Germans were among the most numerous immigrants to the eighteenth-century colonies. Many wrote letters to family members at home, relating their experiences and impressions.

Dearest Father, Brother, and Sister and Brother-in-law,

I have told you quite fully about the trip, and I will tell you what will not surprise you—that we have a free country. Of the sundry craftsmen, one may do whatever one wants. Nor does the land require payment of tithes [taxes to support a local landlord, typical in Europe]. . . . The land is very big from Canada to the east of us to Carolina in the south and to the Spanish border in the west. . . . One can settle wherever one wants without asking anyone when he buys or leases something.

I have always enough to do and we have no shortage of food. Bread is plentiful. If I work for two days I earn more bread than in eight days [at home]. . . . Also I can buy many things so reasonably [for example] a pair of shoes for [roughly] seven Pennsylvania shillings. . . . I think that with God's help I will obtain land. I am not pushing for it until I am in a better position.

I would like for my brother to come. . . . and it will then be even nicer in the country. . . . I assume that the land has been described to you sufficiently by various people and it is not surprising that the immigrant agents [demand payment]. For the journey is long and it costs much to stay away for one year.

Johannes Hänner

From Memorial against Non-English Immigration (December 1727)

Only a minority of emigrants from Europe to British North America in the eighteenth century came from the British Isles. Some English settlers, such as the authors of this petition from Pennsylvania to the authorities in London, found the growing diversity of the colonial population quite disturbing.

How careful every European state, that has Colonies in America, has been of preserving the advantage arising from them wholly to their own Nation and People, is obvious to all who will consider the policy & conduct of the Spanish, French & others in relation to theirs. . . .

About the year 1710 a Company of religious People called Menists [Mennonites] from the Palantine of the Rhine, transported themselves into the Province of Pennsylvania from Holland in British shipping, and purchased Lands at low rates towards the River Susquehanna. The Terms & Reception they met with proved so encouraging, that they invited diverse of their relations and friends to follow them. In the succeeding years. . . . several thousands were settled in that Province. . . . We are now assured by the same people that five or six thousand more are to follow them this next ensuing year.

All these men young & old who arrived since the first, come generally very well armed. Many of them are Papists, & most of them appear inured to War & other hardships. They retire commonly back into the woods amongst or behind the remoter inhabitants, sometimes purchase land, but often sit down on any piece they find vacant that they judge convenient for them without asking questions. . . . Few of them apply now to be Naturalized, [and as they] generally . . . adhere to their own customs. The part of the country they principally settle in is that towards the French of Canada, whose interest, it may be apprehended, . . . (since several of them speak their language) [they] would as willingly favor as the English. . . . It is hoped therefore that nothing need be added to shew the present necessity of putting a stop to that augmentation of their strength. . . . A general provision against all Foreigners may be necessary.

QUESTIONS

1. What does Johannes Hänner have in mind when he calls America a “free country”?

2. What do the petitioners find objectionable about non-English migrants to Pennsylvania?

3. How do these documents reflect different views of who should be entitled to the benefits of freedom in the American colonies?