

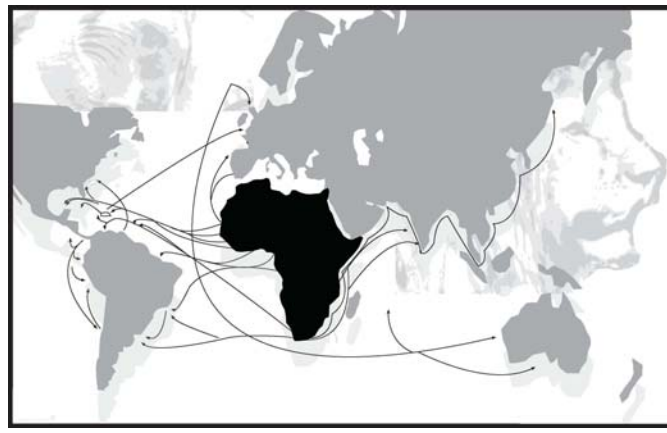
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Immigration, Race, and Nation: Baltimore's Immigrant Recruitment and Response, 1880-1910

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Abstract

"Immigration, Race, and Nation: Baltimore's Immigrant Recruitment and Response, 1880-1910"

In the period immediately following the Civil War, Maryland was among the southern states to pursue an active campaign to recruit European immigrants. This paper explores these efforts as well as the response of residents already residing in the state, and strives to locate these initiatives within the broader context of race relations across the region.

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Introduction

For much of the late 19th and early 20th century, Baltimore was the second or third largest port of entry into the United States. Located more than 150 miles up the Chesapeake Bay, the nation's best protected deep water port, Baltimore was also the closest East Coast port to the Midwest and strategically located between North and South. When the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was built in 1853, linking the Chesapeake Bay with the Ohio Canal, Baltimore became the fastest route to the Midwest. For those seeking a way out of the crowded stench of 19th century urban life, or who hoped to make their fortune in the West, Baltimore was the gateway. Between 1850 and 1910, close to 1.5 million people entered the United States from abroad via the Port of Baltimore, putting it regularly as the second or third largest port of entry in the nation and prompting at least one observer to dub the city, "The Ellis Island of the South."ⁱ

Despite all of this traffic Baltimore remains one of the least studied, major ports of immigration in the United States.ⁱⁱ There are several reasons for this neglect, I believe. First, because immigration to New York was so vast by comparison, there has been a tendency among historians to generalize based on the New York Ellis Island/Castle Garden experience, assuming that similar patterns of entry and settlement occurred elsewhere in the United States, at least along the eastern seaboard. Second, unlike Ellis Island and even Philadelphia, many of the physical markers to Baltimore's historic immigration have been lost -- burned or dismantled to make way for new structures along its port. In this instance, it has literally been a case of "out of sight, out of mind." And third, with the dismantling of these structures came a dispersion of documents. In sharp contrast to Ellis Island where collection efforts, and the long presence of massive federal structures and bureaucracies created a wealth of resources for the historian to draw upon, Baltimore presents challenges despite the active work of preservationists and community members.

It is, I will argue, a history very much worth rescuing. With the short time we have today, I am just going to focus on one chapter in this history: the State of Maryland's efforts to recruit and retain immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. But what this chapter teaches us, I believe, holds true for the long sweep of the city's immigrant past. Baltimore reminds us that U.S. immigration history is intertwined with African American history and the history of American race relations, even though these streams of historical

literature too often take place as entirely separate conversations. Baltimore also reminds us of the importance of region, and regional variations, in the history of U.S. migration and immigration. National immigration restrictions of the type we see today, are themselves a late 19th and early 20th century invention and coincide with a period of nation-building and push for national unity that not only had no real precedent in earlier periods of U.S. history but also was not uniformly embraced by either the South or the West.

Race and Nation

Understanding the importance of Baltimore as an immigration port dates back to the period of Reconstruction. Maryland sits below the Mason-Dixon line. It is therefore a "southern" state where slavery was legal and played a significant role in developing the state's economy. But unlike her southern sisters, Maryland remained with the Union throughout the Civil War. As a result, the state did not undergo reconstruction in the same manner as those in the former Confederacy. Sharply divided over the issue of slavery, bitterness between those who had sided with the South versus those who sided with the North was keen. Although there were other points of disagreement, race relations proved especially divisive.

The result was a state that culturally and socially was very typically "southern," but in other ways bore much more common with her northern neighbors. Like most other southern states, Maryland remained predominantly native born. (In 1870, only about 5% of the state's residents were foreign-born, compared to more than one-third in many northern communities.)ⁱⁱⁱ Over one-third of the state's residents were African American. While foreign-born people from Ireland, Germany, England, and Scotland, as well as smaller numbers from Haiti, Cuba, and Jamaica, were a conspicuous presence in cities like Baltimore, overall Maryland was a native-born state where African American laborers were central to many of Maryland's core industries --- a fact not lost on the state's white, native-born employers.

Many employers began to express concern with their dependency upon black labor. Some felt this threatened the social hierarchy. Others simply abhorred the idea of resorting to using truly "free labor" and all the inconveniences that included -- employees who would leave when they wanted or when a better offer presented itself, organize to demand better pay and working conditions, and otherwise challenge the authority of their employer. Some

of these disgruntled employers began looking to Asian or European contract laborers. Others simply hoped to find European workers to replace African Americans, a shift that, as historian Christopher Phillips has noted, "began to push African Americans out of the unskilled labor market, one [African Americans] had only recently come to dominate." Starting in the immediate post-Civil War period, then, the state of Maryland joined with other states across the South and began to actively recruit European immigrants. In 1891 they formalized their efforts, establishing a Bureau of Immigration and Immigrant Recruitment.^{iv}

Caroline County was held up as a particular model for what state legislators hoped Maryland could become. Touting Maryland's Eastern Shore as "the Italy of America," they pointed to the area's extensive transportation routes, daily steamboat communication with Baltimore City, flat land, mild climate, and great variety of soils as being its desirable features.^v Accompanying photographs showcase a variety of bucolic scenes - large open pastures, fields of corn, smiling, white farmers holding up mammoth, lush melons, flowing waterways, endless vistas. In only one picture were there any African Americans depicted and then it was as "assisting" a white, immigrant family with the strawberry harvest in Westover. In subsequent publications from the Bureau of Immigration, African Americans were deleted altogether. Indeed, this, too was the unspoken but no less overt message of much of this propaganda: Swelling the ranks of European immigrants would have the two-fold benefit - in the eyes of these legislators and business interests -- of not only growing the state's economy but growing the state's northern European population, as well.^{vi} Over the next decade, the State of Maryland honed its recruitment skills to a perfect edge.

This traffic in people was also immensely profitable. Under the direction of two German immigrants -- Albert Shumacher, an agent for the German Lloyd Steamship line and his nephew, George von Lingen, a banker who also directed the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad -- on January 21, 1867, the two companies signed an agreement to jointly recruit and transport people from Europe to the United States and back again.^{vii} Mr. von Lingen's appointment as the German Consul in Baltimore nine years later only cemented these longstanding ties and facilitated even more international movement and trade. By the late 19th century, prospective passengers could purchase a single ticket that would take them from Germany or Britain to the Port of Baltimore, where they could immediately board the

B&O Railroad, bound for western destinations from Ohio to Colorado.^{viii} By 1900, the Port of Baltimore was receiving as many as 100,000 people from abroad each year. The numbers continued to rise until 1907, the peak year of immigration to Baltimore, and continued until the eve of World War I when travel across the Atlantic was suspended for the duration of the war.

Attitudes toward Immigration and Immigrants

The period of peak immigration to Baltimore coincided with a growing push across the South to recruit new immigrants. Between 1904 and 1913, a Conference on Immigration to the Southern States was convened. South Carolina, Maryland, and Louisiana were among the states that pursued the most aggressive policies to recruit new immigrants, mounting campaigns to overturn recently instituted federal regulations restricting the importation of contract laborers. As Maryland's Secretary of State Immigration, A. L. Trapp, told the U.S. Congress in 1906, the demand for "desirable immigrants" had become so acute that only a repeal of these regulations would ensure economic solidity across the southern states.^{ix} Reports on the proceedings of the conference on southern immigration, were published daily in newspapers from New Orleans to Atlanta, Charleston, Memphis and Baltimore and relayed the various views put forth by state representatives and employers: W.J. Oliver of Knoxville, Tennessee, for example, gave a "rousing speech" about the "troubles of contractors in keeping negroes at work on construction, but still, he said, he preferred the negro to the Italian or the Chinaman." Others like Stephen M. Newman of Washington, D.C.'s Liberal Immigration League argued that "any conference to seek to deal with immigration...is not taking up an experiment but is dealing with the solution not only of the race problem, but of all problems."^x

Race, and debates over racial ideology and the status of African Americans, are infused throughout all these discussions and shaped the response of Baltimore residents of all ethnic and class backgrounds. Groups like the American Federation of Labor, which nationally took a strong anti-immigration position, and which had deep roots in Baltimore, never managed to amass the same type of anti-immigrant support as in other cities. Although Baltimore's white Progressives debated the merits and limitations of immigration, Baltimore never saw the formation of a significant restrictionist movement as they did in Boston, for example. Nor did Baltimore's African Americans rally to support the anti-

immigration charge, even though some white advocates took this position on their behalf. Editors for the Afro-American put it like this:

“Some of our white friends are worrying about the fact that a large number of Afro-Americans are losing out in certain lines of work, especially menial positions. They need not worry on this account for colored people now find work in a hundred avenues formerly occupied exclusively by the white people.”^{xi}

While this prevailing middle and upper middle class view expressed by the Afro-American's editors may not have been typical of the response of the majority of Baltimore's black working-class, it does shed important light on how a vocal core of the city's African American leadership viewed the immigration issue.

The particular contours of Baltimore politics also lead to the formation of a critical black-immigrant coalition that formed in 1905 to challenge the Poe Amendment, a law that would essentially have stripped the franchise from the majority of Maryland's black voters by instituting a grandfather clause that made eligible only those voters who had qualified to vote as of January 1, 1869. Booker T. Washington was among the national figures who helped to lobby the Catholic Diocese of Maryland to oppose the Amendment, prompting what to many was an unexpected coalition of foreign-born whites (who feared they might also be disenfranchised under the language of the amendment) with African Americans across the state.^{xii} Thanks to this coalition, the Amendment was defeated.

Editors of the Afro-American also published a series of essays, countering reports in other newspapers, including the Sun, which claimed the importation of foreign-labor was necessary due to labor shortages, noting, "A great deal of talk is going around about importing Italians and other foreign labor. We have not the slightest doubt but all that is said about the scarcity of Negro labor is true. And why is it true? ... No man is going to work when his wages are small and inadequate to supply his needs, saying nothing about his wants."^{xiii} Where many white, native-born Americans sought to conflate the position of black and immigrant Americans, an important core of Baltimore's African American leaders and intellectuals sought to disaggregate these issues, arguing against race prejudice under any circumstances and pressing for equal rights and higher pay for African Americans, not immigration restrictions.^{xiv} Together, these examples remind us of how complicated local response to immigration often was, and how tied to the peculiarities of local circumstances

and local politics.

Baltimore escaped other types of grassroots outcry against mass waves of immigration for another reason: while very much an immigrant city, with a few important exceptions, most of the immigrants who arrived in Baltimore after 1904 moved on almost immediately to other destinations. Touting itself as the "Gateway to the South" as well as the West, Baltimore officials tallied how many immigrants came and from where, but they also matched those numbers to how many disembarked for other destinations. Even as immigration to Baltimore peaked, the total percentage of foreign-born within the city also fell off steadily and consistently remained well below that in other northern cities and ports of entry. Where 40 per cent or more residents in New York City, Chicago, and San Francisco and over one-third of residents in Buffalo, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Boston were foreign-born in the period stretching from 1870 into the first decades of the 20th century, Baltimore looked much more like other southern port cities like New Orleans or middle south cities like Nashville or Louisville with only about 14-15 percent of the city comprised of immigrants.^{xv} This, too, had an impact on how new arrivals were perceived, underscoring both the relative vulnerability of immigrants already residing in the city and the increased pressure to assimilate that often accompanied such vulnerability. Nonetheless, because of their skill in dispersing arrivals across the country as well as moving them in, Baltimore's port of entry continued to receive tremendous acclaim from southern states for its work to relocate immigrants to these other regions.^{xvi}

But Baltimore never received the type of financial support it needed to maintain and grow its facilities to meet the demands of daily traffic through the port. By 1912, as immigration from Europe began to slump, the need for new and improved facilities was abundantly clear. When war broke out in Europe in 1914, the immigration piers were shut down, and international traffic suspended.^{xvii} In its place, the former North German Lloyd pier was converted to the main terminal for the Furness-Withy English line of steamers.

Then on October 30, 1917, a few months after the United States has formally entered World War I, "the most disastrous fire on the Baltimore waterfront in years" broke out at Pier 9, destroying the pier and the immigration pier adjoining it.^{xviii} The piers were never rebuilt. The great wave of European immigration effectively ended. Only in the past two decades has the influx of foreign-born into Baltimore begun to compare to this historic

period of mass migration.

Conclusion: Baltimore's Place in U.S. Immigration History

So why does this largely unstudied, now defunct immigration pier deserve serious, historical attention? The answer, I would argue, lies in what this chapter of U.S. immigration history can teach us. Although the total number of immigrants received at this port fell well behind that of Ellis Island, what took place in Baltimore was no less significant. Where Ellis Island was under largely federal control, Baltimore -- like comparable ports across the South: Charleston, Cape Charles (in Virginia), Galveston, New Orleans, Miami and Key West -- was in private hands, owned and operated by the shipping and transportation companies which owned the piers. As such, this chapter of immigration history sheds new light on the Progressive Era and progressive era politics, as well as the complex range of issues and interests that shaped the most restrictive era in U.S. immigration history over the second decade of the 20th century.

Baltimore's experience, like that of other southern cities, also underscores the extent to which immigration history and American race relations are intertwined. Immigrant recruitment was directly tied to white Americans' views about African Americans, and their struggle to retain control over the social hierarchy. Claims about labor shortages testified both to white discontent about their strong reliance upon black labor in the South and to the refusal of African Americans to take just any job that was offered, at any wage, under any conditions. The reluctance of many white owners to employ free labor under any circumstances, seeking to re-implement contract labor policies and indentured servitude, is a critical chapter in this history as well. Ultimately, of course, this mass immigration plan failed. Italians, Chinese, Swedish, and East European laborers were no more willing to provide unlimited coerced labor than the African Americans before them. Subsequent partnerships between southern or western agricultural states and the federal government to employ guest-workers from the West Indies and Mexico followed. Taken together, we get a fuller picture of the South's labor history -- itself a still largely neglected field -- that unites these important streams of ethnicity, class, migration, local, state, and federal control.

Baltimore also provides an important reminder that immigration history must be about more than just who came and stayed. As a gateway city, the fluidity of human migration into and out of the city is clear. Unlike New York, Baltimore was not a city

where the majority of those who entered through its port stayed put. Rather they continued on elsewhere, heading west, south, and north. As such, their experience links Baltimore with the immigration experience in a diverse array of cities across the country and provides a vivid reminder of the inadequacy of the "immigrant paradigm" to fully explain the complex array of human choices and experiences as people navigated international borders.

Finally, as the state of Maryland and city of Baltimore again work to actively recruit new immigrants, perhaps there are lessons this history can teach us about the present as well: tolerance and tension, race relations and the socio-economic status of African Americans, the central role of jobs and the economy, private versus public interests, all of these issues again filter out through the contemporary immigration debates. Less a new phenomenon, these contemporary debates provide a reminder that the past has many lessons to teach us. No where is this more clear than in Baltimore, an old, new immigrant city.

Notes and References

i. George B. Luckey, "America's Largest Immigration Pier: Located at Locust Point, Baltimore, and Owned by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad," *Book of the Royal Blue*, Vol. 7, No. 10 (Baltimore: Passenger Department of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, July 1904), 1, Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Museum, Baltimore, Maryland. Records of people who moved through the Port of Baltimore were maintained by both the State of Maryland, and, after 1870, by the U.S. federal government.

ii. To date, the most comprehensive scholarly work on Baltimore as a port of immigration is Dean R. Esslinger, "Immigration through the Port of Baltimore," in *Forgotten Doors: The Other Ports of Entry to the United States*, ed. by M. Mark Stolarik (Philadelphia: Balch Institute, 1988), 61-74. Baltimore receives no mention in the *Dictionary of American Immigration*. Nor is it, or most other southern ports, mentioned in most of the work that has been written about U.S. immigration over the late 19th and 20th centuries.

iii. On foreign-born, see U.S. Census of Population, 1870-1890. In 1870, 56% of Maryland's immigrants were from Germany. The Irish accounted for another significant percentage of new arrivals. On African American migration over this period, see Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1997), 12, 194-197.

iv. Many other Southern states established similar programs over this period. In the 1880s, West Virginia established a program to attract Northern European immigrants, with a particularly emphasis upon attracting Swiss migrants. Virginia and Louisiana were also among the states who most actively sought to recruit European immigrants over this period, although there were also others. See: Elizabeth Cometti, "Swiss Immigration to West Virginia, 1864-1884: A Case Study," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (June 1960), 66-87; Bert J. Loewenberg, "Efforts of the South to Encourage Immigration, 1865-1900," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (October 1934), 363-385; Joshua L. Rosenbloom, "Looking for Work, Searching for Workers: U.S. Labor Markets after the Civil War," *Social Science History*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Fall 2004), 377-403. These activities gained momentum in the early 20th century, particularly as emphasis shifted toward attracting the "right" kind of immigrant. See: Robert H. Whitten, ed., *New York State Library Comparative Summary and Index of Legislation*, Bulletin 331 (March 1905), 121-122.

v. *The State of Maryland and the Advantages it Offers to Immigrants, Especially Farmers, Manufacturers, and Capitalists* (Baltimore: Maryland State Bureau of Immigration, 1891), 15.

vi. *The State of Maryland and the Advantages it Offers* (1891), 5-6.

vii. *Baltimore: Its History and Its People*, Vol. 2: Biography (Chicago and New York: Lewis Historical Publishing, 1912), 80-81.

viii. Passenger Ticket, ca. 1908, Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, B&O Railroad Museum Archive. Thanks to Richard Olson, UMBC, for bringing my attention to this document via the Teaching American History in Maryland project.

ix. *Baltimore Sun*, November 17, 1906.

x. *Baltimore Sun*, November 14, 1906.

xi. *Afro American Ledger*, November 11, 1906.

27. See M. L. Callcott, *The Negro in Maryland Politics, 1870-1912* (1969), 115-116, 122-125, 140; August Meier, *Booker T. Washington: An Interpretation in Black History* (1968), 338, 350; J. Clay Smith, Jr., *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844-1944* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), n180.

xiii. *Afro American Ledger*, June 9, 1906.

xiv. See Jeff Diamond, "African American Attitudes toward United States Immigration Policy," *International Migration Review*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer 1998), 451-470, esp. 455.

xv. Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born of the United States: 1850-1990," Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census (February 1999), Table 19: Nativity of the Population for the 50 Largest Urban Places: 1870 to 1990.

xvi. *Baltimore Sun*, March 24-31, 1912.

xvii. For individual passengers, this often meant getting detained or turned back when they were part way across the ocean. See Aronoff Sisters to 'My Loving Parents,' New York, August 3, 1914 in *The American Immigration Collection*, ed. by Edith Abbott (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 324-326.

xviii. *New York Times*, October 31, 1917. The piers were considered an important strategic site because the B&O grain elevators were nearby, the primary store of grain for the Allies, and because of the presence of the British steamers. Munitions and supplies for the American Forces in France and their allies were also stored in large quantities at Piers 8 and 9. Rumors that German submarines were in the Chesapeake Bay and Inner Harbor also proliferated.