

ON AMERICAN SOIL INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

“America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality,
a weaving back and forth, with the other lands,
of many threads of all sizes and colors”

(Randolph S. Bourne)¹

On Saturday afternoon, October 3, 1965, at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, against the skyscrapers of New York City, and surrounded by politicians, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act (known also as the Hart-Celler Act for its sponsors in Congress). In his address, the President observed that the Act was “not revolutionary” and would “not affect the lives of millions [or] reshape the structure of our daily lives, or really add importantly either way to our wealth or our power”.²

On October 2, 2015 anyone with access to *The Atlantic* magazine could read: “The Immigration Act That Inadvertently Changed America”³. Two weeks earlier, on September 14, Emily Cadei, a *Newsweek* politics correspondent entitled her article: “Fifty Years Later, the Immigration Bill That Changed America”.⁴ On October 5, Lawrence Downes from *The New York Times* headlined his post

¹ Bourne wrote these words in an essay published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, in July 1916. Quoted after: D. Hoerder, “Migration, People’s Lives, Shifting and Permeable Borders. The North American and Caribbean Societies in the Atlantic Worlds, in D. Hoerder, N. Faires (eds.), *Migrants and Migration in Modern North America. Cross-Border Lives, Labor Markets, and Politics*, Duke University Press, 2011, p. 33. The online version of the essay is available at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/16jul/bourne.htm>.

² Remarks at the Signing of the Immigration Bill, Liberty Island, New York, October 3, 1965. (entry 543). <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=27292&st=&st1=> [Accessed: 5.10.2015].

³ <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/immigration-act-1965/408409/> [Accessed: 6.10.2015].

⁴ <http://www.newsweek.com/immigration-reform-act-50-years-later-371879> [Accessed: 5.10.2015].

“Remembering a Milestone for Immigrants and America”.⁵ Some commentators showed less enthusiasm and pointed to the unanticipated consequences of the Act: “The law that created illegal migration”.⁶

References to the 50th anniversary of the Immigration and Nationality Act have appeared in a number of newspapers, TV and radio news, blogs, tweets and websites.⁷ The event has been celebrated by various institutions, and the White House issued a statement in which the law was called “transformational”⁸. During the White House naturalization ceremony to commemorate the anniversary, an American writer and public speaker, Taylor Branch, said: “A few historians like me have proclaimed the 1965 Act a third pillar of democratic fulfillment from the civil rights era, along with Voting Rights and the Civil Rights Act of 1964”.⁹

Thus President Johnson was wrong. The law did change the U.S. landscape. But Lyndon Johnson was not the only one who failed to foresee the scale of immigration growth in the subsequent decades. Senator Ted Kennedy argued: “Under the proposed bill, the present level of immigration remains substantially the same (...) Secondly, the ethnic mix of this country will not be upset”.¹⁰ It was anticipated that there would be a moderate increase in the number of immigrants coming from Southern Europe and few other countries thanks to new regulations regarding family reunification.¹¹ Although similar opinions prevailed among the congressmen, more reserved voices were also heard: “We estimate that if the President gets his way, and the current immigration laws are repealed, the number of immigrants next year will increase threefold and in subsequent

⁵ <http://takingnote.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/10/05/remembering-a-milestone-for-immigrants-and-america/>

⁶ J. Hong, “The law that created illegal migration”, October 2, *Los Angeles Times* [op-eds], at <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-1002-hong-1965-immigration-act-20151002-story.html> [Accessed: 5.10.2015].

⁷ For instance: Smithsonian APA (Asian American Pacific Center) on Twitter: “Today is the 50th anniversary of the Hart-Celler Act, an end to policies excluding Asian and American immigrants”, at <https://twitter.com/smithsonianapa/status/650350620822495232> [Accessed: 3.10.2015].

⁸ Statement by the President on the 50th Anniversary of the Immigration and Nationality Act <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/10/03/statement-president-50th-anniversary-immigration-and-nationality-act>. [Accessed: 4.10.2015].

⁹ Remarks by Taylor Branch to New U.S. Citizens, 5 October, 2015 <http://taylorbranch.com/2015/10/05/remarks-by-taylor-branch-to-new-u-s-citizens/#more-2359> [Accessed: 6.10.2015].

¹⁰ B. Ong Hing, *Defining America through immigration policy*, Temple University Press. Philadelphia 2004, p. 95.

¹¹ Ch. Hirschman, D. Massey, “Places and Peoples: The New American Mosaic”, in: D. Massey (ed) *New Faces in New Places. The Changing Geography of American Immigration*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York 2010, p. 1.

years will increase even more (...)” – said the Republican vice-presidential candidate William Miller.¹² The final version of the Act passed overwhelmingly both in the House and Senate. What is interesting is the fact that at that time neither immigration nor the Act itself were of major concern to public opinion.

What happened, then, that today the Hart-Celler Act is labeled ‘a landmark piece of legislation’, ‘a milestone’, or ‘one of the most far-reaching laws’? The fact is that the law ended the system based on national origin¹³ and created a new one that prioritized family reunification and skilled immigrants.¹⁴ The countries in the Eastern Hemisphere were granted 170,000 visas annually (but no more than 20,000 for a single country), while those in the Western Hemisphere were given 120,000 (with no per-country limit). However, as Victor Greene has underlined, although the new law prohibited discrimination on the basis of nationality, the entrance policy became only slightly less restrictive. In consequence of introducing a new distinction, the Western Hemisphere lost its exemption.¹⁵ For Latin Americans, Mexicans in particular, legal immigration became more difficult and the number of undocumented migrants began to rise steadily. Scholars point to the *unintended consequences* that the document brought. Douglass S. Massey and Karen A. Pren argue that while the Act might have enhanced the immigration numbers in the case of Asians, the post-1965 wave of Mexican, Central American, and South American immigrants was not a direct result of new regulations, but arose indirectly through an accumulation of unintended consequences that unfolded afterward.¹⁶ Hirschman and Massey note that arrivals from Mexico surged after the Bracero Program was shut down in 1964, while immigration of Cubans arose from the tumult of Castro’s revolution.¹⁷ Although one can argue if the changing immigration landscape was due to the Act itself, it is no accident that American scholars distinguish the post-1965 immigration. Let us take a quick look at statistics.

¹² Quoted after: C. Wong, *Lobbying for Inclusion: Rights Politics and the Making of Immigration Policy*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2006, p. 52.

¹³ The national origins quota system was established in 1921.

¹⁴ A seven-category preference system was introduced to determine who would be permitted under the quotas.

¹⁵ V. Greene, “Offering a Refuge or Refusal?: American Immigration Policy, Past & Present”, *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny*, no 3, 2009, p. 22.

¹⁶ D.S. Massey, K.A. Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America,” *Popul Dev Rev*, 2012, no. 38(1), p. 12, at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3407978/pdf/nihms389585.pdf>

¹⁷ Ch. Hirschman, D.S. Massey, *Places and Peoples...*, p. 2.

According to the most recent Pew Research Center report, since the passing of the Immigration and Nationality Act, almost 59 million immigrants have arrived in the United States. In 2013, the number of foreign-born population in the U.S. amounted to 41.3 million, i.e. 13.1% of the country's population. By comparison, in the 1960s there were 10 million foreign-born residents. Despite the fact that growth has slowed in recent years, the number of immigrants living in the United States is projected to almost double by 2060.¹⁸ In 1965, 84% of Americans were non-Hispanic whites, 14% were Hispanic and less than 1% were Asian. In 2015, the numbers are markedly different: 62% white, 18% Hispanic, and 6% Asian. Only the black population shares have remained stable (11% in 1965 and 12% this year).¹⁹ In 1960, the vast majority of immigrants living in the USA were born in Europe or Canada (84%), while only 6% came from Mexico, 3.8% from South-East Asia and 3% from Latin America. Fifty three years later only 14.2% of those born outside the USA were Europeans or Canadians, 28% originated from Mexico, 25.8% were from Asia and 24% came from Latin America.²⁰ As for newly-arrived immigrants, Asia became the largest source region (it had previously been Central and South America). Not only numbers have changed. Douglas S. Massey and Chiara Capoferro speak of the "new geography of immigration". During the period from 1965 to 1990 immigrants headed mainly to five states: California, New York, Texas, Florida and Illinois, whereas current newcomers are much more diverse in their choices. Notable increase has been observed in the states that heretofore had received a small amount of immigrants (e.g. Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina).²¹

Over the next 50 years, the authors of Pew report predict, that immigrants and their descendants will play an even greater role in the country's growth. If current demographic trends hold, they will account for 88% of growth, bringing the total population to 441 million.²² In this regard, Bourne's words seem still

¹⁸ *Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born Population in the United States, 1960–2013*, issued September 28, 2015, at <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2015/09/28/statistical-portrait-of-the-foreign-born-population-in-the-united-states-1960-2013-key-charts/> [Accessed: 30.10.2015]. Moreover, the report reads that "today's 14% foreign-born share [as estimated by Pew Research Center-author's note] is a near historic record for the U.S., just slightly below the 15% levels seen shortly after the turn of the 20th century".

¹⁹ *Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S., Driving Population Growth and Change Through 2065. Views of Immigration's Impact on U.S. Society Mixed*, issued September 28, 2015, at http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2015/09/2015-09-28_modern-immigration-wave_REPORT.pdf

²⁰ *Statistical Portrait of the Foreign-Born...*

²¹ D.S. Massey, C. Capoferro, "The Geographic Diversification of American Immigration", in D.S. Massey (ed.) *New Faces...*, p. 36–37.

²² *Modern Immigration Wave...*

accurate: “We are all foreign-born or the descendants of foreign-born, and if distinctions are to be made between us, they should rightly be on some other ground than indigenoussness”.²³

Even a cursory review of daily papers, magazines or internet discussion sites reveals that the 50th anniversary of the Hart-Celler Act has intensified an already heated public debate on the changing face of migration in the United States and on the challenges for the immigration policy. And the so called “immigration problem” is among the most important and widely discussed issues in the current presidential campaign. The question arises whether ‘a visit into the past’ may be instructive. In other words: what can we learn from the history of immigration? The demographic composition of migration flows has changed significantly, but many of the problems that today’s immigrants have to cope with, resemble those faced by earlier generations.

This volume seeks to provide a multi-voiced account of immigrants’ live, experiences, choices and challenges on American soil, both in the past (in times of mass migration) and at present time. Scholars from several disciplines discuss such topics as transnational ties, inter-ethnic relations, the popular image of immigrants, immigrant employment niches, identity negotiation.

At first glance, the volume may seem too eclectic, relatively diverse, perhaps even mismatched. But a deeper insight into the texts allows to discover a number of common elements, unexpected ties and connections. Each article, like a single piece of a puzzle, helps to build a highly complex and complicated picture of American immigration. The volume binds the past and the present, “the old issues and the new questions”. The topics covered by the authors interweave and overlap. Some authors focus on the stories of a particular ethnic group, others deal with inter-group relations.

Balazs Venkovits looks closely at emigrant accounts written by Hungarian revolutionaries but his article is also a story of the transnational engagement of political exiles who “continued their work as people struggling for the betterment of the country”. Anna Mazurkiewicz examines the transnational (transatlantic) identities of the Cold War political exiles, often suspended between two worlds. She argues that their legacy should be “considered in the context in which they were created: being influenced by certain transpolitical, transnational, multiethnic spaces.”

²³ S. Bourne, *Trans-national America*, at <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/issues/16jul/bourne.htm> [Accessed: 4.09.2015].

In a number of the articles, the mother land is a returning motif. It is present in immigrants' memoirs, letters and accounts. Sometimes migrants attempt to escape from their roots, try to "crawl out of their skin", as in the case of Anya – the protagonist of Waclawiak's novel discussed here by Grażyna Kozaczka. Yet, somehow, a homeland is still present in their thoughts. Bruckner's words, quoted by Monika Kocyba in her article on the reception of *Nathan the Wise*, seem particularly apt in this context: "When an exile comes to a new country he takes his 'Heimat' along". Kocyba points out the difficult situation of an exile "torn between loyalty for the country of refuge and fear for his or her home country, especially the family, friends, and colleagues left behind there." What is clearly visible is migrants' search for identity, often in terms of a "struggle to make sense of their own dual identity." At times, however, immigrants use a kind of 'pick and choose' strategy. The letters of Janos Xantus (quoted by Venkovitz) are good examples of this 'tactic.' The first one reads: "Believe me, my friends, the Hungarian can never become American, for his heart and soul can never become as hard as the metal from which the dollar is minted", while the other, as Venkovitz pointedly remarked "tells yet another story." Xantus' approach seems essentially pragmatic and, as Venkovitz points out, he changed "his texts according to the effect he wanted to achieve".

Personal documents (including letters and diaries) are crucial sources for learning more about the subjective dimensions of their authors' migration experiences. They also help to capture immigrants thoughts, beliefs, anxieties, needs and hopes. Despite the obvious value of these "ego-documents," until recently they have been used predominantly only as illustration or additional material to other more "objective" sources.²⁴ Suzanne Sinke uses them as a source of their own. She analyzes letters written by the members of a bourgeois Viennese family, with Bohemian Jewish roots, named Hesterlink, who managed to escape from Austria to various countries before the outbreak of WW II. What seems particularly interesting is the author's focus on cases of self-censorship. In doing so, the family members protected not only their own reputation in the eyes of their relatives, but also the feelings of those whom they wrote to. In her analysis, Sinke is equally interested in what people say in their correspondence and what they choose not to say. She pays attention to what is included and to what is omitted, and why. She notes: "The collection offers a tremendous insights into silences".

²⁴ U. Lehmkuhl, "Reading Immigrant Letters and Bridging the Micro-Macro Divide", *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny*, no. 1, 2014, p. 10.

The reaction of natives towards newcomers, especially in a time of intensive migration flows, has been rarely enthusiastic. The *Other* is often looked upon somewhat suspiciously and exoticized. Steven Diner focuses on the academic world and demonstrates that in the first half of the 20th century, professors and administrators of American colleges expressed great concern about immigrant students. In particular, they complained about immigrants' lack of social refinement and disadvantage in personality development. They shared the view that South and East European immigrants represented a threat to Anglo-American values.

When two or more groups share geographic space and immigrants' paths constantly cross, conflicts are likely to arise. Walter D. Kamphoefner, Steve Leahy, Dominic Pacyga, Marek Vlha and Mary Patrice Erdmans's articles focus on inter-ethnic relations. Frequently, stereotypes and negative attitudes toward newcomers, as well as animosities between various ethnic groups were transplanted from the Old World. For instance, in August 1914, Chicago German newspaper, *Abendpost*, "declared that a Slavic victory in the war would mean death to education, constitutionalism, liberalism, and free thought" (see Pacyga's paper in this volume). The divisions, however, are not necessarily structured along ethnic lines, as Pacyga's article demonstrates. Reactions to the outbreak of World War I clearly showed the complicated and divided loyalties even among members of the same ethnic group. On the one hand, Poles and Czechs acted together in opposition to the German war (and, concurrently, to German-American political influence in Chicago), on the other hand, Polish Chicagoens were far from unanimous.²⁵ Sometimes, a conflict with the third *Other* and "a common enemy" (Germans) favored the cooperation, as in the case of Chicago's Poles and Czechs.

Social networks in which immigrants are embedded have often funneled newcomers (both turn-of-the-twentieth and present day ones) to specific sectors of the labor market, such as the garment industry, coal mines, construction, elderly care, and restaurants. For nineteenth-century Jewish migrants peddling used to be such a niche. For many of the contemporary immigrants to the USA, taxi-driving is the first job they take. Graham Hodges takes a closer look at immigrant taxi drivers in New York city. Hasia Diner discusses peddling as "one of the longest and most consistent aspects of Jewish history." The author draws attention to the fact, that regular contact with non-Jews, a key feature of this job, forced immigrants onto a path of integration, learning new languages,

²⁵ As Erdmans noted in her book *Opposite Poles. Immigrants and Ethnicity in Polish Chicago, 1976–1990* (p. 3) people tend to "homogenize groups, smoothing over differences within groups in order to compare differences between groups," whereas in fact "communities are as heterogeneous as they are homogenous."

and social realities. Moreover, peddling represented only a stage in Jewish immigrants' life and such a job was not 'inherited' by subsequent generations.

As Ursula Lehmkuhl remarks, "migration includes multiple ways of 'border crossing', of change and adaptation."²⁶ It is my deep hope that this volume has managed to add another piece to our understanding of 'border crossing' and immigrants' experiences on American soil.

The volume owes its existence to Dorota Praszalowicz, who initiated, eleven years ago, a bi-annual workshop series at the Jagiellonian University titled "American Ethnicity: Rethinking Old Issues, Asking New Question". The articles that comprise this special edition of *Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny* were originally presented and discussed during the 6th edition of the workshop, titled *American Ethnicity and East European Immigration* held at the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora of the Jagiellonian University.

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²⁶ U. Lehmkuhl, *Reading Immigrant...*, p. 29.