# UNIT 4 Immigration and the American Tradition

#### **Unit Selections**

- 18. New Americans Fresh Off the Presses, Daniel Akst
- 19. The Diversity Visa Lottery—A Cycle of Unintended Consequences in United States Immigration Policy, Anna O. Law

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- 20. Immigration and America's Future: A New Chapter, Doris Meissner et al.
- 21. More Muslims Are Coming to U.S. after a Decline in Wake of 9/11, Andrea Elliott
- 22. A True Believer in Immigrants, Karin Brulliard
- 23. The Hotel Africa, G. Pascal Zachary

### **Key Points to Consider**

- In what ways have the events of 9/11 and the War in Iraq spilled over into American communities? Did you know about Arab-Americans and Muslims in America prior to these events? How are local police officers and police budgets prepared for the new demands of Homeland Security?
- · Does discrimination based on national origin affect all ethnic populations? Why?
- Does the proliferation of ethnic media suggest the improvement of public information?
- Do large-scale economic, social, and political systems increase or decrease the need for small-scale social systems—such as ethnic enclaves and affinity associations rooted in ethnic/racial tradition, ritual, custom, and support groups based on ethnic identity?

#### **Student Web Site**

www.mhcls.com/online

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## **Internet References**

Further information regarding these Web sites may be found in this book's preface or online.

Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) http://www.cwla.org National Immigration Forum http://www.immigrationforum.org The National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR) http://www.nnirr.org U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) http://uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm Center for Migration Studies http://www.cmsny.org Islamic Human Rights Commission

http://www.ihrc.org

28\_Unit 4.indd 70

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The history of immigration law does not champion American ethnic groups. Immigration laws include the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s, the National Origins Quota System of the 1920s, the Mexican Repatriation Campaign of the 1950s, and the McCarran-Walter Act in 1952. A new era began with the inclusiveness of the mid-1960s. The findings of the 1990 U.S. Census pointed to a range of demographic, economic, and social indicators in this most recent era of immigration in the United States. Both the immediate impact of present-day newcomers and the changes in America that can be attributed to the conflicts and contributions of previous immigrants appear to be facets of nearly every contemporary social issue.

As the unit articles make clear, immigration and migration not only have an impact on the receiving country, but also affect nations that lose the talents, skills, and loyalty of disaffected migrants. Immigration and migration, moreover, contribute to an already complex process of inter-generational relationships and the socialization of persons whose experiences of profound cultural change are intensified by competition, patterns of settlement, options for mobility, and the consciousness of ethnic traditions that conflict with dominant cultural and educational institutions. As a guide for your own study, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has noted that increased immigration raises the following issues for both recent arrivals and Americans by birth:

- Employment: The areas of occupation selected by or imposed upon various ethnic populations trace ethnic group mobility strategies and ethnic succession in the workplace, especially in manufacturing, hospitals, restaurants, and maintenance and custodial positions. Some ethnic populations appear to have greater numbers of highly educated persons in professional or semiprofessional positions.
- Institutional and societal barriers: The job preferences and discrimination against the ethnic enclaves and persons in small communities that are isolated from mainstream English-speaking society suggest the value of second-language competencies. Mutual accommodation is required to minimize the effect of inadequate language skills and training as well as difficulties in obtaining licenses, memberships, and certification.
- Exploitation of workers: The most common form is the payment of wages below minimum standards. Alien workers have been stereotyped as a drain on public services. Such scapegoating is insupportable.
- Taking jobs from Americans: Fact or fiction?: The stunning fact is that immigrants are a source of increased productivity and a significant, if not utterly necessary, addition to the workforce as well as to the consumer power that drives the American economy.

The intrinsic complexity of immigration as a social issue is one reason for the lack of comprehensive and long-range planning evidenced by U.S. immigration laws. The extreme diversity in our immigration sources clearly adds to the complexity of this issue. Immigrant success stories are mingled with fear that the foreigner will take jobs and that our infrastructure will be strained. The late 1900s is a turning point in U.S. immigration history, not only because it signals the beginning of direct federal controls, but also because it reflects new immigrant sources, whose ability to assimilate will be questioned. The first general immigration law was enacted in 1882. Generally, it established a 50-cent head tax per immigrant and gave the treasury secretary jurisdiction over immigration matters. The 1882 act also excluded convicts, paupers, and mentally defective aliens. Earlier that year, Congress had passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which based ineligibility for admission to the United States on national origin. The act also prohibited foreign-born Chinese from becoming citizens, and placed a 10-year ban on the admission of Chinese workers. In 1890 there were 107,488 Chinese aliens on the

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28 Unit 4 indd 71

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American mainland; because of the Exclusion Act that number had dwindled to 61,639 by 1920.

Thousands of Chinese aliens had come to the West Coast as contract laborers to build the railroads in the mid-1850s. By 1880 there were 189,000 Chinese in the United States. Their sheer numbers coupled with the fact that most were unskilled and worked for low wages generated hostility and adverse public opinion. Calls for restrictive measures grew until Congress responded with the 1882 act. However, the issue did not disappear after the act's passage.

In the next several decades, Congress would take further restrictive measures against the Chinese. In 1884 in fact, Congress amended the Chinese Exclusion Act. The section dealing with Chinese workers was extended to cover all Chinese, regardless of whether they were Chinese subjects. The immigrant head tax increased to \$1.00 in 1884. Thousands of Japanese immigrants arrived in the late 1800s. Initially, Hawaiian sugar plantations were their destination, where they worked as contract labor. Canadians and Mexicans also streamed across our land borders in this period to work in factories and fields. Congress amended the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act again in 1892, as it was about to expire. The 1892 amendment extended the exclusion provisions for an additional 10 years and required all Chinese workers to obtain a residence certificate within 1 year. In 1893 Congress passed an act that reinforced prior immigration laws. It also required ship owners to collect information about incoming aliens to help identify those who were excludable. Boards of inquiry were established in 1893 to deal with immigration problems, including deportation. Calls for more regulation and restriction of immigrants continued through the turn of the century. Various members of Congress proposed a literacy test again and again as an immigration control to exclude aliens who were unable to read in any language. Legislation to accomplish this was vetoed by presidents Cleveland, Taft, and Wilson. In 1917 a literacy test for incoming aliens was enacted over President Wilson's veto. Between 1901 and 1920, 14,531,197 immigrants entered the United States.

In 1901 an immigrant anarchist assassinated President McKinley. Theodore Roosevelt, who succeeded McKinley, told Congress that U.S. policy should be to systematically exclude and deport anarchists. Two years later, Congress responded by adding anarchists to the growing list of excludable aliens in the first federal law making political ideas and beliefs grounds for deportation.

The 1903 immigration act also barred epileptics, insane persons, and professional beggars from entry. In addition, it raised the head tax to \$2.00 and re-codified the contract labor law. Congress passed a subsequent statute in 1907, which raised the head tax to \$4.00 and earmarked these revenues for use in defraying the costs of enforcing U.S. immigration laws. The 1907 act also created a commission to study immigration, which came to be known as the Dillingham Commission after the senator who chaired it. The commission submitted its lengthy 42-volume report in 1911. It concluded that the immigrants who started coming to the United States in the late 1800s adversely affected the American labor movement.

The engagement of the United States beyond its continental limits brought American and Asian interests into a common arena now called the Pacific Rim. The most recent and perhaps most traumatic episode of this encounter was the conflict that erupted in 1941 at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The cultural roots and current interaction between the United States and Asia form complex concerns that are explored in this unit's articles. Understanding the cultural matrices of Asian nations and their ethnicities and languages initiates the process of learning about the Asian emigrants who, for many reasons, decided to leave Asia to seek a fresh beginning in the United States.

By the 1980s the public language had again changed. The metaphors of Third World resistance to colonialism born out of opposition to the Vietnam War was transferred to domestic politics and Third World people were equated with a new domestic group, "people of color." The black/white metaphor resulted in the leveling of the ethnic reality into a simple bi-polar racial world. Both of these undermined the possibility of a common language to build solidarity. With the coming end of the dominations of this bi-polar thinking in American life, we can see the possibility of a re-emergence of ethnicity that will include not only the older third and later generations of the old ethnic groups-who continue to hunger for identity that has a meaning, a rich culture and a story which "white ethnicity" does not offer-but also the new immigrants from most of these groups who continue to come with the language and culture of the homeland, and who must be brought into engagement with American life and culture.

For this we need new expressions of ethnicity that can underpin a generous multi-culturalism. Its legitimacy has already been established. Now we need to give it rooting in solid values that come out of each ethnic group's experience, and to its expression in their different enculturations to be shared across groups. There are two elements that need to be developed if we are to be successful. First, the soft multi-culturalism that is based on superficial sharing of cultures has to be given some rigor. It is now largely based on the exchange of information about the folk and high culture of the homeland and contains almost nothing about the American experience of the group, the cultural adaptations it has developed to make it successful in the New World, or its interactions with others. This is where we can learn about the contributions of the group to the civic culture of the communities it lives in. The second element is that we need to train the leaders of groups to elicit from their history precisely those experiences which allowed them to be successful, and to contribute. It is at this point that we will be able to move to mobilizing ethnic groups to use their experience positively and to teach those lessons abroad.

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