

Roberts, P. (1912). *The new immigration*. New York, NY: Arno Press.

All students of immigration should try to do two things: first, get the facts, argue from them, and discard popular prejudices and antipathies—we want to know conditions as they are and not as the biased imagine them to be; second, not to lay at the door of the foreigners evils and conditions which are due to the cupidity, short-sightedness, and inefficiency of the native-born.

"The Scum of the Earth"

The statements that the millions of "the distressed and unfortunate of other lands and climes," "the scum of Europe," "the beaten men of beaten races," "the inefficient, impoverished, and diseased," seek American shores, are untrue, uncharitable, and malicious. Emigration from any land, taken as a whole, is made up of the most vigorous, enterprising, and strongest members of the race. No one denies this when the character of the immigrants who came to America in 1820-1880 is discussed. Censors and prophets of evil proclaimed the stereotyped catalogue of calamities when they came, but their fears were not realized; the men made good and their children are an honor to the nation. The men of the new immigration are now under the eye of the censor, and the prophets of calamities are not wanting, but those who know the newer immigrants intimately believe that they, as their predecessors, will make good and that their children will be an honor to us, if the same opportunities are given these men and thirty years of American influences are allowed to shape and mold their lives. In the winning of the West, the Atlantic states lost much of its best blood by migration, and the same may be said of the exodus of young men from southeastern European countries to America. Every European government, losing its workers by emigration, bemoans the fact and is looking around for some means to check the outflow of strong manhood: would any of them do this if the "scum," "the unfortunate," "the beaten" emigrated?...

The slums of Europe are not sent here. The facts and figures of immigration to the United States clearly show that the men of the new immigration come from the farm, and they compare favorably in bodily form and strength with men raised in agricultural communities elsewhere. In the stream, undesirables are found, but the percentage is low. Taken as a whole, they do not show moral turpitude above the average of civilized men. Although transplanted into a new environment, living under abnormal conditions in industrial centers, and meeting more temptations in a week than they would in a lifetime in rural communities in the homeland, yet when their criminal record is compared with that of the native born males, it comes out better than even. All the immigrants landed do not stay here. In the decade 1900-1910, 8,795,386 arrived, but the last census enumerators only found 13,343,583 foreign-born in the United States, as against 10,213,817, in 1900. These figures clearly indicate that little more than 60 per cent of the total arrivals of that decade were in the country in 1910. A large percentage of this returning stream represents men and women who could not stand the stress and strain of American life; or, in other words, the unfit were more carefully weeded out by industrial competition than by the laws regulating immigration. This again works in favor of virile accretions to the population of the United States.

We constantly hear about the stream of gold going to Europe, which reached high-water mark in 1907, the year when immigration exceeded a million and a quarter, and the industrial boom was at its height. In that year, the Immigration Commission estimated the amount of money sent back to Europe at \$275,000,000. America is a great country, and this sum should be compared with our industrial and commercial importance. The value of the coal mined that year was nearly two and a half times larger than the sum sent to Europe; the products of our mines were eight times as valuable; our commerce with foreign countries aggregated a sum more than eleven times as great; the value of the produce of the farms of the United States was twenty-one times as great; the value of the products of our manufacturing was fifty times larger; and if we compare the sum sent by immigrants to Europe during this year of prosperity with the total estimated wealth of the nation in 1907, it is about two-tenths of one per cent. Can the economists and statesmen, who, in this great country of ours, become excited over this item, as if the welfare of America depended upon its retention on this side of the water, be taken seriously? We don't think they take themselves

seriously....

But we are told that "the immigrants most dangerous are those who come ... to earn the *higher wages* offered in the United States, with the fixed intention of returning to their families in the home country to spend those wages." The fact is, that the immigrants earn the *lower wages* offered in the United States, suffer most from intermittent and seasonal labor, and, being largely employed in hazardous industries, pay the major part of the loss of life and limb incident to these operations. The country owes a debt to every immigrant who returns having spent many years of his life in our industrial army. . . .

The Standard of Living

We are also told that the foreigners have reduced wages and affected the American standard of living. On the first point, the Department of Commerce and Labor, after long and patient investigation, has failed to find a reduction in wage in the industries largely manned by immigrants.

Is it not a fact that wages were never as high in the industries of the United States as in 1907, the year when immigration touched high-water mark and 1,285,349 came to America? The immigrants from southeastern Europe, when they understand what the standard wage is, will fight for it with far greater solidarity than the Anglo-Saxon or the Teuton. The most stubborn strikes in recent years have been the anthracite coal strike, the McKees Rocks, the Westmoreland, etc., in each of which the men of the new immigration were in the majority. It would be difficult to give concrete instances of foreigners actually reducing wages, but many instances may be given where they have stubbornly resisted a reduction and bravely fought for an increased wage. As to the second point, the American standard of living is a shifting one. In the mill towns and mine patches of West Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama, the foreigners would have to come down many degrees in order to conform with the standard of living of Americans of purest blood. In a town in New England, a banker said that the New England Yankee was in his capacity to save money a close second to the Magyar, who led the foreigners in this respect. Put the native-born on \$450 a year—the average wage of foreigners—and will he be able to build a home, raise a family, and push the children several degrees up hi the economic scale? The immigrants are doing this. Suppose the new immigration had kept away, would the wages of unskilled labor be higher? This leads us to the region of conjecture. One thing we know, that the wage has steadily advanced notwithstanding the unprecedented inflow of the last decade. . . .

We are further told that "the immigrants are not *additional* inhabitants," but that "their coming displaces the native stock"; "that the racial suicide is closely connected with the problem of immigration." If "racial suicide" were a phenomenon peculiar to the United States, there would be force in the argument. There is no immigration into France, and yet sterility and a low birth rate have been the concern of statesmen and moralists in that country for the last quarter of a century. The same phenomenon is observed among the-middle classes in England and the Scandinavian peninsula. Artificial restriction on natality is practiced in every industrial country by men and women whose income is such that they must choose between raising a family or maintaining their social status. One or the other of these two institutions must suffer and it is generally the family. This is the case in America. The native-born clerk, tradesman, machinist, professional man, etc., whose income ranges between \$800 and \$1200 a year, can hardly risk matrimony hi an urban community. If he does take a wife, they can hardly afford to raise one child, while two cause great anxiety. A low birth rate is a condition that is superinduced by industrial development. The opportunity for advancement, social prestige, love of power and its retention in the family, etc., these are some of the causes of a low birth rate. "But greater than any other cause is 'the deliberate and voluntary avoidance of child-bearing on the part of a steadily increasing number of married people, who not only prefer to have but few children, but who know how to obtain their wish,'" [according to W.B. Bailey]. Immigration is no more the cause of racial suicide than the countryside superstition that a plentiful crop of nuts is the cause of fecundity. . . .

Immigrants Do Needed Work

The foreigners are despised for the work they do. Must this work be done? Can America get along without sewer digging, construction work, tunnel driving, coal mining, meat packing, hide tanning, etc.—disagreeable work, which the English-speaking shun? This labor is necessary and the foreigners do it uncomplainingly. Should they be condemned, despised, and dubbed "the scum of the earth" for doing basic work which we all know is a necessity, but which we ourselves will not perform? A percentage of foreigners is illiterate, and a still larger percentage is unskilled, but every one who has studied these men knows that they have common sense, meekness, patience, submission, docility, and gratitude—qualities which have made them admirably suited for the coarse work America needs done. The accident of birth accounts largely for skill in reading and writing as well as for a knowledge of the trades: we cannot choose the country of our birth any more than hereditary tendencies; why, then, should we blame men for the consequence of these accidents? The best judges of America's need of unskilled labor are employers, men of affairs, and leaders in the industrial development of the nation, and these without exception say that the foreigner has been a blessing and not a curse. In 1910, the National Board of Trade received letters from ninety-three such men, residing in thirty-five states, expressing their views as to the effect of immigration on labor and the industries, and the following is the summary of their answers:—

1. That the general effect of immigration to this country has been beneficial.
2. That immigration so far has not constituted a menace to American labor.
3. That it is still needed for our industrial and commercial development.

In view of these conclusions, the right of the foreigner to respect and honorable treatment from Americans ought to be acknowledged; the credit due him for the part he has played in the industrial development of America should be freely given; his right to the free enjoyment of the fruit of his labor wherever he chooses to spend his money should be conceded; but unfortunately none of these rights is recognized by a vast number of native-born men in the immigration zone. . . .

We have reason to believe that immigration to the United States suffers from too much legislation. Multiplicity of laws will not secure to the United States immunity from the evils of immigration. Each new barrier erected invites the cunning and duplicity of shrewd foreigners to overcome it and affords an opportunity to exploit the ignorant. It is the duty of the government to guard the gates against the diseased, the insane, and the criminal, and our present laws, in the hands of competent men, do this. The immigrant has a right to look for transportation conveniences on steamships and accommodations in detention stations, which comply with the demands of sanitary science and personal hygiene. Every important distributing center should have detention halls, where the immigrants could be kept until called for by friends or guided by responsible parties to their destination. America collects \$4 per head from all immigrants coming to the country. Canada spends that amount per head to give the newcomers the necessary information as to agricultural opportunities and economic conditions, so that the men may exercise their judgement as to place to locate and employment to seek. The immigrants will never be distributed in the states and the communities where their labor would count for most, as long as the hands of the division of information of the Bureau of Immigration are tied by the want of funds to fulfill the purpose for which it was created. The attempt to regulate the inflow of immigrants by legislation according to the labor supply of this country is impracticable and will inevitably lead to political skirmishing. Who is to decide the condition of the labor market, the operators or the trades-union? Economic law will regulate this far more effectually and promptly. While the recommendations of the Immigration Commission wait the action of Congress, industrial depression has driven 2,000,000 workers out of the country. If the "Conclusions and Recommendations" of the Commission were written in 1907 instead of 1910, their tone would be very different. A few efficient laws left alone and well executed are better than many statutes, continuous legislative tinkering, and inefficiency.

The assimilation of the immigrants must depend more upon private effort than upon legislation. No action of either Federal or state government can do half as much for aliens wishing to join the

family as the conduct of Americans in the immigration zone, who can help this cause more by throwing open the school building than by urging the enactment of state laws concerning the illiteracy of foreigners. Centers opened in every public school in foreign colonies, where immigrants could be taught, would do more for foreigners in one year, than ten years of legislative inhibition as to what the foreigners should or should not do. ...

Legislative action and private organizations can do much for immigrants, but the most effective of all remedies is personal contact. We can legislate as we have a mind to, but unless the native-born is ready to take the foreign-born in confidence and sympathy into the family, there will be no assimilation. Of the 13,500,000 foreign-born in the country at present, about half of them are from southeastern Europe: in other words in a population of 90,000,000 whites, just one out of every fifteen is a child of the backward races of Europe, and we all stand in awe of him and say he is a menace. Would it not be better to trust the brother, believe that he is capable of infinite good, give him a fair chance in the race, secure to him all freedom of opportunity, and treat him at all times as a responsible moral being with rights and duties as other men? If this personal touch is secured, righteous treatment given, and broad sympathetic interest shown, the immigration problem will be solved in the light of the brotherhood of man and the spirit of our democracy.