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Untold Stories of How Everyone Got Here

Border-guarding Minutemen and immigrant-pummeling politicians should get a grip on this country's history at the [Ellis Island Immigration Museum](#) in New York Harbor. Exhibits are planned to tell the full story of the teeming masses, including African slaves, displaced Indians, modern globetrotters and Know-Nothing nativists.

"There's an old saying among immigrant groups: America beckons, but Americans repel," said Alan Kraut, chairman of the museum's history committee. He promised that the updating will be candid and inspiring as it presents so much that's been overlooked in the continuous restocking of America.

Ellis Island operated from 1892 to 1954, and an estimated 40 percent of today's Americans are descended from foreigners who passed through its halls. Until now, its museum has mainly told the stories of European immigrant groups. The new Peopling of America Center is scheduled to open this fall with the mission to be the one place in the nation where all immigrants can go to search their story roots.

Scholars and exhibit designers have spent three years vetting American history for the missing tales. The new displays will show the smallest villages and largest cities changing with immigration but also the larger economic and political pressures driving the myriad decisions to move on. The nation's zigzagging immigration laws, the virulent anti-immigrant prejudices and newcomers' resilience will all be depicted through family histories.

Ideally, the museum will blur the narrative "they" — the immigrants — with the "we" who visit, as in Mr. Kraut's bracing summary: "Without their talent and muscle, where would we be?"