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Throughout American history, the oppressed and their oppressors have fought for inclusion or exclusion in two arenas: the legislation, in granting legal rights and recognitions, and the culture, in shifting public perception and opinion. Although neither is independent from one another, groups have targeted one primarily, which would influence the other if accomplished successfully. 1830s working-class women fought against corporations in the cultural battlefield, seeking to counter corporate propaganda and to persuade the public. In the 1840s, by positioning themselves in opposition to the emergence of Asian immigration of the 1860s, European immigrants quietly won the cultural battle and began a descent into acceptance in American society. The cultural battleground now occupied, Asian immigrants could not assimilate and hence fought almost exclusively in legislative fronts. This transition from cultural to legislative in this period of American history reveals three successive<sup>1</sup> key themes. Firstly, “degrees of separation”, a dynamic metric of how removed an identity is from society, was complicated by different group identities participating in society. Secondly, any notable degrees of separation of one identity generally collapsed when another identity with a higher degree of separation arose. Thirdly, the successful integration of each previous group into society (via collapsing of degrees of separation) created legislative openings but closed cultural opportunities for the next group. These three concepts determined the strategy each group took in arguing for their inclusion in the United States.

In fighting for fair treatment in industrial factories, working-class women of the 1830s focused on fighting the culture battle: the intense and continued effort to spread “working-class feminist

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<sup>1</sup> Successive in that each theme builds upon the previous.

consciousness”<sup>2</sup> through cultural mediums like self-published newspapers led to and secured legislative victories such as the 10-hour workday<sup>3</sup>. Even if strikes did not elicit any concrete results like increased wages, the culturally revolutionary nature of women assembling in labor unions proved to be more durable and effective in the fight for equality than any one policy change. Even political advocacy organizations like the Female Labor Reform Association aimed to, first and foremost, persuade the public of their feminine morality *and* their right to control their labor<sup>4</sup> while parrying corporations’ cultural propaganda<sup>5</sup>. Although women were ill-treated in factory life, as women they played an instrumental role in American society, even maintaining a somewhat elevated social status at times from their central work in the household<sup>6</sup>. At this time, legislative rights were strictly limited and a woman had no representation in that sphere, yet women possessed few degrees of separation. Hence, working-class women aimed primarily at shifting cultural dialogue, for this was the a sphere they had high initial leverage over – the state and position of nearly half of society was formidable and demanded attention – which eventually provoked significant changes in the legislation. Gender identity aided class identity.

Meanwhile, in the period of 1840 to 1860, four million immigrants had arrived to the United States, and the number was quickly rising. The majority of these immigrants were European, coming primarily from German, Ireland, Scandinavia, and England<sup>7</sup>, but were not initially considered to be white, a term restricted to mean ‘Anglo-Saxon’<sup>8</sup>. Such recognition came with notable legislative advantages, like favored enfranchisement and legal representation through voting<sup>9</sup>. To gain entry into the United States, European immigrants needed to prove their whiteness, much like how working-class women needed to demonstrate their purity while upholding their right to their own labor, both in an effort to gain complete inclusion into American society. Their different religion, physiognomic features, and skin tones were all

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Reagan, “*Band of Sisters: Class and Gender in Industrial Lowell*”, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Reagan, “Band of Sisters”, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Reagan, “Band of Sisters”, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Reagan, “Band of Sisters”, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Reagan, “Band of Sisters”, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Reagan, “Race, Immigration, and Whiteness: Labor Markets and Cultural Constructions,” TS History: American History of 1877 (Class Lecture, Online University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, November 3, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Jacobson, “*Becoming Caucasian*”, 85.

<sup>9</sup> Reagan, “Race, Immigration, and Whiteness” (Class Lecture).

manipulated to serve as barriers for discrimination; yet the notable distinction that characterized their high degrees of separation from the struggle for women's rights was their lack of roots in America. With no cultural standing and with a widening but still restrictive legislative body, they were especially vulnerable to a barrage of cultural and legislative assaults. Attacks on European immigrants occurred through cultural thought vessels like political cartoons and flyers, as well as more confrontational intimidation and outright violence resulting from cultural hatred<sup>10</sup>; in addition, legislation was manipulated in both indirect and direct methods. Standards for whiteness were shaped subtly in, for example, *Rollins v. Alabama*, when it was determined that a Sicilian woman was not conclusively *white*<sup>11</sup>. More emphatically, explicit calls for naturalization and immigration restriction were made; an 1837 Anti-Catholic petition recommended such action against Roman Catholics in a political tone, arguing that Catholicism was a political ideology masquerading as a religion<sup>12</sup>. Thus, European immigration marked a transitioning period: with many degrees of separation, European immigrants were particularly subject to both cultural and legislative attacks; yet they later succeeded in making the cultural argument for their inclusion in American society, premised in opposition to the next arriving group: Asian immigrants.

In comparison to European immigration, Asian immigration was much smaller in magnitude; in 1860, only 41,000 Chinese had arrived in the United States, compared to the nearly 2.5 million European immigrants in the same ten-year period<sup>13</sup>. Even with such a small population, racial legislation like zoning ordinances, taxes, and removal of the right to testify in court were enforced selectively against the Chinese<sup>14</sup>. Like European immigrants, Asians were prevented from citizenship and, on a cultural level, subjected to vicious portrayals and mob violence; the difference is the extent to which this was enabled by legislation. As the *Shasta Republican* reported in 1856, "...in all this time we have heard of but two or three instances where the guilty parties [murderers of the Chinese] have been brought to justice and

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<sup>10</sup> Reagan, "Race, Immigration, and Whiteness" (Class Lecture).

<sup>11</sup> Jacobson, "*Becoming Caucasian*", 86.

<sup>12</sup> "Anti-Catholic Petition" (New York: National Archives, 1837).

<sup>13</sup> Helen Zia, "*Asian American Dreams: The Emergence of an American People*" (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 26.

<sup>14</sup> Zia, "*Asian American Dreams*", 26.

punished according to law.”<sup>15</sup> Laws from the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 to the Immigration Act of 1924 (targeting Japanese immigration) solidified what had been proposed of the Irish and Roman Catholics. It was this exclusion and solidification against Asians that drove a cultural consolidation of Europeans – for instance, the Workingmen’s Party, which rallied around the slogan “The Chinese must go!”, had a significant Irish following<sup>16</sup>. The once loathed Celt could, in the presence of outsiders, be an active member in The Order of Caucasians for the Extermination of the Chinaman in San Francisco<sup>17</sup>. European immigrants newly occupied and blocked the culture space, establishing inclusion for themselves premised on the exclusion of others; in the presence of another group with a higher degree of separation, their differences were relatively insignificant. Thus, Asians were culturally rejected wholesale; the Chinese were simultaneously attacked for *not assimilating* while the Japanese were attacked on the basis that they *assimilated too readily*<sup>18</sup>. Each round of Asian nationalities disparaged the previous nationality group as having a higher degree of separation (for instance, Koreans believed that the Japanese and the Chinese were responsible for their lack of success in America because they did not give up old customs<sup>19</sup>) – the same cultural tactic that granted European immigrants fuller acceptance to America – but failed at achieving the same success. The cultural corridor had closed.

Hence, for Asian immigrants, the forum for change shifted from changing culture – an impossible initial scheme – to that of the legislation, enabled by legislative structured poked and prodded by previous groups just wide enough to pry open. In 1896, the Supreme Court case *Yick Wo v. Hopkins* established that “race neutral” laws could not be enforced against any specific group. In 1898, another Asian-American, Wong Kim Ark, attained a legislative victory in solidifying U.S. citizenship by birthright<sup>20</sup>. Other significant efforts, like *Ozawa v. United States*<sup>21</sup> and *United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind*<sup>22</sup>,

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<sup>15</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Jacobson, “*Becoming Caucasian*”, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 30.

<sup>22</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 33.

attempted to combat restrictive citizenship laws. Even cultural institutions like marriage and boundaries of race were argued in court and not through changing popular opinion or acceptance; Filipino Salvador Roldan argued for his right to marry outside of his race in 1933 by claiming that he was “Malay”, not “Mongolian”<sup>23</sup>. The dynamics of Asian immigration, while reminiscent in many ways of the treatment of European immigrants prior to Asian arrival, was characterized more distinctly by legislative action that split open a legislative system just ripe enough for change.

As different group identities arrived or emerged in the United States, the malleable degrees of separation of any one group were manipulated as many identities and intersections populated society. For one, working-class women leveraged the cultural importance of their gender to aid their class struggle, a strategy determined by a calculus of potential leverage and current degrees of separation. Degrees of separation of one group were generally consolidated, albeit not completely, when a group with a higher degree of separation arose; with this, European immigrants framed their entry on the premise that they were more American than Asians. Similarly, the Chinese and Filipinos were accepted “friends” after the bombing of Pearl Harbor as Japanese Americans’ degrees of separation spiked<sup>24</sup>. The successful integration of a group into the society drove an expansion in legislation and, almost paradoxically, a constriction in culture, for the dynamic degrees of separation that dictated inclusion of one identity could only truly be defined in relation to the exclusion of others. Thus, as more group identities complicated the hierarchy of degrees of separation in the United States, naturally the debate shifted from the cultural to the legislative. These three themes continue to appear even today, for instance with attitudes and action towards the Muslim immigrant population, one of the currently fastest-growing groups in America.

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<sup>23</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Zia, “Asian American Dreams”, 39.