Waves of Immigration: A Comparative Analysis of the Thematic Similarities and Differences in European and Latin American Immigration to the United States.

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In 1883, poet Emma Lazarus penned her famous invitation to the “huddled masses, yearning to breathe free,” and beckoned them to the United States.\(^1\) Tradition would have the people of this country believe that the more than 26 million Europeans who immigrated to America between 1880 and 1924 came in response to this call.\(^2\) While it is true that some arrived at the “golden door” to seek freedom, my research and that of others offers a more complex explanation. European immigrants were both pushed out of their homelands and pulled to the United States; more often than not necessity, rather than desire, mandated their decision. Now, nearly a century later, the recent wave of Latin American immigrants has been prompted to leave home and come to the United States for many of the same reasons. Overall, in fact, the immigrants’ reasons for leaving their homelands—war, poverty, discrimination, and the search for a better job or life—have not changed; only the dates and names are different. In many ways, what the immigrants of today are finding upon their arrival—that poverty and hardship are the first things to welcome them to the United States—are the same circumstances that Europeans encountered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even the ways in which U.S. citizens receive immigrants today resemble the reactions of Americans a century ago; Hispanics are received with much of the same discrimination their European counterparts faced. Therefore, by examining European immigration to America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is possible to better understand the recent and current movement of Hispanic immigrants to the United States and to show that the challenges posed by mass immigration have been surmounted before and can be

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overcome again.\(^3\) It will take time, just as it did with Europeans, but if history is any indication, Latin American immigrants will eventually assimilate and become full, active, productive members of U.S. society.

In 1951, three decades after the first Great Wave of immigration ended, Harvard scholar Oscar Handlin remarked, “Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.”\(^4\) If there is one thing that historians agree upon when researching and writing about immigration, it is that the United States is a country built of immigrants. This paper synthesizes a wide variety of the scholarship that has been produced in order to illustrate the depth to which immigrants have impacted the history, culture, and citizenry of the United States.

Secondary source materials regarding European immigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries differ from reports about recent Latin American immigration because not many historical debates remain about the wave of immigration from Europe. While European immigration was beset with conflict in its time, the passing years have dampened the fiery emotions the topic evoked at the peak of the Great Wave. By contrast, because recent and current Latino immigration is still a controversial topic both politically and socially, the secondary scholarship regarding this wave of immigrants is often charged with emotion. Much of the scholarship on Hispanic immigration reflects these strong opinions.

\(^3\) This comparison cannot be taken too far, as there are historical catalysts that influenced European immigration which cannot be recreated and the country to which immigrants are arriving today is vastly different. Still, a comparative analysis of the two waves can help shed light on the future of Latin American immigration.
One aspect of the scholarship on immigration that is not controversial is what immigrants left behind in their native countries; scholars agree that the conditions in Europe largely merited the search for a new life and that situations in Latin America are equally poor, if not worse. Scholars Ellis Cose, Max Paul Friedman, and Loretta Britten and Paul Mathless all provide evidence of the hardships that prompted people to leave Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Overall, secondary sources report widespread violence and a broad lack of necessities such as food and adequate housing. This paper focuses extensively on primary sources to illustrate the reasons for European immigration, allowing the immigrants themselves to describe the details of the poverty and persecution. There are a number of published collections of immigrant stories, including Peter Morton Coan’s *Ellis Island Interviews*, Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky’s *American Mosaic*, and June Namias’ *First Generation*. Information from Ellis Island National Park Museum, gathered by the author while conducting research there, is also used as a primary source of immigrants’ memories and opinions about the hardships they faced in their native countries.

Just as poverty, wars, and discrimination caused European immigration, these struggles also account for much of the Latin American movement to the United States. Authors Ramón López and Alberto Valdés give a broad overview of poverty in Latin America in “Fighting Rural Poverty in Latin America,” as does Cristóbol Kay in “Conflictos y violencia en la Latinoamérica rural” (“Conflicts and Violence in Rural Latin America”). Beatriz Manz’ book *Paradise in Ashes* offers a detailed report on the destruction of Guatemala by its civil war, and a study of Nicaragua by the Library of Congress discusses the poverty and violence that plagued that country in the 1980s. Other
sources detail the conflicts and poverty in countries such as El Salvador, Honduras, and Mexico and are used as case studies in this paper.

Although coming to the United States meant an escape from many difficult situations, in both waves of immigration, the immigrants were often disappointed upon arrival in the United States. In all but the smallest minority of cases, immigrants faced hardships and discrimination in their first generation. Gary Gerstle focuses on assimilation difficulties for European immigrants in “Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans.” His article and Max Paul Friedman’s “Beyond ‘Voting With Their Feet’” also discuss the phenomenon of return migration among Europeans who were unsatisfied with what they found in the United States. Jacob Riis’ book *How the Other Half Lives* provides a detailed account of life in the tenements of New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. Accessed through the Manuscript Division of the New York Public Research Library, the personal papers of John Foster Carr also provide insight about how immigrants assimilated into life in America. A social worker, Carr labored tirelessly during the early twentieth century to aid recently-arrived immigrants, delivering speeches, publishing guides for immigrants, and fighting the Nativism and racism against foreigners prevalent in his time. In my discussion on Latin American assimilation, Sonia Nazario and Héctor Tobar’s works provided critically important information and analysis. Nazario spends nearly half of her detailed book, *Enrique’s Journey*, describing the difficult assimilation process for Hispanics. Tobar’s *Translation Nation* also discusses the challenges of developing a Latino identity within the United States.

One of the most extensively researched areas of both waves of immigration is the response of U.S. citizens to the newly arrived. Some Americans welcomed European
immigrants, but overall, the reaction to the influx of foreigners was racist and negative. Information gathered at Ellis Island National Park and through the John Foster Carr Papers provides primary source evidence of the anti-immigration movement in the early twentieth century. Scholars Roger Daniels, Gary Gerstle, Ellis Cose, and Loretta Britten and Paul Mathless also provide evidence of the negative response to European immigrants in their respective books and articles.

Opinions about immigration today continue to differ. Some authors manage to remain impartial in their analyses. Stephen Currie’s *Issues in Immigration* presents the two sides of current immigration thought in a debate-like format, helping to illustrate the contemporary scope of opinions. Ellis Cose and Raymond Mohl also remain refreshingly neutral in their respective articles rather than offering a politically charged commentary.

Those authors who offer biased analyses of Latin American immigration are plentiful. Patrick Buchanan outlines his anti-immigration viewpoints in *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*. Buchanan does not intend to present an objective analysis, and his book represents his political extremism. Still, his opinion is necessary in order to gain a full understanding of the negative response to immigration. Current newspaper articles and other media, including evidence from the popular college networking site “Facebook” are also used to show the widespread discrimination against Latin American immigrants. A search conducted among Facebook’s “groups,” which members can join to show support for a variety of political and social issues, uncovered a number of anti-immigration themes.

In direct contrast to Buchanan and others like him is Sanford J. Ungar, who highlights the positive effects of Latino immigration in his book *Fresh Blood: The New*
American Immigrants. The collection of articles edited by Juan F. Perea, Immigrants Out: The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States is also supportive of immigration. Perea’s anthology contains contributions from a number of talented scholars who address a wide variety of issues, including the history of Nativism, recent legal developments against immigrants, and poverty amongst recently-arrived Latinos. Immigrants Out! also explores many of the most common debates about immigration, including border control, English-only laws, and the citizenship rights of children born to illegal immigrants in the United States. The book, overall, is deeply critical of the opponents of immigration and advocates a more tolerant approach to dealing with Hispanic immigration. While Roberto Suro, author of Strangers Among Us, is not as adamant as Ungar and Perea in his support of immigration, he does feel that the problems it causes could be fixed if the U.S. government made the issue more of a priority in legislation and policy.

In addition to the scholarly books and articles used in research, this paper also draws from a few less-conventional sources of information. Anzia Yezierska’s novel Bread Givers offers a fictitious yet historically accurate representation of common European immigrant struggles; the account of Sara Smolinsky and her family is telling of the familial conflicts that often took place between parents and children as the younger generations of immigrants assimilated at a faster rate than their elders. In a similar fashion, Betty Smith’s A Tree Grows in Brooklyn is used to illustrate the daily routines of life in the tenement districts. The novel focuses on Francie Nolan and her family as they struggle to survive in the poverty and filth of Brooklyn at the turn of the twentieth
century. Both novels are loosely based on the authors’ own lives and reflect well the realities of the immigrant experience.

While it is in the experience of immigrants after their arrival that the deepest comparisons can be made between European and Latin American immigration, any discussion regarding this topic must look first at the reasons the immigrants had for leaving their home countries and moving to the United States. As previously mentioned, poverty, war, and discrimination in Europe pushed the immigrants out of their native lands. The promise of jobs and better lives and the influence of family members already in America pulled them to the United States. The bloody conflicts in Europe played an important role in the Great Wave of immigration; those seeking a new life away from the danger of the fighting often left their homelands for the United States. Greek immigrant James Karavolas explained his family’s 1915 decision to immigrate by saying, “after they bombed the whole place…bodies were piled up on the sidewalk. Blood all over. So my father says, ‘well, there’s no use staying here.’”\(^5\) Italy and the Balkan states were also involved in armed conflicts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result, these countries all sent large numbers of immigrants to America.\(^6\)

While wars influenced the decision to immigrate, scholar Max Paul Friedman claims in his article “Beyond Voting With Their Feet” that one of the most common misconceptions about European immigration is that people came to the United States searching for freedom. He maintains that, with the exception of groups like the Jews, who were being actively persecuted in Europe, “labor, rather than liberty, remained the


\(^6\) Ellis Island National Park Museum, visited 14 October 2007.
overriding concern in the decision to move to the United States.” Rocco Morelli, an Italian immigrant whose family immigrated in 1907, remembers that his mother told his father, “I do not want to raise my children in this country any longer…I don’t want no poverty. I want to go…to the United States. You work over there. The children will work over there. And at least we’ll eat.” In fact, some poverty-stricken groups from Europe came only long enough to earn enough money to improve their social status when they returned home; immigrating was “a means rather than an end.” Called “Birds of Passage,” these families saw their migration to America as a strictly temporary arrangement, “treating the Atlantic as a lake that had to be crossed twice a year on the way to and from work.” Many families who sent members to work in the United States were accustomed to this arrangement on a smaller scale; sons often traveled to far-away cities in their native countries to earn money. Going to America, then, meant only a longer commute than before.

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7 Max Paul Friedman, “Beyond Voting With Their Feet: Toward a Conceptual History of ‘America’ in European Migrant Sending Communities, 1860 to 1914,” *Journal of Social History* 40:3 (Spring 2007), Database online, available from EBSCO HOST, Academic Search Premier, 557. Between 1870 and 1914, more than two million Jews left Europe, where “the Jewish existence was continually and violently attacked.” Jews escaping anti-Semitism in Czarist Russia also became immigrants to the United States. After Czar Alexander II’s assassination in 1881, anti-Jewish riots and restrictions on Jewish businesses caused 80 percent of Jews from Russia to migrate to the United States. As Friedman explains, Jews who were “facing a hostile majority at home” found in America “not only a brighter economic future or a temporary source of earnings but religious tolerance, republican institutions, and the separation of church and state, all of which seemed essential to survival for many Jews in the 1880s and few of which could be readily found elsewhere.” See June Namias, *First Generation: In the Words of Twentieth Century American Immigrants* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 4; Ellis Cose, *A Nation of Strangers: Prejudice, Politics, and the Population of America* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1992), 60; Friedman, 559.

8 Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum.

9 Friedman, 558.


11 Ibid. One immigrant reported that her “father spend most of his time going back and forth to America because there wasn’t enough work [in Italy] for a carpenter…he’d come back and forth every couple of years.” See Coan, 55.
Those families who immigrated permanently were often split up for years before the rest of the family could follow the original pioneer. Once money had been saved and a second home had been established, the influence of family members created a pull to America. Many Europeans living in the United States reported an increase in their standard of living to family members. Polish immigrant Adam Raczkowski, for example, wrote to his brother in 1906 to urge him to come to America because “up to the present I am doing very well here, and I have no intention of going to our country, because in our country I experienced only misery and poverty, and now I live better than a lord in our country.”[12] The influence of family members like Raczkowski helped to spread the news of life in America to other Europeans and helped to propel forward an already strong wave of immigration.

While some immigrants influenced family members to join them in the United States, immigration more often than not meant a permanent separation; most who left for America never again saw those they left behind. Julia Goniprow, who immigrated from Lithuania in 1899, remembered that her mother told her when they said good-bye that “it was just like seeing me go to my casket.”[13] Thus, for “relatives bidding farewell to emigrants, America could be seen as the land that robbed them of their loved ones.”[14] As a result, many songs in Europe during the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries cursed the United States, with lyrics that bemoaned the fact that many husbands and beaus left and never returned. Friedman observes that “Sicilian ‘America widows,’ who wandered through towns crying out the names of their husbands or sons in

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12 Ellis Island National Park Museum.  
14 Friedman, 566.
the United States would hardly have been thinking of that country as paradise.”15 Sung by women who had been abandoned, one Hungarian folksong encapsulated this fear and anger: “Oh you undulating soil of America,/How many girls have called down curses upon you!/America, be cursed…forever!”16 In other parts of Europe, colloquial phrases with “America” in them often came to signify distance; Friedman reports that “in Hesse, the Amerika-feld was the field furthest from the farmhouse,” and “in parts of Italy, andare [walk] in America meant to undertake a long journey to a distant town.”17 Similar phrases also came to signify insults or dismissals; in Bohemia, telling someone to “go to America” meant more or less the same thing as telling him to “go to hell,” and saying that someone had been “sent to America” could mean that he had gone to jail or had gone crazy.18

Just as poverty and war ravaged Europe at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, conflict shattered Central America in the 1980s and 1990s. In Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, civil wars left more than half a million dead and millions more displaced by fighting.19 In addition to the human carnage, the economic casualties of the wars were catastrophic. In Nicaragua, the fighting resulted in $500 million worth of destroyed industries and $800 million of infrastructural damage.20 The conflicts also lowered agricultural production and led to further economic instability in

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 562.
18 Ibid.
20 “Legacy of the Sandinista Revolution.”
these largely agrarian societies.\textsuperscript{21} Therefore, the situations in these countries made survival there extremely difficult.

Human rights violations committed by the governments of El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala also pushed people out of their native countries in the 1980s. In their book \textit{El Salvador: Testament of Terror}, Joe Fish and Cristina Sganga describe the war there as “a deliberate and systematic policy of depopulation being carried out in the mountains and villages of El Salvador in violation of international law.”\textsuperscript{22} Beatriz Manz, an anthropologist who studies the indigenous Guatemalan peoples, claims that the brutality in Guatemala “[exceeded] the toll in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chile, and Argentina combined [and that] ethnic cleansing was practiced on a scale beyond even that of Bosnia.”\textsuperscript{23} In the 1980s, Guatemalan soldiers searching for guerrilla fighters regularly destroyed entire rural villages, looting and burning before killing everyone they could find.\textsuperscript{24} Many of these murders were not reported because they took place in the highlands and other remote areas, and there was a language barrier for the indigenous people. Furthermore, there were no human rights organizations or established journalism in Guatemala, and the world focus at the time was on the more publicized conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador.\textsuperscript{25} As a result of the bitter fighting, citizens of Latin American countries left their homes to immigrate elsewhere, with a large number choosing the United States. Between 1981 and 1983, 1.5 of 8 million Guatemalans were “displaced internally or forced to flee the country” and two-thirds of the 1.5 million Salvadorans.

\textsuperscript{21} Kay, 112, translated by Anna Hahn.
\textsuperscript{22} Quoted in Charles D. Brockett, “Review: El Salvador: The Long Journey from Violence to Reconciliation,” \textit{Latin American Research Review} 29:3 (1994), 179. One of the most infamous massacres by the Salvadoran military occurred at El Mozote, where investigators found the skeletons of 131 children. The average age of those victims was 6 years. See Brockett, 178.
\textsuperscript{23} Manz, 4.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 1-2.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., xiv.
who fled their homes went either to refugee camps in Honduras or Mexico or to the United States.  

The civil wars in Central America only served to aggravate the already overwhelming poverty there. In Latin America, citizens are considered impoverished only if they make less than $360 annually. In 1990, skilled Nicaraguan office workers made approximately $10 per month, and half of the work force was unemployed. 

Asked what it would take for people to stay in Honduras, one woman replied, “There would have to be jobs. Jobs that pay okay. That’s all.” In Honduras, many children are pulled out of school at age eight so that they can help support their families by begging or selling food and water. In order to eat, children as young as six scavenge the landfills for food, and an elementary school principal in Tegucigalpa said that some of his students are so malnourished that they cannot stand long enough to sing the national anthem.

As in Central and South America, Mexico’s economy has forced its citizens to seek provisions elsewhere. The wave of Mexican immigrants largely began in the 1980s, when economic crisis rocked Mexico at the same time that the United States experienced prosperity. Today, that same imbalance continues. Forty percent of Mexico’s 106 million people earn less than $2 per day, while in the United States even minimum wage

26 Ibid., 4; Brockett, 179.
30 Ibid., xxiv.
31 Ibid., 26, xxiv.
allows for at least $46.80 per day.\textsuperscript{33} One Mexican man said “it’s the money” that makes him come back when he is deported; even with what he pays coyotes to smuggle him across the border multiple times, he can earn ten times more in the United States than in Mexico.\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, journalist Sonia Nazario states, “for immigrants, the material benefits of coming to the United States are clear.”\textsuperscript{35}

Poverty, war, and discrimination all push Hispanics out of Latin America, but other factors pull them to the United States. Two of the biggest pulls for Hispanic immigrants are word-of-mouth advertising and—just as with earlier European immigration—the influence of family members already in the United States. One immigrant explained the strong influence that family members have on each other:

First my family came…and then my friends came, and then the friends of my relatives and then the relatives of my friends and then the friends of my friends’ relatives came. And now those who remain [in Mexico]…are sending their children.\textsuperscript{36}

Thus, the immigration wave tends to grow larger over time, as established immigrants send for their families and friends, pulling them north. One study, conducted by William Kandel and Douglas Massey, showed that the more time Mexicans have spent in the United States, the higher their desire to live there permanently becomes.\textsuperscript{37} This desire is

\textsuperscript{33} “U.S. Department of Labor,” On-line at http://www.dol.gov/wb/faq24.htm, Accessed 16 November 2007. This statistic is based on the federal minimum wage of $5.85/hour and assumes an eight-hour work day. For immigrants, a more realistic 12-hour work day could earn them at least $70.20 per day at this wage.
\textsuperscript{34} Quoted Britten and Mathless, 348.
\textsuperscript{35} Nazario, 243-244.
also positively influenced if family members have been north; Latinos who see the merchandise and the pictures of material wealth that relatives send home want to experience that same lifestyle and are therefore more likely to travel north.\footnote{Ibid., 992; Suro, 28-29.}

Furthermore, Kandel and Massey found that “for young men…migration [to the United States] becomes a rite of passage, and those who don’t attempt it are seen as lazy, unenterprising, and undesirable as potential mates.”\footnote{Kandel and Masey, 982.} Immigrating north, then, is seen as an adventure by young Hispanic men; not attempting the journey would hurt their image among friends and neighbors at home.\footnote{Ibid., 984.}

Many immigrants are also lured north by the promise of upward mobility. In Latin American culture, social class is determined by birth, gender, and ethnicity, and the rigidity of the class system often prohibits advancement in society. “In Latin America,” writes Tobar, “you are born to a station in life. Class mobility is something that exists only in the telenovela soap operas…The only way to give your life a telenovela ending is to head northward.”\footnote{Héctor Tobar, Translation Nation: Defining a New American Identity in the Spanish-Speaking United States (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005), 44.} In Guatemala, those of Mayan descent are especially discriminated against and pushed into the lowest classes of society, whereas in America, according to one immigrant, “no one knows what family you came from and nobody cares.”\footnote{Quoted in Suro, 42.} The promise of equality is especially enticing for women; Hispanic countries are traditionally patriarchal, and women are often abused, neglected, or abandoned. “For women,” Kandel writes, “the United States offers a means of overcoming patriarchal restrictions…of attaining power and autonomy within the family, of reducing the burdens
of housework and child rearing, and of achieving a more egalitarian marriage.”

According to one immigrant, in Guatemala women could never work outside of the home for money, so the right to employment for women in the United States is a welcome change and an advancement in their liberties. Thus, the promise of being able to redefine one’s social class is one reason why many Hispanic immigrants come to the United States.

The pull north is perpetuated by the United States itself. Scholar Sanford J. Ungar explains, “We sell our country hard…Indeed, every day we send out the message, none too subtly, that anyone in the world in his or her right mind should want to live in America. It is hardly surprising, then, that so many people try to come.” U.S. advertising is not just indirect; a radio commercial advertising jobs paying $6.45 per hour in Eagle Pass, Texas, brought Mexican immigrant Román north. Some companies also post billboards in Mexico to draw workers. In 2002, a Gold Kist billboard in Tijuana, Mexico advertised, “Mucho Trabajo en Russellville, Alabama [There are lots of jobs in Russellville, Alabama].”

While the same reasons motivated both European and Latin American immigrants to come to the United States, the journey to America is much different now for Hispanics than it was for European immigrants traveling in the early twentieth century. While the

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43 Kandel, 984.
44 Suro, 33.
45 It is important to note that, like many of the ideas immigrants have about the United States before immigrating, the prospect of redefining and improving one’s social class is not always as easy as it appears in the United States; the poverty and discrimination faced by immigrants—especially illegal ones—often hinders the ability of those people to truly rise in social status in the United States. This harsh reality will be discussed further later in this paper.
47 Tobar, 80. Neither Román’s last name nor date of immigration were included in Tobar’s account
Europeans had further to go and arrived in a completely unknown country, their journey was highly regulated by immigration officials on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, which reduced the risks involved. Latin Americans, although somewhat familiar with the United States because of its proximity and because of technology, embark on a much more unregulated, and therefore, more dangerous, journey.

The trip from Europe to America often began with a train; immigrants were carried to port cities, “in steerage, like animals,” according to one immigrant.49 Once at the ships, immigrants underwent a legal exam and were processed, deloused, and fumigated in an attempt to prevent epidemics aboard the ships and to ensure that all of the passengers would be admitted into the United States.50 The journey to America, which lasted eight to fourteen days on a steamship, presented different challenges depending on the season; it was frigid during the winter and sweltering during the summer.51 Conditions in steerage were hardly bearable. On average, 3,000 people were housed in third class, the berths were “stacked to [the] ceiling,” and passengers were fed little besides soup and bread.52 Because the ship kitchens were not Kosher, many Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States severely undernourished because they refused to eat the food offered to them.53 One immigrant felt that the ships were “calculated as to inflict upon us the last, full measure of suffering and indignity.”54 Storms encountered at

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50 Ibid. After 1903, the U.S. government began charging steamship companies $100 per immigrant who was sent back to Europe because they were unfit to enter the country. The companies were also required by law to pay for the room and board of those immigrants detained on Ellis Island. Information gathered from Ellis Island National Park Museum.
51 Ellis Island National Park Museum
52 Britten and Mathless, 28; “Island of Hope, Island of Fear.”
53 Ellis Island National Park Museum. As a result of this, Ellis Island established a separate, Kosher kitchen in 1911 to serve the needs of those Jewish immigrants who were detained there.
54 Quoted in Britten and Mathless, 28.
sea aggravated the situation; many immigrants suffered from seasickness. An Irish immigrant remembered, “one night I prayed to God that [our ship] would go down because the waves were washing over it. I was that sick.”

Arrival in New York City did not mark the end of the third-class passengers’ journey. First and second-class passengers were admitted immediately into the country, but steerage-class immigrants were taken from New York Harbor by barge to Ellis Island. On average, more than 5,000 people passed through the Registry Room at Ellis Island each day between 1900 and 1924. This Great Hall was called the “Tower of Babel” with good reason; more than two dozen languages were spoken every day as immigrants were processed and admitted into the United States.

The vast majority of the 12 million immigrants who entered the United States through Ellis Island were released in less than a day, and only two percent were ultimately refused entry into the United States. Because officials wanted immigrants to be healthy enough to support themselves, they rejected one percent for medical reasons. The doctors in charge of determining the health of the immigrants were called “6 Second Specialists”; they had about that long to check newcomers for more than 50 diseases.

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55 Quoted in Ibid., 28.
56 Ellis Island National Park Ranger-Guided Tour, 14 October 2007.
57 On the busiest day in history at Ellis Island, April 17, 1907, 11,747 people were processed in one day. Information gathered during Ellis Island National Park Ranger-Guided Tour.
58 When I visited Ellis Island, the Registry Room of Ellis Island was loud with the echoes of just a few hundred tourists, who tended to be quiet, respectful, and on their best museum-style behavior. What it must have been like with five to eleven thousand loud, tired, frightened immigrants is almost unimaginable. The yelling, the different languages, the crying babies, the fussing children, the panic caused by families being separated, and the officials shouting out names over the noise must have produced nothing short of a roar. “Island of Hope, Island of Fear.”
59 Ibid. The Park Ranger at Ellis Island explained that the stairs that led from the luggage room to the Registry Room were designed in such a way that doctors standing at the top could observe all four sides and the top of the head of all immigrants as they walked up the steps. In this way, doctors were able to check for ailments such as lice and lameness, and look for evidence of heart disease, such as shortness of breath as the immigrants ascended the stairs.
Persons afflicted with mental handicaps and those suspected of insanity faced further scrutiny, and were often administered tests designed to test their cognitive abilities, such as fitting shapes into cutouts or drawing a certain shape.\textsuperscript{62} The eye disease Trachoma, which inevitably led to blindness and could even cause death, was one of the most common reasons for rejection on medical grounds. Because Trachoma was not treatable at the time and was highly contagious, it was grounds for immediate rejection.\textsuperscript{63}

Once the medical exam ended, immigrants also faced a legal exam, which was printed in 39 different languages. The ship manifest, which contained the answers to the 29 questions immigrants had been asked when they boarded their ship in Europe, was used to administer the exam. Immigrants who could give an acceptable, matching answer to a selection of questions chosen at random by an immigration official were cleared for entry into the country.\textsuperscript{64} Only one percent of immigrants were not granted clearance because of legal issues. Single women were among those most often denied entry because of legality; laws designed to prevent prostitution required women to be accompanied by a male family member.\textsuperscript{65} For men, one of the most common questions asked during the legal exam was whether or not they had a job lined up already and if their future

\textsuperscript{62} Ellis Island National Park Museum. According to a 1917 U.S. Public Health Service Manual, 9 percent of immigrants underwent mental testing. Also interesting to note is the fact that the test wherein immigrants were asked to draw a certain shape was often failed by illiterate immigrants; those who had never held a pencil before had difficulty managing the writing device well enough to draw an acceptable circle. Information gathered from Ellis Island National Park Museum.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
employer had paid their passage, since both of these steps were illegal under the 1885 Contract Labor Law.  

The immigrant experience at Ellis Island varied greatly and produced a variety of emotions and opinions. For many, it induced panic. The uniforms of the immigration officials were especially frightening for some immigrants. One Jewish man remembered, “we were scared of uniforms. It took us back to the Russian uniforms we were running away from.” Cultural differences also caused confusion, and those detained for long periods of time on the Island were often disheartened by their experience. “By the time we came to New York…” remembered Ukranian immigrant Bessie Akawie, who came to the United States in 1921, “somehow the experience on Ellis Island had aged us. We didn’t want to sing anymore. We were all grown up.” However, for some immigrants, Ellis Island was the beginning of the fulfillment of their dreams of the new world. The food, especially, caused quite a stir among newly arrived peasants. “To me,” one immigrant exclaimed, “this white bread was like cake already!” Many immigrants

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66 This law was enacted in an effort to prevent indentured servitude; immigrant had to pay back their fare to their employer, which forced them to stay in a certain position. It also brought down the wage scale and kept Americans out of jobs. However, there were exceptions: family members were allowed to pay relatives’ passage, and clergy of all faiths and touring entertainers were permitted to have jobs lined up before arrival. Information gathered from a Ranger-Guided Tour at Ellis Island National Park.

67 Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum. Other immigrants from similar backgrounds stated, “The word government frightened me. Government was tyranny. Government was officers who looked at you and wanted to hate you or get rid of you,” and that, “Policeman to me was someone who could cut my head off.” Quotes from “Island of Hope, Island of Fear.”

68 One example of this cultural confusion comes from Oreste Telgia, an Italian immigrant who arrived in 1916. “We got oatmeal for breakfast,” she reported, “and I didn’t know what it was, with the brown sugar on it, you know. I couldn’t get myself to eat it. So I put it on the windowsill, let the birds eat it.” Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum.

69 Ellis Island National Park Museum.

70 Quoted in “Island of Hope, Island of Fear.”
tasted their first hotdog on Ellis Island or were served some other American treat, such as a doughnut.  

Because European immigrants traveled across the Atlantic to arrive in the United States, their arrival in America was relatively easy to regulate. The limited number of ports at which the boats could dock created a funnel into the country, thereby facilitating the construction of immigration processing centers like the one on Ellis Island. By contrast, the nature of the southern border of the United States, which is almost 2,000 miles long, makes entry into the country for Latin Americans much less regulated. The trip itself is also vastly different now than it was at the turn of the last century. The deep corruption of many authorities in Mexico, who rob, beat, and blackmail immigrants, makes the journey exceedingly dangerous. This is especially true for immigrants from countries other than Mexico who must travel its length to reach the U.S. border; many are deported from Mexico multiple times before making it to the Rio Grande River. There are several ways for non-Mexican immigrants to cross Mexico, but most immigrants spend some time riding on the roofs of trains. Those traveling in this manner are often beaten, robbed, raped, starved, crushed during derailments, thrown off by gangs, get

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71 Signe Bergman, a 1916 Swedish immigrant, remembered that, “When I arrived at Ellis Island they served us coffee and doughnuts. That was the first time that I ever saw or ate a doughnut and I thought it was great! It tasted so good. Of course at home we didn’t have anything like that.” Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum.

72 It must be noted that this section of the paper deals with illegal as opposed to legal immigration. Of course, those persons entering the country legally face none of the challenges or dangers discussed below; they travel by airplane or car and are duly processed in government offices. Entry into America is highly unregulated for illegal immigrants and it is for this group of people that the journey differs so radically from the experience of European immigrants.

73 Nazario reports that in one Mexican city, 17 buses of detained people are sent back to Guatemala each day. Many of these, like Enrique, cross back into Mexico within a few hours of being deported to Guatemala, but it takes several attempts to make it all the way to the United States. Nazario, 243.
knocked off by low tree branches, or fall off and lose limbs or die boarding or exiting.\textsuperscript{74}

The immigrants cannot get on and off of the trains in the stations, where the migration police are ever present. Instead, they must jump off the moving train as it slows to enter a town, run around the town, and catch up with the train as it leaves on the other side. Those who do not catch the same train face serious dangers before the next train comes through.\textsuperscript{75} Nazario reports that at the train station in Tapachula, Mexico, “fights break out between municipal and state police officers over who gets to rob [groups] of migrants.”\textsuperscript{76} Even worse than the police are the gangs; some areas are so dangerous that even the corrupt authorities will not venture into them because of gang violence.\textsuperscript{77}

Two thirds of the border between the United States and Mexico, more than 1,250 miles, is determined by the Río Grande, making it difficult to seal completely.\textsuperscript{78} In 1996, a typical year, the Border Patrol apprehended 1,249,876 immigrants, but an estimated 300,000 evaded capture each year in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{79} INS patrols of areas around the Río Grande have greatly intensified lately, with the use of infrared detectors, motion sensors, and more officers, but even with these increases, many areas are still under-patrolled.\textsuperscript{80}

Extra patrols have also led to an increase in smugglers and illegal immigrant deaths, as travelers engage in more risky ways to cross the border in an effort to elude the authorities, such as cutting through vast expanses of the southwestern desert, where

\textsuperscript{74} At some points along the journey, such as in the Mexican state of Veracruz, local residents meet the trains and throw food and water to the starving immigrants who are riding on top of the train. These generous rations often are the difference between life and death for many immigrants. See Nazario, 104.

\textsuperscript{75} See Nazario’s book \textit{Enrique’s Journey} for further description of these dangers.

\textsuperscript{76} Nazario, 49.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 241-242.

\textsuperscript{78} Britten and Mathless, 144.

\textsuperscript{79} Daniels, 53; Britten and Mathless, 22.

\textsuperscript{80} Nazario, 163-165. The El Paso Border Control has an 85,000 square mile patrol area of mountains and deserts, yet fewer officers than a normal big city police department. See Stephen Currie, \textit{Issues in Immigration} (San Diego: Lucent Books, 2000), 62-63.
temperatures routinely soar above 100 degrees Fahrenheit, without a proper supply of water.\textsuperscript{81} Between the dangers of the desert and the risks of overheating in railroad cars or suffocating in trucks, an estimated 2,000 immigrants died trying to cross the border between 1998 and 2003.\textsuperscript{82}

Arrival in the United States has never meant the end of the struggles for immigrants. In both the European and Latin American experiences, what immigrants found in the United States was rarely what they expected. With few exceptions, the first generations of immigrants experienced isolation, poverty, low-level jobs, poor housing conditions, and racism upon arrival. One Italian immigrant expressed her disappointment with what she found in America by saying, “I came to America because I heard the streets were paved with gold. When I got here, I found…they weren’t paved at all; I was expected to pave them.”\textsuperscript{83} For Latino immigrants, this disappointment is even greater than it was for their European counterparts: they come not only with expectations gleaned from rumors, but also with a picture in their minds of the America they have seen on television.\textsuperscript{84} “Latinos,” Suro writes, “are the only major group of immigrants who arrive so deeply imbued with American ways. Anyone growing up in Latin America…has been saturated with images and information about the United States from birth.”\textsuperscript{85} Many immigrants, then, are disappointed when they arrive and realize that their lives here are

\textsuperscript{81} Nazario, 259; Luis Alberto Urrea, \textit{The Devil’s Highway} (New York: Little, Brown and Company: 2004), xv.
\textsuperscript{82} Tobar, 45.
\textsuperscript{83} Quoted in Britten and Mathless, 56.
\textsuperscript{84} Suro, 71.
\textsuperscript{85} Suro, 71.
nothing like the television images. Socorro Ibara, who came to Los Angeles when he was fifteen, reported that “what we found there was lies and abuse.” Furthermore, not only do Latin Americans not find what they were hoping for here in the United States, sometimes they encounter the very things that they hoped to leave behind: violence associated with the Salvadoran gang Mara Salvatrucha, for example, is so bad that, according to one sociologist, immigrants from El Salvador who “came here to escape death squads…now…live in fear of death squads made up of their own children.”

Instead of the riches and comfort they had imagined, low paying jobs awaited European immigrants, and similar positions exist today for Latin Americans. In 1914, immigrants made up 14 percent of the population, but they held more than 50 percent of the industrial jobs, laboring in the mills and mines for wages totaling between $250 and $450 per year. Recent Latin American immigrants face similar situations. Although work can usually be found, without a high school diploma or English language skills, even the wages of full time jobs are not enough to support a family; author Roberto Suro writes that Latino immigrants are “experiencing the poverty of full employment.” The wages of illegal Latino immigrants are lower than those of citizens in comparable

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86 Nazario, 13. To ward off the humiliation that would come from returning home empty-handed after failing to get rich in the United States, many Cuban immigrants in the 1980s took pictures of themselves outside of the homes of well-to-do Americans and sent the photos home to family members under the guise of owning the home themselves. These immigrants, then, “having heard stories of other Cuban émigrés’ legendary accomplishments, expected the streets of America to be paved with gold, and some simply pretended they were.” This falsification helped them to avoid a blow to their pride that having family at home who knew of the true circumstances in America would cause. See Ungar, 205.
87 Tobar, 105.
88 Quoted in Suro, 50.
89 Ellis Island National Park Museum.
90 Suro, 213. The 2000 Census Comparison of Education and Poverty found that 49 percent of Mexican immigrants, 35.7 percent of South Americans, and 28 percent of Central Americans did not receive high school diplomas, compared to only 13 percent of non-Hispanics. Furthermore, only 5.1 percent of those with Mexican backgrounds received bachelors degrees, while 18.1 percent of non-Hispanics held degrees from a four year college. In direct correlation, 21.2 percent of Mexicans live below the poverty line and only 2.1 percent earn more than $75,000 annually, compared to 8 percent and 14.3 percent, respectively, of non-Hispanics. Rodolfo F. Acuña, *U.S. Latino Issues* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), 6.
positions, but because organizing into unions would mean unwanted attention and possible deportation, there is little that these immigrants can do to protest or evoke change. Furthermore, as one Latino Union Worker explained, “the problem with Los Angeles is that everyone in Latin America wants to come here and the bosses know that. It doesn’t scare them for us to say we are going on strike because if they have twenty-five people working in a building, they know they have a thousand waiting outside who want to work.” Thus, the general thought amongst Hispanic laborers is that the consequences of strikes greatly outweigh the possible benefits. As a result, “disproportionately high poverty rates” are not only the standard for recent immigrants; they are often “visible even in the third generation after settling in the United States.”

In addition to low wages, immigrants’ jobs are dangerous. For European immigrants, the most dreaded job was mining. One immigrant mother explained that with family members working in the mines, “you say one prayer in the morning when your husband or son goes to work and another when they come home.” Among Latin Americans, meatpacking, which is now considered “the most dangerous job in the United States,” is the modern equivalent to mining. In addition to the normal dangers of the work, training in Spanish is minimal, and as a result, many immigrants do not understand safety regulations or take necessary precautions. Furthermore, as Sonia Nazario points out in *Enrique’s Journey*, many immigrants work twenty hours each day, and their extreme exhaustion makes it easier to make fatal mistakes. The numbers speak of these dangers; in 2001, OSHA reported that Hispanics faced “a 20 percent greater risk of being

91 Mohl, 45-46.
92 Suro, 216.
93 Zavella, 140.
94 Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum.
95 Nazario, 13-16.
killed on the job than black and white workers combined.” As with wage inequalities, there is little Latino immigrants can do to bring about change; those who protest conditions are sometimes threatened with being reported to authorities, which could mean deportation.96

Hispanic immigrants who work as migrant workers, traveling around the United States to find work in agriculture, are often the hardest worked and worst paid immigrant laborers. The roots of migrant labor come from the Bracero [Arm] Program, established in 1941 during World War II. Because there were not enough agricultural laborers in the United States during the war, Mexican workers were brought north to work the fields in states like California. During the twenty-three years that the Bracero Program lasted, the workers established relationships with the ranch owners, and so when the Bracero Program ended in 1964, workers continued to cross the border in order to find employment.97 Long hours in the hot sun performing physically strenuous jobs wear down these workers quickly, and “their productive capacities are used up early in their lives.”98 The pay often leaves migrant workers in deep poverty; in 1993, strawberry pickers in California earned $3.70 per hour plus an additional sixty to sixty-five cents for each box of fruit they picked. In the same area of California, one room apartments rented for nearly $500 each month. Because of the discrepancy between salary and cost of living, there is a high number of multiple family households, and many migrant workers live in poor conditions.99

96 Mohl, 45.
97 Zavella, 138-139.
99 Zavella, 145-146.
One aspect of the immigrant experience faced by Europeans that is better regulated now is child labor. In 1890, New York law mandated that “children under sixteen [could not] be employed unless they [could] read and write English,” and no child under the age of fourteen was to be employed. By 1914, 35 states had outlawed employing children under the age of 14 and mandated an eight-hour work day. Still, European immigrant children, whose wages were needed for survival, often worked ten or twelve hours per day in factories, on farms, or peddling goods on the streets. To get jobs, many lied about their ages, and few companies investigated. During inspections of the factories, employers hid underage children or sent them home before the officers arrived. Corrupt authorities allowed this practice to occur. Pauline Newman, who worked at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory as a child before the infamous fire, bluntly assessed the situation when she stated that “the factory always got an ok from the inspector, and I suppose someone at City Hall got a little something, too.” The long work hours made it impossible for the majority of these children to attend school; one tenement dweller reportedly asked photo journalist Jacob Riis, “when shall we find time to learn?” Riis wrote in his book How the Other Half Lives, “I owe him the answer yet.”

A large percentage of immigrants’ hard-earned wages were sent home to aid family and friends who remained in the old world, further cutting into their already low income. For European immigrants, these remittances were a common practice. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants living in the United States sent

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101 Ellis Island National Park Museum. Accidents in work venues involving children were three times higher than incidents among adult laborers. Ellis Island National Park Museum.
102 Quoted in Morrison and Zabusky, 10.
103 Riis, 91.
home almost $8 million annually.\textsuperscript{104} According to John F. Quinlan, who worked for the Contract Labor Bureau of New York City during the height of the European immigration wave, Italian immigrants cost the United States even more: he estimated that this group sent almost 20 million dollars home annually. Still others argued that the numbers were even higher, between 118 and 150 million dollars each year.\textsuperscript{105}

For Latin American immigrants, remittances have become even more significant economically. In 1992, the money sent home to Latin America from the United States was the second largest international money exchange that year, behind only the oil trade.\textsuperscript{106} This money is so important that it constitutes 15 percent of El Salvador’s GDP, making labor “the largest export” in that country.\textsuperscript{107} In Mexico, money sent home by immigrants living and working in the United States represents the second largest contribution to the Mexican economy.\textsuperscript{108} Kandel states that “foreign remittances enable poor households [in Mexico] to self-insure against risks to their economic well-being and to elevate material standards of consumption.”\textsuperscript{109} And, like Juan, a Hispanic immigrant, said, “It [doesn’t] take many dollars from here to make a difference there.”\textsuperscript{110} Thus, often times this income is critical to the survival of Latin American families and the development of infrastructure in the home countries.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{104} Suro, 36.
\textsuperscript{105} Neil Larry Shumsky, “Let No Man Stop to Plunder,” in \textit{Journal of American Ethnic History} (Winter 1992, 11:2). Accessed through EBSCO Host, 11 September 2007, 3. [The page numbers for Shumsky’s article cited in this paper do not align with the page numbers in the print copy of the \textit{Journal of American Ethnic History} but are instead compliant with the paper copy printed off the Internet by the author of this paper.]
\textsuperscript{106} Suro, 36
\textsuperscript{108} Nazario, 249
\textsuperscript{109} Kandel, 982
\textsuperscript{110} Suro, 45. Suro did not include the date of Juan’s immigration to the United States nor his country of origin.
\textsuperscript{111} Zavella, 140; Funkhouser, 137.
Poor wages meant that European immigrants found themselves living in the tenement districts of cities, which were crowded, dark, and dirty; photo journalist Jacob Riis called them “the hot-beds of the epidemics that carry death to rich and poor alike…[and] the nurseries of pauperism and crime that fill our jails and police courts.”

In 1890, Riis estimated that 75 percent of New Yorkers lived in tenement districts. In the 1890s in New York City, 39,138 buildings housed 1,332,773 people. Tenement district structures, which stood between four and seven stories tall, were built on lots that were 25 feet by 100 feet deep, with four apartments on each floor. One study found that with the ratio of people to space in the tenements, “court-yards and all included,” each tenement dweller could claim an area of approximately two square yards to himself. In these close quarters, disease was rampant, and epidemics periodically swept through the immigrant neighborhoods with disastrous results, due to the “practical impossibility of isolating the patient in a tenement.”

The barrios that now house recent Hispanic immigrants are also crowded. For many Hispanic immigrants, a modern home is too expensive; many live on the edges of suburbia in tent cities that are not much different from the horrible conditions they left in Latin America. The barrios are often dangerous, as well, with gang violence and robberies, which means that “[Latinos] are learning to become Americans in urban

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112 Riis, 2-3.
113 Riis, 6; Britten and Mathless, 52.
114 Riis, 8. The crowded conditions of the tenements was made even more miserable during the summer months, when sweltering temperatures caused “life indoors [to be] well-nigh unbearable.” Because the only way to find repose was to be outdoors, Riis reports that during the summer many immigrants died after “rolling off roofs and window-sills” as they slept outdoors. Furthermore, “life in the tenements in July and August spells death to an army of little ones who the doctor’s skill is powerless to save.” Riis, 124.
115 Riis, 125. In 1902, infant mortality rates among Irish immigrants were higher in the United States than they were in Ireland, where famine was still an issue. Suro, 236.
116 Nazario, 13-16; Ungar, 140.
neighborhoods that most Americans see only in their nightmares.” Furthermore, unlike the tenement districts of the nineteenth century, the barrios are not necessarily a stepping-stone to a better life; according to Suro, the neighborhoods foster poverty and are often permanent homes because it is so difficult to rise out of them. “For millions,” Suro explains, “the barrios have become a dead-end of unfulfilled expectations.”

For some immigrants, the dramatic change in social status they encountered upon arrival in America resulted in misunderstandings, anger, or disappointment. One European immigrant reported that her highly-educated father, who had been a Hebrew teacher in Europe, was forced to work in a factory in the United States because he did not understand English. This blow to his dignity was hard on him, and was complicated by a translation problem that arose at his work when someone innocently told him to “push” something in the factory. Misunderstanding the instruction for an insulting, similar-sounding word in Hebrew, he got into a fight to defend his honor, and subsequently lost his job. Reb Smolinksy, a character in Anzia Yezierska’s novel *Bread Givers*, encountered a similar situation. Although Smolinsky is a fictitious character, he and his family are emblematic of the struggles endured by many immigrants in America. Smolinsky, a respected Jewish rabbi in Poland, encountered a broad lack of understanding for his Old World position in the United States, and he did not understand America’s rejection of his knowledge and traditions. His refusal to work confounded his American landlady, and her indignation insulted and infuriated him. “The dirty do-nothing!” she screamed at him when she came to collect rent money and discovered that

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117 Suro, 13.
118 Suro, 7.
119 Story from Ellis Island National Park Museum.
the family could not pay her. “Go to work yourself! Stop singing prayers. Then you’ll have money for rent!”

The opinion among the upper class that a poor work ethic, rather than often insurmountable challenges, caused immigrants’ poverty also fueled misunderstandings between natives and immigrants. Betty Smith’s main character in her novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Francie Nolan, is exposed to these unjustified prejudices as she grows up in the tenement districts of New York City in the early twentieth century. Although her mother worked long hours as a janitress in their building and saved every penny possible, it was often impossible to make ends meet. Still, Francie’s teacher, unaware of her home situation, tells Francie that “there is no excuse for [poverty]. There’s work for all who want it. People are poor because they’re too lazy to work. There’s nothing beautiful about laziness.” Francie knows this to be false, thinking to herself, “Imagine Mama lazy!” Like humanitarian John Foster Carr, she knew that immigrants possessed “a prodigious will to work.” Smith bases the experiences of the Nolan family on her own childhood in the tenements of New York City, and Francie’s life is a representation of the immigrant experience as a whole. Through allowing the reader a glimpse into the typical immigrant life by detailing Francie’s childhood, Smith illustrates that many of the stereotypes surrounding the tenement districts were the result of uninformed and misguided opinions about immigrants.

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121 John Foster Carr argued against this upper-class opinion in a pamphlet entitled “The Truth About the Black Hand.” Quoted in Francis J. Oppenheimer, “The Truth About the Black Hand,” 17 January 1909, Box 4, John Foster Carr Papers, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, NY, NY, 6-7. [Hereafter all sources from this collection will be cited as the JFC Papers]; John Foster Carr, undated speech entitled “How to Make Americans out of Our Immigrants,” Box 3, JFC Papers.
123 Ibid.
124 John Foster Carr in “The Truth About the Black Hand,” by Francis J. Oppenheimer, 4, Box 4, JFC Papers.
European immigrants were more likely to experience downward mobility after resettling in the United States than Latin American immigrants are today. According to Nazario, “Mexican immigrants arrive [in the United States] with an average of five to nine years of education.”\(^{125}\) Because of this, many are only qualified for service-industry jobs; they lack the schooling necessary to compete for higher-level positions. However, some Latinos do immigrate with higher education and skill levels, and Hispanics who are forced into jobs below their skill levels because of discrimination against foreigners or language barriers often experience disappointment similar to that of the European immigrants described above. Scholar Patricia Zavella even argues that a college education does not necessarily guarantee a good job for Hispanic immigrants, many of whom face discrimination in the work force because employers assume that all Latino immigrants are illegal, that they have no voice, or that they are willing to work harder for less because of their poor economic situation. “Highly educated Mexican immigrants find themselves extremely vulnerable,” Zavella says, and they are often forced to work jobs that are “semi-professional…underpaid…and often temporary.”\(^{126}\) Andres Arias, who came to the United States from El Salvador in the early 1980s, is one example of someone who was qualified for a higher-level job than he could find in the United States. “I come from a middle-class family,” Arias reported, “so I expected to come here and get a decent job. But I didn’t know English at all; I didn’t know the culture at all. So I started working in a restaurant.”\(^{127}\) The social stigma that comes with being an illegal immigrant can also be a shameful reality for Latinos: they are, after all, technically criminals in this country, although this is not a label which they apply to themselves. Héctor Tobar, author

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125 Nazario, 257.
126 Zavella, 148-149.
127 Britten and Mathless, 156.
of *Translation Nation*, explained this identity crisis. Immigrants who are arrested trying to cross the border are:

> treated as…criminal[s] and the idea of this [is] like being forced to wear a set of clothes that [belong] to another man. [They do] not think of [themselves] as…criminal[s], of course. [They think] what [they were] doing was an act of nobility and self-sacrifice: [they]…risked arrest and injury to bring [their] famil[ies] a better life.128

Thus, for Latin American immigrants today, the decline in social status experienced by Hispanics who lived middle-class lifestyles in their home countries is often even greater than that faced by their European counterparts at the beginning of the twentieth century; not only are they forced into low-level positions, they are often denigrated legally, as well.

The difficulties of the Latino immigrant experience are compounded by the constant threat of deportation for those who are in the country illegally. This did not affect European immigrants; during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, all immigrants were legal as soon as they were cleared to enter the country through ports like Ellis Island. The same is not true today; immigration laws have become more strictly regulated, the result being that “no immigrant group has carried the stigma of illegality that now attaches itself to many Latinos.”129 Because of this, illegal Hispanic immigrants must live in constant fear of being discovered and deported. One of Héctor Tobar’s relatives is in the United States illegally, and Tobar reports that this uncle lives in a constant state of limbo. “He knows that one day,” without warning, “he could step out

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128 Tobar, 48.
129 Suro, 9.
from his San Fernando Valley apartment and never return, the food in the refrigerator left
to grow stale and rot.”\textsuperscript{130} Thus, Tobar writes, undocumented immigrants forever live in a
“state of not quite being at your destination, of not quite having arrived.”\textsuperscript{131} The threat of
depортation is amplified by the fact that many citizens have begun to complain about lax
law enforcement with regards to illegal immigrants, and in some cases have begun taking
matters into their own hands. One such story was reported by \textit{The Columbus Dispatch} on
3 February 2008. According to the article, in January 2008, an anonymous tip to the
television show “America’s Most Wanted” placed the number one fugitive in America,
Manuel Penaloza, in a South Side Columbus, Ohio home. When U.S. marshals raided the
home on January 7, they found “no evidence that Penaloza had ever been there.” What
they did discover, however, were five illegal immigrants, who were subsequently
deported. Officials have since questioned whether or not the tip was real; Tom Genz,
supervisor of the U.S. Marshals in Columbus calls it “fishy” and is skeptical that the false
alarm was more than just “an honest mistake.” He suspects, rather, that “the caller just
want[ed] to get ride of some Latinos in the neighborhood.” Attorney E. Dennis
Muchnicki, an immigration lawyer who represents illegal immigrants about to be
deported, agrees with Genz that the tip was most likely false. Citizens, he says, have
become frustrated in recent years by the appearance of inaction on the part of local
officials in dealing with illegal immigrants. Many do not understand that local officials’
hands are often tied because only federal authorities have jurisdiction over immigration, a
fact that is sure to prompt more incidents such as the bogus tip in Columbus.\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130} Tobar, 51.
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{132} Mark Ferenchik and Stephanie Czekalinski, “Officers’ Hands Tied on Illegal Immigrants,” in \textit{The
Columbus Dispatch} (3 February 2008), section 1A.
The ways in which immigrants reacted to the harsh realities they found in the United States varied a good deal. Among European immigrants, with the exception of ethnic groups who faced persecution at home, there was a high level of return migration.\(^\text{133}\) Almost half of all the Italians who immigrated to the United States went home as soon as money would allow.\(^\text{134}\) Return migration among those from the Balkans was the highest of any group of Europeans; 89 percent eventually returned to their home countries.\(^\text{135}\) This practice is not as common for recent immigrants. While many Latin Americans return home, it is usually only temporary, as a vacation or family visit. As a whole, they tend to stay permanently in the United States more than Europeans did.\(^\text{136}\)

For those European immigrants who stayed, assimilation was one of the biggest challenges, and that difficulty remains for recent Latino immigrants. European ethnic groups who settled into communities like New York City’s Little Italy for safety and support quickly reestablished cultural traditions and social organizations from Europe.\(^\text{137}\) This was so true that Jewish writer Alfred Kazin wrote that “Rivington Street was only a suburb of Minsk.”\(^\text{138}\) The high concentration of immigrants in cities prompted one editor to write in 1914 that “Germany seems to have lost all her foreign possessions with the exception of Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Cincinnati.”\(^\text{139}\) In her book *The Sidewalks of New York*, published in 1923, Bernadine Kielty described Mulberry Street in Little Italy as “a charming, pleasure-loving, sociable southern Italy, cramped and warped.

\(^{133}\) Between 1908-1914, the overall return rate for European immigrants was 32 percent, while Jews returned at only a seven percent rate. See Friedman, 559.

\(^{134}\) Currie, 25.

\(^{135}\) Gerstle, 535.

\(^{136}\) Mohl, 43.

\(^{137}\) Gerstle, 537.

\(^{138}\) Quoted in Britten and Mathless, 49.

\(^{139}\) Quoted in Currie, 27.
in the unfragrant and ugly tenements of New York.” The famous photo-journalist Jacob Riis reported in his book *How the Other Half Lives* that in the tenement districts, “an English word falls upon the ear with almost a sense of shock, as something unexpected and strange.” The ethnic press flourished in these immigrant neighborhoods, reaching its peak during World War I, when information from the old country was most valued; in 1917 there were 1,300 foreign-language newspapers nationwide, some with circulations of one million. Like the tenement districts of the early twentieth century, the barrios of today provide Latino immigrants a place to live that is connected to home while they learn the area and the language, find a job, and settle into life in the United States. These barrios, like the tenement districts, have ethnic grocery stores, newspapers, sports, clothing stores, clubs, festivals, and radio and television programming. Because of the constant influx of newly arrived immigrants into the barrios, the Hispanic culture is renewed continually, which, while comforting, can also complicate the assimilation process.

Even with the help of ethnic communities, assimilation into the American culture proved very difficult for Europeans. Some of the challenges that the earlier wave of immigrants faced were unique and have not proved to hinder Latin American immigrants. For example, cultural expectations bound many European women to the home, which caused them to assimilate at a slower pace than men because they were rarely able to put newly learned American ways into practice. Latin American women do not face the same cultural expectation and therefore are at no more of a disadvantage than Latino

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140 Excerpt from Kielty book found at Ellis Island National Park Museum.
142 Ellis Island National Park Museum.
143 Mohl, 54.
144 Gerstle, 547.
men. While both waves of immigrants have faced language barriers, making it difficult to venture out of their ethnic communities, many of the immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were unfamiliar not only with English but also with the Latin alphabet.\textsuperscript{145} Furthermore, the variety of non-English languages made it difficult for Americans to break down these barriers in the early twentieth century. By contrast, Hispanic immigrants today find a country that more and more caters to its Spanish-speaking population, which makes learning English and, consequently, assimilating, easier. Furthermore, because of the proximity of Latin America to the United States, Joe Feagin points out that “many Latino immigrants come to the United States partially assimilated because of the dominance of U.S. culture and corporations in their countries.”\textsuperscript{146} Thus, while the overall experience is still trying, Latino immigrants do not have to deal with some of the specific difficulties encountered by their European counterparts.

However, Latin Americans face challenges that Europeans did not. The lighter skin color of northern and western European immigrants allowed for full assimilation within a generation.\textsuperscript{147} Being darker, and therefore more noticeable, complicates assimilation for Latinos.\textsuperscript{148} Furthermore, society increasingly demands an education in order to succeed. Because only 62 percent of Latin American-born teenagers in the United States still attend school by age seventeen, they are put at a disadvantage for the

\textsuperscript{145} Britten and Mathless, 31.
\textsuperscript{147} Of course, the challenge posed by darker skin color was one that European immigrants from southern and eastern Europe had to face.
\textsuperscript{148} Suro, 8.
rest of their lives, making it even harder for them to rise above the impoverished barrios.  

European immigrant children often assimilated faster than their parents because they attended public schools that taught American customs and culture along with literacy and government. This faster assimilation, however, left the children of immigrants split between two worlds: the American one they lived in outside the home and the European one in which their parents operated. The European ways of their parents often embarrassed children and created family divisions. Immigrant Cosma Sullivan, who came to the United States in 1905, remembered that, “after we came here, we started fussing with my mother because we didn’t want her to cook the way Italians did. We wanted her to learn to cook the American way…we sort of got ashamed of being Italians.” In her novel Bread Givers, author Anzia Yezierska explores this generational culture gap that often existed between parents, who lived by Old World expectations, and children, who embraced the freedoms offered by the American culture. The novel focuses on the character of Sara Smolinsky, who embodies the struggles of Yezierska and other immigrant children at the turn of the twentieth century. Sara’s father, Reb Smolinsky, expected to be treated with the same respect in America that his position as father and religious leader had mandated in Poland. He is outraged when Sara finally rebels against his oppressive rules and expectations. “How dare you question your father…?” he fumes. “What’s the world coming to in this wild America? No respect for fathers. No fear of God.” However, Sara’s resolve that in America “children are people” prompts her to

149 Ibid., 12.
150 Britten and Mathless, 58.
151 Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum.
152 Yezierska, 135.
respond to her father by saying, “I’m not living in the olden times. Thank God, I’m living in America…I’m going to live my own life. Nobody can stop me. I’m not from the old country. I’m American!” As it did with Sara and her father in *Bread Givers*, this cultural difference often caused irreconcilable splits in family ideology and values.

The same division between parents and children is often found in Latin American immigration. Financial situations, especially, cause a great deal of stress between the generations. The parents can remember what life was like in Latin America and consider even their poverty in the United States to be an improvement. On the other hand, children with no memory of life in Latin America “have no reason to be thankful for escaping it.” As a result, many Latin American teenagers go through what Suro calls “bumpy line assimilation,” in which they become “Americanized” too quickly and learn only the negative aspects of American life. This is aggravated by the fact that parents who come to the United States are working such long hours that they lose track of their children’s activities. Because Latin American culture is very family oriented, this can be difficult for Hispanic immigrants; one man recognized that there are rewards to life in the United States but that “it has its negative sides” as well: “In Latin countries, family values play a greater role. Here the family, because of economic and other problems, tends to separate. There are great opportunities here, but one can become easily frustrated.” Because of the lack of parental supervision, then, many immigrant children get into trouble that could be prevented if their parents were not as busy struggling to make ends meet in their new country.

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153 Ibid., 135; 137-138.
154 Suro, 13.
155 Ungar, 206. At his request, this man’s name was withheld by Ungar in his book.
156 Suro, 50-51.
Although different rates of assimilation often caused problems between parents and children, the younger generation was often responsible for helping their parents to assimilate more quickly by inspiring them to learn English and introducing them to American goods.157 These “go-betweens,” as photo journalist Jacob Riis called them, served as translators for their foreign-language speaking parents and acted as bridges between the two cultures.158 Newspapers of the time also recognized the role that immigrant children played helping their parents to assimilate. Boston’s *The Sunday Herald* reported in a July 1919 article that many immigrant parents decided to attend night school to learn English because their children could speak the language and they could not. “My boy read, my girl read, now I come to school and I learn to read!” one immigrant woman reported to the *Herald*.159 This desire of many parents to learn the language of their children inspired many welfare agencies to offer English classes in immigrant homes. This was necessary, author Elizabeth A. Woodward reported in her article “Education of Immigrant Mothers,” because “mothers must at least know enough of the language to converse with their English-speaking public school children.”160 Thus, while the faster assimilation of children often caused tension in immigrant family homes, it also contributed to the faster assimilation into American life of many immigrant parents.

While immigrant children often prompted the faster assimilation of their parents, familial relationships could also complicate the experiences of European immigrants.

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157 *The Sunday Herald*, “My Boy Read, My Girl Read, Now I Come to School and I Learn to Read,” (Boston, July 6, 1919), Box 4, JFC Papers.
158 Ellis Island National Park Museum.
159 *The Sunday Herald*, “My Boy Read, My Girl Read, Now I Come to School and I Learn to Read,” (Boston, 6 July 1919), Box 4, JFC Papers.
Because many fathers traveled to the United States first, the patriarchs of immigrant families had likely already assimilated at least partially to American ways by the time the rest of their families joined them. Thus, inserting an old world family into the life he had established in the United States could cause marital problems: having become accustomed to American ways, he would be jarred by their old world views and they, expecting to find the same man who had left Europe years before, were shocked by his new mannerisms.\footnote{Many times the patriarch of the immigrant family came to America first, and more than a decade could separate the families before other members were able to immigrate. Information gathered at Ellis Island National Park Museum.} To address this problem, Progressive organizations started directly intervening to ward off some of the shock. One organization met arriving families at the boats and provided them with American clothing to wear when they were reunited with their husbands and fathers. Virginia Swain’s article “Saving Heartaches with a Dash of Powder and a Comely Skirt,” explained the importance of this charity. “The beauty, the clothes, the spirit of eternal youth that characterizes American women are so impressed upon [the husband],” she wrote, “…that the shock when he meets the little peasant wife with her shawl over her head, is sometimes so great that the entire future of the family is endangered.”\footnote{Virginia Swain, “Saving Heartache with a Dash of Powder and a Comely Skirt,” in \textit{The NEA Feature} [a Progressive Magazine], 26 January 1926. Information gathered at Ellis Island National Park Museum.} Thus, not only did the arriving family have to assimilate into the new world, they also had to deal with the culture shock of finding a father or husband who was greatly different than the man they remembered. By offering the immigrants new clothes, Swain and her co-workers helped to lessen this surprise and worked to make the transition to life in the United States more bearable.

Being reunited with unfamiliar family members has caused similar problems in Latin American immigrant homes. In this recent wave, however, it is the mother, not the
father, who travels to the United States first. Coming to the United States in search of work is often the last recourse for Latin American mothers who have been divorced or abandoned; without this move to the United States, the entire family could die of starvation.¹⁶³ This has produced a unique double-wave of immigration over the past thirty years, in which single mothers immigrate and children follow, alone and illegally, years later.¹⁶⁴ In Enrique’s Journey, Nazario researched one particular family who experienced this type of separation. Lourdes, the mother of two children, Belky and Enrique, left Honduras in 1989, when Enrique was just five years old, to come to the United States.¹⁶⁵ In Honduras, she “could barely afford food for [Enrique]…and Belky…[and she had] never been able to buy them a toy or a birthday cake.”¹⁶⁶ In the United States, by working long, grueling hours in a string of low-paying, service industry jobs, Lourdes, like other mothers, was able to send enough money home to provide for her children’s needs.

Nazario argues, however, that because mothers are so desperate to provide for the physical needs of their offspring, they often sacrifice the emotional security of their children, many of whom, like Enrique, feel abandoned or unloved.¹⁶⁷ Nazario tells of one Guatemalan boy, Minor, whose mother came to Los Angeles to work as a housekeeper. His friends, jealous of the money and presents that his mother sent him, told him that he was lucky. “You have it all,” they said. “Good clothes. Good tennis shoes.” Nazario

¹⁶³ Nazario, xiii. In Honduras, most women earn between $40 and $120 per month working in service-industry jobs, and “a hut with no bathroom or kitchen rents for nearly $30 a month.” It is easy to see, then, how desperate single mothers in Latin America can become as they try to provide even the bare necessities of life for their children. Nazario xxiii-xxiv.
¹⁶⁴ Ibid., xiii. In Los Angeles, 82 percent of live-in nannies and 25 percent of housekeepers are mothers with at least one child still in Latin America. Every single one of the women interviewed by Nazario who left children in Latin America to come to the United States left thinking that their time in the United States away from their children would be short. They did not realize the extent of the hardships they would encounter and how difficult it would be to return home. Nazario, xiv; xxv.
¹⁶⁵ To protect the identity of Lourdes and Enrique, Nazario did not include their full names in her account of their story.
¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 4.
¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 245.
reports that Minor answered them by saying, “I’d trade it all for my mother. I never had someone to spoil me. To say: Do this, don’t do that, have you eaten? You can never get the love of a mother from someone else.” The desire to restore that relationship and the length of the separation often spurs the abandoned children, some as young as eight years old, to set out on journeys of their own in attempts to find their mothers. According to Nazario, 75 percent of the 48,000 unaccompanied children who enter the United States illegally each year are looking for mothers who are already here.

Many of the children attempting this journey fail. They are either killed along the journey, turn back because of the dangers, or are caught by Mexican or American authorities and deported. For those who do succeed, turmoil awaits. After the initial joy of being reunited, in which “these children and their mothers cling to romanticized notions of how they should feel toward each other,” Nazario reports, “…reality intrudes.” On average, the separation of mothers and children lasts ten years, so what they discover upon reuniting is that they “hardly know each other.” Bottled up emotions on both sides explode in emotionally painful arguments. The children resent that they were left behind, but their fury bewilders their mothers, who find their children ungrateful for the sacrifices they have made over the years to provide for them. The presence of new family members, such as step-fathers or half-siblings, can cause extreme jealousy. Teenagers’ independence, fostered by the difficult journey, often surprises their mothers, who left behind dependent toddlers and babies. Thus, many Latin American

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168 Ibid., xii.
169 Ibid., 5.
170 Furthermore, children detained while crossing the border are often jailed with accused rapists or other felons while awaiting deportation. Ibid., 181.
171 Ibid., 191.
172 Ibid., 244-246; 191.
173 Ibid., 191.
family relationships suffer because of the prolonged separation often associated with immigration.

While assimilation was complicated by many things—familial problems, economic conditions, skin color—in most cases, European immigrants eventually felt at home in the United States. World War I helped to speed the assimilation of many immigrants, especially Germans. Because of the war, “Germans could no longer be Americans in politics and Germans in culture,” notes scholar Gary Gerstle. “They had to be Americans through and through.”174 Popular slogans such as “Many People, but One Nation,” faded away and were replaced by saying such as “100% American,” while ethnic foods were renamed to appear more American; sauerkraut, for example, was widely referred to as “liberty cabbage” during World War I.175 Many German immigrants changed their names, dress, and lifestyles to appear more American.176

Because of assimilation, European immigrants often found themselves caught between their two countries, unable to fit completely into either after spending time in the United States. Part of this uncomfortable situation was that Europeans who had stayed in their native countries often viewed returning immigrants as corrupted or foreign. In Sicily, many were of the opinion that “America…weakened a man’s capacity to act honourably.”177 The American mannerisms of returnees fueled resentment and misunderstandings; they “behaved oddly from the point of view of residents of small conservative communities.”178 One European remarked that “returnees are the worst

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174 Gerstle, 541.
175 Ellis Island National Park Museum.
176 Ibid.
177 Friedman, 566.
178 Ibid., 567.
parasites I have ever encountered.”

Those who went back to their home countries after time in America also noted this change in perception. Stoyan Christowe, a Bulgarian immigrant, returned to her native country to visit after many years in the United States. In her memoir *Half an American*, published in 1918, Christowe discussed this challenge:

While I am not a whole American, neither am I what I was when I first landed here; that is a Bulgarian. Still retaining some inherited native traits, enough to bar me forever from complete assimilation, I have outwardly and inwardly deviated so much from a Bulgarian that when recently visiting that country I felt like a foreigner and was so regarded...In Bulgaria I am not wholly a Bulgarian; in the United States not wholly an American.  

Although many faced this same confusion in their self-identification, according to Gerstle, most immigrants who stayed eventually called themselves Americans by the 1940s or 1950s, which he feels marks the end of the assimilation process.  

Latin American immigrants face this same identity confusion after having lived in the United States for an extended amount of time. Although those persons with documentation of their legal status can easily come and go between the United States and Latin America, after years in the United States, those trips home start to seem like vacations more than anything else for many immigrants. Tobar, speaking of a visit he took to Mexico City, wrote, “I stayed there just long enough for it to begin to feel like home and to simultaneously realize it could never be home.” After many years in the United States, the double loyalty that many Hispanic immigrants feel can cause them

179 Ibid., 567.
181 Gerstle, 539.
182 Tobar, 116-117.
confusion in identifying their nationality. The popular Mexican band “Los Tigres del Norte” [“The Tigers of the North”] explore this dual identity in their song “Mis Dos Patrias” [“My Two Homelands”]: “Two flags shook me/one green, white and red with the seal of an eagle,/the other deep blue/with stars, red and white stripes,/the flag of my sons…” The lyrics continue, “Don’t call me a traitor/because I love both of my fatherlands./In mine, I left my dead/here, my sons were born.”183 Of course, with each generation, the attachment to the country of origin fades a little. Tobar, born in the United States to Guatemalan immigrants, describes the difficulties he encountered explaining his background on a trip to Mexico. “I didn’t fit into the categories into which you placed brown-skinned people in Mexico,” he recognizes. “I was a U.S. born young man with Mayan features who carried himself with a vaguely American air of entitlement and spoke a fluent but strange variant of Spanish.”184 While Tobar identifies himself as an American, he also feels strong roots in Guatemala, the homeland of his parents. Thus, if a fully American identity is established, it does not happen until at least the third or fourth generation of Latin American immigrants.

Many societies and agencies assisted with the Americanization of European immigrants. So great were the efforts to assimilate Europeans to American ways that Gerstle maintains that “any analysis of Americanization, past and present, must accord coercion a role in the making of Americans.”185 The Progressive Party, whose members dedicated themselves to human uplift and social reform, played a large role in these assimilation attempts. Gerstle writes, “the Progressive reformers responded with Americanization campaigns on a scale not seen before…[they] were a confident bunch,

183 Ibid., 73-74.
184 Ibid., 19.
185 Gerstle, 527.
sure that their use of government and science would turn immigrants into Americans.”

Under the Progressive movement, settlement houses opened throughout many cities. These establishments offered English classes, vocational schools, employment offices, social clubs, and health care to first and second generation immigrants.

Organizations such as the Immigrant Publication Society and the National Liberal Immigration League also played a role in welcoming and assimilating European immigrants. Founded by humanitarian John Foster Carr, the Immigrant Publication Society (IPS) worked to make literature about America available to newly arrived immigrants. The “patriotic mission” of the IPS was “to rouse among the foreign born an interest in America and to lead that interest on to enthusiasm for old-fashioned American ideals and for citizenship.” In a speech entitled “Our Country and the Immigrant,” Carr explained that the IPS offered “no charity or sentimental philanthropy, but welcome, guidance, [and] education” for recently arrived immigrants as they assimilated into life in the United States. The National Liberal Immigration League, in which Carr was also deeply involved, held goals similar to those of the IPS. In its charter, the organization declared that it “aims to preserve for our country the benefits of immigration while keeping out undesirable immigrants.” As such, the League supported laws that excluded “criminals, paupers, persons having contagious diseases, and similar

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186 Ibid., 530.
187 Ellis Island National Park Museum.
188 John Foster Carr Papers.
189 “The Story of the Immigrant Publication Society.” Four page brochure most likely used for the recruitment of new members and donors, Box 1, JFC Papers.
190 “Our Country and the Immigrant,” Speech given by John Foster Carr at Mt. Vernon, 1912, Box 3, JFC Papers.
191 National Liberal Immigration League Charter, printed on the back of President Grover Cleveland’s Veto Message of the Educational Test Bill, from “Messages and Papers of the Presidents,” compiled by Congressman James D. Richardson (12 March 1897:Volume IX, page 757), Box 4, JFC Papers.
undesirable classes,” but stood against laws that required literacy tests or otherwise blocked immigrants whom they felt could have a positive impact on the United States.  

As a humanitarian active in both of these foundations, John Foster Carr was an influential proponent for the rights of immigrants. Throughout his career, Carr was quite active politically, carefully watching legislation pertaining to immigrants and urging politicians to support his cause. In a letter to James P. McNichol of the Pennsylvania Legislature on March 29, 1911, for example, Carr campaigned for a law that would provide equal life insurance benefits to immigrants, reminding the senator that “equal treatment to the alien…is in conformity both with the high principles of morality and with the spirit of our American institutions.”  

Carr used Scripture to justify his opinion to McNichol; the stationary on which he wrote to senator quoted Deuteronomy 10:19, “Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt,” in an effort to remind McNichol of his roots and garner sympathy and compassion for the immigrant.

In charitable spheres, Carr supported groups such as the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, which, amongst other causes, raised money to send immigrant children to summer camps outside of the city. The poster advertising the opportunity to contribute to this particular fundraiser reminded prospective donors that “such children sorely need a break in the monotony of their cheerless lives…for mind’s sake and…for the future welfare of the city itself.” The poster boasted pictures of frail

192 Ibid.
193 John Foster Carr to James P. McNichol, 29 March 1911, Box 1, JFC Papers.
194 Ibid.
children swimming, hiking, cooking out, and taking hayrides, activities which the caption described as “real country joy for city kids.”\footnote{Three Page Advertising Poster from the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Box 1, JFC Papers.}

Carr also battled the racism and eugenics-based thought that plagued the immigrant experience in the early twentieth century. In a 1910 speech entitled “Immigrants Are Not Criminals: The Facts,” Carr fought a favorite stereotype of Nativists at the time, that immigrants were responsible for crime and corruption.\footnote{“Immigrants Are Not Criminals: The Facts,” Public Speech given by John Foster Carr, 17 November 1910, Box 3, JFC Papers.} “The truth,” Carr maintained, “is that we ourselves are a lawless nation. It is not the fault of the foreigner.”\footnote{“Restrictions on Immigration,” Public Speech given by John Foster Carr at the People’s Institute, 9 April 1911, Box 3, JFC Papers.} Furthermore, Carr argued, many of the Italian immigrants were far “from being the scum of Italy’s paupers and criminals.” By contrast, they were “the very flower of her peasantry. They bring healthy bodies and a prodigious will to work.”\footnote{John Foster Carr, quoted in “The Truth About the Black Hand” by Francis J. Openheimer, (New York City: The National Liberal Immigration League, 17 January 1909), 4. Box 4, JFC Papers.} And while Carr held that there was a great need to teach newcomers the American ways, language, and history, he also struck an important balance between assimilation and coercion, the need to welcome newcomers as they were while simultaneously teaching them to be Americans. He urged immigrants to learn English and claim citizenship, but he also told recently-arrived Jews to “be proud of your race, your birth and your family.”\footnote{John Foster Carr, \textit{A Guide to the United States for the Jewish Immigrant} (Immigrant Publication Society, New York), 63-64. Box 2, JFC Papers.} This sensitive balance was largely unprecedented in Carr’s time; Nativists overwhelmingly argued that immigrants needed to give up all traces of their old lives in order to fully assimilate into American life.
One of Carr’s most practical accomplishments was the publication of his “Little Green Books.” In these guides for immigrants, written in their native tongues, Carr offered advice about how to find a job, briefly explained U.S. government, currency, and geography, and highlighted important American laws. The books were met with great approval by the immigrants. One Norwegian immigrant reported, “It’s good and it stays with you.” An Italian man “liked the new words he had learned, and was enthusiastic over the undreamed-of facts he had discovered about the founding of his new country.” Similarly, another Italian was quoted as saying, “I always knew there was something about the Declaration of Independence. Now I know what it is.”\textsuperscript{200} As Carr intended, then, the books helped new immigrants to feel welcome and begin to learn about U.S. culture.

The statutes Carr chose to explain to the immigrants in his book illustrate the practical problems that they encountered; his advice was largely designed to protect immigrants. For example, Carr warned his readers to “absolutely refuse to work in a dangerous situation,” an admonition, unfortunately, that most immigrants could not afford to heed. The book also stressed the importance of such things as good personal hygiene and healthy diets to prevent illness. In the section that instructed immigrants how to send money home, Carr included a picture of what an official money order form should look like in an effort to prevent naïve recent-arrivals from being cheated by a corrupt businessman.\textsuperscript{201}

\textsuperscript{200} Letter from John Foster Carr to Mary Bristol, 25 February 1925, Box 1, JFC Papers.
\textsuperscript{201} Carr, The Little Green Book, 44; 40-41; 53-55, Box 2, JFC Papers. In Betty Smith’s novel A Tree Grows in Brooklyn the main character’s grandma recounts to her daughter how she saved enough money to buy a plot of land, but was cheated because she could not read and did not understand that the deed the man gave her was fake. It was this sort of scandal that Carr sought to prevent by including examples of money orders in the book. See Smith, 85-86.
Carr’s books also illustrate the practical problems that immigrants caused in the cities where they settled. Most of the immigrants for whom he wrote lived in the crowded tenement districts, which is why he felt it necessary to remind his audience that it was “a crime to beat or shake a mat, carpet, rug, or garment out of a window…in such a manner that the dust therefrom passes into the street or into occupied premises.”202 And, in an effort to prevent legal trouble for immigrants who were accustomed to keeping farm animals, Carr informed his readers that “it is a crime to keep a live chicken within the built-up sections of New York without a permit from the Board of Health, or to kill a chicken within the city.”203 The rural homelands of the majority of immigrants must have made this seem like a strange and expensive law for recently-arrived Europeans, but the fine imposed for its violation was one that many immigrants could not afford to pay, so it was important that they know of the statute.204

The cultural differences between European societies and the United States and the stereotypes many Americans held about Europeans also become apparent through the subject matter Carr chose to include for specific ethnic groups. At one point, for example, Carr explained to Jewish readers that it was illegal to marry a girl under the age of eighteen without the permission of her parents.205 Writing for the Italians, he reminded his audience to “never give wine or beer to children,” an admonition that did not appear in the books for Poles and Russian Jews.206 Because many Americans thought that Jews married too marry young—Jacob Riis wrote about them, “wives and mothers at sixteen, 

202 Ibid., 40.
203 Ibid., 41.
204 Betty Smith’s novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, discusses the trouble that keeping chickens could cause ignorant immigrants; Francie’s grandparents found themselves in legal trouble after buying chickens as an investment. See Smith, 86.
205 Ibid., 36.
at thirty they are old—and that Italians were “inferior stock that lived lives centered in liquor,” it is intriguing to consider to what extent these separate reminders for each culture were necessary and to what extent Carr, perhaps unwittingly, played into some of the most wide-spread stereotypes of the time. Some of the contemporary legal issues, however, spanned enough ethnic groups that Carr felt the need to include them in all versions of his book: in bold, capitalized script Carr made sure that the immigrants knew that “bigamy is a crime,” and that “the fact that the first wife lives in Europe and has never been to this country makes no difference [in the law].” Carr’s words shed light on one of immigration’s serious issues; men sometimes started second families upon arriving in the United States because of the great distance of their families in Europe.

Even amongst those who worked on behalf of immigrants, Carr’s sensitivity towards the plight of the immigrant and his admonition to foreigners to remain true to their roots was rare. Jacob Riis, who worked tirelessly in the tenement districts of New York City to document the plight of the immigrant through photo journalism, felt that total Americanization was necessary in order for the newly arrived Europeans to succeed in the United States. Furthermore, Riis called the immigrants “loose in morals [and] improvident in habits.” In *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis’ most famous documentation of the vices of New York City’s slums, the journalist criticized the lives that immigrants in tenement districts lived, but was also of the opinion that this moral collapse was not necessarily the fault of the tenement dwellers. “It can be said of [them],” wrote Riis, “that

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207 Riis, 77; T.V. Powderly (1888), quoted in Feagin, 21-22.
209 Ibid., xiii.
210 Riis, 6.
he is no worse than the conditions that created him.”211 The tenement districts, which were overcrowded with crime, corruption, and poverty, left, in Riis’ opinion, little other recourse for the immigrants but to fall into vice themselves: “they are shiftless, destructive, and stupid; in a word, they are what the tenements have made them. It is a dreary old truth that those who would fight for the poor must fight the poor to do it.”212

Thus, while Carr worked to improve the immigrants themselves, Riis attacked their plight from another angle, placing much of the blame on the government and the public policy surrounding the tenement districts for many of the vices that developed there. “We know now,” wrote Riis in 1890, “that there is no way out; that the ‘system’ that was the evil offspring of public neglect and private greed has come to stay…”213 Riis also appears to have been critical of missionaries working in foreign lands while neglecting their own countries; about the “one hundred and nine missionaries in…Persia, Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt” who spent “one year and sixty thousand dollars in converting one little heathen girl,” Riis remarks that “if there is nothing the matter with those missionaries, they might come to New York with a good deal better prospect of success.”214 However critical he was, though, Riis’ exposés of the dark and dangerous tenement districts resulted in the revamping of a number of the worst areas, with buildings torn down and rebuilt to higher standards.215 In the last chapter of *How the Other Half Lives*, Riis discusses the advancements that had been made since the 1860s in New York City’s worst slums, noting that “air and sunlight now have a legal claim…a

211 Ibid., 89. In keeping with the idea that immigrants’ vices were created by their circumstances, Riis cited one official report that recommended “the prevention of drunkenness by providing for every man a clean and comfortable home.” Ibid., 3.
212 Ibid., 207.
213 Ibid., 2.
214 Ibid., 139.
215 Ibid., ix.
long step [has been] taken toward the moral and physical redemption of their tenants." Riis makes the point that “tenements quite as bad as the worst are too numerous yet” and reaches the conclusion that “noting short of entire demolition will ever prove of radical benefit.” Still, he remained hopeful that through law, remodeling, and new construction, advances would continue to be made in the tenement districts, the results of which would allow immigrants to rise out of lives of crime and filth and assimilate more fully into American life.

Although there were attempts to assist European immigrants, many people voiced deep concern about how immigrants affected American society. In 1895, poet Thomas Bailey Aldrich penned his protest of immigration: “Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,/And through them passes a wild motley throng…/O Liberty, white Goddess! Is it well/To leave thy gates unguarded?” Representative Albert Johnson, sponsor of the 1920 Immigration Quota Act, was also concerned that the United States was “being made a dumping ground [for] the human wreckage of [World War I]” and that too many people were homeless and unemployed, a problem which immigration only amplified. Many also feared that the arrival of so many immigrants limited the number of jobs open for American citizens. Author Francis J. Walker maintained that “the influences upon the American rate of wages [in] a competition such as this cannot fail to be injurious and even disastrous.” However, while there were many who feared the impact immigrants would have on Americans’ jobs, not all were of this opinion; Representative Bourke

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216 Ibid., 204.
217 Ibid., 42.
218 Ibid., 204; Ibid., 216.
220 Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum.
Cochran of New York, speaking to Congress in January 1908, testified, “I welcome this
tide of immigration, because I believe there is nothing that can enter our ports so valuable
to us as a pair of human hands eager and anxious to engage in labor upon our soil.”
Furthermore, Cochran maintained, immigrants did not take jobs away from citizens but
rather “widen[ed] the field of production in which highly paid American laborers [could] find employment.” Representative Samuel McMillan of New York agreed with his
colleague; in a speech to Congress that same month, he contended that immigrants did
the jobs no one else desired: “where would your furnaces have been puddled,” he asked
Congress, “where would your mines have been dug and worked, where would your great
iron industries and constructions…have been were it not for the immigrants?” Even
more critical of the argument that immigrants were taking American jobs was John Foster Carr, who was of the opinion that American citizens who could not find well-paying jobs
had no one to blame but themselves. “With our present standards,” he maintained during
a public speech in 1911, “no native-born American, who has had the advantage of
American schools, should be doing the lowest forms of manual labor. If he is doing it, he
is apt to be an economic failure; and justify the prejudice of employers against the
American manual labor.”

The high number of immigrants who returned to Europe and the large amount of
money that those who stayed in the United States sent back to the old country also

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222 Representative Bourke Cochran (New York), speech to Congress, January 1908. Quote accessed through Ellis Island National Park Museum.
223 Representative Samuel McMillan (New York), speech to Congress, January 1908. Quote accessed through Ellis Island National Park Museum. The word “puddling” refers to the process of working “iron oxide in a furnace, to produce wrought iron by oxidizing carbon.” The process was a long, hot, dangerous one; a job immigrants were likely to do since Americans avoided it. See The New Oxford American Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1377.
224 John Foster Carr, public speech given at the People’s Institute (9 April 1911), 37 pages. Box 3, JFC Papers.
prompted anger amongst American citizens at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Nativists viewed the “Birds of Passage,” immigrants who only came to America to work for short amounts of time, as “parasites who damaged the financial and monetary well-being of the United States.” These persons had no desire to assimilate into the American way of life, and Nativists contended that they could do nothing but damage to American society. Furthermore, these immigrants “fled the country with their pockets bulging,” which was injurious to the U.S. economy. Alarm spread after the end of World War I that large numbers of immigrants would return home, emptying the country, by some estimates, of more than six trillion dollars. Neil Larry Shumsky, author of the article “Let No Man Stop to Plunder!” points out that this accusation was totally absurd, given that the figure was “an amount greater than the total currency in circulation.” Thus, many of the reports that prompted the fear of economic catastrophe were largely sensationalized. Still, the accusations helped to raise anti-immigrant sentiments.

Many Americans also feared immigrants’ influence on politics. “In 1910, 75 percent of the residents of New York, Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, and Boston were immigrants or the children of immigrants.” Because of this, the immigrant vote was crucial in urban areas, and both the Republican and Democratic parties actively recruited their foreign-born constituents. Ballots were published in multiple languages to ensure that the largest number of people possible could be reached. The government worked under the table to ensure the most possible votes: Riis reported that one police raid in

225 Shumsky, 3.
227 Shumsky, 7.
228 Ellis Island National Park Museum.
229 Ibid.
which he participated was successful in rounding up several hundred tramps on the charge of vagrancy, but that, while the typical sentence for such a crime was six months of jail, the men would be dismissed because the raid occurred “within a month of an important election, [and] if tramps have nothing else to call their own they have votes, and votes that are for sale cheap for cash.”

Candidates and political machines like the Democrat’s Tammany Hall in New York City also employed direct—if not somewhat shady—tactics in recruiting the immigrant vote. Betty Smith’s novel *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* discusses the ways in which these methods influenced those living in the tenement districts. For Francie Nolan, the main character in the novel, Election Day festivities were one of the highlights of her year. In her neighborhood, like in many others, the Democratic party hosted carnivals for children, providing free food and beverages and carnival rides: “Tammany owed much of its power to the fact that it got the children young and educated them in the party ways…the school boy of today [is] the voter of tomorrow.” To reach the adults, representatives circulated the tenements handing out cigars compliments of the Democratic candidate on the day before the election.

Although some Americans feared this direct involvement in politics by immigrants because of the impact that immigrant votes could have on the country’s political situation, participating in the process of voting often made immigrants feel more like citizens. “We really felt American then, electing a president,” remembered 1905

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230 Riis, 55.
231 Smith, 179.
232 Ibid., 185.
233 In 1908, William Z. Ripley made the point that “the newcomers of the last eight years could, if suitably seated in the land, elect thirty-eight of the present ninety-two Senators of the United States. Is it any wonder that thoughtful political students stand somewhat aghast?” William Z. Ripley, “Races in the United States,” in *The Atlantic* (1908, Volume 102:6), 746. Box 4, JFC Papers.
Finish immigrant Peter Kekonnen.\textsuperscript{234} Thus, while the immigrant opinion surely changed the outcome of elections, it also was of great importance in advancing assimilation.

Many of the complaints by Americans regarding immigrants stemmed from racist mindsets. Early racism was largely directed towards the Irish, the first predominantly Catholic group of immigrants to arrive in an otherwise Protestant country. Signs in store windows such as “No Irish Need Apply” evidenced this prejudice.\textsuperscript{235} One nineteenth century mayor of Boston announced that the Irish were “a race that will never be infused into our own, but on the contrary will always remain distinct and hostile.” In Philadelphia and other cities, looters vandalized Irish Catholic churches and burned Irish homes to protest this wave of immigration.\textsuperscript{236} As time passed and the immigration wave grew both larger and darker-skinned, eugenics-based racism flourished; the faces of these immigrants “tended to be brown yellow instead of white. They were Third World instead of Old World.”\textsuperscript{237}

Racist scientists considered Eastern and southern European immigrants to be “racially inferior to ‘Anglo-Saxon’ Americans,” and eugenicists at the turn of the century linked traits such as alcoholism, pauperism, and insanity to the genes of Southern and Eastern Europeans.\textsuperscript{238} “The immigration of the last decade,” contended one author in the \textit{German Review}, “has increased the number of hands, but not the number of heads, in the United States.”\textsuperscript{239} These eugenics-based opinions came from all sectors of society, initiated by well-known and respected scientists and encouraged by many of those who

\textsuperscript{234} Quote from Ellis Island National Park Museum.
\textsuperscript{235} Britten and Mathless, 23.
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 155
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{238} Gerstle, 552; Cose, 63.
worked directly with the immigrants. In May 1903, the *New York Times* quoted the Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island, William Williams, as saying, “the present predominating immigration from southern and eastern Europe is inferior on the whole to the old north European immigration. It contains many undesirable and unintelligent people.”

Many who opposed immigration because of racism feared that the superior Anglo-Saxon race and the lower quality eastern and southern European races would intermarry, thus “watering down the nation’s life blood.” Madison Grant’s 1916 book *The Passing of the Great Race* claimed that mixing races together would reproduce all of the bad qualities of both groups and none of the good. He recommended excluding inferior races from America to prevent “mongrelization,” the “mixing of ‘primitive’ and Anglo-Saxon blood.” In an article entitled “The Future of American Ideals,” published in *The North American Review*, Prescott F. Hall agreed with Grant. Intermarriage, Hall contended, had the potential to disrupt the social order of the United States, especially between blacks and whites. “Let us assume that some interbreeding with the negroes takes place,” Hall argued. “Will the descendants of the emotional, fiery Italians submit to the social judgment that a [colored man]… must occupy? Assuredly not, and thoughtful Southerners are already alarmed by this prospect…” Thus, Nativists feared that the introduction of new cultures would disrupt the country’s established ways and force uncomfortable changes.

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242 Quoted in Cose, 71-72.
Furthermore, Nativists argued, the negative qualities found in these groups of immigrants could not be changed by life in the United States or by education in the American ways of life. George William Curtis argued that “heredity is a much more important factor than environment [with] regards to social conditions.”\(^\text{244}\) In other words, in direct contrast to what Carr and other Progressives argued, exposing the immigrants to the culture of the United States and helping them to learn the language and history of America would not help them to shed their old, undesirable habits. Carr held that “blood becomes American when [a] judge signs [the] final naturalization paper,” asking in one speech, “Who are the Americans? Not men of one race or blood, but those who think alike.”\(^\text{245}\) Nonetheless, many disagreed with him. “You cannot change a leopard’s spots, and you cannot change bad stock to good,” stated Professor Karl Peterson. “You may dilute it, possibly spread it over a large area, spoiling good stock, but until it ceases to multiply it will not cease to be.”\(^\text{246}\)

As racism and fear spread in the early twentieth century, lawmakers responded to public opinion and began to close the door on immigration. In 1882, Congress passed the first immigration law, which barred lunatics, “idiots”, and convicts from entering the country.\(^\text{247}\) Another major law concerning European immigration, passed in 1917 over

\(^{244}\) Quoted in Ibid., 101. Box 4, JFC Papers.
\(^{246}\) Quoted in Ibid., 101-102. Box 4, JFC Papers.
\(^{247}\) Britten and Mathless, 21. Starting in 1878, a series of laws known as the Chinese Exclusion Acts had preceded laws barring European immigrants from entering the country; as Gerstle points out, “The United States did not just happen to be a nation of European descendants; it wanted to be.” Even stricter than those that would eventually block European immigrants, these laws were also motivated by racist tendencies against persons of Asian descent, which illustrates the scope of discrimination that occurred in American society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Gerstle, 550; Kevin R. Johnson, “The New Nativism: Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue,” in Immigrants Out!: The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States, edited by Juan F. Perea (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 168.
Woodrow Wilson’s veto, required immigrants over the age of 16 to read a 40-word Bible passage in their native language.\(^{248}\) Congress had attempted to enact a literacy test once before, but President Cleveland had vetoed the earlier 1897 law. In his veto message of the Educational Test Bill, Cleveland first argued that requiring a literacy test would be “a radical departure from our national policy relating to immigration.”\(^{249}\) He then reminded his audience that those who argued that the newly arrived Europeans were undesirables were in fact the offspring of an earlier wave of immigrants about whom the same things had been said. Those citizens, Cleveland stated, “are now numbered among our best citizens.”\(^{250}\) Finally, Cleveland argued that literacy was not an accurate test of character, saying:

> Violence and disorder do not originate with illiterate laborers. They are, rather, the victims of the educated agitator. The ability to read and write, as required in this bill, in and of itself, affords, in my opinion…unsatisfactory evidence of desirable citizenship… If any particular element of our illiterate immigration is to be feared for other causes than illiteracy, these causes should be dealt with directly, instead of making illiteracy the pretext for exclusion, to the detriment of other illiterate immigrants against whom the real cause of complain can not be alleged.\(^{251}\)

Regardless, by 1917 the wave of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe had grown noticeable enough and the Nativists had become strong enough that Congress

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\(^{248}\) Ellis Island National Park Museum.

\(^{249}\) President Cleveland’s Veto Message of the Educational Test Bill, from “Messages and Papers of the President,” compiled by Congressman James D. Richardson, Volume IX, p. 757. Published by the National Liberal Immigration League, March 12. Box 4, JFC Papers.

\(^{250}\) Ibid.

\(^{251}\) Ibid.
enacted the literacy test despite protests from President Wilson and the Progressive Party. While the 1882 law had barred some from entering the country, this law was the first step in halting the majority of European immigration.  

Finally, the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the National Origins Act of 1924 ended the Great Wave of European migration. The 1924 Act limited the total number of immigrants to 150,000 per year, compared with the one million or more of years before. Because that total was divided proportionally among specific countries based on the 1890 Census, the law gave preference to immigrants from England, Ireland, and Germany. On 13 April 1924 the *Los Angeles Times* headline, aware of the racism being exercised through the law, declared, “Nordic victory seen in Drastic Reductions.” After the 1924 Act, only 5,800 Italians were permitted to enter the country each year, compared with 66,000 British and 26,000 Germans. Therefore, “the thrust of the 1921 and 1924 laws,” scholar Roger Daniels notes, “was undisguised ethnic discrimination directed largely against people from southern and eastern Europe.”

Just as there was a mixed reaction amongst American citizens to European immigrants, opinions about the recent wave of Hispanic immigrants also vary. Some Americans welcome the newcomers. Nazario writes that “many…understand that being born in the United States, with all the opportunities that entails, is a matter of sheer serendipity…They want the United States to provide desperate people a shot at a better life.”

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252 Between 1892 and 1924, 12 million immigrants entered the United States through Ellis Island. Between 1924 and 1954, after the enactment of the Quota law, only 4 million immigrants were processed at Ellis Island. Information gathered during Ranger-Guided tour at Ellis Island National Park Museum.
253 Ellis Island National Park Museum.
254 Information gathered during Ranger-Guided tour at Ellis Island National Park Museum.
255 Britten and Mathless, 21-22.
256 Feagin, 25.
257 Ibid., 24.
258 Daniels, 14.
life.” Others, like attorney Erwin Mitchell, look at the immigrants in a practical way. “The factories need the workers,” he pointed out, “and the workers come with families.” The country, then, must accept that it cannot have the one without the other. For Americans who have seen the conditions from which many Latin American immigrants come, the decision to welcome the immigrants is one based on sympathy. Mrs. Frankie Beard is the principle of Roan Street Elementary School in Dalton, Tennessee, where Latino students make up 80 percent of the student body. After visiting the Mexican state of Zacatecas, the homeland of many of her pupils, she stated, “if I were living in those conditions and I were pregnant, I’d crawl across the border to get here.” She understands that coming to the United States is the only hope for a better life for many Latino immigrants.

Acting under this mindset, many social and religious organizations have established programs to assist immigrants. Churches hold religious services in Spanish and, like the Progressive reformers of a century ago, a variety of organizations offer English classes to recent Latino immigrants. Furthermore, between 1982 and 1985, a string of more than 200 churches and other social institutions in the American Southwest ran an “underground railroad” of sorts to aid illegal immigrants coming to the United States to escape the wars in their countries.

259 Nazario, 252.
260 Tobar, 108.
261 Ibid., 107.
262 Ibid., 108.
263 Mohl, 50-51.
264 Cose, 191-192. Feagin would argue that because the U.S. government backed the oppressive regimes in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua that forced so many people to leave during the 1980s, it should not be surprised or angered by the fact that so many immigrants had to come here simply to survive. Feagin, 29.
Many public schools are also beginning to train their teachers in Spanish in order to better communicate with the students and their parents. At Roan Street Elementary School, for example, bilingual teachers are so important that the school sends its faculty to Mexico during the summer to learn Spanish. Although it is expensive, this training has earned the school district a stellar reputation among Hispanic immigrants, one of the few rumors about the United States, according to immigrant Rafael Huerta, that turn out to be true. Huerta thought at first that the good reputation of the Dalton City Schools was just another “milk and honey” story; he was pleasantly surprised upon arriving to find that the district lived up to its reputation.265

While many feel a connection to the Hispanic immigrants and desire to help them, a growing number of citizens are speaking out against Latin American immigration. Some U.S. citizens have legitimate concerns about the effects of immigration on their homeland. An honest assessment of current immigration reveals that there are some serious negative side effects of Latino immigration. Residents in major crossing areas complain of garbage that immigrants leave behind, including excrement, diapers, and drug syringes. Some of the trash, like plastic bags, can kill cattle if ingested, which causes major economic problems for ranchers.266 Homeowners in southwestern states have started to put food and water on their doorstep to prevent immigrants from breaking in and stealing it.267 One Texas woman near the border reported that her house has been broken into 25 separate times by immigrants looking for food. Desperate for water, some also break into water lines, which can be costly to repair.268

265 Tobar, 109.
266 Currie, 58.
267 Nazario, 163.
268 Currie, 58.
Once they make it across the border, immigrants, especially illegal ones, are a financial burden on the areas in which they settle. As a whole, immigrants use more government services, qualify for more welfare, and pay fewer taxes than the native-born population. In California, the average citizen household pays $1,178 more in taxes than the value of the services they receive, while immigrant households pay $3,463 less than the services they receive.\textsuperscript{269} Educating illegal immigrant children, whose parents do not pay taxes, costs California between $3.5 and $6 billion each year, and in 1994 the state’s medical costs for illegal immigrants was $7.5 billion.\textsuperscript{270} Nazario notes that for residents in neighborhoods with high numbers of immigrants, “the influx [has] meant not cut-rate nannies and gardeners, but heightened job competition, depressed wages, overcrowded government services, and a reduced quality of life.”\textsuperscript{271}

Some consequences of immigration, such as whether it causes a loss of jobs for American citizens, are still the subject of hot debate. Evidence is available for both sides of the issue. Some contend that because Latinos are willing to work for low wages, they pose an “economic threat to their American-born co-workers.”\textsuperscript{272} Especially affected by the immigrants are those citizens without a high school or college education; it is from this sector of society that jobs are disappearing. Immigrants who are willing to work for less cut the wages of citizens without high school degrees by 7.4 percent, which is equal to about $1,800 out of a $25,000 salary.\textsuperscript{273} Texas resident Lamar Smith finds it incredible that the United States imports low skilled workers instead of caring for its own. “No other

\textsuperscript{269} Nazario, 254-255.
\textsuperscript{270} Currie, 46.
\textsuperscript{271} Nazario, 256.
\textsuperscript{272} Britten and Mathless, 56.
\textsuperscript{273} Nazario, 255-256.
nation in the world,” he contends, “has the delusion that it can ignore its own poor while importing a whole generation of poor people every year.”

Others, however, are not so sure that immigrants are decreasing the number of jobs available; they are of the opinion that the immigrants are filling jobs that no one else is willing to do, and are therefore benefiting society. While some argue that “dishes were washed in this country and vegetables were picked long before we had an illegal immigrant problem,” others disagree, saying that American citizens do not want those jobs. “There are some jobs that native-born Americans won’t do,” reported one Kansas job placement specialist. “Meatpacking is one of them.” One University of Memphis study conducted in 2000 found that Latinos were not replacing citizens in jobs, but were actually adding to economic growth. Suro states, “…the immigrants who deliver pizza, wash dishes, clean houses, do construction work, or take care of children and old people…are…the great unseen facilitators of the two-income, cul-de-sac lifestyle so favored by white baby boomers with children.” The immigrants themselves often hold this opinion. One Mexican man was confident that “if [the government] tries to send all the Latinos out of Los Angeles, all the blancos will go crazy in their dirty houses…And so they will invite us—yes, invite us—to build a subway from Tijuana to Los Angeles that goes right under the border and under the noses of la migra.” Thus, while some view immigrant labor as unneeded or undesired, immigrants themselves often see their

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274 Quoted in Cose, 205.
275 Currie, 32-33.
276 Mohl, 48.
277 Currie, 32-33.
278 Mohl, 48.
279 Suro, 48.
work in the United States as a valuable economic factor in the society in which they now live.

The controversy over jobs has put pressure on employers in recent years, but some managers contend that immigrants are hired not to undercut the American laborers but because they are the more dedicated employees. Nazario argues that immigrants are often the “most motivated”; after all, she asks, “who else would leave everything they know, cross Mexico on top of freight trains, and come to a place where they have to start from scratch?”280 Employers who recognize this dedication are more likely to hire immigrants, according to some. One job placement agent in St. Louis reported that “some companies have a hard time finding people who work hard, are drug free, and are family oriented. That’s what they find [in immigrants].”281 Thus, for employees who are “frustrated by the poor performance of American citizens,” immigrants are often the best solution.282 While it is against the law to hire illegal immigrants, employers are only required to examine their employees’ identification, not verify the validity of the documents, and well-fabricated Social Security and Resident Alien cards are readily available on the street for between $50 and $150.283 The result, then, is that illegal immigrants are being hired instead of American citizens in some jobs. The question that remains, though, is whether or not American citizens—and their reportedly poor work ethics—are to be blamed for their own downfall.

The ethnic group most affected by Latino immigrants is the already-impoverished African-American community. Employers can save money by hiring Latinos to do low-

280 Nazario, 253.
281 Currie, 37.
282 Ibid., 36.
283 Mohl, 49.
skill jobs and laying off African-American workers. In the 1980s, African-Americans in Los Angeles made $12 an hour in the same jobs that Latinos today hold for minimum wage, and the Latinos do not belong to unions that demand benefits, insurance, and vacation time.\textsuperscript{284} This fuels resentment between the two groups. One African American expressed his frustration by saying:

All the people on the street know that Pedro, Paco, and Maria are working and they are not…. That’s where the tension is—jobs. Say we’ve been living together harmoniously, but all of a sudden you are working and I’m not, and I ask you, ‘where do you work?’ And you can’t answer me because you don’t speak English. Well, I’m left here thinking, wait a minute. He can’t even speak to me and he’s got a job downtown.\textsuperscript{285}

In addition, because Hispanics are “often praised as being more compliant and having a strong work ethic,” many African-Americans feel that they are being negatively stereotyped and held at a disadvantage because of their skin color, which causes further anger.\textsuperscript{286}

Although there are legitimate concerns about immigration, in many instances racism still motivates the poor reception of Hispanic immigrants. In a blatantly honest remark, James Floyd, who served as the protest leader for an anti-immigration march, “Stand Up for Cullman [Alabama],” illustrated this racism by saying, “I like my own people more than others, and I’m not ready for a world without borders.”\textsuperscript{287}

\textsuperscript{284} Suro, 213.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{286} Mohl, 46-47.
\textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 53.
still stems from the long-discredited science of eugenics. Buchanan feels that America has become paralyzed by guilt and that for this reason the country is unlike its superior ancestors, who, “confident in their culture and civilization…believed in their superiority over what Kipling had called the ‘lesser breeds without the law.’”

These racist attitudes cause discrimination against U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent as well as illegal immigrants; many report being held at a disadvantage because of their physical appearance. Naturalized citizens or birthright citizens with Latino roots in southwestern states are often stopped by Border Patrol agents and harassed about their documentation or legal status. Many legal Mexican immigrants, according to Zavella, have “experienced what they characterize as discrimination in hiring…or are forced to work extra hours or tasks without extra pay” because employers assume that they can exploit immigrants. One Latino woman, who declined to give her name because of fear of retaliation, pointed out that Hispanic persons who are here legally or who are American-born citizens resent the assumption that “because you are Hispanic, you are illegal…They assume I’m breaking the law, and they assume that none of my people have any right to be here.” Furthermore, this woman told Columbus Dispatch reporters, “saying, ‘we’re going to call la migra…’ is in the same category as telling a black person you’re going to get a rope.” This threat, of course, has an inflammatory and threatening racist connotation, given the history of lynching African-Americans in the United States.

Sadly, the darker skin color of immigrants has produced discrimination throughout

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288 Buchanan, 83.
289 Johnson, 180. Many Border Patrol agents resent the accusations that they are prejudiced, arguing that they are simply doing their job. One INS official in Miami, Florida, stated, “I wish a boatload of blue-eyed Anglo-Saxon Protestants tried to enter the U.S. illegally,” so that he could arrest them and demonstrate that he was not racist. See Daniels, 133.
290 Zavella, 149.
291 Ferenchik and Czekalinski, section 1A.
The darker skin of Hispanic immigrants has many racist Americans concerned about the future of the United States. Patrick Buchanan argues that “by 2050…by nation of origin of our people, America will be a Third World country.” In reality, however, Buchanan’s argument makes no sense; the status of a country is dependent not on the origin of its people but on the infrastructural development within the nation. Thus, if immigrants from undeveloped countries come to the United States and begin to live an American lifestyle, the nation is in no danger of becoming Third World. The race of a country’s citizens, then, should make no difference in its ability to grow an economy and improve the standard of living. “In recent years,” Feagin writes, “popular magazines have run major stories asking, ‘What will America be like when whites are no longer the majority?’” Feagin responds by remarking, “one can ask what the predominance of whites has to do with the future of the nation, unless one has racist proclivities.” Thus, it is a racist concern for the future of the United States that motivates Buchanan and others like him to oppose immigration. And while Buchanan holds the fact that “the European core of America has become irrelevant [and that]…what matters is that you contribute to the GDP” to be a turn for the worse, it hardly seems that non-Caucasian immigrants who help to advance the economy should be considered bad simply because of their skin color; what Buchanan holds to be negative is actually a positive change.

292 Johnson, 166.
293 Buchanan, 37.
As with last century’s influx of European immigrants, many today have begun to worry about the great impact that Latin American immigrants might make in the political process. Already in Texas, New York, and California, “the Hispanic vote decides the election.” Politicians are aware of this power and work hard to sway the immigrant voters. In 1996, for example, President Bill Clinton worked tirelessly to naturalize 1,045,000 new American citizens before the presidential election with the hope that the majority of those new voters would support his candidacy.\textsuperscript{294} The political involvement of immigrants, who tend to be more liberal and Democratic in their ideologies, worries conservatives, but many scholars feel that involving new arrivals in the political system will strengthen the country; immigrants “[invigorate] the nation’s democratic institutions,” and many hope that, like with the European immigrants, participation among Hispanics today will serve “as an integrating and Americanizing force,” one that will aid in assimilating the millions of Latinos who now call the United States home.\textsuperscript{295}

To encourage this involvement, ballots in southern states are now available in Spanish.

One of the biggest “irritants” of immigration opposition today is the language barrier.\textsuperscript{296} There has been an outpouring of support in recent years for English-only laws and much protest over bilingual services. By the middle of the 1990s, laws had been passed in seventeen states approving English as the official language, and “from the early 1980s to the 1990s an English Language Amendment to the U.S. Constitution has regularly been introduced in the U.S. Congress.”\textsuperscript{297} In 1995, Texan Judge Samuel C.

\textsuperscript{294} Buchanan, 58.
\textsuperscript{295} Gerstle, 533-534; Mohl, 54.
\textsuperscript{297} Feagin, 35.
Kiser, presiding over a divorce trial, went so far as to threaten to award custody to the father because the mother spoke to her daughter in Spanish rather than English, which Kiser declared to be a type of abuse.\textsuperscript{298} This recent anti-immigrant trend can be evidenced through many different media outlets, as well. Facebook, the social networking site for college students, is one way in which the young adult generation can express their animosity towards immigrants. Members of Facebook can join “groups,” created to show membership in different organizations, express opinions about a plethora of issues, celebrate inside jokes, and support a wide variety of social and political causes. A February 2008 search of these groups with the key words “speak English” netted more than seventy different groups with more than two thousand members in opposition to bilingualism in the United States. One group that declared, “Learn English or get the hell out of my country.” Another was entitled, “Welcome to America…Now learn to speak English and pay your taxes,” while a third featured a picture of Uncle Sam pointing his finger while proclaiming, “I want YOU to speak English.” In reference to the fact that many automated telephone systems now offer Spanish, one group was named, “Press 1 for English, Press 2 when you learn how to speak the language.” And—apparently unaware of the ironic grammatical error—one group requested, \textit{Your in America SPEAK ENGLISH.}\textsuperscript{299}

Although there have been claims that the current wave of immigrants will not learn English, studies have shown that Latinos are no different than past waves of

\textsuperscript{298} Raymond Tatalovich, “Official English as Nativist Backlash,” in \textit{Immigrants Out!: The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States}, edited by Juan F. Perea (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 96. The judge in this case was of the opinion that speaking to the girl in Spanish put her at a disadvantage in school, which was not in the best interest of the child.

\textsuperscript{299} All information regarding Facebook was accessed by the author on 11 February 2008 through her personal Facebook account. Emphasis in last group name added.
immigrants when it comes to learning the new language. “It’s a refrain we’ve heard throughout history,” said Lisa Navarrete, the vice-president of the National Counsel of La Raza in Washington D.C. “Ben Franklin said the Germans would never assimilate. The same was said about the Irish, and the East European Jews at the start of the twentieth century. They’ve been proved wrong again and again by American history.”

Latino immigrants will learn English, but it will take time to see the full effects of the process. One study showed that 80 percent of immigrants speak no English upon arriving in the United States, but that within ten years, 75 percent speak English with a high level of proficiency. Even in bilingual homes, 80 percent of Hispanic children in Florida prefer English to Spanish. Thus, according to Rodolfo de la Garza of Columbia University, “there is no evidence that Hispanics are not, for the most part, learning English.”

Another major complaint of those who oppose immigration is the automatic birthright-citizenship that is given to the children of illegal immigrants. Some extremists claim that the fourteenth amendment did not actually intend to extend citizenship to all persons born in U.S. territory, and that the children of illegal parents should not be made U.S. citizens based solely on their place of birth. One physician, Dr. Madeleine Cosman, explained her position: “illegal alien women come to the hospital in labor and drop their little anchors, each of whom pulls its illegal alien mother, father, and siblings into permanent residency simply by being born within our borders.” The idea that the fourteenth amendment has thus been misinterpreted, then, begs the question, what did the amendment intend? As scholar Dorothy Roberts points out, “denying dark-skinned

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300 Quoted in Thomas G. Dolan, “Do Hispanics Fail to Assimilate?” in Education Digest (November 2004, 70:3), 47.
301 Currie, 27.
302 Quoted in Dolan, 47.
303 Buchanan, 31.
immigrants the right to give birth to citizens perpetuates the racist ideal of a white American identity.” Instead, Roberts argues, “our policy should be to make every effort to embrace these children and to include them in a pluralistic redefinition of American citizenship.” The racism that provokes the anger against immigrants must be fought in order to move forward.

Because racism is also present amongst government officials, the motivation for some laws concerning immigration has been called into question. The most famous of these is California’s 1994 Proposition 187, which sparked aggressive debate on both sides of the issue across the country. The law, which passed with 59 percent of the vote, barred illegal immigrants from public schools, including universities, health facilities (with the exception of emergency services), and welfare and social services. It was designed to combat the economic toll illegal immigrants have taken on California by using these services but not paying taxes.\(^\text{304}\) However, opponents of Proposition 187 argued that the law enjoyed high levels of support not because it saved the state money but because of widespread racist tendencies among its advocates. Nicknamed “SOS,” the law was popular with Nativists and those who feel that California has been invaded by Latinos in the past twenty years.\(^\text{305}\) Ron Prince, who helped to draft 187, stated that “illegal aliens are killing us in California…Those who support illegal immigration are, in effect, anti-American.” In a deeply racist attitude, another sponsor of the law declared that Hispanic immigrants are “the posse…and SOS is the rope.”\(^\text{306}\) Again, the connection to the Jim Crow south implies hatred, violence, and racism. In “The New Nativism,” scholar Kevin Johnson denigrated Proposition 187 by recognizing the racist tendencies of

\(^{304}\) Feagin, 62; Suro, 110.

\(^{305}\) Johnson, 177.

\(^{306}\) Ibid., 178.
its supporters and comparing the law to the Quota and Exclusion acts of the 1920s.\textsuperscript{307} Furthermore, Johnson argued, the law failed to achieve the economic objectives its proponents claimed. By cutting preemptive medical care for immigrants, the law had the potential to cost California more money in the end; one study showed that “every dollar spent on prenatal care saves between two and ten dollars in future medical costs.”\textsuperscript{308} Leo Chavez pointed out in his article “Immigration Reform and Nativism” that there is no evidence that ending medical aid would cut back on immigration; not having access to a primary care physician is something to which most illegal Latino immigrants are accustomed.\textsuperscript{309} Regardless of the points made by Johnson and Chavez, the law remained popular until it was declared unconstitutional in 1999.\textsuperscript{310}

Overall, public support for Latin American immigration has declined recently. According to one study, 66 percent of Americans now oppose immigration, as opposed to only 50 percent in the 1970s, and in 1990 a Gallup Poll showed that 54 percent of citizens thought that too many immigrants were coming from Latin America.\textsuperscript{311} A 1994 poll showed only 33 percent of Americans felt that immigration regulations should be allowed to remain the same or allow for an increase in immigrants.\textsuperscript{312} The RAND Corporation, a non-profit research organization that publicly supported immigration in the 1980s,
reversed its decision in 1997 after extensive investigations and recommended that legal immigration numbers be reduced.\textsuperscript{313} An increase in anti-immigrant rallies and protests can also be seen. On 19 September 1993, a protest known as “Operation Blockade” formed a human chain that stretched along twenty miles of the Río Grande in order to keep illegal immigrants out of the country. In January 1998, men in Cullman, Alabama, burned a Mexican flag and a United Nations flag in protest of immigration, and in a 2000 anti-immigrant rally in North Carolina, protesters carried signs that proclaimed “No way Jose” and “The melting pot is boiling over.”\textsuperscript{314}

Even with the decline in public support of immigration, U.S. lawmakers have been slow to react with regards to border-control legislation, and the laws that do exist have not proven very effective.\textsuperscript{315} The Immigration Act of 1965 capped immigrant numbers at 20,000 per country annually, with a preference given to those with family already here or with needed skills.\textsuperscript{316} The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act attempted to curb immigration by building up the Border Patrol and by enacting new sanctions on employers who knowingly hired illegal immigrants.\textsuperscript{317} However, documents deemed acceptable to prove legality are easily forged and employers do not always enforce the laws.\textsuperscript{318} Furthermore, some scholars feel that “the net effect [of the 1986 Act] was to stimulate a larger flow of illegals,” because the law gave amnesty to those already here and persuaded those who used to cross the border daily to stay permanently because

\textsuperscript{313} Nazario, 257.  
\textsuperscript{314} Mohl, 52-53; Tobar, 113.  
\textsuperscript{315} Nazario, 258. One success in the battle against illegal immigration was President Clinton’s August 18, 1994 decision to halt the granting of automatic political asylum to all Cubans found at sea and to instead return them to Cuba. See Suro, 27.  
\textsuperscript{316} Britten and Mathless, 22; Currie, 77-78.  
\textsuperscript{317} Mohl, 34.  
\textsuperscript{318} Suro, 94-97.
the journey became too dangerous.\textsuperscript{319} “In essence,” Nazario argues, “politicians have put a lock on the front door while allowing the back door to swing wide open.” The laws have not been effective because they do not work in harmony with each other and do not address core issues.

Internal legal attempts to deal with immigration have not been very successful either, because of an inability or unwillingness to enforce the laws. For example, despite the fact that there are a high number of immigrants working illegally, INS raids are rare; in 1994, the INS only followed through on 1,761 cases of 36,000 leads regarding illegal employment.\textsuperscript{320} California’s Proposition 187, which proponents argue would have proved effective in halting illegal immigration, or at least in cutting the cost of immigration for citizens, was ruled unconstitutional, and similar laws in Texas and other southern-border states have met with the same fate.\textsuperscript{321} According to the \textit{Columbus Dispatch}, in 2007, “244 immigration bills became law in 46 states.” However, these laws, like Proposition 187, are also in danger of being declared unconstitutional because they “infringe on the federal government’s power to enforce immigration laws.”\textsuperscript{322} Ultimately, some question whether attempts to halt immigration will ever be successful; Tobar writes that “the larger, inevitable truth at the U.S.-Mexican border [is] that all the technology in the world would not hold back the tens of thousands of men, women, and children who [head]

\textsuperscript{319} Ibid., 92-94; Mohl, 34. Tobar points out that “in trying to close down the border, the American government…made the Mexicans living in the United States a more sedentary, less nomadic people,” which means they are more likely to remain permanently in the country. Tobar, 54.
\textsuperscript{320} Suro, 96.
\textsuperscript{321} Cose, 190. When a 1975 Texan law barring immigrant children from receiving a public education was declared unconstitutional, many school districts began charging fees, some up to $1,000 per month, to attend school. This effectively barred the immigrant families from being able to send their children to school. This was also declared unconstitutional at a later date. Cose, 190.
\textsuperscript{322} Ferenchik and Czekalinski, section 1A.
northward because they [believe] their lives [will] be better there.”

323 Homero Luna, a Hispanic immigrant who founded the Spanish newspaper *El Tiempo* in Dalton, Georgia, agrees with Tobar; he is of the opinion that trying to stop immigration is like “trying to block the sun with a finger.”

324 Thus, Latin American immigration is a topic that politicians debate, authors discuss, and citizens protest, yet the questions of who to blame for it and how to deal with it remain unanswered. Some argue that U.S. political, economic, and social policies over the last three decades have only perpetuated immigration; by supporting the oppressive regimes of Central American countries in the 1970s and 1980s, the U.S. helped to cause the initial wave of immigrants north. 325 Not only that, argues Suro, the United States:

- has exercised a powerful influence over Latin America, and whether the medium was the Marine Corps or the Peace Corps, the message has always been that Americans knew better, did better, lived better…With TV shows, soldiers, and political ideals, the United States has reached out and touched people across an entire hemisphere. It has gotten back immigrants in return.

326 Thus, U.S. citizens should not be all together surprised that Hispanic immigrants are finding their ways north: it is human nature to desire a better existence and to work towards the very ideals that the televisions in Central America advertise America to have.

In his discussion of the reception of Latin American immigrants in the United States, Johnson points out that “the United States has been schizophrenic in its views” regarding immigrants; Hispanics have been welcomed as a source of cheap labor but

323 Tobar, 44.
324 Quoted in Ibid., 121.
325 Nazario, 252.
326 Suro, 20.
quickly become the scapegoats for “virtually every ill afflicting [the country] today, from the crisis in public finance to rising crime rates to environmental hazards.” Even if immigrants have influenced some of these areas of public life, they by no means can be blamed for all of the problems. The hypocrisy in the treatment of immigrants is even deeper with regards to U.S. treatment of Cuban immigrants, many of whom immigrated here to escape the oppressive regime of Fidel Castro. At first, the government held up these refugees as “ornaments of American democracy and refutations of the communist way of life,” which only further encouraged immigration. Thus, when President Bill Clinton declared in August 1994 that all Cubans found at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard would be returned to their home country, he did so in direct contrast to earlier government policies. Because of this, Suro argues that “illegal aliens are the wrong target for public rage. The real culprits are the officials of both political parties who have refused to make hard choices.” When Washington begins to make those hard decisions, however, they must work to assure that the laws passed are not based on the racist tendencies and discrimination that motivated the legal action against immigrants in the 1920s.

Overall, the similarities between Latin American and European immigration are striking. In almost all areas of the immigrant experience, there are shared themes amongst this wave of immigrants and that of the last century. Historically, foreigners have lived in poor neighborhoods and worked in dangerous positions. Today, Hispanic immigrants find their homes in the rundown barrios and labor in meatpacking factories, construction, or

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327 Johnson, 171; Feagin, 33.
328 Cose, 131.
329 Suro, 27.
330 Ibid., 100.
in agricultural positions. Europeans encountered many difficulties in assimilating into life in the United States, and struggled to find a place in their new country. While the assimilation process is still underway for many Latino immigrants, current trends seem to suggest that Hispanics will eventually find a niche in U.S. society and become active, involved, and contributing constituents in its government and economic systems. Learning the English language takes time, of course, but those European immigrants who remained in the United States eventually overcame that same hurdle, and there is nothing to suggest that Latino immigrants will not do so as well.

For all the similarities between European and Hispanic immigration, it is in the reception of the foreigners by U.S. citizens that the most commonalities can be found. “Each new wave of immigration,” remarked President Bill Clinton in his 1997 Inaugural Address, “gives new targets to old prejudices.” The twentieth century has been hailed as a time of great advances against racism and prejudice, but in examining how Latino immigrants are received today, one has to wonder how far the country has truly come; for all the emphasis on being sensitive to other races, the fact remains that “the very things they said about the Irish and the Eastern Europeans and the Jews… are word for word the same accusations being leveled against Hispanic…immigrants coming in today.” Many authors have pointed out the irony of these current accusations, considering that the majority of contemporary Nativists are themselves the descendants of European immigrants from last century’s Great Wave.

Further illustrative of the irony in the current accusations is Richard Hernstein and Charles Murray’s 1994 book *The Bell Curve*, in which the authors remarked that

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331 Quoted in Britten and Mathless, 23.
332 Coan, xxviii.
333 Ungar, 114; Britten and Mathless, 21; Feagin, 32.
Southern and Eastern European immigrants were different from Latino immigrants because they were “brave, hard-working, imaginative, self-starting—and probably smart.” In actuality, European immigrants “were actually more likely than today’s immigrants to receive welfare.” The positive attributes accorded immigrants by Hernstein and Murray are nothing if not the exact opposite of the qualities associated with immigrants by Nativists at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Eastern and Southern Europeans were considered to be “poor human material, lacking in self-respect and intelligence; the great majority being distinctly unskilled—few being competent to perform even such simple work as domestic service.” Furthermore, according to William S. Rossiter of The North American Review, these immigrants “[preferred] to become a burden upon the municipality in which [they lived], rather than to seek out or accept opportunities.” Thus, Hernstein and Murray’s claim only serves to show the repetitiveness of the racist tendencies of some citizens in the United States, further illustrating the thematic similarities of European and Latin American immigration.

Hernstein and Murray’s statement also illustrates the rose-tinted glasses with which Americans today tend to see the Great Wave of immigrants who arrived at the start of the twentieth century. Traditions surrounding the melting pot, the coming together of a new American race, and the patriotism that newly-arrived immigrants immediately embraced now permeate the classrooms, textbooks, and imaginations of American school children. An attempt to erase the ugliness of the eugenics and the racism of the last century has led to an idealized version of the events that surrounded immigration between

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334 Quoted in Feagin, 32.
335 Roberts, 207.
337 Rossiter, 361. Box 4, JFC Papers.
1890 and 1924. It is true that differences between the two waves exist: the social and political backdrop of each wave was different, and unique historic catalysts influenced European immigration. However, to a certain extent the discrepancies between the two waves are accentuated by traditional yet false views of European immigration. The nostalgia and romanticism afforded European immigration can warp perspectives of the “Great Wave,” thereby making the problems associated with Latin American immigration appear more intense than those caused by European immigration. In reality, the wave of European immigration was just as problematic in its time as the current wave is now. Suro explains:

Looking back on the last great era of immigration for...perspective is not much help because it is obscured by the myth of the melting pot, which tells us how happily and successfully European immigrants assimilated into American ways. All but forgotten are the settlement houses and the skid rows, the murderous coal mines and the children at the looms. The glories of the melting pot ignore the anti-Semitism, the nativism, the restrictive covenants on housing, and the many less explicit forms of prejudice that circumscribed America for many immigrants and their children.

Precautions must be taken, then, in stating that Hispanic immigration is plagued with problems that did not exist in European immigration. In truth, the same problems existed,

338 Joseph Baccardo, who immigrated from Italy in 1898, held a strong opinion about the warped views on European immigration: “I hear people talk about the good old days. Well, look how many people suffered. All those bridges, all those roads, all those railroads—they were all built by people who worked hard to build them. It took a long time, and time and effort and sweat and blood. My father had to work his heart out to get anywhere. And yet, no matter how hard he worked, there was never enough money. My dad and mother pretty near died in the clothes they got married in. They had to economize. Today you don’t see people with patches on their britches anymore—unless they put them on just for show.” Morrison and Zabusky, 67.
339 Suro, 68-69.
but traditional conceptions of history have obscured these issues. Thus, a thorough examination and analysis of the previous wave of immigration from Europe can help to educate the American response to Latino immigration today; by revealing both the initial hardships and the eventual outcome of European immigration, it may be possible to illustrate to the American people that the challenges presented by Hispanic immigration are not unprecedented and provide hope that the difficulties can be overcome.

Ultimately, the fact remains that distance is needed for full comprehension and perspective, and while that space has been achieved for European immigration, the United States is still actively involved in the movement from Latin America. For that reason, it is difficult to judge the full impact and influence that Hispanic immigrants will have on the United States and the ultimate reaction of the American people. Still, an accurate comparison of the two waves can illustrate the true similarities and differences between immigration from Europe and Latin America. “If history is anything to go by,” argues author Bill Bryson, “then three things about America’s immigrants are as certain today as they ever were: that they will learn English, that they will become Americans, and that the country will be stronger for it. And if that is not a good thing, I don’t know what is.” The United States will change through this process, but if dealt with effectively, Latin American immigration can serve as a positive impact, one which will stretch the country to new levels of tolerance and acceptance. “These decades,” points out Muller, “will be recalled as the time during which the United States permanently shifted from a single language, biracial society to a multiracial, multicultural, and bilingual nation. Only future generations can evaluate the costs and benefits of this profound

340 Currie, 29.
change.\textsuperscript{341} Looking to the past has always been a guide for the future, and a thorough examination of all the different facets of European immigration can help the United States to confront the issues connected to the current wave. In this way, the country can begin to move towards reasonable and effective solutions to this complex problem.

\textsuperscript{341} Muller, 116-117.
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