HOMEWORK: Racism, Feminism & Immigration

Your homework for next class – **Monday, March 26th** – has three parts.

**PART I:** First, to wrap up our discussion of “Race: the Power of an Illusion” from class today, you’ll respond to one of the three following questions (*let’s assign them now)*:

1) **Responding to the idea that the U.S. is a melting pot**, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva states, “That melting pot never included people of color. Blacks, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, etc. could not melt into the pot.” Think about the phrase “melting pot” – what does it imply? Should people aspire to “melt into the pot”? Can you think of a better metaphor to describe how immigrants might “become American”?

2) **Supreme Court Justice Henry Blackmun asserts**, “To get beyond racism we must first take account of race. There is no other way.” What does Justice Blackmun mean – and do you agree? Contrast Blackmun’s statement with people who strive to be “colorblind” (i.e., those who strive to look beyond race and treat everyone the same). Who benefits if we adopt a colorblind approach to society? How is colorblindness different from equality?

3) **The American Dream** is based on the notion that anyone who works hard enough will be rewarded – that anyone can “pull themselves up by their bootstraps.” How has this been made more difficult for people not defined as white? What is the relationship between equality of opportunity and equality of condition? Consider **affirmative action** and other programs that give preferential treatment to historically disadvantaged groups – in your opinion, are they a reasonable way to address this issue?

After reviewing your movie notes, please write at least half a page (typed & double-spaced) responding to your question. This is **“semi-formal” writing**, meaning that you do need complete sentences and specific details, but you don’t need to worry about citing or TS’s, and first-person is totally fine. FYI, you’ll be turning this in next class for a small homework grade.

**PART II:** Your next step is to write another brief reflection, this one on the feminism presentation from last class. Please make this part of the same document from Part I that you print out and submit. Same exact format as before – half a page of typed, semi-formal writing. This time, you have a choice to answer any (or all!) of the three questions below (**FYI, no right or wrong answers here**):

- **Why do you think that feminism has become such a controversial idea?**
- **Research shows that gender inequality still exists in America. How do we explain this? In your view, how big of a problem is this – and what measures (if any) should be taken to address it?**
- **In your opinion, to what extent is sexism an issue here at MA? Speaking personally, what is the hardest part about being male or female at MA? (Please speak just for your gender)**

To refresh your memory, here are the notes from last class:
• Have you heard any stereotypes about feminists? *(It’s okay if they’re offensive or you don’t believe them)*

• **Question:** who can actually **define** feminism? *(just the basic textbook def). Let’s look at three…
  - “The belief that women are and should be treated as intellectual and social equals to men.”
  - “The theory of political, social, and economic equality of the sexes.”
  - “A social theory or political movement supporting the equality of both sexes in all aspects of public and private life.”

• Um…why is this so controversial?

• Knowing this, a question to ask yourself: **Am *I* a feminist?**
  - A story from when I first started teaching that I’m not especially proud of…

• **But women are equal now…right?** **Three sobering stats:**

  1) If you rank 190 countries by which has the highest % of women in their national legislature, America is tied for **94th**…with Turkmenistan! *(16.8% overall – FYI, the full class notes have citations)*

  2) The **Fortune 500** is a ranking of America’s 500 most powerful companies

     - Of the Fortune 500 CEOs in 2011, **488** were men and **12** were women *(that’s 2.4%)*

  3) As of 1997, “Women earned less than men in **99%** of all occupations for which data is available.”


  - **BUT**, what is for sure: gender inequality still exists

PART III: The third and final part of this crazy assignment is to annotate two short readings. They focus on the history of **immigration** with an emphasis on **1880–1930**, when the government took an especially active role in restricting the flow of “undesirable” immigrants:

SOURCE #1: **The History of U.S. Immigration.** Please read and annotate this reading, which covers America’s history of immigration from colonization through **1924**. No formal guiding questions here, but look for patterns and connections – both within the packet and to the rest of our studies this year.

SOURCE #2: **The “New Immigration”** *(1880–1930)*. Again, read and annotate, looking for parallels.
The History of U.S.

Immigration

by David Marshall

Immigration to the U.S. and the American Dream

"Every year in Russia was a year lost, my father said. The children should be spending these precious years in school, in learning English, in becoming Americans... America became my dream." These were the words of young Jewish immigrant Mary Antin, who moved to America with her family in 1894 to avoid religious persecution and seek a better life.

Like Mary, millions of immigrants have moved to America to seek an accepting political community: to find a good-paying job, get an education or practice one's religion freely. Yet this "American Dream" has not always been true for foreigners – many immigrants have faced discrimination depending on the historical circumstances of their arrival. And like all people living in a new country, immigrants have always faced the dilemma of preserving their old traditions versus assimilating, or adapting, to American culture.

EARLY YEARS–1840: The Development of Naturalization

In the words of sociologist Steven Steinberg, "America is a country without a people." Indeed, aside from Native Americans – who migrated to America roughly 15,000 years ago – the United States has been peopled entirely by foreigners. After gaining its independence from England in the Revolutionary War, the small and newly-formed United States government faced a high need for workers. Largely because of this labor demand, Congress did not establish any restrictions on immigration. From 1790 to 1802, Congress also passed a series of laws establishing a process of naturalization, or a path for foreigners to become American citizens. To become naturalized, immigrants were required only to have lived in the country for at least five years. However, at this time, naturalization was not open to all: for example, neither women nor the 500,000 to 600,000 Africans brought to America as slaves through forced migration were granted citizenship.

Both ethnically and religiously, the early United States was far less diverse than it is today. Although the young nation had a sizeable (and largely enslaved) African-American population, nearly 80% of white Americans in 1790 were originally from the British Isles (England and Ireland), and 99% of them were Protestant! Despite the homogeneous population in America at this time, people still worried about foreigners' influence on the country. "Why should Penn-
-sylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens?” Ben Franklin wrote in 1750 about German immigrants living in his colony, “[They] will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs.” This would not be the last time that Americans would fear corruption of their culture by immigrants – indeed, it has been a recurrent theme throughout this country’s history.

1840–1880: THE RISE OF MASS IMMIGRATION AND NATIVISM

Starting in the 1840s, immigrants began flocking to the United States by the millions, lured by jobs in the rapidly industrializing cities and cheap farmland in rural areas. Most of these immigrants came from countries in Northern and Western Europe like England, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Ireland, immigrating to escape poverty and political instability.

The Great Irish Potato Famine & Its Aftermath

The case of Irish immigration was especially dramatic. Starting in 1845, a disease wiped out nearly all of the potatoes in Ireland, leading to mass starvation, suffering, and unemployment. Over the next ten years, the Great Irish Potato Famine killed nearly a million people in Ireland. Another 1.5 million Irish immigrated to America from 1845 to 1860 in search of jobs, food, and a better life. At the time, this was the largest number of immigrants ever to arrive in America in such a short period of time.

In response to this sudden flood of foreigners, many Americans became increasingly nativist, or anti-immigration. Due to their Catholic faith and working class backgrounds, Irish immigrants were common targets for abuse and discrimination. A political party called the “Know-Nothings,” whose goal was to limit further immigration to the U.S. and deprive Irish immigrants of their rights, became very popular in the mid-1850s. One typical Know-Nothing document proclaimed, “Death to all foreign influences, whether in high places or low.” Anti-Irish Job postings in newspapers would often conclude with the acronym NINA, universally understood to mean, “no Irish need apply.”

HELP WANTED
NO IRISH NEED APPLY

Irish immigrants and their descendants faced discrimination upon arriving in the U.S., as shown by this newspaper advertisement.

Not all immigrants during this period, however, faced such difficulties in assimilating to American society. Many already spoke English and were Protestant, like most Americans of the time. Moreover, overall immigration policies during this period were quite liberal – anyone could enter the U.S. regardless of their nationality, social class or political beliefs. This policy of openness to foreigners, though, would not last for long.


“Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free...I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

These lines, penned by Emma Lazarus in 1883, are probably the most famous words ever written about U.S.
immigration. In her poem, “The New Colossus,” Lazarus personified the Statue of Liberty as a mother welcoming immigrants from all countries, no matter what their problems or how miserable they might be.

Yet this period in U.S. history also saw the creation of immigration laws that discriminated against certain nationalities. The first of these laws limited immigration from China. Since the 1849 Gold Rush in California, Chinese immigrants had been a substantial and important ethnic group on the West Coast; thousands helped to build the Transcontinental Railroad in the 1850s and 1860s. Yet these immigrants also experienced significant discrimination. Chinese workers on the railroad were paid a fraction of what other workers received, and California state laws made Chinese people pay high taxes to enter the country or to sell certain products.

The Tide Turns against Chinese Immigrants

As long as there were available jobs for the Chinese immigrants — whether mining for gold or working on the railroad — nativist tensions remained under control. But when the U.S. entered a prolonged economic depression starting in the early 1870s, jobs disappeared and Chinese immigrants became easy scapegoats. Soon, organized anti-Chinese boycotts and even violent riots were common in cities like Denver and San Francisco. In 1882, Congress responded to these growing tensions by passing the Chinese Exclusion Act, which banned all Chinese immigration and naturalization indefinitely. It was not repealed until 1943.

The “New Immigrants” and Assimilation

With Chinese people banned from entering the U.S., the majority of immigrants to the U.S. after 1880 were from Eastern and Southern Europe, including Italy, Russia, Ukraine, Poland and Hungary. They were called “new immigrants” in contrast to the previous wave of immigrants from Northern and Western Europe (dubbed “old immigrants”). Like Mary Antin, a number were Jews from Eastern Europe seeking refuge from religious persecution. In general, the new immigrants were poorer and spoke less English than the old immigrants, often making assimilation very difficult. Settlement houses like Hull House in Chicago offered some help to poor immigrants, providing support services, translators and job opportunities. Immigrants usually clustered in ethnic enclaves with fellow countrymen and women to preserve their old food, customs and culture. Yet living in a “Chinatown” or “Little Italy” often made it more difficult for these immigrants to learn English and fully assimilate.
To further deal with this overwhelming number of new arrivals, a massive new center for immigration processing was set up at *Ellis Island* in New York Harbor. Between 1892 and 1954, over 12 million immigrants were processed through this 32-acre island. Though 98% of them were eventually admitted to the country, hundreds of thousands of immigrants were detained or even sent back to their home countries for various reasons, including their political beliefs, mental problems, or lack of financial resources.

**The 1920s: A Resurgence of Nativism**

In the 1920s, with the number of new immigrants higher than ever, a second wave of nativism swept America. Native-born Americans used racist arguments to restrict immigration, calling new immigrants inferior and blaming them for crime and lower salaries. "Unless something is done," warned the head of the government's immigration service, "the mighty tide of immigration will soon poison the very fountainhead of American life and progress."

In 1924, something was done. Congress passed the **Immigration Act of 1924** to limit the number of immigrants who could enter the U.S. Overall, just 165,000 people were allowed to enter the country each year. From there, each country had a quota (a limit based on a percentage) for how many immigrants could enter the country based on how many people from the country had been living in the U.S. in 1890.

This made it much harder for the new immigrants to enter the U.S. — they only got 14% of the quotas, while the old immigrants got 86%, even though each group represented 45% and 41% of immigrants to the U.S. in 1920, respectively.

Asian immigrants were banned from immigrating altogether. These discriminatory quotas stayed in place for over forty years.

---

*The 1920s saw a resurgence of nativist sentiments in American society, as shown by this political cartoon warning against the dangers of 'Riff Raff Immigration'"*
READING #2: The “New Immigration” (1880-1930)

Excerpts from The Ethnic Myth by Steven Steinberg (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), pp. 32-41.

“Just as the South came to depend primarily on slave labor, at least in the critical area of cotton production, the North, and to a lesser extent the West, came to depend heavily on foreign labor imported primarily from Europe.

“Immigration began as a trickle, gradually gained momentum during the 19th century, and finally assumed the dimensions of a flood by the beginning of the 20th century. A few figures will help to convey the immensity of this movement. As late as 1820, when the first official immigration statistics become available, only about 8,000 immigrants entered the country annually. In the 6 decades between independence and 1840, total immigration was only 750,000. After 1840, however, there were two great waves of immigration that provided the necessary manpower for sustained economic growth. Between 1840 and 1880 over 8,000,000 Europeans entered the country. Between 1880 and 1930 the figure rose to over 23,000,000. This extraordinary population movement – the largest in recorded history – was fundamentally the result of an extraordinary economic expansion – also the largest and most concentrated in history.…

“Virtually all of the 8,000,000 immigrants who came to American between 1840 and 1880 had their origins in northwestern Europe. Most came from Germany, Britain, Ireland, and Scandinavia, in that order. In contrast, the 23 million immigrants who constituted the second wave between 1880 and 1930 largely had their origins in eastern and southern Europe. Italians, Poles, and Russian Jews were by far the largest groups, but numerous other nationalities had significant representation: Slavs, Slovaks, Croatians, Serbs, Czechs, Bulgarians, Hungarians, Lithuanians, Romanians, Spanish, Portuguese, and others. Even though eastern and southern Europeans constituted the bulk of the “new immigration,” especially after 1890, this second wave [also] included substantial numbers of “old” immigrants from northwestern Europe.…

**Immigration to the U.S. by Country of Origin (1880-1930)**

1) Italy 4,600,000
2) Austro-Hungarian Empire 4,000,000
3) Russian Empire 3,300,000
4) German Empire 2,800,000
5) Great Britain 2,300,000
6) Ireland 1,700,000
7) Sweden 1,100,000

“It would be difficult to overestimate the critical role that immigrant labor played in the industrialization of America. The volume of immigration itself closely followed the vagaries of the economy…. With every peak and trough in the business cycle, immigration tended to rise and fall accordingly. Despite occasional recessions, however, the overall direction was one of dramatic growth, and the expanding labor force became increasingly dependent on immigrant labor. By 1910, the foreign born made up a quarter of the nation’s work force, and in many of the industries closest to the industrial center, the foreign-born were a clear majority.…"
Despite over half a century of nativist agitation and repeated efforts to restrict immigration by introducing a literacy test or some other device, the floodgates of immigration remained open so long as cheap foreign labor was in demand. By the 1920s, however, the rate of capital growth declined from its previous heights, and the application of new labor-saving technology further reduced the demand for labor. Besides, nearly a century of mass immigration consisting largely of adults in their childbearing ages, had swelled the population to a point where the nation was assured of an adequate labor supply in the future without depending on massive infusions of foreign labor. With the passage of the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, the door was rudely shut on the ‘huddled masses of Europe.”