

**Immigration and American Culture
Honors American Studies – Mr. Meizys**



The Immigrant Experience--Irish, Italians, Germans, Poles, Jews, Japanese, and Arabs -- Michael Thomas Bedard

When Frederic Loewe, Vienna-born composer of *My Fair Lady*, arrived in the United States during the 1920s, he had a hard time launching his career. Although he was a gifted pianist, he couldn't find a job. One morning while waiting for his piano to be repossessed, he sat down to play. He played with rare inspiration. When he looked up from the piano, he was startled to find that he had an audience of three moving men, who were seated on the floor.

The movers said nothing, and made no movement toward the piano. Instead, they dug into their pockets, pooled enough money to pay the installment due, placed it on the piano and walked out empty-handed.

The above story, illustrates tolerance toward a recently-arrived American immigrant. Unfortunately, not all exchanges between new and native-born citizens have been marked by such understanding. Words of insult such as "Paddy" and "Wop" became part of the American vocabulary. The first, a variation of the Irish word for Patrick, and the second, a bureaucratic term used by immigration officials for Italians "without papers," became slang expressions used by many native-born citizens.

America's love-hate relationship toward immigration parallels its ambivalent attitude toward equal opportunity. Politically, the Declaration of Independence proclaimed "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" for all citizens--at a time when only propertied white males could vote. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, passed in the aftermath of the Civil War, granted civil rights to African American males, yet "Jim Crow" segregationist laws persisted well into the twentieth century.

How can America's ambivalence toward immigrants be explained? Some people were pulled to immigrate by opportunities and others were pushed to immigrate by events in Europe, observes Stanford Professor David M. Kennedy in a November 1996 article published in *The Atlantic Monthly* ("The Price of Immigration: Can We Still Afford to be a Nation of Immigrants?").

One describer of those "pulled" to America by its opportunities was the flamboyant World War II General George S. Patton. Professor Kennedy describes the scene in Tunisia on July 9, 1943:

The occasion was the eve of the invasion of Sicily, and General George S. Patton Jr., was addressing his troops, who were about to embark for the battle. He urged, "When we land, we will meet German and Italian soldiers whom it is our honor and privilege to attack and destroy. Many of you have in your veins German and Italian blood, but remember that these ancestors of yours so loved freedom that they gave up home and country to cross the ocean in search of liberty. The ancestors of the people we shall kill lacked the courage to make such a sacrifice and continued as slaves."

In his own inimitable idiom Patton was invoking what for most Americans was--and still is--the standard explanation of who their immigrant forebears were, why they left their old countries, and what their effect was on American society. In this explanation immigrants were the main-chance-seeking, most energetic, entrepreneurial, freedom-loving members of their Old World societies. They were drawn out of Europe by the irresistible magnet of American opportunity and liberty, and their galvanizing influence on American society made this country the greatest in the world.

And yet not everyone who came to America was pulled here; some were "pushed" by conditions in Europe. Professor Kennedy observes in his article that "a process that eventually put some 35 million people in motion is to be found in two convulsively disruptive developments that lay far beyond the control of individual Europeans." Ultimately 40 percent of this country's population could point to an ancestor who came through Ellis Island.

The first of these forces mentioned by Kennedy needs little elaboration. It was, quite simply, population growth. In the nineteenth century the population of Europe more than doubled, from some 200 million to more than 400 million, even after about 70 million people had left Europe altogether. (Only half of these, it should be noted, went to the United States--one among many clues that the American-as-magnet explanation is inadequate.) That population boom was the indispensable precondition for Europe to export people on the scale that it did. And the boom owed little to American stimulus; rather, it was a product of aspects of European historical evolution, especially improvements in diet, sanitation, and disease control.

The second development was more complex, but we know it by a familiar name: the Industrial Revolution. It includes the closely associated revolution in agricultural productivity. Wherever it occurred, the Industrial Revolution shook people loose from traditional ways of life. It made factory workers out of artisans and, even more dramatically, turned millions of rural farmers into urban wage-laborers. Most of these migrants from countryside to city, from agriculture to industry, remained within their country of origin, or at least within Europe. But in the early stages of industrialization the movement of people, like the investment of capital during the unbridled early days of industrialism, was often more than the market could bear. In time most European societies reached a kind of equilibrium, absorbing their own workers into their own wage markets. But in the typical transitional phase some workers who had left artisanal or agricultural employments could not be reabsorbed domestically in European cities. They thus migrated overseas.

After two centuries, the question remains in America: How does a nation governed by majority rule protect the rights of minorities? A second question also emerges: How do people of diverse backgrounds gain access to the majority culture?

The latter has been posed since the beginning of the republic. The framers of the Constitution considered how the "more perfect union" they envisioned could be enlarged by addressing the immigration issue; Article I, section 8 of the Constitution grants to Congress, among other duties, the power to "establish a uniform Rule of Naturalization . . . throughout the United States."

When the Federalist and Anti-Federalist political parties were emerging in the 1790s and early 1800s, the issue of who constituted a "real American" dominated the partisan debate of the day. Ironically, the pro-British Federalists and the pro-French Anti-Federalists (that is, the Democratic-Republican party of Thomas Jefferson), argued over which party could better safeguard the American experiment.

During Federalist President John Adams's term, the Alien and Sedition Acts were passed by Congress in 1798. The Alien Acts empowered the president to imprison or exile foreigners who posed a threat to the government. The Naturalization Act mandated that a foreign-born individual live in the United States for 14 years before citizenship could be granted. (The Constitution required that a person must have been for "fourteen Years a Resident within the United States" to be eligible for election to the presidency!)

One hundred and fifty years later, the "true American" question also dominated the political debate of the day. The House of Representatives established a Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin instituted a one-man witch hunt for alleged enemies of the republic, most of whom were natural born citizens of the United States. Given these situations, it is not surprising that hostility and suspicion have often greeted immigrants to America in search of a better life.

The Irish

"The Irish, the most assimilated Catholic ethnic group in America, were the first to experience the lash of hatred at the hands of native Protestant Americans," observes Richard Krickus, author of *Pursuing The American Dream: White Ethnics and the New Populism*. He describes how the newly arrived Irish immigrants existed on the bottom rung of America's social ladder:

In the 1840s Irish immigrants began to enter the United States in large numbers. Unlike those who had previously arrived--the Scotch-Irish Protestants or middle-class Catholics who neatly blended in with the mainstream populace--the newcomers were poor, uneducated Catholics. During the 1840s, 1.7 million Irishmen fled the famine that depleted Ireland's villages and filled its graveyards. Living in dirty, overcrowded hovels along the nation's East Coast cities . . . the Irish who lived in New York City and Boston worked as domestic servants, dug ditches, or labored on the docks toting cargo. Editorialists wrote that they were stupid, lazy, violent, and prone toward drunkenness and criminality. It was alleged that half of the convicted criminals in the mid-nineteenth century were foreign-born and they were ten times as likely as native Americans to live off the dole; most of these miscreants were Irish.

"Paddy" cartoons filled the publications of the day, with the stereotyped Irishmen wearing top hats and waistcoats, sporting large noses and invariably carrying whiskey bottles. Such portrayals, of course, differed from the way the Irish saw themselves. One wrote back home: "How often do we see such paragraphs in the paper as an Irishman drowns--an Irishman crushed by a beam--an Irishman suffocated in a pit--an Irishman blown to atoms by a steam engine--ten, twenty Irishmen buried alive by the sinking of a bank."

Anti-Irish hate literature appeared. In 1836 and 1837, "Maria Monk" (an anonymous anti-Catholic writer) wrote two fictitious books about her experiences as an ex-nun in a Montreal convent where priests raped nuns. Over 300,000 copies of the false accounts were sold prior to the Civil War.

A social war raged within America before the military conflict that split the Union. The "domestic Tranquility" mentioned in the Preamble to the Constitution was not evident in events like these:

A Charleston, Massachusetts, mob burned a convent in 1831.

In 1844, Irish laborers fought anti-Catholics in the Kensington section of Philadelphia.

In 1846, a Philadelphia Irish Catholic church was burned. The German Catholic church a few blocks away was left untouched.

Interpreting the Preamble's goal to "provide for the common defense" domestically, native-born citizens formed political organizations to block immigrant assimilation into society. The American, or Know-Nothing, Party constituted one such group. Formed in 1843, its members came from urban lower-middle-class ranks, opposed immigration, hated Catholicism, and sought to ban parochial schools. They saw themselves as defenders of values and traditions held in common only by native-born citizens.

Members of the secret organization replied "I don't know" when asked questions about the party's policies by outsiders, hence its familiar nickname. The Know-Nothing Party carried Massachusetts in 1854 and nominated former President Millard Fillmore for the presidency in 1856. That a former president could be persuaded to carry the party's antitolerance banner speaks to how respectable it was to oppose people based on their national origin and religious preference, a right guaranteed within the Bill of Rights, in the mid-nineteenth century.

But political action against immigrants did not end there. The anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, and anti-African American Ku Klux Klan was formed in 1866 at Pulaski, Tennessee. Statements against Irish Catholics appeared in mainstream periodicals and were made by a sitting president in the 1870s.

"The unpatriotic conduct of the Romanish population in our chief cities during the late rebellion is well known. They formed a constant menace and terror to loyal citizens; they thronged the peace meetings; they strove to divide the Union; and when the war was over they placed in office their corrupt leaders," observed *Harper's Weekly* in 1872.

Irish immigrants did play a prominent role in the New York City draft riots during the Civil War; however, many Irishmen served in the Union Army during the conflict. The "Fighting 69th" regiment, which served with distinction, was composed mainly of Irishmen.

In 1875, President Ulysses S. Grant remarked: "If we are to have another contest in the near future of our national existence, I predict that the dividing line will not be Mason and Dixon's, but between (Protestant) patriotism and intelligence on one side, and (Catholic) superstition, ambition and ignorance on the other. . . ."

As noted by Krickus, Irish power in the cities rested on three pillars: the Catholic Church, the labor unions, and the urban political machines. "Paddy wagons" were originally named for the Irishmen contained within them; they were later named for the Irish policemen who operated them. Ironically, the former members of the "criminal

element" eventually dominated the New York City Police Department. The 1960s television series *Batman* was on track when it featured "Chief O'Hara"--obviously an Irishman--as the uniformed head of police in Gotham City, a fictionalized New York City.

In 1928, Democratic presidential candidate and Irish Catholic Al Smith lost his bid for the presidency--in part--owing to his religious affiliation. Thirty-two years later, the Democrats again nominated an Irish Catholic for the presidency--Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts.

His Catholicism had to be addressed head on and it was at two decisive points in the campaign. The first occurred during the West Virginia primary in May of 1960; the second took place before an audience of Protestant clergy in Houston on September 12, 1960.

In 1960, only 5 percent of West Virginians were Roman Catholics. To prove that an Irish Catholic could win the November general election, the state's primary was a "must win" for Kennedy. On May 10, 1960, Catholic Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts defeated Protestant Senator Humphrey of Minnesota in West Virginia's Democratic primary. Humphrey's campaign ended that night.

Four months later, Kennedy made these remarks before the 300-member Greater Houston Ministerial Association, as recounted in *The Making of the President 1960*:

. . . because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected President, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured. . . . So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again--not what kind of church I believe in, for that should be important only to me, but what kind of America I believe in.

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute--where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be a Catholic) how to act and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote. . . . I am not the Catholic candidate for President. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for President, who happens also to be a Catholic. . . .

But if this election is decided on the basis that 40,000,000 Americans lost their chance of being President on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loser in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people.

On January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the thirty-fifth president of the United States. The paternal grandson of one Massachusetts state senator and the maternal grandson of another, who had also served as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives and as mayor of Boston for two terms, Kennedy had broken the unwritten rule--the political glass ceiling of its day--that an Irish Catholic couldn't be elected to the nation's highest office.

The Irish came to America during the "Old Immigration" period prior to 1890. From 1820, the year when the federal government began to keep immigration statistics, to around 1890, western and northern Europeans accounted for most of the newcomers. They had the advantage of sharing religious and cultural similarities with those already here.

Yet the Irish experience in America paralleled that of later immigrant groups. All were subjected to the "new kid on the block" syndrome, whereby they were required to "measure up" to "fit in."

New immigrants faced two common practices: a sociological one known as "scapegoating" and an economic one known as "hard times." "Scapegoating" is a means of diverting mass discontent from the people responsible for the conditions breeding unrest. Throughout American history domestic economic stress has periodically given rise to nativist hostility toward foreigners and "outsiders." At the turn of the century, "Catholics and Jews" and "Wops and Polaks" bore the responsibility for the disruption wrought by urbanization and industrialization. Economic hard times have also contributed to the difficulties experienced by the foreign-born at the hands of the native-born. During periods of prosperity, Americans have tended to be more tolerant of alien residents; during periods of hardship, Americans have tended to be less tolerant of immigrant groups.

John Higham, author of *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925*, points to the Italian experience in the coal fields of Pennsylvania. "In the seventies and eighties the coal mining country was rapidly becoming the industrial hell of the northeastern United States," he wrote, describing the "grimy company towns," "ravaged landscape," and "class cleavage" that existed in that environment. An economic war between labor and management began in 1865, the year of the Civil War's ending, and strikes, lockouts, and strife pervaded the entire region. Having had enough of native laborers, the mine owners tapped another source: foreign-born workers, from Hungary and Italy. Perceived as creatures of the employers, they experienced hostility and resentment at the hands of Americans who opposed these new strangers.

The Italians

The Italians constituted one of the largest groups who came to America during the "New Immigration" period. Beginning in the 1890s, more new immigrants came from southern or eastern Europe; 2 million people--47.5 percent of those arriving in the United States from overseas--emigrated from Italy, Poland, and Russia during the decade. Mostly Catholic, they were either unskilled laborers or displaced farmers. Between 1901 and 1910, 6 million immigrants--71 percent of all newcomers--left southern or eastern Europe for the United States.

Commenting on stereotypes applied to the new immigrants, Higham observes: In the case of the Italians, a rather similar fear of "infuriated foreigners" took a different twist. Anti-foreign sentiment filtered through a specific ethnic stereotype when Italians were involved; for in American eyes they bore the mark of Cain. They suggested the stiletto, the Mafia, the deed of impassioned violence. "The disposition to assassinate in revenge for a fancied wrong," declared the *Baltimore News*, "is a marked trait in the character of this impulsive and inexorable race." Every time a simple Italian laborer resorted to his knife, the newspapers stressed the fact of his nationality; the most trivial fracas in Mulberry Street caused a headline on "Italian Vendetta." The stereotype conditioned every major outburst of anti-Italian sentiment in the 1890's. The distinctive nativism which swarthy *paesani* experienced took the guise of social discipline applied to alleged acts of homicide.

These three actions were taken against Italians in the 1890s:

In 1891, a New Orleans mob hung eleven Italian suspects following the acquittal of some for the murder of the city's superintendent of police.

In 1895, Colorado miners and residents killed six Italians involved in a native-born saloonkeeper's death.

In 1896, a Louisiana town mob broke into a jail and lynched three Italian prisoners.

Hostility toward Italians did not end in nineteenth-century America; it continued into the twentieth century. In 1914, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a New York statute requiring American citizenship of employees on public projects. Times were hard in the depression year of 1914; the New York City Bricklayers' Union invoked the statute against Italian aliens working on the subway.

Responding to nativist pressures during World War I, Congress passed a deportation law in 1918. It permitted the Secretary of Labor--who presided over the Immigration Bureau--to sign a warrant authorizing the deportation of aliens. Among its grounds for deportation was membership in any organization certified as "subversive" by the secretary.

Ironically, the Immigration Bureau was then headed by the first Italian American ever elected to Congress, Anthony Caminetti of California, while the Secretary of Labor at the time was a naturalized citizen, labor leader William B. Wilson, who was of Scottish origin.

The two clashed on enforcement of the law. Caminetti's bureau attempted to deport 39 alien members of the International Workers of the World (IWW), or "Wobblies," as they were known. But the deportations were largely halted, since Secretary Wilson refused to certify the left-wing labor organization as subversive and required a stringent burden of proof relative to their alleged guilt.

By the dawn of World War II, the Italian presence in America had reached a state of peaceful coexistence with the native born, even though Italy constituted one of three enemy nations. Italian and German Americans were treated as individuals for the purpose of determining their loyalties and allegiances. The same cannot be said for descendants of the third Axis Power--Japan.

The Japanese

Treated as a group, Japanese Americans were "evacuated" from the American West Coast--the area closest to their ancestral homeland--and interned in concentration, or "re-location," camps. They lost most of their possessions, much of their dignity, and all of their honor. Not one case of treason or sabotage was ever prosecuted against a Japanese American during World War II. More information about the Japanese American experience as immigrants are found in chapter 4.

Edison Uno, one of the internees, recounted his wartime experiences in the documentary series *The World At War* (produced by Thames Television in Great Britain, c. 1972):

There was a tremendous change. The change being that we were the same individuals prior to December 7th. December 8th when we went to school, many of our classmates and friends called us dirty Japs, teased us, harassed us and our so-called friends were no longer friends.

The mental anguish that my mother went through--having four of her sons in the service of the United States government--and having her husband labeled a dangerous enemy alien.

We had guards, watchtowers, machine guns. It was a picture of incarceration. We felt that we were prisoners--prisoners in our own country.

Another internee, Isamu Naguchi, drew this comparison later in the program:

In the First World War, as you know, the Germans were hated thoroughly and there was a great deal of discrimination and harassment of the Germans. In the Second World War, we were at war with three different nationalities: the Italians, the Germans and the Japanese.

And I remember that Thomas Mann . . . spoke up for the Germans and said they couldn't be removed because that would be the last despair--having fled Nazi Germany, to be again put into a concentration camp.

And Joe DiMaggio's mother spoke up, you know, and that was a very moving act in San Francisco, I remember. But the Japanese had really nobody. I think the picking on the Japanese was partly a kind of a logistically rational thing that the Army could handle.

They said no, we can't handle the Germans, but we can handle the Japanese. After all, they couldn't have moved all the Germans and the Italians in this country. They would have had to move half the people out of New York City. It would have been ridiculous.

By the end of World War II more than 100,000 Japanese Americans had been interned mostly on the West Coast. On the other hand, the 600,000 German and Italian Americans were treated individually.

Three lessons emerge. Just as hard economic times have affected immigrant groups, so have hard social and political times. The Japanese Americans, unpopular with many Americans before the war, became even more disliked during it. Planted prior to the Pearl Harbor raid, the bitter seeds of animosity sprouted a hundredfold after it.

Further, the Japanese American experience during World War II indicates one thing: that the road traveled by "ethnic groups" in America--though an often long and tough one--has not been as rough as that traveled by people of different "racial groups." One former Roosevelt administration official, after describing the jealousy of many Californians for the productive Japanese-American farmers, commented that the government acted "hastily and brutally." "Racially" applies as well.

Also evident is the impact of wartime emergency measures on civil rights in America. Executive Order 9066 barred people of Japanese descent from the Pacific coast area. In 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a 1942 military order enforcing it in *Korematsu v. United States*. However, Justice Murphy, one of three dissenters, concluded: "This exclusion [falls] into the ugly abyss of racism . . . The reasons [for the removal] appear . . . to be largely an accumulation of much of the misinformation, half-truths and insinuations that for years have been directed against Japanese Americans by people with racial and economic prejudices."

The Germans

German Americans fared better than their Japanese American counterparts during World War II. However, citizens of German ancestry were hated and discriminated against during the First World War. American language changed as German-sounding words were "Americanized": for example, "frankfurters," named for the sausages made in

Frankfort, Germany, became "hot dogs." German language and literature courses ceased to be taught in U.S. schools and colleges.

Historically, Germans represented the largest of all the immigrant groups who came to the United States between 1820 and 1960. The table compares their numbers with those of eight other nationalities.

We The People: An Atlas of America's Ethnic Diversity describes the German contribution this way:

Germans were the most important white ethnic population other than the English in the period before the American Revolution, making up almost 9 percent of the population in 1790. . . . Their descendants and those of the larger nineteenth- and twentieth-century immigrant groups have made the total German-ancestry population almost equal in size to the English. English and German ancestries were each reported by over 26 percent of those who responded to the ancestry question [in the 1980 census form].

Despite their numbers, German Americans were by no means completely safe from nativism. Richard Krickus observes:

Once the United States entered the [First World] war . . . the German-Americans came under heavy pressure to "assimilate"; their loyalty was held suspect and as nativist hysteria about a 'German fifth column' spread, businessmen with German surnames were boycotted and some German language newspapers were forced to close. After American troops set sail for Europe, citizens of German descent were under incessant pressure to demonstrate their loyalty; many responded by relinquishing their membership in German organizations, attending churches which were distinctively 'American,' using English in their meeting halls, and instructing their children not to lapse into German outside the house. Like the Southern Wasps after the Civil War, the German-Americans sought to protect themselves from accusations that they were antipatriotic by wrapping the Stars and Stripes tightly around themselves. . . . they first reacted to the war as Old World nationalists but that sentiment was later superseded by New World patriotism.

Germany no longer serves as a major source for immigration to the United States. Today's immigrants, escaping economic hardships or fleeing from politically repressive regimes, tend to come from Third World nations. The table on the following page, based on U.S. Immigration and Nationalization Service figures, indicates the national origin of the 530,639 people admitted to America in 1980.

As shown by the table, only one nation (Great Britain) sends people to America who speak English as their first language; those from the other nine speak in other tongues. Though revisited here, the issue of which language should be spoken in the United States has been raised before, see chapter 4.

"English Only"

Following American entry into the First World War, Iowa's governor mandated by proclamation that English be spoken in all schools--both public *and* private. The sweeping declaration also extended to church services and private telephone conversations, areas normally granted First Amendment "free speech" protection. "English only" directives were not limited to Iowa. By the end of 1919, fifteen states had statutes on the books requiring that English be spoken in *all* schools.

The issue has arisen again. In the 1990s, legislatures across America have debated "English only" bills. The forces allied both for and against such legislation are particularly vocal and polarized in states with large foreign-born populations. As immigrants continue to arrive from lands where English is not the dominant language, this emotionally charged cultural issue will increase in importance.

The Poles

The Poles brought their Slavic language with them when they began arriving in the 1870s. Their first destination was the coal fields of Pennsylvania. By 1880, Poles had arrived around the Great Lakes in the Midwest; Russo-Polish Jews could also be found in New York City.

Higham recounts one early example of their "welcome": "In the early seventies, at the peak of America's receptiveness to immigrants, native settlers refused to move into the same vicinity with a Polish colony in Illinois, the land nearby long remaining vacant."

Amidst these nativist forces stood one force *for* the alienated Poles: the Roman Catholic Church. Krickus describes the centrality of its place in the everyday life of the Polish:

The church was a source of security for the immigrants; it was part of the Old World transplanted and a refuge from a frightening environment. In America the church among the Poles took on an importance that was unrivaled even in Poland, where the peasants were among the most devout Catholics on the Continent. Even those who took their religion lightly in the old country were attracted to the church in America because it was the focal point of immigrant life . . .

The church was the nexus for organizations which proliferated as the immigrant community grew. After World War I the largest Polish parish in the United States, St. Stanislaw Kostka in Chicago, was home for 140 organizations--mutual aid societies, women's organizations, youth groups, cultural associations, and various and sundry other organizations serving the Polish immigrants of the parish. The priest was often the best educated member of the community and he could perform services crucial to the welfare of his parishioners; he found work for the unemployed, served as banker, marriage counselor, judge, and scribe, and intervened with the authorities when one of the faithful broke the law. The church for many years was the only institution to which the immigrant had access which wielded power; even the American authorities respected it.

The church constituted a powerful bastion on which the hopes of Catholic immigrants--the Poles especially--rested. It represented the first stage of access to the majority culture. The Roman Catholic Church served as the intermediary between the larger society and the smaller ethnic community.

Gaining access to local political machines represented the next step in Americanization for immigrants. As a particular community grew and its members became voting citizens, local "pols" would serve its needs and eventually recruit candidates from among its ranks. However, the coming of the New Deal to America eventually diminished both church and machine influence among immigrants, as the federal government provided many services formerly given by those more locally based institutions.

The Jews

Unique in several ways is the Jewish American legacy. Outside the Christian mainstream, they brought an entirely different religious tradition with them. Their social

mobility, built on the foundation of higher education, attained remarkable heights. Their relatively small numbers--currently around 3 percent of the U.S. population--raise special issues of "assimilation" within the larger culture.

The first wave of Jewish emigrants came from Germany before the Civil War. Higham describes how the stereotypes they initially encountered in Europe followed them across the Atlantic:

Smallest of the prominent immigrant groups, American Jewry was largely a by-product of immigration from Germany. At first, native folk had difficulty in differentiating Jews from Germans, but with the dispersion of Jewish peddlers and shopkeepers throughout the country, the European tradition of the Jew as Shylock came to life. To a segment of American opinion, the Jews seemed clothed in greed and deceit. It was this conception that had exposed them to the charge of disloyal profiteering during the [Civil] war. Thereafter the persistent Shylock image acquired a significant new dimension. It broadened during the Gilded Age into an indictment of Jewish manners for vulgarity and ostentation. The Jew, it now appeared, was not only mercenary and unscrupulous but also clamorously self-assertive--a tasteless barbarian rudely elbowing into genteel company. In line with this impression, society began to exclude Jews from areas of intimate social intercourse, the most celebrated of the initial proscriptions being at eastern summer resorts.

Jews of Slavic origin constituted the second wave of Jewish immigration. Between 1881 and 1925, 2,650,000 Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe to the United States. They were different from the Western European Jews in many cultural respects. Within the context of the other "New Immigration" peoples, the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe experienced serf-like condition within their "ghettos" prior to coming to the United States.

Jewish American families placed a high emphasis on scholarship and entry into the three Learned Professions--theology, law, and medicine. Today, they are well represented in the teaching, legal, and medical fields. In the 1990s, the quiz show *Jeopardy* provided the answer, "This U.S. ethnic group has the highest percentage of college graduates"; the correct question emerged: "Who are the Jews?"

The issue of Jewish "assimilation" has been posed in the popular culture. A 1993 movie, *The Opposite Sex and How to Live with Them*, features the courtship and eventual marriage of a Catholic woman named Carrie Davenport and a Jewish man named David Crown. Carrie introduces David to her WASPish friends at a wine and cheese party.

Following the encounter, David spoke to Carrie about the experience. "Well, what about your friend, Chipper?" David asked. "He was following me from room to room--ah, excuse me David--but what exactly kind of Jew are you? Are you an assimilated Jew or are you a committed Jew?"

Though not assimilated with respect to their religion, the Jews have committed to participating fully in the American mainstream. Politically, they have served in all branches and levels of government. A "Jewish seat" has normally been reserved on the U. S. Supreme Court. One person of Jewish descent--whose family totally assimilated, including conversion to Christianity--was even nominated for the presidency: Barry Goldwater (the original surname was Goldwasser), the arch-conservative Republican candidate in 1964.

The Arabs

What do consumer advocate Ralph Nader, deejay Casey Kasem, heart surgeon Michael De Bakey, Heisman Trophy winner Doug Flutie, and former Senate majority leader George Mitchell have in common? All are Arab Americans.

In the late 1800s, the first Arab immigrants to America, mostly members of the Christian faith, came from Syria and Lebanon. Most became merchants in their adopted country.

Arabs who came to the United States after World War II did so as a result of changing political and economic conditions in their own countries. Displaced Palestinians, dispossessed Egyptians, and escaping Syrians arrived following the founding of the Israeli nation, the confiscations wrought by President Gamal Abdel Nasser's "reforms," and the overthrow of Syria's government by revolution, respectively.

"Immigration from the Middle East picked up dramatically in the 1960s. In fact, more than 75 percent of foreign-born Arab Americans in 1990 had immigrated after 1964. . . . This recent flood is due in large part to the Immigration Act of 1965, which ended a quota system that favored immigrants from Europe," observed Samia El-Badry, author of "The Arab-American Market," an article published in the January 1994 issue of *American Demographics* magazine.

According to the Census Bureau's definition, Arab Americans are people who trace their ancestry to the northern African countries of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, and Egypt, and the western Asian countries of Lebanon, occupied Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

El-Badry's observations on the Arab American experience give a clear interpretation of census data:

The 1990 census found 870,000 Americans who list an Arab country among their two top ancestries . . .

Census data show that 82 percent of Arab Americans are U.S. citizens, and 63 percent were born in the U.S. . . .

As with many other minorities, Arab Americans are a geographically concentrated group. Over two-thirds live in ten states; one-third live in California, New York, and Michigan. They are also more likely than other Americans to live in metropolitan areas. Thirty-six percent of Arab Americans live in ten metro areas, led by Detroit, New York, and Los Angeles-Long Beach . . .

Immigrants coming from Arab nations still represent less than 3 percent of all immigrants coming to the United States, but their numbers are growing. In 1992, more than 27,000 people from Arab nations immigrated to the United States--68 percent more than those who came ten years earlier . . .

The economic and political instability of many Arab countries will spur continued growth in the Arab-American community.

Arab stereotypes include name-calling descriptions such as "A-rabs," "camel jockeys," and "towel heads." Perhaps the most pervasive of stereotypes sees Arabs as "terrorists." The April 19, 1995, bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building was instantly followed by media and public speculation that Arab terrorists were involved. That was not the case.

Even prior to the incident, Arab Americans were subjected to harassment and abuse in the United States. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) tracked 119 "hate crimes" against Arab Americans in 1991--the year of Operation "Desert Storm." The committee defined "hate crimes" as acts of violence "motivated in whole or in part by bias" that "manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, religion, sexual orientation, or ethnicity"--the U.S. Justice Department's standard for investigating "hate crimes."

Newsweek's February 29, 1988, "My Turn" column featured "The Media's Image of Arabs," by Jack G. Shaheen. He comments:

America's bogymen are the Arabs. Until the nightly news brought us TV pictures of Palestinian boys being punched and beaten, almost all portraits of Arabs seen in America were dangerously threatening. Arabs were either billionaires or bombers--rarely victims. They were hardly ever seen as ordinary people practicing law, driving taxis, singing lullabies or healing the sick. . . A dictionary informed my youngsters that an Arab is a "vagabond, drifter, hobo and vagrant" . . . The Arab remains American culture's favorite whipping boy. . .

To me, the Arab demon of today is much like the Jewish demon of yesterday. We deplore the false portrait of Jews as a swarthy menace. Yet a similar portrait has been accepted and transferred to another group of Semites--the Arabs. Print and broadcast journalists have started to challenge this stereotype . . .

It would be a step in the right direction if movie and TV producers developed characters modeled after real-life Arab Americans. We could then see a White House correspondent like Helen Thomas, whose father came from Lebanon, in *The Golden Girls*, a heart surgeon patterned after Dr. Michael DeBakey on *St. Elsewhere*, or a Syrian American playing tournament chess like Yasser Seirawan, the Seattle grandmaster. The stereotypical Arab American usually portrayed in the mass media presents a false image of this diverse population.

Arab Americans, like other "hyphenated" Americans, have had to endure stereotypes and discrimination. Proving that one's ethnic group can fit into the American "Melting Pot" has served as one of the recurring realities of U.S. history, and not for just the Irish, Italian, German, Polish, Jewish, and Arab Americans among us. The same situation applied equally to the Austrians, Belgians, Czechs, Dutch, French, Greeks, Hungarians, Norwegians, Portuguese, Swiss, Turks, Yugoslavians, and other Europeans who came in search of a better life.

Ethnicity and Civil Rights

The three presidential elections of the 1960s show how attitudes about civil rights changed in America. In 1960, the Republican and Democratic party platforms both called for moderate change and progress. Once elected, President Kennedy moved prudently to advance the concept of equal employment opportunity for all citizens, but landmark civil rights legislation was not passed during the life of his administration. That achievement fell to his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, who enthusiastically signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. He campaigned for re-election on that and other egalitarian issues and received an amazing 61 percent of the popular vote. Civil rights was a winning issue in 1964.

Four years later, the tide had turned. Civil rights had once again become divisive. Alabama Governor George Wallace seized upon the "white backlash" against it.

Appealing to white ethnic voters, he received 9,906,141 votes nationwide--13.5 percent of all those cast--and the 45 electoral votes of Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

In *The Making of the President 1968*, Theodore H. White described Wallace's movement:

. . . I joined the Wallace campaign in Chicago, four weeks after the Democratic convention. . . . He led his country picnic through the streets of Chicago, and scores of thousands were there to greet him. The signs spoke the emotions he aroused: . . . AMERICA--LOVE IT OR LEAVE IT . . . HAVE OUR SCHOOLS BEEN SOLD TO THE GOVERNMENT? POLISH WANT WALLACE. ITALIAN POWER FOR WALLACE. WALLACE--FRIEND OF THE WORKING MAN. VOTERS RING THE BELL OF LIBERTY WITH WALLACE. GIVE AMERICA BACK TO THE PEOPLE, VOTE WALLACE.

White commented that Wallace "was telling the people that their government had sold them out. Alienation is one of the most fashionable words in current American politics. It is the negative of the old words, the old faith that America was a community, and that government served the community. Alienation is disillusion--the sense that government no longer serves the interests of the people."

White ethnic America was questioning the effect on its future that civil rights legislation might bring. And the questions extended beyond the political process into the entertainment industry, including television sitcoms. The fifteenth episode of *The Odd Couple* debated the merits of affirmative action programs.

College quarterback Ernie Wilson, "the greatest Eskimo athlete of all time" and "the greatest quarterback in college football today," retained sports writer Oscar Madison (Jack Klugman) to represent him before pro football talent scouts. But the Eastern Conservatory of Music was also interested in Ernie Wilson and offered him a full scholarship.

Oscar's roommate Felix Unger (portrayed by Tony Randall) heard Ernie playing his cello--badly--and called Effram Goodchild, who had made the scholarship offer. After they listened to his playing, they conferred privately. Felix asked how the conservatory could offer Ernie a scholarship for such awful playing. Mr. Goodchild admitted that they had not heard Ernie's playing before, but that they needed an Eskimo student.

"You offered him a scholarship because he's an Eskimo . . . I think that's terrible," Felix told Goodchild. As if to speak for all angry white ethnics, he exhorted, "A man should have a chance because of his abilities, not because of his ethnic background." Goodchild responded, "We're merely victims of the system," to which Felix retorted, "Well, I think it's a rotten system!"

Felix Unger was not alone in thinking that the affirmative action system was "rotten." Many agreed with him and they didn't exist only on TV sitcoms.

Alexis de Tocqueville, author of *Democracy in America* (1835), observed: "Scarcely any political question arises in the United States which is not resolved, sooner or later, into a judicial question." The political questions raised about civil rights in the 1960s went to the courts during the 1970s. Chief among these cases was *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978.

In filling the 100 freshman seats available annually, the university's medical school used a two-tier approach. Eighty-four slots were assigned through the regular admissions program without regard to race. The remaining sixteen were reserved for students classified as "economically or educationally disadvantaged."

Alan Bakke, a Caucasian male twice denied admission in the regular program, sued the University of California on the grounds of "reverse discrimination." He claimed that the medical school, by admitting minority candidates with lower scores solely on the basis of race, deprived him of his equal rights under the law.

In a narrow five-to-four decision, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the California Supreme Court's order to admit Bakke, found the medical school's particular affirmative action program unacceptable, but upheld the general rule that race may be a factor in admissions.

Politically, affirmative action continued as a "wedge issue." In the presidential election of 1980, the Republican candidate was helped greatly by the defection of "Reagan Democrats," mostly blue-collar workers of Irish, Italian, and Polish background. The Democratic Party's championing of equal opportunity for all hurt it among some of its core groups. Only among women--themselves beneficiaries of affirmative action--did the party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt broaden its appeal in the so-called "gender gap" of the 1980s.

Immigration, aliens both legal and illegal, and affirmative action programs were among the issues in the 1992, 1994, and 1996 elections. The 1992 major party presidential candidates, Republican incumbent George Bush and Democratic challenger Bill Clinton, both favored "free trade" agreements with other nations, but Independent candidate Ross Perot called for an economic policy based on a "Made in the U.S.A." foundation.

In his book *United We Stand: How We Can Take Back Our Country*, Perot wrote: "Take a look at your VCR, or your television, or even your telephone. They weren't manufactured here. They may have American names on them, but they were made overseas. We have allowed entire industries to vanish. Our loss is another nation's gain." His views harken back to the "mercantilist" economic warfare policies of the major European powers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

An implicit nativist theme was espoused in both Perot campaigns for the presidency. His 1992 criticism of goods made abroad was supplemented by his 1996 stand against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); he claimed that Mexico's low-wage labor market would create a "giant sucking sound" of lost American businesses.

In the 1994 election, Proposition 187, which prohibited illegal aliens from receiving social services, passed in California. It sought to deny health, educational, and other taxpayer-supported benefits to unregistered aliens.

Immigration and ending affirmative action programs constituted two emotionally charged issues in the election of 1996. Republican presidential candidate Patrick Buchanan advocated ending all immigration, both legal and illegal.

California's Proposition 209, a measure designed to prohibit "discriminating against or giving preferential treatment to" any person or group in public employment, education, or contracting, passed in 1996 by a 54 percent to 46 percent margin. The words "affirmative action" did not appear on the ballot measure.

CNN political analyst William Schneider provided some interesting interpretations on "Inside Politics Weekend" (November 23, 1996). He cited a *Los Angeles Times* exit poll that revealed that voters supported affirmative action by 54 to 46 percent, the identical margin cast for the ballot measure proposing to end it!

In analyzing the results, Schneider observed that people voted for Proposition 209 to end "preferential treatment" or "quotas" but that they still supported "compensatory measures" designed to assist those hurt by past discrimination. He concluded that the voters agreed with President Clinton's position on affirmative action: "mend it, don't end it."

The results of Proposition 209 indicate that equality of opportunity remains an American ideal but that equality of result or quota programs has been rejected by society at large. The majority of citizens believe that competition for positions and opportunities should be open to all and that the most qualified should prevail.

Affirmative action programs under attack in the 1990s were designed in the 1960s, an era when many sought to "establish justice" for groups discriminated against in the past. The Preamble to the Constitution also contains another stated goal: to "promote the general Welfare."

The debate over affirmative action revolves around these two stated ideals found within the Constitution. Those who see justice in helping groups discriminated against in the past point to the "establish justice" clause; those who see the necessity of maintaining the "melting pot" aspect of American society stress the "general welfare" of the nation at large. Many advocates of the latter view are Americans not covered by affirmative action legislation.

Our national motto, the Latin phrase *E Pluribus Unum*, means "one out of many." Originally meant to convey one union of many states, its meaning today differs from that of the past. In an age of multiculturalism, can many ethnic and racial groups coexist in harmony along values shared in common? In seeking "to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity," Americans of all backgrounds will continue to ponder that question.

-- Michael Thomas Bedard

FURTHER READINGS

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