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Mateusz Mach May 7, 2019

Nasze Szkoly, Nasza Polonia: The Story of Public and Parochial Education in the Making of Chicago's *Polonia*, 1880-1924.

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An Abstract of a

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Abstract

Nasze Szkoły, Nasza Polonia: The Story of Public and Parochial Education in the Making of Chicago's *Polonia,* 1880-1924.

By Mateusz Mach

This study focuses on the cultural transformations undergone by the Polish-American community at the turn of the 20th century. Specifically, the study highlights the tension between native-born American supporters of public school systems and foreign-born supports of parochial schools.

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For my parents who taught me to live with dignity,

For Claudia Cornelison,

And for the Immigrants who yearn to breathe free.

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Introduction

"I don't understand how Dziadek (grandpa) *has spent almost two decades in America and still can't speak more than a few sentences in English."* I spoke these words during a weekend barbeque that took place on a warm summer evening in 2010. Friends of my parents – some loosely related to us, others acquaintances whom my parents had known before they had immigrated to the Unites States – gathered together for a night of drinking and eating. The men and the women alike traded stories about work: the long hours; the rise in construction jobs that the summer weather afforded; the stubborn aches and pains that each adult at the table knew all too well. Every adult at the table was Polish and, at one point or another, had made the life-changing decision to immigrate to the United States and settle in *Shee-Kah-Goh*: the idiosyncratic Polish pronunciation of Chicago.

My criticism of my grandfather's inability to assimilate over so many years silenced the energetic, jubilant conversation of the table. My father grimaced. "*Oczym ty gadasz,* (What are you talking about)," he asked with an edge in his voice. "*Let me explain something to you that you obviously haven't learned from your American teachers. Imagine you're in a country that is poor and that you would need a miracle to find work that could afford a comfortable life for your family. You hear that there is work with decent pay in America from someone you know. You barely have enough money to send yourself to America so you leave your children behind and you pray every day that you'll make enough so that they can join you. You arrive in America and*

you don't speak any English. You begin to work at a factory or a gas station. Have you ever worked in a factory? You repeat the same movements over and over, and you accept any overtime so that you can send enough money back to your wife and children so that they don't starve in your absence." He pauses. "*Show me where the hell you find the time to learn a new language while you're already killing yourself for the sake of your family?"* My father's diatribe was met with a wave of nods from the Poles at the table. A friend of my parents then told me: "*Mateusz, don't worry about us stare konie (old horses). We get by with the English that we need to get through robota (work). What's more important is for you to not forget your first language and the fact that you are, first and foremost, a Pole, so that when you go off and become more successful than we could have ever dreamed, you'll remind these Amerykanie (Americans) what Poles are capable of."* At this point, I became embarrassed. I understood my father's annoyance with my question.

My father immigrated to the United States alone in 2000. For the first year and a half, he worked day shifts at a pharmaceutical factory and night shifts as a gas attendant, sending remittances to my mother and me back in Poland. Upon my mother and my arrival to the United Sates, I was immediately enrolled in an American Catholic school. At the same time, my mother purchased elementary Polish textbooks. My six-year-old self would learn to read and write in English during the day and come home to practice my Polish. *"If you don't practice your Polish, you'll lose it, and then you won't be able to talk with your friends and relatives when we return to Poland,"* warned my mother.

Almost a decade after my father's impromptu lesson on assimilation, I found myself revisiting the duality of my identity. The present work is the product of my wrestling with the various ways immigration complicates one's identity, my own identity included. So, I elected to

piece together the story of the Poles who came before me to see how they negotiated their identities and how they created Chicago's *Polonia* – the Polish community that stands resolute to this day. The following pages relay the tumultuous story of Polish immigration to the United States: a history that delicately balanced both change and continuity through the lives and experiences of immigrants and natives alike.

Polish history is, among other things, a history of serfdom, colonization, and lifelong toil. In his Nobel prized novel, *The Peasants* (1925), Ladislaus Reymont tells the story of a peasant village in modern-day eastern Poland. The four-volume work paints a vivid picture of the world Polish peasants experienced – one that oscillates between celebration and suffering, joy and pain, preservation and survival. *The Peasants* begins with one of the most important phrases in Polish cultural-religious life: "Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus" – praise be to God. Matthias Boryna, one of the main characters in the novel, represents the archetypal Polish peasant. Matthias had been a peasant his entire six-decade-long life. In one scene, Matthias is wounded by a squire who was attempting to steal lumber from a forest claimed by Matthias's clan. Matthias falls into a coma, but awakens a few months later. Matthias then rises, walks into his field as though he intends to sow it once again – and dies.[1]

Matthias's life and, perhaps more importantly, his death stand as a metaphor of the centrality of labor not simply in peasant life, but in Polish culture itself. The Poles of the nineteenth century witnessed the entrenchment of colonial power following Poland's tripartite partition, the gradual abolition of serfdom, and a grand exodus of Poles fleeing their occupied homeland. It is true, however, that Polish immigrants varied greatly in their reasons for

[1] Ladislaus Reymont, *The Peasants* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925)

emigrating, their intended destinations, their religious and regional identities, and, significantly, their understanding of what it meant to *be* Polish. Despite this internal, multi-dimensional diversity, however, a coherent story of the Polish immigrant in the United States is possible. Polish immigrants in the United States shared a common history, language, and set of cultural values for which the experience of occupation, the nature of labor and life under serfdom, and settlement in the New World were formative.

By 1880, roughly half a million Poles had immigrated to the United States.[2] By 1920, the number had risen to over two million.[3] These immigrants were not monolithic: they were skilled workers, writers, academics. However, the vast majority are remembered today as immigrants *za chlebem*: immigrants in search of bread. That is, most of the new Polish immigrants were of a peasant background who did not benefit politically or economically following the gradual abolition of serfdom in partitioned Poland. Karen Majewski's brilliant study of Polish-American reading and publishing history, *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish-American Identity, 1880*-1939, provides a nuanced portrait of who Polish immigrants were and their various reasons for emigrating:

> "While the great wave of turn-of-the-century immigration to America tends to be perceived as a distinctly peasant movement prompted by financial necessity, in actuality economic, social, and political factors combined, often indistinguishably, to propel immigration not only from the peasantry but also, although in much smaller numbers, from the petty nobility, the intelligentsia, and the professional middle class."[4]

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[2] Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: the Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1.

[3] Library of Congress, "The Nation of Polonia," www.loc.gov, accessed October 17, 2018. http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/immigration/polish4.html.

[4] Karen Majewski. *Traitors and True Poles: Narrating a Polish-American Identity, 1880–1939*. (Athens: Ohio State University Press, 2003), 21.

The industrialized United States was not only a place where wage-work could be found, but also a country that Poles could escape to away from the political and cultural subjugation they faced in their homeland.[5]

The United States itself produced pull factors to stimulate European immigration. American industries, including steamship, mining, and railroad companies, broadcasted enticements for European laborers to come to the United States to provide cheap labor and passenger fares, often circumventing Unites States contract labor laws. One example of this was the Illinois Central Railroad's formation of the *Agencja Polskiej Kolonizacji* (Polish Colonization Agency) which attempted to recruit Polish laborers.[6] Indeed, the Poles that found early success in the United States often engendered a chain migration through letters encouraging family and friends to emigrate as well. The 1911 reports of the Congressional Immigration Commission indicated that out of 145,670 Polish immigrants surveyed, 143,932 Poles – almost 99% - indicated that they would be joining relatives or friends after entering the country.[7]

The Polish wave was part of a larger wave of southern and eastern European immigrants – Jews, Italians, Slovaks, Russians, Croats, and others – who entered and settled in the U.S from late 1800s up until the outbreak of World War I. Naturally, this massive influx of "new" immigrants engendered reactions from native-born citizens of the United States. These reactions

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[5] Sister Lucille. "The Causes of Polish Immigration to the United States." *Polish American Studies* 8, no. 3/4 (1951): 87.
[6] Ibid, 90.
[7] *Reports of the Immigration Commission.* (Senate Document No. 747, 61 Cong., 3 sess.) Vol. XII (Washington, Government Printing, 1911), 59.

were themselves varied, complex, and often influenced by competing notions "Americanism," that is, notions of what it means to be an American, who deserved to claim a place in the United States, and who had the authority to decide what is American and what is not. Above all, native-born Americans were faced with the question of how to deal with this new and immense class of immigrants.

The present study is concerned with the experience of Polish immigrants in Chicago, beginning around 1880, when distinct Polish communities and institutions became acknowledged and discussed by concerned native-born Americans, ending in 1924, marked by the passage of the restrictionist Immigration Act of 1924. Specifically, this study focuses on the *cultural* life of Polish immigrants in Chicago in this period and how their cultural life was affected by the host American society and, in turn, how this cultural life affected the host society itself. I center my study on the evolution of education both as a positive institution that included teachers, pupils, communities, parents, and administrations and as a cultural idea which had a contested purpose. The period of mass Polish migration also witnessed the passage of compulsory education laws in America. As we will see, a tension arose between native-born Americans in support of public education and immigrants who favored private, parochial education in the belief that the ethnic-religious schools would facilitate immigrants' adjustment in the United States.

The native-born citizens of the United States at the turn of the twentieth century were divided on the immigrant question; there were the nativists who believed immigration should be restricted and there were those who welcomed immigrants into the United States. However, these welcomers existed on a spectrum, with some, like philosopher John Dewey, taking a pluralist

view that immigrants should retain their ethnic distinctness, while others believed that immigrants should assimilate into American culture.

This project will focus on the class of native-born white Americans who represented the various gradations of the welcoming attitude. This class includes the likes of social reformers such as Jane Addams, Sophonisba Breckinridge, Edith Abbott, and Graham Taylor. These individuals were members of what Rivka Lissak termed the "Hull-House Group."[8] The Hull-House Group was a milieu of intellectuals, academics, politicians, reformers, and social workers whose intellectual headquarters was Hull-House: a settlement house located in central Chicago founded by Jane Addams. Established in 1889, the stated purpose of Hull House was "…to make social intercourse express the growing sense of the economic unity of society. It is an effort to add the social function to democracy. It was opened on the theory that the dependence of classes on each other is reciprocal."[9] Hull House, situated between different immigrant colonies, was a sort of laboratory for upper-middle class Americans to study and engage with the immigrants of Chicago. Hull House was also the epicenter of a nationwide Progressive movement championed by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.

What is particularly illuminating about the Hull House group is that they had an expressed interest in affecting the lives and behaviors of new immigrants. They were neither fully accepting of immigrants as they were, nor were they convinced that all immigrants should simply be shut out. Instead, this class of welcomers, in one degree or another, believed that the immigrant should, or would, become Americanized. And, importantly, many of these

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[8] Rivka Shpak Lissak. *Pluralism and Progressives: Hull House and the New Immigrants, 1890-1919.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 25.

[9] Jane Addams. "The Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements." In *Philanthropy and Social Progress* (Montclair: Patterson Smith Publishing Corporation, 1970), 1.

assimilationists assumed the role of a liaison – placing themselves between the immigrant masses and the ideal American citizenry that they wished to cultivate. Nativists and eugenicists felt that "being American" was solely defined and represented by white native-born citizens of Anglo-Saxon heritage, and they directed their xenophobic antipathies towards whatever they felt was "un-American" – effectively fostering a negative definition of Americanism. The Progressive Americans represented in part by the Hull House group, on the other hand, attempted to elucidate a positive notion of Americanism. For the Progressives, positive American values included liberty, social reciprocity, economic progress, secularism, tolerance, and, most importantly, democracy.[10] In order for one to Americanize an immigrant, one needed to develop, or at least crystallize, a definition of what it means to *be* an American. Thus, we see these actors reorienting what qualified as "good" citizenship and reinforcing institutions that cultivate good citizenship, namely: the public school. It should also be noted that these reformers shifted in their efforts to deal with the immigrant problem. Many began by agitating for English only, compulsory public school education. Over time, these efforts would shift into putting parochial schools under the supervision of the city of Chicago, and later on, developing ethnic studies curriculums in public schools. Rformer efforts may have begun with a firm push for assimilation, but by the 1930s, these reformers would assume a more acculturationist program of action.

Formal education lies at the heart of this study. The period and place in question witnessed the passing of mandatory compulsory education laws, which went hand in hand with the passing of anti-child labor laws. At the same time, we see the proliferation of ethnic parochial schools – Polish Roman Catholic schools in particular. Here lies the critical juncture: across the United States and in Chicago specifically, Poles had some of the lowest public school attendance

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[10] Addams. "Subjective Necessity for Social Settlements," 3.

rates vis-à-vis other ethnic groups.[11] However, as historian Dominic Pacyga has noted, "By 1920, 3,557 children attended the Polish Schools of South Chicago, where they made up 92 percent of the Catholic student body."[12] And so, the question arises: why were Poles averse to public education, yet so proactive in the formation of, and participation in, their own educational institutions?

I suggest that the United States, and Chicago in particular, provided an unprecedented setting for the formation of Polish institutions and ideas – be it Polish schools, churches, fraternal organizations, or the Polish national identity itself. What followed was a collective endeavor to create and cultivate these institutions, resulting in a distinct Polish-American identity and populace, as well as a physical space we still observe today known as Chicago's *Polonia.*

Protestant institutions like the American public school, or even the Irish Catholic school, did not fit the needs of Polish immigrants and the lives they wanted for their children. As Pacyga writes:

> "…the Polish Catholic school provided a way of preserving the religious and cultural values brought from Europe. The peasant, who had been exploited by the class system in Poland, often regarded formal education as a waste of time…the typical Polish child attended parochial school until he or she received the sacraments of the Catholic church and then transferred to public schools until old enough to join the workforce."[13]

[11] John Bodnar. "Schooling and the Slavic-American Family, 1900-1940" in *American Education and the European Immigrant* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 78
[12] Dominic Pacyga. *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago, 1880-1922,* (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1991), 146
[13] Ibid.

Note that the parochial school was regarded as a cultural necessity, whereas the public school was regarded as a temporary obligation.

But what is perhaps even more telling in this story is the function that the parochial school served for the maintenance of the Polish family itself. Polish parochial schools offered instruction in both English and Polish, as well as courses in Polish history, geography, and literature, which were critical to the cultivation and prolongation of the Polish community in the United States. The parochial schools also provided that critical religious instruction that children needed to receive the sacraments of reconciliation, first communion, and confirmation. Moreover, the Polish parochial schools were sensitive to the needs of Polish families themselves. As John Bodnar indicates: "Hunger and sickness were known to have forced children to remain home…."[14] Even Abbott and Breckinridge had to concede that "The advantages of learning English are not necessarily underestimated, but bread is felt to be more important than education…"[15] It is no secret that poor Polish immigrants living in industrial Chicago faced wretched working and living conditions. Though, to the dismay of the Hull House activists, parochial schools overall had lower levels of truancy, non-attendance, and drop-outs.[16]

The competition between the parochial schools and the public schools, or, in other words, the cultivation of immigrant communities versus the project of Americanization, continued into the 1920s. I identify the peak use of the public school as an instrument of Americanization to be the new educational institutions that arose during the First World War. These institutions, organized by the "official" Americanization movement, and spearheaded by the National Americanization Committee and the federal bureau of Naturalization, pursued a program that

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[14] Bodnar, "Schooling and the Slavic-American Family," 81

[15] Abbott and Breckinridge, *Truancy and Non-Attendance,* 265

[16] Lissak, *Pluralism and Progressives,* 52.

demanded "'100 percent Americanism'" from new immigrants.[17] Polish-American immigrants were therefore faced with a choice. The fact that Polish immigrants had a choice over where to send their children to school is the purest evidence of the fact that Poles had agency over their adjustment and self-development in the United States.

My final suggestion is that the *failure* of American public schools to induce attendance and consequently "Americanize" new immigrants, and Polish immigrants in particular, was a major impetus for the passing of the infamous quota law of 1924. Of course, the red scare of 1919 and a resurgence of nativism, as exemplified by the reemergence of the KKK, were major factors in the passing of this law. But insofar as the Immigration Act of 1924 banned the immigration of non-white persons while substantially limiting the immigration of Eastern Europeans, why is it that, as Matthew Frye Jacobsen has argued, Eastern European immigrants were included in the consolidation of whiteness following the passing of the law? I argue that the only way native born Americans in power could ever hope to preserve their sociocultural authority over the United States was to exert their power by substantially altering the country's immigration policy, *while simultaneously acquiescing to the robust, persevering, and indomitable sociocultural life of certain immigrants already in the United States.* The passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 represented a moment wherein the longstanding nativist calls for immigration restriction conjoined with the recognized ineffectiveness of Progressive programs to assimilate new immigrants. The Immigration Act of 1924, then, appeased nativists and welcomers alike because both groups maintained an idealistic view of the United States that sought to preserve the Anglo-Saxon roots of American values, the only difference being that Americans who were open to the arrival of

[17] John McClymer, "The Americanization Movement and the Education of the Foreign-Born Adult, 1914-25," in *American Education and the European Immigrant.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 97

immigrants occluded a racial component to their definition of "Americanism." In both cases, new immigrants were perceived as inferior, either culturally or racially.

There is a significant body of both primary and secondary literature pertaining to the immigrant experience of this period. In terms of academic literature, I utilize modern academic literature pertaining to education, immigration and labor. These include Karen Majewski's work on Polish reading culture in America and Norman Davies' encyclopedic work on modern Polish history.[18] What has been particularly useful, though, is the academic literature published in the period itself. Many of the social reformers that I have mentioned were themselves academics, and their published works have served as rich primary source documents that have allowed me to understand and flesh out the perspective held by these reformers. Some of these works include William Thomas's and Florian Znaniecki's groundbreaking sociological work on Polish peasant immigrants in Chicago, speeches made at annual meetings of the National Child Labor Committee, and the writings of Jane Addams which surveyed her experiences of working with immigrants at Hull-House.[19] As for non-academic primary source documents, I have reviewed the collections held in Chicago's Newberry library. These include the letters of Jane Addams and school composition books from the period. I conducted further research in the archives of the Polish Museum of America in Chicago, which hold a plethora of letters and oral history documents from the period at hand. Furthermore, I am deeply indebted to the work of the Work Progress Administration who translated thousands of Polish-American newspapers through the Chicago foreign language press survey in 1938, which have illuminated the educational debates within the

[18]Norman Davies. *God's Playground: A History of Poland, 1795 to the Present.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Majewski, Karen. *Traitors and True Poles,* 32

[19] Jane Addams. *Forty Years at Hull-House.* (New York: Macmillan, 1910); "PUBLICATIONS OF THE NATIONAL CHILD-LABOR COMMITTEE." *Monthly Review of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics* 3, no. 1 (1916): 149-51; William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America.* (Boston: Gorham Press, 1920)

Polish community itself at the period. Emory University's Woodruff Library was also a rich source of published secondary and primary materials. All of these materials have been instrumental in recreating a picture of Chicago's *Polonia* at the turn of the century.

Chapter One

Niech Będzie Pochwalony Jezus Chrystus: Polish Identity-Making in the Nineteenth Century

Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus (Praise be to Jesus Christ) are the first words a Polish Catholic Priest speaks to greet his congregation at the beginning of Sunday mass. For centuries, Polish Catholics have responded to the greeting with the words *Na wieki wieków, Amen* (Now and forever, Amen). In parallel, Ladislaus Reymont's novel *The Peasants* opens with the same words, beckoning the reader into the difficult, yet culturally rich, lives of the Polish peasantry. The opening words of the novel are also a symbol of the relationship between the Polish Roman Catholic Church and the Polish peasantry – a relationship from which a distinct religious-national culture and identity arose. The following chapter is an attempt to reconstruct a brief history of how this relationship developed in 19th century Poland to be strong enough to be reproduced by Polish immigrants in the United States, as evidenced by the strong trend of Polish communities forming around their Parish and choosing to engage in Parish life in the New World.

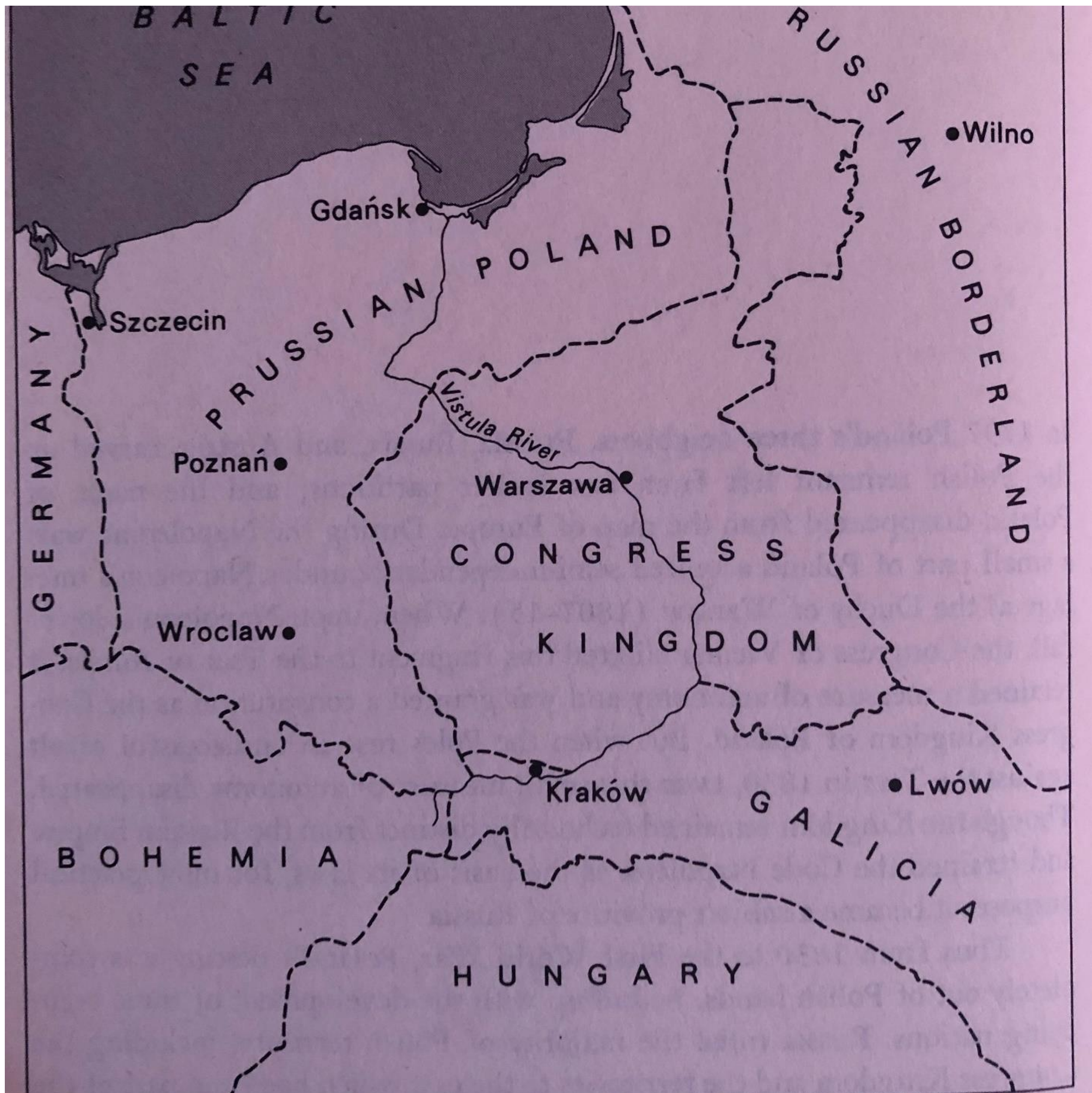

Figure 1: Partitioned Poland, 1795[20]

[20] Adam Zamoyski. *Poland: A History,* (London: Harper Press, 2009), 4.

The vast majority of Polish immigrants who voyaged to Chicago in particular and to the United States overall between 1880 and 1914 were peasants who did not experience economic improvement after they had been emancipated from serfdom.[21] While there existed Polish immigrants who were of middle-class, aristocratic, or even industrial working-class origins, it stands to reason that our greatest attention must be paid to the members of the Polish peasantry.

The history of the Polish peasantry goes hand-in-hand with the history of serfdom in Eastern Europe. Prior to the partitioning of Poland, Polish serfs were bound to the land of their respective lords. Polish royalty, nobility, and the clergy constituted the lordship. Beginning in the late fifteenth century, the growth of the grain trade, supported by the importance of the Vistula River to the European economy, led to the legal institutionalization of serfdom in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Lords gained the positive right to unpaid labor services. By law, Polish lords had absolute authority over their serfs. The difference between serfdom and slavery was that under serfdom, peasants could not be bought and sold at will. Instead, serfs existed in the narrow space between being chattel and wage-laborers. It is no surprise, then, that the Polish word for peasants, *chłopi,* derived from *Kholopy*: the slaves of medieval Slavic society.[22]

The peasants of this period had to painfully weigh the pros and cons of serfdom. On one hand, peasants would have to give up any semblance of political freedom that they hitherto possessed. By 1496, only one peasant per year in a given village could even apply to leave the land – migration of any sort was forbidden to everyone else. In 1521, Polish serfs lost the right to submit grievances against their lords in court. Eventually, Polish serfs would be required to ask for permission to marry or to attend school. On the other hand, however, refusing to tie oneself

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[21] William Falkowski. "Labor, Radicalism, and the Polish-American Worker" in *Polish-Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics.* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1996), 39
[22] Davies, Norman. *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Volume II*, 140.

and one's family to a lord's estate put a family at great risk of losing one's family plot and falling into a state of poverty and destitution. Under serfdom, peasants did not legally own their plots of land, but they maintained the sense that their respective plots belonged to them – a belief warranted by the generations of family members that had worked on the same plot for ages. It has also been argued that, although lords had every right to discipline their serfs, "A nobleman who offended his serfs, or who drove them away, was heading for disaster. It was clearly in the best interests of both lord and serf to work together in an atmosphere of mutual understanding."[23] In short, the Polish peasantry was faced with the absurdly contradictory and incredibly difficult decision of living free and hungry or securely in bondage. The vast majority of the Polish peasantry chose bondage, and the common experience of serfdom laid the foundation for the manifestation of Polish sociocultural traits that would survive and be brought over by Polish peasant immigrants: the ability to recognize forms of economic and political exploitation fostered by the peasants' experience of serfdom and sharecropping; the tradition of every member of the family to take part in the economic life of the family during periods of struggle and impoverishment practiced as a means to deal with the precariousness of peasant life; the importance of, and the status attributed to, owning one's own home and land after generations of peasants not having the legal or economic means to do so; above all, the yearning to breathe free and the motivation and spirit to resist when necessary.

The Poles who would come to constitute Chicago's *Polonia* brought with them a historical memory that informed their cultural lives. From 1795 up until the end of the First World War, the vast majority of what was formerly the Kingdom of Poland was colonized –

[23] Norman Davies. *God's Playground: A History of Poland, Volume I, the Origins to 1795.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 280-281

erased from the world's maps by the tripartite power of the Russian Empire, Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Kraków (Cracow) – the "cultural capital" of Poland - was the only exception because it was granted the status of "Free City" by the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. The sociopolitical conditions beset by the partitions of Poland presented novel challenges to Polish autonomy – be it their autonomy over matters of work, self-government, religion, communal organization, and, importantly, formal education.

If we wish to better understand the evolution of Polish-American educational institutions as they progressed amidst the countervailing forces of Americanization at the turn of the twentieth century, it is necessary to understand who the Poles were *before* they immigrated. Specifically, we must uncover how and why Poles developed particular – though not always uniform – relationships and attitudes towards labor, familial organization, state power, and formal education within colonization.

The six decades following the partition of Poland saw the gradual emancipation of Polish serfs. Year by year, region by region, serfdom was abolished: "It was achieved piecemeal, by different authorities in different regions acting for different motives, and by different methods each with its particular vices and virtues." Over time, peasants were no longer legally bound to the land, but the material condition of most peasants kept them from being able to buy back their plots of land, forcing the peasants to deal with the added economic burden of having to rent their land from their lords. In other words, for most Polish peasants, the political freedom returned to them in no way guaranteed economic freedom or prosperity. The daily realities of the Polish peasantry have been detailed as follows:

> "The ancient three-field system maintained its hold in many regions until the turn of the century, perpetuating and ensuring periodic shortages of bread…Potatoes, black bread, and cabbage formed the basis of the diet…Colourless, homespun

> clothes were the norm…Shoes were doffed on leaving the church or the market, and in all but the harshest weather…Purchases concentrated on agricultural implements. Education was rare."

The three-field system mentioned in this quote refers to the medieval organization of farmland that divided crop fields into three parts. Each year, two sections of a field would be used to grow crops while the third section was left fallow to restore its fertility. In the following year, a different section would be left fallow, and so on. The three-field system was succeeded by the more efficient four-field system that left half of a field fallow, ensuring that no section of a field had to bear the burden of two consecutive harvests and risk becoming infertile. Unfortunately, most Polish peasants had to deal with the consequences of the inefficient three field system that rendered their fields infertile at a much faster rate. Despite the often horrifying conditions of Polish peasant life before and after emancipation, however, the peasants' ties to the church, their continued use of the Polish language, and "…above all their ineradicable conviction that the land was theirs, irrespective of the technical details of its legal ownership" did not falter.[24] Thus, the Polish peasantry distinguished itself by its use of its former national language, by its distinct customs and traditions within their Catholic faith (such as *wigilia* – a family celebration that takes place on Christmas eve which is followed by the family attending midnight mass), and by its almost spiritual devotion and claim to their ancestral land. And, importantly, the Polish peasantry possessed a collective memory of serfdom and subordination. That is to say, the peasantry possessed its own unique history. It has been argued that, before the mid-19th century, the ability to call oneself a "Pole" was solely reserved for the members of the Polish nobility.[25] Nevertheless, the aforementioned qualities can be understood as reflecting a proto-nationhood –

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[24] Norman Davies. *God's Playground: a History of Poland, Volume II, 1795 to the Present.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 136-140.

[25] Karen Majewski. *Traitors and True Poles*, 22

they served as the foundation of the ethnic/national identity, with its respective cultural customs and values, which Poles would come to cultivate and eventually reproduce upon arriving in the New World.

To be clear, hindsight shows that the Polish peasantry of partitioned Poland was were a distinct people whose constituents, in large part, shared a common Catholic faith, a common language, and a collective memory of serfdom and imperial occupation. Further, these Polish peasants lived alongside Jews, Germans, Lithuanians, and Russians from whom Polish Peasants could ethnically differentiate themselves in the negative sense, that is, Polish peasants had the ability to recognize that their stock was different from their Russian, German, or Lithuanian neighbors. On the other hand, Polish peasants generally possessed a parochial worldview, which concentrated peasant interests within the *rodzina, parafia,* or *okolica* (family, parish, and local neighborhood, respectively).[26] Thus, there existed a tension between the limited, local worldviews of the peasants and the broader currents of cultural, religious, and economic homogeneity. So, the critical issue here is whether or not these peasants possessed a national consciousness or at least a sense of "Polishness." I submit that the national consciousness of the Polish peasantry in nineteenth century partitioned Poland was in its incipient stage of development, impeded by the absence of a nationwide public sphere and the denationalizing pressures of the Russian and Prussian occupiers.

By now we can infer that most Poles living before World War I had limited access to formal education. The partitioning of Poland only made matters worse. Two decades before the partition, the government of Poland had established the National Education Commission. Under

[26] Ibid.

its tenure until 1794, the Commission was able to "organize two universities, 74 secondary schools, and 1,600 parish schools." The commission attempted to centralize the previously Catholic schools system, and inject it with "secular and national ideals." Textbooks were published, teachers were educated in state colleges and paid a salary, and both boys and girls were allowed to study. Instruction was carried out in Polish, rather than Latin. By 1790, about 15,000 students were enrolled in the secondary schools alone. Even after the partitions, the Polish schools continued to operate without serious issues until the 1830s when the policies of "Prussification" and "Russification" came into play. Austria-Hungary, with its lenient attitude towards Polish culture, was the only exception.[27]

In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire largely ignored Polish educational institutions. Interestingly, until 1850, Polish peasants living in Russian Poland were even compelled to complete elementary education. However, beginning in 1830, political tensions within the Tsarist government inspired the "Russification" of Polish school districts.[28] The autonomy of the Polish schools was rescinded. Instruction in the Polish language was forbidden. It was believed that a state school system should produce subjects loyal to the Tsarist government – any form of education that attempted to do otherwise was akin to treason. The Catholic Church was weakened in the face of the state-backed power of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In Prussian Poland, there was no support for the Polish school system. Parallel to Russification policy, Prussian educational policy was based on cultivating German culture and all instruction was conducted in German. Only in the region of Poznania was Polish the language

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[27] Davies. *God's Playground,* 167-170.
[28] Ibid.

of instruction in local schools, but even here it was replaced by German by 1870. In 1874, Polish textbooks were forbidden. By 1887, Polish students did not have the opportunity to study in their native language, not even as a secondary language.[29][30] This situation broadened after the unification of the German Empire under Bismarck, who established a policy known as *Kulturkampf* (culture struggle). The *Kulturkampf* policy did not only target Polish education, but Polish culture itself, directly attempting to subdue the influence of the Catholic Church. Polish historian Adam Zamoyski writes: "The original Prussian analysis had been that once the Polish nobility and clergy had been emasculated, the peasant masses would turn into loyal Germans."[31]

But this goal, similar in many ways to the Russification policy goal, was never fully achieved thanks to the efforts of educated Polish nationalists and the Polish Catholic clergy.

The resistance to the suppression of Polish culture and education was widespread. One group of such resistors were Polish cultural icons, such as Frederyk Szopen and Adam Mickiewicz, as well as the intellectuals and educators working in Austrian Poland, who ensured the survival and continued cultivation of Polish art and literature.

As a response to the Russification and Prussification of Polish schools, a generation of young, educated, mostly female Poles took it upon themselves to act as cultural missionaries. These *révoltés* entered the Polish countryside in the Prussian and Russian partitions and instructed Polish peasants about Polish history, literature, and music, among other topics. The cultural missionaries would meet in the homes of peasants, and would often host congregations of over a dozen Poles within these impromptu "classrooms." It should be noted that this

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Zamoyski, *Poland: a History,* 262.
[31] Zamoyski. *Poland: a History*, 261.

underground cultural movement was secular in its spirit, attempting to not only imbue the Polish peasantry with nationalist ideals, but also attempting to rein in the cultural authority that the Catholic Church had over the peasantry. The success of these cultural missionaries was made apparent by the Russian perception of them. As Norman Davies writes: “In Russia, the typical Polish ‘patriot’ of the turn of the century was not the revolutionary with a revolver in his pocket, but the young lady of a good family with a textbook under her shawl.”[32] The peasantry itself was also active in resisting the tides of the denationalizing policies of Russia and Prussia. Catholic priests who refused to comply with the Bismarckian *Kulturkampf* policies, which placed Catholic schools under state supervision, began to be persecuted by Prussian officials. On several occasions, groups of Polish peasants would come to the aid of Polish priests, pushing back Prussian law enforcement authorities attempting to arrest the priests.[33] These events show the depth of the relationship between the Polish peasantry and the Catholic clergy. It is also within this cultural resistance movement that three historically separate estates of Polish society – the clergy, the educated middle class, and the peasantry – converged because of their mutual dedication to keeping alive the ethno-nationalist spirit within Poles against the threat of state-backed erasure of that spirit. While the motivations of these three groups were not identical and often antithetical, the common thread of their dedication to the colonized land of Poland, the Polish language, and resistance to the colonial powers was resolute enough to carry on until Poland finally gained its independence at the close of World War I and, importantly, be brought to the United States during the period of mass exodus from Poland.

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[32] Davies, *God’s Playground,* 170-172

[33] Zamoyski, *Poland: a History,* 262.

From the institutionalization of serfdom, through the wars of partition and the denationalization movements of the colonial powers, to the era of mass migration, the Polish people had cultivated a collective memory that brought with it the weight of generations of struggle, poverty, war, exploitation, and persecution. Time and time again, the Polish peasantry had to make painful sacrifices, trading their political and economic freedom for the sake of not going hungry. By the end of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of Polish peasants would make the great sacrifice of leaving their beloved land – the same land that their ancestors accepted bondage in order to retain. But, the Polish peasantry, along with middle class and clerical activists, refused to let go of their distinct, rich cultural history and language. In the following chapters, it will come as no surprise to the reader that by the time Polish immigrants in Chicago and the United States in general came face to face with the state-sponsored Americanization movement, the Poles were no strangers to efforts to undermine their nationality. Indeed, the tactics that the Polish peasantry developed to weather the forces of poverty and exploitation in their homeland were transposed to meet the onslaught of the vicissitudes of American racism and industrial capitalism. Further, the educated Polish middle class and the clergy would also find footing in the United States and continue their cultivation of Poland's political and cultural heritage – though not without their own internal and external tensions. The persevering, collective effort of developing and protecting the Polish identity was honed not in spite of the oppressive partitioning powers, but *because* of them. And the collective memory of serfdom and impoverishment would be brought over to the new world. This unique history of subordination would come to be remembered by Polish immigrants in America – particularly during World War I when Poles would summon the memory of their historical struggles to inspire their participation in the war effort.

Several phenomena provided the impetus for Polish migration to the United States. The first waves of Polish emigration began in Prussian Poland in the 1870s. In 1807, Serfdom was abolished in Prussian Poland, but titles to the land were only granted to the largest peasant farms, and only by 1860 was this process of giving titles to the largest peasant farms completed. The majority of Prussian-Polish peasants, then, had to suffer the realities of landlessness, and, by 1870, these landless peasants began migrating in great numbers to the United States, but also to more industrialized areas of Western Europe.

Austrian, or Galician, Polish peasants received both political freedom and titles to the land in 1848. However, like in the other partitions, peasant farming relied heavily on the ancient grain trade, which itself relied on access through the Vistula River. Galician peasants faced the difficulty of having limited access to the Vistula River because the river crossed through both Russian and Prussian lands, stifling the Galician grain trade. By the 1890s, Galician Poles began to leave Galicia at a rate of 50,000 per year. The number of emigrants skyrocketed at the outbreak of the Great War, with one million Poles leaving Galicia in 1914, two-thirds of whom left for the United States. Between 1902 and 1911, Galician migration was made up of agricultural laborers: small-landowning peasants (25%); agricultural wage laborers (35%); servants (15%). Feeling the weight of economic impoverishment, these Poles elected to emigrate.

In Russian Poland, Peasants were freed from Serfdom in 1864, but were not granted titles to the land. On top of this, the failed insurrection of the January uprising of 1863 only sharpened Russian suppression of Polish culture. Following the emigration of Prussian Poles, Russian Poles too decided to leave their impoverished and subjugated lives in Russian Poland.

In all three partitions, peasant emancipation left the majority of Polish agricultural laborers landless and impoverished, beckoning them to leave the partitioned lands in search of better economic opportunities. Importantly, many of these peasants planned to return to Poland after securing enough savings abroad to live comfortably in Poland.[34]

[34] John J. Bukowczyk. "Polish Rural Culture and Immigrant Working Class Formation, 1880-1914." *Polish American Studies* 41, no. 2 (1984): 23-44.

Chapter Two

The American Response to "New" Immigrants: Americanization, Public Education, and Naturalization

The citizens of the United States witnessed a tidal wave of migration of unprecedented size and character between the close of the American Civil War and the beginning of World War I. Internally, the United States witnessed massive domestic migrations, most notably the Great Migration of freed blacks from the south into the North. From abroad, the United States experienced another wave of migration – known as "new immigration" – was overwhelmingly comprised of immigrants hailing from Southern and Eastern Europe: Slovaks; Czechs; Italians; Jews; Russians; Lithuanians; Hungarians; Ukrainians; Greeks; and, of course, Poles. Statistics from the U.S Immigration Commission indicate that between 1873 and 1910 over 9,300,000 Southern and Eastern European immigrants migrated to the United States.[35] Polish immigration to the United States in this period represented over two million individuals alone.[36] In addition to European immigration, the United States received many East Asian immigrants, though the passage of the Chinese exclusion act in 1883 and the "Gentlemen's Agreement" of 1907 sharply curtailed Asian immigration. These immigrants were termed "new" immigrants because of the ways they differed from the earlier, predominantly Western and Northern European immigrants

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[35] Edward Hartmann. *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 15.
[36] Sister Lucille. "The Causes of Polish Immigration to the United States.", 85

that had migrated to the United States before the Civil War. The "old" immigrants, with the exception of Irish, French-Canadian, and German Catholics, were mostly Protestant and, for the most part, were better acquainted with political freedoms and industrialized economies in their homelands than their Southern and Eastern counterparts. Of course, the similarities between the "old" immigrants and the early citizens of the American republic in no way guaranteed the immediate acceptance of the American public; the nativist Know-Nothing movement of the 1850s is but one example of the pushback against "old" immigration. However, I argue that the American reaction to "new" immigration was more comprehensive, pointed, and perhaps more severe than the reaction to "old" immigration on account of increased legislation regarding immigration policy, education policy, and labor law.

The ways in which Americans reacted to and acted upon "new" immigration were multitudinous – comprised of many, often rival, voices and actors. Native-born Americans responded to both individual immigrant groups and the "immigration question" at large. Importantly, this response was an explicit one: the sheer amount of new immigrants entering the United States was a phenomenon that no one could ignore, and many politicians, writers, social workers, and business owners took it upon themselves to engage with new immigrants and, critically, attempt to influence the manner in which the new immigrants settled and acted in their new home. The fundamental catalyst of the broad American initiative to answer the "immigrant question" was the ways native-born Americans *perceived* 1) who the new immigrants were and 2) the lands from which the immigrants emigrated from. I use the word "perceived" because there was, unsurprisingly, a gap between American conceptions of new immigrants and their homelands and the *reality* of who the new immigrants were and what their homelands were like. Native-born Americans witnessed certain common traits within the new immigrants which,

compared to those ascribed to the old immigrants, were judged as inferior: "Standards of living among [new immigrants] were decidedly lower, illiteracy rates ran high, experience with self-government was practically nil…Very few had the common background of Protestant Christianity…."[37]

And so, the "immigrant question" – *what shall we do with these newcomers* – gained national attention. Should we assimilate these immigrants into Anglo-Saxon American life? If so, what is the best way to assimilate them? Are they even capable of assimilating? Do we let the immigrants speak their own language and form their own communities? Should we try to learn from these immigrants, mutually sharing and adapting our sociocultural identities? Should we approach each immigrant group differently, or do we follow a general plan of action? Should we continue to even allow these immigrants to keep pouring in? And if we do, what do we as native-born American citizens stand to lose? Such questions festered in native-born American minds in the wake of new immigration.

We can better understand the American response to new immigration by recognizing that the "immigrant question" was a critical impetus for a broader discussion of American identity. The period of mass new immigration was also a period during which native-born Americans attempted to reevaluate and define what it meant to *be* an American. A clear definition of "proper" American attitudes, habits, characteristics, and citizenship would serve as a measure for whether or not an immigrant or a group of immigrants should or could be accepted into American society and better inform the ways in which immigrant groups should be handled. In

[37] Hartmann, *The Movement to Americanize the Immigrant,* 14-16.

effect, this moment represented a recalibration of the margins of American society and the structure of the American social order.

American nativism was one of the many significant and influential attitudes that responded to the immigrant question. As previously mentioned, American nativism was not a new phenomenon. In the 1750s, Benjamin Franklin lamented the influx of German immigrants into Pennsylvania, stating: "'…those who came hither are generally the most stupid of their own nation…Not being used to liberty, they know not how to make modest use of it.'"[38] Here, we can see an early instance of a trend that would continue to pervade nativist rhetoric throughout American history: the sentiment that foreigners of a low socioeconomic status pose a threat to the American republic. That which makes the United States exceptional – its system of government, economic ambition rooted in the Protestant ethic, its dedication to liberty – was believed to be in jeopardy because of the presence 'unadjusted and backward' immigrants. Central to nativist ideology is an unwavering sense of nationalism that is contoured by what or who it excludes; the values and beliefs of nativist nationalism cannot exist without a fundamental demarcation of who *represents* and who *threatens* said values. Exclusion and a national mythos are two sides of the same coin when it comes to nativist ideology. In 1855, a pamphlet of the nativist "American Party" provided the party's mission statement: "The grand work of the American Party is the principle of nationality…we must do something to protect and vindicate it. If we do not it will be destroyed."[39] American nativism is not just an ideology hell-bent on promoting bigotry. Instead, American nativism reflected anxieties felt by those who believed themselves to be "true citizens" of the United States – anxieties that were responses to the

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[38] Benjamin Franklin quoted in Hing, Bill. *To Be An American: Cultural Pluralism and the Rhetoric of Assimilation. (*New York: New York University Press, 1997), 14.
[39] Quoted in Sister M. Evangeline Thomas, *Nativism in the Old North-West, 1850-1860.* (Washington, 1936), 151.

presence of internal minority groups. Members of the American Party could very well have very different issues with different sets of foreigners, but all of these problems are uniformly painted as the result of the "Un-American" qualities and behaviors of foreigners. Indeed, the central project of American nativists was to agitate against what they believed to be *un-American* rather than fighting for what they believed was *American.*[40] American nativists, therefore, held a strictly restrictionist view towards immigration policy and disagreed with policies of assimilation or pluralism because they believed that immigrants possessed un-American loyalties that could only be viewed as a threat.[41]

The nativist camp also included eugenicists who attempted to scientifically prove the inferiority and superiority of certain races. Madison Grant's *Passing of the Great Race* was a popular eugenics text that argued that people of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic stock were racially superior, but also warned that this superiority was under threat because of mass immigration. Carl Brigham was a eugenicist at Princeton University who, after giving a sample of Polish immigrants literacy tests, concluded that Polish people were naturally less intelligent than Anglo-Saxon stock. Ironically, Carl Brigham was also the inventor of the SAT: the standardized college admission test used by most schools today.[42]

On the other side of the spectrum concerning the immigrant question were the "Welcomers" – those who accepted the arrival of immigrants. Cultural pluralism was one of the attitudes held by the welcomers: an ideology that arose around the turn of the twentieth century. Its adherents – such as philosophers John Dewey and Horace Kallen – believed that if the United

[40] John Higham. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925.* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 4.
[41] Ibid, 5.

States was to uphold its democratic values, then it must accept all types of immigrants and allow those immigrants to self-develop and autonomously participate in the democratic life of the country. They believed that the cultural distinctiveness of immigrant groups was the very reason immigrants would benefit American democracy because of the richness and depth that it would add to American democratic life. As John Dewey wrote: "'I never did care for the melting pot metaphor, but genuine assimilation to one another – not to Anglo-Saxondom – seems to be essential to an America. That each cultural section should maintain its distinctive literary and artistic traditions seems to be most desirable, but in order that is might have the more to contribute to others.'"[43] Cultural Pluralism of the early twentieth century was an ideology of acculturation: the process in which immigrants and natives retain their most of their respective cultural distinctness while mutually adopting new cultural characteristics through social contact sans coercion by the host society. The nation-state would simply serve as the common ground upon which multicultural exchange between peoples would take place. For the cultural pluralists, the answer to *what does it mean to be American* was not static; to be American was to participate in social, democratic life within the borders of the United States.

The second major group of welcomers were the Americanizers. To this group belonged Progressive social reformers such as Florence Kelley, Edith Abbott, and Sophonisba Breckinridge, as well as supporters of the "melting pot" theory such as playwright Israel Zangwill who coined the term in the early twentieth century. Now, the melting pot theory of assimilation and the americanization program of Progressive social reformers bore similarities and differences. The melting pot theory stressed a timeline which predicted that over time and

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[43] John Dewey quoted in J. Christopher Eisele. "John Dewey and the Immigrants." *History of Education Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1975): 71.

through intermarriage, the multitude of races and ethnicities in the United States would disappear and form a single "great race."[44] The Progressives, on the other hand, firmly supported institutions that would expedite the assimilation of immigrants into American culture. In other words, Progressive social reformers believed that the "Americanization" of new immigrants would not only benefit the state of American democracy, but also help new immigrants adjust to and familiarize themselves with the American social, economic, and political landscape. Progressive social reformers were keen agitators. In 1883, members of the National Child Labor Committee successfully lobbied the Illinois legislature to pass Illinois' first anti-child labor law. Six years later, the same group of reformers succeeded in passing a compulsory education law after witnessing the ineffectiveness of the previous law's ability to transition children from working to receiving an education.[45] Progressive political activism shows us that Progressive social reformers of the turn of the twentieth century not only understood the importance of political action in bringing about social change, but also the fact that Progressive social reformers did not hesitate to expand state authority over the lives of the people they were claiming to be trying to help.

As we shall see, the Progressive push for compulsory public education was an attempt to expand the state apparatus into a sector of American life that was traditionally in the domain of a child's parents, namely: the ability to make the decision of whether or not a child will go to school or to work. But the expansion of state-sponsored education was not the only instance wherein Progressive reformers sought to expand state power. Historian Gary Gerstle has pointed out that, in the wake of rapid industrialization around the turn of the twentieth century, "Liberal

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[44] Isaac Berkson. *Theories of Americanization: A Critical Study.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1920), 73.
[45] Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge. *Truancy and Non-Attendance in the Chicago Schools.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1917), 35

reformers began arguing that corporations were occluding individual opportunity for the masses and that a regulatory state was now necessary to restore faith in America or in what liberal intellectual Herbert Croly called 'the promise of American life.'"[46] In short, both Progressive social reformers and supporters of the melting pot theory (and those who overlapped both of these parties) possessed their own sense of nationalism that was distinct from, though in many ways similar to, the nationalism professed by American nativists. Gerstle distinguished between the two forms of nationalism; He terms the Progressive brand of nationalism "civic nationalism" and nativist nationalism as "racial nationalism."[47] Civic nationalism, in its ideal form, resisted a racial component to its conception of the American promise – it was a secular ideal that envisioned the United States as providing opportunity to all. Racial nationalism, on the other hand, refered to the nativist nationalism previously discussed in this chapter. American racial nationalism found its roots in the idea that the United States is an Anglo-Saxon nation, built by, and for the benefit of, Anglo-Saxon Americans.[48] But let us consider the similarities between these two conceptions of nationalism because a discussion of what bound the two nationalisms together helps us contextualize political movements and governmental policies that came to life during the period in question.

Sophonisba Breckinridge was a Progressive social reformer who was active in Chicago at the turn of the twentieth century. Breckinridge was the first woman to receive a Doctorate of Philosophy in political science and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Chicago. With Edith Abbott, another Chicago Progressive, Breckinridge authored an expansive study of the history of

[46] Gary Gerstle. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 7.
[47] Ibid, 4.
[48] Ibid, 6.

public education in Chicago and the truancy issues the Chicago school system faced. The book, titled *Truancy and Non-Attendance in the Chicago Schools,* approaches the issue of immigrant assimilation as one that stems from the fact that, for many new immigrants, the idea of formal education was foreign: "Coming from the most impoverished countries of Europe, where free education is unknown, the parents do not easily understand that school attendance is not only free but compulsory…."[49]

Abbott and Breckinridge belonged to a school of educational philosophy that dated back to the beginnings of American mass education in the mid-nineteenth century. These figures were heavily concerned with the role of the educator within the body politic, believing that teachers should be regarded as professionals and took steps to "professionalize" the teaching force. In the words of John Dewey: "This principle [of democracy] applies with peculiar force to the administration of school systems. Every teacher should have some regular organic way in which he can, directly or through representatives democratically chosen, participate in the formation of the controlling aims, methods, and materials of his school."[50] Evidently, Dewey was troubled by the lack of autonomy teachers had within their workplace – an issue that not only affected teachers' professional standing, but also impeded the progress the Unites States' education system and democratic vitality. Dewey was not alone in his worry. Margaret Haley, a school teacher and one of the founding figures of the Chicago Teacher Federation (CTF), addressed the same issue in 1904 in a speech to members of the National Education Association, stating: "'Unless teachers could devise as well as execute what went on in their classrooms, the school would not model the democracy they were meant to serve… and the teachers would remain

[49] Abbott and Breckinridge, *Truancy and Non-Attendance,* 123.
[50] John Dewey. "John Dewey Discusses Democracy and Education." *The Clearing House* 11, no. 8 (1937): 499.

oppressed workers rather than professionals for whom the classroom was a place to model workplace democracy.'"[51]

The ideas expressed by these thinkers were nothing new; these educators were heirs to a philosophy of education that dated back to the beginnings of mass education in the United States. Horace Mann – an early influential proponent of universal education in the mid-nineteenth century – made clear his understanding of the purpose of mass education: to teach democracy. Mann contended that "'A republican form of government, without intelligence in the people, must be, on a vast scale, what a mad-house, without superintendent or keepers, would be, on a small one….'"[52] From the very beginnings of public schooling in the United States, educators were expected to bear the responsibility of maintaining and cultivating the health of American democracy. Unlike the educational minds of the *fin de siècle,* however, Mann believed that schoolteacher autonomy over their workplace should be limited and that a supervisory school committee was necessary to make sure that teachers remained "custodians and models of virtue" and not models of an activist democracy.[53] Thus, ever since the early years of American public education, there existed a dichotomy between educators and administrators, with the latter having authority over the former and their workplace.

This philosophy was based on the idea that the public school is the primary instrument with which a nation can cultivate a healthy citizenry that is conscious of the fundamental values and traditions of American life. Abbott and Breckinridge did not mince words when they

[51] Margaret Haley, quoted in James W. Fraser. "Agents of Democracy: Urban Elementary School Teachers and the Conditions of Teaching" in *American Teachers: Histories of a Profession at Work.* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 129
[52] Horace Mann, quoted in James W. Fraser. "Agents of Democracy: Urban Elementary School Teachers and the Conditions of Teaching", 120
[53] Ibid, 121

highlighted how this philosophy applies to the immigrant child: "… [immigrant] children are to be trained for a civic life that has grown out of American experience and Anglo-Saxon tradition, and for an industrial life based on new world ideas of industrial organization."[54] In this statement, "American" and "Anglo-Saxon" are used interchangeably, evidence of a belief shared with racial nationalists, namely, that "Americanism" is a product of Anglo-Saxondom. And the setting wherein immigrant children should be educated is one that will inculcate the children with Anglo-Saxon virtues, as was believed to be necessary to maintaining the health of the United States.

In Illinois, the politics of education produced a heated fight between Progressive organizers and religious leaders over the details of compulsory education legislation: whether or not children might only attend public schools; whether or not foreign languages should be taught in the schools; what sort of professional standards teachers should be held to. For context, I will briefly lay out the history of education legislation in Illinois. In 1825, Illinois passed its first education bill: "An Act Providing for the Establishment of Free Schools," which established Illinois' first common school system, "…open and free to every class of white citizens…."[55] In 1835, the Illinois legislature passed "An Act Relating to Schools in Township Thirty-nine North, Range Fourteen East," which established the Chicago Public School system.[56] In 1855, the legislature passed "An Act to Establish and Maintain a System of Free Schools," which mandated property taxes to be used as school funding, with each township allowed to decide how much property tax revenue should be used for their respective school systems once a year.[57] In

[54] Ibid, 266.
[55] Abbott and Breckinridge, *Truancy,* 431.
[56] Ibid, 435.
[57] Ibid, 437.

1883, Illinois' first compulsory education bill was passed, but was ineffective in raising school enrollment. The passage of the 1889 Compulsory education bill marked the beginning of disputes between Progressive reformers and religious authorities. This was because the 1889 act specified that the compulsory mandate could be met at any institution that offered instruction in English exclusively. Under pressure from Catholic priests, another education act was passed in 1893 that omitted the English-only restriction.[58] Members of the Hull-House group, such as Grace and Edith Abbott, then endeavored to undercut parochial schools by agitating for Chicago's parochial schools to be put under the supervision of the board of education. This was done because the Progressive agitators knew that many teachers in the parochial schools did not meet state qualifications. So, putting the parochial schools' under the board's supervision, Progressive reformers could simultaneously deal a blow to the success of the parochial schools while also reinforcing the professionalization of teachers. This effort also failed because of Catholic and Lutheran church leaders claiming that such supervision violated the right to freedom of religion.[59]

Anti-Catholic sentiment was yet another common ground shared between Progressive reformers and anti-immigrant nativists. The overwhelmingly Protestant makeup of the native-born American population starkly contrasted the largely Catholic new immigrants. To American nativists, Catholic immigrants were perceived as being doubly disloyal to the United States because of their allegiance to the Pope as well as their homeland. "Anti-Popist" sentiments dated back to the mass Irish migration of the 1830s and 1840s, and continued well through the era of new immigration.[60] For the Progressive reformers, the Catholic Church was a formidable

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[58] Lissak. *Pluralism and Progressives,* 51.
[59] Ibid, 52.
[60] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 28.

obstacle against Progressive efforts to expand public schools, mainly because of the common practice of parishes running their own parochial schools that better fit the needs of Catholics in the United States. However, it was not the Irish Catholics presenting this obstacle; Irish bishops, such as Archbishop Mundelein, were in favor of Americanizing Italian and Polish Catholics, among others, arguing that both parochial and public schools should be taught in English exclusively.[61] As educational theorist Isaac Berkson wrote in 1920: "The Catholics have (1) consistently maintained that the state schools do not serve their needs and that only the parochial school is adequate and (2) generally held that parents who send their children to parochial schools should be exempted from taxation for the support of public schools."[62] As such, if the public schools were believed to be the primary organ working to assimilate new immigrants, then Catholic parochial schools, especially in the ethnic parishes, were the direct counterforce to Progressive assimilationist efforts. Antipathy towards and anxiety over the Catholic parochial school system ran so deep that during a veterans' reunion event in 1875, then-President Ulysses S. Grant stated that growing Catholic influence in education put the public education system in jeopardy, and went so far as to say that if such a trend continues, the United States would plunge into another civil war.[63] The tension between Catholics and Protestants during the era of new immigration was not a theological dispute. Rather, the Catholic-Protestant dispute represented a social, political, and cultural tug-of-war over who would be the dominant authority over new immigrants. Catholic parochial schools posed a threat to both Progressive agitation for public education, but also American Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony as a whole. This educational dispute reached its climax when the Supreme Court of the United States ruled on the cases *Meyer*

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[61] Daniel Buczek. "Equality of Right: Polish American Bishops in the American Hierarchy?" *Polish American Studies* 62, no. 1 (2005): 5-28.
[62] Berkson, *Theories of Americanization,* 153.
[63] Higham, *Strangers in the Land,* 29.

v. Nebraska (1923) and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925). Taken together, the Supreme Court struck down laws in Nebraska and Oregon that barred foreign language instruction in public schools and mandated that all elementary school students to attend a public school.[64] Barbara Woodhouse has argued that these cases represented a choice between state and familial/patriarchal authority. The ability to choose what kind of school one's child went to was traditionally the prerogative of the parent, and state-mandated public school attendance would have eliminated this longstanding component of parental authority. Owing to the conservative makeup of the Lochner court, parental authority was preserved. Had the court swayed in the opposite direction, the history of American compulsory education would have been dramatically different. These cases, importantly, reaffirmed the legality of ethnic parochial education and threw a wrench into the pro-public education efforts of Progressive reformers because after these cases, reformers could no longer agitate for either English-only instruction in the parochial schools or for mandatory public school attendance.

Instances of nativist scorn towards new immigrants and the Progressive push for compulsory state education were active responses to anxieties felt by native-born white Americans. Nativists often voted for political candidates who favored immigration restrictions because of the threat that cheap immigrant labor posed to Native-born American job security; to this end, one New Yorker wrote in 1881: "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."[65] Along a similar vein, the poor immigrant presented a challenge to social reformers. Immigrant poverty, crime, and illiteracy were perceived as ills that needed to be

[64] Barbara Bennett Woodhouse. "Who Owns the Child? Meyer and Pierce and the Child as Property." *William and Mary Law Review* 33, no. 4 (1992), 995-1122.
[65]Quoted in Higham, *Strangers In The Land,* 38.

corrected – agitating for policies that would transfer the immigrant child from the workplace to the classroom served to buffer against immigrant ills brought over from the old world. Here, I am not arguing that wanting to provide universal education is inherently wrong – my personal beliefs are quite the opposite. Rather, I wish to bring attention to the paternalistic nature of Progressive reform. Well-meaning as they were, Progressive reformers were acting upon a need or duty that was arose from the reformers themselves; it was not a response to immigrants pleading for help with their adjustment in the new land. Thus, it can be surmised that Progressive social reformers – the majority of whom were white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, native-born, middle class Americans – were conscious of their position in the sociocultural hierarchy of American society. In essence, Progressive social reformers were self-appointed guardians of the poor and the foreign. Abbott and Breckinridge relay this sentiment clearly: “From the point of view of the American state, the great problem is to help these people (immigrants) and their children to become intelligent and useful citizens in the shortest possible time….”[66] There is abundant evidence of Progressive social reformers attempting to forge an authentic partnership with the immigrants of Chicago, with Jane Addams’s Hull-House settlement being a prime example.[67] However, the early Americanization movement in Illinois embodied within the agitation for, and passing of, compulsory education laws that prioritized public education over private contradicted professed Progressive values of progress, democracy, and liberty. The significant difference between Progressive Americanization reformers and American nativists was the fact that the Progressives believed that, given the proper conditions and resources, new immigrants could be assimilated into American society and not weigh down the progress of the

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[66] Abbott and Breckinridge, *Truancy and Non-Attendance,* 265.
[67] Shannon Sullivan. "Reciprocal Relations between Races: Jane Addams's Ambiguous Legacy." *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* 39, no. 1 (2003): 43-60.

Republic, whereas nativists maintained an outright belief that new immigrants were incapable of assimilation on account of their foreign loyalties which posed an existential threat to Americanism itself. Moreover, the Americanism of American nativists was mostly defined negatively, and its positive definition rested upon a claim to Anglo-Saxon lineage and professed loyalty to the United States. Progressive, “civic” nationalism possessed a more substantial positive definition, embracing “American” virtues of progress, liberty, democracy, and secularism. Progressive social reformers confidently took up the task of assimilating new immigrants into American culture – an effort that more or less sought to strip the majority of an immigrant’s ethnic identity. This confidence, however, began to wean as Progressive social reformers gradually came to recognize that new immigrants were not assimilating as quickly as the reformers hoped they would.

Chapter Three

When he is older, he will not suffer misery: Polish Education and National Self-Realization in Chicago

The arrival of Polish immigrants to the shores of New York City and their sojourn to Chicago was, understandably, a period of uncertainty – uncertainty that not only burdened the newcomers themselves, but the families that they left behind. Indeed, such is the experience of all immigrants throughout human history. Regardless of the tales and myths an immigrant might have heard in their homeland about their foreign destination, upon arrival, the immigrant was, and still is, tasked with familiarizing themselves with the people, laws, landscapes, language(s), and economic system of the new land.

This task has always been acutely more difficult for poorer immigrants who, amidst their frenzied endeavor to settle and find steady work as a measure to evade the clutches of hunger and desperation, lacked the time and resources necessary to comfortably acquaint themselves with all their new homes had to offer. It stands to reason, then, that for the new immigrant, the least-rocky avenue towards permanent settlement and attaining a modicum of security was the formation of, and attachment to, a migrant colony composed of people who, at the very least, spoke the same language. This was the avenue taken by most Polish immigrants in Chicago.

The Polish immigrants who arrived at Ellis Island went on to scatter across over thirty states. Most ended up settling in the industrial centers of the Great Lakes Basin, though about a third of Polish immigrants elected to live in rural communities. On average, male individuals would immigrate first, find work, and then send for their families to join them. Great numbers of

Poles settled in Buffalo, Detroit, and Chicago because of the employment opportunities these industrial centers offered.[68]

Overwhelmingly, the Polish immigrants of the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century had immigrated *za chlebem* – for bread. Chicago's *Polonia* (the beloved name of the Polish diaspora) was for these immigrants not only an amalgamation of predominantly Polish neighborhoods, but a necessary social, cultural, and economic institution that aided Polish immigrants in their struggle to find stable footing in the United States, to buttress the feelings of anomie and guilt that came with the decision to leave family back home, and, perhaps most importantly, provide a sense of community and identity that all members of *Polonia* could assume *and* define for themselves.

The aim of this chapter is to describe (1) the development of Polish parochial Catholic schools that preserved, relayed, and enriched the Polish community's conception of *Polskość* (Polishness) within the Chicago area and (2) intra-communal debates over the definition of Polishness and the effects of those debates. To this end, Polish-American educational institutions in Chicago will serve as the focal point of these developments because these institutions were direct examples of Polish immigrants exerting agency over the formation, and continued cultivation, of their *Polishness* – the sum total of the sociocultural traits, values, practices, and attitudes that, ideally, would be assumed and carried on by their children. Further, Polish-American educational institutions in Chicago, most notably the vast network of Polish parochial schools, were a reflection of the complex balancing act Polish immigrants had to undergo: the negotiation to determine which Old World cultural traits and values would ensure both the

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[68] Edward Kantowicz. *Polish-American Politics in Chicago: 1888-1940.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 6-13.

survival of their Polishness *and* their children's success in their adopted land. Of course, the development of Chicago's *Polonia* was in no way linear, but was marked by its own internal tensions, disagreements, and conflicts. As we will see, the question of Polish education in America was central to these debates within the community.

As discussed in the first chapter, up until the second half of the nineteenth century, the title of "Pole" was practically exclusive to the members of the upper classes: the gentry/nobility; the clergy; the small but educated middle class.[69] For Polish peasants, formal education was scarce, though not unheard of. In fact, in Russian Poland, "the [Russian] government allowed only Russian schools, but peasants would have little to do with them. For this reason illiteracy rates [among Poles] remained high even at the turn of the [twentieth] century."[70] Common to all three regions of partitioned Poland, however, was the dominant influence of the upper classes of Polish over formal education. In other words, the institutional settings wherein the Polish heritage, culture, and identity were being defined and preserved fell under the authority of a minority population of privileged Poles. As previously discussed, however, this authority was not monolithic. The history of serfdom in Poland had engendered a resentment within the Polish peasantry towards the Polish nobility, known as the *szlachta.* In all three partitions, members of the Polish nobility held governmental positions and, for the most part, continued to enjoy a high level of social status. That is to say, in the eyes of most Polish nobles, there was little incentive to involve themselves with and support the nationalist movements being carried out by the Polish intelligentsia, since any sort of internal revolt may have threatened the comfortable situation the nobility enjoyed. There were, of course, notable exceptions like Poland's most popular poet,

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[69] Majewski. *Traitors and True Poles*, 22

[70] Pacyga. *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago,* 120.

Adam Mickiewicz, who, despite being a member of the Polish nobility, was exiled to central Russia in 1824 for his involvement with a pro-Polish independence student organization.[71]

The Catholic Church, however, did indeed retain its sociocultural authority over the peasantry. Before they regarded themselves as Poles, most Polish peasants simply understood themselves to be Catholics who belonged to a given parish in a given region.[72] Over time, however, Protestant pressure from Prussia and Orthodox pressure from Russia led the Polish Roman Catholic clergy to begin to identify itself as a "Polish" enterprise. In a trickle-down process, the Catholic Church's adoption of "Polishness" wed the concept of being Polish to the spiritual lives of the Church's peasant congregations.[73] With the benefit of American civil liberties, the church's ability to provide a distinctly Polish education and edification was magnified.

It is important to note that while the Catholic Church was the dominant authority over the Polish peasantry, there existed other, though much smaller, populations within partitioned Poland who belonged do different religious denominations. The Jewish population in Poland was significant. However, by the nineteenth century, the majority of Polish Jews were not peasants. Rather, the Jews partook in the non-agricultural economy: "Polish Jews served the peasant's trading and banking needs. Living in towns and villages, they offered a number of business services to the local Christian community."[74] This trend was accentuated in Russian Poland because of the Russian Empire's policy of restricting Jews from being able to own land. The Polish peasantry, then, traditionally enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with the Polish

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[71] Kazimierz Wyka. "Mickiewicz, Adam Bernard," in *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* Vol. 20. (Cracow: Polish Academy of Learning, 1975), 656.
[72] Majewski. *Traitors and True Poles,* 21.
[7373] Pacyga, *Polish Immigrants*, 121.
[74] Pacyga. *Polish Immigrants,* 117.

Jewry. However, the religious, economic, and ethnic differences between the peasantry and the Jewry damaged the chances of the two groups coming together under the banner of a single nationality.

The influence of Protestant Poles over a Polish national identity, both in Poland and the United States, was slim because their higher living standards in Prussia which encouraged Polish Protestants to stay in Europe. The populace of partitioned Poland was indeed diverse – religiously, ethnically, and economically. But, the sheer numbers of the Polish Roman Catholic peasantry provided a basic view of what it meant to be Polish. Here, we can recognize that a proto-national Polish identity was already being defined in both positive and negative ways. That is to say, from the beginning, Polish culture and identity had distinct characteristics of its own, but these characteristics were in large part defined by who the peasants were and *who they were not.* Even during its embryonic stage, the Polish proto-nationalism had a substantial exclusionary nature.

The kaleidoscopic constitution of Polish society - divided by three foreign powers, antagonistic class structures, and provincial rather than national allegiances – was reproduced on a microcosmic scale in Chicago during the late nineteenth century. Poles of all social strata settled within the roughly 200 square miles of Chicago – an unprecedented concentration that expedited the development of an ethnically-conscious community. The erection of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in the Pulaski Park neighborhood in 1871 carried over the Catholic Church's centrality in the Polish communities of Chicago, as it was in the homeland. More importantly, St. Stanislaus Kostka Church founded a parochial school, offering instruction in Polish as well as English: "The [Polish] immigrant in America experienced 'an entire school of Polish patriotism.'…The patriot priest, the national parish, and parish schools (with curricul[a]

emphasizing Polish language, literature, history, and geography, and staffed by ethnically committed nuns) consolidated the consciousness of the immigrants' Polish origins…"[75] Indeed, the freedom of expression, of communal organization, and of self-education that the United States provided made for a ripe opportunity for Polish immigrants to use formal education as a route to their ethnogenesis.

Both the material conditions of peasant life in Poland and Roman Catholic ideology concerning the family were major formative components of the organization of the Polish peasant family. Polish immigrant settlement in Chicago led to both the restructuring *and* reaffirming certain characteristics of the Polish family. Significantly, the role and expectations of the child evolved as the Poles adjusted to American legal customs. Specifically, Polish immigrant parents had to react and adjust to a codified language of children's rights, compulsory education laws, and anti-child labor laws. Moreover, the child came to represent *Polonia's* continuity, or, at worst, its survival. By centering our discussion around the child of the Polish experience in the United States, we may reach a deeper understanding of the historical evolution of Polish culture and society post-emigration; the broad constellation of Polish American religious, fraternal, political, and family life came into focus on the question of the Polish child of immigrants.

The life of the Polish peasant child growing up in Europe on the family plot called for the child to begin working at a young age. Children were economic instruments expected to contribute to the family's workload as soon as they were physically able. More often than not, children did not know their own age – the maturity of a peasant boy was measured by his ability

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[75] Stanislaus Blejwas, "Polonia and Politics" in *Polish Americans and Their History: Community, Culture, and Politics.* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1996), 127

to work. Further, the very idea of "childhood" – an almost romantic portion of one's life prior to "adulthood," during which one "grows as a person" under the guidance and care of one's parents or guardians – lacked the ubiquity it enjoys today. Historian Susan Pearson has demonstrated that, at the turn of the twentieth century, working-class American natives and immigrants alike did not regard age as a biological fact: "…working-class understandings about a child's readiness for labor typically measured a boy or girl's perceived size and capacity as it intersected with a family's needs."[76] For Polish peasant immigrants in Chicago, this issue became very clear following the passing of the first anti-child labor law in Illinois in 1883, which forbid children from laboring before the age of fourteen. The law further specified that children between the ages of eight and fourteen had to attend school for at least a period of twelve weeks per year. However, the law failed to improve school attendance because of provisions stating that certain children might be excused from instruction by the board of education or school administrators. As a result, another bill was passed by the Illinois legislature in 1889. The 1889 law amended the 1883 law, extending mandatory school attendance to sixteen weeks per year, eight of which had to be consecutive. Critically, the new bill allowed for children to go to private schools approved by the board of education, so long as the private schools taught core subjects in English. Finally, the 1889 law provided funding for truancy officers in hopes of enforcing the new law. Immediately after the passage of the 1889 education law, newsletters printed in several languages, including Polish, were distributed to Chicagoans, informing them of the new policies. Another letter was sent to 171 private and parochial schools in Chicago asking for a list of the children enrolled at said schools. Only 32 schools replied.[77]

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[76] Susan Pearson. "'Age Ought To Be a Fact': the Campaign Against Child Labor and the Rise of the Birth Certificate." *Journal of American History*, vol. 101 (March, 2015): 1149,

[77] Abbott and Breckinridge. *Truancy and Non-attendance,* 53-60.

The period during which these laws were passed was, indeed, a transformative period for the Polish immigrant family. Of course, the effectiveness of the education/child labor laws only gradually gained momentum due to resistance from immigrants and Americans alike as well as the bureaucratic shortcomings of those who enforced the law. Nevertheless, in one way or another, the majority of Polish immigrants in Chicago for the first time had to come to terms with a state policy that compelled their children to attend school and deterred their children from being the economic instruments they had always been. Working class Polish immigrants in Chicago were forced to negotiate and somehow balance the demands of domestic economic life and the law. The decisions the parents made would not only affect their family income, but fundamentally determine, and likely alter, the traditional structure of the family unit. This juncture revealed the tension, and conflict, between parental authority and state authority – a tension central to, and formative of, the Polish sociocultural development and adjustment in America. And, for the leaders of Chicago's *Polonia* – the Catholic priests, newspaper editors, political activists, and heads of Polish fraternal organizations – the compulsory education laws were addressed in different ways, each hoping to push forward their respective agendas concerning the sociocultural trajectory of the Polish-American community.

During World War I, American Progressive educators/activists Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckinridge conducted a case study examining the rates and causes of truancy in a public school on the Northwest side of Chicago wherein 61 percent of the students were first and second-generation Poles. They discovered that, over a period of twelve weeks, an incredible 92 percent of students were absent for five or more days. Subsequently, the researchers visited the homes of the truant children in order to discover the reasons of their truancy. 78 percent of the families they visited were classified as "poor" or "very poor." In the home of two Polish students

who had been truant for several weeks, Abbott and Breckenridge discovered: "Two little Polish boys, Stanley, aged twelve, and Matthew, aged ten, were being kept at home alternately to care for a mother who was ill with tuberculosis."[78] Abbott and Breckenridge further discovered one of the biggest reasons for non-attendance was the children not having proper shoes, and that "In the vast majority of cases it was found that the children were absent with their parents' consent or at their parents' command."[79] The results of this study demonstrated the persistence of absolute parental authority over Polish children – a characteristic of the Polish family that continued to be a means of surviving situations of scarcity. More often than not, it seems, the decision to keep a child at home was not the result of an abject averseness to education or a stubborn prioritization of work over schooling, but rather a result of trying – often desperately – to deal with the difficulties of economic destitution.

Polish parochial schools provided an avenue by which Polish parents could satisfy the mandates of the state, their ever-growing desire to pass on the Polish cultural heritage and religion to their children, and the desire to maintain a close bond with their parish. Most importantly, instruction in a Polish Catholic parochial school was likely to reinforce the potency of parental authority over the child during a time when that authority was being threatened. An article in the Chicago Times, written by an unnamed author in 1878, remarked: "In the matter of education, the Poles of Chicago are not behind other nationalities. There is a school connected with St. Stanislaus church, taught by nuns, or "sisters" as they are uniformly called. Here, besides the usual branches that are taught in public schools instruction is given in the Polish language and literature."[80] As historian Dominic Pacyga has argued: "Polish schools became

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[78] Abbott and Breckenridge, *Truancy,* 118-133.
[79] Ibid, 136-147.
[80] "Poor Poles, They Find in America the Free Home Denied by Europe." *Chicago Times,* October 14th, 1878.

immediate successes, in part because they fit well into the tradition of Catholic Chicago" adding that "In the early years of immigration, the typical Polish child attended parochial schools until he or she received the sacraments of the Catholic church and then transferred to public schools until old enough to join the workforce…" – a trend that would falter as the parochial school system expanded.[81] Using the already well-established Irish and German Catholic schools as models, the Polish Catholic parochial schools blossomed – to the degree that in 1915, while the formerly-large student body of the Irish parish of St. Rose of Lima had severely contracted, several Polish school in the same neighborhood were experiencing overcrowding.[82] The success of the Polish parochial schools was further accented by the fact that, according to a 1911 study by the United States Immigration Commission, Poles, along with Slovaks, had the lowest rates of public school attendance in the country's urban centers; in 1910, only one percent of Polish children were attending Chicago public high schools.[83]

On the parochial side, there were nine Polish Catholic schools by 1893: St. Stanislaus Kostka's; St. Adalbert's; St. Casimir's; St. Hedwig's; St. Joseph's; St. Josephat's; St. Mary of Perpetual Help's; St. Mary of Immaculate Conception's; St. Michael Archangel's. Roughly 6000 pupils, male and female, were enrolled in these schools in 1893. St. Stanislaus Kostka's parochial school was then the largest Polish parochial school in the United States, itself boasting a population of 2,659 students. Curiously, the Kostka school only employed "…nine lay teachers and fourteen Notre Dame Sisters on its staff."[84] It is important to understand, however, that Polish immigration to Chicago peaked after 1900, and the figures of parochial school enrollment

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[81] Pacyga,. *Polish Immigrants and Industrial Chicago*, 145-146.
[82] Ibid.
[83] John Bodnar. "Immigration and modernization: The case of Slavic peasants in industrial America." Journal of Social History 10, no. 1 (1976): 48.
[84] "The Catholic Church in the United States: Polish Catholic Institutions in This Country," *Dziennik Chicagowski,* 18 March, 1893.

are therefore more substantive than those before 1900. By 1918, around 383,000 Poles lived in Chicago, and 35,909 Polish children attended the Polish parochial schools of Chicago.[85] By contrast, in 1920 roughly 300,000 students were enrolled in Chicago public schools out of a total city population of around 2,700,000 – roughly 2,300,000 of whom were not Polish.[86] By 1905, one newspaper announced that: "Proportionally, very few Polish parents send their kids to public school. They still believe that their children should first learn the Polish language…."[87] The popularity of parochial schools among the Polish population of Chicago rivalled the popularity of public schools among Chicago's non-Polish population. Polish school-age children were almost as likely to attend parochial schools as non-polish children were to go to public schools. Of course

The success of the Polish parochial schools did not go on without its fair share of criticisms, from native-born American critics and Polish-American critics alike. American critics, attempting to deal with the "immigrant problem" in America and the difficulties of trying to Americanize and assimilate European immigrants, strongly preferred the public school system to the ethnic parochial schools because of their belief that only the public schools could properly assimilate immigrants into American life. Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckenridge lamented "…the parochial school opposition…" that "…led to the omission of the requirement of compulsory instruction in English from the later compulsory laws," and concluded that the "…development of the bilingual schools…must be regarded as an educational and social misfortune."[88] Yet, Abbott and Breckinridge chose to ignore their own statistics.

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[85] Miecislaus Haiman. "The Poles of Chicago" in *Poles of Chicago, 1837-1937.* (Chicago: Polish Pageant, 1937), 6.
[86] Breckinridge and Abbott, *Truancy,* 448.
[87] "Growth of Parochial Schools." *Dziennik Chicagowski,* 7 September, 1905.
[88] Abbott and Breckenridge. *Truancy,* 68.

TABLE V

DISTRIBUTION OF CHILDREN IN CHICAGO SCHOOLS BETWEEN PUBLIC AND CATHOLIC PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS

YEAR*	NUMBER PER 1,000 SCHOOL CHILDREN	
	Public Schools	Catholic Parochial Schools
1897–98	809	153
1899–1900	803	157
1901– 2	792	169
1903– 4	778	182
1904– 5	773	187
1905– 6	768	183
1907– 8	762	199
1908– 9	755	204
1909–10	750	211
1910–11	749	212
1911–12	746	215
1912–13	747	215
1913–14	749	213

*As the enrolment for the separate Catholic schools was not given in 1906–7, it was impossible to compute the total enrolment, and was therefore necessary to omit from the table the figures for this year.

Figure 2: Distribution of Children in Chicago Schools between Public and Parochial schools[89]

[89] Ibid, 448.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF CHILDREN REPORTED TO TRUANT OFFICERS FOR INVESTIGATION AND NUMBER RETURNED TO SCHOOL*

Year	Investigations	Returns		
		Public Schools	Private Schools	Total
1889–90	17,463	8,363	1,436	9,799
1890–91	20,325	10,581	673	11,254
1891–92	12,906	7,157	435	7,592
1892–93	14,683	6,024	1,714	7,738
1893–94	8,375	3,025	202	3,227
1894–95	11,878	4,052	365	4,417
1895–96	13,121	5,710	210	5,920
1896–97	13,990	6,482	80	6,562
1897–98	16,596	9,143	101	9,244
1898–99	17,195	9,027	67	9,094
1899–1900	31,593	16,490	291	16,781
1900–1901	33,684	18,621	178	18,799
1901–2	33,002	18,411	174	18,585
1902–3	33,617	17,134	136	17,270
1903–4	36,516	21,611	237	21,848
1904–5	See explanation in text	25,247	350	25,597
1905–6		.... †	.... †	26,888
1906–7		30,014	1,052	31,066
1907–8		33,912	3,583	37,495
1908–9		38,122	8,362	46,484
1909–10		44,472	12,525	56,997
1910–11		48,770	12,601	61,371
1911–12		50,301	13,554	63,855‡
1912–13		.... †	.... †	59,696‡
1913–14		46,769	11,295	58,064‡

*It should be noted that these figures show not the number of children but the number of "returns" to school. One child may have been returned several times.

†Corresponding figures not published.

‡Does not include truants returned to school, since the returns to public and private schools are not given for absence due to truancy in these years.

Figure 3: Number of Truant Children Returned to School by Truant Officers[90]

They include a table showing the number of truant children returned to school each year from 1889 to 1914, divided between public and private schools. In 1900, the authors report that 18,621 truant children were returned to public schools by truant officers, compared to only 178 truant

[90] Ibid, 90.

children being returned to private schools.[91] And this enormous difference was not because there were substantially more public school students than private school students. Another table shows the distribution of children between public and parochial schools. This table shows that in 1900, roughly eighty percent of Chicago school children attended public schools and about seventeen percent attended Catholic parochial schools.[92] These statistics clearly indicate that truancy was substantially less common in parochial schools, and the authors' omission of that fact in their analysis highlights that the issue with the Catholic schools was that they posed a formidable challenge to the goals of the reformers. The statistics in Figure 2 also point to an increase in Chicago's Catholic population. Poles contributed to this increase, especially with the great Galician migration around the beginning of World War I. In a chapter titled "The Special Problem of the Immigrant Child," Abbott and Breckenridge firmly stated that: "It is to the public schools, obviously, that we must look for aid in teaching these great foreign groups not only the English language but the principles of government upon which our democracy is based."[93] The success of the parochial schools threatened American hegemony over education and, more importantly, the manufacturing of "proper" citizens.

Polish immigrants of a secular disposition also fiercely criticized the parochial school system. To understand the origin of such criticism, we must look back to the beliefs of Polish nationalist activists in partitioned Poland. As previously discussed, the Polish intelligentsia was primarily concerned with Polish independence and were often resistant and critical of the influence of the Catholic Church over Polish peasants. The rivalry between the clergy and the middle-class intelligentsia found its way to the United States. Polish historian Stanislaus Blejwas

[91] Ibid, 90.
[92] Ibid, 454.
[93] Ibid, 264.

summarized the schism within American *Polonia* as being divided into two camps: the "religionists" and the "nationalists." While both groups supported the idea of Polish independence and work towards raising ethnic consciousness in the United States, "The two groups differed over the definition of a Pole and over the objectives of Polonia." The nationalists believed that fighting for Polish independence should be the *primary* goal of the Polish community and believed that the Polish identity should be inclusive of people of different religious backgrounds. By contrast, the religionists – much more numerous than the nationalists – believed that a Pole must be Roman Catholic, "…and that the primary function of the community in America, organized around the Polish parish, was to maintain that identity."[94] This opposition was reflected most clearly by the two most successful Polish-American organizations: the Polish National Alliance (PNA) and the Polish Roman Catholic Union (PRCU), both founded in Chicago in the 1870s. Both of these organizations had their respective newspapers which consistently published editorials bashing the opposing side: "There was no consensus on just what that national identity entailed and demanded, and so the struggle for political independence and the consolidation of nationhood resulted in as much infighting as it did cooperation…writers reserved the bitterest criticism not for outside antagonists (Prussians, Russians, Irish priests, or American nativists, for example), but for the Poles accused of aiding and abetting them."[95] An unnamed author, writing for the secular newspaper *Dziennik Ludowy* (the People's Daily) in 1907, remarked: "The children of Polish workers should attend the public schools, schools from which they may benefit a great deal! If we wish the children not to blame us when they grow up we should forbid them from going to Polish parochial schools, schools which are infested with

[94] Blejwas, "Polonia and Politics," 123-124.
[95] Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles,* 16.

clerical bums, disseminating unworthiness."[96] On the other side, an author named F. Gora writing for the Catholic *Dziennik Chicagowski* (Chicago Daily) in 1893 described the daily activities of the St. Stanislaus Kostka parochial school, ending with a response to Polish critics of the school:

> "Dziennik Chicagoski printed and invitation to attend the examinations, extended to all those interested in the school, but, unfortunately, none of the critics of parochial schools were present. They call themselves patriots! Those who condemn our own schools and praise the schools of others – with no foundation whatever for their complaints – call themselves patriots. That is not patriotism...the children of these noisy critic-patriots, who attend public schools, can hardly say a few words in Polish, and those incorrectly."[97]

These editorials reflect the often callous antipathy that influential Polish Americans felt towards one another, with the issue of education being a common point of debate. Though, despite the internal argument over the definition and purpose of Polish patriotism, the very fact that the argument existed proved that Polish ethnic consciousness existed as well.

Ultimately, given the enrollment statistics already discussed, the "nationalist" camp was no match for the religionists regarding the matter of educating the Polish youth. The ancient ties between the Polish peasantry and the church laid a powerful foundation for the organization of Polish communities and granted the church dominant authority of the meaning of Polishness. The success of the parochial school system only served to perpetuate the non-inclusive definition of a Pole – a Pole must be a Roman Catholic. The Polish Roman Catholic Church in Chicago and the United States overall, through its various public institutions (newspapers, schools, church services, mutual aid organizations, etc.), devised and disseminated a roadmap for the proper

[96] "Attention! To What Kind of Schools Should We send Our Polish Children?" *Dziennik Ludowy,* September 4, 1907.
[97] F. Gora,. "A Visit to St. Stanislaus Kostka Parochial School." *Dziennik Chicagowski,* June 27, 1893.

adjustment of Polish immigrants. Finding a new life in the United States surely threatened the survival of traditional cultural customs, attitudes, and understandings, many of which were already Catholic in nature. The Polish Catholic Church in America protected new immigrants from that threat. For the most part, Polish immigrants did not assimilate – they acculturated enough to comfortably navigate American social and economic life. Their experience in their colonized homeland had groomed these immigrants to not only survive in the new world, but also to harness and cultivate their ethnic consciousness. It was not so much the lack of effectiveness of American educators and the public school system that, in the Polish case, caused the Americanization movement to fail. Rather, American cultural and state authority could in no way substitute or replace the authority of the Catholic Church over the lives of Polish immigrants.

As a final note, what of the Polish immigrant child? Polish parental involvement in the life of their children reached an all-time high after the parallel passing of compulsory education laws and anti-child labor laws. But the motivations for this involvement is in no way clear or homogenous. Of course, there were Polish immigrant parents who genuinely wished for their children to get an education – especially one that included a religious education necessary to receive the sacraments. In 1911, a Polish immigrant named Helena Dabrowska wrote to her family in Poland about her unruly son who refused to go to school: "…I gave Maniek away to a school for two years… I gave him away, dear sister, because he would not go to school and listen…When he is older, he will not suffer misery."[98] This quote is a perfect representation of how Polish immigrants came to recognize the value of education in the United States. Dabrowska had to send her child to a reformatory school, but understood that it was what was

[98] Quoted in William Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant*, 155-156.

best for her son. The Poles recognized their own suffering in both Europe and the homeland, and some viewed education, as Helena did, as a way to finally escape that cycle of suffering. The Poles' resistance to cultural whitewashing and Americanization was indeed admirable, and it is a testament the resilience and agency of the poor and the oppressed.

But at what cost did *Polonia* crystallize? On one hand, the Polish community in Chicago accepted the United States as their new home. One second generation Polish author wrote in the 1920s: "We, who are sons and daughters of the immigrant…have made nothing to conceal, we are loyal to our country, the United States, we have made our sacrifices and have done our full duty in the late war."[99]This article is evidence of the Polish-American community striking a balance between their ethnic identity and their being inhabitants of the United States. Indeed, the Polish community faced obstacles in their efforts to create their own Polish institutions in America. However, Polish-Americans understood that it was because of the United States and the political freedoms that it afforded that they were able to create such a distinct community in the first place. Furthermore, The Polish community in America, and the refusal of its members to return to Poland after World War I, also highlighted the peculiar phenomenon of separating identity from space. The Poles were able to be Polish in the United States – the fact that the Poles were not physically present in their homeland did not detract from Poles' abilities to engage in Polish cultural life. The Poles had their ethnic parishes, schools, fraternal organizations, and didn not need to return to Poland, which signals the extent of Polish-American acculturation.

In another letter written a few months earlier, Helena remarked: "You [her sister] say, 'beat!' In America you are not allowed to beat [your children]; [the authorities] can put you into

[99] "A Real National Danger" *Chicago Society News.*

a prison."[100] Could it be said, that Catholic education - which has always stressed honoring one's father and mother – allowed absolute parental authority to survive in Polish immigrant households and provided a deep, cultural excusal of child abuse? The question of the Polish immigrant child was critical to Poles' adjustment in America – but, it seems, the Polish immigrant child remained passive, with no authority of their own, completely at the mercy of their parents and pastors. Another consequence was the self-isolation of the community. In one survey conducted in Chicago in the late 1920s, several Poles were asked the question *what does the word "jew" mean to you?* One Pole heartily answered: "Everything that is not Polish is Jewish." Others responded in kind.[101] St. Michael's parish, located in the densely Polish neighborhood of South Chicago, did not allow inter-ethnic marriages or non-Polish pupils in its parochial school – a trend that was common in Chicago's *Polonia.*[102] On the topic of mixed marriages, one Pole wrote: "…the greatest enemy of the Catholic Church is the mixed marriage…Marrying one of another nationality, even if he or she be a Catholic, makes a person indifferent towards his own nationality and at the start one can be convinced that the children derived from such a marriage are lost to the Polish race."[103]

As the number of blacks in Chicago grew during the period of the Great Migration, blacks, too, became a target of Polish antipathy. Scholars have cited the competition for jobs as one of the sources of this antipathy. One incident in particular fanned the flames of Polish racism towards blacks. In 1893, Polish canal workers went on strike. Their employers responded by bringing in black workers to continue digging the canal as well as black strikebreakers. The

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[100] Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant,* 155.
[101] C Jozef Chalasinski. "Parafie Polskie w Ameryce" *Przeglad Sociologiczny* 3, no. ¾ (1935): 643.
[102] Ibid.
[103] "Mixed Marriages." *Narod Polski,* 25 January, 1905.

event ended in a bloody clash between Poles and black. Several Poles were killed, and the Polish press emphasized the fact that the strikebreakers were mostly black. Similar events unfolded during packinghouse strikes in the early twentieth century; immigrant strikers were pitted against black workers time and time again, deepening the divide between Poles and blacks.[104]

The community also embraced a heavily patriarchal worldview supported by the church. One Polish writer decried the suffragette movement because he believed that the movement led to an increase of women having their husbands arrested for domestic abuse: “[The suffragettes] incited the Polish women against their own husbands by teaching them about the privileges of women and American freedom.” The author goes on to depict the Polish men as innocent victims of the suffragettes who “…were the real accusers.”[105] All this goes to show that Chicago’s *Polonia* was itself guilty of its own oppressive tendencies – towards women, Jews, and, as we will see in the next chapter, Germans and Russians. Of course, the Poles are not the only group guilty of such tendencies, but the Poles did have their own history that produced and reinforced, such attitudes and behaviors. While native-born americanizers were engaged in policing and reforming immigrant communities, we see that the Polish-American community was also intent on forming and enforcing its own status quo.

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[104] Thaddeus Radzialowski. "The Competition for Jobs and Racial Stereotypes: Poles and Blacks in Chicago." *Polish American Studies* 33, no. 2 (1976): 5-18.
[105] “Why” *Polonia Magazine,* 21 December, 1916.

Chapter Four

The Great War and Its Aftermath: a Rebranding of Whiteness and Citizenship

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 caused seismic shifts in American social life despite the United States not formally entering the war until 1917. Immigration into the United States halted on account of German U-boats scouring the Atlantic Ocean. Nationalist feelings surged during wartime, engendering new sympathies and antipathies among the world's nations.

American nativism, with its emphasis on national loyalty, reappeared with a new vigor. The primary target of nationalist hostility were the German-Americans who felt the consequences of German Emperor Wilhelm II's decision to declare war in Europe.[106] The radical activities of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) international trade union and other socialist movements both in Europe and America also sparked the anxieties of Americans.[107] For the Poles, World War I was a moment of both hope and pressure.

On the one hand, World War I was an opportunity for the Polish diaspora to reclaim its old country's land after over a century of occupation after the war, with the Poles hoping to exert enough international influence to have a seat in post-war negotiations. On the other hand, Polish-Americans faced the pressures of American scrutiny, including formal Americanization programs, military recruitment, and subjected to investigations by the United States war department testing their loyalty to the United States. But the Poles faced another conundrum: the partitioning empires of Poland were divided between the two sides of the war, with Russia – the traditionally most-hated power – siding with the United States. As a result, many Polish-

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[106] MARK KUSS. "Hey Man! Watch Your Language: Treatment of Germans and German Americans in New Orleans during World War I." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 56, no. 2 (2015): 178-98.
[107] Peter Roberts. *The Problem of Americanization.* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1920), v.

Americans were suspicious of, or at least were not confident in, the hope that the United States would keep Polish interests in mind during peace talks.[108]

On a greater scale, however, World War I represented a crucial moment in Polish-American history. The outcomes of the War would go on to define Polish-American relations in the United States until World War II. More specifically, Polish-American support for the American war effort appeased American suspicious of ethnic disloyalty. Furthermore, Polish-American radicals represented an insignificant portion of the radical labor movement in the United States, owing to the largely conservative Catholic mindset of most Polish-Americans which also reinforced the United States' favorable view of the Poles.[109] Finally, the reestablishment of Poland as an independent nation-state did not result in Polish immigrants returning in large numbers to the homeland.[110]

In 1914, three years before the United States formally entered World War I, Poles in Chicago were already anticipating what the Great War might mean for the struggle for Polish independence – a foundational pillar of the national consciousness of the Polish diaspora. A closer look at Polish-American public opinion regarding the war reveals the way Polish-Americans framed the war, simultaneously attacking the members of other nations while bolstering a Polish national mythos: "In this war," wrote one Pole, "races will fight each other. Just as once on the fields of Grunwald the Slavic world, under the leadership of Poland, fought a battle for life or death with Germanism, so now will the Slavs stand together as a barrier before Germanism and will cry out, 'kill or die!'"[111] Here, the author made an appeal to the "golden

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[108] Jacobsen. *Special Sorrows*, 222-223.

[109] John Dewey. *Conditions Among the Poles in the United States: Confidential Report.* (Los Angeles: University of California Libraries, 1918).

[111] "War (Editorial)." *Dziennik Zwiazkowy,* 1 August, 1914.

age" of Polish history through their mentioning of the Battle of Grunwald, which took place in 1410 and resulted in a decisive victory for the Polish military against the Teutonic order. It should also be mentioned that this editorial appeared in the *Dziennik Zwiazkowy* (Polish Daily News): the press organ of the Polish National Alliance which, as noted earlier, maintained the struggle for Polish independence as its top priority. By conflating the Great War to the fifteenth century Polish-Teutonic War, the author evinces a sentiment that the Polish people are the subjects of an ancient struggle against Germanic peoples and the Great War was the newest iteration of said struggle – a clear call to action that was evidence of the extent to which American *Polonia's* national consciousness had grown.

This article, however, did not neglect the ancient Polish struggle against the Russian empire and thus reflected anxiety over the fact that two of the Polish nation's oldest oppressors were on opposite sides of the war. "Just as we wish the Slavs victory and the Germans absolute political annihilation," the author wrote, "so do we wish that Russia, in gaining the victory, become so weak as to give us a chance to settle the score with her."[112] Three days after the article was published, another writer described what had transpired at a "Polish meeting" that took place in Chicago: "…the arrangers of the meeting…burned on the stage a portrait of the Tsar and one issue of *Dziennik Narodowy* (Polish National Daily News)…."[113] Presumably, the particular newspaper was burned because it was an ultra-secular publication unpopular among Polish Catholics. The author goes on to rebuke the actions of the arrangers, calling them "childish" and warned that Polish-Americans would be seen as laughing stocks if they continued to burn Polish publications during public events. The author cautiously reprimanded his community by

[112] Ibid.
[113] "A Childish Prank." *Dziennik Zwiazkowy,* 4 August, 1914.

reminding members of Chicago's *Polonia* to remember how to act respectably amid the excitement of the unraveling of the Great War. This middle-class appeal to civility and respectability – typical of the members of the secular, though not entirely anticlerical Polish National Alliance intelligentsia – accurately represented the minority of Polish-Americans who rejected the authority of the Catholic Church and who endeavored to align themselves with American Progressives.[114] But, the author's cautioning also helps us partly understand why the secular, "nationalist" sect of *Polonia* was not successful in winning over the majority of Polish-Americans over the topic of education; during a moment of intense nationalistic passion, the author chose to paternalistically scold Polish-Americans for not acting appropriately, in effect implying that the Poles owe a debt to the United States and must therefore act as if they were guests in another's home.

The United States government, too, kept a watchful eye over domestic social affairs and increasingly supported nativist immigration policies aimed towards restriction. Significantly, the Americanization movement found a second wind from the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion that existed during World War I. Furthermore, the American government engaged in a dualistic campaign to win over white immigrants with state propaganda while simultaneously delegating researchers to measure the allegiance of individual immigrant groups to the United States Finally, the Americanization movement was supplanted by the passage of the Immigration Act of 1917, which cemented the restriction of immigration from the Asia-Pacific region and imposed a literacy test upon those seeking to come to the United States.[115]. Therefore, World War One marked an incredibly critical period in American immigration history because it witnessed the

[114] Lissak, . *Pluralism and Progressives,* 66.
[115] Albert E. Reitzel. "The Immigration Laws of the United States. An Outline." *Virginia Law Review* 32, no. 6 (1946): 1099-1162.

melding of Progressive Americanization efforts, nativist immigration restriction efforts, and the hyper-vigilance of the United States government over internal affairs during wartime. At the same time, the Polish-American response to the war reflected an adjacent effort to use the Great War for their own, though often rival, agendas. Above all, it was clear that the outcome of the war and its concurrent movements would go on to determine the future of American immigration; the outcome of World War I decided the which nations would be "winners and losers" of the military struggle, and within the United States, the War would likewise decide the "winners and losers" in the purview of American immigration policy.

With respect to the state of then-present Americanization efforts, writer Randolph Bourne wrote in 1916: "As the unpleasant truth has come upon us that assimilation in this country was proceeding on lines very different from those we had marked out for it, we found ourselves to blame those who were thwarting our prophecies."[116] Bourne keenly recognized the potent effect that the war had on making native-born Americans aware of the many ways in which previous and continuous efforts to assimilate the United States' immigrants, including the efforts discussed in my earlier chapters, had failed. Historian John F. McClymer adds: "War lent the Americanization crusade an urgency; because it was discovered in the midst of war, diversity smacked of disloyalty."[117] McClymer is right to emphasize the urgency that fueled the meteoric rise of nativist hostility during the Great War, but he fails to mention, for reasons unknown, the accusations of disloyalty in earlier American nativist discourse. The war certainly did not initially generate nativist suspicion towards the loyalty of immigrants. Rather, the War afforded the nativist creed of a homogenized "Americanism" greater influence in the political arena.

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[116] Randolph Bourne. "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly,* 118 (July 1916), 86-97.
[117] John F. McClymer "The Americanization Movement and the Education of the Foreign-Born Adult, 1914-1925." In *American Education and the European Immigrant: 1840-1940.* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 97.

Moreover, during World War I, the United States witnessed a synthesis of the efforts of Progressive "civic nationalists" and nativist "racial nationalists." At the federal level, both the Republican Party and Democratic Party adopted pro-Americanism platforms during the 1916 presidential election. During the election campaign, Theodore Roosevelt firmly stated he only wishes for the support of those citizens who were "…prepared to say that every citizen of this country has got to be pro-United States first, last, and all the time, and not pro-anything else at all."[118] Similarly, Progressive Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson persuaded the Democratic Party to announce that "The supreme issue" at hand was "the indivisibility and coherent strength of the nation" and accused ethnic organizations as being "subversive" due to their "advancement of the interest of a foreign power."[119] Americanization educational efforts found their footing at the federal level when the federal Bureau of Naturalization elected to coordinate a nationwide system of Americanization classes that targeted foreign-born adults. The effort had little success, evidenced by the overwhelming amount of immigrants who decided to stop attending Americanization courses post-enrollment.[120] The movement was also met with sharp criticism from immigrant communities. An article published in the *Narod Polski* Chicago-based, Polish-American newspaper accused "American chauvinists" as only being able to comprehend Americanism as "only one language, unity of thought and opinion, one sympathy and antipathy," and called the effort a "foolish Americanization, similar to the Prussian system of denationalization."[121] As we have seen, the Poles were no strangers to state policies of nationalist

[118] Theodore Roosevelt. "Roosevelt or Hughes," *Literary Digest,* 52 (April 15, 1916), 1043.
[119] Representatives of the Democratic Party. "Democratic Campaign Issues," *Literary Digest,* 52 (July 1, 1916), 4.
[120] McClymer, "The Americanization Movement" in *American Education and the European Immigrant,* 103.
[121] Unknown Author. Article in *Narod Polski,* Feb. 5, 1919. Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey, WPA (Ill.) Project 30275, reel 55.

indoctrination on account of their previous experience with similar policies in the Russian and Prussian empires.

Nevertheless, despite the pressure and insult that was felt from the party platforms and the Americanization movement, Poles did not significantly withhold their support for the American war effort or President Wilson for that matter. In an unprecedented move, the leaders of the rival Polish National Alliance and Polish Roman Catholic Union coauthored a telegram to President Wilson in 1916 thanking the President for sending humanitarian aid to Polish victims of the war: "…believing that we express the sentiments of four million of our co-residents here, take this means of expressing to you, Mr. President, our profound gratitude and deep appreciation of your prompt and generous conduct."[122] Publicly, Wilson took time to appeal to immigrants who were eager to be naturalized. Wilson addressed a group of recently-naturalized immigrants in Philadelphia in 1915 and claimed that "This is the only country in the world which experiences this constant and repeated rebirth…this country is constantly drinking strength out of new sources by the voluntary association with it of great bodies of strong men and forward-looking women out of other lands."[123] Throughout the war, Poles in the United States continued to voice their support for the Wilson administration, especially after Wilson's decision to veto the Immigration Act of 1917. As one Pole editorialized in an article titled "How Should Poles Vote?" in the newpaper *Polonia*: "…the Republican Party is a party of the capitalists oppressing and exploiting the workingman, while the Democratic Party is the party of progress and freedom…the Democratic Party was never prejudiced against the citizens of Polish

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[122] K.Zychlinski, and Peter Rostenkowski. "Telegram of Thanks to President Wilson for His Part in the Cause of Polish Day," *Narod Polski* (Jan. 5, 1916).
[123] Woodrow Wilson. "Address at Convention Hall, Philadelphia, May 10, 1915," *Woodrow Wilson, Franklin K. Lane, Theodore Roosevelt on Americanism* (Washington D.C: published by the Americanization Department of the United States, 1919), 1.

descent…."[124] However, the Unites States government did not retract their suspicions about the Poles.

In 1917, the Military Intelligence Bureau of the Unites States called upon John Dewey to write a report compiling "…any information in [his] possession on the conditions among the Poles in this country."[125] The report was published after the war had ended. Dewey explained that the purpose of his research, which he conducted in Polish communities in Detroit and Philadelphia, was to "ascertain forces and conditions which operate against the development of a free and democratic life among the [Poles]."[126] Four other researchers were likewise tasked with investigating other aspects of the Polish community, including educational conditions, the conditions of the church, and intellectual activity. Importantly, Dewey does not at any point in the 86 page report indicate that the purpose of the study was to inform the Unites States Government of the likelihood of Polish communities being an internal threat to the American war effort. However, given that this document was confidential and commissioned by the Unites States War Department, we can surmise the government's motivation for this inquiry. Dewey describes the fact that "Considerably less than 10 percent of the Poles belong to any organization having a national membership of any kind," which, in turn, allowed the leaders of Polish organizations to "…manipulate the Poles as a whole and profess to speak in their name," resulting in "The history of Polish organizations in this country" presenting "a series of secessions, alliances, splits, and fights within organizations."[127] Dewey concluded his report by assuring the War Department that "…the United States is the one country which is universally

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[124] "How Should Poles Vote?" *Polonia* 11, no. 44 (Nov. 2, 1916).
[125] Dewey,. *Conditions Among the Poles in the United States,* 1.
[126] Ibid, 2.
[127] Ibid, 30-31.

regarded as disinterested and the one country therefore which would unqualifiedly win and retain the confidence of Poles in Europe."[128] In effect, Dewey's report supported the idea that the Poles in the United States were too unorganized to pose any threat to the war effort, or to negotiations after the war. And the large amount of Polish recruits in the American military, numbering over 200,000, supported this claim further. Wilson's inclusion of Polish independence in his Fourteen Points signified Wilson's awareness of, and sympathy towards, the Poles of both Europe and the United States – but the same sympathy was not awarded to other stateless peoples in Europe, like Jews.

Now, if we take into consideration the Polish-American efforts to resist Americanization previously discussed in this piece, how then are we to understand the treatment of Polish-Americans in the aftermath of World War I? In particular, how best can we reread the Immigration Act of 1924 in a way that may explain (1) the Act's ban on non-white immigration, (2) the Act's limits on Southern and Eastern European immigration, and (3) the creation and enforcement of a consular system of immigration? How do we square the opposing realities of Polish immigrants being incorporated into a system of naturalization and immigration that was predicated upon the preservation of whiteness while simultaneously heavily limiting future Polish immigration? I submit that those who supported restrictionist immigration policies had to weigh what they perceived to be the benefits and pitfalls of America's many immigrant groups. The Polish case was an acute example of a group that, in the eyes of the native-born American public, resisted assimilation and constituted a cheap labor force which threatened American

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[128] Dewey, *Conditions Among the Poles,* 80.

workers, while also being a group that was physically white, shared similar disdain for non-white groups in the United States, and demonstrated loyalty to the United States during the Great War.

The question *what does it mean to be an American* was temporarily yet forcefully answered by the Immigration Act of 1924. Interestingly, the answer to said question was based on a new set of qualifications for those who wished to *become* American, or, in the very least, become residents of the United States. We must also remember that the Immigration Act of 1924 was, in effect, an amalgamation of previous immigration legislation dating back to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. There exists a linear progression of American immigration policy that led to the omnibus statute that was the Immigration Act of 1924. The constitutionality of the Chinese Exclusion Act was upheld in 1889 in the case *Chae Chan Ping v. United States*. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the government, stating that the power to exclude foreigners is a natural right of the government as it is an issue of state sovereignty and added that the court will no longer hear cases on the state's ability to exclude foreigners. The significance of this decision cannot be emphasized enough. *Ping v. U.S* cemented the idea that the United States government has *absolute authority* over its immigration policy. In 1907, the United States government and the Empire of Japan made a "Gentleman's Agreement" to not restrict Japanese immigration to the United States so long as Japan restricted its citizens from immigrating to the United States. Unsurprisingly, the agreement was nullified by the Immigration Act of 1924 which barred all immigration from the Asia-Pacific region, codifying and ratcheting up the previous informal agreement. The Immigration Act of 1917 had reaffirmed the Gentlemen's Agreement, but nevertheless excluded immigration from the Middle East and South Asia. The imposition of a literacy test for prospective immigrants symbolized an urge to buffer against another mass immigration of majority-uneducated immigrants and apply a measure of intellectual fitness

required for American citizenship. The Act also banned: alcoholics' criminals; diseased persons; the mentally ill; radicals; prostitutes; epileptics.[129] As previously stated, President Wilson vetoed the bill, but it was overridden by congress two months later. The majority consensus backing the bill was replayed during the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, for which 72 percent of the Senate and 71 percent of the House of Representatives voted "Yea." The Immigration Act of 1924, utilizing the absolute power the government possessed over immigration policy, imposed heavy quotas on Southern and Eastern European migration. Moreover, the Act of 1924 restructured the process of immigration to the United States by delegating the work of granting immigrants entry to consular offices located abroad. No longer was Ellis Island the door to America and American citizenship; after 1924, one was not even guaranteed the ability to see the United States, for they had to be accepted in beforehand.

Where do the Poles fit into this picture? It has been argued that the primary cause of the Act of 1924 was the upsurge in domestic radical activity. But, given what we know about the general history of Poles in the United States, what would warrant a quota on Polish immigration? Poles fought nobly in the Great War, showed a willingness to educate their stock, and did not have a strong organized presence, especially in radical labor unions. I suggest that Polish self-determination in the United States, particularly with the case of the parochial schools, and the success it witnessed in adapting Old World values and structures to the world of Chicago, posed a threat not to the nativists who rejected them from the beginning, but rather to the influential Progressive advocates of Americanization who defined a generation of political life. The education organizers of Chicago recognized the failure of their public school initiative, and

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[129] Helen F. Eckerson. "Immigration and National Origins." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*367 (1966): 4-14.

decried the Polish community as being self-isolationist. In short, the assimilation of the Polish immigrant *failed.* Ironically, at the same time, the nativist claim that immigrants could not be absorbed into American culture was, in part, proven correct. In the words of Matthew Jacobsen, Polish Americans truly represented *whiteness of a different color*; Poles were unmistakably *physically* white, but their robust cultural life, coupled with their overwhelmingly working class population was regarded as inferior to Anglo-Saxon stock. And the effort to "uplift" Polish immigrants from their "backward" way of life had not succeeded. American cultural hegemony was in crisis, and curbing the inflow of immigrants who resisted assimilation was the only way to stabilize said hegemony. The optimism held by Progressive Americanizers about immigrants' ability to be absorbed into American culture was diminished. This, along with the expansion of governmental power over immigration, resulted in the contraction of the qualities that define what it means to be American. One who wished to be an American could not be ill, leftist, Asian, Middle-Eastern, Indian, or African. And only a select few from Southern and Eastern Europe, those who met the new quota and standards of being American could ever dream of coming to the Land of the Free. In effect, the qualifications for being American favored a future United States that was much whiter and more educated, despite the fact that many American citizens of color had resided and were an integral part of American history.

Polish resistance to Americanization stands as a testament to the resilience and agency of the oppressed, though their story does not come without its own share of injustice and prejudice. And the Polish story is, in a way, unsurprising, given the history of the Polish partitions. What is equally true is the fact that Poles embraced whiteness in the years following the passage of the 1924 law. On the question of limiting Canadian and Mexican immigration, one Pole wrote in 1927: "…there is a great difference between a Mexican and a Canadian, the former settle in

communities populated with their own kind, and are not assimilable, on the other hand, Canadians do not differ from us, therefore, make good citizens." Note the use of the word "us." It is unclear who the author is referring to, but it is likely that the author is referring to the white population of the United States. The author goes on to write: "Evidently the hundred percent Nordics (Anglo-Saxon whites), who were so anxious to restrict European immigration, are now confronted with an even greater problem, and instead of Italians and Poles, they have an influx of Mexicans, whose standard of living is much lower than that of the European, besides their being of an unassimilable nature."[130] Indeed, the same rhetoric that was used towards the "backward Polish masses" was coopted by the Poles themselves following the passage of the quota law. Another article from 1928 lauded the amount of Poles who had been naturalized in the previous year: "Nearly 200,000 new citizens in one year! Of this total, 34,983 were Poles, which shows an admirable representation."[131] Here, we see that the Polish community after the 1924 laws began to measure themselves and other groups by their ability to assimilate – something that Poles resisted for decades.

What should we take away from this story? If anything, I would hope that we will have gained a greater insight into the tremendous nexus of historical forces that were at play during the period in question, which will hopefully have the effect of reminding us to be cautious when we are confronted with questions of culture, assimilation, and immigration. I also hope that after reading this piece, we may collectively step a little further towards the understanding that everyone deserves the opportunity to find a life in the United States and that those who have

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[130] "A Suitable Quota for Both Mexico and Canada" *Dziennik Zjednoczenia,* 2 September, 1927.
[131] S. L. Kolanowski, "34,983 Poles Received Their Citizenship Papers; Italians Rank Highest." *Dziennik Chicagowski,* 12 January, 1928.

already immigrated have overwhelmingly earned their place in American history and the United States in general.

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