

Citizenship Lessons from the Past: The Contours of Immigrant Naturalization in the Early 20th Century*

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Objectives. What were the determinants and patterns of naturalization in the first two decades of the 20th century? Low levels of citizenship acquisition among contemporary immigrants are frequently contrasted to the assumed rapid naturalization of prior European migrants, but in truth we know little about the earlier period. Historic data are well suited to investigate four explanations for naturalization: individuals' resources and skills; regulatory and bureaucratic barriers to citizenship; relative costs and benefits of citizenship; and the degree of political mobilization directed to immigrants. *Methods.* I use U.S. Census microfile data to run logistic regression models, and documentary material to examine the contours of immigrant naturalization in the early 20th century. *Results.* I find that while individual attributes matter, place of residence could be even more important; in 1900, where an immigrant lived influenced naturalization more than birthplace, ability to speak English, or literacy. Residence effects seem linked to a state's relative openness to immigration and local political mobilization. Over time, however, residence effects attenuate as the 1906 Naturalization Act and establishment of a federal naturalization bureaucracy appear to make citizenship patterns more uniform across the country. *Conclusions.* These findings suggest that historic and contemporary explanations of immigrants' naturalization should focus as much on the context of reception as the presumed quality of immigrants.

Amid the aging tenements of the Lower East Side, on the second floor of the Streit's Matzo factory, Domingo Pena stands in a room thick with the sweet aroma of baking dough. . . . [H]e emigrated from the Dominican Republic 22 years ago and has worked at Streit's the past 14 years. He and his wife live comfortably nearby, raising three young girls who were born in this country . . . But if Pena has built an American life for himself on the Lower East Side like

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generations of European immigrants, he has yet to take a step that many of them took quickly: become a citizen of the United States.

Philip P. Pan (2000)

Contemporary low levels of immigrant naturalization—in 2004 only 38 percent of the foreign born were American citizens—invite implicit or explicit comparisons with earlier European migration, as in the *Washington Post* story above. Yet as Nancy Foner cautions, “[a]n elaborate mythology has grown around immigration at the turn of the century, and perceptions of that earlier migration deeply color how the newest wave is seen” (2000:2). Surprisingly, we have few statistical analyses of historic immigrant citizenship. The few numbers available usually come from local courts of record and apply only to certain groups in a specific locale (Erie, 1988; Gavit, 1922; Ueda, 1982, 1996). We know almost nothing about the determinants of naturalization for the great wave of European immigration from 1880 to 1924.

Here, I examine patterns of citizenship acquisition in the early 20th century using individual microfile data on adult male immigrants from the 1900, 1910, and 1920 U.S. Censuses.¹ Such an analysis adds to our knowledge of immigrants’ historic political incorporation and it serves as an important corrective to myths of uniformly rapid naturalization among European immigrants.

Historic data also let us test the temporal validity of four explanations for contemporary naturalization. Contemporary accounts focus on the characteristics of individual migrants, be it their culture, skills, or interests (Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1990; Jones-Correa, 1998; Portes and Mozo, 1985; Uhlaner, Cain, and Kiewiet, 1989; Yang, 1994), on legal and bureaucratic barriers restricting migrants’ ability to acquire citizenship (Alvarez, 1987; DeSipio, 2001; North, 1985, 1987), or on a perceived general decline in the value of American citizenship (Schuck, 1998). More recently, scholars link present-day changes in the political system, especially the decline in mobilization by political parties, to falling naturalization levels (Jones-Correa, 1998; DeSipio, 2001; Andersen, forthcoming; Wong, 2006). All these factors—immigrant attributes, regulatory changes, the benefits of citizenship, and political mobilization—varied in the past. Evaluating these explanations for earlier migrants can shed theoretical light on the current period.

To anticipate, local political environments were critical in facilitating or hindering immigrants’ propensity to naturalize. In 1900, where an immigrant lived influenced naturalization more than birthplace, ability to speak English, or literacy. The effect of residence was not just a function of urban political machines but appears linked to how warmly, or punitively, a state

¹Data are from the Integrated Public Use Microfile Samples (IPUMS (www.ipums.org)). I focus on adult men (21 years and older) since enumerators did not collect systematic data on women’s or children’s citizenship before 1920.

treated noncitizens. Soon after, however, the dynamics of citizenship underwent a sea-change as the federal government centralized and bureaucratized naturalization. Interstate citizenship differences attenuated between 1900 and 1920 and, by implication, the relative influence of national versus local politics on immigrant citizenship increased.

Explanations for Naturalization

Since its inception, the United States has had one of the most open citizenship policies in the world, despite ethnoracial and gender restrictions at various periods (Ueda, 2001; Bloemraad and Ueda, 2006). Individuals can acquire U.S. citizenship at birth by being born on American soil or to American parents in a foreign country. *Naturalization* is the legal process enabling noncitizens to become Americans. For most of U.S. history, the requirements of naturalization have changed little: adult immigrants generally need five years of residence; basic knowledge of English, American history, and civics; proof of good moral character; and a willingness to swear an oath of allegiance.²

Between 1900 and 1920, the proportion of immigrants who held U.S. citizenship fell dramatically from 67 percent to 49 percent. In part, the decline stemmed from rapid, large-scale migration as 14.5 million immigrants entered the country. Such an influx increases the number of foreign born living in the United States—the denominator for naturalization calculations—but because immigrants cannot become citizens immediately, new arrivals drive down aggregate citizenship levels.³ However, the “new” immigrants of the early 20th century also appeared less likely to apply for citizenship than those who came in the 19th century. As Table 1 shows, citizenship levels declined from 1900 to 1920 among migrant cohorts with similar years of residence. The decline, akin to what we see among immigrants in the last three decades of the 20th century (Schmidley and Gibson, 1999; Bloemraad, 2006), raised fears over “unsuitable” or “unassimilable” migrants.

²A number of exceptions exist. For example, residency requirements are three years for those married to American citizens and reduced or waived for those who served in the U.S. armed services.

³Time in the United States also matters because the more years an immigrant lives in his or her new home, the more likely he or she is to naturalize. Time might reduce the costs of citizenship and make the benefits more apparent (Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1986; Yang, 1994), or it may mark assimilation and growing attachment to the new home (Evans, 1988; Liang, 1994).

TABLE 1
 Percentage of Foreign-Born Men (21 Years and Older) Naturalized,
 by Years of Residence*

Years of Residence	1900	1910	1920
Less than 5	4	2	4
5–9 years	39	18	15
10–14 years	61	48	31
15–19 years	77	68	44
20–29 years	83	82	69
20 years or more	89	86	80
30 years or more	93	91	86
Average	65	51	49

*The 1900 and 1910 Census did not collect citizenship data for women or children.

SOURCE: Author's calculations using 1900, 1910, and 1920 IPUMS Census samples.

The Wrong Sorts of Immigrants—The Individual Attributes Explanation

Given relatively low barriers to citizenship in the United States, most accounts of immigrants' naturalization focus on how immigrants' characteristics affect their propensity to take out citizenship. Relevant characteristics fall into two types: individual skills and interests (Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1986; Yang, 1994) or an immigrant group's cultural traits (Greeley and McCready, 1975; Huntington, 2004). We have abundant contemporary evidence that personal resources matter in naturalization, so we would expect that citizenship acquisition in the past varied by level of education and English-language ability. We know less, however, about the relative importance of resources and skills compared to the sociopolitical context in which immigrants found themselves.

The cultural argument is more controversial since migrant groups can share socioeconomic characteristics as well as cultural norms. After controlling for key socioeconomic determinants, researchers find that significant intergroup differences persist (Bueker, 2005; Liang, 1994; Yang, 1994). However, group effects could be due to culture or another omitted variable. One way to test for the consistency of a cultural effect is to compare the same immigrant group across different U.S. states. Little interstate variation would suggest a uniform ethnic group effect; interstate differences would imply that cultural traits undergo modification depending on the sociopolitical environment.

This proposition will be tested below, but historic inconsistencies in identifying civically recalcitrant immigrant groups are worth noting. The 1907 Immigration (or Dillingham) Commission provided the scientific rationalization for immigration restrictions in the 1920s. It drew stark differences between the "new" immigrants from east and central Europe and

the “old” immigrants from west and northern Europe. Citizenship levels provided powerful proof that older immigrants assimilated better than newer ones: 92 percent of Swedes and 86 percent of Germans were American citizens, compared to only 30 percent of southern Italians and 28 percent of Russians. Some argued that groups with little background in democratic government were ill suited for American society.

Beyond the methodological problems with this comparison—the Dillingham Commission failed to adequately take into account length of residence—comparing yesterday’s favored groups to today’s reluctant naturalizers is revealing.⁴ Of those migrating to the United States in 1977, by 1995 *all* 10 immigrant groups with the lowest naturalization levels came from developed countries. Australians, at 9 percent, were least likely to be U.S. citizens, and the “assimilable” groups of 1907 were among those with the lowest naturalization rates in 1995: only 14 percent of Swedes and 17 percent of Germans had taken out citizenship.⁵ Other immigrants in the “bottom 10” came from Norway, Denmark, Japan, Finland, Austria, Canada, and the Netherlands. Thus the worst citizenship delinquents today come from highly developed countries with cultural and political similarities to the United States. Some Latino groups also naturalize slowly, but public scrutiny can be selective in identifying such groups.⁶

The “Long Gray Welcome”—The Bureaucratic Barriers Argument

A second set of arguments attributes low contemporary naturalization to the bureaucratic process and legal regulations structuring citizenship acquisition. According to these accounts, immigrants are deterred from naturalizing by long processing delays, difficult regulations, unwelcoming staff, and

⁴The Commission distinguished between those with less than 10 years of residence and those with more, but as Gavit argues, “those of the ‘older’ races had been in the United States *considerably* longer than ten years, while those of the ‘newer’ races had been here only *slightly* longer than ten years. . . . This means, of course, that the immigrants of the ‘older’ races had had on average a much longer time than those of the ‘newer’ to acquire ‘civic interest’ and seek naturalization” (1922:209–10, emphasis in original).

⁵The average citizenship level of all 1977 immigrants was 46 percent. The figures reflect naturalization rates for those granted permanent residence in 1977 and thus legally able to naturalize. Data are from the INS Fact Sheet (<http://www.ins.usdoj.gov/graphics/aboutins/statistics/299.htm>).

⁶If we instead consider Census data, among immigrants who entered the United States between 1975 and 1979, less than a quarter of Canadians (21 percent), Salvadorans (23 percent), Mexicans (23 percent), the Dutch (24 percent), and people from the United Kingdom (24 percent) had acquired U.S. citizenship in 1990 (Bloemraad, 2002). Unlike administrative INS data, Census data include individuals with no documents or who hold temporary work or student visas. These people cannot become citizens. Thus, while Latino groups such as Salvadorans and Mexicans have low levels of naturalization, this stems in part from legal status. Further, given Canadian and Mexican geographic proximity to the United States, these groups might have a greater tendency to see their stay in the United States as temporary and be less interested in citizenship (Portes and Rumbaut, 1996).

a perception of arbitrary decision making (Alvarez, 1987; DeSipio, 2001; North, 1985, 1987). Although the laws and regulations governing naturalization seem, on paper, simple, the actual experience of naturalization is “embedded in the quagmire and inconsistency of the I.N.S. bureaucracy” (Alvarez, 1987:333). David North summed up needlessly cold and ponderous application forms, administrative problems, and an absence of citizenship promotion by calling American naturalization the “long gray welcome” (1985, 1987).

The early 20th century provides a unique opportunity to examine the relative importance of bureaucratic practice and regulation. In the 19th century, the administration of citizenship varied by state even though the Constitution assigns jurisdiction over naturalization to Congress. Local or federal courts could bestow citizenship, and judges enjoyed great latitude. Federal law dating from 1802 mandated five years of residence, but verification procedures were often poor or nonexistent. No formal language or knowledge requirements existed, yet some judges required them (Gavit, 1922). After surveying 423 judges and examining more than 23,000 citizenship petitions filed between July 1, 1913 and June 30, 1914, Gavit concludes:

When we speak of the “personal equation” as an important factor in the adoption or rejection of an applicant for citizenship, we are likely to be thinking chiefly of the personality of the petitioner. . . . But this is only part. . . . For while it is true in one sense that the applicant does pass into the maw of a machine, constructed “of law rather than of men” . . . the fact is that there is hardly any other legal process in our governmental system in which personality—individual ideas, prejudices, idiosyncrasies—play so large a part. In no other activity of the courts is the individual petitioner so entirely at the mercy of the court, so completely without recourse in the event of a decision against him. (1922:143)

In response to this inconsistency, to complaints of fraud perpetuated by political machines, and to a growing sentiment that American citizenship was a privilege to be earned, the federal government, in 1906, introduced a comprehensive citizenship law codifying the requirements of naturalization (Gavit, 1922; Hazard, 1927; Ueda, 1982; Schneider, 2001). The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization was established to administer the new law uniformly. Officials created a standard application form and scrutinized documents attesting to immigrants’ length of residence. Applicants now needed to demonstrate a command of English by answering basic civics questions.

The 1906 law allows us to examine the repercussions of national standardization and the new English and civics requirements. If standardization matters, interstate variation in citizenship should decrease, and if regulatory obstacles are important, we should see, after 1906, larger differences in naturalization between those with and without English-language skills.

The Structure of Costs and Benefits—The Rational Decision-Making Argument

A third set of explanations centers on the costs and benefits of citizenship (Schneider, 2001). For some, contemporary declines in naturalization can be traced to a “devaluation” of American citizenship as legal distinctions between permanent resident aliens and citizens fade (Schuck, 1998). Put bluntly, the few rewards associated with American citizenship do not compensate for the bother of naturalizing. Others point to the “cost” side of the equation: not only do you gain little, but naturalization in the United States could cause the loss of a prior nationality, with attendant loss of property rights, political rights, and legal membership in the homeland (Jones-Correa, 1998). In these accounts, individuals’ attributes or bureaucratic hassles matter, but they do so mainly in the context of an overarching structure of benefits and penalties.

The historic record provides an ideal place to examine this argument. The penalties of noncitizenship varied significantly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In some states, certain professions and privileges were restricted to U.S. citizens, while in others immigrants who had merely declared their intention to naturalize could vote in elections. The devaluation argument suggests that states that were more punitive toward noncitizens should enjoy higher levels of naturalization since the benefits of citizenship are clearer, while the costs argument implies that naturalization should vary according to the difficulty of citizenship.

The Urban Machine, and Beyond—The Political Mobilization Argument

Contemporary impressions of early European migration include an image of easy naturalization linked to urban political mobilization. According to Erie, by 1868 the New York City machine Tammany Hall perfected processing through its “Naturalization Bureau” so that “[i]mmigrants fresh off the boat were given red tickets, allowing them to get their citizenship papers free. Tammany paid the required court fees and provided false witnesses to testify that the immigrants had been in the country for the necessary five years” (1988:51). Erie contends that by 1886, almost 80 percent of New York’s Irish, German, and other west European immigrants had naturalized through the machine (1988:53). Machines’ fraudulent activities raised cries of alarm and spurred the move to political reform and the 1906 Naturalization Act (Schneider, 2001).

Mobilization by political machines clearly facilitated citizenship for some immigrants in cities such as New York. Yet machines’ overall effect on naturalization has probably been exaggerated (Erie, 1988; Sterne, 2001). Urban machines’ citizenship activities involved only a few cities, usually

benefited only a few immigrant groups, and did not begin to absorb the massive immigrant influx of 1880–1924. Early immigrants, such as the Irish, benefited, but later immigrants received little assistance. Casting a wider net, the political mobilization argument suggests that citizenship levels vary in proportion to localized political activity.

The Determinants of Naturalization

Using Census microfile data assembled and standardized through the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), I estimate the determinants of citizenship in 1900 and 1920 using logistic regression models. The individual attributes explanation suggests that years of residence, age, English ability, education, and country of origin all influence citizenship acquisition (Bernard, 1936; Evans, 1988; Jasso and Rosenzweig, 1986; Liang, 1994; Yang, 1994). The Census questions on years of residence, age, and English ability are similar for 1900 and 1920, providing a highly comparable measure of these variables. Measuring education is more difficult since early Censuses did not ask about educational attainment. I use reported literacy (in any language) as a rough proxy for education in 1900 and 1920. Most individuals claim to be literate, so this measure probably distinguishes between those with no formal education and those with some schooling. Although crude, the measure has value since the limited statistical work we have from the early 20th century suggests that citizenship levels were roughly similar across most levels of education, but lower for those without formal schooling (Gosnell, 1928, 1929; Bernard, 1936). To evaluate the cost/benefit argument, I also include a dummy variable coding whether a respondent occupies a clerical or professional occupation since many states imposed citizenship restrictions on professional or business licenses.

Evaluation of the cultural argument and localized political mobilization depends on the relative effect of place of birth versus place of residence on citizenship acquisition. Each model contains variables for eight numerically significant immigrant groups and 10 key immigration states.⁷ I restrict the model to people born in Germany, Canada, England, Ireland, Sweden, Italy, Russia, and Poland. These eight groups totaled 76.5 percent of the 1900 male adult immigrant sample and 65.6 percent of the 1920 sample. I include 10 key immigrant-receiving states: Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and California. Just over 70 percent of all immigrants in 1900 lived in these 10 states, as did 73 percent of the adult males from the selected immigrant

⁷I make these restrictions to control for changes in the overall immigrant composition from 1900 to 1920, and because the number of cases for other groups and states is too small for statistical analysis.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for Adult Male Immigrant Sample, 1900 and 1920

Variable	1900 (N = 3,803)				1920 (N = 35,444)			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Naturalized Citizen</i>	0.689	0.463	0	1	0.528	0.499	0	1
<i>Length of Residence</i>								
Year in U.S.	21.604	14.315	0	80	22.955	14.268	0	92
Years in U.S., squared	671.598	816.216	0	6400	730.533	868.675	0	8464
<i>Age</i>								
Age	43.261	14.858	21	93	44.175	14.428	21	105
Age, squared	2092.255	1438.997	441	8649	2159.613	1416.499	441	11025
<i>Education</i>								
Literate	0.882	0.323	0	1	0.880	0.325	0	1
Prof. or clerical occupation	0.142	0.349	0	1	0.171	0.376	0	1
<i>English Ability</i>	0.906	0.292	0	1	0.901	0.299	0	1
<i>Place of Birth</i>								
Germany	0.345	0.476	0	1	0.169	0.375	0	1
Canada	0.120	0.325	0	1	0.097	0.296	0	1
Ireland	0.195	0.396	0	1	0.097	0.296	0	1
England	0.102	0.303	0	1	0.079	0.270	0	1
Sweden	0.069	0.254	0	1	0.061	0.239	0	1
Italy	0.075	0.264	0	1	0.194	0.395	0	1
Russia	0.041	0.198	0	1	0.150	0.358	0	1
Poland	0.053	0.224	0	1	0.152	0.359	0	1
<i>Place of Residence</i>								
MA	0.102	0.302	0	1	0.107	0.309	0	1
NJ	0.069	0.253	0	1	0.075	0.263	0	1
NY	0.260	0.439	0	1	0.287	0.452	0	1
PA	0.122	0.327	0	1	0.131	0.338	0	1
IL	0.126	0.332	0	1	0.121	0.326	0	1
MI	0.078	0.268	0	1	0.078	0.268	0	1
OH	0.064	0.246	0	1	0.055	0.229	0	1
WI	0.067	0.250	0	1	0.042	0.201	0	1
MN	0.069	0.253	0	1	0.045	0.207	0	1
CA	0.044	0.206	0	1	0.059	0.236	0	1

SOURCE: Author's calculations using 1900 and 1920 IPUMS Census samples.

groups. For 1920, the figures are 73 percent and 76 percent, respectively. Table 2 provides descriptive statistics of the data.

Between 1900 and 1920, the relative ethnic composition of the immigrant population changed markedly, but other sociodemographic characteristics remained quite stable. On average, adult male immigrants in the two samples had lived in the United States 22 or 23 years, and they were 43 or 44 years old. In both years, 88 percent were literate and 90 percent could

speak English.⁸ The distribution of the immigrants among the 10 selected states also remained relatively constant. Only two major differences stand out. First, citizenship was much less prevalent in 1920 than in 1900, falling by 16 percentage points. Second, the relative size of the immigrant groups shifts. “Old” immigrants from west and north Europe represent 83 percent of the sample in 1900, but in 1920, three “new” immigrant groups—Italians, Russians, and Poles—account for 50 percent of all male adult immigrants.

Since citizenship status is a dichotomous variable—either one is or is not a citizen—I use logistic regression to model the effect of the independent variables on propensity to naturalize. Table 3 presents the results.⁹ The base categories for the models are being born in Germany and living in New York. Length of residence, English-language ability, and being literate have significant positive effects on naturalization in 1900 and 1920. Age has a significant effect in 1920, but not in 1900. Likewise, holding a professional or clerical occupation is significant in 1920 but not in 1900. In both models, country of birth or state of residence has a significant effect on naturalization.

Logistic coefficients are difficult to interpret from a table of results since, unlike ordinary least squares, the effect of any one variable depends on the values of the others. It is thus easier to evaluate relative effects by comparing predicted probabilities and calculating first differences, the change in probability that occurs from varying one of the independent variables. I use statistical simulation techniques to calculate 95 percent confidence intervals for predicted citizenship probabilities, as reported in Table 4.¹⁰

The top line in Table 4 reports the expected probability of being a citizen for a man with the average characteristics of the sample. Probability values fall between 0, indicating certainty that someone with these characteristics would not be an American citizen, and 1, indicating absolute certainty of naturalization. The rest of the table displays predicted citizenship probabilities for various attributes while holding other variables at their mean. The probabilities can be compared within a category (e.g., across birthplaces), or to the average probability of the sample. The difference between two prob-

⁸Having English, Irish, and (English) Canadians in the sample raises the reported level of English ability slightly. Of the whole adult male immigrant population, 88 percent reported English-language ability.

⁹The original IPUMS data are random samples of household clusters, defined differently depending on the Census. The model results include a Huber-White correction for robust standard errors. For more information on the IPUMS sample methodology, see Ruggles and Sobek (1997).

¹⁰I ran Monte Carlo simulations based on the vector of parameter estimates and the variance/co-variance matrix (Tomz, Wittenberg, and King, 2001). The best naturalization studies report first differences (Liang, 1994; Yang, 1994), but few provide measures of uncertainty for the expected probabilities. Estimation uncertainty is inherent to statistical sampling; thus outcome measures should report a distribution of expected values in the same way standard errors describe a band of possible coefficient values (King, Tomz, and Wittenberg, 2000).

TABLE 3

Determinants of Naturalization, Foreign-Born Men (21 Years and Older), 1900 and 1920, Logistic Regression Results

Variable	1900		1920	
	Logged Odds	se	Logged Odds	se
<i>Length of Residence</i>				
Years in U.S.	0.244*	0.013	0.207*	0.004
Years in U.S., squared	-0.0026*	0.0002	-0.0019*	0.0001
<i>Age</i>				
Age	0.030	0.020	-0.034*	0.007
Age, squared	-0.0004	0.0002	0.0002*	0.00007
<i>Education</i>				
Literate	0.370**	0.161	1.055*	0.052
Prof. or clerical occupation	0.259	0.143	0.616*	0.038
<i>English Ability</i>	0.642*	0.177	0.786*	0.058
<i>Place of Birth</i>				
Germany	—		—	
Canada	-0.207	0.164	-0.452*	0.062
Ireland	0.637*	0.152	0.514*	0.066
England	-0.182	0.178	0.048	0.068
Sweden	0.244	0.206	0.196*	0.072
Italy	-0.619*	0.195	-0.643*	0.053
Russia	-0.721*	0.228	-0.466*	0.054
Poland	-0.269	0.209	-0.860*	0.054
<i>Place of Residence</i>				
MA	-0.778*	0.176	-0.475*	0.054
NJ	-0.079	0.190	-0.078	0.058
NY	—		—	
PA	0.077	0.171	0.164*	0.049
IL	0.760*	0.166	0.457*	0.050
MI	0.005	0.218	-0.024	0.063
OH	0.827*	0.237	0.127	0.067
WI	-1.183*	0.213	-0.256*	0.087
MN	-0.107	0.220	0.302*	0.083
CA	-0.246	0.236	-0.084	0.067
<i>Constant</i>	-3.704*	0.469	-3.629*	0.165
<i>Log Likelihood</i>	-1529.132		-16417.385	
<i>Pseudo R²</i>	0.352		0.330	
<i>N</i>	3,803		35,444	

*Significant at the $p < 0.01$ level; **significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Huber-White corrected standard errors.

abilities tells us how much a variable increases or decreases one's chances of being a citizen. Relative first-difference effects can be compared across 1900 and 1920. Since length of residence exerts such a strong influence on

TABLE 4
 Predicted Probability of Being a Citizen, Foreign-Born Men (21 Years and Older), 1900, 1920

Variable	1900				1920			
	10 Yrs Residence		20 Yrs Residence		10 Yrs Residence		20 Yrs Residence	
	Probability	95% Confidence Interval	Probability	95% Confidence Interval	Probability	95% Confidence Interval	Probability	95% Confidence Interval
Expected probability, at means	0.489	0.453 0.528	0.837	0.817 0.857	0.198	0.188 0.208	0.529	0.520 0.539
<i>Education</i>								
Illiterate	0.410	0.339 0.488	0.787	0.732 0.836	0.089	0.081 0.099	0.308	0.287 0.330
Literate	0.500	0.462 0.540	0.843	0.823 0.862	0.219	0.209 0.229	0.561	0.551 0.570
Prof. or clerical occupation	0.544	0.472 0.616	0.864	0.829 0.894	0.292	0.274 0.309	0.652	0.636 0.667
<i>English Ability</i>								
No English ability	0.349	0.278 0.427	0.739	0.672 0.805	0.109	0.098 0.120	0.356	0.331 0.381
Able to speak English	0.505	0.466 0.544	0.845	0.826 0.863	0.211	0.200 0.221	0.549	0.539 0.558
<i>Place of Birth</i>								
Germany	0.488	0.434 0.542	0.835	0.808 0.860	0.251	0.233 0.268	0.604	0.584 0.621
Canada	0.438	0.368 0.509	0.805	0.759 0.846	0.176	0.160 0.193	0.493	0.469 0.516
Ireland	0.641	0.574 0.701	0.905	0.878 0.926	0.359	0.334 0.386	0.718	0.696 0.740
England	0.444	0.364 0.524	0.809	0.755 0.856	0.261	0.240 0.285	0.616	0.587 0.643
Sweden	0.547	0.451 0.639	0.864	0.810 0.905	0.291	0.264 0.320	0.650	0.621 0.677
Italy	0.340	0.266 0.415	0.732	0.661 0.796	0.150	0.140 0.161	0.445	0.428 0.462
Russia	0.320	0.234 0.415	0.712	0.624 0.791	0.174	0.163 0.186	0.489	0.470 0.508
Poland	0.420	0.335 0.512	0.793	0.730 0.849	0.124	0.116 0.134	0.392	0.375 0.409

TABLE 4—continued

Variable	1900				1920			
	10 Yrs Residence		20 Yrs Residence		10 Yrs Residence		20 Yrs Residence	
	Probability	95% Confidence Interval	Probability	95% Confidence Interval	Probability	95% Confidence Interval	Probability	95% Confidence Interval
<i>Place of Residence</i>								
MA	0.313	0.253 0.383	0.707	0.643 0.765	0.131	0.119 0.144	0.406	0.384 0.428
NJ	0.476	0.387 0.561	0.828	0.775 0.872	0.183	0.165 0.200	0.503	0.478 0.530
NY	0.495	0.442 0.549	0.839	0.807 0.867	0.195	0.182 0.206	0.523	0.509 0.537
PA	0.514	0.434 0.589	0.849	0.806 0.886	0.222	0.206 0.238	0.564	0.543 0.584
IL	0.678	0.610 0.739	0.918	0.894 0.939	0.277	0.259 0.296	0.635	0.615 0.654
MI	0.493	0.396 0.589	0.837	0.779 0.884	0.191	0.172 0.210	0.517	0.488 0.546
OH	0.690	0.588 0.780	0.922	0.886 0.950	0.216	0.194 0.239	0.555	0.524 0.585
WI	0.234	0.166 0.312	0.617	0.523 0.706	0.159	0.136 0.184	0.461	0.420 0.502
MN	0.466	0.373 0.565	0.822	0.757 0.873	0.247	0.218 0.277	0.598	0.560 0.633
CA	0.434	0.330 0.541	0.802	0.728 0.863	0.183	0.164 0.203	0.504	0.473 0.535

SOURCE: 1900 and 1920 US Census, Public Use Microfile samples.

naturalization, I report separately probabilities for an immigrant with 10 years of residence and with 20 years of residence.¹¹

Immigrant Attributes and Place of Residence

As suggested by numerous studies, individual attributes matter in explaining immigrant naturalization. Men who report knowing English or being literate in any language are more likely to hold U.S. citizenship in 1900 and 1920. If one interprets place of birth as a proxy for cultural values, these also affect citizenship. Glazer and Moynihan (1963), for example, suggest that the New York Irish have a cultural proclivity for politics bred in their experience with democracy and communal pub culture. Although they do not use the term, we could imagine “hanging out” increases bar patrons’ social capital and, in turn, their propensity to naturalize and participate in politics. In contrast, Glazer and Moynihan suggest that Italian immigrants eschew politics because of patron-client norms in their homeland and strong ties to family that impede public or civic ties. These accounts are consistent with the regression results: Irish with 10 years of residence are more likely to be naturalized citizens (a 0.64 probability in 1900) than Italian immigrants (a much lower 0.34 probability).

However, other interpretations are also possible. According to a political mobilization approach, we should not be surprised at high Irish naturalization since this is the group that most benefited, and controlled, early urban political machines (Clark, 1975; Erie, 1988). Indeed, being born in Ireland produces the greatest positive increase in the probability of being a citizen of any immigrant group considered. The predicted probability of citizenship among the Irish in 1900 for those with 10 years of residence is fully 30 percent higher than the average for all similarly situated male immigrants. At the same time, while the results show some support for the “new” and “old” immigrant group distinction highlighted by the Dillingham Commission, the confidence intervals around the predicted probabilities reveal that German, Canadian, and English migrants were not much different from Italians, Russians, and Poles. Mostly the Irish—and perhaps the Swedes—acquired American citizenship rapidly and in larger numbers, compared to other immigrants.

The focus on place of birth—spurred by the long-standing question of why certain ethnic minorities appear more adept at politics—obscures the arguably more important effect of place of residence. For example, 90 percent of the German-born living in Ohio were naturalized citizens in 1900, compared to only 60 percent of their compatriots in Wisconsin.

¹¹Below, I compare 10-year residents from 1900 and 20-year residents from 1920 because the average probability of citizenship for these two cases is roughly similar, eliminating any floor or ceiling effects that result from comparing widely different probabilities.

The cultural argument rests on an assumption of strong, relatively uniform immigrant cultures. We should consequently see little interstate difference among people born in the same country after holding key sociodemographic characteristics such as language ability and length of residence constant.

Yet results suggest that in 1900, place of residence exercised a greater effect on naturalization than place of birth. Among immigrants with 10 years of residence, the chance of citizenship doubles from the most reluctant naturalizers, those born in Russia, to the most likely to naturalize, the Irish, with predicted probabilities of 0.32 and 0.64, respectively. In comparison, predicted citizenship probabilities triple when we move from the state with the lowest predicted probability, Wisconsin at 0.23, to that with the highest, Ohio, at 0.69. These large and significant interstate differences, noticeable even after controlling for individual attributes and birthplace, indicate that social and political environments played a central role in early 20th century naturalization, and they cast doubt on a simple cultural explanation of immigrants' political membership.

Historians have repeatedly underscored the importance of place for immigrant naturalization in the early 20th century (Schneider, 2001; Ueda, 1982), but lacking national, generalizable statistics, they have not been able to measure the breadth of interstate differences. An adequate understanding of these differences, and their attenuation, will require in-depth historic work beyond the scope of this article, but the statistical data point to fruitful paths to explore.

The 1906 Naturalization Act, Bureaucratization, and Federalism

One of the most significant changes affecting naturalization was the passage of the 1906 Naturalization Act. It sought to centralize and standardize the naturalization process by creating a federal agency to oversee the administration of citizenship. It also instituted a new English requirement for would-be Americans.

The English-language requirement speaks to both a bureaucratic barriers argument and one centered on individual attributes. Those who identify bureaucratic impediments as a key determinant of naturalization would expect that as the barriers to citizenship increased from 1900 to 1920, naturalization levels should decline. This is indeed the case: the predicted probability of naturalization for a 10-year resident in 1900 is 0.49, whereas in 1920 it is only 0.20, a significant drop.

The bureaucratic approach, coupled with a focus on individual attributes, also suggests that the importance of English-language skills should increase. Under the new law, speaking English matters more in 1920 than in 1900. Surprisingly, such a skills argument does not hold empirically. In both 1900 and 1920, not speaking English and being illiterate decreased an immigrant's chance of naturalization, but the relative importance of literacy

increases unexpectedly while the effect of English ability remains constant. In 1900, a 10-year resident of the United States increased his chance of citizenship about 25 percent if he was literate, from a predicted probability of 0.41 to 0.50. Having English-language skills was much more important: it raised the predicted probability of citizenship almost 45 percent, from 0.35 to 0.51. In 1920, English ability has roughly the same effect as before, despite the addition of language as a requisite for citizenship: it increases the predicted probability of citizenship for a 20-year resident 54 percent, from 0.36 to 0.55. In comparison, although no literacy test was included in the 1906 Act, the importance of literacy increases dramatically: the average literate immigrant in 1920 was about 80 percent more likely to hold citizenship (a probability of 0.56) than an illiterate compatriot (0.31). These results seem counterintuitive given the formal requirements of the 1906 law. They suggest that the language requirement was not necessarily onerous, but bureaucratization privileged literacy through the need to read and understand forms and/or to negotiate a formal, standardized regulatory process.

Bureaucratization and standardization also apparently reduced the citizenship gap between states from 1900 to 1920. The effect of place of residence becomes much more muted in 1920, shrinking to 0.23 between high probability naturalizers in Illinois and much less likely citizens in Massachusetts. The disadvantage of residence in Wisconsin weakens from 1900 to 1920, and the advantage of living in Ohio diminishes to be insignificantly different from residing in New York. In comparison, the magnitude of the birthplace effects changes little. The spread in the predicted probability of citizenship for immigrants with 20 years of residence in 1920 is 0.33 between those born in Ireland and those born in Poland, a gap similar to that in 1900. The 1906 Naturalization Act thus fundamentally restructured citizenship acquisition by attenuating interstate differences and bureaucratizing the process, but the formal regulations added to ensure the quality of would-be citizens—by ensuring they could understand some English—had relatively less effect.

State Laws, Cost/Benefit Calculations, and the Warmth of the Welcome

The first article of the U.S. Constitution assigns power over naturalization to the federal Congress, but U.S. states have long controlled many of the benefits associated with citizenship. After the War of Independence, the former colonies' practice of granting local citizenship persisted and states continued to regulate areas such as property rights, professional licenses, and suffrage, using—or refusing to use—citizenship as a criterion. Hoping to encourage settlement, various states in the 19th and early 20th centuries granted aliens the franchise once an immigrant declared his intention to seek U.S. citizenship (by filing “first papers”) rather than upon the actual acquisition of citizenship. Other states embraced an anti-immigrant stance,

limiting certain rights and benefits to U.S. citizens. Depending on the state, the costs and benefits of citizenship varied dramatically.

A rational choice approach would suggest that we will find lower naturalization where benefits are not tied to citizenship: given that citizens and noncitizens enjoy similar rights, it would make little sense to take the time, expense, and hassle to acquire U.S. citizenship. By the same token, states that limit benefits to citizens should have higher levels of immigrant citizenship, all else equal, since the costs of being a noncitizen are higher.

Historical data on citizenship restrictions are sparse and incomplete, but the available evidence suggests that such a cost/benefit analysis is wrong or, at best, holds in a limited way. The three states where foreign-born residents were most likely to be citizens were also the three with the fewest “citizens-only” restrictions. Table 5 outlines the legal restrictions enacted on occupational licenses and property law for the 10 states used in the statistical model. The states are arranged in order according to their relative effects on citizenship probability in 1920. Residence in Illinois increases the probability of naturalization most, controlling for the other variables in the model, while living in Massachusetts depresses citizenship acquisition most. The first two columns of Table 5 indicate the percentage of occupations open only to citizens or open to anyone, including aliens.¹² Laws pertaining to nine occupations for which we have full data are included: accountants, attorneys, dentists, engineers, liquor dealers, notary publics, pharmacists, physicians, and teachers.¹³ Surprisingly, the three states with highest predicted probability of citizenship are also those where aliens could engage in over half the professions surveyed.¹⁴

Instead of considering laws merely as items inputted into a cost/benefit calculation, citizenship legislation might be an indicator of the relative warmth of the welcome afforded to immigrants, or of anti-immigrant environments. This argument turns the cost/benefit paradigm on its head, suggesting that relatively open laws in Illinois, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania reflect these states’ generally pro-immigrant attitude. Immigrants perceive

¹²A third category of restrictions allows only citizens or “declarants”—individuals who had declared their intention to become a citizen by filing papers with the INS—to practice certain professions.

¹³These nine do not exhaust the possible restrictions enacted, but include those professions most likely to have been the focus of lawmakers’ concern. The data are derived from Vernier (1938), apparently the earliest comprehensive survey of citizenship restrictions at the state-level.

¹⁴The data in Table 5 carry one important caveat. Vernier examined statute books from the late 1920s and early 1930s. The data might consequently under- or overstate the restrictions that held for earlier immigrants. Generally, commentators at the time felt that occupation-related citizenship restrictions were increasing over the early decades of the century, although a few key court cases declared some anti-alien legislation unconstitutional (Konvitz, 1946; Vernier, 1938). Increasing alien restrictions further undermines the cost/benefit approach: using the logic of rational choice, naturalization levels should rise as the disadvantages of alien status increase, yet naturalization levels fall over the 1900–1920 period. In many cases, new restrictions targeted Asian immigrants, especially in western states. Since my analysis does not include Asian immigrants, temporal disjunctions might be minimal.

TABLE 5
 Citizenship Restrictions in Key Immigrant States, c. 1935

State	Professional Restrictions		
	% Citizen Only	% Open to Aliens	Property Restrictions?
Illinois	22	56	yes
Minnesota	22	67	yes
Pennsylvania	22	78	yes
Ohio	44	33	no
New York	33	22	no
Michigan	56	22	no
New Jersey	44	33	no
California	44	22	yes
Wisconsin	33	33	no
Massachusetts	56	44	no

NOTE: Percentages do not always sum to 100 across the rows because some states restricted professions to citizens and declarants, individuals who had filed their intention to apply for citizenship.

SOURCE: Vernier (1938).

these states as more welcoming, and consequently feel a part of society and take up American citizenship. The “stick” of restrictive laws might drive naturalization less than the “carrot” of a friendly environment.

The available historical data make it difficult to adjudicate between these two perspectives in a definitive way, although the “carrot” hypothesis better fits the professions data in Table 5. In defense of a cost/benefit analysis, property restrictions do seem to correlate with naturalization in the expected direction.¹⁵ All three states that register strong positive effects on citizenship probabilities, Illinois, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania, have legislation that restricts aliens’ ability to possess land. One can easily imagine that if citizenship status determines property rights, restrictive legislation would encourage naturalization. In contrast, all states further down the list, with the exception of California, allow aliens resident in the state the same property rights as citizens.¹⁶

The importance of property restrictions should not, however, be overstated since in 1920 the proportion of immigrant farmers in a state—those most affected by land legislation—tends to be small. About 4 percent of

¹⁵Under the Constitution, states may pass property laws as they see fit. However, federal treaties with foreign countries trump state legislation. Thus restrictive property laws did not apply to nationals of certain countries since bilateral treaties ensured reciprocal property rights for signatories’ citizens.

¹⁶California’s restrictions are race-specific, barring Asians from holding land, but allowing aliens of the “white race or of African descent” to possess realty. Since no Asians are included in the statistical models, California has no restrictions for the immigrants I consider.

Illinois's immigrants are farmers in 1920 and less than 2 percent of Pennsylvania's foreign born held a similar occupation. Only in Minnesota are almost a quarter of all male immigrants farmers. The property restrictions in Minnesota and Pennsylvania are also quite specific, probably touching few immigrants. In Pennsylvania, aliens could own up to 5,000 acres of land or any amount of land that produces a net annual income of less than \$20,000. In Minnesota, full property rights were guaranteed to aliens as long as they did not acquire more than 90,000 square feet of realty; this restriction was waived if the immigrant declared his intention to become a citizen and a special exception was made for settlers on farms. Illinois had the strongest and clearest restrictions on alien landholding: noncitizens were allowed to possess land for up to six years, but after six years the land was forfeit unless the alien had become a U.S. citizen. Perhaps the mere impression of property restrictions was enough to encourage immigrants in Illinois, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania to naturalize at levels greater than other states.

We should also note the change in the effect of holding a professional or clerical occupation on propensity to naturalize. In 1900, immigrants in professional or clerical occupations were not significantly more likely to naturalize than others, but in 1920 their occupation increased their chance of citizenship significantly (see Table 3). It is possible that growing citizenship restrictions—often targeting professionals—encouraged these immigrants to naturalize, but that the general atmosphere created by restrictions discouraged nonprofessionals from taking U.S. citizenship.

Political Machines, Mobilization, and Alien Suffrage

Data limitations prevent a statistical test of the effect of urban machines on immigrant naturalization; there are too few cases in many cities of interest. As it is, we need to look beyond political machines to consider overall political mobilization. Politics clearly engaged many would-be citizens, spurring them to naturalize. The 1905 Presidential Commission on Naturalization noted that “not all of the naturalizations conferred immediately before an election are sought for unlawful or even improper reasons. When an important political contest is in progress many aliens . . . having their interest aroused and desiring to have a voice in elections, apply for citizenship for praiseworthy reasons” (U.S. Commission on Naturalization, 1905:11). Similarly, an observer of political contests in Nebraska in 1908 and 1910 noted that despite the stricter new naturalization law:

[T]he first step toward the acquisition of citizenship is voluntary but encouraged . . . Almost every presidential year shows a rise in the temperature of the political thermometer. . . . But it takes a liquor election to raise the thermometer to the boiling point. . . . Investigation proves that the great majority of declarations made in Lancaster country have been the direct

result of encouragement in some political campaign. (Williams 1912:419–21)

Williams is suspicious of alleged special interests driving immigrant voting, but her account suggests the importance of external mobilization.

Indeed, the precipitous drop in citizenship over the first decades of the 20th century probably stems in part from a noticeable decline in political mobilization. American politics were changing rapidly in this period. Surveying the historical literature, Sterne concludes: “Between the Gilded Age and the 1920s, American politics shifted from a rowdy, partisan street-based electoral culture to a distant and bureaucratic style of campaigning that made politics less interesting and less accessible” (2001:38). Lacking the “encouragement” Williams decries, immigrants were less apt to naturalize.

We find support for a political mobilization approach when we consider alien suffrage in Wisconsin. Starting in colonial times, and continuing to 1926, many states allowed noncitizens to vote.¹⁷ Wisconsin allowed alien suffrage between 1848 and 1908. As we saw in Table 4, foreign-born residents in Wisconsin were the least likely to acquire citizenship in 1900, but by 1920 the naturalization gap between Wisconsin and other states diminished markedly.

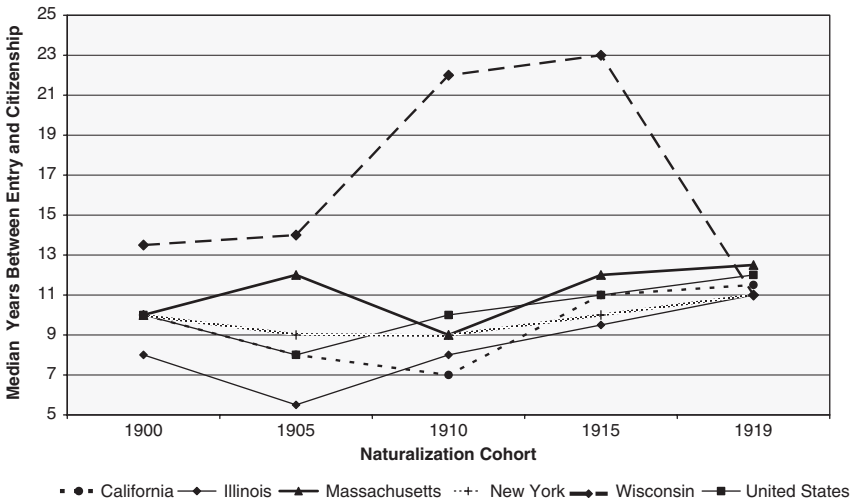
I have suggested that administrative changes, especially the imposition of national naturalization procedures, reduced interstate variation. Using data on naturalization cohorts, we see that in Wisconsin the elimination of alien suffrage also played a role. Using 1920 Census microfile data, Figure 1 tracks the median number of years elapsed between entry into the United States and naturalization for five groups of new citizens: those who acquired citizenship in 1900, 1905, 1910, 1915, and 1919. The graph includes residents of five states and reports the national median.

Nationally, the median wait between migration and naturalization increased between 1905, the year before the new citizenship law, and 1919. Illinois and New York follow the national pattern more or less closely, while Massachusetts and California show a bit more variation. The state that stands out is Wisconsin, not only due to its very high median wait times, but also because of the significant increase in those times from 1905 to 1915, only to drop to the national average by 1919. An obvious explanation is the end of alien suffrage in 1908. Long-time residents of Wisconsin, previously allowed to vote with only first papers rather than citizenship, were forced to naturalize to keep their franchise. The data imply that the desire to vote acted as an important motivator for turn-of-the century immigrants.

¹⁷Aylsworth (1931) claims at least 22 states and territories allowed alien suffrage. My own count puts the number higher, at 28. States with alien suffrage fell into three broad types: early Union members that gave suffrage to “inhabitants” of the state; western settler states such as Wisconsin that extended suffrage to entice newcomers; and southern states, which, immediately following Reconstruction, had their constitutions rewritten to allow alien suffrage in the hope that immigrants would change the demographic makeup of former members of the Confederacy (Rosberg, 1977; Raskin, 1993).

FIGURE 1

Median Number of Years Elapsed Between Immigration and Naturalization, by State of Residence



Concluding Thoughts: Lessons from the Past

Although immigrants' individual characteristics influence naturalization outcomes, social, legal, and political contexts matter as much, and in some cases more, than individual attributes. Importantly, the effect of legal and political contexts does not necessarily work in a punitive way. A view of citizenship predicated on the rational evaluation of costs and benefits would suggest higher naturalization in states with many restrictions on noncitizens, and that the addition of an English-language requirement in 1906 would increase the relative importance of English ability. Yet while we find some evidence that citizenship varied with property restrictions, restrictions on occupations varies inversely with citizenship levels. Further, literacy, not language ability, becomes much more important in predicting naturalization.

The upshot is that the warmth of the welcome extended to newcomers—in the form of legislation and through local political mobilization—mattered greatly in encouraging citizenship among immigrants. Some localized historical work has suggested this, but data limitations restricted the generalizability of such claims. This broad statistical analysis shows that in the early 20th century, local context *did* matter, and it mattered greatly. At the same time, the evidence reveals the rapid and dramatic attenuation of local effects: the 1906 Naturalization Act centralized and standardized the process of citizenship; political mobilization became less local. The homogenization

of citizenship experiences for immigrants across the United States probably reflects less fraudulent naturalization in some locales, and less arbitrary restrictiveness in others.

What lessons can we draw from the past? Students of immigration debate whether the experiences of earlier immigrants can inform contemporary patterns. Post-1965 migrants, mostly of non-European origins, face a qualitatively different America: a restructured, “hour glass” labor market with more limited opportunities for mobility; racial barriers due to their non-European origins; and easier transnational communication and travel that may diminish the need for or interest in American citizenship (Gans, 1992; Guarnizo, 2001; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Levitt, 2001). Yet in several respects, the comparison makes sense. Both periods witnessed massive influxes of newcomers whose ethnic and cultural background differed markedly from native-born Americans and the immigrants who had arrived earlier (Foner, 2000). The relative newness of transnationalism can be debated (Foner, 1997) and, while the absolute importance of citizenship might have declined (Jacobson, 1996; Schuck, 1998; Soysal, 1994), citizenship remains “a powerful instrument of social closure” (Brubaker, 1992:x; Carens, 1989). The details of the immigrant experience change, but similar trajectories resurface (Alba and Nee, 2003).

Many explanations of low naturalization among contemporary immigrants center on formal barriers to naturalization or the problematic attributes of today’s migrants. Yet the rules governing acquisition of citizenship have not changed in any substantive way since 1952 when basic writing and reading ability were added to the list of requirements. Indeed, despite bureaucratic hassles, becoming a U.S. citizen is more fair and inclusive today than at any point in the past. In the late 19th century and well into the 20th century, the decision to naturalize was primarily the reserve of European male immigrants.¹⁸

Alternatively, some commentators identify what they see as a decline in the quality of today’s immigrants (Borjas, 1999; Camarota, 2001). Newcomers’ low human capital, relative to the native born, allegedly hinders incorporation into the labor market, retards social integration such as language learning, and, by extension, undermines immigrants’ ability and

¹⁸The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act prohibited any Chinese immigrant from acquiring U.S. citizenship through naturalization and, in a series of intellectually contradictory courts cases, the prohibition was extended to almost all Asian migrants (Gualtieri, 2001; Haney López, 1996; Ueda, 1982). Prohibitions only started to disappear during World War II and all race restrictions were finally dropped with the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act. Married immigrant women lost their right to control their citizenship in 1855 when a legislative act decreed that an immigrant woman could become a citizen only upon her husband’s naturalization or, if he were a U.S. citizen prior to their marriage, upon their marriage. The 1907 Expatriation Act extended this logic to American women, mandating the forced expatriation of U.S. citizen women who married aliens. Not until the 1922 Cable Act did most women gain control of their nationality, and in 1931 women’s citizenship became completely independent of their marital status and spouse’s status.

interest in citizenship. Others claim that contemporary immigrants' deep-seated cultural values clash with America's Anglo-Protestant civic culture and political system (Huntington, 2004). Yet the average level of education among immigrants has increased—even if the relative gap with the native born might be widening—so today's immigrants have more personal resources than those who came before. Further, as the earlier discussion of contemporary citizenship "laggards" made clear, those least interested in American citizenship appear to be those most like the native born in culture and in prior experience with an industrialized, Western liberal-democracy.

Instead, now, as then, we need to consider the sociopolitical environment within which immigrants find themselves and ask how changes in the context of reception affect naturalization. Two contextual changes stand out as particularly salient: the relative costs and benefits of citizenship and the warmth of the welcome extended, especially by political actors. From the early 1970s to the mid 1990s, the penalties of noncitizenship decreased as occupations previously restricted to citizens rapidly opened to permanent resident aliens and social benefits were extended regardless of citizenship status (Plascencia, Freeman, and Setzler, 2003). We might conclude that with little to gain, immigrants cannot be bothered to naturalize, leading to the devaluation of American citizenship.

This account is plausible, but not likely. Citizenship still provides significant rights, especially right of entry onto U.S. soil, protection from deportation, eased family reunification, greater access to social benefits, and the right to vote and stand for office. These rights are not negligible; repeated surveys show that immigrants are interested in citizenship. In Canada, where the relative benefits of citizenship are even smaller than in the United States, naturalization levels today stand much higher than in the United States, a difference that cannot be explained by differences in the immigrants who migrate to the two countries (Bloemraad, 2002, 2006).

We are thus left to speculate about the warmth of the welcome. Who is extending a hand, as the political boss of yesteryear did, when newcomers come off the plane or cross the border? Even if party organizations mobilized only some immigrants, the political system embraced newcomers more in 1900 than in 2000 (DeSipio, 2001). The late 19th century was a period in which politics—especially at the local or regional level—absorbed the attention of many adult men. It is probably no accident that as rates of voter turnout and other indicators of political participation fall in the general population, levels of naturalization in the post-World War II era also decline. Some suggest that elites' failure to encourage participation is partly to blame, as is the move from mass-based associational life to professional interest group politics and parties' apathy to mobilizing immigrants (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993; Skocpol, 1999; Jones-Correa, 1998). More generally, the American state offers little integration support to contemporary immigrants, providing virtually no assistance in learning English, learning civics, or fostering local organizations that can assist newcomers. Where we

find greater state intervention, such as in Canada or around refugee resettlement in the United States, we find higher levels of citizenship (Bloemraad, 2006; Fix, Passel, and Sucher, 2003).

The evidence from the early 20th century provides a final lesson. The dynamics of citizenship for earlier immigrants was a local affair. But since then the contours of citizenship—its legal implementation, political practice, and discursive meaning—have been nationalized. Already by 1920 locality mattered much less in explaining citizenship outcomes. A contemporary political and social solution to declining naturalization must be found on the national, not local, level.

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