

Charles Kurzman, "Nativism, Then and Now," March 29, 2018

<http://kurzman.unc.edu/nativism>

America's current bout of nativism is nothing new. The descendants of immigrants have often opposed additional immigration, characterizing recent arrivals as violent, unpatriotic, unwilling to learn proper English, unable to adapt to customs established by earlier immigrants, a burden on other residents and unfair competition for jobs and resources.

What has changed over the generations is the target of this hostility. One of the founders of the United States, John Jay, suggested "a wall of brass around the country for the exclusion of Catholics." In the mid-19th century, the Know-Nothing Party organized attacks on German and Irish communities. In the 1880s, mobs destroyed many Chinese neighborhoods. In the early 20th century, eugenicists such as the commissioner of Ellis Island objected to "undesirable and unintelligent people from Southern and Eastern Europe."

The cartoons pictured below used painfully familiar imagery to depict the Irish as unassimilable, the Chinese as job-stealers, Italians as terrorists, and Jews as communists. Today, President Trump and other nativists aim similar insults at Latin Americans, Muslims, and other immigrants.

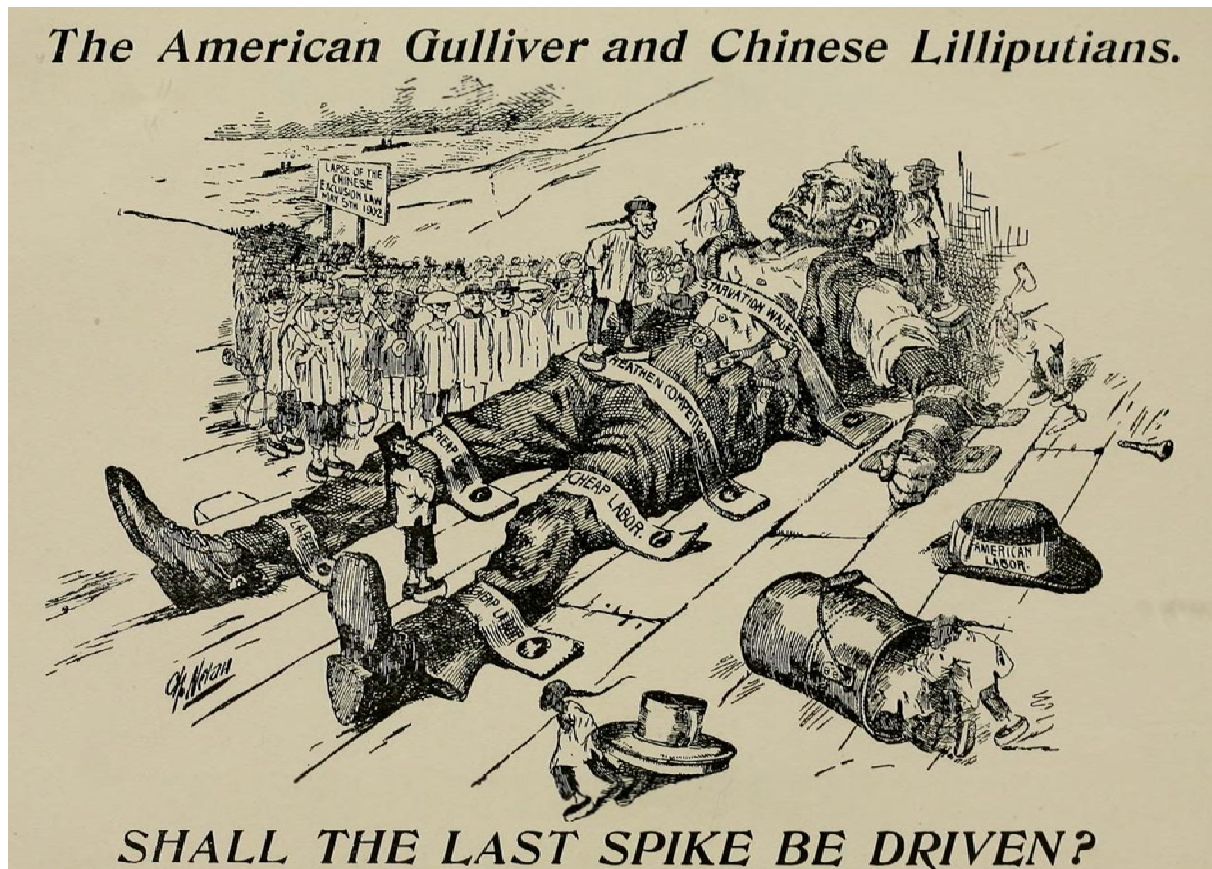
Nativists have periodically triumphed, sometimes through legislation and sometimes through violence. But another American tradition has consistently countered the nation's nativist urges – a tradition that views continual immigration as crucial to American identity and progress. Today's nativists may need a reminder of the ugly reception that many of their ancestors faced, and of the ideals of openness that benefitted their families and themselves.

Lady Liberty stirs the “mortar of assimilation” with a spoon labeled “equal rights,” but there is “one element that won’t mix.” This violent character leaps from the peaceable crowd brandishing a knife and the banner of “Clan na Gael” – Clan of the Gaels, a militant Irish immigrant organization. Though mainstream Irish-American organizations repudiated the group’s violence, some Americans – including cartoonist Charles Taylor and the editors of *Puck*, a leading humor magazine -- considered it emblematic of Irish unsuitability for American society.



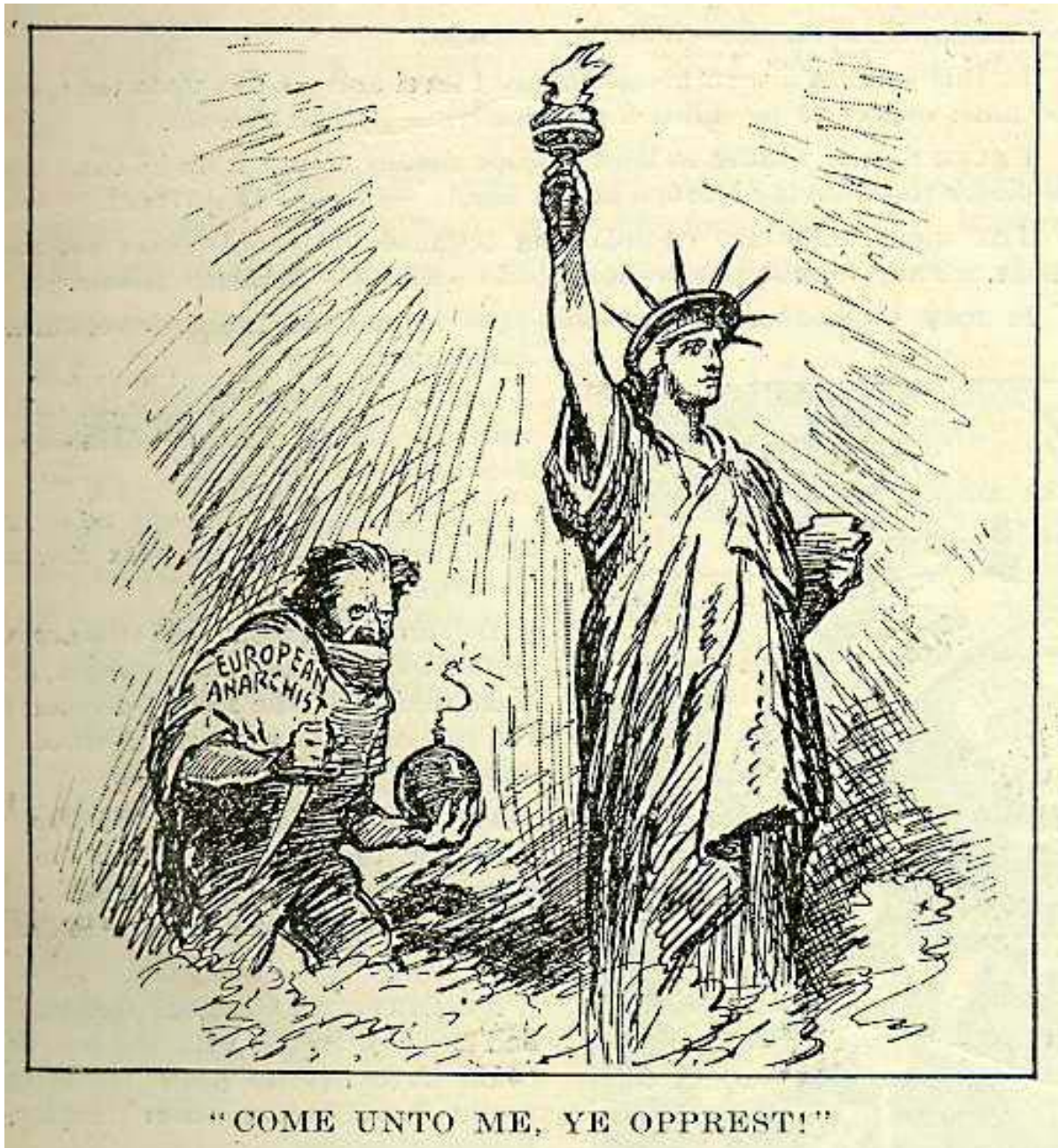
Puck (New York), June 26, 1889

After Chinese workers drove the last spike in America's transcontinental railroad, Congress banned Chinese immigration for two decades. This cartoon, reprinted by the American Federation of Labor from a Philadelphia newspaper, suggested that the end of the ban would allow masses of Chinese immigrants to subdue white workers with straps labeled "cheap labor," "starvation wages," and "heathen competition." The accompanying pamphlet charged Chinese-Americans with "every crime imaginable," including smuggling and dealing opiums. Several months later, Congress made the ban permanent.



American Federation of Labor, *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion; Meat vs. Rice; American Manhood vs. Asiatic Coolieism; Which Shall Survive?* (1902)

In 1903, a bronze tablet was affixed to the Statue of Liberty with Emma Lazarus's lines, "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free..." Some Americans, including editorial cartoonist James P. Alley, considered this an invitation to bomb-throwing anarchists. The previous month, an Italian anarchist group led by Luigi Galleani – who bore some resemblance to Alley's caricature -- had detonated simultaneous explosions in eight American cities, leading to an outburst of anti-Italian hostility and the arrest of thousands of immigrants, most of whom had no connection to terrorism and were later released without charge.



Commercial Appeal (Memphis), July 5, 1919

As Jews fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s, many Americans objected to refugee resettlement in the United States. Among the most outspoken was Father Charles Coughlin, an influential radio broadcaster. In December 1938, weeks after Kristallnacht, Coughlin's magazine *Social Justice* ran a sympathetic sketch of a Jewish man gesturing to his worried family as a Nazi dragged him away. The accompanying text was less sympathetic. Jews had brought persecution upon themselves through their involvement with communism, the magazine suggested, and Americans should also be concerned about the "closely interwoven relationship between Communism and Jewry." The magazine ominously warned American Jews to "shak[e] off Communism before it is too late."



Nazism . . . Spawn of Communism
MAY IT NEVER HAPPEN HERE

German Jews are today suffering persecution because for 15 years after the Great War Germany was prostrated by Communism, headed by Jews under direction of Moscow.

With the rise to power of Adolph Hitler and his party came a frightful "swing to the right." After their long travail of serfdom under the thumb of the Muscovites, the German people sought vengeance against the JEWS—not because they were Jews but because they had fostered Communism.

Had it not been for Communism with its policy of destructive exploitation and unmoral values, Nazism would never have come to Germany. There would be no anti-Semitism, no Jewish persecution.

Anti-Semitism is spreading in America because the people sense a closely interwoven relationship between Communism and Jewry. It is known that the Soviet leaders of Russia dictate the policies of the Communist Party in the United States. It is also known that the Comintern is predominantly Jewish in personnel.

It is the DUTY of American Christians to aid their Jewish fellow-citizens in shaking off Communism before it is too late.

There must be no anti-Semitism against Jews as human beings. But there must be unflinching opposition to Communism, whether led by Jews or alleged Christians.

Your contribution, however large or small, to Father Coughlin's Broadcasting Fund will help to prevent recurrence in the United States of what is happening in Germany.

SOCIAL JUSTICE PUBLISHING CO., INC.
Royal Oak, Michigan.

I wish to contribute to the 1938-39 Broadcasting Fund so that Father Coughlin may continue to spread principles of social justice in America.

I hereby pledge the sum of \$ _____ which I am enclosing herewith or which I will send in two equal monthly remittances on or before Dec. 10 and on or before Jan. 10, 1939.

My Name Is _____

My Address Is _____

City or Town _____ State _____

Social Justice (Royal Oak, Michigan), December 5, 1938

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump often recited “The Snake,” a song recorded a half-century earlier by Al Wilson. The lyrics re-tell Aesop’s ancient fable of a poisonous reptile who cannot help but bite a woman who saved him from freezing, but Trump repurposed the story to insinuate that immigrants were by nature ungrateful and dangerous, especially Mexicans Trump called “rapists,” Syrian refugees and other Muslims he accused of terrorism, and Haitians he claimed had AIDS. At the end of a recent reading, while the audience hooted and cheered, Trump shrugged his shoulders and grimaced, as if to say: What else do you expect?



<https://vimeo.com/262486734>