

Immigrants Out!

**The New Nativism and the
Anti-Immigrant Impulse in
the United States**

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2. OLD POISON IN NEW BOTTLES

The Deep Roots of Modern Nativism
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Recently, white students attacked the home of Asian Indian immigrants on Staten Island. They broke windows, smeared the house with paint, and left a statement on the drive: "Indians go home. Leave or die." Across the country in Houston white skinheads beat and killed a Vietnamese teenager. The Vietnamese boy, according to one of the murderers, cried out: "God forgive me for coming to this country."¹ Contemporary nativism, the desire of many Americans to restrict, exclude, or attack immigrants, has taken many forms, ranging from verbal epithets against "foreigners" and restrictive legislation to vandalism of property and murder.

Contemporary attacks on immigrants do not represent a new social phenomenon with no connection to past events. Anti-immigrant nativism in North America is at least two centuries old. In this chapter, I will examine the deep roots of modern nativism. Historically, and on the present scene, nativists have stressed to varying degrees four major themes. One common complaint is that certain "races" are intellectually and culturally inferior and should not be allowed into the country, at least not in substantial numbers. Nativists have often regarded immigrant groups as racial "others" quite different from the Euro-American majority. A second and related theme views those who have immigrated from racially and culturally inferior groups as problematical in terms of their complete assimilation to the dominant Anglo culture. A third theme, articulated most often in troubled economic times, is that "inferior" immigrants are taking the jobs and disrupting the economic conditions of native-born Americans. A fourth notion, also heard most often in times of fiscal crisis, is that immigrants are creating serious

government crises, such as by corrupting the voting system or overloading school and welfare systems.

These nativistic arguments and movements date back at least to the late 1700s and early 1800s. Moreover, the consequences and impact of the nativistic movements, restrictions, and laws of the first two centuries of American development are serious. These movements and laws have had profound consequences for the history and present demography of this nation. For instance, the 1990 census revealed that *only twelve* of the world's nearly two hundred countries were checked off by as much as 1 percent of Americans as countries of national origin: Britain, Ireland, Canada, Italy, Russia, Poland, France, Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Norway, and Mexico. In assessing major population sources, one would need to add Native Americans and African Americans to this list, although the latter could only check off a continent (Africa), not a country of origin. Dozens of other countries of ancestry are represented in the U.S. population, but at proportions of less (or far less) than 1 percent. This list demonstrates that from 1607 to 1990 the major infusions of immigrants to this country originated in Great Britain and certain other European countries (all but one in northern Europe), and in Africa and Mexico. Conspicuously absent from the list are *any* countries in the Middle East, Asia, South America, or postcolonial Africa.²

Whether in the past or in the present, significant human migration across national boundaries is much more than a question of the individual decisions of migrating individuals seeking opportunities in a new country. As a rule, international migration is shaped at its base by broad political-economic conditions and institutions. For the most part, both immigration and the shape of the U.S. population reflect the desires, interests, and purposes of Americans of European descent. As we will see, a certain variability, if not schizophrenia, characterizes American thought about immigration. While there has been much anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, in most periods some immigration has been viewed as desirable, at least when immigrants come from certain areas of the globe. Indeed, between 1820 (the date of the first records) and the mid-1990s more than 52 million legal immigrants entered the United States. In addition, a large number of legal immigrants came prior to 1820, and since 1820 millions of undocumented immigrants have come from Europe, Latin America, and other areas of the globe. In addition, nearly half a million Africans came in chains. It is with good reason that one can call the United States a "nation of immigrants."

However, as the aforementioned data on countries of origin suggest, this immigration has been highly focused in terms of its points of origin. Historically, most immigrants to this nation have come from Europe, and relatively few immigrants have come from Asia, the Middle East, or, since 1865, Africa. This fact suggests the national-origin bias in U.S. immigration policy.

Indeed, if the United States had not had a Euro-American nativist movement from the 1880s to 1920s, there would not have been a Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), an anti-Japanese "Gentleman's Agreement" (1907-8), or a series of immigration acts from 1917 to 1924 designed to keep out southern and eastern Europeans. In addition, there would not have been a 1924 Immigration Act sharply reducing the number of Catholic immigrants from countries like Italy and Poland and the number of Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe—and excluding Asian immigrants. If these biased regulations and laws had not been in effect, the current U.S. population would likely include far more Asian Americans and have a majority composed of Catholic and Jewish Americans.

Clearly, then, battles over immigration have more than temporary effects. Indeed, they are struggles over the composition and character of the nation. Today, many native-born Americans are rising to assert their desire to shape the U.S. population, once again in narrow cultural or racial terms. As in the past, most of the new American nativists wish to keep the nation predominantly white and European.

THE COLONIES: DEFINING "SAVAGES" AND "FOREIGNERS"

A full understanding of contemporary nativism requires some comprehension of the deep historical background. The foundation for aggressive nativism in North America begins in the expansion of European capitalism. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, several European nations, especially the Netherlands, France, and England, had spurred the globalization of capitalism. In the process, they created a type of colonialism with fundamental inequalities between colonizers and the newly colonized. Beginning in the 1600s, English immigrants began a major colonization of North America, taking over Native American lands in four distinctive waves. The first to come were English Puritans, who settled in New England and brought dissenting Protestant churches. A second wave, a few Royalists and many indentured servants, came to Virginia in the mid-seventeenth century and established a hierarchical colony with Anglican churches. A third wave of English Quakers came to the Delaware Valley between 1675 and 1725 and established a pluralistic system based on spiritual and social equality and an intense work ethic. The fourth wave came to the Appalachian backcountry from the borderlands of Britain between 1718 and 1775; this group represented English, Scotch, and Scotch-Irish ancestries and was mostly Protestant. While each group had a distinctive type of English or Scottish culture, for the most part they shared a commitment to an Anglo-Protestant culture, central to which were variants of the English language.³

This fierce commitment to the English norms, values, and ways of op-

erating begins the trail to modern nativism. In particular, the famous Puritans built a base for the ethnocentrism and parochialism of the newly emerging U.S. republic. They developed, as Joel Kovel has noted, "a powerful tradition of hating strangers, foreigners, and subversives."⁴ This tradition was honed in the bloody attacks by Puritans on the native population. The Puritan immigrants created the first colonial settler-society, one animated by the arrogant notion that these English settlers would make better use of what they saw as undeveloped "wilderness" than "wild savages" who were the present occupants. Commenting on this English settler perspective, Kovel has noted that "the land wasn't densely settled, but it was settled everywhere, and everywhere the whites went they had to get rid of highly developed and very profoundly interesting cultures that had achieved a kind of equilibrium with the land over millennia."⁵ English immigrants' destruction or oppression of highly civilized Native American communities was soon coupled with the importation and oppression of Africans brought to the new immigrant colonies in the slave trade.

Genocide against Native Americans and enslavement of Africans were part of the original foundation of this nation. These oppressions gave the lie to the idealized notions of liberty and democracy freely espoused in the struggle between British Americans and the British Crown called the Revolutionary War. For most Americans of British ancestry, these ideals did not encompass African Americans and Native Americans, who were viewed as cultural "others," as aliens, strangers, and uncivilized savages. Among the English invaders the anti-other images increasingly accented not only cultural differences but also physical and racial characteristics. From the seventeenth century to the late twentieth century this racialized framework of otherness has shaped Euro-American attempts to exclude or oppress subsequent non-European groups, such as the Chinese and Japanese immigrants brought in for cheap labor in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries or the Mexican immigrants brought in for cheap labor since the early 1900s. Over four centuries, many non-European groups have been defined by Euro-Americans as sub-human "others," as non-citizens without rights or as citizens with only limited rights.

Early European interpretations of the colonial enterprise could be found both in popular sentiment and in the systematic perspectives developed by intellectuals and political leaders. From the fifteenth century onward, European and Euro-American intellectual and political elites defended the racism and exploitation of the imperialist enterprises. Scholars, theologians, and politicians in European and the new American colonies developed theories of the superiority of white Europeans and of the animal-like inferiority of peoples exploited in the expansion of colonialism. These views buttressed popular feelings about certain outgroups. Common to most societies is eth-

nocentrism—the perspective that sees one's own group as the center and evaluates outgroups with reference to that center. However, a distinctively negative ethnocentrism in regard to outsiders developed in the American colonies and, later, the United States. Europeans distinguished themselves from the "savages," and colonized peoples were demonized as replete with vices Europeans feared in themselves: wildness, brutishness, cruelty, laziness, and heathenism. "Far from English civilization, [the Europeans] had to remind themselves constantly what it meant to be civilized—Christian, rational, sexually controlled, and white. And they tried to impute to peoples they called 'savages' the instinctual forces they had within themselves."⁶ By the 1700s and 1800s well-developed theories of the cultural and racial inferiority of the "uncivilized savages" were common in both England and the new United States.

IMMIGRANTS AS SAVAGES: NATIVISM IN THE 1800S

From the 1700s onward Euro-American views of savage outsiders were directed not only at Americans of color but also at certain new immigrants of European origin. By the 1830s and 1840s, negative ethnocentrism took on a distinctive American form that was given the name *nativism*. Many English American leaders, as well as many in the English American public, had negative or mixed feelings about new European immigrants who were not Protestants. Then, as now, we glimpse the schizophrenia in regard to immigrants. The new immigrants were often needed to meet the labor needs of U.S. employers, and many native-born Americans profited from the economic impact of immigration. At the same time, many Americans viewed the new immigrants as a major threat to the nation's Anglo culture and institutions.

By the late eighteenth century, well-established English Americans often viewed themselves as liberty-loving "republicans" who were concerned with protecting the new nation, as some said, for the "worthy part of mankind."⁷ Before the revolution, nativistic concern about new immigrants was centered in the latter's religious and moral traits. Certain religious groups (particularly Catholics), the very poor, and convicts were discouraged from entering the colonies. Anti-foreign sentiment was directed primarily at non-English immigrant groups. English American colonists and their descendants increasingly resented the intrusion of new peoples onto what was seen as English soil. This anti-immigrant sentiment took the form of law by the late 1700s. The dominant Federalist party was concerned about the support of non-British immigrants for Jeffersonianism. Thus, a 1798 Alien Act empowered the English American president to deport immigrants considered a threat, and the period of residence for citizenship was raised significantly in 1798.

If immigrants could not be excluded, restricted, or discouraged, the next best thing was to assimilate them, in a one-way adaptation pattern, to the dominant Anglo-Protestant culture. From the 1700s to the present, the assimilation of immigrants to the dominant Anglo culture has been a central feature of much nativist thought. Immigrant assimilation has been seen as one-way, as conformity to the Anglo-Protestant culture: "If there is anything in American life which can be described as an overall American culture which serves as a reference point for immigrants and their children, it can best be described, it seems to us, as the middle-class cultural patterns of, largely, white Protestant, Anglo-Saxon origins."⁸

Nativists have long used forced or pressured assimilation as an essential weapon in insuring the hegemony of whiteness and the Anglo culture over the immigrants who reside in the United States. From the dominant perspective, the impact of new immigrants is reduced if they assimilate culturally to Anglo ways and institutions. For example, when Benjamin Franklin set up a Pennsylvania school in the 1740s, he was greatly concerned that many non-English immigrants did not know the English language or customs.⁹ Like many of his fellow English Americans, Franklin had strong prejudices about the new German immigrants to the colonies and feared these uncivilized immigrants would "shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of us Anglifying them."¹⁰ Ethnic homogeneity was a proclaimed goal of prominent English American leaders. Indeed, George Washington believed in a homogeneous citizenry, and both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Rush wished immigrants to be Anglo-assimilated.¹¹

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, nativists honed their anti-foreign perspective further, with increasing emphasis on anti-Catholicism and white supremacy. Many nativists targeted Irish Catholic immigrants and their children. In the early nineteenth century, industrial capitalists faced a shortage of labor. Native-born workers resisted the oppressive conditions of the new industrial enterprises, and capitalists increasingly recruited workers for building transportation projects and manufacturing mills from overseas. By the mid-nineteenth century, Irish and German immigrants were critical to many new industrial enterprises, including textile mills, railroad lines and shops, and foundries. The ability of a capitalist system to "expand successfully is a function both of the ability to maintain relative social solidarity at home and the arrangements that can be made to use cheap labor far away."¹² In this case, major capitalists aggressively sought the new immigrant workers, while other Americans wished to see this immigration reduced if not curtailed. Over the course of U.S. history, capitalists and exclusionary nativists have periodically found themselves at odds on the matter of immigration. Indeed, every time that nativists have succeeded in getting restrictive legislation, business interests needing cheap labor have found ways around the

laws. Laws have never stopped immigration because powerful interests desire it, at least in times of labor shortage.¹³

English American resistance to Irish immigrants dates from the seventeenth century, but it was the nineteenth-century Catholic immigrants from famine-ridden Ireland who were attacked viciously under the new banners of nativism. Anglo-Protestant nativist organizations played a major role in verbal and physical attacks on the Irish Americans. Catholics were hated not only because they were "foreign" immigrants but because of Protestant stereotypes of Catholic "popery." The large number of Catholic immigrants from Ireland (and to a lesser extent Germany) in the mid-nineteenth century brought new targets for the anti-immigrant nativists among Anglo-Protestant Americans.

THE RISE OF RACIST NATIVISM

By the mid-nineteenth century a racist perspective joined anti-Catholicism at the heart of much Anglo-American thought and action in regard to immigrants. Initially, the racial supremacy perspective took the form of accenting the superiority of those Americans whose ancestors came from the dominant "race" of northern Europe. This perspective defined the dominant core of the U.S. population in positive terms, by accenting the achievements and culture of the so-called Anglo-Saxon race. It was common in England and the United States in the early nineteenth century. Other north European Protestants often joined together with British Americans to celebrate a "superior Anglo-Saxon race." By the 1840s and 1850s, Anglo-Saxonism could be found in many nooks and crannies of the new nation. Sometimes it targeted white immigrants; in other cases, it targeted people of color, whose lands were still coveted by white colonizers. It was adopted by Euro-American expansionists who lusted after Mexican land in California and Texas. The vigorous thrust into those areas was seen as legitimated by a racial mandate to colonize, as one expansionist proclaimed: "The Mexican race now see in the fate of the aborigines of the north, their own inevitable destiny. They must amalgamate or be lost in the superior vigor of the Anglo-Saxon race, or they must utterly perish."¹⁴

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the "white race" emerged as a constructed social group for the first time in history. As we noted above, the early English invaders and their descendants saw themselves as culturally and physically different from Native and African Americans, the stereotyped "uncivilized savages." Moreover, by the early 1800s the importance of Southern cotton plantations for the U.S. economy had brought a growing demand for Native American land and for African and African American slaves. Slavery was being abolished in the North, and the number of free black men

and women was growing. In this period, the Anglo-Protestant ruling elite developed the ideology of a superior "white race" as one way of providing racial privileges for poorer European Americans and keeping the latter from joining with black Americans in worker organizations. White nationalism grew dramatically. By the mid-nineteenth century, not only later English immigrants but also immigrants from Scotland and Scandinavia, Ireland, and Germany had come to accept a place in this socially constructed "white race," whose special racial privileges included the rights of personal liberty, travel, and voting.¹⁵

The dominant economic and political elites, still entirely north European in ancestry, became bastions of a racialized nativism after the Civil War. They were influenced by English and U.S. historians who argued for the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon background and its role in English and U.S. greatness. Convinced that "Anglo-Saxon institutions" were the most civilized, many English and U.S. intellectuals adopted a social Darwinist viewpoint with racist notions accenting the "survival of the fittest" nations on the world scene. Popular U.S. writers like Josiah Strong, whose book *Our Country* sold thousands of copies in the last years of the nineteenth century, parroted racial myths of Anglo-Saxon superiority in attacks on non-British immigrants. The English peoples were rapidly multiplying and the United States was destined to be the seat of an "Anglo-Saxon race" whose numbers, Strong asserted, would reach a billion by the 1980s. This survival of the racially fittest dictated the ultimate superiority of the "Anglo-Saxon race" throughout the world.¹⁶ Vigorous Anglo-Saxonism was initially developed in patrician circles and was centered on the superiority of English traditions and culture. Gradually, however, it came to target in a negative way the new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. Racist thinkers like Strong saw these immigrants not only as culturally deviant but also as racially inferior.

Still, racialized immigrant-bashing was countered in part by the needs of the ever expanding U.S. economy. Over the course of U.S. history, immigration flows have usually reflected the labor needs of U.S. capitalists—an important aspect of immigration often ignored by U.S. nativists. "In times of great labor shortage the state imposes few obstacles on immigration."¹⁷ In addition, native-born workers worry less about labor competition from immigrants in such periods. This was the case during most of the nineteenth century; after the U.S. Civil War, the federal government generally encouraged immigration, particularly from Europe. There were overseas recruitment campaigns; periodically, industrial employers and land companies sent agents to Europe and Asia to recruit labor. As of 1900, the major source of new labor for expanding industries was southern and eastern European immigrants. Indeed, between 1881 and 1920 the majority of the twenty-one million immigrants emigrated from southern and eastern Europe.¹⁸

In spite of the fact that U.S. business interests had played a crucial role in generating much of this migration, many Americans at all class levels were becoming opposed to these new immigrants, an opposition that intensified during and after World War I. The renewed nativism of the late 1910s and 1920s made use of the sciences of biology, anthropology, and psychology. Racial eugenics thinking spread from European intellectuals to U.S. leaders. Promulgated in many articles in the media, this eugenics perspective accentuated the importance of breeding the right racial groups. For most U.S. nativists, immigrants from southern and eastern Europe did not represent the "superior races." Madison Grant, an influential ideologue of racism, argued that the "Nordic race" (for him the "white man par excellence") was being destroyed by the millions of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, the "inferior races."¹⁹ In Grant's view, the Nordic race, seen as the original white race in North America, was intellectually, culturally, and politically superior to all others. In the early 1900s, many Americans of northern European descent described themselves as "white men," taking this substantially to mean that they were completely different in racial terms from the southern and eastern Europeans. Others, however, saw the southern and eastern Europeans as "inferior" races within the white race. A great fear among native-born Euro-Americans was that the mixing of the Nordic race with the inferior white races would "mongrelize" and destroy the true white race.

Popular writers, scholars, and members of Congress spread the alarm. They warned of the disaster that would come from allowing inferior racial stocks from Europe into the United States. Prominent journalist Kenneth L. Roberts wrote of the dangers of the immigrants: "Races can not be cross-bred without mongrelization, any more than breeds of dogs can be cross-bred without mongrelization. The American nation was founded and developed by the Nordic race, but if a few more million members of the Alpine, Mediterranean, and Semitic races are poured among us, the result must inevitably be a hybrid race of people as worthless and futile as the good-for-nothing mongrels of Central America and southeastern Europe."²⁰ The "Alpine, Mediterranean, and Semitic races" generally covered countries of heavy emigration other than those of northern Europe; Italians and European Jews were seen as examples. At the heart of this racist attack was a great fear that the immigrants would damage the U.S. economic and political systems. One writer warned in a 1913 magazine article that "unless Americans are careful, they will take over."²¹

Among the favorite targets of these nativists were Italian Catholic immigrants. Nativists saw the "Italian race stock" as "inferior and degraded." They also accentuated an old nativist theme, that the new "racial stock" will "not assimilate naturally or readily with the prevailing 'Anglo-Saxon' race

stock of this country; that intermixture, if practicable, will be detrimental; that servility, filthy habits of life, and a hopelessly degraded standard of needs and ambitions have been ingrained in Italians by centuries of oppression and abject poverty."²² Racial indictments of Italian Americans appeared in national magazines. In the 1888 *North American Review*, labor activist T. V. Powderly alleged that southern Europeans were an inferior stock that lived immoral lives centered in liquor.²³ Like poor immigrants before and after them, the Italians were blamed for destroying the moral fabric of the nation and for accelerating the costs of government, particularly in relation to crime and poverty.

For many of the same reasons, Jewish immigrants from eastern Europe were also major targets by the early 1900s. Widely accepted racial stereotypes caricatured Jewish immigrants in the national and local media. Jews were seen as immoral and as unscrupulous business competitors. They were accused of taking the jobs of "Americans." By the early 1900s, riots erupted among Gentile workers against Jewish American workers brought into factories. In Georgia, the Jewish part-owner of a pencil factory was convicted of killing a girl employee, though evidence pointed elsewhere. After being beaten up in prison, he was lynched by a white Gentile mob. Moreover, by the 1920s a revived Ku Klux Klan waged violence against both Jewish and Catholic immigrants and their children. Crosses were burned on Jewish property, and synagogues were desecrated and vandalized.²⁴

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Anglo-Protestant stereotypes of the immigrants' intellectual inferiority were based in part on misreadings of the results of new psychological tests inaccurately labeled intelligence tests. (The new tests actually measured only a limited range of learned skills not a global intelligence called IQ.) With the coming of World War I, psychologists developed verbal and performance tests for large-scale testing of draftees. In the early 1900s, prominent psychologists and other professionals, as well as north European political leaders, used the new test results to defend racist views of southern and eastern European immigrants. Detailed statistical analyses gained public and congressional attention because of the racial inferiority interpretation placed on the test results of southern and eastern European draftees. Indeed, in the early 1920s, Carl Brigham, a Princeton psychologist, published a detailed analysis of the alleged intellectual inferiority of white immigrant groups, drawing on data from army tests. The average scores for foreign-born draftees ranged from a high of 14.87 for English draftees to lows of 10.74 for Polish American draftees and 11.01 for Italian American draftees. The lower test scores of these white groups "proved" they were "inferior" racial stocks.²⁵ Major psychologists, such as Brigham and Robert M. Yerkes, the army's chief psychologist and one of the nation's prominent scientists, interpreted these "scientific" results to support the ideology of

Nordic racial superiority. The arguments of scientific racism permeated the debates leading to the anti-immigrant legislation discussed in the next section. Interestingly, these debates over the IQ inferiority of "racial" groups among white Americans now seem an absurd historical curiosity, but this is not the case for similar debates over the intelligence levels of African Americans and recent Latino and Asian immigrants.

In the nativistic attacks on the southern and eastern European immigrants, we see all four aspects of nativism suggested earlier. Not only are these immigrants viewed as racially and intellectually inferior but they are also accused of being incapable of assimilation to the Anglo culture. Periodically, they are also blamed for problems of unemployment and for increasing societal crises, such as poverty, disease, and crime, that must be dealt with by burgeoning governments at the federal, state, and local levels.

NATIVISTIC ACTION AGAINST IMMIGRANTS: THE 1920S

Nativistic Organization and Anti-Immigrant Laws

At the turn of the twentieth century, large-scale immigration from southern and eastern Europe and the modest immigration from Asia became the target of much anti-immigration action. Many in the political elites were vigorously questioning the new immigrants and immigration regulation. Henry Cabot Lodge, an English American aristocrat from New England and a powerful political figure, was determined to use politics and the law to defend the nation against what he saw as immigrant threats. Some British Americans in Boston formed the Immigration Restriction League to try to curtail immigration. Working in several different arenas, the League pressed the U.S. Congress to pass literacy restrictions on immigrants. Some of the League's members were enamored of the eugenics philosophy spreading from England to the United States. American eugenicists were obsessed with racial miscegenation and feared that allowing racially inferior southern and eastern Europeans into the country would destroy the "superior Nordic race."²⁶

Southern and eastern Europeans faced other anti-immigrant organizations as well. Oddly enough, these organizations were made up of the descendants of earlier immigrants. In the late nineteenth century, the American Protective Association (APA) and a revived Ku Klux Klan were working aggressively against immigration of the southern and eastern European and Asian workers. The membership of these groups included many business people, white-collar workers, and fundamentalist Protestants. The often racist anti-immigrant agitation led to restrictive laws; between 1875 and 1917, the U.S. Congress passed laws excluding "immoral" aliens, those with diseases, political radicals, and the illiterate. Congress overrode a presidential veto to enact

a law excluding persons of "psychopathic inferiority," vagrants, and illiterate adults. In addition, one 1917 Act created an Asiatic barred zone, from which no immigrants could enter. Such laws reflected the northern European prejudices against immigrants from Asia and southern and eastern Europe.²⁷

By the 1920s, the anti-immigrant hysteria had taken on major proportions, and in many areas aliens were prohibited from practicing certain jobs or professions, including medicine, engineering, and law. In the heat of postwar fears of "foreigners" taking jobs from demobilized soldiers, and of the United States being inundated by inferior races, the first major law restricting immigration across the board was passed. While temporary, it was the first to impose numerical limits on immigrants by means of a nationality quota system. It limited European immigrants to about 3 percent of the number of foreign-born from each country present in the United States in 1910. The total limit was about 350,000, with most slots reserved for northern Europeans. This law was in effect until the more restrictive 1924 law was set into motion in the late 1920s. However, there was nativist opposition even to this act, as many northern European Americans wished to exclude all immigrants, and others wanted to restrict the number of southern and eastern Europeans even further.²⁸

The chair of the House committee dealing with immigration laws, Albert Johnson, a high school dropout who was semiliterate himself, was closely linked to the nation's racist intellectuals and anti-immigrant activists. He shared in the arguments about immigration being generated by some of nation's Ivy League scientists, like Carl Brigham, and by racist advocates of Nordic supremacy like Madison Grant and Kenneth Roberts. As a result, the 1924 Immigration Act crafted under Johnson's leadership sharply limited immigration; it specified the baseline year to be 1890, when there were few southern and eastern Europeans in the United States, and reduced the percentage allowed from 3 to 2 percent.²⁹ This overtly racist law established small discriminatory quotas for southern and eastern Europeans. For example, the annual quota for Italian immigrants was about 5,800, compared with nearly 66,000 for Great Britain and nearly 26,000 for Germany. The British, Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians got most of the total allowance. As a result of these skewed quotas, Allan Chase estimates, about six million people from southern and eastern Europe, including many who would die in Adolf Hitler's concentration camps, were excluded.³⁰ The nativists' greatest victory, a racist immigration law, would stay in effect until the mid-1960s.

These discriminatory quotas were defended as maintaining the "racial balance" that had existed in the country as of 1890, a balance that of course heavily favored those from northern Europe. The year 1910 could not be used as the baseline for quotas, the nativists argued, because it would favor southern and eastern Europeans by making them more important than they

had been "historically" in forming the United States. The new law explicitly relied on the views of contemporary pundits and experts who spoke of the necessity of maintaining the "racial preponderance" of the "basic strain of our population."³¹ Clearly, racist nativism had reached its peak of power and influence in the United States. The 1924 Immigration Act was widely seen as a victory for the Nordic race, as in this April 13, 1924 headline of the *Los Angeles Times*: "Nordic victory is seen in Drastic Restrictions."³² Nativists were overjoyed that immigrants at Ellis Island now looked like real "Americans." The discriminatory law even got support at the highest political levels. It was approved of by the new president, Calvin Coolidge, who had earlier written in a 1921 *Good Housekeeping Magazine* article that the Nordic population propagates itself successfully but will deteriorate if it is mixed with other racial groups. Coolidge even argued that this was a basic "ethnic law."³³ The history of early nativism makes it clear that it was not the invention of poor or working-class white Americans, as it has often been portrayed.

Forcing One-Way Assimilation

Nativist pressures do not stop at excluding immigrants. There was growing concern about those immigrants who were already here, as well as immigrants' children. As we noted above, non-British immigrants have long faced great pressure to assimilate rapidly to the dominant Anglo-Protestant culture. One of the first great conflicts took place when Anglo nativists became obsessively concerned with the Irish immigrants of the 1830s and 1840s and with their Catholicism. Maintaining a significant Irish ethnicity was important for these new immigrants, a way of asserting their own identity against Anglo-Protestant assimilation pressures.³⁴ The Irish, however, did share certain cultural mores with the English and most did assimilate relatively easily to many aspects of the dominant culture.

This was not the case for immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century. They usually came from cultures quite different from that of the English Americans. As a result, the assimilation pressures were heated up to blast-furnace levels. In this regard, it should be noted that not all U.S. nativists are alike. While some nativists wished to exclude all or most immigrants who were not English, other influential Americans wanted the immigrants to be allowed in, but only on anglocentric terms. Indeed, the view that immigrants must quickly "Americanize" was widely shared by powerful U.S. capitalists. The nation's most famous capitalist, Henry Ford, pressed strongly for immigrant Americanization. Working with his firm's executives, Henry Ford recruited southern and eastern European immigrants for his auto plants. The company set up a "Sociological Department" with investigators who visited workers' homes, providing strong advice on family matters and personal

morality. In addition, the immigrant workers had to attend a "melting pot school," where they learned English and certain Anglo-Protestant values of great concern to men like Ford. Remarkably, during graduation ceremonies Ford's employees, at first dressed as in their home countries, walked through a big pot labeled "melting pot" and emerged in business suits holding American flags.³⁵ Although this process was labeled "melting pot" assimilation, the actual model is one-way assimilation to the dominant culture.

From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, new public school systems grew hand in hand with the expansion of industrial capitalism. Homer Bartlett, a representative of the Massachusetts Cotton Mills, argued that the "owners of manufacturing property have a deep pecuniary interest in the education and morals of their help." For these industrialists one of education's major goals was assimilating immigrants by teaching them the Anglo culture's values of discipline, obedience, and respect for economic and political authorities. In the mid-nineteenth century one urban school board complained that many youngsters "have to receive their first lessons of subordination and obedience in the school room."³⁶ From the capitalists' point of view, properly trained and educated immigrant workers would abide by the Protestant work ethic and would be less likely to join unions or to protest substandard working conditions. Typically, the nativism of corporate capitalists accented one-way assimilation rather than exclusion of immigrants.

NATIVISM: FROM THE 1930S TO THE 1960S

Changes in economic conditions in the United States have often affected the surges of anti-immigrant thought and movements. Nativism took a particularly ugly form in the economically troubled years between the late 1920s and the mid-1940s. The racist 1924 immigration law significantly reduced the numbers of immigrants, including Jewish immigrants in countries where genocide against the Jews was becoming public policy. Franklin Roosevelt's administration, particularly his State Department, did much less than it could have to allow Jews to flee the Nazi Holocaust. At first, the State Department adopted callous immigration restrictions to reduce the flow of refugees fleeing Hitler's reign of terror, then in mid-1940 it put an end to most immigration from central Europe. More than 400,000 slots within U.S. immigration quotas for refugees from countries under Nazi control were left unused.³⁷

Moreover, with immigration limited by these special restrictions and the older nativistic immigration laws (as well as the Great Depression and World War II) the primary targets of nativist groups were now the immigrants already in the United States, together with their children. The number of openly anti-Semitic organizations was increasing dramatically, from only one

in the early 1930s to well over a hundred just a few years later. Many of these were large-scale enterprises that sponsored large anti-Jewish rallies and distributed millions of anti-Jewish pamphlets and newspapers. Prominent groups included the German-American Bund, the Silver Shirts, and the Christian Front. By 1941, hatred of Jewish immigrants and their children was growing in the United States, even as the nation went to war against Nazi Germany. Radical organizations like the Ku Klux Klan created new outlets for white Americans desiring to attack Catholic and Jewish Americans, who were often immigrants or their children, and thereby preserve, as they said, the "Anglo-Saxon race."³⁸

The end of World War II did not curtail this outburst of nativism. Opposition to immigration continued after World War II, when various members of Congress and various northern European organizations even opposed legislation permitting displaced persons, such as European Jews and Catholics, to migrate in significant numbers to the United States. In addition, anti-Semitism continued. Attacks on Jewish Americans, their property, and their synagogues have been common since 1945.³⁹

As we will see in later sections, most contemporary nativism targets immigrants of color. This and much media discussion of current racial troubles may give the false impression that the old antagonisms directed at southern and eastern European Americans is dead. This is not the case. Once developed, the harsh stereotypes and prejudices central to nativistic thought have a certain inertia. Today there are lingering traces of the earlier prejudices and practices. Sometimes this nativism takes the form of stereotyping and harassing those not of north European ancestry. In recent presidential campaigns, for example, Democratic party candidates have been targeted because of their ancestry. In the 1984 election, the Italian ancestry of vice-presidential candidate, Geraldine Ferraro, was attacked. Republicans (many of north European ancestry) alleged that she and her Italian American husband had major connections to organized crime (the "Mafia"). Moreover, in the 1990s a number of Italian Americans, such as Governor Mario Cuomo of New York, have been forced to change their political plans because of "Mafia" stereotyping directed at them or their families. In the 1988 election, supporters of Republican candidate George Bush, an English American, poked fun at the Greek ancestry and name of Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis.⁴⁰

Americans of south European ancestry are still not viewed by many northern Europeans as fully "American." In the United States there is still much anti-Semitic vandalism and violence directed at Jewish Americans. For example, in the half decade between 1979 and 1984 nearly 3,700 anti-Jewish incidents were reported, including arson and the painting of swastikas on tombstones or synagogues. These numbers had increased by 1991, when a record number of 1,897 incidents were recorded.⁴¹ Among the most serious

contemporary manifestations of the old nativism are these attacks on the property and persons of Jewish immigrants and their descendants.

MODERN NATIVISM: THE 1980S AND 1990S

By the late 1950s, discontent over nativism, racism, and other oppressive social conditions was growing, and large numbers of protest organizations were springing up in the communities of color across the nation—from Atlanta and Birmingham to New York to Los Angeles. In particular, African Americans and Latinos organized many protest organizations and rallies, as well as civil disobedience. In addition, by the late 1950s the earlier immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and their adult children, now central to the Democratic party, had increased their political clout and pressed for changes in the racist quota system.⁴² Finally, the new liberal Democratic politics of the 1960s brought an end to the racist immigration law that had dominated the United States since the 1920s. A pathbreaking 1965 Immigration Act eliminated the racist immigration quotas and opened up immigration to Asians and other formerly excluded or restricted immigrants, including southern and eastern Europeans.

Shifting Patterns of Immigration

Not surprisingly, immigrants of color took advantage of the end of racist quotas. Between 1970 and 1990, the U.S. population grew by a fifth, while the Asian American and Latino populations grew at 385 percent and 141 percent respectively. In this period about nine million new Americans were added from countries in Asia and Latin America. Asian Americans and Latinos now make 3 percent and 9 percent of the total population, with much of the growth coming from immigration.⁴³

These Asian and Latino immigrants are viewed as a "problem" by many native-born Americans, some of whom have joined new nativist organizations. Interestingly, these nativists seem to view the immigrants as dropping like unwanted sky hooks into the body politic, with no connection to the past history of the United States. Yet recent immigrants have mostly come from countries that have been substantially influenced by imperialistic efforts by U.S. corporations and by the U.S. government around the globe. As we saw earlier, human migration across national boundaries is more than a matter of individuals seeking opportunities, for international migration is greatly shaped by broader social conditions. Beginning in the 1940s, the U.S. government, its military forces, and multinational corporations came to dominate not only the U.S. economy and politics but increasingly the world economy and politics overseas. Large corporations have moved capital investments from the central cities to the suburbs and from U.S. cities to cities

and rural areas in many countries around the globe. This capital "flight" has resulted in fewer well-paying jobs in central cities of large U.S. metropolitan areas. As a result, many ordinary Americans have lost their jobs, and, not surprisingly, view immigrants as a job threat. Yet few commentators in the mainstream media, and no one in the U.S. Congress, help native-born U.S. workers understand the linkage between corporate investments overseas and the loss of well-paying jobs in the United States. Instead, they often encourage immigrant-bashing.

In addition, U.S. corporations and the U.S. government are directly implicated in generating much out-migration from key sending countries, a point also missed by most commentators on immigration. For example, large numbers of Latino immigrant workers have come to U.S. cities and rural areas from Mexico, Central America, and South America. Some have migrated for economic "pull" reasons, and they have often been recruited by U.S. employers, particularly those in the agribusiness and garment manufacturing sectors. In addition, U.S. corporations have played a major role in pushing poor Mexican and Central American workers out of their countries. For several decades, U.S. agribusinesses operating in Mexico have stimulated the development of export-oriented agriculture there, thereby driving many peasant farmers and their families off their land and reducing the crops grown for local consumption. Many agricultural workers and small farmers have left rural areas and gone to Mexican cities, enlarging the number of unemployed workers, many of whom have come to the United States to earn money to support families. They mostly take low-wage jobs in textile, construction, agriculture, and service firms, and, as happened in earlier decades, the competitive job situation causes resentment from native-born workers. This is the case even though most immigrants have little effect on the employment situation of native-born workers, because they mostly fill low-wage jobs that would not otherwise have been created or filled by employers seeking to pay very low wages.⁴⁴

In addition, many Latino immigrants have come to the United States to flee political oppression. Large U.S. corporations have played a dominant role in the economies and politics of numerous Central American countries since 1900. For instance, the United Fruit Company became so strong in Guatemala that the threat, by a democratically elected government, to nationalize the company's lands led to intervention by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, and many Guatemalans were forced to flee the brutal U.S.-backed dictatorship that was established. U.S. corporations and the U.S. government have played a major role in generating emigration from Nicaragua and El Salvador. Similarly, since the 1970s there has been a great increase in the Taiwanese (Chinese), Koreans, and Vietnamese coming to the United States. These migrations were triggered for the most part by U.S. involvement

in supporting Taiwan against mainland China, in the Korean War of the 1950s, and in the Vietnam War. U.S. participation in these struggles has created a significant group of Asians politically oriented to, or economically dependent on, the United States. In addition, the U.S. government long supported the corrupt Fulgencio Batista dictatorship in Cuba, whose oppressiveness generated the guerrilla movement led by Fidel Castro. When Castro took power, many Cubans who had prospered under the dictatorship fled to the United States.

Here we do not have the space to probe further the implications of the widespread and aggressive U.S. involvement overseas for recent patterns of immigration to the United States, but it is clear from this brief review that this immigration is not something that "just happens" without any input from or generation by U.S. corporate or governmental actions abroad. Neither U.S. schools and colleges nor the mass media recount these intimate economic and political connections between U.S. intervention in other countries and the streams of migration to the United States, historical connections that began in the nineteenth century and persist today. If critics of immigration really want to reduce immigration, it would seem, they might well turn their attention to eradicating U.S. imperialism, both economic and military imperialism, overseas.

Nativist Reactions to Recent Immigrants

The four historic themes of nativism can all be seen in recent opposition to immigration from native-born Americans and others, including some long-term resident immigrants who have picked up the nativist cause. For example, the theme of immigrants taking good "American" jobs is obvious in much recent debate over immigration. Recent opposition to immigrants by many native-born workers is linked not only to the selling of anti-immigrant messages to these workers by the media and politicians seeking votes, but also to the increasingly troubled character of the U.S. economy. Significantly, the problems of the U.S. economy are substantially due to the failure of top corporate executives to invest adequately in creating decent-paying jobs in the United States. Worker opposition to immigration would doubtless decrease if this major corporate disinvestment were to be reversed.

Polls show mixed public reactions to immigrants. A 1993 national opinion poll found that two-thirds of Americans believed immigrants today are hard-working and productive. In addition, the majority felt immigrants "take jobs away from Americans."⁴⁵ This public opinion is greatly shaped by anti-immigrant advocates in the mass media and in politics, as well as by the ever-present intellectuals and pundits who, like Madison Grant and Kenneth Roberts in the early twentieth century, try to sell a new version of nativism to U.S. workers and their families. For example, Dan Stein, who heads the

Federation for American Immigration Reform, has argued that new immigrants are "driving Americans" out of certain places like southern California and New York and are "eroding jobs for native Americans, especially the unskilled."⁴⁶ Similarly, *Forbes* editor Peter Brimelow, a member of the Anglo-American elite, has articulated a strong anti-immigrant perspective. In a recent book, *Alien Nation*, Brimelow worries that immigrants are, or soon will be, taking many jobs from U.S. workers, particularly from low-wage workers.⁴⁷ Interestingly, Brimelow's best-selling book echoes the title of a famous collection, *The Alien in Our Midst*, that was put out more than sixty-five years ago under the editorship of the arch nativist Madison Grant.⁴⁸

However, most research studies show that immigrants do not take away more jobs than they create. Drawing on several studies, a report of the Council of Economic Advisors concluded that the low-wage jobs "taken by immigrants in years past have . . . increased employment and income for the population as a whole."⁴⁹ On the whole, immigrants create jobs, as well as take them; they create new jobs by their demands for housing and other consumer goods. In addition, it is the lowest-wage native-born workers who are likely to be affected by immigrants, and yet they play little or no part in the ideological or political debates over immigration.⁵⁰

Since the truth about U.S. corporate and government interventions overseas and their link to immigration are not discussed much in the United States, alternative explanations for the troubled U.S. economy and government are developed. Much of the anti-immigrant diatribe is socially constructed by political, business, and media leaders, as well as the white-collar whites who have organized anti-immigrant groups. These elites and groups intentionally, according to immigration scholar Wayne Cornelius, "prey upon the fears and lack of knowledge of the average citizen, creating doomsday 'Third World-ization' scenarios out of a jumble of unrelated facts and unsubstantiated assertions."⁵¹ As a result of biased media coverage, many Americans do not understand the character of contemporary immigration. For instance, a 1993 survey revealed that most respondents vastly overestimated the percentage of immigrants who enter the United States illegally. Almost two-thirds believed that *most* immigrants enter illegally, although official estimates put the proportion at just under one-quarter of all immigrants. Such myths have fuelled anti-immigrant organizations and efforts.⁵² Indeed, the concern with illegal immigration is often a mask for other interests. Anti-immigrant groups like the Forum for American Immigration Reform harp on the number of illegal immigrants, some argue, as a way of getting the public to accept major cutbacks in legal immigration.⁵³

As we have seen, nativists have often questioned the racial inferiority and the character or culture of immigrants. Like their counterparts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many native-born civic and political

leaders, as well as many in the general public, today question the intelligence of the Latino and Asian immigrants who constitute the majority of recent newcomers. For example, the most prominent contemporary advocate of racial differences in intelligence, the late Richard Herrnstein, let his ideological concerns over immigrants of color affect his scholarly analyses. In his best-selling *The Bell Curve* Herrnstein, and coauthor Charles Murray, argue that white immigrants at the turn of the century, the southern and eastern Europeans, were different from today's immigrants, for they were likely to be "brave, hard-working, imaginative, self-starting—and probably smart."⁵⁴

What is remarkable here, in addition to the revisionist view of these earlier immigrants, is that the most important early study of so-called IQ differentials, the aforementioned study of Carl Brigham, has test figures relevant to this point, but Herrnstein does not cite the earlier study in his discussion of these white immigrants. Interestingly, the Brigham book is noted in the opening of *The Bell Curve*, and Brigham's test statistics are similar to those Herrnstein lauds throughout his book. Yet, the Brigham data are *not* cited on this question of how "smart" the early immigrants were. The reason doubtless lies in the fact that Brigham reports southern and eastern European immigrants to have had very low IQ scores, some 25 percent lower than those of English immigrants and well below the average for native-born whites. However, not long after commenting on how brave and smart earlier white immigrants were, Herrnstein and Murray make use of the 9 percent lower (than whites) average IQ test scores for Latinos in a negative assessment of the future of the overall intelligence of the U.S. population. The allegedly declining level of intelligence that stems from the "lesser intelligence" of immigrants of color is, in their view, very serious, and they suggest it may lead to increasing social problems like single-parent households, women on welfare, and crime.⁵⁵ It seems likely that Herrnstein does not deal with the earlier Brigham study because it would contradict his major point about recent immigrants. Of course, in both cases, the so-called IQ tests do not measure a general "intelligence" but, mostly, a limited range of verbal skills (in the English language).

The image of immigrants as a problem group with character and morality problems greater than those of the native-born population is an old nativistic canard. Today, as in the past, the reality of immigrants is different from the nativistic fictions. As a group, to quote a prominent social demographer, immigrants are still "upwardly mobile, ambitious, saving; they have traditional values, care about their children, all that sort of stuff. They've done something very dramatic to upgrade themselves."⁵⁶ There is no evidence that immigrants as a group are not as hardworking or honest as native-born Americans. Almost all are here to make a better life for their families. Today, as in the past, immigrants make mostly positive contributions. Data from the

1990 census on immigrants' financial status underscore this point. Even though the median family income of foreign-born Americans was well below that of native-born Americans, the per capita income of the foreign-born was higher than that of the native-born, reflecting in part a greater number of workers per family among the foreign-born. In addition, immigrant incomes rise dramatically with length of residence in the United States.⁵⁷

Moreover, just as in earlier decades, contemporary nativists blame certain governmental problems on the new immigrants from Asia and Latin America. This can be most clearly seen in the attacks on immigration by California politicians and citizen groups. As Wayne Cornelius has put it, "In illegal immigrants (or immigrants in general), they find convenient scapegoats for virtually every ill afflicting California today, from the crisis in public finance to rising crime rates to environmental hazards."⁵⁸ Some nativistic intellectuals, such as *Forbes* editor Brimelow, also complain that immigrants are consuming the taxes of ordinary working Americans by becoming public charges and rely much too heavily on government, an argument made by anti-immigrant advocates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries against southern and eastern Europeans.⁵⁹ However, the data suggest such perspectives are exaggerated. Jeffrey Passel, an immigration specialist, has argued on the basis of Urban Institute research that immigrants likely pay far more in government taxes than they get back, "with a \$25 billion to \$30 billion annual surplus from recent post-1970 immigrants."⁶⁰

Another nativist concern focuses on the number of immigrants coming to the United States. These numbers are heralded, often with fanfare, as unprecedented. Brimelow, for example, argues that today the United States is "engulfed by what seems likely to be the greatest wave of immigration it has ever faced."⁶¹ Like earlier nativists, modern opponents of immigration doubt the United States can absorb the "huge numbers" of new immigrants. Contrary to popular images, however, the recent immigration is not the greatest faced by this nation, nor is it fueling a huge population expansion. Indeed, the 1980s saw a population increase of only 10 percent, the second-lowest rate of increase for any decade in U.S. history. Moreover, the ratio of immigrants to the native-born population is much lower today than in earlier decades of the twentieth century. In 1910, the foreign-born constituted nearly 15 percent of the population, yet in the mid-1990s the figure was still just 8 percent. Indeed, the United States now has a smaller percentage of foreign-born citizens than many other nations, including England, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.⁶²

In recent years, popular magazines have run major stories asking "What will America be like when whites are no longer the majority?" However, one can ask what the predominance of whites has to do with the future of the nation, unless one has racist proclivities? As with earlier anti-immigrant

perspectives, the views of nativists today include a worry about immigrants' physical and cultural characteristics. Earlier in the century it was the southern and eastern European immigrants who were seen as racially and culturally inferior. Today, it is the Latino and Asian immigrants. Some anti-immigrant advocates like Brimelow have developed explicitly racial arguments directed at the character and provenance of new immigrants. As Brimelow sees it, "the American nation has always had a specific ethnic core. And that core has been white."⁶³ Later, he notes that as late as 1950 some 90 percent of Americans "looked like me. That is, they were of European stock. And in those days, they had another name for this thing dismissed so contemptuously as 'the racial hegemony of white Americans.' They called it 'America.'"⁶⁴

Representing some in the ruling elite, analysts like Brimelow take the position that public policy should insist on the speedy Americanization of all immigrants, an assimilation policy often explicitly modelled on that for turn-of-the-century immigration.⁶⁵ These analysts often insist that all money spent on cultural diversity and foreign-language retention be cut off, because these programs forestall the anglicization of immigrants. The old theme of pressured one-way assimilation is common among modern nativists, who feel that the cultures of the immigrants of color are not compatible with the dominant Anglo culture.

TAKING ACTION AGAINST IMMIGRANTS

Modern nativists, like their predecessors, are not content with developing anti-immigrant ideologies. Many are organizing and pressuring political leaders to take action to restrict or exclude immigrants. Language is now one focus of this new parochialism. About one in ten Americans, some 25 million people, live in homes where a language other than English is spoken. Many of these Americans are immigrants or their children. Recent organizing by nativists targets the language and culture of these Americans, particularly those who are Spanish speakers. For instance, an amendment to the Arizona state constitution went so far as to make English the language "of all government functions and actions," but as of this writing, the federal courts have ruled this violated the constitution.⁶⁶ The intensity of this anti-Latino sentiment can be seen in a quote from a Council on Interamerican Security paper: "Hispanics in America today represent a very dangerous and subversive force that is bent on taking over our nation's political institutions for the purposes of imposing Spanish as the official language of the U.S. and indeed of the entire Western Hemisphere. . . . If we desire to preserve our unique culture and the primacy of the English language, then we must so declare rather than sitting idly by as a de facto nation evolves."⁶⁷

On the contemporary scene, xenophobic nativists view English-Only policies as a way to promote Anglocentric values. These efforts are a type of colonial "hegemony that threatens to silence the less powerful."⁶⁸ One result of lobbying by nativist organizations is the introduction of legislation to make English the official language. In 1986, California passed a ballot proposition declaring English to be the official language there, and by the mid-1990s such legislation was passed in seventeen states. In addition, from the early 1980s to the 1990s an English Language Amendment to the U.S. Constitution has regularly been introduced in the U.S. Congress. Today anti-immigrant advocates still vigorously argue for a constitutional amendment making English the official language.⁶⁹

Leaders of contemporary nativist organizations such as the California English Campaign and the national group U.S. English argue that they are not trying to discriminate against immigrants, but that they wish immigrants to quickly become part of the mainstream by adopting English and the Anglo culture. However, until the late 1980s U.S. English was linked to an organization pressing for immigration restrictions. Moreover, many pro-English advocates favor discrimination such as prohibiting Spanish as a language in government agencies and cutting off bilingual programs in schools.⁷⁰

Nativist campaigns to promote the English language underscore the uneasiness that descendants of earlier immigrants feel in the presence of languages and cultures brought by relative newcomers. As Juan F. Perea notes, their "first myth is that our national unity somehow depends solely on the English language, ergo we must protect the language through constitutional amendment or legislation. A corollary is that the only language of true American identity is the English language."⁷¹

A number of citizen organizations, such as Americans for Immigration Control (AIC), are openly pressing for immigration policies favoring immigrants from Western Europe. In this manner, the anti-immigrant viewpoint is racialized. A few prominent politicians are beginning to take the same perspective. For example, the 1992 elections signaled the beginning of a major political attack on Latino and Asian immigrants. In 1992, both Patrick Buchanan and David Duke used hoary nativistic appeals as part of their campaigns. A former leader of the Ku Klux Klan, David Duke put his hat in the ring for the 1992 Republican presidential nomination. Duke echoed Madison Grant and other early-twentieth-century nativists in his assertion that immigrants are destroying the dominant Anglo culture and its values: "We've got to begin to protect our values. We've got to begin to realize that we're a Christian society. We're part of Western Christian civilization."⁷²

Moreover, in 1992 Pat Buchanan challenged President George Bush for the Republican nomination, and in 1996 he made another run for the presi-

dency. In his comments, articles, and interviews since the early 1990s, Buchanan has strongly articulated the classic nativists' concern with unassimilable immigrants of color. In his announcement for the 1992 presidential race, Buchanan signaled he was worried about the racial mix of the U.S. population: "Our Judeo-Christian values are going to be preserved and our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations and not dumped on some landfill called multiculturalism."⁷³ The caustic landfill comment targeted immigrants of color. Commenting in a similar vein, Buchanan told an ABC interviewer that "if we had to take a million immigrants in, say, Zulus next year or Englishmen, and put them in Virginia, what group would be easier to assimilate and would cause less problems for the people of Virginia? There is nothing wrong with us sitting down and arguing that issue that we are a European country, English-speaking country."⁷⁴ In Buchanan's view, the new immigrants of color cannot be easily assimilated and the dominant European American culture is being watered down seriously by immigration.⁷⁵ Buchanan represents the nativist position that there is one "true" culture, that of European Americans, and those who are not European are not really "American." Commenting on why Americans are more shocked at massacres in the former Yugoslavia than in Africa, Buchanan says it is because the former "are white people. That's who we are. That's where America comes from."⁷⁶ This paeon to whiteness may not be surprising in light of his previous opinion about white fascist leaders, as in his famous comment some years back that, while Adolf Hitler was a villain, he was "an individual of great courage" who had "extraordinary gifts."⁷⁷ Modern nativism can be as autocratic and racial as the old nativism of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

In the mid-1990s, not only Duke and Buchanan but a number of formerly moderate politicians took up the nativist rant. These included California Governor Pete Wilson, a candidate for the 1996 Republican party presidential nomination, who moved away from a pro-immigration stance to a more nativist approach. He emphasized the large number of illegal immigrants in California as a major source of the state's fiscal problems.⁷⁸

Nativists have scored important legislative victories. Nativist concern over the presence of undocumented immigrants was one source of support for the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The congressional and public debate over this 1986 legislation conjured up anti-immigrant arguments of the early twentieth century, including concerns that the new immigrants were taking jobs from "Americans" and that many Latinos and Asians were not really interested in assimilating to the dominant culture. We should note that this argument was, and is, nativistic and inaccurate, for many Latino immigrants come to the United States partially assimilated because of the dominance of U.S. culture and corporations in their countries.⁷⁹ In addi-

tion, the majority assimilate relatively rapidly to the English language and other aspects of Euro-American culture. Surveys have found that most Mexican Americans are bilingual and that almost all Latino adults feel it is very important for their children to be fluent in English. They do not need nativists to tell them that they and their children will do better socially and economically if they learn English.⁸⁰

Many Latino Americans are troubled by provisions of the IRCA law, including intrusive government documentation of legal work status, sanctions for businesses that employ undocumented aliens, and a program screening welfare applicants for migration status. In 1990, nativists were again successful in reducing the number of immigrants. This new limit most affects immigrants from those countries in Asia and Latin America from which many people wish to enter the United States. This contrasts with the generally unlimited immigration allowed before the 1910s, when most potential immigrants were European.⁸¹

In 1994, anti-immigrant groups scored an important political success in California. Citizen groups forced Proposition 187 onto the California ballot, which passed with a substantial majority in the fall of 1994. Proposition 187 severely restricts access of undocumented immigrants to public services, including schools and hospitals, and requires public employees to report undocumented immigrants. Immigrant-bashing was common among white political candidates during the 1994 election campaign in California, and a number of anti-immigrant groups aggressively supported the proposition. These political victories are the modern parallels to the 1924 Immigration Act and may signal the beginning of a string of anti-immigrant actions by citizens' groups and state and federal legislatures.

Nativism has waxed and waned over the course of U.S. history, but it remains an important perspective that many native-born Americans use to construct and interpret hard economic times. Certain essential components of nativism remain more or less constant: the accent on the racial or cultural inferiority of immigrants, the problematizing of assimilation of immigrants, the idea that immigrants are a serious threat to the U.S. economy, and the notion that immigrants are responsible for government crises. These images of immigrants remain a critical part of the "cultural shelves" in the minds of a majority of native-born (and even many long-term resident) Americans. The development of U.S. society has been such that few alternative explanations have ever been allowed on those cultural shelves, so immigrants, together with Jewish Americans and black Americans, are often the scapegoats for the political-economic difficulties that this capitalist society routinely faces. These naive, stereotyped, often racist explanations help many Americans explain what seems to them inexplicable, and in the process leave many other

Americans, especially the newcomers who face many adjustment problems anyway, hurting from the nativistic attacks.

The cultural explanations have a folk component and are to some degree rooted in the ancient folkways of the dominant racial-ethnic groups in this society. However, today as in the past, crises over immigration are often *manufactured* by the nation's ruling elite, both through capitalists' investment decisions that reduce job opportunities and through the creation of immigrant bogeymen that native-born citizens can use as scapegoats. Immigrant myths and fictions are frequently created in the speeches of prominent politicians, the writings of establishment pundits, and the journalistic commentaries in the mass media. In particular, anti-immigrant advocates and nativist leaders often suggest that native-born Americans are strongly opposed to immigration and want it to be curtailed sharply or ended.

However, in spite of certain folk interpretations of immigration and the elite efforts to create myths about immigrants, even today a majority of Americans are not as anti-immigrant and exclusionist as many national leaders, and especially leaders of nativist organizations, often suggest. Indeed, how strongly Americans feel about limiting immigration depends on how it is presented to them. In some national surveys three-quarters of those polled favor limiting immigration. However, this does not mean all favor major cutbacks in the number of immigrants. Indeed, in a 1994 National Opinion Research Center poll considerably less than half (34 percent) the respondents thought immigration should be decreased a lot. Another 28 percent felt it should be decreased only a little, while one third felt immigration should actually be increased or stay about the same. A clear *majority* of those Americans polled did not wish to see major changes in immigration flows.⁸² In addition, there were no large variations in opinions about immigration by region or income group, although the most affluent respondents were a little less inclined to support major cuts in immigration than others. Black and white Americans had similar levels of concern about immigration.⁸³ There is no evidence that the majority of Americans favor significant cutbacks in immigration or that those native-born Americans who see the most new immigrants, those on the West Coast or in New York, are the most opposed to continuing immigration.

Today nativists face a major demographic problem. The dominance of people of color is coming to the United States whether white and other nativistic Americans like it or not. Even if some immigration restrictions are imposed, current demographic trends are likely to persist, and the United States will have a population where the majority is composed of people of color sometime in the middle of the twenty-first century. Around 2050-60 a.d. the majority of Americans will be of African, Asian, Latin American,

Middle Eastern, or Native American ancestry. Moreover, long before that date more than half of all young Americans will be people of color, and large cities in several states will have populations that are mostly people of color.⁸⁴ By the year 2002, it is estimated, whites will be the minority in the largest state in the union, California. Latinos, Africans, Asians, and Middle Eastern Americans will be the majority there.⁸⁵ By approximately these dates European Americans will, as in the 1700s, be a minority population.

As a result, there will be major social and political changes. Over the next several decades these changes in demographic composition will force actions to be taken against the racist aspects of the nativistic ideologies. People of color will not tolerate their inferiorization in racial and cultural terms. In addition, those Americans with political and economic power, mostly white Americans today, will have to cease the now common discriminatory practices targeting people of color in most sectors of U.S. society. Over the next few decades, as they increase in political and economic power, people of color will refuse to accept inferior treatment and subordinate positions in the institutions of U.S. society.

In my judgment now is the time for European Americans, who are themselves all descendants of immigrants, to return to the inclusionist philosophy celebrated in the inscription on the Statue of Liberty. They might well remember the inscription by Jewish American poet Emma Lazarus: "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

NOTES

Portions of this article draw on and extend some arguments made in Joe R. Feagin and Clairece B. Feagin, *Racial and Ethnic Relations*, 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1995), chapters 1-3, 5-6, and 13. These materials are used by permission.

1. Deborah Sontag, "Across the U.S., Immigrants Find the Land of Resentment," *New York Times*, December 11, 1992, p. A1.

2. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 *Census of Population: Social and Economic Characteristics: United States*, CP-2-1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), p. 166.

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4. Quoted in Gerry O'Sullivan, "Mythmaking in the Promised Land; An Interview with Joel Kovel," *Humanist*, September 1994, p. 18.

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82. National Opinion Research Center, 1994 *General Social Survey*. Tabulation by author.
83. The greatest concern about reducing immigrants was expressed in the old South where there are in fact few immigrants; the least concern was expressed in the New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania area (26 percent). There was some variation by racial group and ethnicity, with Canadian Americans showing the greatest anti-immigrant views (58 percent for decreasing it a lot), and Asian Americans and Latin Americans showing the least concern, at 12 percent and 18 percent for major restrictions respectively. National Opinion Research Center, 1994 *General Social Survey*. Tabulation by author.
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