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## The Chicago Americanization movement: Solutions to the immigrant problem

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**THE CHICAGO AMERICANIZATION MOVEMENT:  
SOLUTIONS TO THE IMMIGRANT PROBLEM**

**A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors**

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## I. Introduction

Our nation is in the midst of an increase in immigration from Mexico, an increase which many policy makers have called a “crisis”. This “crisis” has left our nation, and specifically educators, asking, “What do we do with these millions of immigrants, and their children, who are so different from us?” This concern over an influx of “others” is the basis of a long struggle between the native-born and immigrants. In fact, the rhetoric used today in reference to the current “immigrant problem” is a direct reflection of the ideas developed one hundred years ago, during the first Americanization movement that took place from 1914 to 1924. The phrase “English first” is just one example of the continuation of ideas that began during that movement. The leaders of the Americanization movement worked, as leaders today do, to legalize the responsibilities that native-born Americans and immigrants have towards one another.

When our nation perceived an “immigrant problem” at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a wave of programs sprang up with solutions for the lack of unity amongst the American people. Native-born Americans felt that something had to be done to restrict or change the immigrant, as his entrance into the nation was chipping away at the American way of life. From this fear, four ideas emerged: the melting pot, cultural pluralism, assimilation and restrictionism. Because they carried with them perceptions of immigrant quality and distinct visions of the future of the United States, these ideas guided reformers making efforts across the nation to solve the immigrant problem. The ideas exist today as driving forces behind choices being made in our nation’s educational and legal systems. Yet, the public and many leaders seem unaware that our nation has faced challenging “immigrant problems” in the past. Americans seem to think that immigrants in the past easily and willingly assimilated themselves to the American way. In addition, the American public seems unaware that the ideas they passionately support have

significant historical contexts. It is of essential importance that the historical context of each of these ideas be understood, so that leaders and voters today can make better choices than their predecessors did.

Chicago acts as an incredible source of information on the history of the four solutions used to solve the immigrant problem and the reality of the Americanization movement as whole. With an understanding of this movement, educators can better cope with the immigration challenges today and can use their words more wisely. This paper aims to clarify each of these four solutions to the immigrant problem and place them within the context of Americanization activities in Chicago. Between 1914 and 1924 the Americanization movement in Chicago followed the national pattern in its attempt to transform immigrants into homogenized Americans. Those who led the movement in Chicago used the ideas of assimilation, melting pot and cultural pluralism as tools to homogenize immigrants for more than ten years, only stopping when restrictionist ideas and new quota laws undermined their desire to continue the movement.

## **II. Literature Review**

Historians have written a great deal on the first national Americanization movement since it came to an end in 1924. Most recently, they have completed regional studies that analyze the effect of the movement on large immigrant populations in the west and Midwest. Most authors agree on the factors which led to the national Americanization movement, the existence of the four ideas and their rise and fall in popularity. Yet, scholars have understudied the ideas themselves. By focusing on the growth and use of the ideas, the specific actions taken on their behalf can be more effectively interpreted. To fully grasp the shifting culture of the United States, ideas and actions must be studied equally. This is the gap in the historiography which this research fills.

a. Factors Leading to the Americanization Movement

Factors leading to the Americanization movement include a dramatic increase in immigration in the four decades leading up to World War I, a change in the origin of those immigrants to less desirable nations, and heightened fears amongst native born Americans as they watched their cities flood with “others”.

At the turn of the century the United States was in the process of a great period of urbanization and industrialization. Its growing economic influence convinced millions of immigrants to leave their homes in search of the promised “good life”. Between just 1899 and 1910 nearly 9.6 million immigrants entered the United States, the majority settling in urban centers in the north.<sup>1</sup> Between 1890-1920 Chicago experienced a boom in population from 1.1 million to 2.7 million, due almost entirely to foreign immigrants. Chicago was not the only urban center to experience such a transformation. By 1910 more than three-fourths of the population of the nation’s top five cities was composed of immigrants and their children.<sup>2</sup> This rapid increase of immigrants between 1870 and 1910 appeared to most native-born Americans to be an “invasion”. This “invasion” of immigrant peoples challenged the status quo of the nation and made the differences between immigrants and foreign born more noticeable.

The literature clearly reveals the stark differences between the “new” immigrants of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “old” 19<sup>th</sup> century immigrants and native-born populations of the United States. Sharing a common Anglo-Saxon culture, the native-born population and the “old” immigrants were protestant, educated and familiar with democracy. On the other hand, the “new” immigrants from southern and eastern Europe were generally poor and illiterate. “New” immigrants had lived under autocratic rule and practiced religions like Catholicism, Orthodox Christianity and Judaism.<sup>3</sup> Together, these more visible differences and a lack of cultural understanding led the

Anglo-Saxon Americans to consider the “new” immigrants inferior. As “others”, the “new” immigrants became the focus of degrading rhetoric about their lack of intelligence and virtue.<sup>4</sup>

This increasing diversity fueled three important fears in Americans which drove leaders across the nation to pursue Americanization efforts. The first fear was the belief that the increased diversity divided Americans because they no longer shared a common language, religion, education or political experience. As immigrants entered urban centers they settled in ethnic enclaves with others from their home nations which allowed them to preserve their cultural traditions and languages. Native-born Americans hated these enclaves because they prevented assimilation. They viewed the “new immigrants” as stubborn and ungrateful towards the nation which had opened its doors to them.<sup>5</sup> As immigrants poured in, enclaves in cities like Chicago and New York grew in size, and this fear increased. Simply, leaders thought the nation would crumble into numerous “foreign colonies” in which loyalty to one’s ethnic homeland would trump one’s loyalty to the United States.

A lack of loyalty to the United States was the second great fear brought about by the “immigration problem” of 1914. Disloyalty became a primary concern as World War I progressed in Europe and the likelihood of American involvement increased. The ignorance of immigrants to the function of the government, American ideals, and the English language became clear when the the World War I draft of soldiers began. The draft was a disaster for the United States as it was discovered that one in five men were foreign-born and the great majority of them did not speak English.<sup>6</sup> Native-born Americans grew suspicious of foreigners, who did not appear to be true citizens. Citizenship was elevated to a national concern, as non-citizens were capable of directly harming the war effort.<sup>7</sup>

The possibility of subversive acts--the third fear--haunted leaders in politics and industry

throughout World War I. Many thought that immigrants would create chaos in the industrial sector, crippling the production of war goods essential for victory. The fear drove some industrial companies, like the Ford Motor Company, to organize spy networks to watch for treasonous activities. This fear of radicalism, based on the presumption that ignorance made immigrants more likely to embrace “evil” ideas, led to a high degree of suspicion and paranoia.<sup>8</sup> Numerous Americans feared “new immigrant” opposition to the war effort and concluded that the only solution to such a problem was “100 percent Americanism.” They called for each immigrant to swear allegiance to the United States and the American way of life *only*, abandoning ethnic ties and cultural traditions in favor of an American identity. Loyalty came to be synonymous with conformity and, as summarized by historian John F. McClymer, diversity suddenly “smacked of disloyalty.”<sup>9</sup>

This desire to protect the American way of life is reflected in the analysis of much of the historiography, as it was the cornerstone of the Americanization movement and the foundation of the previous two fears. The rush of “inferior” peoples into the United States was thought to be the cause of the dilution of American identity. Historian, Frank Van Nuys summarized this fear excellently, concluding that diversity challenged Americanism because “American identity... depended on the maintenance of cultural and racial homogeneity and the defense of the American race.”<sup>10</sup> Immigrants were viewed as a cultural threat because their ignorance of the American way of life threatened the image of the white, Christian nation as a whole. Native-born Americans worried that if immigrants continued to bring their “backward” ideas into the nation, the United States would lose its place as the “shining city on the hill.” Many Americans felt that the diversity of the nation, and the lack of democratic ideals within immigrant communities, had put the country on a path to self-destruction.<sup>11</sup>

b. The Americanization Movement

These three fears and heightened nationalism brought on by World War I resulted in a call for action by political and educational leaders. A new sense of urgency emerged in the rhetoric of the time. Native-born Americans argued that the survival of the nation depended on the correction of this societal flaw. Politicians called on Americans to join the “crusade” to Americanize the foreign-born and told foreigners that they must be completely American. The complacency of the past was gone; it was time to change the heart and soul of every American.<sup>12</sup> Although leaders did not provide a specific course of action, two distinct plans emerged. These plans were based on whether ancestry or environment constituted the most influential part of a person.

i. Environmentalists

One group of Americans believed that immigrants were inferior because their environment had made them that way. If they were placed in a superior American environment, they would easily adopt American values and become good citizens. While there were three different types of members of this group, they shared the belief that all immigrants, regardless of race, could become American citizens. This hopeful outlook on the “immigrant problem” included a “program of education and guidance” which would forge a new national unity.<sup>13</sup>

To these Americans, the public school system was a factory for “making” Americans in which education acted as a “homogenizing agent” on the minds and hearts of children.<sup>14</sup> Schools instilled American values in children from a young age and this shared experience helped to create unity in the nation. Educators stated that the school systems needed to “catch” immigrant children as early as possible in order to impress on them the American way. The countless numbers of illiterate immigrant adults also needed to be educated in American values, the

English language, and American history. This Americanization education would turn these “inferior” peoples into respectable citizens who deserved to benefit from the nation’s success. If this education did not take place, the social fabric of the nation would surely be torn apart.<sup>15</sup>

Within this group of Americans, three of the four “immigrant problem” ideas can be found. Assimilationists, Cultural Pluralists, and Melting Pot supporters promoted the power of education to solve the national crisis. Yet, they differed on the form and goal of the education process and the responsibilities that immigrants and native-born Americans had to one another.

Assimilationists composed the majority of the first Americanization movement. Assimilationists argued that the best course of action was to pressure foreigners to forgo their inferior heritage, foreign language and ethnic ties in favor of the English language and American allegiance only. It was the responsibility of immigrants to fit themselves into the American mold which had been presented to them. Conformity of all people in the United States to the superior American, or Anglo-Saxon, norms was viewed as the only solution to the “immigrant problem”.<sup>16</sup> The breakdown of foreign influences in the United States would promote American culture as a whole. Thus, Assimilationists viewed those immigrants who stubbornly held onto the culture of their homeland as destroyers of the American future. Assimilationists resented those immigrants who did not fully assimilate themselves into American society, as conformity had become synonymous with loyalty. World War I increased this pressure on immigrants and a movement against “Hyphens” began. Many Americans, including Theodore Roosevelt, felt that a “Hyphen” could not be trusted as he “was one who put the interests of his former homeland before those of his adopted country. This group concluded that it was impossible for an immigrant to be loyal to more than one nation or more than one culture. You were either completely American or not American at all. Thus, an ethnic tie was no longer a personal choice;

it was a matter of national security. Those who persisted in retaining their inferior, foreign culture committed “moral treason” against the nation and needed to be stopped.<sup>17</sup>

The cultural pluralists composed only a small portion of the Americanization movement because the suspicion and fear brought on by World War I drowned out their calls for a more accepting, cosmopolitan approach. Unlike assimilationists, cultural pluralists defended the value in all cultures, and the benefit of diversity to the nation. Cultural pluralists thought the cultures immigrants brought to the United States added to American society.<sup>18</sup> Pluralists envisioned that the various groups, with their unique cultural “instruments”, would come together as a “symphony of civilization”. The practical function of this type of society was not detailed, but the vision was a powerful one for members of this group.<sup>19</sup> Cultural pluralists pushed for Americans to be educated in citizenship and cultural competency so that they could interact with immigrants in a positive way and participate fully in their new home. In this way, the Americanization movement would act as a cultural exchange rather than the aggressive coercion of one group to change another.

Leaders of this movement, including intellectuals and immigrants, reasoned that preservation of culture was essential to the success of the nation. Cultural pluralists argued that the nation was founded by immigrants and that assimilationist and restrictionist actions violated the ideals of American society, freedom and democracy.<sup>20</sup> The nation benefitted from the promotion of interethnic understanding; it suffered when radical patriotism homogenized diversity. Therefore, cultural pluralists supported immigrants who established parochial schools and foreign language papers to preserve their cultural heritage. These organizations promoted pride in one’s culture as well as loyalty to the United States. Cultural pluralists did not see cultural pride and loyalty to the United States as mutually exclusive. In their view, the

commitment one had to the United States was the most important factor in determining whether one was a loyal American. Racial background, language and religion should not be factors in that decision. Cultural pluralists insisted that diversity did not constitute disloyalty and pointed out the unfairness of labeling immigrants as unpatriotic when so many immigrant men were fighting on the front lines.<sup>21</sup> To this group, diversity and cultural pride constituted essential components to individual identity and American identity as a whole.

The last education-based ideology, the “melting pot,” has become a common idea in American politics despite the fact that its true meaning is lost. The “melting pot” ideology was developed by playwright Israel Zangwill in his 1908 work *The Melting Pot*.<sup>22</sup> It called for the melting of *all* people, so a new brand of American citizen would be forged. These new citizens, a combination of many cultures, would create a stronger nation. This was the most radical of the education based ideas and the one which had the fewest true followers during the movement. Between 1914-1924, assimilationists used melting pot theory to justify their actions, which conflicted with the original goals of the approach. The “melting pot” became synonymous with conformity, in which immigrants did all of the melting.<sup>23</sup> Adding to this, the newly forged liquid would be poured into pre-made “American” molds, which promoted the continuation of Anglo-Saxon norms over all others.<sup>24</sup> This reflects the usage of the “melting pot” today, in which immigrants are expected to forget their heritage and dive into the American pot. This application of the “melting pot” ideology would have horrified its creators.

#### ii. Restrictionists

The above three ideas promoted the idea that the immigrant was not restricted by his heritage. The final of the four ideas states the opposite idea. Restrictionists thought that immigrants from inferior regions of the world should not be welcomed into the United States.

Supporters of this movement told the American people that no amount of education or guidance could change the innate, inferior qualities of these new immigrants.<sup>25</sup> Their illiteracy and poverty made them ineligible for citizenship and thus not worth the effort of Americanization education. Their entrance into the United States should be restricted in order to protect the American “stock”. Supporters of restriction feared the mixing of races would cause a dilution of Anglo-Saxon bloodlines and result in a loss of democracy and freedom as uneducated immigrants took over the nation.<sup>26</sup> These anxieties led restrictionists to call for tougher requirements for admission and citizenship.

This ideology did not become popular until the end of the Americanization movement as many leaders supported education as the best solution for the “immigrant problem”. Yet, a “sense of alarm that too much was changing and that not enough had changed that needed changing” swept across the nation in the last years of the movement.<sup>27</sup> A feeling of failure emerged because the Americanization movement had not achieved its lofty goal of one hundred percent homogeneity. Taking this failure as proof that immigrants were incapable of being positive members of American society, restrictionists successfully lobbied for tighter immigration laws. These laws established immigration quotas and ultimately resulted in a dramatic reduction in immigration and the end of the Americanization movement as a whole.<sup>28</sup>

In conclusion, the historiography completed on the first Americanization movement has been focused primarily on national changes and eastern cities such as New York City. The effect of the Americanization movement in the urban Midwest, in a diverse city like Chicago, has not been studied. In addition, historians have focused on the mechanisms of Americanization rather than the ideas which drove the usage of those mechanisms. Unfortunately, the origin and popularization of ideas about immigration, Americanism and the future of the American nation

have largely been ignored. Finally, the relationships between the four ideas which drove Americanization have been overlooked by historians. In order to evaluate the Americanization movement as a whole it is important to understand the thought processes which drove action. The historiography of the first Americanization movement is thus incomplete.

### **III. Argument**

#### **a. Immigrants in Chicago**

Chicago acts as an excellent source of information about the Americanization movement because of the sheer number of immigrants who called the city home. In the 1900 national census, Illinois was listed as having experienced the third fastest population growth, behind New York and Pennsylvania. Illinois had experienced a population increase of 24.3 percent between 1880 and 1890 and an increase of 26.0 percent between 1890 and 1900.<sup>29</sup> Chicago alone experienced a population increase from 503,185 people in 1880 to 1,608,575 people in 1900. This population increase is due to a variety of factors, one of the most important being “an increase in excess of immigrants.”<sup>30</sup> This pattern continued in Illinois. In 1910, 51.9 percent of the state’s population was foreign-born or children of foreign-born parents. It was reported that urban areas had the largest percentages of foreign-born individuals, not surprising given the fact that urban areas provided greater opportunities for employment.<sup>31</sup> In 1900, Chicago was home to 585,420 foreign-born immigrants; in 1910, Chicago was home to 781,217 foreign-born individuals; and in 1920, the city was home to 805,482 foreign-born individuals.<sup>32</sup> From these statistics it is clear that immigration was an important factor in the growth of Chicago.

In addition, the change in origin of immigrants appears in the census information about Chicago in the 1900, 1910 and 1920 censuses. In the 1900 census, the top five origin nations of foreign-born immigrants were Germany, Austria, Ireland, Russia and Sweden. In 1910, the top

five remained the same, but Italian foreign-born population almost tripled. In 1920, the composition of Chicago foreign-born immigrants changed with the top five origin nations including immigrants from Poland, Germany, Russia, Italy and Sweden.<sup>33</sup> Chicago is thus a prime example of the change in immigration that occurred between 1880 and 1920 which was the driving force behind the Americanization movement.

Chicago was a prime center of settlement for immigrants because of the great number of employment opportunities available. Chicago was a “national transportation hub... the meatpacking center for the country, and a major producer of farm equipment, automobiles, and steel” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>34</sup> Immigrants arrived in waves, seeking better jobs and better lives, and the city was soon divided into a great number of ethnic enclaves. A report produced by the Chicago Community Trust titled “Americanization in Chicago,” characterizes the city as cosmopolitan, which is certainly reflected in its large number of immigrants from a variety of origin nations. The survey lists thirteen foreign language groups and thirty nationalities, not including those labeled “other,” which speaks volumes of the diversity which did exist in Chicago during the Americanization movement.<sup>35</sup> In summary, as clarified in the Chicago Heights Star, the number of immigrants in Chicago, “shows that the immigration problem is our problem.”<sup>36</sup>

#### b. Chicago and the Americanization Movement

While the motivation for Americanization activities existed in Chicago, the city only practiced Americanization programs between 1917-1922.<sup>37</sup> One of the earliest mentions of Americanization in Chicago newspapers occurred in the spring of 1916 in the outline of a Bureau of Education cooperative program. This program planned the opening of night schools for immigrants beginning in the fall. At the end of 1916, a newspaper reported that night schools

would open across Chicago the following year.<sup>38</sup> The Americanization movement in Chicago consisted of a variety of activities, almost entirely focused on the assimilation of the immigrant into American society. The purpose of these activities was to “convey an understanding of the language but also a set of appropriately ‘American’ values” to the immigrants so that they could become American citizens.<sup>39</sup> In this way, the Americanization movement in Chicago relied on the first three of the solutions most heavily in its attempts to unite the city. When the war excitement calmed down, the Americanization movement in Chicago began to fragment. It stopped following the passage of the Emergency Quota Act. In summary, the Americanization movement in Chicago was very similar to but shorter than the national movement.

### c. Assimilation

Assimilation drove almost all Americanization activities in the nation--and in Chicago--between 1914 and 1920. Peter Roberts, an advocate for the Americanization program, described the fundamental principles of this idea excellently in his guidebook titled *The Problem of Americanization*. Roberts raised three fundamental questions: How can unity be achieved in the United States? What is the role of the immigrant? And, in what way is America exceptional?

#### i. Assimilationist Beliefs

Roberts answered these three questions, writing, “America’s future is full of hope, but it is inseparably involved in the question of whether or not we are willing to weld our five million aliens to the body politic.”<sup>40</sup> He stated that, first, only “welding” immigrants into the American way of life would result in the necessary homogenization of the nation. Next, the role of the immigrant was to “weld” as quickly and thoroughly as possible, a process in which differences would melt away. Finally, America was exceptional because it had the power to turn the inferior millions into proper citizens.

First, homogeneity was the key to unity and the only way to ensure the survival of the America way of life. Theodore Roosevelt best explained this rationality when he stated that, “the one certain way of bringing this nation to ruin...would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities...each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality than with the other citizens of the American Republic.”<sup>41</sup> The most popular assimilationist of the nation, President Roosevelt, like others, firmly believed that differences, especially those of culture, would destroy the nation. He often repeated this idea in speeches. In 1918 Roosevelt called for unity again, declaring, “we must insist that this whole country be unified, nationalized, Americanized, and that no division of our American loyalty....to an alien flag be for an instant tolerated.”<sup>42</sup>

The Chicago newspapers echoed this desire to protect everything “American”. The Cook County Herald quotes assimilationist Dr. Dudley Grant Hays’ Women’s Club address, in which he stated that the United States had a “rich heritage of national community customs worth perpetuating.”<sup>43</sup> The “Americanization in Chicago Report” clearly stated this determination to defend America in 1920. The author argued that “the basis for a sound society is found in a healthy and congenial community life” in which differences are expelled. The report asks its readers, “Are we a united people?...Do the people know each other? Do the people understand each other?” in an effort to show them that the differences between people in the United States are important and dangerous.<sup>44</sup>

The feelings expressed by the Chicago Americanization leaders were direct reflections of the beliefs expressed on a national level about the need for unity through removal of differences. At the final Americanization conference in 1919, those who attended recited the “American’s Creed” declaring the nation as, “a perfect union, one and inseparable.”<sup>45</sup> Yet, it is clear that those

who supported assimilation wanted this unity to extend from the state to the community level. In his opening address, Fred C. Butler pointed out that the nation was on its way to being a “polyglot boarding house,” a phrase often used by Roosevelt.<sup>46</sup>

In summary, a poem titled “The American,” featured in the *Englewood Economist* in 1920 best expresses the belief of assimilationists that homogeneity was the path to unity. In this humorous but telling poem, a native-born man declares “don’t open your mouth to speak of your socialists or your anarchists, don’t mention the Bolsheviks, I’ve had enough of this foreign stuff.... One God, one flag is the creed, I brag.”<sup>47</sup> This piece beautifully expresses that ultimate desire to make the nation “one” in all matters. This poem introduces the second belief of assimilationists, the role of the immigrant as future Americans.

Assimilationists determined that the role of the immigrant was to become thoroughly American, a desire that assumed two important things: that environment mattered most, and that assimilation change occurred in only one direction. Assimilationists supported homogeneity as the path to unity because they felt that immigrants could change, which in turn demanded that they believed that a person’s environment was more significant than his heritage. In his work, *The Problem of Americanization*, Peter Roberts said that to be an assimilationist you must understand that, “these men who come from foreign countries have in them the stuff of which governing citizens are made.”<sup>48</sup> He reasoned that foreigners were born into a bad environment and that with the right environment they had the potential to become full-fledged American citizens. Roberts thought that ninety-five percent of all immigrants were good and wanted to learn, and that an assimilation program based on kindness would forge them into American citizens.<sup>49</sup> Once again Teddy Roosevelt best summarized this aspect of assimilationist beliefs in a speech given in Chicago in 1916, where he commented that citizenship “does not depend upon

the man's birthplace, it does not depend upon the man's creed. It does depend upon the man's soul, and upon his possession of a single-minded and whole hearted loyalty to this country of ours."<sup>50</sup>

On a local level, Chicago newspapers appealed to their readers to assist in the assimilation movement. One stated that "a very great majority of the foreigners coming to our shores are all right and willing to obey our laws and customs when they come here" but were swayed by bad people before they got a chance to show their potential.<sup>51</sup> It was up to American citizens to help these people reach their full potential. Another article demonstrates this focus on environment over heritage, summarizing that instead of looking down on immigrants because of the faults of their upbringing, people should instead show them sympathy and the path to a better life.<sup>52</sup> One final article from Chicago adds that foreigners could change when they were taken out of their inferior environment, either their foreign home or their foreign enclave in the city. This writer thought that the material of a good citizen was abundant and that immigrants only needed opportunities to become good citizens.<sup>53</sup> In essence, assimilationists widely took for granted that immigrants were capable of change and had the potential to be equal to native-born citizens.

Second, assimilationists assumed that assimilation occurred in only one direction. Roberts discussed this one-way change in *The Problem of Americanization* in which he stated that immigrants must be brought up to the American standard of living so that they could live better lives. The "new" immigrants were born and raised in inferior nations and thus needed to be brought up to the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon culture. He assumed that it was the "aliens" who must change because America had achieved a higher standard of living than any other country, as represented by the fact that it was the "hope of the world."<sup>54</sup> This ethnocentrism is apparent in the publications of Chicago newspapers as well. An article titled "Child Training at

Home” states that the “odd little foreign lads and lassies... did not seem to know how to play,” dress or behave properly. The article provides many examples of the inferior clothing and play of immigrant children and then urges Americans to help in the assimilation process so that the children could learn “how to live in the American town.”<sup>55</sup> This article speaks volumes on the assumption by many assimilationists that it was the “odd” immigrants who needed to be changed. Attendees of the national Americanization Conference in 1919 frequently mentioned the transformation of immigrants as opposed to a mutual exchange between all people.. The Commissioner of Education, Dr. Claxton, affirmed that immigrants needed help to be transformed “into good Americans” and that they relied on Americans to provide them with opportunities to learn about the nation and what it meant to be a good American.<sup>56</sup>

Assimilationists answered the question, “What constitutes a good American?” with a variety of descriptions, the majority of which focused on undivided loyalty. First, Roberts characterized his ideal citizen as someone who “puts patriotism above partisanship, principles above personalities, country above creed.”<sup>57</sup> On a different note, Theodore Roosevelt described the perfect American as someone who, “shows himself to be a 100 percent American, wholehearted and single-minded in his loyalty to this country” with the justification that “there is room here only for 100 percent Americans and nothing else.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, the *Englewood Times* characterized being an American as “a big thing, it is to be something more than Democrat, Republican, Russian, Englishmen.... American citizenship means that we are to be Americans first, last and all the time.”<sup>59</sup> It is clear in these examples that assimilationists expected those who claimed to be American to be American and nothing else.

This push against those things deemed un-American led to a national movement called “anti-hyphen” or “100 percent Americanism” which criticized immigrants for retaining anything

deemed un-American. Theodore Roosevelt concisely summed it up when he said that “a hyphenated American is not an American at all.”<sup>60</sup> According to assimilationists of this period, becoming an American was an all or nothing process. If an immigrant completed the assimilation process, he had “a right to insist that we treat him exactly on a level with every other American,” but, if he did not live up to this requirement, then he should be deported immediately because he was not a worthy citizen.<sup>61</sup> Roosevelt summarized the ridiculousness of dual loyalty when he said, “there is no such thing as being loyal to the United States, and also loyal to any other power. It is just as impossible as for a man to be loyal to his wife and also equally loyal to some other woman.” Simply, Roosevelt and others deemed that dual loyalty was diluted loyalty.

This national assimilationist movement for one-hundred percent Americanism trickled down very clearly into Chicago Americanization ideology. In publications from 1915-1922, there are countless examples of calls for one-hundred percent Americanism, including bashing immigrants who did not think of the United States first, a declaration that you were either for the United States or for the Kaiser, and a quotation from Charles Evans Hughes in which he stated that he stood for “an Americanism that knows no ulterior purpose, for a patriotism that is single and complete.”<sup>62</sup> The black and white world view of assimilationists was made very clear in these articles. It hailed back to their second belief, the role of the immigrant to change who and what they are to fit the American mold. Assimilationists thought that it was reasonable for them to expect this change because the nation had the power to make worthy citizens out of the most inferior of peoples.

Finally, assimilationists, like most Americans, believed that the United States was the most exceptional country in the world. In a political cartoon featured on the front page of the *Cook County Herald*, beams of heavenly light shine on President Lincoln as he stands over a

map of the nation. The words peace and prosperity appear beneath him, signifying the support God gave to the nation.<sup>63</sup> Assimilationists felt that because the environment had the largest influence on a person's character and success, one of the greatest gifts of the United States was its ability to improve inferior immigrants.

#### ii. Assimilation Activities in Chicago

Supporters of assimilation argued that making Americans out of immigrants was best achieved through rapid and thorough education on all things American. This idea led to greater support of public schools which then became foundations for social order and function. An article in the Cook County Herald expounds this change: "speaking of Americanizing our newly acquired citizens, surely there is no place where this is so well accomplished as in our schools." Another article declares that "the heart of America lies in our schools and the teachings as exemplified there are the real foundations of future America."<sup>64</sup> The 1920 *Americanization of Chicago Report* examines the use of public schools to Americanize immigrants. It asserts that public schools were "reaching more people than all other Americanization agencies combined" and that the public schools would act as "a common experience for the diverse children they were preparing for respectful citizenship."<sup>65</sup> In summary, public schools became factories where immigrants were to be molded into future American citizens.

Creating new Americans required two essential steps: "a common language, the English language" and an "increase in social loyalty-citizenship, absolutely undivided."<sup>66</sup> First, the use of a single language was determined to be essential for the unity of the country because of the "hundreds of thousands of alien men and women... who are ignorant of our tongue and dead to the traditions of democracy." Roberts argued that "ignorance was a menace to democracy" and without a literate, English-speaking citizenry the nation could not survive. Commissioner of

Education Claxton addressed this issue during the final Americanization Conference in 1919, detailing the practical need of a single language to communicate laws, news, and warnings to all people. Claxton felt that it was the first, and most important, objective of the Americanization movement because it would help move the immigrants out of their inferior environment and into the superior American environment.<sup>67</sup>

On a local level, Chicagoans agreed that English was an essential first step in the process of assimilation. One article states that the “quickest way to make an all-round American out of a new arrival is to teach him to talk our language.” Another article quips that, “immigrants should learn the American language immediately upon arrival as it sounds almost rude to criticize our government and everything connected with it in mixed jargon.” While this article’s goal is to poke fun at the speech of immigrants, it hints at the inability of those immigrants to fully participate in politics when they are unable to speak English. These feelings grabbed the nation as a whole and, by 1923, thirty-four states had made English the sole language of public schools. In that year Illinois legislators declared that “American” was the official language of the state as it was necessary for the preservation of national unity.<sup>68</sup>

The second step of assimilation was the citizenship training of immigrants followed by their successful naturalization. Education Commissioner Claxton addressed this when he summarized that immigrants would never be able to experience freedom, happiness and equality if they did not understand the ideals of the nation. He felt that the American story was exceptional and “a story worth knowing.”<sup>69</sup> A naturalization booklet from 1919 best explains the need for citizenship training. The naturalization process itself required that applicants be literate in English, swear an oath of allegiance, file a series of paperwork, and pass a citizenship test. The material for this citizenship test takes up ninety-seven pages of the booklet and includes

information on the rights of citizens, government organizations, American history, important American documents, holidays, biographies of thirty-three American leaders, national hymns, American ideals, and a series of creeds and pledges.<sup>70</sup> Assimilationists believed that without intense citizenship training and assimilation endeavors it would be almost impossible for new immigrants to pass such a detailed and Anglo-Saxon-biased test.

Citizenship training was primarily completed through public schools, night schools for adults, and community centers. The *Americanization in Chicago Report* listed thirty-one night schools, sixty-two community centers, sixty factory classes, and twenty mother's classes are listed. Between 1917 and 1924 local newspapers published countless articles about night schools for adults, the most popular program run by assimilationists. Newspapers provided immigrants with a great deal of information about these night classes including the types of classes offered, the number of students who attended, the graduation rate, and the facilitators of such programs.

First, there were a wide range of night classes offered to fit the needs and interests of adults, including English lessons, art classes, technical and shop courses, naturalization preparation courses, and high school courses.<sup>71</sup> The aim of these courses was to transform immigrants into a real citizen by immersing them in American patterns of behavior and thought. The assimilationists wanted to change every aspect of immigrant's lives so that they fit into the prescribed American mold. Female educators, who had received minimal training, typically facilitated these courses. These facilitators were "a corps of fifty-six volunteer workers, many of them married women with home responsibilities, who have been receiving training... in the Americanization of the foreign born." Teachers who were paid led classes over twenty, but volunteers led smaller courses.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, newspapers reported the attendance at these night schools. Numbers of

attendees varied considerably between sources, from 6,000 individuals enrolled at the Englewood evening school to a staggering figure of more than 52,000 individuals attending all evening schools in the Chicago area.<sup>73</sup> Smaller groups also advertised their relatively low enrollment numbers, with class sizes as few as twelve members. These attendance numbers differ considerably from those presented in the *Americanization in Chicago*, which stated that Americanization activities throughout Chicago reached only 25,000 immigrants.<sup>74</sup> Although there is no explanation for this difference, it is possible that these figures represent those students who attended regularly and graduated.

Newspaper articles featured graduations of students who had completed their studies and passed the naturalization exams. These ceremonies often featured speeches by assimilationists who hailed the hard work of the immigrants and applauded them for their transformation into real Americans. In several cases only a handful of students graduated from these courses after years of study. In just one extraordinary case, fifty students graduated from a citizenship course in Hamilton Park.<sup>75</sup> These numbers are incredibly low considering the high enrollment rates advertised over the years, a result of the ineffectiveness of the courses. Bad courses resulted in poor attendance and ultimately heavily reduced graduation rates over the course of the Americanization movement.

The facilitators of these programs were not concerned with the background of the immigrants, which left classes boring and frustrating for students. Roberts clarified that, “the foreign-born was very practical. He wants what is useful... he wants that which he can use in his daily life.” Often, the courses in English used children’s material which was not relevant to immigrants’ quest for naturalization papers or better employment.<sup>76</sup> As a result, immigrants became frustrated and stopped attending the courses after only a few weeks, choosing to spend

their limited free time on more useful endeavors. The *Americanization in Chicago Report* addresses this phenomenon, stating that assimilation activities only reached immigrants for “very brief periods in a week or a month” after which they continued on being foreigners. The report twice addresses the seriousness of the movement, stating that the task of Americanizing through classes, must an intelligent one.<sup>77</sup> The inclusion of such a statement in this short document suggests that the classes were not as successful as assimilationist leaders had hoped. A *Cook County Herald* editorial echoes this disappointment in the evening classes detailing that, “aliens will come to the night school for a while, learn to read a little, and then they will get discouraged.”<sup>78</sup> Overall, it appears that the poor quality of Americanization education activities frustrated immigrants and assimilationists.

Chicagoans attempted many other assimilationist programs during the movement, including community centers, libraries, and boys’ activities. First, community centers were locations of informal education for immigrants where they could be taught American ideals of thought and behavior. The first mention of a Chicago community center specifically targeting immigrants was in 1917, when plans were publicized for a community center in Chicago Heights. This community center was to be “open to all creeds and nationalities” and would do “a great good for the community.” One such public good, mothers’ classes, highlighted the breadth of the assimilation movement. Community centers often held mother’s classes for immigrant women so that they could be taught how to speak English and how to properly care for their children.<sup>79</sup> Twenty such classes existed in the Chicago area in 1920 which enrolled approximately four hundred women, a small number of classes for the multitudes of immigrant women.

The public library, was called the “most democratic of American educational institutions”

by Chicago newspapers throughout the Americanization movement. Libraries were open to the public and were considered one of the best places to continue the ideas learned in the public school system. In addition, libraries touted themselves as being a comfortable location where immigrants could gain the knowledge needed to transform themselves into Americans. Libraries carried texts in foreign languages as well as English and could offer immigrants countless books about Americanization. Finally, librarians expressed their desire to be advisers to immigrants on their path to becoming Americans.<sup>80</sup> Clearly libraries were just another piece in the assimilation puzzle in which many Americans strived to open the eyes of immigrants to America and American culture.

Finally, there were several attempts to train boys in citizenship and American ideals through Boy Scout and summer training programs. The Boy Scout program began in 1910 and had provided citizenship training to more than a million boys by 1921. The program claimed to create Americans out of immigrant and native-born children across the nation. Leaders of the program declared their determination to continue “building 100 percent Americanism into the United States of tomorrow,” a clear expression of their assimilationist attitudes towards the immigrant problem.<sup>81</sup> Another program, a summer training program for boys between the ages of 17-24, was based solely in Chicago. This program planned to enroll 40,000 boys who would be trained in “military tactics, personal hygiene, and etiquette” were taught. Open to native and foreign born boys, this program claimed to help boys be better men (Americans).<sup>82</sup> This summer camp is another example of the wide range of formal and informal education programs which assimilationists enacted in an attempt to homogenize the great mass of foreigners in the nation.

Although these programs varied in their success, assimilationists proudly and frequently advertised their achievements in Chicago newspapers. Naturalization announcements are

common place in newspapers articles of the period, yet the success stories of immigrants turned Americans are the seemingly far more powerful propaganda tool of assimilationists. One such piece tells the story of an immigrant who showed his patriotism by refusing to take the alien draft exemption. Another, placed in the midst of a marriage announcement, states the desire of an immigrant to get his naturalization papers “as soon as good old Uncle Sam will let him.” One other, the longest of these pieces of propaganda, tells the story of Joseph A. Roth, a Hungarian immigrant who came to America with only \$1.40 who, with hard work, became a successful business man and American.<sup>83</sup> All of these stories popularized the notion that unity could be achieved through the transformation immigrants.

#### d. Melting Pot

The melting pot metaphor was first used by French writer J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur in his collection of essays titled, *Letters from an American Farmer*. In this work, Crevecoeur characterized the American people as a “mixture of English, Scotch, Irish, French, Dutch, Germans, and Swedes. From this promiscuous breed, that race now called Americans have arisen.” He stated that the American race was a “strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country” which includes men who leave “behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced.” Finally, Crevecoeur determined that this was possible in America because “individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.”<sup>84</sup> In this metaphor, all races are tossed into the melting pot and forged into a new race which retains only the best qualities of the original races. Americans were an entirely new race of human beings whose mixed heritage made them superior to other isolated races around the world. No one race controlled the melting and, as such, all were equally required to exchange

their old identities for a new American one.

This understanding of the term melting pot changed drastically beginning in 1908 with the publication of Israel Zangwill's play, *The Melting Pot*. This play tells the story of a young Russian Jew named David Quixano who emigrated to the United States in hopes of living in a nation without hatred. Over the course of the play, he falls in love with a Russian Orthodox Christian woman and faces racial prejudice from Americans because of his Jewish heritage. As a talented musician, he composes a symphony titled "The Crucible" through which he expresses his hope that differences amongst people will melt away to be replaced by equality for all. In this work, the melting down precedes shaping into an Anglo-Saxon American mold. The many negative comments about Judaism in the play reflect the distrust and dislike of anything outside of the American mold. Early in the play, the Quixano family cook, confused by Judaism, asks, "why don't ye have a sensible religion." Later, after forgetting to celebrate Purim, David justifies his forgetfulness by exclaiming, "Who can remember Purim in America?" David's "forgetfulness" points to his belief that American cultural practices are more worthwhile, and that his Jewish heritage is of no use to him in a place as progressive and exciting as America. One final comment occurs during a conversation about allowing Jewish musicians into symphonies in the city, when an American states that "I wouldn't have a Jew if he paid *me*."<sup>85</sup> All three of these examples highlight the inequality inherent in the new form of the melting pot.

There are many passages in the play devoted to David's love of the United States which show how fervently he attempts to rid himself of his Jewish heritage in favor of an American one. David addresses his hopes when coming to America, "the place where God would wipe away tears from off all faces," where one can escape oppression.<sup>86</sup> His reference to God's existence in America points to his belief that America was the chosen land, superior above all

others in the world. This deep desire to transform into an American is expressed most clearly in David's emotional performance of "The Flag of the Republic" after watching young children saluting the American flag. In this scene David recites, "we, the natives of distant lands, who find rest under thy folds, do pledge our hearts, our lives, our sacred honour to love and protect thee."<sup>87</sup>

In addition to pointing out the inequality of people, this new melting pot process adopts the industrial language of the time period. David outlines this melting pot process:

"America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand.... in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to- these are the fires of God. Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians- into the Crucible with you all.... God is making the American.... The real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the Crucible, I tell you- he will be the fusion of all races, perhaps the coming superman."<sup>88</sup>

While it may superficially appear that the melting pot is still mixing all people equally into one superior race, the industrial language points to a different understanding of the usage of the melting pot. The idea of the crucible, a container used to melt down metal, requires someone to pour contents into it, someone to mix the substance while it melts, and someone to pour the melted material into a mold of some kind. In all of these cases it is easy to assume from the language of the play that the person in charge of this process would be an Anglo-Saxon American.

This natural, painless process had become unnatural and forced. Continuing through the metaphor the crucible itself is used to melt down metals to remove impurities. If the individual in

charge of this process is of Anglo-Saxon heritage one can assume that impurities in the mixture will be those things which are foreign to him, namely the culture of the “new” immigrants. Now, the melting pot process is focused on the melting down of a select few individuals rather than the entire population. Finally, one melts down metal in order to pour it into a mold of some kind, a concept which the author was surely familiar with. Thus, the mixture must fit into the predesigned mold rather than forming something entirely new. If one continues to assume that Anglo-Saxon individuals retained power in the nation, it becomes clear that this mold would reflect the creators themselves. Thus, all those placed into the melting pot would become Anglo-Saxon Americans. By following this metaphor to its conclusion one can see the transformation of the melting pot from a symbol of equality to a symbol of American superiority<sup>89</sup>

With this new understanding, melting pot supporters acted with the following core beliefs during the Americanization movement: unity would be achieved when the impurities of the foreigners were melted away; the immigrant’s role in the United States was to rid himself of everything un-American; and the United States was exceptional because it could melt away the differences between people and successfully incorporate large numbers of new citizens.<sup>90</sup> The melting pot analogy had become a tool by which assimilationists could help immigrants transform into Americans. Simply, the melting pot became synonymous with assimilation ideology and activities. Historian Jeffrey E. Mirel summarized this transition when he stated that, “the phrase mistakenly has come to metaphorically describe the complete assimilation of immigrants into Anglo-American culture.”<sup>91</sup>

This is best illustrated by the fact that Israel Zangwill’s play was dedicated to Theodore Roosevelt, a staunch nativist and one of the most vocal supporters of assimilation. The dedication reads, “To Theodore Roosevelt, in respectful recognition of his strenuous struggle

against the forces that threaten to shipwreck the great Republic which carries mankind its fortunes.”<sup>92</sup> If Zangwill prescribed to the earlier understanding of the melting pot analogy he would not have thought of new immigrants as forces threatening the nation, as all people were of equal melting value in that earlier concept. No one race was dangerous to another because they would all be evenly mixed in the great melting pot, leaving behind their flaws and emerging as a new, better race of human beings.

The famous Ford Motor Company’s Melting Pot graduation ceremony best exemplifies the use of the melting pot as a tool of assimilation. The Ford Motor Company enacted an aggressive nine-month Americanization program for their immigrant employees. The culmination of this program was a ceremony which sought to symbolize the melting down of immigrants and their remolding into true Americans. Mirel recounted this ceremony in which “the graduates first appeared wearing the clothes of their original homeland and slowly filed into a huge paper-mache cauldron... Atop this cauldron, teachers... stirred the numerous nationalities together using long ladles.... Eventually, the men emerged from the cauldron dressed exactly alike in a dark American-style suit and tie, and each waving a tiny American flag.”<sup>93</sup>

The idea that only some inferior things were melted down was also expressed in Chicago newspaper articles, one of which states that, “it is all very well to think of America as a melting pot, but one must remember that some things won’t melt down unless we make it very hot for them.”<sup>94</sup> Other articles point to the need for a mold during the melting pot process, one writing that, “Chicago’s melting-pot is too much of a bullet mould.” Another calls for a great mold to improve the character of children in the public school systems.<sup>95</sup> These two examples point to the industrial nature of the new melting pot process which required both an American facilitator and an American mold.

Chicagoans most commonly used the term “melting-pot” to describe Chicago as a place where aliens were quickly absorbed and molded into Americans. There was no sense of equality in this understanding of the melting pot. Rather, the melting pot was the process of absorbing the alien population into the American way of life. Descriptions of programs as melting pots clearly preferred American over other nationalities. One writer stated that kindergarten was a melting pot where “ideals were projected upon the fresh little minds.”<sup>96</sup> Immigrants’ ideals were not on an equal plane with American ideals. Rather, immigrants were expected to leave their heritages behind and embrace Americanism. Finally, this perception of the melting pot was extended to the exceptionalism of the nation, described by a Chicago writer as “the greatest land, the melting pot of nations.”<sup>97</sup> The United States was considered superior to other countries because it had the power to melt down newcomers and pour them into the American mold.

A 1916 Englewood Evening School graduation was a rare exception to the industrial understanding of the melting pot. In this ceremony, planned by the students themselves, representatives of various nations placed their native country’s flag in a real pot in which they burned together. As the flags burned, the representatives prayed in their native languages for a future where a federation of the world would “usher in an age of the Kingdom of God,” in which all people would be treated equally.<sup>98</sup> Unlike previous examples, in this one there was no supervisor, no mold and no magical transformation into a quintessential American. Rather, the representatives all had an equal share in the slow, natural process of melting together. The conclusion of this ceremony, a prayer for future equality calls to mind the original meaning of the metaphor, in which all people will merge into one new race, without prejudice. Although this is an example of a different understanding of the melting pot metaphor, it is but one exceptional case, created by the immigrants rather than Americanizers, in a larger movement towards the use

of the metaphor to describe assimilation practices.

In conclusion, melting pot supporters of the Americanization movement were largely assimilationists with a different name. Thus the activities in which they engaged were those activities discussed previously. The melting pot idea became just another component of the assimilation process of the Americanization movement.

#### e. Cultural Pluralism

Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne, public intellectuals in the early twentieth century best expressed the ideology of cultural pluralism in their respective essays “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot” and “Trans-National America.” Both authors thought that unity could only be achieved through the maintenance of cultural diversity and a movement towards greater social equality between individuals of different nationalities. Kallen argued that it was ridiculous to force immigrants to abandon their heritage, because it could not be eradicated and it made them who they were. He stated that forced “Americanizing,” through the processes of melting pot and assimilation, would result in a fake Americanism as well as an intensification of nationalism.<sup>99</sup> Bourne added that forced assimilation increased distrust, fear, and anger and created a population of cultural half-breeds who had an “absence of mind and sincere feeling” for any nation.<sup>100</sup> These two men, and other cultural pluralists, felt that a better solution to achieve unity was to foster greater cultural equality amongst groups.

Bourne concluded that Americans needed to accept that the lot of the United States was simply to be a “federation of cultures”. They should stop trying to find a magical formula for achieving homogeneity amongst a wide array of individuals.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, the American ideal of a nation of identical citizens was a narrow and impossible one which Americans needed to

drop. Kallen added that “resentment of the ‘hyphenated’ American was... pathetic” and the result of fear on the part of elite Americans. He explained that rather than accept the fact that the nation was a mixture of many different types of people, Anglo-Saxon elitists despised differences and blamed them for domestic problems. Bourne concluded that “effective integration will be one which coordinates the diverse elements and turns them consciously toward working out together the place of America in the world-situation.”<sup>102</sup> Kallen defined this solution as being that of accepting and improving the chorus which was the United States. He called for a harmony of “many voices each singing a rather different tune.”<sup>103</sup> In summary, cultural pluralists believed that unity did not rely on uniformity; rather, it relied on cultural equality.

This idea led cultural pluralists to believe in a positive role for immigrants. Bourne explained that Anglo-Saxon dominance in the United States was not due to their inherent superiority, but rather to the fact that they were “merely the first immigrant[s]” to the area. He reasoned that all cultures were of equal value and that all individuals, regardless of their nationality, should have a say in America’s future. He concluded that all immigrants had played an important role in the creation of the nation and must continue to bring their ideas and talents if America wanted to continue to progress. Bourne and other cultural pluralists determined that without this influx of ideas “America must ever be a follower and not a leader of nations.”<sup>104</sup> Cultural pluralists felt that immigrants were needed to maintain the exceptionalism of the nation by bringing and maintaining their cultural heritages in the United States.

Finally, cultural pluralists reasoned that the United States was exceptional because it was the “first international society” which had the potential to lead the world.<sup>105</sup> Kallen added that the United States would become the first “great and truly democratic commonwealth” of the world because it was a conglomeration of many different peoples.<sup>106</sup> This vision of the nation was

popular among intellectuals but did not have public support because of its idyllic nature. In the face of mass immigration, WWI, and the Red Scare this idea was not considered a practical one. People used it primarily to critique the other three solutions rather than to formulate a feasible option to solve the immigrant problem. Mirel stated that the operation of this cosmopolitan nation was never outlined during the movement, which added to its role as more of a dream for the future than a practical solution. The lack of a guide to the creation of the great democracy prevented the acceptance of this idea throughout the nation and in Chicago.

Settlement houses--fifteen of which existed in Chicago by 1900--are the best example of the practical application of cultural pluralism.<sup>107</sup> Led by the outspoken Jane Addams and Grace Abbott, Hull House was the most famous of the group. It covered nearly a city block by 1907 and offered many services to neighbors including a nursery, a music room, a boy's club, and an art studio. It aimed to reform society to improve immigrant's lives in crowded and unsanitary cities.<sup>108</sup>

Addams and Abbott explained the practical application to cultural pluralism in many publications. They both pointed out the failure of forced assimilation programs, which resulted in "half-breed" citizens. Addams wrote that the high criminal conviction rate of second generation immigrants proved that the assimilation process created lost individuals who lacked any sense of loyalty. In addition, she argued that the required oath of allegiance did not magically create good citizens. Rather, it led to indifferent citizens with full citizen rights, a dangerous mix.<sup>109</sup> Abbott believed that "the general American attitude has... been that the immigrant is only a one-generation difficulty and that all we had to do was to see that the children got a good American education" to ensure unity.<sup>110</sup> She concluded that this did not work because there was no special formula to change the heritage of a person. Abbott and Addams concluded that unity would not

be achieved by assimilation, a key belief of the cultural pluralist idea.

Second, Abbott and Addams pushed for an acceptance of the nation as it was, a mixture of nationalities. Addams criticized the Americanization movement for its failure to “treat our growing Republic in the spirit of a progressive and developing democracy” and called for a more honest approach to achieving national unity.<sup>111</sup> Elaborating on this Abbott argued that “community organizations and institutions shall be established and maintained, not for an imaginary homogenous Anglo-Saxon population, but for the population as it is.”<sup>112</sup> In essence, these leaders of the settlement house movement believed that Americans needed to stop romanticizing the past so that they could work toward a better future. This directive was based on the belief that all people were equal and should all have the opportunity to contribute to the progress of the nation. Abbott argued that prejudice inherent in the molding process was reckless because of its “disregard of the talents and capacity of other peoples.” She concluded that if the United States was truly living up to its ideals of consent of the governed and equality for all, then all people who came to America should be treated fairly.<sup>113</sup> In the minds of these women, it would be wrong to disregard immigrants as inferior because there should be equality among all people, regardless of race or creed.

Finally, Abbott and Addams expressed the same understanding of the exceptionalism of the nation as Kallen and Bourne did. Abbott deduced that the nation needed to make changes to retain its potential. She stated that “instead of being ashamed of this diversity we should recognize that it offers us a particular opportunity for world service.”<sup>114</sup> Abbott and Addams felt that the world needed a place of true democracy where people of all nationalities lived and worked together. It was the fate of the United States to hold this role, and it was essential to foster cultural understanding and tolerance to reach this goal.

From readings of this period it would seem that settlement workers like Jane Addams and Grace Abbott were staunch cultural pluralists, but historians have begun to challenge this perception of the settlement movement. Rivka Shpak Lissak's work *Pluralism and Progressives* points to the reality of the role of the settlement house movement and the role of Jane Addams in the larger Americanization movement. Lissak described the "myth" of the Hull House, a place where "immigrants were treated as equals... where their cultures were respected and cultivated" as a fallacy created by the settlement house workers of the time. Although immigrant cultures were tolerated, this was done to "improve the living and working conditions of the working class, to uplift them culturally, and to create a sense of community through the inculcation of a new value system."<sup>115</sup> This cultural uplifting was through the education of immigrants in American customs and values, which hoped to eventually replace the immigrant's native culture.

Lissak clarified that the myth of the Hull Houses' cosmopolitan attitude toward ethnic differences was due to the fact that the program tolerated ethnic differences with the understanding that assimilation was inevitable. Lissak wrote, "newcomers were not required to renounce their languages and cultures upon arrival and adopt the English language and ways immediately." It was reasonable for them to live in ethnic enclaves upon arrival, but it was felt that these divisions would be temporary and would dissolve when the immigrant "became adjusted to the American environment."<sup>116</sup> This mirrors Abbott and Addams' dislike of the assimilation process, which forced immigrants to change too quickly.

This mixture of assimilation and cultural pluralism, which Lissak called liberal progressivism, adjusted the assimilation process to make it more humane and tolerant. This concept "demanded that newcomers assimilate structurally into American society through free communication, elimination of national and cultural barriers, and social and racial blending."<sup>117</sup>

This more natural form of assimilation was deemed essential for the “sake of equality” because differences of any kind led to one group claiming superiority over another. In the minds of settlement workers the fragmentation of the nation would disappear through a natural and slow process of assimilation as immigrants became familiar with and supportive of American values.

One can see that the idyllic version of the cultural pluralist idea was seldom found in its original form in the Americanization movement. This is further highlighted by Chicago newspaper articles of the period which show few examples of true cultural pluralism, many examples of its more assimilative form, and the conflict between the two. The phrases “cultural pluralism” and “liberal progressive” are not found in Chicago newspapers between 1914 and 1924, which speaks volumes about their popularity in the Americanization movement of the time. A 1921 article quotes Illinois senator Borah as stating that the American way of life was the “handiwork of all creeds and all faiths, all races and all classes” and that this cooperation among different peoples had led to a “strengthened and prospered” nation.<sup>118</sup> This article stresses that this more tolerant and respectful approach to the “immigrant problem” is greatly needed. In this example, the concept of equality of people, a foundation to cultural pluralism, is evident. Another article succinctly states the position of Illinois Republicans who believed that “there was not a bit of harm in the hyphen, so long as it was understood that it does not separate, but unites.”<sup>119</sup> In these two examples, one can see glimpses of true cultural pluralist ideals, but they are outnumbered and overshadowed by the great number of assimilationist ideas advertised in newspapers of the time.

An article about caring for Chicago’s poor children exemplifies this tolerant assimilationist approach within the Americanization movement. This article summarizes that programs like the Kiwanis Club “Poor Children’s Christmas” helped to assimilate immigrants

because they allowed immigrants to see the best aspects of the nation. The author reasoned that immigrants treated cruelly were “ apt to grow up embittered, anti-social enemies of the United States.”<sup>120</sup> This hints at the idea that assimilation of immigrants needed to be conducted in a humane way because forcing immigrants to change or treating them disrespectfully would only foster distrust and further social fragmentation. This conflict between assimilation and treating immigrants as equals is best exemplified by an article which invokes two very different understandings of American exceptionalism, its role as the great democracy and its eminent failure from the “hodge-podge” of citizens within it.<sup>121</sup> The desire to assimilate immigrants made it hard for individuals to fully embrace cultural pluralism in everyday Americanization activities.

#### f. Restrictionism

American politics was dominated by restrictionism beginning in 1920, a transition in national opinion which ultimately ended the Americanization movement in 1924. Restrictionists called for immigration restriction on the basis of eugenics and concerns over the “stock” of the nation. Eugenics was the “science” of the improvement and maintenance of separate races of human beings through controlled breeding. Deep-seated racism within the eugenics movement led to the belief in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and the perceived need to protect it from “inferior” stocks of people. This type of protection appealed to many who feared that the “immigrant problem” was destroying the nation. The beliefs of restrictionists are best illustrated by Henry Pratt Fairchild’s *The Melting Pot Mistake* and the publications of the Immigration Restriction League. Restrictionists argued that the Americanization movement was doomed to fail because people could not change their racial traits. Fairchild determined that “all true racial traits are exclusively hereditary.... no racial trait can ever be acquired, nor can it ever be lost by an individual as a result of the experiences of his life.”<sup>122</sup> Following this logic, the entire

Americanization movement was deemed a waste of time, as foreigners who were too different would never be thorough Americans. Fairchild stated that it was cruel to try to assimilate a foreigner who did not have the qualities needed to be Americanized. Rather, only those individuals who were able to adopt American customs should be allowed to immigrate into the country.<sup>123</sup> An Immigration Restriction League publication analyzed the failure of the Americanization movement in further detail. The author stated that Americanization activities were only beneficial to those few immigrants who were most similar to Americans, and even they only succeeded with “long, close, patient and unselfish personal contact on the part of intelligent and sympathetic Americans.” Rather than spend time trying to assimilate the inassimilable, Americans should focus on the few who could benefit from Americanizing and block the rest from entering the nation.<sup>124</sup> In summary, it was made clear that only some people had the qualities necessary to become true Americans while the rest of the world would only work to destroy the American race and the nation as a whole.

As one can see, restriction supporters determined that the Anglo-Saxon stock was superior to all others and needed to be protected from racial mixing. Inferior people would dilute the race and destroy all that it had achieved, namely the creation of America and democracy. The Immigration Restriction League asked in 1913, “why is it that with all our efforts to improve the breeds of our domestic animals we have neglected the most important animal of all? Why is it that we have left the breeding of Man altogether to chance?”<sup>125</sup> The Immigration Restriction League told its followers that it would be, “in the highest level ungenerous in us, the custodians of the future heritage of our race, to permit to land at our shores mental, physical and moral defectives, who... will lower the standards of our own people.”<sup>126</sup>

Restrictionists explained that this protection of the American race was not just for the

benefit of Anglo-Saxons, it was to the benefit of the entire world because democracy and other American values depended upon the existence of a pure Anglo-Saxon race. Fairchild wrote that “the destruction of this characteristic racial foundation held potential for changing American institutions and cultural values.”<sup>127</sup> The Immigration Restriction League added that a cost-benefit analysis of unrestricted immigration showed that there lacked enough benefit to outweigh the loss of American institutions, which were the democratic hope of the world. Due to this imbalance, the United States had the right to “protect itself from the invasion of anything tending to retard its normal life and development.”<sup>128</sup> In summary, restrictionists affirmed that it was in the best interest of Americans and the world as a whole to stop unrestricted immigration in the United States so that the Anglo-Saxon institution of democracy could be preserved.

In answer to the three questions of this paper, restrictionists reasoned that unity was only possible through homogeneity of the American race, the failure of which would result in the loss of democracy. Restrictionists also concluded that the role of immigrants within the United States should be non-existent unless they belonged to a similar culture in which case their role was to completely assimilate to the American ideal. Finally, restrictionists deemed that the United States was exceptional because of its high percentage of pure Anglo-Saxons who had fostered the creation of democracy. These ideas drove restrictionists to push for legislative changes which would end the period of unrestricted immigration.

The push for restriction legislation began in 1911 with the publication of the *Dillingham Commission Report*. This Dillingham Commission was created in 1907 and aimed to detail the patterns and potential risk of open immigration into the United States. Three members from both houses of Congress and three experts hand selected by President Roosevelt composed the commission. The commission was named after its chairman Senator William P. Dillingham, but

real power lay with member Henry Cabot Lodge, a long-time restrictionist who had lobbied for immigration restriction as early as 1896. Due to his power in the commission and constant lobbying by the Immigration Restriction League, the commission was pressured to support, “the idea of a literacy test, the exclusion of unskilled laborers, a head tax, and other devices including a limit based upon nationality.”<sup>129</sup> During the course of its existence, the commissions “held no public hearings at all, nor were witnesses cross examined. Neither did the Commission utilize readily available detailed information from census reports, state bureaus or labor and other agencies.”<sup>130</sup> In the end, the conclusions reached in this report were biased and based on little accurate data but continued to hold power in politics, ultimately helping three important immigration restriction bills become law.

The first of these bills, on the literacy test, had been proposed as early as 1896 by Henry Cabot Lodge and had been vetoed by President Taft in 1913 and President Wilson in 1915. Two years later, the literacy test bill again passed in Congress, was vetoed by President Wilson again, but was passed by Congress over his veto. This bill called for an eight dollar head tax, again listed excluded individuals including prostitutes, insane people, idiots and anarchists, and provided the requirements of the literacy test. The literacy test was mandatory for all immigrants, except elderly or female relatives of citizens, and required them to read between thirty and forty words in whichever language they were literate in. Although this bill is best known for the literacy test, it also included descriptions of a five year deportation period in which any alien who originally belonged to the list of excluded individuals, had broken any American law, or had taught anarchy to another would be immediately deported to their former country.<sup>131</sup> While the law was claimed to prevent only a few inferior individuals from entering the country, it actually worked to prevent a large number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe from entering

the nation as those nations had the highest illiteracy rates before and during the war.

Following the end of World War I, literacy rates rose across Europe, making the United States' literacy test less effective in preventing lower stock individuals from entering the nation.<sup>132</sup> When Republicans gained control of Congress in 1919, they used the Dillingham Commission to push for more restrictive immigration laws. Between 1919 and 1921, hearings were held on the proposed law and on May 19, 1921, the Emergency Quota Act became law. It states that "the number of aliens of any nationality who may be admitted... in any fiscal year shall be limited to 3 per centum of the number of foreign persons of such nationality resident in the United States as determined by the United States census of 1910."<sup>133</sup> Although the 1920 census was available, the 1910 census was used because it showed fewer of the new immigrants. Thus by basing the quota off of this census, restrictionists could seemingly fairly give favor to Anglo-Saxon immigrants over all others.<sup>134</sup>

The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 was made permanent by the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act, which furthered restricted immigration of those individuals considered inferior. While the quota system remained, it became more severe as the number of allowed immigrants dropped from 357,803 to 164,667. The percentage was based on the 1890 census rather than the 1910 census.<sup>135</sup> These changes show the transparent favor given to Anglo-Saxons over those with "inferior stock." This is made clearer by the fact that eastern and southern European nationalities made up only 11.2% and Anglo-Saxon nationalities made up 86.5% of the total quota ceilings. The restrictions were so limiting that a mere 18,439 individuals of eastern and southern European stock were allowed to enter the United States in any fiscal year.<sup>136</sup> This effectively slowed immigration to a level which made Americanization efforts, and particularly education programs, seem like a waste of time. Simply, if immigrants were not coming into the nation then

there was not an “immigrant problem” to solve. Thus, with these three immigration restriction laws, the Americanization movement was brought to a quick and efficient end by 1924.

Surprisingly, the end of the Americanization movement came with very little opposition from Chicago Americanizers. The opposition in Chicago newspapers reflected the same idea, stating that immigration restriction constituted “a radical change in the policy of the nation.”<sup>137</sup> One article explains that if the Johnson-Reed Act was passed, it would too severely limit immigration.<sup>138</sup> This was especially important for those individuals who sought to bring family members from their homelands, but who might have been forced to wait years to be reunited with their family. Another article adds that the restriction legislation, “seeks to all but close entirely the gates of asylum which always have been open to those who could find nowhere else the right and opportunity of... the natural and inalienable rights of man.”<sup>139</sup> Although these were strong arguments against restriction legislation, the sheer length of the movement, its fragmentation, and the disappointment felt by many at its apparent failure left the nation largely apathetic towards immigration restriction.

This is best illustrated by two articles, one of which summarizes the Johnson-Reed Act in just two sentences and another which hails the end of open immigration as a great event for American prosperity. The first article, a remarkably short summary of the Johnson-Reed Act, states just the facts with very little acknowledgment of its importance or its outcomes.<sup>140</sup> The low priority of such news is clear in the brevity of the article and its position on the bottom of the tenth page. The second article, a summary of the year 1922, excitedly claims that, “the restriction of immigration has been maintained... experience has taught that unrestricted immigration is not an unmixed blessing and that bars will be kept up until such time as we have perfected the process of assimilating the new-comers as fast as they arrive.”<sup>141</sup> This concisely summarizes the

popularity of the restrictionist idea that open door immigration was unsafe because the Americanization movement, and specifically, assimilation efforts, had failed. It was clear that many Chicagoans agreed that Americanization failed and that the only solution was to limit immigration to an acceptable level.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The Americanization movement occurred during a time in which American thought on concepts such as immigration, unity, equality, Americanism, and American exceptionalism was seriously fragmented. Four very different ideas about the future of the nation emerged which answered the three questions: How can unity be achieved in the United States? What is the role of the immigrant? And, in what way is America exceptional?

The first of these ideas, assimilation, composed almost all of the Americanization movement's activities and was centered on the idea that all people held qualities which could be used to mold them into thorough Americans. Both the melting pot and cultural pluralist ideas were more idealistic visions of the future than practical guides to solving the immigrant problem facing the nation. While they carried more just and balanced notions of the role of immigrants and the future of the American nation than assimilation, they were often used by assimilationists to promote their one-way education programs for immigrants. This was due largely to the fact that such idyllic and peaceful notions of Americanism were not popular during World War I and the Red Scare when patriotism reached new heights. The final idea, restrictionism took the most extreme approach to the immigrant problem of the early twentieth century. This idea represented a growing frustration with the failure of the assimilation-based Americanization movement, the rise in eugenics, and a diminishing desire to solve the immigrant problem. The leaders of this idea successfully lobbied for an end to open immigration, ultimately bringing the

Americanization movement to a quick end with the binding Johnson-Reed Immigration Act that slowed immigration of “inferior peoples” to a near stop.

The Americanization movement as a whole showed the great divisions in thought among Americans on what it meant to be American and what America would symbolize in the future. The actions of Chicago Americanizers reflected the popularity of the assimilation idea over others, but also showed very different visions of the American future. This fragmentation is still apparent in discussions of immigration and Americanism today in which people often use the terms assimilation, melting pot, cultural pluralism and restrictionism to describe what must be done to solve the current immigration problem. In conclusion, this period in American history cannot be overlooked as being a symptom of extreme war-time patriotism. Rather, it needs to be appreciated as a period in which ideas about Americanism evolved and fragmented into the four ideas that remain constants in American thought today.

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