

German immigrants in the United States: Levi Strauss

Case Study

Levi Strauss was born in Germany in 1829. His parents were poor. After his father's death his mother decided to immigrate to North America in search for a better life, taking her three youngest children with her. Soon, aged 24, Levi Strauss decided to follow the gold-rush-movement and went to San Francisco where he opened a wholesale business marketing clothing, blankets, hats and other dry goods to stores, which then sold these items to miners and other settlers. In 1873, Levi Strauss invented and patented what his name still stands for: the blue-jeans, extremely sturdy pants that were soon highly appreciated not only by workers but also by the fashion-industry. They became a part of American culture and one of the best-known brands in the world.



Your notes:

German immigrants in the United States: Marlene Dietrich Case Study

Marlene Dietrich was born in Berlin in 1901. She started her career as an actress and singer in Germany but soon followed her mentor Joseph von Sternberg to Hollywood and became an American citizen in 1937. Films like “The Blue Angel” (1st European talking picture), “Shanghai Express”, “Witness for the Prosecution” or “Morocco” (for which she was nominated for the Academy Award) reflect her lasting contribution to film history. Due to her immense popularity she was offered a king’s ransom to return to Germany by the Nazis, but – having a strong political opinion and an even stronger personality to express herself – she declined and instead recorded several anti-Nazi records and sang for the Allied troops during World War II. Without question, Marlene was a superstar, famous for her movies and cabaret-performances, her songs and her political activities and certainly also for being a fashion-icon. She died in Paris in 1992 and is buried in Berlin.



Your notes:

German immigrants in the United States: “Old Shatterhand” Case Study

German children believe that one of their favourite literary heroes, “**Old Shatterhand**”, was a historical personality. He left his humble family in Germany and emigrated to North America in search of a better life. And that he got! “Old Shatterhand” soon achieved success and glory by one man battles for human rights, especially in favor of Native Americans. In fact, “Old Shatterhand” and his blood brother Winnetou, the chief of an Indian tribe, became famous heroes in their ongoing struggle for the good.

“Old Shatterhand”, as well as Winnetou, are, of course fictitious characters. They were created by the successful author Karl May (1842-1912). His novels, reaching cult status for generations of Germans, are still read today. They are marketed in films and movies and even performed in annual Karl May Open Air Festivals.



Your notes:

German immigrants in the United States: Wernher von Braun Case Study

Wernher von Braun was born in 1912 as the first son of an influential aristocratic German family. From early childhood on he was fascinated by space and rockets and, after getting a PhD from the University of Berlin, made a fast career in Germany's prestigious space-program. Under his leadership, a group of engineers designed and built rockets that were able to fly a distance greater than a mile. Von Braun's inventions were of special interest for the Nazis since rockets were used as weapons during World War II. Using heavy labour of thousands of concentration camp inmates, von Braun's team invented and built the "famous" V2-rocket which was used e.g. for the bombing of London in 1944. Six months later he and his team surrendered to the Americans and were brought to the United States. There he started his second career, becoming one of the most influential engineers in the US-rocket-programs. He received US-citizenship in 1955 and became director of NASA, significantly influencing the work on the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo Projects. He died in 1977 in Virginia.



Your notes:

German immigrants in the United States: Dirk Nowitzki Case Study

Dirk Nowitzki was born in Würzburg, Germany, in 1978 and moved to the United States when he was 20 years old. He is considered to be one of the best basketball players in the world and has achieved great victories as forward player with his team, the Dallas Mavericks. Nowitzki is a natural talent: he started playing basketball when he was already 15-years-old and became the first German basketball player ever to be traded directly from Europe to the NBA. Being a “modern immigrant”, he lives and works in the United States but also plays in the German National Basketball Team on an international level.



Your notes:
