

Race and Ethnicity

Background

“Some of the most vicious racial violence in American history took place between 1917 and 1923” (Smith, n.d., p. 6) in major cities like Tulsa and Chicago. The violence was, in part, due to the large influx of African Americans to northern cities to fill factory jobs called the *Great Migration*, which began during WWI. The Ku Klux Klan also experienced a resurgence in the 1920s; “the Klan helped elect 16 U.S. senators [as well as] many representatives and local officials. By 1924, when the Klan had reached its peak in numbers and influence, it claimed to control 24 of the nation's 48 state legislatures” (Smith, n.d., p.6).

At the same time, African American culture flourished in many major metropolitan areas through a movement known as the *Harlem Renaissance*. Also known as the *New Negro Movement*, the Harlem Renaissance was a flowering of artistic and cultural expression in urban centers (like Harlem, New York) that were affected by the Great Migration of African Americans. While there was significant cross-racial appreciation of African American contributions to music, literature, and art, there was also significant racial tension, as noted in some of the following documents.

The KKK, along with many average Americans, violently opposed continued immigration from southern and eastern Europe. These immigrants, many believed, could not be easily assimilated into American society and brought with them radical political ideas, such as communism.

Smith, M. (n.d.) The 1920s – An overview. Digital History. Retrieved from <http://faculty.ithaca.edu/mismith/docs/USsince1865/1920s.pdf>

Document A: Hiram Wesley Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *The North American Review*, March 1926 (Excerpt)

We are a movement of the plain people, very weak in the matter of culture, intellectual support, and trained leadership. We are demanding, and we expect to win, a return of power into the hands of the everyday, not highly cultured, not overly intellectualized, but entirely unspoiled and not de-Americanized, average citizen of the old stock. [. . .]

The Klan, therefore, has now come to speak for the great mass of Americans of the old pioneer stock. We believe that it does fairly and faithfully represent them, and our proof lies in their support. To understand the Klan, then, it is necessary to understand the character and present mind of the mass of old-stock Americans. The mass, it must be remembered, as distinguished from the intellectually mongrelized "Liberals."

These are, in the first place, a blend of various people of the so-called Nordic race, the race which, with all its faults, has given the world almost the whole of modern civilization. The Klan does not try to represent any people but these.

*Evans, H. W. (1926, March). The Klan's fight for Americanism. The North American Review, 223(830), 33-63. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25113510>
For educational purposes.*

Document B: The KKK Marches Down Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., 1926



French, H. A. (1926, September 13). Ku Klux Klan parade, 9/13/26 [Image]. National Photo Company Collection (Library of Congress). Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/npc2007016218/> Orphan work; image cropped for this lesson.

Document C: Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation*, 1926 (excerpt)

Jazz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul—the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile.

Yet the Philadelphia clubwoman [. . .] turns up her nose at jazz and all its manifestations—likewise almost anything else distinctly racial. [. . .] She wants the artist to flatter her, to make the white world believe that all negroes are as smug and as near white in soul as she wants to be. But, to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist [. . .] to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "Why should I want to be white? I am Negro—and beautiful."

Hughes, L. (1926). The Negro artist and the racial mountain. The Nation, 122(318), 692-694. In C. D. Wintz (Ed.) The Politics and Aesthetics of "New Negro" Literature. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. For educational purposes.

Document D: Claude McKay, "The Barrier," 1922

I MUST not gaze at them although
Your eyes are dawning day;
I must not watch you as you go
Your sun-illumined way;

I hear but I must never heed
The fascinating note,
Which, fluting like a river-reed,
Comes from your trembling throat;

I must not see upon your face
Love's softly glowing spark;
For there's the barrier of race,
You're fair and I am dark.

McKay, C. (1922). The barrier. In J. W. Johnson (Ed.) The Book of American Negro Poetry. Retrieved from <http://www.bartleby.com/269/81.html> Public domain.

Document E: "Guarding the Gates Against Undesirables" Current Opinion, April, 1924 (Excerpt)

Against these unassimilated and unassimilable peoples the proposed measure would discriminate. They all represent the newer immigration. Before 1890 the United States received mainly folk from northern and western Europe. Since 1890 the majority have come from southern and eastern Europe. By basing quotas upon the 1890 census Italian immigration would be cut down from over forty thousand to under four thousand, the Russians from over twenty thousand to under two thousand, and the Poles from about twenty thousand to five thousand, admissible in one year. The new bill would not greatly reduce the number who would come in from the United Kingdom, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, France and Germany. These groups have made no protest against a measure which aims to cut the immigration total approximately in half, from about three hundred and sixty thousand to about one hundred and eighty thousand persons.

There is no blinking the fact that certain races do not fuse with us and have no intention of trying to become Americans. The Poles, for example, are determined to remain Polish. No doubt this is good Polish patriotism, but it is very poor Americanism. The Polish Diet, as the Indianapolis News points out, has adopted a resolution asking the government to request the Holy See to use its influence with the Catholic hierarchy in the United States to permit the continued use of the Polish language in Polish Catholic churches and parochial schools. A dispatch from Warsaw declares that the resolution is part of an effort to stop "the systematic Americanization of the Poles"! Nevertheless, as the News declares, if we are to permit any Poles to come here in the future, "the systematic Americanization" of them must continue.

Ku Klux Klan. (1924, April). Guarding the gates against undesirables. Current Opinion, 400-401. Retrieved from https://ehistory.osu.edu/sites/ehistory.osu.edu/files/mmh/clash/Imm_KKK/Immigration%20Pages/Documents/guardinggatesagainstundesirables.htm For educational purposes.

Document F: Cartoon illustrating the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 (renewed in 1924)



The number of immigrants admitted into the United States from any other country was limited to 3% of the total number of U.S. residents (as determined by the 1910 census). This dramatically reduced the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe.

Hallahan. (1921, May 7). *The Literary Digest*, 69. New York: Funk & Wagnalls. Retrieved from <https://books.google.com/books?id=XINFAQAAMAAJ&pg=RA5-PA13&lpg=RA5-PA13&dq=hallhan+literary+digest+immigrants+1921&source=bl&ots=TglOz-8WhI&sig=tUPzaOkomBEI2szc3TXY3f0Z19s&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjOssbOuM3MAhVU3mMKHZx5BZEQ6AEINzAE#v=onepage&q=hallhan%20literary%20digest%20immigrants%201921&f=false>
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