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The Immigrant vs. The Foreigner, 1919.

LECTURE BY RABBI ABBA H. SILVER, ON "THE
IMMIGRANT VS THE FOREIGNER," AT THE INDUS-
TRIAL ASSOCIATION OF CLEVELAND, HOTEL
OLMSTED, CLEVELAND, OHIO, DECEMBER 16, 1919.

The war, I believe, has been helpful in many ways, and in one way especially, in that it has made the nations of the world more self-conscious than heretofore. The peoples of the earth have become conscious of their past, their innate capacities for greatness, and their great promises for the future. That is a very salutary thing. A nation does great things only as long as it is conscious of its own greatness.

But alongside of that there has come a certain unwholesome over-emphasis of nationalism. Some nations have developed what I choose to call the spirit of tribalism, and the cry resounds in many lands today, "Poland for the Poles, Serbia for the Serb, Bohemia for the Czech, England for the Englishman."

Now, an echo of that same tribal spirit has been heard on our own shores. To be sure, the great majority of the American people has gained out of this war a greater sympathy for the diverse elements in our national life, a greater tolerance, and a greater liberalism. But there is a small group, closely knit and vociferous, that has gained out of this war nothing but a narrow kind of patriot-

ism, a sort of chauvinism, whose main characteristic is suspicion of the immigrant and the stranger, and whose dominant tone is one of supreme Anglo-Saxon arrogance.

Now, this group greatly laments the fact that the American nation is unlike other nations, that it has no racial unity. They confess that we have made a mess of our national life; we have lost that fine unity that characterized America a century ago. And if I were to summarize their contentions concerning the immigrant, I would say they maintain that the immigrant of today is of an inferior intellectual type compared to the immigrant of the '30's or the '40's or the '50's; that he therefore lowers the intellectual level of the electorate; that the immigrant of today coming from lands of oppression has no sympathy for our free institutions, and therefore becomes the main source of unrest and strife and revolution; that the immigrant refuses to be Americanized; that he owes a double allegiance; that coming here in vast hordes he thwarts our fine experiment in democracy; that the immigrant coming here in vast numbers lowers the standard of American life by glutting our labor market, and that he hinders industrial progress because he can not be adequately unionized, being in the main an unskilled laborer.

The solution which these tribal Americans offer for this sad state of affairs is simply this: restrict immigration at once; shut down on immigration, and then suppress at once all foreign languages, all foreign news-

papers, and throw all the immigrants into one mold and quickly turn them out Americans.

Now, I am not going to hold a brief this evening for the immigrants. That has already been done more competently and more adequately than I can hope to do by students of note and of conscience. Any man the axlw of whose mind has not been bolted by the bars of prejudice, any man who has given the subject any study, must acknowledge the fact that the immigrant has not bwered the standard of living, that he has not hindered but advanced the cause of industrial progress, that he is not inferior in type to the immigrant of the '30~~h~~, the '40's and the '50's. He is just as poor in possessions and just as rich in promise as the early immigrant; that he responds most readily to every intelligent agency for Americanization; that he owes no double allegiance; and that he has not thwarted our experiment in industrial democracy. And were proof of his loyalty needed in this last crisis, the war has produced theproof. If the immigrant needed vindication this war has completely and superbly vindicated him. If the immigrant needed justification this war has supremely justified him.

I venture to say that no nation, not even France, that first felt the inundation of German aggression, responded so wholeheartedly, so spontaneously to the challenge of the moment than did this rainbow of nations, this gem of a hundred glittering racial facets--the American nation. And why? Because each group fought

in this war in the spirit, the urge and the press of a great and glorious past, and in the promise of a great future.

The Greek felt in this war the spirit of Leonidas, the Italian caught the spirit of Garibaldi again expressing itself in glory, and the Pole the spirit of Kosciuszko, the Irishman felt the impact of the spirit of Emmet and the Jew the spirit of the Maccabees. Did you read during the war the daily list of casualties? Did you read the names of those who were singled out for honor and distinction, and did you catch the full significance of those names? Those names spoke of the distant and storied Hellenes, of the vast steppes of Russia, of the fens and crags of Scotland. These names spoke of the Dane and the Norse and the Italian and the Slav and the Slovak. These names told the story of a hundred peoples welded together by the heat of one powerful emotion, of a hundred tongues blended into one.

You recall the beautiful story of the bible, when the nations of the earth became presumptuous and set about building the Tower of Babel. God took their language and confused them so that each one spoke a speech unknown to his fellow man. In this war when the children of men set about to build not a tower of Babel but a temple of humanity in a spirit of humility and sacrifice, God took their hundred tongues and speeches and by wonderful spiritual alchemy welded them into one so that

all of them spoke one language--the language of democracy.

My friends the tribal Americans lament the fact that we are not a homogenous group, that we are not a racial unity. But that to my mind is the very glory and triumph of American life. The world needed an experiment, an experiment not alone in democracy but in real universalism, in real cosmopolitanism, in real humanity; and so by the act of providence this nation was fashioned and formed. It was to show to the world that the things that divide man from man--the racial and national and religious divisions--may all be transcended by one great hope and by one great ideal. The world needed a proving ground where the new hopes and the struggling ideas of humanity may have a chance to realize themselves, and so America became the proving ground for the hopes of the world.

We are unlike other nations and we shall by the grace of God continue to be unlike them, for we are all of them combined; we are their hopes and their dreams and their passions and their genius; we are what they aspire to be and cannot be. God took the strands and threads of all the world and wove a new tapestry after a pattern of sublime beauty. America is a mosaic made up of many blocks of many sizes and shapes and colors, but all fashioned into one beautiful pattern, the pattern of real democracy.

America is an experiment not in racial unity but in spiritual unity, and that is the sublime glory of American life. That is why an ideal such as the League of Nations had to spring from the soil of America. I do not mean

necessarily this league of nations which is now being considered, but a league of nations. Other peoples in other lands may speak of it derisively, as a vision and a dream of dreamers, as an impractical thing; but we say unto them it is practical, it can work because it has worked in our own workshop in this land of experimentation. And every ideal of tomorrow, every ideal that sets as its aim to destroy the lines of demarcation between man and man and groups of men, must of necessity emanate from the soul of America because it is here that we are experimenting with them.

So that the solution which these tribal Americans offer is to my mind a very faulty solution because their premise is wrong--restrict immigration. Immigration should be restricted only as an economic expediency. When it becomes necessary for the sake of protecting our own people to restrict immigration, then it becomes a moral duty so to do. Immigration should be restricted against those who bring to our shores nothing but hate in their hearts. America is not in duty bound to become the receptacle for all the scum of Europe, but we are not going to surrender, because we may be for the moment a little nervous, the sacred prestige, the sacred privilege of being humanity's sanctuary, the refuge for all the denied, the deprived and the oppressed of Europe, a place by God fashioned where men can come and make new lives out of old and live free lives as God meant them to live.

And their other contention, to suppress foreign

language and foreign newspapers, is to my mind also a faulty one. Not because I am an enthusiast or an advocate of foreign languages or foreign newspapers, but because the suppression of these would hinder, to my mind, the cause of real Americanization. When you suppress a foreign newspaper you are not alone putting the older immigrant, who is too old to gain a reading knowledge of English, into a prisonhouse of ignorance, shutting off moral avenues of information, making him unhappy in a land of freedom, but you are actually destroying the best and immediate agency for Americanization. This older immigrant must be reached, he must be educated, he must be taught the institutions of our land, our standard of living, our ways of thinking. How are you going to teach him these things if you destroy the only channel for imparting this information to him--his newspaper? But beside that the suppression of foreign languages will bring, to my mind, real tragedy into the lives of millions of our immigrants. You will help to widen the gap between father and child; you will help to destroy the authority and the discipline of a home by casting contempt and frowning upon the language which the father and mother speak. The reason that the immigrant groups in our larger cities supply so many of the gangsters and the thugs is because the rising generation, the children of the immigrants, hold their parents in comparative contempt. They cannot go to them for counsel and advice. The authority of the home has been destroyed, and so the child seeks companion-

ship in the street. And when you continue to frown upon the language which the father and mother speak, and when you continue to frown upon their habits and their traditions, you are confirming the child in his attitude of contempt for his parents, and you are helping to make criminals of the children of immigrants.

I am afraid that in our desire for Americanization we have become victims of our great and general failing--we are too hasty; we have a passion of immediacy, for doing things quickly. Well, you cannot Americanize people by quick-lunch methods. Just because the child of an immigrant can prattle English and parade in American dress and visit moving picture palaces and acquire a voracious taste for chewing-gum is no evidence at all that that child has been completely Americanized. Americanization must not be a thing of externalities. You do not wish to white-wash all immigrants. You do not wish to create a sameness and a monotony to drive them all into one preconceived mold. You do not wish to strip them of all their national and racial qualities of mind, their culture, their tradition, their habits--things which they have brought with them from lands much older than ours, and from civilizations much older than ours. To do that would mean that we did have a definite type of an American and a definite type of an American people.

The American, to my mind, is still in the process of becoming, and the American people is still in the melting pot being fused and fashioned by the hand

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of destiny. The American will in decades and generations, perhaps in centuries to come, emerge as the fusing and the blending, the summary of all these vast racial and national elements that were poured into our American life.

We must not become the slaves of immediacy. I am reminded of a similar movement that took place two centuries ago in Russia. Russia, as you remember, was a backward state of Europe. For three centuries it had been under the influence of the Asiatic Mongols, and there was very little contact between western Europe and Russia. Peter the Great visited western Europe and came back with an intense admiration and passion for all things European--style, language, habits of conduct; and he set about a program of Europeanization just as we are setting about on a program of Americanization, and the method which he adopted suffered also from this blight of immediacy. He thought he could take two hundred millions of people and by the work of a few years make them like the Frenchman or the Englishman that had enjoyed civilization for centuries. The Russian of his day wore long beards and mustaches and long kaftans, survivals of Asiatic influence. And so Peter in his enthusiasm got a few of his men and gave them each a pair of scissors and stationed them at the entrance to his palace, and every nobleman that appeared that was quickly subjected to a process of beard-shortening and garment-shortening, and a tax was placed upon beards in the empire,--so much per inch or so much per foot, as the case may have been. Peter thought that he solved the

problem of Europeanization simply by changing the external appearances of his subjects. But he had not. It took Russia three centuries to approach the standard of western European civilization, and it has not arrived there yet.

Our program of Americanization must be more deliberate and thorough, and to do that we must have a philosophy of American life. Our system of education must not be built up for an imaginary Anglo-Saxon population. We must not forget that there are thirteen and one-half millions of immigrants in the United States, and thirteen millions more who are the children of immigrants. We must not forget that half of the school children in Cleveland come from homes where a foreign language is spoken; and we must not forget that there is a radical difference between the immigrant and the foreigner.

The immigrant is one who has not yet completely adjusted himself to American institutions but has a desire to do so. That man is a potential American the minute he sets foot on American soil. The foreigner is one that has not yet completely adjusted himself to American ideals and has no desire to do so. He is a foreigner, even if he happens to be born in America (applause). An immigrant who speaks English brokenly but works honestly and raises his children into fine manhood and womanhood, with a love and a reverence for American ideals and American institutions,--that immigrant is a spiritual kinsman of Lincoln--an American of Americans.

But the man who sees in America only opportunities for cheap exploitation, the man who is a bigot in religion or politics, and a snob in his social relations,--that man is a foreigner to his polished fingertips, even if his ancestors happened to be one of that exclusive lot that came from the Mayflower. For America is not a thing, it is not an aggregate of individuals. It is a holy combination; it is a set of ideals and principles; it is a program of life.

The immigrant is an asset or a liability in American life in proportion to the way we attitudinize ourselves towards him, in the relations which we establish with him.

Take the immigrant as he comes flushed with hope, with ineffaceable ambitions to make good, to strike out on a new trail, and exploit him and throw him into some dirty mining town or steel town and crowd him into some filthy ghetto or tenement district and make him the prey^{of} shyster lawyers and profiteering landlords, and conduct yourself toward him in a spirit of suspicion and hostility and arrogance, and that immigrant will become a liability in American life. He will become the quickest prey and victim to any tantalizing doctrine of social reconstruction.

We have suddenly awakened to the realization that the immigrant falls the easiest prey to any crazy doctrine of economic reconstruction. In my heart I cannot find courage to blame him, knowing the things that he has been subjected to in the past. But take the immigrant as he comes here and give him of yourself and your love,

of your sympathy, of your leadership, of your guidance; educate him, increase and extend his opportunities for self-realization, and that immigrant will become a tremendous asset in American life. I do not mean to say we have to pamper the immigrant. America does not have to pamper or humor anybody, masses or classes, immigrant or native; but I do say that the immigrant needs intelligent and sympathetic leadership, not a brow-beating type of Americanization, but the Americanization that spells not annihilation but a slow and gradual adjustment to American institutions,--the Americanization that means the evoking and the calling forth of all the latent potentialities in the soul of the immigrant; the Americanization that means the co-ordination of all the groups in our national life to work in harmony and in sympathy with one another towards a common goal.

This hasty American, to my mind, is a direct product of our state of mind. We are frightfully nervous; we are being stampeded into an unhealthy kind of chauvinism, the kind that failed in Europe. Now, friends, there is nothing wrong with America. America is absolutely and completely sound. It is our minds that are not sound. We have worked ourselves into a psychology of defeatists; we have become childishly nervous, and there are certain sinister influences that are endeavoring to avail themselves of and utilize our nervousness.

Now, let us not sacrifice the things we purchased with blood and effort in two hundred years in a moment of

blind nervousness. If America is not the promised land, it is certainly the land of greatest promise. Let's you and I try to make real these wonderful promises by courage, by vision, by faith in the ultimate triumph of our democratic institutions.

Sometime ago in the heat and the fury of the war I was asked to define America, and I gave them my definition of America. It has helped me in my work; it has helped me to understand the problems of American life, and to adjust myself to these problems. It is the creed which to my mind the immigrant brings with him to these shores. It is the creed which the real American, who knows and loves democracy at all times, in times of peace or in times of stress, holds sacred, and it is this:

God built Him a continent of glory and filled it with treasures untold;

He studded it with soft flowing fountains, and graced it with long winding streams;

He carpeted it with soft rolling prairies and pillared it with thundering mountains;

He graced it with deep shadowed forests and filled them with song.

Then He called unto a thousand peoples and summoned the bravest among them; they came from the ends of the earth, each bearing a gift and a hope.

The glow of adventure was in their eyes and the glory of hope within their souls.

And out of the bounty of the earth and the labors

men,

Out of the longing of hearts and the prayers
of souls,

Out of the memory of ages and the hopes of the
world, God fashioned a nation in love, blessed it with
a purpose sublime, and called it--America. (Applause).

DISCUSSION

MR. EVANS: I am going to ask just one or
two questions. There is so much of your lecture that I
have enjoyed, and yet there is so much of it that I absol-
utely disagree with, that I can only think of one or two
things on which I would like to have further expression
from you. Inasmuch as America so far has been an absolute
failure in treating the immigrants that we have received
in the past, don't you think it would be a mighty good
idea now to let us deal with those that we have at present
and shut out all others? We have not, according to your
lecture, been able to in any way treat them the way we
ought to treat them. That America is a melting pot there
is no question, and that a very large percentage of the
names on the casualty lists were foreigners. But I also
notice when I read of the crimes that are detrimental to
society that it is always a larger percentage of foreign
names. My point is, don't you think we ought to shut down
on immigration now until we can take care of what we have?

RABBI SILVER: If I have left the impression with you that we have utterly failed in our task of Americanizing the immigrants, I have not succeeded with my talk this evening. That was not my contention nor my intention. We have succeeded marvelously in assimilating vast hordes of immigrants in the last forty and fifty years. I venture to say that there are men and women here within the hearing of my voice who are themselves immigrants or the children of immigrants--men and women who are thoroughly Americanized and thoroughly conscious of their duties and their obligations to America. We have been marvelously successful because of our schools and because of our other agencies for Americanization. What I was advocating and intending to advocate is that we do not sacrifice these agencies that we had in the past for the sake of a hasty kind of Americanization that is narrow-visioned and intolerant, and that will not achieve the ends it sets out to achieve. There is room for improvement, to be sure, in our treatment of the immigrant, and we did, up to the days of the war, improve our agencies.

To be sure, there are foreigners who figure in our list of criminals, but when you take into consideration that twenty-six millions of our ninety-millions are either themselves foreigners or the children of foreigners, it is not surprising that you have a large number of foreign names among the criminals. I think it is a decidedly erroneous contention that the foreigner is responsible for bolshevism in the United States or for industrial unrest.

Let us be honest with ourselves. There is industrial unrest in every part of God's world today. I found it in Egypt this summer, and in Palestine, and the industrial unrest in those countries is not the work of foreigners but of natives; and had we no single foreigner in the United States today, we would still have as a result of the frightful disorganization incident to the war, industrial unrest.

Let's not, in the parlance of the day, "Pass the buck." Let's not shift the responsibility. The leaders of bolshevism in America--the figure-heads are natives of natives. Mr. Debs, to my knowledge, is not a foreigner, nor Scott Nearing, nor John Reed, nor Mr. Williams. Now, why shift the entire responsibility upon the shoulders of foreigners?

My contention was that the foreigner falls the easiest prey to these tantalizing doctrines of social or economic reconstruction, because he has not the avenues of education, of information that the average American has, because he has, perhaps, felt the harder and cruder side of American life more than the average American, and my thought was the way to make him a loyal and devoted American is to reach him by agencies of friendliness and education and opportunity, to show him the beauty and the glory of American life, so that he will be like unto one of us (applause).

MR. EVANS: What I wanted to know is, if America was your workshop, and you had so many of those

people in it as we have right here today, and you have had your trouble with them as we have had, would you not think it proper to shut down employing any more until we had these kind of humanized or naturalized according to our way of doing things, rather than let any more in? Would you or would you not?

RABBI SILVER: I would restrict immigration, as I stated, upon one consideration only--a purely economic consideration. I believe that we can assimilate more immigrants coming to our shores if we have the proper agencies for Americanization. You can Americanize them not only in the school but in the shop. People sometimes ask me, "Why is it these foreigners do not attend our night schools? We have so many night schools for them." Well, I wonder how many of you men and women who work eight hours a day and are pretty tired at the end of the day, would take up, for example, the study of French as a pastime.

MR. EVANS: We have them right here in the Association.

RABBI SILVER: Yes; you have some.

MR. EVANS Five hundred of our number come and study various subjects.

RABBI SILVER: You must remember that the type of man you have in this organization and the type of ~~workmen you have in the shop~~ are men who have ambitions and have hopes and want to climb in life, and want to aspire to higher things. The average immigrant that you get has

not these ambitions. After the day's work is over he is exhausted physically; he is tired out. Now, I am heartily in sympathy with the Americanization classes within the industries, within the shops and factories. We can educate them through our churches; we can educate them through our press; we can educate them in many ways. Instead of shutting down on immigration, let us increase the possibilities of Americanization; let us get as many immigrants as we need or we can stand, and when that is reached, let us shut down on it. (Applause).

MR. WILTON: I want to say a little upon the other side. I am an immigrant. I came from the other side about eleven years ago, and I just want to tell this little story to emphasize the fact that democracy is the real thing, and that America is doing just about all she can for the immigrant. Some seven years ago I returned to my native land. Prior to coming here I was a member of a large bible class. We had then a man that was very familiar with the bible. He was a great bible student, and on account of the exclusiveness of the English clergy he was not permitted to enter the clergy and complete his studies in order to preach the gospel. While I was over there I happened in one day. He didn't know who I was, as I had been away for three and a half or four years, but he spoke to me in regard to the opportunities that America presents to the immigrant. I outlined it as briefly as possible, and he said he would sail for America with me. I said, "You can be sure they will take care of you." However, he had quite a struggle for a

year, but, at last, owing to the fact that there wasn't any exclusiveness in America, within a period of eighteen months after arriving here he was ordained as a minister of the gospel. Two years later the war broke out and his duty called him back home. He has gone back home, but with the realization that America could give him what no other country could (applause).

