

**strangers in their own land**

**patterns of  
black nativism,  
1830-1930**

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John Higham's now classic essay, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, initially published in 1955, said little about black Americans. The two sentences which refer to black responses to immigrants deal with the rise in Southern nativism following the Spanish-American War. The author writes:

Meanwhile the Negroes too distrusted the "Third Force" entering the southern racial world, for the newcomers did their work and sometimes came as their competitors. Booker T. Washington echoed the sentiments of white natives by warning that southern European immigration might create "a racial problem in the South more difficult and more dangerous than that which is caused by the presence of the Negro."<sup>1</sup>

Most historians in the past have either ignored black people or, like Higham, assumed that they thought as whites, that they were passive or imitative, and that their experiences as Africans, slaves and as poor, often segregated citizens meant nothing in shaping their outlook. And when references to black views do appear in the literature, the reader is likely to be told that Afro-Americans were nativistic or xenophobic.<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Osofsky, for example, in his important study of black Harlem referred to "the deep strain of nativism that traditionally runs through American Negro thought."<sup>3</sup> Such assertions seldom receive more than a few sentences in which the author quotes one or more comments critical of an immigrant, an ethnic group or of immigration in general. Even in those rare cases where more than a paragraph is devoted to the subject the message remains the same.<sup>4</sup> Socio-

economic and regional differences in black America are not considered, favorable responses to immigrants are omitted<sup>5</sup> and alternative meanings of derogatory or hostile comments are overlooked.

This essay is not presented as a definitive statement on black nativism. Rather, it is designed to challenge the assumptions implicit in many of the brief observations on the subject made in the past, to summarize the findings contained in the widely scattered existing studies based on research in black sources, and to encourage further study in an area heretofore largely ignored by students of nativism and of Afro-American history. The paper draws heavily upon the work done in the past decade on black views of immigrants by the author and others, notably Arnold Shankman of Winthrop College, and on John Higham's earlier investigations of American nativism.

As "strangers in the land," albeit the land of their birth and that of their parents and grandparents, black Americans reacted differently to immigrants than did white natives—even when much of their rhetoric was almost identical, as was often the case. Blacks responded to the newcomers as insiders and outsiders, as Americans with physical features and a heritage which set them apart from others and which whites used to justify treatment of them as inferior people and second-class citizens. Much of what W. E. B. DuBois referred to early in this century as the "two-ness" or dual consciousness of blacks derived from their being treated as strangers in their own country. Indeed, the presence of immigrants and the preference they received over black citizens fostered the feeling of apartness. It was the discrepancy in the status of blacks and foreigners, for example, that moved Frederick Douglass in 1853 to complain, "aliens are we in our native land."<sup>6</sup>

It is easy to understand why some scholars have concluded that Afro-Americans were nativistic in outlook and that their thought had the same origins as that of whites. The frequency of derisive and even hostile remarks about immigrants in black writings and speeches, and the contents of many of them, seem to support the contention. Blacks clearly devoted more energy to criticizing than praising the immigrant. By relying solely on a quantitative approach one might even conclude that blacks were more nativistic than whites. Such an approach, however, would contribute little to either the study of American nativism or of black social thought for it ignores the context of the statements and especially the fears which inspired them. Studies which label blacks "nativistic" are also marred by a tendency to equate ethnocentrism, a feeling of cultural superiority, with nativism, an intense fear that foreign-born residents constitute a threat to the nation's well-being or survival. As Higham notes, unfavorable reactions to the personal and cultural traits of others, while important in creating a climate for the rise of nativism, are not in themselves nativistic.<sup>7</sup>

The most important factor shaping black dislike and fear of aliens was their common position at or near the bottom of the nation's social structure. Immigrants for the most part were poor, rural people with

little exposure to formal education and the skills valued in a rapidly industrializing society. During most of the nineteenth century they were welcomed for the labor they provided. Like the slaves and freedmen, they did the work native whites found distasteful. Also as with the Negro, white Americans were uncomfortable with their presence even though heavily dependent upon them. The strange ways of the immigrants—their clothes, food, language and often their religion—created suspicion which in times of crisis or rapid social change resulted in wide-spread, organized movements to control the power of aliens or limit their entry.<sup>8</sup>

Under slavery the great bulk of blacks had little if any contact with immigrants. Their unwillingness to compete with slave labor, if not their repugnance at the “peculiar institution,” led foreigners to settle in the North or West. They continued to avoid the South after emancipation despite southern efforts during Reconstruction and at the turn of the twentieth century to recruit them. Consequently, with the exception of port cities and isolated locations elsewhere, black southerners—and as late as 1930 most blacks resided in the South—had only sporadic exposure to immigrants. Black-immigrant interaction, in short, was largely confined to the minority of blacks living in the North and West.<sup>9</sup>

Black criticism of immigrants first became common among the small group of free people living in the North in the generation preceding the Civil War. Of the two nationalities which comprised the bulk of the newcomers, Germans and Irish, the latter received by far the greater attention. As relatively weak and visible people competing for food and shelter in a hostile environment blacks and Irish vented their frustrations upon each other. As a result of the long and often violent confrontations, Afro-Americans came to see the Irish as a unique people deserving of all the ill-will and misfortune they encountered in the New World.

Afro-Americans detected the same deficiencies among the Irish that large numbers of white natives found endemic to the group: ignorance, superstition, drunkenness and a proclivity for violence. The Catholicism of the Irish was also of concern to black and white Protestants. On occasion black denunciation of the Roman Catholic Church matched the intensity of the most rabid white anti-Catholic voices. But unlike white nativists, blacks did not view the devotion of the Irish to Catholicism as the major threat to the country's institutions. Rather, the danger to both them and the nation as a whole lay in the ignorance and poverty of the Irish and in their lack of prior experience with self-government. In no ways did the Irish better demonstrate that they were not a freedom loving people than by the support they gave the Democratic party, the agent of slaveocracy, and by their recurrent attacks on innocent black citizens in the streets of northern cities.<sup>10</sup>

In reacting to the Irish and to post-bellum immigration, blacks often blamed newcomers for blocking their mobility. Foreigners were

handy targets for the release of aggression spawned by the repeated frustration of hopes among blacks excluded from full participation in a society which, according to its ideology, provided liberty and opportunity for all. Large numbers of blacks no doubt truly believed that aliens were responsible for their plight, especially after slavery had been abolished and they were legally free people. Many of those with whom they competed, most often unsuccessfully, were relatively recent arrivals. It was the Irish who displaced skilled blacks in the North in the 1840s and 1850s just as the Italians and Greeks replaced blacks as barbers, bootblacks, longshoremen, waiters and domestics later in the century. In their despair blacks often did not bother to examine the motives of those who promoted immigration or who employed, rented to, or befriended aliens in preference to dark-skinned citizens.

But it is erroneous to conclude that anti-immigrant rhetoric was aimed solely or even primarily at newcomers. In his excellent discussion of black humor which ridiculed the Irish and other ethnic groups in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, Lawrence W. Levine noted that verbal attacks on immigrants did more than enable Afro-Americans to take revenge symbolically upon people who had so soon after their arrival become staunch and active Negro-phobes. They also allowed them to identify with white Americans in looking down upon the unassimilated aliens and provided a socially acceptable format for blacks to express contempt for white people.<sup>11</sup>

When mentioning aliens blacks often contrasted the strange and dangerous ways of the newcomers with the similarity of their values, language and religion to those of native whites. They ridiculed foreigners for their seeming stupidity and awkwardness, their accents, their clothes, and, indeed, for just about every characteristic which separated them from older residents. In periods of war and domestic strife blacks questioned the desire or ability of aliens to accept and defend the American way of life. Blacks hastened to remind whites that they had served in all of the nation's wars, that there was no hyphen in the word "Negro" and that no need existed to Americanize them. Furthermore, there were few blacks in unions; as workers they, unlike the immigrants of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were dependable, loyal and non-violent. Blacks did not work primarily to support relatives overseas or to secure sufficient funds to live a better life in some distant country, as immigrants often did. And blacks, as natives, were not corrupted by the various alien ideologies introduced into the New World by the migrants.

In itemizing the shortcomings of immigrants Afro-Americans were not seeking to protect themselves from a threat to their well-being posed by an influx of newcomers as much as they were seeking to obtain what they as citizens viewed as rightfully theirs. The granting to immigrants opportunities denied to black natives symbolized the gap between the nation's professed values and beliefs and social reality. Black attacks on aliens represented efforts by a subjugated sector of

the populace to alter patterns of behavior deeply rooted in American life. Racism rather than alien traditions and perspectives imperiled American values and institutions.

The use of criticism of immigrants as a political instrument by relatively powerless people to influence powerful and generally unsympathetic if not hostile whites is well illustrated in Booker T. Washington's references to immigrants, many of which did indeed predict dire consequences from an influx of foreigners into the South. In his famous address at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895, for example, Washington contrasted the virtues of "faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful" Negroes with "those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits" in urging whites to avoid the temptation to obtain a new labor supply and to "cast down your buckets where you are."<sup>12</sup>

To interpret such a comment as nativistic<sup>13</sup> would be to overlook the political climate in which Washington operated. He realized that large scale immigration would weaken the already precarious position of the Afro-American and his status as a black leader. Yet he also knew that immigrants were unlikely to come to the South on their own and that those developing plans to attract them were not friends of the Negro. The danger to the bulk of the race residing in their traditional home was an internal rather than an external one, and Washington responded accordingly. He and others who shared his concerns—and no doubt the negative stereotypes regarding immigrants prevalent in the white South—could not directly scuttle the creation of public and private agencies to solicit alien workers. But he could use his position as an inter-racial statesman and his considerable oratorical skills to arouse latent white fears of outsiders and to suggest that the interests of all would best be served by continued reliance on stable, loyal and peaceful blacks. Rather than "echoing" whites, in other words, Booker T. Washington spoke critically of immigrants to proclaim the loyalty of Negroes to the South and to the nation and to urge whites to acknowledge their merits and citizenship by treating them as full-fledged Americans.

Most of the repugnant characteristics that Washington and others found in immigrants were not unique to recent arrivals. Blacks, for example, castigated newcomers for supporting the Democratic party, for refusing to work alongside them and for preventing their admission to labor unions. They condemned their use of violence against blacks and their adoption of the host of overt and covert means employed by whites over the centuries to express their contempt for non-whites. They complained that one of the first things aliens learned upon arriving was the norms of the American caste system. In effect immigrants were rebuked not for being different from native whites, but for behaving, at least in regard to the Negro, as did all too many American citizens. It would have been foolish, however, for blacks to express their feelings about white natives directly; immigrants, on the other hand, were a weak and thus safe target.

Black dislike of the foreign-born, unlike that of most whites, was rooted in envy and resentment. They envied European immigrants for the privileges that accompanied their white skins; they resented outsiders being treated better than they who were "to the manor born." Newcomers, blacks frequently pointed out, were allowed to vote, to hold offices closed to them, to safeguard their rights in the courts and to have their children educated with other Americans. Furthermore, the American government did more to protect aliens in the United States than it did to safeguard the rights of black Americans. As Afro-Americans saw formerly penniless and uneducated immigrants alter their condition while they languished in poverty and misery, their rage intensified. Much of this anger was released in the form of an outpouring of hatred toward newly arrived groups, but the target of a great deal of it was those who had created and perpetuated a system in which race or previous servitude played a greater role in shaping one's destiny than either individual performance or nativity.

While restrained in openly attacking white natives, blacks often indirectly acknowledged that the source of their bitterness was American racism rather than the lowly immigrant. They did so primarily by stressing that newcomers acquired their antipathy for the Negro on this side of the ocean. Some added that, consequently, their Negrophobia was not as strong as that of native whites, that it was only "skin deep." In any case it clearly was not innate or part of their Old World heritage. In fact, in the pre-Civil War years especially, blacks looked upon Europe in a favorable light. As Jay Rubin observed in his study of black nativism between 1830 and 1860,

Where white nativists generally saw Europe as a continent steeped in corruption and autocracy and feared that the immigrants were carrying these elements to America, Negro leaders stressed the racial tolerance and anti-slavery sentiment prevalent in their view, among all classes of European society.<sup>14</sup>

Some blacks commented that it was understandable for people such as the Irish who had experienced centuries of oppression to turn against those worse off. The hatred of the immigrant for the black American, they noted, had its origin in external forces operating both in the New and Old Worlds—forces over which neither group had much control but which nevertheless bred a climate of mutual fear and distrust.

It was difficult for blacks to show much compassion for the Irish and many of the "new immigrants" of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their experiences with some newcomers, however, were more positive. The Germans who arrived in the nineteenth century, for example, were on the average better educated and more skilled than the Irish; competition between blacks and Germans therefore was less intense. Many German aliens expressed sympathy for the Negro's plight and condemned the institution of slavery. As the Irish

symbolized all that was despicable, the Germans represented virtue and goodwill; they generally were welcomed as freedom loving people dedicated to fighting oppression in America as well as in their homeland.<sup>15</sup>

Black reactions to Jews varied considerably, but throughout the era from 1830 to 1930 favorable images and references exceeded negative ones. Jews played a vital role in the lives of the slaves, few of whom ever encountered a Jew in person. In song and verse bondsmen retold stories of the biblical Hebrews as they awaited a black Moses to lead them from their enslavement. The image of a proud and united people who had accomplished much despite a heritage of suffering and oppression continued to inspire the freedmen in the decades following Appomattox. Although they did not always agree about the reasons for Jewish success, black leaders ranging from Frederick Douglass to Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey urged the race to study and emulate the Jews. Blacks were often embittered by the failure of Jews to identify fully with fellow victims of oppression, and in the twentieth century as Jewish and black newcomers competed in northern urban centers, tensions grew. But Jews were typically criticized for failing to measure up to the high expectations blacks had for them; they were condemned not for being Jews but for being too much like white Gentiles. Moreover, they continued to be viewed as an exemplary people from whom blacks could learn much.<sup>16</sup>

As in the case of the Jews, black attitudes toward the Chinese and Japanese in America were strongly influenced by a common bond of persecution. Afro-Americans shared the revulsion many whites had at the peculiar habits and lifestyles of Asians. They were especially disturbed by their religious practices and by the slowness with which they became assimilated. They resented that the much despised newcomers sometimes received more attention from the American government than native-born blacks and that on occasion Asians absorbed anti-Negro attitudes and behaviors. They also viewed them as actual or potential competitors in the unskilled labor market. But with near unanimity and consistency Afro-Americans rejected schemes to limit or exclude Asian immigrants while the much larger flow from Europe continued virtually unchecked. Such proposals, they noted, were racially inspired and were advanced by enemies of the Negro; thus it would be dangerous to support them. As with the Jews, blacks found comfort in the successes of Asians, especially in the Japanese, in the United States. If other highly visible minority groups could overcome racial barriers in America, so could they, many reasoned.<sup>17</sup>

Nativism, Higham demonstrates, was defensive in nature; it was an attempt to preserve the status quo against evils introduced into the nation by foreigners.<sup>18</sup> As Americans there was much about the nation that blacks wanted to protect; their degradation and enslavement did not weaken their commitment to the religious or democratic ideals of the larger society. Like many whites they often feared the impact of

aliens on traditional American values and institutions and not infrequently were quite vociferous in expressing their concerns. But some features of American society that they—as blacks—sought to protect and extend, white nativists rejected; namely, the image of the United States as a free, open and dynamic society, a nation in which diversity was affirmed rather than feared. As an oppressed minority incapable of large-scale passing, self-interest dictated that they support a fluid social structure in which people would be treated on their merits rather than on the basis of ascribed status.

Although Higham argues that the three strands of American nativism, anti-Catholicism, antiradicalism and Anglo-Saxon racial nationalism, existed more or less independently,<sup>19</sup> many blacks detected a relationship among them. Any inclination black citizens had to join whites in counteracting real or imagined threats to the nation derived from the religious and political doctrines of newcomers was stifled by their need, as blacks, to resist movements based on opposition to people on the grounds of group membership. They recognized that the kind of America a great number if not most nativists sought to perpetuate left little room for blacks to escape from their second-class citizenship.

Nativism flared three times in the century covered in this essay: in the 1850s, the 1890s and in the World War I era. Information regarding the relationships of blacks with the largest nativistic organizations of the nineteenth century—the Native American or Know-Nothing party and the American Protective Association (APA)—is very scanty. Prior to the Civil War white nativists would have had little to gain by appealing to disfranchised blacks for support. Furthermore, the Know-Nothings, albeit unsuccessfully, desperately sought to sidestep the controversy surrounding slavery.<sup>20</sup> The APA did seek support from Afro-Americans: they were welcomed as members and even represented state councils at national conventions; a journal affiliated with the association ran advertisements in a black magazine soliciting subscribers.<sup>21</sup>

Although blacks were ineligible for membership in the Ku Klux Klan, the major nativist body in the twentieth century, on occasion Klansmen sought to exploit the despair and frustration which led blacks to turn against foreigners in ever larger numbers in the post-World War I America.<sup>22</sup> But the anti-Negro background and ideology of the Klan made it anathema to all but a tiny handful of blacks and evoked a plethora of strongly worded attacks from black leaders. Most instructive in understanding black nativism, therefore, is their response to the earlier nativistic organizations, movements which were essentially anti-Catholic and not avowedly anti-Negro.

The remarks of two leading black abolitionists, Frederick Douglass and Robert Purvis, regarding the Know-Nothings illustrate how the black experience in America led them to suspect nativism. Both made no secret of their dislike of many immigrants, but they were equally

clear in rejecting the call of white nativist groups. "I am not what is called a Native American," Purvis wrote in 1860, "I don't believe in measuring a man's rights either by the place of his birth or the color of his skin."<sup>23</sup> Douglass, who labelled the Know-Nothing party "a hollow-hearted affair, based on the ever to be hated principles of selfishness, and sectarian hate," feared it was frightening German Catholics into the arms of the Democrats.<sup>24</sup> Like their fellow abolitionist, William Wells Brown, who viewed the party as pro-slavery,<sup>25</sup> they detected within white nativism forces antithetical to the present and future well being of the race. Thus, while they deplored the preferential treatment immigrants received over blacks, they could not support those fighting foreign influences in the nation.

By the late 1880s and 1890s dreams that the Civil War would give birth to a new America had vanished with the spread of Jim Crow, disfranchisement, racial violence, and economic servitude. With the exception of the ban placed on Chinese in 1882, immigration continued essentially unrestricted as southern and eastern Europeans replaced the groups formerly comprising the bulk of migrants. Blacks and whites alike increasingly questioned the desirability of continuing to admit all who arrived at the nation's gates. They associated much of the social unrest of the era with the advent of the "new immigration." These people, Americans feared, were not as easily assimilable as their predecessors. Their religion, low level of education and numbers aroused fears among masses of Americans much more secure than black Americans.<sup>26</sup>

While some blacks expressed concern about the impact of immigrants on American society by joining or supporting the APA, there is no evidence to suggest that they did so in large numbers. The APA's strength was confined to the mid-West where blacks had not yet settled in large numbers. Furthermore, many found the anti-Catholicism of the movement offensive. The *Savannah Tribune*, for example, in characterizing the organization as "dangerous and un-American" observed that the mixing of religion and politics was contrary to the spirit of free institutions. The Negro, it advised, should steer clear of it. The reaction of the editor of the *A. M. E. Church Review* and future bishop, Levi J. Coppin, provides greater insight into the dilemma black Americans faced in responding to the APA. In 1894 he remarked that he had not joined the organization because of his commitment to religious freedom and because of the "kindly treatment" blacks received from the Roman Catholic Church. Yet he noted with approval that in one community, Peoria, Illinois, the association stressed economics rather than religion. He agreed that it was indeed time for the nation to feed and employ its own citizens—including the Negro—first. "The APA that has bread in it for the honest toiler is a good society to join," he concluded, "but we [blacks] can well afford to pass by that which has no higher aim than religious bigotry."<sup>27</sup>

The absence of a strong anti-Catholic feeling in black America was

but one difference between black and white opponents of the foreign-born in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Anti-Semitism, although on the rise in black communities, also did not motivate them to the extent that it influenced white foes of the “new immigration.” The biggest gap, however, centered around the treatment of Asian immigration. While more and more whites either enthusiastically endorsed or accepted the racially inspired Chinese exclusion acts first passed in 1882 and the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1907 with Japan, blacks persisted in condemning measures aimed primarily at people of color.

The twentieth century brought no break in the steadily declining position of Afro-Americans or in the growth of immigration. The outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, however, had a pronounced effect on both immigration and the lives of black Americans. Immigration dropped dramatically while demand for labor in war-related industries and, later, the armed services expanded. Blacks, many of whom moved from the South to the industrial centers, eagerly awaited the dawning of a new era. The war-time rhetoric of Woodrow Wilson and the opportunity once again to demonstrate to skeptical whites their devotion to the nation on the battlefield pushed black expectations still higher. Concurrent with the Great Migration and the revival of black hopes was a flourishing of anti-foreign sentiment which expressed itself in a variety of ways: the spread of Americanization programs, campaigns to prevent the teaching of German in the schools, the passage of the Literacy Act of 1917, and the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan. Despite the role of the Klan and pseudo-scientific racist doctrines in the movement, many blacks, eager to affirm their Americanism, enrolled in the anti-foreign crusade.<sup>28</sup>

If there was ever a time between 1830 and 1930 when blacks and whites responded to immigration in concert, it was in the post-World War I decade. Black confidence in America, which had risen sharply in the war years, sank to a new low. The Promised Land many had expected to find in the North proved to be a mirage. Anxious whites turned against black citizens—including some still in uniform—as well as aliens. The race riots of the summer of 1919, the recession of 1921-22, and the resumption of massive immigration compounded black frustration. Blacks had reacted as good Americans during the crisis only to rediscover that the rules for success were not written for them. Levine has observed that the despair ignited by this discovery resulted in a series of “revitalistic” movements: the rise of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the Harlem Renaissance, the effort to create separate, parallel black institutions in the nation’s ghettos, the spread of practices formerly limited to the Holiness Churches to larger denominations and the rise of the blues.<sup>29</sup>

A related movement, overlooked by Levine, was the growing demand in black America for strict limits on immigration. So strong was the pressure to safeguard the very modest and vanishing gains of the

war years that Afro-Americans endorsed the racially-based national origins immigration acts of 1921 and 1924 designed primarily to curtail immigration from south and eastern Europe. The measures also excluded virtually all Asians not previously denied entrance, and the 1924 act threatened to limit the largely black residents of European colonies in the West Indies from entering the United States while other Western Hemisphere peoples were exempt from a quota. Nor were blacks deterred from supporting the laws by the participation of the Ku Klux Klan and similar anti-Catholic-Jewish-alien and anti-black organizations in their passage and in other anti-foreign movements, especially the Red Scare of 1919-20.

Some, most notably W. E. B. DuBois, saw the irony in uniting with the Klan against the foreign-born. But the criticism of DuBois and a few other iconoclasts had little visible effect. Afro-Americans had decided that if their dark skins prevented them from becoming genuine Nordics, they could at least affirm their common cultural heritage and bond of citizenship with white Americans by becoming proponents of 100 percent Americanism. In that way, perhaps, they could stake out a claim for complete acceptance in their native land at some future time. They continued to deplore exclusion of the Japanese under the legislation of the 1920s but tolerated it with less and less difficulty as time passed. For now at least, the racist ideology spawned early in the nation's history and applied to Native Americans and blacks, and later to Asians, was serving to reduce the influx of southern and eastern Europeans, people whom they had singled out as primarily responsible for their continued degradation. Curtailment of the "new immigration" seemed to offer the possibility of expanded economic opportunities for the race; it may also have given blacks a sense of victory over their enemies among the recently arrived Europeans.

Much of the black response to immigrants in the century preceding the Great Depression, and especially in the early twentieth century, can be characterized as "nativistic." Black Americans, like others, were ethnocentric and stereotyped the newcomers. Their comments about aliens were more often derogatory than complimentary. As with whites their criticism of immigrants intensified in periods of crisis. Likewise, their attacks upon the foreign-born were defensive in nature. It is in this area, however, that blacks differed from the white critics of immigrants.

As James M. Berquist notes, contemporary historians view nativism "not merely as a blind hatred for foreigners or a weapon for dealing with competition, but as a distinct set of values and beliefs about American society and culture."<sup>30</sup> In promoting conformity to older established values nativists rejected pluralism. The America white nativists wanted to defend or resurrect was one which excluded blacks—regardless of their values—from full citizenship. The America blacks sought to defend, symbolized in a very large part by the Statue of Lib-

erty, was threatened more by white nativists than by the foreign-born. It was their commitment to the values implicit in the nation's traditional open-door immigration policy that, at least until World War I, restrained Afro-Americans from advocating closing the gates to protect themselves from competition with the newcomers.

Scholars seeking to analyze the response of the Afro-Americans to immigrants, and especially black nativism, face numerous problems. Little consensus exists regarding the definition, sources and functions of nativism. The relative shortage of written records left by a largely rural, southern and lower class people makes generalization about any aspect of black thought exceedingly risky. And even a valid statement regarding attitudes does not necessarily tell much about behavior since social pressures often impede people from acting as they might like.

Yet the biggest barrier to assessing patterns of black nativism in America is the deeply ingrained tendency of scholars to impose an assimilationist perspective on the outlook of blacks and in so doing ignore the fundamental insight DuBois offered over three-quarters of a century ago regarding the consciousness of black Americans. To assume that people with such diverse backgrounds as had black and white Americans would perceive the social environment identically ignores an important social reality: namely, that the experiences of people of color in former homelands and on this continent affected the thought and behavior of dark-skinned citizens. Just as white American responses to aliens reflected their varied hopes, frustrations and anxieties and were influenced by their contacts with Native Americans and Africans, the views of black citizens reflected the challenges they faced and were colored by their interaction with native whites. America was a heterogeneous society in the past as it is today. This condition may be applauded or deplored, but it must be recognized by scholars, and especially by those who would study Afro-American social thought.

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## notes

The author expresses appreciation to the National Endowment for the Humanities for support in the preparation of this article.

1. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, 1955; New York, 1969), 169. Higham does warn the reader in his preface that he has paid little attention to inter-minority group relations. Thomas J. Curran's study, *Xenophobia and Immigration, 1820-1930* (Boston, 1975), gives even less attention to black views than did Higham two decades earlier.

2. Nativism as used by Higham and in this paper refers to an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connections." Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 4. Curran in *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 12, defines xenophobia as "the distrust of strangers because of the fear that they pose a threat to the culture of the natives."

3. Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, Negro New York, 1890-1930* (New York, 1968), 134. See also Wilson J. Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1978), 112-13.

4. For examples, see Forette Henri, *Black Migration: Movement North, 1900-1920* (Garden City, New York, 1975), 145-48, and David M. Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, 1973), 121-24, both of which refer to blacks in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as xenophobic.

5. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton in commenting on the reactions of black Chicagoans to immigrants in the pre-World War I era observed that "Negroes viewed the influx of European immigrants with mixed emotions." *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York, 1945, 1962), 57. Their brief explanation, however, overlooks some important sources of black ambivalence. In his study of black Harlem Seth Scheiner noted that a black statement regarding newcomers often contained praise as well as scorn. Scheiner, *Negro Mecca: A History of the Negro in New York City, 1865-1920* (New York, 1965), 130. Historians, unfortunately, have ignored Scheiner's warning that "to reduce the Negro's attitude toward the foreign newcomers to one of mere hostility would be an oversimplification." *Ibid.* Scheiner has devoted more attention and has provided more insight to black reactions to the foreign-born than other historians. See *ibid.*, 129-36.

6. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (3rd ed., Chicago, 1930), 3; Philip S. Foner, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass* (4 vols., New York, 1950-55), II, 243-44.

7. *Strangers in the Land*, 24.

8. The relationship between social upheaval and nativism is noted by Higham, *ibid.*, preface to second edition, and Curran, *Xenophobia and Immigration*, 22.

9. Although dislike and even fear of another group can exist without direct contact, scholars who talk of black nativism tend to ignore that in the century of greatest immigration to the United States most blacks had little exposure to aliens.

10. Black-Irish relations are considered in Hellwig, "Black Attitudes Toward Irish Immigrants," *Mid-America*, LIX (Jan. 1977), 39-49; Dennis Clark, "Urban Blacks and Irishmen: Brothers in Prejudice," in Miriam Ershkowitz and Joseph Zikmund, II, eds. *Black Politics in Philadelphia* (New York, 1973), 15-30; Carl Wittke, *The Irish in America* (Baton Rouge, 1956), 125-34; Jay Rubin, "Black Nativism; The European Immigrant in Negro Thought, 1830-1860," *Phylon*, XXXIX (Fall 1978), 193-202. While blacks had little good to say about the Irish in America, they often lauded their cousins in Europe. See Arnold Shankman, "Black on Green: Afro-American Editors on Irish Independence," *Phylon*, XLI (Sept. 1980), 284-99.

11. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), 302.

12. Louis R. Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers* (Urbana, 1974), III, 584-85.

13. One scholar who cited Washington's remarks regarding immigrants in the Atlanta address referred to them as nativistic after previously noting that he was playing upon white fears. Moses, *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, 98, 112. Washington could have been expressing his fears as well as exploiting those of whites, but other references of the Tuskegeean to foreigners suggest he was primarily doing the latter. See Hellwig, "Building a Black Nation: The Role of Immigrants in the Thought and Rhetoric of Booker T. Washington," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XXXI (Fall 1978), 529-50; Shankman, "This Menacing Influx: Afro-Americans on Italian Immigration to the South, 1880-1915," *Mississippi Quarterly*, XXXI (Winter 1977-78), 73-78.

14. Rubin, "Black Nativism," 194.

15. *Ibid.*; Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 166-67; Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby, eds., *The Negro in New York: An Informal Social History* (New York, 1967), 103-04; Carter G. Woodson, "The Negroes of Cincinnati Prior to the Civil War," *Journal of Negro History*, I (Jan. 1916), 13; Hellwig, "Black Attitudes Toward Irish Immigrants," 48-49.

16. Hellwig, "The Afro-American and the Immigrant, 1880-1930: A Study of Black Social Thought" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1973), 141-78; Shankman, "Friend or Foe? Southern Afro-Americans View the Jew, 1880-1935," in Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., "Turn to the South": *Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1979), 105-23.

17. Shankman, "'Asiatic Ogre' or 'Desirable Citizen?' The Image of Japanese Americans in the Afro-American Press, 1867-1933," *Pacific Historical Review*, XLVI (Nov. 1977), 567-87; Shankman, "Black on Yellow: Afro-Americans View Chinese-Americans, 1850-1935," *Phylon*, XXXIX (March 1978), 1-17; Hellwig, "Afro-American Reactions to the Japanese and the Anti-Japanese Movement, 1906-1924," *Phylon*, XXXVIII (March 1977), 93-104; Hellwig, "Black Reactions to Chinese Immigration and the Anti-Chinese Movement, 1850-1910," *Amerasia Journal*, 6 (Fall 1979), 25-44.

18. Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, preface to second ed. See also Carroll J. Noonan, *Nativism in Connecticut, 1829-1860* (Washington, D.C., 1938), 1.

19. Higham, "Another Look at Nativism," *Catholic Historical Review*, XLIV (July 1958), 150.

20. Studies of pre-Civil War nativism such as Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York, 1938), and W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1950), make no mention of black involvement.

21. Donald L. Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle, 1964), 47; Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 86; Katzman, *Before the Ghetto*, 122-23; *Woman's Era* (Boston), II (July 1895), 17, (Nov. 1895), 16.
22. E. David Cronin, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Madison, 1955), 188-91; Tony Martin, *Race First: The Ideological and Organizational Struggles of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association* (Westport, Connecticut, 1976), 344-55; Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville, 1977), 44.
23. *The Liberator*, May 18, 1860.
24. *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Dec. 15, 1854; *Douglass' Monthly*, II (Aug. 1859), 116.
25. *The Liberator*, Oct. 16, 1857.
26. Hellwig, "The Afro-American and the Immigrant," 48-60, 219-31.
27. *Savannah Tribune*, March 24, May 12, 1894; *A.M.E. Church Review*, XI (Jan. 1895), 429-30. See also *American Citizen* (Kansas City, June 2, 9, 1893).
28. The discussion here and in the following paragraphs of black attitudes towards immigrants and American immigration policy during World War I and the twenties is based upon the author's essay, "Black Leaders and United States Immigration Policy, 1917-1929," *Journal of Negro History*, 56 (Summer 1981), 110-27.
29. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, 269.
30. James M. Berquist, "The Concept of Nativism: A Review of the Past Quarter Century," paper delivered at the Organization of American Historians Convention, April 10, 1980, 14.