



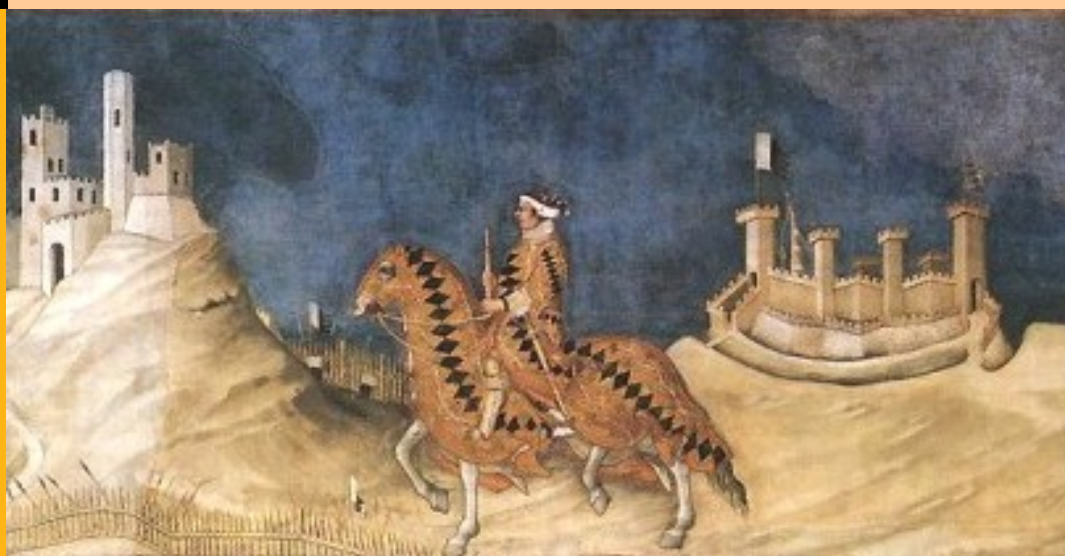
UNIVERSITÀ
DI SIENA
1240

**QUADERNI DEL DIPARTIMENTO
DI ECONOMIA POLITICA E STATISTICA**

**Luca Fiorito
Tiziana Foresti**

Progressive Era Racism and its (Jewish) Discontents

n. 740 – Novembre 2016



Progressive Era Racism and its (Jewish) Discontents

Luca Fiorito and Tiziana Foresti***

Abstract

This work analyzes the contribution to the debates on labor and immigration of a group of Jewish academicians and reformers who, during the second half of the Progressive Era, explicitly took a stance against the racialist and eugenic rhetoric of the period. This group includes first-rank economists like Edwin R. A. Seligman, Jacob H. Hollander, and Emanuel A. Goldenweiser; influential field specialists such as Isaac A. Hourwich and Isaac M. Rubinow; and relatively less known figures like Max J. Kohler and Samuel K. Joseph. By focusing on the voices of these dissenters, the work enriches the emerging picture of Progressive Era eugenic and racial thought.

Keywords: American Progressive Era, Edwin R. A. Seligman, Immigration, Race, Anti-Semitism

JEL: B1, B15

* University of Palermo. Email: luca.fiorito.1967@gmail.com

** Baffi Carefin, Centre for Applied Research on International Markets, Banking, Finance and Regulation, Bocconi University, Milan. Email: tiziana.foresti@unibocconi.it

We have too much sympathetic judgment of the immigrant masses on the ground that here and there a settlement worker knows an exceptionally bright young Jewish boy or two. It is refreshing to read a book that has a better perspective and that judges by averages, not by exceptions (Wolfe 1915, 378).

1. In a path-breaking 2003 HOPE article, and in a series of subsequent contributions culminating in *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (2016), Thomas C. Leonard has ably documented how eugenic and racist arguments were a common part of American Progressive Era social science. Progressive reformers, he indicates, provided scientific respectability to the cause of race-based immigration restriction. Building on the growing fear of “race suicide,” leading figures of the period, such as John R. Commons, Richard T. Ely, and Edward A. Ross, argued that, by undercutting American workers’ wages, immigrants with lower standards of life outbred and displaced their Anglo-Saxon ‘betters.’ Race suicide, Leonard (88) explains, “was an amalgam of late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century anxieties over jobs being outsourced to the lowest bidder and progressive attempts to define an American nationality, both trends intersecting homegrown American discourses on inferiority—racism, nativism, sexism—and all supercharged by the influential new sciences of heredity, Darwinism, eugenics, and race.”

Importantly, eugenic and “race improvement” ideas played a significant role in the arguments made for measures such as minimum wage and laws restricting hours of work for women and children. Take the case of a minimum wage. By pushing the cost of unskilled labor above its value, a binding minimum would ensure employment only to the most productive workers. The economically unproductive—the “unemployables,” i.e., those whose labor was worth less than the legal minimum—would be expelled from the labour force, or deterred from entering it. For progressive reformers, Leonard affirms, the resulting job loss would be beneficial to the public since it would protect the national race from the deteriorating contamination of “inferior” elements—African Americans, Eastern and Southern Europeans, women and Northern European men with physical or mental disabilities. Leonard provides a flow of textual evidence to sustain his claim. For instance, he quotes Albert B. Wolfe’s (1917, 278: quoted in Leonard 2003, 703) statement: “If the inefficient entrepreneurs would be eliminated [by minimum wages] so would the ineffective workers.” Wolfe added: “I am not disposed to waste much sympathy with either class. The elimination of the inefficient is in line with our traditional emphasis on free competition, and also with the spirit and trend of modern social economics ... [These incompetents] are a burden upon society.” Wolfe, who would serve as president of the American Economic Association (AEA) in 1943, was by no means an isolated case. Charles Henderson, Arthur T. Holcombe, Henry E. Seager, Sidney and Beatrice Webb, just to name a few, all shared his views on the eugenic virtues of a legal minimum wage.

Leonard’s explicit targets are the progressive reformers. Accordingly, he identifies the main coordinates of progressivism as an overt distrust of markets as an instrument to attain efficiency, a disavowal of the American natural rights tradition, and an almost unconditioned faith in the potentialities of technocratic, public-spirited social control by well-educated elites. Within this intellectual framework, Leonard (2016, 190) argues, eugenics and scientific racism fit particularly well: “Eugenics was anti-individualistic; it promised efficiency; it required expertise, and it was founded on the authority of science.” Equally important, “biological ideas” provided progressives

¹ Corresponding author. Email: luca.fiorito.1967@gmail.com.

with “a conceptual scheme capable of accommodating the great contradiction at the heart of Progressive Era reform—its view of the poor as victims deserving state uplift and as threats requiring state restraint” (xii). These affinities between eugenics and labor reform, Leonard insists, help explain why so many progressives felt under the spell of eugenics.

Leonard is well aware that during the Progressive Era eugenic influences were pervasive and cut across traditional political divisions. In several passages, he suggests that not only progressives, but “[c]onservatives and socialists also drank deeply from the seemingly bottomless American wells of racism, sexism, and nativism, and they, too, borrowed evolutionary and eugenic ideas in support of their politics” (xiii; 115; 166). Yet, this *caveat* notwithstanding, Leonard’s actual focus is almost exclusively on progressive reformers. He does observe non-progressive economists such as Frank Fetter and Frank Taussig flirting with eugenic ideas, but in the main does not investigate the differences (if any) between progressives and their more conservative counterparts on racial and eugenic issues. This weakness of an otherwise excellent book is reflected, for instance, in Leonard’s almost complete neglect of Harvard economist Thomas N. Carver, who while unquestionably less in favor of state regulation of the economy than most contemporaries, nevertheless took a stance on eugenics and the “unfit” so extreme that he drew harsh criticism from progressive reformers like Wolfe and Father John Ryan, who had supported a minimum wage for eugenic reasons (Fiorito and Orsi 2017). Eugenics was thus a complex amalgam of ideas, the influence of which can hardly be painted with a single brush. It ranged from the advocacy of full-scale eugenic programs, as in the cases of Irving Fisher and Carver, to a nuanced use of hereditary arguments that did not imply any strict form of biological determinism. Such inherent heterogeneity within Progressive era social science and its eugenic commitments is not fully captured by Leonard’s fascinating account.²

All this leads to a further reflection: If it was not only progressives who embraced eugenics, it also seems that not all progressives shared the same enthusiasm for the eugenic and racist reasoning of people like Commons, Ely, and Ross. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century voices of dissent among academicians and reformers were indeed rare, but they became more numerous and outspoken during the second half of the Progressive Era, especially after the publication in 1911 of the Dillingham Commission report on immigration. The aim, then, of the present essay is to offer a further piece in the jigsaw of progressive era eugenic and racial thought by assessing in some detail the contribution of these dissenters and the role that they played in the academic debates on labor and immigration.

The group of individuals under scrutiny here is quite variegated—including first-rank economists like Edwin R. A. Seligman, Jacob H. Hollander, and Emanuel A. Goldenweiser, who all served as presidents of the AEA; influential field specialists such as Isaac A. Hourwich and Isaac M. Rubinow; and relatively less known figures like Max J. Kohler and Samuel K. Joseph, who nevertheless raised their voice in the academic arena. All these individuals share a common element: they were all Jewish, either American- or foreign-born. This is crucial because, as historian Hasia Diner (2012, 4) points out, while “rhetoric defaming the Jews extended backward to earlier periods in American history, between the 1870s through the 1920s anti-Semitism became obvious and prevalent.” Anti-Semitism was in fact an essential part of the Progressive era racist and xenophobic campaigning, as will be shown in the next section.

2. The emergence of a distinct anti-Semitic rhetoric, especially in public discourse, was mainly a reaction to the massive influx of eastern European Jews to the United States that began at

² Matters are further complicated by the fact that in many cases the expository style of even the most outspoken racist figures of the period was ambiguous and even contradictory. In this connection, suffice it to say that Ross in his famous essays on “The Causes of Race Superiority”—where he first introduced the expression “race suicide”—felt compelled to affirm: “We Americans who have so often seen the children of underfed, stunted, scrub immigrants match the native American in brain and brawn, in wit and grit, ought to realize how much the superior effectiveness of the latter is due to social conditions” (1901, 67).

the end of the nineteenth century. In 1880, of a Jewish population of approximately 250,000, only one out of six was of East European extraction; 40 years later, of a population of four million, five out of every six American Jews came from Eastern Europe (Dinnerstein 1994). The eastern European Jews who arrived in the United States formed one of the largest new immigrant populations, and it is little surprise that they came to play a major role in the racial concerns of the time. Evidence in this connection, as Leonard shows in his book, is abundant and unequivocal. The unhappy country of Poland, Harvard's railroad economist William Z. Ripley declared, was so "saturated with Jews" that Germany "shudders at the dark and threatening cloud of population of the most ignorant and wretched description which overhangs her Eastern frontier." Because of lax immigration standards, Ripley warned, this had now become an American problem: "[t]his great Polish swamp of miserable human beings, terrific in its proportions, threatens to drain itself into our country as well, unless we restrict its ingress" (1899, 372).

Similar concerns were expressed by Ross, the leading sociologist from Wisconsin. Ross lamented that roughly "one-fifth of the Hebrews in the world are with us," although his estimates were later proved to be without foundation.³ America, he insisted, "is coming to be hailed as the 'promised land,'" while "Zionist dreams are yielding to the conviction that it will be much easier for the keen-witted Russian Jews to prosper here as a free component in a nation of a hundred millions than to grub a living out of the baked hillsides of Palestine" (1914, 143–144). Russian and Polish Jews were held to differ from other immigrant "races" in being more clannish, money-loving, dishonest, ambitious, and individualistic. According to Ross, "[n]one can beat the Jew at a bargain, for through all the intricacies of commerce he can scent his profit" (1914, 147–148). Writing about the tendency of Jewish workers to concentrate in crowded urban centers, he asserted: "centuries of enforced Ghetto life seem to have bred in them a herding instinct. No other physiques can so well withstand the toxins of urban congestion" (1914, 145). Ultimately, Ross did not deny the possibility of changing Jewish traits under the influence of the new American environment, but he placed a clear ceiling upon America's capacity to assimilate eastern European Jews: "No doubt thirty or forty thousand Hebrews from Eastern Europe might be absorbed by this country each year without any marked growth of race prejudice; but when they come in two or three or even four times as fast, the lump outgrows the leaven, and there will be trouble" (1914, 165).

Commons's analysis of Jewish immigration went well beyond the typical stereotyping of the period. In a study of the economic effects of immigration, conducted in 1900 for the US Industrial Commission, he described the sweatshop as reflective of the distinct "racial" characteristics of Jewish immigrants (Commons 1901; see also Commons 1907). In his report, Commons explained that the Jew is physically unfit for manual labor and agriculture, while his "individualism" makes him unsuitable for the "life of a wage-earner" and especially for the discipline of the modern American factory (1901, 325). Jews, he thought, were willing to accept the uncivilized conditions of the sweatshop because of its lack of control and lax discipline. Commons also saw Jews as exceedingly ambitious and always eager to rise to the position of employer: "instead of trying to raise the standard of living in the trade," he speculated, the Jew "will try to leave the trade and throw his lot in with people whose standard of living is somewhat higher." Thus, "his commercial instinct militates continually against making active efforts to better the conditions of his trade" (1901, 327).⁴

³ See our discussion below.

⁴ Commons even blamed the Jews' supposed racial inclination to speculation and trade, rather than the effects of unrestrained competition, for the proliferation of strict piece-rate payment systems and the lengthening of working days in the sweatshops: "One reason why piecework and high speed have become the framework of the contractors' shops is probably because the Jewish people are peculiarly eager to earn a big day's wages, no matter at what sacrifice. The Jewish workman is willing to work very hard for this, and does not want to have it said that there is a limit to his earning capacity. It is the desire of the Jew to have his employment so arranged that he can speculate and bargain upon his earning capacity, and can make use of the seasons. Piecework gives him that opportunity" (1901, 346).

Commons's account contains a thinly veiled normative message. He regarded the sweatshop as the center of a rising immigrant economy, threatening to undermine not only the wages and the well being of native workers, but also the stability and efficacy of the union movement. Accordingly, Commons argued that the Jew's individualistic and uncooperative nature would weaken the development of permanent unions. "The Jew's conception of a labor organization"—he wrote—"is that of a tradesman rather than that of a workman." As a consequence, "[t]he Jew joins the union when it offers a bargain and drops it when he gets, or fails to get, the bargain" (1901, 327-328). Such a description of Jewish attitudes towards unions gained some consensus. Writing in 1904, Ripley observed that the condition of trade unionism in the garment and cigar-making industries "plainly reflects certain racial peculiarities of the Jews." Drawing almost verbatim upon Commons's "excellent report on immigration," Ripley declared that the "Jew will join a union only when there is a bargain directly in sight in the shape of material advancement" (Ripley 1904, 302-303). A few years later, in the pages of the *Journal of Political Economy*, Howard T. Lewis (1912, 937) reiterated: "[t]he Jews in the garment trades organize under the pressure of necessity as do few other races. Almost immediately upon the achievement of a victory, however, dues lapse, the union organization breaks down, the employer violates his contract, and the whole fight has to be made over again."⁵

This is a representative, but by no means exhaustive picture of Progressive era anti-Semitism. These published opinions on immigration from eastern Europe were clearly intended to distance the Jews from the old-stock of Anglo-American "Protestant" values and bloodlines and to differentiate them from the more desirable immigrant races. As we will argue in the next sections, several Jewish figures came to criticize such a racist and discriminatory perspective. Some decided to deal with the problem from a general point of view, attacking the "race suicide" narrative and proposing a view of labor reforms devoid of any eugenic implication. Others focused on the specific accusations waged against Jewish immigration.

3. The first figure under scrutiny is Edwin R. A. Seligman, the then world-famous public finance specialist from Columbia University. Born in New York into a wealthy German-Jewish family, Seligman was the only Jew among the founders of the AEA in 1885, and was the first Jewish economist to serve as its president (1902-1903).⁶ Edwin's father, Joseph Seligman, the founder of the prominent investment bank J. & W. Seligman & Co, was involved in one of the most famous anti-Semitic episodes of the time when, in 1887, Judge Henry Hilton denied him entry into the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs (Dinnerstein 1994, 39). In this connection, Leonard (2016, 14) speculates, the young Seligman "sought refuge from the constraints of his religious inheritance, becoming an active supporter of his colleague Felix Adler's Society of Ethical Culture. No less than his social gospel colleagues, Seligman was impelled by a felt ethical obligation to improve the conditions of American economic life." Seligman was certainly a progressive—at the same time, however, he clearly distanced himself from the eugenic and racist perspective of the bulk of his contemporaries.

In order to assess Seligman's anti-racist stance it is necessary to start with his theory of wage determination. Progressive era wage theories were quite eclectic, often combining some form of marginal productivity analysis on the demand side with "standard of life" explanations on the supply (cost) side.⁷ Workers with lower standards of life are disposed to accept lower wages, so that the lowest standard of life determines the prevalent wage and work conditions in each industry.

⁵ Similar views on Jewish attitudes towards unionism were expressed by Beatrice Webb (1898) in England and by Georg von Halpern (1903) in Germany.

⁶ For a detailed autobiographical account of Seligman's life and career see Asso and Fiorito (eds.) 2006.

⁷ For instance, Carver asserted (1894, 396) that the "true" theory of wages is found in "a combination of the 'marginal productivity,' or the 'no rent increment,' theory of Professor Clark and the 'standard of living,' or 'cost of production,' theory of the classical English economists."

Thus, it was argued, “unworthy” individuals could undercut their more deserving betters.⁸ As a fundamental corollary of this theory, many postulated a strict correspondence between races and standards of life. The Webbs in England epitomize this attitude. In their influential *Industrial Democracy*, they advanced a tripartite classification based on a racial group’s willingness to accept a lower (and their ambition to obtain a higher) wage. First, there are those racial groups, represented by the “Anglo-Saxon skilled artisan,” who refuse to work below a customary standard of life, but who have no definite maximum. Second, there are those races, such as “the African negro,” who show no assignable minimum and a very low maximum; i.e. “they will work ... for indefinitely low wages, but cannot be induced to work at all once their primitive wants are satisfied.” Finally, there is the Jew, who is the sole race with neither a minimum nor a maximum: “he will accept the lowest terms rather than remain out of employment; as he rises in the world new wants stimulate him to increased intensity of effort, and no amount of income causes him to slacken his indefatigable activity” (1897, 697-698n1).⁹

In his *Principles of Economics*, Seligman openly criticized the standard of life approach to wage determination. The standard of life, he wrote, “cannot accomplish the impossible,” in the sense that: “The highest standard will not prevent wages from falling in the face of a decrease in the demand for the product and a decline in industrial prosperity. If the employers cannot sell their product at a given price, they must lower cost or abandon the business” (1905, 419). The standard of living is equivalent to a marginal cost theory of wages but, Seligman objected, labor’s wage is only determined by the value of its marginal product: “Marginal productivity (that is, marginal efficiency or utility) is the *causa causans* of the rate of wages,” while “the standard of life (or marginal cost), which seems to be cause, in reality adjusts itself to the productivity.” Ultimately, “the rate of wages may be expressed in terms of either, but the positive force is productivity” (1905, 176-177).

Seligman’s marginal productivity theory of wages was strictly Clarkian. Like Clark, he explained that diminishing marginal labor productivity is a consequence of the fact that each subsequent worker benefits less and less from the contribution of capital, and not because successively less efficient workers are employed. Workers are assumed to be interchangeable, so that workers of different skill levels do not compete with each other. “If there is free competition”—Seligman wrote—“and if all the laborers do their allotted task equally well, *so that there is no choice between them*, the share of the product ascribable to any of the workmen must be equal to the additions made by the last or marginal laborer actually at work” (1905, 418: emphasis added). Accordingly, skilled laborers yield higher marginal products and therefore deserve a “rent” in reward for those skills. Interestingly, the use of rent to explain wage differentials was instrumental in attacking the idea that wage competition among different immigrant groups or “races” is a competition between higher and lower standards of life:

Again, different employers may utilize different grades of workmen to fell trees or to build railways. One uses a three-dollar American, another a two-dollar French Canadian, another a dollar Italian. Yet ... the high-price workman is not really more expensive, because his output is greater. If he did not earn the higher wage, he would not in the long run get it.

⁸ In the words of Carver: “where the average standard of living is high, numbers will not increase beyond the point which will enable the laboring population to live up to its standard, unless the immigration of laborers of a lower standard from some other community should set in, in which case the laborers of a lower standard will displace those of a higher standard, causing the latter to migrate or stop multiplying, leaving the field ultimately in the possession of the low standard, as surely as cheap money will drive out dear money, or as sheep will drive cattle off the western ranges” (1904, 171). It should be noted that the proponents of a standard of living theory did not always explain why more productive native workers couldn’t command relatively higher wages.

⁹ To “this remarkable elasticity” in the Jews’ standard of life, the Webbs attributed the “striking fact that their wage-earning class is permanently the poorest in all Europe, whilst individual Jews are the wealthiest men of their respective countries” (1897, 697-698n1).

Since all the trees sell at the same price, as fixed by the marginal producer who is using the least efficient workmen, the higher wage of the American represents a surplus product or labor rent over the low wage of the Italian. If we say that the higher rent of the good land does not enter into the price of wheat, we can equally well say that the higher wage which represents the surplus product of the American does not enter into the price of trees. The good land rents or sells for more because it produces more,—the rent is the product: the high-grade laborer secures higher wages because he produces more,—the wage is the product.

“The wages of every different grade of workman”—Seligman concluded—“are a differential in the same sense as the rent of different grades of land or capital is a differential” (1905, 377). Seligman's use of different nationalities to express different degrees of skilled labor was merely a rhetorical device to rebut the standard of life theory of wages. Nowhere in his writings does he make use of racial reasoning, let alone postulate a strict correspondence between race and productivity.

The distance between Seligman and the progressives discussed in Leonard's book is even more evident in the former's discussion of immigration. Seligman dismissed the race suicide concerns of his contemporaries on empirical grounds. Although immigration has increased consistently for the past half-century, he stated, it has not grown appreciably faster than the native population: “[t]he foreign born constituted 13.2 per cent of the total population in 1860; and while the proportion rose slightly in the succeeding decade, in 1900 it was again about the same—13.7 per cent. *This is contrary to the current opinion, but is none the less a fact*” (1905, 60; emphasis added). More generally, Seligman asserted that “when there is any prospect of speedy equality” interference with the natural course of immigration is “uneconomic.” In his own words:

This was the error of the Know-nothings in the fifties, as it is of the anti-immigrationists at present in the United States. That the low class immigrant is the chief source of supply of the sweat-shops and in many respects complicates the labor problem is undoubtedly true and ominous. The remedy, however, consists not in abolishing immigration, or even in restricting it materially, but in raising the standard of pay and conditions of work through labor organization, public opinion and legal enactment, and in making this possible by increased production and successful enterprise. (1905, 166-167)¹⁰

Accordingly, Seligman supported minimum wages as a measure to elevate the overall standard of life of labor. In his view, “the demand for a minimum wage and some of the other legitimate practices of trades unions are intended to bring the weakest nearer the standard of the strongest. In its best aspects it is a levelling up, rather than a levelling down” (1905, 148).

Seligman's opposition to nativism and racial prejudice was not limited to his academic duties. “He practiced as he preached,” as John L. Recchiuti (2007) observes, serving as chairman in 1910 of the newly organized Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, and, the following year, as the first president of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes, the oldest and largest community-based African-American civil rights organization of the United States.¹¹ In May 1909, at the first National Negro Conference held in New York City, Seligman rejected any form of racial determinism, affirming: “It is just because the economic environment is changing,

¹⁰ However, Seligman accepted some limitation on Chinese immigration on the ground that “the Chinaman [...] refuses to assimilate, and will not adopt American methods” (1905, 166).

¹¹ The founders who formed the nucleus of the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes held that “the Negro needed not alms but opportunity—opportunity to work at the job for which the Negro was best fitted, with equal pay for equal work, and equal opportunity for advancement” (quoted in Myrdal 1944, 837).

just because there is a hope in the future of such fundamental alterations in the environment of the American Negro, that we can look forward with confidence to a point yet to come.”¹² He added:

As a member of a race which has also borne hardships, I wish to call attention to this particular fact: It is often said of the Jews that they run through the whole gamut of society; they have both the Jesus type and the Shylock type, coming from one and the same race. Now the trouble with the Negro is that the ordinary man considers only the Shylock type, if there is a man that corresponds to the Shylock type, and that we have not yet learned to appreciate the Jesus type. To me there is nothing more tragic in the whole of human experience than the lot of that American Negro, cultivated, refined gentleman, who at the same time is thrown into the caldron and fused with a mass of his unhappy and more unfortunate brethren. The scientific man, of course, knows no prejudice. ((Proceedings of the National Negro Conference 1909, 68)

Seligman was not speaking only for the more assimilated and well-to-do African-Americans. His concerns were authentic and unfiltered by class prejudice. This is shown by what he wrote to his friend W. E. B. Du Bois, the famous African-American scholar and civil rights leader, after the Atlanta riots of 1906, when a white mob descended on the Negro district, ruthlessly slaughtering, destroying, and pillaging: “I was amazed & disgusted at the happenings in Atlanta. But perhaps I did not realize the horror of it all, until I read your beautiful poem in the Outlook. It must indeed be a tragedy for men like you ... Let us hold to the things that are eternally true, & let us seek within ourselves for compensation for the things that are withheld by an unthinking and uncivilized world” (E. R. A. Seligman to W. E. B. Du Bois, October 28, 1906. In Aptheker 1973, 123).

4. The immigration flow to the United States reacheds peak in 1907, when over one million people entered the country, roughly 150,000 of whom were Jewish (Daniels 2004). That year, Congress established the US Immigration Commission, chaired by Vermont Republican Senator William Paul Dillingham, to investigate numerous questions related to the new patterns of immigration.¹³ The commission’s survey classified over ten million individuals, immigrant and native-born, according to their race, correlating immigrants’ “racial identities” to their occupations, wage rates, children’s years of education, union membership, and home ownership, as well as imprisonment, institutionalization, pauperism, and dependency on charity (Zeidel 2004). As far as the racial taxonomy of immigrants was concerned, the researchers adopted the “list of races or peoples” already in use at the Immigration Bureau, which included a distinct entry for the “Hebrew” race.

In general terms, the Commission’s report helped to crystallize the (already popular) dichotomy between “old” and “new” immigrants. The former group, composed of northern and western European immigrants, was described as “a movement of settlers, who came from the most progressive sections of Europe for the purpose of making themselves a home in the new world.” They had entered a wide range of occupations, settled throughout the country, and posed no problem of assimilation. By contrast, the new immigration was depicted as a “a movement of unskilled laboring men who have come, in large part temporarily, from the less progressive and advanced countries of Europe.” Mostly concentrated in large urban centers, these new arrivals

¹² Seligman (1905, 289) had written in his *Principles*: “The gist of the negro problem in the South is seen by all careful thinkers to consist in the increase of productive efficiency through an appropriate education of the negro.”

¹³ Under the leadership of William Paul Dillingham, the joint House-Senate commission included US senators Henry Cabot Lodge and Asbury Latimer; US representatives Benjamin Howell, William Bennett, and John Burnett; and Charles Neill of the US Department of Labor, economist Jeremiah W. Jenks of Cornell University, and William Wheeler, the California Commissioner of Immigration.

“have congregated together in sections apart from native Americans and the older immigrants to such an extent that assimilation has been slow as compared to that of the earlier non-English-speaking races.” The undesirability of the new immigrants was also due to their alleged mental and moral inferiority:

The new immigration as a class is far less intelligent than the old, approximately one-third of all those over 14 years of age when admitted being illiterate. Racially they are for the most part essentially unlike the British, German, and other peoples who came during the period prior to 1880, and generally speaking they are actuated in coming by different ideals, for the old immigration came to be a part of the country, while the new, in a large measure, comes with the intention of profiting, in a pecuniary way, by the superior advantages of the new world and then returning to the old country (United States Immigration Commission 1911a, 13-14).

The commission found evidence that there was a disproportionate concentration of “new” immigrants in unskilled occupations, specific industries, and geographic localities. As a consequence, it was argued, immigration was adversely influencing wage levels and standards of life, posing a serious threat to the American economy and culture, and should therefore be greatly reduced. Among the recommendations proposed by the Commission were a literacy test, a permanent bar to Asian immigration, legislation restricting the further admission of unskilled labor, and some sort of quota system. Not surprisingly, the publication in 1911 of the commission’s final report, which comprised forty-two volumes, gave new vigor to the academic discussion on immigration and racial issues.¹⁴

What is relevant to our discussion is that several Jewish figures entered this debate, openly criticizing the commission’s approach and main conclusions. In this connection, the contribution of Franz Boas, the eminent Columbia anthropologist of Jewish descent, has received special attention (Morris-Reich 2011; Zeidel 2004). Boas was among the researchers involved in the commission’s survey and his findings explicitly contradicted the commission’s overall racist stance. Boas (1912) in fact demonstrated that careful measurement of the cephalic indexes of migrant children showed dramatic differences between the growth patterns of first- and second-generation children. On this evidence, he argued that European immigrants’ head forms were quite plastic and that nutrition and other external conditions determined “racial traits” much more than heredity. If the cranial capacity changed under the influence of a new environment, Boas concluded, the whole bodily and mental makeup of immigrants might change, including those very features thought to measure intelligence and capacity for civilization.

Boas had trouble convincing extreme nativists like Prescott F. Hall, the ultra-conservative leader of the Immigration Restriction League. “Many biologists dispute Boas’ conclusions;”—Hall declared (1912, 677)—“and it would still have to be proved that changes in the skull involve changes in character.” On the other hand, Boas’s findings appealed to those who challenged the notion of acquired racial traits. “To attempt ... to establish relative standards of race value, to the detriment of the new immigration,” wrote Max J. Kohler in the *American Economic Review* in 1912, “is purely unwarranted assumption, especially in the light of Professor Boas’ interesting demonstration that even the most pronounced physical indications of race differences, the shape of the skull, are rapidly lost by immigrants born here” (1912a, 77). In a series of contributions, Kohler, a preeminent Jewish activist and former New York district attorney, attacked the restrictionist agenda supported by the commission and those economists “with only slight familiarity with this branch of our national history, and still less familiar with the development and extent of our

¹⁴ After the reports of the Dillingham Commission were released, Jeremiah Jenks, along with his partner W. Jett Lauck, published a book promoting the findings of the commission and stressing the need for a literacy test (Jenks and Lauck 1912).

present-day Americanizing agencies, or with the history of the 'new' immigrant races in our midst, whom they distrust" (1914, 93).¹⁵

Kohler contested the commission's claim that the "new" immigration had caused an oversupply of unskilled labor in basic industries. "The commission," he argued, "did not find that wages have decreased, but the contrary, though it claimed that employment is not uniform, and that American standards of living are supposed to be in danger." In his view, "neither assumption seems warranted"—and this because "all the field work of the Commission ... was conducted in 1907-8 in the midst of the panic, when employment was slack, proving nothing" (1912a, 74). As to the urban concentration of immigrants emphasized by the commission, Kohler wrote:

It is a remarkable fact that the representatives in Congress of the so-called congested sections, which are supposed to be experiencing most acutely the evils of immigration, such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, and even parts of Boston, are almost unanimously opposed to restrictive legislation. The opposition to immigration comes almost wholly from New England, and the South and other sparsely settled sections with few immigrant settlers. The anti-immigration feeling has been largely artificially stimulated. (1912, 74)

Ultimately, for Kohler, the commission's overall thesis "that the new immigrants are less easily assimilable than the old were, is pure assumption." Such a contention overlooked two crucial facts. First, "that we have been rapidly assimilating these very immigrants for years, and similar objections were pressed in vain against the old immigrants." Second, that "our machinery for Americanization today is tenfold as great as it was before 1881, so that Americanization takes place in general more, not less, rapidly, than before, despite greater differences in language and race stock" (1912a, 76-77).

Kohler was joined by Samuel K. Joseph, a Columbia University graduate whose dissertation, written under Boas and Seligman, was published in 1914 as *Jewish Immigration to the United States*.¹⁶ Joseph rejected the commission's conclusions and provided statistical evidence showing that the recent Jewish immigration embraced a "larger relative proportion and absolute number of skilled laborers" than is furnished by any other immigrant people, including those belonging to the "old" immigrant stock (1914, 145). Jewish immigrants, Joseph argued, differed also in their age, sex, and occupational distribution. The high proportion of women among Jewish immigrants as well as the presence of very old and very young dependants, was considered as an indication of intent to settle and not merely to reside temporarily. This was further confirmed by the very low return movement of Jewish immigration: "From 1908 to 1912, the Jewish immigrants constituted 9.7 per cent of the total immigrants. In the same period, the Jewish emigrants constituted only 2.3 per cent of the total emigrants" (1914, 134). All this led Jacobs to affirm:

¹⁵ Kohler (1871-1934) graduated from the City College of New York with a B.S. in Political Science in 1891, moving on to Columbia College to obtain an M.A. and LL.B. in 1893. After graduation he served as assistant US attorney from 1894 to 1898, and in that capacity he gained considerable experience with immigration legislation issues. After his terms expired, he represented aliens frequently in court, published several articles on immigration policy for journals and newspapers, and served as chair for the Committee on Immigration Aid and Education for the Baron de Hirsch Fund and the Committee on Immigration of the American Jewish Committee. For a brief biographical sketch of Kohler see Huhner (1937).

¹⁶ Although largely a study in demography, a province of sociology at Columbia, Joseph's dissertation was directed by Boas and Seligman because of the alleged anti-Semitism of Franklin H. Giddings, then the leading sociologist at Columbia. Born in Russia in 1881 and having escaped from religious persecution, after graduation from Columbia Joseph spent several years teaching the children of immigrants, first in the preparatory school that he founded and headed, and later in public high schools. In 1924 he joined the department of sociology at City College in New York, where he remained until his retirement. See Page (1982) 82-83.

Although the Jewish immigration has been contemporaneous with the “new” immigration from Eastern and Southeastern Europe, and is furthermore essentially East-European in origin, its characteristics place it altogether with the “old” immigration. Most striking, however is the fact that in all of these respects—family composition, and small return movement (both indicating permanent settlement) and in the proportion of skilled laborers—the Jewish immigration stands apart even from the “old” immigration. (155)

Using new data obtained through a series of early Jewish annual reports, Joseph also attempted to confute “the general tendency among writers on the subject of Jewish immigration to exaggerate the magnitude of this movement” (1914, 91). As an example, he reported Ross’s then recently published statement regarding the supposed “emigration of 50,000 Roumanian Jews between January and August, 1900, ... brought about by steamship agents who created great excitement in Roumania by distributing glowing circulars about America” (Ross 1913, 196; quoted in Joseph 1914, 106–107). Through his own estimates, Joseph was able to show that only 6,183 Romanian Jews arrived in the United States in the year 1900, and that the total number for the whole period from 1899 to 1910 was less than 55,000.

5. Other attacks on the Immigration Commission came from Emanuel A. Goldenweiser and Isaac A. Hourwich, two foreign-born Jewish economists then affiliated to the Census Bureau (Perlmann 2011). Born in Kiev in 1883, Goldenweiser spent his early life in Russia. After graduation from the First Kiev Gymnasium in 1902, he emigrated to the United States and entered Columbia University. He received a B.A. in 1903 and took an M.A. at Cornell University in 1905 and a Ph.D. in 1907. Goldenweiser’s early studies were in the field of immigration, to which he was led by his special interest in Russian migration—the subject of the doctoral thesis he completed under Walter F. Willcox. After receiving his doctorate, he served for three years as a research worker with the U.S. Immigration Commission, for which he authored the final report on “Immigrants in Cities” (United States Immigration Commission 1911b).¹⁷

The report was mainly descriptive in character and the vast amount of statistical data presented left no room for personal considerations. Still, Goldenweiser dissociated himself from the racist perspective of the commission: in 1911, just as the report was about to appear in print, in an article published in the *Survey*, he accused the “social reformer who wishes to remedy preventable evils,” and “the journalist who is anxious to present readable material,” of having created in the public opinion the impression that the recent immigrant is solely responsible for the “filth, squalor, and depraved humanity” of the congested sections of large cities. “The Italian, the Hebrew, and the Slav,”—he wrote—“according to popular belief, are poisoning the pure air of our otherwise well-regulated cities; and if it were not for them there would be no congestion, no filth, and no poverty in the great industrial and commercial centers of America” ([1911] 1920, 217). Goldenweiser announced that his forthcoming report showed that “the immigrants in cities in a large majority of cases live a clean and decent life, in spite of all the difficulties that are thrown in their way by economic struggle and municipal neglect.” Even more crucially, he continued, the report:

¹⁷ In 1919 Goldenweiser entered the employment of the Federal Reserve Board as associate statistician and in 1925 he became assistant director of Research and Statistics. In 1926 he was appointed Director of Research and Statistics and served in that position until 1945, when he became Economic Adviser to the Board. In 1946 he retired from the Federal Reserve and became a member of the Institute for Advanced Studies. He left the Institute in 1949 but remained in Princeton, studying, writing, and acting as a consultant on monetary and economic policy to, among others, the Committee for Economic Development. In 1946 Goldenweiser was elected President of the American Economic Association.

strongly indicates that racial characteristics are entirely subordinate to environment and opportunity in determining that part of the immigrant's mode of life which is legitimately a matter of public concern; and finally, it shows that foreign colonies in large cities are not stagnant, but are constantly changing their composition, the more successful members leaving for better surroundings, until finally the entire colony is absorbed in the melting pot of the American city. ([1911] 1920, 222-223)

The following year, Goldenweiser turned his critical attention to Francis Amasa Walker's famous argument that immigration causes race suicide because the poor immigrants drive down wages and the native worker responds by reducing fertility. Goldenweiser formulated his attack in two steps. First, drawing upon data provided by Willcox (1911), he showed that America's birth rates began falling as early as in 1810, even before the massive influx of the "old" immigration, and that the rapidity of the decline between 1810 and 1840 was about the same as that between 1860 and 1900.¹⁸ "Did the native Americans of 1810 and 1820"—Goldenweiser ironically asked (1912, 346-347)—"anticipate the influx of the following decades and refrain from having offspring, for fear that their children might be obliged to compete with those who were at that time being reared in Germany and Ireland, but who were destined to invade these shores?"

Second, Goldenweiser compared for each state (data referred to the year 1900): 1) the percentage of population living in cities of at least 25,000 inhabitants; 2) the percentage of foreign born; and 3) the number of children under 5 per 1,000 native white women aged 15-44.¹⁹ The evidence showed that fourteen of the fifteen states with a greater-than-average rate of urban residency also showed a native fertility rate lower-than-average. At the same time, among the twenty-four states with a higher percentage of foreign-born, sixteen had a native fertility rate below average, and eight above average. Of these sixteen states, ten also showed an above average percentage of urban inhabitants, while four were only slowly below average. Finally, of the eight states showing a correlation between high immigration and high native fertility, all had a proportion of urban inhabitants well above average. All this led Goldenweiser to conclude: "The decline in birth-rates and the growth of immigration, according to this view, represent two effects of the same cause, namely, the industrial development and the urbanization of the continent" (1912, 347).

Like Goldenweiser, Hourwich was a Russian-Jewish immigrant. He had arrived in the United States in 1890 at the age of thirty. After joining the Russian Workers Society for Self-Education in New York, he enrolled at Columbia University where he obtained a PhD in economics in 1893. His doctoral dissertation, which he completed under Seligman, was published as *The Economics of the Russian Village* (1892).²⁰ He then taught statistics at the University of Chicago from 1892 to 1893, after which he returned to New York City, where he practiced law while also contributing to Marxist legal magazines in Russia. In 1900 Hourwich moved to Washington, where he worked for the United States government for several years, first as a translator at the Bureau of the Mint in 1900-1902, then at the Census Bureau in 1902-1906 and in 1909-1913 as a statistician and expert on mining.

Hourwich presented his critique of the commission's findings, first in a 1911 essay published in Columbia's *Political Science Quarterly*, then, the following year, in a voluminous 500-hundred page volume, *Immigration and Labor*, whose publication had been commissioned by the American Jewish Committee (on which more below).²¹ Hourwich firmly rejected the racist

¹⁸ It is ironic that Goldenweiser relied upon the authority of Willcox, who was among the champions of the view that immigration contributed to race suicide. On Willcox's views on race and immigration see Aldrich (1979).

¹⁹ Our discussion here is indebted to Prévost and Beaud (2012).

²⁰ Seligman also provided financial support for Hourwich's studies at Columbia.

²¹ It should be pointed out that Hourwich's concern with racial issues by no means began with the works of the Immigration Commission. Writing to Du Bois in 1904, he described how the plight of Jews in Russia was very similar to the African American: "Permit me to assure that I deeply feel the injustice of the attitude of the white race toward the coloured people. I am a Russian Jew by birth and our condition in and our condition in Russia is very much similar to

approach of the commission and presented a detailed statistical refutation of the main arguments for immigration restriction.²² Exactly like Goldenweiser, he attacked the race suicide thesis, observing that “Prof. Wilcox has proved by an analysis of population statistics that the decrease in the proportion of children began in the United States as early as 1810,” well before the arrival of the new immigration (1912, 18). Similarly, for Hourwich, “there is absolutely no statistical proof of an oversupply of unskilled labor resulting in the displacement of native by immigrant laborers” (1912, 11). The effect of immigration on labor, he affirmed, had been “the elevation of the English-speaking workmen to the status of an aristocracy of labor,” while the immigrants “have been employed to perform the rough work of all industries” (1912, 12).

Hourwich also addressed directly some of the main charges leveled against Jewish immigrants. “The sweating system did not originate with the Jewish clothing workers,” he asserted, but “it preceded them by more than half a century.” Drawing upon data recently made available by the United States Bureau of Labor, Hourwich was able to provide evidence on “the employment of women in the clothing industry in the first third of the nineteenth century, at the time when the wage-earners were nearly all American-born” (1912, 363). And the Jews’ alleged instinctive tendency to concentrate for work in urban centers, he explained as “due to the relation of supply and demand in the American labor market, and not to the racial characteristics of the immigrants” (1911, 620). On Commons’ claim that the innate inclinations of Jewish workers would constitute a threat for American unionism, Hourwich wrote: “The statistics of the Immigration Commission show ... that trade-unionism is as strong among the immigrants as among the native American workmen” (1911, 636). Even more significantly, he denied a line could be drawn in respect of unionism between the “desirable” immigrants from northern and western Europe and the “undesirable aliens from Southern and Eastern Europe.” Hourwich documented that the percentage of trade unionists among Jewish workers was 21.4, more than four times that of German workers and almost twice the average percentage for all the “desired” races. “Regardless of the opinions of the Immigration Commission,” he was led to conclude, “one thing seems to be well established by its statistics, viz. that there is no causal connection between immigration and the slow progress of organization among the industrial workers of the country” (1911, 637-638).

Hourwich’s pro-immigration campaigning continued in his writings as a political activist. His overt socialist sympathies did not impede his detection of racist leanings within the radical circles of the time. In 1914, for instance, he attacked the leaders of the Socialist Party of America for proposing a view of race antagonism as a complex of feelings more deeply rooted than class-consciousness and certain to persist even after the advent of socialism.²³ Two years later, he did not hesitate to criticize Meyer London—the only Socialist representative in Congress—for his support of Chinese and Japanese immigration restriction. The Socialist congressman, Hourwich wrote, had no authority to speak in favor of Asian exclusion, after a resolution against the immigration of “backward races” was defeated in 1907 at the Stuttgart International Congress by an overwhelming

yours in the United States. The difference is only that the best men of Russia make no discrimination against the Jews and preach and practice social as well as political and civil equality of all races, whereas those who are considered the best people in America are reactionary, aristocratic and snobbish in their tendencies in general and with regard to the coloured race in particular.” Isaac A. Hourwich to W. E. B. Du Bois, September 27, 1904. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries.

²² Hourwich observed: “It would seem as if the investigation of the Immigration Commission proceeded upon the supposition that immigrant races represented separate zoological species” (1912, 57).

²³ Hourwich’s reference was to the majority report submitted by the Committee on Immigration to the Socialist Party convention of 1912, which asserted: “Race feeling is not so much a result of social as of biological evolution. It does not change essentially with changes of economic systems. It is deeper than any class feeling and will outlast the capitalist system. ... We may temper this race feeling by education, but we can never hope to extinguish it altogether. Class consciousness must be learned, but race-consciousness is inborn and cannot be wholly unlearned. A few individuals may indulge in the luxury of ignoring race and posing as utterly raceless humanitarians, but whole races, never. Where races struggle for the means of life, racial animosities cannot be avoided” (quoted in Hourwich 1912, 577).

majority of 900 against 100. London had apparently hoped to appease the American Federation of Labor's restrictionist requests, Hourwich concluded, but "there could be no compromise between the positions of the Stuttgart congress and that of the AFL" (1916, 138).

6. Isaac M. Rubinow and Samuel Hollander are the last two figures under scrutiny here. Neither directly intervened in the debate over the Immigration Commission reports, but their discussion of poverty and labor reforms clearly place them far from the nativist and racist reasoning of many of their contemporaries.

Rubinow, another Russian-Jewish immigrant, was an eclectic character. Born into a relatively comfortable Jewish family, he emigrated from Russia to the United States in 1893 at the age of eighteen. After graduating from Columbia University and New York University Medical School, he practiced medicine for five years among poor immigrants in New York City's Lower East Side. In 1900, while still in medical practice, Rubinow returned to Columbia as a part-time graduate student in economics, statistics, and sociology. His interest was shortly captured by the problem of social insurance, the topic that was to become his lifelong interest. As he later recollected: "The neglect of this most important branch of social legislation by the American economists, which was very forcibly brought to my attention some ten or twelve years ago, when, as a student in Professor Seligman's seminar, I first became interested in the subject, is fortunately a thing of the past" (1913, iii). In 1903 Rubinow left medicine for full-time employment in Washington, working in a succession of federal bureaus and agencies.

Rubinow's anti-racist stance is manifest from his earliest publications. Writing in 1905, he targeted Willcox's (1904, 64) claim, based on data obtained from the 1900 Twelfth Census, that the death rate for blacks (30.2) largely exceeded that of whites (17.3). "As a simple restatement of the figures quoted above,"—Rubinow wrote—"the assertion is undoubtedly true." If, however, "it be taken as an effort at causative interpretation, i.e., that the high death-rate of the American negro is a trait of the negro race, it is open to serious criticism" (1905a, 344). In Rubinow's eyes, Willcox had ignored one of the key factors affecting the death rate, namely, the "general level of economic prosperity or poverty" of the different populations compared. "That poverty has some effect in increasing the death-rate will be admitted in a general way by many statisticians ... but, in view of the impossibility of measuring this influence, it is usually entirely disregarded" (1905a, 345). Through his own estimates, based on statistics from the Russian province of Voronezh, Rubinow was able to show how classes of households with increasing wealth, measured by the number of acres of land owned, showed progressively lower death rates. He thus rhetorically wondered: "May not one ask himself what the conclusions would be if a similar investigation were made into the condition of the American negro? May not one express the wish that some such investigation be undertaken by some one fit for the work and free from all prejudices against the negro? The scientific results will undoubtedly repay any amount of labor or expense" (1905a, 349).²⁴

Also in 1905, Rubinow published a detailed statistical study on the economic conditions of the Russian Jews in New York. He located the origin of the sweatshop in the economic conditions of the clothing industry, rather than in the genetic traits of the Jewish immigrant:

Of the horrors of the sweatshops so much has been written and spoken that scarcely an intelligent New Yorker can be found who is not to some degree aware of their evils. Private investigators as well as authoritative official bodies have made thorough studies

²⁴ As a militant radical, Rubinow was also disturbed by the passive attitude of the Socialist Party toward the so-called "Negro problem." He made his concerns explicit in a sixteen part series titled "The Economic Aspects of the Negro Problem," published from February 1908 to June 1910 in the *International Socialist Review* under the pseudonym of I. M. Robbins. "It is curious,"—he wrote—"that while it is generally understood that the vast majority of the negroes in this country belong to the proletarian class, nevertheless the party which claims to represent the interest of this class has troubled itself very little about the negro problem" (1907-1908, 480).

of the situation. The peculiar conditions of the clothing industry which make home work and the exploitation of ignorant immigrants so easy, have facilitated the establishment of the system. The very "green" immigrant who knows nothing of the conditions of the market is an easy prey to the sharks of his own or any other nationality. The subcontracting system, once established, was a terrible competitor to the legitimate factory. (1905b, 116)

In the tragic conditions of the sweatshops, "we do not see any specifically Jewish question," Rubinow declared, therefore "as the problems are general, and not specifically Jewish, so the solution must be" (1905b, 117). As to the view that the new immigrant, with his lower standard of life, reduced American wages, he called attention on "the remarkable progress ... the Russian Jewish population has made within the very short period of fifteen or twenty years," progress which "has made the Russian Jew a fighter within the ranks of the American labor movements and a force for the betterment of the American working class" (1905b, 114-115). Rubinow also challenged the alleged anti-unionist attitude of the Jewish immigrant. He calculated that, in Manhattan, total membership in the unions of the clothing and allied trades, those with the highest Jewish concentration, amounted to more than 20,000 individuals. "If we consider that the total membership of unions in the borough is about 150,000,"—Rubinow (1905b, 115) continued, "the part Jewish Workers play in the union movement will easily be appreciated."

Rubinow's opposition to racial prejudice surfaces also in his discussion of social insurance. In many respects, Rubinow was the pioneer of a social insurance tradition that emphasizes the redistributive function of any insurance or assistance program. To Rubinow, social insurance was primarily an effort "to readjust the distribution of the national product more equitably" (1913, 491). Crucial to this view was the idea that financial support should be extended to the whole class of wage earners as a matter of universal right, and not as a form of charity or reward. Accordingly, Axel R. Schäfer (2014, 137) observes, Rubinow "vigorously denounced the distinction between worthy and unworthy poor, and between productive and unproductive workers"—a distinction which, as Leonard amply documents, was often made on racial or eugenic grounds. In this connection, Rubinow criticized private pension funds and the Federal civil War pension program for excluding immigrants as well as African Americans (Schäfer 2014, 138). Rubinow's inclusive view of social reform is also reflected in his conception of the "unemployable." While for labor reformers like the Webbs and Seager this notion was instrumental in asserting ethnic, biological, and even moral, hierarchies among individual laborers, Rubinow held that the factors causing permanent unemployment "are mostly impersonal factors, and those that are personal pertain to the personality of the employer and not the employee." He admitted that there may be some "hereditary tramps," who "present a separate problem of social hygiene." Nonetheless, Rubinow asserted, "this type, like the type of the hereditary criminal, is an exceptional one; most tramps, like most criminals, are creatures of those circumstances which have forced them out of the routine of honest and systematic toil" (1913, 450-451).²⁵

Whereas Rubinow was an outsider in the discipline, Hollander was among the most authoritative economists of his time. A renowned banking and public finance specialist, as well as an outstanding historian of economic thought, from 1901 to 1940 Hollander was a leading member of Johns Hopkins, serving successively as instructor, associate professor, and full professor of Political Economy.²⁶ Hollander's contribution to labor economics—a less-known aspect of his career—is what concerns us here. In 1914 he published a slim but significant volume entitled *The Abolition of Poverty* where he called for a comprehensive list of labor legislation that included a

²⁵ Compare, in this connection, Rubinow's position with that of Charles R. Henderson, the leading sociologist from Chicago. According to Henderson: "For defectives and paupers industrial insurance is inapplicable, and these must be supported by public or private relief; while delinquents are placed under public control at compulsory labor in coercive institutions" (1909, 42). See Leonard (2016) for a discussion of Henderson's views on eugenics.

²⁶ In 1921 Hollander became the second Jewish economist, after Seligman, to serve as President of the AEA.

minimum wage, collective bargaining, unemployment insurance and government employment offices. Here he openly attacked the nativists' claim, supported by the Immigration Commission, that immigration had depressed wages and exacerbated the problem of unemployment:

Neither racial qualities nor national characteristics account for the presence of such poverty. It persists as an accompaniment of modern economic life, in widely removed countries among ethnically different peoples. It cannot be identified with alien elements in native race stocks. Countries which have for generations been relatively free from foreign influx and have developed industrialism from within exhibit the same phenomenon of economic want. Wholesale immigration is likely to be attended by urban congestion and industrial exploitation, but these are supplementary phases of the problem of poverty. Even in the United States, where immigration has attained proportions unexampled in the world's history, there is no reason to believe that such influx—bearing in mind the part it has played in creating and enlarging industrial opportunity—has permanently affected the condition of poverty. (1914, 5)

Hollander was also adamant in rejecting the view that “all poverty is sin—the consequence of thriftlessness, prodigality, intemperance, unchastity, even irreligion.” For the Johns Hopkins' economist, to blame the poor for their own condition “is economic pharisaism, neglecting the most obvious facts of modern industrialism—the undeserved poverty that comes from involuntary idleness, from industrial accident, from parasitic occupation” (1914, 16).

Hollander's discussion of the minimum wage further distances him from the position of people like Ely, Commons, Seager, and the Webbs. No whiff of eugenic reasoning can be found in the motivations that led him to support such a measure. The immediate effect of a legally imposed minimum wage, he argued, would be “the relief of a large class of underpaid wage-earners otherwise exposed to poverty.” Hollander thought that, after a period of adjustment, a higher minimum wage would result in enhanced efficiency and a better outcome for all the parts involved. First, he argued, a binding minimum may lead to “heightened efficiency on the part of the worker,” or to “more economical methods of production on the part of the enterpriser.” Second, if the industry is “parasitic,” in the sense that a “low price to the consumer is made possible by underpayment of labor,” minimum wages will effect “a social revaluation of the product” through the “successive stages of reduced profits, curtailed industry, and diminished output” (1914, 69-70).

In contrast to those who praised the eugenic virtues of the job loss induced by a binding minimum wage, Hollander took the view that the disemployment of less efficient workers through what he termed “labor dislocation” represented the greatest cost of the minimum wage—and not its alleged benefit. Accordingly, he wrote: “It is desirable that the distress of dislocation be minimized and that provision be made for those injuriously affected; but the cautious extension of minimum wage legislation ... may reasonably be expected to attain such results” (1914, 70-71). In any case, for those disemployed, Hollander called for some form of “exceptional provision”—that is, “just as those trade unions which insist most strongly upon a standard wage rate permit members who have become unable to command the minimum rate to work for what they can get, so properly drafted minimum wage legislation authorizes licensed exemption” (1914, 71).²⁷

A few final words are warranted on Hollander's engagement with the American Jewish Committee. Founded in 1906 by a group of prominent New York Jews, the AJC was America's first civil right organization to take concerted action against Czarist anti-Jewish policies, and to

²⁷ The gulf between Hollander and the most eugenically oriented figures of the time was well caught by Alvin Johnson. Johnson contrasted Hollander's position with that of Carver, whose *Essays in Social Justice* had been hailed by the *Journal of Heredity* as a “very important step in the coordination of the various sciences which make up applied eugenics” (*Economics and Eugenics* 1917, 120). In discussing poverty, Johnson (1916, 349) pointed out, “Professor Carver is more concerned with the mechanical adjustment of quantitative forces; Professor Hollander, with the conditions of social economic conflict.”

manage the increasing inflow of Russian Jews to America. Early in 1909, the AJC began an intense campaign to prevent the Immigration Commission from adopting the Immigration Bureau's list of races, a list that included a distinct entry for the Jewish race. On December 4, 1909, Judge Julian Mach, one of the two vice Presidents of the AJC—the other was Hollander, who served in that position from 1908 to 1915—testified in front of the Commission and bitterly protested the notion of classifying “Hebrews” as a race or people (Cohen 1972). In its efforts to combat the Commission's proposal for a literacy test, the AJC enlisted the contribution of Kohler who, as an immigration lawyer, had accumulated considerable experience on the discriminatory practices of immigration officials.²⁸ Even more crucially, on February 19, 1911, the AJC decided to sponsor “an impartial digest of the forthcoming report of the Immigration Commission,” and, upon Hollander's proposal, “Dr. Isaac A. Hourwich of Washington, D.C.” was assigned the task.²⁹ There was some subsequent discussion within the AJC as to whether such a digest “was to appear as the work of an individual student of the question or as the result of an investigation by an organization interested in the subject.” The AJC Executive Committee agreed that “it was clearly inadvisable for such a book to be published under the name of the American Jewish Committee,” and, at Hollander's suggestion, it was decided that “Dr. Hourwich be directed to write the book upon the theory that it is to be the work of an individual,” with the Committee reserving to itself “the right to make such alterations of matter and form in the manuscript as are deemed desirable.”³⁰ The volume appeared in late 1912 under the authorship of Hourwich—who received 6,000 dollars—with no mention of the AJC editorial and financial support.³¹

The following year, Hollander expressed his profound concerns over the “recent phases of anti-Jewish feeling conveniently described by the term ‘the higher anti-Semitism.’” As he put in a report addressed to the Executive Commission of the AJC, from which we cannot forbear to quote at full length:

In the last ten years, both in this country and in Europe, anti-Semitism has shown increasing tendency to hide its ugly head under the cover of a culture struggle. Twentieth-century logic seems to have made it difficult for even bigots to indict a race by virtue of personal distaste justified by verbal expletives. The Jew-baiter has been driven by the sheer common-sense of his auditors to seek some other warrant for the hate that is in him than distorted caricature and obvious misrepresentation. In consequence, there has sprung up a veritable literature in which pseudo-philosophical pretentiousness and counterfeit scientific method struggle to present the Jew as a national incubus and a social menace. Physiology, psychology, economics, politics are in turn exploited with a view to establishing the Jew as a peril to national progress. In lieu of the old clothes man and the pawn-broker fence there is depicted an offensive composite of feebler physique, lower morality, parasitic industrialism, neurotic mentality—degrading the national standard and undermining the national character.

In Hollander's eyes: “The books of [Houston Stewart] Chamberlain [1912] and [Werner] Sombart [1911] are but examples—although conspicuous ones—of this new assault.”³²

²⁸ In 1912 Kohler published a pamphlet on *The Injustice of a Literacy Test for Immigrants* (1912b).

²⁹ Minutes of the American Jewish Committee Meeting of Executive Committee. February 19, 1911. American Jewish Committee Archives, New York, NY.

³⁰ Minutes of the American Jewish Committee Meeting of Executive Committee. November 11, 1911. American Jewish Committee Archives, New York, NY.

³¹ Ross was probably referring to Hourwich's volume when he wrote: “Hebrew money is behind the National Liberal Immigration League and its numerous publications. From the paper before the commercial body or the scientific association to the heavy treatise produced with the aid of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, the literature that proves the blessings of immigration to all classes in America emanates from subtle Hebrew brains” (1914, 144–145).

³² Minutes of the American Jewish Committee Meeting of Executive Committee. November 8, 1913. American Jewish Committee Archives, New York, NY.

7. All the people discussed in this paper found a way to express dissent toward the racist and eugenic arguments put forward by many of their leading contemporaries. In some cases, this dissent was direct and explicit, in others it was more nuanced and implied, yet still significant. As professional economists and social reformers—think especially of Seligman, Hollander, or Rubinow—they denounced the injustices caused by modern industrial capitalism and shared the progressives’ open commitment to the establishment of an administrative state capable of rational planning and ameliorative policy. Yet their approach was not exclusionary. Nowhere in their discussions of minimum wage legislation, industrial conditions, let alone of the Negro problem, were attempts made to establish racial, or even moral hierarchies as a key criterion to distinguish “worthy” workers from the “unemployables,” or to determine which individuals were deserving of state assistance and which were not. All—in this case the contributions of Goldenwieser, Hourwich, Joseph, and Kohler are most significant—reacted against those who blamed the “new immigration” for the most intractable industrial problems, from undermining the American standard of living to inhibiting the formation of unions.

All the individuals discussed above were Jewish, certainly an important fact given the pervading anti-Semitism of those years. Leonard (2016, 11-12) is correct in pointing out that nearly all the progressives “descended from old New England families of seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay background,” and that, almost as a rule, they “were the children of Protestant ministers or missionaries, fired with an evangelical urge to redeem America.” During the second half of the Progressive era, however, the intellectual arena became more pluralistic. Several Jewish figures had emerged as leading authorities across the disciplines, including the then roaring social sciences—where racial and eugenic arguments surfaced in a more systematic fashion. Significantly, the responses of the authors reviewed here were not limited to mere self-defense—a rebuttal of then recurrent anti-Semitic arguments—but took the form of a more general and “non-partisan” reaction to the racial and hierarchical vision of American nationhood paraded by many of their contemporaries. Whether and to what extent this “collective” reaction was a coordinated move towards the creation of a new Jewish identity in a rapidly changing society, as was America in the Progressive era, is an issue too complex and multi-faced to be discussed here.³³ One of the interesting aspects that emerges from our discussion, however, is that all the figures discussed were part of a well established personal, academic, and institutional network.

In this connection, Seligman was a key figure—not only does his work show no trace of nativist concerns and eugenic reasoning but, as an influential figure at Columbia, he taught Rubinow, Hourwich, and Joseph, who all completed their doctoral dissertations under his guidance. Seligman was also in contact with Kohler and, together with Joseph, they were all active in the philanthropic activities of the Baron de Hirsch Fund.³⁴ Hourwich and Goldenwieser knew each other well and at the time they waged their attacks on the Immigration Commission they were colleagues at the Census Bureau. Goldenwieser’s brother, Alexander, had studied at Columbia under Boas and, like Boas, he built a career challenging the claims of the racial anthropologists of the day (Kan 2015). Hourwich and Rubinow were also personal friends.³⁵ Both men belonged to the more radical wing of progressivism, and both fought against the vicious racism they encountered in socialist circles.³⁶ Hollander was another important figure in this network. His ideas on labor reforms were

³³ On the construction of a Jewish identity during the progressive era see the fascinating accounts offered by Eric Goldstein (2008) and William E. Forbath (2014).

³⁴ Later in life, Joseph published a history of the activities of the Baron de Hirsch Fund in support of the Jewish immigrant. See Joseph (1935).

³⁵ Rubinow (1932) authored the entry on Hourwich for the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*.

³⁶ In 1904, Rubinow expressed his concerns to Du Bois: “I must say that even among certain groups of socialists the Negro problem is not fully understood, and the new Southern members of the movement have not altogether succeeded

very much on the progressive track but without any eugenic or racialist content. He corresponded for more than thirty years with Seligman on several issues, including the organization of the second National Negro Conference in 1910 (Recchiuti 2007, 286), and as vice president of the AJC he played a major role in the enrollment of Kohler and Hourwich to campaign against the Immigration Commission's findings and policy recommendations.

We are well aware that much here remains to be explored—the network involved many other figures from different disciplines, as well as attorneys, union leaders, journalists, and exponents from the “learned professions.” As Diner has recently pointed out, “the involvement of local Jews, both the elites as well as members of the working class, in progressivism constitutes a subject that has not yet been studied other than in an episodic fashion and pretty much on the local level” (Diner 2012, 5-6). This essay, incomplete and partial as it is, can be considered as a first (incidental) attempt to fill this historiographic gap.

in freeing themselves from the prejudices that arose in chattel slavery, and persist in wage slavery.” Isaac M. Rubinow to W. E. B. Du Bois, November 10, 1904 (Aptheker 1973, 82).

References

- Aldrich, Mark. 1979. Progressive Economists and Scientific Racism: Walter Willcox and Black Americans, 1895-1910. *Phylon* 40(1): 1-14.
- Aptheker, Herbert. (Ed.) 1973. *The Correspondence of W.E.B. Du Bois*. Volume 1, Selections, 1877-1934. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Asso, Pier Francesco and Luca Fiorito. (Eds.) 2006. Edwin Robert Anderson Seligman, Autobiography (1929). *Research in the History of Economic Thought and Methodology* 24C: 149-187.
- Boas, Franz. 1912. Changes in the Bodily Form of Descendants of Immigrants. *American Anthropologist* 14(3): 530-562.
- Carver, Thomas N. 1894. The Theory of Wages Adjusted to Recent Theories of Value. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 8(4): 377-402.
- Chamberlain, Houston S. 1912. *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*. New York, John Lane Company.
- Cohen, Naomi W. 1972. *A History of the American Jewish Committee, 1906-1966*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America.
- Commons, John R. 1901. Immigration and Its Economic Effects. In *Reports of the U.S. Industrial Commission*. Volume 15. Washington: Government Printing Office: 293-743.
- . 1907. *Races and Immigrants in America*. New York: The Chautauqua Press.
- Daniels, Roger. 2004. *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Diner, Hasia. 2012. The Encounter between Jews and America in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11(1): 3-25.
- Economics and Eugenics: Review of a Book by Thomas Nixon Carver. 1917. *Journal of Heredity* 8(3): 120.
- Dinnerstein, Leonard. 1994. *Anti-Semitism in America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fiorito, Luca and Cosma Orsi. 2016. Anti-Semitism and Progressive Era Social Science: The case of John R. Commons. *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 38(1): 55-80.
- Fiorito, Luca and Cosma Orsi. 2017. "Survival Value and a Robust, Practical, Joyless Individualism": Thomas Nixon Carver, Social Justice, and Eugenics. *History of Political Economy*.
- Forbath, William E. 2014. *Jews, Law and Identity Politics*. Mimeo. Austin: University of Texas.
- Goldenweiser, Emanuel A. 1911. Immigrants in Cities. *The Survey* 25 (1): 596-602. Reprinted in Philip Davis and Bertha Schwartz, eds. 1920. *Immigration and Americanization: Selected Readings*. New York: Ginn & Co.: 216-223.
- Goldstein, Eric. 2008. *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- . 1912. Walker's Theory of Immigration. *American Journal of Sociology* 18 (3): 342-351.
- Hall, Prescott F. 1906. *Immigration and its Effects Upon the United States*. New York: Holt.
- . 1912. Review of *The Immigration Problem* by Jeremiah W. Jenks and W. Jett Lauck. *American Economic Review* 2(3): 675-677.
- Halpern, von Georg. 1903. *Die jüdischen Arbeiter in London*. München: Brentano and Lotz.
- Henderson, Charles R. 1909. *Industrial Insurance in the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hollander, Jacob H. 1914. *The Abolition of Poverty*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hourwich, Isaac A. 1892. *The Economics of the Russian Village*. Columbia College Studies in History, Economics and Public Law. Volume 2, no. 1.
- . 1911. The Economic Aspects of Immigration. *Political Science Quarterly* 26(4): 615-642.
- . 1912. *Immigration and Labor: The Economic Aspects of European Immigration to the United States*. New York: Putnam's Sons.
- . 1914. Socialism and the War. *New Review* 2(10): 561-578.

- . 1916. Congressman London on Immigration. *New Review* 4(5): 137-138.
- Huhner, Leon. 1937. Max James Kohler. *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*. 34: 295-301
- Jenks, Jeremiah W. and W. Jett Lauck. 1912. *The Immigration Problem*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls.
- Johnson, Alvin S. 1916. Review of Essays in Social Justice by Thomas Nixon Carver and *The Abolition of Poverty* by Jacob H. Hollander. *American Economic Review* 6(2): 347-350.
- Joseph, Samuel K. 1914. *Jewish Immigration to the United States, from 1881 to 1910*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 1935. *History of the Baron de Hirsch Fund; the Americanization of the Jewish Immigrant*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Kan, Sergei. 2015. The Falling-out between Alexander Goldenweiser and Robert Lowie. In Regna Darnell, and Frederic Wright Gleach (eds.) *Corridor Talk to Culture History: Public Anthropology and Its Consequences*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1-32.
- Kohler, Max J. 1912a. Restriction of Immigration—Discussion. *American Economic Review* 2(1): 72-78.
- . 1912b. *The Injustice of a Literacy Test for Immigrants*. New York: The Author.
- . 1914. Some Aspects of the Immigration Problem. *American Economic Review* 4(1): 93-108.
- Leonard, Thomas C. 2003. More Merciful and Not Less Effective: Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era. *History of Political Economy* 35(4): 709-734.
- . 2016. *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics, and American Economics in the Progressive Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Lewis, Howard T. 1912. The Economic Basis of the Fight for the Closed Shop. *Journal of Political Economy* 2(9): 928-952.
- Morris-Reich, Amos. 2011. Circumventions and Confrontations: Georg Simmel, Franz Boas and Arthur Rupp and Their Responses to Anti-Semitism. *Patterns of Prejudice* 44 (2): 195-215.
- Myrdal, Gunnar. 1944. *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
- Page, Charles H. 1985. *Fifty Years in the Sociological Enterprise: A Lucky Journey*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Perlmann, Joel. 2011. Views of European Races among the Research Staff of the US Immigration Commission and the Census Bureau, ca. 1910. *Working Paper* 648. Levy Economics Institute of Bard College.
- Prévost, Jean-Guy and Jean-Pierre Beaud. 2012. *Statistics, Public Debate and the State, 1800–1945: A Social, Political and Intellectual History of Numbers*. London: Pickering & Chatto.
- Recchiuti, John Louis. 2007. *Civic Engagement: Social Science and Progressive-Era Reform in New York City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Ripley, William Z. 1899. *The Races of Europe: A Sociological Study*. New York: D. Appleton and Co.
- . 1904. Race Factors in Labor Union. *Atlantic Monthly* 93(March): 299-308.
- Robbins, I. M. 1900-1910. Economic Aspects of the Negro Problem. *International Socialist Review* 8(1907-1908): 480-488, 548-554, 614-521, 691-700, 765-777; 9(1908-1909): 161-171, 282-292, 309-314, 499-510, 690-702, 985-994; 10(1909-1910): 50-59, 253-265, 527-541, 1010-1020, 1106-1117.
- Ross, Edward A. 1901. The Causes of Race Superiority. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 18: 67-89.
- . 1913. The Old World in the New: Economic Consequences of Migration.” *Century Magazine* 67 (November): 28-35.
- . 1914. *The Old World in the New: The Significance of Past and Present Immigration to the American People*. New York: The Century Co.

- Rubinow, Isaac M. 1905a. Poverty's Death-Rate. *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 9(72) 344-349.
- . 1905b. The Economic Conditions of the Russian Jew in New York City. In Charles S. Bernheimer (Ed.), *The Russian Jew in the United States: Studies of Social Conditions in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago*. Philadelphia: J. C. Winston: 102-121.
- . 1913. *Social Insurance: With Special to American Conditions*. New York: Holt.
- . 1913. 1932. Isaac A. Hourwich. *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. VII. New York: Macmillan: 494.
- Schäfer, Axel R. 2014. Beyond "Uplift and "Efficiency": Isaac M. Rubinow, Immigration, and Transatlantic Health Care Reform, 1900-1935. In Daniel Scroop and Andrew Heath (Eds.) *Transatlantic Social Politics: 1800-Present*. London: Palgrave Macmillan: 129-163.
- Seligman, Edwin R. A. 1905. *Principles of Economics, with Special Reference to American Conditions*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co.
- Seligman, Edwin R. A. 1909. Address. In *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference 1909*: New York, May 31 and June 1. New York: The Conference: 67-70.
- Sombart, Werner. 1911. *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben*. Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot.
- United States Immigration Commission. 1911a. *Reports of the Immigration Commission. Abstracts of Reports of the Immigration Commission: With Conclusions and Recommendations and Views of the Minority*. Volume 1. Washington: Government Printing Office.
- United States Immigration Commission. 1911b. *Reports of the Immigration Commission. Immigrants in Cities. A Study of the Population of Selected Districts in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, Cleveland, Buffalo, and Milwaukee*. Volumes 26 and 27. Washington: Government Printing Office.
- Webb, Beatrice. 1898. The Jews of East London. In Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, *Problems of Modern Industry*. London: Longmans, Green: 20-45.
- Webb, Sidney and Beatrice Webb. 1897. *Industrial Democracy*. Two volumes. London: Longmans, Green.
- Willcox, Walter F. 1904. The Negro Population. In Walter F. Willcox and W. E. B. Du Bois. *Negroes in the United States*. U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of the Census, Bulletin 8. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office.
- . 1911. The Change in the Proportion of Children in the United States and in the Birth Rate in France during the Nineteenth Century. *Publications of the American Statistical Association* 12(93) 490-499.
- Wolfe, Albert B. *et al.* 1917. Some Phases of the Minimum Wage: Discussion. *American Economic Review* 7(1): 275-81.
- . 1915. Review of *The American Japanese Problem* by Sidney L. Gulick, and *The Old World in the New. The Significance of Past and Present Immigration to the American People* by Edward A. Ross. *American Economic Review* 5(2): 375-378
- Zeidel, Robert F. 2004. *Immigrants, Progressives and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission 1900–1927*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press.