



Immigration:

1. **The rise of Nazi Germany.** A Nazi soldier holds a sign warning, “Germans beware: Don’t buy from Jews.” Next to him, a notice on a doctor’s office reads, “Attention Jews: visiting is forbidden.” Both signs are written in German.
2. **Two women mourn men in coffins.** Art historians often identify the men as Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, based on their similarity to Shahn’s depiction of them earlier in his career. However, according to Bernarda Bryson Shahn, the figures were actually victims of a pogrom (a riot targeting the Jewish community). This would have been unusual since coffins are closed in Jewish tradition.
3. **Two men sew while sitting cross-legged on the floor.** This was the traditional working position for tailors. Many European Jews worked in the garment trade because they were banned from certain other types of work and from owning land.
4. **The Registry Room at Ellis Island,** which millions of immigrants passed through on their way into America. The cage-like structures are pens facilitating the movement of people through the hall. The Statue of Liberty can be seen through a window in the back of the room.
5. **Bridge symbolizing the act of immigration.** Some of the immigrants are specific individuals. Front and center are Shahn’s mother, Gittel Lieberman Shahn, and Albert Einstein. Next to Gittel is artist Raphael Soyer (1899–1987) who immigrated to America with his family as a teenager. Further back is Charles Steinmetz (1865–1923), an electrical engineer and inventor. Shahn chose to portray luminaries like Einstein, Soyer, and Steinmetz to show that although immigrants came to America to improve their lives, they also brought valuable talent and knowledge with them.
6. **The lives of immigrants after arriving in America,** drawn from Shahn’s memories of his own childhood on the Lower East Side. In the foreground, immigrants sleep outside in the park because it was often too hot in tenement buildings (seen in the background) during the summer months.

Labor:

7. **Working conditions for American needleworkers.** Some were employed in large garment factories. Others worked in small, crowded sweatshops located in tenement apartments. Some even did piecework in their own homes, as one woman does here with the help of her children.
8. **Labor union activity.** On the left, workers file into a union hall with one man clutching a flyer that reads “Mass meeting.” In the center, a union organizer speaks to a crowd of workers. The organizer resembles John L. Lewis (1880–1969), the president of the United Mine Workers of America, 1920–1960, and the founding president of the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO). Lewis was a somewhat controversial figure and according to Bernarda, “Ben did his utmost not to make that look like John L. Lewis, but, in spite of everything, he did.” Regardless, the text on the placard next to the figure comes from Lewis’ 1937 speech, “The Rights of Labor.” Behind the organizer is the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory where a 1911 fire killed 146 workers, most of whom were young, female immigrants. This tragedy led labor activists to demand safer working conditions.
9. **Gates representing the growth of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU).** The front gate shows the ILGWU’s newest building, while further back are the buildings of the local unions that the ILGWU grew out of. Applicants to the Jersey Homesteads project had to be union members in good standing and most were members of the ILGWU.
10. **Classroom featuring a lesson in labor history.** On the wall is a picture of Jewish immigrant Samuel Gompers (1850–1924), the first and longest serving president of the American Federation of Labor, who helped grow it into the biggest and most important labor union in the world. The blackboard tracks the history of labor unions in America and lists a number of major strikes.

Jersey Homesteads:

11. **Men work in an orchard.** The final section of the mural shows the creation of Jersey Homesteads and scenes of life in the town.
12. **Workers build the Jersey Homesteads factory.**
13. **These houses,** which are right on top of each other, are meant to contrast the open green space in Jersey Homesteads.
14. **A family waiting to move to Jersey Homesteads.**
15. **“The ideal of countryside and orchards,”** as described by Bernarda. The large building is labeled “Co-op.”
16. **Alfred Kastner, the architect for Jersey Homesteads, leans over the town’s blueprint.** Around the drafting table sit other influential New Deal figures: Heywood Broun (1888–1939), a newspaper journalist who wrote about social justice and labor unions; Rexford Tugwell (1891–1979), head of the Resettlement Administration; Senator Robert Wagner (1877–1953), who wrote the National Labor Relations Act (a landmark law governing labor rights); and labor leaders Sidney Hillman (1887–1946) and John Brophy (1883–1963). Above the drafting table is a poster of President Roosevelt reading, “A Gallant Leader: Franklin D. Roosevelt.”

Jersey Homesteads Mural, 1938. Ben Shahn (1898–1969); located in the Roosevelt Public School, N.J. Photo by © RicardoBarros.com 2019

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