

Problems in American History

Series editor: Jack P. Greene

Each volume focuses on a central theme in American history and provides greater analytical depth and historiographic coverage than standard textbook discussions normally allow. The intent of the series is to present in highly interpretive texts the unresolved questions of American history that are central to current debates and concerns. The texts will be concise enough to be supplemented with primary readings or core textbooks and are intended to provide brief syntheses of large subjects.

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IMMIGRATION AND AMERICAN DIVERSITY

A Social and Cultural History

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Immigrants in a Nativist America, 1890–1920

In 1919 Nicola Sacco, a skilled worker in a shoe factory, lived with his wife Rosina and their school-age son Dante in Stoughton, Massachusetts. “Those day,” he would remember later, “they was a some happy day.” Sacco was well liked in the small community of workers employed at the Three-K Shoe Company. His employer, George Kelley, the son of Irish emigrants, had trained Sacco years before in another shoe factory in Milford, Massachusetts. Kelley described Sacco as a steady and dependable worker who was up early every morning to tend his vegetable garden before beginning a long day at work. There was just one small problem with Sacco – the meetings. A quiet family man and good worker, Nicola Sacco was also an anarchist.

In the years before and after 1900, Americans typically viewed the rapidly growing industrial power of the USA, along with its attractions to humble workers such as Nicola Sacco, as additional signs of American superiority. Many also saw the country’s free markets and large-scale corporate, capitalist businesses as expressions of the economic liberty that political democracy had facilitated. And they were convinced that immigrants such as Andrew Carnegie, the wealthy steel magnate, had demonstrated the benefits of American liberty for rich and poor alike by rising from rags to riches. Unlike their counterparts 50 years earlier who saw newcomers as “emigrants” fleeing restraints in the Old World, Americans who now labeled men such as Carnegie and Sacco “immigrants,” emphasized the obvious benefits of New World life.

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Nicola Sacco saw things differently. Born in 1891 into a family of peasants in Torremaggiore, near the city of Foggia, in southern Italy, he became an anarchist only after he came to the USA, during the short but sharp depression of 1907–8. As a follower of the exiled anarchist theorist Luigi Galleani, Sacco disdained union membership but nevertheless participated in a shoe workers’ strike and raised money for the striking textile workers of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in nearby Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912. Unlike most Americans, when Sacco looked at the economy of the USA, he thought mainly of people such as his friend, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, who worked at temporary, dangerous, low-wage jobs with little hope of finding material comfort or even respect in American society.

Sacco was no intellectual. To him anarchism meant simple moral truths – “capitalism is evil, government is slavery, war is crime against humanity, freedom is essential for human development,” and churches existed only to lull people into submitting to tyranny.¹ Unlike anarchists who rejected individual acts of violence, this otherwise gentle, modest man saw nothing wrong with the assassination of corrupt political leaders or the bombing of the property of governments and capitalists. As rank-and-file anarchists, Sacco and his friend Vanzetti sometimes acted on their principles. Refusing to register for the draft in 1917, Sacco left his family behind and fled to Mexico. When he was arrested in 1920, and charged with the robbery murder of a shoe company guard, he was carrying a gun. “Give up the radical stuff! Be an American!” Sacco’s employer had recommended. But to no effect. While most Americans saw class struggle as a threat to economic liberty, Sacco remained true to political beliefs that Americans devoted to liberty as they understood it refused to protect. In an increasingly nativist country, he and his friend Vanzetti would later be executed for a crime they probably did not commit.

America, Migration, and the Wider World

In many ways, Nicola Sacco's migration, work, and resistance to Americanization reflected the rapidly changing place of an industrializing USA in the wider world. If the USA in the late nineteenth century had focused on mending sectional divisions, Americans' attentions after 1890 increasing turned outward. Prosperous American businessmen heading abroad in search of markets, natural resources, and investment opportunities crossed paths with humble immigrants such as Sacco who were looking to earn wages in the country's burgeoning industries. By 1910, almost 15 percent of the American population was of foreign birth. Most of the newcomers were poor, industrial wage-earners.

Mobile businessmen and immigrants represented two faces of a new, and truly global, world economy. By 1910, corporate investors had helped Europe's expanding empires to build transportation – steam ships and railroads – and communication – telegraphs and telephones – that spanned the globe, facilitating the transfer of natural resources, manufactured products, laborers, and even anarchist ideals around the world. Americans agonized over ignoring George Washington's warnings against entangling foreign alliances but seemed firmly committed at least to the Monroe Doctrine of 1823 – that the USA should lead its hemisphere toward independence from European influence. In 1898 the USA fought against Spain and gained control over its former colonies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines. While American soldiers went to Mexico and Nicaragua to protect American investments there, and to the Philippines to suppress a nationalist revolution against American rule, they also offered protection to corporations against immigrant revolutionaries such as Sacco at home.

In the past, global migrations had flowed toward the plantations of Asia and the Americas and toward the prairie frontiers of North and South America. After 1900, industry and the commercial agriculture that fed its urban workers

motivated most new migrations. In Europe, Britain, Germany, Switzerland, and France employed large numbers of Italians and Poles; in the British Empire, Indians migrated to South Africa and Europeans and Chinese to Australia and Canada. Nicola Sacco could easily have joined other Italians working in France, Argentina, or Brazil. But like the largest number of Europe's migrants in these years, he instead chose to search for work in the USA.

There, by 1890, Social Darwinists were already commenting critically on the changing races of the newcomers without having resolved how to restrict their entry. See Table 5.1, which uses the racial categories of the era of scientific racism to show the changes that so concerned nativists of the day. Italians now outnumbered the Irish; Polish Catholics and Jews outnumbered the Germans; Japanese, Koreans, and Filipinos had replaced the excluded Chinese. First railroad building, then revolution, lured and then pushed Mexicans across the Rio Grande, and the building of the Panama Canal, along with Florida's growing cigar industrysparked migrations from Cuba and Jamaica. Few of these new immigrants were Protestants. While the numbers of immigrants entering the USA fell off slightly during the depression of the 1890s, they peaked at a million yearly in the decade after 1900. Nativists felt they had all the evidence they needed that a “new” – and less desirable migration from southern and eastern Europe, and from lands populated by peoples with dark or swarthy skin, was about to inundate Nordic America. (See student exercise at the end of the chapter.)

The economic expansion of the USA was a strong magnet to immigrants, yet many European and other immigrants – like the Chinese of the previous century – came to take jobs only to leave again. Well over half of Russians and Rumanians returned home, as did about half of the immigrants from Italy, Greece, and Hungary, about a third of those from Poland, and southeast Europe, and about a quarter from Great Britain, Mexico, Japan, and the Caribbean islands.² So many jobs in the USA were seasonal, and open only to men, that families often separated for years while male “birds of

Table 5.1 Race of immigrant aliens admitted to the USA, 1899-1924

Race	Numbers of immigrants
North and south Italian	3,820,986
Hebrew	1,837,855
Polish	1,483,374
German	1,316,614
English and Welsh	1,110,749
Scandinavian	956,308
Irish	808,762
Slovak	536,911
Greek	500,463
Magyar	492,031
Croatian and Slovenian	485,379
Mexican	447,065
Scottish	441,172
French	415,244
Ruthenian	265,478
Lithuanian	263,277
Japanese	260,492
Russian	258,985
Finnish	226,922
Dutch and Flemish	205,874
Spanish	190,521
Portuguese	186,244
Bulgarian, Serbian, and Montenegrin	165,091
Bohemian and Moravian	159,319
Rumanian	148,251
African	135,029
Syrian	97,716
Armenian	76,129
Chinese	57,058

Source: Calculated from data in Imre Ferenczi, compiler, and Walter F. Willcox, ed., *International Migrations*, vol. 1: Statistics (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1929), tables 10 and 13.

passage" – along with their cash savings – commuted back and forth across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Perhaps this explains why immigrants often referred to Ellis Island as "the isle of tears" through which they entered a country that did little to hide its nativist hostility toward them.

Italians were the largest group of immigrants at the turn of the century but they were also among the most likely to return home again. Among the women in this heavily male stream of immigrants was Rosa Casseteri. A foundling from the mountains of northern Italy, Rosa had grown up very poor, which meant that she started work as a young child, in her case producing silk thread and working as a domestic servant. Her foster mother arranged Rosa's marriage to a returned immigrant and Rosa left her baby behind when she followed him back across the Atlantic. In the USA, Rosa's husband worked as a miner while Rosa cooked and cleaned for boarders. Like many immigrants, they sent money to Italy to help support relatives.³ In much of Italy, remittances allowed struggling peasants to survive long years of severe agricultural crisis while still hoping for a future in a country where they could feel more at home than in the USA.

Rosa, too, eventually returned to Italy to reclaim her son. Unusual for immigrant women, she then left her first husband and chose a new partner after emigrating again. Much like other Italian men, Rosa's new husband found work in construction and as a fruit peddler in Chicago. There Rosa also found work, cleaning at Chicago Commons, one of many new Settlement Houses emerging in the city. But while Rosa scrubbed floors, many more women immigrants from Italy worked in the Chicago's and New York's garment industries.

Not long after Rosa Casseteri arrived in Chicago, Israel Antin left his family in Polotzk, Russia, and migrated to Boston. Like the Antins, most Jewish immigrants after 1880 left Russia and Russian or Austrian Poland, where they had faced harsh lives. Land ownership was forbidden to them, and many schools closed to them. Jewish men feared conscription into the Russian army and whole families fled in terror as physical attacks on Jewish property and lives escalated into a veritable epidemic of violent anti-Jewish pogroms (massacres) in the 1880s.

As refugees, Jewish immigrants traveled in family groups and very few subsequently returned. The Antins were fortunate to be reunited in the USA in 1894. Less Orthodox in

their religious practices than many of their neighbors, their daughter Mary dreamed of a bright future in a new "promised land." Israel Antin, a former rabbi, struggled to support his family; many of his small businesses failed. Although originally a Yiddish-speaker, daughter Mary relished learning English and was proud of her American education. She eventually wrote an autobiography that described her admiration for America but also defended immigrants from hostile nativists, calling the newcomers the Pilgrims of their era.⁴ Unlike many Jewish immigrant girls, Mary Antin was fortunate and did not have to leave school at an early age to work as an "operative" at a sewing machine in a garment factory or as a "cash girl" clerk in a department store.

Slavic-speaking peoples in central and eastern Europe – from Poland, Russia, Austria–Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire – formed one of the largest and newest groups of immigrants at the turn of the century. Antonina Rzeszutko, born in 1889 into a peasant family in a small town in Poland, feared that as a young girl travelling alone she might be excluded as a potential "public charge." She entered in 1906 posing as the daughter of a man from her home village. She first joined her half-sister in Utica, New York and then moved to Webster, Massachusetts, where friends had found her a job in the spinning room of a cotton mill. In 1909 she married John Ruda. At first both worked in the mills; giving birth to seven children, Antonina Ruda then raised her family in mill town housing.⁵

Smaller in number than the Jewish, Italian, and Polish migrations, but equally new, were the Mexicans venturing northward, at first mainly into the southwest. For the American businessmen who invested simultaneously in the southwestern USA and in northern Mexican railroads and mines between 1880 and 1910 and for the workers they sought among the Indians and Spanish-speakers of the adjoining regions, the border between the two countries was no great impediment. But had seasonal jobs in California agriculture, Texas cotton fields, or New Mexican mines and railroads been their only motivation, more migrants from Mexico might have

returned to Mexico, as so many of their contemporaries in the east – notably Italians, Greeks, and Balkan Slavs – chose to do. After 1910, however, the political instability and violence that accompanied revolution in Mexico created economic chaos, discouraging many emigrated Mexicans from returning. By 1920, Mexicans had found their way to midwestern meatpacking cities like Kansas and Chicago, with their more stable industrial jobs, facilitating the relocation of whole Mexican family groups.

With the near-exclusion of Chinese labor after 1882, Japanese and Koreans found their way from Asia and from Hawaii to replace them on the west coast. California's "agribusinesses" – appropriately called "factories in the fields" – now raised crops on a massive scale for export eastward. Their demand for seasonal harvesters was almost insatiable, and Mexicans, Filipinos, Portuguese, Koreans, and Japanese all found work as farm laborers. After studying law in Tokyo, the father of Kazuko Itoi arrived in Seattle in 1904 hoping to earn money to continue his studies. He first worked on a railroad gang and in the potato fields of Yakima, and then as a cook on Alaska-bound freighters. Returning to Seattle, he then purchased a cleaning shop.

Shortly after Itoi arrived in the USA, the segregation of Japanese children in San Francisco schools and Japanese government protests resulted in the 1908 "Gentlemen's Agreement" between the USA and Japan. While it ended the migration of laborers from Japan, it permitted Japanese laborers in the USA (unlike their Chinese counterparts) to send for "picture brides," who married them by proxy before departing Japan. Itoi, however, arranged to marry the daughter of a newly arrived Japanese missionary; he then raised four children, including Kazuko, while managing a hotel for transient men.⁶ Like many immigrants from Japan, the Itoi family faced persistent discrimination; the newer arrivals did not escape the hostility experienced earlier by the Chinese.

New immigrations like these made American cities from Seattle to New York seem even more foreign in 1900 than they had in 1850. In cities, unskilled factory jobs characteris-

tic of the country's second industrial revolution could be found in the greatest number and variety. Half or more of the residents of America's large cities – including New York, Chicago, and San Francisco – were foreigners and their children. In his book, *How the Other Half Lives*, Jacob Riis exaggerated only slightly when he concluded, "The one thing you shall vainly ask for in the chief city of America is a distinctively American community. There is none . . ." He instead called the urban-dwellers of New York "the mixed crowd." The city's garment industry, like those of Chicago and Philadelphia, attracted disproportionate numbers of Italian and eastern European Jewish immigrants, and disproportionate numbers of women. Farther west, centers of heavy industry such as Buffalo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Chicago, seemed equally foreign but attracted more men from Poland, Russia, the Baltic, and Balkans. In the southwest, San Antonio housed new arrivals from Mexico, while San Francisco mixed immigrants from Asia and Europe.

Not all immigrants found urban and industrial jobs. Seasonal construction of railroads, dams, highways, streets, sewers, and water systems scattered male laborers from Asia, Mexico, and Europe throughout the country. Huge agricultural businesses producing wine, wheat, cotton, sugar beets, and dozens of other crops, along with their packing sheds and canneries, drew seasonal migrants to California, Texas, and Colorado. As wage-earners in seasonal agriculture and industries, few of these immigrants could settle immediately. And by the early twentieth century, immigrant yeoman farmers such as the Svendens and the Seyffards had almost disappeared from the American scene, and the rural midwest had lost much of its earlier importance as a receiver of immigrants. Over time, however, intensive cultivation of strawberries, asparagus, and potatoes in California became a specialty of Chinese, Japanese, and Italian "truck farmers," allowing for a more settled life even in areas of large-scale agriculture.

Points of Contact

Thus, once again, immigrants' most significant cross-cultural encounters occurred in cities and in the rural southwest. Newcomers exchanged ideas and material aid with other immigrants and with the working-class children of earlier emigrants from Germany and Ireland. These urban encounters were less violent than their antebellum antecedents. But violence erupted instead when immigrant workers tried to unite against their employers, the corporate "robber barons" old-stock Americans glorified as symbols of economic liberty and the superiority of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Class temporarily eclipsed region and race as the most controversial source of diversity in American life.

Immigrant men most often met old-stock Americans in positions of considerable authority over them. As the Mexican Ernesto Galarza observed in California, "the bartenders, the rent collectors, the insurance salesmen, the mates on the river boats, the landladies, and most importantly, the police – these were all gringos."⁸ So were most of the managers and executives of the mines, enormous factories, and agribusinesses where immigrants worked long hours in poorly paid, dangerous, and seasonal jobs. It was a volatile encounter. Drawing on the ideas of Social Darwinism and scientific management, American employers often assigned different tasks to workers of different races, hoping to prevent solidarity and to maintain control over immigrant employees they scarcely knew. In Pittsburgh's steel mills, Hungarians, Poles, Italians, and Negroes all received jobs deemed appropriate for their distinctive racial fitness for work.

To communicate with workers, American employers hired bilingual supervisors who had arrived earlier or were second-generation children of immigrants. In California, Italian, Mexican, Filipino, and Japanese labor bosses recruited, supervised, and even fed and paid gangs of harvesters assigned by race to separate bunks and dining facilities. In the garment factories of New York City, a complex skill hierarchy based on gender,

background, and length of time in the USA also emerged. Men – first of German, then of Jewish, and eventually of Italian origin – held the most highly skilled jobs as cutters, pressers, and supervisors. Some subsequently became jobbers, subcontractors, and employers in small, sweatshop businesses. Old-stock American women, along with the daughters of German and Irish women supervised first Jewish and then Italian female operatives at their sewing machines.

Especially in the south, physical violence occasionally replaced managerial manipulation to intimidate and divide workers. In New Orleans in 1891, Americans lynched nine Sicilian dockworkers accused of the murder of Irish-American police chief David Hennessy. Twenty years later, the Jewish Leo Frank was lynched in Atlanta after having been convicted of raping a young white mill operative on the testimony of a colored witness.

Ultimately, however, no employers' strategies could be counted on to prevent immigrant workers from occasionally unifying to challenge their power. Already in 1892, the heterogeneous workforce of the Carnegie Steel Plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania united to strike when Andrew Carnegie announced he intended to hire non-union laborers. Carnegie had arrived from Scotland in 1848 as a young boy. By the 1880s, his steel trust symbolized the power of huge corporations to monopolize national and even international markets. Carnegie had prided himself on good relations with "his men" but he, like most American employers, increasingly left their management to subordinates as business grew. Carnegie's subordinate was the American Henry Clay Frick. Knowing his decision would provoke conflict, and fearing criticism, Carnegie departed for Scotland after advising Frick, "My idea . . . is always to shut down and suffer. Let them decide by vote when they decide to go to work."⁹

Frick disagreed; he was determined to lock out workers and replace them with non-union labor. When Carnegie left town, he built a stockade with watchtowers and barbed wire around the Homestead mill. The arrival of 300 Pinkerton detectives to protect the mill began a violent day-long battle with

strikers. While Pennsylvania's governor sent 8,000 troops to secure the plant, Russian-born anarchist Alexander Berkman traveled from New York with a gun. But he failed in his attempt to assassinate Frick, who promptly re-opened the Homestead mill with non-union, "scab" labor. Still in Europe, Carnegie lamented, "I was expecting too much of poor men to stand idly by and see their work taken by others."¹⁰

Of course immigrant workers shared many grievances – from dangerous working conditions and long hours to job insecurity and reductions in pay. But what most often united them, as it did in Homestead, was the threat of being replaced by new workers they labeled "wage depressors." In West Virginia mines, the wage depressors were often southern Negroes or Italians; in western mines they were more often Mexicans; in eastern factories they were Italians, Serbians, or Syrians. In San Francisco, immigrants from Europe objected to the employment of Chinese men and women in garment shops, while white miners continued to attack Chinese workers throughout the Rocky Mountains.

The result was a division between a mainstream labor movement that rejected class conflict, revolution, and radical political ideals while advocating immigration restriction, and a radical, labor movement organized by the wage depressors, often across racial lines. Both were culturally diverse labor movements, where "Americanization from the bottom up" facilitated different forms of class solidarity. America's first national labor organizations – the National Labor Union of the 1860s, the Knights of Labor of the 1870s and 1880s and the American Federation of Labor of the 1880s – united old-stock American skilled workers and earlier emigrants from Ireland, Great Britain, and Germany in a movement to maintain autonomy and wages. By 1900, only the American Federation of Labor, with its president, the Jewish immigrant cigar worker, Samuel Gompers, survived, and its solidarity was founded, in part, on advocacy of immigration restriction. AF of L unions of skilled German, Irish, British, and American workers routinely barred female, Negro, or immigrant workers from membership, calling them wage depressors.

But even within the AF of L, several industrial unions promoted cooperation between older and newer immigrants. In the mining towns of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, the midwest, and Colorado, the United Mine Workers (UMW) welcomed membership from foreign and African-American miners; their Irish-born organizer "Mother Jones" worked with both. In the west, Filipinos, Japanese, Mexican, Italian, Portuguese, and Chinese workers struggled to organize as cannery and agricultural workers. In the east, the International Ladies Garments' Workers' Union (ILGWU) solved conflicts among German-Yiddish- and Italian-speaking members by organizing workers into separate language locals. In the aftermath of a 1909 strike of women workers, and the tragic Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire in which more than 200 female operatives died, the ILGWU organized the largest group of women workers in the country. Jewish and Irish women predominated at first; after 1910, Italian women became more active. The goal of the ILGWU, like that of the AF of L generally, was to reform capitalism and restrict corporate power through collective bargaining or political pressure on legislators, not to overthrow legislatures or capitalists.

Unlike AF of L leaders, some old-stock Americans and earlier emigrants saw capitalism, not wage depressors, as the enemy. Americans such as "Big Bill" Hayward led the IWW in western mines, and leaders of the Socialist Party of America were also mainly natives; the best-known American socialist of the era was Eugene V. Debs, the son of immigrants from Alsace. Nicola Sacco was more typical of new immigrants with his passionate devotion to anarchism. And, the radical union alternative to the AF of L, the syndicalist IWW, was often more successful than the AF of L in leading strikes among culturally diverse immigrant workers, for example in the textile towns of Lawrence and of Paterson, New Jersey. IWW leaders included foreign-born radicals such as the Italian Carlo Tresca and the second-generation Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, both of whom hoped workers organized in one big union could control their industries, creating democratic workplaces where workers enjoyed the profits of their work. In the Lawrence

strike, a dozen language groups sent representatives to the strike committee; appeals for funds appeared in German, Italian, French, Serbian, Russian, Finnish, Polish, Greek, Armenian, and Spanish newspapers. The IWW even welcomed women and Negroes as members.

Anarchism was an equally diverse movement of Germans, Russian Jews such as Alexander Berkman and his sometime lover Emma Goldman, Italians such as Galleani and Sacco, and Indians from Asia such as Dhan Ghopal Mukerji.¹¹ Goldman prided herself on her anarchist advocacy of sexual liberation but expressed nothing but contempt for American women reformers' interests in moral reform and the right to vote. The American Socialist Party, too, was culturally diverse; it organized its membership into language sections and published newspapers in many languages advocating the democratic conquest of the American government by a coalition of naturalized and old-stock socialist voters.

The fact that immigrants lived in far greater intimacy with each other than with their American employers reinforced workplace solidarity across cultural lines. Although the children of immigrants later recalled growing up in homogeneous communities, most actually lived in mixed neighborhoods. In southern Manhattan, alone, Jacob Riis found "an Italian, a German, a French, African, Spanish, Bohemian, Russian, Scandinavian, Jewish and Chinese colony."¹² In Sacramento, the Mexican boy Ernesto Galarza discovered Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, Hindus, Portuguese, Italians, Poles, Yugoslavs, Koreans, and Negro neighbors all within walking distance. East and west, simple material assistance – the sharing of cash, clothes, and food – established relations among even the poorest neighbors. More than one historian has pointed out that entire communities, including housewives and children, went on strike in places like Homestead or Lawrence.

Religion and local politics further strengthened cross-cultural neighborliness. In New York, an important center of Jewish life by 1900, the so-called uptown Jews who had arrived earlier from Germany and central Europe feared that the poverty and orthodox religious practices of Yiddish-

speaking Russian and Polish Jewish newcomers on the Lower East Side were provoking anti-semitism among scientific racists and Americans generally. Nor were they happy with the free-thinking atheism that inspired Mary Antin to announce one day to her schoolgirl classmates that since no God, but rather "nature made me" she would not even observe Passover. Invoking a long history of Jewish communal traditions, uptown Jews provided educational programs and charity for newcomers, much as the Catholic bishop John Hughes and immigrant sisters had for newcomer Irish and German Catholics a half century before.

Augmenting programs that linked older and newer immigrants through Catholic and Jewish welfare services, urban political machines also continued to incorporate new voters. In fact, the first step toward political participation for many new immigrant men was assistance in obtaining citizenship from a naturalized immigrant ward heeler who expected nothing except a vote for his help. Some cities even required citizenship of workers hoping for jobs collecting municipal garbage or building municipal services such as streets or subways. By 1890, however, the machine politicians' traditional opponents, American reformers, also had something new to offer newcomers. Upset by the class conflict that corporate power and radical ideologies encouraged, old-stock Americans now demanded that efficient and nonpartisan governments provide welfare services to help the poor adjust to American life without empowering ward heelers and corrupting electoral politics. Reform of municipal government became a centerpiece of reformers who called themselves "Progressives" after the turn of the century.

Many of the Progressive reformers seeking to bridge the class divide were old-stock American women – the first generation of well-educated, professional (and usually unmarried) women escaping from the cult of domesticity that had shaped Anna Murray Douglass's life. In public schools and social settlement houses, women enjoyed relatively peaceful encounters with clients who, as women and children, were already well accustomed to subordination to authority. In her

book *The Promised Land*, Mary Antin, who attended a private Catholic girls' school, eulogized her teacher Miss Dillingham – who shared the name, but not the prejudices, of an influential, anti-semitic, and nativist Congressman, William P. Dillingham. Miss Dillingham invited Antin to tea; Antin remembered Dillingham as an inspiring woman who taught her important lessons about America's civic religion and about religious toleration. Farther west, in Sacramento, Ernesto Galarza remembered the racial insults of his schoolyard but also recalled "We were sure to be marched up to the principal's office for calling someone a wop, a chink, a dago, or a greaser. The school was not so much a melting pot as a griddle where Miss Hopley and her helpers warmed knowledge into us and roasted racial hatreds out of us."¹³

Still, when Miss Dillingham invited Mary Antin to tea, she served the young Jewish girl ham – a reminder that public school teachers were as devoted to Anglo-Saxon civilization and to ensuring the cultural conformity of immigrants as were Gertrude Bonnin's Indian school instructors. Teaching English generally came first. Concerned that new immigrants lacked the facility or willingness to learn a new language, worried census takers from 1890 until 1930 categorized every person they listed as "able" or "unable" to speak English. Meanwhile their teachers experimented with teaching small groups of immigrant children in their native languages – today we would call it bilingual education – largely to discourage older children, otherwise assigned to the first grade, from leaving school completely, thus ending their exposure to English-speakers.

For Antin as for Bonnin, cultural transformation meant more than learning English or America's civic religion or respect for representative government. Public schools sought to transform immigrant boys into workers immune to radicalism and immigrant girls into American mothers who were also good consumers. State laws increasingly required children to remain in school until age 14 and school days now started with pledges of allegiance followed by vocational training for factory, domestic service, and housework. Lessons in personal hygiene –

some public schools even installed bathtubs for instruction – entered the curriculum, as did textbooks introducing American cooking and home decoration.

Educational experiments such as these had originated as experiments in settlement houses much like the one employing Maria Casseteri. Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago was the best known of dozens of settlement houses established in immigrant neighborhoods between 1880 and 1920. Addams and her largely female co-workers opened Hull House with nursery programs for the children of working mothers and a wide variety of educational and athletic clubs for boys and girls. Settlement houses taught girls American housewifery and lured immigrant mothers with clubs and parties. Hull House organized campaigns to improve garbage service, public schools, and factory conditions in Chicago. Groups like the Women's Trade Union League, an initiative of middle-class reformers and immigrant labor activists in New York and Chicago, often met in settlement houses.

Maria Hall Ets, the woman who recorded Maria Casseteri's life story at Chicago Commons, shared with Addams a conviction that immigrants had gifts to give their new homeland. Hull House thus built a labor museum that displayed and demonstrated immigrant arts and crafts. New York's settlement houses sponsored programs where immigrants performed their dances and songs for appreciative audiences. While never abandoning their distaste for class struggle or their desire to see immigrants culturally transformed, women professionals' relatively harmonious relations with their neighbors did counterbalance workplace conflict and nativist rhetoric. Immigrant children such as the Italian Leonard Covello fondly recalled that "Miss Ruddy [Protestant director of the East Harlem Home Garden Settlement] filled a need we could find nowhere else."¹⁴ But the adult Rosa Casseteri summed up her contacts with the American women somewhat less enthusiastically, noting "They used to tell us that it's not nice to drink the beer, and must not let the baby do this, and this . . . I went to sleep when they started the wringing. I couldn't learn it."¹⁵

New Groups and Identities

Without question, the early twentieth century was one of the most important periods of ethnic group formation in American history. Group identity still originated at home, in immigrants' families and in their neighborhood communities. Immigrant businesses reinforced that domestic culture by making it a part of an emerging consumer marketplace. And immigrant voluntary associations extended that domestic culture by giving it institutional expression.

Foreigners and old-stock Americans alike agreed that differing expectations of family solidarity, different patterns of childrearing, and different relations between men and women divided them. For the child Leonard Covello, family solidarity meant starting work at age 12 and turning his \$1.75 earnings over to his mother. For Kazuko Itoi it meant obeying her mother and going to Japanese language instruction after school every day. For Rose Gollup, a Russian Jewish immigrant girl several years older than Mary Antin, it meant respecting her father's request when he showed her a red paper book and announced "This is my union book. You too must join the union."¹⁶ Not all immigrant children subordinated their individual desires for education or for the purchase of American clothes, food, or books willingly of course. But even their conflicts with children drove home to parents the stark contrast between their family ties and the individualism of Americans.

Gender ideologies particularly clashed in schools and settlement houses. Most immigrants agreed that daughters, and even mothers, should help support their families, and the daughters of immigrants dominated the female workforces of most northeastern and western cities. Yet female wage-earning, especially by mothers, violated Americans' expectations of female domesticity. For women reformers, the wage-earning mother symbolized male tyranny, while it revealed immigrant men as failures as breadwinners. For immigrants, unmarried women reformers often symbolized female autonomy, especially as the American suffrage movement grew to

its peak, and American women gained the right to vote in 1919. With no other way to understand the American women, Catholic immigrants sometimes called the women reformers "nuns without God." While some admired the unmarried female reformers and suffragists as American role models, many more pitied and resented them.

Immigrant parents supervised the work and family behavior of their daughters with special anxiety, believing that they, as mothers, would determine the survival of the entire group. Leonard Covello not only married an Italian Catholic girl, he married one from his parents' native town of Avigliano. When she died, he chose her younger sister as a second wife. Nevertheless, rates of intermarriage did rise in the second generation. But children who found spouses of different cultural background generally continued to respect religious boundaries, creating separate Catholic, Jewish, and Orthodox Christian marital "melting pots." Newly arrived Catholic immigrants married the children of earlier German or Irish immigrants, but all three religious melting pots isolated newcomers from contact with Protestant families of old-stock Americans. The free-thinking Mary Antin was quite unusual in eventually marrying outside her faith.

In west coast Chinatowns and Koratowns, it was the absence of women and the prominence of immigrant bachelors that instead marked group boundaries. The mother of Korean immigrant Mary Paik cooked for four years for 30 Korean men without families who worked in the citrus groves of Riverside, California.¹⁷ In New York, Jacob Riis observed that only a very few Chinese merchants (whose wives, along with those of students and ministers, were the only Chinese women able to enter the USA) lived in families. He frightened American readers with lurid descriptions of Chinese bachelors seeking white "wives" among the female opium addicts they had lured into their "dens." But he also urged Americans to consider a more humane immigration policy that would allow Chinese men to bring Chinese wives into the country.¹⁸

Whether called "Little Italy," the "Jewish Ghetto," "Polonia," "Koratown," or "el Barrio," neighborhood communities

extended solidarity beyond the family. For Ernesto Galarza, the ability to speak Spanish and to recognize regional differences among recent refugees from the Mexican revolution created a sense of living in a culturally homogeneous neighborhood even with other immigrant groups nearby. "All our immediate neighbors were old friends from Korea," Mary Paik also remembered; one had even been the boyhood friend of her father.¹⁹ No Jim Crow laws forced European immigrants into these neighborhood communities. Even Mary Paik's family had traveled by choice to Los Angeles with Korean friends from Hawaii and were glad to have the assistance of other Koreans in Riverside when finding a job and a place to live. Thus, even the adoption of American clothing and the pronunciation of an immigrant's first words of English typically occurred in the company of a friend or neighbor of the same cultural origins.

Although otherwise quite different, Jews, Italians, Poles, and Koreans contrasted their communal ties and their intense sociability to the individualism and privacy Americans more highly valued. Jewish immigrants praised the "mensch" among them, as a person honored by his friends and neighbors for helpfulness and concern for others. Italians sought "respect" from a face-to-face community, with the result, according to Riis, that "those who are not in the street are hanging half way out of the windows, shouting at some one below. All 'the Bend' must be, if not altogether, at least half out of doors when the sun shines."²⁰ Foreigners shared their cramped homes with relatives and boarders; their doors were open to neighbors; the family kitchen doubled as adjunct to the factory when neighborhood groups of women and children took in industrial homework. Relegated to the worst jobs in the industrial economy, new immigrants understood economic liberty less as individual mobility – as Americans viewed it – and more often as the collective achievement of economic comfort by a family, a community, or the entire working class.

Immigrant neighborhoods nevertheless provided an insecure foundation for group stability. A typical "Little Italy," for example, had emerged in the 1880s as a cluster of saloons,

restaurants, banks, and boarding houses serving transient male laborers. Newcomers subsequently arrived as young married couples or reuniting families; as children began earning wages their families could often afford better housing and so moved away in search of it. A dismayed social worker living in New York's Little Italy reported "One never becomes accustomed to the kaleidoscopic changes of one's neighbors."²¹ In addition, few American cities had only one Little Italy or Jewish Ghetto, and even most Chinese immigrants lived outside New York's Chinatown, not within it. In New York, the Jewish Lower East Side became a launching pad into smaller Jewish neighborhoods in Harlem, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.

In constantly changing cities, immigrant businesses made cultural diversity a more enduring feature of urban markets. Immigrants often preferred to do business and to work among their own kind. A Polish immigrant wanting to buy and eat kielbasa would expect a Polish immigrant grocer or butcher to know his consumer preferences. Grocery stores like the one Israel Antin opened, along with saloons and cafes, provided centers for sociability, where neighbors quickly met and gossiped. By trusting their clients with credit, grocers assured that both the Antin and Paik families ate during periods of temporary unemployment. Immigrant businessmen also offered services immigrants needed – sending money to the homeland, selling insurance, translating documents, arranging travel. Ernesto Galarzo, Kazuko Itoi, Maria Casseteri, Antonina Rzeszutko, and Leonard Covello all described the importance of immigrant businesses in their memoirs of community life.

For Italian and Jewish immigrants living in huge urban communities and in cities such as New York, the production of culture also became an important business. Actors and actresses in the Yiddish- and Italian-language theatres specialized in stories with immigrant themes. The Italian actor Farfariello created a new genre of comedy by joking about immigrant mixing of dialects with American English and standard Italian. Sicilians even supported their own puppet theatre for a time. Yiddish literature enjoyed a renaissance in the USA

because of the large population of Yiddish readers living on New York's Lower East Side. Books, novels, political pamphlets, and newspapers in Yiddish poured from Jewish presses between 1890 and 1920.

Immigrant businessmen also often preferred to hire and do business with immigrants of their own background. A Tuscan immigrant gave Maria Casseteri's husband the money and advice he needed to start his own business as a banana peddler. On the west coast, Chinese merchants first loaned Mary Paik's mother the money she needed to begin cooking for citrus grove workers. Out of practices such as these, distinctive "ethnic niches" developed in urban economies. Italians worked in disproportionate numbers in construction, produce marketing, and restaurants. Chinese clustered in groceries, restaurants, and laundries. Some scholars even describe New York's garment industry as an ethnic enclave economy dominated from top to bottom in the last two decades of the nineteenth century by Jewish immigrants.

Market relations so shaped group formation, that competition, diversity, and individual consumer choices could easily threaten group solidarity. A shopper in San Francisco's Chinatown could buy from dozens of competing Chinese groceries or restaurants. Yiddish-speaking Jews in New York could select from a wide variety of newspapers, each reflecting its editor's political and religious ideals. Immigrant churches and synagogues survived only if they could successfully raise funds to build meeting places like the one where Mary Paik's father occasionally preached on Sundays. Even anti-capitalist clubs of socialists and anarchists produced plays and sponsored May Day celebrations in order to raise money.

Little wonder, then, that immigrant businessmen filled many of the leadership positions of immigrant community associations. Members of a particular family, kinship group, or hometown organized the smallest societies – Italians' paese clubs, Jewish Landsmannschaften, and Chinese district associations. Smaller societies often confederated. Chinese immigrants had their Six Companies. More characteristically, the Sons of Italy generated a competitor – the Columbian Federation – while,

for Poles, the Polish National Alliance (which placed no religious limits on its members) competed with its counterpart the Polish Roman Catholic Union, which limited membership to Catholics.

Immigrants could choose among associations with differing agendas, too. Most offered to do "what had to be done" in order to take care of "our own kind." The smallest societies offered sociability, usually for the adult men who gathered in their club rooms. Their picnics, banquets, and dances generated cash while creating important, if temporary, moments of family recreation. Among the Japanese, Chinese, and Finns, voluntary associations also sometimes functioned as cooperative businesses, operating small grocery stores. Japanese mutual aid societies supported farming and marketing cooperatives, while Chinese societies organized trade and commerce between Chinatown and China, or guaranteed that the bodies of the dead returned to their homes. Many societies offered members some of the same services – insurance, charity, healthcare, burial – as urban machines, private businesses, and the municipal welfare programs old-stock American reformers increasingly preferred. Others united around ideology: Italian socialist, anarchist, syndicalist, and nationalist clubs published their own papers in Italian and either supported or opposed union organization, strikes, Mussolini, American ward heelers, or candidates in municipal elections. Some societies sponsored English classes, others supported cultural programs in the immigrants' native tongues or taught the language to immigrants' children.

Irish, Polish, as well as Jewish Zionist organizations united newcomers to lend support for independence or the creation of a national homeland outside the USA. The first Yugoslav newspaper, addressing all South Slavs, appeared in the USA before Yugoslavia became a country. Women's associations also became more common in the late nineteenth century. Jewish women's clubs federated as the National Council of Jewish Women, and the Zionist movement had its own female organization, Hadassah. Even relatively small fraternal societies eventually generated women's auxiliaries and – often

somewhat belatedly – children's organizations, often in an effort to attract second-generation members.

Because membership in communal societies was completely voluntary, many – perhaps even most – immigrants joined not a single one. While she remembered no society important to Antonina and John Ruda, for example, their granddaughter in the 1990s did recall that "the Polish Catholic Church was the center of their lives . . . Many men donated a lot of money to the church and would work free for the church's needs. The church was a great unifying factor."²² Far more than secular voluntary associations, religious institutions ensured group survival into the second generation. In Homestead, Pennsylvania, for example, Orthodox Christians speaking half-a-dozen Slavic languages formed separate congregations, some of which survived for over half a century.

Among Catholics, Polish and Italians replaced Germans and French-Canadians as challengers of Irish hegemony. Italians were not content to worship in the basements of churches dominated by Irish worshippers and by their English-speaking priests but attracted missions funded and staffed by Italian-speaking Catholic brothers, notably from Italy's Scalabrinian Order. These brothers were independent; not subject to Irish-American bishops, they learned to tolerate immigrants' cults of particular patron saints, which generated loud, yearly, and very public celebrations in which the patron's statue was paraded through the streets. Although the Catholic Church organized dozens of "nationality parishes", and tried to guarantee that priests and nuns could speak the languages of the parishes to which they were assigned even nationality parishes were territorial and the property of their founding religious order or of the bishops of the Church. Still, the proliferation of clubs and organizations for Catholic parishioners, along with parish schools and social services and public processions, reinforced the association between neighborhood and parish in the minds of many immigrants. It may even have encouraged higher rates of homeownership among Catholic than Jewish immigrants of the era.

Among new Jewish immigrants, the aid and assistance of

"uptown Jews" could not impose religious homogeneity, and it often reinforced a sense of cultural difference between immigrants of German and eastern European origin. Most Jewish immigrants from Russia and Poland continued to prefer their own, small Orthodox congregations, with their own synagogues, to the reform temples of the uptown Jews. Over the next half-century, new Jewish immigrants generated a wide variety of American Jewish congregations from Reformed, to Conservative and Orthodox. Each congregation in turn developed somewhat distinctive adaptations of kosher culinary restrictions, Sabbath domestic rituals, and forms of synagogue worship. Each represented a different adaptation to American life and a somewhat different strategy for cultural survival. Even in matters of faith, then, immigrants had cultural options. As this suggests, Nicola Sacco, and other anarchists, were also particularly unusual among immigrants in rejecting religious practice altogether.

Immigration and American Culture

The almost continuous immigrations of the nineteenth century created a growing cultural chasm between rural and urban dwellers, significantly transforming the regional cultures and identities of the USA. By 1920, a slight majority of all Americans lived in cities. As mixed crowds, cities were most characteristic, and most foreign, in the industrialized northeast. In the west and southwest – New Mexico, Arizona, Texas, and California – where commercial agriculture also produced a diverse society, older emigrants were numerous among the natives welcoming or rejecting newcomers, many of them from Mexico or Asia. New immigrants had again bypassed the rural south but in the twentieth century they also avoided the rural midwest and Great Plains. Shaped by distinctive histories and distinctive cross-cultural encounters, new and diverse urban, western, and rural American cultures would not result in a second Civil War in the USA. But they did promote a new political coalition to support the nativists with their rising demands for racially based immigration restriction.

East, west, or southwest, American cities again generated a larger-scale, impersonal, and polyglot urban culture. This culture was increasingly commercial and inevitably secular; it blended elements from the foodways, dialects, and leisure-time preferences of religiously diverse new immigrants. The vast beer gardens and saloons opened by earlier German and Irish immigrants gave way in the early twentieth century to music halls, nickelodeons, street snacks, candy stores, dance halls, and amusement parks such as Coney Island. Here, mixed crowds of young people met and experienced the pleasures of a consumer culture that pleased neither their parents nor their school teachers or social settlement neighbors.

The blending of popular theatrical, culinary, and musical traditions of Europe, Asia, and – with the slow but increasing migration from the south – of Africa gave the country vaudeville, dance crazes, Hollywood, hot dog "red hots," "dago red" wine, singing waiters, and chow mein restaurants. In California, Mary Paik vividly recalled seeing her first movie – a cowboy story – in 1914; in the east, Leonard Covello, as a teacher, tried to help newer Italian immigrants understand why their sons seemed more interested in baseball and basketball than in wage-earning.

In rural areas, old-stock American farmers viewed this new urban commercial culture as more than disturbingly foreign – to them it was also morally dangerous. And in the years before World War I, nothing seemed more dangerous to rural Americans than urban-dwellers' toleration of alcohol production and consumption – an issue that had separated old-stock Americans from newcomers at least since the days of Agoston Haraszthy. Like Haraszthy, the vast majority of new immigrants saw nothing morally wrong with drinking beer, wine, or spirits. On the contrary, they believed drinking became a problem only for old-stock Americans. In California, Andrea Sbarboro, an immigrant Italian winemaker and banker, lectured a delegation from the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) that women's most effective contribution to temperance would be to serve their sons wine as part of a good meal. Even a child like Ernesto Galarza believed that

"on skid row we rarely saw a drunk wino who was not a gringo."²³

Even as Sbarboro lectured the women temperance activists, a Chicago minister in 1903 predicted that "deliverance [from alcohol] will come . . . from the sober and august Anglo-Saxon south, unspoiled and unpoisoned by the wine-tinted, beer-sodden, whiskey-crazed, sabbath-desecrating, God-defying and anarchy-breeding and practicing minions from over the sea."²⁴ The rural and southern America this minister praised in such fulsome language had remained Anglo-Saxon, unspoiled and unpoisoned by migration in large part because it was undergoing a profound economic crisis that would continue for almost a century. The rural south, along with the rural midwest and Great Plains, attracted few new immigrants after 1890 because large-scale commercial agriculture there left few opportunities for yeoman family farmers and generated few jobs for wage-earners. The depression of the 1890s drove large numbers of old-stock Americans, earlier emigrants, and hundreds of thousands of freedmen, off their marginal family farms in both regions.

Southern and western farmers responded to economic crisis both politically and culturally. They organized a populist political movement that glorified family farmers as the foundation for American democracy and they narrowly missed electing their candidate to the presidency in 1896. And some of these latter-day midwestern Jeffersonians who excoriated corporate capitalist modernity, urban consumer hedonism (including alcohol consumption), Jewish-dominated eastern banks, and the godless and un-American foreigners of the urban east now bore German, Czech, or Norwegian names.

Religious revivals among the rural poor formed a second response to painful economic change. Between 1880 and 1920 religious revivals again raged through the troubled fields and small towns of Protestant rural America. As in the past, too, urban dwellers at first seemed relatively immune to them. In cities, immigrants came into contact with wealthier, "mainline" Protestant reformers such as Jane Addams who were less interested in immigrants' souls or conversion than in a social

gospel of neighborly good works that would inoculate immigrants from the temptations of radicals' calls for class struggle. In the countryside, Protestant revival instead encouraged the development of a rural religious culture broadly shared by poorer second-generation emigrants, freedmen and their children, and old-stock Americans alike.

The revival had started in the holiness movement spreading among freedmen in the 1870s. By the 1890s, Charles Price Jones, a Negro preacher from Selma, Alabama, and other Negro members of the Pentecostalist Church of God in Christ, were converting and ordaining hundreds of white southern worshipers. By the twentieth century the enthusiastic worship, praying, and preaching styles of poor southern Negroes and whites had spread to Charleston and Nashville, and from Kansas City to Los Angeles, often travelling with displaced farmers. On the Great Plains, Methodists, Baptists, and holiness preachers found new converts among children growing up in rural communities originally settled by emigrants such as Gro Svendsen or William and Sophie Seyffardt.

By letting the Holy Spirit into their hearts and by singing, dancing, and speaking in tongues, rural communities believed they could heal sickness and divine God's word. They spoke of being "baptized with fire." More importantly, they sought to restore America to moral purity in the new millennium. And in doing so they excoriated cities as foreign and un-American places, sought to ban the sale of liquor in state- and nationwide and supported "dry" candidates for office to achieve that end.

In the antebellum USA, nativism had failed to unite white southerners and northerners as they quarreled over slavery and abolition and the future of the west. After the Civil War, scientific racism helped to bind up their wounds, and to create a foundation for a new nativist movement focused on restricting foreigners' access to life in the USA and to American citizenship. By the twentieth century, nativist policies proposed by Yankee scientific racists sounded appealing even to rural and southern Protestant believers – both black and white – who otherwise rejected Darwin and his ideas about evolution

as contrary to the word of God. In the two decades surrounding World War I, this odd political coalition delivered the more stringent restriction of immigration scientific racists had long demanded.

In fact, nativists in these years were probably correct in seeing immigrants as cultural, if not racial, threats. Linguistically, occupationally, economically, religiously, and – in Nicola Sacco's case – morally and politically, immigrants shared little enough with English-speaking Americans, many of them Protestants and influenced, at the very least, by the moral fervor of recurring Protestant revivalism. Although newcomers, like natives, appreciated liberty and material prosperity, they generally defined and evaluated them differently. Before they could find acceptance as Americans, many immigrants would have to learn – as Nicola Sacco could or would not – to worship a God, to respect private property, to admire representative government, and to solve their economic problems as individuals.

Further Reading

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STUDENT EXERCISE

DETERMINING THE GEOGRAPHIC ORIGINS OF IMMIGRANTS AT CENTURY'S TURN

When studying immigration and ethnicity, historians often have little choice but to use the categories employed by governmental officials in times past. Yet census takers and record keepers at the borders of the USA continuously revise the categories they use to describe the character of newcomers. This complicates historians' ability to make sensible comparisons between successive waves of immigrants.

You know from chapter 4 that Social Darwinist nativists argued that the immigrants of the turn of the century represented racial groups unfit for citizenship because they were not the "Nordic" northern and western Europeans who had dominated among earlier international migrations. But just how seriously did newcomers from the regions of southern and eastern Europe, Mexico, and Asia outnumber immigrants from northern and western Europe? To answer that question, first use the figures in Table 5.1 to complete the Table 5.2.

You may need to consult an atlas or a dictionary to complete this task. Where, for example, is Armenia? And where are the boundaries of eastern and southern Europe? Who are the Magyars? The Hebrews? The