The Political Incorporation of Immigrant Groups:
An Historical Perspective on the American Experience

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This essay explores and analyzes the political incorporation of immigrant groups in the United States across the last two centuries. Political incorporation refers to the process through which immigrants and their descendants have come to think of themselves as Americans with political rights and with a voice in politics, should they choose to exercise it. It is a process that, while central to the republic's past, present, and future, has been complex and frequently marked by contradiction. On the one hand, the United States arguably has managed throughout its history to incorporate more immigrants, both in absolute and relative terms, than any other nation. This has been an extraordinary achievement. On the other hand, the United States has almost always barred some immigrant groups either from entering the United States or from allowing them to become citizens. Groups of native-born Americans, meanwhile, have often discriminated against members of racially or religiously "suspect" immigrant groups, making the process of political incorporation more arduous and incomplete than it otherwise would have been.

This essay begins with a general framework for understanding political incorporation in the United States, one that should prove useful in understanding Arab-American involvement in politics. It then explores the experiences of groups with which the experience of Arab Americans can profitably be compared. In general, it seems useful to locate the Arab-American experience somewhere between that of southern and eastern European Christian and Jewish immigrants who arrived early in the twentieth century, and who were subjected to religious and racial prejudice without ever formally being defined as nonwhite, and that of Mexican and Asian immigrants who faced both more intense racial discrimination than Europeans and, frequently, formidable barriers to political involvement. Considerable attention is also paid below to the history of Irish Catholic immigrants to the United States. In the nineteenth century, this group experienced a hostility toward their religion that resembles the hostility toward Islam encountered by Muslim Arabs today. In the twentieth century, however, Irish Catholics demonstrated how a group once reviled for its faith achieved social acceptance and political incorporation in the United States. The twentieth century experience of German Americans is equally relevant to the case of Arab Americans because of the former's association in the public imagination, in the World War I era, with foreign enemies of the American state. This historical and comparative overview will provide a framework within which to evaluate questions pertaining to the politics of Arab Americans today.

The process of political incorporation operates in three dimensions: formal, political-cultural, and political-institutional. The formal dimension entails immigrants becoming citizens of the United States and thereby gaining the right to vote, sit on juries, serve in the military, and hold elective office. Citizenship in the United States has always been relatively easy to acquire for immigrants defined as white, but for immigrant groups defined as nonwhite, citizenship was often out of reach. Between

1870 and 1952, for example, this category included immigrants from East and South Asia (but not Hispanics), effectively barring them from the most elementary dimension of political incorporation.

The political-cultural dimension refers to the process through which individuals come to feel as though they belong in and to the United States and can play a part in its democratic politics. Belonging can develop through formal naturalization and political channels – becoming a citizen, joining a political party, voting, and enlisting in the military. Typically, however, it develops in more multifaceted and diffuse ways: through learning English and gaining exposure to American culture; among the young, through going to school and absorbing both the manifest curriculum (American literature, American geography, American history) and the latent one (through which schoolchildren learn about "American" notions of physical beauty, dress, male-female courtship, music, and sports); through participating in American holidays, both sacred (Christmas, Thanksgiving, July 4th and, at one point, Memorial Day) and profane (the World Series, the Super Bowl, "American Idol," and spring break); and, sometimes, through discovering powerful affinities between American culture, religion, and politics and one's Old World roots. Because of the complex and multilayered nature of this process, it has sometimes unfolded almost invisibly. Its advance has often surprised both immigrants and their native-born hosts. In the present day United States, for example, the children of Mexican immigrants are learning English more quickly and thoroughly than outsiders generally recognize.[1] As this second-generation Mexican linguistic pattern suggests, the political-cultural dimension of incorporation can often operate independently of formal naturalization processes. It has almost always involved a mix of voluntarism (immigrants or their children choosing to embrace American customs and culture) and coercion (state or private authorities compelling immigrants to Americanize).[2]

The political-institutional dimension of political incorporation refers to the institutions that immigrants and their offspring join or establish and through which they seek political influence. Political parties are examples of these sorts of institutions; so are political machines, the municipal organizations developed by professional politicians between the 1840s and 1960s to control local politics through alliances with private business interests on the one hand and ethnic constituencies on the other. Immigrants frequently turned to work-based institutions such as labor unions and small business associations to voice their political concerns, and they were also active in establishing new ethnic or religious institutions to promote their interests. Churches, synagogues, and mosques have sometimes functioned in this role as have fraternal, civil rights, and lobbying organizations such as the Ancient Order of Hiberians (Irish), the American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress, the American Israel Political Action Committee, the Sons of Italy, the Japanese American Civic League, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations. Sometimes these institutions have worked to integrate immigrants and their offspring into established patterns of American politics. At other times they operated in ways that have shaken up and even transformed those established patterns.

In evaluating the political-institutional dimension, we have to be alert to historical changes in its character. Political scientists and historians have argued, for example, that the prime institutions of immigrant political incorporation in 1900 – political parties, political machines, and labor unions – are now in eclipse, and thus of much less utility to immigrants today than to the generations who

preceded them. Some scholars conclude from studies of these trends that political incorporation has become a more difficult proposition than it once was and that immigrants are, indeed, incorporating more slowly than they once did. Other scholars, however, stress that new institutions have arisen to take the place of those earlier "incorporators."[3] We will return to this subject later in this essay.

Although Americans do not consciously think about the process of political incorporation in terms of the three dimensions outlined above, many tell a narrative about immigrants and American history that deploy them nevertheless. That narrative, or story, goes something like this: prior to the 1960s, immigrants to the United States, most of whom were European, quickly acquired citizenship and developed feelings of belonging to the United States. Millions who fled poverty and religious and political oppression in their native lands were inspired by the United States' promise of freedom. They wanted to become American, to be reborn as new men and women, and to become part of a country that they associated with liberty, self-rule, and economic opportunity.[4]

In this popular telling of the immigrant experience, the United States welcomed the newcomers. Naturalization law required little more than residence in the United States for five years, obedience to the country's laws, and the ability to produce two witnesses who could vouch for an individual immigrant's character. Political mobilization and influence took longer to develop, simply because immigrants needed time to find their way into existing political parties, to build new ones, or to establish ethnic associations with the ability to battle for political power and to influence public policy. If it took two or three generations of hard work, however, it did happen, making the process of incorporation complete.

There is no doubt that millions of immigrants followed the path of political incorporation described above, demonstrating again and again the remarkable integrative capacities of the American nation and of American republicanism. American history, however, is also full of episodes of partial or non-incorporation of immigrants along each of the three dimensions of the incorporative process. While this is a lesser-known story, in part because it runs counter to the myth of the United States as a land of freedom and opportunity, it is an important story that we must comprehend if we are fully to understand the process of political incorporation.

Consider, for example, the nationality law passed in 1790 by the first U.S. Congress. It declared that in order for an immigrant to be eligible for citizenship, he had to be free and white.[5] The law was meant to bar immigrants from Africa, slave or free, from U.S. citizenship, and it had precisely this effect from its passage until after the Civil War. In 1870, Congress amended the 1790 law in order to allow immigrants of African descent to naturalize.[6] This reform was part of Reconstruction, a revolutionary project to give all blacks in the United States the same access as whites to American nationality and freedom. Even as Congress exempted blacks from the provisions of the 1790 law, however, it kept the statute on the books, its prohibition on nonwhites becoming citizens now directed at the Chinese, who had begun immigrating to the United States in large numbers in the 1850s and 1860s.

Over the course of the next fifty years, the courts extended the ban on citizenship for nonwhite immigrants from the Chinese to the Japanese, Indians, and then to virtually all East and South Asians. Government officials also engaged in a twenty year effort to exclude immigrants from Armenia, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt from citizenship eligibility on racial grounds. These immigrant

groups included many Arabs in their ranks. The campaign ultimately failed in the 1920s, but not before it had convulsed the lives and emotions of an entire generation of individuals who had come to the United States from West Asia and North Africa. The 1790 law still remained in force against East and South Asians, preserving the racial cast of naturalization law in the United States for another generation, as Congress did not repeal it until 1952.[7] For most of its history, in other words, the United States barred groups of immigrants defined as nonwhite from ever becoming citizens.[8]

Some analysts of immigration policy have argued that the 1790 law, even with its restrictions, has to be counted as the most liberal naturalization law in the world at the time of its passage. This is true, in the sense that this statute allowed virtually any European male to become a citizen of the United States. Other countries that had delineated formal naturalization mechanisms in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries defined immigrant eligibility for citizenship far more narrowly than the new United States had done.[9] Moreover, the United States mitigated some of the worst effects of the 1790 law in 1868 when the Fourteenth Amendment established an extraordinarily generous and egalitarian policy of birthright citizenship. The amendment granted citizenship at birth to all children born to immigrants on U.S. soil, even if those immigrants had not naturalized, had entered the country illegally, or were barred by the 1790 law from ever becoming citizens.[10] Thus, in 1900, a child born to a Chinese immigrant on U.S. soil automatically received citizenship even though his or her father was prohibited from having the opportunity to gain an equivalent status. The same is true of a child born on U.S. soil in 2006 to an undocumented alien from Mexico.

The birthright policy of the Fourteenth Amendment effectively opened a back door to the political incorporation of groups who were told, in other ways, that they could never enter the American polity. By constructing this generational back door, the United States spared itself the situation that arose in Europe after World War II, where immigrants in countries such as Germany and Italy were barred from citizenship for two and sometimes three generations, rendering routine the complete isolation of these groups from normal political life. Some of the 2005 political turmoil in Europe involving Muslim groups stems from these barriers to immigrant naturalization put in place a generation or two ago.[11]

Of course, the mere possession of citizenship should not be interpreted to mean that an immigrant or the child of an immigrant has been incorporated into the United States polity. Citizenship is a legal status. Possessing it tells us nothing about the other dimensions of political incorporation, a sense of belonging to the United States and the ability to influence politics and policy through organization and action. If we shift our attention from the Chinese to the Irish, from one of the most poorly treated immigrant groups to one that today we regard as being among the most favored in U.S. history – and the most precocious in terms of political mobilization and influence – we can gain a better appreciation for how complex and uneven the process of political incorporation has been.

The Irish were one of the largest groups to come to the United States in the nineteenth century. They advanced quickly in American politics as a result of their numbers, the liberal U.S. naturalization laws that gave them easy access to citizenship, their knowledge of English, and the sophisticated political consciousness that they had developed during decades of struggle against the English masters in their homeland. They proved themselves adept at penetrating existing political institutions in the United States, especially local branches of the Democratic Party in the northeastern, midwestern, and western cities where they settled. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Irish also occupied

top leadership positions in many labor unions and were learning how to make trade union power a mechanism of political advance. The Irish were also good at creating new institutions with the ability to influence politics. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the dense archipelago of Catholic institutions that arose in the United States between the 1870s and the 1920s: parish churches and schools, welfare agencies, universities, and fraternal societies such as the Knights of Columbus. While Catholics of many ethnic backgrounds contributed to this institutional achievement, Irish Catholics were at its center. The institutions were important launching pads for political mobilization, allowing the political advance of the Irish to occur across a broad front. Still, the front moved slowly, unevenly, and sometimes not at all, often because the Irish encountered fierce hostility and discrimination and challenges to their fitness to be members of the American republic.[12]

Some of the hostility arose from the desperate poverty of hundreds of thousands of Irish who constituted the first waves of immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s, most of whom were fleeing Ireland's potato famine. But a good deal of it, and the part that endured the longest, arose from religious, rather than economic, antagonisms. Irish immigrants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were largely Roman Catholic, and they entered a country that was overwhelmingly and intensely Protestant. Significant numbers of the original seventeenth-century British immigrants to North America were Protestant zealots who saw themselves engaged in a holy and global war against Roman Catholicism. They were determined to make America into a Protestant redoubt that would first halt the spread of Catholic influence into the New World and then eliminate it from Europe. These Protestants, known to us as Puritans and Pilgrims, accused the Catholic church of undermining Christian piety and faith by elevating the Pope to a divine status, corrupting clergy, pursuing worldly ambition, and substituting rituals grounded in superstition and magic for true Christian faith.

By the late eighteenth century, many Americans believed that Protestantism was not only the one true Christian religion but that it alone among the faiths nurtured the political qualities central to the fledgling American republic: freedom, individual rights, and popular sovereignty. The large Protestant majority in America associated Catholicism with the politics they despised: monarchy, aristocracy, and tyranny. The intensity of these anti-Catholic sentiments did not surface in the constitutional debates of 1787 and 1788, and the framers put the country on the path to religious toleration by refusing to denigrate any religion by name or establish any faith as the country's official religion. This apparent embrace of religious pluralism, however, had more to do with feuds between Protestant sects about which of them should enjoy primacy than it did with a softening attitude toward Catholicism. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, the United States' Protestant majority construed Popery as one of the chief threats to the American republic. Many in that majority viewed Catholic immigrants as the papacy's fifth column, sent to the United States to gain political power, destroy democracy, and to put the new nation under the pope's control.[13]

This history is easily forgotten now that Catholic-Protestant antagonisms have dissolved and Catholics feel as secure in the United States today as do their erstwhile Protestant antagonists. It is important to remember how recently acceptance of Catholicism became a defining feature of American life, however, because from the 1840s through the 1940s, this was not the case. Generations of Catholic Americans suffered discrimination, were accused of disloyalty to the United States, and were frequently told that they were not fit to enjoy the privileges of American citizenship. A major

reason why Catholics developed their own institutional infrastructure – schools, universities, welfare agencies, fraternal organizations – is either because they were not welcome in the established institutions or because they believed that if they entered those institutions they would come under unbearable pressure from Protestants to sacrifice their faith.

Anti-Catholic sentiments help to explain why Irish Americans, for all their talent as politicians, could not get one of their own nominated for the office of U.S. president by either mainstream party until 1928, almost a hundred years after they began arriving in the United States in large numbers. The Irish American whom the Democratic Party chose that year, Alfred Smith, the governor of New York, was routed by his Republican opponent, Herbert Hoover, who seized every opportunity to stigmatize Smith as a papal minion who could not be trusted to lead the United States. As late as 1960, the second Irish-Catholic nominee for president, John F. Kennedy, felt obligated to appear before a group of Protestant ministers in Houston to assure them that his election would not deliver the United States to the pope.[14]

This discrimination occurred to people who were by and large U.S. citizens or had easy access to citizenship. It underscores that simply measuring political incorporation through citizenship status is inadequate to understanding the phenomenon. Mae Ngai has introduced the phrase "alien citizen" to describe the situation of groups who have possessed formal citizenship rights but, for reasons of religion, nativity, or race, have not been fully accepted as Americans. Ngai has used this phrase to analyze the 1940s and 1950s experience of Japanese Americans and Chinese Americans, groups that suffered more serious discrimination than the Irish or other European groups ever did. The phrase, however, can be extended to other groups – Mexican Americans, eastern and southern European Americans, even Irish Americans – who have faced a disjuncture between their formal rights and citizenship status on the one hand and their experience of those rights and membership in the American polity on the other. It underscores the importance of the second dimension of the process of political incorporation, that which focuses our attention on belonging, and it causes us to inquire more closely into the responses of those groups and individuals who gained formal membership in the American polity while feeling as though they did not belong to it.

Historically, citizen immigrants have reacted in three distinct ways to their experience of not belonging, or of what we might call civic alienage: first, quiescence and quietude; second, an eagerness to prove one's bona fides as Americans by displays of patriotism and proclamations of allegiance to American ideals; and third, a determination to establish new institutions and new policies that would change the United States sufficiently to allow alien citizens to feel as though they could overcome their alienation and make this new land their home. Over the course of their lives, of course, many immigrants reacted in all three of these ways, depending on the moment, event, and circumstance. While in some instances they responded in two or even three of these ways simultaneously, the three responses are analytically distinct and need to be treated as such.

The quiescent response to civic alienage entails accepting discrimination and marginality as a fact of life and doing one's best to cope with it. It often reflects a calculation that one (or one's group) is weak, and that speaking out or mobilizing will only make things worse. There are many instances of such quiescence, from the Japanese-Americans' response to their World War II internment to the lack of protest by eastern and southern European-Americans to Congress's racially discriminatory decision in 1924 to all but end further immigration from their countries of origin. Some scholars

have argued that Arab Americans, after the repeated challenges to their whiteness and thus to their eligibility for citizenship early in the twentieth century, deliberately kept a low profile.[15]

Immigrant organizations sometimes deployed public quiescence as a mask for behind-the-scenes efforts to overcome discrimination. This was a strategy adopted by Jewish groups such as the American Jewish Committee early in the twentieth century, and it was informed not just by a fear of losing political confrontations that became too public but also by internal tensions within the Jewish community itself. Members of the American Jewish Committee tended to be prosperous and assimilated second- or third-generation German Jews. They thought of themselves as worldly, culturally refined, the natural leaders of American Jewry, and those best positioned to represent their tribe to Gentile America. They worried a great deal, however, not just about whether they, themselves, would be able to move freely in Gentile America but what the presence of masses of eastern European Jewish immigrants would do to the image of Jewry in the United States. Many German Jewish leaders viewed the Jewish immigrants as uncouth, unruly, and uncultured, and thus as a threat to the Jewish image. These leaders therefore labored hard not only to help their impoverished co-religionists adapt to the United States but also to do so in ways that would keep them out of the public eye.[16]

Anxieties about recently arrived co-ethnics were hardly unique to Jewish Americans. One can find an abundance of similar sentiments among the long settled elites of other immigrant groups: among the "lace-curtain" Irish of the early twentieth century, who saw the Irish poor as a threat to their hard-earned respectability; among the established Mexican-American families of New Mexico and Arizona, who feared the contaminating effects of close contact with waves of new Mexican migrants coming across the border in the early twentieth century; and among Arab-American Christian elites, whose strategy of relative invisibility was upset in the 1970s and 1980s by the arrival of large numbers of Muslim Arabs.[17]

This desire to put the best face on one's community also expressed itself in an eagerness among groups of ethnics to demonstrate their American patriotism. They did this by associating themselves with the symbols of the United States (such as flags), learning English, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, singing the national anthem, proclaiming their fealty to the core American values of liberty, equality, and opportunity, and demonstrating their loyalty to the United States in times of war. Sometimes, too, immigrants attempted to display their patriotism by demonstrating how Old World values underlying their ethnic institutions were deeply American in spirit. Some of this patriotism was heartfelt, some of it was strategic (a way to improve one's prospects for work and acceptance in the United States), and some of it was simply capitulation to Americanization pressures deemed too powerful to resist. Regardless of its sources, immigrant patriotism has been a potent mechanism of political incorporation.[18]

One of the outstanding historical examples of patriotic adaptation accelerating political incorporation was the mission successfully undertaken by the Catholic Church in the United States to demonstrate the compatibility between its religious faith and Americanism. This movement had multiple nineteenth century origins, but it crystallized as a mission in the late nineteenth century, when American church leaders embraced it. These leaders tended to be Irish-American clerics who had decided that the Catholic Church had to Americanize itself in order for Catholics to be fully accepted. This "Americanist" turn within the U.S. Catholic Church aroused deep opposition both in the Vatican and among non-Irish groups of Catholics in the United States. The former condemned "Americanism" as bordering on heresy while the latter (French-Canadian, Italian, and Polish Catholics were prominent in their ranks) viewed

it as a political plot by Irish-American clerics to strip them of the freedom to practice their faith as they had done for generations in their homelands.[19]

Catholic Americanizers fought Catholic traditionalists for forty years until the events of the 1930s and 1940s tipped the battle decisively in favor of the former. The economic misery generated by the Great Depression caused many Catholics to rethink their traditionalism and to open themselves to new political ideas and movements, especially those that called upon them to embrace American ideals and to use them to rebuild an ailing American republic. Then the Second World War compelled millions of young Catholic men to serve in the U.S. military, an experience that further intensified their sense of belonging to the country. Finally, the Cold War allowed and even encouraged many Catholics to represent their faith as a quintessential expression of American political principles. Anticommunism facilitated this union of Catholicism and Americanism. The Vatican had made the fight against Communism a religious imperative of the highest order in the 1930s. When this fight became a priority of the U.S. government in 1946, the U.S. and the Vatican, in effect, became allies.[20]

Seeing the United States embracing anticommunism in the late 1940s allowed many Catholics to feel as though the United States was embracing them as well. Within Catholic communities in the United States, lingering tensions between Catholicism and Americanism vanished overnight. For the first time, many American Catholics felt as though they could speak on behalf of the American republic. Their Catholic inheritance made them not just acceptable Americans but exemplary ones. From Senator Joseph McCarthy to Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, from labor priest and Richard Nixon advisor Father John Cronin to Senator Pat McCarran of Nevada, from the brilliant Yale undergraduate William F. Buckley to President John F. Kennedy, Catholics were among the lions of the postwar American anti-communist crusade. As the names on this list suggest, Irish Catholics seized the lead and showed other groups of ethnic Catholics the way.[21]

The U.S. struggle against communism, the Americanization of the U.S. Catholic church, and the political incorporation of American Catholics were processes that went hand in hand in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. It is hardly an accident that the first Catholic American to become president of the United States was an anticommunist warrior who won election in large part because of his perceived toughness on Cold War issues.

If the Irish-American experience conveys a sense of the benefits that can accrue to a group by aligning itself with American ideals and American foreign policy, the German-American experience in World War I offers a sense of the perils that confront a group refusing or unable to do so. Prior to 1914, German Americans had been one of the largest, most prosperous, most respected, and most visibly ethnic of American immigrant groups. They seemed to be both integrating into American life and maintaining important elements of their ethnic culture. Many German immigrants believed that they had become American in terms of allegiance to the U.S. state and in terms of their embrace of American democratic ideals. But in matters of culture – and especially in terms of language, music, and literature – they still loved and practiced things German.[22] The German-Jewish-American philosopher Horace Kallen deemed this German-American perspective to be not just a legitimate mode of adaptation to the United States but a preferred one. In 1915 he labeled it cultural pluralism, and today we recognize it as a forerunner of multiculturalism.[23]

The entry of the United States into a world war against Germany in 1917 convulsed the proud German-American population. President Woodrow Wilson's administration, worried about the millions of German speakers in the United States, expected these immigrants to become 100 percent American overnight, which meant that they were called on both to pledge loyalty to the American state and to extinguish from their lives all signs of affection for German culture. When German immigrants were perceived as slow to do the latter, the U.S. government began condemning German culture as barbaric, censoring German newspapers and books published in the United States, and arresting thousands of German speakers suspected of disloyalty. State and local governments banned the performance of German music in the United States (this included Beethoven's symphonies), removed German books from library shelves, and prohibited the teaching of German literature and the German language in schools.[24]

In this wartime climate of repression and hate, German Americans risked being fired from work, losing their businesses, and being assaulted on the street. In 1917, a St. Louis mob lynched an innocent German immigrant whom they suspected of subversion. After only twenty-five minutes of deliberation, a St. Louis jury acquitted the mob leaders, who had brazenly defended their crime as an act of patriotism.[25]

Such experiences devastated the proud German-American community. Its members began hiding their ethnic identity, changing their names, speaking German only in the privacy of their own homes, and celebrating their holidays out of the public eye. While the physical assaults on individual Germans, the violation of their civil liberties, and the racialization of Germans as barbaric stopped soon after the Armistice was signed in November 1918, many German Americans would take far longer to recover from the shame and vulnerability they experienced in 1917 and 1918. Millions would never again celebrate their Germanness in public. Many abandoned their heritage entirely, choosing to assimilate into white Anglo-Protestant culture (if they were Lutheran) or into Irish-American culture (if they were Catholic).[26]

In some respects, German Americans can be seen as having fared well over the long term despite their World War I ordeal. By the 1930s and 1940s, individual German Americans had ascended to positions of political power and influence throughout American society. Robert Wagner of New York was a leading U.S. senator, Walter Reuther had become one of the nation's most powerful labor leaders, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower had become the United States' most important military commander. While none of these men had to fend off accusations that their German heritage rendered their patriotism suspect, however, none of them dared speak about their Germanness in public. They presented themselves, and were seen by the public, simply as Americans. It was as if the ethnic group that only thirty years earlier had been so proud and so public in its practice of cultural traditions had disappeared as a collective entity. Indeed, it can be said that World War I inflicted upon German America a mortal cultural wound. Outside of small and barely visible pockets, German ethnicity never revived. Most Americans today do not even regard the Germans as having been a viable ethnic group in the United States; Germans are simply assumed to have assimilated into white native-born America upon arrival. As the above indicates, however, this assumption misreads the past. The critical event shaping the twentieth century terms of German-American political incorporation and loss of ethnic identity was World War I, when German Americans ran afoul of the U.S. state and became vulnerable to charges that they lacked proper regard for the American republic.

That the United States is currently fighting foes in Iraq and elsewhere who share a religion and culture with many Arab Americans raises the possibility that the latter will be subjected, as German Americans once were, to extreme demands for conformity to American ideals and for demonstrations of loyalty to the American state. The situation of Arab Americans today is not identical to that of German Americans a hundred years ago. The cultural pressure on Arab Americans, for example, does not seem as great as the 100 percent Americanism demanded of German immigrants during World War I. Whereas the U.S. government sought to obliterate German culture then, it is now taking major steps to encourage the study of Arabic language and literature in American universities.[27] The American government has also refrained, quite deliberately, from making the war on terror into a total war, and from whipping up the kind of popular hatred of enemies, internal and external, that total wars usually require. Nevertheless, many Arab Americans have been subjected to forms of scrutiny and surveillance greater than what most non-Arab Americans have experienced. Many feel, too, as though their loyalty to the United States has been unfairly challenged. Most either cannot escape this scrutiny, or would not choose to escape it, by passing imperceptibly into white or Christian America, as German Americans did in the 1920s and 1930s. Thus the German-American experience in World War I remains a troubling precedent for how the American state can turn on a group of immigrants and undermine its prestige, legitimacy, and voice in American politics.

The Irish-American experience offers a more hopeful historical precedent for the incorporation of Arab Americans. A group that was once despised for its religion and culture is now fully accepted and integrated into American politics. That process took a long time (more than a hundred years), and it required sustained efforts on the part of Irish Catholics to demonstrate their patriotism and to insist on the compatibility between American democracy and Catholicism. Irish Catholicism has also benefited, in the 1940s and beyond, from the convergence of deeply felt Catholic political convictions and the post-World War II aims of U.S. foreign policy. This convergence came late in the process, however, and could have meant little had it not been preceded by an Americanization movement among U.S. Catholics that had been going on for generations and that accelerated during the era of the European-initiated world wars.

In the Americanization experience of Catholic immigrants in the United States, it is possible to glimpse the third response to civic alienage noted earlier: a determination to establish new institutions and new policies that would change the United States sufficiently to allow alien citizens to feel as though they could overcome their alienation and make this new land their home. Irish Catholics did not incorporate into the United States by sacrificing their religion. To the contrary, they established Catholicism as a legitimate expression of Americanism. American Jews went through similar struggles, battling for generations against anti-Semitism until they had won widespread assent to the proposition that the values underlying the United States were not Christian but Judeo-Christian.[28] Americanization, then, should not be understood entirely in terms of immigrant capitulation to prevailing patterns of American politics, culture, and society. It has also meant altering, disrupting, and sometimes transforming those patterns in ways that allowed the newcomers to embrace the United States as their own.

Perhaps the best example of this transformative form of incorporation is the 1930s labor movement, whose ranks were full of immigrants and their descendants – Irish, German, Italian, Jewish, Polish, Greek, Arab, French Canadian, and others – united by their poverty and marginality, and by their conviction that, as Americans, they deserved better. These working-class ethnics took seriously the first principles of

the republic – freedom, democracy, and opportunity – and infused them with new meaning. Freedom now meant the right of a worker to speak his or her mind at work or to cast a ballot for a Democrat at the polling station without fear of reprisal from a management that favored Republicans. Democracy meant ending the regime of autocracy at the workplace and replacing it with one in which workers had a voice in the conditions of their labor. Opportunity only had meaning, these trade unionists argued, if poor workers and their families had access to government-guaranteed forms of assistance that would cushion the effects of unemployment, illness, the loss of a breadwinner, and old age.[29]

Ethnic workers mobilized not just in unions but in politics. Millions of immigrant Americans and their children voted for the first time in the 1930s, and most of them cast their votes for the Democratic candidate Franklin Delano Roosevelt. They not only helped to carry him to victory in four elections but helped to shift the balance of power in the United States from conservatism to liberalism, and from a politics that glorified the free market to one that celebrated the role of government in regulating a capitalist system that seemed unable to right itself. Regardless of whether one supports or opposes the politics embodied in what came to be called the New Deal, one has to concede that it wrought major changes. Immigrant and ethnic voters were a key constituency in this transformation.[30]

These voters also began to engineer a significant reorientation in American conceptions of belonging by insisting that Catholics and Jews had as great a claim on the United States as did the descendants of those original English settlers who had wanted to make the United States a Protestant land. The New Deal never self-consciously promoted religious pluralism or multiculturalism, and never described its supporters as a "rainbow coalition" of different ethnic and racial groups. Indeed, in important ways the New Deal reinvigorated older cultural and racial prejudices. The groups pouring into the Democratic Party were a diverse lot, however, and their very presence began to disrupt accepted ways of defining and representing the American nation. This became abundantly clear in World War II when the dominant and most honored image of the nation became that of the multiethnic platoon, with its Protestant, Irish, Polish, Italian, and Jewish soldiers fighting side by side to preserve American democracy and freedom. In these and other ways, the incorporation of immigrants had convulsed and changed American politics and culture.[31]

The civil rights movement of the 1960s represents another example of the transformative form of political incorporation, although the initial protagonists were African Americans rather than immigrants and their descendants. They had themselves been subjected to a sharp form of civic alienage, in that they had long experienced a chasm between their formal status as citizens and their ability to possess and enjoy those rights. In the process of claiming their rights, African Americans forced the United States to confront the depths of racial, gender, and other forms of discrimination in ways the nation had rarely done before. African-American militancy impelled Congress not only to put through the most vigorous civil rights legislation since Reconstruction but also to enact the Immigration Act of 1965 that finally ended the racially-based system of immigration restriction that had been in place since the 1920s.[32] After 1965, it became almost impossible for the American government to deny foreigners entry into the United States and access to citizenship on the basis of race. The result over the next forty years was an immigration wave unprecedented in its global origins and racial diversity.[33]

The civil rights upheaval also challenged prevailing notions of cultural integration and incorporation. Through the "Black is Beautiful" movement, African Americans signaled that their political

incorporation would not cost them their cultural pride or distinctiveness. Immigrant groups, both old and new, quickly adopted a similar stance in regard to their own ethnic cultures, thereby broadening and intensifying the effort to locate the United States' vitality in its ethnic and racial diversity. The breadth and strength of this movement would have been unimaginable to immigrant and native Americans a hundred years earlier.[34] The movement's influence on politics can be discerned in the dramatic rise in the number of political officeholders who were the children and grandchildren of immigrants and in the rising importance of racial and ethnic group interests in Democratic Party affairs.

The changes wrought by the civil rights movement did not always strengthen the forces of political incorporation. Some groups of new immigrants saw in post-1960s multiculturalism an opportunity to cultivate their native cultures and ties to their homelands while keeping themselves distant from American culture and politics. Other groups that wanted to draw close to American politics discovered that traditional mechanisms of incorporation such as labor unions and political parties no longer worked as capably as they once had.[35]

Moreover, the Immigration Act of 1965 mentioned above had unintentionally created a whole new class of immigrants chronically estranged from American politics. To restrict immigration from Latin America, the act had imposed quotas on the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States from other Western Hemispheric countries in any given year. These quotas failed to deter immigrants from Mexico and other Latin American countries with high poverty rates from entering the United States through tunnels, under cover of darkness, or with false documents. Within twenty years of the law's passage, the United States had become home to millions of these immigrants, now categorized as illegal aliens. Except for those able to take advantage of the amnesty provision of the Immigration Reform Act of 1986, these "illegals" had no access to U.S. citizenship, the most elementary form of political incorporation. Their status resembled that of East Asian immigrants of a century earlier who were barred from becoming citizens. By the 1990s, many native-born Americans had come to regard these undocumented immigrants as a drain on the nation's resources, a source of criminality, and a threat to American politics and culture. The sentiment intensified in the long period of national insecurity following the September 11 attacks and sparked suspicion of other groups of immigrants, too, especially those of Muslim origin and from the Middle East.[36]

The Civil Rights revolution therefore cannot be said to have eliminated all the obstacles to the participation of immigrants in American politics. The events of those years, however, as of those in the 1930s, do demonstrate the transformative potential of political incorporation. Immigrants' participation in politics has sometimes changed the United States in major ways. These changes have not come easily. They have required political mobilization on a large scale, new institutions and strategies, and years and sometimes decades of struggle. The outcomes, however, have often been positive for immigrants and a source of national renewal.

NOTES

1. Rubén G. Rumbaut, "Assimilation and its Discontents: Ironies and Paradoxes," in Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind, eds., *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), pp. 182-185; Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation* (University of California Press and Russell Sage Foundation,

2001), pp. 118-128; Tamar Jacoby, "The New Immigrants: A Progress Report," in Jacoby, ed., *Reinventing the Melting Pot: The New Immigrants and What It Means to Be American* (Basic Books, 2004), pp. 23-24.

2. Gary Gerstle, "Liberty, Coercion, and the Making of Americans," 84 *Journal of American History* (September 1997), pp. 524-558.

3. Gary Gerstle and John Mollenkopf, "Introduction," in Gerstle and Mollenkopf, eds., *E Pluribus Unum: Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Immigrant Political Incorporation* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), pp. 1-30; Evelyn Savidge Sterne, "Beyond the Boss: Immigration and American Political Culture from 1880-1940," in Gerstle and Mollenkopf, *E Pluribus Unum*, op. cit., pp. 33-66.

4. The trope of America as a place of rebirth is often thought to have originated with the eighteenth century French-American farmer, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur. *See* his *Letters from an American Farmer* (London: Printed for T. Davies, 1782; E. P. Dutton & Co., 1912).

5. An Act to Establish an Uniform Rule of Naturalization, Mar. 26, 1790, 1 Stat 103-104.

6. Naturalization Act of July 14, 1870, 16 Stat. 254.

7. Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act), P.L. 82-414.

8. Matthew Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Americans and the Alchemy of Race* (Harvard University Press, 1998); Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York University Press, 1996); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Randa A. Kayyali, *The Arab Americans* (Greenwood Press, 2006), pp. 45-64.

9. Aristide Zolberg, *A Nation by Design: Immigration Policy in the Fashioning of America* (Harvard University Press, 2006).

10. Section 1 of the Fourteenth Amendment reads, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."

11. Gerald Neuman, *Immigrants, Borders, and Fundamental Law* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

12. Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation* (Harvard University Press, 1941); David A. Gerber, *The Making of an American Pluralism* (University of Illinois Press, 1989); Kerby A. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (Oxford University Press, 1985); John McGreevey, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (University of Chicago Press, 1996); Christopher J. Kaufmann, *Patriotism and Fraternalism in the Knights of Columbus: A History of the Fourth Degree* (Crossroad, 2001); Paula Kane, *Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

13. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Rutgers University Press, 1955); David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

14. John F. Kennedy, Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Sept. 12, 1960, available at http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/democrac/66.htm.

15. Roger Daniels, *Concentration Camps USA: Japanese Americans in World War II* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971); Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 2001); Kayyali, *The Arab Americans*, op cit..

16. Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (Columbia University Press, 1997); Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton University Press, 2006); Irving Howe, *World of Our Fathers* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

17. Kane, *Separatism and Subculture*, op. cit.; Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Harvard University Press, 1999); Kayyali, *The Arab Americans*, op. cit.

18. Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

19. Op. cit.

20. Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, op. cit., chs. 7, 9; Gerstle, *American Crucible*, op. cit., chs. 4–6.

21. Gerstlê, *American Crucible*, op. cit., ch. 6; David R. Roediger, *Working Towards Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Become White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (Basic Books, 2005).

22. Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); Russell Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

23. On Horace Kallen, *see* Gary Gerstle, "The Protean Character of American Liberalism," 99 *American Historical Review* (Oct. 1994), pp. 1043–1073.

24. Gary Gerstle, "The Immigrant as Threat to National Security: A Historical Perspective," in John Tirman, ed., *The Maze of Fear: Security and Migration after 9/11* (New Press, 2004). In 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a 1919 Nebraska law that prohibited the teaching of German and other modern languages to grade school children. *Meyer v. Nebraska*, 262 U.S. 390.

25. David Kennedy, *Over Here! The First World War and American Society* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

26. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock*, op. cit. The German Catholic integration into Irish-American culture was facilitated by exceptionally high rates of intermarriage between German and Irish Catholics.

27. Najwa Saad, "Demand for Arabic Language Education Rises in United States: U.S. Gov't Increases Funding for Foreign Languages and Area Studies," *Washington File*, Dec. 30, 2004, http://usinfo.state.gov/mena/Archive/2004/Dec/30-175318.html?chanlid=mena.

28. Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, op. cit.

29. Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism*, op cit.

30. Op. cit.

31. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Verso, 1998); Gerstle, *American Crucible*, op. cit.

32. Immigration and Naturalization Services Act of 1965, P. L. 89-236.

33. Mae M. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2004), ch. 7.

34. Gerstle, *American Crucible*, op. cit., ch. 8.

35. David Plotke, "Immigration and Political Incorporation in the Contemporary United States," in Hirschman et al., *Handbook of International Migration*, op. cit., pp. 303–308.

36. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, op. cit.