AMERICAN NATIVISM AND EXCLUSION: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION LEAGUE, 1894–1921

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By

Keith Jones, B.A.

Georgetown University
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Keith Jones, B.A.

Mentor: Kazuko Uchimura, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

In the 1890s, a political movement was slowly gathering steam in the United States to restrict immigration qualitatively, via literacy tests, and quantitatively, through restrictive federal legislation. Leading the charge was the Immigration Restriction League, a Boston group that drove a nationwide campaign for requiring literacy tests for new arrivals. Unlike the Know-Nothings, the anti-Irish nativists of the 1850s, the League’s members were Harvard-educated elitists who feared the influx of undesirables from southern and Eastern Europe. They worried that America was becoming the world’s dumping ground for paupers, criminals, and madmen fleeing the Old World.

Presidents Taft, Cleveland, and Wilson, however, vetoed the League’s literary test provision three separate times. President Cleveland described it as “illiberal, narrow, and un-American.” Additionally, the proposal failed to acknowledge the high illiteracy rates of native-born Americans particularly in rural areas and the South, and the fact that illiterate blue-collar Americans were hardly considered undesirable. Moreover, the literacy provision failed to recognize that previous exclusionist laws were ineffectual. The Chinese Exclusion Act had failed to stifle Chinese immigration on the West Coast, giving rise to the first great wave of commercial human smuggling. The Exclusion Act froze the Chinese population in 1882, but undocumented migration commenced from the
southwestern borderlands, and after The Great 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the false-papers industry thrived.

During the Progressive Era (the 1880s through the 1920s), American nativism ebbed and flowed; by the end of the Great War, the Roaring Twenties had ushered in an era of openness and optimism. In general, an easygoing faith in freedom and liberty had returned. In the background, however, lurked a nativistic fear and loathing toward the strangers in the land. In the midst of the emerging pseudoscience of eugenics, the growing fears of a few insecure yet influential Yankee intellectuals, such as Henry Cabot Lodge and the Immigration Restriction League, began to shape immigration legislation in the 1920s. These laws laid the framework for restrictions that lasted until the 1960s. This legislation cemented the immigration system in dependency on quotas and overall ceilings, rather than flexibility with business cycles, labor market demands, and family reunification needs.
EPIGRAPH

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them presses a wild motley throng—

—Thomas Bailey Aldrich, 1895
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Americans have historically been ambivalent about new arrivals. When the economy is growing, we welcome immigrants for the contributions they can make, but when times are hard and businesses are contracting, we seek to exclude newcomers. It has been said that what America wants is workers, by and large, but what we get are people. Since colonial days, immigration has traditionally aroused strong passions, and although Americans like to profess pride in their history as an immigrant nation, each group, once established, has fought to shut the gates on newcomers (Sassen 1998, 32). The spirit of nativism—an intense anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment—evolved distinct patterns under the pressure of successive impulses in American history. The nativist upsurge of the mid-nineteenth century, which ran counter to the currents of immigration, barely escaped the grasp of legislative initiatives to exclude certain races of people (Higham 1955, 11).

In the 1890s, a political movement was slowly gathering steam to restrict immigration qualitatively, via literacy tests, and quantitatively, through restrictive federal legislation. Leading this charge was a small but influential Yankee institution from Boston, the Immigration Restriction League, which commenced a remarkable nationwide campaign to guide public opinion toward requiring literacy tests for new arrivals. This thesis is an examination and analysis of the Immigration League through the construct of nativism. The central questions—and the problems to be examined in this thesis—are: (1) what pattern of nativism did the Immigration Restriction League present? And, (2) how
did their rise and decline parallel the ebb and flow of xenophobic, anti-immigrant sentiments across the land? The principal hypothesis of this thesis is that the League’s pattern of nativism was a Yankee-Progressive strain of what John Higham defined as Anglo-Saxon nativism. The League’s members took an elitist approach, while simultaneously attempting to align themselves with organized labor, and their beliefs echoed the sentiments of the believers of the pseudoscientific eugenics movement. Their rise and decline at first paralleled public sentiments against new arrivals, but after the start of the First World War, xenophobic sentiments began to flow away from the entering immigrant, and toward the lingering alien—growing a hundred fold.

Three Harvard University graduates formed the League in 1894: Charles Warren, Robert DeCourcy Ward, and Prescott Farnsworth Hall. The club was born out of a meeting of these four blue bloods at Warren’s law office in Boston, and it later established branches in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. Although its founders longed to build the League into a mass movement, its active members never exceeded a handful, and probably no more than twelve ever came to any single meeting. The founders were practically minded intellectuals from well-to-do, long-established families that were steeped in Boston ways and Boston ideas. They had all attended Harvard College in the late 1880s, and they had all undertaken graduate work in the Lawrence Scientific School, or the Harvard Law School (Higham 1955, 102).

Watching with anxiety as immigration increased sharply in the 1880s and 1890s, the League’s members lost faith in the nation's ability to amalgamate these new arrivals into its political, social, and cultural fabric. They associated immigration with the
socioeconomic problems of their increasingly urban and industrialized society—crowded tenements, poverty, disease, labor unrest, crime, and violence. In particular, League members distinguished between the old immigrants of English, Irish, and German stock and the new immigrants from southern and Eastern Europe. They claimed that these recently arrived so-called undesirables were inherently unable to adopt American values or participate in self-government. Many League spokesmen came to identify directly with the eugenics movement, which found a pseudoscientific basis for classifying and ranking ethnic and racial groups. They worried about these supposedly inferior and illiterate immigrants bringing in poverty and organized crime at a time of high unemployment, and they felt that these newcomers were threatening what they believed was the American way of life and the high wage scale. They were determined to mount a counteroffensive against the wave of strange invaders, who seemed so grave a threat to their class, their region, their country, and their race (Higham 1955, 102).

From beginning to end, two men dominated the League. Prescott F. Hall, the more aggressive among them, had just opened a legal practice. Hall had a variety of interests, but for the rest of his life, nothing ever mattered as much to him as the League. He was described as a gaunt, sunken-eyed figure—the product of an intensely over-protected childhood in an old Boston family, and throughout his life he struggled with insomnia and ill health. But his mind was sharp, arrogant, and proud. He had a passion for the music of Wagner and German philosophy and a lifelong interest in medicine and biology (Higham 1955, 102). Hall’s Harvard classmate, Robert De-Courcy Ward, was equally committed to the League, and in nineteen years, he only missed a single meeting.
Twenty-seven years old at the League’s inception, Ward was Hall’s senior by one year and he was about to enter a lifelong career as a professor of climatology at Harvard. Cooperating with them were several Boston scholars and philanthropists, and various illustrious names graced the League’s letterhead (Higham 1955, 102).

The League used books, pamphlets, meetings, and numerous newspaper and journal articles to disseminate information and sound the alarm about the dangers of the immigrant flood tide, and their political allies in Congress used their power to gain support for their intentions. The League was the leading advocate for the literacy test, as it had been in previous sessions of Congress, and its constitution explicitly stated that its objective was to “advocate and work for the further judicious restriction or stricter regulation of immigration” (Immigration Restriction League Constitution). Although their ultimate goal was to exclude the number of immigrants, the campaign for a literacy requirement fit their objectives in the short term. The League commenced its remarkable, nationwide campaign to guide public opinion toward the test, devoting itself single-mindedly to the project, centering its arguments chiefly on data designed to prove that southern and Eastern Europe, in sharp contrast to northwestern Europe, was dumping an alarming number of illiterates, paupers, criminals, and madmen who endangered American character and citizenship. They sent speakers to address local Boston groups, distributed propaganda leaflets throughout the country, and engaged in direct legislative lobbying in Washington. They also made a strenuous effort to sell the literacy test to organized labor, but with mixed effect (Higham 1955, 103).
At the end of the nineteenth century, the American economy was suffering and public opinion was ripe for xenophobic views. The League's publicity got a wide hearing, with five hundred daily newspapers receiving its literature and reprinting it as editorials. According to Higham, “All the nativist and xenophobic ferment of the past ten years was coming to a head in the atmosphere of unrelieved depression, intense jingoism, and great political tension” (Higham 1955, 103). Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s poem, “Unguarded Gates,” perhaps best expressed the fury and rising xenophobic sentiments of nationalism and white supremacy. It is a shocking portrayal of the nativist strains weaving through the country's history at the time. A native of New Hampshire and a former editor of The Atlantic, Aldrich published “Unguarded Gates” with a collection of others poems in 1895. The poem was so well received that it garnered space in the book's title:

*Unguarded Gates and Other Poems.*

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,
Flying 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 loud,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!
The second stanza of the poem weaves a clear picture of the strongest examples of white nationalism: “O Liberty, white Goddess! Is it well / To leave the gates unguarded?” asks Aldrich, worrying that the “wild motley throng” of immigrants pressing through the New York Harbor will trod and trample upon the land and its citizens (Aldrich 1895, ll. 31). “Strange tongues” and strange religions with “unknown gods and rites,” Aldrich states, are “Accents of menace alien to our air,” an affront to what he believed was the purity of the American way of life (Aldrich 1895, ll. 29).

Aldrich was not alone in his sentiments. The Immigration League seized upon the nativist sentiment, working with the new Republican Congress in 1895 through their contact with nativist leaders like Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Since 1893, when he joined the House of Representatives, Lodge had been working to introduce a bill that would have required new immigrants to pass a literacy test before entering the country. They were joined by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in support of the literacy measure, as organized labor continued to harbor concerns about the admission of unskilled immigrants who were willing to work for low wages. Some unions, however, were beginning to see the immigrants as ripe for recruitment into their ranks. But the crafts-oriented AFL focused primarily on the unions that organized skilled workers who felt the most threatened by the immigrants. Moreover, the leader of the AFL, Samuel Gompers, shared many of the eugenicists’ notions of immigrants (Martin, 139).

The League zeroed in on the European backgrounds of immigrants—upon their unfamiliarity with independent political action and their familiarity with hierarchy and authority—stressing the urgent needs that grew out of their migration (Hofstadter 1955,
Immigration from southern and Eastern Europe threatened Yankee notions of the ideal American way of life. Their core beliefs were rooted in the indigenous Yankee and Protestant political traditions of middle-class life, which demanded the constant activity of the citizen in public affairs and argued that political life should moralize the lives of individuals and develop individual character (Hofstadter 1955, 9).

The tremendous influx of immigration since 1882, which was followed by the industrial depression of 1883–1886, fueled the native workingman's cause for complaint against the foreign-born on the ground of self-interest. Higham argues that the American workingman did much of the same work, served the same boss, and lived in the same neighborhood as the immigrant, and relations were seldom entirely free from strain: “The immigrant entered the American economy on its lower rungs, and commonly began by accepting wages and enduring conditions which Americanized employees scorned” (Higham 1955, 45). As nationalism returned during a period of recurring calamities and unrelieved discontent, which culminated in the savage economic downturn of 1893–1897, industrial warfare was waged. Rebellious employees clashed with unyielding employers, and according to Higham, “Americans groped to escape the dominance of an uncompromising plutocracy—and groped in vain.” National Guard units were called out in the summer of 1892 to quell disturbances, and in Homestead, Pennsylvania, steel workers fought with an army of private detectives. Two years later, in a crescendo of discontent, the Pullman strikes unleashed mobs in Chicago railroad yards, bringing United States soldiers into the battle on the company side (Higham 1955, 69).
During this transitional time in American history, the Immigration League formed their association of myths and dreams into a rationale for restriction that they ardently defended against various criticisms and pressures for nearly three decades. Opposition came chiefly from steamship and transportation companies, whose agents came to Washington and labored unceasingly to defeat all such legislation. The proposed literacy test was frankly objected to on the grounds that it would in large measure eradicate the introduction of cheap labor, which the railroads and other corporations greatly needed at the time. Furthermore, inclusive and optimistic ideals of nationality were defended as American ideals, and as the economy improved, the American people generally maintained a confident faith in themselves, their limitless opportunities for improvement and acquisition, and the boundless strength of their principles of freedom. Sentiments of defensiveness, fear, and loathing toward foreign minorities were checked by the more optimistic and cosmopolitan sentiments of the American mind (Higham 1955, 11).

Higham’s theme of Anglo-Saxon nativism forms a basic theory, a lens from which to view the Immigration League. Richard Hofstadter’s work provides important background context on the Progressive Era ethos of 1890s, which directly lead to reform movements like immigration restriction. And Barbara Miller Solomon’s work on the New England Brahmin tradition situates the unique perspective of these Yankees, which was an elitist but deeply insecure New England mindset. The aim of this thesis, then, is to better understand the unique sentiments that characterized this strain of Anglo-Saxon Yankee nativism. To more clearly understand the myths and dreams in which they believed and the realities in which they had to compromise, it is important to understand
the context of the Yankee heritage and traditions, and the pressures and uncertainties that industrialization brought into their world. Throughout the rise and decline of this strain of nativism, we find the strange emotional motives of its so-called reformers—their sentiments of melancholy, alienation, and nostalgia, and their congenial companions in the emerging pseudoscience of eugenics.

In their profound discontent and insecurity with an ever-industrializing America—in their melancholy, despondency, and general malaise—these Yankee nativists manifested their fear and angst into a Progressive zeal for immigration restriction and exclusion. Their project was imperfect; whether or not they realized this is uncertain, but ultimately it was vetoed as “most illiberal and un-American.” First of all, the literacy test failed to address the high illiteracy rates already existing among American citizens, particularly in rural areas and the South, and the fact that illiterate citizens were not necessarily so-called undesirable Americans. Secondly, the project failed to recognize that previous exclusionist efforts, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, had failed to effectively enforce restrictions or seal the ports of entry. The literacy test ultimately failed to produce results during Prescott Hall’s lifetime. However, the sum total of the League’s efforts—underscored by implicit nativistic sentiments in the back of the American mind—continued to influence immigration policy, leading the way to the national origins quotas that existed from the 1920s until the 1960s.
CHAPTER 2
AMERICAN NATIVISM

Nativism as a term is a construct that scholars employ to explain hostility and intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its imputed foreign connections. At the heart of American nativism is “an intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its un-American connections” (Higham, 1955, 11). Americans have historically been ambivalent about new arrivals, and ever since colonial times, public opinion has ebbed and flowed optimistically and pessimistically between open cosmopolitanism and defensive nativism. By and large, the subject of immigration has aroused inflammatory passions, and opposing beliefs have checkered American thought since colonial times. A leading sociologist from Columbia University put it aptly: “Although Americans claim to profess pride in their history as being a nation of immigrants, each group of arrivals, once established, has tried to keep out newcomers” (Sassen 1998, 32).

Nativism evolved its own patterns under the pressure of successive impulses in American history. As it ebbed and flowed, the nativist upsurge of the mid-nineteenth century, which ran counter to the currents of immigration, just barely escaped the grasp of legislative proposals to shut the gates on new arrivals. By the 1890s, a political movement was slowly gathering steam to restrict immigration, and the Immigration League appeared on the political scene, commencing a remarkable nationwide campaign to guide public opinion toward requiring a literacy test for new arrivals (Higham, 102). The League’s ideas, myths, and dreams were rooted in the mid-nineteenth century New
England traditions. These men, like their Brahmin fathers, desperately feared the old order’s vanishing way of life. They were discontent about the influx of new arrivals, believing that the waves of immigration, rather than the rise of urbanization, were the chief cause of their alienation, which threatened their status and way of life.

In his unsurpassed work *Strangers in the Land*, historian John Higham attempted a general history of the anti-foreign spirit, which he defined as *nativism*. Higham tried to show how American nativism evolved its own distinctive patterns, how it ebbed and flowed under pressures of successive impulses in American history, how it fared at every social level, and how was passed into action (Higham 1955, xi). He made clear that although his book was about nativism, it was not about crackpots, even though there were crackpots in it. As a study of public opinion, *Strangers in the Land* dealt with American people; this thesis is likewise a study with crackpots in it.

It is important to acknowledge that, as Richard Hofstadter claimed, the Progressive Era of the 1880s through the 1920s had an air of innocence that will never again be known. We couldn’t see its character with perfect clarity because there were complexities in his time that conventional images of the past failed to address, and we needed to know more than we did about our political traditions before his generation could accurately depict earlier figures in American history. Rather than rendering final judgment, Hofstadter hoped that his observations would spur further studies of American reform movements. This thesis, however, will attempt to render judgment on the Immigration League and their Anglo-Saxon nativism. Their prejudice, which gathered to a storm during the Progressive Era, was rooted in the myths of Yankee superiority and
elitism, which, I argue, was anti-American. The question is important because, as Higham concluded, nativism as a habit of mind darkly illuminates some of the large contours of America’s past, and it has mirrored our anxieties over the years and marked out the bounds of our tolerance (Higham, 1955, xi).

Higham claimed that the spirit of nativism appeared long before the word was coined in 1840, and it has continued to have profound impacts long after the word dropped from common parlance. The nativists didn’t attach a label to themselves; their critics named them. Anti-foreign parties arose in New York, evolving gradually into the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s, and opponents labeled them as bigoted nativists (Higham 1955, 4). Their leaders called their organizations Native American parties, and they described their philosophy as the grand work of the American Party. The nativist, whether he was a southern conservative or a northern reformer, believed in a certain form of nationalism. He believed that some un-American force with foreign connections, whether it was the Catholic menace threatening freedom and liberty or pauper labor threatening the high wage scale, was threatening the nation and the distinctively American way of life (Higham 1955, 4).

Higham noticed that nativistic agitation tended to follow certain styles and themes, and he outlined three of these patterns that stood out as major currents reaching back before the Civil War. The oldest theme in early America came from a combination of the Protestant Reformation and a hatred of Rome, and Higham called this sentiment *anti-Catholicism* (Higham 1955, 5). A flood of Catholic immigrants came to America in the nineteenth century and nativists responded with Protestant evangelical fervor,
considering these immigrants minions of a European plot whom the Pope dispatched to convert American institutions. Anti-Catholic nativists aimed to strengthen naturalization laws and exclude Catholics and foreigners from public office (Higham 1955, 5). The American party offered a way to ensure national homogeneity, and its strength reached a climax in 1855, but the division between North and South soon suffocated the nativists’ concerns (Higham 1955, 7).

In *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, author Kerby Miller provides some interesting context about what fueled the incendiary anti-Catholic nativist fury of the Know-Nothings in the 1850s, describing the background of the Great Irish Famine and how it led to mass exodus during the mid-1840s. In pre-famine Ireland, partial and even total failures of potato harvests due to bad weather and disease were common. However, successive annual failures were rare, and the blight that struck in 1845 was cause by a previously unknown fungus, which appeared without warning:

"The leaves turned black, crumbling into ashes when touched," according to one farmer, "and the very air was laden with a sickly odor of decay, as if the hand of death had stricken the potato field, and everything growing in it was rotten" (Miller 1985, 281). Farmers desperately tried to arrest the disease by cutting off the blackened leaves and stalks, only to discover that the tubers had rotted in the ground. Some thought they had escaped the blight, harvesting thousands of seemingly healthy potatoes, which later decayed into inedible putridity. (Miller 1985, 281)

The 1846 harvest was only 20 percent of the pre-famine level, and the blight afflicted the entire island, with nothing to expect but immediate famine. In 1847, the famine abated, but the demoralized people had planted few potatoes, and consequently the harvest was only 10 percent of 1844 levels. In 1848, the blight returned in full force, and the
countryside from coast to coast appeared to be “one mass of unvaried rottenness and decay” (Miller 1985, 282). Blight continued to affect the crops for six more years, turning many subsistence farming communities into virtual wastelands—even the Wicklow Mountains within sight of Dublin and Rathlin Island off the prosperous Antrim coast (Miller 1985, 282).

While the Irish government and charities made great efforts, relief was woefully insufficient, as only extraordinary efforts could have avoided wholesale starvation. Ireland lacked adequate facilities. There were few hospitals and the workhouses, which had been constructed since the Irish Poor Law in 1838, could accommodate only 100,000 people. The law denied relief outside the workhouses, where admittance was restricted. This reflected the negative attitudes of landlords and ratepayers, and the negative attitudes toward charity that prevailed among British politicians and economists (Miller 1985, 282). For example, The Assistant Secretary of Treasury and Government Relief, Charles Trevelyan, seemed more concerned that charity might demoralize the Irish than that starvation might kill them. Trevelyan was convinced that Ireland's “great evil” was not famine, but "the selfish, perverse, and turbulent character of the people" (Miller 1985, 282).

A special relief commission was authorized to purchase and distribute Indian corn from America and establish public works, such as road building to employ the poor. By 1846, the government was employing 30,000 laborers. However, the public knew that the ministry's motives, rather than being altruistic, were designed “to prevent slaughtering the cattle.” The peasants thought the Indian corn was poisonous; they had no idea how to
prepare it, so they consumed it half-cooked (Miller 1985, 283). While the blight was
unavoidable, the Great Famine was largely the result of Ireland's colonial status and
grossly inequitable social system. Underrepresented and outnumbered at Westminster,
English ministers often knew little and cared less about Ireland's condition. While the
Irish perished from hunger, Ireland's grain, cattle, and other foodstuffs were continually
exported to British markets. Tragically, this was a poignant example of Ireland's political
and economic subservience to British interests (Miller 1985, 286).

The most lethal legacy of Irish colonialism was the absentee landlord class, which
took the opportunity during the famine to clear their estates of thousands of pauper
tenants who were in arrears, as they staved off hunger by eating their grain and cattle and
thus had no money to pay their rents. Parliament further stimulated clearances by adding
the infamous Gregory Clause to the amended Poor Law, which forbade public relief to
any household of a quarter acre or more that refused to relinquish possession to his
proprietor (Miller 1985, 287). While many peasants tried to evade the law, thousands
acquiesced to prevent starvation, and some chose to die rather than forfeit their holdings.
Dominated by landlords, the Poor Law boards applied the laws ruthlessly, even denying
relief to women and children. Between 1845 and 1846, perhaps half a million people
were heartlessly and brutally evicted from their homes in the depths of winter. Rural
hospitality vanished, and it became “every man for himself.” Out of apathy and a fear of
contagion, wakes, a pre-famine cultural necessity, disappeared. Soon, coffins became so
impossible to supply that reusable “trap-coffins,” which had hinged bottoms and were
situated above mass graves, became ubiquitous. In short, rural Ireland was in a state of social and moral collapse (Miller 1985, 291).

One million and half Irish people sailed to the U.S., another 340,000 went to British North America, 200,000 went to Great Britain, and thousands more went to Australia. In all, approximately 2.1 million (a quarter of the population) went overseas between 1845 and 1855 (Miller 1985, 291). The mass exodus bore all of the marks of panic and hysteria, and people often absconded without paying their taxes or debts: “They cut the corn on Sunday, sell it on Monday morning, and are off to America in the evening, leaving the wastelands behind them and the landlords without rent” (Miller 1985, 294). The country had dry rot, and the sooner they left the better. “Let me go to the land of liberty. Let me see no more of the titheman and taxman” was the plea of one emigrant farmer. Families often banded together, combining their earnings to send one son or cousin to the New World. And these emigrants gave Irish-America a decidedly Gaelic cast (Miller 1985, 294). Dulled by want and oppression, these exiles, according to Lady Wilde, “often spoke no other language save the ancient tongue of the primitive Celt, through which no new light of thought has flashed for a thousand years.” These people had resisted the lure of emigration in the darkest pre-famine years, and it is unlikely that many would have left home after 1845 had it not been for the catastrophe (Miller 1985, 299).

The Great Famine left its survivors with eternal memories. Fifty years later, in 1895, one Irishman in America remembered how after the crops failed, “weeds blossomed beautifully, their yellow blossoms rustled by the gentle breeze, glistening in
the sun, made a picture in my mind that often stands before me—a picture of Death's victory, with all deaths agents decorating the fields with their baleful laurels.” However, the Irish also attributed the catastrophe to “Divine Providence” (Miller 1985, 300). As one clergyman declared, “God's lamentable judgment” and “the scourge of God fell down in Ireland.” Contemporary Catholic clerics, ballad composers, and peasants often interpreted the famine as “a calamity with which God wishes to purify the Irish People…from their wickedness and animosity against one another.” Fatalism and passivity seemed especially characteristic of western Irish-speakers, who “melted away...like snow before the sun,” noted one observer in County Mayo (Miller 1985, 301). Clerics also offered the religious rationalization that the famine constituted a “divine mission to scatter the blessings of the catholic religion over distant lands.” As one American traveler noted, “Instead of sorrow on leaving their native country” they expressed “nothing but joy at their escape from this doomed land, this poverty Isle,” the ruins of Ireland. As one poor Ulster woman noted, “There's a curse on ould green Ireland…and we'll get out of it.” News of California gold strikes only fed dreams of an American arcadia (Miller 1985, 302).

Nevertheless, traditional resistance toward emigration was still evident, especially among western Irish-speakers, who could scarcely contemplate life beyond their parish boundaries. When crown officials initiated assisted emigration, the tenants deluged them with “pathetic, semiliterate petitions, pleading they be allowed to die in the land of their forefathers and their birth…clinging to their huts with the greatest tenacity,” rejecting
relief even when the Gregory clause presented them with a choice between life and land (Miller 1985, 303).

Catholic nationalists had sought to explain all Irish grievances as having been caused by landlords, Protestant malevolence, and the school system. However, Irish people at home and abroad soon blamed England for their sufferings, and the famine itself became the ultimate symbol of British tyranny, permanently enshrined the now-imperishable interpretation of emigration as exile forced by English oppression (Miller 1985, 305). The famine evictions engendered “the savage hatred of England that animates Irishmen on either side of the Atlantic.” Even nationalist politician John Maguire remarked: “The burning memory of the horrors seems to overwhelm all other recollection, and the noble generosity of the English people appears to be forgotten in a frenzy of reproach.” Wholesale clearances inextricably linked the government to the horrors, but subtler psychological factors were also at work. Panicked and demoralized, Irish people were often only able to save themselves at the expense of neighbors and kinfolk. During and after the famine, tremendously ashamed about the violations of communal mores, they would seek “explanations” for what had happened, projecting responsibility and resentment onto “outsiders” (Miller 1985, 306).

The nationalist group Young Ireland greatly influenced the Irish in America, particularly the famine immigrants and their children. One nationalist claimed that they only had to “arouse an original hatred” by deploying nationalist interpretations of their experiences. One reason, Miller asserts, was that many who emigrated were Irish-speakers and rural dwellers who shared a common culture that devalued individual
initiative and improvement (Miller 1985, 311). Unlike pre-famine immigrants, famine refugees had not made calculated, responsible decisions to seek independence overseas. Rather, they had merely fled in panicked desperation, compelled by fear and by forces beyond their understanding or powers of resistance. Some were literally transported by Poor Law guardians. Others were lured by remittances, trusting blindly in relatives overseas, hoping naïvely that the New World was still the promised land of legend. Under such circumstances, emigration itself did not challenge passive, dependent outlooks; instead, it validated traditional tendencies to skirt individual responsibility for actions that violated customary communal mores (Miller 1985, 312).

Young Ireland’s leaders ceaselessly blamed England, the perennial enemy, for forcing the Irish to leave their homes and to endure the shame, horror, and degradation into which starvation reduces human nature. Thus, Irishmen who felt guilty for their demoralized and antisocial behavior during the crisis, who initially regarded the Famine as God’s chastisement for their sins, who emigrated because internal sanctions momentarily crumbled in the face of death, all culturally and psychologically needed Young Ireland (Miller 1985, 312). Like the Gaelic poets of the seventeenth century, Irish-American nationalists offered a redemptive solution, as well as an explanation for Irish suffering: if famine emigrants rose above self pity, renewed communal fealty, and united behind nationalist leadership, then they might expunge their shame, win freedom for Ireland, and take bloody revenge against those responsible for the famine graves and coffin ships (Miller 1985, 312).
Irish people fleeing the famine generally entered the American workforce at the very bottom, competing with slave labor in the South for the dirty, backbreaking, poorly paid jobs that white American citizens and emigrants from elsewhere generally disdained. Most Irish males worked part of their lives in North America as canal, railroad, building-construction, or dock laborers (Miller 1985, 318). One Irish laborer concluded, “In fact, I have lost all ambition—poverty soon humbles pride.” Irishwomen's domestic service work included textile factories, sweatshop garment manufacturing, and domestic piecework in the needle trades. Like the menfolk, they worked in oppressive, often dangerous conditions, and they usually received miserably low wages; during depressions, many turned to prostitution.

In New York City, almost 30,000 Irish lived below ground in cellars, which often flooded with rainwater and raw sewage (Miller 1985, 319). “Irish abodes in cellars and garrets of the city were not more deplorable nor more squalid than Irish hovels.” Furthermore, Irish-American working-class life exacerbated severe social problems, such as drunkenness, crime, violence, and insanity, which reinforced economic deprivation and uncertainty (Miller 1985, 319). After the Civil War, there was rampant inflation in food and housing costs, and the labor marked became saturated. American conditions likely only increased the Irish propensity for drinking, which was exacerbated by physical pain caused from work accidents, a lack of proper food and clothing, and psychological anxieties stemming from unfamiliar situations. Whatever the cause, Irish emigrants dominated crime statistics and prison populations in most states and cities (Miller 1985, 320).
The general consensus among the Irish was that all things nearly in America were done differently than in Ireland. In addition to poverty, a lack of skills, and discrimination, norms and customs also made it difficult for Famine Irish to succeed in America. Famine emigrants were temperamentally and economically less prepared than their predecessors for material achievement and assimilation abroad (Miller 1985, 326). “I could not feel more isolated, more bewildered,” declared one Irishman, “This is a fast country which our lot has been cast, with our ideas of old movements still clinging to us, like memories of childhood...We are a primitive people, wandering wildly in a strange land, the Nineteenth Century.” Even Irish-American newspaper editors, who ceaselessly urged readers to adopt entrepreneurial attitudes, often acknowledged that the typical Famine emigrant was a culturally conservative “bundle of habits and associations, with a number of unanswerable longings, likings, and propensities which stay in his nature though he changed his place.” Miller described Irish-American culture at the time as “a loving to clan together” and "an enjoyment of their boisterous wakes, Paddy funerals, and frolics." Contemporaries lamented that the “huddling together of the Irish” greatly blocked them against assimilation and denationalization (Miller 1985, 326).

Miller points out that although American animosity usually focused on the Irish lower classes, Protestant prejudices generally embraced Irish-American Catholics. “The great majority of the American people are, in heart and soul anti-Catholic, but more especially anti-Irish,” lamented a middle-class emigrant, “Everything Irish is repugnant to them” (Miller 1985, 323). During the 1850s, anti-Irish-Catholic feelings, exacerbated by social and political tensions, reached a crescendo with an outbreak of virulent nativism.
that was institutionalized in the American Protestant Society, the short-lived Know-Nothing Party, and to a lesser degree, the new Republican Party. The prejudice was greatest in Yankee New England, along the Atlantic seaboard, and in the upper Midwest, where most Famine Irish settled. Such prejudices adversely affected nearly all Irish-American Catholics, regardless of their social status. Unskilled workers and servants encountered the ubiquitous “No Irish Need Apply” notices when they searched for jobs in Boston, New York, and other major cities (Miller 1985, 323). Likewise, skilled workers were also discriminated against. American nativism, reinforcing a legacy of colonialism and social inferiority, made most Irish Catholic emigrants almost morbidly sensitive. Yankified Irish strove to erase the stigma by changing their accents, their names, and even their religion. The number of famine emigrants who abandoned Catholicism is unknown, but contemporary churchmen believed their number to be alarmingly large (Miller 1985, 325).

Nevertheless, Famine Irish were the first to erect a national, institutional framework for Irish-America. The Democratic Party was a bulwark against nativist attacks and a means by which the Irish generally could attain status in their adopted country (Miller 1985, 328). New York Irish had the protection and largesse of Boss Tweed. “Long life and health to you, Bill Tweed” was the general consensus. The tragedy of this pathetic dependence on champions of “the poor man's cause” was that Gilded Age America offered the Irish very few alternative sources of charity and secular guidance (Miller 1985, 331). The Catholic Church also commanded Irish fealty. The majority of Irish Catholic emigrants remained loyal to the church and became more
faithful practitioners. This bolstered and modernized their faith, insulating them from Protestant scorn and proselytization. Like Democratic ward bosses, educated priests were vitally necessary protectors and intermediaries between illiterate Irish emigrants and an unfamiliar, often hostile environment (Miller 1985, 332).

Catholic critics countered that Irish Catholics in fact made the best American citizens because they were coming to the New World to seek religious liberty, and the same government that had exiled the Puritans had exiled them. Nevertheless, the road to respectability was on a track separate to Protestants, and the church’s primary function was as a buffer from native animosity and despair from their deplorable condition (Miller 1985, 332). Sermons and textbooks idealized a medieval version of society, in which poverty should be endured with patience and resignation because it is part of god's plan. Piety outweighed material attainments, perpetuating a fatalistic conceptualization of Irish history. By and large, the situation was akin to that of the Jews of the Old Testament. The Irish had been a “martyr nation” for seven centuries of British oppression that had culminated in them being exiled because of the famine and their religion, which was dominated by saints and martyrs and had minimal secular heroes. Catholic clerics denounced not just nativism but Protestantism, as godless (Miller 1985, 333).

Young Irelanders drifted into Democratic politics, cementing emigrant loyalties to the party of Jackson. Irish Americans were the most energetic and hateful of the British dominion of Ireland, especially the landlord class, and they would not hesitate to destroy both. They supplied money and arms, and they trained soldiers for a forthcoming rebellion. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, also named the Fenian Brotherhood,
romantically linked modern nationalism to Gaelic antiquity's legendary heroes (Miller 1985, 335). Irish-American nationalism, Miller states, was an ultimate means to assimilation. Since American prejudice thwarted the ambitions for upward mobility of all middle-class emigrants, they sought Irish freedom to promote group status and personal success in their adopted country. Nationalism was used to promote careers in mainstream politics (Miller 1985, 336). Fenian circles were no more than local auxiliaries of the Democratic Party. Additionally, many nationalists undoubtedly were less concerned with freeing Ireland from British rule than freeing Irish-Americans from nativist scorn. While they believed that the strongest and best hater of England was sure to be the best American, they maintained their nationalist spirit and refused to assimilate (Miller 1985, 336). Later generations were less alienated from American society and more integrated into Irish-American socioeconomic, political, and religious institutions, which promoted relative security and contentment. Nevertheless, the famine exodus and its nationalist fervor left a permanent mark on American society, fueling the darker side of nativistic sentiments (Miller 1985, 339).

Before the anti-Catholicism and anti-Irish sentiments of the Know-Nothing era, there was an older form of nativism, which Higham identified and called anti-radicalism. At the end of the eighteenth century, in response to the French Revolution, anti-radicalism crystallized. In 1798, the country was heading internationally toward war with revolutionary France. At home, a factious opposition was organizing against the gentlemen of the Federalist Party, such as John Adams and Alexander Hamilton, which had unified the new nation. Hamilton himself had formed the Federalist Party. During
George Washington’s first term, Hamilton built a network of supporters, largely urban bankers and businessmen, to support his fiscal policies. These supporters grew into the Federalist Party, a group of gentlemen who were committed to a fiscally sound and nationalistic government. The Jeffersonian Party showed sympathy toward French democracy, and the ruling gentlemen in America noted the internal support their opponents received from English, French, and Irish immigrants. If the Federalists were right, Europe’s disorders could have likely spread to the New World. And in their pessimistic determination to check foreign radicalism, they proceeded to sign the Alien and Sedition Acts (Higham 1955, 8). But the undeclared naval war between the United States and the French Republic ended in 1800, and the triumph of Jeffersonian democracy dispelled conservative pessimism and anti-radical nativism.

Beyond these anti-Catholicism and anti-radicalism strains, of particular importance for this thesis is a third form of nativism that Higham outlined. This more recent style of nativism aimed to describe what America was, as opposed to anti-Catholic and anti-radical patterns, which declared more clearly what America was not. Racial nativism, which Higham calls the Anglo-Saxon tradition, characterized the in-group directly and the alien out-groups only by implication (Higham 1955, 9). The concept of the United States belonging to some superior Anglo-Saxon race offered an interpretation—a myth and a dream to explain why America was a source of national greatness. The idea crystallized in the early nineteenth century as a way of defining American nationality in a normative sense, rather than as a formula for attacking outsiders. Ironically for intellectual history, the Anglo Saxon tradition actually began as a
liberal idea. The Americans who attributed the uniqueness of their nation as an Anglo-Saxon race were merely echoing the claims of the English. Parliamentarians traced England’s freedom-loving heritage to the Goths, a collective designation for Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and other primitive tribes that had invaded the Roman Empire (Higham 1955, 9).

Romantic writers and scholars, rebelling against the coldly rational outlook of the Enlightenment, loved the diversity and organic inwardness of all forms of life, and they searched through the mists of their medieval Gothic past to find their intrinsic character (Higham 1955, 10). This search led them to believe that they were the finest offshoot of the Teutonic branch of the Goths, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Romantic Englishmen believed that they owed their national genius to this mythically unitary racial source (Higham 1955, 10). Higham postulates that in England the fountainhead of the new racial nationalism was Sharon Turner’s widely popular book, *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1799-1805). In American thought, this idea received its first considerable impetus when a Philadelphia edition of the book was released in two volumes in 1841 (Higham 1955, 10). As the tradition passed into American hands, it preserved its early libertarian emphasis. Although it ministered to the national ego, rather than seeking to implement a constitutional controversy, this romantic cult nonetheless stressed that the gift of political freedom was the supreme Anglo-Saxon virtue. The Anglo-Saxons, or perhaps the Teutons, had been bestowed with a unique capacity for self-government and a special mission to spread its blessings (Higham 1955, 10).
Higham argues that in popular thought and emotion, this idea found an initial outlet not among nativists but among expansionists (Higham, 1955, 10). During the annexation of Texas and California, many Americans saw themselves as taking on the role of their conquering ancestors, executing a racial mandate, along with the religious manifest destiny, to enlarge the area of freedom. The penny press roared that the Anglo-Saxon impulse would carry the American flag throughout the continent (Higham 1955, 10). Nativists, on the other hand, touched on this idea very rarely and very lightly, Higham argues. Horace Bushnell, as early as 1837, had cautioned the Americans to protect their noble Saxon blood against the miscellaneous tide of immigration, and in the 1850s there were occasional suggestions that a Celtic flood might swamp America’s distinctive Anglo-Saxon traits. But on the whole, Higham claims, racial nationalists at the time proclaimed an unqualified confidence in the American destiny, believing that Anglo-Saxon would always retain predominance all over the country (Higham 1955, 10-11).

The significance of this claim lies in the extent to which the very concept of race had not attained its later fixity and definiteness (Higham 1955, 11). Racial Nationalism, having arisen out of political and literary speculation, rather than scientific inquiry, displayed a characteristic vagueness, according to Higham. Nationalists often used the word race to mean little more than national character, usually suggesting some sort of innate impulse. But despite the growing interest in biology in the nineteenth century, race was understood to be more of an ongoing spirit than a physiological actuality. At best a minor strain in American thought before the Civil War, Anglo-Saxon nationalism in the
mid nineteenth century lacked both the intellectual and emotional impulse to have a serious, nativistic appeal (Higham 1955, 11).

Higham’s claim is persuasive, and it would seem that in addition to these limitations and curbs on racial thought, every nativist tendency in pre-Civil War America operated under powerful limitations. Only during the two great crises of the 1790s and 1850s did defensiveness and fear of foreign minorities overtake the checks on nativist sentiments, striking deep into nativist hearts. Even then wider, more inclusive and optimistic ideals of nationality were stubbornly defended and ultimately victorious. In general, the American people maintained what Higham describes as a “cocksure confident faith in themselves, in their limitless opportunities for improvement and acquisition, and in the boundless strength of their principles of freedom” (Higham 1955, 11).

An age of confidence began at the end of the Civil War. On one end of the spectrum, the heroic deaths of Irishmen in General Thomas Meagher’s Irish Brigade at the Battle of Fredericksburg represented the end of a nativist era. At about the same time, a small band of dispirited men gathered in New York City for the last recorded meeting of the Grand Executive Committee of the Order of United Americans (Higham 1955, 12). As the largest of the nonpolitical nativist associations, the O.U.A. had spread through sixteen states in the early 1850s, trumpeting a message of hatred and fear of immigrants and Catholics. But by 1865, the remainder of the demoralized remnants of the O.U.A. could no longer pay its bills or secure a quorum at consolidated meetings (Higham 1955, 12). While one ended in heroism and the other expired in neglect, Higham suggests that
the death of Irishmen at Fredericksburg and the death of the O.U.A. were both indicative of a flow away from defensive nativism (Higham 1955, 12).

Five-hundred-thousand foreign-born soldiers served in the Union armies alone, often organized in their own companies, regiments, and even divisions. Everywhere, the anti-foreign movement of the prewar years melted away (Higham 1955, 13). The very heart of anti-Irish Know-Nothingism, the American Party, vanished in 1860, its last surviving strength passing into the Constitutional Union Party, which stood for nothing but the preservation of the nation. The Sons of America, once mighty in Pennsylvania, succumbed when the war began, and a mere fragment of the Order of United American Mechanics remained in existence (Higham 1955, 13). Higham claims that the war completed the ruining of organized nativism by absorbing xenophobes and immigrants into a common cause.

Now the foreigner had a new prestige; and prestige was the issue at the heart of the matter. The foreigner was a comrade-at-arms, and the previous clash that had alienated their sections was newly reconciled on the battlefield. While quieting old anxieties, Higham claims that the war raised new ones, but in only a few instances did these concern foreign groups. The fearful draft riots that rocked New York for four days in 1863 arose principally from the discontents of the city’s Irish working class. The convulsion was widely interpreted as a disloyal Irish conspiracy inspired by Confederate agents. Higham cites evidence that, out of the horror that the rioting produced came an effort to revive the Know-Nothing movement, but it passed swiftly and without consequence. Outraged gentlemen, who could hardly contain their loathing for the rioters,
nevertheless observed that a revived Know-Nothing movement would be under the disadvantage of having to discriminate between Irish and Germans, and it is also suggestive that *Harpers Weekly*—a bitter critic of the Irish in the 1870s—defended their loyalty on this occasion. Altogether, the nativistic repercussions of the event were slight in comparison with the provocation (Higham 1955, 12; and footnotes pp. 348–349).

In addition to the psychological bonds of a common enemy, Higham raises the question of how the war forged between American ethnic groups the ties of a common economic need. Higham argues that foreign-born civilians served the Union in as important a way as foreign-born soldiers on the battlefield (Higham 1955, 14). While this claim may not be as persuasive as his other arguments, it is a valid point that from the depopulated farms and straining factories of the North, the loud demands came calling for more immigrant labor. And in 1864, Congress revived an eighteenth-century technique for stimulating the flow of fresh European manpower. A contract labor law authorized employers to pay the passage and bind the service of prospective migrants (Higham 1955, 14). The heart of the Know-Nothing Party vanished in the Gilded Age in the 1860s, and the new age of American confidence returned in the 1870s. Postwar America beckoned, and the foreigner had a new prestige after the war completed the ruin of organized nativism by absorbing xenophobes and immigrants in a common cause. For two decades after Appomattox the summons to enrichment and opportunity smothered any serious natives challenge (Higham, 13). As the Civil War drew to a close, the sentiment of optimism was in the air, as the *Chicago Tribune* jubilantly celebrated the bright future of America:
Europe will open her gates like a conquered city. Her people will come forth to us subdued by admiration of our glory and envy of our perfect peace. On to the Rocky Mountains and still over to the Pacific our might populations will spread….Our thirty millions will be tripled in thirty years. (Chicago Tribune, September 28, 1864)

If the country did not quite live up to the Tribune’s grandiose statistics, for twenty of those thirty years it echoed the paper’s confident welcome (Higham 1955, 14). Thus, immigration would build upon America’s cosmopolitan traditions and fluid culture of incorporating alien peoples into its midst. Postwar America beckoned, and as it was, the Civil War inaugurated an era of immense industrial, agricultural, and geographic expansion, in which the hundreds of thousands of annual arrivals from across the Atlantic seemed a national blessing (Higham 1955, 14). Transatlantic migration was resumed in full force when the war ended, and the throngs who came found the way prepared and a place awaiting them. Better transportation greatly shortened and eased the rigors of the Atlantic crossing in the 1860s, as steamships replace the old sailing vessels as carriers of human cargo (Higham 1955, 15). Once arrived, immigrants usually moved into a pattern of settlement created by earlier compatriots. Citing data from the United States Census, in 1860 Higham postulates that the proportion of foreign-born to the total population of the United States was already around what it would remain through 1920, and most of the immigrants were concentrated in urban areas (Higham 1955, 15).

Until the 1880s, the number of nationalities in the country and the locations where they lived did not change very much. German immigration held the leading position it had attained in the late 1850s, and it continued to pour chiefly into the Midwest, drawing increasing numbers of Bohemians and a scattering of Poles in its wake (Higham 1955,
British immigrants (English, Scotch, and Welsh) rose to second place among the transatlantic currents. As skilled craftsmen, framers, miners, and white-collar workers, the British diffused themselves more evenly throughout the country than any other group. Irish immigrants, although now less numerous than the Germans or the British, still arrived in large numbers. As before the Civil War, Irishmen continued to be concentrated in the northeastern states. There, they did most of the common labor and found increasing opportunities as industrial workers, though mining attracted many to the far west. Two other groups also sprang into prominence during the war and postwar years. Scandinavians, having established themselves in the prairies of the upper Mississippi Valley two decades before, began to migrate in great numbers in the 1860s. Unlike other nationalities, they avoided the cities for the most part, spreading instead westward across the plains. Meanwhile, French Canadians, pulled southward by the Civil War, flocked to the mill towns of New England to compete with the Irish. Thus, by 1865 each nationality was vaguely familiar in the region that received it, and each had familiar tasks (Higham 1955, 15).

Higham claims that the fact that an earlier generation had cleared the paths that they trod undoubtedly eased the immigrants’ reception, but the basic condition of their popularity was the appetite for material growth and achievement that dominated postwar America (Higham 1955, 15). Higham asserts that, with only marginal dissent, the Gilded Age that Mark Twain satirized and adored, and the Chromo Civilization that E. L. Godkin criticized and defended, were filled with avid dreams of wealth. The headlong growth of business made the city, the machine, and the capitalist the controlling forces in
American culture. The expansion of the railroad system particularly quickened the whole economy, opening up vast natural resources and creating a national market that was capable of absorbing them (Higham 1955, 16). The very real economic exploits of the age added to the booster spirit of the American idea. There seemed no end to what the country could produce with enough men to do the work and buy the results. Business leaders, marveling that the population growth kept pace with economic opportunities, saw in the flow of immigration the workings of one of the grand laws of nature (Higham 1955, 16).

Many businessmen, unwilling to leave matters entirely in the hands of a beneficent fate, actively expedited the immigrant traffic. Here, the railroads played a key role, as did the tough economy. Railroads pushed boldly into the empty West to settle the wilderness. They needed immigrants to construct the railroads, to buy the great railroad land grants, and to insure future revenues. The Burlington, Northern Pacific, and other lines sent agents to blanket northern Europe with alluring propaganda. Other real estate interests sometimes organized similar campaigns, and many speculators believed that real estate owners made money out of immigrants immediately upon their arrival (Higham 1955, 16).

In the period after the Civil War, Higham postulates, the United States probably felt more secure from interference by European powers than it had at any other time. Isolation was a fact more than a theory, as two mighty oceans surrounded the nation geographically. The common belief of the ardent nationalists was that the Republic could never fall, as others had, to a foreign foe. Comforted by the knowledge of its military
security, Higham makes a strong case that the country tolerated Irish Fenian activities, which would certainly have provoked a good deal of tension in other contexts (Higham 19). With impunity, Americans indulged their own Anglophobia and allowed Irish-American to do the same in more violent ways. The Fenians, without arousing significant resentment, attacked Canada from American territory, organized revolts in Ireland, and tried to incite war with Britain. Untroubled by dangerous adversaries abroad, the United States could work out its own group relations in isolated safety (Higham 19).

Nevertheless, beneath the surface of the age of confidence, the traditions of American nativism persisted. Instead of being liquidated, anti-foreign fears were simply contained (Higham 1955, 28). The major ideological outlines of American nativism had been established, even if they were presently at low tide. As Higham claimed, the anti-Catholic, anti-radical, and Anglo-Saxon traditions had opened the channels through which the xenophobia of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would flow. Moreover, the content and dynamics of this later story would result from changes unimaginined in the days of the Know-Nothings (Higham 1955, 11). There would be social, economic, and intellectual changes in the country, and future nativists like the Immigration League would echo these patterns in their cause for reform. The beginning of a new era of discontent and an age of progressive reform in politics were already underway.
CHAPTER 3
THE PROGRESSIVE ERA ETHOS

As Richard Hofstadter claimed in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Age of Reform*, the 1890s marked the beginning of an era of reform and progressivism in American politics (Hofstadter 1955, 4). By *progressivism*, Hofstadter meant the broader impulse toward criticism and change that was conspicuous everywhere after 1900, when agrarian discontent was enlarged by the growing enthusiasm of middle-class people for social and economic reform (Hofstadter 1955, 5). Its aim was to restore a type of economic individualism and political democracy that was widely believed to have existed earlier in America and to have been destroyed by large corporations and the corrupt political machine. With this purity a kind of morality and civic purity would return that was believed to have been lost (Hofstadter 1955, 6).

Hofstadter’s chief concern was not about the best but the most characteristic thinking of middlebrow writers, and the issues that were presented in the popular magazines, the muckraking articles, the campaign speeches, and the essays of the representative journalists and influential publicists (Hofstadter 1955, 6). Hofstadter postulates that the Populist and Progressive movements took place during a rapid and sometimes turbulent transition from the conditions of an agrarian society to those of modern urban life. This claim is particularly important for the context of this thesis, in that that being much closer to the completion of this shift from agrarianism to urbanism, we have in some respects a clearer understanding of its meaning in the modern world,
though we are likely to have lost sight of the poignancy with which earlier generations experienced it (Hofstadter 1955, 7).

The American tradition of democracy was formed in small villages and farms, and its central ideas and myths were founded in grassroots rural sentiments and metaphors. Hofstadter claims that rural life and democracy were sacred and sacrosanct. Furthermore, a certain complacency and self-righteousness entered into Americans’ thinking—a complacency that was rudely shocked by the conquests of industrialism (Hofstadter 1955, 7). In the modern world, the industrialization and urbanization of the country were coupled with a fragmentation in the relative homogeneity of the population. Until about 1880, American democracy had been not only rural but Yankee and Protestant, and enclaves of immigrants were too scattered to impact the scheme of civic life.

The rise of industry, however, brought what contemporaries thought of as an “immigrant invasion,” a massive forty-year migration of European peasants whose religions, traditions, languages, and sheer numbers made easy assimilation impossible (Hofstadter 1955, 8). Hofstadter claims that Populism and Progressivism were considerably colored by the reaction to this immigrant stream among the native elements of the population. Out of the clash between the needs of the immigrants and the sentiments of the natives, Hofstadter believes there emerged two thoroughly different systems of political ethics. One, founded upon the indigenous Yankee-Protestant political traditions and middle-class life, assumed and demanded the constant, disinterested activity of the citizen in public affairs. They argued that political life ought to be run in
accordance with general principles and abstract laws, and they expressed a common feeling that government should be intimately related to the stimulation and development of individual character.

The other system, founded upon the European background of the immigrants, took for granted that the political life of the individual would arise out of family needs. They interpreted political and civic relations chiefly in terms of personal obligations, and they placed strong personal loyalties above allegiances to abstract codes, laws, or morals. Hofstadter argues that it was chiefly upon this system of values that the political life of the immigrant, the boss, and the urban machine was based. Furthermore, Hofstadter credibly argues that in many ways the struggles of the Progressive Era were influenced by the conflicting codes of the leaders of Protestant social reform and the bosses and immigrant masses (Hofstadter 1955, 9). After the Civil War, the tensions and reactions between these two systems of values reached a crescendo, and the intellectual response in Boston to the immigrant stream became particularly intense.

Hofstadter claims that much of the strength and the weakness of our national existence is grounded in the fact that Americans do not abide very quietly the evils of life. We are forever restlessly pitting ourselves against them, demanding changes, improvements, and remedies, but rarely with sufficient sense of the limits of the human condition (Hofstadter 1955, 16). This relentlessness is the most valuable and successful when we are dealing with things, such as technology, inventions, productivity, and the ability to meet needs and provide comforts. However, in dealing with human beings and institutions, in matters of morals and politics, I agree with Hofstadter’s assertion that the
limits of this undying, absolutist restlessness quickly became evident (Hofstadter 1955, 16). At the so-called grassroots level of American politics, there is a wide and persuasive tendency to believe that there is some great but essentially very simple struggle going on, at the heart of which there lies some single conspiratorial force, whether it be the Catholic Church, big business, corrupt politicians, liquor interests and saloons, the Communist Party. With grassroots American politics, evil is something that must be not merely limited, checked, and controlled, but also expelled permanently (Hofstadter 1955, 17).

So, Hofstadter observes, mainstream Americans go off on periodical psychic sprees that purport to be moral crusades to restore absolute popular democracy or complete honest competition in business. Progressive reformers aimed to wipe out saloons and liquor forever from the nation’s life, to destroy the political machines and put an end to corruption, or to achieve absolute and final security against war, espionage, and the affairs of the external world. Hofstadter points out that the people who attach themselves to these several absolutisms are not always the same people, but they do create for each other a common climate of absolutist enthusiasm (Hofstadter 1955, 17). Very often, the evils that they are troubled about do exist in some form, and usually something can be done about them. In many historical instances, something has been done. Hofstadter’s observation is duly noted because our reform tradition has usually been the first to point to the real and serious deficiencies in our economic system, and it has taken initiative to make improvements. However, the American reform tradition’s chief limitation is “that it often wanders over the border between reality and impossibility.” And Hofstadter makes a clear case about the ways in which this was pre-
eminently true of the Progressive generation. It was hardly an accident that the same
generation that wanted to bring about direct popular rule, break up the political machines,
and circumvents representative government was the same generation that imposed
Prohibition and proposed to make the world safe for democracy (Hofstadter 1955, 17–
18).

Hofstadter asserts that isolationism and extreme nationalism in American life (a
hatred of Europe and Europeans; racial, religious, and nativist phobias; and a resentment
of big business, trade-unionism, intellectuals, the Eastern seaboard, and its culture) have
been found not only in opposition to reform, but at times oddly aligned with it
(Hofstadter 1955, 20-21). One of the most interesting and least-studied aspects of
American life, Hofstadter claims, is the frequent recurrence of the demand for reforms,
many of which are aimed at fixing genuine ills, combined with strong moral convictions
and the choice of hatred as a kind of creed (Hofstadter 1955, 21).

As Hofstadter suggests, when thinking of the Progressive Era between 1890 and
1917, one should keep in mind that the innocence and relaxation of the era can never be
known again (Hofstadter 1955, 22). Even if we cannot see it quite clearly, there are
complexities in our history that our conventional images of the past miss, and we need to
know more than we do about our political traditions before this generation can finish its
portraits of earlier performers. For this reason, Hofstadter hoped that his observations
would be taken as a prelude and a spur to further studies of American reform movements,
rather than an attempt to render final judgments (Hofstadter 1955, 22).
In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, towns and cities sprouted up with miraculous rapidity all over the United States. Large cities grew into great metropolises, small towns grew into large cities, and new towns sprang into existence on vacant land. Simultaneously, the rural population multiplied almost seven times (Hofstadter 1955, 174). The larger cities of the Midwest grew wildly, and Chicago more than doubled its population in the single decade from 1880 to 1890, while the Twin Cities tripled theirs and other like Detroit, Milwaukee, Columbus, and Cleveland increased from 60 to 80 percent (Hofstadter 1955, 174).

The city, with its immense need for new facilities in transportation, sanitation, policing, light, gas, and public structures, offered a magnificent internal market for American business. And businesses looked for sure things: privileges, profitable franchises, and opportunities to evade the burdens of taxation as much as possible (Hofstadter 1955, 174–175). The urban boss, a dealer in public privileges who could also command public support, became a more important and powerful figure. With him came that train of evils that preoccupied the liberal muckraking mind: the bartering of franchises, the building of tight urban political machines, the marshaling of hundreds of thousands of ignorant voters, the exacerbation of poverty and slums, the absence or excessive cost of municipal services, the cooperation between politics and commercialized vice—in short, the entire system of underground government and open squalor that provided such a rich field for crusading journalists and reformers (Hofstadter 1955, 175).
Even with the best traditions of public administration, the complex and constantly changing problems created by city growth would have been enormously difficult. Cities throughout the industrial world grew rapidly, almost as rapidly as those of the United States. But many European cities had histories stretching back hundreds of years, long before the founding of the first white village in North America, and they therefore had traditions of government and administration that predated the age of unrestricted private enterprise. While they too were disfigured and brutalized by industrialism, Hofstadter claims, they often managed to set examples of local administration and municipal planning that American students of municipal life envied and hoped to emulate.

American cities, springing into life out of mere villages, often organized around nothing but the mill, the factory, or the railroad. Peopled by a heterogeneous and mobile population and having no settled governing classes for administrative experience, these cities found that the pace of their growth was far out of proportion with their capacity for management. In short, the problem in America involved how to make a great city in a few years out of nothing (Hofstadter 1955, 175).

Thus, the combination of the underdeveloped traditions of management and the exponential growth put a premium on quick, short-range improvisation, and on action without regard for considered rules. Hofstadter claims that this was an ideal situation for the development of the city boss and informal government—and the consequences were truly dismal (Hofstadter 1955, 175). One of the keys to the American mind at the end of the old century and the beginning of the new one was that American cities were filling up considerably with small-town and rural people. The whole cast of American thinking in
this period was deeply affected by the experience of the rural mind confronted with the phenomena of urban life—its crowding, poverty, crime, corruption, impersonality, and ethnic chaos (Hofstadter 1955, 175). To the rural migrant, who was raised in respectable quietude, and the high-toned moral imperatives of evangelical Protestantism, the city seemed not merely a new social form or way of life; it seemed a strange threat to civilization itself. Hofstadter asserts that the age resounds with the warnings of prophets like Josiah Strong that the city, if not somehow tamed, would bring with it the downfall of the nation. “The first city,” wrote Strong, “was built by the first murderer, and crime and vice and wretchedness have festered in it ever since” (Hofstadter 1955, 175).

In the city, the native Yankee-Protestant American encountered the immigrant. Between the close of the Civil War and the outbreak of the First World War, the rise of American industry and the absence of restrictions drew a steady stream of immigrants, reaching its peak in 1907, when an estimated 1,285,000 immigrant entries were recorded. By 1910, 13,345,000 foreign-born persons were living in the United States—almost one seventh of the total population (Hofstadter 1955, 177). The country had long been accustomed to heavy immigration, but the native Yankee was not prepared for the great shift in the sources of immigration that were especially noticeable after 1900, from the familiar English, Irish, Scandinavian, and German to the peasantry of southern and Eastern Europe—swarms of Poles, Italians, Russians, eastern European Jews, Hungarians, Slovaks, and Czechs. The native was horrified by the conditions under which the new Americans lived—their slums, their crowding, their unsanitary misery, their alien tongues and religion—and he was resentful that the local machines made use
of the immigrant vote (Hofstadter 1955, 177). In those days, educated citizens of cities spoke about, believed, and acted upon the theory that it was the ignorant riff-raff of the big congested towns that made municipal politics so bad, for it was the boss who saw the needs of the immigrant and made him the political instrument of the urban machine. The machine provided quick naturalization, jobs, social services, personal access to authority, release from the surveillance of the courts, and deference to ethnic pride. In return, it garnered votes, herding to the polls new citizens who were grateful for services rendered and submissive to experienced leadership Hofstadter 1955, 175).

In many great cities, the Yankee found himself outnumbered and overwhelmed. Among the large cities, a city like Baltimore, where native children from native parents outnumbered immigrants and their children, was a rarity. Far more characteristic of the East and Midwest were Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis, the foreign-born and their children of the first generation considerably outnumbered the native stock (Hofstadter 1955, 175–176). Often, the Yankee felt himself pushed into his own ghetto, marked off perhaps by its superior grooming and also by the political powerlessness of its inhabitants. The Irish politician, the established immigrant who knew how to manage, surveyed the situation and found it good, but the Yankee brooded over “the Irish conquest of our cities,” and wondered if it meant the beginning of the end of traditional American democracy. The Mugwump type, resentful of capitalist and immigrant failures to consider the public good before personal welfare, had always been troubled about the long-range consequences of unrestricted immigration and had begun to question universal suffrage out of fear that traditional democracy might be
imperiled by the decline of ethnic homogeneity. Early civic reform was strongly tainted with nativism (Hofstadter 1955, 176).

Hofstadter claims that hostility to immigrants was probably most common near the extreme ends of the political spectrum, among ultraconservatives and progressives whose views were most influenced by a populist inheritance. The Populistic Progressives were frank to express their dislike of the immigrant and to attack unrestricted immigration with arguments presented in popular and liberal languages. Many labor leaders stood with them on this issue, and so did a number of academic scholars. Men like Edward A. Ross, John R. Commons, and Edward Bemis, all three of whom lost academic jobs because they were considered radicals, gave learned support to the anti-immigrant sentiment. Ross, formerly a Populist and now one of the leading ideologues of progressivism, a stalwart member of the La Follette brain trust at the University of Wisconsin, in 1914 wrote a tract on immigration called *The Old World in the New*, which expressed the anti-immigrant case from the Anglo-Saxon progressive standpoint (Hofstadter 1955, 179).

Although he discussed the older immigrant stocks with some indulgence, Ross was unsparing with the most numerous immigrants, who currently came from southern and Eastern Europe (Hofstadter 1955, 179). Immigration, he said, was good for the rich, the employing class, and a matter of indifference to the shortsighted professional classes with whom immigrants could not compete, but it was disastrous for Native American workers. Immigrants were strikebreakers and scabs, who lowered wage levels and reduced living standards toward their “pigsty mode of life,” just as they brought social
standards “down to their brawls and animal pleasures.” They were unhygienic and alcoholic, Ross claimed. They raised the rate of illiteracy and insanity. They fostered crime and bad morals. They lowered the tone of politics by introducing ethnic considerations and of journalism by providing readership for the poorest newspapers, the yellow journals. They threatened the position of women in their “coarse peasant philosophy of sex,” and debased the educational system with parochial schools. They spurred the monstrous overgrowth of cites and by selling their votes for protection and favors, increasing the grip of the bosses upon city politics. They bred in such numbers that they were increasing dominant over the native stock, thus threatening to overwhelm so-called American blood and bastardize American civilization (Hofstadter 1955, 177).

Hofstadter claims that Ross’s book was an articulate and educated man expressing a feeling that was most common among the uneducated and those who were half-ashamed to articulate them. Hardly anyone devoted to the way of the predominantly Anglo-Saxon civilization and political culture of the United States could help giving some troubled thought to the future consequences of the heavy immigration of people whose ways were so completely different (Hofstadter 1955, 180). More characteristic of the educated progressives, Ross’s harsh judgment was an appeal to what he called “pride of race,” an attempt to meet the immigration problem with a program of naturalization and Americanization. Moderate conservatives and liberal-minded progressives alike joined in the cause of Americanizing the immigrant by acquainting him with the English language and giving him education and civic instruction. Hofstadter asserts that the decent Anglo-Saxon liberals were forever reminding themselves of their own humane
values, the courage of the immigrant, the reality of his hardships, the poignancy of his deracination, the cultural achievements of his homeland, his ultimate potentialities as an American, and above all, the fact that he did the hard, dirty work of American industry and urban life (Hofstadter 1955, 181). Progressives who were engaged in practical politics in industrial communities also realized that they must appeal to the pride as well as to the interest of the immigrant, if they were to have lasting success.

But, as Hofstadter points out, the typical progressive and the typical immigrant were immensely different, and the gulf between them was not usually bridged with much success in the Progressive Era. The immigrant could not shear off his European identity with the rapidity demanded by the ideal of Americanization. He might be willing to take advantage of the practical benefits of night schools and English-language courses, and he might be able to do what is necessary to take on a new nationality and learn about American ways. However, even if he felt no hostility, he could hardly fail to sense the condescension in the efforts of those who tried to help him. More often than not, Hofstadter asserts, he rebuffed the settlement worker or the agent of Americanization, and looked elsewhere for his primary contacts with American political and civic life. He turned, instead, to the political boss, who accepted him as he was and asked no questions (Hofstadter 1955, 181).

Faced with these challenges to their traditions and heritage, Yankee-Protestant progressives in New England viewed the turbulence of this industrial and political struggle, and the cycles of capitalism that shocked the values of the older community, as alien and un-American. They started to view more than the new Irish political power as
visible symptoms of a strange disorder in modern society, and by 1890, older Brahmins were on the verge of an intellectual decision in favor of immigration restriction. Boston Brahmins and the mature men of the 1880s had supposedly scientific proof that the Anglo-Saxon stock was indispensable to the democratic civilization of the United States.
CHAPTER 4
BOSTON BRAHMIN AND THE LEAGUE

Physician and writer Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., father of the famous
Supreme Court justice, coined the term Brahmin. Holmes used the term both in a novel
and in an 1860 Atlantic Monthly article called “The Brahmin Caste of New England” to
describe the region's upper crust. He entitled the first chapter of his 1861 novel, Elsie
Venner, “The Brahmin Caste of New England,” but he had long been writing about the
group without using the term—it was in Elsie Venner that Holmes first coined the term
Boston Brahmin, originally referred to as “the Brahmin caste of New England…the
harmless, inoffensive, untitled aristocracy”:

There is nothing in New England corresponding at all to the feudal aristocracies
of the Old World. Whether it be owing to the stock from which we were derived,
or to the practical working of our institutions, or to the abrogation of the technical
"law of honor," which draws a sharp line between the personally responsible class
of "gentlemen" and the unnamed multitude of those who are not expected to risk
their lives for an abstraction,—whatever be the cause, we have no such aristocracy
here as that which grew up out of the military systems of the Middle Ages…There
is, however, in New England, an aristocracy, if you choose to call it so, which has
a far greater character of permanence. It has grown to be a caste—not in any
odious sense—but, by the repetition of the same influences, generation after
generation, it has acquired a distinct organization and physiognomy, which not to
recognize is mere stupidity, and not to be willing to describe would show a
distrust of the good-nature and intelligence of our readers, who like to have us see
all we can and tell all we see. (Holmes 1861, 3)

The words caste and Brahmin would seem to clearly indicate where Holmes got the idea;
in India, a Brahmin was a member of the highest priestly caste among the Hindus. By
applying the term to his native Boston, Holmes described the more secular but equally
powerful group of the city's entrenched Anglo-Saxon elite as “harmless, inoffensive,
untitled aristocracy” (Bowers, 1). The term was absorbed as many of these families
participated in trading with the British East India Company in India, and was also applied partly in jest to characterize for outsiders the often erudite and pretentious nature of the New England gentry (Bowers, 1).

Holmes counted himself a Boston Brahmin, and in large part, he used the term to refer to families who produced generation after generation of scholars at higher education institutions like Harvard. He contrasted this "race of scholars," whose aptitude for learning he believed was congenital and hereditary, with what he called the “common country boy,” whose race has been bred to bodily labor. However, Holmes also thought there was room in elite circles for hearty country boys who had gained an education, as their better health could be useful in certain cases: “A man's breathing and digestive apparatus (one is tempted to add muscular) are just as important to him on the floor of the Senate as his thinking organs” (Bowers, 1). The phrase “Boston Brahmin” quickly came to imply great wealth, political influence, and old New England roots, and these Yankee Brahmins frequently intermarried, founded and patronized Boston cultural institutions, and had connections with nearby Harvard. Dr. Holmes himself was Dean of the Harvard Medical School (Bowers, 1). “A Boston Toast,” the famous poem by Harvard alumnus John Collins Bossidy, captures the snobbish essence of Brahmin culture:

And this is good old Boston,
The home of the bean and the cod,
Where the Lowells talk only to Cabots
And the Cabots talk only to God.

Boston's Brahmin elite developed a semi-aristocratic value system by the 1840s that was cultivated, urbane, and dignified; a Boston Brahmin was the very essence of enlightened aristocracy. The ideal Brahmin was not only wealthy, but he displayed
suitable personal virtues and character traits. He was expected to cultivate the arts, support charities like hospitals and colleges, and assume the role of community leader (Story 1985). Although the ideal called on him to transcend commonplace business values, in practice many found the thrill of economic success quite attractive. The Brahmins warned each other against avarice, insisting upon personal responsibility. Scandals and divorce were unacceptable. The total system was buttressed by the strong extended family ties present in Boston society. Young men attended the same prep schools and colleges, and heirs married heiresses. Family not only served as an economic asset, but also as a means of moral restraint (Story 1985). Most belonged to the Unitarian or Episcopal churches, although some were Congregationalists or Methodists, and politically they were successively Federalists, Whigs, and Republicans. They were marked by their manners and distinctive elocution, the Boston Brahmin accent—a version of the New England accent (Story 1975, 281). The Brahmins were well known for their hostility to the Irish and other immigrants whose large numbers transformed the city in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Bowers 1). In the post-Civil War era, Irish immigrants had slowly emerged from their initial status in American society to become effective politicians and wielders of new power, and in Boston, they became a threat to the Yankee-Protestant hierarchy.

As Barbara Miller Solomon claimed in her book *Ancestors and Immigrants*, New England thought was part of the forming of American civilization in state of mind and as a geographic entity (Miller Solomon 1956, vii). Its leading citizens, the self-named Brahmins, regarded Boston as the hub of the universe. Predominantly of English stock,
their society attained a distinctive character in the half-century following the American Revolution. By then, overseas trade and manufacturing had created Yankee families of substance and wealth. And two hundred years had solidified patterns of thought and service in the community (Miller Solomon 1956, vii).

All over the country, writers and reformers respected the Brahmin leadership, and often descendants of New Englanders returned there fully identified with its traditions, preserved even in the far-removed sections of the country. Others whose careers led them to the Boston community were converted. Thus, Miller Solomon claims, Brahmin criteria reached beyond the little Yankee group and disseminated its ideas through the nation, including the rationale for immigration restriction. She points to how Americans were indeed thinking about the immigrants in the second half of the nineteenth century, but Brahmin thought had the most significant social and intellectual implications. Miller Solomon argues that from the 1850s through the 1920s, the Brahmins contributed significantly to the development of the ideology of restriction, in their local society and in the nation at large (Miller Solomon 1956, vii).

The introspective writings of New Englanders provided the first insight into the anxieties that beset all but a few hardy souls from the 1850s to the 1890s. Miller Solomon posits that this loss of faith cumulatively pervaded what was before a mellow society. And in these later decades, the Brahmin state of mind grew anxious about immigrants, for these newcomers were visible reminders of the strangeness and unpredictability of the United States after the Civil War, and from these new perspectives came a new chapter in the intellectual history of old New Englanders (Miller Solomon 1956, vii).
By 1890, older Brahmins were on the verge of an intellectual decision in favor of immigration restriction. The mature men of the 1880s had supposedly scientific proof that Anglo-Saxon stock was indispensable to the democratic civilization of the United States. Miller Solomon claims that New Englanders viewed the turbulence of the industrial struggle and cycles of capitalism that shocked the values of the older community as alien and un-American. Moreover, she claims the Brahmin group had to face more than the new Irish political power, and they viewed strikes, riots, and anarchists as visible symptoms of a strange disorder in modern society (Miller Solomon 1956, 82).

Henry Cabot Lodge thought the time had come to exclude the illiterate foreigners and sift them from intelligent and thrifty immigrants. At the same time, the older generation asked: “Whose country is this?” Moreover, Miller Solomon posits that the formalizing of Yankee kinship enhanced the belief that Americans of Anglo-Saxon birth were the genuine type of Americans (Miller Solomon 1956, 87). Without taking action, they protested against the burden of the foreign-born. Convincing evidence to support this claim exists in Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s voice of nativist desperation. An aristocrat by choice, Aldrich predicted a sorry end for real Americans because they let their politicians coddle the worst elements for votes. Disgusted with his native land, the poet pessimistically stated that some sort of “unnaturalized mongrel” would be more accurate an emblem for America than the eagle. His social resentment increased after attending a meeting of anarchists, and his fellow citizens there enraged him to the point of suggesting that the “brutes, jailbirds, professional murderers, and human gorillas” generally should
be questioned at America’s gates. He finally launched into a full attack upon immigrants in his poem, “The Unguarded Gates.” Less restrained than most of his friends, Aldrich released a racial vitriol toward these strangers in the land, which he believed was prophetic (Miller Solomon 1956, 88). But systemic action against traditional immigration would have to wait for the next generation.

In the troubled 1880s, the responsibilities of the native youth had become the major focus of all thinking citizens. The Brahmins were vexed to find that the young men of American ancestry read novels while the Irish American boys studied history, biography, and constitutional law in the public libraries. All over the country, the education of the native college man was a touchstone in the cause of good citizenship. And its impact upon the students of Harvard College proved decisive to the cause of immigration restriction in New England (Miller Solomon 1956, 88). Harvard College excelled in the new civic education of the 1880s. Most conspicuously among the faculty were luminaries in the physical and social sciences, which exposed young men to the complex society that was contemporary America. After the Civil War, although Harvard expanded in numbers, it became more Bostonian in character than ever. Students and instructors increasingly identified with the Brahmin group. When westward movement decreased the supply of eligible young men in Boston, Boston women suddenly became aware that Harvard contained many young gentlemen from New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere (Miller Solomon 1956, 88).

President Charles Eliot’s introduction of the elective system reduced the unity of the classes, so various social, athletic, and quasi-academic clubs became the focal points
of friendships and associations. Few Southerners now came, and neither the children of
the newly rich nor the poor working students provided leadership. Thus, the college
environment reinforced the narrow social habits of upper-class Boston (Miller Solomon
1956, 89). As New Englanders became self-conscious and diffident in their commitment
to the nation, the feeling grew among these students, who had never voted, that the safety
of the democracy hung in perilous balance, while two million illiterate voters controlled
the destiny of the United States (Miller Solomon 1956, 99).

As the 1890s drew to a close, the idea of restricting democracy seemed valid to a
small group of Teutonist scholars, and a few Harvard undergraduates agreed. A student-
run debate in the Harvard Union also introduced the new self-conscious claim that the
nation had the right to choose its own policy on immigration. Finally, three young men of
the class of 1889—Charles Warren, Robert DeCourcy Ward, and Prescott Farnsworth
Hall—regarded the question of immigration with more than academic intensity (Miller
Solomon 1956, 99).

Charles Warren was the descendant of a famous colonial family and the son of
Winslow Warren, a member of the class of 1858 and a typical Mugwump (Miller
Solomon 1956, 99). As an undergraduate, Charles probed the political implications of
New England life for one born in to the old pattern of public service. A serious youth, he
took courses in the constitutional and political history of the United States, and in 1887
he concentrated on the nature of representative government, arguing in a student debate
for the formation of an independent political party to meet the best interest of the country
(Miller Solomon 1956, 99). The climax of Warren’s undergraduate thoughts was clear in
his commencement speech in June 1889, “The Failure of the Democratic Idea in City Government.” Expanding upon the conflict between the majority of the population and the majority of interests in urban communities, he objected that the immigrant voters had the power to vote for taxes that others had to pay. Moreover, the desire of the poor to receive jobs from political parties would ensure the continuation of degenerate municipal government (Miller Solomon 1956, 99). He generalized with Teutonist finality that immigrants were poor ignorant men bound by all of the old ideas of bureaucratic and autocratic rule, with no knowledge of America’s democratic system and the relations and duties of the offices (Miller Solomon 1956, 99).

The second member of the restrictionist band was Robert De Courcy Ward, the son of a Boston merchant, Henry Veazie Ward. As an undergraduate, Ward took the average eclectic course, with some emphasis on German literature, biology, and European and American history. As a senior, however, he studied the ethics of social reform under the Rev. Peabody, with lasting effects (Miller Solomon 1956, 100). In 1891, Ward observed that “all the great questions…the liquor question, the public school question, the problems connected with prisons and reformatories, and many more, were all tied up with the one great problem of foreign immigration.” He concluded that these matters would remain insoluble, “so long as our ports are open to the ignorant, the depraved, and the vicious of all nations” (Miller Solomon 1956, 100). After graduation, he continued advanced study under the influence of an older professor, and Ward made a point of observing steerage passengers and talking to peasants abroad. After watching “a good looking lot” of Irish, Scandinavian, and Russian Jewish emigrants land in East
Boston, he “could not help feeling that it would be far better for the country if many of them could be sent back” (Miller Solomon 1955, 101). The national census of 1880 had listed 15,000,000 immigrants in the country, and the Massachusetts census of 1885 classified over 63 percent of Boston’s population as foreign by birth or parentage. Since few native children attended the same schools as foreign-born children, public schools could no longer accomplish the tasks of amalgamation, assimilation, and Americanization. Well versed in the intellectual justifications of restriction, Ward could not understand the indifference of the American people toward the dangers of free immigration (Miller Solomon 1956, 101).

The third member of the Harvard trio was Prescott Farnsworth Hall, the son of Boston merchant Samuel Hall and Elizabeth Farnsworth. Describing his upbringing, Hall’s widow later recalled that, “his was one of the old-time families which spent winters in Boston and summers in Brookline.” At college he showed an interest in German thought and literature, Wagnerian music, and modern philosophical trends, but he took no specific courses related to the subject of immigration. After attending Harvard Law School, he practiced his vocation for a time, but eventually he made the cause of restriction his life’s work. He was, however, like Henry Adams and Barrett Wendell, an unstable New Englander—contemplative, melancholic, discontent, subject to depressions. According to Miller Solomon, he became violent in his prejudices and later seized upon ideas whose abnormality extended beyond any inculcation at Harvard (Miller Solomon 1956, 101-102).
According to Miller Solomon, the young men maintained their elders’ insecurities about the depravity of American character in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. Four generations removed from New England’s prime, these Brahmins entered adulthood in the 1890s with the conviction that neither the economic nor the social promises of democracy seemed to work in society divided between rich and poor, native and foreigner, educated and illiterate, Anglo-Saxon and scum of Europe (Miller Solomon 1956, 102). With their parents’ emotions and their professors’ ideologies, youths like Warren, Ward, and Hall could easily ignore the old belief that immigration was materially advantageous to the United States. Even if immigration were advantageous, Miller Solomon posits, they would have rejected the superficial financial consideration of materialism, as opposed to the pursuit of character and virtue (Miller Solomon 1956, 102).

As observers of the Mugwumps, the new generation saw that neither civil service reform nor educational activities in the community had solved the terrible problems that Yankee New Englanders had lived with since the Civil War. Mindful of the changing tide of demographics, they thought their elders’ fight for good citizenship, against the low elements, was futile if the Anglo-Saxon Americans continued to die out (Miller Solomon 1956, 102). The heirs of the independent voter tradition answered Henry Cabot Lodge’s call to use their liberal education in the service of their country—not as petty critics but as positive agents of change. These three Harvardians of the class of 1889 resolved to save the nation by preventing any further inroads upon Anglo-Saxon America by strangers (Miller Solomon 1956, 102). They rounded up a few congenial classmates who
agreed that the gravity of the social problem demanded organized action. And in the spring of 1894, a handful of young Brahmin blue bloods formed a committee that became the Immigration Restriction League of Boston (Miller Solomon 1956, 102). But nothing they would ever dream to produce could ever match the ambitions of intellectual hero, Henry Cabot Lodge, and his argument five years before to sift and exclude “a million immigrants a year.”
CHAPTER 5

HENRY CABOT LODGE AND THE UNDESIRABLES

In 1891, the Honorable Henry Cabot Lodge, Representative in Congress from Massachusetts, published an article in the *North American Review* entitled “The Restriction of Immigration.” In it, he argued that in addition to the consular certificate given after careful inquiry and due proof of an immigrant’s admissibility, “we should make a further definite test which would discriminated against illiteracy if we desire any intelligent restriction or sifting of the total mass of immigration” (Lodge 1891, 36). Lodge argued that it was a truisms to say that one of the greatest dangers to a free government is ignorance, that the danger can be overcome only by constant effort and vigilance, and that we spend millions annually in educating our children so that they may be fit to be citizens and rulers of the republic. Moreover, Lodge argued that America was ready to also educate the children who come to us from other countries, but it is not right to ask us to annually take in a large body of persons who are totally illiterate and who are for the most part beyond the age at which education can be imparted.

Further, Lodge claimed not only that did the government has the right to exclude illiterate persons from immigration, but that this could realistically be accomplished through the test, combined with the other restrictions of a more general character. In all probability, this would shut out a large part of the undesirable portion of the present immigrant population. In a discriminating manner, it would reduce the total qualitative number of immigrants, thereby greatly benefitting the labor market and helping maintain the rate of American wages. At the same time, he argued, it would sift out many
immigrants who had come to this country and shut out many of those elements that, “tend to lower the quality of American citizenship, and which now in many cases gather in dangerous masses in the slums of our great cities” (Lodge 1891, 36).

Lodge’s measure proposed “to benefit every honest immigrant who really desired to come to the United States and become an American citizen, and would stop none” (Lodge 1891, 36). It would exclude many, if not all, of those persons “whose presence no one desires, and whose exclusion is demanded by our duty to our own citizens and to American institutions.” Above all, Lodge argued, it would protect and aid America’s workingmen, “who are more directly interested in this great question than anyone else can possibly be” (Lodge 1891, 36). What Lodge failed to consider, however, was the illiteracy rates among American natives, and illiteracy statistics from the day give an important indication of the education level of the adult population. Today, illiteracy is a much different issue than it was in earlier years. More recently, the focus has been on functional literacy, which addresses whether a person’s educational level is sufficient to function in a modern society; earlier surveys of illiteracy, however, examined a very fundamental level of reading and writing (National Center For Education Statistics, 1993).

According to the data, in the 19th century and early 20th century, illiteracy was very common. In 1870, 20 percent of the entire adult population was illiterate, and 80 percent of the black population was illiterate. By 1900, the situation had improved somewhat, but 44 percent of blacks remained illiterate. The statistical data show significant improvements for black and other races in the early portion of the 20th
century, as former slaves who had no educational opportunities in their youth were replaced by younger individuals who grew up in the post Civil War period and often had some chance to obtain a basic education. In 1890, 13.3 percent of the total population was illiterate, and of the white population, 6.2 percent of the native-born were illiterate, while 13.1 of the foreign-born were illiterate. By 1900, total illiteracy rates dropped to 10.7 percent, while native illiteracy dropped to 4.6 percent, and foreign-born illiteracy dropped to 12.9 percent, according to the data (National Center For Education Statistics, 1993). In addition to failing to consider the illiteracy rates among native-born Americans, particularly in the South and rural regions, Lodge also failed to consider that on the whole, an illiterate immigrant worker was, as President Wilson would later put it in his literacy test veto message, not necessarily an undesirable immigrant. Moreover, Lodge’s imperfect project failed to recognize the realities that powerful economic forces, industry demands for labor—the booster spirit of Americans—and the dreams and desires of brave immigrants would not be stopped by any amount of qualitative or quantitative restrictionist legislation.

Instead, Lodge elected to reference somewhat irrelevant numbers concerning immigration, apparently in an attempt to sound the alarm numerically. Immigration into the United States from 1874 to 1889, he cited, amounted to an astonishingly precise 6,418,633 persons (Lodge 1891, 27). To put it another way, immigration into the United States during that sixteen-year period was equal to one-tenth of the entire population of the country at the time, and “has furnished probably every four years enough voters to decide a Presidential election” (Lodge 1891, 27). During those sixteen years, immigration
fluctuated with the business prosperity of the country, the highest point being reached in 1881 and 1882—720,645 persons arrived in the former year and 730,349 people arrived in the latter, while the average annual immigration had been 401,164 (Lodge 1891, 27). During the last eight years of this sixteen-year period, from 1882 until 1891, the exclusion of the Chinese caused immigration from Asia to decline from over thirty thousand, Lodge claimed, to only a few hundred annually. In addition to this real loss, no attempt had been made since 1883 to compute the very heavy overland immigration from Canada, which he claimed had also decreased. Like balancing a bank account, Cabot Lodge concluded that despite these important deductions, there had been a large gain of 175,458 persons in the average annual immigration in the eight years preceding 1891, and as it is thus apparent that immigration was increasing in quantity, the next point was to determine its quality (Lodge 1891, 27).

In the consular reports on “Emigration and Immigration,” published by the State Department in 1887, Lodge found what he thought was evidence in the figures of the general character of the foreign immigration into the United States during a long period of fourteen years. Moreover, he believed that this could be ascertained best by examining the rate of increase in the immigration from the different countries from which it chiefly came during the two periods of eight years each from 1874 to 1881 and from 1882 to 1889, respectively. Lodge claimed that the percentages of increase from southern and Eastern Europe – namely, Poland (166 percent); Italy (286 percent); Russia (297 percent); and Hungary (476 percent) – were interesting and deeply significant (Lodge 1891, 28). The upbuilding of the original thirteen colonies were the English, the Scotch-
Irish, so called, the Dutch, the Germans, and the Huguenot French, he argued. With the exception of the last they were practically all people of the same stock. During the 19th century and until very recent years these same nations – Lodge argued – with the addition of Ireland and the Scandinavian countries, continued to furnish the chief component parts of the immigration which has helped to populate so rapidly the territory of the United States (Lodge 1891, 28). Among all of these people, Lodge claimed sterotypically, with few exceptions community of race or language or both has facilitated the work of assimilation. In more recent years, however, as appears from the figures, Lodge believed that “new and wholly different elements were introduced into America’s immigration, and – what is more important – the rate of immigration of these new elements had risen with much greater rapidity than that of those which previously had furnished the bulk of the population of the country” (Lodge 1891, 28).

The mass of immigration, absolutely speaking, continued of course to come from the United Kingdom and from Germany, but relatively the immigration from these two sources was declining rapidly, Lodge argued, in comparison with the immigration from Italy and from the Slavic countries of Russia, Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia, the last of which appears under Austria. Of the generally good character of the immigration from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries, Lodge asserted, it was hardly necessary to speak; but nevertheless he quoted a single paragraph from the State Department report he referred to, in regard to the immigration from these countries:
The diagrams show the remarkable predominance of the United Kingdom and Germany in supplying the United States with skilled labor, and also the fact that the Germans represent those industries that depend upon hand labor or the requirements of everyday life, while the English supply the mechanical element. While Germany sends blacksmiths, butchers, carpenters, coopers, saddlers, shoemakers, and tailors, the United Kingdom supplies miners, engineers, iron- and steel-workers, mechanics and artisans, weavers and spinners. This distinction is clearly marked and is certainly important. (Lodge 1891, 28)

Now as to the immigration from the other countries, which Lodge noted had been increasing so much faster than that to which American natives had been accustomed, and which he argued were in the main valuable, Consul-General Jussen said in his report (1886) in regard to the Bohemian emigration, which forms a large part of that which is classed under the head of Austria:

The labor and agricultural classes of Bohemia probably supply the greatest number of emigrants to the United States, and among the Bohemian industrial laborers some of the most violent ultra-socialist are to be found. The great majority of these Bohemian laborers, both of the industrial and agricultural class, are illiterate and ignorant in the extreme. They stand in great awe of police authorities at home.

In regard to Hungarian emigration, Lodge cited Mr. Sterne, consul at Budapest (1886) who said as follows:

I am of the opinion that with the present condition of the labor market in the United States there is no room there at present for this class of people… Under more favorable conditions in the United States these Slovaks are not a desirable acquisition for us to make, since they appear to have so many items in common with the Chinese. Like these, they are extremely frugal, the love of whiskey of the former being balanced by the opium habit of the latter. Their ambition lacks both in quality and quantity. Thus they will work similarly cheap as the Chinese, and will interfere with a civilized laborer’s earning a ‘white’ laborer’s wages. (Lodge 1891, 29)

Lodge noted that the emigration form Italy came largely from the southern provinces – from Naples and Sicily; “a smaller proportion being drawn from the finer population of
northern Italy” (Lodge 1891, 29). In regard to this Italian emigration, he cited Mr. Alden, consul-general at Rome (1886), who said:

As to the habits and morals of the emigrants to the United States from the northern and central portions of Italy, both men and women are sober and industrious, and as a rule trustworthy and moral. They are generally strong, powerful workers, and capable of enduring great fatigue. A less favorable view may be taken of the emigrants from the southern districts and Sicily. These are the most illiterate parts of Italy, and in these districts brigandage was for many years extremely prevalent.

In regard to the emigration from Russia, Mr. Young, the consul-general (1886) was quoted as saying:

The government of Russia does not encourage emigration. On the contrary, it prohibits all Russian subjects from leaving the empire of Russia, except Poles and Jews. . . . The Mennonites have emigrated perhaps more extensively than any other class of Russian subjects. . . . The lowest classes generally form the greater part of emigrations.

Thus, Lodge claimed, it was proved that immigration to this country was making its greatest increase “from races most alien to the body of the American people,” and “from the lowest and most illiterate classes among those races.” In other words, it was apparent to him that, while our immigration was increasing, it showed at the same time a “marked tendency to deteriorate in character” (Lodge 1891, 32). It had been a policy of the United States, until that time, to encourage immigration in all possible ways, which was, under the circumstances a wise and obvious course to pursue, Lodge argued. He noted that the natural growth of the people established in the thirteen colonies was not sufficient to occupy or develop the vast territory and great resources of the Union. We therefore “opened our arms to the people of every land and invite them to come in,” and when the region beyond the Alleghanies, or even beyond the Mississippi, was still a wilderness, the
general wisdom of this policy – Lodge admitted – could not be understated. However, he lamented patronizingly that “the practical advantages to be gained from the rapid filling-up of the country were also joined the sentimental and generous reason that this free country was to be a haven of refuge for the unfortunate of every land” (Lodge 1891, 32).

Lodge concluded that this liberality toward immigration, combined with the normal growth of the population, in the course of the century, rapidly filled the country, and the conditions under which, at the outset we had opened our doors and asked everyone to come in changed radically (Lodge 1891, 32). The first sign of an awakening to this altered state of things was in the movement against the Chinese:

When that great reservoir of cheap labor was opened and when its streams began to pour into the United States, the American people, first on the western coast and then elsewhere, suddenly were roused to the fact that they were threatened with a flood of low-class labor which would absolutely destroy good rates of wages among American working men by a competition which could not be met, and which at the same time threatened to lower the quality of American citizenship. The result was the Chinese Exclusion Act, much contested in its inception, but the wisdom of which everybody now admits. (Lodge 1891, 32–33)

The next awakening, Lodge argued, came upon the discovery that employers of labor were engaged in making contracts with large bodies of working people in other countries, and importing them into the United States to work for a remuneration far below that which American workmen were accustomed to receive. This resulted in the passage of the Alien Contract Labor Law, intended to stop the importation of this low-priced labor. Lodge argued that no one in 1891 doubted that the general principle of that law was sound, although its details were defective and its enforcement so imperfect that it had little practical effect (Lodge 1891, 33). Such had been the actual departures from the former polices of the United States, Lodge claimed, in regard to immigration. That they
were needed, he was certain and adamant. That they were insufficient appeared to him to
be equally so. The committee of the Fiftieth Congress appointed by Speaker Carlisle to
investigate the subject of immigration said at the close of their report:

Certainly the effect of the present unrestricted system of immigration, as
applicable to the conditions under consideration, upon the industrial situation of
this country, has been very bad, and the committee believe that the time has come
when immigration should be more effectively regulated; that persons who
immigrate to the United States should at least be composed of those who in good
faith desire to become its citizens and are worthy to be such. (Lodge 1891, 33)

As one example of the practical effect of unrestricted immigration, Lodge pointed to the
committee’s sentiments in the case of the coal-mining industry:

Generally speaking, the class of immigrants who have lately been imported and
employed in the coal regions of this country are not such, in the opinion of the
committee, as would make desirable inhabitants of the United States. They are of
a very low order of intelligence. They do not come here with the intention of
becoming citizens; whose purpose being to accumulate by parsimonious, rigid,
and unhealthy economy a sum of money and then return to their native land. They
live in miserable sheds like beasts; the food they eat is so meager, scant,
unwholesome, and revolting that it would nauseate and disgust an American
workman, and he would find it difficult to sustain life upon it. Their habits are
vicious, their customs are disguising, and the effect of their presence here upon
our social condition is to be deplored. They have no the influences, as we
understand them, of a home; they do not know what the word means; and, in the
opinion of the committee, no amount of effort would improve their morals or
‘Americanize’ this class of immigrants. They have been brought here in such
numbers, and have been employed at such low wages, that is has resulted in their
replacing the American citizens who formerly performed this class of labor, until
now there are comparatively few Americans engaged in mining coal in
Pennsylvania. (Lodge 1891, 33–34)

Fourteen years later, in a 1904 speech to Congress entitled “A Million Immigrants
a Year: Efforts to Restrict Undesirable Immigration,” once again Cabot Lodge sounded
the alarm about the dangers of the rising immigrant flood tide, and the need for
strengthening and repairing the mechanics the immigration system. Lodge claimed that
fifteen years earlier he had discovered, from an examination of the statistics, the radical change which had then begun, and which had continued ever since with increasing force, in the races and places of origin of our immigrants (Lodge 1904, 466). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Lodge argued, the change began which he referred to and which seemed very grave in its import, if rightly considered. Then it was that the immigrants from Germany, Scandinavia, Great Britain, and Ireland began to decline, and the immigration from Canada, Italy, and eastern Europe began to grow, not only absolutely, but relatively to the other sources of the new population (Lodge 1909, 467).

To Lodge, the French-Canadians racially presented nothing new: “Among the English-speaking people, both in England and America, there was always a large infusion of French blood,” he claimed, “and the French-Canadians, Americans for many generations, who have come in recent years in such large numbers to New England form an excellent addition and have proved to be a valuable and promising element in our population” (Lodge 1909, 466). With regard to the Italian immigration, which was one of the newest and which had advanced the most rapidly, Lodge stated, “they represent people with whom the English-speaking people have never before amalgamated; but even with that immigration one can say at least that they are a people of Western civilization like our own, that there is among the northern Italians an infusion of Germanic blood, and that they presented in themselves no very alarming feature” (Lodge 1909, 467). When, however, he passed to eastern Europe, Lodge’s nativistic sentiments rang loud and clear:

We come upon people with whom not only the English-speaking people and the people of Germany and Scandinavia have never amalgamated, but who are utterly alien to us, not only ethnically, but in civilization, tradition, and habits of thought. In these later years immigration from Bohemia, from Hungary, from all the Slav
provinces, from Russia and Poland, including both Russian and Polish Jews, and now from Greece, Syria, Armenia, and the Levant, has advanced with leaps and bounds. These people are in the main not only totally different from us, but they have an enormous percentage of wholly uneducated persons. (Lodge 1909, 467)

To enter upon the truly terrible experiment of assimilating these people, with whom we have never amalgamated or had relations of any kind, Lodge claimed, is enough to give pause to any reflecting man. It was this fact, Lodge said, which more than any other led him to study the question of immigration, and he came by investigation to the profound conviction that there should be vigorous and suitable legislation to regulate and restrict it (Lodge 1904, 467).

With regard to previous efforts to restrict immigration, Lodge traced the efforts during the administration of President Harrison, when Congress secured the passage of the first law to regulate immigration. According to Lodge, it went now further than to make provision for the exclusion of the diseased, the criminal, and the pauper classes; but it was a first and most important step. At about the same time Congress also passed what was known as the Contract Labor Law, that was aimed “at the great abuse which then existed of bringing to this country large bodies of cheap laborers to perform work under a contract made abroad and then to be returned to their native country” (Lodge 1909, 468). This law put a stop to this practice of introducing large bodies of cheap temporary labor in its most exaggerated form, but in Lodge’s view, it was never thoroughly carried out, and had often been enforced in an absurd manner and so as to bring ridicule and opposition without attaining any good result (Lodge 1909, 468). Nevertheless, Lodge claimed, on the whole it had been very valuable, for it had stopped the bringing in of a great mass of the most undesirable kind of immigrants by the most vicious and wholesale
methods: “The Contract Labor Law had probably not had much restrictive effect on the actual numbers of persons in this class,” Lodge lamented, “but they at least have not come to us in the thoroughly objectionable way which was in practice before this law was placed upon the statue-books” (Lodge 1904, 468).

Mindful of the limitations of the Contract Labor Law, the future restrictionists agreed with Lodge’s fight for good citizenship, against the low elements, and believed his efforts were futile if the Anglo-Saxon Americans continued to die out (Miller Solomon 1956, 102). These heirs of the exclusionist tradition answered Henry Cabot Lodge’s call to use their Harvard education in the service of their country – not as petty critics, but as positive agents of change, and they resolved to save the nation by preventing any further inroads upon Anglo-Saxon America by strangers (Miller Solomon 1956, 102). But in their overzealous excitement, what they failed to consider was the sheer magnitude and power of and industrializing America’s economic demands for labor, and the obvious fact that previous restrictionist legislation had been utterly unable to seal or even enforce the ports and borderlands.
CHAPTER 6
THE LEAGUE AT HIGH TIDE

Though Higham and others fail to discuss the Chinese Exclusion Law of 1882 – which pains the author of this thesis and his mentor – by placing racial markers at the center of enforcement, the Chinese Exclusion Act ultimately racialized the nation’s borders, and shaped the practice and culture of undocumented immigration, and immigration law enforcement (Ettinger 2009, 35). In Prescott F. Hall’s magnum opus, written in 1907, *Immigration and its Effects Upon the United States*, he claims the justification for treating Chinese immigration was found in the fact that Congress has always regarded it as a separate subject for legislation, and that the administration of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, until 1900, was entirely distinct from that of the immigration service (Hall 1907, 327). Hall cites that Chinese immigration began in 1854, when about 13,000 came to this country. From that date to 1884, he claimed that his research showed that thousands arrived each year, the greatest number being 39,463 in 1882. After 1884, Hall believed, owing to the Exclusion Acts, immigration fell off to an appreciable figure. The number of Chinese arriving in 1904 was 4,327 according to his data, and from 1821 to 1904, inclusive, the total number was 322,238 (Hall 1907, 327).

The first treaty between the United States and China was negotiated in 1844. By that instrument and subsequent treaties down to 1868, Americans were given various trading privileges in China, and the right of migration in either direction was freely recognized (Hall 1907, 328). Large numbers of Chinese came in, and were employed in mining an in building the Pacific railroads. They also took part in farming and fruit
raising, and a considerable number became domestic servants. But it did not require many years for a strong feeling against the Chinese to arise in the Pacific States. Hall claimed “This was not according to race prejudice; the strange dress and manners of the Orientals excited interest and amusement rather than aversion; it was due to the gradual spreading of the conviction that the Chinese were displacing white labor” (Hall 1907, 328). Hall’s research claimed it was pointed out:

Though generally peaceable, temperate and industrious, the Chinaman’s standard of living was much inferior to that of white people; that he was able to live and to save money on a few cents a day; and that sooner or later he returned to China with his savings, having indeed added to the natural wealth of this country, but having taken no part in its civic, intellectual or religious life. In addition to the class of peaceable Chinese, there came a smaller but very troublesome class who settled in San Francisco and other large cities of the west, and who were members of secret societies or “tongs” called Highbinders. (Hall 1907, 328)

Hall goes on to further expand on this point in a footnote:

These societies still exist. They are formed chiefly for making money by the running of opium dens, houses of ill fame and gambling resorts. They do not hesitate to murder any Chinese who stand in the way of their schemes, but, in general, they do not molest white people, fearing that an uprising against their race would be the result. Owing to the fear with which they inspire the Chinese they have hitherto been able to escape the law. They procure any evidence they desire to clear their members and agent, or to implicate their enemies. Indeed, it is sometimes said that instead of murdering an enemy they use the process of the criminal law by means of perjured testimony. (Hall 1907, 328–329)

And he concludes that upon the general policy of the Chinese Exclusion Acts, there was a hopeless difference of opinion:

Organized labor is unalterably opposed to the admission of Chinese labor; the railroads, some manufacturers, and many planters, especially in the South, would like the benefit of its cheapness. Recently, the desire to obtain free entrance to Chinese markets for American manufacturers has led to an agitation for the repeal or modification of the acts which are offensive to the Chinese. Many persons think the Chinese should be put under the immigration laws now applied to other races. Others say that the Chinese are so essentially different in character
and habits even from inferior classes of Europeans, that they cannot be put upon the same footing. It seems probable that the acts may be modified, but their repeal in the near future is unlikely. (Hall 1907, 335)

Undoubtedly these anti-Chinese nativist sentiments against had a lasting effects. As Erika Lee pointed out in her book *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America*, echoed by feeling of frustration, anger and despair, Chinese detainees on Angel Island experienced hardship brought about by American nativism and the Chinese Exclusion Act. For a thirty year period from 1910 to 1940, over 178,000 Chinese men and women were admitted into the country as new immigrants, returning residents, and U.S. citizens. The majority came through San Francisco and Angel Island, and approximately 100,000 Chinese were detained there (Lee 2010, 70). Oppressive as the Chinese exclusion laws were, Chinese immigrants, returning residents, and Chinese American citizens employed a wide range of legal, political, and immigration strategies to enter and return to the United States during this restrictive era (Lee 2010, 70).

Initially welcomed as valued laborers and investors in the expanding American economy during the Gold Rush, when the money ran out and the economy faltered Chinese men and women became targets of racist stereotyping, discriminatory laws, and racial violence. Lee argues that Chinese immigrants were seen as foreigners who could never assimilate into American life and who would always pose a moral and racial threat to the United States (Lee 2010, 74). Given the moral temper of the times and the effort of social reformer to eradicate prostitution, Chinese women, like other immigrant women applying for admission in the country, were also scrutinized for an evidence of immoral behavior (Lee 2010, 80).
Chinese immigration, particularly of women, was affected by the 1924 Immigration Act, which effectively barred foreign-born Chinese wives of U.S. citizens and merchants. These exclusion laws were not repealed fully until 1943 and the government’s strict enforcement practices led many Chinese immigrants to adopt migration strategies to continue immigrating during this restrictive period (Lee 2010, 76). For many Chinese, taking “the crooked path” offered the only means of entering the United States while the exclusion laws were in effect, and both former detainees and immigration official estimated that 90 per cent of all Chinese had false papers (Lee 2010, 84).

The most common strategy was to falsely claim membership in one of the classes that were except from exclusion laws, such as Chinese merchant or native-born citizens of the United States. A lucrative business of false papers sprang up on both sides of the Pacific Ocean, and Chinese companies, for example, regularly sold multiple partnerships – and the merchant status that accompanied such status – to prospective immigrants (Lee 2010, 85). The exempt status of Chinese American citizens was another loophole in the law that was relatively easy to exploit because the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire had destroyed all of the city’s birth records. By the 1920s and 1930s, more Chinese entered as U.S. Citizens than as members of any other class, a fact most likely explained by false claims to U.S. citizenship (Lee 2010, 85). Identification papers for children, known as “paper sons,” of exempt-class Chinese were useful because the immigration service often lacked reliable documentary evidence verifying births and marriages occurring either in the United States or in China. A Chinese immigrant entering the
country for the first time could easily claim more children than he actually had and then sell those slots to prospective migrants. Papers usually cost $100 per year of age of the applicant (Lee 2010, 86).

As immigration officials attempted to distinguish false claims for admission from real ones, long and detailed interrogations became commonplace, and some inspectors used intimidation and even threats to test applicants. A new arm of the “paper son” business sprang up in the form of coaching book production and distribution, and the Chinese came to rely on these books that contained answers to questions that would likely come up in the interrogations. Coaching notes were passed to immigrants in food packages sent by relatives or by the Chinese kitchen staff (Lee 2010, 88).

According to Lee while detained in the barracks of the Angel Island Immigration Station, Chinese Immigrants dreamt of the day when they might finally be admitted into the United States. Passing through America’s gates, however, did not mean freedom from the exclusion laws. For many, the shadow of exclusion haunted them for years. The widespread “paper son” immigration and enduring anti-Chinese sentiment motivated U.S. Government officials to increase their efforts to track, arrest, and deport Chinese immigrants who had entered or remained in the country in violation of the law. Immigration raids in Chinese American communities took place in neighborhoods, places of business, and in schools and churches (Lee 2010, 105).

After the Immigration Act of 1924 explicitly required all Chinese merchants, travelers, and students to maintain the exempt status under which they were admitted, Chinese immigrants were recognized as the country’s first “illegal immigration” problem,
and were therefore more vulnerable to deportation. During the 1920s, the San Francisco Chinese community complained of a veritable Reign of Terror against them, and lived their lives in the shadows, anxious about their immigration status, harassment by immigration officials, and personal safety. For Chinese Americans, Lee argues, detention on Angel Island symbolized the broader discrimination that they faced on and off the island. The “one hundred kinds of oppressive laws” created memories of sadness, anger and frustration that lasted for decades (Lee 2010, 108).

Although Prescott Hall and the Immigration Restriction League failed to recognize the fact, perhaps as many as 17,300 Chinese immigrants, and quite possibly more, entered the United States through the back doors of Canada and Mexico from 1882 to 1920. While the number of Chinese entries pales in comparison with that of contemporary border migrants from Mexico, contemporary scholarship has all but ignored this early history of Chinese exclusion in the northern and southern borderlands (Lee 2006, 159). In the north, Chinese border crossers took advantage of established smuggling networks for opium and other contraband substances along the U.S.- Canadian border, but by 1906, U.S. government attempts to curb Chinese illegal entries along the northern border had proved effective enough that business shifted south. From 1907 to 1909, 2,492 Chinese were arrested for illegal entry along the Mexican border, and it was estimated that 80 percent of the Chinese arriving at Mexican seaports eventually reached the border (Lee 2006, 162).

Lee postulates that increased Chinese illegal entries via Mexico were a direct outgrowth of successful border enforcement in the north. Unlike the northern border, the
southern border had always been marked by conquest and contestation between the United States and Mexico, and was routinely the site of Indian raids, banditry, smuggling, and revolutionary activities (Lee 2006, 177). Lee claims that Chinese immigrants – racialized as perpetual foreigners – became the first group in the country marked as “illegal immigrants” making “Chinese” synonymous with “illegal” in the same way “Mexican” is racialized now. Metaphors for war, for example, were commonly used in border enforcement discourse one hundred years ago, just as they are used in contemporary times (Lee 2006, 182). As an aside, the parallel between the resilient Chinese and Mexican undocumented workers is uncanny, and would be an interesting problem for further research.

In the north, Chinese border crossers took advantage of established smuggling networks involving opium and other contraband substances along the U.S- Canadian border, but by 1906, U.S. government attempts to curb Chinese illegal entries along the northern border had proved effective enough that the business shifted south. From 1907 to 1909, 2,492 Chinese were arrested for illegal entry along the Mexican border, and it was estimated that 80 percent of the Chinese arriving at Mexican seaports eventually reached the border (Lee 2006, 162). The importance of the Chinese Exclusion Law is the precedent that it had set for the Federal Government to exclude a certain ethnic group or a race from entering the United States. While the agitation to expel the Chinese started on the West Coast, this federal legislation helped to turn the American public opinion towards increasingly restrictionist sentiments. The key take-away from the Chinese immigration experience should be that, if there exists powerful economic demands for
labor, and if a group of people is determined to come in, it's difficult, if not impossible to stop them. Moreover, it would seem from the empirical evidence, that any amount of restriction would not stop the flow of labor through the Southwestern region which, historically, has proved costly and impossible to seal. But this was not the observation of Lodge or Prescott Hall.

Lodge believed the Immigration Restriction League had for many years done admirable work, and of course he agreed that undesirable immigrants were likely to become a public charge and endangered American character and citizenship. The opposition outside Congress to the literacy bill, or to any restrictive measure, however, came from the steamship and transportation companies, whose agents came to Washington and labored unceasingly to defeat all such legislation. The literacy test was frankly objected to on the grounds that it would in large measure stop the introduction of cheap labor, which the railroads and other corporations greatly needed at the time.

But Lodge remained steadfast in his argument that unrestricted immigration would fundamentally affect the quality of American citizenship. The electorate was pouring in upon America due to the looseness of naturalization laws, and constantly in the large cities and towns, Lodge claimed, a large mass of unfit voters – many of whom obtained the great privilege of American citizenship by fraud, had no sense of the value of that privilege, and became the tools of the worst and most dangerous political managers (Lodge 1904, 469). The labor market, Lodge believed, was “filled with the cheapest and most objectionable labor of eastern Europe and Asia Minor.” Thus he urged Congress and anyone to take the time to study the statistics of America’s prisons,
insane asylums, and almshouses, to see by the numbers what an enormous direct burden unrestricted immigration places upon the States and upon taxpayers. There were many public questions which affected the welfare of the United States, Lodge conceded, but there was none which went so deep or in which the future was so much involved, he claimed, as was the tide of unrestricted, unsifted foreign immigration. (Lodge 1904, 469).

In, Immigration and Its Effects Upon the United States, Prescott Hall’s editor, Ralph Curtis Ringwalt stated that this book was the first of a series which the publishers planned gradually to augment until it covered the field of controverted topics in American political, economic and social affairs, in which there was widespread public interest. The problems with which the Series dealt were believed by the editor to be all important, as Ringwalt claimed grandiosely, “and those on the right solution of which much of the nation’s greatness and prosperity, and even its existence, may well be said to depend. And it is to such understanding and discussion that the Series will seek, in as weighty a measure as possible, to contribute” (Hall 1907, v). In the preface, Hall states that the immigration question in 1907 had never in the past had the attention to which its importance entitled it:

It had sometimes been the scapegoat of religious and racial prejudices, and always, in recent years an annual sacrifice to the gods of transportation. The causes of this indifference are not far to seek. In the early days, the people of this country were busy with other matters: the immigration was small and not especially objectionable in quality. Later, the doctrines of the laissez faire school, and the narrow and prejudiced theories of the Know-Nothing movement helped to continue the status of free immigration. More recently a superficial interpretation of the doctrine of the “survival of the fittest” has led the public to adopt and easy-going optimism with regard to racial questions, forgetting that this doctrine really means that those survive who are fittest for survival only, and not necessarily fittest for any other purpose. At the present time, the enormous volume of
immigration has attracted the attention of the public, but its conditions and effects are familiar to few. (Hall 1907, viii)

In Chapter III, entitled “Racial Conditions of Immigration,” Hall’s research parallels the earlier sentiments of Lodge, and of the Consul-generals’ reports from the 1880s:

It would be hard to determine whether the volume of immigration or its racial composition is the more important element in the progress of our population. Each is of great weight, and when combined, as in the advent of large masses of a particular race, they cannot fail to leave a permanent and visible mark upon our people, if, indeed, they do not result in a radical modification of our instincts and a total reconstructions of our institutions. (Hall 1907, 36)

However much social prejudice there may have been against the Irish and German immigrants of the forties and fifties, Hall claimed, and although even that immigration tended to diminish the native stock, he lamented, it remained true that, before 1870, immigration was chiefly of races kindred in habits, institutions and traditions to the original colonists. (Hall 1907, 26-37). He continued:

Thus if a line were to be drawn from north to south across Europe, it would be found that the countries of western Europe, that is to say Great Britain, Ireland, France, Germany and Scandinavia, furnished more than three-fourths of the total immigration from all countries before 1880. Eastern Europe, including Austria-Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Russia, furnished less than one percent. How marked the change in nationality has been, is shown by the fact that in 1869 nearly three-quarters of the total immigration came from the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Scandinavia. In 1902 only one-fifth was from those countries. Or, to put it in another way; in 1869 the immigrants from Austria-Hungary, Italy, Poland and Russia were about one-hundredth of the number from the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Scandinavia; in 1880, about one-tenth; in 1894 nearly equal to it; in 1902 three and one-half times as great. In 1903, the largest elements in immigration was the South Italian, with 196, 117 souls, and the next largest was the Polish, with 82,343. Considering the immigration of 1904 by the great racial division we have the following result, in striking contrast to the days when immigration was almost entirely Teutonic and Keltic. (Hall 1907, 38)
He then goes on, citing data from Special Consular Reports, in an interesting but sharply patronizing, nativistic, and pseudo-scientific section called, “The Characteristics of the Various Races”:

*Armenians.* The Armenians, who are rather recent arrivals, began to come both because of Turkish persecution and of new steamship communication with the Levant. Missionaries and sympathizers in the United States have also done much to encourage their immigration. The total number arriving in 1904 was 1745, most of whom were destined to Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New York. A considerable part were shoemakers, tailors, bakers and weavers, and the balance chiefly laborers and servants. They showed about twenty-three dollars per capita, but only one-tenth brought fifty dollars or more. Of those over fourteen years of age, 21.9 percent were illiterate. Some of the Armenian merchants are fairly intelligent and are not undesirable immigrants. On the other hand, many of the lower class are extremely objectionable. Their standards of living and morals are low, and they tend to form small colonies in manufacturing centres. Some take up the occupations of cigarette making and peddling. On the whole they are not desirable immigrants. (Hall 1907, 41–42)

Aside from the obvious stereotypical, prejudiced, and overall judgmental tone, what pains the author of this thesis is how Hall seemed to convince himself that his data was so precise – he didn’t even bother to round-off the percentages to the nearest whole number. Thus Hall continued:

*Canadians.* Immigration from Canada consists of two very different classes: the British element, composed of immigrants from England, Scotland, and Ireland, and their descendants; and the French element. No reliable statistics are at hand as to the numbers or conditions of either class. The British Canadians are in many respects similar to the native Americans, but they have fewer defectives and fewer criminals in serious crimes. Their skill is not as great as that of the English and Scotch, and the perpetual migration which goes on back and forth from Canada tends to make them less reliable and steady in their work. The French Canadian element is entirely different from both the British Canadian and from the modern French. The general intelligence of these people is much less than of the British Canadians and they perform a lower grade both of skilled and unskilled labor. The birth rate is very high among them; they seem likely to increase as fast as or faster than any other element of our population. Their standard of living is very low, and, as they often regard their stay in the United States as temporary, they do not attempt to improve it. On account of their willingness to underbid other labor
they are very unpopular in New England, the section in which they are chiefly employed. Whole families work in the mills and other manufacturing establishments. In the absence of factory legislation, the tendency of the race is to work its young children and to labor very long hours. Many of the French Canadians are also employed in lumbering, not only in New England but in Michigan and the other border States; and, on the whole, they make excellent laborers in this industry. They do not, however, by any means take the place in the social life of the community of those whom they drive out. They fail to educate their children and they lower the average of intelligence and morality. (Hall 1907, 42–43)

**Greeks.** Greek immigration, like other immigration from the Levant, has recently increased. In 1904 it amounted to 12,625 persons. Most of these were going to New York, Illinois, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. The proportion of professional persons was surprisingly small. Among the skilled, the principal classes were machinists, blacksmiths, bakers, shoemakers, tailors and clerks; but by far the greater part were unskilled laborers. The per capita money showed was about eighteen dollars, and the illiteracy of those over fourteen years was 23.6 percent. Many of the Greeks, especially the boys and young men, come under contract to work for padroni in the peddling and boot-blackening trades. They are usually well coached and in that way evade the contract labor acts. Owing to the fact that they emigrate practically under contract they tend to congregate in certain large cities and to live in very unhealthy surroundings. The percentage of trachoma and other contagious diseases among them is high; many are also of poor physique. During the year 1903, on Greek out of every thirty landed was sent back as liable to become a public charge. Not a few of the immigrants are from rural districts and were, in their own country, agriculturists and shepherds. They are very patriotic, and, in most cases, come to this country with the intention of returning; for that reason the immigrants are chiefly men, who leave their women behind to care for the farms and flocks until their return (Hall 1907, 48–49)

Hall then goes on, in a detached summary of Jewish immigration:

**Hebrews.** It is estimated that there are approximately 12,000,000 Jews in the world. . . . In 1904, of the 106,236 Hebrews coming to this country, 77,500 were Russian, 20,000 Austro-Hungarian, 6500 Romanian, 817 British, and 669 German. By far the greater portion were destined for New York, Massachusetts, Illinois, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Among the professional classes the most numerous were musicians and teachers, though only about one per cent of the total immigration was engaged in professional occupations. Of the skilled classes, the most numerous were tailors, bankers, carpenters, clerks, locksmiths and painters. . . . Notwithstanding that some Hebrews bring comparatively large sums, the average money shown was extremely small – only fifteen dollars per capita. The illiteracy of those over fourteen years of age was 23.3 per cent. The fact that
practically no German Jews are now coming to us seems due to the greater civil
liberty which they enjoy as compared with their co-religionists in other countries.
Although the Jews were originally an agricultural people, on reaching America
the vast majority settle in large cities,—where previous immigrants of their race
are already located,—and take up small manufacturing under the sweat-shop
system . . . They therefore take up tailoring, harnessmaking and the like, and
have, till recently, practically controlled the clothing trade in New York City.
Owing to the great congestion in the East Side of New York many of the Hebrews
are unable to succeed in the struggle for economic independence. . . . It is said that
whenever the Jew gets away from the Ghetto he succeeds, and great efforts are
being made to distribute the recent immigration to agricultural regions. How far
such attempts will be successful on a scale large enough to do any good remains
to be seen. . . . The family as an institution has a strong hold upon them, and their
desire for race and religious purity tends to keep them from intermarriage with
other races, so that assimilation is often a mingling rather than a fusion. (Hall
1907, 51–52)

And, about the Irish and Italians, Hall had this to say:

Ireland. Immigration from Ireland, like that from other parts of the United
Kingdom, has shown a great falling off in recent years . . . From 1821 to 1902
Ireland sent us almost four million immigrants, a number surpassed only by
Germany. There were, moreover, in 1900, nearly five million persons in the
United States having one or both parents Irish, or about half a million more than
the population of Ireland itself in 1901. With some truth, therefore, it may be said
that the Irish race has been literally transplanted to the United States. . . . The
Irish, like several other nationalities among our immigrants, present the spectacle
of an agricultural and rural people suddenly transferred to city life. As a whole
they have been essentially mediocre, for although many have attained to position
of moderate dignity an importance – especially in politics, for which this race has
a genius – few have secured pre-eminence in professional, scientific or social
pursuits. So, although may have interested themselves in athletic matters, as a
race they hav no great physical vitality, and their death rate is very high. The
number of defectives among them is large, and their record for drunkenness and
pauperism is bad. . . . The race is conventional in temper rather than
individualistic, and readily enters into exisiting institutions. Especially fond of
political life, it attempts to influence other races politically, and to that extent
encourages assimilation. It is also noted for its cheerful temperament, and genial,
easy-going disposition, which, though it often leads to intemperance, adds to the
pleasure of a community. The monopoly which the earlier Irish immigrants had
of the heavier forms of manual labor is giving way before the inroads of Italians
and French Canadians, and the Irish themselves are beginning to feel social
aspirations and to limit their birth-rate in order to secure social advantages. Of the
various nationalities the Irish show the smallest rate of national increase and to some extent they may be supplanted by more fertile races. (Hall 1907, 53–54)

Italians. From 1821 to 1903 Italian immigration to the United States amounted to nearly 1,600,000 persons; and in 1903 was about 27 percent of the total immigration of that year. The term “Italian” is, in a sense, very misleading, for the nation is composed of many races of different origins. In general, however, there is a broad distinction between the Keltic elements inhabiting northern Italy, and the Iberic elements living in the southern part. Under the classification adopted by the Immigration Bureau, “Northern Italy,” includes Tuscany, Emilia, Liguria, Venice and Lombardy; and “Southern Italy” the other States. The northern Italians come of much better stock, and are more enterprising, thrifty and intelligent than their southern fellow countrymen. . . The Southern Italians have constituted the largest single element in the immigration of recent years; and while immigration from northern Italy has diminished, they have rapidly increased. . . The principal skilled occupations were those of carpenters, sailors, masons, miners and tailors, but less than one-fifth of either group was professional or skilled. . . . The earliest Italian immigration to the United States was of a very low class, and took up organ-grinding, rag-picking, and similar pursuits. Next came barbers, bootblacks, fruiterers and shoemakers from northern Italy. These people were, on the whole, peaceable and industrious, and improved the trades in which they engaged. They soon began to come through representations of friends, with a definite destination and purpose of work in their minds. In this respect, they differed from southern Italians, who in most cases gave New York as their destination and were sent wherever the padroni could find work for them. . . . Upon the whole, it may be said that the Italians are a tractable and imitative people, with great capacities – either for good or evil. But, unless they can be induced to go into the country districts, to adopt the idea of permanent settlement, and to bring over families or intermarry here, it is to be feared that the second and third generations will contribute a large number of defectives and delinquents. Like other races which have recently come to us, the Italians take little interest in political matters and do not readily assimilate in other ways. The fact that many of them are continually moving about in response to economic demand, and that a large number are above the age when they will receive any schooling, makes assimilation more difficult. It is asserted that there is a growing demand in the south for Italian labor to take the place of negroes, and that the Italians can endure the sun as well and turn out a much larger product. The demand is, however, for intelligent farmers and farm laborers with some money, who intent permanent settlement. It cannot be supplied by the class of totally unskilled Italians now arriving in New York in such large numbers (Hall 1907, 57-58)
And finally, about the Slavic peoples, he stated this:

Slavs. For convenience, the various Slav peoples will be briefly considered together. . . . By far the larger part of these immigrants is unskilled workmen, and goes to the mining regions of Pennsylvania, although some take up other forms of unskilled labor and the simpler kinds of manufacturing industries. With the exception of the Bohemians they bring but little money, the average amounts varying from eight dollars, the case of the Lithuanians, to fifteen dollars in the case of the Russians. They Bohemians bring nearly twice as much. Nearly all Slavs are Roman Catholics, but a few belong to the Greek Church, still fewer to the Lutheran Church. The Poles were intrinsically a warlike and progressive people. They have been the victims of political oppression and spoliation, and have thus been reduced to a lower industrial and social position than they would otherwise have reached. More than the other Slavic races, they go into manufacturing concerns and mills, and many have reached a comfortable independence. Five-sixths of the male Polish immigrants are unskilled laborers, and practically all are Roman Catholics. The Bohemians have an extremely low per cent of illiteracy, less than one-half that of German immigrants. They are largely settled in New York, Chicago, Cleveland and other cities, where they generally engage in cigar-making and in other manufacturing pursuits. They publish a number of newspapers and many books in the Czech language, and are wide awake and progressive. In religion and politics they are very independent. Their nature is said to be at times suspicious and quarrelsome, though this seems less true of the younger generations. . . . Like other peoples who have escaped from officialism and autocracy, the Bohemians dislike law and authority, and insist strenuously on their rights and liberties . . . Upon the whole, the Bohemians are likely to prove a valuable addition to our population, especially if they can be mixed with other races. The north Bohemians are especially desirable, as the great majority are skilled in glass blowing, textile industries and the like. . . . In general it may be said that the Slavic immigrant furnishes probably the most difficult problem with which we have to deal. For while, like other immigrants, he has large possibilities of development and improvement provided his environment is favorable, his past, his customs and his inherited traditions make change very slow, especially in view of his temporary residence and the persistency with which his love for his native country and language survive. In the second and third generations, indeed, man of the Slavs desire the concentration of advantages, and consequently their birth rate is falling and their standard of living is rising. But these are, after all, only matters of outward conformity, and the difference in training between children raised in a native community and those accustomed from childhood to the surroundings of a foreign mining camp is immense. Most of what is said later in parts of this volume, of the dangers and difficulties arising from recent immigration, is especially true of Slavic immigration and need not be repeated here. (Hall 1907, 64–65)
By the end of the nineteenth century, public opinion seemed overwhelmingly favorable to some form of restriction, but the sentiments of immigrants were unclear. As yet, southern and eastern Europeans counted for little in American politics, but the older immigrant groups were becoming electorally important, and their attitude was by no means certain. Party managers pointed out the danger of taking up the question on the eve of a national election (Higham, 104). In the House, however, they failed to suppress the issue. In two days of fierce debate, the bill passed 195 to 26. Lodge had less success forcing a vote in the Senate, but secured an agreement which left the bill as unfinished business to be called up when Congress reconvened after the elections. And when the new session opened in December, the Republican Senate caucus pressed for action on the immigration bill, and the literacy test won by a wide margin (Higham, 104).

But the conferees had gravely miscalculated because in the opinion of Higham the crest of nativism passed. It started ebbing the moment that William Jennings Bryan lost the election of 1896. In the midst of immense relief at the triumph of McKinley and of the status quo, alert conservatives noted an astonishing fact. Foreign-born voters in half a dozen Midwestern states had much to do with the Republican victory. Without their overwhelming support, McKinley might well have lost. In the light of immigrant conservatism, anti-radical nativism began to seem less relevant. Furthermore, immigrant opposition to the literacy test was crystallizing. German newspapers were especially outspoken against the bill, and moreover, the federal immigration commissioner reported that the entire foreign-language press condemned it (Higham 1955, 104).
Now it seemed clear that the Lodge forces in the Senate lacked the votes to override a Presidential veto if Grover Cleveland chose to disapprove of the bill. And disapprove he did. A man with a strong sense of personal integrity and a steady faith in the ways of the fathers, President Cleveland denounced the bill for upsetting tradition and hinted that the criterion of illiteracy was hypocritical. Don't make illiteracy a pretext for exclusion, he said in effect, if what you fear is something else (Higham 1955, 105). Cleveland characterized the bill as “illiberal, narrow and un-American” (Daniels 2004:32) and he pointed out that it was safer to admit illiterate workers than literate political agitators (Martin, 139).

The House speedily overrode the veto but the legislation stalled in the Senate. The tide of public sentiment had already reversed its course, and the crest of nativism had passed. And 16 years would pass before another Congress submitted to another President the literacy restriction proposal (Higham 1955, 105). The League lapsed into a period of suspended animation, and formerly nativistic magazines like Nation fell completely silent on the matter. The return of the complacent cosmopolitan mood during the last years of the nineteenth century ran counter to the currents of immigration. The return of confidence coincided with a surge in immigration from southern and Eastern Europe, and the clock did not turn back (Higham, 111). The measure was reintroduced in subsequent Congresses and appeared to gain momentum after President McKinley’s assassination in 1901, but it again stalled in the Senate, even with the support of the new president, Theodore Roosevelt. The provision was raised once more in 1906 in the context of other reforms in immigration. English proficiency was made a basis for citizenship. While
efforts to impose a similar English proficiency requirement on admission failed, those in favor of restriction turned to a literacy requirement as a way to limit immigration (Martin, 133). Although other provisions were adopted in the 1907 Immigration Act, the literacy test proved more controversial (Martin, 139).

By the congressional debate in 1906, the opponents of the literacy measure had become more organized. Business had been in opposition from the beginning, failing to see how a literacy requirement could do anything other than restrict access to the labor force they sought. The National Association of Manufacturers, The National Board of Trade, and other business groups lobbied against the measure. Immigrants themselves were also more organized and sought to harness the political power of newly naturalized citizens. The American Jewish committee, which was formed in 1906 to fight discrimination against Jews and support immigrant rights, mounted a campaign against the measure (Zolberg, 2006, 229-30). Speaker Joseph Cannon, who opposed the legislation had taken firm control of the House of Representatives and had no intention of allowing the literacy test to pass. Faced with upcoming midterm elections, and fearing the loss of the immigrant vote in key jurisdictions, Roosevelt pulled his support for the measure, letting it die in Congress for that session (Martin, 140).

The confidence of progressivism was waning and in general American public opinion was also indifferent and aloof. Under easygoing Jeffersonian legislation that had lasted more than a century, as many as 5,000 separate state courts administered naturalization with no central supervision whatever. In a campaign against municipal corruption, the Naturalization Act of 1906 finally terminated the wholesale distribution of
citizenship papers on the eve of elections. In response to State Department protests, the reform measure restricted naturalization to certain courts, laid down a standardized procedure for them to follow, and established a federal Division of Naturalization to supervise the whole process. But the law ignored the old nativist demand for lengthening the resident requirement for citizenship because it aimed not to disfranchise the immigrant, but end the conditions under which his vote was sold. It succeeded brilliantly, and in doing so completed the separation between nativism and municipal reform” (Higham, 118).

The more sweeping legislation passed in 1907 expanded the grounds for exclusion to cover imbeciles, feeble-minded persons, persons with physical or mental defects that may affect their ability to earn a living, persons afflicted with tuberculosis, children unaccompanied by their parents, and women coming to the United States for immoral purposes. Each of these categories addressed specific concerns about the characteristics of immigrants, generally focusing on health and criminality. Despite evidence to the contrary, Congress and the executive branch feared that lax controls were leading to the admission of the sick and the immoral. Fears about the poor quality of the recent immigrants received support from the emerging pseudoscience of eugenics. And believers in eugenics claimed that poverty, disease, and crime were biologically determined by inherent characteristics that were immutable (Martin, 137).

In the end, the supporters of the English language requirement won the vote. Passage of the legislation, though supported by immigration restrictionists, could be divorced from the more controversial issue of immigration itself. Requiring English
fluency for naturalization could be supported by many who opposed the literacy requirement on entry as an affirmation of American values rather than a repudiation of immigration. Because there was no serious questioning of the legitimacy of English as the language of the land, knowledge or English seemed to be a fitting basis for citizenship (Martin, 141).

Although the literacy requirement for admission failed and was not included in the 1907 immigration bill, the concept didn’t disappear. President Taft vetoed a legislative provision that would have established a literacy requirement during his term of office. Congress passed such a requirement in 1915, only to see the bill vetoed by President Wilson. Unable to override the veto, Congress took up the provision next in 1917. Wilson vetoed it once more. Wilson himself had complicated views on immigration, and criticized the new immigration, saying that countries in southern Europe were “unburdening themselves of the more sordid and hapless elements of their population,” while “immigrants of eastern Europe had neither skill nor energy nor any initiative of quick intelligence” (Wilson, 190).

Wilson vetoed the literacy requirement because of his notion that national interests should trump group interests. He saw those supporting the literacy requirement, including the unions and members of Congress from the South, as special interests on the other side of the issue (Martin, 142). In his 1917 veto message, Wilson argued that the literacy test would operate merely as a penalty for lack of opportunity in the country, and “our experience in the past has not been that the illiterate immigrant is as such an undesirable immigrant” (Wilson, 1917). But in contrast to previous vetoes, the 1917 one
was overridden and the literacy test became law. All immigrants over the age of 16 years, who were physically capable of reading, would have to demonstrate literacy in English or some other language. Exceptions were made, however, for wives, mothers, grandmothers, unmarried or widowed daughters, and fathers and grandfathers over the age of 55. The immigration inspectors, under the direction of the Secretary of Labor, were to use uniform pieces of paper, each with no fewer than 30 nor more than 40 commonly used words, printed in plainly legible type, to test the immigrants (Martin, 142).

The literacy test was part of a broader set of restrictive provisions that included a head tax on arriving immigrants increasing to $8, and expanded grounds for exclusion. Under the category of intellectual defects, the statute listed idiots, imbeciles, feebleminded persons, epileptics, insane persons, persons who have had one or more attacks of insanity at any time previously, persons of constitution psychopathic inferiority, and persons with chronic alcoholism. Political grounds for exclusion barred anarchists, or persons who advocate the overthrow by force or violence of the government of the United States, or of all forms of law, or who disbelieve in or are opposed to organized government, or who advocate or teach the unlawful destruction of property (Martin, 143). On April 6, 1917 the United States declared war on Germany, entering World War I. The war succeeded in accomplishing what neither qualitative restrictions nor business cycles had achieved. Immigration in 1918 was at the lowest level since 1862, at the height of the Civil War. Just over 110,000 documented immigrants entering the country in 1918. This was the lowest level of immigration since 1862, at the height of the Civil War. How
much the literacy test affected immigration levels, as compared with U.S. entry into the war, is unknown, however when the war ended, immigration began to increase (Martin, 143).

The leaders of the Immigration Restriction League, at a quiet victory dinner in Boston’s Union club, began at once to plan additional barriers, but Congress would take no further interest in the question until after the war. Already most nativistic anxieties centered on the lingering alien rather than the entering immigrant. Once war came, the immigrant restriction question disappeared from view, while fear of the alien absorbed the whole of American nativism and grew a hundred fold (Higham, 204). Although immigration decreased somewhat during and immediately after World War I, it regained former levels as soon as conditions in Europe permitted resurgence in immigration. Believing that the qualitative restrictions in place were inadequate to stem the tide, those favoring restriction turned to quantitative restrictions as well as to shifts in the ethnic composition of immigration. The national origins quotas established in the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 accomplished these aims and led to substantial reduction in numbers of immigrants and severe limitations on immigration from eastern and southern Europe (Martin, 133).

The League attempted to make deep impacts politically, but Higham believes they were ultimately unsuccessful due to the changing tide of public opinion. Immigration was one of the cornerstones of the whole social structure, and a cosmopolitan ideal of nationality was woven deeply into America’s Christian and democratic heritage (Higham, 97). Supporters of an English language requirement won
the vote over the literacy test as a more effective way to ensure the quality and assimilability of new comers. Passage of the 1907 legislation, though supported by immigration restrictionists, could be divorced from the more controversial issue of immigration itself. Requiring English fluency for naturalization could be supported by many who opposed the literacy requirement on entry as an affirmation of American values rather than a repudiation of immigration. Because there was no serious questioning of the legitimacy of English as the language of the land, knowledge of English seemed to be a fitting basis for citizenship (Martin, 141).

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CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

Nativism had been on the rise in America from the Know-Nothings of the 1850s to the Progressive ethos of the 1890s. In the late nineteenth century, the passion for progress and reform was in the air, and the reformers of the Progressive era struggled with the myths and dreams in which they believed, and the concrete realities of the world in which they had to compromise. The Immigration Restriction League’s rise in the 1890s at first paralleled the rising hostility against new arrivals. But the League’s popularity waned, as ambivalent sentiments of fear and loathing flowed away from the entering immigrant, and ebbed toward the lingering aliens in the land. These Boston Brahmin “reformers,” who hoped to make deep impacts in American public policy, would not see the full realization of their goals to restrict immigration through the literacy test.

These Yankees’ stance against the “undesirable” strangers in their midst – which, as mentioned, was aimed particularly at southern and Eastern Europeans – was an altered form of Anglo-Saxon nativism. Though they were an elitist and quasi-intellectual breed of nativists—in contrast to the lowbrow, anti-Irish Know-Nothings of the 1850s—both nativist groups’ heritage is traced back to the same Anglo-Saxon tradition. Like the Know-Nothings, the League was anti-Catholic and anti-radical, believing the virtue of America’s cultural heritage was principally Anglo-Saxon Protestant in form. These Yankee Brahmins were defensive about their position in the world, but their elitist mood also characterized as alienated, melancholic, and misanthropic. They had tried to present
what Prescott hall claimed was a “less superficial” interpretation of the doctrine of the “survival of the fittest,” one that would include a provision for mental fitness, rather than simply for those who are fittest “for survival only,” and not necessarily fittest for any other purpose. What these reflecting men failed to realize, however, were some obvious and salient facts, such as the failure of previous restrictionist policies, like the Chinese Exclusion Law, which never fully succeeded in restricting Chinese immigration, but lead to the fraudulent papers industry and the first wave of undocumented migration through the Southwestern borderlands. Moreover, what the designers of the illiteracy test also failed to consider or address was another obvious fact, that a large percentage of native-born Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – particularly in the South and in rural areas — were functionally illiterate, and more importantly, this fact in and of itself did not mean they were “undesirable” Americans.

From their self-aggrandized point of view, the League’s members presented themselves as the young intellectual wielders of old power, the old guard of the Yankee Brahmin heritage. To support their Anglo-Saxon nativist rationale and ideology, they designed studies and data – obtained through their curiously unfettered access to Ellis Island – that reinforced their claim that America in the 1890s was becoming “the world’s dumping ground, for an alarming numbers of illiterates, paupers, and madmen.” The League attempted to bolster their sphere of influence by seeking common cause with organized labor. They worked with Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who in turn sponsored bills through Congress which were challenged by the steamship companies’ lobbyists,
and whose bills were vetoed by presidents Taft, Cleveland, and Wilson on three separate occasions.

Unlike the lowbrow Know-Nothings, the League’s middlebrow members thought of themselves as progressive reflecting men – a patronizing, proud, and arrogant group of reflective men. Their literacy test was an imperfect project, but it was theirs from beginning to end, and they fought ardently for it for nearly three decades. The League attempted to support their claims with studies and data designed to sound the alarm and persuade Congress and the president to take action. They presented their views about particular races of so called “undesirables” in America, and to support their arguments they constructed a broad scheme of stereotypical assumptions about each race, and its threat to the “American way of life.”

In the end, the literacy test was an invalid, unviable, and un-American project. The test would have been little more than a mundane bureaucratic impediment to economic and cultural progress – a functional hurdle only to be surpassed and overcome by the most determined new-arrivals and employers in the massive American economy and labor market. The literacy test would have been a costly, ineffective, and pointless program to administer – except for the purposes of harassment of new arrivals and the delay of progress. As mentioned, the literacy project also failed to take into consideration two obvious but key questions: the illiteracy rates of native-born Americas; and the ineffectiveness of exclusionist laws to prevent undocumented immigration. Prescott Hall’s approach was misguided from the outset, and ultimately unsuccessful, if not for his persistent and badgering efforts. The League’s goals of making deep impacts politically
were ultimately destined to fail, due in large part to the demands of the economy for cheap labor, the changing tide of public opinion, the growing force of immigrants in politics, and the return of the quintessential American belief in individual freedom, liberty, and an optimistic future.

A key challenge of race-thinking projects is how these subjective human constructs – such as abstract definitions like races and groups of people – cannot fully capture and contain the complexity of the human experience. As Hofstadter postulated, the Populist and Progressive movements took place during a rapid and sometimes turbulent transition from conditions of an agrarian society to those of modern urban life. This claim is particularly important in that being so much closer to the completion of this shift from agrarianism to urbanism, we have in some respects a clearer judgment of its meaning in the modern world. Hofstater makes a compelling point, however, that we are likely to have lost sight of the poignancy with which it was experienced by earlier generations (Hofstadter 1955, 7). Moreover, he aptly suggests that among those things which should be kept in mind when thinking of the Progressive era between 1890 and 1917, is that it had about it an innocence and relaxation that cannot again be known, and even if we cannot see its character quite clearly, there were however, complexities in our history which our conventional images of the past have not caught, and we need to know more than we do about our political traditions before his generation could finish its portraits of earlier performers (Hofstadter 1955, 22). For this reason, Hofstader hoped that his observations would be taken as a prelude and a spur to further studies of American reform movements and not as an attempt to render final judgment.
Therefore, in an attempt to study, rather than render final judgment on these Yankee nativists, one ought to imagine their emotions and moral situation, the myths and dreams in which they believed, and the concrete realities of the world in which they had to compromise. Although we cannot fully understand their sentiments, indeed an expansive amount of secondary research has been done on these so called “reformers,” and the complexities and political traditions of the world in which they lived. At the very least, there is enough primary source material and secondary research, to make a credible claim that clearly situates their nativistic anxieties, and white supremacist sentiments, as a Yankee-Protestant strain of Anglo-Saxonism.

In sum, the League had attempted to make deep impacts politically, but was ultimately unsuccessful due to the return of optimistic economic growth and the parallel changing tide of public opinion. Immigration was one of the cornerstones of the whole American social structure, and a cosmopolitan ideal of nationality was woven deeply into the country’s Christian and democratic heritage (Higham, 97). Americans’ sentiments of “fear and loathing” against entering immigrants flowed toward the lingering aliens in their midst. The fate of the League was sealed, and the failure to pass into action the literacy restriction marked a pivotal moment in the American mind and its growth toward maturity. The League’s fearful and alienated members, in their melancholic nostalgia and longing for an imagined mythical American past, framed their myths and ideas behind a wall of prejudice, supported by the pseudoscience of eugenics.

What’s clear is that the rise and decline of the Immigration League paralleled the ebb and flow of America’s ambivalent sentiments toward immigrants. As American
nativism evolved its own patterns under pressure of successive impulses in American history, and as the general anti-foreign sentiment ebbed and flowed, the nativist upsurge of the mid-nineteenth century – which ran counter to the currents of immigration – just barely escaped the grasp of legislative trends. Moreover, the League’s failure to pass a literacy test to exclude new arrivals marked an important moment in the American mind and its growth to maturity. What also remains clear, however, is this tradition of nativist thinking – formed in the Progressive ethos and in the race thinking of the Anglo-Saxon mythical tradition – never completely died out. Although publicly these nativistic perspectives were denounced and shunned by Americans as bigoted and illiberal, implicitly these lurking nativistic sentiments have influenced immigration legislation over the years – even into contemporary times.

In their own words, the League summed-up the goals of their project: in the industrialized cities of America “the machinery of exclusion needs repairing and strength” (Hall 1906, 216). To this end, they remained obstinate and single-minded in their focus on qualitative and quantitative restrictions on new arrivals. The tide of American nativism began to turn, however, and the open air of optimism returned to the land – there was a general sentiment of easy-going faith in freedom and liberty, in the perfectibility of man as an individual, and in his limitless opportunity – and this sentiment, along with the economic demands for labor, checked most nativist angst. In the darker contours of the American mind, however, there remained a lurking nativistic sentiment, a sense of fear and loathing toward the strangers in the land. Forged over the mists of time, and called-up in their Romantic myths and stories, this notion of the
supremacy of some mythical Anglo-Saxon ancestors is what occupied the thinking of these few despondent and insecure reflecting men. In the midst of the emerging pseudo science of eugenics, the fears of these few insecure Yankee thinking men – like Henry Cabot Lodge, and the dozen or so members of the Immigration Restriction League – began to shape immigration legislation in the 1920s. These laws laid the framework for the qualitative and quantitative restrictions – via tests, national origin quotas, and overall ceilings – which lasted until the 1960s, stalemating the modern-day immigration system in this country in a rigid and byzantine path dependency upon legislation from previous eras.
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