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**White Supremacy Part 4:
Becoming White - Immigration**

August 10, 2023

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**From White Borders: the History of Race and Immigration in the
United States from Chinese Exclusion to the Border Wall by Reece
Jones, 2021**

— CHAPTER 4 —

THE WHITE MAN, PAR EXCELLENCE

Takao Ozawa was born in Kanagawa, Japan, on June 15, 1875. He moved to San Francisco when he was nineteen, graduated from Berkeley High School, and enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley. In 1906, he moved to Honolulu and married a woman of Japanese descent who was also educated in the United States. They had two children who became American citizens at birth. The Kingdom of Hawai'i had been overthrown by a cabal of American colonists in 1893 and then annexed through a legally suspect process in 1898. In 1900, Congress extended birthright citizenship to the territory of Hawai'i.¹ Ozawa practiced Christianity, spoke English fluently, and worked for an American company. Consequently, he felt like he should be eligible for American citizenship and applied for naturalization. The petition was rejected so he took his case to the courts, but he continued to lose at the Federal District Court in Honolulu and in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco.

At that point, his case came to the attention of the Pacific Coast Japanese Association, which was looking for a test case to press for citizenship rights for people of Japanese origin. Ozawa's sterling personal history and light-skinned appearance made him a perfect vessel for their argument. In addition to his local lawyer from Honolulu, David Withington, the association paid for a top-tier New York lawyer, George Wickersham, to take the case. Wickersham was the US attorney general from 1909 to 1913 during the administration of William Howard Taft, and he had a reputation for progressive racial views. In 1912, he caused a stir when

he backed William Lewis, a Black lawyer, who had petitioned to join the American Bar Association. Wickersham's stature added gravitas to the case and made it much more likely that the Supreme Court would hear it. However, it took some time. Ozawa began the legal process during World War I, which slowed things down. After the war, there were delicate negotiations with Japan at the Paris Conference about the role of racial equality in the League of Nations charter that further delayed the consideration of the case.

The Supreme Court finally heard oral arguments in the case on October 3 and 4, 1922. By then, William Howard Taft, the president Wickersham had served as attorney general, was now the chief justice of the Supreme Court, the only person to serve in both roles. The Ozawa team hoped Taft might be persuaded by his old friend. Ozawa's petition made two primary arguments for why he qualified for citizenship in the United States. The first was that many people from Japan have very light skin colors, often lighter than Europeans. If skin color was the determining factor, then people from Japan could be thought of as white. The second argument was that the character of the individual should also play a role in citizenship decisions, as Senator Hoar suggested during the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act debates. Ozawa's petition stated, "My honesty and industriousness are well known among my Japanese and American friends. In name Benedict Arnold was an American, but at heart he was a traitor. In name I am not an American, but at heart I am a true American."²

Despite his upstanding behavior, Ozawa was living in a moment in which race was increasingly significant in American life. In the early years of the country, the distinction between a white person from England and Western Europe and a Black slave was clear. The United States was created by white colonists for their white progeny. However, although citizenship was limited to a "free white person" and there was widespread racialized talk in the United States, the definition of the racial category "white" was still not settled in the early twentieth century. The seemingly straightforward language of "free white person" in the naturalization law became ambiguous as different shades of human beings were born inside or made their way to the country. One of the first challenges to whiteness came from the mixed-race offspring that kept showing up in slave households as white male owners raped their female slaves. What of someone who is half white or whose skin is so light they can pass as white? As

people from other parts of the world arrived in the country, a flurry of other questions about whiteness emerged. Population growth in Eastern and Southern Europe, combined with a stabilizing population in England and Northern Europe, meant that the people arriving in the US began to differ from previous immigrants. Additionally, the US expanded its colonial ambitions throughout the Pacific and Caribbean with the annexation of Cuba, Guam, Hawai'i, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Samoa at the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898. These acquisitions created new migration routes into the country and provoked questions about how to handle these people who were subject to the laws of the United States in colonial territories. Finally, in the years leading up to Takao Ozawa's hearing before the Supreme Court, a completely new set of scientific arguments began to lay the foundation for a very limited and exclusive definition of who was white.

RACE PSEUDOSCIENCE AND EUGENICS

Scientific research today has demonstrated that race is a socially constructed system for classifying people, not a genetic fact. Recent studies have found that the diversity within the genetic code of particular racial groups is much wider than the differences between them.³ Similarly, large-scale genetic studies have found that migration and mixture were the norm and that "the assumption that present-day people are directly descended from the people who always lived in that same area . . . is wrong almost everywhere."⁴ Genetic research has shown that there is no such thing as homogeneous races of people tied to a particular place. Even the Nordic blood revered by the white supremacists of the past and the alt-right of today does not exist. A DNA study of the Viking town Sigtuna, in modern-day Sweden, found that half the residents had migrated there from as far away as Southern and Eastern Europe.⁵

Even if race is not a legitimate scientific category, racism and exclusion based on common ideas of race still exist. Indeed, race is fundamentally a system of socially constructed hierarchy and exclusion that develops through a set of norms in a particular place, not based on universal values or facts. In the US, the "one-drop rule" was the underlying assumption of racial classification, and the idea that any Black blood makes someone Black is still prevalent today. Barack Obama is known as the first Black

president even though he is equally as white as he is Black. The comedian Trevor Noah, who also has one white and one Black parent, writes in his autobiography that as a child growing up in a South African township, he was the white kid and often treated preferentially. However, when he went to white neighborhoods, he was unambiguously Black and looked down on.⁶

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, science was deployed to legitimize the racial exclusion that was rampant in society, often coining new categories to justify white supremacy. The term “Caucasian” is the clearest example of this. Today “Caucasian” is ubiquitous on legal forms, driver’s licenses, and the census as a stand-in for white, but its origin is completely arbitrary. Johan Friedrich Blumenbach (1752–1840) was a German anthropologist at the Georg-August University at Göttingen, in modern-day Germany. Blumenbach was a leading thinker of his day and taught English princes as well as the geographer Alexander von Humboldt, who became the most famous public intellectual of his era. After his studies with Blumenbach, Humboldt would go on to make an array of scientific discoveries during a five-year expedition in the Americas from 1799 to 1804, ranging from identifying isotherms to documenting human-induced environmental change. Humboldt published his results in his book *Cosmos*, which was widely read and lauded around the world. The book influenced generations of scholars and politicians including Simón Bolívar, who credited his friend Humboldt with inspiring him to return to South America in pursuit of revolution, and Charles Darwin, who said, “My admiration of his famous personal narrative (part of which I know almost by heart) determined me to travel to distant countries and led me to volunteer as naturalist on her majesty’s ship *Beagle*.” On Darwin’s voyage, his daily diary entries were a conversation between himself and Humboldt. From the Humboldt Current to Humboldt, California, there are more features on earth named after Alexander von Humboldt than any other human being.⁷

In addition to teaching Humboldt, Blumenbach was an early proponent of what would come to be known as phrenology, the study of the shape of the head to ascertain other attributes of the individual. In the 1790s, Blumenbach came into possession of a skull of a woman from the Caucasus region, the area today that runs through Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Russian regions such as Chechnya, Dagestan, and

Ingushetia. To Blumenbach, the skull represented the pinnacle of beauty, with clean lines and symmetry. Since he already knew that white Europeans were the most beautiful in the world, he deduced that this skull from the Caucasus Mountains represented an ancestor of Europeans. Consequently, he unilaterally decided that Europeans were originally from the Caucasus Mountains and the term “Caucasian” was born. The term is based on one German man’s view that a skull was beautiful and must have been from a white person.⁸

The publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 opened a whole new way of thinking about human civilizations. Darwin’s careful observations on his trip through the Pacific and then his slow methodical consideration of the data resulted in a new model for understanding the diversity of traits in nature. It was soon accepted that organisms were not static and permanent; rather, they evolved through time as the better-adapted individuals survived and reproduced at greater numbers while the less well adapted died and their genes ended with them.

Within a few years, the idea of species adaption was overlaid onto human societies in what came to be known as social Darwinism.⁹ Social Darwinism posited that just as the fittest species survived, there was also a survival of the fittest human societies. Darwin’s theory was both a vindication and a threat to race thinking. It vindicated the idea that one group was superior to another group through its evolution, but it also suggested that the group needed to be hypervigilant and continue competing in order to avoid becoming unfit in the future.¹⁰

Sir Francis Galton, an English biologist and Charles Darwin’s cousin, launched the eugenics movement, which applied the agricultural method of selective breeding for desirable characteristics to humanity. Before he delved into race science, Galton had already made significant scientific contributions, including the discovery that everyone has a unique fingerprint and proof of the statistical law of regression to the mean.¹¹ Galton was a prolific author who wrote twenty books and more than two hundred journal articles over his lifetime. In the 1870s, he coined the phrase “nature versus nurture,” and he proposed the term “eugenics” in 1883, taking it from the German for “good in stock.” His work on eugenics culminated with his 1889 book *Natural Inheritance*, which used statistics to trace how traits would be passed down through generations of humans.¹² Galton’s research noted that the children of successful people tended to also be

successful, which he attributed to superior genetics. He apparently did not consider that children of successful people were born into wealth and a system of quality education, social connections, and structural power, which play a decisive role in predicting the success of children. Eugenicists say that if horrific diseases are known to be hereditary, society should select against those to remove them from the human genome. However, the argument goes further to suggest that more intelligent or athletic people should be selected for as well.

Eugenics migrated from Europe into mainstream American thought at the end of the nineteenth century as scholars at eminent institutions such as MIT and Harvard began to look at the science of the race question. The first significant text in the US was written by Francis Walker, the president of MIT, who introduced the idea that lesser races breed more. As the idea percolated, it came to stand in as a justification for not only closing borders at home to prevent overbreeding races from entering the US but also pursuing imperial adventures abroad to bring civilization to the lesser races and control them.¹⁴ By the early twentieth century, Walker's idea was boiled down to the slogan of "race suicide," which was trumpeted by President Theodore Roosevelt. He argued that the US would be foolish to let in too many people from lower races that breed more quickly than whites.

For the white supremacists of the era, there was little doubt that the white race was superior to the African and Asian "savages" they were in the process of conquering around the world through colonialism. The real question for the scientists was whether and where to draw the line between Northern Europeans and the Southern and Eastern Europeans who had begun to migrate to the United States. Francis Walker asked one of his former students, William Ripley, to write a book classifying the races of Europe. Ripley, who was an economics professor at MIT and also affiliated with Columbia University, later said he needed money at the time to pay for his child's school, so he took on the task. *The Races of Europe* was published in 1899 and had all the trappings of an authoritative scientific study. It was 624 pages long, contained over three hundred pictures, maps, and charts and more than two thousand citations at the end. Ripley argued that the population of Europe was not a single white people but rather was composed of three distinct groups that were identifiable regionally by their complexion and facial structure.¹⁵

Ripley's three races in Europe were the Teutonic, the Alpine, and the Mediterranean. The Teutonic had blond, lighter complexions and long, thin heads. During World War I, the term "Nordic" replaced "Teutonic" to emphasize Scandinavia and England rather than Germany. The Alpine were found in the middle parts of Europe and were characterized by a shorter stature and a round head. The Mediterranean race was found in Southern Europe and had a slender build with dark complexion and a long head. *The Races of Europe* made Ripley famous, and he secured a coveted professorship at Harvard where Franklin Delano Roosevelt was one of his students. Like his advisor, Francis Walker, Ripley also served as the president of the prestigious American Economic Association.¹⁶

The confluence of race science and genetics research led to extensive coverage in the press. From 1910 to 1914, major US magazines carried more studies on eugenics than "slums, tenements, and living standards combined."¹⁶ The eugenics turn was not just happening in the United States. In Australia, Keith Murdoch, the father of right-wing media baron Rupert Murdoch, was a staunch believer in eugenics, which played a role in the white Australia policy to prevent the mixture of races.¹⁷ It was also growing in popularity in Germany, where eugenics would eventually become state policy in the Nazi regime.

In 1916, Madison Grant published *The Passing of the Great Race*, which would become the most significant book on race science by combining Ripley's race classification of Europe with Walker's idea of race suicide. Like almost all of the white supremacist writers of the era, Grant was born of the patrician class in New York and was a denizen of high society, summing on his family's estate in Long Island. He graduated from Yale then earned a law degree at Columbia, and he was integral to the founding of the Bronx Zoo. He was a trustee of the American Museum of Natural History, where he socialized with much of high-society New York and became close friends with Presidents Herbert Hoover and Theodore Roosevelt, another conservationist. Grant used his wealth and connections to promote conservation causes including wildlife management and species protection. He realized that some species were not able to reproduce at a rate sufficient to allow them to survive under the current pressure from hunting and development. Consequently, he argued for protected areas to allow species like the American bison to survive. As he became familiar with race science, he grew alarmed with what he saw as a threat to his

race that was similar to the threats faced by other endangered species. He realized that just as endangered species needed protected areas to prevent aggressive invasive species from taking over, so did human races, particularly the genetically superior but numerically inferior Nordic race.

The Passing of the Great Race was influential because Grant was not a scholar and consequently dispensed with the careful language of the academy. Instead, he went further than any academic had and did so in plain, easily accessible language. The book is a laundry list of shocking racial claims as he laid out the case for Nordic superiority and the inferiority of other European and global races. The tone is set in the first chapter where he explains matter-of-factly that better races use slavery to control weaker races. And, anyway, he writes, "From a material point of view slaves are often more fortunate than free men when treated with reasonable humanity and when their elemental wants of food, clothing and shelter are supplied."¹⁸

The bulk of Grant's book is concerned with categorizing and explaining the history of the three "subspecies," his term, of humans in Europe. While the Alpine race is subservient and "always and everywhere a race of peasants," the Mediterranean race has an inferior body. By contrast, "the Nordics are all over the world a race of soldiers, sailors, adventurers and explorers, but above all, of rulers, organizers and aristocrats." The Nordic race is the race of chivalry and knighthood, literature, scientific research, and discovery. In sum, the Nordic "is a purely European type, in the sense that it has developed its physical characteristics within the confines of that continent. It is, therefore, the *Homo Europaeus*, the white man par excellence."¹⁹

However, despite its superiority in virtually every trait, Grant sees a danger lurking for the great race. The other races of humans are coming and they are larger in number and more fertile than the great race of Nordic men. Additionally, for whatever reason, Nordic men cannot resist women of other races. He writes, "The unfortunate fact that nearly all species of men interbreed freely leaves us no choice in the matter. Races must be kept apart by artificial devices of this sort or they ultimately amalgamate and in the offspring the more generalized or lower type prevails."²⁰ Consequently, the only way to preserve the endangered great race is to create a protected area through immigration restrictions and guarded borders.

The Passing of the Great Race came out during World War I and was not widely read at first, but it became influential in the 1920s and sold over a million copies. Former president Teddy Roosevelt wrote the back-cover endorsement for the book: "It is the work of an American scholar and gentleman."²¹ Grant's book was recommended on the Senate floor by Ellison DuRant Smith of South Carolina, known as Cotton Ed, during the debates around the 1924 national origins quotas. Smith said,

I would like for the Members of the Senate to read that book just recently published by Madison Grant, *The Passing of a Great Race*. Thank God we have in America perhaps the largest percentage of any country in the world of the pure, unadulterated Anglo-Saxon stock; certainly the greatest of any nation in the Nordic breed. It is for the preservation of that splendid stock that has characterized us that I would make this not an asylum for the oppressed of all countries.²²

Perhaps the clearest indication of the influence of the book is that Adolf Hitler reportedly wrote a personal note to Grant calling *The Passing of the Great Race* "my bible."²³ There was a copy of the book in Hitler's bunker in Berlin when he committed suicide in 1945.²⁴

As the eugenics fervor gripped the wealthy elite of New England, a new idea of intelligence tests came into vogue. Henry Goddard, a psychologist at the Vineland Training School for the Feebleminded, decided to translate the Binet-Simon intelligence test from French into English in order to administer it to the residents, then he expanded the test to Ellis Island. Goddard found a like-minded scholar in Robert Yerkes, who was a student of eugenicist Charles Davenport at Harvard. After receiving his PhD in 1902, Yerkes began working on intelligence testing at Harvard in 1913. During World War I, he used funding from the National Academy of Sciences and the National Resource Council to expand his IQ testing to the US military. By the end of the war, they had tested 1.75 million soldiers. The army did not find the results useful and pointed out that many of the men tabbed as feebleminded by the tests turned out to be excellent soldiers. However, Yerkes was unbowed and published his results in academic venues. He realized there was a broader public interest in the work and asked another scholar named Carl Brigham to produce an accessible version. Brigham was a recent PhD graduate from Princeton who a few

years later would develop the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), which continues to be used for college admissions through the present day. Brigham received funding from Madison Grant to produce *A Study of American Intelligence* in 1923 with Princeton University Press.²⁵ The book was powerful because it used bar graphs to demonstrate the superior intelligence of the white race, even if the source of the data was not really explained. In chart after chart, English and Nordic people were on top, Eastern and Southern Europeans in the middle, and Black Americans at the bottom.

Eugenics thinking and intelligence testing resulted in laws in many US states allowing sterilization for people of lower mental acuity. The Supreme Court upheld these laws in 1927 in the case of *Buck v. Bell* in an 8-1 ruling, and from 1907 to 1956, 60,166 people were sterilized in the US. California accounted for one-third of the total, with 19,998 sterilizations. Virginia was second with 6,811.²⁶

In the early 1920s, a series of other similar books were published arguing that the winding down of colonialism and the growing population around the world signaled the end of white domination. The most influential of these was Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, which included an introduction by Madison Grant. Stoddard used demographic data to argue that Europe had been the location of rapid population expansion throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but that wave was cresting and the twentieth century would be marked by growth in Asia and Africa. Like Grant, Stoddard took these trends and shaped them into a white supremacist narrative of the eminent demise of the genetically superior but numerically inferior white race.²⁷ Both Grant's and Stoddard's work was regularly republished in the influential *Saturday Evening Post*, where the danger that the white race could be replaced by other inferior races became part of the mainstream media diet of everyday Americans in the early 1920s.

WHO IS WHITE?

Takao Ozawa's case was finally taken up by the US Supreme Court in 1922, the same year that Warren Harding, the sitting president of the United States, recommended Stoddard's book *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* in a speech.²⁸ Although it was the first time the Supreme Court considered how to interpret the phrase "free white person" in the

naturalization law, there had been a series of previous federal district and appellate court rulings, often with contradictory or seemingly arbitrary results, reflecting the illusory nature of the category "white."

In 1878, a court found that Chinese people were not white. In 1889, Hawaiians were not white. In 1894, Burmese were not white. In 1894, 1902, 1908, and 1910, Japanese were not white, which did not bode well for Takao Ozawa's case. In 1897, Mexicans were white. In 1900, Native Americans were not white. In 1905, Armenians were white. In 1909 and 1917, South Asians were not white. In 1910, 1913, 1919, and 1920, South Asians were white. In 1909, 1910, and 1915, Syrians were white, but in 1913 and 1914, Syrians were not white. In 1916 and 1917, Filipinos were not white. In 1921, Koreans were not white.²⁹ There were also cases that considered whether someone was white if one parent was white and another was Native American (1880), Chinese (1909), Japanese (1912), or Filipino (1912 and 1916).³⁰ In every case, the courts decided people of mixed heritage were not white.

Since there was no scientific basis to whiteness and others who had once been on the outside eventually were incorporated into it, such as the Irish, Syrians, Armenians, Mexicans, and, to some extent, South Asians, it was not outrageous for Takao Ozawa to think that a well-behaved and light-skinned Japanese person could also plausibly be redefined as white.

The Supreme Court only took a month to reach a unanimous decision in the case, which Associate Justice George Sutherland announced on November 13, 1922. Sutherland was born in England in 1862; his family moved to Utah, where he was elected to both the House of Representatives and the Senate. He had just joined the court in 1922 but went on to be one of the "Four Horsemen," the conservative block of justices that would impede Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal legislations in the 1930s.

The ruling in the *Ozawa* case begins by explaining that the basic role of the Supreme Court is to ensure that Congress's laws are being executed faithfully, not to create laws itself. Then it describes the history of the terminology in the naturalization law, which limited citizenship to "free white persons" from 1790 and was expanded to include "aliens of African nativity" and "persons of African descent" in 1870.³¹ Sutherland says that it is not enough to point out that the framers of the law did not think of a particular case, but that it is also necessary to consider what they would have done. For Sutherland, it is clear that the framers meant to exclude

Black slaves and Native Americans. Furthermore, the terminology in the law is not meant to gauge individuals but rather groups. Although the law says "free white person," Sutherland writes that it does not mean simply white skin:

Manifestly the test afforded by the mere color of the skin of each individual is impracticable, as that differs greatly among persons of the same race, even among Anglo-Saxons, ranging by imperceptible gradations from the fair blond to the swarthy brunette, the latter being darker than many of the lighter hued persons of the brown or yellow races. Hence to adopt the color test alone would result in a confused overlapping of races and a gradual merging of one into the other, without any practical line of separation.

Rather than relying on an individual test, Sutherland turned to the term Blumenbach made up after examining a beautiful skull: "The words 'white person' were meant to indicate only a person of what is popularly known as the Caucasian race." Sutherland then writes that there are, of course, borderline cases and those should be individually adjudicated, but *Ozawa's* is not one of them. "The appellant, in the case now under consideration, however, is clearly of a race which is not Caucasian and therefore belongs entirely outside the zone on the negative side." *Ozawa* lost his case, but since the ruling pointed to Blumenbach's fantastical idea of a Caucasian race as the defining characteristic of a "white person," it opened up other avenues for plaintiffs to argue they were white.

Early in 1923, the US Supreme Court heard the case of Bhagat Singh Thind, whose lawyers "expected a favorable decision" because the court decided in *Ozawa* that white meant Caucasian and the people of North India were predominantly Aryan and Caucasian.¹² Like Takao *Ozawa*, Bhagat Singh Thind performed the role of model American citizen. He was born in a village near Amritsar in the Punjab district of British India on October 3, 1892. In 1913, he came to the United States to attend the University of California at Berkeley for a theology PhD. As World War I raged, he joined the US Army, rising to the rank of acting sergeant before his honorable discharge at the end of the war. He applied for citizenship in 1920 and was initially given it by a US district court. However, the Bureau

of Naturalization appealed to the Supreme Court, which heard the case on January 11 and 12, 1923, only two months after the *Ozawa* decision.

The Thind brief goes farther than *Ozawa* did in arguing that he shared a kinship with white America. In addition to citing linguistic studies that showed the connections between Hindi and European languages, Thind argued that like white Europeans who conquered and colonized other people, his Aryan ancestors conquered and subjugated the lesser races of India "The high-class Hindu regards the aboriginal Indian Mongoloid in the same manner as the American regards the Negro, speaking from a matrimonial standpoint."¹³

As with the *Ozawa* case, the court quickly reached a unanimous decision in about a month, again written by Associate Justice Sutherland, overturning the lower court's ruling and denying Thind citizenship. Sutherland argued that the law is based on a common understanding of terms, not an academic one. The verdict went further to suggest that language is not the same as race: "The term Aryan has to do with linguistic, and not at all with physical, characteristics, and it would seem reasonably clear that mere resemblance in language, indicating a common linguistic root buried in remotely ancient soil, is altogether inadequate to prove common racial origin." Finally, the court suggested that there was substantial mixing between groups in India, producing darker skin, so even if North Indians were once white, they no longer were.

The result of the decision was calamitous for other South Asian people who had previously received US citizenship and then had it rescinded. Many appealed the loss of citizenship but without success. In the years that followed, lower courts followed the precedent set by the Supreme Court in *Ozawa* and *Thind*, understanding "free white person" narrowly as a person with white skin with European ancestry. In 1923, 1925, 1928, 1939, and 1942, courts reconfirmed that South Asians were not white. Filipinos were again ruled not white in 1927, 1935, and 1941. People from Afghanistan were not white in 1928. People from the Arabian Peninsula were not white in 1942 and 1944.¹⁴

Bhagat Singh Thind finally became a US citizen in 1936 after a new law gave citizenship to all foreign veterans from World War I, but the "free white person" provision in citizenship law remained in place all the way until 1952. Consequently, for the first 162 years of the United States,

citizenship was formally limited to whites only and, after 1870, former African slaves and their descendants.

Despite these restrictions on citizenship, by the first decades of the twentieth century, it became clear that it was not just Chinese immigrants who wanted to come to the United States to work. People from across Asia and from Eastern and Southern Europe began to make the journey. With a growing scientific consensus about the racial superiority of the Nordic race, Congress would soon turn its eye to these other immigrant groups who were arriving in increasingly large numbers at the ports of the United States.

KEEP AMERICA AMERICAN

With curly hair parted down the middle and pince-nez spectacles balanced on his nose, Albert Johnson looked the part for his original career as a peripatetic journalist. Johnson was born in Springfield, Illinois, in 1869 and grew up in Kansas. He got his first job at the *St. Joseph Herald* in Missouri before moving on to the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* and the *New Haven Register* in Connecticut, where he became managing editor in 1896. In 1898, at the age of twenty-nine, he was named the news editor at the *Washington Post* before moving that same year to Tacoma, Washington, to take the position of managing editor of the *Tacoma News*. In Washington State, he became alarmed about the issue of Asian immigration, which continued to roil the West. The dangers of Eastern European immigration also became clear to him after he reported on the impact of Russian immigrants who brought Marxist theories of communism to the local labor unions in Washington. He ran for Congress in 1913 on a platform of strict immigration controls to protect the white people and capitalist culture of the United States. He won the election and remained in Congress for the next twenty years. As a legislator, he was rumored to take bribes, and he was a public drinker, even after Congress passed Prohibition. After serving as a captain in the Chemical Warfare Service during World War I, he became chair of the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization in 1919.¹

As the chair of the committee, Albert Johnson invited many of the advocates of eugenics and race science to testify before Congress. In 1920, Harry Laughlin, the director of the Eugenics Records Office, testified

about the dangers of race mixing. Johnson said that Laughlin had convinced him that “factors of this nature are the basis upon which the American people must develop their permanent immigration policy.”² Johnson then named Laughlin as the “Expert Eugenics Agent” for the committee. Johnson began a regular correspondence with Madison Grant, the author of *The Passing of the Great Race*. Lothrop Stoddard, the author of *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, testified before the committee. Johnson ordered the Government Printing Office to publish several of V. S. McClatchy’s pamphlets on the danger of a Japanese invasion of the West Coast, and McClatchy also gave testimony before the committee.

The foundation for what would become the 1924 Immigration Act was laid with the 1921 Emergency Act to limit the arrival of refugees from Europe after World War I. Albert Johnson’s initial draft of the 1921 Emergency Act called for a complete ban on all immigration to the United States for one year. The Senate version, written by Republican William Dillingham of Vermont, who had chaired the Dillingham Commission that studied immigration from 1907 to 1911, instead created quotas based on national origin in which 3 percent of the foreign-born population in the 1910 census would be admitted each year. The Emergency Quota Bill passed both houses of Congress in early 1921 but was vetoed by President Woodrow Wilson in the final days of his term. After Warren Harding was inaugurated as president in March, Johnson brought the bill up again. It passed the House with a voice vote, signifying how broadly it was supported. The vote in the Senate was 90–2, with three present votes. Harding signed it into law on May 19, 1921.

The emergency quotas went into effect two weeks after the bill was signed, which meant that some ships that set sail before it was passed were still at sea when it went into effect, resulting in chaotic races to reach port before the quotas were filled. For Italians and Greeks, the new quotas represented a 99 percent reduction in the number of spots available. Consequently, the monthly quotas would often be filled immediately by a single ship on the first day of the month. As a result, ships would position themselves off the port on the last day of the month, then race into harbor the next morning to unload passengers. On August 31, the *King Alexander* and the *Acropolis*, two ships filled with Greek passengers, eyed each other warily off New York Harbor. After midnight on September 1, they raced

for the port; the *King Alexander* won by two minutes. Its passengers filled the Greek quota for the entire month, and the *Acropolis* was forced to sail back to Europe.³ At the other end of the spectrum, the vast British quota of 77,342 went only half filled in 1921.

THE NATIONAL ORIGINS QUOTAS

When Calvin Coolidge ascended to the presidency after the sudden death of Warren Harding in August 1923, it was clear that Johnson’s House committee was going to formulate a permanent restriction bill. Coolidge had written an article about race in 1921 titled “Whose Country Is This?” and said in his December 1923 annual message to Congress that “America must be kept American. For this purpose, it is necessary to continue a policy of restricted immigration.”⁴ Coolidge used the campaign slogan “Keep America American.”

With the winds at their backs, Albert Johnson and the eugenics movement pushed for a final and definitive immigration law. Johnson found a new ally in John B. Trevor Sr., who took up the baton and got the law across the finish line. Trevor was born into old money in New York and was educated at Harvard for his BA (1901) and MA (1903) and then Columbia for law school (1906). Trevor moved in the same elite circles of the Northeast as those promoting race science and eugenics. As with seemingly all of the other eugenics advocates, Trevor was a trustee of Henry Fairfield Osborn’s American Museum of Natural History, which at the time was the center of the eugenics movement. Trevor’s office in New York was next door to Madison Grant’s. Trevor’s wife was friends with Eleanor Roosevelt, and John D. Rockefeller Jr. was Trevor’s close friend and lifetime benefactor. In World War I, Trevor served as a commander in military intelligence and was tasked with monitoring for subversives in New York, where he focused on Jewish anarchists and communists. As part of his work, he created ethnic maps of New York and became concerned about the stock of the new immigrants. After the war, he became assistant attorney general of New York before moving to Washington, DC, to consult on the planned immigration law.⁵ Trevor hit it off immediately with Representative Johnson, who in addition to chairing the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization had become the president of the Eugenics Research Association at Cold Spring Harbor in 1923.

Johnson made Trevor an informal advisor for the committee where as an unpaid volunteer he wrote reports, sat in on meetings, and developed restriction schemes.⁶

The problem that Johnson and other legislators were stuck on was how to ensure the new law shifted the immigration flow back to the Nordic population at the expense of Eastern and Southern Europeans but did so without being obviously discriminatory to Italians, who were a growing political constituency in the United States. Trevor solved the puzzle with a statistical model that showed that the 1921 emergency quotas, despite their harsh reductions in Southern and Eastern European numbers, were actually still tilted in the new immigrants' favor. His argument was that because the quotas were based only on data of recent immigrant arrivals, the origins of native-born Americans were not considered and thus their immigrant heritage was devalued. Consequently, Trevor suggested that the only fair option was to base the quotas on the national origins of all Americans, not just the national origins of recent immigrants. The Senate majority leader, Henry Cabot Lodge, called Trevor to his office and congratulated him on a scheme that finally provided "an answer to the charges of discrimination" with impartial data.⁷ The final decision was to use data from the 1890 census as the baseline for the quotas, to ensure the vast majority of immigration slots went to Northern Europeans.

The push for restrictions in Congress was met with support from the labor movement, the Ku Klux Klan, and even the editorial board of the *New York Times*. For many years, labor unions were divided on the issue of immigration. Most of their members were immigrants themselves and tended to have solidarity with other immigrants to the country, but there was the persistent fear that new immigrants were willing to work for less than unionized workers, undercutting their job security and wages. Samuel Gompers, who headed the American Federation of Labor, supported Lodge's literacy test in the 1890s and wrote publicly in favor of immigration restrictions in 1924. He published an article titled "America Must Not Be Overwhelmed" that emphasized the importance of controls for "the persistence of racial characteristics."⁸ The grand dragon of the South Carolina Ku Klux Klan wrote an article titled "The Regulation of Immigration" that argued it was time to "do a bit of house cleaning" to avoid being the "dumping ground of the world from millions of heterogeneous elements." The grand dragon argued there would no longer be an

"America for Americans" if the country continued to allow the "influx" of "Anarchism and Bolshevism," "undesirables," "Jews," "paupers, diseased, and criminals," and "hyphenated-Americans" who "do not deserve the respect of any decent, loyal, patriotic, red-blooded, pure and unadulterated American citizen."⁹ What is striking is how closely the KKK position matched the mainstream at the time. The *New York Times* editorial page endorsed the proposed law in an editorial on April 5, 1924, titled "Preserving the American Race."¹⁰

At first, it appeared that the Japanese Exclusion League and its founder, V. S. McClatchy, the newspaper publisher who pushed for a complete ban on Japanese immigration, would have to settle for a continuation of the Gentleman's Agreement.¹¹ Several senators, including Henry Cabot Lodge, were uncomfortable with the secret contents of the Gentlemen's Agreement and asked the US secretary of state, Charles Hughes, to clarify it with the Japanese ambassador, Masanao Hanihara. Hanihara responded with a letter laying out the terms as the Japanese government understood them, which amounted to a ban on Japanese immigration. However, Hanihara ended the letter by saying, "Relying on the confidence you have been good enough to show me at all times, I have stated or rather repeated all this to you very candidly and in a most friendly spirit, for I realize, as I believe you do, the grave consequences which the enactment of the measure retaining that particular provision would inevitably bring upon the otherwise happy and mutually advantageous relations between our two countries."¹²

Opponents of Japanese immigration pounced. What did the phrase "grave consequences" mean? they asked. Were the Japanese making a threat against the United States? Whether the ambassador meant it as such or not, the sentiment in the Senate quickly shifted, and Lodge convinced his colleagues that the complete exclusion of the Japanese was the only reasonable response. V. S. McClatchy was elated.

In the final debate in the Senate, the need for restrictions was a given, and speakers mostly rose to argue for more or less extreme versions. While the debates about Chinese exclusion in the 1880s had a strong minority who opposed it, by the early 1920s the idea that the country could and should limit migration had taken hold, and the speeches were more explicitly about race. Senator Oscar Underwood of Alabama began by focusing on labor, but after a question, he seemed to drop his talking

points and dove into race: "There was never a race in the world that did not desire to maintain its own racial integrity." He continued, "Racial integrity will be maintained always by every race of people and we cannot permit the yellow and brown races to come to this country in large numbers without destroying racial integrity."¹¹

Then the other senator from Alabama, James Thomas Heflin, rose to speak. Heflin has the honor of being the author of the bill that created the Mother's Day holiday, but he was also a consistent voice for white supremacy in his native Alabama and in the US Senate. In 1901, he helped write the Alabama constitution that prevented African Americans from voting, and he was said to be a member of the KKK. While he was in the House of Representatives, he introduced a bill to enforce segregated streetcars in Washington, DC. As it was under consideration, he rode a streetcar and attempted to kick a Black man out of a section for white riders. When the man resisted, Heflin pulled out a pistol and accidentally shot a tourist from New York in the leg. Heflin claimed he was defending a white woman, and the charges were dropped after he paid the tourist's medical bills.¹²

On the Senate floor, Heflin recounted a loose history of the 1813 Fort Mims massacre in his home state of Alabama. He said that the leaders of the fort felt that the defeated Creek Nation was of no threat to them, so they left the gate of the fort open. A young girl, Lucy Dean, asked, "Who left the gate open?" and said, "Close the gate," but no one did. When the Creek warriors arrived, everyone screamed, "Close the gate!" Unfortunately, Heflin shouted to his colleagues, "it was too late!" He paused for effect, then he added more quietly, "Too late." The "whole white population" was massacred. For Heflin, the implications were clear, and he ended by appealing to the Senate to close the gate to nonwhite immigrants before it was too late.¹³

There were a few senators who spoke against the restrictions. David Walsh of Massachusetts railed against the amendment that switched the baseline of the law to the 1890 census, in which 87 percent were from Western and Northern Europe. If they used the most recent census from 1910, it would have been 56 percent. "It simply amounts to reducing and practically eliminating all emigration from southern and eastern Europe. Whatever may be the surface reason for the change in date, it must be insisted that the true reason is racial discrimination."¹⁴

However, the voices against restrictions were in the distinct minority. The mood of the country had turned against immigration, a reality reflected in the Johnson-Reed bill. The bill passed in the US House by a vote of 308–62 and the Senate 69–9 on May 15 and was signed by President Calvin Coolidge on May 24.¹⁵ The reaction in the press was unequivocal. The *Los Angeles Times* headline cheered, "A Nordic Victory!" Henry Cabot Lodge called the law "one of the most important, if not the most important, Congress has ever passed."¹⁶ It would also be one of Lodge's last acts as Senate majority leader. He died six months later.

W. S. McClatchy celebrated his victory but then turned to what he saw as a third wave of the Asian invasion of the United States, Filipinos who were able to move to the mainland because the Philippines was a US colony. He reconstituted the Japanese Exclusion League as the California Joint Immigration Committee and pressed for legislation to limit Filipino migration and to restrict return migration from people living in Japan who possessed US citizenship. McClatchy never reconciled with his brother and died of a heart attack on May 15, 1938. His son H. J. McClatchy took over as the executive secretary of the California Joint Immigration Committee and was a vocal supporter of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, arguing, "It was impossible to separate the loyal from the disloyal. While the loyal might therefore suffer in mass treatment, this was preferable to endangering the welfare of the nation."¹⁷

In March 1929, the quota board released the finalized quotas for the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act, which reduced the total immigration cap further to 153,700.¹⁸ Descendants of former African slaves were not counted as immigrants, so their native countries did not get higher quotas. Asian residents, even those with birthright citizenship, were not counted because new migrants from those countries could not be naturalized. Territories like Hawai'i and Puerto Rico, which had large nonwhite citizen populations, were also excluded. The result was an even whiter data set for an already mostly white country. The largest share went to Great Britain with 65,721 slots per year. Germany was second with 25,957, and Ireland was third with 17,853. The German quota would play a role in the lead-up to World War II, as Jews fleeing the Nazi regime were nevertheless turned away when the yearly quota was met. Most other countries received the minimum quota of 100. Some countries, like Palestine,

Ruanda [Rwanda], Nauru, and Muscat [Oman], got quotas but with the caveat that the immigrant needed to be eligible for naturalization, which meant that these quotas were only open to white European colonists who were residing there.²¹

The impact of the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act was immediate. While in 1914, the last year of open migration before World War I, 1.2 million people arrived in the United States, in 1924 that was reduced to 164,700. While in 1920–21, only 25.7 percent of immigrants were from Northern and Western Europe, by 1925 it was back up to 75.6 percent.²² The impact on particular countries was even more dramatic. Italians and Greeks were the most affected. Italian arrivals went from 222,260 in 1921 to 2,662 in 1925. Greek immigration to the US was nonexistent in 1890, so the quota was set at the minimum of 100 people per year, down from over 20,000 arrivals in 1921.²³ From 1880 to 1920, 23.5 million people immigrated to the US. From 1921 to 1965, only 6 million more would come.²⁴

TABLE 2: Major US immigration acts and agreements

YEAR	TITLE	PURPOSE
1790	Naturalization Act of 1790	Citizenship limited to "free white persons"
1870	Naturalization Act of 1870	Citizenship extended to "aliens of African nativity" and "persons of African descent"
1875	Page Act	Banned Chinese labor contracts and prostitutes
1882	Chinese Exclusion Act	Banned all Chinese immigration
1882	Immigration Act of 1882	Banned criminals, the insane, the sick, and those likely to become a public charge
1891	Immigration Act of 1891	Created Bureau of Immigration in the Treasury Department
1892	Geary Act	Renewed the Chinese Exclusion Act (continued to be renewed every ten years until 1943) and tightened restrictions on the Chinese
1903	Anarchist Exclusion Act	Banned anarchists, polygamists, beggars, and epileptic people
1907	Immigration Act of 1907	Banned new groups of disabled and diseased people
1907	Gentleman's Agreement	Stopped Japanese immigration
1917	Immigration Act of 1917	Added a literacy test, created an Asiatic Barred Zone
1921	Emergency Quota Act	Imposed a temporary quota of 3 percent of that country's immigrant population in the US as of 1910
1924	Johnson-Reed Immigration Act	Banned Asian immigration, created strict national origins quotas for everywhere else except the Western Hemisphere

TABLE 2: Major US immigration acts and agreements (continued)

YEAR	TITLE	PURPOSE
1952	McCarron-Walter Immigration Act	Removed "free white person" requirement for citizenship, removed ban on Asian immigration, added bans on communists and totalitarians
1965	Hart-Celler Immigration Act	Ended national origins quotas, shifted immigration visas toward family reunification
1980	Refugee Act	Created a yearly quota for refugee resettlement
1986	Immigration Reform and Control Act	Gave amnesty to undocumented in US, made it a crime to hire undocumented workers
1996	Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act	Added penalties for undocumented people who commit crimes or overstay visas, strengthened enforcement at border
2002	Homeland Security Act	Moved all immigration-related agencies to DHS
2005	REAL ID Act	Prohibited driver's licenses for undocumented people, provided waivers for border wall, restricted habeas corpus for immigrants
2006	Secure Fence Act	Authorized construction of 700 miles of border wall
2012	Executive order, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals	Deferred immigration actions against people brought to the US as children without documents

'The Chinese Must Go!'

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ON FEBRUARY 28, 1882, Sen. John F. Miller of California introduced a bill to exclude Chinese immigrant laborers from the country. For two hours, the former Union general presented his case. The Chinese, Miller said, posed an imminent danger, in part because they came from a "degraded and inferior race." Other senators jumped in, calling them "rats," "beasts," and "swine." Oriental civilization, they claimed, was incompatible with the United States and threatened to corrupt the nation.

Chinese immigrants also posed an economic danger to white workers, Miller said, through their "machine-like" ways and "muscles of iron." The U.S. laborer, whether on the farm, the shoe bench, or the factory floor, simply could not compete with these low-paid counterparts. A vote for Chinese exclusion was thus a vote for both American labor and the public good.

There was minimal opposition to the law. Former Radical Republicans, such as Massachusetts Sen. George Frisbie Hoar, decried the act as "old race prejudice" and a crime against "the great doctrine of human equality affirmed in our Declaration of Independence." But most members of both the Senate and the House agreed that the Chinese needed to be stopped. "The gate must be closed," Rep. Edward Valentine of Nebraska succinctly declared. Just over two months later, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 became law.

Today, as the debate heats up over the economic and security implications of immigration, particularly with regard to Muslims, it's worth looking back at America's first law to single out an immigrant group for exclusion.

'American Manhood vs. Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?'

Americans were first introduced to the Chinese through reports from U.S. traders, diplomats, and missionaries, who tended to describe the foreigners as crafty, dishonest heathens. When significant numbers of Chinese immigrants started coming to the country, they were the largest group of nonwhite immigrants to the United States. Almost as soon as they arrived, questions were raised about whether they should be welcomed or expelled.

Demagogues such as Workingmen's Party leader Denis Kearney blamed Chinese laborers for unemployment and low wages, capitalizing on a deep sense of economic insecurity during the depression of the 1870s. Anti-Chinese activists drew on earlier debates over Asian indentured labor in the Caribbean and Latin America, and they charged that the capitalists employing the Chinese were creating a new system of quasi-slavery to degrade U.S. workers. Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, framed the issue with a pamphlet titled *Meat vs. Rice--American Manhood vs. Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?*

Industrialists, meanwhile, praised Chinese immigrants as an ample source of cheap, available labor to build the transcontinental railroad and to help develop the lumber, fishing, mining, and agricultural industries of the West.

Many restrictionist arguments stressed the sexual danger that both Chinese women and men allegedly posed to the country's morals. Chinese prostitutes were accused of causing "moral and racial pollution" through their interracial liaisons; Chinese men were

said to lure pure and innocent white women into dens of vice and depravity. The men were also seen as undermining acceptable gender roles by engaging in the "women's work" of cleaning and cooking.

'Filth, Immorality, Diseases, Ruin to White Labor'

Nineteenth century popular culture helped spread these caricatures. One cartoon titled "A Statue for Our Harbor," published in 1881 in the San Francisco-based magazine *The Wasp*, encapsulated white California's fears about Chinese immigration. It depicted a statue of a grotesque Chinese male coolie in San Francisco Bay mocking New York's Statue of Liberty, then under construction. His ragged robes, rat-tail-like queue, stereotypical facial features, and opium pipe symbolized the supposed unassimilability and immorality of the Chinese. His foot rests on a skull, rats scurrying around the pedestal, as capsized ships languish under a slant-eyed moon. Rays of light emanating from the coolie's head inform readers that the Chinese bring "filth," "immorality," "diseases," and "ruin to white labor."

By the time that cartoon was published, Californians had been trying to regulate Chinese immigration for decades. As early as 1850, the state passed its first anti-Chinese law, in the form of a foreign miner's tax. Although the law was aimed at all foreigners, it was primarily enforced against the Chinese. In 1870, California collected \$5 million in taxes from Chinese immigrants alone, an amount that equaled a quarter to half of the state's total revenue.

In 1854, Chinese immigrants were officially granted unequal status when the California Supreme Court ruled that they--along with African Americans and Native Americans--could not give testimony in court cases involving a white person. In support of its decision, the court argued that Chinese immigrants were a "distinct people whom nature has marked as inferior." In 1855, California Gov. John Bigler signed a bill that taxed any master or owner of a ship found to have brought Asian immigrants to the state. Although the state Supreme Court invalidated the law, on the grounds that

only the federal government had the power to legislate immigration, it foreshadowed national legislation to come.

Anti-Chinese sentiment also turned violent. From the 1850s through the end of the 19th century, Chinese Americans were systematically harassed, rounded up, and driven out of cities and towns across the West. During the winter of 1858-1859, a veritable race war began in the goldfields, as armed mobs forced Chinese out of various campsites and towns. In 1853, some 3,000 Chinese were in California's Shasta County. At the end of the decade, only 160 remained.

By the 1870s, anti-Chinese vigilante violence was common throughout the West. On October 24, 1871, 17 Chinese were lynched in Los Angeles after a Chinese suspect shot a policeman. A mob of nearly 500 people, representing nearly a tenth of the city's population at the time, dragged Chinese out of their homes while others hastily built gallows downtown to hang the victims. Police did little as a broad cross-section of Angelenos, including women and children, carried out what many historians have called the largest mass lynching in U.S. history.

The violence increased in the 1880s. In February 1885, the entire Chinese population of Eureka, California--300 people in total--was rounded up within 48 hours after a city councilman was killed in the crossfire between two Chinese rivals. On September 2, 1885, 28 Chinese miners were killed and another 15 were wounded in Rock Springs, Wyoming; then the rest of the town's Chinese population, numbering in the hundreds, were driven out into the desert. On November 3, 1885, 300 armed men descended on the two Chinese neighborhoods in Tacoma, Washington, and forced all the residents--anywhere from 800 to 900 people--out of the city. Some were dragged from their homes and were forced to watch as their businesses were pillaged and belongings thrown into the street. Three days later, Seattle also demanded that all the Chinese leave town.

'The Crooked Path'

Beginning in the 1860s, the U.S. government passed a series of laws restricting Chinese immigration. The 1862 Coolie Trade Act outlawed coolie labor and U.S. involvement in the coolie trade. The 1875 Page Act kept out not just Asian laborers brought to the United States involuntarily but any Asian women suspected of prostitution.

The Chinese who came to the United States in the late 19th century were only a small fraction of the country's growing immigrant population. From 1870 to 1880, 138,941 Chinese immigrants entered the U.S., representing 4.3 percent of the total number of immigrants (3,199,394) who were admitted that decade.

When the Chinese Exclusion Act became law on May 6, 1882, it barred Chinese laborers for a period of 10 years and allowed entry only to certain exempt classes (students, teachers, travelers, merchants, and diplomats). It also prohibited all Chinese from obtaining naturalized citizenship. The message was clear: Chinese could come for business, travel, or education, but not to settle. In 1888 a second law, known as the Scott Act, imposed further restrictions. Laborers who had returned to China were forbidden to re-enter the United States unless they had wives, children, parents, or property or debts in excess of \$1,000 here. The act nullified 20,000 return certificates that had already been granted to Chinese laborers.

In 1892, the Geary Act extended the exclusion laws for another decade, requiring all Chinese in the United States to register with the federal government to obtain certificates of residence (precursors to today's Green Cards) proving their legal right to be in the country. The Chinese Exclusion Act was renewed again in 1902 and made permanent in 1904.

The Chinese still living in the United States referred to the exclusion regime as a "hundred kinds of oppressive laws" and began to protest. "Why do they not legislate against Swedes, Germans, Italians, Turks and others?" Yung Hen, a Chinese poultry dealer in

San Francisco, asked in 1892. "There are no strings on those people. For some reason, you people persist in pestering the Chinamen."

When the Supreme Court in 1884's *Chew Heong v. United States* upheld the constitutionality of Chinese exclusion, Chinese activists turned their attention to opening up additional immigration categories within the confines of the restrictions. They used the courts to affirm that merchant families, returning laborers, U.S. citizens of Chinese descent, and their families had the right to enter and reenter the country.

From 1882 to 1943, some 300,000 Chinese were admitted into the United States as returning residents and citizens, exempt-class merchants, family members, and so on. Many hired immigration lawyers or brokers to assist with their cases and prepare paperwork. Others learned to evade or circumvent the exclusion laws. As immigrant Ted Chan explained in a 1977 interview, "We didn't want to come in illegally, but we were forced to because of the immigration laws. They particularly picked on the Chinese. If we told the truth, it didn't work. So we had to take the crooked path."

The most common strategy was to falsely claim membership in one of the classes exempt from the exclusion laws, such as merchants or native-born citizens of the United States. A multinational business in false papers and relationships, or "paper sons," aided their efforts and an estimated 90 to 95 percent of the Chinese immigrants entering the United States during this time used false papers. The first ethnic group to be singled out for restriction, the Chinese, then spawned the first wave of "illegal immigrants."

'A Bowlful of Tears'

Nearly 100,000 Chinese entered the United States through San Francisco from 1910 to 1940. About half were admitted directly from their ships, and another half were detained at the Angel Island Immigration Station. While popularly called the "Ellis Island of the West," this station was very different from its counterpart in New York. Ellis Island enforced laws that restricted, but did not prohibit,

European immigrants. Angel Island enforced policies that singled out Asians for exclusion.

Chinese were first subjected to a primary inspection on the steamship that had carried them. After receiving identification numbers, new arrivals were sent to the hospital for a medical examination. There the staff examined their bodies for physical defects and even measured their body parts to determine their ages. They looked for evidence of parasitic "Oriental diseases" such as uncinariasis (hookworm), filariasis (round worm), and clonorchiasis (liver fluke), which were all grounds for expulsion if untreated after arrival.

Chinese immigrants found these examinations extremely humiliating. They were unaccustomed to being naked in front of strangers, let alone forced to provide stool samples on demand so that the hospital staff could test for disease. "When the doctor came, I had to take off all my clothes. It was so embarrassing and shameful," Lee Puey You recalled in 1939. She was held for 20 months and then sent back to China. She later told interviewers that she cried a "bowlful of tears" on Angel Island.

The arrivals then had to make their case to immigration officials. Merchants, for example, were required to provide detailed documentation of their business activities, the volume of their merchandise, and all their business partners. A returning merchant also had to have "two credible witnesses, other than Chinese" to testify on behalf of his status and state of business. Wives and children of merchants and citizens had to confirm that their husbands or fathers still qualified as exempt from the exclusion laws. They also had to prove that their relationship was genuine.

To combat the "paper son" system, Angel Island officials gave particularly strong scrutiny to cases involving families. As a routine part of the interrogations, prospective immigrants were questioned about a wealth of minute details concerning their family histories, relationships, and everyday life in the home villages-- things immigration officials believed should be common knowledge

to all parties. What are the marriage and birth dates of your family members? When did you last see your father? How many steps lead up to your house? How many windows are in your house? How many clocks are in your house? How many rows of houses in your village? Who lives in the third house, fourth row?

In some cases, applicants were required to draw extensive maps of their villages, complete with the locations of major buildings and all houses. Sometimes wives were required to recall minute facts about their husbands' extended family and native village or to share intimate details about their marital relationship. If any major discrepancies were discovered in the testimonies, immigration inspectors concluded that the relationship did not exist and the entire case was discredited.

These interrogations were terrifying. They typically lasted two or three days, but could take much longer if witnesses had to travel to the island to testify or if applicants had to be recalled and interrogated again. Applicants were often asked as many as 200 questions; some were asked a thousand. Law Shee Low, who was detained on Angel Island in 1922, recalled the anxiety and despair in the women's barracks over the interrogation: "One woman was questioned all day and then deported. She told me they asked her about life in China: the chickens and the neighbors, and the direction the house faced. How would I know all that? I was scared."

Because of these harsh interrogation methods, Chinese immigrants had one of the highest rejection rates at the Angel Island Immigration Station. Of the 95,687 Chinese who applied for admission there between 1910 and 1940, 9 percent were initially rejected. The vast majority appealed their decision through attorneys; in the end, 5 percent of Chinese applicants were ultimately returned to China.

Chinese also made up the overwhelming majority (70 percent) of the station's detainee population. Anywhere from 200 to 300 men and 30 to 50 women were detained in the Angel Island barracks at any given time. Their average stay was for two weeks,

the longest of all the immigrant groups. Kong Din Quong, who arrived in San Francisco in 1938, spent the longest recorded time in detention: 756 days. His grandfather was a native citizen of the United States. His father, though born in China, also held U.S. citizenship status, but Kong was born before his father resided in the country. His admission was denied on the grounds that a father cannot transfer citizenship rights to his children until he becomes a U.S. resident. Kong appealed his case, but he was eventually deported.

Chinese immigrants bitterly resented their long detentions. They watched people from Japan, Russia, and South Asia come and go while they remained imprisoned. The barracks were crowded and sparsely furnished. The prisoners were guarded at all times and were not allowed visitors. Some wallowed in feelings of helplessness and despair. Others petitioned the Chinese Six Companies benevolent association in San Francisco or the Chinese consul general for help. Chinese men formed a self-governing association to provide assistance to their fellow detainees. In 1871, after a Chinese suspect shot a policeman in Los Angeles, a mob dragged 17 Chinese out of their homes and hastily built gallows downtown to hang them--the largest mass lynching in U.S. history.

Many expressed their frustration, anger, resentment, loneliness, and despair by writing poems on the walls. More than 200 poems from the Angel Island barracks have been recorded. Written anonymously, they are found in almost every corner of the men's detention barracks (now preserved as a National Historic Landmark) and serve as powerful reminders of the costs and hardships of immigration under such a discriminatory regime. One reads:

There are tens of thousands of poems composed on these walls. They are all cries of complaint and sadness. The day I am rid of this prison and attain success, I must remember that this chapter once existed.

'Humiliation Day'

America's heated debate over Chinese immigration influenced other nations as well. In Canada, the Chinese were just a fraction of the more than 3.5 million immigrants who entered the country from 1883 to 1914. (In 1901, for example, there were only 17,312 Chinese there.) But as in the United States, they were greeted with an animosity disproportionate to their numbers.

Calls to keep British Columbia a "white man's province" and to rally around a "white Canada forever" fueled the movement to restrict immigration from China, Japan, and South Asia. Anti-Asian organizations, modeled after ones in the United States, adopted slogans like "The Chinese Must Go!"

Due to British relations with China, an all-out exclusion of Chinese immigrants was not feasible for Canada. Thus, instead of an explicit policy of exclusion, Canadian commissioners suggested a head-tax policy that would permit entry to every Chinese person, provided that he or she paid the landing fee. The federal government waited until a largely Chinese workforce had completed construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway, then imposed a \$50 head tax on Chinese laborers. In 1900, the tax was raised to \$100. Three years later, it was raised again to \$700.

One unintended consequence of the head tax was to turn Chinese laborers into a scarcer and increasingly valuable commodity. Chinese immigrant wages doubled and, in some cases, tripled. By 1909, the tax was less a deterrent to Chinese immigration than a profitable source of state revenue. From 1887 to 1923, Chinese immigrants paid \$22.5 million to the Canadian government for the privilege of entering and leaving the country. No other group was required to pay these taxes.

In 1923, Canada transformed its regulation of Chinese immigration altogether. Closely modeled on U.S. exclusion laws, the 1923 Exclusion Act abolished the head tax system and instead prohibited all people of Chinese origin or descent from entering the country. Consular officials, children born in Canada, merchants, and

students received the only exemptions. The act also required every person of Chinese origin in Canada, regardless of citizenship, to register with the government and obtain a certification of registration, as in the United States. For Chinese Canadians, July 1, 1923--the day the law was passed--came to be known as "Humiliation Day."

'Impossible to Compete With'

By 1910, Chinese lived and worked in almost every state and territory in Mexico. By 1926, they were the country's second-largest group of foreigners--around 24,000 total. The rise of the anti-Chinese activists, or antichinistas, soon followed.

Mexican newspapers called the Chinese "savages," "uncivilized," and "lazy." Chinese immigration itself was characterized in catastrophic terms: the "yellow wave," the "yellow plague," the "Mongol invasion." In the northern state of Sonora, antichinistas focused on the unfair economic competition that the Chinese allegedly posed to Mexicans. Although the Chinese population was never large, they dominated local commerce in groceries, dry goods, and general merchandise in border towns such as Nogales and Agua Prieta, where American companies were busy digging mines and building railroads. Sonorans, who already felt disadvantaged by the large presence of U.S. capital in the region, greatly resented the Chinese-owned businesses. The chino was "impossible to compete with," charged the anti-Chinese leader Jose Angel Espinoza.

Antichinista attacks on interracial marriages between Chinese men and Mexican women added another layer to the rhetoric. Chinese men were called lecherous, Mexican women who married Chinese men were demonized as traitors to their race, and Chinese-Mexican children were denigrated as "freaks of nature." Race, economics, masculinity, and sexual power were all bound together.

Anti-Chinese sentiment especially flourished after the Mexican Revolution of 1911, which tried to destroy all aspects of

President Porfirio Diaz's reign--including his support of U.S. trade and policies encouraging Chinese immigration. The revolutionary indigenista nationalism included an intense xenophobia.

Anti-Chinese leader José María Arana, for example, pitted the "evils and vices of the Chinese" against the progress and national regeneration of the Mexican nation. José Angel Espinoza similarly identified the campaign against the Chinese as a movement "for the fatherland and for the race." Driving the Chinese out of Mexico was "the moral duty of all true Mexican nationalists," he proclaimed. The cover of his 1932 book *El Ejemplo de Sonora* (The Example of Sonora) boldly illustrated this message: A Mexican politician kicks a Chinese immigrant --greedily holding onto a bag of gold and a brick of opium--out of Sonora while holding a newly passed anti-Chinese law in his hand. A worker stands behind him to make sure that the will of the people is carried out while the sun looks on approvingly and heralds the victory.

An anti-Chinese riot broke out in Mazatlán in 1886, and several unprovoked attacks on Chinese occurred in Mexico City that same year. Then came the massacre in Torreón on May 5, 1911. This "two-day orgy of unbelievable brutality" resulted in the deaths of 303 Chinese (out of an estimated 600-700 in the city) and \$850,000 worth of damage to Chinese businesses and homes.

In 1908, Mexico passed a new law, inspired by U.S. policies, to regulate immigration and create the Mexican Immigration Service. In 1927, the treaty between Mexico and China was canceled, and in July of that year, another race-based immigration law was passed, restricting the immigration of blacks, British Indians, Syrians, Lebanese, Armenians, Palestinians, Arabs, Turks, and Chinese.

'The Dumping Ground for the Rest of the World'

By the 1930s, in addition to the controls put in place in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, most countries in Latin America had restricted Chinese entry in one way or another, varying from total exclusion to regulations that limited the number of immigrants

allowed in each year. The anti-Chinese campaign that began in the United States ended up having far-reaching consequences for the regulation of immigration around the world.

It wasn't until the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act that a Congress embarrassed by America's race-based immigration system finally undid the Chinese Exclusion Act. Today, that 1965 law

How Italians Became 'White'

nytimes.com

by Brent Staples

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Congress envisioned a white, Protestant and culturally homogeneous America when it declared in 1790 that only "free white persons, who have, or shall migrate into the United States" were eligible to become naturalized citizens. The calculus of racism underwent swift revision when waves of culturally diverse immigrants from the far corners of Europe changed the face of the country.

As the historian Matthew Frye Jacobson shows in his immigrant history "Whiteness of a Different Color," the surge of newcomers engendered a national panic and led Americans to adopt a more restrictive, politicized view of how whiteness was to be allocated. Journalists, politicians, social scientists and immigration officials embraced the habit, separating ostensibly white Europeans into "races." Some were designated "whiter" — and more worthy of citizenship — than others, while some were ranked as too close to blackness to be socially redeemable. The story of how Italian immigrants went from racialized pariah status in the 19th century to white Americans in good standing in the 20th offers a window onto the alchemy through which race is

has come under increasing attack from the supporters of a presidential frontrunner who wants to deport millions of people and to ban a vast category of immigrants based on their religion. America, Donald Trump warns, has become "the dumping ground for the rest of the world." 2015 isn't really that far from 1882.

constructed in the United States, and how racial hierarchies can sometimes change.

Darker skinned southern Italians endured the penalties of blackness on both sides of the Atlantic. In Italy, Northerners had long held that Southerners — particularly Sicilians — were an "uncivilized" and racially inferior people, too obviously African to be part of Europe.

Racist dogma about Southern Italians found fertile soil in the United States. As the historian Jennifer Guglielmo writes, the newcomers encountered waves of books, magazines and newspapers that "bombarded Americans with images of Italians as racially suspect." They were sometimes shut out of schools, movie houses and labor unions, or consigned to church pews set aside for black people. They were described in the press as "swarthy," "kinky haired" members of a criminal race and derided in the streets with epithets like "dago," "guinea" — a term of derision applied to enslaved Africans and their descendants — and more familiarly racist insults like "white n***er" and "n***er wop."

The penalties of blackness went well beyond name-calling in the apartheid South. Italians who had come to the country as "free

white persons" were often marked as black because they accepted "black" jobs in the Louisiana sugar fields or because they chose to live among African-Americans. This left them vulnerable to marauding mobs like the ones that hanged, shot, dismembered or burned alive thousands of black men, women and children across the South.

The federal holiday honoring the Italian explorer Christopher Columbus — celebrated on Monday — was central to the process through which Italian-Americans were fully ratified as white during the 20th century. The rationale for the holiday was steeped in myth, and allowed Italian-Americans to write a laudatory portrait of themselves into the civic record.

Few who march in Columbus Day parades or recount the tale of Columbus's voyage from Europe to the New World are aware of how the holiday came about or that President Benjamin Harrison proclaimed it as a one-time national celebration in 1892 — in the wake of a bloody New Orleans lynching that took the lives of 11 Italian immigrants. The proclamation was part of a broader attempt to quiet outrage among Italian-Americans, and a diplomatic blowup over the murders that brought Italy and the United States to the brink of war.

Historians have recently showed that America's dishonorable response to this barbaric event was partly conditioned by racist stereotypes about Italians promulgated in Northern newspapers like The Times. A striking analysis by Charles Seguin, a sociologist at Pennsylvania State University, and Sabrina Nard in, a doctoral student at the University of Arizona, shows that the protests lodged by the Italian government inspired something that had failed to coalesce around the brave African-American newspaper editor and anti-lynching campaigner Ida B. Wells — a broad anti-lynching effort.

A Black 'Brute' Lynched

The lynchings of Italians came at a time when newspapers in the South had established the gory convention of advertising the

far more numerous public murders of African-Americans in advance — to attract large crowds — and justifying the killings by labeling the victims "brutes," "fiends," "ravishers," "born criminals" or "troublesome Negroes." Even high-minded news organizations that claimed to abhor the practice legitimized lynching by trafficking in racist stereotypes about its victims.

As Mr. Seguin recently showed, many Northern newspapers were "just as complicit" in justifying mob violence as their Southern counterparts. For its part, The Times made repeated use of the headline "A Brutal Negro Lynched," presuming the victims' guilt and branding them as congenital criminals. Lynchings of black men in the South were often based on fabricated accusations of sexual assault. As the Equal Justice Initiative explained in its 2015 report on lynching in America, a rape charge could occur in the absence of an actual victim and might arise from minor violations of the social code — like complimenting a white woman on her appearance or even bumping into her on the street.

The Times was not owned by the family that controls it today when it dismissed Ida B. Wells as a "slandering and nasty-minded mulattress" for rightly describing rape allegations as "a thread bare lie" that Southerners used against black men who had consensual sexual relationships with white women. Nevertheless, as a Times editorialist of nearly 30 years standing — and a student of the institution's history — I am outraged and appalled by the nakedly racist treatment my 19th-century predecessors displayed in writing about African-Americans and Italian immigrants.

When Wells took her anti-lynching campaign to England in the 1890s, Times editors rebuked her for representing "black brutes" abroad in an editorial that joked about what they described as "the practice of roasting Negro ravishers alive and boring out their eyes with red-hot pokers." The editorial slandered African-Americans generally, referring to rape as "a crime to which Negroes are particularly prone." The Times editors may have lodged

objections to lynching — but they did so in a rhetoric firmly rooted in white supremacy.

'Assassins by Nature'

Italian immigrants were welcomed into Louisiana after the Civil War, when the planter class was in desperate need of cheap labor to replace newly emancipated black people, who were leaving backbreaking jobs in the fields for more gainful employment. These Italians seemed at first to be the answer to both the labor shortage and the increasingly pressing quest for settlers who would support white domination in the emerging Jim Crow state. Louisiana's romance with Italian labor began to sour when the new immigrants balked at low wages and dismal working conditions.

The newcomers also chose to live together in Italian neighborhoods, where they spoke their native tongue, preserved Italian customs and developed successful businesses that catered to African-Americans, with whom they fraternized and intermarried. In time, this proximity to blackness would lead white Southerners to view Sicilians, in particular, as not fully white and to see them as eligible for persecution — including lynching — that had customarily been imposed on African-Americans.

Nevertheless, as the historian Jessica Barabata Jackson showed recently in the journal *Louisiana History*, Italian newcomers were still well thought of in New Orleans in the 1870s when negative stereotypes were being established in the Northern press.

The *Times*, for instance, described them as bandits and members of the criminal classes who were "wretchedly poor and unskilled," "starving and wholly destitute." The stereotype about inborn criminality is plainly evident in an 1874 story about Italian immigrants seeking vaccinations that refers to one immigrant as a "burly fellow, whose appearance was like that of the traditional brigand of the Abruzzi."

A *Times* story in 1880 described immigrants, including Italians, as "links in a descending chain of evolution." These characterizations reached a defamatory crescendo in an

1882 editorial that appeared under the headline "Our Future Citizens." The editors wrote:

"There has never been since New York was founded so low and ignorant a class among the immigrants who poured in here as the Southern Italians who have been crowding our docks during the past year."

The editors reserved their worst invective for Italian immigrant children, whom they described as "utterly unfit — ragged, filthy, and verminous as they were — to be placed in the public primary schools among the decent children of American mechanics."

The racist myth that African-Americans and Sicilians were both innately criminal drove an 1887 *Times* story about a lynching victim in Mississippi whose name was given as "Dago Joe" — "dago" being a slur directed at Italian and Spanish-speaking immigrants. The victim was described as a "half breed" who "was the son of a Sicilian father and a mulatto mother, and had the worst characteristics of both races in his makeup. He was cunning, treacherous and cruel, and was regarded in the community where he lived as an assassin by nature."

Sicilians as 'Rattlesnakes'

The carnage in New Orleans was set in motion in the fall of 1890, when the city's popular police chief, David Hennessy, was assassinated on his way home one evening. Hennessy had no shortage of enemies. The historian John V. Baiamonte Jr. writes that he had once been tried for murder in connection with the killing of a professional rival. He is also said to have been involved in a feud between two Italian businessmen. On the strength of a clearly suspect witness who claimed to hear Mr. Hennessy say that "dagoes" had shot him, the city charged 19 Italians with complicity in the chief's murder.

That the evidence was distressingly weak was evident from the verdicts that were swiftly handed down: Of the first nine to be tried, six were acquitted; three others were granted mistrials. The

leaders of the mob that then went after them advertised their plans in advance, knowing full well that the city's elites — who coveted the businesses the Italians had built or hated the Italians for fraternizing with African-Americans — would never seek justice for the dead. After the lynching, a grand jury investigation pronounced the killings praiseworthy, turning that inquiry into what the historian Barbara Botein describes as “possibly one of the greatest whitewashes in American history.”

The blood of the New Orleans victims was scarcely dry when *The Times* published a cheerleading news story — “Chief Hennessy Avenged: Eleven of his Italian Assassins Lynched by a Mob” — that reveled in the bloody details. It reported that the mob had consisted “mostly of the best element” of New Orleans society. The following day, a scabrous *Times* editorial justified the lynching — and dehumanized the dead, with by-now-familiar racist stereotypes.

“These sneaking and cowardly Sicilians,” the editors wrote, “the descendants of bandits and assassins, who have transported to this country the lawless passions, the cutthroat practices... are to us a pest without mitigations. Our own rattlesnakes are as good citizens as they. Our own murderers are men of feeling and nobility compared to them.” The editors concluded of the lynching that it would be difficult to find “one individual who would confess that privately he deploras it very much.”

President Harrison would have ignored the New Orleans carnage had the victims been black. But the Italian government made that impossible. It broke off diplomatic relations and demanded an indemnity that the Harrison administration paid. Harrison even called on Congress in his 1891 State of the Union to protect foreign nationals — though not black Americans — from mob violence.

Harrison's Columbus Day proclamation in 1892 opened the door for Italian-Americans to write themselves into the American origin story, in a fashion that piled myth upon myth. As the historian

Danielle Battisti shows in “Whom We Shall Welcome,” they rewrote history by casting Columbus as “the first immigrant” — even though he never set foot in North America and never immigrated anywhere (except possibly to Spain), and even though the United States did not exist as a nation during his 15th-century voyage. The mythologizing, carried out over many decades, granted Italian-Americans “a formative role in the nation-building narrative.” It also tied Italian-Americans closely to the paternalistic assertion, still heard today, that Columbus “discovered” a continent that was already inhabited by Native Americans.

But in the late 19th century, the full-blown Columbus myth was yet to come. The New Orleans lynching solidified a defamatory view of Italians generally, and Sicilians in particular, as irredeemable criminals who represented a danger to the nation. The influential anti-immigrant racist Representative Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, soon to join the United States Senate, quickly appropriated the event. He argued that a lack of confidence injuries, not mob violence, had been the real problem in New Orleans.

“Lawlessness and lynching are evil things,” he wrote, “but a popular belief that juries cannot be trusted is even worse.”

Facts aside, Lodge argued, beliefs about immigrants were in themselves sufficient to warrant higher barriers to immigration. Congress ratified that notion during the 1920s, curtailing Italian immigration on racial grounds, even though Italians were legally white, with all of the rights whiteness entailed.

The Italian-Americans who labored in the campaign that overturned racist immigration restrictions in 1965 used the romantic fictions built up around Columbus to political advantage. This shows yet again how racial categories that people mistakenly view as matters of biology grow out of highly politicized myth making.

