Xenophobia, Whiteness, and Citizenship

Senior Thesis
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English – Writing and Rhetoric
Who is an American citizen?
Who *isn’t* an American citizen?

- Nonwhites (1790)
- Prostitutes (1875)
- Chinese, convicts, lunatics (1882)
- Unskilled workers (1885)
- Women travelling alone (1892):
- Anarchists, epileptics, polygamists, and beggars (1903)
- Non-English speakers (1906)
- Those with physical or mental defects, tuberculosis, unaccompanied children (1907)
- Illiterate (1910)
- All Asian immigrants (1917)
Who is an American citizen?

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

Emma Lazarus, 
“The New Colossus”
Who do we consider to be an American?

- Whites?
- Irish?
- Italians?
- Eastern Europeans?
- African Americans?
- Asian Americans?
- Latino/a Americans?
“True Americans”

⇒ Racialized

⇒ Achieved

⇒ Performative
National Myths and the Rhetoric of Civic Identity and National Belonging

What do national myths do and why are they created?

◊ “to maintain arrangements that support a useful sense of civic identity,
◊ to include political friends and exclude foes,
◊ to add persons who can help promote the regime’s prosperity and power,
◊ to reinforce narratives of civic identity that foster allegiance to the regime and its current leaders” (Smith, Civic Ideals, 35).
National Myths: A Few Examples

Immigrants as:

- A natural disaster: “floods” or “pollutants”
- Commodities
- Dangerous, dirty, criminal
- Job takers
- Docile workers, global care chain
Solution?

“The task at hand is not to convince more whites to ‘oppose’ racism… there are already enough ‘antiracists’ to do the job. The task is to make it impossible for anyone to be white. What would white people have to do to accomplish this? They would have to break the laws of whiteness so flagrantly as to destroy the myth of white unanimity. They would have to respond to every manifestation of white supremacy as if it were directed at them”

(Noel Ignatiev, The White Issue, p. 202)
Works Cited


