

Department of History  
University of Wisconsin -- Madison  
Semester I. 1987-88

History 403  
Immigration and Assimilation in U.S. History

MW 11 - 12:15

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History 403 examines American immigration and ethnicity from the arrival of the first English colonists to the present day. The course emphasizes the analysis of causes and consequences rather than the narration of events. It examines the experiences of Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans as well as those of the Europeans who constituted the majority of the immigrant flow. Likewise, it compares the experiences of the United States with those of other nations, such as Canada, which incorporated large numbers of foreign arrivals.

The goal of History 403 is to answer a series of basic questions. Who came, and why did they leave their native lands? When did various ethnic and racial groups arrive in North America, and where did they go after landing here? How were newcomers received by the residents whose families had come to America in earlier years or decades or centuries? How did the immigrants respond to the foreign environment in which they suddenly found themselves? To what extent did the immigrants and their offspring become part of the mainstream of American society? Which of their Old World practices and values -- if any -- survived in the New World? Of what importance is immigration in the present era and how may it affect the future? The questions seem straightforward, but beneath their appearance of simplicity lies a reality that involves serious and complicated problems of definition, measurement, and judgment.

I intend to use my book, *Becoming American: An Ethnic History*, as the core reading for most of the course. At the end of it, however, David Reimers's book, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America*, becomes the focus of attention. In addition, nine shorter readings appear as assignments throughout the course. The Archdeacon and Reimers books are available at the bookstore, and a packet of the other readings can be obtained at Kinko's.

I have set aside time for three examinations. Two will take place during regular lecture hours; the third is scheduled for the final examination period for this course, which is Monday, December 21, at 2:45 PM. The tests will not be cumulative; each will cover material drawn from approximately one-third of the lectures and reading assignments. Each examination will determine one-third of the final grades of the students taking History 403 for three credits. The requirements for students taking the course for four credits are noted at the end of the schedule.

## Schedule of Lectures, Assignments, and Examinations

Block 1            Colonial Immigration            Sept. 2, 7, 9

European immigration to the area of North America that later became the United States first became sizable in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although the English were the most numerous of the colonial immigrants, large numbers of men and women from the outlying districts of the British Isles and from the nations of the continent joined them in the New World. So too did large numbers of involuntary Black immigrants from Africa. In many demographic and socioeconomic respects, the colonial immigrants resembled those who would follow in the 19th and 20th centuries, but the substantial portion of bound white servants found in the early traffic is an interesting difference.

*Becoming American*, Prologue, ch. 1  
Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West*, ch. 4

Block 2            The "Old" Immigration            Sept. 14, 16, 21

For a variety of reasons immigration to the United States remained at a modest level for approximately a half century after the War of Independence. That, however, was no longer the case after the 1830s. Hordes of Irish and German immigrants arrived in the decade and a half before the Civil War, and substantial numbers of other Britons, Canadians, and Scandinavians joined the influx after that conflict. Block 2 is primarily concerned with discussing the general reasons behind this surge in immigration and the specific causes for the emigration from the European "donor" countries.

*Becoming American*, ch. 2  
Frank Thistlethwaite, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in Herbert Moller, ed.,  
*Population Movements in Early European History*, pp. 73-92

Block 3            The Immigrants' Impact            Sept. 23, 28

The arrival of the immigrants posed a series of serious challenges to American society and to the self-image that the United States was articulating in the middle of the nineteenth century. Many of the newcomers, unlike most of the native population, became city dwellers. Their neighborhoods helped transform the urban environment physically, and the visible poverty of some of them disturbed the nation. Likewise, the connection between the coming of the immigrants and the rise of the factory raised among Americans fears of declining economic opportunities. Many of the European continentals did not speak English, and their inclination to hold on to familiar mores and languages tested the hegemony of Anglo-American culture. Finally, the presence of a high percentage of Roman Catholics among the new arrivals threatened the inclination in American Protestantism to identify the U.S. with the land of the millennium.



*Becoming American*, ch. 5

Lucie Cheng, "Free, Indentured, Enslaved: Chinese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America," in Lucie Cheng and Edna Bonacich, eds., *Labor Immigration under Capitalism: Asian Workers in the United States before World War II*, pp. 402-34

Block 7                    **Immigration Restriction**                    Nov. 2, 4, 9

The United States took the first serious steps toward severely restricting the right of people to enter this nation when, in 1882, it "temporarily" blocked further immigration by unskilled Chinese laborers. Over the next four decades, a formidable restrictionist movement developed and sought political mechanisms to identify and exclude undesirable immigrants. For some activists, the search gradually shifted from efforts to ferret out individually unfit applicants for admission to attempts to establish "scientifically" the unworthiness of whole nationalities and races. A policy of sharply limited immigration, with access tied to ethnic background, emerged as the law of the land after World War I.

*Becoming American*, ch. 6

Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, pp. 192-233

Exam                    **Mid-Term #2**                    Nov. 11

Block 8                    **Immigrants to Ethnics**                    Nov. 16, 18, 23

The descendants of America's immigrant populations continued to experience the processes of acculturation and assimilation between the Great Depression and the election, in 1960, of John F. Kennedy as president of the United States. Without continuing reinforcements in the form of new arrivals from abroad, the ethnic population became increasingly composed of persons whose families had been in the United States for at least two generations. Those people spoke English, shed many of the outward styles that had underlined the alien status of their forebears, and shared to a greater extent in mainstream experiences. By the end of the period, however, the American population still seemed subdivided by attributes of ethnicity, religion, and race.

*Becoming American*, ch. 7

Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, ch. 2

Block 9                    **The New Ethnicity**                    Nov. 25, 30; Dec. 2

The late 1960s and the 1970s saw an important shift in American attitudes toward immigration and ethnicity. Legislation attempted to remove the ethnically discriminatory features of immigration policy, and commentators came to accept the idea that demographic and cultural diversity was at least a semi-permanent feature of the U.S. population and perhaps a desirable one as well. The roots of these changes were partly a rejection of prejudice, partly a

concession to the seemingly unsolvable race problem, and partly a reaction to social policies willing to social benefits on the basis of ascribed characteristics. Scholars remain divided, however, on whether the "new ethnicity" celebrated by some marked a permanent stop of the road to the complete assimilation of all groups or a transient phenomenon.

*Becoming American*, ch. 8, Epilogue  
Herbert Gans, "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2 (1979), 1-20

Block 10                      The "Newest" Immigration                      Dec. 7, 9, 15

Since the changing of the nation's basic immigration law in the mid-1960s, the United States has experienced a fresh influx of new arrivals. Many of these newcomers come from nations that are described as belonging to the "Third World." The arrivals include in their ranks some who enter legally under the relaxed laws, others who enter without documentation, and a special sub-group of political refugees. These immigrants pose challenges that, in the context of American immigration, have both familiar and novel elements. Their arrival has renewed the debate about the role of ethnicity in American society and has led to another reformulation of immigration law.

David M. Reimers, *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America*

#### The Fourth Credit

Students may take History 403 for 3 or 4 credits. Those who desire the extra credit will be expected to attend an additional class period from 11 to 11:50 AM each Friday. I shall use the time to teach the students how to use a microcomputer and such software as database managers, spreadsheets, and statistical packages. The students will be expected to apply what they have learned to analyzing sets of problems related to immigration and ethnicity. Conscientious attendance and completion of those assignments are the principal requirements. The fourth credit will generally not change one's course grade, but a demonstration of extraordinary effort and understanding in regard to the assignments may have a favorable impact.