Volume Title: The Regulated Economy: A Historical Approach to Political Economy

Volume Author/Editor: Claudia Goldin and Gary D. Libecap, editors

Volume Publisher: University of Chicago Press

Volume ISBN: 0-226-30110-9

Volume URL: http://www.nber.org/books/gold94-1

Conference Date: May 20-21, 1993

Publication Date: January 1994

Chapter Title: The Political Economy of Immigration Restriction in the United States, 1890 to 1921

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Chapter URL: http://www.nber.org/chapters/c6577

Chapter pages in book: (p. 223 - 258)

7 The Political Economy of Immigration Restriction in the United States, 1890 to 1921

Claudia Goldin

> It does not matter in the least what the favored classes of the country think about immigration; the doors of this land will never be closed except upon the initiative and the imperative of the laboring classes, looking to their own interests, and to the heritage of their children.
>
> Francis A. Walker, *Discussions in Economics and Statistics*

7.1 Introduction

With the passage of the Emergency Quota Act in May 1921 the era of open immigration to the United States came to an abrupt end.[1] The American policy of virtually unrestricted European immigration was transformed, almost overnight, to a quota system that would last, virtually unchanged, until 1965. The ultimate switch in policy is not hard to explain. The perplexing part of the legislative history of immigration restriction is its timing. More astonishing than the closing of the door in 1921 is that it remained open despite twenty-five years of assault during which 17 million immigrants from among the poorest nations in Europe found refuge in America. This paper details the remarkable set of events that propped the door open and the forces that eventually slammed it shut.

Because the story of immigration restriction is a legislative one, its main players will be representatives, senators, and presidents. But behind the legislative tale are the shifting interests of various groups. The first is organized labor,

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The author thanks Lisa Kao, Boris Simkovich, and Marian Valliant for providing superb research assistance. Helpful comments were provided by Stanley Engerman, Zadia Feliciano, Lawrence Katz, Robert Margo, Jeffrey Williamson, the members of the Harvard Economic History Workshop, and participants at the NBER–DAE conference on the Political Economy of Regulation, particularly the discussant, Joseph Ferrie. Shawn Kantor supplied the wage data by city for the union sample, 1907 to 1923, and Howard Rosenthal provided the congressional districts for the 1915 vote. The author thanks them both. This research has been funded by National Science Foundation grant SES-9122782.

1. As I will argue later, the abrupt end should more accurately date with the final passage of the literacy test in 1917, since it was a simple step to move from the test to a quota.

represented by the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Knights of Labor, and unorganized labor. Owners of capital, joining together, for example, through the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Board of Trade, and boards of trade and chambers of commerce in numerous cities, are the second but the most difficult to categorize. Immigrants, both new and old, are the third.

There is also an important fourth group—rural America, consisting of Yankee farmers as well as agriculturalists having foreign roots. With one important exception, native-born rural America was firmly in the anti-immigrant camp from the very beginning of this story, and their anti-immigrant sentiment goes back to earlier times.[2] This group was one of the major forces that put the issue on the table in the 1890s, and they remained solidly in the anti camp throughout. What shifts did occur in rural America from 1890 to 1920 were a retreat from an open immigration stance among older immigrant groups, such as Germans and Scandinavians in the upper midwestern areas, not a change of heart among the native born.

The South provides the exception among rural native-born Americans. Much of the South was in the pro-immigrant camp in the 1890s. But by the early 1900s the South had become a block solidly against unrestricted immigration. I will have more to say about this later.

Controlling segments of the various groups united in the 1890s to form a coalition opposed to unrestricted immigration. The coalition nearly succeeded in the late 1890s—indeed, they were but two votes short of passing legislation to curtail immigration.[3] Portions of the coalition switched sides during the first decade of this century, and a new force to champion the cause of open immigration—the recent arrivals themselves—emerged. Capital, which had joined the anti-immigrant forces in the economically turbulent 1890s, threw much of its weight on the side of open immigration in the early 1900s. Congress witnessed several battles over the immigration issue during the twenty years following the first vote on the literacy test in 1897, but none succeeded in altering the flow of immigration. It has been claimed that it took a world war, igniting xenophobic and staunchly nativist sentiment, to pass immigration restriction. There may be some truth to that view, but the analysis in this paper suggests that the declining political power of the foreign born, falling real wages for lower-skilled workers after 1910, and the negative impact of the foreign born

2. See, for example, Higham [1955] 1981 on the two previous waves of anti-immigrant and nativist sentiment in 1798, with the Alien and Sedition Acts, and during the 1850s, with the rise of the Know-Nothing Party.

3. The closeness of both the 1897 and 1898 votes belies the fact that there was a large contingent in the House not voting on both occasions, although some absences for the 1898 vote may be related to Christmas recess. Further, about half those not voting in 1898 were "paired," that is, one nay and one yea who both agreed to be absent (or two nay and one yea for the override vote). Although the 1898 vote did not clear a majority in the House, it is termed close because McKinley was president and would probably not have vetoed the act. One cannot, however, rule out that such a large number of abstentions may mean that the vote was not as close as it seems.

on the wages of even skilled workers may have eventually clinched the vote for restriction.

The chronology of immigration restriction will be detailed first. The history is well known and has been recounted elsewhere (Higham 1955; Hutchinson 1981; Jones 1992; Taylor 1971). I then move to a more in-depth analysis of city-level wage data by occupation and industry from 1890 to 1923 to ascertain the possible economic bases of support.

The wage data reveal substantial negative effects of immigration for both laborers and artisans, although the effects by industry depended on demand-side considerations. The impact, moreover, appears to have increased from the 1890s to the early 1920s, corresponding to the rise in negative sentiment toward open immigration in the immediate pre–World War I period. Finally, voting in the House is linked to the strength of the wage effect and to the proportion of the population that was foreign born. The greater the increase in wages in particular cities, the lower was the probability that a representative would vote for restriction. The greater the percentage foreign born in these cities, the lower was sentiment for restriction. Once the foreign born had about a 30 percent share of a city's population, support overwhelmingly shifted to a pro-immigrant stance. At lower levels of the foreign born—in the 10 to 30 percent range—the anti-immigrant position was very strong, although at still lower levels it became weaker. The desire to restrict was, therefore, tempered by the composition of the electorate. Increased numbers of foreign born may have threatened the economic position of many native-born workers, as well as many foreign-born workers. The personal interests of the foreign born in keeping the door open dominated economic interests once the foreign born reached some critical level in a district. But the foreign born may ultimately have been scapegoats for unfavorable economic factors in certain local labor markets, similar to recent experience in the United States.

7.2 The Literacy Test

7.2.1 Chronology of Immigration-Restriction Legislation

The history of European immigration restriction in the United States begins with the movement to pass the literacy test, succeeding ultimately in 1917.[4] Quotas and other types of blanket restrictions were not seriously considered in the House or the Senate prior to 1920.[5] Of the multitude of regulations pro-

4. Immigration was restricted and regulated in various ways in addition to the literacy test and, eventually, quotas, but none was of great quantitative significance. Of most importance is that the restrictions placed on Asians will not be treated in any detail here. See, for example, Higham [1955] 1981 for a defense of limiting attention to European immigration. It should be noted, as well, that immigration from the Western Hemisphere was not restricted by the 1921, 1924, and 1929 quotas, although the literacy test was unaffected by that legislation.

5. Various influential groups, prior to the passage of the quotas, had petitioned Congress to end immigration for some period of time. The AFL in December 1918 requested that Congress curtail

posed, only two could have significantly restricted immigration—the financial and literacy tests. Only the literacy test received serious deliberation.[6] By the time the literacy test finally passed, it was not as restrictive a measure as when it was first proposed because literacy rose rapidly in Europe. Thus the quotas of 1921, 1924, and 1929 quickly followed. The forces that prompted these more restrictive measures were the same as those that led to the passage of the literacy test. Thus most of this paper is concerned with the passage of the literacy test, since the quotas were its logical extension.

The literacy test was not merely given careful consideration in Congress from 1897 to 1917. It passed the House on five separate occasions and passed the Senate on four. Further, the House overrode presidential vetoes of the bill twice and on two occasions failed to override by fewer than seven votes. The Senate overrode a presidential veto once, when the test became law in 1917.

The literacy test was to be administered to physically capable adults to assess their ability to read. The test was well-defined, although it varied somewhat across proposed immigration legislation. It generally consisted of reading several sentences of the Constitution in any language chosen by the potential immigrant, including recognized dialects. Some of the proposed legislation also required that immigrants be capable of writing the sentences they could read. Close relatives of an adult male immigrant who was literate were often exempted. Because the shipping companies that brought immigrants across the ocean were responsible for the return voyage of any who did not meet U.S. immigration standards, it is likely that these companies would have administered a literacy test of their own, in the same way that they screened for health violations in European ports.[7]

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immigration for at least two years (Higham [1955] 1981). During the debates over the quota legislation in the aftermath of World War I, several bills were introduced that would have suspended immigration for periods of from three to five years (Hutchinson 1981, 171). Of the many possible means of restricting and regulating immigration contained in the *Reports of the Immigration Commission* of 1910, none was a blanket quota of the type eventually adopted in 1921, 1924, and 1929. One suggested means would have limited "the number of each race arriving each year to a certain percentage of the average of that race arriving during a given period of years" (Senate 1911a, 747).

6. Section 39 of the immigration bill introduced in 1906 contained a financial test that would have required, among other things, that all male immigrants over sixteen years old (or the male head of the household) have $25 or its equivalent (Hutchinson 1981, 139). The final version of the 1907 act did not contain the provision. An amount of $25 was 2.4 weeks of income for lower-skilled manufacturing labor in America in 1906 and about 9 weeks of income for an equivalent worker in southern and eastern Europe at the time (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, series D 778; Simkovich, Taylor, and Williamson 1992).

7. The literacy test was put in place in 1917 and remained after the quotas were passed. The experience with the literacy test immediately following its passage, and prior to the quotas, can be seen in U.S. Department of Labor 1918, 23. The 1917 act allowed for a fine of $200 per alien to be assessed against any transportation company bringing an alien excludable by the literacy test. The fine and the passage home may have been sufficiently steep to give shipping companies an incentive to screen aliens prior to passage, although I do not know whether or how they accomplished that task. In 1917 fines were levied for only 192 excludable illiterate aliens out of a total of almost 300,000 aliens.

The literacy test first came to a vote in Congress in 1897 and was overwhelmingly passed by the House and cleared a majority in the Senate (see the chronology in table 7.1). At least one other bill was proposed during the debate in the House that could have been even more restrictive and that would have restricted immigration from any port in Europe not having a consular inspection station.

Several factors operated in the mid-1890s to create a short-lived coalition, yet one that would resurface in another form, around regulating and restricting

Table 7.1 **Immigration Restriction Chronology: Votes on the Literacy Test**

Date	Branch of Government	Vote	Notes
2/9/97	House	217-36-102[a]	Affirmative vote on bill
2/17/97	Senate	34-31-25	Affirmative vote on bill
3/2/97	President Cleveland	Veto	
3/3/97	House	195-37-123	Overrides Presidential veto
3/3/97	Senate		Takes no action, bill dies
1/17/98	Senate	45-28-16	Affirmative vote on bill
12/14/98	House	101-104-150	Negative vote on consideration of bill
5/27/2	House	No vote found	Affirmative vote on bill, literacy test dropped in House-Senate conference
6/25/6	House	128-116	Vote to remove literacy test from immigration bill and to set up Immigration Commission
4/19/12	Senate	9-56-30	Vote to strike the literacy test from the bill; affirmative vote on bill, sent to conference
12/18/12	House	179-52	Affirmative vote on bill, sent to conference
2/14/13	President Taft	Veto	
2/19/13	House	213-114-54	Fails to override
1/2/15	Senate	50-7-39	Affirmative vote on bill
1/15/15	House	227-94-103	Affirmative vote on conference report of bill
	President Wilson	Veto	
2/4/15	House	261-136-26	Fails to override
3/30/16	House	307-87-39	Affirmative vote on bill
12/14/16	Senate	64-7-25	Affirmative vote on bill
	President Wilson	Veto	
2/1/17	House	287-106-40	Overrides veto
2/5/17	Senate	62-19-5	Overrides veto

Sources: Hutchinson 1981; *Congressional Record,* 62d, 63d, and 64th Cong.

Note: Roll call votes count those not voting, whereas non–roll call votes have only pro and con.

[a]Hutchinson reports those not voting as 125, not 102.

immigration. The leadership and members of the AFL and the Knights of Labor came out strongly in favor of the literacy test in 1897, but had not done so before. The depression of the 1890s, with its extremely high rates of unemployment, particularly in the manufacturing sector, appears responsible for the change of heart.[8] But capital, too, turned against immigration.

Industry had depended on immigrant labor. Thus the restrictionist sentiment of certain associations of capitalists may seem inexplicable. The labor unrest of the 1880s and early 1890s, fresh in the minds of many, may have been a deciding factor. In addition to a rash of strikes there were particularly odious events, such as the Homestead Strike of 1892 and the Haymarket Riot of 1886. The business faction that united against immigration in the last two decades of the nineteenth century is not easily categorized, but it disintegrated rapidly once economic conditions improved, labor unrest subsided, and wage decreases from immigration were more apparent (Heald 1953; Wiebe 1962).

The face of immigration changed rapidly in the 1890s, moving from northern and western Europe to southern, central, and eastern Europe. Whereas the new immigrants were 35 percent of the total flow in 1890, they were 56 percent in 1896, although the flow was of comparatively modest size in the mid-1890s, a product of economic depression (see figures 7.1 and 7.2).[9] Some have claimed that the new immigrants were too recent and too few to motivate the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1890s (Higham 1955). A reading of the *Congressional Record* affords ample reason to disagree with this claim, but not with a related assertion that the new immigrants were too recent and too few to influence policy.[10] But they would be fortified by numbers and unified by fear very soon.

President Cleveland vetoed the immigration legislation in 1897 because it contained the literacy test, and although the House voted to override his veto, the Senate took no action and the bill died. Just one year later, in 1898, a similar immigration law was proposed in Congress. In this case the bill cleared the Senate but failed by three votes to pass the House, which had just a year before given it overwhelming support.[11] The flip-flopping that took place on this im-

8. The AFL letter to Congress in 1898 argued that "laborers are imported from other countries to reduce our wages and thereby our standard of living" (*Congressional Record* 1898, 31:686). The AFL, like others, was arguing against contract labor and shipping and railroad companies' enticing people to emigrate to the United States.

9. New immigrants are those from southern, central, and eastern Europe. The countries (at various points in time) in the eastern, central, and southern European group include Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Rumania, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Turkey (in Europe), Yugoslavia, and the Baltic republics. I have included non-German-speaking emigrants from Austria in eastern Europe.

10. According to Higham ([1955] 1981) the Immigration Protection League, organized primarily by the older immigrant groups in the late 1890s, led the defeat of the 1898 literacy requirement in the House.

11. Of the 45 yeas in the Senate in 1898, 23 voted affirmatively in 1897, 6 had voted negatively, 9 had been recorded as absent, and 7 were new members of the Senate. Had all those present in both 1897 and 1898 voted as they did in 1898, the vote would have been 37 for and 22 against in

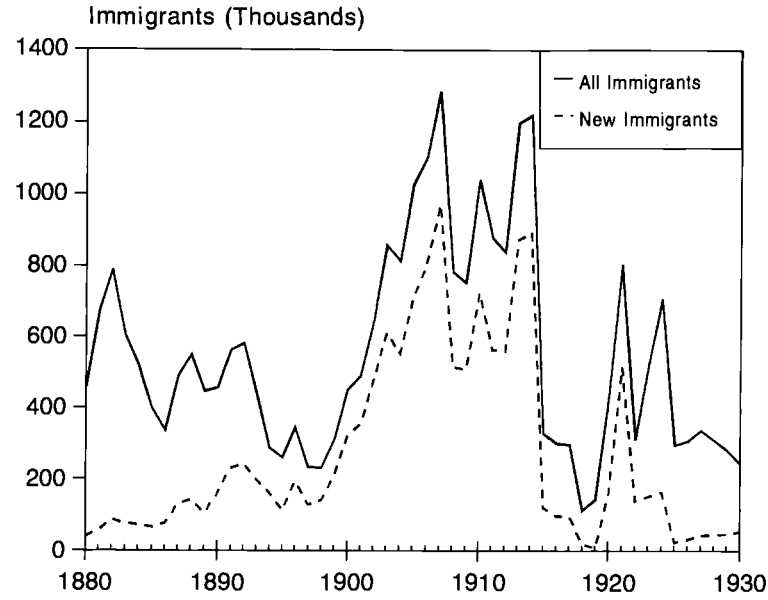

Fig. 7.1 Immigration, 1880–1930
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, series C89–119.
Note: New immigrants are those from southern, central, and eastern Europe. See note 9 for the included countries.

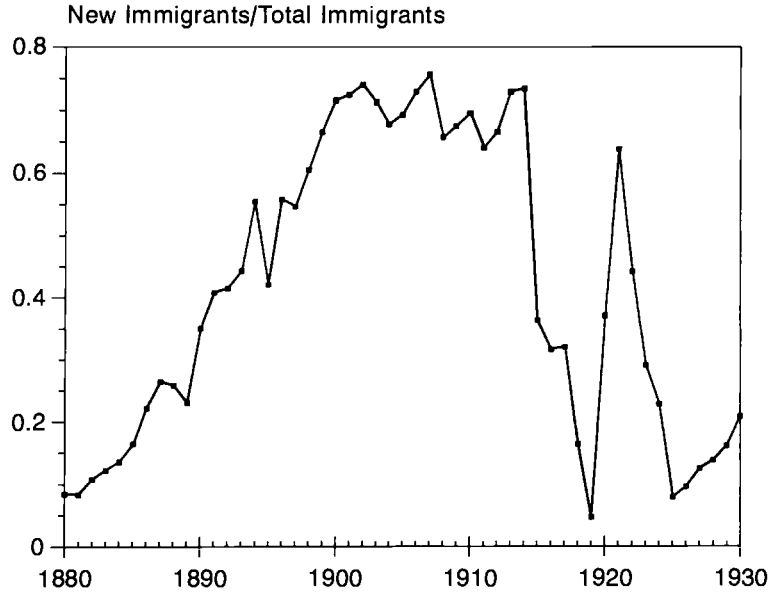

Fig. 7.2 Proportion of new immigrants, 1880–1930
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, series C 89–119.
Note: New immigrants are those from southern, central, and eastern Europe. See note 9 for the included countries.

portant issue extended to the executive branch as well. Although Cleveland vetoed the act in 1897, his successor, McKinley, ran on a Republican platform that called for the literacy test. It is doubtful that McKinley, having run on a platform calling for the literacy test—the only such platform in the prerestriction period—would have vetoed it. Had but two members of the House changed sides in 1898, the literacy test would have become law, although the large number of abstentions on the vote call the apparent closeness into question. Thus the binding constraint in 1898 was the House, whereas the constraint just a year before was the Senate.

The literacy test passed the House again in 1902, but was dropped in House-Senate conference and was not again incorporated into an immigration act until 1906. Through the political maneuvering of Representative Joe Cannon, Speaker of the House, the House voted in 1906 to remove the literacy test and set up the Immigration Commission to explore the matter in greater depth. The now-famous forty-two-volume *Reports of the Immigration Commission* (U.S. Senate 1911b) was issued in 1910. Seven methods to restrict immigration were listed by the commission, including quotas, a financial test, and a literacy test. "A majority of the Commission," the report concluded, "favor the reading and writing test as the most feasible single method of restricting undesirable immigration. . . . The Commission as a whole recommends restriction as demanded by economic, moral, and social considerations" (U.S. Senate 1911a, 1:48). On the heels of the report, the literacy test was reintroduced in Congress in 1912.

From 1898, the previous vote on the literacy test in Congress, to 1912, the next vote, were fourteen years of extraordinary immigrant flow, particularly from southern, central, and eastern Europe. The relative silence in Congress on the literacy test is all the more curious. It might be claimed, however, that the halls were actually not silent. There had been a vote in 1902, and the test was almost incorporated into legislation in 1906. With the creation of the Immigration Commission, Congress may have felt obliged to wait for its report, since its directive was to assess immigration restriction. Another interpretation is that shifting interests were at work. Although organized labor remained against unrestricted immigration, capital had shifted decisively. Looking more toward its long-run interests in holding down wages, capital put aside its fears that labor unrest would be fueled by foreign agitators. Perhaps of most importance was the emergence of a pivotal group in the form of the foreign born, who were vocal and rapidly gaining the franchise.[12]

1897. The new members of the Senate in 1898 split their votes about evenly for the test in 1898. Thus it was the disproportionate exit of the negative votes, primarily Democrats, that increased the strength of the prorestriction coalition, primarily Republican. See Higham ([1955] 1981), who claims the bill passed the Senate in 1898 along party lines.

12. The new immigrants have been portrayed by many as a potent force in big-city politics during the Progressive Era, but recent data on the percentage foreign born in major cities who were eligible to vote raises questions about their strength (see Keyssar, forthcoming). Keyssar looks at the percentage naturalized of males twenty-one years or older and finds that between 40

Both the Senate and House passed the literacy test again in 1912, only to have it vetoed by lame duck President Taft. The House failed by just six votes to override the veto. Had it been able to override, the test would have become law, since the Senate vote was 86 percent in favor of the amendment on the literacy test. The literacy test was reintroduced in 1915, passing the Senate by a wide majority and the House by enough to override a veto but with a large segment not voting. President Wilson, an ardent Progressive remembering his promise to immigrants in the 1912 election, vetoed the legislation, and the House failed to override it, this time by just five votes.[13] In 1916 the House and Senate once again passed a bill containing the literacy test, and finally, in 1917, both houses successfully overrode Wilson's second veto. The literacy test had become law.

The votes on the literacy test are evidence of the shifting coalitions mentioned earlier. The first vote in the House, in 1897, brought southern and urban-northeastern interests together in opposition to the test, with virtually the rest of the country favoring it.[14] The overwhelmingly anti-immigrant vote in 1897 may have been a hysterical reaction to the prolonged economic downturn of the 1890s, although recovery was well under way by the date of the vote. A more sober view of the immigration issue may have been given to the vote in 1898, a very close one in the House.

7.2.2 Analysis of Votes on the Literacy Test by State

As can be seen in table 7.2, New England, much of the Middle Atlantic, and about half of the midwestern region were in favor of the test in 1898. The South was generally against it, as it had been in the previous vote. The Mountain and Pacific states were not yet numerous enough to categorize. The next roll call vote on the literacy test was not for another fifteen years, in 1913. By that date the shifting coalitions mentioned earlier had become apparent. The Northeast was split, with the larger cities voting pro-immigrant and the rural areas voting anti. The Midwest was also split. Differences there may have been rooted in

percent and 70 percent were, but that states often had residence requirements that the mobile foreign born often could not meet. The evidence presented here supports, in principle, the assertions of the older literature. The foreign born might have been an even more potent force had naturalization been faster and had various states had more lenient residency requirements.

13. Wilson's veto of the 1915 act can be rationalized, after the fact, by his promise to the foreign born during the election, but it is not clear that it could have been predicted prior to the vote in the House. Only after the House passed the act did Wilson warn the Senate that he would veto the bill if the literacy test was not removed (Link 1954, 60–61). But there is no indication that Wilson explicitly stated that he would veto the bill prior to its passage in the House, although Link states that Wilson "intimated that he would." In fact, the official magazine of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters predicted in August 1913, six months after Taft's veto of the literacy act, that "any immigration law passed, carrying a literacy test in all probability, will be approved by President Wilson" (International Brotherhood of Teamsters, August 1913, 5).

14. Of the thirty-seven negative votes, twenty-five were cast by southerners. Three from New York City joined them together with eight others from urban areas in the Northeast. One additional representative, from Wisconsin, voted against the test (*Congressional Record* 1897, 29:2947).

Table 7.2 **Proportion of House Voting for the Literacy Test or to Override a Presidential Veto of the Literacy Test, by State, 1898, 1913, 1915, 1917**

	For Test	Proportion to Override			Number Voting			
	1898	1913	1915	1917	1898	1913	1915	1917
New England								
CT	1.0	0.40	0.0	0.20	4	5	5	5
MA	0.82	0.33	0.25	0.35	11	12	16	17
ME	1.0	0.50	0.67	0.80	2	4	3	5
NH	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.0	2	2	2	2
RI	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1	1	1	3
VT	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1	2	2	2
Middle Atlantic								
NJ	1.0	0.0	0.45	0.67	7	6	11	12
NY	0.52	0.28	0.19	0.26	23	29	37	42
PA	0.85	0.65	0.64	0.75	27	23	36	36
East North Central								
IL	0.47	0.39	0.54	0.63	15	23	26	27
IN	0.69	0.80	0.67	0.50	13	10	12	12
MI	0.50	0.44	0.69	0.50	10	9	13	14
OH	0.65	0.74	0.67	0.80	17	19	18	20
WI	0.43	0.40	0.40	0.55	7	10	10	11
West North Central								
IA	0.33	0.27	0.60	0.80	9	11	10	10
KS	0.0	0.86	0.88	0.86	3	7	8	7
MN	0.33	0.44	0.57	1.0	3	9	7	11
MO	0.13	0.79	0.67	0.81	15	14	15	16
ND	1.0	1.0	0.67	0.67	1	1	3	3
NE	0.40	0.50	0.50	0.80	5	6	6	5
SD	0.50	0.50	1.0	1.0	2	2	3	3
South Atlantic								
DE	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1	1	1	1
FL	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	2	1	4	4
GA	0.0	1.0	0.83	1.0	10	10	12	12
MD	1.0	0.83	0.67	0.83	4	6	6	6
NC	0.60	1.0	1.0	1.0	5	10	9	10
SC	0.57	1.0	0.86	0.86	7	6	7	7
VA	0.44	1.0	1.0	1.0	9	9	10	10
WV	0.67	1.0	1.0	1.0	3	2	6	6
East South Central								
AL	0.43	1.0	0.8	1.0	7	9	10	10
KY	0.22	0.91	0.91	0.91	9	11	11	11
MS	0.0	0.89	1.0	1.0	6	9	8	8
TN	0.22	1.0	1.0	1.0	9	10	10	9
West South Central								
AR	0.80	1.0	1.0	1.0	5	7	8	7
LA	0.0	0.17	0.43	0.63	6	6	7	8
OK	—[a]	1.0	1.0	1.0	—[a]	4	7	6
TX	0.17	0.80	0.78	0.84	12	15	18	19

Table 7.2 (continued)

	For Test	Proportion to Override			Number Voting			
	1898	1913	1915	1917	1898	1913	1915	1917
Mountain								
AZ	—[a]	1.0	1.0	1.0	—[a]	1	1	1
CO	—[b]	0.67	0.50	1.0	—[b]	3	4	4
ID	—[b]	1.0	1.0	0.50	—[b]	1	2	2
MT	—[b]	—[b]	1.0	1.0	—[b]	—[a]	1	1
NM	—[a]	0.0	0.0	1.0	—[a]	2	1	1
NV	—[b]	1.0	1.0	1.0	—[b]	1	1	1
UT	0.0	0.0	0.50	0.0	1	1	2	2
WY	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1	1	1	1
Pacific								
CA	0.75	0.71	0.91	0.90	4	7	11	10
OR	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1	1	3	3
WA	0.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1	3	5	4
Total					281	342	409	427

Notes: A vote to override was a vote against open immigration. "Paired" votes (these were two to one for the override) are included with either the yeas or nays. Those not voting (and not paired) or absent are not included in the denominator.

[a]Not yet a state.

[b]No votes were cast by representatives of this state.

Source: Congressional Record, various years.

the nativity of constituencies, as they were in the cities.[15] The South was firmly against open immigration, as were the Pacific region and most of the Mountain states. The 1915 and 1917 votes are similar to that in 1913 with an erosion of support in much of the Midwest and an increase in support in some large cities.

A large segment of rural America was against open immigration at least by the first vote in 1897 and even in the first strongly contested vote in 1898. Why this was the case probably has more to do with the history of nativist sentiment in America than with the particulars of immigration restriction of concern here. It is important, however, that some parts of rural America were considerably less in favor of restriction than were others. Rural Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Michigan can be easily contrasted with equally rural areas in Ohio, Indiana, and Kansas (see table 7.2). In general, those from countries whose populations were still emigrating at high rates voted to keep the door open, while the native born and those from countries that were not active sending regions did

15. Ongoing research of mine on this issue indicates that those of German and British ancestry opposed open immigration, whereas those of Scandinavian and "new" ancestry supported it. I am also exploring the role of concentration. Areas with many foreign born of one nativity may have been pro-immigration. But areas with many foreign born of several nativities may have been less willing to keep the door open.

not.[16] The reasons seem obvious, but one cannot differentiate between a personal interest in open immigration and an ideological one. Recent immigrants may have wanted to send for relatives and friends. But they may also have clung more fervently to the notion that America was a haven for the world's poor and oppressed than did those who emigrated years before.

The proportion of the House vote in favor of the literacy test has been regressed on the percentage foreign born, the level of urbanization, and the immigration rate from 1900 to 1910, all at the state level. The regressions (table 7.3) demonstrate the political strength of the foreign born but also reveal the mounting opposition to immigration from residents of states with expanding foreign-born populations.

The most obvious result in the regressions is that the constant terms in all regressions are close to one—states with few foreign born and only sparse urban areas voted overwhelmingly against open immigration. Percentage foreign born and percentage urban reduce support for the literacy test. A one-point increase in the percentage foreign born decreases support for the test by one to two percentage points.[17] The greater importance of the percentage urban variable in 1915 than in 1913 highlights the importance of the redistricting that occurred between the 62d and 63d Congresses. Although increasing the percentage foreign born reduces support for the literacy test, an increase in the rate of immigration decreases support.[18] The impact of the rate of increase in immigration helps explain the anti-immigration sentiment of the West.

The support the West gave to the literacy test by the 1913 and 1915 votes arose, it appears, from the rapid increase in the percentage foreign born in those states, rather than from any previous biases regarding Asian immigration. With few exceptions all states in the West had among the highest rates of immigration but only moderate levels of foreign born. The percentage foreign born in those states was insufficient to provide enough positive sentiment against restriction, but the rate of increase was sufficient to fuel a strong negative reaction. Immigrants who settled in the West during this period, it should be added, were largely Europeans, not Asians and Mexicans.

The South has been omitted from the state-level regressions. Its lack of foreign born and paucity of cities would have lent overwhelming support to the

16. A more accurate test of the proposition that the foreign born from the current sending regions were more in favor of open immigration than were those from regions that were no longer sending a large fraction of their populations, requires county-level data on nativity reaggregated to congressional districts. I am currently collecting county-level data to investigate the role of ethnicity and ethnic mix in immigration restriction sentiment in rural districts and to explore how statewide voting regulations affected the political strength of the foreign-born population. A simple scanning of the ethnic origins of populations in the midwestern states that were most antirestrictive (e.g., Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin) suggests the proposition stated here.

17. Adding a quadratic in the percentage foreign born shows that the peak negative sentiment occurred at about 10 percent.

18. The immigration rate between 1910 and 1920 is used to gauge the most recent flows of foreign born. Because immigration was very low from 1915 to 1920, most of the increase in the decade was between 1910 and 1915.

Table 7.3 Explaining the Proportion of the House Vote for the Literacy Test

Vote in 1913 = 0.857 − 2.08 (% FB) − 0.045 (% Urban) + 0.328 (Immigration Rate)
(8.39) (3.31) (0.17) (2.50)
$N = 31$ (nonsouthern states); adjusted $R^2 = 0.44$

Vote in 1915 = 1.02 − 1.19 (% FB) − 0.608 (% Urban) + 0.339 (Immigration Rate)
(11.93) (2.30) (2.93) (3.37)
$N = 32$ (nonsouthern states); adjusted $R^2 = 0.63$

Notes: *t*-statistics, in absolute value, are in parentheses. Ordinary least squares regressions are weighted by the total number of representatives voting. Vote in 1913 and in 1915 is the proportion of the states' votes in the House cast for the literacy test (that is, to override the presidential veto); % FB is the proportion of foreign born in the state in 1910; Immigration Rate is the rate of increase in the foreign-born population between 1900 and 1910. The vote in both years includes those who were "paired"; in this case each negative vote was paired with two positive votes.

relationships investigated. But such results would have offered no insight why the South shifted sides from the 1890s to the early 1900s. The movement of the South from the pro-immigration camp to the prorestriction side gave the prorestriction forces a decisive edge in the House. Had the South remained in the pro-immigration camp, the literacy test would not have cleared a majority in the House even in 1915.[19] Several hypotheses for the switch can be offered.

The most apparent hypothesis from a reading of the *Congressional Record* is that antiforeign sentiment on the basis of race had emerged. The South was struggling with its own race problem and viewed the "new" immigrants as a European mulatto, adding yet another racial group in America.[20] Barring immigrants from the new sending regions would remove this danger and, moreover, would not constrain the South. Southern states had tried to attract immigrants, particularly for agricultural work, but they had not flocked there in any numbers for almost a century. The new immigrants had gone north and west, rarely south.

Because the South had been unable to attract immigrants for some time, its changed position around 1900 might have been related, as well, to the resolution of its own race problem. Jim Crow laws may have given southerners the false sense that closing the door on immigration would not lead blacks to flee en masse to the North. Although their numbers might have been higher still

19. The total vote in 1915 (including the "pairs") was 269 to override and 140 against. The South accounted for 134 votes, and 118 were for the override, 16 opposing it. Had the South in 1915 voted as it had in 1898 (see table 7.2 for the proportions cast for and against), it would have cast 43 votes for the override in 1915 and 91 against. The net gain for the pro-immigration forces would have been 75 votes, giving the anti-immigration forces only 194 and the pro-immigration forces 215.

20. See, for example, the speech of Senator Simmons of North Carolina during the 1906 debates: "The broad fact, then, is that about two-thirds of all the immigration to this country to-day and during recent years has come from southern and eastern Europe. . . . They belong . . . to a different civilization from that represented by the Anglo-Saxon race" (*Congressional Record* 1906, 40: 7295).

had blacks felt safe to leave, manufacturing interests in the North did entice blacks to emigrate during World War I and throughout the 1920s.

Southern manufacturing interests may have recognized that their sole advantage was a low-wage, nonunion workforce, and that immigrants were providing the North with a similar workforce. If immigrants would not come South, the South would deprive the North of them. Yet another potential explanation is that the North was gaining power in Congress and that much of its population increase was in the form of the foreign born and their children.[21] Although I cannot differentiate among these various hypotheses, each could have been reinforcing. By the early 1900s the South saw nothing to lose and much to gain from closing the door.

7.2.3 The Eventual Triumph of the Anti-immigration Forces

The three votes on the literacy test by three successive seatings of the House enable one to see how the changed composition of the electorate altered the outcome and precisely which forces held the anti-immigrant forces at bay (see table 7.4).[22] Comparing first those representatives who voted in both the 62d (1912/13) and 63d (1914/15) Congresses, 74 percent voted for the literacy test. Thus the incumbent members of the House were overwhelmingly in favor of restriction in 1915. The recently seated members of the House did amass a majority in favor of restriction, but they did so just barely. Only 54 percent voted for the test in 1915, clearly not enough to override a presidential veto. Thus it was the newly elected representatives who held the literacy test at bay, suggesting that big-city districts had changed composition. The new immigrants themselves, it seems, managed to elect representatives who voted disproportionately against the literacy test. But if this were the only change in the House, the vote would have become less in favor of the act over time. Rather, the percentage voting in favor remained at 65 percent. Those who were voted out of office were in favor of the keeping the door open to the same degree as those who took their place. Thus the vote in 1913 would have cleared the two-thirds needed to override, had only those who kept their seats to 1915 voted. Those who were defeated in 1914 voted far more decidedly against restriction, although with a majority in favor of the literacy test.

Those who remained seated from the 62d to the 64th Congresses voted disproportionately prorestriction in the 1913 and 1915 votes. Those newly elected and those who suffered defeat at the polls in 1914 were less restrictionist. The

21. The South had opposed cheap land, a half century before, on similar grounds. Cheap land meant more immigrants, and more immigrants meant greater political power for the North. There were additional reasons for southern reluctance to give land away. Cheap land also meant higher tariffs, and the South opposed both high tariffs and increased political power for the North. On the South's opposition to free land, see Robbins [1942] 1976.

22. I am looking only at the voting record of the House because the Senate passed the test by wide enough margins in 1912/13, 1914/15, and 1916/17 to override a presidential veto. The Senate would be expected to be more supportive of restrictive immigration than the House, in which certain representatives were elected in districts populated by the new immigrants.

Table 7.4 **Votes to Override the Presidential Veto on the Literacy Test in the 62d, 63d, and 64th Congresses, 1913, 1915, and 1917**

	Number For	Number Against	Number Not Voting	% For[a]
Vote in 62d Congress (1913)	213	114	54	65.1
Those remaining in office to 63d	160	71		69.3
Those defeated in 1914	53	43		55.2
Vote in 63d Congress (1915)	262	136	26	65.8
Incumbents only (62d and 63d)	178	64		74.2
Nonincumbents only (63d not 62d)	84	72		53.8
Those defeated in 1916	73	55		57.0
Vote in 64th Congress (1917)	287	106	40	73.0
Incumbents only (63d and 64th)	187	70		72.8
Nonincumbents only (64th not 63d)	100	36		73.5

Sources: Congressional Record, various years; *Congressional Directory,* various years.

[a]Two-thirds is necessary to override a presidential veto.

new members hailed primarily from the large and industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, whereas those defeated in 1914 came from small to middle-sized towns across America. Those suffering defeat, therefore, were replaced by representatives far less in favor of open immigration. But the newly elected group was able to make up the difference and prop the door open. America had become more bifurcated along the lines of open immigration, and it was redistricting in 1914 that resuscitated the pro-immigration bloc.[23] Without it, the anti forces would have won. The increased population of the nation's big and industrial cities, with its largely immigrant composition, was responsible for keeping the anti-immigrant forces just below the two-thirds majority needed to override. All that changed by 1917, however, when there was no relationship between incumbency and the vote on the literacy test. All in the House—save those whose districts were in the nation's largest cities and a handful of others—voted overwhelmingly for it, regardless of time in office and party affiliation.

7.2.4 Restrictiveness of the Literacy Test

The literacy test was an overture to the Emergency Quota Act passed in 1921, the Immigration Act of 1924, and, eventually, the National Origins Act

23. The possibility that it was redistricting is by inference only. There were forty-five more representatives seated in the 63d Congress than in the 62d Congress, and there were forty-three more representatives present for the vote in the 63d than in the 62d Congress to override the president's veto (see table 7.1). Much of the redistricting took place within states, it appears. A tabulation of representatives by state does not reveal much difference between the two Congresses. But New York City, for example, gained seven representatives. Among those who were not seated in the 62d Congress but who voted in the 63d, there were nine from New York City who voted against the test. Two representatives from New York City were not reelected, one of whom was against and one of whom was for the test. Three of the newly elected representatives were from Philadelphia, which lost only one seat from the 62d to the 63d Congresses. Chicago, however, made no net gain.

passed in 1929. Although the quotas were plausibly more potent than the literacy test, the test could have imposed considerable constraints, particularly on the newer immigrant groups. How much of a constraint depended on the type of test, the sending country flows, and the period considered.

As initially conceived in 1897, the literacy test involved reading and writing a short passage of the U.S. Constitution and barred illiterate adult males and their accompanying family members. At that time it was believed that the test would have checked the entry of 25 percent of all recent arrivals, although more than 40 percent of the newer groups would have been barred.[24] More precise estimates were compiled for the *Reports of the Immigration Commission.* According to the report, data collected by the U.S. commissioner general of immigration from the self-reported statements of immigrants upon arrival indicated that 33.4 percent of eastern European and 44.9 percent of southern European immigrants (fourteen years and older) arriving from 1899 to 1910 were illiterate.[25] Thus the test would have reduced the new immigrants by 37.4 percent in 1907 at the height of immigration. The constraint would have been less in the 1920s due to the rising literacy in eastern and southern Europe, although the test could have been made more difficult.[26]

For the entire 1905 to 1914 period, a decade of immigrant flows of more than one million per year, the literacy test would have restricted immigration from southern and eastern Europe to about 445,000 annually when the flow was, in actuality, 712,000.[27] But the eventual quotas were far more restrictive. The 1921 act limited southern and eastern Europeans to 156,000, and the 1924

24. During the debate on the immigration act of 1898, Senator Fairbanks of Indiana inserted data in the *Congressional Record* showing that about 25 percent of immigrants (fourteen years old and over) arriving from 1895 to 1897 were illiterate. Illiteracy was declared by the immigrant, and no official test was given (*Congressional Record* 1898, 31:515).

25. Female immigrants were less literate than male immigrants. Because many versions of the literacy test allowed the illiterate family members of a literate adult male immigrant to emigrate, the constraint would have been less than calculated on the basis of the aggregate data. But younger adults were more literate than older adult immigrants, and since the Immigration Commission data group all ages, this factor would tend to bias the calculation in the other direction. The data from the U.S. commissioner general of immigration in the *Reports of the Immigration Commission* (1911a, 1:99) differ, often radically, by country from those reported in the *Congressional Record* (1898, 31:516) for a somewhat earlier period of time. But the data in the report are consistent with estimates I have computed using the 1910 Public Use Micro-data Sample (PUMS).

26. Primary-school enrollment had been rising secularly in Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, and Rumania across the latter half of the nineteenth century and exploded in Russia after the revolution. See, for example, the data in Easterlin 1981.

27. Emigration to the United States from Europe could have slowed in the 1920s as conditions improved in certain European countries relative to those in the United States. Wage data collected for a project on international economic convergence (Simkovich, Taylor, and Williamson 1992) indicate that Italy, the only new immigrant country in the data set, improved its real wage position relative to the United States during the 1900s to 1920s period. In 1910, for example, the ratio of Italian to American real wages for unskilled laborers was 0.29, but by 1925 it was 0.48.

It should also be noted that even though gross immigration was 6.71 million from 1908 to 1914, many immigrants returned home. The net immigration figure is 61 percent of the gross, or 4.07 million (Willcox 1931, 88).

and 1929 acts lowered it further to just over 20,000, a mere trickle. Put in terms of total immigration, from 1905 to 1914 730,000 would have entered each year had there been a literacy test, whereas the 1921 act called for about half that number. The 1924 and 1929 acts stipulated numbers that were one-quarter to one-fifth the hypothetical flows. Thus the literacy test, even as conceived in 1897, would have imposed rather stringent restrictions on the new immigrants, although not nearly as harsh as those eventually imposed by the 1929 National Origins Act.

It is easier to understand why much of rural America lost interest in immigration than it is to explain why it voted to restrict immigration. Losing interest is not the same as feeling threatened. The source of anti-immigrant sentiment could have been nativism, anti-Catholicism, and racism. But another possibility is that many rural Americans, outside the South, saw the future of their children, and possibly even that of their own, in the nation's cities and factories. It was in these cities that the anti- and pro-immigrant forces waged their most contested battles, and rural America may have sided with those who saw the American standard of living threatened by immigrants. Urbanites, we shall see, were pulled in two directions. The foreign born and their children generally supported open immigration for the reunification of their families and as a set of beliefs about America. But their jobs and wages may have been threatened by unrestricted immigration. The "heart strings" and the "purse strings" of urban Americans often tugged in opposing directions. I turn now to the economic effects of immigration to justify this characterization of the support for anti-immigrant legislation.

7.3 The Economic Basis for Immigration Restriction

Almost all serious calls for the literacy test were preceded by economic downturns, some of major proportion, and few economic downturns of the era were not accompanied by a call for restriction in the halls of Congress. Unemployment and labor unrest were clearly in the minds of legislators in the 1897 and 1898 votes, and economic conditions had worsened just as the 1915 literacy test came to a vote. The major recession just following World War I was a factor in the Emergency Quota Act. But the clamor for restriction at particular junctures in our history must have been reinforced by other economic forces, some national and long-run in nature and some specific to the cities and periods that experienced the greatest influxes. Immigrants, no matter where they went in the United States, had economic effects on those already in the country no matter where they lived and worked. But the initial impact that immigrants had on wage levels of their close substitutes in production must have been greatest in the local labor markets to which the immigrants originally went and in which most remained. The long-run story of general wage rate changes with the flood of immigrants since the late 1840s is one of

enormous importance on an international scale.[28] That most relevant to the political economy of restriction is a somewhat more short-run tale.

The literacy test was introduced and gained momentum because immigration in the 1890s had shifted to ethnic and national groups whose schooling levels and living standards were distinctly below those of previous groups. They were, moreover, disproportionately male and were often "birds of passage" who spent only brief durations in America. Such individuals were perceived as a threat to the American working man. By toiling long hours and bringing living standards from low-wage countries, they probably did lower the wage-hours offer curve by more than an equivalent increase in native-born workers would have. Moreover, because they often lacked rudimentary skills in reading and writing, and more often in speaking English, they may have earned even less than competitive forces would have dictated.[29] These were certainly the claims of many observers of the day—Progressives, conservatives, and labor movement organizers alike. Although each group had its own solution, a dominant one was to restrict immigration on the basis of literacy.

7.3.1 Occupations and Destinations of Immigrants, 1890 to 1920

Certain occupations and industries were disproportionately composed of immigrants. If recently arrived immigrants were more closely substitutable for other foreign-born workers and lesser-skilled workers than for native-born higher-skilled workers, then the wage effects should have been more negative in industries and occupations having a large percentage of foreign-born and lesser-skilled workers. The percentage of the labor force that was foreign born by industry and for selected occupations in 1910 is given in table 7.5. The foreign born are divided into three groups—all foreign born; the "new" immigrants, by which is meant those from eastern, central, and southern Europe; and among the new immigrants those who emigrated within the ten years preceding the 1910 census, termed "recent" immigrants.

All manufacturing employments were more heavily populated by immigrants than was the male labor force as a whole, although a substantial fraction of the differential is accounted for by the disproportionate employment of native-born workers in agriculture. Excluding the agricultural sector, foreign-born workers were 1.4 times as likely to have been in the goods-producing sector than were native-born workers, and the new immigrants were almost 1.6 times as likely.[30] Among the industries most populated by the new and recent immigrants were clothing, mining, and iron and steel. But there was substantial variation in the ethnic backgrounds of workers within industries; in foundries,

28. See Hatton and Williamson 1992 on the general issue of wage rate changes with large-scale immigration on an international level.

29. See, for example, Hannon 1982 for empirical evidence on the extent of labor market discrimination against immigrants during the late nineteenth century.

30. The goods-producing sector is mining, manufacturing, and construction.

Table 7.5 **Percentage of "New" and Recent Immigrant Males in the Labor Force, by Industry and Selected Occupations in the Goods-Producing Sector, 1910**

	(1) Foreign Born (%)	(2) "New" Immigrant (%)	(3) "New" and Recent Immigrant[a] (%)	(4) Relative %, Foreign Born[a] ([1]/32.9)	(5) Relative %, "New" and Recent[a] ([3]/12.2)
All employed males (≥ 14 years)	21.0	8.7	5.8		
Excluding those in agriculture	25.9	11.7	8.1		
In goods-producing sector	32.9	16.5	12.2	1.00	1.00
Mining	42.3	29.3	21.7	1.29	1.78
Building trades	27.2	10.6	7.4	0.83	0.61
Laborers	29.9	15.6	12.1	0.91	0.99
Painters	22.6	8.2	5.2	0.69	0.43
Brick and stone masons	33.1	10.9	7.1	1.00	0.58
Manufacturing	31.9	15.1	11.2	0.97	0.92
Chemicals	30.6	14.8	12.4	0.93	1.02
Clay, glass, and stone	30.8	18.4	14.2	0.94	1.16
Clothing	67.1	53.6	32.3	2.04	2.65
Food	40.7	16.0	12.2	1.24	1.00
Bakeries	53.7	21.0	15.4	1.63	1.26
Iron and steel	36.9	20.5	16.9	1.12	1.39
Foundries	34.9	18.2	15.2	1.06	1.25
Foundry laborers	54.5	37.2	32.2	1.66	2.64
Machinists[b]	25.7	5.6	3.6	0.78	0.30
Leather	35.8	18.7	15.2	1.09	1.25
Liquor and beverages	41.3	8.9	5.6	1.26	0.46
Lumber and furniture	22.6	8.3	6.1	0.69	0.50
Metals (except iron and steel)	33.9	17.1	13.3	1.03	1.09
Paper and pulp	31.0	13.1	11.2	0.94	0.92
Printing and publishing	20.0	4.1	2.4	0.61	0.20
Textiles	31.0	12.3	9.1	0.94	0.75
Tobacco and cigars	36.2	15.5	8.3	1.10	0.68

Source: 1910 PUMS, males fourteen years and older.

Note: "New" and recent immigrants are eastern, central, and southern Europeans who emigrated during the ten years preceding the 1910 census.

[a]The relative percentage divided by the percentage of all employed males (fourteen years and older) in the goods-producing sector for each of the two immigrant groups.

[b]Not necessarily working in foundries or in the iron and steel industry.

for example, 32 percent of the laborers were of the new and recent group of immigrants but only 4 percent of the machinists were.

Immigrants went disproportionately to the nation's largest cities, but so did all Americans during the period under study. Despite the notion that immigrants, particularly from 1900 to 1914, crowded themselves into a handful of America's urban centers, they were in fact extremely dispersed across all cities

regardless of size.[31] Indeed, the change in the foreign-born population from 1900 to 1910 was, on average, the same across almost all deciles of the size distribution of cities in 1900. The fifteen cities with the largest and smallest increases in the proportion of foreign born in their populations are given in part A of table 7.6 for 1890 to 1900 and 1900 to 1910. No city in the top decile (decile = 10) is included in the fifteen having the largest increases from 1890 to 1900, and there are many small cities represented among the ranks of those accumulating the foreign born at a faster rate than they accumulated native-born residents. And while there is some repetition in the top and bottom lists across the decades, there is also a lot of movement. Immigrants went to different cities in different decades. They went where the jobs were, and, as will be demonstrated in table 7.7, they went where their earning power would be highest.

Also of importance in assessing the political economy of immigration restriction is whether immigrants went to areas already populated by immigrants. To the extent that "immigration begot immigration," certain cities and congressional districts within them would have become even more disproportionately immigrant in makeup and thus more inclined to oppose immigration restriction. Part B of table 7.6 reports the results of the regression of the difference in the percentage foreign born across a decade on the percentage foreign born in the earlier year. That is, $\Delta[\%\ \text{Foreign Born}_{(t,\ t+10)}]$ is run on $[\%\ \text{Foreign Born}_t]$. Interestingly, the coefficient is negative for the 1890 to 1900 and 1910 to 1920 decades, but positive for the 1900 to 1910 decade.[32] Immigration was reinforcing or concentrating in its impact from 1900 to 1910. Thus immigration restriction was held at bay during the largest immigrant flows, in part because the new immigrants were able to capture various congressional districts. By the 1910 to 1920 decade, however, the flows had a more diluting impact. Also note that only during the decade of the greatest immigration, from 1900 to 1910, did immigrants flow into America's cities at the same rate that native-born Americans populated the same urban areas. The percentage foreign born actually fell during the 1890 to 1900 and 1910 to 1920 decades in the cities under study. Similar notions are apparent in part C of table 7.6. During the 1890 to 1900 and 1910 to 1920 decades, the percentage foreign born in the urban population declined where population grew, but the reverse occurred from 1900 to 1910. Only in the 1900 to 1910 decade did the fastest-growing cities also increase their population share of the foreign born. These burgeoning urban areas gained representatives who held the prorestriction movement at bay, at least for a while.

31. The one exception—and it is an important one—is New York City. There are 142 cities in the 1890 to 1900 sample and 127 in the 1900 to 1910 sample. (These are the cities of the Bureau of Labor Statistics wages and hours studies for the various time periods.) The earlier sample includes more small cities, although the deciles in table 7.6 are recomputed for each decade.

32. The same cities have been used for the 1890–1900 and 1900–1910 regressions. There are twelve fewer cities for the 1910–1920 regression.

Table 7.6 Changes in the Proportion of Foreign Born by City, 1890 to 1920

A. Changes in proportion of foreign born in the population (ΔFB)[a]

Largest Increases	ΔFB	Decile[b]	Smallest Increases	ΔFB	Decile[b]
1890 to 1900					
New Bedford, MA	.056	6	St. Paul, MN	−.112	9
Passaic, NJ	.055	2	Spokane, WA	−.103	5
Hartford, CT	.025	7	Duluth, MN	−.093	5
Bridgeport, CT	.023	7	Portland, OR	−.081	8
Tampa, FL	.018	1	Milwaukee, WI	−.077	10
Middletown, CT	.018	1	Seattle, WA	−.076	7
Lincoln, NE	.014	4	Davenport, IA	−.071	3
Nashua, NH	.013	2	Neenah, WI	−.070	1
Providence, RI	.011	9	Tacoma, WA	−.069	4
Pueblo, CO	.010	2	Saginaw, MI	−.067	4
Lynn, MA	.009	7	Minneapolis, MN	−.067	9
New London, CT	.008	1	Holyoke, MA	−.065	5
Somerville, MA	.008	6	Chicago, IL	−.064	10
Brockton, MA	.006	4	Dubuque, IA	−.063	3
Schenectady, NY	.005	3	Cincinnati, OH	−.063	10
1900 to 1910					
Johnstown, PA	.072	3	Davenport, IA	−.052	2
Passaic, NJ	.056	3	Fall River, MA	−.050	7
Lynn, MA	.051	6	Covington, KY	−.050	3
St. Joseph, MO	.050	5	Clinton, IA	−.049	1
Brooklyn, NY[c]	.047	10	Saginaw, MI	−.038	2
Utica, NY	.044	5	Fort Worth, TX	−.037	3
Trenton, NJ	.044	6	Quincy, IL	−.037	1
Elizabeth, NJ	.043	5	Troy, NY	−.036	5
Youngstown, OH	.043	5	Oshkosh, WI	−.035	1
Spokane, WA	.043	7	Dubuque, IA	−.033	1
Bridgeport, CT	.042	7	Evansville, IN	−.031	4
Bayonne, NJ	.042	3	Peoria, IL	−.028	4
New Haven, CT	.042	8	Salt Lake City, UT	−.027	6
Canton, OH	.041	2	Louisville, KY	−.026	9
New Bedford, MA	.039	6	St. Paul, MO	−.023	8

B. Regression of difference in % foreign born between t and (t + 10) on % foreign born in year[d]

	Coefficient (t-stat.) on % Foreign Born	*N*	R^2	Dependent Variable Mean: Unweighted	Dependent Variable Mean: Weighted
1890 to 1900	−.135 (−10.4)	127	.68	−.0296	−.0373
1900 to 1910	.192 (1.86)	127	.27	.0045	.0131
1910 to 1920	−.119 (−11.2)	115	.52	−.0298	−.0390

C. Regression of difference in % foreign born between t and (t + 10) on log of population in year[d]

	Coefficient (t-stat.) on Log Population	*N*	R^2
1890 to 1900	−.0041 (−3.20)	127	.52
1900 to 1910	.0053 (4.26)	127	.42
1910 to 1920	−.0057 (−5.31)	115	.19

(*continued*)

Table 7.6 (continued)

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population,* 1890–1920.

[a]The cities are those in the sample for the wage regressions. There are 142 cities for 1890 to 1900 and 127 for 1900 to 1910. The change in the proportion of foreign born in the population is calculated as (e.g., 1900 to 1910) percentage (white) foreign born in 1910 − percentage (white) foreign born in 1900. It is a percentage point change and is identical to the dependent variable in the wage regressions in table 7.8.

[b]The city's decile is in the distribution of cities by population for 1900 and 1910. A ten means the top decile, and a one is the lowest.

[c]Brooklyn is treated as a separate city in 1900 and 1910 for consistency with the data for 1890, when it was independent.

[d]All regressions are weighted by the population in the base year. The 1890–1900 and 1900–1910 regressions also contain regional dummy variables; that for 1910–20 does not.

7.3.2 Wage Data by City, 1890 to 1923

Economists have, for some time, pondered the wage effects of the enormous influx of less-skilled workers in the first two decades of this century. Paul Douglas's (1930) pioneering volume on wages from 1890 to 1926 concluded that real wages in manufacturing rose by 8 percent or only 0.32 percent average annually from 1890 to 1914, the period of greatest immigration. The increase from 1919 to 1926, according to Douglas, was an astounding 3.3 percent average annually, whereas that in real wages in the several decades before 1890 was more on the order of 1.5 percent average annually.[33] By implication immigration had decreased the earning power of manufacturing workers.

But Douglas's findings were questioned by Albert Rees, whose construction of a new consumer price index altered Douglas's central conclusion. According to Rees's estimates, real wages rose by 40 percent from 1890 to 1914, or 1.4 percent average annually ([1961] 1975, 120). By implication—and, once again, only by implication since this is not a real test of the proposition—immigration had not altered the course of real wages in the manufacturing sector. The aggregate economy, it appeared, had enormous absorptive capacity for new workers.[34]

But the data for the manufacturing sector (using Rees's price deflator), when contrasted with those for "lower-skilled" workers, suggest that immigration depressed wages for the least skilled. Figure 7.3 graphs the wage data for manufacturing workers and those from Coombs (1926) for "lower-skilled" workers. Although real manufacturing wages increased at about the same rate for the entire 1900 to 1914 period, those for the "lower-skilled" workers did not. The "lower-skilled" series slows down, flattens out, and then declines some-

33. See Douglas 1930, whose series are reproduced in U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, series D 766 for nominal wages and E 185 for the price index.

34. This is also a conclusion of Hatton and Williamson (1992) based, in part, on Williamson (1982), who concludes, on the basis of a computable general equilibrium model, that despite the generally large absorptive capacity of the economy, it was lowest around the World War I period.

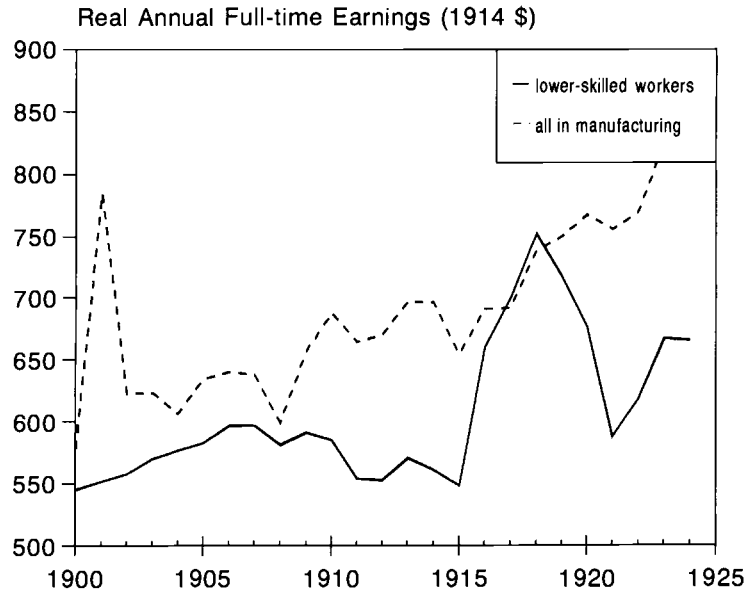

Fig. 7.3 Real annual full-time earnings, 1900–1924

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, series D 740, D 778; Coombs 1926 for 1920–24.

Notes: The weekly wages of the "lower-skilled" or Coombs series is multiplied by 52 to get full-time earnings. Because the lower-skilled data are defined as "full-time" on both a weekly and an annual basis, they are inflated compared with those for all manufacturing workers and are thus above the other series in two years. Rees's cost-of-living index ([1961] 1975; see also U.S. Bureau of the Census 1975, series E 186) for 1900 to 1914 is spliced to the BLS Consumer Price Index for all items (series E 135); 1914 = 100.

time after 1907. Real wages among less-skilled workers stagnated from 1900 to 1915.

Rees's evidence, like Douglas's, was indirect, and only by inference could he conclude that immigrants had a slight impact on the real wages of American manufacturing workers. He did not directly estimate the effect of immigration on the wages of workers. To get a more direct estimate of the economic impact of immigrants would require a cross section of labor markets, each receiving immigrants in different proportions to the existing population. But a single cross section of cities may be insufficient. Immigrants, as I will show, sought particular labor markets that paid high wages. With city-level observations for two cross sections one can estimate a difference equation that gets around part of the simultaneity problem. Ironically, the same data that both Douglas and Rees used to construct their nominal wage series are precisely those that contain the type of observations needed and used in this study.

Data on hourly and weekly wages for particular occupations and industries by city are available for much of the period of interest, although they are not uniform across the entire period. For the 1890–1907 period there are the Bu-

reau of Labor Statistics (BLS) wages and hours series for nonunionized employees that were used by Paul Douglas and Albert Rees, among others. As many as one hundred cities were surveyed for each of about twenty occupations, with information on hourly earnings given annually. For the 1907–23 period the BLS wages and hours series covers unionized workers in thirteen occupations across sixty-six cities.

In the data from 1890 to 1907, two groups of occupations have been selected for study. The first includes four types of laborers—working in foundries, by contract on streets and sewers, in municipal street and sewer work, and in the building trades, as common laborers and as hod carriers. A second group includes skilled workers—painters, bricklayers, plasterers, plumbers, and machinists working in foundries and machine shops. The series through 1903 is contained in the *Nineteenth Annual Report* (U.S. Commission of Labor 1905) and is continued through 1907 in the subsequent BLS wages and hours series, although with a reduced number of cities. After 1907 the series covers only unionized employees by occupation. In the data from 1907 to 1923 there are only skilled workers and their helpers—bricklayers, carpenters, wiremen and their helpers, painters, steamfitters and their helpers, and iron finishers and their helpers. Both sets of data—those for the nonunionized sample and the unionized—contain hourly wages by year and occupation for a large number of cities. That for the nonunionized group contains the number of workers in the occupation-city cell, whereas that for the unionized group does not.

Among the building tradesmen, laborers had about the same proportion of new and recent immigrants as did the entire goods-producing labor force. Painters and masons, however, were disproportionately native born (see table 7.5), although a large fraction of the masons were from older immigrants groups, such as Germans. Among street and sewer workers 22 percent were the new and recent immigrants, whereas only 12.2 percent of all in the entire goods-producing sector were, yielding a relative proportion of 1.8.[35]

City-level earnings data can also be found in the censuses of manufacturing for 1899, 1904, 1909, and 1914. The data in this source are by industry, not occupation. All employees, not just adult males, are covered, although for some of the industries men were the bulk of the labor force. Annual earnings per production workers, not hourly wages, are available for each of the four years considered.

Four industries—men's clothing, printing and publishing, bread and bakery products, and foundries—have been chosen to span the various characteristics of workers and products. The most serious constraint on the choice of industries was that the number of cities represented had to be substantial, and not many industries were found in a large enough sample of cities. Further, the

35. The data on street and sewer workers are not included in table 7.5. Foreign-born workers were 49.4 percent of all street laborers, the new immigrants were 30.5 percent, and the new and recent immigrants were 22.0 percent.

choice of industries was governed by the skills and ethnic composition of workers. The nature of the product, as will be apparent soon, was also a consideration.

Men's clothing hired immigrant labor to a very large extent, particularly tailors who came to America with training and who worked in the production of coats that were traded nationally. Printing and publishing, at the other end of the spectrum, hired more highly educated laborers and very few immigrants—only 2 percent of its workforce were new and recent immigrants (table 7.5). The product was often locally consumed newspapers. Bread and other bakery products, like men's clothing, had large numbers of immigrants among its workers and was found in virtually every city, and like printing and publishing, its product was generally nontraded. Foundries hired a mixture of skills and produced a nationally traded good. Although foundry laborers were disproportionately new and recent immigrants, few machinists were.

The impact of immigrants on the wages of workers already in an industry depends on the complementarity versus substitutability between the two laboring groups in the production function. It also depends on how much immigrants increase the demand for the good produced by the industry. Immigrants increase the demand for many types of goods, but their impact on local wages is greater and more positive if these goods are produced locally. In terms of the two main determinants of the impact of immigration on wages, the four industries considered here can be categorized using the following matrix:

	Immigrants as a Percentage of the Labor Force	
	Below Average	Above Average
Product Demand		
Local	Printing	Bakeries
National	Foundries	Clothing

7.3.3 The Economic Impact of Immigration on Local Labor Markets

The objective of this section is to estimate the impact of immigration on the wage outcomes of native-born workers, in part to assess whether immigration restriction was motivated by economic concerns. Immigration to particular cities, like that to particular countries, was not exogenous. Rather, immigrants went to cities that had high wages. Thus a simple cross-sectional regression of city-level wages on the percentage of immigrants yields a strong positive coefficient, as is apparent in the regression coefficients in table 7.7. But rather than indicating that immigrants caused wages to increase, the result suggests that immigrants sought out labor markets with high wages.

Certain cities could have had higher demand curves for less-skilled labor than did others. If this higher demand were a permanent feature of the city, as opposed to one that was transitory, there is a simple way around simultaneity.

Table 7.7 **Cross-sectional Relationship between Immigrant Flows and City Wages**

A. Regression of hourly wages on fraction of immigrants, by city for various occupations, 1890–1910

Occupations	Using 1893 Wage, Elasticity[a]	*N*	Using 1903 Wage, Elasticity[a]	*N*
Laborers and hod carriers	0.094	192	0.135	192
Building trades and machinists	0.101	278	0.082	278

B. Regression of annual earnings on fraction of immigrants, by city for various industries, 1900–1910

Industries	Using 1904 Wage, Elasticity[a]	*N*
Bakeries	0.126	108
Clothing	0.125	48
Foundries	0.078	101
Printing	0.092	105

Sources: By occupation: U.S. Commissioner of Labor 1905; by industry: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures,* 1904; population: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population,* 1890–1920.

Note: Fraction of immigrants = [foreign born in $(t + 10)$ − foreign born in t]/[average population from t to $(t + 10)$].

[a]The elasticities are evaluated at the means from a regression of the wage in the year given on the percentage of the city population that was immigrant, where immigrant = (foreign born in year $t + 10$) − (foreign born in year t). The regressions are weighted by the number of workers in each occupation-city cell or in each city-industry cell. When the 1893 wage is used, the percentage immigrant is for 1890 to 1900; when the 1903 (or 1904) wage is used, the percentage immigrant is for 1900 to 1910.

The method is to estimate a difference equation. The difference in the (log of) wages for a group of workers is regressed on the difference in the percentage of the population (or the labor force) that is immigrant. The procedure, which estimates a fixed-effect model, assumes that, for each city i, the (log) wage at time t, (w_{it}), is a function of the percentage foreign born, (F_{it}), and an error term consisting of a portion that may be correlated with F_{it}, ε_i or the fixed effect, and a portion that is not, (μ_{it}):

$$\ln(w_{it}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (F_{it}) + \varepsilon_i + \mu_{it}. \tag{1}$$

If equation (1) were estimated, the coefficient of interest, $\hat{\beta}_1$, would be biased because cities that have positive demand shocks will have both high wages and a high percentage foreign born. By first differencing (and dropping the i subscripts) we get

$$\ln(w_{t+j}/w_t) = \beta_1 (F_{t+j} - F_t) + (\mu_{t+j} + \mu_t), \tag{2}$$

$$\text{that is, } \Delta \ln w_{t+j} = \beta_1 \Delta F_{t+j} + \Delta\mu_{t+j}$$

(see Altonji and Card 1991 for the functional form derivation).[36] Note that $\hat{\beta}_1$, which under the assumptions is now unbiased, is the percentage change in the wage of a particular group (e.g., artisans, laborers, workers in some industry) in response to a percentage point change in the proportion of the population (or labor force) that is foreign born.

Because immigrants can increase the demand for particular products and thus the labor that produces them, as well as compete with or complement other labor, the sign of β_1 is ambiguous a priori. If the group in question were unskilled labor and if the foreign born were disproportionately unskilled, then β_1 could be less than or equal to zero. If the reference group were skilled labor, however, β_1 could be positive.[37]

In addition to the potential biases already mentioned is the possibility that labor, either native-born or prior immigrant workers, migrates from cities in which recent immigrants landed. This bias would result if recent immigrants drive away previous workers by reducing wages, increasing the price of housing, or through a general dislike of the newer immigrant groups. Such groups would then decrease wages in other cities that had fewer immigrants. If mobile workers tend to equalize wages across cities, the econometrician's data would show little or no effect when there was a negative effect for all workers of that skill level.[38] "Spillovers" of this type bias β_1 toward zero. The facts for the period under consideration, however, do not suggest that native-born and already settled foreign-born workers were moving away from areas to which recent immigrants went in the 1900 to 1910 period. Rather, they were moving in. Although spillover effects could still bias the relevant coefficient to zero, there is no evidence that the bias was large.[39]

36. If the error term also consisted of a time-dependent component, not orthogonal to F_t, it would not be first differenced away and could serve to bias the coefficient. Transitory demand shocks would be such a factor and would serve to upwardly bias β_1.

37. There are two cases, one each for skilled and unskilled labor. Altonji and Card (1991) present the unskilled case. The skilled case is easily derived from their model and is given by

$$\Delta \log w_s = \{\lambda_s[(1-\alpha)/(1-a)] + \eta_{su}\lambda_u(\alpha/a)\}/\{[\eta_{su}\eta_{us}/(\varepsilon_u - \eta_{uu})] - (\varepsilon_s - \eta_{ss})\}\ \Delta I/P,$$

where s = skilled labor, u = unskilled labor, a = proportion of population that is unskilled, α = proportion of immigrants who are unskilled, η = the usual elasticities of substitution, ε = the usual supply elasticities, I = immigrants, P = population, and $0 \leq \lambda \leq 1$. The λ's are a function of the degree to which the product is internally or externally consumed. To the extent it is consumed by residents of the local labor market, the positive impact of immigration on wages is enhanced. Note that if η_{su} is positive, that is, the inputs are relative substitutes, the effect of immigrants on the wages of the reference group must be ≤ 0. Only if the inputs are relative complements could the impact of immigration on the wages of the reference group be positive. Because immigrants were disproportionately unskilled, the impact of their increase on the wages of the unskilled would have to be nonpositive. But there is reason to view the skilled and unskilled as complementary, at least in the short run. If the goods produced by the skilled (e.g., housing) are demanded by immigrants, the wages of the skilled could rise with increased immigration.

38. The result will also hold if the effect were to increase wages in occupations having workers complementary to immigrants.

39. See, for example, Borjas, Freeman, and Katz 1992 on estimating the economic impact of immigrants in a framework that attempts to circumvent the spillover problem.

The estimates of equation (2) are presented in table 7.8 for the nonunion occupation sample (1890–1907), the union occupation sample (1907–23), and the industry sample (1899–1914). The data for the percentage foreign born from the census are often, but not always, for the nearest census date. In most cases the impact of immigration is allowed to take effect over several years (e.g., the equation for the difference in the wage from 1890 to 1903 uses population data for 1890 and 1900).

The estimates of the impact of immigrants on the wages of laborers are generally negative and often substantial, particularly for the period extending into the twentieth century. Only the artisan sample covers both the 1890–1907 and the 1907–23 periods, and it shows an increase in magnitude of the effect with time. In general, a 1-percentage-point increase in the population share that was foreign born decreased wages by about 1 to 1.5 percent.[40]

Interestingly, the negative effects of immigration on the wages of both the unskilled and skilled occupations for the 1890–1903 (or 1907) period are not found for the 1890–97 period.[41] Wages appear extremely rigid during the period of the 1890s depression and only began to respond to the various labor market shocks with the large change in prices after 1898. Thus when the literacy test came before Congress for the first and second times (1897 and 1898), capital may not yet have benefited from the wage effects of immigration, but labor was still reeling from unemployment. By 1904, when capital had swung to the pro-immigration, antiliteracy test camp, the wage effects were, in some cases, quite strong.

One may question the estimates showing substantial negative effects of immigrant workers on the wages of artisans. Immigrant groups, particularly of the newer variety, were uncommon in several of the artisan trades. Yet they may have been a threat to the wages and employment of many artisan groups.[42]

40. The union sample uses weekly rather than hourly wages, while the nonunion sample uses hourly wages. In the nonunion sample, hourly wages are given, whereas the union sample has weekly wages for a union contract and the contract hours for the week. Regressions using the implied hourly wage do not yield coefficients that differ much from those using the weekly wage for the union sample, but the standard errors are larger.

The estimates for the impact of immigration on wages are approximately equal to those of Altonji and Card (1991) for the less-educated native-born group. Comparisons between the two sets of estimates, however, must be adjusted for slight differences in variable definition. My estimates use foreign born as a percentage of the total population, whereas they use foreign born as a percentage of the labor force.

41. Note that the population data exist only for 1890 and 1900, but this is not the reason for the differences between the 1890–1903 regressions and those for 1890–97. The real reason is to be found in the stickiness of wages, which may have been the single most important factor giving rise to a large unemployment in the 1890s. A significant fraction of the cities had no change in nominal wages from 1890 to 1897, but wages changed rapidly in the face of price changes after 1897.

42. One possible bias concerns the convergence of wages across cities. If immigrants went to cities with initially high wages but wages were converging in the absence of immigration, a spurious relationship could be found between the wage change and the change in the percentage foreign born. To test for this, I first checked the data for wage convergence and next added the initial wage in the equation. For 1890–1903 there was no wage convergence in the sample cities. For 1907–23

Table 7.8 **Percentage Change in Wages with a Percentage Point Change in the Proportion of Foreign Born: City-Level Observations by Occupation or Industry, 1890 to 1914**

	β	t-Statistics	*N*
By occupation, nonunion,[a] hourly wage			
Laborers[b]			
1890 to 1897	−0.010	(−0.053)	192
1890 to 1903	−1.02	(−2.98)	192
1890 to 1907	−1.60	(−3.39)	160
Artisans[c]			
1890 to 1897	0.679	(2.92)	278
1890 to 1903	−0.539	(−1.88)	278
1890 to 1907	−0.145	(−0.33)	162
By occupation, union,[a] weekly wage			
Artisans[c]			
1907 to 1915	−1.44	(−3.27)	223
1909 to 1915	−1.20	(−3.58)	223
1907 to 1923	−1.60	(−2.81)	225
1909 to 1923	−1.41	(−2.65)	225
By industry,[a] annual wage			
1899 to 1914			
Bread and bakery products	0.418	(0.69)	107
Clothing, men's[d]	−3.06	(−2.45)	27
Foundry	−0.829	(−1.92)	91
Printing and publishing	0.764	(1.47)	104

Sources: By occupation, nonunion: 1890–1903, U.S. Commissioner of Labor 1905; 1907, Department of Commerce and Labor 1908. By occupation, union: data provided by Shawn Kantor, from U.S. Department of Labor, 1907–23. By industry: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Manufactures,* 1899–1914. Population: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Population,* 1890–1920.

Notes: Regressions are estimated for each group of occupations or each industry. The dependent variable is the difference in the log of wages between the end and beginning years. Percentage foreign born is (foreign born)/(total population). All regressions have been weighted by the average number of sample workers in the interval, except those for the union sample, where the weights are the log of city population in 1910. The growth rate of the population (difference in the log of the population between the end and beginning years) is also included as an independent variable in the regressions.

[a]The change in the percentage foreign born is for 1890–1900 for the nonunion occupation data and for 1910–20 for the unionized occupation data. That for industry uses 1900–1910.

[b]Laborers include laborers in building trades, in foundries, and in streets and sewer work (municipal city and contract) and hod carriers.

[c]Nonunion artisans include building tradesmen (bricklayers, carpenters, painters, plasterers, and plumbers) and machinists in foundries. Union artisans include bricklayers, carpenters, wiremen, painters, steamfitters, and structural-iron workers.

[d]Excludes firms that do not remain in the sample to 1919 and the observation for New York City.

That they were perceived as a threat is clear in several labor union journals of the time. A mason in New York, for example, complained in 1906 that "emigrants come [to New York City] with the intention of making big money. . . . By their killing work they drive down the American bricklayer, for if he does not follow suit he will have to join the great army of unemployed brickies that are now marching through this wonderful state" (Bricklayers and Masons International Union, September 1906).

The industry results conform to the predictions regarding the roles of labor composition and product demand. In men's clothing, which contained a large proportion of immigrants, wages were distinctly depressed in cities having an increase from 1899 to 1909 in the percentage of their populations that was foreign born. The decrease is substantial: a 1-percentage-point increase in the fraction of the city's population that was foreign born decreased wages by about 1.5 to 3 percent. Foundries also show negative coefficients. Because foundries hired both skilled (native) and unskilled (foreign-born) workers (see table 7.5), the results are even more supportive of the view that immigration severely depressed the wages of less-skilled labor.

The other two industries considered show small, generally insignificant, if not positive, coefficients. The absence of a negative effect in printing and publishing, indeed the presence of a positive effect, should not be surprising. Most printing establishments employed skilled and native-born labor and produced a locally consumed good the demand for which would have risen with immigration.[43] The small, positive, but always statistically insignificant effects of immigration on the wages of workers in bakeries may, as in the printing and publishing case, be due to the positive demand effect of immigration on a locally consumed good. Bread was, and is, the staff of life, but was even more so for immigrant and poor populations in America.[44]

It should be noted that the generally negative impact of immigration on the wages of both lower-skilled and higher-skilled workers could not be caused by the simple addition to the working population of lower-waged workers. The mean wage is no more than a simple average of the wages of native-born and

(the union sample) there was wage convergence, but the addition of the initial wage for the subperiods in table 7.8 left unchanged the magnitude and significance of the coefficient on the change in the percentage foreign born.

43. The largest positive effect would occur in an industry hiring both skilled and unskilled (or native and immigrant) labor in which the two types of labor are complementary and the good is locally consumed in its entirety, if the wages of only the skilled workers were considered. The data, however, consist of a labor force–weighted average of the wages of all workers in the industry.

44. In a simple model of local labor markets the nature of product demand alone cannot generate a positive impact of immigration on wages; one needs complementarity of demand between immigrants and the labor in the occupation or industry. In the case of printing and publishing there were probably both effects. In the case of bakeries it is less likely that both effects operated, and thus the existence of a positive coefficient is curious. Even if the wages of (skilled) labor hired by an industry were unaffected by the increase in (primarily unskilled) immigrants, the coefficient would be zero, not positive. See, for example, Altonji and Card 1991.

foreign-born workers. If immigrants earned less than natives by virtue of their lack of skill or by dint of labor market discrimination, then the mean wage would have decreased as foreign-born workers increased. But the depressing impact of the foreign born on wages in the difference regressions is found even for the artisan group, which included very few of the new and recently arrived foreign born (see table 7.5). The difference in wages between immigrants and natives in the same occupation would have to have been extremely high to account for the large negative impact of immigration on wages in general and even for those occupations in which the foreign born were a large percentage.

7.3.4 Explaining the 1915 Vote to Override Wilson's Veto

The wage effect of the foreign born suggests a role for economic forces in the movement to restrict immigration. The underlying model is one in which constituents more vigorously urge their representatives to vote for restriction (that is, to pass the literacy test or to override a presidential veto) when the increase in wages is lower (or the decrease in wages is greater). The foreign born may be the cause of the wage change, or they may be the scapegoats for other economic influences. But at the same time, if a large enough fraction of the constituents were themselves foreign born, they would probably urge their representatives to vote against restriction. Table 7.9 explores these two factors in determining the House vote in 1915 on the override of President Wilson's first veto of the literacy test. The data are by city for the union-occupation sample, whereas the votes are by congressional district. I have matched the cities to the district in the 63d Congress. For those cities covering more than one congressional district, the dependent variable is the fraction of representatives who voted to override the veto. The estimation is performed for all city-occupation observations in the union data set and for the non-South subset as well. Southern cities were typically small and voted overwhelmingly to override Wilson's veto.

In both samples (all cities and the non-South) an increase in the wage by occupation, from 1907 to 1915, decreased the proportion of votes for the override. A vote for the override was a vote for closing immigration; thus the lower the wage increase, the more support for closing immigration. Increasing the wage change by one standard deviation in the non-South sample (a 13 percent increase) would have decreased the percentage voting against open immigration by 12 percentage points. The percentage foreign born in the city was an even more powerful determinant of the vote. The proportion of foreign born is divided into four groups to evenly divide the cities. In the non-South group, however, very few cities are in the smallest class of percentage foreign born. With the exception of these few small cities, increasing the percentage foreign born would decrease the probability of voting against the override by a substantial amount. When the foreign born were about 30 percent of the total population, almost all representatives voted against the override, given the mean values for all other variables in the non-South sample.

Table 7.9 **Explaining the 1915 House Vote on the Literacy Test**

	All Cities		Non-South		Means	
	$\hat{\beta}$	s.e.	$\hat{\beta}$	s.e.	All	Non-South
Dependent variable: vote to override presidential veto[a]					0.402[b]	0.344
Log (population$_{1910}$)	−0.114	(0.034)	−0.0552	(0.036)	12.6	12.9
$(FB_{1920} - FB_{1910})/FB_{1910}$[c]	0.268	(0.104)	−0.0480	(0.122)	0.082	0.088
Proportion of foreign born in population[d]						
1 if [0, .1)	0.442	(0.120)	0.124	(0.206)	0.287	0.029
1 if [.1, .2)	0.265	(0.110)	0.402	(0.114)	0.244	0.271
1 if [.2, .3)	0.256	(0.099)	0.336	(0.0902)	0.321	0.479
Log (wage$_{1915}$/wage$_{1907}$)[e]	−0.461	(0.219)	−0.913	(0.256)	0.179	0.173
Proportion in political party[f]						
Republican	0.181	(0.080)	0.210	(0.074)	0.248	0.354
Third party[g]	0.492	(0.123)	0.436	(0.120)	0.065	0.096
Constant	1.52	(0.491)	0.799	(0.517)		
R^2	0.25		0.31			
N	209		140			

Sources: Voting data from *Congressional Record* 1915; wage data from Shawn Kantor, from U.S. Department of Labor, 1907–23.

Note: Also included is a dummy variable for the city of Boston, home of the Immigration Restriction League.

[a]A vote to override the presidential veto (1 = vote to override) was a vote for immigration restriction. Most cities in the sample contain one congressional district, but almost all of the large cities contain several. A split vote was treated as the fraction voting for the override. Absent congressmen who "paired" (in this case pairs were two to one) were allocated on the basis of their stated preference for or against the override. There were very few congressmen absent for this vote; see table 7.1.

[b]The percentage voting to override the veto is considerably smaller in this sample than in the nation as a whole because urban representatives voted more overwhelmingly against immigration restriction than did those from rural America.

[c]FB = foreign born.

[d]Cities with more than 30 percent foreign born are the omitted class. Foreign born is as of the 1920 census. Because immigration was very low after 1914 to the end of World War I, the 1920 census figure most closely reflects the composition of cities in 1915, the year of the vote.

[e]The wage change is by city for the union occupations described in the notes to table 7.8. There can be several observations per city, depending on the number of occupations in the sample.

[f]Democrat is the omitted political party. In cities having more than one congressional district, these variables are the proportion of each political party in all the districts in the city. Thus these are not true dummy variables, although few cities have representatives from different parties.

[g]Third parties include Progressive and Progressive Republican.

The estimation underscores the critical importance of reinforcing flows of immigration in building and maintaining the open immigrant vote. Flows that were reinforcing increased the fraction of foreign born to the critical level needed to produce votes against overriding the veto. Flows that diluted, however, raised the proportion of foreign born in the intermediate range (10 to 30 percent), but not to the higher level (greater than 30 percent) required to keep the restrictionist forces at bay. Recall that flows were reinforcing from 1900 to

1910 but were diluting from 1910 to 1920. Had the distribution of percentage foreign born been at its 1910 level, rather than the level recorded by 1920, the vote for restriction would have been reduced by about one-third in the sample cities.[45] Note, as well, the importance of the (log of) 1910 population variable. The greater the total population, the lower is the vote to override; that is, the greater is the expressed sentiment for open immigration. The reason complements that on the percentage foreign born. With a greater population there is more room for minorities, segregated in enclaves, to gain a representative.

7.4 Summary and Conclusions

The curtailment of immigration, codified in the 1921 Emergency Quota Act and in subsequent laws culminating in the National Origins Act, was heralded for twenty-five years. That immigration was not restricted from sometime in the mid-1890s to World War I was the result of shifting political interests, generally favorable economic times, and a lot of good luck for Europe's poor and oppressed.

Restrictive legislation almost became law in 1897 and again in 1898, but sentiment to regulate immigration from Europe then abated. An economic recovery turned the interests of capital around, and the flood of immigrants of the early 1900s reinforced pro-immigration constituencies in various big-city districts. But the rest of America moved toward restriction.

Much of rural America was prorestriction from the 1897 vote. But the midsection of the nation—for example, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Nebraska—was deeply divided on the issue, as was much of the far West. The South switched sides, certainly by the 1906 vote, joining much of rural America in its opposition to unrestricted immigration. The big cities moved strongly into the pro-immigration camp as their ever-increasing foreign-born constituency gained the vote or influenced the vote in other ways. In most other urban and industrial centers, workers experienced downward pressure on wages from the new immigrants but not the political pressure from the vast numbers that clustered in the big-city districts. Eventually much of the rural midsection moved against unregulated immigration, as did most of the smaller and midsized cities. Capital maintained its pro-immigration stance to the bitter end, when all but the big-city vote went to the anti-immigrant camp.

This study has looked primarily at urban votes and the twin forces of economics and demography in the drive for immigration restriction. Although a majority of the American population still lived in rural areas in 1910, the battle for immigration restriction was fought primarily in the cities, both large and

45. Using the 1910 figures, 43 percent of the non-South cities (actually city-occupation observations) had percentage foreign born greater than 30 percent, but only 22 percent did using the 1920 figures. Multiplying the percentages in the dummy foreign-born categories by the coefficients in table 7.9 and differencing yields an increase of 0.0785 from 1910 to 1920 for the non-South sample. The 1915 vote in the non-South urban sample is 0.344. If the 1910 percentage foreign born data were used, the vote would have been 0.266, or 30 percent less.

small. Even for rural Americans, the well-being of those in the cities may have been the litmus test for immigration restriction. Pro-immigration support eventually faded in the midsection of America, the far West, and all but the largest cities.

A regime change was inevitable.[46] From the early 1900s to 1917 it was just a matter of waiting for some exogenous force—an economic downturn, a war, a rash of labor unrest—to close the door. That 17 million slipped through from 1897 is the miracle.

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46. See Benhabib 1992 for a theoretical model of why regime changes may be inevitable and what might explain the 1965 regime change (and why there could be another quite soon). Immigration restriction cycles, according to Benhabib's model, are rooted in a median-voter model with wealth accumulation. If the median voter is rich in capital, immigration will be open. When the median voter becomes poor in capital, immigration will be restricted by capital (human and/or physical).

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