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IMMIGRATION RESTRICTION AND THE CLOSING
OF THE FRONTIER

A CONJUNCTION OF FEARS 1882-1897

By

David Shetler

B.A., Carleton College, 1970


Presented in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

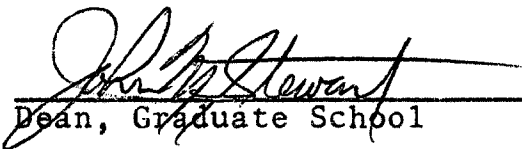
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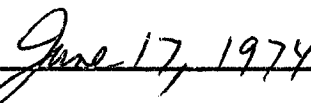
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: AN AGE OF DOUBT

Americans throughout the nineteenth century believed that the phenomenal growth and prosperity of their nation had depended upon two basic factors: the seemingly inexhaustible supply of fertile, resource-laden lands to the West, and, to exploit those Western riches, an ever-increasing population, including welcome additions of immigrants from Europe. During most of their history, Americans had greeted newcomers from Europe hospitably. They not only assumed that their nation, as an experiment in individual freedom, should serve as an asylum for the oppressed of the Old World, but they also realized that the country needed able-bodied and conscientious immigrants for its destined expansion across a virgin continent. Even if Americans looked at times with scorn upon the apparently ignorant character of many of the nineteenth-century immigrants, they nevertheless believed that the immigrants provided the brawn necessary to complement the brains and capital supplied by native-born citizens in the march across the Western wilderness. As long as open lands remained in the West, Americans could not feel crowded, and they welcomed any additional aid that they might receive for their task of subduing their land.

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Americans suddenly began to realize that their supply of land in the West was not inexhaustible. Throughout the 1880's and 1890's a wide variety of spokesmen warned the American public of the imminent disappearance of the nation's free public lands. The famous prediction included in the 1890 census report, of course, and Frederick Jackson Turner's renowned 1893 essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" were the most dramatic examples of this danger signal. But long before the 1890's other Americans had begun to discuss the coming exhaustion of the Western lands and the ominous future that such a process could bring to the American republic.

With one of the factors that had created the nation's growth disappearing, many Americans of the late nineteenth century began to argue that the other--large-scale immigration--could no longer be welcomed as a benefit to the country. With the continent subdued, with opportunities for homesteads in the West continually decreasing, some Americans suggested, further immigration could only be a burden. That the nation's first extensive campaign for immigration restriction occurred at the same time as the nation began to worry about the end of the frontier was more than coincidence. Although it was not the only or, by any means, the most significant factor in the drive for restriction, the belief in the exhaustion of the public lands provided a powerful impetus to the crusade for immigration restriction that arose in the late nineteenth century.

Lord Bryce, the British historian and politician and a perceptive observer of the American nation at the end of the nineteenth century, provided one of the more coherent discussions of the way in which the disappearance of the frontier might affect American society. In his influential study of The American Commonwealth, first published in 1888, Bryce suggested that the United States possessed three great advantages that protected it from the problems disturbing Europe: a general lack of class distinctions; widespread diffusion of wealth and property among the population; and relative freedom from poverty and economic distress, because of the abundance of economic opportunity in America, with "the still unoccupied or undeveloped West providing a safety valve available in times of depression."¹ But, Bryce warned, those advantages, and with them the security and prosperity of the United States, were threatened by two influences: the increasing tide of immigration to America, and the impending exhaustion of the Western lands.² Just as mysterious fog-banks endanger a ship in the ocean, Bryce observed, the coming exhaustion of the public lands presented to America "a time of mists and shadows, wherein dangers may lie concealed whose form and magnitude she can scarcely yet conjecture." The

¹James Bryce, The American Commonwealth (2nd ed., rev.; 2 vols.; London and New York: MacMillan and Co., 1890), p. 716.

²Ibid., pp. 716-717.

disappearance of the nation's best land would lead to a rise in food prices and a harsher struggle for existence; more significantly, it would end the outlet for population that the West had provided, drive people more and more into cities, and there increase the problems of labor competition and pauperism. "In fact," Bryce declared, "the chronic evils and problems of old societies and crowded countries, such as we see them to-day in Europe, will have reappeared on this new soil."³

Bryce also noted in his monumental work that the West had always been the part of the United States most free from the corruptions of Europe, and that immigrants who settled in the West, through a continual process of isolation and hard work, shed their old customs and ties and became more attached to American society.⁴ But as the frontier disappeared, that process, too, was threatened. According to Bryce, the final exhaustion of the public lands might not occur for another thirty years, but when it did come a huge series of problems would beset the United States: "It will be a time of trial for democratic institutions."⁵

Lord Bryce was only one of the many authors who, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, called attention to the dangers presented by the passing of the public lands.

³Ibid., p. 717.

⁴Ibid., p. 697.

⁵Ibid., p. 717.

He was not, furthermore, an active participant in the campaign for immigration restriction. His brief reference to the closing of the frontier in The American Commonwealth, however, is significant because it demonstrates all of the major themes that tied the exhaustion of the public lands to the cause of restriction. Not only did Bryce connect immigration and land exhaustion as the two factors threatening American institutions, but he also described specifically how the two factors intertwined. The disappearance of the frontier ended the possibility of rural settlement on cheap homesteads for immigrants, and drove them into cities. It removed America's traditional labor safety valve, and meant that immigrant labor competition would lower American wages. Finally, it eliminated the pioneering life by which immigrants had been assimilated into true American society. These themes were reiterated continually throughout the 1880's and 1890's by many Americans who claimed that the closing of the frontier provided one reason for an immediate reduction in immigration to the United States.

The belief in the disappearance of the frontier and the campaign for immigration restriction appeared at--and were themselves a product of--a time of profound psychological crisis for the United States. In the 1880's and 1890's Americans sensed that the values and ideals that they had always cherished suddenly were dissolving within a flood of change.

There is in all the past [wrote Henry George in 1883] nothing to compare with the rapid changes now going on in the civilized world And that the rapid changes now going on are bringing up problems that demand most earnest attention may be seen on every hand. Symptoms of danger, premonitions of violence, are appearing all over the civilized world. Creeds are dying, beliefs are changing; the old forces of conservatism are melting away.⁶

Americans had always believed that theirs was a society of prosperity and opportunity, but in the late nineteenth century they felt the effects of large-scale depression, particularly in the years after 1893, and they witnessed mass unemployment, poverty, and slum conditions in the cities. They had always believed that their society was free from the class conflict that plagued Europe, but in the 1880's and 1890's they fearfully watched the growing strength of trade unionism, felt the bitter attacks of Henry George and Thorstein Veblen, and noted the rising discontent of impoverished farmers. They had always maintained faith in the perfection of their democratic institutions, but now they saw those institutions mocked by urban boss governments and threatened by the appearance of socialists and anarchists. They had believed that America could be a land free from violent industrial labor conflicts, but suddenly they heard of the railroad strikes of 1877, the Haymarket Square riot of 1886, the Homestead Strike of 1892, the Pullman Strike of

⁶Henry George, Social Problems, in The Complete Works of Henry George, II (New York: Doubleday Page and Company, 1904), pp. 6-7.

1894, and dozens of other examples of labor unrest. In 1894 Americans even had to consider the meaning of an "army" of some five hundred men, led by the reformer Jacob S. Coxey, marching upon the Capitol of the United States and demanding federal relief programs to combat the depression. The psychological impact of all this on Americans was devastating, and produced at the end of the nineteenth century what one historian has called a transition period from an age of confidence to an age of doubt.⁷

The most basic aspect of the rising mood of doubt in the United States was the country's rapid transformation into an urban-industrial society, with all of the dislocations presented by such a change. Industrialization meant that the old Jeffersonian concept of a nation of yeoman farmers no longer could apply to the United States. By 1890 American industry produced more wealth than did American farms,⁸ and the urban-industrial future of the country had become a fact. Americans increasingly were leaving their farms and heading for jobs in the cities. Moreover, those farmers who remained were by no means prosperous, contented Jeffersonian yeomen. They were impoverished and oppressed by the forces of agricultural depression and the vagaries of a new world-wide

⁷Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), pp. 47-48. See, in particular, all of Chapter II: pp. 41-54.

⁸Gilbert C. Fite, The Farmers' Frontier 1865-1900 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), pp. 223-224.

agrarian market, and their discontent coalesced into political demands for basic changes in the American economic and social structure.

The doctrine of the closing of the frontier conformed perfectly to the general mood of doubt in the late nineteenth century, and the statements of Turner and others received a wide hearing among the American public. Indeed, the fear of the exhaustion of the public lands was a basic part of the transition from an agrarian nation to an urban-industrial society.

Although it is by no means true that the frontier simply ended in the 1890's--in 1900 there were still some 560 million acres of land available under federal land laws⁹--most of the better, more arable lands of the West had fallen into private hands by that time. More significantly, Americans of the late nineteenth century sincerely believed that their frontier was disappearing, and the belief profoundly frightened them. The closing of the frontier would bring to Americans final proof that their agrarian democracy was evaporating, and that the renowned pioneer spirit was vanishing from the United States. Accordingly, many Americans in the 1880's and 1890's desperately sought ways by which they could alleviate the distress that must face the nation when the frontier was gone.

⁹E. Louise Peffer, The Closing of the Public Domain: Disposal and Reservation Policies 1900-50 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1951), pp. 3-4.

Such a goal involved, in one direction, a search for new frontiers to conquer. This could take the form, domestically, of active participation in the "strenuous life" advocated by Theodore Roosevelt or, internationally, of seeking foreign markets for American industry and trade.¹⁰ In another direction, it involved a search for new measures by which the United States could preserve the virtues that formerly the frontier had provided. The pioneer life, Americans believed, had always promoted democracy, individualism, nationalism, and the formation of a composite American character. With the frontier gone, new and more artificial means of protecting those qualities had to be devised, such as an additional

¹⁰For contemporary suggestions of the need to open up new frontiers through overseas expansion, see Josiah Strong, Expansion Under New World-Conditions (New York: The Baker and Taylor Company, 1900), pp. 27-43; and Frank Norris, "The Frontier Gone at Last," The World's Work, III (February, 1902), pp. 1728-1731. Walter LaFeber has shown that American expansionism of the 1890's was not a sudden effect of the closing of the frontier, but rather the culmination of the foreign policy and industrial transformation of the entire post-Civil War period. According to LaFeber, the industrial revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century brought to America an era of economic surplus, depressions, and labor violence, and the United States tried to solve these social and economic problems through a policy of foreign expansion. This was not expansion in terms of a colonial empire, but rather an economic expansion based on a need to acquire new markets for America's industrial surpluses. LaFeber, The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1963), pp. 1-61, 407-417. Although LaFeber denies that there was any direct cause-and-effect relationship between the closing of the frontier and the expansionism of the 1890's, he does agree that Americans of the period believed that there was a connection: "But there can be no doubt that one important part of the rationale for an expansive foreign policy in the 1890's was a fervent (though erroneous) belief held by many American [sic] that their unique and beneficial internal frontier no longer existed." Ibid., p. 64.

and more positive role for government in guaranteeing equality of opportunity. Another means by which the old frontier characteristics could be preserved, many Americans announced, was to eliminate one of the forces that now threatened those characteristics: immigration.

Immigrants, many Americans believed, had become more of a threat to American institutions with the frontier disappearing, because they contributed to most of the problems connected with the loss of the public lands. With Western homesteads unavailable, immigrants crowded into cities and increased the problems of crime, pauperism, and corrupt urban governments. With the Western safety valve gone, immigrants had to seek jobs in Eastern factories, where they competed with native-born workers, drove down wages, and aroused labor discontent. Their radical and socialist views, Americans claimed, promoted unionism, strikes, and labor violence. Furthermore, the immigrants--especially the newer ones from southern and eastern Europe--did not assimilate into American society, largely because the Americanization process provided by the frontier had vanished. With these fears in mind, leading Americans of the late nineteenth century found that the closing of the frontier provided a potent reason for halting further immigration.

In the 1880's and 1890's, then, two general fears--those produced by the increasing tide of immigration and by the loss of the public domain--combined in a drive to restrict European immigration. This aspect of the movement for restriction dom-

inated the period roughly from 1882, when Congress passed the first general law regulating immigration, to 1897, when President Cleveland vetoed a bill designed to reduce immigration substantially by means of a literacy test. During that period the fears caused by the closing of the frontier were most immediate and most influential in the American mind. During that time, leading American restrictionists--and three men in particular: Josiah Strong, Francis Amasa Walker, and Richmond Mayo-Smith--made effective use of the frontier theme in their arguments against immigration. Large-scale restriction, of course, did not appear until Congress devised the quota system in the 1920's. By that time, however, racial fears and the general mood of disillusionment following World War I were more important factors behind restriction. The frontier theme was most prominent in the campaign during the years when Americans believed that the frontier was disappearing, at the end of the nineteenth century.

The closing of the frontier, obviously, was only one of the influences affecting anti-immigration sentiment in the 1880's and 1890's. Resentment of labor competition, fear of radicalism from abroad, the urban crisis, the huge increase in immigration following 1880, and especially prejudice against the "new" immigration all combined as important factors in the movement. It is, however, a significant fact that sentiment in favor of restriction rose to such a height in a period when Americans for the first time expressed anxiety about the loss

of their public lands, and the fear of the disappearance of the frontier permeated many of the arguments for restriction presented in the periodical literature of the era.

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST FEAR: IMMIGRATION

"There is land enough in America for the inhabitants of all Europe," declared the politician and orator Edward Everett in a speech on immigration in 1852, a sentiment with which most Americans agreed for the following three decades.¹ The United States had, in fact, looked favorably upon immigration from the very beginning of its history as a nation; one of the grievances that the authors of the Declaration of Independence had directed against the King of England had been that he obstructed the immigration of foreigners to the colonies. Resentment of immigrants had appeared at times in the early years of the republic, such as the prejudice against Irish Catholics in the 1830's or the Know-Nothing movement in the 1850's, but those incidents had resulted primarily from religious bias and were not, by any means, widespread and perdurable movements throughout the nation. Through the Civil War era and beyond, the country still believed in its obligation, as a haven of liberty, to welcome the oppressed masses of Europe, and it furthermore sought the assistance of

¹Quoted in Edith Abbott, Historical Aspects of the Immigration Problem: Select Documents (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), p. 625.

immigrants in subduing the continent.²

Americans often declared that immigrants supplied the muscle, while native-born citizens provided the "headwork," needed to develop the land. Immigrant labor aided in the construction of railroads and canals, provided needed manpower in young industries, and supplied much of the unskilled labor that the country required. Above all, Americans welcomed the aid of immigrants in pushing the agricultural frontier further and further west. With a huge and nearly empty continent of arable lands, the nation accepted all the help that arrived at its shores.

It will be seen at once [an American declared in 1855] that we have plenty of land yet unoccupied, and that there is no danger as yet of crowding one another It is not surprising that, while we have so much land, which it is utterly impossible for us to use or occupy, the crowded population of Europe should annually send off immense numbers to find a home in the western world, where there is so much room for them, and such ample accommodations. We are glad that they come. We would welcome them and give them on our soil a free and happy home.³

The United States government, on the basis of similar sentiments, often encouraged immigration through the middle years of the century. In 1864 the Senate committee on agriculture

²For much of the material of this chapter, I am indebted to John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925 (2nd ed.; New York: Atheneum, 1963); and Maldwyn Allen Jones, American Immigration (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

³A. Woodbury, "The Moral of Statistics," New Englander, XIII (1855), pp. 189-191; quoted in Abbott, Historical Aspects of the Immigration Problem, p. 810.

formally noted the benefits of immigration in developing the land and mineral resources of the nation,⁴ and in the same year the Republican party declared its support for an open immigration policy: "Foreign immigration which in the past has added so much to the wealth, resources and increase of power to this nation--the asylum of the oppressed of all nations--should be fostered and encouraged by a liberal and just policy."⁵

Western states and territories, in particular, actively encouraged immigration throughout the 1860's and 1870's. Many states created immigration agencies to promote foreign settlement in their open agricultural areas. The agencies advertised widely in the East and in Europe, published maps and pamphlets to lure immigrants, and even sent representatives abroad to stimulate migration. Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa were especially successful in enticing settlers from Scandinavia and Germany, and states actually competed against one another for potential settlers. Western railroads, in addition, directed an extensive land promotion campaign toward immigrants. Not only did the railroad companies hope to sell the lands that they had acquired through federal land grants, but they also needed settlement along their western routes to provide future freight business. Accordingly, the railroad

⁴Quoted in ibid., pp. 346-348.

⁵Quoted in William S. Bernard, ed., American Immigration Policy: A Reappraisal (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1950), p. 6.

companies offered special long-term payment policies to immigrants who purchased their lands, and offered, as well, reduced passenger fares to those lands. Some companies even built churches and schools for new communities in the West in order to encourage settlement. Individual land speculators, Western editors, and local boosters, along with the states and railroads, all energetically promoted immigrant settlement of the West at a time when the frontier lands appeared to be inexhaustible.⁶

Most immigrants in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it is true, did not settle as farmers in the West. Many thousands of Britons, Scandinavians, and Germans did migrate to Midwestern agricultural areas, but other immigrant groups tended to congregate in the cities of the United States. Many immigrants of the period were unskilled workers, not farmers, and lacked the capital and knowledge necessary for agriculture in the West. A general sense of economic opportunity, not specifically the promise of free lands, had attracted them to America.⁷ Nineteenth-century Americans,

⁶Fite, The Farmers' Frontier, pp. 24-29; Jones, American Immigration, pp. 187-190. For a more extensive treatment of the efforts of Great Plains states to attract immigration, the roles of state immigration bureaus, and promotional advertising of this era, see David M. Emmons, Garden in the Grasslands: Boomer Literature of the Central Great Plains (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), pp. 50-59, 99-127, and passim.

⁷Folke Doving, "European Reactions to the Homestead Act," Journal of Economic History, XXII (December, 1962), pp. 462-464; Jones, American Immigration, pp. 210-216.

however, did not always grasp such knowledge so readily available to twentieth-century historians. To them, immigrants were beneficial because they did appear to settle on Western farms and further the development of the continent. Moreover, immigrants who settled in the East often replaced American farmers who moved West, and in that way they contributed to the general westward expansion of the nation.

During the 1860's and 1870's, therefore, most Americans were confident of the material growth of their nation and regarded immigration as an aid to that growth. They actively encouraged immigration to the West, and maintained a faith in the assimilative powers of the nation as a melting pot.⁸ By the beginning of the 1880's, however, Americans began to question the long-accepted benefits of immigration. A continually growing tide of immigration, a rise in labor unionism and unrest, the growth of urban problems, and, above all, a change in the source of immigrants all combined to create, in the minds of Americans, a new and widespread fear of immigration.

Early in 1891 the superintendent of police in New Orleans was murdered. Suspicion immediately centered around the local

⁸Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 14-23. Higham notes that some materialistic Americans even assigned a monetary value of up to \$1000 or more to each immigrant, as an indication of the value he brought to the nation: ibid., p. 17. See also Emmons, Garden in the Grasslands, pp. 47-50.

community of Italian immigrants, many of whom were believed to have connections with a secret group known as the Mafia. The local authorities brought several Italians to trial for the crime, but the jury refused to convict a single one. The citizens of New Orleans suspected bribery, and decided that they would have to enforce justice themselves. On the night of March 14, 1891, a mob composed primarily of leading businessmen of the city burst into the prison where those accused of the crime were being held and lynched eleven Italians. The prison officials did nothing to stop the deed, and the local press of New Orleans applauded the action.⁹

Two months later, Representative Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, in an article for The North American Review, discussed the meaning of the incident for the American public. Lodge announced his disapproval of the mob action, of course, but declared that the real significance of the deed went far beyond the issue of a mere act of violence. Americans were a peaceful and law-abiding people, Lodge noted, and "such acts as the killing of these eleven Italians do not spring from nothing without reason or provocation." With a rather obscure bit of logic, Lodge proceeded to show that the immigrants had died because of the fact that they had been there; that is, their mere presence in the United States aroused uncontrollable fears and destroyed the normal lawful conscience

⁹Ibid., pp. 90-91; Henry Cabot Lodge, "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration," The North American Review, CLII (May, 1891), pp. 602-612.

of the American people. The existence, Lodge argued, of masses of illiterate and potentially criminal immigrants in American cities--classes of people who might possibly contribute to the rise of such dangerous societies as the Mafia--in itself undermined the system of local government in the United States, created widespread fear of violence and crime, threatened the American standard of living, and destroyed the natural equanimity of the American people. The blame for the Italians' deaths, Lodge observed, lay with the United States government for allowing them to be in the country in the first place.

I believe that, whatever the proximate causes of the shocking event at New Orleans may have been, the underlying cause, and the one with which alone the people of the United States can deal, is to be found in the utter carelessness with which we treat immigration to this country.

Lodge, therefore, demanded stricter controls over immigration to prevent such scenes from occurring again.¹⁰

Other Americans of the time saw the New Orleans incident as an argument for further restriction of immigration. "The New Orleans massacre of Italians has made more prominent than ever the question of restriction on immigration," noted E. L. Godkin in The Nation, and he went on to suggest that only immigrants who could speak English should be admitted to the United States.¹¹ A writer in the Political Science Quarterly

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹[E. L. Godkin], "The Proper Sieve for Immigrants," The Nation, LII (April 16, 1891), p. 312.

referred to the "disorder" as "an alarm-bell" that should awake the nation to the dangers of a foreign population in its midst,¹² and throughout the country the event contributed to a mood of anti-immigration hysteria.¹³

The New Orleans incident, therefore, was not only significant as one example of mob violence in the late nineteenth century; it was also an example of the pervasive fear of immigration that had appeared in the United States by the 1880's and 1890's. The episode dramatized the social, economic, and political fears by then held by Americans toward immigrants, and it furthermore indicated how those fears were most often directed against the "new" immigrants from the southern and eastern parts of Europe. By the last two decades of the nineteenth century, more Americans than ever before opposed immigration; to them, it seemed that immigration now menaced the social, political, and moral stability of the republic.

Widespread fear of immigration began in an era when immigration to America had risen to proportions never before reached. By the 1880's vast improvements in communication and transportation, leading to cheaper and easier steamship travel across the ocean, provided greater opportunity for

¹²John Hawks Noble, "The Present State of the Immigration Question," Political Science Quarterly, VII (June, 1892), p. 232.

¹³Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 91-92.

emigration from Europe. Instead of a crossing that took from one to three months, steamships now made possible a ten-day voyage to America at any time of the year.¹⁴ Steamship companies, competing with one another, actively promoted immigrant travel to the United States and offered attractive fares for a voyage to the land of opportunity. Americans of the time suddenly found themselves burdened with what they called "the great gulf-stream of humanity which sets from Europe upon America--the greatest migration of peoples since the world began."¹⁵ Beginning in the 1880's, the sheer force of numbers from abroad frightened Americans.

Americans, however, were more afraid of what those numbers could mean to the future of American institutions. The arrival of hordes of immigrants aroused great fears concerning all aspects of American society. Economically, the immigrants

¹⁴Jones, American Immigration, pp. 183-185.

¹⁵Henry George, Social Problems, p. 20. A special commission created by Congress in 1891 to investigate the causes of immigration to the United States issued a lengthy, two-volume report of its findings. The five commissioners, reporting separately, disagreed somewhat on the major reasons for emigration from Europe, but all emphasized the general hope for a higher standard of living and increased economic opportunity. Some of the commissioners believed that immigrants usually decided to move through the letters and information they received from friends and relatives already living in America. Other commissioners, however, emphasized the importance of steamship company promotion, contract labor agreements, and fraudulent advertising in enticing immigrants to the United States. U.S., Congress, House, A Report of the Commissioners of Immigration Upon the Causes Which Incite Immigration to the United States, House exec. doc. 235, 52nd Cong., 1st Sess., 1892, Vol. I, pp. 120-123, 235-237, 248, 263, and passim.

seemed to endanger the high standard of living and the bargaining power long enjoyed by the American worker. "Immigration," wrote Richmond Mayo-Smith in 1888, "subjects the laborer of America to a stress of competition such as no laboring class in the world has ever been called upon to endure."¹⁶ Immigrant labor competition, Americans shouted, would end high wages in the United States.

Politically, Americans viewed mass immigration as a threat to democracy. Ignorant new voters, with no experience in or knowledge of the responsibilities of self-government, could overturn the American electoral system. Moreover, they could easily fall victim to the corrupt influences of demagogues and urban bosses. "There is no corner of our system," E. L. Godkin argued, "in which the hastily made and ignorant foreign voter may not be found eating away the political structure, like a white ant, with a group of natives standing over and encouraging him."¹⁷ Immigrants posed a further political threat, many Americans believed, because they often brought with them anarchism, socialism, and other radical doctrines.¹⁸

¹⁶Richmond Mayo-Smith, "Control of Immigration. II," Political Science Quarterly, III (June, 1888), p. 223.

¹⁷[E. L. Godkin], "The Harm of Immigration," The Nation, LVI (January 19, 1893), p. 43. For similar views of the political fears aroused by immigrants, see Hjalmar H. Boyesen, "Dangers of Unrestricted Immigration," The Forum, III (July, 1887), pp. 532-542; and Noble Canby, "Immigration," The Chautauquan, XVI (November, 1892), pp. 197-201.

¹⁸Although it was true that immigrants provided a high percentage of the trade union members and leaders in America,

European immigration continues [Lord Bryce wrote], and though more than two-thirds of the immigrants make valuable citizens, the remainder, many by their political ignorance and instability, some few by their proneness to embrace anti-social doctrines, are a source of danger to the community, lowering its tone, providing material for demagogues to work on, threatening outbreaks like those of Pennsylvania in 1877, of Cincinnati in 1884, of Chicago in 1886.¹⁹

Mass immigration, the citizens of the United States began to fear after 1880, menaced the political stability of the nation.

Socially, the immigrants aroused an even greater fear. To a large extent, this was because of the way in which they congregated in the cities of the country. The immigrants lived by themselves in urban areas, organized by nationality, speaking their own languages, following their native customs, and refusing to become "Americans." They often established their own schools, churches, and newspapers. They lived in the most degraded slum conditions, and, Americans claimed, increased the levels of crime, poverty, disease, illiteracy, and insanity. Accordingly, they placed a financial burden upon the local taxpayers and endangered the security of the community. But the greatest social fear, as one author indicated,

as well as many of the more radical leaders of the late nineteenth century, and although nativists always linked immigration with political radicalism, most immigrants were actually very conservative. Their European tradition of accepting the existing state of things, their loneliness and confusion in America, their fear of change and belief that change could only make matters worse, and their ties to the past and the ideals of their homeland all tended to make immigrants socially and politically conservative. See Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951), pp. 108-110; and Jones, American Immigration, pp. 229-232.

¹⁹Bryce, The American Commonwealth, p. 716.

was the one based on the simple fact that the immigrants were "different": "The danger which threatens us is the growth of a large foreign element in our population whose habits of thought and behavior are radically different from those which the founders of the nation hoped to establish here."²⁰ This fear arose in the 1880's and 1890's directly in response to the so-called "new" immigration from southern and eastern Europe.

Americans had always been accustomed to an immigration consisting of the English, Germans, and Scandinavians--Anglo-Saxon peoples from the northern and western parts of Europe. Those immigrants had been similar in traditions, customs, and religions to the native-born citizens of the United States, and they had assimilated easily into American society. Americans could tolerate and welcome them readily; after a while, they found that they could tolerate even the Irish immigrants. Around 1880, however, driven by political and religious discontent and the economic dislocations caused by industrialism and agricultural depression, a rising tide of immigrants began arriving in the United States from such places as Austria, Hungary, Russia, Italy, Turkey, and Rumania. These "new" immigrants by no means replaced the older immigration from northern and western Europe, but they did appear in ever-

²⁰Noble, "The Present State of the Immigration Question," p. 232.

increasing numbers throughout the 1880's and early 1890's.²¹

The new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe frightened most Americans by the fact of their difference. They were, in general, poorer and less educated than any class of immigrants who had come before them. They were, moreover, generally Roman Catholic or Jewish, thus arousing hostility in a Protestant nation. Furthermore, they seemed to aggravate all the political, economic, and social dangers that Americans associated with immigration. They were, for the most part, unskilled workers who increased labor competition and drove down wages. They were ignorant of democratic political institutions. They lived in crowded slum conditions in the nation's cities. Above all, they looked different; they were not Anglo-Saxons, Americans claimed, they were members of a different race.²²

With the arrival of the new immigrants in the 1880's and 1890's, Americans began a storm of hysterical criticism. Senator William E. Chandler of New Hampshire, one of the

²¹For a convenient table of European immigration figures throughout United States history, see The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present (Stamford, Conn.: Fairfield Publishers, n.d.), pp. 56-57.

²²Jones attacks the validity of the whole notion of a "new" immigration, claiming that these immigrants came in the same patterns and for the same reasons as all earlier waves of immigrants: American Immigration, pp. 3-5, 178-183, 192-193. It is nevertheless true that native-born Americans of the late nineteenth century believed sincerely in the idea of a new immigration, and reacted on the basis of that belief. It is also true, from a historical viewpoint, that immigration from the nations of southern and eastern Europe did increase drastically in the 1880's.

earlier Congressional leaders in the restriction movement, complained that the nation was now receiving "the very worst class of immigrants. They are illiterate, coarse, and stupid--utterly unfit for residence or citizenship in the United States."²³ Chandler's colleague Henry Cabot Lodge made the issue his most consistent political theme in the late nineteenth century.²⁴ Francis Amasa Walker, a leading lay spokesman for the cause of restriction, filled his writings with hostile references to the "shiftless peasants" and the "foul and stagnant pools of population" that were draining off from southern and eastern Europe into the United States. There was no reason, Walker exclaimed, why the country should have to accept persons who obviously represented "the utterest [sic] failures of civilization, the worst defeats in the struggle for existence, the lowest degradation of human nature."²⁵

Countless others joined in the denunciations. A writer in The Chautauquan complained of "those nationalities in the south and eastern part of Europe which have not held their own in the race struggle" dominating the recent arrivals in the country. "These hordes are of an inferior type," he

²³Wm. E. Chandler, "Methods of Restricting Immigration," The Forum, XIII (March, 1892), p. 129.

²⁴See, e.g., Henry Cabot Lodge, "The Restriction of Immigration," The North American Review, CLII (January, 1891), pp. 27-36.

²⁵Francis Amasa Walker, "Immigration," The Yale Review, I (August, 1892), pp. 131-135; Walker, "Immigration and Degradation," The Forum, II (August, 1891), pp. 643-644.

continued, "least capable of understanding our institutions, or adapted to responding to the opportunities and privileges of a free government."²⁶ The labor leader Terence V. Powderly agreed: "The population which came previous to 1860 was civilized, that which comes to-day is, in a great proportion, semi-barbarous."²⁷ Everywhere Americans protested the fact that the new immigrants did not assimilate into Anglo-Saxon, Protestant society, claiming that the new immigration "is not related to us in race or language, but has habits of thought and behavior radically foreign to those which have so far prevailed in the United States. These facts are too potent to be missed and too significant to be disregarded."²⁸

Many Americans of the period did not disregard such "facts." The first of the great fears of the 1880's and 1890's--that of immigration--motivated many influential leaders to campaign for some type of control over the rising tide of immigrants, and resulted in the first series of federal laws restricting immigration.

Nativist sentiment, of course, to some extent had been present in America ever since the first wave of settlers began

²⁶Canby, "Immigration," p. 199.

²⁷T. V. Powderly, "A Menacing Irruption," The North American Review, CXLVII (August, 1888), p. 166.

²⁸[J. H. Noble], "The New Immigration," The Nation, LIII (September 17, 1891), p. 210.

to consider themselves true "Americans." Before the 1880's, however, nativism specifically directed against immigration had reached significant proportions only sporadically. Most early forms of nativism, moreover, had appeared as part of fears that went beyond mere resentment of immigrants. The early colonial laws aimed at the restriction of some types of immigration had often stemmed from hostility toward religious and economic differences, not from any real race or nationality prejudice. In the 1790's, bitter political rivalries had influenced the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts by the Federalists, measures designed in part to halt the admission of alleged alien radicals whom the Federalists feared. Antagonism directed against the Irish in the 1830's and 1840's had been largely a result of religious bias against Catholics and fears of a papal plot against American democracy. The Know-Nothing movement, which became powerful enough to control some states in the middle 1850's, had not called specifically for immigration restriction, but more for excluding immigrants from participating in politics. The movement, furthermore, disappeared quickly in the midst of the more significant sectional conflicts in the 1850's; and, like all early nativist campaigns, it never really captured the support of a majority of the American public.²⁹

By the 1880's, however, the increasing social, economic,

²⁹Jones, American Immigration, pp. 39-176, passim.

and political fears aroused by the new immigration, and the ever-expanding numbers of immigrants, produced a new wave of anti-immigration sentiment, and one that affected a sizable portion of the American public and that revealed specific demands for a federal restriction of immigration. Americans from varied backgrounds and interests began to agree on the necessity of reducing immigration. Labor leaders and organizations campaigned against the labor competition that unrestricted immigration created.³⁰ Urban reformers of the late nineteenth century resented the problems of poverty and crime that immigrants seemed to intensify in the cities. Protestants continued to alert the public to the growing strength of the Catholic church in America as immigrants swarmed to the country. Americans reacted hysterically to the labor violence of the late 1880's and 1890's by increasing their demands for restriction of the immigrants who seemed to cause the conflicts. Above all else there were the racial fears against the new immigrants. What, in general, arose from the tensions of the period was the first widespread and long-lasting American movement against immigration.³¹

³⁰American labor generally favored restriction of immigrants specifically induced to America as contract labor, because of its fear of competition. Because American unions, however, included so large a percentage of foreign-born members and leaders, labor usually opposed sweeping limitations on voluntary immigration: Higham, "Origins of Immigration Restriction, 1882-1897: A Social Analysis," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXIX (June, 1952), pp. 80-81.

³¹Jones, American Immigration, pp. 252-258; Higham, "Origins of Immigration Restriction," pp. 78-84.

The mood of fear created, in the 1880's and 1890's, a series of local and national nativist societies throughout the United States. Many patriotic and fraternal organizations began to endorse the principle of restriction. The American Protective Association, founded in Clinton, Iowa, in 1887 by Henry F. Bowers, called for restriction of Catholics, but the group withered away by the late 1890's.³² More important and influential was the Immigration Restriction League, organized in 1894 by a group of young Boston Brahmins who resented the rising power of foreign elements in America, their own loss of status, and the weakening numerical strength of the Anglo-Saxon race in New England. For twenty-five years the League issued pamphlets, organized speeches, lobbied in Congress, and in other ways campaigned vigorously for a reduction in immigration.³³

The various restrictionists and their societies in the late nineteenth century announced their support for specific measures by which the nation could stop the flow of immigration, but there was never universal agreement upon what measures would be most effective. "There is an almost universal feeling in favor of greater restrictions than the law now imposes," declared Senator William E. Chandler in

³²Jones, American Immigration, pp. 255-256.

³³Barbara Miller Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 99-111 and passim.

1893, "but there is no unanimity of opinion as to what the new restrictive measures should be."³⁴ Chandler favored a system of consular certificates, whereby any prospective immigrant, before sailing to the United States, would obtain a certificate from an American consul attesting to his beneficial qualities and character, and indicating that he would not place an additional burden upon the American taxpayers. Others proposed various types of head taxes, by which only immigrants who could afford to pay a certain sum upon landing could settle in the United States.³⁵ Others declared that only those who could speak English should be admitted, since they could adapt easily to American political institutions.³⁶ A general test of literacy in any language became, in the 1890's, probably the most popular idea regarding restriction. Edward Bemis, a Johns Hopkins economist, first proposed the measure in 1888 in an article for the Andover Review.³⁷ The Immigration Restriction League appropriated the idea and made it one of its basic campaign doctrines. Prescott F. Hall, an original founder and secretary of the League, declared that there was a distinct correlation between illiteracy and crime, poverty, and violence, so that the literacy test measure would

³⁴W. E. Chandler, "Shall Immigration be Suspended?", The North American Review, CXLVI (January, 1893), p. 4.

³⁵See, e.g., Walker, "Immigration," pp. 139-141.

³⁶[Godkin], "The Proper Sieve for Immigrants," p. 312.

³⁷Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants, pp. 78-79.

exclude easily all undesirable immigrants from the country. Hall even suggested that the plan was a perfect one because the Statue of Liberty held a torch in one hand and a book in the other!³⁸ For these and other similar measures, restrictionists waged an extensive campaign at the end of the century.

Such a campaign implied that the federal government had the responsibility of enacting some type of controls over immigration, and by the late 1880's immigration bills had become a frequent aspect of Congressional business. Immigration restriction had become as well a major issue in political campaigns. In an 1891 survey of "The Political Issues of 1892," Henry Cabot Lodge noted that, along with silver coinage, the tariff, election reform and the civil service system, "there is, besides, a question of a widely different kind which ought perhaps to be considered in any enumeration of the probable issues of next year. This is the question of immigration." Lodge went on to suggest that the restriction issue was receiving more and more attention and was becoming "the gravest subject before the American people."³⁹ By the 1890's restriction was a leading doctrine of the Republican party, with Senators Lodge and Chandler organizing the

³⁸ Prescott F. Hall, "Immigration and the Educational Test," The North American Review, CLXV (October, 1897), pp. 400-401. See also Noble, "The Present State of the Immigration Question," pp. 238-243.

³⁹ Henry Cabot Lodge, "The Political Issues of 1892," The Forum, XII (September, 1891), pp. 104-105.

campaign in Congress. The Democratic party in general was less enthusiastic about restriction, because it contained more foreign-born members, but in 1892 the Republicans, Democrats, and Populists all issued platform statements calling for some type of controls over immigration.⁴⁰ In the closing years of the nineteenth century immigration restriction became a prominent social and political concern of a wide segment of the American public.

This concern about immigration, and the profound fears aroused by immigrants, produced in the 1880's and 1890's the first significant series of federal immigration laws. The measures passed often proved ineffective, and they were only minor acts compared to the sweeping immigration laws of the twentieth century, but they were nevertheless an important indication of the dominant fears of the late nineteenth century.

Although Congress had enacted a few measures concerning immigration earlier, the first general federal immigration law was passed in 1882.⁴¹ That act gave the Secretary of the

⁴⁰Harold U. Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion 1890-1900 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), p. 5.

⁴¹For brief surveys of the immigration legislation of the 1880's and 1890's, see Roy L. Garis, Immigration Restriction (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1927), pp. 83-116; Marion T. Bennett, American Immigration Policies: A History (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1963), passim; and Bernard, ed., American Immigration Policy, pp. 1-21. Garis is generally in favor of restriction, Bernard calls for a

Treasury supervision over immigration, and excluded certain categories of immigrants from landing in the United States: convicts, idiots, paupers, lunatics, and all persons likely to become a public charge. The law of 1882 also decreed a fifty-cent duty on all aliens entering the country, with the money acquired to be used for the expenses of inspecting the immigrants and for a relief fund for some of the arrivals. The measure was a weak one, and proved almost impossible to enforce; an immigration inspector in New York, for example, was unable to determine immediately which immigrants might be paupers or likely to become public charges.⁴²

Also in 1882 Congress passed the first Chinese exclusion act, the beginning of a series of measures aimed directly against oriental immigrants. Then in 1885, in an attempt to solve the problem of labor competition from European immi-

more liberal policy, while Bennett's work is simplistic and poorly written. Another survey of the early legislation can be found in a volume of the Dillingham Commission report: U.S., Congress, Senate, Reports of the Immigration Commission: Immigration Legislation, S. Doc. 758, 61st Cong., 3rd Sess., 1911, pp. 29-81. The latter work also reprints all the laws passed prior to 1911: pp. 95-126.

⁴²A Congressional committee appointed in 1890 to investigate the effectiveness of the law of 1882 and other immigration measures noted, in its report, that the port of New York had only five immigration clerks, who were so hurried in the inspection procedure that they could devote only thirty seconds of time to each immigrant. Under such conditions, the committee declared, "it is manifest that the inspection is wholly inadequate." U. S., Congress, House, Report of the Select Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House report 3472, 51st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1891, p. iii.

grants, Congress passed the Foran Act, or the Contract Labor Act. Enacted partly in response to demands from organized labor, the measure prohibited the importation of any alien already under a contract to work in the United States, and it voided all contracts signed by aliens prior to their landing. Exempted from the provisions of the law, however, were actors, singers, musicians, artists, domestic servants, and skilled workmen in new industries. Such exemptions, and the general difficulty of proving that a prior contract may have existed, made the Foran Act nearly impossible to enforce.⁴³

The next major piece of immigration legislation was a law of 1891, which added new categories to the 1882 lists of excluded persons: polygamists and those "suffering from a loathsome or a dangerous contagious disease." More importantly, the 1891 measure established a permanent federal administration in charge of immigration, and it created a series of federal inspection officers in all major American ports, thus allowing more vigorous enforcement of restriction laws. The act also compelled steamship companies to return, at their own expense, all passengers rejected for admission by the inspection officers; this provision forced the companies themselves to act as immigrant inspectors on the other side of the Atlantic.⁴⁴

⁴³Jones points out, in addition, that very few manufacturers in the post-Civil War period had actively encouraged contract labor in the first place: American Immigration, pp. 190-191.

⁴⁴Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 99-100.

The measures of 1882, 1885, and 1891, even when properly enforced, excluded only a small percentage of the thousands of immigrants seeking entrance to the United States in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁵ They did not, therefore, satisfy most of the spokesmen for restriction. In the 1890's the restrictionists began to band together in an extensive campaign for a harsher law: the literacy test bill, which was directed specifically at the "new" immigrants. Henry Cabot Lodge began promoting the idea as early as 1891, and in 1895 he presented such a bill to the Senate. Lodge's bill would have prohibited all aliens over the age of fourteen who could not read and write some language from entering the country. Congress finally passed the measure in December, 1896, but President Cleveland vetoed the bill just before leaving office in 1897. Cleveland charged that the proposed law would keep out beneficial as well as undesirable immigrants, and he noted, furthermore, that the measure was inconsistent with America's traditional image as a haven for the oppressed of the world.⁴⁶ Attempts to revive the literacy test bill were numerous throughout the early 1900's, but such a measure was not enacted until 1915. Immigration legislation in the

⁴⁵The laws, in addition, could not stop excluded immigrants from entering the country across the Canadian border, where there was no system of inspection.

⁴⁶Excerpts from Cleveland's veto message are reprinted in Edith Abbott, Immigration: Select Documents and Case Records (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), pp. 198-201.

1880's and 1890's, in general, remained diluted and sporadic.

The significant fact about the federal immigration legislation of the 1880's and 1890's, however, was that for the first time it existed. A rising fear of immigration in the late nineteenth century contributed to the passage of federal restriction laws, and, more importantly, to a widespread public campaign against immigration.

American nativism, John Higham has suggested, always arose as a defensive form of nationalism, and only at times when Americans were losing confidence in some aspect of their way of life.⁴⁷ When, in the 1880's and 1890's, tremendous new social, economic, and political pressures weakened Americans' confidence in their institutions, fear of immigration appeared. At the same time a second great fear grasped the attention of the nation: the impending exhaustion of the public lands. When the two fears met, Americans began to question seriously whether the right of immigration might not be "an abstract theory for whose sake we are sacrificing the great advantage of our elbow-room and risking our national character."⁴⁸ The combination of the two fears threatened both elbow-room and the national character, and that combined threat could only serve to intensify the already-existing demands for immigration restriction.

⁴⁷Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁸Noble, "The Present State of the Immigration Question," p. 243.

CHAPTER III

THE SECOND FEAR: THE CLOSING OF THE FRONTIER

When Frederick Jackson Turner announced to the "World's Congress of Historians and Historical Students" assembled at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1892 that "the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history,"¹ he was not saying anything new. As Theodore Roosevelt wrote to the young historian in 1894, Turner actually had only "put into definite shape a good deal of thought which has been floating around rather loosely."² Turner clarified and popularized in an academic context the

¹Frederick Jackson Turner, The Frontier in American History (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920, 1947), p. 38.

²Quoted in Ray Allen Billington, America's Frontier Heritage (Hinsdale, Ill.: The Dryden Press, 1966), p. 13. For a general discussion of the background to Turner's hypothesis, see ibid., pp. 4-13, as well as Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 108-131. Also valuable are James C. Malin, "Space and History: Reflections on the Closed-Space Doctrines of Turner and MacKinder and the Challenge of Those Ideas by the Air Age," Agricultural History, XVIII (April, 1944), pp. 65-74; Herman Clarence Nixon, "Precursors of Turner in the Interpretation of the American Frontier," South Atlantic Quarterly, XXVIII (January, 1929), pp. 83-89; and Lee Benson, Turner and Beard: American Historical Writing Reconsidered (New York: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 79-89.

importance of the frontier and its closing, but he admittedly had appropriated many of his ideas from an already existing body of opinion. The Italian economist Achille Loria had demonstrated the importance of the availability of free land to political institutions, and had suggested in the 1880's that the future exhaustion of lands in the United States would lead to widespread social unrest.³ More importantly, large numbers of Americans themselves throughout the 1880's and 1890's had begun to express anxiety about the impending disappearance of the frontier. Their ideas had helped to create, in the late nineteenth century, a widespread American fear that the future of the United States was seriously threatened by the closing of the public domain.

A wide variety of Americans--government officials, renowned authors, educators, private citizens--expressed their fears about the coming end of the frontier in the late nineteenth century, and the theme appeared frequently in the periodical literature of the era. As early as 1880 The Nation noted the danger: "The great progress of this country has taken place within the past twenty years, owing to the rapid settlement and cultivation of Western lands; and we have been going on as if there were to be no exhaustion of the impelling force." But, the editorial continued, the land was rapidly disappearing: "At the present rate of settlement the desir-

³Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner, pp. 121-123; Benson, Turner and Beard, pp. 1-40.

able free 'homestead' lands will probably all be occupied before this decade has ended."⁴ A special Land Commission Report of 1880 gave official notice to the idea.

It was estimated, June 30, 1879, that (exclusive of certain lands in the Southern States) of lands over which the survey and disposition laws had been extended, lying in the West, the United States did not own, of arable agricultural public lands, which could be cultivated without irrigation or other artificial appliances, more than the area of the present State of Ohio, viz., 25,576,960 acres.⁵

A few years later Thomas Donaldson's immense statistical analysis of The Public Domain echoed the warning. There was a large quantity of desert lands still available in the West, Donaldson stated, and many lands suitable only for mineral or timber use, but "the agricultural lands are now about absorbed, and the movement westward in search of free government lands must soon cease."⁶

The fear mounted throughout the 1880's. "It has never seemed to occur to [the nation] that a day would come when there would be no public domain to give away," announced a special reporter for The North American Review in 1886. But through ineffective land laws, through huge grants to rail-

⁴"An Agricultural Outlook," The Nation, XXXI (August 19, 1880), p. 127.

⁵Quoted by Thomas P. Gill, "Landlordism in America," The North American Review, CXLII (January, 1886), p. 60.

⁶Thomas Donaldson, The Public Domain (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), p. 27.

roads and speculators, through a false optimistic belief that the nation's riches would last forever, the government had squandered nearly all of its lands.

It is no longer a question of untold millions of acres of public domain. It is no longer a question for to-morrow, it is a question for to-day. The pressure has already come. For all practical purposes of bestowing free farms on its growing population, the public domain of the United States is now exhausted.⁷

One month later another writer in the same magazine repeated the warning. "Considering the great wealth of public domain which Uncle Sam had at the outset it is amazing to contemplate the brief period in which he has squandered his estate," the author noted. But, he went on, it was unfortunately true that there were very few arable acres remaining in the West, and it "seems clear that by the end of the century we shall have no public lands open for cultivation."⁸ Both writers were particularly concerned that many of the Western lands had fallen into the hands of private speculators and absentee landlords, thus raising the price of land, destroying the ideal of a small homestead, and creating a landlord-tenant system in the United States.

The notes of alarm continued into the early 1890's. C. Wood Davis, writing in The Country Gentleman in 1891, asked what the closing of the frontier might mean to the nation.

⁷Gill, "Landlordism in America," pp. 52-60; quotes from pp. 54, 60.

⁸A. J. Desmond, "America's Land Question," The North American Review, CXLII (February, 1886), pp. 157, 158.

When we reflect that the prime factor in the unexampled prosperity of the United States, and our comparative freedom from many of the social and economic problems long confronting Europe, has been the existence of an almost unlimited area of fertile land to which the unemployed could freely resort; that, practically, such lands are now fully occupied, and that such occupancy has occasioned a sudden halt in the westward movement of population at the line found to the extreme western limit of profitable agriculture, it may be well to inquire what changes are likely to result from the exhaustion of the tillable portion of the public domain.⁹

F. H. Newell, writing in Science in 1893, indicated that most of the Western land suitable for agriculture had already been appropriated: "At the present rate of disposal of public lands it is a question of only a few years when every available acre will be taken."¹⁰ By the time of Turner's famous essay, a profound fear concerning the future of the nation without its public lands already had arisen in the United States.¹¹

Henry George was probably the most important writer of the 1880's to warn of the imminent exhaustion of the public

⁹Quoted in Benson, Turner and Beard, p. 80.

¹⁰F. H. Newell, "Our Vacant Public Lands," Science, XXI (April 14, 1893), p. 199.

¹¹Not everyone believed that the closing of the frontier would be a disaster. C. Wood Davis, for example, thought that the exhaustion of the public lands would bring a rise in agricultural prices and prosperity, while J. Willis Gleed, a Kansas lawyer and real estate promoter, suggested in The Forum that land values would rise as the frontier disappeared: Benson, Turner and Beard, pp. 58-63, 65-66.

domain. Land was the basic component of George's entire economic theory, and to George the problem of the disappearance of the public lands involved the rise of a landlord class who controlled those lands and the consequent division of American society into social classes. The dangers presented by the loss of the frontier, according to George, threatened the very stability of American civilization.

As early as 1871 George noticed that relatively little good, arable land remained free of private control in the United States. In Our Land and Land Policy he announced that if one deducted from the total acreage of the public domain the lands that had been lost through railroad grants, lands covered by water, mountains, and desert, and dry plains land unfit for agriculture, the nation contained only the relatively small figure of 450 million acres of profitable farm land.¹² Accordingly, he warned, the public domain could not last so long as the end of the century: "In fact, if we go ahead, disposing of it at the rate we are now doing, it will not begin to last so long, and we may even count upon our ten fingers the years beyond which our public lands will be hardly worth speaking of."¹³

The loss of the public domain was a tremendously serious matter to George, because he saw individual, privately-owned

¹²Henry George, Our Land and Land Policy, in The Complete Works of Henry George, VIII (New York: Doubleday Page and Company, 1904), pp. 3-5.

¹³Ibid., p. 8.

homesteads as a basic component of American society. In his most celebrated work, Progress and Poverty, published in 1880, George closely forecast Turner's later remarks about the role of frontier settlement as a determinant of American character.

This public domain--the vast extent of land yet to be reduced to private possession, the enormous common to which the faces of the energetic were always turned, has been the great fact that, since the days when the first settlements began to fringe the Atlantic Coast, has formed our national character and colored our national thought The General intelligence, the general comfort, the active invention, the power of adaptation and assimilation, the free, independent spirit, the energy and hopefulness that have marked our people, are not causes, but results--they have sprung from our unfenced land. This public domain has been the transmuting force which has turned the thriftless, unambitious European peasant into the self-reliant Western farmer All that we are proud of in the American character; all that makes our conditions and institutions better than those of older countries, we may trace to the fact that land has been cheap in the United States, because new soil has been open to the emigrant.¹⁴

Such a beneficial trait of the frontier, George warned, would disappear as all of the public lands passed into private hands--especially into the hands of large speculators and landowners. Already the best lands in the country had been appropriated by the railroads and other private interests, leaving only mountain and desert land available: "The great fact which has been so potent is ceasing to be. The public

¹⁴George, Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy; Works, I, pp. 387-388. For a similar statement, see George, Social Problems, p. 21.

domain is almost gone--a very few years will end its influence, already rapidly failing."¹⁵

America's most urgent problem, George therefore declared, was to eliminate land monopoly, an evil that became more sinister as the public lands disappeared. Land monopoly, he suggested, was the source of the widespread discrepancy in wealth in America, and of the problems of industrial depression as well. Since land was the ultimate source of all wealth, labor must have access to land in order to find opportunity and produce wealth. But land monopoly, particularly that involving speculation, allowed much of America's land to lie unused, and thus destroyed access to opportunity and upset the nation's economy. The problem became more acute as the previously free lands of the West disappeared into private hands, eliminating access to wealth to an even greater extent.

George's solution to the problem, of course, was a simple one: the single tax on land. The government should, in effect, make land common property by abolishing all taxes except those on land values. This system would force landowners either to make profitable use of their land or to sell it to someone else who would; no one could afford to hold land idle for speculative purposes. The single tax thus would reinstate access to economic opportunity, and, in addition, overcome the difficulties presented by the loss of the public domain.

¹⁵George, Progress and Poverty, pp. 388-389.

Henry George, as a realistic observer, was not worried that all of the Western lands were about to be consumed. He only feared that they were being appropriated--"fenced in"--by private speculators, thus removing America's traditional unit of Western settlement, the cheap homestead.¹⁶ To George, as well as to many other Americans of the late nineteenth century, the final exhaustion of the free public lands seemed close at hand, and such a circumstance would occasion vast and unwelcome changes in the pattern of American society.

From a twentieth-century viewpoint, it is easy to demonstrate that the frontier really did not close in 1890 or at any other time near the end of the nineteenth century. The nation actually disposed of more land under its homestead laws after 1890 than it did prior to that year, and in 1900 one-fourth of the entire country was still available under various land laws.¹⁷ It is, nevertheless, significant that a major portion of the arable homestead lands in the West--

¹⁶See, e.g., Social Problems, pp. 24-25.

¹⁷Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion, p. 2; Fred A. Shannon, "The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus," American Historical Review, XLI (July, 1936), pp. 637-651; Peffer, The Closing of the Public Domain, pp. 3-4. David Potter has further suggested that the closing of the frontier is a meaningless concept, because as early as the middle of the nineteenth century urbanism and industrialism had replaced the frontier as the principal source of economic abundance in the United States: People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), pp. 158-160.

lands that could be cultivated profitably without irrigation--had been appropriated by the turn of the century. Mostly desert and mineral lands remained available under the nation's land laws in 1900, and the wild land rushes into Oklahoma in 1889 and the Cherokee strip in 1893 indicated that the public was feeling some type of land pressure by that time.¹⁸

More important is the fact that many Americans of the late nineteenth century sincerely believed that their long-cherished frontier was passing. By the 1890's the pioneer life had practically entered into the realm of nostalgia, and Americans expressed deep anxiety about what such a condition meant to the future of their institutions. Many concluded that the loss of free lands had caused the depression of the 1890's, and could see only widespread poverty and unrest in a frontierless future.¹⁹

The exhaustion of the public lands, therefore, was a real fear to Americans of the era. Predictions as to when the last acre of the public domain would disappear varied, but not widely. Lord Bryce gave the most optimistic estimate in 1888, setting the date as "not more than thirty years ahead."²⁰ At the other extreme, The Nation declared

¹⁸Fite, The Farmers' Frontier, pp. 215-216; Faulkner, Politics, Reform and Expansion, pp. 2-4; Peffer, The Closing of the Public Domain, pp. 3-4, 9.

¹⁹Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner, pp. 108-109.

²⁰Bryce, The American Commonwealth, II, p. 717.

in 1880 that the last arable homesteads would be taken up by the end of the decade, and The North American Review announced in 1886 that the frontier, for all practical purposes, had already perished.²¹ Henry George, Josiah Strong, and most other observers agreed that the end of the century would provide the magic date. To a large segment of the American public, the fear of the exhaustion of the Western lands was a real one and an ominously imminent one.

To Americans who fearfully pondered two of the prevalent fears of the late nineteenth century--the fear of immigration and the fear of the closing of the public domain--the two combined and pointed to an important assumption. With America's public lands disappearing, many reasoned, immigration must be restricted. A campaign against immigration would have materialized on its own in the 1880's and 1890's, simply as a result of the fears engendered by the "new" immigrants. But the closing of the frontier, occurring at the same time, intensified these fears and strengthened the restriction movement. Writers in leading periodicals of the era combined the two themes, and explained that the simple loss of space in the country, the disappearance of the frontier safety valve, and the end of the assimilative influences of the pioneering process all

²¹"An Agricultural Outlook," The Nation, p. 127; Gill, "Landlordism in America," p. 60.

meant that the United States no longer could afford to admit a vast number of immigrants. The argument was an effective one to a public concerned about both of the fears.

CHAPTER IV

RESTRICTION AND THE LOSS OF THE PUBLIC LANDS

To many of the spokesmen for immigration restriction, the impending exhaustion of the public lands provided a simple and direct reason for the necessity of reducing the flow of immigrants to the United States. The decline of open lands, obviously, indicated that the nation was nearly filled with settlers and no longer needed an artificial increase in its population. With most of the arable lands of the West under cultivation, there was no further demand for able-bodied immigrant laborers and farmers to help push back the frontier and hasten the growth of America. The frontier had already been pushed back, and the nation now should preserve those few lands that remained for the use of its own native-born citizens.¹ The United States,

¹This theme was a predominant one in the attack on alien landownership, which, though not directly a part of the campaign against immigration, showed some aspects of the connection between the loss of the frontier and hostility against foreigners. A letter-writer to the New York Tribune in 1881 was one of the first to use this theme directly. Discussing the declining opportunities for American citizens in the late nineteenth century, he decried the fact that foreigners were grabbing too many of those opportunities, such as the remaining land: "The nation has reached a point where its policy should be to preserve its heritage for coming generations, not to donate it to all the strangers we can induce to come among us." (New York Tribune, July 2, 1881, p. 5. Quoted in Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 38.) Opposition to

restrictionists claimed, no longer could afford to admit a stream of immigrants who could contribute only to the overcrowding of the land.

All of those who argued for restriction agreed that in the earlier days of the republic immigration had been a benefit--in fact, a necessity--to the growth of the nation. In an 1891 article calling for restriction, Henry Cabot Lodge, at that time a representative from Massachusetts, heartily agreed that the earlier American policy of encouraging immigration had been "a wise and obvious course to pursue."

The natural growth of the people established in the thirteen colonies was not sufficient to occupy or develop the vast territory and valuable resources of the Union. We therefore opened our arms to the people of every land and invited them to come in, and when

alien landholding became increasingly vociferous through the 1880's and early 1890's, and alien landlords repeatedly were condemned as a major source of the rising system of tenant farming and other social problems of the West. (See especially George, Social Problems, passim.) In 1887 Congress passed a law forbidding aliens who did not declare an intention of becoming American citizens to purchase land in the Territories. In its report to the House of Representatives, the Committee on Public Lands strongly recommended the passage of the bill, announced that alien landownership was a perversion of the original intent of the Homestead Act, and indicated that the practice, if not halted, could cause the quick disappearance of the Western lands: "At the present rate of disposition this generation will see the last acre of public land worth taking for a home by a farmer disposed of." (U.S., Congress, House, 49th Cong., 1st Sess., July 31, 1886, Congressional Record, XVII, pp. 7830-7831.) The act of 1887 was aimed particularly at foreign absentee landlords who controlled lands in the United States, but it was nevertheless part of the increasing concern about the role of foreigners in the disappearance of the frontier. A spokesman for restriction writing in 1890 noted the still-present concern of the West with alien purchase of lands, as well as further political demands for an end to the practice: Peri Ander, "Our Foreign Immigration: Its Social Aspects," The Arena, II (August, 1890), p. 269.

all the region beyond the Alleghanies, or even beyond the Mississippi, was still a wilderness, the general wisdom of this policy could not be gainsaid.

But, Lodge argued, the process of settling those vast lands was now complete; a policy of unrestricted immigration must now be considered harmful to the interests of the country.

We no longer have endless tracts of fertile land crying for settlement. Many parts of the United States, it is true, are still unsettled, and much of our territory is sparsely inhabited as compared to the standards of Europe. None the less, the conditions have changed utterly from the days when the supply of vacant land was indefinite, the demand for labour almost unbounded, and the supply of people very limited. We have now a large population, the natural increase of which is quite sufficient to take up our unoccupied lands and develop our resources with due rapidity.²

To Lodge, as to most other proponents of restriction, it might have been true that some lands were still available in the West. But it was more important that those lands were rapidly disappearing, and the United States should initiate a policy of saving what remained for the use of native-born Americans. The nation, with its declining lands, no longer could afford to serve as the haven for the oppressed of the world, or as the hope of economic opportunity for a horde of immigrants from Europe. As one restrictionist declared, such ideas were in the late nineteenth century only "vague and antique maxims" that applied

²Lodge, "The Restriction of Immigration," pp. 32-34.

when the nation was sparsely settled, but no longer.³

The restrictionists feared the continuing influx of immigrants even more when they realized that the loss of the public lands meant that immigrants, with cheap farm lands no longer available to them, would flock into the nation's cities. The presence of large numbers of foreign-born residents in the cities of the East presented an awesome problem to Americans of the late nineteenth century. Urban immigrants, the restrictionists claimed, lived in the midst of unbelievable poverty and squalor and increased the problems of crime, vice, and pauperism in the cities. They were a source of labor competition, and drove down wages and the standard of living of native-born Americans. More importantly, they were a source of labor unrest, radicalism, socialism, anarchism, and other threats to the American political system. With these fears in mind, fears compounded by the closing of the frontier, restrictionists accelerated their demands for immigration reform.

One of the first persons to connect the loss of public lands and the consequent dangers of immigrants in cities was the statistician Worthington C. Ford, who mentioned the theme in an 1887 article for The Epoch. Like other restrictionists, Ford agreed that in previous eras, when a vast amount of unoccupied land was open to the immigrant settler, the nation could absorb easily the influx from abroad with-

³John Chetwood, Jr., "Immigration, Hard Times, and the Veto," The Arena, XVIII (December, 1897), p. 798.

out danger to American institutions or prosperity. But now, Ford declared, the problem of immigration had become a vital one: "The exhaustion of the public domain has removed one of the best openings for the foreigner who has no capital . . . [T]he opportunities for the great mass of unskilled laborers . . . are becoming less, and this part of the immigration congregate in our cities, and, unable to obtain a living or to move westward, fill our charitable and penal institutions."⁴

Other restrictionists used the argument even more vehemently, with frequent bombastic allusions to the political dangers of urban immigrants. A writer in The Forum, for example, declared that the disappearance of profitable homestead land was increasing the threats posed by the immigrants: "Our cities are filling up with a turbulent foreign proletariat, clamoring for panem et circenses, as in the days of ancient Rome, and threatening the existence of the republic if their demands remain unheeded."⁵ A few more realistic observers noted that the Western lands were not all filled as yet, but that the immigrants were crowding into the Eastern cities anyway. Representative Samuel W. McCall of Massachusetts, speaking before the House in favor of the proposed literacy test bill in 1896,

⁴Worthington C. Ford, "Regulating Immigration," The Epoch, I (April 15, 1887), pp. 229-230.

⁵Boyesen, "Dangers of Unrestricted Immigration," p. 533.

answered opposing arguments that there was plenty of land still available for immigrants in Texas and other parts of the West.

The great difficulty is that this particular class of immigrants do not go to Texas, do not go to our unoccupied territory, but they settle down in our large cities, in our congested districts. They add to the labor problems that are vexing them, and most of them go into the dangerous slums of our Eastern cities.⁶

To many restrictionists, however, it was, without a doubt, the pressure of the closing frontier that was driving the immigrants into the cities and increasing the problems of the nation. In the hands of effective restrictionists, the loss of the public lands was a powerful argument for a need to halt the flow of immigrants in the late nineteenth century.

Three influential spokesmen of the period, in particular, used the frontier theme most effectively in awakening the American public to what they saw as a vital need for immigration restriction. One of these men, the Reverend Josiah Strong, was enormously popular and influential with the general Protestant reading public of the United States. The other two--Francis Amasa Walker, a distinguished economist and the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Richmond Mayo-Smith, a noted Columbia University

⁶U.S., Congress, House, 54th Cong., 1st Sess., May 20, 1896, Congressional Record, XXVIII, p. 5477.

political scientist--directed their appeals more often at the scientific and intellectual community of the nation. Together, these three men presented a powerful and distinguished front for the cause of restriction, and they influenced a major segment of the American public. All three used the frontier theme in their arguments against immigration, although in widely different ways. Their fears were based really on something much more important than the simple closing of the public lands, but in their use of the frontier theme they all began with the belief, as announced by other spokesmen of the 1880's and 1890's, that the exhaustion of the public lands was imminent, and that such a danger provided a logical reason for a reduction in immigration.

To Josiah Strong (1847-1916), the West was of vital importance to the nation; indeed, the future of the West would decide the future of America, and even the future of mankind. The closing of the Western lands, obviously, would be a factor of grave significance in Strong's scheme of things.

Strong had spent a relatively short part of his early career in the actual West. A native of Illinois and a graduate of Western Reserve College in Ohio, Strong withdrew from Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati in 1871 to accept a position as home missionary pastor of the Con-

gregational Church in Cheyenne, Wyoming.⁷ He lasted in that frontier community for only two years, trying to combat the saloons, gambling halls, and "disreputable houses" of the town while guiding a church of some thirteen members. This short career in the West, however, profoundly influenced Strong, and was undoubtedly the source of many of his later thoughts about the imperative need to save the West for Christianity.

In 1873 Strong returned to his alma mater, Western Reserve, as chaplain and instructor in theology. Two years later he accepted a pastorate in Sandusky, Ohio, and in the early 1880's he served as a regional secretary for the Congregational Home Missionary Society. In 1884 he became the pastor of a large Congregational church in Cincinnati, and it was while serving in that capacity that in 1885 he published his first major book, Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis. The book perfectly mirrored the thoughts of most nineteenth-century Protestant Americans,

⁷For information on the life of Strong, see John Haynes Holmes, "Josiah Strong," Dictionary of American Biography, XVIII (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1936), pp. 150-151; Jurgen Herbst, editor's introduction to Josiah Strong, Our Country (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. xv-xvi; Dorothea Rosalie Muller, Josiah Strong and the Challenge of the City (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1955; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, Inc., 1970), pp. 3-14; and Frank R. Grant, "The Kingdom of God and the Crisis of America: An Interpretation of Josiah Strong's Thought" (unpublished seminar paper, University of Montana, 1970), pp. 1-13.

was an immediate bestseller, and made Strong a famous and influential figure for life.⁸ For the rest of his career Strong served as one of the most powerful spokesmen for applied Christianity and the social gospel movement, devoting most of his time and attention to the problems of the industrial city. After the success of Our Country he went to New York as General Secretary for the Evangelical Alliance of the United States, and later himself organized and directed other societies designed to combat problems of the new urban age, duties upon which he concentrated until his death in 1916. The American public, however, always knew him mainly as the author of Our Country.

In many respects, the major theme of Our Country was the significance to the nation of the coming exhaustion of the Western lands, and Strong was one of the first major writers of the late nineteenth century to tie that theme directly to the problem of immigration.⁹ To Strong, the West was the area in which the destiny of mankind would be determined within the coming decades. The late nineteenth century, he announced, was a momentous focal point in his-

⁸The first edition of the work sold at least 130,000 copies, and numerous other editions were issued. Sections of the book were reprinted frequently in newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets, and the work was translated into several foreign languages: Herbst, editor's introduction to Our Country, p. ix; Josiah Strong, preface to Our Country (rev. ed.; New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1891), pp. 3-4.

⁹Higham says that the book was the first major attack on immigration since the 1850's: Strangers in the Land, p. 39.

tory, second in importance only to the birth of Christ, and an era that would determine the future of the human race. Not only was the nineteenth century a time of dynamic changes in communications and transportation, but, more significantly, it was the period in which the last New World--the American West--was being settled.¹⁰ As the world's final frontier, the lands of the West, according to Strong, could decide man's fate. With its vast resources, the West would be the future home of millions.¹¹ America held the future of all aspects of man's needs, from mining, manufacturing, and agriculture to the concerns of the spirit. The whole history of mankind had been a continual progressive westward, until in the closing years of the nineteenth century the movement had reached its final destination. "The West is to-day an infant," Strong warned, "but shall one day be a giant, in each of whose limbs shall unite the strength of many nations."¹² It was, therefore, a concern of the utmost importance that the American West, in its final years of settlement, be furnished with the proper form of Christian civili-

¹⁰Josiah Strong, Our Country: Its Possible Future and Its Present Crisis (New York: The American Home Missionary Society, 1885), pp. 1-7. Strong reiterated the importance of the late nineteenth century in most of his later works; see, e.g., The New Era, or The Coming Kingdom (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1893), pp. 1-16.

¹¹Strong estimated that, with improvements in agriculture, the arable lands of the West could feed as many as 1,012,000,000 Americans! Our Country, p. 10.

¹²Ibid., pp. 7-29. Quote from p. 29.

zation, which to Strong meant Anglo-Saxon Protestantism.

The future of the West, however, and therefore of the nation, was threatened by a number of sinister "perils" gathering in the closing years of the century. With a chapter devoted to each of them, Strong described in considerable detail those perils, among them Romanism, Mormonism, intemperance, socialism, disparity of wealth, and the problems of the city. The one that he listed first, however, and one that profoundly increased the dangers of all the others, was the peril of immigration.¹³ An army twice as large as that of the Vandals and Goths who had destroyed Rome, Strong announced, in recent years had invaded the United States. This influx of immigrants seriously menaced the future of American civilization, as such a huge foreign element "must have a profound influence on our national life and character" and accelerate "several of the most noxious growths of our civilization."¹⁴ The immigrants, especially the typical "peasants" of the new immigration from southern and eastern Europe, would lower the standard of morality in the United States; they would increase the levels of disease, vice, and debauchery; and they would threaten the political institutions of the nation by falling prey to demagogues and city bosses. Moreover, immigrants could only increase the

¹³ Ibid., pp. 30-46.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 40.

dangers presented by the other perils of the era, Strong insisted. They added to the ranks of Catholics, Mormons, socialists, and anarchists, and they increased tremendously the problems of the urban slums. In short, immigration was the first threat to American civilization.

The threat posed by immigration, Strong went on to announce, was even more serious because of the impending loss of the public lands in the West. Based on the figures of land sales in 1884, Strong calculated that all of the arable lands in the West would be taken by the end of the century,¹⁵ a problem that made the peril of immigration an immediate one. For one thing, the end of the frontier would drive the immigrants even more into cities (including the new cities of the West), where they would increase the urban problems to which they had contributed already.

If the growth of the city in the United States has been so rapid during this century, while many millions of acres were being settled, what may be expected when the settlement of the West has been completed? When the public lands are all taken, immigration, though it will be considerably restricted thereby, will continue, and will crowd the cities more and more.¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 155-156. In a work published at the turn of the century, in 1900, Strong endorsed his own prediction: "Practically, therefore, our arable public lands are exhausted." Expansion Under New World-Conditions, pp. 19-21. In this work, Strong declared that the exhaustion of the lands was one of the new conditions that made necessary American economic expansion abroad, especially to the tropics. For a discussion of Strong's views in the context of the expansionism of the 1890's, see LaFeber, The New Empire, pp. 72-80.

¹⁶Strong, Our Country, p. 137.

More importantly, however, the potential settlement of immigrants in what few lands remained in the West, at a time when the West was to determine the destiny of mankind, posed a serious threat to Strong's plans for the West. The character of any community or area, he proclaimed, was decided by the character of its first settlers. With the West about to be settled permanently within the next fifteen to twenty years, the pioneers who migrated there would determine, "for centuries to come," the destiny of the West and therefore of the whole nation.¹⁷ To Strong, the problem reduced itself to a question of whether the West was to be Americanized or foreignized, and to him the choice was an obvious one. The nation could not afford to watch a stream of immigrants, with their foreign religions, languages, and customs, populate the West. It should take steps to guard against the dangerous influx of foreigners, and make certain that the West was peopled by the proper civilization. To Strong, that civilization meant Protestant members of the Anglo-Saxon race.

The Anglo-Saxon race, in Strong's view, represented man's purest ideals of both civil liberty and spiritual Christianity, and that race, therefore, should be responsible for the civilization and evangelization of the world.¹⁸ God obviously had prepared the exhaustion of arable lands in the West as a means of increasing population pressure in the world. That pressure

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 144-158.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 159-163.

would lead to "the final competition of races," and from that competition the superior Anglo-Saxon race, of course, would emerge victorious. But as a means to that ultimate victory, the Christians of the late nineteenth century should open their eyes and realize the importance of settling the West with the right kind of people--Protestant Anglo-Saxon Americans, not immigrants.¹⁹ With that important theme in mind, Strong then, in the closing chapter of his book, announced to his readers the ulterior motive that was actually behind the whole work: a plea for contributions to the Home Missionary Society, to help that organization bring the proper types of civilization and Christianity to the West.

To Josiah Strong, then, the closing of the frontier and the dangers of immigration combined to menace the future of Protestantism and the Anglo-Saxon race in America. Such a threat obviously necessitated some type of a halt to the flow of immigrants from Europe, especially those from southern and eastern Europe.

Francis Amasa Walker also feared the possible racial and social consequences of the influx of "new" immigrants--his writings on restriction abound with hostile references to the "degraded peasants" finding their way to the United States. As a respected economist and educator, however, Walker was more concerned with showing that immigrants in

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 174-180.

the late nineteenth century no longer (and perhaps never had) brought necessary benefits to the growth of the republic. In demonstrations of this thesis, Walker made ample use of the theme of the closing of the frontier.

Walker (1840-1897) led one of those fascinatingly varied lives that seemed to be common to many members of the late nineteenth-century educated elite.²⁰ He was a member of an old and distinguished New England family, the son of the well-known economist Amasa Walker. Francis Walker went to Amherst College at the age of fifteen, graduated in 1860, studied law for a brief time, and then entered the Union Army. By the age of twenty-five he was a brevet brigadier-general, and he won praise as an efficient officer who emphasized the necessity of precise military information. Wounded and imprisoned during the Civil War, with his health permanently weakened, Walker left the army in 1865 and for a few years taught Latin and Greek and wrote editorials for a Massachusetts newspaper. In 1869, his reputation for accurate statistical information apparently still alive in governmental circles, Walker was appointed chief of the Federal Bureau of Statistics, a position he filled, either officially or unofficially, for the next several years. Conscientious

²⁰For information on the life of Walker, see Jeannette P. Nichols, "Francis Amasa Walker," Dictionary of American Biography, XIX, pp. 342-344; George M. Fredrickson, The Inner Civil War (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), pp. 202-205; and Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants, pp. 69-77.

and thorough, Walker reorganized the bureau along more scientific lines, and as superintendent of the censuses of 1870 and 1880, he issued the most lengthy and precise census reports yet published, an accomplishment that greatly enhanced his reputation as a statistician. Following a brief term as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Walker in 1872 accepted an appointment as professor of political economy at the new Sheffield Scientific School at Yale, although he still maintained his connections with the Bureau of Statistics until after the 1880 census. In 1881 he became the second president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a position he retained for the rest of his life.

Walker was the author of several major works on economics, and even though he criticized many of the established laissez faire doctrines of late nineteenth-century conservatism,²¹ he was considered the most prominent and influential American economist of his time. His economic and statistical theories relating to the development of the United States have been identified as one of the influences on Turner's formulation of the frontier hypothesis,²² and his economic influence extended to Europe as well. As a distinguished

²¹For a brief summary of Walker's economic views, see Joseph Dorfman, The Economic Mind in American Civilization, III (New York: The Viking Press, 1949), pp. 101-110.

²²Billington, America's Frontier Heritage, pp. 9, 11; Fulmer Mood, "The Development of Frederick Jackson Turner as a Historical Thinker," Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, XXXIV, Transactions 1937-1942 (Boston, 1943), pp. 306-307.

statistician, economist, and educator, as a member of Boston Brahmin society who knew the right people and belonged to the right clubs, Walker was one of the most respected members of the educational community of the era. His position of respected leadership can perhaps best be indicated by the fact that he received more honorary degrees than any other American of his time.²³

A man so honored undoubtedly would command great influence as a spokesman for the cause of immigration restriction, a cause to which Walker devoted much of his attention in the 1880's and 1890's. Like many other members of the Brahmin aristocracy, Walker strongly believed that the immigrants severely threatened the influence and status of his class, and he repeatedly called for an end to unrestricted immigration. His major contribution to the campaign was to demonstrate, in a statistical and scientific manner, that immigration no longer could be considered a social and economic benefit to the nation, a major factor of this conclusion being the loss of the public lands.

Walker actually tried to show that immigration had never been a blessing to the United States. Rejecting the traditional theory that immigrants previously had supplied manpower when the country needed it, Walker, in an 1891 article for The Forum,²⁴ announced a radical new theory that he

²³Fredrickson, The Inner Civil War, p. 203.

²⁴Walker, "Immigration and Degradation," pp. 634-644.

continually emphasized for the rest of his life. Using detailed statistical information, Walker "proved" that immigration had contributed neither to the population increase, nor the economic growth, of the nation in the nineteenth century. He declared that the birth rate of native-born Americans, which had always been a high one, decreased drastically beginning around 1830 when large-scale immigration first became a noticeable factor in the United States. The low birth rate of native-born Americans then had remained in effect ever since that time. Walker could only conclude that the influx of foreigners, with their low standards of living, decency, and morality and their added competition in the labor market, "constituted a shock to the principle of population among the native element."²⁵ In other words, terrified by the arrival of "stagnant pools of European population, representing the utterest [sic] failures of civilization, the worst defeats in the struggle for existence,"²⁶ native-born Americans stopped reproducing at the rate to which they had been accustomed. As a result, the immigration of the nineteenth century had not added to the American population; it had merely replaced native stock that otherwise would have appeared. Consequently, Walker could not consider even the earlier immigrants as economic benefits to the country.²⁷

²⁵ Ibid., p. 640.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 644.

²⁷ For a contemporary attack on Walker's theory, see [E. L. Godkin], "The Harm of Immigration," The Nation, LVI (January 19, 1893), p. 43.

To a public that generally believed that immigration had, at least in the early years of the republic, provided some kind of a service to the nation's growth, Walker's argument could not be accepted completely. Consequently, in many of his other articles on immigration, Walker conceded that immigration possibly could have been desirable in earlier times. But, he emphasized, the conditions of the late nineteenth century, and particularly the disappearance of the frontier, had now ended whatever need for immigrants might have existed previously.²⁸

"There was a time," Walker declared in an 1892 article for The Yale Review, "a long time, when every able-bodied man coming to our shores, however poor and even however ignorant, if not vicious or criminal, brought or added strength to the young nation."

The more came [he went on], the more there was for all and for each. A continent was to be wrested from savage nature, was to be annexed, occupied, cultivated, and every one's help was welcome in the great work.²⁹

But around the middle of the nineteenth century, Walker continued, Americans began to question the usefulness of immi-

²⁸Walker used this theme directly in "Immigration," The Yale Review, I (August, 1892), pp. 125-145; and "Restriction of Immigration," Atlantic Monthly, LXXVII (June, 1896), pp. 822-829. For another article in which Walker emphasized the changing conditions of the nineteenth century, but not the frontier theme specifically, see "The Tide of Economic Thought," Publications of the American Economic Association, VI, Nos. 1 and 2 (January-March, 1891), pp. 15-38.

²⁹Walker, "Immigration," p. 126.

gration. Even more recently, Americans became seriously alarmed by the influx of immigrants. The earlier belief in immigration as a source of wealth and power could apply no longer in an era witnessing the loss of the public lands in the West.

A generation or less ago, a vast extent of free public lands offered to every new-comer a home and a farm simply for the seeking. So wide was the range of possible settlement that the immigrant could scarcely go astray in his seeking. If not here, then there, lands of excellent quality and easy of cultivation lay open to his choice To-day, the tracts of public land worth taking up under the homestead and preemption acts are few and far between. The crazy rush and the frenzied struggles which attended the opening of the Territory of Oklahoma, a few years ago, and the opening of the Cherokee Reservation within the past twelve months, afford striking testimony to the difference between the new and the old state of things.³⁰

Walker then announced his agreement with the prevalent fear of the loss of the frontier forcing immigrants into the nation's cities: "Exhaustion of the free public lands makes the resort to the soil far more difficult and costly; and is having a marked effect in retaining an increased proportion of the new arrivals at the very ports of entry or in sending them to swell the operative populations of our manufacturing towns."³¹

Walker repeated his use of the frontier argument in similar, but even more forceful, terms in an 1896 article in the Atlantic Monthly. Of the major new conditions that

³⁰Ibid., pp. 129-130.

³¹Ibid., p. 130.

necessitated a more restrictive immigration policy in the United States, he listed in first position the loss of the public domain.

First, we have the important fact of the complete exhaustion of the free public lands of the United States. Fifty years ago, thirty years ago, vast tracts of arable land were open to every person arriving on our shores, under the Preemption Act, or later, the Homestead Act. A good farm of one hundred and sixty acres could be had at the minimum price of \$1.25 an acre, or for merely the fees of registration. Under these circumstances it was a very simple matter to dispose of a large immigration. To-day there is not a good farm within the limits of the United States which is to be had under either of these acts.³²

The only possible solution to this problem, according to Walker, was a drastic reduction in the number of immigrants admitted. His favorite plan for accomplishing this task involved a deposit of one hundred dollars to be paid by each immigrant upon entering the United States. If, after a period of three years, the immigrant had demonstrated that he was a self-supporting, law-abiding citizen, the government would refund his deposit.³³

The important point to Walker was that such a policy would prevent the poorer and degraded peasants from southern and eastern Europe from coming to the United States, but not the more prosperous (and Anglo-Saxon) immigrants from Sweden, Norway, and Germany.³⁴ Walker, in fact, was really much more

³²Walker, "Restriction of Immigration," p. 826.

³³Walker, "Immigration," pp. 139-141.

³⁴Ibid.

afraid of the "new" immigrants, "shiftless peasants" who threatened American social, political, and industrial institutions, than he was of the consequences of the closing of the frontier.³⁵ He did believe, nevertheless, that the loss of the public lands was one of the most important reasons for the need to restrict immigration, and in the hands of such a distinguished member of the academic community, the frontier argument provided an especially powerful weapon against immigration.

Another distinguished political economist and educator of the period, Richmond Mayo-Smith, presented probably the most rational and least inflammatory appeals for immigration restriction in the 1880's and 1890's. Like the other major restrictionists, Mayo-Smith made effective use of the notion of the closing of the public lands, although on a much more perceptive level than either Strong or Walker.

In contrast to Walker's wide range of activities and careers, Richmond Mayo-Smith (1854-1901) led the duller, commonplace life of a typical college professor.³⁶ Descended from seventeenth-century New England settlers, he was born in Troy, Ohio, and grew up in Dayton. As a member of a family

³⁵ For an example of Walker's racial prejudices, see ibid., pp. 130-135.

³⁶ Information on Mayo-Smith's life comes from William R. Leonard, "Richmond Mayo-Smith," Dictionary of American Biography, XII, pp. 467-468; and Solomon, Ancestors and Immigrants, pp. 77-78.

who held traditional New England values, he naturally went to college in New England, graduating from Amherst in 1875. After two years of studying economics at German universities, he began to teach political science at Columbia, where he remained for the rest of his life. His economic views, as well as his ideas on statistics and immigration, were influenced by Walker. Mayo-Smith became widely respected in the academic community as an authority on economics and statistics, and was the author of various works on those subjects. He was one of the original editors of the Political Science Quarterly, founded at Columbia in 1886, and he frequently contributed to that publication. After such a lackluster and scholarly life, Mayo-Smith finally managed to make the front page of the New York Times in 1901 when he jumped to his death from the window of his fourth-floor study. Oddly enough, he was on his sabbatical at the time.³⁷

As a spokesman for immigration restriction, Mayo-Smith showed much less of an emphasis on racial fears than did either Strong or Walker. He definitely was disturbed by the masses of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe, as almost all Americans in that era were, and he was admittedly hostile to Chinese immigrants and American Negroes.³⁸ But he

³⁷"Columbia Professor Killed by a Fall," New York Times, November 12, 1901, p. 1.

³⁸See, e.g., Emigration and Immigration: A Study in Social Science (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), pp. 64-65, 247-248. The work was originally published in 1890.

did not dwell on those racial fears as did many other restrictionists of the late nineteenth century. Instead, Mayo-Smith emphasized the social and economic aspects of immigration, the results of increasing labor competition and the threat that the immigrants posed to the American standard of living. The closing of the frontier provided one major ingredient to his discussion of such topics.

Mayo-Smith's first major contribution to the literature of restriction, and his first use of the frontier theme, came in a three-part article that he wrote for the Political Science Quarterly in 1888.³⁹ Like other restrictionists, Mayo-Smith agreed that immigration had been a benefit to the young United States, a welcome addition to the labor force of an under-populated and expanding nation.

The whole history of this country, of course, has been one of colonization and immigration. The original need was for labor The task which lay before the original settlers was immense. There was in front of them to be subdued a wilderness three thousand miles wide, covered with primeval forest, unbroken by roads and even unexplored.⁴⁰

The natural increase of American population alone could not have supplied the manpower necessary to conquer that wilderness in a short period of time, so "that with our immense unoccupied territory almost any addition to our population was useful in developing our resources and was to be wel-

³⁹Richmond Mayo-Smith, "Control of Immigration," Political Science Quarterly, III, part I (March, 1888), pp. 46-77; part II (June, 1888), pp. 197-225; part III (September, 1888), pp. 409-424.

⁴⁰Mayo-Smith, "Control of Immigration, I," pp. 46-47.

comed."⁴¹ But in the final years of the nineteenth century, such conditions no longer applied.

The first work of the pioneer has been done and will never have to be done again. We have not brought all our land under cultivation, but we have taken up the better part of it, and there is no reason why we should desire to cultivate that inferior part which will make a less return for the labor.⁴²

With the most arable public lands already under cultivation, and with population density increasing in the United States,⁴³ there was no longer a need for immigrants. When added to the problems caused by the lack of assimilation on the part of the "new" immigrants and the effect of immigration on the social and political institutions of the nation, this factor could lead only to the conclusion of a need for some type of restriction.

Mayo-Smith again touched upon the frontier theme in his major work on the topic, Emigration and Immigration, published in 1890. He reiterated his belief that not all of the Western lands had been settled, but that most of the productive ones had, and he again emphasized the idea that the benefits of immigration could no longer be assumed in an era in which the valuable public lands had disappeared.⁴⁴ Again, the loss

⁴¹Mayo-Smith, "Control of Immigration, II," p. 198.

⁴²Ibid., p. 219.

⁴³Mayo-Smith produced a statistical chart to demonstrate the increasing population density as the lands were settled more and more: "Control of Immigration. I," p. 52n.

⁴⁴Mayo-Smith, Emigration and Immigration, pp. 96-97, 119.

of the frontier provided a convincing argument against further immigration.

The frontier argument, however, meant much more to Mayo-Smith than a simple statement of the closing of the public lands. As a rational economist and political scientist, Mayo-Smith was more concerned with the loss of the frontier as a safety valve for immigrant laborers, and with the loss of the pioneering process as a means of assimilating and Americanizing the masses of foreigners in the United States. His major use of the frontier theme involved those more advanced elements of the problem of immigration and the closing of the Western lands.

In itself, however, the simple fact of the impending loss of the public lands in the West was a direct motivating force behind the drive for immigration restriction in the late nineteenth century. By the middle of the 1890's, economic depression and the collapse of the agricultural frontier strongly intensified the campaign. Even Western congressmen were voting for restriction by that time, and the Western states had eliminated their earlier promotion of immigration.⁴⁶ When also applied to the themes of the safety

⁴⁶Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 73-74; Higham, "Origins of Immigration Restriction," pp. 86-87. For indication of declining Western encouragement of immigration in the 1890's, see "Immigration, Past and Present," The Review of Reviews, III (July, 1891), pp. 571-572; and Chetwood, "Immigration, Hard Times, and the Veto," p. 795.

valve and the Americanization process, the belief in the disappearance of the frontier was an even more powerful incentive for restriction.

CHAPTER V

RESTRICTION AND THE LOSS OF THE SAFETY VALVE

The writers who demanded immigration restriction in the 1880's and 1890's emphasized the closing of the frontier in a special argument aimed at the social and economic fears of the American public. The restrictionists claimed that the exhaustion of the public lands signaled the end of the protection traditionally offered to American economic institutions by the frontier as a safety valve. With the safety valve gone, they suggested, immigrants no longer could take up farms in the West; they instead would crowd into the industrial cities of the East. There, they would not only increase the burdens of crime and pauperism, but, more importantly, they would compete with native-born workers for jobs and drive down the wages and standard of living of the American working class. A large urban population of foreigners, furthermore, would increase trade unionism and labor unrest in the United States, the restrictionists claimed, and would raise the threat of socialism and anarchism. The flood of immigrants, then, combined with the loss of the safety valve, constituted a grave threat to American society. This argument was another effective one

used by many of the opponents of immigration.

Americans traditionally had believed that the frontier served as a safety valve, with the cheap lands of the West providing economic opportunity to all and draining off industrial workers from the East to Western farms. In this way, Americans claimed, the frontier safety valve reduced labor competition in the East, maintained wages at a high level, eased depressions by providing an outlet for unemployed workers, prevented class consciousness and labor unrest, and generally destroyed social and economic tensions in the United States. The frontier, therefore, served as the stabilizing force for the American republic.¹

Belief in the safety valve began practically with the settlement of the continent. Turner found a 1634 statement by Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts Bay Colony indicating that the availability of lands in New England caused settlers to neglect their trades.² The safety valve was a basic tenet of Jeffersonian agrarianism; Jefferson himself in 1805 wrote to a friend that the Western lands would prevent the rise of a large discontented laboring class in the young republic.

¹The best general discussions of the safety valve theory are to be found in Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), pp. 201-210; and Billington, America's Frontier Heritage, pp. 29-38.

²Turner, The Frontier in American History, p. 62.

As yet our manufacturers [industrial workers] are as much at their ease, as independent and moral as our agricultural inhabitants, and they will continue so as long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to; because whenever it shall be attempted by the other classes to reduce them to the minimum of subsistence, they will quit their trades and go to laboring the earth.³

Throughout the nineteenth century Americans continued to pay homage to the values of their safety valve. Horace Greeley often emphasized the theme in his New York Tribune, and encouraged Eastern workers to move west in order to relieve the suffering caused by the Panic of 1837.⁴ Europeans as well praised the safety valve as the factor that prevented unrest in America. The famous English historian Thomas B. Macauley indicated his views on the safety valve in a letter to an American friend in 1857: "As long as you have a boundless extent of fertile and unoccupied land, your laboring population will be far more at ease than the laboring population of the Old World, and, while that is the case the Jefferson politics may continue to exist without causing any fatal calamity."⁵ The safety valve doctrine was a major impetus behind the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862, and,

³Jefferson, Writings, edited by Andrew A. Lipscomb (20 vols.; Washington, 1903-1904), XI, p. 55. Quoted in Smith, Virgin Land, p. 203.

⁴Smith, ibid., pp. 201-202.

⁵G. O. Trevelyan, The Life and Letters of Lord Macauley (New York, 1909), II, pp. 451-454. Quoted by Nixon, "Precursors of Turner in the Interpretation of the American Frontier," p. 84.

Americans believed, provided part of the reason for the success of American democracy. Turner, in a 1903 article for the Atlantic Monthly, summarized the traditional concept of the safety valve's contribution to American stability and freedom. The free lands in the West, he said, made the American ideal of opportunity real: "Whenever social conditions tended to crystallize in the East, whenever capital tended to press upon labor or political restraints to impede the freedom of the mass, there was this gate of escape to the free conditions of the frontier."⁶

An important corollary of the safety valve theory was that the free lands of the West provided a safety valve for immigrants as well as for American workers, thus preventing the foreign-born from flocking into the cities. "Hearty young laboring men" from abroad could easily purchase the cheap lands of the United States, and become prosperous farmers instead of city workers, Benjamin Franklin announced as early as the 1780's: "Multitudes of poor people from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Germany have by this means in a few years, become wealthy farmers who, in their own countries, where all the lands are fully occupied and the wages of labor low, could never have emerged from the poor condition wherein they were born."⁷ Even Alexander Hamilton, the principal

⁶Turner, The Frontier in American History, p. 259.

⁷Quoted by Joseph Schafer, "Was the West a Safety Valve for Labor?," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIV (December, 1937), p. 300.

spokesman for the future of industrialism in the young republic, agreed in his 1790 Report on Manufactures that the Western lands would attract immigrants away from the Eastern factories.

The desire of being an independent proprietor of land is founded on such strong principles in the human breast, that where the opportunity of becoming so is as great as it is in the United States, the proportion will be small of those whose situations would otherwise lead to it, who would be diverted from it to manufactures. And it is highly probable . . . that the accessions of foreigners who, originally drawn over by manufacturing views, would afterwards abandon them for agricultural, would be more than an equivalent for those of our citizens who might happen to be detached from them.⁸

Alexis de Tocqueville supported this sentiment in Democracy in America: "No power on earth can close upon the immigrant that fertile wilderness which offers resources to all industry and a refuge from all want."⁹ After the passage of the Homestead Act, Americans believed that the West provided sufficient farmland for both the native-born and the foreign-born, and settlers lauded that fact in a song they sang on the way west in the 1870's.

Come along, come along, make no delay,
Come from every nation, come from every way;
Our lands are broad enough, don't be alarmed,
For Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm.¹⁰

⁸Ibid., p. 301.

⁹Quoted by Charles Stewart Smith, "Our National Dumping-Grounds: A Study of Immigration," The North American Review, CLIV (April, 1892), p. 433.

¹⁰Quoted by Eric Goldman, Rendezvous with Destiny (rev. ed.; New York: Vintage Books, 1955), p. 23.

Until Uncle Sam started to run out of farms in the 1880's and 1890's, most Americans believed that the frontier provided an ample safety valve for all immigrants who came to the nation's shores.

Twentieth-century historians, of course, have demonstrated that the safety valve theory was a myth. As a significant means of attracting workers and immigrants from the East, the frontier safety valve never operated.¹¹ Laborers from the East simply did not go west in any appreciable

¹¹For the principal twentieth-century attacks on the safety valve theory, see Murray Kane, "Some Considerations on the Safety Valve Doctrine," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIII (September, 1936), pp. 169-188; Fred A. Shannon, "The Homestead Act and the Labor Surplus," American Historical Review, XLI (July, 1936), pp. 637-651; Shannon, "A Post-Mortem on the Labor-Safety-Valve Theory," Agricultural History, XIX (January, 1945), pp. 31-37; Clarence H. Danhof, "Farm-Making Costs and the 'Safety Valve': 1850-60," Journal of Political Economy, XLIX (June, 1941), pp. 317-359; Henry M. Littlefield, "Has the Safety Valve Come Back to Life?," Agricultural History, XXXVIII (January, 1964), pp. 47-49; Carter Goodrich and Sol Davison, "The Wage-Earner in the Westward Movement," Political Science Quarterly, L (June, 1935), pp. 161-185, and LI (March, 1936), pp. 61-116; and Smith, Virgin Land, pp. 201-210. For articles defending certain aspects of the safety valve, see George G. S. Murphy and Arnold Zellner, "Sequential Growth, the Labor-Safety-Valve Doctrine and the Development of American Unionism," Journal of Economic History, XIX (September, 1959), pp. 402-421; Norman J. Simler, "The Safety-Valve Doctrine Re-Evaluated," Agricultural History, XXXII (October, 1958), pp. 250-257; Ellen von Nardroff, "The American Frontier as a Safety Valve--The Life, Death, Reincarnation, and Justification of a Theory," Agricultural History, XXXVI (July, 1962), pp. 123-142; and three articles by Joseph Schafer: "Was the West a Safety Valve for Labor?," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXIV (December, 1937), pp. 299-314; "Some Facts Bearing on the Safety-Valve Theory," Wisconsin Magazine of History, XX (December, 1936), pp. 216-232; and "Concerning the Frontier as Safety Valve," Political Science Quarterly, LII (September, 1937), pp. 407-420.

numbers in the nineteenth century. For one thing, they did not have the capital necessary to purchase lands, buy livestock and farm equipment, and transport their families to the frontier.¹² More importantly, Eastern workers lacked the skill and knowledge of agriculture necessary for one to become a prosperous farmer. Furthermore, historical evidence indicates that workers remained in Eastern cities in times of depression, and migrated to other areas only when times were prosperous, contrary to the basic suppositions of the safety valve. Nor did the safety valve prevent labor unrest as it was expected to do, because there were, in the 1870's and 1880's, many examples of violent labor conflict in the United States. There may have been a few workers who did settle upon Western farms, but their number was not significant enough to justify the presence of an actual frontier safety valve.

Immigrants, moreover, did not settle on Western farms in any appreciable numbers in the nineteenth century. Many thousands of Germans and Scandinavians, it is true, did settle on Midwestern homesteads, but the vast majority of the immigrants--especially the "new" immigrants--went into cities even when frontier land was available. Like American workers, they lacked the money, skill, and knowledge necessary to become Western farmers. They had come to America with a vague hope for economic improvement, but with no specific hopes for an

¹²See, especially, Danhof, "Farm-Making Costs and the 'Safety Valve'," pp. 317-359.

isolated rural farm.¹³ As a general rule, the frontier did not act as a safety valve for the immigrants in the nineteenth century.

This historical evidence, however, does not contradict the pervasive belief in the West as a safety valve in the nineteenth century. The fact is that almost all Americans of that era sincerely believed that the frontier always had served as a safety valve, and they had no historians proving to them that they were wrong.¹⁴ The notion was accepted and unquestioned at the time.

This pervasive belief in the safety valve meant that Americans would fear seriously the loss of that means of protection when the public lands disappeared. As early as 1838 a United States Congressman had questioned the future effect on the nation when the safety valve evaporated.

Whenever labor has found itself straitened by population exceeding the ready means of subsistence, it has found a safe and abundant refuge in the mighty wilds of the West. So long as this resource exists, the free systems of Government in the Northern States may endure

¹³Dovring, "European Reactions to the Homestead Act," pp. 462-464; Jones, American Immigration, pp. 210-216.

¹⁴Some recent historians have indicated that the prevalent strength of the safety valve myth may have created what they call a "socio-psychological safety valve." That is, even though Eastern workers hardly ever moved to a farm in the West, they always believed that they could if their conditions became desperate enough. In this way, the socio-psychological safety valve lowered labor discontent and unrest. See Billington, America's Frontier Heritage, pp. 32-38; and Nardroff, "The American Frontier as a Safety Valve," pp. 123-142.

But the time will come,--is rapidly approaching, when the way to the West will be blocked up. Population will increase there, too, and diminish the price of labor What, then, will become of the Republican forms of Government in the Northern States [?]¹⁵

When, in the 1880's and 1890's, the loss of the public domain and its safety valve appeared imminent, Americans became anxious about the future of their prosperity and their political stability. One way by which the effects of this danger could be minimized, the restrictionists claimed, would be to reduce immigration.

The restrictionists who used the safety valve theme emphasized that the crowding of the immigrants into cities, because of the loss of the frontier, would create labor competition, reduce the level of wages, and promote the rise of socialism and labor conflict. Such predictions were designed to--and did--arouse the direct, personal fears of the American people. Josiah Strong was again one of the first to employ this argument, with a brief reference to the passing of the safety valve in Our Country in 1885. Strong mentioned a common fear of the era, that with crowded urban conditions and labor unrest, the United States would lose its unique prosperity and fall victim to the problems besetting the Old World.

¹⁵U.S., Congress, House, Representative R. B. Rhett of South Carolina speaking for the independent treasury bill, 25th Cong., 2nd Sess., June 25, 1838, Congressional Globe, appendix, p. 506.

The rapid accumulation of our wealth, our comparative immunity from the consequences of unscientific legislation, our financial elasticity, our high wages, the general welfare and contentment of the people hitherto have all been due, in very large measure, to an abundance of cheap land. When the supply is exhausted, we shall enter upon a new era, and shall more rapidly approximate European conditions of life.¹⁶

Now, Strong announced, those public lands were nearly gone, and the loss of that traditional safety valve would threaten the American political system: "After our agricultural land is all occupied, as it will be a few years hence, our agricultural population, which is one of the great sheet-anchors of society against the socialistic current, will increase but little, while great manufacturing and mining towns will go on multiplying and to multiply."¹⁷ As the major source of the "socialistic current," immigrants would be an even more important danger to the country once the safety valve was gone. This fact, according to Strong, provided a further reason for the necessity of protecting America against an invasion of immigrants.

Although it was not one of his major concerns, Francis Amasa Walker also touched upon the safety valve theme in his argument for restriction. As an economist, Walker heartily agreed that the safety valve had been of vital significance to America's high level of wages, as he pointed out in one of his scholarly works.

¹⁶Strong, Our Country, p. 153.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 108.

It has been the competition of the farm with the shop which has, from the first, most effectually retarded the growth of manufactures in the United States

Now, the mode of living on the part of the agricultural population has necessarily set a minimum standard of wages for mechanical labor. With an abundance of cheap land, with a population facile to the last degree in making change of avocation and of residence, few able-bodied men are likely to be drawn into factories and shops on terms which imply a meaner subsistence than that secured in the cultivation of the soil.¹⁸

But the loss of such a system of protection meant, to Walker, the rise of labor competition and unrest, a fact only compounded by the presence of masses of immigrants driven into the cities. In the same article in which he called for a one-hundred-dollar deposit from all foreign arrivals in the United States in order to decrease immigration, Walker explained how immigration and the loss of the safety valve combined to endanger the nation.

With, on one side, the resort to the land now become more difficult and costly, and, on the other, with declining wages in the harvest field, it would be surprising, indeed, if the more intelligent of the labor-leaders did not look with apprehension upon the spectacle of five millions of foreigners and more added to our population within ten years. Reluctant as we may be to recognize it, a labor-problem is at last upon us. No longer can a continent of free virgin lands avert from us the social struggle which the old world has known so long and so painfully.¹⁹

¹⁸Walker, Political Economy (2nd ed., rev.; New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1887), pp. 512-513.

¹⁹Walker, "Immigration," p. 130.

The loss of the safety valve only increased the threat of urban immigrants leading the United States into a state of labor and class conflict. Such a danger, according to Walker, was another indication of the absolute need for restriction.

Richmond Mayo-Smith's economics also included an acceptance of the safety valve doctrine, and he, too, applied the theory to the problem of immigration. As with his use of the simple fact of the exhaustion of the public lands, Mayo-Smith did not over-emphasize the safety valve theme, nor was it his principal concern in his campaign against immigration. It was, nevertheless, a factor of sufficient importance to be indicated, and in his major work Emigration and Immigration Mayo-Smith directed special attention toward the traditional importance of the safety valve in the West.

Few people realize how this abundance of land has simplified all social problems for us in this country. We have laughed at the fear of over-population,--that nightmare of the countries of Europe. There has always been room for the restless and energetic. When a man failed in the East he could go to the West. When trade became unprofitable, a man could take to agriculture. Our public land has been our great safety-valve, relieving the pressure of economic distress and failure. This enormous expansion has been due very largely to it.²⁰

Such an abundance of lands, Mayo-Smith indicated, always had provided an outlet for immigrants, but, with the lands declining, the immigrants now were settling in the cities and threatening the social institutions of America. He stressed

²⁰Mayo-Smith, Emigration and Immigration, pp. 56-57.

such a fear in his 1888 series of articles for the Political Science Quarterly. He contradicted the views of those who claimed that further immigration was needed to settle the public lands, pointing out that the better, more arable portions of the public domain had already been appropriated and that the "great safety valve" was therefore disappearing. With the lands vanishing at so rapid a rate, the nation should preserve those that remained for its own citizens: "This great domain should perform the same service for future generations that it has already performed for the present. Because we have a valuable heritage, why should we divide it among strangers?" With the end of the safety valve approaching, Mayo-Smith declared, the United States should make certain that the dangers posed by immigration were eliminated as soon as possible.²¹

More rational and perceptive than most of the other restrictionists of his era, Mayo-Smith did not exaggerate the importance of the safety valve. At times, he even agreed that much of the Western land still remained open to settlement. But, he pointed out in statements foreshadowing those of twentieth-century historians, the immigrants did not go to those lands.

One of the greatest misconceptions about this whole subject is, I believe, that all we have to do with this mass of immigrants is put them on the land "out West" and make farmers of

²¹Mayo-Smith, "Control of Immigration. III," pp. 417-418.

them Now the great mass of these laborers are not farmers at all or even farm laborers They do not possess either the skill, or the capital, or the knowledge of modern methods and the use of agricultural machinery, requisite to enter into the ranks of the farmers of this country.²²

To Mayo-Smith, the safety valve was something to be saved for Americans, but it was only one small segment of his argument for immigration restriction. He was much more concerned with the fact that the immigrants of the 1880's, especially when driven into the cities, did not assimilate into the American culture.

The disappearance of the safety valve, along with the general disappearance of the frontier, became a factor of even greater concern to Americans with the rise of the agricultural and economic depressions of the 1890's, and it was one of the many factors that intensified the drive for immigration restriction in that period.²³ The rising flow of the immigrants into cities, it was claimed, threatened the traditional concepts of the republic, as well as its economic stability. What really bothered the restrictionists, however, was the character of the new immigrants of the late nineteenth century, and the fact that, living in cities, they

²²Mayo-Smith, "Control of Immigration. II," p. 217. See also Emigration and Immigration, pp. 115-116.

²³For allusions to this theme in the 1890's, see Canby, "Immigration," p. 198; and Chetwood, Jr., "Immigration, Hard Times, and the Veto," pp. 795-796.

did not assimilate into true Americans. The closing of the frontier provided the spokesmen for restriction with ammunition to use with this argument, too.

CHAPTER VI
RESTRICTION AND THE LOSS OF
PIONEER AMERICANIZATION

The process of assimilation was the factor at the heart of the restrictionists' fears of the new immigrants. As long as immigrants to the United States had adapted to the civilization of the New World, as long as they had discarded their European habits and customs and become true "Americans," the native-born inhabitants of the nation generally had accepted them. But in the 1880's and 1890's Americans discovered that the current group of immigrants, particularly those from southern and eastern Europe, did not "Americanize." They instead retained their European languages, dress, religions, and manners; they lived by themselves in isolated sections of the nation's cities, and even read their own foreign-language newspapers. This created, in effect, a group of foreign nations existing within the United States, the restrictionists said, and threatened the stability of the country: "The danger which threatens us is the growth of a large foreign element in our population whose habits of thought and behavior are radically different from those which the founders of the nation hoped to establish

here."¹

The problem of assimilation was a crucial one that was a part of a general American concern throughout the second half of the nineteenth century--the desire to create a racially homogeneous society. The goal of homogeneity was particularly a part of Republican ideology, and it was the Republican party that most often led the political campaign against immigration. From its beginnings in the 1850's, the Republican party had sought a type of racial homogeneity in the United States, asserting, for example, that it was "the white man's party" and trying to prevent the expansion of blacks into the territories. By the latter part of the century, the party's ideology still included a goal of racial purity, directed not only against the future of blacks in American society but against non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants as well.² This ideology was a predominant one within the general American public in the 1880's and 1890's, and the rise of Darwinian thought in that era gave new respectability to the idea of racial conflict, the struggle for existence among racial groups, and the eventual establishment of a homogeneous

¹Noble, "The Present State of the Immigration Question," p. 232.

²George M. Fredrickson, The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914 (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 130-147, 324. Fredrickson's argument is concerned mainly with American antagonism against blacks in the nineteenth century, but his theories on the desire for racial homogeneity apply also to the prejudice against the new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in the 1880's and 1890's.

society.³ The late nineteenth century, therefore, witnessed an extensive desire for a completely white, Anglo-Saxon civilization in the United States, a goal that seemed thwarted by the increasing numbers of immigrants in the country. Immigrants, Americans believed, posed a more immediate threat because they no longer assimilated into that dominant American society. The restrictionists claimed that the loss of the frontier provided one reason why the immigrants no longer assimilated.

Americans traditionally had believed that the pioneering process had made a man, particularly a newcomer to the United States, more "American." By travelling to the Western parts of the continent, and thus removing himself as far as possible from the tainted conditions of the Old World; by struggling against the wilderness; by building his own house, creating a farm, and providing for his family; in short, by living the rugged life of a pioneer, a man attached himself to his new land and to the American nation. The independent farmer on the frontier, Americans declared, developed courage, inventiveness, initiative, self-reliance, and all the other traits that supposedly made one a real American citizen. Pioneering, moreover, taught men the virtues of equality and democracy, and thus contributed to their worth as citizens of the republic. The frontier, therefore, as Lord Bryce declared, was "the most American part of America," an area in which constant

³Ibid., pp. 228-232.

hard work made a man less of a European, and more of an American.⁴

The belief that the availability of farmlands in the West would help to Americanize immigrants had been one of the forces behind the passage of the Homestead Act, as the debates that centered around that measure in the 1850's and 1860's indicated. Representative Cyrus L. Dunham of Indiana, arguing for an early homestead bill proposal in 1852, declared that free lands would prevent immigrants from crowding into cities and would, therefore, attach the immigrants more closely to the United States government: "There is something in the nature of man which makes him cling to that spot of earth he can call his own, and to the government that protects him in its enjoyment."⁵ Representative Willard P. Hall of Missouri agreed.

If, by a system of legislation at once just and beneficial to our citizens generally, we can induce the foreign immigrant to make his home in the West, we secure his attachment and fidelity to our institutions. As soon as he finds himself in possession of a home, and occupying a position that makes him a free man--free from the control, direction, and oppression of a superior, he will and must feel proud of American citizenship. He becomes identified with us in hopes, in interest, and feeling.⁶

Such a belief continued throughout the rest of the nineteenth

⁴Bryce, The American Commonwealth, p. 697.

⁵Quoted in Abbott, Historical Aspects of the Immigration Problem, pp. 778-779.

⁶Ibid., p. 780.

century. Theodore Roosevelt, in his 1889 historical work on The Winning of the West, continually emphasized the Americanizing qualities of frontier life. Speaking of the early Alleghany frontier, for example, Roosevelt described how people from all nations fused into a unit under pioneer conditions: "A single generation, passed under the hard conditions of life in the wilderness, was enough to weld together into one people the representatives of these numerous and widely different races; and the children of the next generation became indistinguishable from one another." The result, Roosevelt announced, was that foreigners became Americans "in speech, thought, and culture," and they "lost all remembrance of Europe and all sympathy with things European."⁷

The Americanizing qualities of the frontier received their most famous praises in the writings of Frederick Jackson Turner in the 1890's and early 1900's. Turner, in his 1893 essay on "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," stated the theme most directly: "The frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization." Because, according to Turner, life on the frontier brought a continual "return to primitive conditions," immigrants who moved West discarded their old customs and behavior traits and accepted new elements of civilization: "The advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influ-

⁷Theodore Roosevelt, The Works of Theodore Roosevelt, National Edition (20 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), VIII, p. 89.

ence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines."⁸ Consequently, "a composite nationality for the American people" developed on the frontier from the diverse groups of people who moved there: "In the crucible of the frontier the immigrants were Americanized, liberated, and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics."⁹

Turner reiterated the theme at greater length over the next decade in his articles for the Atlantic Monthly. Not only did the frontier Americanize the immigrant socially, he proposed, but it further promoted in the immigrant the ideals of American democracy. Pioneer life encouraged a belief in equality, individual liberty, and confidence in America, and gave the immigrant a faith "in the manifest destiny of his country."¹⁰ The process occurred over and over again across the continent, molding each wave of settlers into staunch American citizens.

European men, institutions, and ideas were lodged in the American wilderness, and this great American West took them to her bosom, taught them a new way of looking upon the destiny of the common man, trained them in adaptation to the conditions of the New World, to the creation of new institutions to meet new needs; and ever as society on her eastern border grew to resemble the Old World in its social forms and its industry, ever, as it began to lose faith in the ideals of democracy,

⁸Turner, The Frontier in American History, pp. 2-4.

⁹Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 210-215.

she opened new provinces, and dowered new democracies in her most distant dominions with her material treasures and with the ennobling influence that the fierce love of freedom, the strength that came from hewing out a home, making a school and a church, and creating a higher future for his family, furnished to the pioneer.¹¹

The frightening aspect of Turner's Americanization theory was that it implied that, when the "most distant dominions" of the continent had been settled, the Americanization process must cease. To the immigration restrictionists, such a thought menaced the future of American democracy and civilization.

Roosevelt and Turner taught the virtues of the pioneer life to the American public at the very time when Americans were beginning to hear of the impending disappearance of the frontier. The spokesmen for immigration restriction combined these ideas and discovered a vital new stimulus for halting the flow of immigrants to the United States. The fact that modern historians have shown that most immigrants did not go to the West even when lands were available does not contradict the power of such a belief. Americans of the late nineteenth century sincerely believed that the frontier had attracted immigrants,¹² and thus, to them, the loss of the frontier re-

¹¹Ibid., p. 267.

¹²Turner declared that immigrants "obviously" had been attracted by cheap lands: ibid., p. 21.

moved the most important factor that had contributed to the assimilation of immigrants. Without the frontier, Americans believed that immigrants would be forced into cities, where they would threaten the stability of the nation.

Various writers of the 1880's and 1890's emphasized this theme, some in an attempt to hasten the passage of restriction laws, others as a means to promote governmental measures that would help develop the unsettled portions of the West.

Brigadier-General Nelson A. Miles, in an 1890 article for The North American Review, agreed that pioneer life produced an American character, and that the dwindling of good lands in the West meant that those who now sought asylum in the United States could only turn to a degraded life in the cities. On the basis of this information, Miles called for federally sponsored immigration projects to open the arid lands of the West to settlement and provide new areas for the future of the pioneer life.¹³ To others, however, the loss of the frontier as an Americanizing process implied that the United States should begin to stop immigration. Josiah Strong declared that the decline of the public domain, and the consequent appearance in the cities of "little Germanies here, little Scandinavias there, and little Irelands yonder," upset the whole system of Americanization: "Our safety demands the assimilation of these strange populations, and the process

¹³Nelson A. Miles, "Our Unwatered Empire," The North American Review, CL (March, 1890), pp. 370-371.

of assimilation will become slower and more difficult as the proportion of foreigners increases."¹⁴ Francis Amasa Walker also agreed that the pioneering process traditionally had promoted America's democratic growth: "None can doubt that both the increase of our population and its expansion over a continually wider territory, have been the chief causes of the remarkable development among us of that public spirit which we call patriotism."¹⁵ But with the lands of the West disappearing, immigrants were pouring into the cities, dividing into separate colonies, speaking their own languages, refusing to adapt to "a land of free laws and educated labor."¹⁶ The inability of the immigrants to assimilate into American society was, to Walker, Strong, and other leaders of the period, the most frightening aspect of late nineteenth-century immigration.

Richmond Mayo-Smith, as usual, provided the most cogent exposition of the theme. Assimilation, in fact, was Mayo-Smith's most basic concern in the entire immigration question,

¹⁴Strong, Our Country, p. 45. In the 1891 revised edition of the book, Strong noted that another means of Americanizing the immigrants, the public school system, was likewise threatened by recent immigration, particularly by Catholics who demanded their separate schools: Strong, Our Country (rev. ed.; New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1891), pp. 79-106.

¹⁵Address at Brown University, 1889. Quoted in Ray Allen Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner, p. 121.

¹⁶Walker, "Immigration," p. 134.

and his belief that the immigrants of the 1880's and 1890's did not assimilate as readily as had earlier arrivals led him to call for restriction. He was too discerning an observer ever to state that the closing of the frontier was the only factor that impeded assimilation, but he certainly saw it as one of the factors, and he often used the idea in his writings.

The frontier life, Mayo-Smith declared, had, in the early years of the nation, allowed the United States to assimilate foreigners easily; but as that type of life disappeared, the country should consider a re-evaluation of its immigration policy.

We are no longer in that vigorous early civilization when we could digest almost anything sent to us and when the conditions of life here corrected and controlled the weaknesses of the immigrants. In a frontier life, the new-comer not only has a chance to begin over but, in a sense, he is obliged to do so. He is thrown on himself and obliged to look out for himself At the present time the conditions are entirely different. The immigrant . . . finds in this country, especially in our large cities, exactly the same environment that he has come from. He may if he chooses take up the same life here which he has left on the other side of the water. If he is weak in resolution, the temptation will be strong to stick to the old familiar ways instead of sticking out in a new and difficult path.¹⁷

With free lands disappearing, Mayo-Smith declared, and with Americanization made that much more difficult, the United States could no longer admit just anybody. The nation had to enact legislation to remove the undesirable, more unassimilable

¹⁷Mayo-Smith, "Control of Immigration, I," pp. 68-69.

elements from the flow of immigrants. In two articles on assimilation for the Political Science Quarterly in 1894,¹⁸ he emphasized this idea. Race mixture in general, Mayo-Smith suggested, was a corruptive force within a nation, so that the promotion of assimilation by intermarriage of different racial stocks in the United States was a retrogressive idea. Assimilation, the fusing of various peoples, institutions, and customs into a composite American nationality, could be promoted effectively only through the influence of the social environment and the physical environment. Mayo-Smith was optimistic about the capacity of the American social environment--particularly the public education system--to Americanize foreign-born citizens. But, he noted ominously, the disappearance of the frontier threatened the survival of the other factor promoting assimilation, the physical environment and the frontier life.

The frontier life, Mayo-Smith asserted, had been the "most powerful influence" in the development of the nation. Constant struggle against nature had promoted self-reliance and self-government, and by such a process the immigrant had become "a pioneer of civilization." He had abandoned his old traditions, and had adopted new American customs and pioneer traits.¹⁹ But now Americans no longer could rely on that

¹⁸Mayo-Smith, "Assimilation of Nationalities in the United States," Political Science Quarterly, IX (September, December, 1894), pp. 426-444, 649-670.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 440.

experience as an assimilating element.

It may be remarked, in passing, that this 'assimilating force, which has so powerfully influenced our past history, tends to become less prominent with the settling up of the country. The frontier life is largely a thing of the past. The best land has been taken up. The conditions of living over a great portion of the country are similar to those of Europe. A larger and larger proportion of the population live in towns and cities where these primitive influences are not felt Now the immigrants find here men of their own tongue, newspapers in their own language They sink into positions already opened for them, and they find an environment suited to their previous habits.²⁰

The result was that the immigrants remained European, instead of becoming Americans, and they thus threatened American society.

Mayo-Smith's major work, Emigration and Immigration, is at bottom an extended study of the process of assimilation in the United States. Mayo-Smith believed that a stable society had to be as homogeneous as possible, and that immigrants who did not assimilate retarded the growth of American civilization.

A nation is great, not on account of the number of individuals contained within its boundaries, but through the strength begotten of common national ideals and aspirations. No nation can exist and be powerful that is not homogeneous in this sense. And the great ethnic problem we have before us is to fuse those diverse elements into one common nationality, having one language, one political practice, one patriotism and one ideal of social development.²¹

²⁰Ibid., p. 441.

²¹Mayo-Smith, Emigration and Immigration, p. 78.

Mayo-Smith was concerned with the effects that immigration brought to American society, how immigrants destroyed homogeneity, and how it affected "the ethical consciousness of the community."²²

American civilization, Mayo-Smith proposed, consisted of four basic elements: the tradition of freedom and self-government; the social morality derived from Puritan New England; a high standard of living for the working classes; and beneficial social habits, such as a respect for law and order, national patriotism, and confidence in the nation's future. Immigration, he asserted, threatened all of these elements of civilization.²³ The presence of thousands of new voters with no training in self-government menaced the nation's political institutions. Immigrant voters could be influenced too much by city demagogues, or by the dictates of the Catholic church, and the "importations of foreign agitators" would bring anarchism and socialism to the United States.²⁴ Immigration lowered the economic level of the American working class by increasing labor competition and thus reducing wages.²⁵

²²Ibid., pp. 4-5.

²³Ibid., pp. 5-8.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 79-92.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 131-138. As a professional statistician, Mayo-Smith even produced a method of calculating the economic value of an immigrant, subtracting the cost of keeping him in the community from the amount of wealth he added to the community, and capitalizing the result "at the current rate of interest" to derive the current value of the man: p. 109.

Immigration threatened American morality and "the social health of the community" by raising the levels of crime, vice, illiteracy, and pauperism.²⁶ The "new" immigrants, in particular, "ignorant, criminal and vicious," lacking "the faintest appreciation of what civilization means," presented an awesome danger to the nation.²⁷

The basis of the problem was assimilation. The new immigrants, Mayo-Smith believed, were so dangerous because they did not assimilate as had earlier immigrants, and one reason why they did not was the loss of the frontier. With most of the nation's lands settled, immigrants no longer filled the needs of a pioneer society; they went, instead, into cities and maintained their traditional European customs and ties.²⁸ This, according to Mayo-Smith, was not the only factor threatening the process of assimilation--the number and character of the new immigrants were really more important--but it was one of the significant factors.

Mayo-Smith was, obviously, antagonistic toward the character of the immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. But his racial views did not dominate his thoughts on immigration, as was often the case with other spokesmen for restriction. Mayo-Smith held the general prejudices of his society--against

²⁶Ibid., pp. 147-167.

²⁷Ibid., p. 133.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 96-97, 119.

blacks, against orientals, against non-Anglo-Saxons²⁹--but he was really more concerned with the economic and social problems caused by immigration. His argument, as a rule, was reasoned and calm, and he tried to keep his demands for restriction as free as possible from blatant bigotry.

The control of immigration must be free from the base cry of "America for the Americans," and from any narrow spirit of trade-unionism, or of a selfish desire to monopolize the labor market. It must find its justification in the needs of the community, and in the necessity of selecting those elements which will contribute to the harmonious development of our civilization.³⁰

He did not ask for total prohibition of immigration, or for legislation directed specifically against any nationality (except the Chinese). He hoped to admit only those immigrants who could assimilate into American society, and he called for appropriate federal legislation that would eliminate unassimilable elements.³¹ The problem to Mayo-Smith was basically one of Americanization in a society that could no longer rely on the assistance of the frontier.

The question of Americanization was really at the heart of all the pleas for immigration restriction in the late nineteenth century, and, in that respect, the loss of the frontier

²⁹See, e.g., ibid., pp. 64-65, 247-248.

³⁰Ibid., p. 278.

³¹Ibid., pp. 279-283.

as an Americanizing force constituted the most important element for restrictionists who used the frontier theme. Racial fears and the fears of the exhaustion of the public lands combined most effectively in that type of argument.

Racial prejudice in itself probably could have generated a drive for immigration restriction. But in the 1880's and the 1890's, the pervasive sense of the impending loss of the public domain, the related fear of the disappearance of a frontier safety valve, and the belief that without a frontier the Americanization of immigrants was no longer assured, all combined to accelerate the demands for restriction.

CHAPTER VII

THE OPPOSITION

The Americans of the 1880's and 1890's who opposed the idea of immigration restriction--and a sizable number did--devised one simple method of countering the restrictionists' emphasis on the closing of the public lands. They simply pointed to the West and said, "Look at all that empty land." The unfortunate disadvantage of such a rejoinder was that, more often than not, these spokesmen were pointing at worthless lands.

On the surface, of course, the idea of declaring the American continent in danger of overcrowding seemed an absurd one. "A man looking out on the vast, fertile, and as yet sparsely-peopled sections of the South-west," wrote New Jersey Congressman William McAdoo, "is not apt to dread unrestricted immigration as much as he who daily views the scenes of our great cities and those of mining and railroad centers."¹ Carl Schurz, perhaps the nation's most distinguished immigrant, agreed: "In such a country, which is capable of nourishing five times its present population, it is simply

¹William McAdoo, "Immigration and the Tariff," The Forum, XI (June, 1891), p. 398.

ridiculous to speak of overcrowding."²

Many other Americans, both politicians and private citizens, denounced the idea of halting immigration on the basis of declining public lands. Senator John T. Morgan of Alabama, speaking against the proposed contract labor bill in 1885, ridiculed the theory.

The vast fields which are open now to settlement in our public domain, and where we extend an invitation for settlement to every man who will come here and declare his intention of becoming a citizen of the United States, are sufficient for the next twenty-five or perhaps fifty years to absorb the unemployed labor of all the civilized countries of Europe that has any possible chance of emigrating to this part of the world.³

The United States Commissioner of Immigration echoed the statement in 1892: "Our resources have hardly been touched, certainly the point of exhaustion has not been approached, so that development is feasible and desirable."⁴ A few years later his successor noted that the 1894 report of the Immigration Investigating Commission suggested that most Western areas were still trying to attract workers and settlers.⁵ Some

²Carl Schurz, "Restricting Immigration," Harper's Weekly, XLII (January 8, 1898), p. 27.

³U. S., Congress, Senate, 48th Cong., 2nd Sess., February 13, 1885, Congressional Record, XVI, p. 1632. See also the remarks of Senator Coke of Texas, ibid., pp. 1788-1790.

⁴John B. Weber, "Our National Dumping-Ground: A Study of Immigration," The North American Review, CLIV (April, 1892), p. 425.

⁵Joseph H. Senner, "The Immigration Question," Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, X (July, 1897), p. 17.

writers, such as Senator Henry C. Hansbrough of North Dakota, even used vast expansionistic dreams to prove that there would be plenty of room for immigrants.

There is ample room in the United States for 500,000,000 of people. By the time our population shall have reached one-fourth that number the northern boundaries of the Union will have been extended to the south coast of Greenland. Shall we for a single moment turn back the tide of willing workers who are to level and tunnel the mountains and subdue the forests?⁶

Even Henry George, so concerned about the appropriation of the lands, was quoted as saying that the nation could support many more immigrants.

I do not believe any restriction whatever upon the immigration of people from Europe and of the Caucasian race, who are not diseased and who are not chronic paupers or criminals, is needed, or is in accordance with the spirit of our institutions. We should have room enough for the whole population of Europe, were not our lands monopolized, and were they taken from the grasp of those who hold them for no other purpose than the hope of profiting by their increasing value.⁷

There was, in fact, even in the depression years of the 1890's, considerable optimism concerning the nation's potential growth.

A few authors devoted entire articles to refuting the frontier theme of the restrictionists, an indication of how powerful the theme had become. In an 1892 article entitled "Incalculable Room for Immigrants," Edward Atkinson, a New England businessman, tried to show that, even if the frontier had disappeared, plenty of land remained.

⁶Henry C. Hansbrough, "Why Immigration Should Not Be Suspended," The North American Review, CXLVI (February, 1893), p. 224.

⁷Quoted in Wm. E. Chandler, "Methods of Restricting Immigration," The Forum, XIII (March, 1892), p. 137.

The argument upon which the proposition for . . . exclusion is based seems to be mainly that our free land has been disposed of by the Government, and that we have no longer any land to give away. That may be admitted. What has it to do with the question? The disposal of land by original owners, either the government, the state, or private persons, has no necessary connection⁸ with the occupancy and productive use of land.

Atkinson, noting the thousands of acres of unoccupied lands in the Southwest and even in parts of the East, believed that immigrants easily could purchase farmlands from their current owners: "Any one who chooses can become possessed of land by purchase from private owners at this time at less cost to himself than when nearly the whole of the Western prairies were open to free occupancy under the homestead law Land itself is more easily obtained than ever before."⁹ According to Atkinson, the frontier had somehow both disappeared and survived.

C. J. Buell, writing in The Arena in 1894, also answered the frontier argument in a rather illogical manner. Buell first indicated that a government had no moral right to legislate against immigration in the first place, because the freedom to move about the globe was one of man's natural rights.

Have you, my reader, a right to change your habitation from St. Paul to California? Most certainly. Then that same right you must accord to every other one of your fellow-men.

⁸Edward Atkinson, "Incalculable Room for Immigrants," The Forum, XIII (May, 1892), pp. 361-362.

⁹Ibid., pp. 362-364. Quote from p. 364.

Have you a right to expatriate yourself and become a citizen of England, China or Afghanistan? With equal emphasis you reply, "Of course I have." Then you must accord that right to every other person on earth.¹⁰

But Buell was more concerned with showing that immigration was still a material benefit to the United States, and that there should be ample lands upon which immigrants could settle. Obviously a disciple of Henry George, Buell declared that land monopoly provided the only problem of the period, and that the existence of land monopoly deluded Americans into believing that their continent was overcrowded. If land monopoly were eliminated by the single tax, Buell proposed, immigrants would be able to settle in the West in large numbers.¹¹

Look at this fair America of ours to-day, and see how few and how scattering are its people. More than all the inhabitants of the United States could live in peace and comfort east of the Alleghany Mountains were it not for the curse of land monopoly. Less than half the land even in New York City is really occupied and used. More than half is only partially used or is held idle by speculators who expect to reap large profits from the increase of values which always comes with increase of population.¹²

By opening up the remaining lands as they should be, Buell suggested, the country would have abundant space for an increase of population.

Another writer, Simon G. Croswell, in 1897 vehemently contradicted the idea that the United States had reached the

¹⁰C. J. Buell, "Immigration and the Land Question," The Arena, X (November, 1894), p. 807.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 809-813.

¹²Ibid., p. 813.

saturation point in population: "Can the most ardent advocate of the Malthusian doctrine claim that the United States already has too many inhabitants, or is in danger of having too many in the immediate future? Do we not rather need to encourage immigration, to fling wide open the gates of our country and secure as large an addition to our working force as possible?"¹³ Croswell believed that the undeveloped lands of the West, "where the average percentage of population to the area of the land dwindles in some localities almost to the vanishing point," still cried out for settlers.¹⁴ A large number of Americans of the late nineteenth century would have agreed with such a view.

Those who claimed that the nation still had plenty of room for immigrants were correct in a literal sense. There was an abundance of empty land in the West. By the 1890's, however, many Americans had begun to realize that the lands that did remain available were not suitable for cultivation by a yeoman homesteader. Throughout the last two decades of the nineteenth century, several spokesmen, and John Wesley Powell, in particular, warned that the United States no longer could expect the arid lands of the Western states to provide profitable 160-acre homesteads. Most of the remaining

¹³Simon Greenleaf Croswell, "Should Immigration Be Restricted?," The North American Review, CLXIV (May, 1897), p. 530.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 527.

lands, Powell declared, were certainly fertile, but could be cultivated successfully only by means of an extensive and expensive system of irrigation.¹⁵ By the 1890's, Americans had begun to listen to Powell's words, and their realization of the fact that much of the public domain was arid contributed to the general fear aroused by the doctrine of the closing frontier.

For the purposes of a single immigrant farmer--of whom there were relatively few in the first place--much of the frontier, then, had closed by the 1890's. The desert and mineral lands that remained available were of little use to a solitary, unskilled immigrant without capital, nor were the potentially productive irrigable lands. There was an agricultural frontier existing in 1890, but it was one that required large amounts of capital, something that few immigrants possessed. In this respect, the restrictionists who claimed that the closing of the public lands meant a decline in opportunity for the immigrant were, to an extent, correct.

The writers who opposed the theory of the disappearing frontier did not realize this fact, and, in their eagerness to combat immigration restriction, resorted to arguments often as irrational as those used by the restrictionists. C. J. Buell declared that the United States should welcome the benefits provided by immigrants just as a man alone on a desert

¹⁵See, e.g., J[ohn] W[esley] Powell, "The Irrigable Lands of the Arid Region," The Century Magazine, XXXIX (March, 1890), pp. 766-776.

island would welcome new arrivals, apparently forgetting that a nation of some sixty million persons was not quite the same as a man on an island.¹⁶ Edward Atkinson displayed his ignorance of New England farmlands by claiming that immigrants could make profitable use of the lands abandoned by earlier Northeastern farmers, and somehow devised the notion that only a few immigrants actually settled in cities.¹⁷ Atkinson, furthermore, could not understand that it was more difficult for a poor immigrant to purchase land from a private owner than it was to obtain land cheaply from the federal government. Nor did Simon Crosswell realize that aridity was a major reason for the low man-land ration in much of the West.

The opponents of immigration restriction argued most effectively when they emphasized the traditional role of the United States as an asylum for the oppressed of all nations. That belief was yet strong in the 1880's and 1890's. When, however, they claimed that an abundant supply of free land remained in the West, they were contradicting one of the dominant fears of the era. The fact that these opponents believed themselves obligated to attack the frontier theme shows how important that theme had become by the 1890's. Many parts of the West itself, in fact, had turned against further immigration by the time of the depression of the 1890's, and several Western states had closed down their immigration

¹⁶Buell, "Immigration and the Land Question," pp. 809-810.

¹⁷Atkinson, "Incalculable Room for Immigrants," pp. 364-365. John B. Weber likewise asserted in 1892 that two-thirds of the nation's immigrants were going west to farms! "Our National Dumping-Ground," p. 425.

bureaus.¹⁸ Regardless of the dubious merits of their attacks on immigration, Francis Amasa Walker, Richmond Mayo-Smith, and the other spokesmen who connected the closing of the frontier to their campaign for restriction, had devised a powerful argument and one accurately designed to meet the fears of a generation of Americans who believed that their frontier was ending.

¹⁸Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, pp. 73-74. For a contemporary view, see "Immigration, Past and Present," Review of Reviews, III (July, 1891), pp. 571-572.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VALIDITY OF THE FRONTIER THEME

Fear of the closing of the public lands, obviously, was not the only reason for the rise of immigration restriction in the 1880's and 1890's, nor was it the most important reason. Labor competition, dread of socialism and radicalism, rising urban problems, and the crises of the industrial age, were all of major importance in turning Americans against immigration. Even more significant was the prevalent social and racial prejudice against the "new" immigration. Many of those who used the frontier argument themselves admitted as much. Francis Amasa Walker, for example, after one of his lengthy discussions of the declining public domain, proceeded to a topic that troubled him even more: "But, in my view, it is not in the increasing numbers which the fast-rising tide of immigration is bringing to our shores, that the chief danger to the republic, politically and industrially, is found. It is in the character of the new arrivals."¹ Walker then emphasized that he did not hope to prevent thrifty Swedes, Norwegians, and Germans from coming to the United States, only the degraded peasants of southern and

¹Walker, "Immigration," p. 130.

eastern Europe.² Prescott F. Hall also showed decisively that declining space was not his main concern: "If immigrants be undesirable the fact that there is land enough for many times the population which we now have in the United States would be generally conceded to be an inadequate reason for admitting them."³ The Review of Reviews agreed that the loss of the frontier was only one aspect of the restriction movement.

The free homestead area in the United States is practically exhausted, and the westward agricultural migration has been carried already beyond the safe limits of the rain-belt, with the inevitable result of disappointment, local distress and occasional abandonment of drouth-afflicted lands. This would account in part for the revulsion of American feeling on the subject of immigration. But the change in the character of immigrants affords no less weighty a reason.⁴

The editorial then proceeded to condemn the recent influx of impoverished peasants.

Racial bias, furthermore, lay behind Josiah Strong's fear of immigration, and Strong believed that the Anglo-Saxon race had a holy duty to spread its dominance first over the American West, and then over the entire world.⁵ Even Richmond Mayo-Smith displayed his prejudices, although he usually referred to the blessings of Anglo-Saxon "civilization" rather than the Anglo-Saxon "race."

²Ibid., pp. 130-141.

³Hall, "Immigration and the Educational Test," p. 393.

⁴"Immigration, Past and Present," p. 572.

⁵See, e.g., Strong, Our Country, pp. 144-180.

Congress, likewise, moved toward restriction more out of fear of the new immigration than because of the idea of the closing frontier. Congressional debates on the immigration bills of the 1880's and 1890's indicate considerable anxiety over labor competition and the character of the new immigrants, but show little concern with the exhaustion of the public domain.⁶ Even Henry Cabot Lodge, who had used the frontier argument before, did not mention the idea when in 1896 he gave his lengthy speech to the Senate on behalf of the literacy test bill. Lodge instead emphasized the manner in which the new immigration threatened the quality of Anglo-Saxon citizenship.⁷ President Cleveland gave his understanding of the problem in his veto message of 1897: "It is not claimed, I believe, that the time has come for the further restriction of immigration on the ground that an excess of population overcrowds our land. It is said, however, that the quality of recent immigration is undesirable."⁸

⁶See, e.g., these volumes of the Congressional Record: XIII, pp. 5105-5113; XVI, pp. 1621-1636, 1778-1791; XXII, pp. 2740-2741, 2945-2959; XXIX, pp. 1423-1433.

⁷U.S., Congress, Senate, 54th Cong., 1st Sess., March 16, 1896, Congressional Record, XXVIII, pp. 2817-2820. See also John A. Garraty, Henry Cabot Lodge: A Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1953), pp. 141-145.

⁸Reprinted in Abbott, Immigration, p. 199. An 1891 Congressional report had suggested a similar idea: "The time is far in the future when we will suffer from an overcrowded population. The territory of the United States will support seven times our present inhabitants. It will be fifty years before statesmanship need apprehend a burden from the influx of desirable aliens, but the time now is, and always will be, when the undesirable should be prohibited a landing in our country." U.S., Congress, House, Report of the Select

The fact that the fear of the new immigration overshadowed the fear of the exhaustion of the public lands, however, does not mean, as one historian has suggested, that the immigration restrictionists were secret racists who "dared not resort to racist tactics and so seized on the closing of the frontier to justify laws against all newcomers."⁹ For one thing, the supporters of immigration restriction in the late nineteenth century were not prone to deception. They displayed their prejudices freely and openly, and, in the context of the era of social Darwinism, their prejudices against certain nationalities were not considered out of the ordinary. Ethnocentrism was a widespread attitude in America in the 1880's and the 1890's, and there would have been no need for restrictionists to hide their true feelings behind a smokescreen provided by the frontier argument. They willingly discussed both their attitudes toward the new immigrants and their fears of the closing of the frontier, because they sensed both sincerely, and they found a logical connection between the two.

The leading restrictionists, moreover, were prominent, respectable, and often worthy men who would have had no reason purposely to deceive the American public. Josiah Strong was, after all, a devout minister who firmly believed that he spoke the truth. He once wrote, in fact, that he thought he was "right where God wanted me to be, and doing just the work

Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, House Report 3472, 51st Cong., 2nd Sess., 1891, p. ii.

⁹Billington, Frederick Jackson Turner, p. 110.

He wanted me to do."¹⁰ Strong spent most of his life applying his Christian principles to the problems of American cities, and trying to awaken American Protestants to the responsibilities of the urban-industrial age. Despite his unflattering racial biases, therefore, he must be considered a respected and respectable man of his era, not the type of leader who would deliberately invent an argument in which he did not believe.

Francis A. Walker, also, despite his obvious hostility toward the "stagnant pools of population" from southern and eastern Europe, was not the type of man who had to stoop to guile to present an anti-immigration viewpoint. He was a distinguished public servant, the president of a leading educational institution, and the most renowned American economist of his era. Richmond Mayo-Smith, as well, was a respected academic leader, and a man who maintained an admirable tone of rationality in his writings. Such men would not have invented fears about the closing of the frontier simply to make a point; they had to have been concerned about those fears themselves.

Finally, the fear of the exhaustion of the public lands was one that permeated a huge number of Americans in the late nineteenth century, not just those who opposed immigration. The fear was a profound one, strong enough to stand on its own; it had its own origin and its own existence, just as did

¹⁰ Strong, My Religion in Everyday Life (New York, 1910), p. 49. Quoted in Muller, Josiah Strong and the Challenge of the City, p. 9.

the fear of immigration. The belief in the closing of the frontier was by no means the source of the immigration restriction movement of the 1880's and 1890's, nor was it the only impetus behind the movement. But many spokesmen of the period did perceive both fears, combined the two, and, in their own minds, believed that such a connection provided an even more impelling reason for accelerating the campaign for restriction of immigration.

CHAPTER IX

EPILOGUE: LATER FEARS

Despite the fears aroused by extensive immigration, by the exhaustion of the public lands, and by the general climate of doubt, the United States did not enact a stringent system of immigration control in the 1880's and 1890's. The restriction laws of 1882, 1885, and 1891 were generally aimed at prohibiting entry only to "undesirable elements;" they were vague and impossible to enforce. Further Congressional attempts to place harsher controls over immigration then subsided for a few years after President Cleveland's veto of Lodge's literacy test bill in 1897.

The entire restriction movement, in fact, declined considerably in the years immediately following the veto. By 1899 The Nation could note that the literacy test bill and the general demand for further controls were topics that the country no longer discussed: "An issue of considerable importance has thus practically disappeared from our politics."¹ Such a reduction in the clamor for restriction was due, in large measure, to the general decline in the numbers of immi-

¹"The Fading Out of an Issue," The Nation, LXIX (October 19, 1899), p. 294. For a contemporary attack on the veto, see Chetwood, Jr., "Immigration, Hard Times, and the Veto," pp. 788-801.

grants in the late 1890's. Annual immigration had begun a downward trend in 1893, and in 1897 and 1898 immigration reached its lowest level since 1879,² the ultimate result of the worldwide depression of the 1890's. In 1897 the United States Commissioner of Immigration declared that immigration had "fallen to such small figures as to be absolutely insignificant as compared with our own enormous population."³ Under such circumstances, the efforts of even the most ardent restrictionists waned.

More important to the fading of the restriction campaign, however, was the general mood of confidence that, for a time, returned to the United States in the late 1890's. As the nation's economy revived, as labor conflict subsided briefly, as the country began to search for overseas markets, a sense of complacency and unity replaced tensions and doubts. Nativism in the late nineteenth century, as always in American history, had been a manifestation of internal unrest, and as that unrest dissolved, hostility toward immigrants abated.⁴

The direct fear of the closing of the frontier subsided as well in the late 1890's as the nation turned to a search for new, external frontiers in the expansionistic climate of opinion that followed the Spanish-American War. Concentra-

²The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present, pp. 56-57.

³Senner, "The Immigration Question," p. 6.

⁴Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 106-111; Higham, "Origins of Immigration Restriction," pp. 87-88; Jones, American Immigration, pp. 260-262.

tion on a new frontier reduced the fears associated with the loss of an old one, and the frontier theme never again intertwined so closely with the cause of immigration restriction as it did in the 1880's and 1890's, when the anxiety created by the loss of the public domain was so immediate and pervasive.

Hysteria against immigration, of course, eventually reached new heights in the twentieth century, in the years following the first World War. That hysteria, however, resulted from a new set of tensions and a new lack of confidence that developed after 1917. Resentment against the "new" immigration had reappeared in the early 1900's with a new wave of immigrants, and had commanded nationwide attention through the forty-one-volume report of the Dillingham Commission in 1911. But in the aftermath of World War I, even more extensive fears created widespread demands for restriction. The internal campaign for "100 per cent Americanism," fear of German immigrants during the war, the incredible hostility aroused by the Palmer raids and the Red Scare in the early 1920's, and the corrosive sense of disillusionment and isolationism that dominated postwar America, all led to the eventual adoption of a rigid system of immigration restriction. The strict quota system that Congress established in the 1920's reduced immigration to a fraction of what it had been earlier, and eliminated much of the immigration from southern and eastern Europe. The nation had finally decided upon an ignoble attempt to bolster its own confidence and sense of unity.

The fears aroused by the closing of the frontier in the late nineteenth century, therefore, had been exceedingly acute, but they had not been powerful enough to drive the nation completely to rigid immigration restriction. The anxiety caused by a belief in the exhaustion of the public lands had provided a strong argument for restriction, and had intensified the campaign against immigration, but it had not been quite strong enough to carry that campaign to an ultimate conclusion. Only an even more disturbing group of fears in the 1920's could do that.

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