

http://www.understandingrace.org/history/gov/eastern_southern_immigration.html

What So Proudly We Hail: The Meaning of America Curriculum
I Am an American, by Elias Lieberman
http://www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/i-am-an-american

American Hall Museum Online
American Centuries—View from New England
Turns of the Centuries Exhibit
Newcomers 1880–1920
http://www.americancenturies.mass.edu/home.html

National Park Service—Ellis Island
http://www.nps.gov/elis/historyculture/index.htm

U.S. History
The Rush of Immigrants
http://www.ushistory.org/us/38c.asp

Exhibitions—National Gallery of Art
American Impressionism and Realism
Biography: Childe Hassam
http://www.nga.gov/exhibitions/horo_hassam.shtm

Library of Congress Presentation
Immigration—Italian
A City of Villages
http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/italian5.html.

PBS American Experience
Immigration to New York, 1900–2000
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/newyork-immigration/

New York: Center of the World
Layers of Lower Manhattan—Interactive map
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/flash-interactive/newyork/

Photos of immigrants
Lewis W. Hine
http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/?col_id=175
http://www.sangennaro.org

Tenement Museum—Parade photo

http://www.tenement.org

Library of Congress
http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/92500817/
Five boys at New Year's celebration, Chinatown, New York City, 1911

Selected EDSITEment Lesson Plans

Pearl S. Buck: "On Discovering America"

Carl Sandburg's "Chicago": Bringing a Great City Alive

Having Fun: Leisure and Entertainment at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Romare Bearden's "The Dove"—A Meeting of Vision and Sound

A Raisin in the Sun: The Quest for the American Dream

Standards Alignment

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.6 Analyze how a writer develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7.2 Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.7.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
Visual Arts Standard: 4. Content Standard: Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures
Visual Arts Standard: 6. Content Standard: Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines

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Jerome Myers

Italian Procession, ca. 1925
oil on canvas,
25 ¼ x 30 in.
Gift of Mrs. Felix Fuld,
Newark Museum Collection
1925 25.1155

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Humanities

Childe Hassam

Allies Day, May 1917, 1917.
oil on canvas,
36 1/2 x 30 1/4 in. (92.7 x 76.8 cm.).
Gift of Ethelyn McKinney in memory of
her brother, Glenn Ford McKinney.
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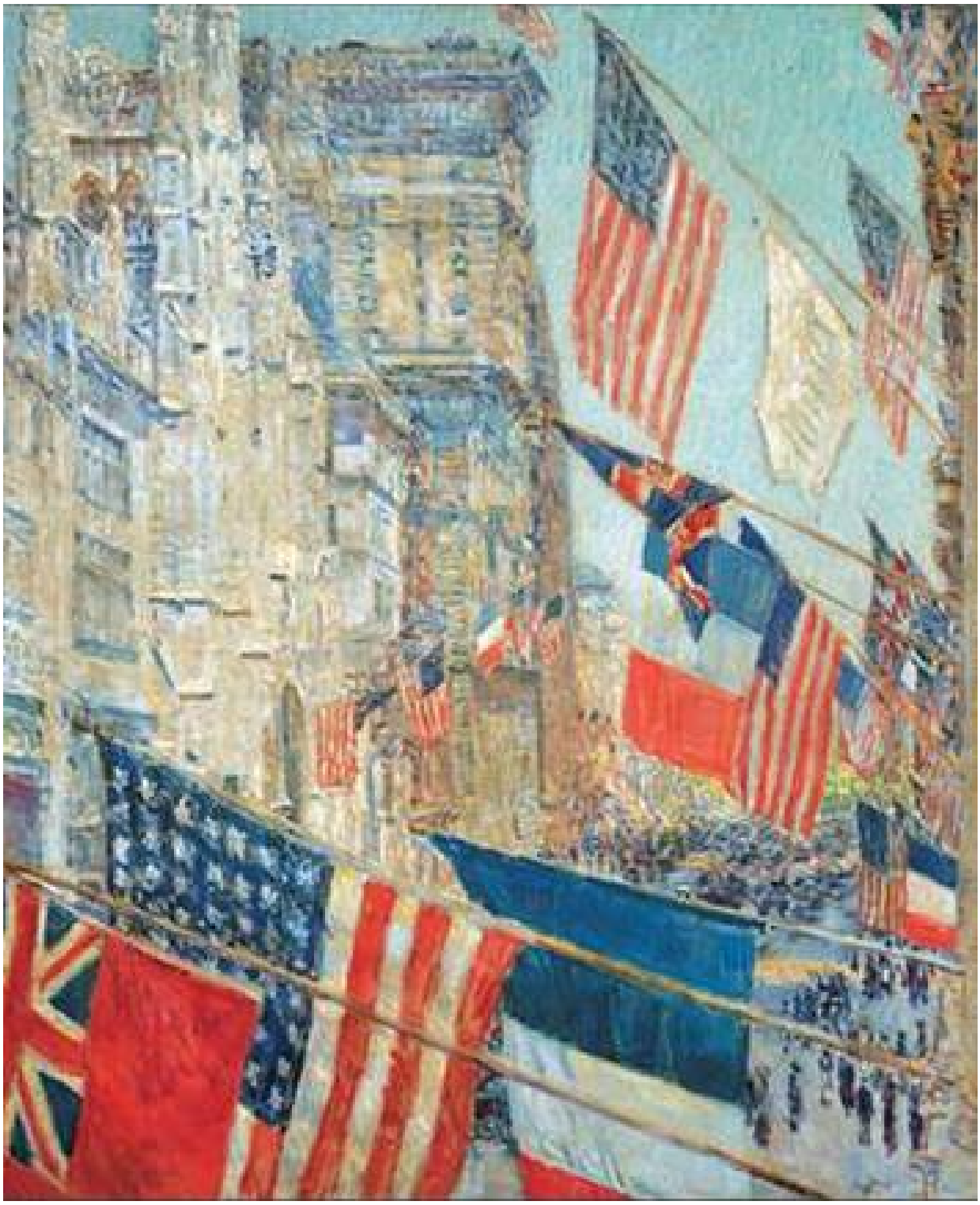
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