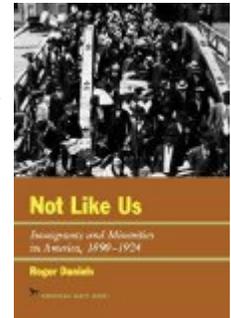


Roger Daniels. *Not Like Us: Immigrants and Minorities in America, 1890-1924.*
Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publisher, 1997. xi + 179 pp. \$22.50, cloth, ISBN 978-1-56663-165-5.



Reviewed by Brian Gratton

Published on H-SHGAPE (February, 1999)

Strange beards, strange hats, strange noses. Folk streaming along a gangplank in the photograph on this book's front cover would fill a nervous nativist's notebook with fearful predictions. Professor E. H. Johnson had just such a fright in 1888 at Castle Garden, watching a "far greater peril to us than the Irish." Yes, it was "the Hungarians, and the Italians, and the Poles" (p. 19). This is the fabulous era Daniels examines in his short review of immigration, race, and ethnicity. Millions of the oddest people in the world came to the United States between 1890 and 1924, most without the slightest intention of staying, and hence with little interest in looking, acting, or behaving like "Americans." Millions of others, stranger still by the color of their skin, were barred from entry by racial exclusion laws. These precedents provided the model upon which those on that gangplank could be stopped--the infamous immigration restriction laws of the 1920s, with their frantic racial taxonomy.

Stopping these immigrants had the wholly unexpected consequence of prompting migratory streams of Mexicans and blacks into the very re-

gions vacated by eastern and southern Europeans (W. J. Collins, "When the tide turned: Immigration and the delay of the Great Black Migration," *Journal of Economic History*, September 1997). The result was a period of immigration, migration, and remigration so intense that it funded the only successful nativist movement in our history, and, at the same time, created a multi-ethnic United States in which immigrants' grandchildren debate whether the latest immigrants deserve a piece of the pie.

Daniels, one of the deans of immigration history, brings his considerable powers to bear on these issues in a way that will please some readers, while not satisfying others. His basic intents are modest: to provide a readable, short examination of major themes in immigration and minority history for a general audience. There are no footnotes, although general references can be found for sections and specific citations for quotations. He advances few novel arguments, relying instead on the foundations of immigration history established over the last three decades. He does assert the indivisibility of immigration and racial/

ethnic history, a position now taken by the re-named Immigration and Ethnic History Society and increasingly the norm of practitioners in the field.

Using this template, Daniels effectively uses Chinese exclusion, "the hinge on which all American immigration policy turned" (p. 17), as a prologue to the whole racially-charged era. He concludes with an optimistic view of the positive effects of New Deal policy and the Second World War's economic impact. In the five chapters between these bookends, he treats American Indians and blacks at considerable length, linking their experiences to Progressive reform and its limitations and tying nativism to a general climate of hostility to those whose ethnic or racial characteristics weren't quite right. The argument follows a conventional liberal approach to the evolution of policy toward immigrants and minorities, which celebrates their agency but focuses most of its attention on their victimization.

The latter posture at times blinds us to the incredible successes of the period, especially in the improvement of standard of living for most natives and immigrants. Urbanization, industrialization, and roller coaster economic cycles took their toll, but, more often, they paid dividends. Immigrants' jobs may have been brutal and poorly paid by our standards, but they were a godsend by the standards of the time. That's why immigrants came here, worked like the very devil, and put up with ill tempered Yankees and bad American cuisine. Viewing the period back through the lens of the 1924 National Origins Law, as liberal historians are wont to do, blurs the rather extraordinary capacity of the United States to absorb such disparate peoples. When I teach immigration history, I have my students read Philip Gourevitch's, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York: 1998), so as to gain a little international perspective on what ethnic strife can descend to. Indeed, the exclusion of Mexicans

from the 1924 restrictions, and the migration of blacks to the north as a direct result of immigration exclusion, tested the framework of the United States in a still more intense way. That framework failed and it succeeded, as Daniels's concluding chapter attests.

Any book on this period reveals again the heart of immigration scholarship: the issue of assimilation. No one working in this tough sod can avoid the clumps: labor unions' discrimination against immigrants and steadfast opposition to open doors, blacks' hostility to immigrants, immigrant hostility to blacks, Mexican Americans' uneasiness about Mexican immigration, the outright prejudices of the scholars and political leaders we usually admire, the desire of many immigrants to become American, the democratic processes that led to exclusion and state coercion. Daniels's decision to integrate race and ethnicity into this story is useful, but it will not satisfy multiculturalists, the subalterns of postmodernism. Only a few references to whiteness and off-whiteness mar an otherwise pleasing narrative. There is no demand that assimilation be utterly rejected as an appropriate model for nation building (on the latter, see Gary Gerstle, Donna Gabaccia, and David A. Hollinger in the *Journal of American History*, September 1997). Daniels hopes for a society in which all members have equal rights; the history he has written shows that "the commitment to equality has both waxed and waned" (p. 160).

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Citation: Brian Gratton. Review of Daniels, Roger. *Not Like Us: Immigrants and Minorities in America, 1890-1924*. H-SHGAPE, H-Net Reviews. February, 1999.

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