Chapter 4

Ethnic Conflict and Immigration Restriction

ALTHOUGH IMMIGRANTS CONTRIBUTED to the accelerated pace of American growth and development, native-born Americans rarely considered their presence an unalloyed blessing. Periodically, different groups of Americans wanted to curtail the immigrant traffic, but the overriding national need for more people and the commitment to the idea of America as a haven for the distressed prevented serious legislative curbs. During the colonial period, the Scots-Irish and the Germans were subject to hostile barbs from earlier arrivals and selective taxation by colonial governments. While John Adams was president, in 1798, the period required for foreigners to be in the United States before applying for citizenship was temporarily increased from five to fourteen years. In the middle of the nineteenth century the Know-Nothing Party again raised the issue of too many foreigners, but it evaporated before it could mount a lengthy campaign.

Between 1875 and 1924, however, pressure groups succeeded in getting Congress to reduce the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States. Congress enacted its first restrictive law in 1875 when it banned prostitutes and alien convicts from American shores. Seven years later a more comprehensive law excluded lunatics, idiots, and people likely to become public charges. In 1884 further legislation eliminated contract laborers. These measures reflected a growing fear of certain types of people, but kept out relatively few of those who sought entry into the United States.

More important, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first proscription of an ethnic group. The enactment of this law was the culmination of a vigorous West Coast campaign against the Chinese, and it reversed the welcome they had received after the gold rush in the early 1850s. In 1852, for example, the governor of California, seeking new sources of labor for the state, characterized the Chinese as among "the most worthy of our newly adopted citizens."

The negative picture of the Chinese originated before they came to America, with American missionaries, merchants, and diplomats who had sent back derogatory pictures of China and the Chinese. At first, these images were not widely known. Nevertheless, they did prepare public opinion for the

growing hostility toward Asians, especially as immigrants from Asia increased from approximately 40,000 in 1860 to over 100,000 in 1880. Although a few opponents of the Asians insisted that Chinese laborers were virtual slaves in this country, most West Coast workers, whether native or foreign-born, claimed that these people depressed wages and consequently provoked unfair competition. In the 1860s, when the race to complete the transcontinental railroad was in full swing and jobs were abundant, this charge mattered little. When the railroad was finished, and especially during the depression of the 1870s, anti-Chinese feelings became virulent in California. One legislative committee in the state, appointed in 1876 to investigate the Chinese in their midst, concluded that "the Chinese are inferior to any race God ever made. . . . [They] have no souls to save, and if they have, they are not worth saving."

Behind much of the anti-Chinese sentiment was racism, the belief that there were vast cultural and racial differences between whites and Asians. The Chinese were accused of having low morals, specifically of practicing prostitution and smoking opium; of low health standards; and of corrupt influences and practices. One advocate of restriction told a congressional committee in 1877:

> The burden of our accusation against them is that they come in conflict with our labor interests; they can never assimilate with us; that they are a perpetual, unchanging, and unchangeable alien element that can never become homogeneous; that their civilization is demoralizing and degrading to our people; that they degrade and dishonor labor; that they can never become citizens.

The movement to ban the Chinese from America centered in California. Mobs assaulted them, legislatures burdened them with special head taxes, and city ordinances harassed their hotels and laundries. The most vigorous opposition came from Dennis Kearney and the Workingmen's Party in the 1870s. One manifesto of this group declared, "The Chinaman must leave our shores. We declare that white men and women, and boys, and girls, cannot live as the people of the great republic should and compete with the single Chinese coolie in the labor market. . . . To an American, death is preferable to life on a par with the Chinaman."

The 1875 law banning prostitutes was in part aimed at Chinese women, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a response to intense pressure from the West Coast. Loopholes in the law allowed for some immigration, however, and this sparked further agitation and violence in the West. In 1885 a Tacoma, Washington mob drove out Chinese residents and burned their

homes, and incidents of violence occurred elsewhere. More Chinese were harassed in Arizona in 1886 than in any other year. While awaiting further congressional action California passed its most far-reaching anti-Chinese law. This measure barred all Chinese except governmental officials from entering the state and required those already there to register with state officials. In 1892 additional congressional legislation virtually ended Chinese immigration and restricted the civil rights of those still in this country.

Following these restrictions, overt violence against the Chinese ceased, and agitation for tighter laws and controls gradually subsided. Yet the prejudice against the Chinese remained. Discrimination in jobs and housing was common after 1890, and derogatory images of Chinese Americans appeared in the media. Newspapers played up stories of prostitution, gambling, and opium dens in Chinatowns. "Chinks" and "John Chinaman" were sobriquets frequently used to describe Chinese Americans. The prejudices and discrimination lasted well into the twentieth century. State laws against interracial marriages, for example, were part of the legacy of racial prejudice, and Chinese aliens were not eligible for citizenship until after 1943.

In part, Americans transferred their prejudice after the Japanese began arriving in California and Hawaii in the 1890s. Again the focus of hostility and agitation was California, where most of the Japanese lived. Arguments similar to those used against the Chinese were employed to assail Japanese immigrants. "The Japs must go," shouted one demagogue; and the United States Industrial Commission reported in 1901 that the Japanese were "far less desirable" than the Chinese. "They have most of the vices of the Chinese, with none of the virtues. They underbid the Chinese in everything, and are as a class tricky, unreliable and dishonest."

And yet the racism directed against the Japanese was not the same as the anti-Chinese feeling. Whereas the Chinese were considered coolies who depressed American wages, at times the Japanese were considered too successful, especially in California agriculture, in which they became efficient workers and growers. Unlike China, Japan was becoming a world power at the beginning of the twentieth century. Instead of showing contempt for Japan, many racists became alarmed by her growing power. The fear was expressed in the "yellow peril" scare just after 1900, an imagined invasion of the United States by hordes of Asians. Congressman Richmond Pearson Hobson of Alabama insisted that the "yellow peril" was already here, and he further warned: "the Japanese are the most secretive people in the world," and were "rushing forward with feverish haste stupendous preparations for war. . . . The war is to be with America." The Hearst press in California insisted that "every one of these immigrants . . . is a Japanese spy."

Growing fear of and antagonism toward Japanese immigrants reached a

crisis after the turn of the century. Led by labor groups, delegates gathered in San Francisco in 1905 to organize the Asiatic Exclusion League. A year later, the San Francisco Board of Education ordered the segregation of all Asian pupils. Of the city's 25,000 schoolchildren only 93 were Japanese, but the public was outraged at reports that older Japanese boys were sitting next to little white girls in classes. The Japanese government protested the order, and Theodore Roosevelt's administration found itself faced with a full-fledged diplomatic crisis. Federal pressure on the San Francisco school board led to the rescinding of the new policy. In return the Japanese, in the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907, promised to restrict exit visas for laborers who wanted to go to the United States. The agreement short-circuited a confrontation but did not prevent those Japanese already here from pursuing the American dream. Reputedly hard workers and shrewd businessmen, they amassed a great deal of property before the California legislature, in 1913, prohibited aliens ineligible for citizenship from acquiring land. The act, based on a provision of the naturalization laws limiting citizenship to incoming whites and descendants of Africans, failed because the Japanese continued acquiring property in the names of their American-born children or under legal corporate guises.

Californians may have been especially concerned with Asian minorities, but the most widespread American hostility was directed at Roman Catholics. The growing Catholic immigrant population after 1880 once more stirred up Protestant bigotry. Even more than before the Civil War, the Roman Catholic Church appeared aggressive and powerful as Irish Catholics succeeded in politics and Catholic leaders spoke without restraint in public.

School issues in particular kindled ethnic tensions. Catholics found the Protestant orientation of American public schools offensive and developed their own parochial schools. Although the Church encouraged all parishioners to send their children to these schools, only a minority—mostly of Irish background—chose, or could afford, to do so. This led in turn to Catholic demands for state aid for parochial schools, a proposal that further enraged Protestants. Local elections often centered on the school issue, as did the 1880 election in New York City, for example. The Democrats had nominated William R. Grace, a Roman Catholic, for mayor, and this incensed a number of the city's Protestants. *The New York Times* stated the prevalent anxieties clearly:

> If the Irish Catholics should happen, for instance, to control the Mayoralty, the Controllership, and the Board of Aldermen, they would very soon be able to reconstitute the Board of Education, to place Catholic Trustees over certain schools, to put in Catholic teachers, to introduce

> Catholic textbooks, to convey public funds to Church schools under some guise which would elude the law, and, in fact, to Romanize our whole system of public education.

In the end Grace won the election, and the fears expressed by *The New York Times* proved groundless. But the anxieties remained.

Boston, with its large Irish population, was also a hotbed of dispute. In 1889 a teacher in a public high school defined indulgences in a manner that was considered offensive by a Catholic pupil. The Church protested and the Boston School Committee reprimanded the teacher, transferred him from history to English (a "safer" subject), and dropped a disputed text. Aroused Protestants organized and in the next election won control of the school committee.

At the national level the issue of religion and the schools intruded and divided political parties. In 1875 James G. Blaine, the House Republican leader, proposed a constitutional amendment to ban governmental property and financial aid for the use of any school or other institution under the control of any religious sect. Although the amendment never passed, the issue prompted considerable debate.

At bottom much of the conflict centered on the belief held by many Protestants that Catholicism was a menace to American values and institutions. This view was not as strong as it had been before the Civil War. Nevertheless, many Protestants believed that a large proportion of American Catholics were under the thumb of Rome and were unwilling to accept American values. Some militant Protestants insisted that Catholics had divided loyalties and should be denied the ballot until they took an oath of allegiance renouncing the supremacy of the pope. A prominent Protestant clergyman, Josiah Strong, expressed much of this anxiety in his popular *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis* (1885), in which he argued that Catholics gave their foremost allegiance to the Church, not to the United States of America. Protestants like Strong were also agitated because of the Roman Catholic Church's opposition or indifference to the temperance crusade.

The largest anti-Catholic organization to appear in the late nineteenth century was the American Protective Association (APA). Founded in 1887 in Clinton, Iowa by Henry Bowers, the APA had a large following until the mid-1890s; at its peak it claimed 2.5 million members. Appealing mainly to working-class Protestants in the Rocky Mountain states and the far West, the APA pledged its members' support of public schools, immigration restriction, and tougher naturalization laws. To fight the so-called Roman menace, APA members organized boycotts of Catholic merchants, refused to

go on strike with Catholic trade unionists, and vowed never to vote for a Roman Catholic for public office. The growing political power of Catholics was especially alarming to the organization, which claimed that "although only one-eighth of the population of the United States was Catholic . . . one-half of all the public officeholders were Catholics . . . Catholics were favored in the Civil Service examinations, and . . . all civil servants were forced to contribute to Catholic charities."

Hysteria peaked in 1893 when many believed a rumor that the pope had written a letter ordering Catholics to exterminate all heretics in the United States. Some Protestants armed themselves, and the mayor of Toledo called out the National Guard to halt the coming slaughter. The rumor soon proved groundless and fraudulent, of course, but members of the APA quickly found other aspects of Catholicism to fight.

The association never formed a political party, but it did enter politics. It supported candidates, usually Republicans, who were against the Catholic Church and lobbied for particular pieces of legislation. The association backed state compulsory school-attendance laws and, at the national level, became embroiled in a dispute over Indian schools. Under federal policy established during the Grant administration, contracts were granted to church groups to operate Indian schools. Thus federal funds were going to parochial schools, which horrified the APA. The association threw its support behind efforts to eliminate the contract system and substitute public schools for the church-supported ones.

In spite of the widespread hostility to Catholicism among non-Catholics, the appeal of the association was limited. The movement crested in the 1890s and then fell apart. Other issues were more important to American voters in the 1890s, and the APA found itself plagued by internal disputes. Republicans used the APA, but they discovered that it was not important politically. Anti-Catholicism took other forms after 1895.

In addition to the religious prejudice directed at Catholics, hostility toward Jews grew in the late nineteenth century. Anti-Semitism was aggravated by the economic depressions that plagued Americans, on and off, from 1873 through 1896. The German Jews, who arrived in the United States in the middle of the nineteenth century, prospered despite the existing prejudices because there were few, if any, economic barriers to those who were enterprising. Their prosperity in the face of widespread unemployment and despair reinforced the old Shylock image of a cunning and avaricious Jew demanding his pound of flesh. One southern patrician noted, for example, "it is quite the fashion to caricature the Jew as exacting his interest down to the last drachma." He then pointed out, perhaps half in envy and half in respect, that in the hardest of times the Jew "has money to lend if not to burn

and before he is ready to execute his will he owns the grocery store, the meat-market, the grog-shop, the planing-mill, the newspaper, the hotel and the bank." The extremist fringe in the free-silver movement saw the Jew as the archenemy foisting an international gold standard on beleaguered American farmers who were fighting for silver, "the people's money."

The presence of east European Jews, who started coming to the United States in the 1870s, aggravated existing anti-Semitic feelings; and as already noted, all Jews faced growing social and economic discrimination. As Jewish immigration from eastern Europe increased, anti-Semitism helped to kindle the movement for immigration restriction. In 1906 a member of President Theodore Roosevelt's immigration commission told an investigator that the "movement toward restriction in all of its phases is directed against Jewish immigration."

Alongside religious antagonisms, immigrants also confronted economic conflicts. Many workers opposed immigrants on the grounds that they depressed wages and were potential strikebreakers. The Knights of Labor called for a ban on contract labor, as did a number of labor leaders. Organized labor, with a high proportion of foreign-born workers, was reluctant to support general immigration restriction, but labor leaders were becoming more critical of immigration in the 1880s and in the economically depressed 1890s. In 1897 the American Federation of Labor (AFL), America's largest labor union, finally supported a literacy test as a means of limiting immigration.

Although employers needed workers for the nation's growing industries, at times they were uneasy about immigration. Labor disturbances, fairly common in the late nineteenth century, were frequently blamed on foreign agitators. In 1886 policemen broke up a peaceful protest meeting in Chicago. Before the crowd could be dispersed, however, a bomb exploded, killing seven policemen. Although no one knew who threw the explosive, the press blamed foreigners. One newspaper declared, "The enemy forces are not American [but] rag-tag and bob-tail cutthroats of Beelzebub from the Rhine, the Danube, the Vistula, and the Elbe." Another said the German anarchists accused of the crime were "long-haired, wild-eyed, bad-smelling, atheistic, reckless foreign wretches, who never did an honest hour's work in their lives."

Especially important in the growth of nativism was Americans' awareness of the increased immigration from southern and eastern Europe. These new immigrants were considered undesirable, unassimilable, and hostile or indifferent to American values. Stereotyped images of Slavs, Italians, and Jews predominated. A retired superintendent who had worked in the Pennsylvania steel mills from the 1880s through the 1930s recalled, "Racism was very distinct then. . . . We all called them Huns, Dagos and Polacks." To the nativist, Italians suggested an image of crime and violence. As a Baltimore

newspaper put it, "The disposition to assassinate in revenge for a fancied wrong is a marked trait in the character of this impulsive and inexorable race." Such hostile sentiments led to the lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans in 1891. After the murder of a police superintendent, suspicion focused on the local Sicilian community and several Italians were indicted. City officials called for stern action but the jury refused to convict. An angry mob then took matters into its own hands and lynched the accused men.

Late nineteenth-century Americans were increasingly receptive to pseudoracial thinking that classified European nationalities or ethnic groups, such as Slavs, Jews, and Italians, as races. Such thinking emphasized differences and deemed one "race" to be superior to another. This point of view found increasing support in the early twentieth century. Not surprisingly, racists regarded earlier immigrant groups as more desirable. One alarmed nativist said, "it is only in recent years that new, more ignorant and therefore more dangerous elements have entered into the problem of immigration. . . . The Irish and German tides were ebbing, while those of Southern and Eastern Europe were both increasing and threatening. None but an optimist . . . can view it without concern."

Just as religious prejudice, economic rivalry, and intellectual racism generated opposition to immigration, so did politics. Urban reformers noted with apprehension the rise of the Irish in urban politics. Reformers, usually old-stock Americans, believed that political machines built on immigrant votes were corrupt and inefficient, the protectors of prostitution, graft, and saloons. Prostitution was considered a virtual immigrant monopoly. A reform group in the 1890s declared, "Unless we make energetic and successful war upon the red light districts . . . we shall have Oriental brothel slavery thrust upon us. . . . Jew traders, too, will people our 'levees' with Polish Jewesses and any others who will make money for them. Shall we defend our American civilization, or lower our flag to the most despicable foreigners—French, Irish, Italians, Jews, and Mongolians?" When the power of the immigrant-supported machine was broken, they argued, American cities would be reformed.

Many reformers, however, attributed political corruption to business influence. They noted that immigrants supported machines because the machines helped them. Clean up the immigrants' environment, and the machine would lose its following. Yet graft and the social ills of American cities, combined with the concentration of immigrants in the urban ghettos, too often led native-born Americans to blame political chicanery on immigrants.

Conflicts also arose among the immigrants themselves. Many of the newcomers distrusted and disliked one another. Irishman Dennis Kearney,

leader of the California Workingmen's Party, led the assault on the Chinese, and English-born Samuel Gompers of the AFL favored immigration restriction. Within the ranks of labor some foreign-born unionists did not want members of ethnic groups other than their own in their unions. Foreign-born Protestants within the APA did not trust Catholics. Within the Catholic Church, Germans, French Canadians, Italians, and Poles resented Irish domination. As one Polish journal remarked in 1900, "is it that the Irish want to dominate the Catholic world? Can't Polish Catholics have as much freedom as the other nationalities? Isn't the United States a land of Freedom? It is, but that is no reason that the Irish should have more preference than any other nationality."

Europeans arrived in America with fears and prejudices that did not disappear. When German votes killed a proposal to teach Bohemian in a Chicago school, Bohemians retorted, "Finally, since impudence, selfishness, obstinacy and insolence is excessively rooted in the minds of all Germans, almost without exception, how then could we expect, even in this land of freedom to receive any support from them?" An American writer of Norwegian ancestry recalls his grandmother admonishing members of the family never to trust a Swede. "The essence of her counsel," the grandson wrote, "was that Swedes were a strange, cold, selfish, sneaky lot and that any contact with them could only have unhappy consequences."

The intense xenophobia in the United States, among both older Americans and more recent arrivals, pointed inevitably in one direction: immigration restriction. Although the Chinese were banned in 1882 and the first restrictive federal immigration law excluded certain classes of immigrants, the legislation did not greatly affect the flow of newcomers. Bigots called for drastic limitations. The time had come, they insisted, to decide whether the nation was "to be peopled by British, German and Scandinavian stock, historically free, energetic, progressive, or by Slav, Latin and Asiatic races, historically downtrodden, atavistic, and stagnant." The most popular scheme for stemming the tide was the literacy test. Led by the Immigration Restriction League, founded in Boston in 1894 by Boston blue bloods, agitation for federal action grew. The literacy test, which required immigrants over sixteen to be literate in some language, made no distinctions among nationalities or races, but the intent of the proposal was clear. Since proportionately more northern and western Europeans than southern and eastern Europeans were literate, the requirement would have barred the latter groups of immigrants from the United States.

The literacy test, supported by the Republican Party, finally passed in 1896, only to be vetoed by President Grover Cleveland, who insisted that

America should remain an asylum for the oppressed of Europe. The president also rejected the inference that the new immigrants were less desirable than the old: "It is said," he declared, "that the quality of recent immigration is undesirable. The time is quite within recent memory when the same thing was said of immigrants who, with their descendants, are now numbered among our best citizens." The literacy test's proponents attempted to muster votes to override the veto, but they failed. And then, after 1896, prosperity returned and the tide of nativism ebbed.

But it resurged quickly. By 1901 President Theodore Roosevelt spoke in a different vein than Cleveland had a few years earlier. Stirred by the recent assassination of President William McKinley by an anarchist, Roosevelt called for a comprehensive immigration act to keep out "not only all persons who are known to be believers in anarchistic principles or members of anarchistic societies, but also all persons who are of a low moral tendency or of unsavory reputation . . . who are below a certain standard of economic fitness to enter our industrial field as competitors with American labor." He also called for an educational test to ascertain the capacity of immigrants to "appreciate American institutions and act sanely as American citizens." Roosevelt insisted that his proposals would decrease the "sum of ignorance" in America and "stop the influx of cheap labor, and the resulting competition which gives rise to so much of the bitterness in American industrial life, and it would dry up the springs of the pestilential social conditions in our great cities, where anarchist organizations have their greatest possibility of growth." Congress responded in part to the president's request by excluding anarchists in 1903 and four years later "imbeciles, feeble-minded [persons] and persons with physical or mental defects which might affect their ability to earn a living."

In 1907 Congress also appointed a joint Senate-House commission to investigate the "immigration problem." The new commission, known by the name of its chairman, Senator William Paul Dillingham of Vermont, issued a 42-volume report in 1911. Its main assumption was that the newer immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were more ignorant, more unskilled, more prone to crime, and more willing to accept a lower standard of living than previous immigrants from northern and western Europe. Although the Dillingham Commission preferred a literacy test rather than a ban, it also suggested that restrictive legislation could be based on a percentage of each nationality group already in the United States. This alternative was ignored at the time but would be revived in the 1920s.

Congress responded to the Dillingham report with passage of another literacy bill in 1913, but once again a president would not sanction it. William Howard Taft, heeding protests from friends favoring liberal immigration

policies, acknowledged an "abiding faith" in American institutions to exert a positive influence upon newcomers "no matter how lacking in education they may be. . . . The second generation of a sturdy but uneducated peasantry," he continued, "brought to this country and raised in an atmosphere of thrift and hard work, and forced by their parents into school and to obtain an instrument for self-elevation, has always contributed to the strength of our people, and will continue to do so."

The outbreak of World War I and American entry into the war in 1917 broke the dam holding back the tide of nativism. On the eve of America's declaration of war Congress again passed a literacy bill, and when President Woodrow Wilson for a second time refused to approve it, Congress overrode his veto. The act also created an Asian "barred zone," which excluded most Asians and added to the list of banned immigrants.

In the heated atmosphere of wartime, patriots insisted upon 100 percent Americanism. Radical opponents of the war and German Americans who were suspected of having pro-German sentiments or of being secret agents of the Kaiser became targets of unrestrained hysteria. Theodore Roosevelt led the attack and insisted that "the men of German blood who have tried to be both German and American are not Americans at all, but traitors to America and tools and servants of Germany against America." Superpatriots attacked German Americans, their organizations, and their press. Libraries removed German books from their shelves, and several states, among them Delaware, Iowa, and Montana, prohibited public schools from teaching German. Sauerkraut was renamed "liberty cabbage," orchestras refused to perform German music, and towns, business firms, and people hastily anglicized their German-sounding names. The governor of Iowa issued a proclamation urging citizens not to use foreign languages in public, and the governing body of Nye County, Nevada, passed a resolution to the effect that use of another language in a publicly designated area would be deemed evidence of disloyalty. Angry mobs sometimes smashed German stores or burned German books. That most German Americans were loyal to the nation and supported the war effort did not seem to matter.

Although they were not as suspect as German Americans, some Irish Americans also came under attack. Many people of Irish ancestry were unenthusiastic about fighting a war in alliance with Great Britain, regarded as the enemy and oppressor of Ireland. A few who were critical of the Wilson administration found themselves in difficulty with the law.

The xenophobia unleashed by the war reached new heights in the 1920s. Although German and Irish Americans now found more acceptance, immigrants and their children were generally suspect. The nation assumed an isolationist mood; old-stock Americans rejected Europe and her peoples and in-

sisted on conformity and loyalty to the United States. Terms like "wop" appeared regularly in newspapers like the *Pocatello* [Idaho] *Tribune*, and about the only time minorities found stories about themselves in the daily newspapers was when they were involved in crimes, industrial accidents, or sports events. Ewa Morawska observes, "The same young men from Slavic and Magyar homes who, as American soldiers fighting in Europe during World War I, had been praised by the *Johnstown* [Pennsylvania] *Tribune* as 'our Johnstown boys' and lauded for heroism in the struggle 'in defense of their country' (the United States) were again labeled 'foreigners' after they returned to the city" at the end of the war. The Russian Revolution, a by-product of the war, added to the fears of things foreign. Americans believed that radical ideology, which was considered a foreign import, had to be stamped out or suppressed. Radical groups were hounded and members physically assaulted, and Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's Justice Department rounded up aliens in spectacular raids and deported them during the Red Scare of 1919. Patriotic groups bombarded Congress with petitions proclaiming that the time had arrived "when Americans should assert themselves and drive from these shores all disloyal aliens."

While conservative and patriotic groups feared radical agitators flooding America with their Bolshevik ideas, union leaders feared cheap labor. The 1920s were lean years for organized labor, as the unions lost more than a million members. In 1918 the AFL, anxious about the problems of industrial reconversion after the war, called for a two-year halt in immigration. Some labor union leaders not only used the old cheap-foreign-labor argument but also warned about the social dangers of immigration. The English-born Gompers, president of the AFL, defended restriction: "America has not yet become a nation." He noted that it was "honeycombed with 'foreign groups' living a foreign life," and this would continue if the nation's door remained open to all comers.

The 1920s have been described as a tribal era during which ethnocentrism and xenophobia ran wild. No development better illustrates this situation than the activities of the Ku Klux Klan, the largest nativist organization of the 1920s, which claimed over 4 million members at its height. Founded in Georgia in 1915, the Klan had a spectacular growth rate in the early 1920s and for a brief period exerted considerable political clout in several states, including Indiana, Alabama, Texas, and Florida. Klansmen thundered at liberal Protestantism and modern ideas and demanded Prohibition enforcement and compulsory Bible reading in the public schools. But the focus of their credo was anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant, and they wanted to keep African Americans "in their place." Hiram W. Evans, the Klan's imperial wizard, believed that the "old-stock Americans," the "Nordic race," had

"given the world almost the whole of modern civilization." And he insisted that aliens from eastern and southern Europe should be kept out of the United States.

The Klan's response to immigration and minorities was merely an extreme version of what many old-stock white Protestants believed. Prohibitionists, for example, insisted there was a sinister connection among liquor, cities, and immigrants. One liberal clergyman proclaimed, "national Prohibition is the highest mark of distinctively American morality and citizenship" and warned, "there is already too much congestion of immigrants in the great cities. . . . If we are to have an American civilization we must assimilate the stream of newcomers. If we do not assimilate them they will adulterate us with an admixture of old-world morals. A straw in the wind is afforded by the recent referendum in Massachusetts on the liquor issue. The entire state went overwhelmingly dry except the large immigrant filled cities, and they went so overwhelmingly wet as to give the state as a whole a wet majority."

From Michigan, Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* published anti-Semitic diatribes. Included in the newspaper's vitriolic writings was the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This fake document, concocted by the Russian secret police at the turn of the century, charged there was a Jewish plot to establish a world dictatorship. During the decade, anti-Semitism even reached the hallowed gates of Harvard University when the institution's administration established a Jewish quota, thereby prompting one Jew to dub the school an "intellectual Ku Klux Klan."

Discriminatory practices and thoughtlessness characterized Americans throughout the country in the 1920s and 1930s, and people of a variety of foreign ancestries suffered through many humiliating experiences. A number of individuals changed their foreign-sounding names to anglicized versions, either for better economic opportunities or merely to avoid unnecessary comments from others. Sam Divanovich of Tonopah, Nevada, for example, became Sam Devine because he thought it would "sound better and not cause as much comment." In Morrelville, Pennsylvania, in the 1930s, teachers often incorrectly characterized students of east central European descent as "Slavish." "At school I went as Thomas," one man later recalled, "because my teacher would not pronounce or spell my own [name]." His wife had a similar experience. Her surname was "Tomasovich, but the teacher spelled it Tumoski; she did not bother to get it right." A child of Polish American parents remembered that she never raised her hand in elementary school to speak. "I was afraid I'd make a mistake. . . . American children called us 'Hunky.' . . . We felt inferior." One man voluntarily misidentified himself and explained why: "I usually say I'm Russian. If you say you're Ukrainian,

the guy tells you, 'Jesus Christ, what's that?' and you have to go into the whole history of Ukraine and explain to the guy what you mean. It is easier to just say that you are Russian."

Ideological racism, another facet of American nativism, peaked in the early 1920s. The eugenics movement in America after 1900 had warned of the dangerous effects of bad heredity. Eugenicists argued that poor hereditary, rather than environmental, factors produced unalterable human inequalities. Many Americans supported racist thinking. Popular writers such as Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard enjoyed a vogue in the 1920s. Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* and Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color* preached a racism that could easily be applied to immigration restriction. Grant declared

> these new immigrants were no longer exclusively members of the Nordic race as were the earlier ones who came of their own impulse to improve their social conditions. The transportation lines advertised America as a land flowing with milk and honey, and the European governments took the opportunity to unload upon careless, wealthy, and hospitable America the sweepings of their jails and asylums. The result was that the new immigration . . . contained a large and increasing number of the weak, the broken, and the mentally crippled of all races drawn from the lowest stratum of the Mediterranean basin and the Balkans, together with hordes of the wretched, submerged populations of the Polish Ghettos.

A follower of Grant argued that continued immigration would inevitably produce "a hybrid race of people as worthless and futile as the good-for-nothing mongrels of Central America and Southeastern Europe," while a psychologist, flushed with uncritical use of intelligence test results, proclaimed that the "intellectual superiority of our Nordic group over the Alpine, Mediterranean and Negro groups has been demonstrated."

Given the intense nativism of the 1920s, the issue was not *whether* there would be immigration restriction but *what form* it would take. Aside from the recent immigrants, few Americans, regardless of background, resisted restriction. Congressmen representing urban areas with heavy concentrations of the foreign-born attacked the proposed laws and their racist assumptions, but they lacked the votes to sustain their views. Over 800,000 newcomers arrived in 1921, and foes of immigration had visions of another immigrant invasion after the wartime lull. Stories circulated of between 5 and 20 million Europeans ready to descend upon the United States.

In 1921 Congress finally established the principle of restriction based on nationality and placed a ceiling on immigration from Europe. The 1921 law limited, for a one-year period, the number of entrants of each nationality to

3 percent of the foreign-born of that group in America based on the 1910 census. Under this stopgap measure approximately 358,000 were eligible to come from Europe. Congress extended the law twice before passing the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924.

The Johnson-Reed law continued the qualifications enacted in the past, such as the exclusion of anarchists, prostitutes, illiterates, and those likely to become public charges, and tightened the quotas established three years earlier. It cut the number of immigrants to 2 percent of the foreign-born of each group based on the 1890 census, further discriminating against southern and eastern nations, which was exactly what Congress wanted to do.

The case of the Greeks shows how moving the base year back from 1910 to 1890 and lowering the percentage helped Congress accomplish its purpose. In 1910 there were 101,282 Greeks in the United States. Under the 1921 act, they were therefore entitled to a yearly quota of 3,038 people (3 percent of 101,282). But the 1924 act, by lowering the percentage and setting the base year back to 1890, when census takers counted only 1,887 Greeks in this country, cut the quota to 38 (2 percent of 1,887), or about one percent of what the 1921 law had allowed. Similar cuts affected Italians, east European Jews, and Slavs. Thus an ostensibly objective change of base years and a one-point decrease in the percentage drastically curtailed immigration opportunities for those that Congress desired to exclude. The quota based on the 1890 census was meant to be temporary. The Johnson-Reed Act established National Origins Quotas, based on the white population according to the 1920 census, that went into effect in 1929. While basing quotas on the entire white population and not simply the foreign-born increased the numbers from southern and eastern Europe, it still drastically reduced their totals from the annual figures before World War I. The new system provided for 153,714 immigrants from Europe (Asians were already barred in 1924, Western Hemisphere natives were not restricted, and African and other colonies came under the quotas for the European nations that controlled them). Each European nation received a number based on its share of the American white population in 1920. English, Germans, and Irish received the bulk of the allotments.

Passage of the Johnson-Reed Act marked the end of an era in American history. Asians had already been excluded, for the most part, but for Europeans the nation had had an open door. The act ended this virtually free immigration policy. Although the United States modified its restrictions after World War II, it never again opened its gates to unlimited numbers.

Immigration restrictions of the 1920s, combined with the severe depression of the 1930s, achieved the effect that restrictionists desired. But the laws did not curtail ethnic conflicts, and the nation continued to experience

tensions over immigration and intergroup relations throughout the twentieth century.

Shortly after the final quota system went into effect in 1929, President Herbert Hoover requested that the State Department use its administrative powers for a tight enforcement of the laws. In particular, the "likely to become a public charge" provision of the immigration codes was invoked, for America experienced a deep economic depression during the 1930s and did not want foreign laborers to compete with the growing numbers of unemployed native-born workers seeking jobs. Actually, few from any land tried to emigrate to America during the early years of the depression. Only 23,068 came in 1933; 28,470 in 1934; and 34,956 in 1935. In several years more people left than arrived; there were simply not enough jobs to go around, and relief benefits were few and inadequate.

Before the immigration acts and the depression combined to curb the numbers of newcomers, Filipinos moved into Hawaii and California to fill the labor gap created by the restriction on other Asians. Because the Philippines was then a commonwealth of the United States, there were no legal barriers to population movement; the enormous needs of the sugar planters in Hawaii and the farmers in California provided the spur.

Filipinos had been emigrating to Hawaii to work for the sugar and pineapple planters since the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1907 with Japan had reduced Japanese emigration. During the next quarter century the Hawaiian Islands welcomed 125,000 Filipinos. In the 1920s, however, when California growers feared that Congress might impose quotas on Mexicans, they turned to the Filipinos for labor. Filipinos came to the mainland from Hawaii and directly from the Philippine Islands. According to 1920 census figures, there were only 5,603 Filipinos on the mainland, but 10 years later they numbered 45,208. Other sources estimate that there may have been more than twice that number. Some 90 percent of the Filipinos were single, male, and under 30 years of age. They worked in northern and central California farms and vineyards. Stockton, California, with a concentration of perhaps 4,000 to 8,000 Filipinos, became known at the end of the 1920s as the Manila of California. Other sizable settlements formed in San Francisco, Seattle, and Portland.

The commonwealth status of the Philippines also permitted substantial numbers of Filipinos to be recruited for the United States armed forces, especially the navy. This accounted for the presence of Filipino communities in the San Diego and Los Angeles areas. A majority of these recruits made the military their career and left the service only upon retirement. The armed forces provided them with security and, more important, with the chance to bring their families to the United States. In the navy the Filipinos

were usually assigned to mess halls and as personal attendants to high-ranking military personnel.

The depression and American prejudices caused many Filipinos to lose their jobs during the 1930s. A congressional act of 1934, which promised the Philippine Islands their independence in 1946, also established an annual Filipino quota of 50 immigrants. The quota, plus the fact that many Filipinos returned home, cut their numbers in West Coast agriculture; by 1940, 90 percent of those who remained in California were working in such personal domestic service jobs as bellboys, houseboys, cooks, kitchen helpers, and waiters.

As economic conditions improved in the late 1930s, the numbers of European immigrants rose again. More important motivating factors than economics, however, were the triumph of fascism in Germany in 1933 and the coming of war in Europe six years later. As the Germans annexed Austria (1938) and Czechoslovakia (1939) and then crushed Poland (1939) and conquered Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France in the spring of 1940, hundreds of thousands fled in terror, and more would have left had they been able to do so.

Though millions of political and religious dissenters were persecuted by Hitler's regime, Jews stood out as the major victims. Plagued by legal and other harassments, they sought asylum in other countries. After accepting as many as they thought they could absorb, the nations of the world refused further modification in their immigration policies. Until 1939 Hitler permitted almost all Jews to leave if they chose to do so; unfortunately, most could not find any nation that would accept them. The horrors perpetrated by the Nazis were legion, but before the mass exterminations in the concentration camps, perhaps the worst single episode occurred on the night of November 9–10, 1938. The government sanctioned a savage assault on German Jews, and throughout the night people were beaten, stores were looted, and homes, hospitals, and old-age institutions were burned; at least 20,000 people were rounded up for deportation to concentration camps. The barbarity of these actions evoked worldwide denunciation. President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared, "I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth-century civilization."

Nevertheless, U.S. immigration laws remained intact, and the American government made few allowances for the victims of Hitler's terroristic policies. Americans certainly feared economic competition from immigrant workers, for with almost 10 million unemployed in the United States, job prospects for newcomers were dim. The likelihood that additional new people in the country would become public charges and swell overburdened relief rolls was not discounted either. A few Americans also believed that spies

and fifth-column agents would enter as refugees if quotas were eased. But especially important in the opposition to relaxing existing quotas was anti-Semitism in the United States. Both Protestant and secular newspapers wrote about it, but the Catholic Church, and Catholics in general, found Jewish support for the Republican cause in Spain particularly galling. Moreover, for many Americans of all stripes the word "Jew" was often used synonymously with the word "communist," and most people were simply against having any more of them in their midst.

President Roosevelt was aware of American hostility toward Jews, yet he also sympathized with the refugees' plight, as did a number of Americans who urged the government to assist them. Roosevelt instructed members of the consular service to grant refugees "the most humane and favorable treatment under the law," which enabled some to come to America; generally the president was willing to let the State Department handle the situation. Unfortunately, anti-Semitism existed in the State Department too, and its influence resulted in a rigid application of the visa policy against Jewish applicants. Typical of this attitude was that of the Assistant Secretary of State, Breckenridge Long, who had charge of refugee affairs after 1939. In a 1941 diary entry he indicated approval of another man's opposition to further immigration. "He said," Long wrote, that "the general type of intending immigrant was just the same as the criminal Jews who crowd our police court dockets in New York. . . . I think he is right."

The State Department position probably reflected the majority viewpoint in the United States. When, in 1939, Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York and Congresswoman Edith Rogers of Massachusetts proposed a measure to allow 20,000 German refugee children between the ages of 6 and 14 years into the United States above the quota limit, patriotic societies like the American Legion and the Daughters of the American Revolution denounced it. In speaking against the legislation a spokeswoman for the Ladies of the Grand Army of the Republic warned that Congress might "decide to admit 20,000 German-Jewish children!" A year later, however, when mercy ships started bringing children from Great Britain to the United States, patriotic organizations voiced no opposition, and congressional mail ran heavily in approval. Over 15,000 American families volunteered to take one of the British children, with "a blond English girl, 6 years old" the most popular choice.

Anti-Semitism reached new heights in the United States in the late 1930s. Groups like the Silver Shirts and the German-American Bund thundered against the Jews. Bigots saw the "hidden hand of international Jewry" around every corner, and patriots organized "Buy Christian" campaigns. The most influential and well-known anti-Semite was the radio priest Father Charles E. Coughlin. Originally a supporter of the New Deal, Coughlin

turned against Roosevelt and increasingly used anti-Jewish and anticommunist arguments in his broadcasts and journal, *Social Justice*. This journal reprinted excerpts from the discredited *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and carried a speech by the German Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels. *Social Justice* had an estimated circulation of over 300,000, and millions heard Coughlin's radio voice. In 1940 and 1941 public opinion polls revealed that 17 to 20 percent of the nation considered Jews "a menace to America." Another 12 to 15 percent admitted that they would support an anti-Semitic campaign, and still others indicated that they would be sympathetic to such a campaign.

Despite the bigotry, though, Jews as well as others who came to America under the quota system received hospitable treatment. A host of organizations like the National Refugee Service, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and various ad hoc groups stood ready to assist the newcomers in finding jobs, housing, and friends.

There were few such welcomes for Mexican immigrants and their children during the Great Depression. The government was reluctant to grant visas to those south of the border. Moreover, as the unemployment lines grew, local, state, and federal officials began to deport Mexican immigrants rather than give them aid. They were sent on buses or trains back to Mexico. Facing the inevitable, the Mexican government cooperated in these efforts, and many Mexican families returned voluntarily. Exact figures are not available, but the number deported ran somewhere over 300,000. The deportees included the American-born (and hence U.S. citizen) children. No other ethnic group was subject to such mass deportations.

European arrivals in the 1930s included a number of eminent intellectuals and scientists. Albert Einstein was perhaps the best known of the illustrious immigrants, as they have been called, but other Nobel Prize winners also came during the decade. Among the most noted were Thomas Mann, the writer; Bruno Walter and Arturo Toscanini, the conductors; Paul Tillich, the theologian; Bela Bartok, the composer; and Enrico Fermi, the physicist. Several of the scientists who came played key roles in the development of the atomic bomb.

Those who arrived in the 1930s usually adjusted to America more readily than most of the millions who had come before them. For the most part the professionals and refugees were well educated, knew some English, and had contacts and skills that they could utilize in the United States. Fleeing in terror from Europe, they were eager to become American citizens and to participate in American society. One such refugee was Henry Kissinger, who would later serve as President Richard Nixon's chief foreign policy adviser and in 1973 would become America's first foreign-born secretary of state.

Not all could adapt as well. Bela Bartok, the composer, never felt at home in America and died in relative obscurity and poverty in New York City in 1945. Some, like Thomas Mann, returned to Europe after the war. Others who lacked the contacts of an Einstein or a Toscanini had to take jobs where they could find them, often beneath their educational levels and skills. The fact that some of them left families and friends behind to an unknown fate added to their anxieties.

Concern that fifth-column agents would enter America if quotas were relaxed may have been one factor blocking a change in immigration laws, but fear of sabotage by enemy aliens already here was even greater during World War II. Consequently, the federal government interned a few Germans and Italians and carefully watched others during the war. Japanese aliens and American citizens of Japanese ancestry, however, fared quite differently. Most of them on the West Coast were incarcerated in relocation centers that some critics likened to concentration camps.

Certainly the fear of espionage, heightened by the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and rumors of attacks to come on the mainland, was a real factor in prompting the federal government to intern Japanese Americans. In spite of the fact that no acts of espionage or sabotage by Japanese Americans were uncovered in either Hawaii or California, the boards of supervisors of eleven California counties solemnly declared that "during the attack on Pearl Harbor . . . the Japanese were aided and abetted by fifth columnists of the Japanese." One United States senator insisted

> A Jap born on our soil is a subject of Japan under Japanese law; therefore he owes allegiance to Japan. . . . The Japanese are among our worst enemies. They are cowardly and immoral. They are different from Americans in every conceivable way, and no Japanese . . . should have a right to claim American citizenship. A Jap is a Jap anywhere you find him, and his taking the oath of allegiance to this country would not help, even if he should be permitted to do so. They do not believe in God and have no respect for an oath. They have been plotting for years against the Americans and their democracies.

Even when others pointed out that no espionage had been reported, proponents of internment argued that that merely proved the danger was greater, for the Japanese were tricky, sneaky, and underhanded, plotting for the right moment to subvert America. Ironically, the absence of overt sabotage was held against them. It was, said General John DeWitt, "a disturbing and confirming indication that such action would be taken!"

Behind the discussions of potential disloyalty lay years of racial antagonism toward the Japanese in America. The Oriental Exclusion Act of 1924

slammed the door against Japanese and other Asian immigrants, but it did not end racism. Various California patriotic and nativist groups hated or mistrusted Japanese in their midst and considered them unassimilable and treacherous. Economic conflicts also influenced attitudes; some small businessmen and farmers envied their economic success. The war clouds gathering in the Far East during the 1930s also added to the fears of Japan and the Japanese.

The attack on Pearl Harbor rekindled old fears and prejudices and prompted new outbreaks of anti-Japanese hysteria. Responding to demands to remove Japanese Americans from the Pacific Coast, in February 1942 President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, one of the most infamous presidential actions in American history. Under this decree, which was later backed by a congressional law, the army rounded up approximately 110,000 West Coast Japanese, most of whom were native-born American citizens, and scattered them throughout the western states in camps called relocation centers. In Hawaii, where martial law existed, prejudice was less intense and the Japanese played a more important role in the economy.

Hasty removal meant hardship and suffering. Given only five days' notice, those interned could take only what they could carry; the government sequestered all other belongings. Not only were the financial losses great, but conditions in the relocation centers were miserable. At first the Japanese were placed in temporary quarters, including a hastily converted racetrack that lacked basic amenities. Eventually the government built ten camps, most of them in barren desert country, hot in the summer and cold in the winter. The surroundings were drab and unattractive, complete with barbed wire, military police, and, in some instances, machine guns. One Japanese American woman wrote of her experience at Camp Minidoka, north of Twin Falls, Idaho.

> When we first arrived here we almost cried and thought that this was a land that God had forgotten. The vast expanse of sagebrush and dust, a landscape so alien to our eyes, and a desolate, woe-begone feeling of being so far removed from home and fireside bogged us down mentally, as well as physically.

Gradually conditions improved, except for internees at the Tule Lake, California camp, who were considered especially disloyal.

One of the sorriest episodes of the Japanese American internment was the reaction of the United States Supreme Court. Several Japanese Americans challenged the government's policy and took their cases all the way to the highest court. In 1943 in *Hirabayashi v. U.S.*, and in 1944 in *Korematsu v. U.S.*, the justices upheld military curfews as well as the evacuation. Three

dissenting justices—Owen Roberts, Frank Murphy, and Robert Jackson—scorned the government's policy and attacked the racial prejudice that supported it. But the majority accepted the argument that internment of these immigrants and their American-born children served the national interest in wartime.

When the government closed the camps in 1945, Japanese Americans were fearful about how they would fare in the United States. Some of the most bitter renounced their American citizenships and returned to Japan. The vast majority, though, elected to return to California despite federal efforts to relocate them elsewhere. Anti-Japanese groups opposed their return. Bumper stickers appeared declaring NO JAPS WANTED IN CALIFORNIA, and a few incidents occurred, especially in the Central Valley of the Golden State. Veterans' groups urged boycotts of reopened businesses, and a few rocks were thrown and shots fired into homes. In Oregon an American Legion post removed the names of local Japanese American servicemen from the public honor roll, and other American Legion posts on the West Coast banned Japanese American servicemen from membership.

Yet the opposition gradually subsided, and, aided by church and liberal civic groups, Japanese Americans were able to find homes, jobs, and increasing acceptance. However, they reclaimed only about a tenth of their $400 million in forfeited holdings. In 1948 an anti-Japanese proposition on the California ballot to make the alien laws harsher was defeated by 59 percent of the voters. Although over 40 percent still favored restrictions against the Japanese, this was the first time in California history that an anti-Japanese referendum had been defeated. In 1952 the California Supreme Court declared the 1913 Alien Land Act unconstitutional. Also in 1952, in the McCarran-Walter Immigration Act, Congress lifted the ban on Asian immigration and the exclusion of Asians from citizenship. Japanese Americans still faced discrimination in the 1950s and 1960s, especially in housing and jobs, but the situation had changed drastically from pre-World War II attitudes and practices. By the 1960s public opinion polls revealed that most Americans considered Japanese Americans desirable citizens, trustworthy people, and loyal to the United States. Nevertheless, the trauma for those interned has not been completely overcome. A generation after the camps closed, one Japanese American admitted, "My father still trembles when he talks about this experience." On Memorial Day 1974, some Japanese Americans whose children had difficulty believing the stories of their parents' hardships made a pilgrimage to the Tule Lake camp. In Klamath Falls, Oregon, where a few had stopped to pay respects to those who died at Tule Lake, a woman passing by rolled down her car window and shouted, "You're on the wrong side of the ocean."

Today most Japanese Americans find the same opportunities available to them as do other Americans. The well educated are quickly employed, the affluent can live where they will, and those who choose to marry people of a different heritage are not blocked by miscegenation laws. In other words, Japanese Americans are no longer ethnics who are feared; now they are Americans who are respected.

The internment of the Japanese during World War II coincided with the peak of American xenophobia. Measured by public opinion polls, hostility toward American minorities probably reached its greatest intensity during the early 1940s. When the war ended in 1945 the European and Asian worlds had been torn asunder, but few Americans wanted to help any of the survivors begin life anew in the United States. The story of how our immigration policies changed after 1945 is related in the next chapter.