

# The Nation

February 18, 1915

p. 190

## Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot

A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY.

By HORACE M. KALLEN.

### PART I.

It was, I think, an eminent lawyer who, backed by a ripe experience of inequalities before the law, pronounced our Declaration of Independence to be a collection of "glittering generalities." Yet it cannot be that the implied slur was deserved. There is hardly room to doubt that the equally eminent gentlemen over whose signatures this orotund synthesis of the social and political philosophy of the eighteenth century appears conceived that they were subscribing to anything but the dull and sober truth when they underwrote the doctrine that God had created all men equal and had endowed them with certain inalienable rights, among these being life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That this doctrine did not describe a condition, that it even contradicted conditions, that many of the signatories owned other men and bought and sold them, that many were eminent by birth, many by wealth, and only a few by merit—all this is acknowledged. Indeed, they were aware of these inequalities; they would probably have fought their abolition. But they did not regard them as incompatible with the Declaration of Independence. For to them the Declaration was neither a pronouncement of abstract principles nor an exercise in formal logic. It was an instrument in a political and economic conflict, a weapon of offence and defence. The doctrine of "natural rights" which is its essence was formulated to shield social orders against the aggrandizement of persons acting under the doctrine of "divine right": its function was to afford sanction for refusing customary obedience to traditional superiority. Such also was the function of the Declaration. Across the water, in England, certain powers had laid claim to the acknowledgment of their traditional superiority to the colonists in America. Whereupon the colonists, through their representatives, the signatories to the Declaration, replied that they were quite as good as their traditional betters, and that no one should take from them certain possessions which were theirs.

To-day the descendants of the colonists are reformulating a declaration of independence. Again, as in 1776, Americans of British ancestry find that certain possessions of theirs, which may be lumped under the word "Americanism," are in jeopardy. This is the situation which Mr. Ross's book,\* in common with many others, describes. The danger comes, once more, from a force across the water, but the force is this time regarded not as superior, but as inferior. The relationships of 1776 are, consequently, reversed. To conserve the inalienable rights of the colonists

\**The Old World in the New.* By Edward Alsworth Ross. New York: The Century Company. \$2.40 net.

**A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY**  
 of 1776, it was necessary to declare all men equal; to conserve the inalienable rights of their descendants in 1914, it becomes necessary to declare all men unequal. In 1776 all men were as good as their betters; in 1914 men are permanently worse than their betters. "A nation may reason," writes Mr. Ross, "why burden ourselves with the rearing of children? Let them perish unborn in the womb of time. The immigrants will keep up the population. A people that has no more respect for its ancestors and no more pride of race than this deserves the extinction that surely awaits it."

### I.

Respect for ancestors, pride of race! Time was when these would have been repudiated as the enemies of democracy, as the antithesis of the fundamentals of our republic, with its belief that "a man's a man for a' that." And now they are being invoked in defence of democracy, against the "melting-pot," by a sociological protagonist of the "democratic idea"! How conscious their invocation is cannot be said. But that they have unconsciously colored much of the social and political thinking of this country from the days of the Cincinnati on, seems to me unquestionable, and even more unquestionable that this apparently sudden and explicit conscious expression of them is the effect of an actual, felt menace. Mr. Ross, in a word, is no voice crying in a wilderness. He simply utters aloud and in his own peculiar manner what is felt and spoken wherever Americans of British ancestry congregate thoughtfully. He is the most recent phase of the operation of these forces in the social and economic history of the United States; a voice and instrument of theirs. Being so, he has neither taken account of them nor observed them, but has reacted in terms of them to the social situation which constitutes the theme of his book. The reaction is secondary, the situation is secondary. The standards alone are really primary and, perhaps, ultimate. Fully to understand the place and function of "the old world in the new," and the attitude of the "new world" towards the old, demands an appreciation of the influence of these primary and ultimate standards upon all the peoples who are citizens of the country.

### II.

In 1776 the mass of white men in the colonies *were* actually, with respect to one another, rather free and rather equal. I refer, not so much to the absence of great differences in wealth, as to the fact that the whites were *like-minded*. They were possessed of ethnic and cultural unity; they were homogeneous with respect to ancestry and ideals. Their century-and-a-half-old tradition as Americans was continuous with their immemorially older tradition as Britons. They did not, until the economic-political quarrel with the mother country arose, regard themselves as other than Englishmen, sharing England's dangers and England's glories. When the quarrel came they remembered how they had left the mother country in search of religious liberty for themselves; how they had left Holland, where they had found this liberty, for fear of losing their ethnic and cultural identity, and what hardships they had borne for the sake of conserving both the liberty and the identity. Upon these they graft-

**A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY**  
 ed that political liberty the love of which was innate, perhaps, but the expression of which was occasioned by the economic warfare with the merchants of England. This grafting was not, of course, conscious. The continuity established itself rather as a mood than as an articulate idea. The economic situation *was* only an occasion, and not a cause. The cause lay in the homogeneity of the people, their *like-mindedness*, and in their *self-consciousness*.

Now, it happens that the preservation and development of any given type of civilization rests upon these two conditions—like-mindedness and self-consciousness. Without them art, literature—culture in any of its nobler forms—is impossible: and colonial America had a culture—chiefly of New England—but representative enough of the whole British-American life of the period. Within the area of what we now call the United States this life was not, however, the only life. Similarly animated groups of Frenchmen and Germans, in Louisiana and in Pennsylvania, regarded themselves as the cultural peers of the British, and because of their own common ancestry, their like-mindedness and self-consciousness, they have retained a large measure of their individuality and spiritual autonomy to this day, after generations of unrestricted and mobile contact and a century of political union with the dominant British populations.

In the course of time the state, which began to be with the Declaration of Independence, became possessed of all the United States. French and Germans in Louisiana and Pennsylvania remained at home; but the descendants of the British colonists trekked across the continent, leaving tiny self-conscious nuclei of population in their wake, and so established ethnic and cultural standards for the whole country. Had the increase of these settlements borne the same proportion to the unit of population that it bore between 1810 and 1820, the Americans of British stock would have numbered to-day over 100,000,000. The inhabitants of the country do number over 100,000,000; but they are not the children of the colonists and pioneers: they are immigrants and the children of immigrants, and they are not British, but of all the other European stocks.

First came the Irish, integral to the polity of Great Britain, but ethnically different, Catholic in religion, fleeing from economic and political oppression, and—self-conscious and rebellious. They came seeking food and freedom, and revenge against the oppressors on the other side. Their area of settlement is chiefly the East. There they were not met with open arms. Historically only semi-alien, their appearance aroused, none the less, both fear and active opposition. Their diversity in religion was outstanding, their gregarious politics disturbing. Opposition, organized, religious, political, and social, stimulated their natural gregariousness into action. They organized, in their turn, religiously and politically. Slowly they made their way, slowly they came to power, establishing themselves in many modes as potent forces in the life of America. Mr. Ross thinks that they have their virtue still to prove; how he does not say. To the common-sense of the country they constitute an approved ethnic unity of the

## A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY white American population.

Behind the Irish came the great mass of the Germans, quite diverse in speech and customs, culturally and economically far better off than the Irish, and self-conscious, as well through oppression and political aspiration as for these other reasons. They settled inland, over a stretch of relatively continuous territory extending from western New York to the Mississippi, from Buffalo to Minneapolis, and from Minneapolis to St. Louis. Spiritually, these Germans were more akin to the American settlers than the Irish, and, indeed, although social misprision pursued them also, they were less coldly received and with less difficulty tolerated. As they made their way, greater and greater numbers of the peasant stock joined them in the Western nuclei of population, so that between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley they constitute the dominant ethnic type.

Beyond them, in Minnesota, their near neighbors, the Scandinavians, prevail, and beyond these, in the mountain and mining regions, the central and eastern and southern Europeans—Slavs of various stocks, Magyars, Finns, Italians. Beyond the Rockies, cut off from the rest of the country by this natural barrier, a stratum of Americans of British ancestry balances the thinnish stratum on the Atlantic sea-coast; flanked on the south by Latins and scattering groups of Asiatics, and on the north by Scandinavians. The distribution of the population upon the two coasts is not dissimilar; that upon the Atlantic littoral is only less homogeneous. There French-Canadians, Irish, Italians, Slavs, and Jews alternate with the American population and each other, while in the West the Americans lie between and surround the Italians, Asiatics, Germans, and Scandinavians.

Now, of all these immigrant peoples the greater part are peasants, vastly illiterate, living their lives at fighting weight, with a minimum of food and a maximum of toil. Mr. Ross thinks that their coming to America was determined by no spiritual urge; only the urge of steamship agencies and economic need or greed. However generally true this opinion may be, he ignores, curiously enough, three significant and one notable exception to it. The significant exceptions are the Poles, the Finns, the Bohemians—the subjugated Slavic nationalities generally. Political and religious and cultural persecution plays no small rôle in the movement of the masses of them. The notable exception is the Jews. The Jews come far more with the attitude of the earliest settlers than any of the other peoples; for they more than any other present-day immigrant group are in flight from persecution and disaster; in search of economic opportunity, liberty of conscience, civic rights. They have settled chiefly in the Northeast, with New York city as the centre of greatest concentration. Among them, as among the Puritans, the Pennsylvania Germans, the French of Louisiana, self-consciousness and like-mindedness are intense and articulate. But they differ from the subjugated Slavic peoples in that the latter look backward and forward to *actual*, even if enslaved, home lands; the Jews, in the mass, have thus far looked to America as their home land.

## A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY

In sum, when we consider that portion of our population which has taken root, we see that it has not stippled the country in small units of diverse ethnic groups. It forms rather a series of stripes or layers of varying sizes, moving east to west along the central axis of settlement, where towns are thickest; *i. e.*, from New York and Philadelphia, through Chicago and St. Louis, to San Francisco and Seattle. Stippling is absent even in the towns, where the variety of population is generally greater. Probably 90 per cent. of that population is either foreign-born or of foreign stock; yet even so, the towns are aggregations, not units. Broadly divided into the sections inhabited by the rich and those inhabited by the poor, this economic division does not abolish, it only crosses, the ethnic one. There are rich and poor little Italys, Irelands, Hungarys, Germanys, and rich and poor Ghettoes. The *common* city life, which depends upon like-mindedness, is not inward, corporate, and inevitable, but external, inarticulate, and incidental, a reaction to the need of amusement and the need of protection, not the expression of a unity of heritage, mentality, and interest. Politics and education in our cities thus present the phenomenon of ethnic compromises not unknown in Austria-Hungary; concessions and appeals to "the Irish vote," "the Jewish vote," "the German vote"; compromise school committees where members represent each ethnic faction, until, as in Boston, one group grows strong enough to dominate the entire situation.

South of Mason and Dixon's line the cities exhibit a greater homogeneity. Outside of certain regions in Texas the descendants of the native white stock, often degenerate and backward, prevail among the whites, but the whites as a whole constitute a relatively weaker proportion of the population. They live among nine million negroes, whose own mode of living tends, by its mere massiveness, to standardize the "mind" of the proletarian South in speech, manner, and the other values of social organization.

### III.

All the immigrants and their offspring are in the way of becoming "Americanized," if they remain in one place in the country long enough—say, six or seven years. The general notion, "Americanization," appears to denote the adoption of English speech, of American clothes and manners, of the American attitude in politics. It connotes the fusion of the various bloods, and a transmutation by "the miracle of assimilation" of Jews, Slavs, Poles, Frenchmen, Germans, Hindus, Scandinavians into beings similar in background, tradition, outlook, and spirit to the descendants of the British colonists, the Anglo-Saxon stock. Broadly speaking, the elements of Americanism are somewhat external, the effect of environment; largely internal, the effect of heredity. Our economic individualism, our traditional *laissez-faire* policy, is largely the effect of environment: where nature offers more than enough wealth to go round, there is no immediate need for regulating distribution. What poverty and unemployment exist among us is the result of unskilled and wasteful social housekeeping, not of any actual natural barrenness. And until the disparity between

**A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY**  
 our economic resources and our population becomes equalized, so that the country shall attain an approximate economic equilibrium, this will always be the case. With our individualism go our optimism and our other "pioneer" virtues: they are purely reactions to our unexploited natural wealth, and, as such, moods which characterize all societies in which the relation between population and resource is similar. The predominance of the "new freedom" over the "new nationalism" is a potent political expression of this relationship, and the overwhelming concern of both novelties with the economic situation rather than with the cultural or spiritual is a still stronger one. That these last alone justify or condemn this or that economic condition or programme is a commonplace: "by their fruits shall ye know the soils and the roots."

The fruits in this case are those of New England. Eliminate from our roster Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, Hawthorne, Emerson, Howells, and what have we left? Outstanding are Poe and Whitman, and the necromantic mysticism of the former is only a sick-minded version of the naturalistic mysticism of the latter, while the general mood of both is that of Emerson, who in his way expresses the culmination of that movement in mysticism from the agonized conscience of colonial and Puritan New England—to which Hawthorne gives voice—to serene and optimistic assurance. In religion this spirit of Puritan New England non-conformity culminates similarly: in Christian Science when it is superstitious and magical; in Unitarianism when it is rationalistic: in both cases, over against the personal individualism, there is the cosmic unity. For New England, religious, political, and literary interests remained coördinate and indivisible; and New England gave the tone to and established the standards for the rest of the American state. Save for the very early political writers, the "solid South" remains unexpressed, while the march of the pioneer across the continent is permanently marked by Mark Twain for the Middle West, and by Bret Harte for the Pacific slope. Both these men carry something of the tone and spirit of New England, and with them the "great tradition" of America, the America of the "Anglo-Saxon," comes to an end. There remains nothing large or significant that is unexpressed, and no unmentioned writer who is so completely representative.

The background, tradition, spirit, and outlook of the whole of the America of the "Anglo-Saxon," then, find their spiritual expression in the New England school, Poe, Whitman, Mark Twain, Bret Harte. They realize an individual who has passed from the agonized to the optimistic conscience, a person of the solid and homely virtues tempered by mystic certainty of his destiny, his election, hence always ready to take risks, and always willing to face dangers. From the agony of Arthur Dimmesdale to the smug industrial and social rise of Silas Lapham, from the irresponsible kindness of Huck Finn to the "Luck of Roaring Camp," the movement is the same, though on different social levels. In regions supernal its coördinate is the movement from the God of Jonathan Edwards to the Oversoul of Emerson and the Divinity of Mrs. Eddy. It is summed up in the contemporary represen-

A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY  
 tative "average" American of British stock—an individualist, English-speaking, interested in getting on, kind, neighborly, not too scrupulous in business, indulgent to his women, optimistically devoted to *laissez-faire* in economics and politics, very respectable in private life, tending to liberalism and mysticism in religion, and moved, where his economic interests are unaffected, by formulas rather than ideas. He typifies the aristocracy of America. From among his fellows are recruited her foremost protagonists in politics, religion, art, and learning. He constitutes, in virtue of being heir of the oldest *rooted* economic settlement and spiritual tradition of the white man in America, the measure and the standard of Americanism that the newcomer is to attain.



*Horace M. Kallen*

Other things being equal, a democratic society which should be a realization of the assumptions of the Declaration of Independence, supposing them to be true, would be a levelling society such that all persons become alike, either on the lowest or the highest plane. The outcome of free social contacts should, according to the laws of imitation, establish "equality" on the highest plane; for imitation is of the higher by the lower, so that the cut of a Paris gown at \$1,000 becomes imitated in department stores at \$17.50, and the play of the rich becomes the vice of the poor. This process of levelling up through imitation is facilitated by the so-called "standardization" of externals. In these days of ready-made clothes, factory-made goods, refrigerating plants, it is almost impossible that the mass of the inhabitants of this country should wear other than uniform clothes, use other than uniform furniture or utensils, or eat anything but the same kind of food. In these days of rapid transit and industrial mobility it must seem impossible that any stratification of population should be permanent. Hardly anybody seems to have been born where he lives, or to live where he has been born. The teetering of demand and supply in industry and commerce keeps large masses of population constantly mobile; so that many people no longer can be said to have homes. This mobility reinforces the use of English—for a *lingua*

A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY  
*franca*, intelligible everywhere, becomes indispensable—by immigrants. And ideals that are felt to belong with the language tend to become “standardized,” widespread, uniform, through the devices of the telegraph and the telephone, the syndication of “literature,” the cheap newspaper and the cheap novel, the vaudeville circuit, the “movie,” and the star system. Even more significantly, mobility leads to the propinquity of the different stocks, thus promoting intermarriage and pointing to the coming of a new “American race”—a blend of at least all the European stocks (for there seems to be some difference of opinion as to whether negroes also should constitute an element in this blend) into a newer and better being whose qualities and ideals shall be the qualities and ideals of the contemporary American of British ancestry. Apart from the unintentional impulsion towards this end, of the conditions I have just enumerated, there exists the instrument especially devised for this purpose which we call the public school—and to some extent there is the State university. That the end has been and is being attained, we have the biographical testimony of Jacob Riis, of Steiner, and of Mary Antin—a Dane and two Jews, intermarried, assimilated even in religion, and more excessively and self-consciously American than the Americans. And another Jew, Mr. Israel Zangwill, of London, profitably promulgates it as a principle and an aspiration, to the admiring approval of American audiences, under the device, “the melting-pot.”

## IV.

All is not, however, fact, because it is hope; nor is the biography of an individual, particularly of a literary individual, the history of a group. The Riises and Steiners and Antins protest too much, they are too self-conscious and self-centred, their “Americanization” appears too much like an achievement, a *tour de force*, too little like a growth. As for Zangwill, at best he is the obverse of Dickens, at worst he is a Jew making a special plea. It is the work of the Americanized writers that is really significant, and in that one senses, underneath the excellent writing, a dualism and the strain to overcome it. The same dualism is apparent in different form among the Americans, and the strain to overcome it seems even stronger. These appear to have been most explicit at the high-water marks of periods of immigration: the Know-Nothing party was one early expression of it; the organization, in the '80s, of the patriotic societies—the Sons and the Daughters of the American Revolution, later on of the Colonial Dames, and so on—another. Since the Spanish War it has shown itself in the continual, if uneven, growth of the political conscience, first as a muckraking magazine propaganda, then as a nationwide attack on the corruption of politics by plutocracy, finally as the altogether respectable and evangelical Progressive party, with its slogan of “Human rights against property rights.”

In this process, however, the non-British American or Continental immigrant has not been a fundamental protagonist. He has been an occasion rather than a force. What has been causal has been “American.” Consider the personnel and history of the Pro-



**A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY**  
 gressive party by way of demonstration: it is composed largely of the professional groups and of the "solid" and "upper" middle class; as a spirit it has survived in Kansas, which by an historic accident happens to be the one Middle Western State predominantly Yankee; as a victorious party it has survived in California, one of the few States outstandingly "American" in population. What is significant in it, as in every other form of the political conscience, is the fact that it is a response to a feeling of "something out of gear," and naturally the attention seeks the cause, first of all, outside of the self, not within. Hence the interest in economico-political reconstruction. But the maladjustment in that region is really external. And the political conscience is seeking by a mere change in outward condition to abolish an inward disparity. "Human rights versus property rights" is merely the modern version of the Declaration of Independence, still assuming that men are men merely, as like as marbles and destined under uniformity of conditions to uniformity of spirit. The course of our economic history since the Civil War shows aptly enough how shrewd were, other things being equal, Marx's generalizations concerning the tendencies of capital towards concentration in the hands of a few. Attention consequently has fixed itself more and more upon the equalization of the distribution of wealth—not socialistically, of course. And this would really abolish the dualism if the economic dualism of rich and poor were the fundamental one. It happens merely that it isn't.

The Anglo-Saxon American, constituting as he does the economic upper class, would hardly have reacted to economic disparity as he has if that had been the only disparity. In point of fact it is the ethnic disparity that troubles him. His activity as entrepreneur has crowded our cities with progressively cheaper laborers of Continental stock, all consecrated to the industrial machine, and towns like Gary, Lawrence, Chicago, Pittsburgh, have become industrial camps of foreign mercenaries. His undertakings have brought into being the terrible autocracies of Pullman and of Lead, North Dakota. They have created a mass of casual laborers numbering 5,000,000, and of work-children to the number of 1,500,000 (the latter chiefly in the South, where the purely "American" white predominates). They have done all this because the greed of the entrepreneur has displaced high-demanding labor by cheaper labor, and has brought into being the unnecessary problem of unemployment. In all things greed has set the standard, so that the working ideal of the people is to get rich, to live, and to think as the rich, to subordinate government to the service of wealth, making the actual government "invisible." *Per contra* it has generated "labor unrest," the I. W. W., the civil war in Colorado.

Because the great mass of the laborers happen to be of Continental and not British ancestry, and because they are late-comers, Mr. Ross blames them for this perversion of our public life and social ideals. Ignoring the degenerate farming stock of New England, the "poor whites" of the South, the negroes, he fears the anthropological as well as the economic effects of the "fusion" of these Continental Europeans, Slavs, and Italians and Jews, with the native stock, and grows anxious over the fate of American institu-

## A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY

tions at their hands. Nothing could better illustrate the fact that the dualism is primarily ethnic and not economic. Under the *laissez-faire* policy, the economic process would have been the same, of whatever race the rich, and whatever race the poor. Only race prejudice, primitive, spontaneous, and unconscious, could have caused a trained economist to ignore the so obvious fact that in a capitalistic industrial society labor is useless and helpless without capital; that hence the external dangers of immigration are in the greed of the capitalist and the indifference of the Government. The restriction of immigration can naturally succeed only with the restriction of the entrepreneur's greed, which is its cause. But the abolition of immigration and the restoration of the supremacy of "human rights" over "property rights" will not abolish the fundamental ethnic dualism; it may aggravate it.

The reason is obvious. That like-mindedness in virtue of which men are as nearly as is possible in fact "free and equal" is not primarily the result of a constant set of external conditions. Its pre-potent cause is an intrinsic similarity which, for America, has its roots in that ethnic and cultural unity of which our fundamental institutions are the most durable expression. Similar environments, similar occupations, do, of course, generate similarities: "American" is an adjective of similarity applied to Anglo-Saxons, Irish, Jews, Germans, Italians, and so on. But the similarity is one of place and institution, acquired, not inherited, and hence not transmitted. Each generation has, in fact, to become "Americanized" afresh, and, withal, inherited nature has a way of redirecting nurture, of which our public schools give only too much evidence. If the inhabitants of the United States are stratified economically as "rich" and "poor," they are stratified ethnically as Germans, Scandinavians, Jews, Irish, and although the two stratifications cross more frequently than they are coincident, they interfere with each other far less than is hopefully supposed. The history of the "International" in recent years, the present *débâcle* in Europe, are indications of how little "class-consciousness" modifies national consciousness. To the dominant nationality in America nationality, in the European sense, has had no meaning; for it had set the country's standards and had been assimilating others to itself. Now that the process seems to be slowing down, it finds itself confronted with the *problem* of nationality, just as do the Irish, the Poles, the Bohemians, the Czechs, and the other oppressed nationalities in Europe. "We are submerged," writes a great American man of letters, who has better than any one I know interpreted the American spirit to the world, "we are submerged beneath a conquest so complete that the very name of us means something not ourselves. . . . I feel as I should think an Indian might feel, in the face of ourselves that were."

The fact is that similarity of class rests upon no inevitable external condition, while similarity of nationality is inevitably intrinsic. Hence the poor of two different peoples tend to be less like-minded than the poor and the rich of the same peoples. At his core no human being, even in "a state of nature," is a mere mathematical unit of action like the "economic man." Behind him

**A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY**  
 in time and tremendously in him in quality are his ancestors; around him in space are his relatives and kin, looking back with him to a remoter common ancestry. In all these he lives and moves and has his being. They constitute his, literally, *natio*, and in Europe every inch of his non-human environment wears the effects of their action upon it and breathes their spirit. The America he comes to, beside Europe, is nature virgin and inviolate: it does not guide him with ancestral blazings: externally he is cut off from the past. Not so internally: whatever else he changes, he cannot change his grandfather. Moreover, he comes rarely alone; he comes companioned with his fellow-nationals; and he comes to no strangers, but to kin and friend who have gone before. If he is able to excel, he soon achieves a local habitation. There he encounters the native American to whom he is a Dutchman, a Frenchy, a Mick, a wop, a dago, a hunky, or a sheeny, and he encounters these others who are unlike him, dealing with him as a lower and outlandish creature. Then, be he even the rudest and most primeval peasant, heretofore totally unconscious of his nationality, of his categorical difference from other men, he must inevitably become conscious of it. Thus, in our industrial and congested towns where there are real and large contacts between immigrant nationalities the first effect appears to be an intensification of spiritual dissimilarities, always to the disadvantage of the dissimilarities.

The second generation, consequently, devotes itself feverishly to the attainment of similarity. The older social tradition is lost by attrition or thrown off for advantage. The merest externals of the new one are acquired—*via* the public school. But as the public school imparts it, or as the settlement imparts it, it is not really a *life*, it is an abstraction, an arrangement of words. America is a word: as an historic fact, a democratic ideal of life, it is not realized at all. At best and at worst—now that the captains of industry are becoming disturbed by the mess they have made, and “vocational training” is becoming a part of the educational programme—the prospective American learns a trade, acquiring at his most impressionable age the habit of being a cog in the industrial machine. And this he learns, moreover, from the sons and daughters of earlier immigrants, themselves essentially uneducated and nearly illiterate, with what spontaneity and teaching power they have squeezed out in the “normal” schools by the application of that Pecksniffian “efficiency”-press called pedagogy.

But life, the expression of emotion and realization of desire, the prospective American learns from the yellow press, which has set itself explicitly the task of appealing to his capacities. He learns of the wealth, the luxuries, the extravagances, and the immoralities of specific rich persons. He learns to want to be like them. As that is impossible in the mass, their amusements become his crimes or vices. Or suppose him to be strong enough to emerge from the proletarian into the middle class, to achieve economic competence and social respectability. He remains still the Slav, the Jew, the German, or the Irish citizen of the American commonwealth. Again, in the mass, neither he nor his children nor his children’s children lose

**A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY**  
 their ethnic individuality. For marriage is determined by sexual selection and by propinquity, and the larger the town, the lesser the likelihood of mixed marriage. Although the gross number of such marriages is greater than it was fifty years ago, the relative proportions, in terms of variant units of population, tends, I think, to be significantly less. As the stratification of the towns echoes and stresses the stratification of the country as a whole, the likelihood of a new "American" race is remote enough, and the fear of it unnecessary. But equally remote also is the possibility of a universalization of the inwardness of the old American life. Only the externals succeed in passing over.

It took over two hundred years of settled life in one place for the New England school to emerge, and it emerged in a community in which like-mindedness was very strong, and in which the whole ethnic group performed all the tasks, economic and social, which the community required. How when ethnic and industrial groups are coincident? When ethnic and social groups are coincident? For there is a marked tendency in this country for the industrial and social stratification to follow ethnic lines. The first comers in the land constitute its aristocracy, are its chief protagonists of the pride of blood as well as of the pride of pelf, its formers and leaders of opinion, the standard set itself explicitly the task of appealing to his capacities. He learns of the wealth, the luxuries, the extravagances, and the immoralities of specific rich persons. He learns to want to be like them. As that is impossible in the mass, their amusements become his crimes or vices. Or suppose him to be strong enough to emerge from the proletarian into the middle class, to achieve economic competence and social respectability. He remains still the Slav, the Jew, the German, or the Irish citizen of the American commonwealth. Again, in the mass, neither he nor his children nor his children's children lose dardizers of its culture. Primacy in time has given them primacy in status, like all "first-born," so that what we call the tradition and spirit of America is theirs. The non-British elements of the population are practically voiceless, but they are massive, "barbarian hordes," if you will, and the effect, the unconscious and spontaneous effect of their pressure, has been the throwing back of the Anglo-American upon his ancestry and ancestral ideals. This has taken two forms: (1) the "patriotic" societies—not, of course, the Cincinnati or the Artillery Company, but those that have arisen with the great migrations, the Sons and Daughters of the American Revolution, the Colonial Dames; and (2) the specific clan or tribal organizations consisting of families looking back to the same colonial ancestry—the societies of the descendants of John Alden, etc., etc. The ancient hatred for England is completely gone. Wherever possible, the ancestral line is traced across the water to England; old ancestral homes are bought; and those of the forebears of national heroes like John Harvard or George Washington become converted into shrines. More and more public emphasis has been placed upon the unity of the English and American stock—the common interests of the "Anglo-Saxon" nations, and of "Anglo-Saxon" civilization, the unity of the political, literary, and social

**A STUDY OF AMERICAN NATIONALITY**  
tradition. If all that is not ethnic nationality returned to consciousness, what is it?

Next in general estimation come the Germans and the Irish, with the Jews a close third, although the position of the last involves some abnormalities. Then come the Slavs and Italians and other central and south Europeans; finally, the Asiatics. The Germans, as Mr. Ross points out, have largely a monopoly of brewing and baking and cabinet-making. The Irish shine in no particular industries unless it be those carried on by municipalities and public-service corporations. The Jews mass in the garment-making industries, tobacco manufacture, and in the "learned professions." The Scandinavians appear to be on the same level as the Jews in the general estimation, and going up. They are farmers, mostly, and outdoor men. The Slavs are miners, metalworkers, and packers. The Italians tend to fall with the negroes into the "pick and shovel brigade." Such a country-wide and urban industrial and social stratification is no more likely than the geographical and sectional stratification to facilitate the coming of the "American race"! And as our political and "reforming" action is directed upon symptoms rather than fundamental causes, the stratification, as the country moves towards the inevitable equilibrium between wealth and population, will tend to grow more rigid rather than less. Thus far the pressure of immigration alone has kept the strata from hardening. Eliminate that, and we may be headed for a caste system based on ethnic diversity and mitigated to only a negligible degree by economic differences.

---

[The conclusions which Mr. Kallen draws from these conditions will be printed in a second paper in next week's issue of the *Nation*.]

OldMagazineArticles.com