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Americanization Now and Then: The "Nation of Immigrants" in the Early Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

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Whereas in 1915 Theodore Roosevelt could proclaim with great conviction that there was no room in the United States for hyphenated Americans, today it is common for Americans to identify precisely as hyphenated Americans, proud of their ethnic heritage. And whilst in 2015 the debate on undocumented immigration is perceived to have reached crisis point, the US continues to project itself as a "nation of immigrants." These reversals and contradictions in American political discourse are scrutinized here in a historical survey of the Americanization movement of a hundred years ago and the concept of the "nation of immigrants" that originated with John F. Kennedy in the Cold War sixty years later. In the analysis of primary and key historiographical sources on twentieth-century American immigration, a change from ethnic shame to ethnic pride is tracked down, revealing both the long-term effects of Americanization as a programme of social engineering and the ongoing ideological work that the "nation of immigrants" slogan performs for American national identity.

We'll take steps to deal responsibly with the millions of undocumented immigrants who already live in our country … even as we focus on deporting criminals, the fact is, millions of immigrants in every state, of every race and nationality still live here illegally. And let's be honest – tracking down, rounding up, and deporting millions of people isn't realistic. Anyone who suggests otherwise isn't being straight with you. *It's also not who we are as Americans*. After all, most of these immigrants have been here a long time. They work hard, often in tough, low-paying jobs. They support their families; they worship at our churches. Many of their kids are American-born or spent most of their lives here, and their hopes, dreams, and patriotism are just like ours. As my predecessor, President Bush, once put it: "they are part of American life."[1]

Thus spoke President Obama in November 2014, announcing long-awaited action on immigration reform in which he – typically – sought to reconcile

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[1] The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Immigration," 20 Nov. 2014, at www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/11/20/remarks-president-address-nation-immigration, accessed 8 Dec. 2015, emphasis added.

familiar Republican fears about illegal immigration with more liberal views, voiced in the language of pragmatic economic and humanitarian considerations.[2] Promising to lift the threat of deportation that had blighted the lives of undocumented migrants for decades, the President offered those who had been in the US for more than five years the opportunity to "stay in the country temporarily" and "get right with the law."[3] As part of his discursive ploy to placate both conservative and liberal critics of his immigration record to date, the President made the undocumented migrants out to be, for all other intents and purposes, Americans already: hardworking, God-fearing, patriotic breadwinners, like the immigrants of old.[4] He counted himself in the lineage of deserving newcomers of golden olden days: "Millions of us, myself included, go back generations in this country, with ancestors who put in the painstaking work to become citizens. So we don't like the notion that anyone might get a free pass to American citizenship."[5] In adopting, for that passage of the speech, the mask of a white Republican, Obama subtly reminded his audience of the white American credentials his *mixed* African/American heritage bestows on him, which sets him apart from African American descendants of slaves. Media reporting in the UK and US failed to note this, however, and focused instead on the President's appeal to American identity and values in his decision to defer deportation of illegal immigrants: "it's not who we are as Americans … *we were strangers once, too*."
And this was significant too, because the inclusive "we" that hinted at the President's own recent (African) and more distant (white mid-western) immigrant descent was a departure from a more familiar presidential discourse of "us" and "them," invoking a residual nativism or merely a fear of the foreign.

Third, however, even as he distanced himself from his predecessor in a conciliatory approach to "unlawful" immigrants and in his appeal to "who we are," Obama also strategically invoked the ghost of George W. Bush to placate

[2] This was executive action; having explained his frustration with Republican leaders in the House who refused to cooperate in the passing of a bipartisan bill on immigration reform, President Obama asserted his "legal authority … as President" to "help make our immigration system more fair and more just." Ibid. David J. Cisneros explains the background of the failed 2013 bill in "A Nation of Immigrants and a Nation of Laws: Race, Multiculturalism, and Neoliberal Exception in Barack Obama's Immigration Discourse," *Communication, Culture & Critique* (2015), 1–20, 3 at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cccr.12088/full, accessed 8 Dec. 2015. The mixing of liberal and conservative tropes in Obama's immigration discourse is insightfully analysed in Margaret E. Dorsey and Miguel Díaz-Barriga's "Senator Barack Obama and Immigration Reform," *Journal of Black Studies*, 38, 1 (2007), 90–104.

[3] "Remarks by the President."

[4] Or, like the new neoliberal subjects David Cisneros describes, who are "produced through discourses about values, competence, hard work, and respectability – all of which become indexed to whiteness." Cisneros, 5.

[5] "Remarks by the President."

immigration hawks in both parties.[6] Whereas Bush's policies on immigration notoriously included a strengthening of border patrol and the building of a 670-mile fence to deter migrants crossing from Mexico, Obama quoted him to lend credence to his own gospel of diversity and inclusivity.[7] Indeed, President Obama's closing sentiment, "My fellow Americans, we are and always will be a nation of immigrants," epitomized the paradox of American national identity ("fellow Americans"/"nation of immigrants") and the contradictions of bipartisan discourse on immigration that is this essay's central conundrum.

It echoed the programmatic opening line of a 2008 report from the Task Force on New Americans to President George W. Bush: "The United States has been since its founding, and continues to be, a nation of immigrants," which proposed a very different immigration agenda from that outlined in Obama's speech.[8] The Task Force had been charged by the President to design a policy for the Department of Homeland Security "to help legal immigrants embrace the common core of American civic culture, learn our common language, and fully become Americans."[9] Not concerned then with "illegal," but with *legal* immigrants to the United States, the report remains a startling document in that it expresses the Bush administration's concern about the purported un-Americanness of recent legal newcomers; by example of the now almost forgotten Americanization movement of a century before, the remedy it proposes is "Americanization for the 21st century."[10]

[6] We would be mistaken to think that Obama's executive order typifies a reversal of his predecessor's immigration policy. Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga note his conservative emphasis on "*earned* citizenship," and write, "his rhetoric looks like that of President Bush." Dorsey and Díaz-Barriga, 97. Cisneros goes further and explains that, partly by means of devolving immigration control to states and local programmes such as Secure Communities, Obama's "represents one of the strictest enforcement regimes in decades, including record numbers of deportations, more Border Control personnel, heightened use of surveillance technologies, and increased fence construction." Cisneros, 3.

[7] The White House, George W. Bush, "Comprehensive Immigration Reform," 26 June 2007, at http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/infocus/immigration, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

[8] US Department of Homeland Security, Task Force on New Americans, *Building an Americanization Movement for the Twenty-First Century: A Report to the President of the United States from the Task Force on New Americans* (Washington, DC: 2008) 1. A summary of the Report is now available on the US government website at www.uscis.gov/archive/archive-news/fact-sheet-building-americanization-movement-21st-century-report-president-united-states-task-force-new-americans; a PDF of the full text can still be found in the archive on www.uscis.gov, both accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

[9] Ibid., iv. The report was the result of two years of consultation and historiographical research and involved a wide range of organizations and interest groups from across the political spectrum. Its status today is unclear; published after the election of Barack Obama, the report became irrelevant as soon as it appeared – which is not to say that it may not be brought to life again should a Republican be elected President in 2016.

[10] Space does not permit a detailed comparison between the twentieth-century campaign and this proposal for Americanization in the twenty-first. That there ever was a concerted, top-

Where Obama thus conceived of undocumented migrants as Americans *in vitro* – work ethic, family values, regular religious worship and all – Bush saw even legal immigrants as outsiders unwilling or unable to integrate, in need of "help" in adopting or adapting to the American way. Both Presidents, however, strategically deployed the idea that "we are and always have been a nation of immigrants" to legitimize their respective stances on immigration reform. That they could do so unchallenged and with equal conviction raises all sorts of questions about the cross-party appeal of the "nation-of-immigrants" rhetoric, its ability to embrace constituencies of Americans with conflicting stances on immigration, and not least its accuracy as a descriptor of American national identity. What does the now apparently consensual idea that the US is "a nation of immigrants" say about contemporary American identity? What does it say about American immigration and its troubled history, for that matter? Where did the concept originate and how does it inform, or necessitate (as it did, according to the Bush Task Force) Americanization initiatives, old and new? Or, simply: what gets lost, and what is found when Presidents represent the US as a nation consisting of "immigrants" (meaning "immigrants and their descendants")?

The answer to these questions is not straightforward, because we are concerned with a discourse that purports to address a national identity in the very act of creating it as an ideological entity. In order to reveal the contradictions disguised by the notion of the "nation of immigrants," it is my aim first to deconstruct its rhetorical power and then to trace how the official discourse of American nationhood changed from "100% Americanism" in 1915 to "a nation of immigrants" a century later, with apparently equal self-evidence. Then, it is also my task to investigate what hides, unofficially, behind those banners of a homogeneous nationalism on one hand, and unity in ethnic diversity on the other. I am thus concerned to analyse presidential discourse as it seeks to endorse policies legitimizing immigrants as potential true Americans, whilst disavowing the cultural difference they bring with them, whether those policies be instantiated in Theodore Roosevelt's Americanization movement, echoed in the report of G. W. Bush's Task Force, or in presidentially sanctioned legal measures to redeem the deserving "illegal" immigrant, as in Obama's executive action of November 2014.[11] In addition, I am interested

down, nationwide *programme* for Americanization of new immigrants is today known only by specialists such as immigration historians and social scientists. Media and political discourse routinely ignore it and refer to "Americanization" as an organic, inevitable *process* of immigrant adaptation to life in the US, part of the nation's story of progress over the twentieth century.

[11] I am not concerned here with ostensible diversification measures such as the Title IX Ethnic Heritage Studies Program, passed by Congress in 1974 in response to a long campaign by

in what happens to cultural difference in the *processes* of Americanization and ethnicization as they evolved in everyday life, through public schooling, employment, trade unionism and civic engagement before World War II, and through expansion of higher education and exposure to American media and the culture of consumption after it.[12] Praxis may well conflict with principle, after all. My hypothesis throughout is that, contrary to appearances and in light of its factual inaccuracy, today's "nation of immigrants" is the paradoxical product of twentieth-century Americanization, and has its origin not in ethnic pride but in immigrant shame – and racist exclusion.

THE TROUBLE WITH "A NATION OF IMMIGRANTS"

Inclusive in its implication of ethnic diversity and affirming – or so it seems – the US's exceptional status as a refuge for the world's poor and persecuted, "we are a nation of immigrants" has become so familiar a slogan that the ideological work it continues to do has long since become obscured by the statement's prima facie truth. For who would deny, in a country that owes its very identity, its *raison d'être*, even, to DIY settlement and governance (call it conquest), that Americans came from somewhere else and that indeed they "were strangers once, too?"[13] Reflection, however, shows this ostensibly innocuous idea to be a self-serving fiction. Strangers to whom, what and when? "Immigrants" to what nation, state or polity? Are the descendants of Native Americans "immigrants"? Are those inhabitants of the Southwest whose Mexican ancestors had their lands annexed in the nineteenth century and subsequently became US citizens by default "immigrants"? Are the children generations removed from those who were brought from Africa to America in shackles, on slave ships, centuries ago, "immigrants"?[14] And

ethnic activists. See, for this history, James Anderson, "The Evolution and Probable Future of Ethnic Heritage Studies," at http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED184964, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

[12] Rudy Vecoli saw a similar dynamic at work in the 1980s, when he wrote that the "return to the melting pot," which had started to appear in Reaganite public rhetoric, "ought not to be mistaken with the underlying social reality of ethnic diversity and multiculturalism." Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Return to the Melting Pot: Ethnicity in the United States in the Eighties," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 5, 1 (1985), 7–20, 17. See, for the process of Americanization as conceived contemporaneously, Grover G. Huebner, "The Americanization of the Immigrant," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 27 (May 1906), 191–213.

[13] "Remarks by the President."

[14] Roger Daniels argues in his well-known history of American immigration that we can and indeed should regard Africans as "immigrants," because doing so would merge the history of slavery and the African diaspora with immigration history, enhancing both. Although I accept his reasoning, to advocate recognition of slaves as "immigrants" in order to achieve a more integrated historiography is to sacrifice the politically crucial distinction between forced migration and free labour. Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History*

were they the kind of strangers who, as President Obama put it in his 2014 immigration reform speech, were "welcomed … and taught … that to be an American is something more than what we look like"?[15] Surely not. Notwithstanding the President's clear allusion to racial difference in this last phrase and his pointed inclusion of himself in the national "we" not as the descendant of whites, but as the son of an *African* immigrant now, the idea of African Americans as erstwhile "immigrants" or "strangers" who were "welcomed" and "taught" anything other than their innate and indelible inferiority is preposterous.[16] And it is more so coming from an African American President: Obama uttered these words the same week the people of Ferguson, Missouri marched in protest against the police killing of Michael Brown, the state of emergency having been declared just three days before.

And so, even as the President tried to represent his pardon to undocumented migrants as part of a national narrative of inclusivity and racial diversity – or rather precisely because *this* President sought to do so – the racist nature of the "nation-of-immigrants" shibboleth was revealed. Exclusion of Native, erstwhile Southwestern Mexican and African Americans from the polity and the history of "the nation of immigrants" speaks volumes about the ongoing erasure in public discourse of indigenous existence on US soil, of slavery and Jim Crow, of the violent "settlement" of the West and of the current crisis for African Americans incarcerated in what Angela Davis has termed the "prison–industrial complex."[17] Even if it is the most important, this is only one aspect of the trouble with "a nation of immigrants."

For, if one wants to invoke the American history of immigration that goes back to the nation's founding, then we could just as well speak of a "nation of nativists." Edward Hartmann wrote in his 1948 history of the Americanization movement that

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of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life, 2nd edn (New York: Harper Perennial, 2002) 54–55.

[15] "Remarks by the President," n.p.

[16] The issue is complicated and potentially doubly offensive to African Americans because most of them, including Michelle Obama, can lay claim to slave ancestry whereas he cannot. Indeed, during his 2007 election campaign Obama's credibility problems were not confined to the Republican right (who demanded he produce his birth certificate to prove his American citizenship) but were also a concern among African Americans who had battled through the civil rights era, because of what they saw as his shallow grounding in black history and activism. See Maria Lauret, "How to Read Michelle Obama," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 45, 1–2 (2011), 95–117.

[17] Angela Davis, "Masked Racism: Reflections on the Prison Industrial Complex," at http://colorlines.com/archives/1998/09/masked_racism_reflections_on_the_prison_industrial_complex.html, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

it takes its place along side [*sic*] those other manifestations of American distrust and discontent with their new neighbors, – the nativism of the 1830's, the Know-Nothingism of the 1850's, the A[merican] P[rotective] A[ssociation]-ism of the 1890's, the Ku Klux Klanism of the 1920's and the immigration restrictionism of the first quarter of the twentieth century[,][18]

through to the Minutemen patrolling the southern border now. Furthermore, as Paul Spickard observes in his analysis of the current immigration debate, "it would be a mistake to think that the United States is the immigrant nation *par excellence* … several nations around the globe have greater percentages of foreign-born people in their populations"; he gives El Salvador, Sweden, Canada and Australia as examples.[19]

Finally, whether fourth-, fifth- and tenth-generation Americans can still, in any way that makes sense, consider themselves "immigrants" is a question that needs asking too: if they can, then a great many countries in the world today would be entitled to call themselves "nations of immigrants" as well, and the exceptionalist premise, which is so deeply ingrained in American political rhetoric, would be exposed for the ideological spin that it is.

The idea is thus fatally flawed as a definition of American national identity, and it is flagrantly ahistorical to boot. If many Americans today see themselves as in some way "ethnic" and identify with (some privileged part of) their forebears' foreign cultural legacy (Irish Chinese Italian Polish Greek Jewish, or indeed "African"), it is worth remembering that their grandparents and great-grandparents would have been mortified to do the same. For, only a hundred years ago and until well into the 1960s, the United States emphatically identified itself as a nation of *Americans*, and proud to be so. "There can be no 50/50 Americanism in this country. There is room here for only 100 percent Americanism," Theodore Roosevelt famously declared in 1915 in his speech to the Knights of Columbus. "There is no such thing as a hyphenated American who is a good American," he continued. "The only man who is a good American is the man who is an American *and nothing else*."[20]

The idea that the US is a "nation of immigrants" thus represents a 180-degree turn from Roosevelt's position and that of American Presidents before and after him, up until the mid-twentieth century. It is, contrary to

[18] Edward George Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948) 7.

[19] Paul Spickard, *Almost All Aliens: Immigration, Race, and Colonialism in American History and Identity* (New York: Routledge 2007), 432.

[20] Former President Theodore Roosevelt, "Americanism," address before the Knights of Columbus, Carnegie Hall, 10 Oct. 1915, in *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt* Memorial Edition, at www.theodore-roosevelt.com/trspeechescomplete.html 781 pdf, accessed 8 Dec. 2015, italics added.

what is commonly thought and despite the rhetorical aplomb of Bush and Obama's speechwriters, quite new. Introduced in a pamphlet written by John F. Kennedy in 1958, when he was a young and thrusting Massachusetts senator, the "nation of immigrants" gained currency as an emblem of national identity only in August 1963, when the *New York Times Magazine* published an article of that title in support of liberalization of the US's then very restrictive immigration quota system.

Kennedy argued in "A Nation of Immigrants" that the National Origins Act of 1924, which had reduced wave upon immigration wave around the turn of the twentieth century to a mere trickle, had stopped America from living up to the promise of Emma Lazarus's words on the Statue of Liberty, "Give us your poor, your tired, your huddled masses." Instead, that offer of universal refuge by mid-century had been so watered down as to have become fatally compromised, so that immigrants were welcome in the US now only "as long as they come from Northern Europe, are not too tired or too poor or slightly ill, never stole a loaf of bread, never joined any questionable organization, and can document their activities for the past two years."[21] In his sarcasm about how the 1924 immigration law had betrayed America's promise, Kennedy criticized the xenophobia of his own day and the paranoia of recent McCarthyism ("questionable organization," "document activities for the past two years"). Unmistakably, however, he also satirized early twentieth-century nativist discourse ("as long as they come from Northern Europe") and the campaign to Americanize "the foreign element," as immigrants were referred to then, which grew up in response to it ("too tired, too poor, or slightly ill").

For although the Americanization movement had originally emerged from the settlement houses and had sought to counter nativist arguments for immigration restriction in the 1910s and 1920s, the eugenicist view, that the new immigrants were of inferior "stock" to that of the northern Europeans who had preceded them, informed its widespread campaign to assimilate the newcomers nonetheless. By 1958, however, that coercive and eugenicist rhetoric had lost credibility, and so Kennedy could argue that a new immigration policy should be "generous, it should be fair; it should be flexible." Like Obama recently, Senator and would-be President Kennedy also included his own history as a descendant of Irish immigrants in his arguments for drastic reform of the National Origins Act and commemorated "waves of hostility, directed especially at the Irish, who, as Catholics, were regarded as an alien

[21] John Fitzgerald Kennedy, "A Nation of Immigrants," *New York Times Magazine*, 4 Aug. 1963, 162–63, 205, italics added. This was an extract from John Fitzgerald Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008; first published 1964).

conspiracy" in his book.[22] Following hot on the heels of his well-publicized visit to Ireland in June of 1963, where he was greeted as a national hero, Kennedy's article in the *New York Times* could then conclude with a rousing call to immigration reform as also a moral mission: "With such a policy we could turn to the world *with clean hands and a clean conscience*."[23]

This new policy would be the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as Hart-Celler, which abolished immigration quotas based on nationality and removed the taint of immigration restriction through selection that had originated in the "scientific" racism of the early twentieth century. Kennedy felt, in arguing for immigration reform, that such selection ill-served the United States in a postwar economy that was increasingly fuelled by and dependent on innovation in science and technology. Instead of a quota system based on national origins (which privileged the historically dominant countries of emigration from northern Europe, such as England, Scotland, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland and Scandinavia) he proposed an immigration policy that prioritized family reunification and would match "the skills of the immigrant and their relationship to our need."[24]

The "clean hands," of course, also reveal Kennedy's Cold War agenda, which required that the US be seen as a free country, unlike the USSR, defined by the promise of "liberty and justice for all" and open to all comers.[25] A combination of equality motivations, partly based on historic guilt that the US had not admitted enough of Europe's Jews during and

[22] Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*, 102–3. Anti-Catholicism has deep roots in American Nativism; see, for example, A. Cheree Carlson, "The Rhetoric of the Know-Nothing Party: Nativism as a Response to the Rhetorical Situation," *Southern Communication Journal*, 54, 4 (1989), 364–83; George H. Haynes, "The Causes of Know-Nothing Success in Massachusetts," *American Historical Review*, 3, 1 (1897), 67–82; John Higham's classic *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988); Bruce Levine, "Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery: Thomas R. Whitney and the Origins of the Know-Nothing Party," *Journal of American History*, Sept. 2001, 455–88; Steven Taylor, "Progressive Nativism: The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 28, 2 (2000), 167–84.

[23] Kennedy, "A Nation of Immigrants," 205, italics added. See, for Kennedy's several visits to Ireland and his family connections there, Sylvia Ellis, "The Historical Significance of President Kennedy's Visit to Ireland in June 1963," *Irish Studies Review*, 16, 2 (2008), 113–30. I am sceptical about the idea that Kennedy's personal connection with his "cousins" in Ireland (both literal and not) was a major factor in the introduction of new immigration legislation. His initiatives in liberalizing immigration as a senator and then as President were unsuccessful and the file of his speeches on immigration in the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum is slight. See www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKCAMP1960-1061-021.aspx, accessed 8 Dec. 2015. Any reputation for immigration law reform connected with the Kennedy name was earned later, by Senator Edward Kennedy.

[24] Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*, 150.

[25] *Building an Americanization Movement*, 1.

after World War II, and partly fostered by the civil rights movement, as well as by Cold War imperatives, thus impelled the senator and later President to liberalize immigration law.[26] He wanted immigration reformed in order that it "serve the national interest and reflect in every detail the principles of equality and human dignity to which our nation subscribes," and he made a specific – and historic – plea that the existing "special discriminatory formula to regulate the immigration of persons … [from] the Asia-Pacific Triangle" be repealed.[27]

Whatever JFK's intentions, however, the effect of the new Immigration and Nationality Act far exceeded what he (and President Johnson, who signed it into law in 1965) had had in mind and caused problems of inequality and injustice even as it solved those of Asian exclusion and racial quota.[28] Eithne Luibheid has lucidly explained, for example, that the current flow of "illegal" immigration (from Mexico principally, Latin America generally) was caused by the Hart-Celler Act because it imposed restrictions of skill and number on migrants from the western hemisphere, who until 1965 had been exempt from such federal legislation. The law "led directly to contemporary struggles faced by Mexicans in the United States today," Luibheid wrote in 1997; it thus caused the current impasse as regards so-called illegal Mexican and Latin@ workers.[29]

[26] This sense of historic guilt had no doubt been strengthened by the Anti-defamation League and B'nai B'rith's appeal to the young JFK, which purportedly instigated the writing of *A Nation of Immigrants*. Ira Mehlmann makes this interesting point in "John F. Kennedy and Immigration Reform," *Social Contract*, 1, 4, *What Makes a Nation?* special issue (Summer 1991) , at www.thesocialcontract.com/artman2/publish/tsc0104/article_66.shtml, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

[27] Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*, 149, 152.This view was not new and neither was Kennedy's July 1963 legislative initiative unprecedented. If anything, it came rather late; in 1952 President Truman had unsuccessfully tried to veto the McCarran-Walter Act (which updated but essentially maintained the principles of the 1924 National Origins Act), noting the "absurdity, the cruelty of carrying over into this year of 1952 the isolationist limitations of the 1924 law." President Truman, cited by Center for Immigration Studies (anonymous author), "Three Decades of Mass Immigration: The Legacy of the 1965 Immigration Act," Sept. 1995), at http://cis.org/1965ImmigrationAct-MassImmigration, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

[28] Notoriously, President Lyndon B. Johnson remarked on signing the new Act into law on 3 Oct. 1965, "This bill we sign today is not a revolutionary bill. It does not affect the lives of millions. It will not restructure the shape of our daily lives or add importantly to our wealth and power … This bill says simply that from this day forth those wishing to emigrate to America shall be admitted on the basis of their skills and their close relationship to those already here." These were infamous words: the 1965 Act changed the face of America out of all recognition and decisively affected voter demographics over the next 50 years by creating what has been called "the browning of America." Edward M. Kennedy, "The Immigration Act of 1965," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 367 (1966) 137–49, 148.

[29] See Eithne Luibheid, "The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act: An End to Exclusion?" *Positions*, Fall 1997, 501–22, 509.

That Presidents Bush and Obama thus both spoke and continue to speak of a "broken immigration system" due to undocumented migration across the southern border is doubly ironic. First, the 1965 Act has forced what were formerly sojourners and seasonal workers to stay in the US, so that their "illegality" is actually a result of the law changing, rather than a change in labour demand or migrant behaviour. Second – and more pertinent for our purposes – why would the US pride itself on being a "nation of immigrants" if it perceives itself at the same time to be in (illegal *and* legal) immigration crisis? If Bush proposed an Americanization movement for the twenty-first century, whilst Obama conceived of the deserving undocumented immigrant as a proto-American and a neoliberal subject in his own image, then how are we to understand the relation between "immigrants" and "Americans," insiders and outsiders to the national identity?

Again, these are complex questions, which elicit paradoxical answers, as we shall see. The dynamic between political discourse and everyday praxis is hard to gauge, the more so because Americanization in the early twentieth century, as a deliberate effort of *nation building* for an industrial and urban society, impacted not only on immigrants but on the native-born as well.[30] Similarly, when reaction against that earlier coercive Americanization came in the 1970s, with the rise of the so called "white ethnics," it was the *native-born* two or more generations on who asserted (rather than rediscovered) an ethnic difference that they themselves had never fully lived or suffered for – they could claim their Irishness (as former SDS leader Tom Hayden did) or their Italian roots or their Polish ancestry precisely *because* they were now secure enough in their white and mostly middle-class American identities to do so.[31]

Both these phenomena were delayed effects of the Americanization movement and they require further explanation if we are to understand the move from "a nation of Americans" to "a nation of immigrants" better than we do at present. In what follows I will suggest that, although the phrase "we are a nation of immigrants" is quite new, its anxious ideological burden (of creating unity from diversity, *e pluribus unum* in a modern sense) originates

[30] Indeed, President Bush's Task Force of 2008 aimed at something rather similar when it called upon "immigrants and native-born alike" to "uphold and pledge allegiance to foundational principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution," in order that "the United States remains a successful nation." *Building an Americanization Movement*, 1.

[31] Hayden serves as a case study of white self-ethnicization in Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009)

in America's first period of mass immigration from 1880 to 1920.[32] More particularly, it is the legacy of the Americanization campaign at its most coercive and virulent, between World War I and the passing of the Johnson-Reed National Origins Act of 1924. I shall argue that, contrary to the long-held view that the Americanization crusade was "unsuccessful" and "should be relegated to the junkheap of history," it in fact succeeded in setting a new standard of what it meant to be a good and true American for decades to come, even as it failed to stem the tide of nativism it was supposed to counter.[33]

AMERICANIZATION: WHAT WAS IT?

We need to return to the Americanization movement of Theodore Roosevelt's time not only to understand the current salience of the "nation of immigrants" as an ideological formation, but also to appreciate its cross-party, nostalgic appeal to the days of the "good" immigrant, which informs the current sense of crisis. Unlike today's monocultural, undereducated and overbreeding migrant who refuses to speak English and has crossed the border illegally, or so the story goes, the immigrant of old *chose* to assimilate to all things American and could not wait for the day he (always he) could "take out his papers." Rather like the hardworking, God-fearing and self-motivated migrant whom President Obama would allow to stay in the country rather than see deported, the good immigrants of old were consistently contrasted to the "melancholic migrant, who holds on to their past culture and to their difference," in Cisneros's words.[34] Why the US across the political spectrum today should want to identify as a "nation of immigrants" when, at the same time, immigrants legal and illegal are seen as a problem, is a question that can be answered only in politically divergent ways. It is because today's border crossers remind white liberals of their own destitute immigrant forebears a century ago, whereas to conservative eyes today's migrants cling to their melancholic difference, unlike those who wholeheartedly joined in the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness a century ago. Here, for an example of the latter, is Samuel Huntington, remembering those good old days:

[32] As Vecoli reminds us, *e pluribus unum* originally referred to the union of states that was formed at the time of the American Revolution from the 13 original colonies. Since then, it has taken on all sorts of expedient other meanings, of which the most recent is "out of many [peoples, or ethnicities] one." Rudolph J. Vecoli, "The Significance of Immigration in the Formation of American Identity," *History Teacher*, 30, 1 (1996), 9–27, 9.

[33] Vecoli, "Return to the Melting Pot," 8, reports that this was the consensus by the 1960s.

[34] Cisneros, "A Nation of Immigrants," 14.

Past immigrants wept with joy when, after overcoming hardship and risk, they saw the Statue of Liberty, enthusiastically identified themselves with their new country that offered them liberty, work, and hope; and often became the most patriotic of citizens …

However:

By 2000, America was … less a nation than it had been for a century … Globalization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, immigration, subnationalism, and anti-nationalism had battered American consciousness … The teaching of national history gave way to the teaching of ethnic and racial histories.[35]

The "nation of immigrants" Huntington wants to remember was willing to work hard, learn English and play by the rule of law; most of all, it was *grateful* for the gift of entry to the Promised Land.[36] I shall return to the importance of gratitude in a moment; for now, it is important to note two things: first, that Huntington chooses to forget about the impact of the Americanization movement altogether, representing the immigrant of old instead as somehow naturally predisposed to enthusiastic Americanism. Second, revisionist historiography of the past thirty years has amply demonstrated that this immigrant was nothing so simple, so assimilationist and so a priori Americanist as Huntington asserts; that s/he could appear so in hindsight can only be attributed to wishful thinking and wilful historical amnesia.[37] Both revisionist and right-wing historians, however, have tended to underplay the importance of the Americanization movement in the formation of twentieth- and twenty-first-century American identities, so it is this that we shall turn to next.

[35] Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? America's Great Debate* (New York: Free Press, 2004) 4–5.

[36] As Mary Antin cannily titled her 1912 memoir of immigration to America: *The Promised Land* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2012). That she was rather more complex than the good immigrant of Huntington's memory is explained in my analysis of her book in Maria Lauret, *Wanderwords: Language Migration in American Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury 2014), 67–94.

[37] For attention to and retention of ethnic cultures from Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot: Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1963) onwards see Leonard Dinnerstein, Roger L. Nichols and David M. Reimers, *Natives and Strangers: Ethnic Groups and the Building of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in American Life* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1995); Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Donna R. Gabaccia, *Immigration and American Diversity: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Jacobson, *Roots Too*.

Originating in the settlement movement and other reform efforts to clean up inner cities and aid the poor in the 1880s and 1890s, the Americanization impulse of voluntary organizations to help immigrants adapt to America's overcrowded industrial centres gradually became, under pressure of growing nativist anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1900s, a concerted local, state and federal effort to civilize the "other." As Edward Hartmann has shown, in its final stages after World War I and fearing importation of un-American ideas after the Russian Revolution, the movement also came to serve as a re-education of the native-born about their patriotic duty in the face of stranger danger. Modernity, after all, was not just a shock for the Italian peasant or the former Jewish *shtetl* dweller who had been – in Oscar Handlin's paradigmatic term – "uprooted" from the stability of kin and country to be unceremoniously dumped into an alien environment and left to get on with it. Modernity had also forced Americans, who had neither chosen nor previously experienced such variety of cultures and tongues, to live and work together in industrial places and urban spaces that were wholly new to them. Not only the European but also American-born country-to-city migrants thus encountered and shaped a nation in flux, an America in the throes of radical social and economic change. As the historian of nativism John Higham has written,

> Under the inroads of industrialism, bureaucracy, and specialized knowledge, the self-sufficiency of the "island communities" [of the nineteenth century] was irretrievably passing … [m]ore and more of the American people became integrated into economic networks and status hierarchies that drastically reduced the significance of the local arena … *consciousness of racial, national, and ethnic differences radically intensified*.[38]

What better way to counter such consciousness of difference and division than with a wide-ranging, state- and federally administered programme of social reform, involving numerous local initiatives and agencies, that would inculcate in everyone, immigrant and native alike, the rights, privileges *and duties* of American citizenship?[39] And what better way to teach newcomers, unused to the rigours of living by the clock in overcrowded city slums, the discipline of industrial labour than to promise them a fair wage and American citizenship after five years of hard work and lawful conduct?

So far, so straightforward in theory; in practice, however, the standard of Americanization to which all immigrants and Americans should be raised proved much harder to define and agree upon. Among the few contemporary historians who have paid attention to the Americanization movement, Donna

[38] John Higham, "Integrating America: The Problem of Assimilation in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 1, 1 (Fall 1981), 7–25, 20, italics added.

[39] President Bush's Task Force Report recommended much the same multilevel approach for Americanization in the twenty-first century.

Gabaccia has shown that, beyond such common programmatic aims as education for industrial labour and citizenship, there was no clear consensus on what Americanization should mean.[40] Then, as now, the idea that the "common core of American civic culture," or what it means to be "fully American," or even "our common language" (knowledge of which might set standards for Americanization according to the 2008 Bush Task Force Report) are in any way self-evident or clear-cut or date back to the founding of the republic must be abandoned in light of evidence to the contrary.[41]

In the 1910s and 1920s the Americanization movement consisted of minimalists and maximalists, liberals and right-wingers. Some believed that immigrants should be educated on a five-year plan to work hard, respect the law, learn English (if only to follow industrial and/or military orders) and apply for citizenship. Others demanded in addition abandonment of any interest in or allegiance to their country and language of origin, wholesale adoption of the American way of life, including American clothing and cuisine (in practice this meant buying canned goods and mass-produced textiles) and spending their money in American stores, rather than sending remittances home to their families in Poland or Sicily.

In their 1993 summary of Americanization historiography, commissioned by "a U. S. philanthropic institution interested in immigration-related issues" in order to assess the viability of "certain forms of social intervention to assist assimilation," Otis L. Graham and Elizabeth Koed put it thus: "Liberal Americanizers tended to promote a minimalist core, a blend of skills [such as English], behavior [such as punctuality and hygiene] and values [such as democracy and egalitarianism]" whilst allowing for immigrant contributions to American culture, such as cuisine, folklore and religion. The "100%-ers," by contrast, demanded in addition "thrift and sobriety … respect for the capitalist system … perhaps conversion to Christianity [and] certainly the repudiation of radical/terrorist political doctrines."[42] Clearly, the equation

[40] See Gabaccia.

[41] English as "our common language" and mastery of it as mandatory for citizenship was contested in the early twentieth-century campaign, as it is today too. English is not now and has never been the official language of the United States. If Americanizers now and then demand(ed) it, they did so in opposition to others who believed language was not essential to citizenship, or they do so against all evidence that bilingualism or multilingualism is a greater asset in the globalized world of today than the English-only advocated by proponents of an official English amendment to the Constitution.

[42] Otis L. Graham Jr. and Elizabeth Koed, "Americanizing the Immigrant, Past and Future: History and Implications of a Social Movement," *Public Historian*, 15, 4 (Autumn 1993), 24–49, 44. "Radical/terrorist" is an informative slip also because it makes visible just how many parallels those interested in "intervention to assist assimilation" saw between social divisions in the early twenty-first and the early twentieth centuries, and why they looked to the Americanization movement of the 1910s and 1920s for inspiration

of "radical" and "terrorist" in this last line betrays these historians' political bias, but it does not invalidate the statement as a whole, which is largely accurate, if not comprehensive.

Historians at the other end of the political spectrum have added an important further dimension to Americanization as a *process*, furthermore, in highlighting that immigrants' successful assimilation also required them to internalize the US's racial hierarchy and to learn to think of themselves as "white."[43] As Matthew Frye Jacobson has observed, this paradoxically produced their descendants' repudiation of the burden of whiteness during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, Jacobson writes, "The sudden centrality of black grievance to national discussion prompted a rapid move among [the new, self-identified] white ethnics to dissociate themselves from white privilege," citing their lack of connection with slavery on account of their relatively recent arrival in the country as well as the discrimination their parents and grandparents had been greeted with when they first arrived.[44]

In advancing his argument about the relation between white ethnics' disavowal of white privilege and the emergence of ethnic pride, Jacobson built on the work of James Barrett and David Roediger, who had earlier demonstrated the mutability of whiteness as a social construction. Because in the early twentieth century the new immigrants had been considered of inferior racial "stock," they occupied a place as "inbetween peoples," Barrett and Roediger argued, above African Americans but below the native-born descendants of Anglo Europeans. Immigrants from southern and eastern Europe had not always and already been considered "white"; they had encountered hostility and discrimination; done worse, harder and lower-paid work than native-born whites; been forced into overcrowded slum housing; and had suffered routine abuse, being called by the ethnic epithets (hunky dago yid greaser) that their grandchildren in the 1970s remembered so well, or worse.[45] Their Americanization *as emancipation* over the course of the twentieth

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and precedent for such intervention. Unfortunately I have not been able to trace precisely which "US philanthropic institution" commissioned Graham and Koed's work. It appeared in the *Public Historian* preceded by an authors' statement explaining the commission and followed by critical "Reviewers' Comments" as well as the "Client's Evaluation of the Usefulness of the Work Product." The latter was largely positive; it concluded that "our foundation will be inclined to look upon assimilation-assisting efforts more favourably than before we commissioned and read this report." Ibid., 49.

[43] Spickard, *Almost All Aliens*, ix, therefore admonishes us in one of his chapter headings to think of this period and these immigrants "Not [in terms of] Assimilation But Race Making."

[44] Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 21.

[45] James R. Barrett and David Roediger, "'InBetween Peoples': Race, Nationality and the New Immigrant Working Class," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 16, 3 (1997), 3–44.

century meant moving out of this "inbetween" status into whiteness and Americanism.[46] Americanization – as we have seen – demanded conformity to American ways and values in line with Roosevelt's 100%-ism, but it also promised them incorporation into the polity, including the right to vote and run for office, and these were rights that Native and native-born African Americans had limited or no access to.[47] It therefore endowed them with racial superiority and a social mobility that, again, was largely denied to Native and black Americans. Henceforth, and as if in anticipation of the legal/illegal dyad of immigration debate today, the "good" conformist immigrant would be a would-be and should-be American citizen; the "bad" (remember JFK's words: who "stole a loaf of bread" or joined a "questionable organization" or could not "document their activities for the past two years") should lose their jobs and return home, or be deported.[48]

The purpose of the Americanization movement by the 1920s was thus a far wider one than its initial agenda of fitting the immigrant to American life and industrial work had intended; it was to produce a "one-minded" nation through assimilation of the "foreign element," in the parlance of the day, to the American*ist* cause.[49]

That this cause was not an old, revolutionary and democratic one but, rather, a new imperial agenda was made clear by Americanizers such as Stephen Emory Bogardus, who stipulated that the purpose of his book *Essentials for Americanization* was "To Help Win the War for Democracy."[50] By this he did not mean World War I, but the US's internal

[46] As Ieva Zake has shown for erstwhile eastern and central European immigrants, by mid-century "the anticommunist white ethnics' understanding of themselves as true Americans was partly built on a conflict with ethnic and racial minorities who, according to the white ethnics, were critical because they had *failed to appreciate the US*"; gratitude and American nationalism were thus tied up with each other. Ieva Zake, "Anticommunist White Ethnics in Search of True Americanness: Ideas and Alliances in the 1950s–1970s," *Journal of American Studies*, 47, 4 (2013), 1065–80, 1073, italics added.

[47] Native Americans were only granted full citizenship with the Snyder or Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

[48] James Barrett writes of the Red Scare of 1919 as "a kind of enforced Americanization," which immigrants with radical sympathies had to accept on pain of being deported or put in jail. James R. Barrett, "Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880–1930," *Journal of American History*, 79, 3, *Discovering America: A Special Issue* (Dec. 1992), 996–1020, 1019.

[49] "To be great a nation need not be of one blood, it must be of one mind," wrote the sociologist John Commons in 1907. Cited by Robert A. Carlson, "Americanization as an Early Twentieth-Century Adult Education Movement," *History of Education Quarterly*, 10, 4 (1970), 440–64, 447.

[50] Stephen Emory Bogardus, *Essentials of Americanization* (Memphis, TN: General Books, 2010; first published 1920) 1.

ideological strife in 1920, when his and most other Americanization tracts were published and distributed across the nation.

This was the point when, according to Edward Hartmann, author of the most comprehensive history of the Americanization movement to date, "interest in Americanization on the part of practically every town and municipality in the United States which contained a substantial immigrant population" reached fever pitch in the "crusade against the alien radical."[51] In that same year, literary scholar Lincoln Gibbs of the University of Pittsburgh, for example, argued for the necessity of top-down Americanization because foreign critics of America, "even though friendly, have expressed their surprise that our citizens seem scarcely to be aware of the governments by which they are controlled," giving us a startling insight not only into American self-consciousness on the international stage, but also into the relative weakness of federal power in the eyes of contemporary commentators.[52] A statement such as Gibbs's would have been unthinkable fifty years ago, let alone today, and the effect of the Americanization movement of the 1910s and 1920s, if understood, as I do here, as the ideological justification for the combined centralizing force of industrial capitalism with state and federal political authority, is a large part of the reason why.

Begun as a local, philanthropic effort to help immigrants settle, the Americanization movement grew into a state-wide and then an increasingly coercive States-wide programme, involving immigrants and the native-born. Ideologues like Bogardus and Gibbs thus help us see that Americanization was a project of nation building very broadly conceived, of forging a national consciousness and purpose – cloaked in the promise of prosperity that "the American way of life" entails – for a divided, recalcitrant and disparate society. Nor was it being torn apart by mass immigration; rather, the rifts in the social fabric that needed to be healed, and that the Americanization campaign sealed over by projecting its attention onto "the foreign-born," ran much deeper and were potentially much more disruptive than those caused by the

[51] Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant*, 235–36, 237. We should be careful, however, to distinguish the red-baiting of this period from that in the Cold War. By 1920, even an enthusiastic Americanizer like Edward Bok could still see the Soviet Union as offering the working man the kind of opportunity hitherto only available in the US: "Russia may, as I like to believe she will, prove a second United States of America in this respect," Bok wrote open-mindedly. Edward W. Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok: The Autobiography of a Dutch Boy Fifty Years After*, 49th edn (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1922; first published 1920), 448.

[52] Lincoln R. Gibbs, "Americanization and Literature," *English Journal*, 9, 10 (Dec. 1920), 551–56, 551.

presence of newcomers.[53] Race riots during the Red Summer in Chicago, Charleston, Washington, DC and other American cities, the Red Scare of the Palmer Raids in 1919, widespread labour unrest (general strike in Seattle and downing of tools by the United Mine Workers), as well as the struggle for female suffrage, evidenced divisions of race, of class, of gender and of political persuasion in a rapidly urbanizing, industrializing, and most of all centralizing society that could not be laid to rest by the efforts of a few benevolent societies or immigrant-aid clubs.

Nor was the real ideological work of Americanization that of fitting the immigrant to an *existing* norm of American-ness, but rather of defining that norm for natives as well as immigrants, and then firming it up with American*ism*. In 1915 the Harvard philosopher Horace Kallen had written in his famous essay "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," "At the present time there is no dominant American mind. Our spirit is inarticulate, not a voice, but a chorus of many voices each singing a rather different tune."[54] Americanization as American*ism* made the difference, and it was the immigrant who was most categorically and coercively required to demonstrate the latter. In the battle over America's soul, and whether it would draw its sustenance from the past or make itself fit for the future, an Americanizer such as Carol Aronovici could therefore go as far as to reverse the relation between immigrant and native-born altogether. Aronovici argued that Americans should take their lessons in Americanization from immigrants, because it was they who "have felt the influence of American institutions and have accepted American methods of living and thinking as their own."[55] These "methods of living and thinking" included, as we have seen, older ideas and practices such as commitment to the values in the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights, understood, for example, by the nativist American or "Know-Nothing" Party in the nineteenth century to be "democracy, individualism, freedom, a high standard of living, equality, and progress."[56] Yet, as Alex Goodall has pointed out, "until the early twentieth century" – that is, until the intensified Americanization campaign of

[53] For, of course, there is a fundamental contradiction underlying both the early twentieth-century and the Bush administration's calls for Americanization of the immigrant; if, as the writers of the Task Force report believe, immigrants have come and continue to come to the United States in pursuit of "liberty and justice for all," then there should be no need to "educate" them (at best) or coerce them (at worst) into respect for America's "core civic culture." *Building an Americanization Movement for the Twenty First Century*, 1.

[54] Horace Kallen, "Democracy versus the Melting Pot," *The Nation*, 25 Feb. 1915, n.p., at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminarsflvs/Kallen.pdf, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

[55] Carol Aronovici, *Americanization* (St. Paul: Keller Publishing Co., 1919), n.p.

[56] Carlson, "The Rhetoric of the Know-Nothing Party," 372.

World War I through to 1924 – "systematic attempts to consider 'Americanism' as a distinctive political ideology were surprisingly rare."[57]

What the campaign added to the concept of Americanism was modern requirements such as participation in consumer society, use of English (and English only, at least in public) and a new kind of patriotic citizenship. This found its clearest articulation in the oath of naturalization, in which the older pledge to "renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sovereignty of whom I have heretofore been a subject or citizen" was augmented under Theodore Roosevelt in 1906 with its corollary, to "support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign *and domestic*, [and] that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same."[58] No wonder, then, that after the Johnson-Reed Act was passed and the border all but closed to new immigrants in 1924, the loyalty so explicitly demanded of the "foreign-born" for incorporation into the American polity now translated into gratitude for the "gift" of being so included. This "gift" was made all the more precious for its no longer being available to those of their countrymen and relatives in Russia, Poland and Italy who would have been emigrants to America too, but whose access would now be denied – or deferred for another forty years.[59]

THE GRATITUDE PARADIGM

Crucial in my theory that the roots of current ideas of American nationhood lie in the early twentieth-century Americanization campaign is what we might call the "gratitude paradigm": a structure of thinking and feeling about US

[57] Alex Goodall, "Two Concepts of Un-Americanism," *Journal of American Studies*, 47, 4 (2013), 925–42, 929.

[58] US Department of Homeland Security, "Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America," at www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/naturalization-test/naturalization-oath-allegiance-united-states-america, accessed 8 Dec. 2015. Wikipedia helpfully provides a comparison of oaths of naturalization in various countries, which reveals that no other is quite so long and so detailed as that of the US, and no other demands the renunciation of allegiance to the pledger's country of birth. See Wikipedia, "Oath of Citizenship," at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oath_of_citizenship#United_States, accessed 8 Dec. 2015. Steven Taylor outlines the legacy of the New England Know-Nothings to the Progressive Party, and therefore to Theodore Roosevelt's thinking, in "Progressive Nativism."

[59] The Immigration Act of 1924 reduced the number of immigrants to the US to 2% of those of that nationality already living in the country in 1880. In practice this meant that immigration from the new regions (southern and eastern Europe) was restricted between 1924 and 1965, when the new Immigration Act was passed, to hundreds per year, in stark contrast to the hundreds of thousands and millions who had been allowed to come in any given year between 1880 and 1920.

citizenship that profoundly shapes American patriotism, exceptionalism and, with it, the "nation-of-immigrants" idea as an ideological formation. I mean by it the notion that immigrants to the United States now, as well as then, owe America something, that the country – in allowing them entry and eventually citizenship – bestowed a gift on them which needs repaying with undying love and loyalty.

Again, the prima facie truth of the US as a "nation of immigrants" is belied if we compare it to the situation in other countries of immigration.[60] Immigrants the world over change domicile in hope of a better life, and that hope, in time, is usually fulfilled – if not as well advertised as the American Dream.[61] They may be thankful that their new country offered them refuge from persecution, or a future for them and their children, or simply work – but they do not, as a rule, think of their new citizenship as a gift requiring, or inspiring, gratitude and an eternal bond of loyalty to their adopted country. Yet such a "visceral, *emotional* attachment to America and its history, or '*patriotic assimilation*'" is precisely what the United States required of its new citizens in the early twentieth century, and in some quarters it does so still – these are the words that the Center for Immigration Studies uses.[62] I believe it is part of the reason why Italian Americans, for example, "as well as other ethnic groups," as Danielle Battisti writes, "became Cold War 'warriors' or 'ambassadors' … [having] achieved upward social mobility, political integration, and cultural inclusion in the U. S. by mid-century."[63] What, then, might the gratitude paradigm have to do with the shift in American self-definition, from a "nation of Americans" to the "nation of immigrants" with which we began?

As we know, immigrants between 1880 and 1920 were enticed, in their millions, by a rapidly developing industrial economy to come to America to work in order to improve their lives and create a future for their children. That they came, as President Bush's Task Force on New Americans puts it, on a "quest for freedom" and in response to "America's promise of liberty and justice for all," however, is rhetoric of hindsight that needs to be deconstructed if we are

[60] A good general source for such an approach is Christiane Harzig and Dirk Hoerder, with Donna Gabaccia, *What Is Migration History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

[61] Daniels, *Coming to America*, 25; and Harzig and Hoerder, *What Is Migration History?*, 41–12, make some interesting observations as regards US immigration figures by comparison with Canada, Argentina, Brazil and Australia.

[62] Mark Krikorian, Center for Immigration Studies, "Legal Immigration: What Is to Be Done?", at http://cis.org/articles/2001/blueprints/krikorian.html, accessed 8 Dec. 2015, emphasis added.

[63] Danielle Battisti, "The American Committee on Italian Migration, Anti-Communism, and Immigration Reform," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 3, 2 (2012), 11–40, 11–12.

to understand twentieth-century immigration and Americanization beyond the hype of Dreams and Democracy.[64] Did these immigrants not serve their time in hard industrial labour? Did they not also raise families; start businesses; pay their taxes; contribute to American society, politics, culture and consumption? Did their offspring not go to school to be made over into law-abiding and loyal American citizens? Did parents not make sacrifices for their children's future, only to see them move away to different places and better jobs, speaking another language than the one they grew up with? Did they not send their sons and granddaughters to far-flung lands to fight America's wars? In other words, were immigrants not the givers, whilst America did the taking?

These questions – so obvious and rhetorical as to be rarely asked – are pertinent ones nonetheless: why should American immigrants *and their descendants to the* n*th generation* be forever grateful for something that in other countries is seen as a fair exchange: citizenship for contribution, incorporation for participation?

Lewis Hyde, in his book *The Gift*, would regard the latter as evidence of market-economy thinking, in which the immigrant's labour is exchanged for a living in a straightforward transaction whose value is determined by the laws of supply and demand. Such an exchange requires no patriotism, no singing of "America the Beautiful" at family reunions, and no pledging of allegiance at the beginning of each schoolday. These, however, are commonplace practices in the United States, no less demonstrations of "visceral, *emotional* allegiance," or "*patriotic assimilation*" than the naturalization oath itself.

Hyde contrasts the economy of the marketplace, *pace* Marcel Mauss, with the very different dynamics of a gift economy, which is "marked by three related obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate," and it is these that, in my theoretical frame, befit the American "gratitude paradigm."[65] The gift thus creates a bond of obligation which necessitates what Hyde calls a "labour of gratitude" that must prove the recipient worthy of the gift, and only when the gift is finally passed on (to the next generation, in our case) is that labour done, and the debt of gratitude discharged. Hyde's anthropological approach is useful here insofar as it contrasts the dynamics of a market economy to that of an older order, which creates an almost mystical bond between giver and receiver. It makes sense of the pledge of allegiance as an everyday ritual that echoes, in abbreviated form, the immigrant's original inauguration into citizenship.

[64] *Building an Americanization Movement for the 21st Century*, 1.

[65] Hyde's concern is with creativity and I am thus taking his work out of context, but the anthropological frame fits all the same. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* (New York: Canongate, 2007; first published 1983), xviii.

Extending his analysis I thus hypothesize that the economy of the gift typifies the way the immigrant's relation to the nation was conceived in early twentieth-century Americanization discourse, under pressure from nativism and demands for 100% Americanism, giving rise to a labour of gratitude that has bound new and old Americans to the nation *through the obligation* of loyalty and patriotism, in an era when in most other areas of life the laws of the marketplace held sway.

And in American popular memory this attitude of gratitude, forcibly instilled in the early twentieth-century Americanization campaign and passed on to subsequent generations, has proved remarkably persistent – even in the face of anti-Vietnam protests or more recent examples of criticism of the US by younger, educated or more liberal Americans. The gratitude paradigm is ubiquitous; in Cynthia Weber's *I Am an American* video series it drives a number of recent immigrants who have been unjustly treated by the Immigration and Nationality Service to proclaim their gratitude and undying loyalty to the United States all the more ardently.[66] It figures in American genealogy shows; in the US version of *Who Do You Think You Are* descendants of immigrants often have their roots traced back to an ancestor in Europe who, it is invariably assumed, came to the United States in search of freedom and prosperity, which – or so the narrative goes – invariably they found. Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *Faces of America* on PBS regularly features descendants of immigrants sobbing, at Gates's prompt, when they imagine the life they might have had if their parents or grandparents had *not* come to the United States – a dismal and most likely destitute existence, is the implication, as if a life worth living outside the US were unimaginable.[67]

[66] In the series, documented and undocumented individuals tell of their travails with the INS as first-generation migrants. They relate their unjust treatment "for being a Chinese American and a Muslim" (James Yee) or their difficulty in obtaining citizenship despite having served in the military for many years (Guadalupe Denogean), yet they invariably affirm their allegiance to the United States. For a description of the project see Cynthia Weber, *I am an American: Portraits of Post-9/11 U. S. Citizens*, at www.iamanamericanproject.com, and for the videos https://www.opendemocracy.net/article/i_am_an_american_portraits_of_post_9_11_us_citizens, both accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

[67] See, for example, the episode with film director Mike Nichols. Nichols's parents were refugees from Nazi Germany and in light of that particular history the sentiment is understandable – were it not for the fact that the US's record on accepting Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany before and during World War II is nothing to write home about. According to the Holocaust Museum, only 137,450 Jewish refugees had settled in the US by 1952. Besides, fleeing to the US, no less than to other countries like Canada or Argentina, often entailed significant hardship and discrimination for the first generation of Jewish refugees. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "United States Policy towards Jewish Refugees, 1941–1952," *Holocaust Encyclopaedia*, at www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007094, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

And it is so because of the gratitude paradigm, in turn endemic to that greatest and most wearisome cliché of the American Dream fulfilled – albeit, in reality, usually only by the third, fourth or fifth generation. Again: what did, and do, these immigrants to the United States have to be grateful *for*, exactly?

The obvious answer would appear to be that they became part of the world's greatest superpower, but such apparently commonsense thinking is ahistorical. First- and second-generation immigrants before World War II (think: the Depression) were not part of any superpower, and besides – as Jacobson has shown in *Roots Too* – many of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren turned against American supremacy in the 1960s and 1970s, protesting the "military–industrial complex" and the racial inequality of 1960s and 1970s America while embracing a self-styled *marginal* ethnic American identity instead.

Ethnic shame is the missing part in this puzzle and the obverse of the ethnic pride which emerged in the 1970s and is still so prevalent today in many Americans' self-identifications as hyphenated. This was the shame – for a parent's accent, for the public humiliation of having your mouth washed out with soap for speaking "foreign" in the playground, for one's obviously Jewish Slovak Polish Italian Greek name, for the "backward" food eaten at home and the hand-me-down clothes, the "superstition" and old-fashioned values of the old country – that conditioned the lives of American-born descendants of immigrants growing up during the Depression, World War II and the Cold War. However much their families may have instilled in them that they were proud Italians, Ukrainians, Poles or Jews, "many ethnic Americans still felt marginalized in many ways" in public life, as Battisti writes, and would point to the continued restriction of immigration from their former homelands as proof of their perceived inferiority.[68] Until well into the 1960s, a sometimes crippling, often resentment-breeding, ethnic shame was the price exacted by Americanizers for the hard-won American-ness of immigrants and their (grand)children, an American-ness which – just as Roosevelt had stipulated – was incompatible with ethnic legacies of the old country during the iciest decades of the Cold War. Hardly surprising, then, that, when third- and fourth-generation immigrants entered higher education in the 1960s and 1970s and saw how civil rights discourse measured American values of equality and justice against equally American practices of segregation and inequality, they applied the same logic to themselves.

[68] Battisti, 12. Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant*, 271–72, adds to this that the Americanization movement resulted in a "deepening of inferiority complexes as the immigrants became increasingly aware that they were considered problems by many of their native American neighbors."

Rejecting the ethnic shame that had kept their elders down, they asserted an ethnic pride which in one fell swoop released them from the taint of white supremacy, and identified themselves henceforth as hyphenated Americans.

Of course, the social mobility this generation was experiencing had everything to do with this. As the essayist Richard Rodriguez polemically argued in the early 1980s, just at the point when they were entering the *middle* class by virtue of their college education, newly but now *self*-ethnicized students claimed their working-class origins.[69] They also, now, disavowed their white-washed position in the racial hierarchy that it had been part of their grandparents' Americanization to adopt. Because it would make them culpable in the eyes of African Americans marching for their rights, the (great-)grandchildren of immigrants claimed, as Jacobson put it, "their immigrant heritage (denoting … recent arrival, underdog credentials, and innocence in white supremacy's history of conquest and enslavement)," thereby paradoxically reclaiming, in a way, their "inbetween" status.[70] And it is this, this "rise of the white ethnics" whose ethnicity had long since been eroded by Americanization as movement and process, that evinced the birth of the "nation of immigrants," *as if* in reprise of the proto-multicultural immigrant America that had briefly existed at the turn of the twentieth century.[71]

In other words, the gratitude paradigm that John F. Kennedy had articulated with *A Nation of Immigrants* was now mobilized to turn ethnic shame into pride ("look how far we have come") and a nation of Americans into one of diverse ethnicities.[72] Because it enables white liberals to celebrate their multicultural tolerance and openness (remember Obama's words, "we were strangers once, too") and conservatives to honour their forebears' sacrifice (legitimating resentment of the "ungrateful" immigrants (and African Americans) of today), the "nation of immigrants" can work wonders: it unites Americans on both sides of the immigration debate

[69] See his first volume of autobiographical essays, Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (New York: Bantam, 1983).

[70] Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 21.

[71] *As if*, because in this third and fourth generation ethnicity was, as Herbert Gans argued in 1979, now (re)claimed in largely symbolic form, nostalgically as a tradition one could take pride in, but did no longer have to live. See Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: the Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2, 1 (1979), 1–20.

[72] Immigration of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Kennedy wrote, "gave every old American a standard by which to judge how far he had come and every new American a realization of how far he might go." Kennedy, *A Nation of Immigrants*, 99.

across the chasm of racial inequality that would still exclude millions of black, Native, and Chican@ Americans from the national project.[73]

A NATION OF AMERICANIZED IMMIGRANTS?

Clearly, if we are to understand current American anxiety about mass immigration – whether addressed in the form of President Obama's deportation deferral or of Bush's second Americanization initiative – we should remind ourselves of its history. We need to evaluate the success, or otherwise, of organized Americanization efforts at local, state and federal levels, yet since there is little recent research on the Americanization movement of a century ago this is not easy to do. What scholarship there is tends to conclude that the movement was short-lived and extreme, and failed to achieve its objectives.[74] Robert A. Carlson's nutshell summary from 1970 has hardly been challenged since:

> the extreme period of Americanization … lasted through 1916, continued at a high pitch through …World War I, slackened briefly after the war, gave a dying flash during the 1919–20 "Big Red Scare," then dropped to a flicker in the prosperity of the 1920s, with the "return to normalcy" and the disillusionment with President Wilson's missionary democracy.[75]

Carlson gives a timeline of the campaign, from Roosevelt's 100% Americanism speech through to the mid-1920s, and reflects the historiographical consensus that by then the Americanization campaign had run its course, chiefly because the nativists eventually got their way with the immigration restriction of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. The latter, after all, created the "immigration pause" that conservative historians Graham and Koed viewed as so fortuitous

[73] Jacobson cites David Horowitz in the debate about slave reparations: "as a Jew I owe a debt to America … black Americans … should feel the same way." We can take this as an example of the gratitude paradigm in full ideological swing, counting the legacy of slavery as one of the plethora of privileges the US has bestowed on its citizens. Jacobson, *Roots Too*, 335.

[74] Many historians of Americanization take their cue from Edward G. Hartmann's *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant* of 1948, the only monograph that, as far as I have been able to ascertain, has ever been published on the early twentieth-century movement. Consultation of primary sources such as field reports and the handbooks which were in (mass) circulation at the time (such as Ruby M. Boughman's report on Americanization in LA, "What Los Angeles Is Doing in Americanization, Beginning with the Schools," Part 1, in Albert A. Shiels, ed., *Americanization: What It Means, How It Operates, How Every City and Town Can Put It into Practical Application* (n.p., 1919), 27–28; Aronovici, *Americanization*; and Bogardus, *Essentials of Americanization*, cited above) gives a more contemporaneous view of the depth and reach of the movement on the ground and in action, however.

[75] Carlson, "Americanization as an Early Twentieth-Century Adult Education Movement," 452.

in retrospect, because it enabled (or so they claimed) the restoration of American order and unity.[76]

As we have seen, however, Carlson's summary of organized Americanization's short and "extreme" career underestimates the impact it had *on immigrants and natives both*; the same can be said of the work of other historians who, from Moynihan and Glazer's *Beyond the Melting Pot* of 1963 onwards, have been at pains to show how ethnicity remained a significant factor in American social and cultural life. However true this may be, my point is that the Americanization that Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson advocated, which – regardless of its minimalist and maximalist manifestations – amounted in essence to American*ism*, did become the hegemonic discourse of American nationhood for most of the twentieth century.[77] It reached its heyday in the Cold War and in particular with McCarthyism, but it is worth remembering that the ground for 1950s anticommunist imperatives had been prepared decades earlier in the Sedition Act of 1918, which proscribed public criticism of the government, including negative statements about the flag, the military and the Constitution. Similarly, the Overman Committee, founded in the same year, had been charged with investigating German and then Bolshevik activities in the United States and can therefore be seen as a forerunner of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) of Cold War infamy.

Even if the movement to impose it was relatively short-lived and may now be considered "extreme," Americanization *as a discourse* was well-nigh inescapable in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and it did not stop suddenly in 1924, even if many of the free provisions of the movement did (such as night school classes in English, or courses in American-style cooking and childcare). In practice and as a norm to aspire to, Americanization was a deliberate and wide-ranging project in social engineering that had real effects on real people.[78] Reaching into their workplaces, their schools, their homes

[76] As noted above, the Act stipulated that no more than 2% of the number of people of a particular national origin already living in the United States according to 1920 Census figures would be allowed entry per year. In practice, this quota system heavily favoured those of Irish, German, and UK origin; according to Desmond King these countries accounted for "about 70 percent of the annual quota of approximately 158,000." Desmond King, *The Liberty of Strangers: Making the American Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 60.

[77] For a good selection of critical perspectives on this notoriously slippery concept see Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, eds., *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[78] Many immigrant autobiographies of the period, for example, measured the narrator/author's progress by the extent of their Americanization; *The Americanization of Edward Bok* epitomized this phenomenon. Like Mary Antin's more ambivalent *The Promised Land*, Bok's book quickly became a best seller and was used by the Americanization campaign as an exemplary text in civics classes.

and kitchens, and ultimately their individual psyches, the conception of American identity forged and promulgated in the Americanization campaign, in terms of the skills, values, behaviour and political conviction outlined above, impressed itself upon immigrant *and* native hearts and minds and took hold there for most of the twentieth century – and beyond.[79] Organized Americanization of the 1910s and 1920s, then, I want to stress, is not some footnote to immigration history, epitomized in its extremity by the Ford Motor Company's staging of its English School graduation ritual, in which workers of various national origins jumped into the melting pot and came out transformed into uniformly clad model Americans.[80] Instead, as Michael Olneck has observed, "The Americanization movement is significant as an effort to secure cultural and ideological hegemony through configuration of the symbolic order … The symbolic redefinition of American civic culture, not the transformation of immigrants, is [its] important historical consequence."[81] These almost throwaway remarks in Olneck's essay deserve to be repeated, highlighted and emphasized. For, as we have seen, the Americanization campaign was not a case of adapting the immigrant to an *existing* national identity and sense of civic duty, but of redefining American identity, with "assimilation of the foreign element" as the excuse.

The Americanization agenda of the early twentieth century was far broader, more pervasive and more intrusive than is generally assumed, and far more aggressively pursued in some quarters than even the Ford factory's theatricals would lead us to believe. It was also far more successful, in the longer term, than historians have given it credit for; not coincidentally, the particular brand of patriotism known as "the American creed" only entered common parlance in 1917, when William Tyler Page first articulated and submitted it to the US House of Representatives.[82] America's entry into World War I

[79] We might think here of the resurgence of a rabid "patriotic" nationalism and concurrent xenophobia in the wake of 9/11, of which the Tea Party's demand that President Obama submit his birth certificate was a delayed and extreme expression.

[80] Among the many scholars who have recounted this story are Joshua L. Miller in *Accented America: The Cultural Politics of Multilingual Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Susan Currell in *American Culture in the 1920s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); and Werner Sollors in *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[81] Michael Olneck, "Americanization and the Education of Immigrants, 1900–1925: An Analysis of Symbolic Action," *American Journal of Education*, 97, 4 (Aug. 1989), 398–423, 399.

[82] Page's declaration was personalized as "An American's Creed" and concluded, "I therefore believe it is my duty to my country to love it, to support its Constitution, to obey its laws, to respect its flag, and to defend it against all enemies." As William Tyler Page's "The American's Creed" it can be found online at www.ushistory.org/documents/creed.htm, accessed 8 Dec. 2015.

was, of course, its cradle, but no less so the increasing intensity of organized Americanization efforts. For the social programme to "educate" immigrants in the American way was also, in intention, effect, or both, a means of coercing them, *as well as the native-born*, to sign up to an imperial brand of American nationalism that would be fit for the twentieth century. After 1924 it was this "American creed" that instilled in immigrants and their descendants the gratitude paradigm that held sway for the next four decades, and was only significantly challenged in the 1960s and 1970s, with the demand for African American civil rights and the social movements it brought in its train.

And so, if we are to gauge accurately what hides under the apparently consensual banner of the "nation of immigrants" in the contemporary context of fear of terrorism and cultural difference, then we need to look back further than JFK and Teddy Roosevelt to the modernity that first necessitated mass immigration to the US and then sought to regiment it with forcible Americanization. Immigration reform, then and now, was never about "America living up to its promise" or about "who we are" as people who do not deport immigrants, because "we were strangers once, too." Rather, it was and is about tracing back the history of that strangeness and that promise, and reexamining the terms and conditions with which it came.

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