

7. Eugenics, Citizenship, and Immigration

America must be kept American. Biological laws show . . . that Nordics deteriorate when mixed with other races.

Calvin Coolidge

Between 1890 and 1914, over 15 million immigrants entered the United States. In some large cities, one out of every three residents was foreign-born. Many Americans felt threatened by the newcomers. In the early 1900s, economist Simon Patten described the way those fears were shaping American life:

Each class or section of the nation is becoming conscious of an opposition between its standards and the activities and tendencies of some less-developed class. The South has its Negro, the city has its slums. . . . The friends of American institutions fear the ignorant immigrant, and the workingman dislikes the Chinese. Every one is beginning to differentiate those with proper qualifications for citizenship from some other class or classes which he wishes to restrain or exclude from society.

President Calvin Coolidge shared that consciousness. His concerns and those of other Americans about the effects of “race mixing” were heightened by eugenicists like Harry Laughlin and Carl Brigham (Chapter 5). They insisted that “according to all evidence available,” “American intelligence is declining, and will proceed with an accelerating rate.” They attributed the decline to the “presence here” of “inferior races.” These eugenicists insisted that the nation could reverse the decline through laws that would “insure a continuously progressive upward evolution.” They urged that those steps “be dictated by science and not by political expediency. Immigration should not only be restrictive but highly selective.”

Brigham’s *A Study of American Intelligence* and other books like it gave many Americans, including the president, a “scientific rationale” for their prejudices. These books also raised important questions about membership in American society. Who should be allowed to settle in the nation? What are “the proper qualifications for citizenship”? Chapter 7 explores the impact of the eugenics movement on the way ordinary Americans and their leaders answered these questions in the early 1900s. It also considers the consequences of those decisions on the lives of real people then and now. Like earlier chapters, Chapter 7 serves as reminder that science, in the words of physicist Leon M. Lederman, “can be used to raise mankind to new heights or literally to destroy the planet We give you a powerful engine. You steer the ship.”

Guarded Gates or an Open Door?

Reading 1

In 1876, the United States celebrated the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. In honor of the event, the French gave the nation a huge copper statue that depicts liberty as a woman holding high a giant torch. Emma Lazarus, a Jew whose family had lived in the nation for generations, later wrote a poem describing the statue.

A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome. . . .
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips.
"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest tossed, to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

In 1903, the year that Lazarus's poem was carved into the base of the Statue of Liberty, 10 percent of the nation was foreign-born. As immigration increased so did the fears of many native-born Americans. Native-born workers often viewed the newcomers as competitors for jobs, housing, and public services. More prosperous Americans felt threatened by the way the immigrants crowded into the nation's largest cities. Their legitimate concerns about the ability of local governments to deal with overcrowding turned into fears about the character of the newcomers. It was as if the new arrivals were the carriers of social problems rather than individuals who experienced those problems.

Like Emma Lazarus, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, came from a family that had lived in the United States for generations. He modeled his poem after the one she wrote, but the sentiment was very different. "The Unguarded Gate" was published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the magazine he edited, in 1892.

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
Named of the four winds, North, South, East and West;
Portals that lead to an enchanted land
Of cities, forests, fields of living gold,
Vast prairies, lordly summits touched with snow,

Majestic rivers sweeping proudly past
The Arab's date-palm and the Norsemen's pine—
A realm wherein are fruits of every zone,
Airs of all climes, for lo! throughout the year
The red rose blossoms somewhere—a rich land,
A later Eden planted in the wilds,
With not an inch of earth within its bound
But if a slave's foot press it sets him free!
Here, it is written, Toil shall have its wage,
And Honor honor, and the humblest man
Stand level with the highest in the law.
Of such a land have men in dungeons dreamed,
And with the vision brightening in their eyes
Gone smiling to the fagot and the sword.

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them presses a wild motley throng—
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Fleeing the Old World's poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,
Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In street and alley what strange tongues are these,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the tower of Babel knew!

O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well
To leave the gates unguarded? On thy breast
Fold Sorrow's children, soothe the hurts of fate,
Lift the down-trodden, but with hand of steel
Stay those who to thy sacred portals come
To waste the gifts of freedom. Have a care
Lest from thy brow the clustered stars be torn
And trampled in the dust. For so of old
The thronging Goth and Vandal trampled Rome,
And where the temples of the Caesars stood
The lean wolf unmolested made her lair.

In 1905, Francis Sargent, the commissioner general of immigration, was interviewed for a *New York Times* article entitled "Are We Facing an Immigration Peril?" He told a reporter:

"Put me down in the beginning as being fairly and unalterably opposed to what has been called the open door, for the time has come when every American citizen who is ambitious for the national future must regard with grave misgiving the mighty tide of immigration that, unless something is done, will soon poison or at least pollute the very fountainhead of American life and progress. Big as we are and blessed with an iron constitution, we cannot safely swallow such an endless-course dinner, so to say, without getting indigestion and perhaps national appendicitis."

"Do you mean that the danger is immediate or prospective?" he was asked.

"Both," he replied promptly. "Today there is an enormous alien population in our larger cities which is breeding crime and disease all the more dangerous because it is more or less hidden and insidious. But the greatest source of uneasiness has to do with the future. Under present conditions nearly one-half the immigrants who pass through [Ellis Island, the main port of entry for European immigrants] never get beyond New York City and State, or the immediately contiguous territory. Unless something is done to discourage this gradual consolidation, it is my fear and belief that within five years the alien population of the country will constitute a downright peril. . . ."

"During the past year there has been a notable increase in the number of criminals coming over here," [Sargent] continued, "some of them being the worst criminals in Europe. There is no question about it, for we have positive evidence of the fact. In short, the time has come for the country to demand to know the character of immigrants that Europe is shedding or trying to shed."

Continuing, the Commissioner stated that in several European cities, with or without the connivance of the authorities, inmates of hospitals and almshouses were, there was reason to believe, being provided with tickets and means of reaching Ellis Island.

Approximately 5 percent of deportation cases come under this class, he estimated.¹

CONNECTIONS

In this reading three Americans who lived at the turn of the 20th century express their views of immigrants. List in your journal the adjectives each uses to describe immigrants. What images do these adjectives evoke?

What part do fears play in the way we perceive others? What is an alien? What is the difference between an immigrant and an alien? If the United States is a country of immigrants, are we all aliens?

Scapegoating is the practice of shifting blame and responsibility for a real or perceived failure from oneself to another individual or group. To what extent does each writer view immigrants as scapegoats responsible for all of society's ills? To what extent might the twisted science of eugenics provide a rationale for the practice of scapegoating?

Although neither Aldrich nor Sargent uses the word *eugenics*, how are the concerns they express similar to those of Francis Galton and Charles Davenport? (See Chapter 3.) On what issues do you think Sargent, Aldrich, and Davenport might agree? Where might they differ?

Modern historians and economists note that immigrants in the early 1900s were as skilled and well educated as most Americans of their day. Although many were unable to read or write, so were many Americans. Sargent and others who opposed immigration often compared immigrants as a group to Americans as a nation. But nearly 80 percent of the immigrants were between the ages of 16 and 44 and about 70 percent were men. If opponents of immigration had compared the newcomers to a group of Americans in the same age range and with a similar gender balance, they would have found the two groups more alike than different. How does the way we use numbers shape the way we define an issue? The conclusions we reach? What other factors may affect the way we define an issue like immigration?

1. *The New York Times*, January 29, 1905, pp. 26, 28.

From an Immigrant's Perspective

Reading 2

In the early 1900s, many Americans saw immigrants as the “other”—people inherently unlike *us*. They focused on differences in clothing, language, and customs and ignored similarities. Many of them never knew the newcomers as individuals—as people with hopes and dreams similar to their own.

In the 1970s, Demetrius Paleologas, a Greek immigrant, recalled how he looked when he arrived in the United States in 1915 at the age of nineteen.

I came to St. Louis, to my father's friend. He says, “I'll take you in.” If I tell you the condition we were in—lice—oh, you have no idea. So he took me to a clothing store and he bought me underwear, socks, shoes, whole suit of clothes, shirt, and everything. And he took me to his place of business—he had a small restaurant—and they had a shower downstairs. He said, “Take all your clothes, throw them down there, wash yourself good, and put the new clothes on.”

This man was very nice and he gave me a job in his restaurant—wash dishes. We used to live with three, five, six beds in one room, over the restaurant. Then immediately I thought that I should learn how to speak and how to write, learn the language. Not only that, but I says, “Where am I going to go now? Remain a dishwasher all the time? That's no good. I don't like to remain a dishwasher.” And after I was doing the dishes, I was looking at the cooks, and I tried to help the cooks. And in the evening—seven o'clock in the evening—I walk about a mile and a half, walk like the dickens, to go down to the Lincoln Avenue School and start learning the English language.

In six months, I became a third cook, then I became a second cook. Inside a year, one of the chef happen to be sick and I took over as a chef, too. But I said to myself, “I'm going to become a cook, how much I'm going to make?” So I ask the floor boss, “I want to come into the dining room and help—you know, the busboys and like that. Could you give me a job?” So he give me a job.

In 1920—almost five years later—I decide to go into business for myself.¹

How typical was Paleologas's experiences? Historian Steven J. Diner tries to set experiences like those of Paleologas's in a larger context:



Immigrants awaiting the ferry to Ellis Island at the turn of the 20th century.

Most of the immigrants who came to America between 1890 and World War I sought economic opportunity more than personal liberty; many intended to return home once they earned some money. Most immigrants although poor did not come from the poorest of the poor, and few lacked homes. Emigration cost money, a carefully calculated investment enabling the sojourners to earn in America the funds needed to increase their modest landholdings and possessions back home. They could hardly be described as tired. Young, ambitious, and accustomed to hard work, immigrants acted boldly and deliberately to gain control over their lives. These artisans and farmers, refusing to accept passively the negative effects of industrial capitalism in their homelands, came to America to find economic security for their families.

More immigrants arrived during the Progressive Era (1890–1914) than ever before or after, fifteen million in the twenty-four years between 1890 and 1914, although the foreign-born proportion of the US population remained nearly the same in 1910 (14.5 percent) as in 1860 (13.2 percent). The sources of immigration changed substantially, however. Before 1890, most immigrants had come from Great Britain, Ireland, Canada, Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, and Holland. Immigrants after 1890 came disproportionately from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Italy, Russia, Greece, Romania, and Turkey. Eighty-seven percent in 1882 arrived from the countries of Northwestern Europe, but by 1907, 81 percent hailed from the South and East. A majority of the “new” immigrants were not Protestants, and they spoke languages, such as Polish, Yiddish,

Lithuanian, Czech, and Greek, that were completely unfamiliar to Americans.

To be sure, immigrants continued to come to America from Northwestern Europe. Between 1890 and 1920, 874,000 people entered from Ireland, 991,000 from Germany, 571,000 from Sweden, 352,000 from Norway, but they drew little attention when compared with the 3,807,000 from Italy, for example. Substantial numbers also came from outside Europe, particularly from French and English Canada, Japan (until excluded by diplomatic agreement in 1906), Mexico, and Syria.²

CONNECTIONS

Create an identity chart for Paleologas. What does he add to our understanding of what it was like to be an immigrant in the early 1900s? How does his story challenge the way Charles Davenport and other eugenicists viewed “the immigrant” (Chapter 3)? The views expressed by Thomas Aldrich and Francis Sargent in the previous reading?

What is the meaning of the word *assimilation*? To what extent did Paleologas become assimilated? What does an immigrant give up when he or she becomes assimilated? What does he or she gain?

Compare the list of adjectives you compiled in the previous reading with Paleologas’s experiences. What similarities do you notice? How do you account for differences?

Why do you think the man who took Paleologas in was able to see beyond the dirt and the lice? What attitudes and values make it possible for someone to see beyond outward appearances? To know another person as an individual rather than as a stereotype?

How do you think Paleologas would have responded to Francis Sargent’s remarks (Reading 1)? What would he want Sargent to know about him and his fellow immigrants?

1. “Demetrius Paleologas” in *American Mosaic* by Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky. New American Library, 1980, p. 75.

2. Excerpt from *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* by Steven J. Diner. Copyright © 1998 by Steven J. Diner. Reprinted by permission of Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus, and Girous, LLC, pp. 76–77.

Who May Enter?

Reading 3

The nation's lawmakers decide who may settle in the United States. Every immigration law excludes, distinguishes, or discriminates based on real or imagined differences. The chart below outlines changes in American immigration policies.

U.S. Immigration Policy 1789–1920

1789–1875	Everyone
1875	No convicts No prostitutes
1882	No idiots No lunatics No one requiring public care No person who cannot pay a head tax of 50 cents
1882–1943	No Chinese
1885	No cheap contract laborers
1891	No immigrants with contagious diseases No paupers No polygamists (Start of medical inspection)
1903	No epileptics No insane persons No beggars No anarchists
1907	No feeble-minded No children under 16 unaccompanied by parents No immigrants unable to support themselves because of physical or mental defects
1917	No immigrants from most of Asia or the Pacific Islands No illiterate adults (start of literacy tests)

CONNECTIONS

“Who am I?” is a question almost everyone asks at one time or another. In answering, we define ourselves. Nations, like individuals, have an identity. Add to the identity chart you created in Chapter 4 for the United States in the early 1900s based on information provided in this reading. Begin with the words or phrases that Americans used to describe themselves. Then add the labels others might have attached to the nation. What does the chart provided in this reading add to your understanding of American identity in the 1800s and early 1900s?

A nation’s identity—its sense of who it is and what it might become—is more than a set of labels. It is also shaped by a philosophy—the ideas, values, and beliefs that affect the way its people understand the world and their place in the world. What ideas about the United States and its place in the world does the chart suggest? What does it suggest about how the nation’s philosophy had evolved since its founding?

Sociologist Kai Erikson has noted that one of the surest ways to “confirm an identity, for communities as well as for individuals, is to find some way of measuring what one is not.” What individuals and groups were not included in the word *American* in the 1800s and early 1900s? Who is not included in the word today? What did it mean to be excluded in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? What does it mean today?

“Race” and Citizenship

Reading 4

Over the years, the U.S. Congress has considered and reconsidered not only the question of who may settle in the United States but also who is entitled to citizenship. In 1790, the nation’s lawmakers offered citizenship to “the worthy part of mankind.” To become a citizen, an immigrant had to live in the United States for two years and provide proof of good character in court. Immigrants also had to be white. Non-whites could live in the nation but could not become citizens, even though their American-born children were citizens by birth.

After the Civil War, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts suggested that “all acts of Congress relating to naturalization be . . . amended by striking the word ‘white’ wherever it occurs, so that in naturalization there still be no distinction of race or color.” He encountered immediate objections from western senators. Historian Matthew Frye Jacobson writes:

Both the significance of Sumner’s proposal and the ramifications of Western dissent were acknowledged and summed up in an amendment proposed by a . . . senator in jest, “Provided, that the provisions of this act shall not apply to persons born in Asia, Africa, or any of the islands in the Pacific, nor to Indians born in the wilderness. [Laughter]” . . .

Sumner himself announced that, in striking the word “white,” he merely wanted to “bring our system in harmony with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States.” “The word ‘white,’” he offered, “cannot be found in either of these great title-deeds of this Republic.” To senators from the West, by contrast, the word provided a critical bulwark against national decline. “Does the Declaration mean,” one wanted to know, “that the Chinese coolies, that the Bushmen of South Africa, that the Hottentots, the Digger Indians, heathen, pagan, and cannibal, shall have equal political rights under this Government with citizens of the United States?” The implicit logic of this list is telling in its very confusion. “White,” by implication here, is a designation that indicates not only color but degree of freedom (as against “coolies”), level of “civilization” (as against “cannibals”), and devotion to Christianity (as against “pagans” and “heathens”).¹

In the end, Congress decided to keep the word *white* and add to those eligible for citizenship persons “of the African race or of African descent.” The change

failed to address an important question: Who is white? It was a question that would be raised in the nation's courts for years to come. The first person to do so was a Chinese immigrant named Ah Yup. In 1878, he asked the court whether a person of the "Mongolian race" qualified as a "white person." The judge replied:

The words white person. . . constitute a very indefinite description of a class of persons, where none can be said to be literally white, and those called white may be found of every shade from the lightest blonde to the most swarthy brunette. But these words in this country, at least, have undoubtedly acquired a well settled meaning in common popular speech and they are constantly used in the sense so acquired in the literature of the country, as well as in common parlance. As ordinarily used everywhere in the United States, one would scarcely fail to understand that the party employing the words "white person" would intend a person of the Caucasian race.²

The judge went on to quote Johann Blumenbach and other scholars (Chapter 2). Despite their lack of agreement, he wrote, "No one includes the white, or Caucasian, with the Mongolian or 'yellow race' and no one of those classifications recognizing color as one of the distinguishing characteristics includes the Mongolian in the white or whitish race." The ruling raised a new question: What is a *whitish race*? In the years that followed, the struggle to define "whiteness" continued. Were Armenians white? Hawaiians? Syrians? The Burmese? Turks? Are people from India white? What about Mexicans? In each case, judges relied on a combination of "race science," eugenics, and "popular understanding" to determine who was "white." Some even consulted segregation laws to determine who was white. A number of these laws noted that anyone who was not legally black was "white."

Two cases in the early 1920s illustrate how race was used to guard the privileges of white Americans. In October 1922, Takao Ozawa, an immigrant from Japan, petitioned the courts for the right to become a U.S. citizen. He argued that the 1875 law that extended citizenship to "Africans" was inclusive rather than exclusive. He noted that Congress had passed a law in 1882 that barred the Chinese from settling in the United States for ten years. From time to time that law was renewed without a single mention of Japanese immigrants. He also cited cases where judges had ruled that anyone not black was "white." And finally, he observed, "The Japanese are 'free.' They, or at least the dominant strains, are 'white persons,' speaking an Aryan tongue and having Caucasian root stocks; a superior class, fit for citizenship. They are assimilable."³

The US Supreme Court ruled against Ozawa, arguing that he was "white" but

not “Caucasian.” In 1923, just a few months after the Ozawa decision, a similar case reached the Supreme Court. This time the government wanted to take away citizenship from Singh Thind, a Hindu from India, because he was “not white.” This time, the same justices who denied Ozawa citizenship because he was “white” but not “Caucasian” ruled that Thind was also ineligible because he was “Caucasian” but not “white.” They stated, “It may be true that the blond Scandinavian and the brown Hindu have a common ancestor in the dim reaches of antiquity, but the average man knows perfectly well that there are unmistakable and profound differences among them today.”⁴

Although judges continued to quote “race scientists,” eugenicists, and anthropologists, they clearly saw race not as a matter of science but as a “practical line of separation” among the peoples of the world. How they drew that line varied case by case, incident by incident.

CONNECTIONS

Each of us has a “universe of obligation.” Whom did Sumner consider a part of his universe of obligation? His “moral community”? How did other senators define their “moral community”? What were the consequences of the way they defined the nation’s universe of obligation?

Whom did the judges regard as assimilable? Create a working definition of the word *assimilate*. Include your own understanding as well as the way a dictionary defines the term and the meanings attached to it in this reading. How is the word *assimilate* related to the way the Senate defined the word *white*? What do you think the word *whitish* means? What is the significance of the term?

Applicants for citizenship in the early 1900s were all men. A woman derived her citizenship from her father and later her husband. A law passed in 1907 stated that any woman born in the United States who married a citizen of another country would lose her citizenship. The law remained on the books until 1922, when Congress separated a woman’s citizenship from that of her husband. How did the 1907 law regard women? What fears did it address? On what values was it based?

What does it mean to see race as a matter of science? As a “practical line of separation”? Who draws the line in either case? For whom is that line “practical”? In reflecting on divisions in American society, sociologist David Schoem writes:

The effort it takes for us to know so little about one another
across racial and ethnic groups is truly remarkable. That we can live

so closely together, that our lives can be so intertwined socially, economically, and politically, and that we can spend so many years of study in grade school and even in higher education and yet still manage to be ignorant of one another is clear testimony to the deep-seated roots of this human and national tragedy. What we do learn along the way is to place heavy reliance on stereotypes, gossip, rumor, and fear to shape our lack of knowledge.⁵

To what extent does the debate in Congress after the Civil War support Schoem's observations? Use newspapers, magazines, and other media to find out the extent to which current debates in Congress support Schoem's view?

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1. Reprinted by permission of the publisher from *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* by Matthew Frye Jacobson, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, Copyright © 1998 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
 5. *Separate Worlds* by David Schoem. University of Michigan Press, 1991, p. 3.

War, Immigration, and Hysteria

Reading 5

Every debate, including the ones over immigration and naturalization, takes place within a context. The debates over immigration and naturalization reflected the fears and concerns of many Americans about differences and membership. They also reflected a belief that the world was a very dangerous place. World War I (1914–1918) intensified that belief.

Before World War I, it was possible to travel anywhere in the world without a passport or visa. Wartime fears of spies and anxieties over open borders changed the way nations regarded not only immigrants but also tourists and business travelers. Those fears and anxieties remained after the war ended. For many Americans, the most visible sign of danger was Ellis Island, where record-breaking numbers of immigrants were arriving daily. Many were among the millions of refugees forced from their homelands by war, revolution, and government decree in the years after the war. Columnist Dorothy Thompson described them this way:

A whole nation of people, although they come from many nations, wanders the world, homeless except for refuges, which may at any moment prove to be temporary. They are men and women who often have no passports; who, if they have money, cannot command it; who, though they have skills, are not allowed to use them. This migration—unprecedented in modern times, set loose by the World War and the revolutions in its wake—includes people of every race and every social class, every trade and every profession.¹

In the United States, a story in *The New York Times* in 1920 about some of those refugees created an uproar. On August 17, *The Times* reported:

Leon Kamaiky, [a commissioner of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and] publisher of the Jewish Daily News of this city returned recently from Europe, where he went together with Jacob Massel, to bring about the reunion of Jewish families who were separated by the war. Mr. Kamaiky has been abroad since last February. . . .

In an article in the Jewish Daily News describing conditions in Eastern Europe, Mr. Kamaiky declared that “if there were in existence a ship that could hold 3,000,000 human beings, the 3,000,000 Jews of Poland would board it and escape to America.”

Alarmed readers wanted to know if this meant that the HIAS was planning to bring over three million Polish Jews. Members of Congress responded by calling for a ban on all immigration for a period of time—some favored a six-month ban, while Representative Albert Johnson, the chairman of the House Committee on Immigration, called for a two-year ban. He argued that “the new immigration is not the kind or quality to meet the real needs of the country. We are being made a dumping ground. We are receiving the dependents, the human wreckage of the war, not the strength and virility that once came to hew our forests and till our soil.” He brought his bill to a vote without a single hearing. After some negotiating, the ban was reduced to one year and the House quickly passed Johnson’s bill.

The Senate Committee on Immigration was more cautious. Its chair told reporters, “This talk about 15,000,000 immigrants flooding into the United States is hysteria and not based on actual information.” He then called for hearings on the bill. The first witness was Johnson who presented a report “confirming the statement if there were in existence a ship that would hold 3,000,000 human beings, the 3,000,000 Jews of Poland would board it to escape to America.” He warned that unless an emergency act was passed, European immigration would “flood this country as soon as the war passport system went out of existence.”

When John L. Bernstein, the president of HIAS, was called to testify, he tried to clarify the situation. He told senators that the rumors were false. HIAS had no plans to bring three million Polish Jews to the United States. The group was not even planning to send, as the American consul in Poland claimed, “250,000 emigrants of one race alone, the Jewish, to the United States within the next three years.” He bluntly stated:

Now, gentlemen, . . . our most prosperous year was the year 1919. . . . During the year 1919 we obtained the largest contributions, both in membership and in donations, we have ever received, . . . and the amount of the contributions was \$325,000. . . .

Now, I will leave it to you, gentlemen, how much of that \$325,000 will be left us to undertake this great plan that somebody is reading, about the bringing over of 250,000 emigrants here?²

Senator Hiram Johnson of California asked Bernstein whether HIAS encouraged or discouraged immigration. Bernstein replied, “Well, to be perfectly frank, we do neither. A man comes to our office for advice; we give it to him. And remember, we do not come in contact with any person unless he is already an emigrant, because we have no offices throughout Europe. . . . Our work in Poland is merely police work. We are trying to prevent the emigrants in Poland from being exploited, cheated, and swindled.”³

In the end the Senate decided that there was no emergency nor were there grounds for a general ban on immigration. Still, like their counterparts in the House of Representatives, many senators were uneasy about the “quantity” and “quality” of the nation’s newest arrivals. In 1921, the House and the Senate passed the first of several laws limiting immigration.

CONNECTIONS

How do you account for the hysteria that resulted from a brief story in *The New York Times*? What fears fueled the hysteria? What prejudices heightened those fears? Why do you think fears related to immigration tend to increase in war time?

Dorothy Thompson believed that no democratic nation can “wash its hands of [the problems of the refugees] if it wishes to retain its own soul.” How do you think a lawmaker like Albert Johnson would respond to her statement? How might a eugenicist like Harry Laughlin respond?

Thompson insisted that “democracy cannot survive” if people deny minorities “the right to existence.” How does she define the word *democracy*? Why does she believe that a democracy must protect the rights of minorities? Do you agree? Would Johnson agree?

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1. *Refugees: Anarchy or Organization?* by Dorothy Thompson. Random House, 1939, p.1.
 2. Quoted in *Shores of Refuge* by Ronald Sanders. Henry Holt and Co., 1988, p. 385.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 385.

Restricting Immigration

Reading 6

Efforts to control immigration had the support of many Americans. As early as 1894, a number of graduates of Harvard University openly expressed their fears of the “inferior hordes of degenerate peoples” who were crowding into the nation. That year they founded the Immigration Restriction League. Their first political victory came during World War I. In 1917, they persuaded Congress to enact a bill requiring that every immigrant pass a literacy test.

The literacy test was just the beginning. Members of the League wanted further restrictions. To make their case, they relied on statistics from the Eugenics Record Office and the organizational abilities of Harry Laughlin. They persuaded the House Committee on Immigration to hold hearings on the “immigration problem” in 1920. The committee consisted of 15 members of the House of Representatives and was chaired by Albert Johnson. Johnson was so impressed with Harry Laughlin’s testimony that he appointed Laughlin “Expert Eugenics Agent of the House Committee on Immigration.”



Harry Laughlin.

Whenever Laughlin testified, he brought graphs, pedigree charts, and the results of hundreds of IQ tests that were administered to soldiers during World War I as evidence of “the immigrant menace.” At one hearing, he plastered the walls of the meeting room with photographs taken at Ellis Island. Above the photos hung a banner that read “Carriers of the Germ Plasm of the Future American Population.”¹ Laughlin told committee members:

The matter of social and cultural assimilation of immigrants has just come to an acute state in the United States. The formation of isolated alien centers, which maintain their alien languages and cultures, is a dangerous thing for the American people. . . .

If the American Nation decides that it is still unmade as a people, then it might as well throw open the doors and admit all comers, but if it decides that we have national ideals worth saving, not only in national tradition and individual quality, but also racial ingredients, the Nation must exercise stricter control over immigration. This is a critical period in American history. We can continue to be American,

to recruit to and develop our racial qualities, or we can allow ourselves to be supplanted by other racial stocks.²

Scientists who publicly disputed Laughlin's findings were ignored. For example, when Herbert Spencer Jennings, a former eugenicist and a respected biologist, told the committee that Laughlin's statistics were flawed, his testimony was cut short. Members of Congress were not interested in hearing that Laughlin's charts and graphs proved the opposite of what he claimed that they proved. Most newspapers and magazines also ignored Jennings's testimony. Reporters found Laughlin's lurid findings more compelling. After all, those findings confirmed what many Americans already believed: immigrants were "different" and those differences threatened the American way of life.

CONNECTIONS

Why do you think Americans paid more attention to the eugenicists than to their critics? What was the appeal of an exclusive rather than an inclusive nation?

Why did Harry Laughlin and members of the Immigration Restriction League believe the recent immigrants would never become socially or culturally assimilated? How does he seem to define the word *assimilate*? How do you define it? To what extent were the immigrants quoted in Chapter 4 assimilated? What might they have added to the picture Harry Laughlin painted?

What does Laughlin mean when he says, "We can continue to be American, to recruit to and develop our racial qualities, or we can allow ourselves to be supplanted by other racial stocks." How does he seem to define the word *American*? President Calvin Coolidge supported restrictions on immigration because "America must be kept American." How did he seem to define the word? Look carefully at the quotations that follow. How does each writer define the word *American*? Which definitions are closest to those of Coolidge and Laughlin? To the views of Emma Lazarus (Reading 1)? Which are closest to the way you define the word?

—In 1782, French immigrant Jean de Crevecoeur wrote, "He is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds."

—In the 1850s, Theodore Parker, a minister of British descent, argued that an American is someone who believes "not 'I am as good as

you are' but 'You are as good as I am.'”

—In the 1920s, Boston Mayor James Michael Curley, an Irish American, stated, “All of us under the Constitution are guaranteed equality, without regard to race, creed, or color. If the Jew is barred today, the Italian will be tomorrow, then the Spaniard and Pole, and at some future date the Irish.”

—In 1939, newspaper columnist Dorothy Thompson, the daughter of an English immigrant wrote, “George Washington was only born in this country because his grandfather was a political refugee. William Penn fled to this country from the prisons of England, where his fight for freedom of conscience . . . kept him continually locked in various jails. Thomas Paine may be called the original author of the Declaration of Independence, and he was twice a refugee of this country—once from the conservatism of England and once from the terror of the French Revolution. Woodrow Wilson’s forebears were religious refugees from Ireland; the LaFollette family were Huguenot refugees; the Middle West was settled to its great advantage by many Forty-Eighters [refugees from the Revolution of 1848 in Germany], and among those Forty-Eighters was the father of Justice [Louis] Brandeis and the father of Adolph Ochs [the publisher of *The New York Times*].

—In 1949, Langston Hughes, a noted African American poet, wrote:
Oh, yes,
I say it plain,
America never was America to me.
And yet I swear this other—
America will be!

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1. Frances Hassencahl, “Harry H. Laughlin, ‘Expert Eugenics Agent for the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, 1921 to 1931.” UMI Dissertation Services, 1970, p. 247.
 2. House Committee on Immigration Hearings, “Europe as an Emigrant Exporting Continent and the United States as an Immigrant Receiving Nation,” March 8, 1924, pp.1294–1295.

The Debate in Congress

Reading 7

In his testimony before the House Committee on Immigration, John Trevor, a New York attorney and member of a group called the Allied Patriotic Societies, proposed that Congress limit immigration country by country to two percent of the immigrants from that country living in the United States in 1890. The date was critical, because most immigrants from southern and eastern Europe arrived after 1890. The House of Representatives debated Trevor's plan in March and April of 1924. Excerpts from the debate reveal how strongly members felt about immigration. It also reveals the extent of Harry Laughlin's influence.

Representative Clarence F. Lea of California told his fellow lawmakers:

What is that assimilation that we demand of a naturalized citizen? Assimilation requires adaptability, a compatibility to our Government, its institutions, and its customs; an assumption of the duties and an acceptance of the rights of an American citizen; a merger of alienism into Americanism.

True assimilation requires racial compatibility. Nature's God has given the world a brown man, a yellow man, and a black man. Whether given to us by the wisdom of a Divine Ruler or by our own prejudices or wisdom we have a deep-seated aversion against racial amalgamation or general social equality with these races. Members of these races may have all the moral and intellectual qualities that adorn a man of the white race.

Many individuals of any race may be superior, by every just standard of measurement, to many individuals of the white race. Yet there is an irreconcilable resistance to amalgamation and social equality that cannot be ignored. The fact is it forms an enduring barrier against complete assimilation. The brown man, the yellow man, or the black man who is an American citizen seeks the opportunities of this country with a handicap. It may be humiliating or unjust to him. You may contend it is not creditable to us, but it does exist. It causes irritation, racial prejudice, and animosities. It detracts from the harmony, unity, and solidarity of our citizenship.

But to avoid further racial antipathies and incompatibility is the duty and opportunity of this Congress. The first great rule of exclusion should prohibit those non-assimilable. Our own interests, as well as the ultimate welfare of those we admit, justify us in prescribing a strict rule as to whom shall be assimilable. We should require physical,

moral, and mental qualities, capable of contributing to the welfare and advancement of our citizenship. Without these qualities it would be better for America that they should not come.

Representative Adolph J. Sabath of Illinois saw assimilation from a different perspective. He argued:

What is meant by assimilation is difficult of definition. The mere fact that an immigrant, when he arrives or even after he has lived here for a number of years, still speaks his native language does not indicate that he is not being assimilated. Every day that he lives here he imbibes American ideas. . . .

Whatever his garb may have been when he came, the first suit of clothes that he purchases with his honestly acquired earnings, which represent his creative efforts from which the country profits, is made according to the American model. His work is performed in accordance with the methods adopted in our industrial centers. He becomes familiar with our form of government. His acquaintance with our laws equals that of the average inhabitant of our country, and his obedience to them measures up to that of the average native. It is true that he reads books and newspapers printed in foreign languages, but it is by means of them that he acquires a fund of information relative to the true spirit of America. Anybody familiar with the foreign language press, and with what it has done in the direction of educating the immigrant into an appreciation of what America stands for, can testify to this fact. The children of these foreign parents brought up in American public schools grow up without even an ability to read the foreign press.

The majority in its report . . . unjustifiably charged and contended that there is in this country an undigested mass of alien thought, alien sympathy, and alien purpose which creates alarm and apprehension and breeds racial hatreds. This, like most figures of speech, can not bear analysis. What is meant by alien thought and alien purpose as applied to immigrants? Does it mean that they are opposed to the land in which they live, in which they earn their livelihood, where they have established a permanent home for themselves and their children? Does it mean that they would invite conquest by foreign nations, and having to a great extent left the lands of their birth because deprived of liberty and that freedom which they enjoy in this country, that they would be willing to forego the blessings that have come to them under our benign institutions? Have they not by coming

here severed their political relations with foreign lands? Does any considerable portion of them ever expect to leave our shores? Have the thought and purpose of that Europe which they left behind been such as to attract instead of increase the repulsion which drove those immigrants to America? Are men apt to choose misery and unhappiness when they are enjoying contentment and comparative prosperity and are looked upon not as cannon fodder but as men? As well might it be said that the Puritans of New England, the Cavaliers of Virginia and Maryland, the Knickerbockers of New York, the Quakers of Pennsylvania, and the Scandinavians of the Middle West brought with them undigested masses of alien thought, alien sympathy, and alien purpose, which made of them a menace to this country.

It is not the immigrants who are breeding racial hatreds. They are not the inventors of the new anthropology. Nor do they stimulate controversy. It would rather appear, in fact is clearly shown, to be those who are seeking to restrict or to prohibit immigration who entertain such sentiments and who are now attempting to formulate a policy which is, indeed, alien to the thought, the sympathy, and the purpose of the founders of the Republic and of that America which has become the greatest power for good on earth.

Representative Grant M. Hudson of Michigan took issue with the idea that immigrants change their customs and their attitudes. He told Congress:

The "melting pot" has proved to be a myth. We are slowly awakening to the consciousness that education and environment do not fundamentally alter racial values.

Today we face the serious problem of the maintenance of our historic republican institutions. Now, what do we find in all our large cities? Entire sections containing a population incapable of understanding our institutions, with no comprehension of our national ideals, and for the most part incapable of speaking the English language. Foreign language information service gives evidence that many southern Europeans resent as an unjust discrimination the quota laws and represent America as showing race hatred and unmindful of its mission to the world. The reverse is true. America's first duty is to those already within her own shores. An unrestricted immigration policy would work an injustice to all, which would fall hardest on those least able to combat it.

George Washington in his Farewell Address said: Citizens by

birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affection. . . . [W]ith slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles.

Washington observed—slight shades of difference.

But today we see huge masses of non-American-minded individuals, living in colonies or ghettos, or even cities and counties of their own. Here they perpetuate their racial mindedness, their racial character, and their racial habits. Here they speak their own tongue, read their own newspapers, maintain their separate educational system.

Ira Hersey of Maine offered his view of the nation's history:

Mr. Chairman, the New World was settled by the white race. True, we found here when the Pilgrim Fathers landed the red race. The Indian was never adapted to civilization. His home was the forest. He knew no government. He cared nothing for civilization. He gave freely of his land to the white man for trinkets to adorn his person; and this race of people, the first Americans, were pushed back as the forests receded until to-day he occupies here and there small portions of the United States, living the primitive life, wards of this Government, and in a few years they will be known no more forever.

They never were a menace to the Government. They have never been known in politics. On account of race and blood they have never been able to assimilate with our people and have kept their own place and have caused very little trouble in the progress of civilization in this country.

America! The United States! Bounded on the north by an English colony, on the south by the Tropics, and on the east and west by two great oceans, was, God-intended, I believe, to be the home of a great people. English speaking—a white race with great ideals, the Christian religion, one race, one country, and one destiny.
[Applause.]

It was a mighty land settled by northern Europe from the United Kingdom, the Norsemen, and the Saxon, the peoples of a mixed blood. The African, the Orientals, the Mongolians, and all the yellow races of Europe, Asia and Africa should never have been allowed to people this great land.

Meyer Jacobstein of New York had a more expansive view of citizenship. He insisted:

Perhaps the chief argument expressed or implied by those favor-

ing the Johnson bill [the National Origins Act] is that the new immigrant is not of a type that can be assimilated or that he will not carry on the best traditions of the founders of our Nation, but, on the contrary, is likely to fill our jails, our almshouses, and other institutions that impose a great tax burden on the Nation.

Based on this prejudice and dislike, there has grown up an almost fanatical anti-immigration sentiment. But this charge against the newcomers is denied, and substantial evidence has been brought to prove that they do not furnish a disproportionate share of the inmates of these institutions.

One of the purposes in shifting to the 1890 census is to reduce the number of undesirables and defectives in our institutions. In fact, this aspect of the question must have made a very deep impression on the committee because it crops out on every occasion. The committee has unquestionably been influenced by the conclusions drawn from a study made by Dr. Laughlin.

This is not the first time in American history that such an anti-foreign hysteria has swept the country. Reread your American histories. Go back and glance through McMaster's *History of the United States* covering the years from 1820 to 1850. You will find there many pages devoted to the "100 per centers" of that time. So strange was the movement against the foreigner in those decades before the Civil War that a national political party, the "Know-Nothing Party," sought to ride into power on the crest of this fanatical wave.

In those early days, however, the anti-foreign movement, strangely enough, was directed against the very people whom we now seek to prefer—the English, the Irish, and the Germans. The calamity howlers of a century ago prophesied that these foreigners would drag our Nation to destruction.

The trouble is that the committee is suffering from a delusion. It is carried away with the belief that there is such a thing as a Nordic race which possesses all the virtues, and in like manner creates the fiction of an inferior group of peoples, for which no name has been invented.

Nothing is more un-American. Nothing could be more dangerous, in a land the Constitution of which says that all men are created equal, than to write into our law a theory which puts one race above another, which stamps one group of people as superior and another as inferior. The fact that it is camouflaged in a maze of statistics will not protect this Nation from the evil consequences of such an unscientific, un-American, wicked philosophy.

In the end, the bill passed by an overwhelming majority in both the House of Representatives (373 to 71) and the Senate (62 to 6). In May 1925, President Calvin Coolidge signed the National Origins Act into law.

CONNECTIONS

A number of Congressmen quoted in this reading try to define the word *assimilate*. How do dictionaries define the word? What does the word mean to you? Why is the word so central to the debate?

Which representatives argue for immigration restriction? What do they fear? What do their speeches suggest about racial attitudes in the 1920s? About the influence of eugenics?

What points do Meyer Jacobstein and Adolph Sabath emphasize in their opposition to the bill? What do they fear? What do their speeches suggest about their racial attitudes? How does each representative define the word *American*? What do all five definitions have in common? On what points do they differ?

According to Sabath, who is breeding racial hatred? Why does he see their efforts as “alien to the thought, the sympathy, and the purpose of the founders of the Republic and of that America which has become the greatest power for good on earth”? How might a eugenicist respond to his attack?

The full text of the debates appears in the *Congressional Record for March and April 1924*, along with charts and graphs from Laughlin’s exhibits. They can be used to prepare a report on regional voting patterns. Which regions of the country show the strongest support for the bill? Which show the least support? How do you explain the geographic division?

In the 1990s there were renewed calls for immigration restriction. Review newspaper and magazine articles on this topic. How do the recent arguments differ from those of the 1920’s? How are the debates similar?

“A Defensive Action”

Reading 8

In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge told the American people, “Restricted immigration is not an offensive but purely a defensive action. It is not adopted in criticism of others in the slightest degree, but solely for the purpose of protecting ourselves. We cast no aspersions on any race or creed, but we must remember that every object of our institutions of society and government will fail unless America be kept American.”

Coolidge’s views were based on his understanding of eugenics and his belief in the racial superiority of “Caucasians.” Many American voters as well as members of Congress shared those views. The new law was extremely popular. It seemed to solve the nation’s “immigrant problem.”

The people who opposed restrictions on immigration and deplored the language the eugenicists used to shape public opinion were those who saw the immigrants as individuals and understood their plight. One of those was Connie Young Yu’s maternal grandmother. She was one of many Chinese women held at the Angel Island immigration station in San Francisco Bay in 1924. Yu’s grandfather was born in the United States and was therefore an American citizen. So were his children. Although his wife was born in China, she too was a U.S. citizen according to American law at the time of her marriage. Yet when she and her young children tried to return to the United States from China after her husband’s death, a health inspector said she had filariasis, liver fluke, “a common ailment of Asian immigrants which caused their deportation by countless numbers. The authorities thereby ordered Grandmother to be deported as well,” writes Yu.

While her distraught children had to fend for themselves in San Francisco (my mother, then fifteen, and her older sister had found work in a sewing factory), a lawyer was hired to fight for Grandmother’s release from the detention barracks. A letter addressed to her on Angel Island from her attorney, C. M. Fickert, dated 24 March, 1924, reads: “Everything I can legitimately do will be done on your behalf. As you say, it seems most inhuman for you to be separated from your children who need your care. I am sorry that the immigration officers will not see the human side of your case.”

Times were tough for Chinese immigrants in 1924. . . .

The year my grandmother was detained on Angel Island, a law had just taken effect that forbade all aliens ineligible for citizenship

from landing in America. This constituted a virtual ban on the immigration of all Chinese, including Chinese wives of US citizens.

Waiting month after month in the bleak barracks, Grandmother heard many heart-rending stories from women awaiting deportation. They spoke of the suicides of several despondent women who hanged themselves in the shower stalls. Grandmother could see the calligraphy carved on the walls by other detained immigrants, eloquent poems expressing homesickness, sorrow, and a sense of injustice.

Meanwhile, Fickert was sending telegrams to Washington (a total of ten the bill stated) and building up a case for the circuit court. Mrs. Lee, after all, was the wife of a citizen who was a respected San Francisco merchant, and her children were American citizens. He also consulted a medical authority to see about a cure for liver fluke.

My mother took the ferry from San Francisco twice a week to visit Grandmother and take her Chinese dishes such as salted eggs and steamed pork because Grandmother could not eat the beef stew served in the mess hall. Mother and daughter could not help crying frequently during their short visits in the administration building. They were under the close watch of both a guard and an interpreter.

After fifteen months the case was finally won. Grandmother was easily cured of filariasis and allowed—with nine months probation—to join her children in San Francisco. The legal fees amounted to \$782.50, a fortune in those days.

In 1927 Dr. Frederick Lam in Hawaii, moved by the plight of Chinese families deported from the islands because of the liver fluke disease, worked to convince federal health officials that the disease was non-communicable. He used the case of Mrs. Lee Yoke Suey, my grandmother, as a precedent for allowing an immigrant to land with such an ailment and thus succeeded in breaking down a major barrier to Asian immigration.

My most vivid memory of Grandmother Lee is when she was in her seventies and studying for citizenship. She had asked me to test her on the three branches of government and how to pronounce them correctly. I was a sophomore in high school and had entered the “What American Democracy Means to Me” speech contest of the Chinese American Citizens Alliance. I looked directly at my grandmother in the audience. She didn’t smile, and afterwards, didn’t comment on my patriotic words. She had never told me about being on Angel Island or about her friends losing their citizenship. It wasn’t in the textbooks either. I may have thought she wanted to be a citizen because her sons and sons-in-law had fought for this country, and we

lived in a land of freedom and opportunity, but my guess now is that she wanted to avoid any possible confrontation—even at her age—with immigration authorities. The bad laws had been repealed, but she wasn't taking any chances.¹

CONNECTIONS

Yu's grandmother was not a penniless immigrant nor was she ignorant of American ways. Most immigrants would not have known how to find a lawyer or had the money to pay one. What does her story suggest about the vulnerability of immigrants—particularly immigrants who have been defined as one of *them*?

Why do you think Connie Young Yu's grandmother decided to become a citizen when she was in her seventies? How does Yu explain that decision? What does her explanation suggest about the dangers of being seen as outside a nation's universe of obligation—the circle of individuals and groups toward whom it has obligations, to whom the rules of society apply, and whose injuries call for amends?

The Chinese were the first immigrants to be excluded from the United States. Those already in the nation experienced prejudice and discrimination. Connie Young Yu explains one of the consequences of lying beyond a nation's universe of obligation.

In Asian America there are two kinds of history. The first is what is written about us in various old volumes on immigrants and echoed in textbooks, and the second is our own oral history, what we learn in the family chain of generations. We are writing this oral history ourselves. But as we research the factual background of our story, we face the dilemma of finding sources. Worse than burning the books is not being included in the record at all, and in American history—traditionally viewed from the white male perspective—minority women have been virtually ignored.²

Why do you think she views being excluded as “worse than burning the books”? How do those who are left out find their place in the history books?

1. “The World of Our Grandmothers” by Connie Young Yu in *Making Waves* ed. by Asian Women United of California © 1989 by Asian Women United of California. Reprinted by permission of Beacon Press, Boston, pp. 39–41.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Immigration and Racism

Reading 9

The United State today is in many ways a very different country than it was in Harry Laughlin's day. Although myths and misinformation about the "other" continue, state and federal laws now ban most forms of discrimination and out-law segregation. The change is also reflected in the nation's immigration laws. In 1965 Congress replaced the old quota system established by the National Origins Act of 1924. The old law was racist. It favored immigrants from Western Europe over those from other parts of the world. It literally cut off all immigration from Asia and Africa. The new law ended that discrimination by establishing a system that gives preferences to refugees from all parts of the world, people with relatives in the United States, and workers with needed skills.

The results of the 2000 Census reveal how the new law has altered the nation in small ways and large. Today only 16 percent of the nation's foreign born are from Europe. A little over half (51 percent) come from Latin America, 27 percent from Asia, 16 percent from Europe, and 6 percent from other areas of the world. Unlike earlier arrivals, the newcomers have not settled in cities or on farms but in the suburbs. Reporter Rick Hampson notes:

A hundred years ago, immigrants from India might have moved onto six blocks on New York's Lower East Side. Now they move into six neighborhoods in central New Jersey.

Instead of walking among pushcarts on Orchard Street, immigrants drive Toyotas to mini-malls filled with stores where their language is spoken.

Many residents of Los Angeles' Koreatown are now Hispanic. Korean immigrants fan across the L.A. basin and form satellite settlements that together constitute the largest Korean community outside Korea. . . .

In Garden City, a southwest Kansas community of about 30,000, City Hall has signs in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. Immigrants from Mexico and Southeast Asia have been attracted by meatpacking houses, which offer work few Americans want to do.¹

The newcomers are changing many parts of American culture, including attitudes toward race. Cindy Rodriguez, a reporter for the *Boston Globe*, describes those changes in an article that focuses on Lawrence, Massachusetts:

They call this Platano City, a place where bins at the corner bodegas overflow with platanos, the green plantains that Latinos from

the Caribbean smash into discs and then fry.

Latinos dominate here, making up an estimate 60 percent of the population, the epicenter of a Latino boom north of Boston.

Throughout the country, communities such as this have made Latinos the nation's fastest-growing minority changing the culture and flavor of urban centers, and in a subtle way, altering the way Americans look at race.

Regardless of their ancestral makeup, whether they have strong African features or more Spanish blood, Latinos don't view themselves as strictly black or white, largely freeing them from the us vs. them mentality that colors U.S. race relations.

"People in America get caught up in race," said Felix Coto, 17, a dark-skinned Latino, walking along Broadway with his girlfriend, Ramona Fernandez, who is light-skinned.

"I don't see him as black," Fernandez said. "He is Dominican, just like me."

[At the end of 2000], the US Census Bureau announced the nation's population stood at 281 million—6 million higher than anticipated.

One of the driving forces behind the growth is the influx of immigrants from Latin America, which helped give Texas and Arizona two extra representatives each in the 435-member US House of Representatives at the expense of the slower-growing Northeast.

"Latinos will play an important role in changing the way America defines race," said Clara E. Rodriguez, a Fordham University professor and author of *Changing Race: Latinos, the Census and the History of Ethnicity in the United States*.

"Race is a social construct, and because of that it will change over time," she said.

Rodriguez said when large numbers of Latinos rejected race categories on the census and checked off "other race" in the past, many people thought they were confused. But it has become clear, she explained, that Latinos see themselves as stretching across racial lines, fitting in two or even three categories.

This isn't a case of cultural pride, or about ethnicity trumping color, Latino scholars say. It's about a mindset of racial fluidity that contrasts with America's legacy of slavery and its painful aftermath. Although racism—against indigenous people and those who are dark-skinned—is evident in Latin America, especially in disparate poverty rates, Latin America did not have overtly racist laws. There were no Jim Crow voting laws that disenfranchised minorities, no

segregated schools, no separate water fountains.

Latinos tend to look at skin color not as fixed markers of race, but as a continuum that shows the melange of ethnic groups that resulted in an endless array of hues.

"It's not viewed as starkly," said William Javier Nelson a Dominican who teaches sociology at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C., a historically black college. "It's not until Latinos came to the US that they're confronted with the black-white dichotomy."

Latino immigrants say that it wasn't until they arrived in the United States that they began to face the polarizing aspects of race.

Before Gustavo Reyes, 32, emigrated from the Dominican Republic six years ago, he viewed himself as Dominican and Latino. But once he stepped off the plane at Logan International Airport, he was suddenly viewed by others as black.

Similarly, Regia Gonzalez, a Cuban who arrived in 1971, also saw herself as Cuban and Latino. But once in the United States, she was labeled white.

Neither Reyes, whose cocoa complexion shows his African ancestry, nor Gonzalez, whose great-great-grandparents hail from Spain, accepts the US-given racial designation.

In their eyes, they are Latino.

"I don't like the terms 'black Hispanic' and 'white Hispanic.' What is that?" said Reyes, a DJ for La Mega, a Spanish-language AM radio station. "I don't know too many Latinos who are pure white or pure black."

Latinos viewed themselves as multiracial long before Tiger Woods popularized the concept in America. They don't adhere to America's "one drop rule" which, throughout history, would categorize anyone with a smidgeon of African blood as a black person.

Americans use the mutually exclusive terms black and white, which have a polarizing effect, scholars say. They say it's interesting to note that "brown" has become the figurative word to identify Latinos, who are wedged in the middle. Though Latinos use the terms "negro" and "blanco" as well, they are more likely to refer to skin tone, not political outlooks. In the same way that they use "moreno" for a person with brown skin color, and "trigueno" for a person with tawny skin.

Latinos use the term "la raza"—literally "the race"—to refer to the wide spectrum of people who comprise Latinos, from Peruvians, who have more Andean blood, to Dominicans who have more African blood, to Chileans, who have more Spanish blood.

"In Cuba, there was no difference between a black Cuban, and a white Cuban and a Chinese Cuban," said Gonzalez, 52 of Roslindale, noting the large Chinese immigrant population. "We were all Cuban. My best friend was a so-called black Cuban. But my parents would never have told me, 'Don't have a friend who has dark skin.' It's not like in this country."

Some people would argue that Gonzalez is overlooking the racism that exists in Cuba and throughout Afro-Hispano countries, but dark-skinned Latinos are the first to say that they are confronted by race in the United States, more so than back home. . . .

[Nelson] said that in cities like Raleigh, which has a small Latino population made up mostly of Mexicans, he gets labeled as black. He rejects the term because it doesn't accurately reflect his history, his culture.

"It's one thing to say you are part of the African diaspora and another to say you are black," Nelson said.

At times, African Americans tell him he is rejecting his blackness, but he doesn't see it that way. He said he thinks of American blacks and Africans as his "long-lost cousins," and that he embraces his African heritage, but says it is just one part of him.

For light-skinned Latinos, there is a different reaction to their being placed in a racial category. Many reject being called white because don't like being associated with "the oppressor"—the Spanish who conquered and colonized much of Latin America.

"If I'm categorized as a 'white Hispanic,' then they are saying I am a Spaniard. And I am not," said Will Morales, 30, of Roslindale, who is a beige-skinned Puerto Rican. "I don't view myself as white. I relate more as a person of color."

He prefers the term Latino, which he says, "transcends the color piece."

But the majority of Latinos in the United States, well over 60 percent, don't have African ancestry, but rather so-called "Indian" ancestry. That includes Mexicans, the largest Latino group in the United States, and Central Americans, who have been arriving in large waves since the 1980s. Because of the demand for workers in the hospitality industry, large influxes have been arriving in New England.

Julio Cesar Aragon, a Mexican who arrived from Chihuahua more than 20 years ago, doesn't know how to classify himself in the United States. His national origin is Mexican, his ethnicity is Latino, but his race is "Indian."

"I am a descendant of the Tarhaumaras," said Aragon, 37, the president of the Mexican Association of Rhode Island. The racial box "Native American" doesn't apply to him, he says, because that refers to indigenous people of North America, such as Cherokee and Onondaga.

But he, too, doesn't want to be placed in one racial category. "What white or black people think of us doesn't matter. . . . I know what I am," Aragon said.²

CONNECTIONS

Harry Laughlin told a congressional committee, "If the American Nation . . . decides that we have national ideals worth saving, not only in national tradition and individual quality, but also racial ingredients, the Nation must exercise stricter control over immigration." The Immigration Act of 1924 was the result of that view of race and citizenship. It was based on a belief that "race" is a scientific construct. In what ways did the Immigration Act of 1965 challenge that view? How have the new immigrants challenged it?

Who in a society determines which differences matter? Where do we get our ideas about "race"? How do we learn what is "normal"? How do we decide who is beautiful? What part does family play? What is the role of the media? To what extent do media images shape standards of beauty? To what extent are those images a reflection of the views of society?

Interview an immigrant who has come to United States since 1965. What does his or her story add to your understanding of immigration today? What questions does it raise? Share your interview with your classmates and discuss similarities among the people you interviewed. How do you account for differences?

1. "1990s Boom Reminiscent of 1890s" by Rick Hampson. *USA Today*, May 24, 2001.

2. "Latinos Give US New View of Race" by Cindy Rodriguez. *Boston Globe*, January 2, 2001.