

LITERACY IN ONE'S OWN LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXCLUSION OF PARTICULAR GROUPS

The Illiteracy Test Would Exclude Undesirables

On March 31, 1911, Congressman John L. Burnett entered into the Congressional Record an outline summary of the arguments in favor of a literacy test as a means of restricting immigration. His "Brief in Favor of the Illiteracy Test" included this table showing that the literacy test would most strongly affect people from southern and eastern European countries and other countries that export "undesirables" to the United States.

1. It is generally admitted that a large proportion of the aliens coming to us today are not as desirable as the former immigration, which settled the middle and western states.
2. The illiteracy of the various races of immigrants in 1909 was as follows:

Northern and Western Europe (Chiefly Teutonic and Celtic)		Per cent.
Scandinavian.....		0.2
Scotch.....		0.5
Finnish.....		0.5
English.....		0.7
Bohemian and Moravian.....		1.5
Irish.....		1.5
Dutch and Flemish.....		2.6
German.....		6.3
French.....		8.0
Italian (North).....		8.4
Average of above.....		3.5
Southern and Eastern Europe (Chiefly Slavic and Iberic)		Per cent.
Spanish.....		10.6
Magyar.....		10.8
Slovak.....		19.7
Greek.....		26.1
Croatian and Slovenian.....		28.7
Hebrew.....		29.2
Polish.....		39.9
Russian.....		41.7
Portuguese.....		42.3
Bulgarian, Servian, and Montenegrin.....		46.5
Ruthenian.....		51.3
Roumanian.....		52.3
Italian (South).....		56.9
Lithuanian.....		58.2
Average of above.....		42.1
Other Races		Per cent.
Cuban.....		2.4
African (black).....		22.4
Armenian.....		22.5
Japanese.....		28.7
Syrian.....		52.5
Mexican.....		64.6
Average of above.....		42.4

* CHINESE ALREADY EXCLUDED
 From this appears that the illiteracy of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe is over twelve times as great as that of aliens from northwestern Europe, and that the illiteracy of Armenians, Japanese, and Syrians is also high.

In 1909 over three-fifths of the total immigration was of these illiterate races.

- o From all immigration station based on one year 1909
- o These figures reflect the elite and educated immigration from native lands

TABLE 5 Foreign-Born Population, by Country of Birth, 1870-1930

Country of Birth	Total Foreign Born						
	1930	1920	1910	1900	1890	1880	1870
All countries	14,204,149	13,920,692	13,515,886	10,341,276	9,249,560	6,679,943	5,567,229
Northwestern Europe	3,728,050	3,830,094	4,239,067	4,202,683	4,380,752	3,494,484	3,124,638
England	809,563	813,853	877,719	840,513	909,092	664,160	555,046
Scotland	354,323	254,570	261,076	233,524	242,231	170,136	140,835
Wales	60,205	67,066	82,488	93,586	100,079	83,302	74,533
Northern Ireland	178,832						
Ireland (Eire)	744,810	1,037,234	1,352,251	1,615,459	1,871,509	1,854,571	1,855,827
Norway	347,852	363,863	403,877	336,388	322,665	114,729	114,246
Sweden	595,250	625,585	665,207	582,014	478,041	194,337	97,332
Denmark	179,474	189,154	181,649	153,690	132,543	64,196	30,107
Iceland	2,764						
Netherlands	133,133	131,766	120,063	94,931	81,828	58,090	46,802
Belgium	64,194	62,687	49,400	29,757	22,639	15,535	12,553
Luxembourg	9,048	12,585	3,071	3,031	2,882	12,836	5,802
Switzerland	113,010	118,659	124,848	115,593	104,069	88,621	75,153
France	135,592	153,072	117,418	104,197	113,174	106,971	116,402
Central and Eastern Europe	5,897,799	6,134,845	6,014,028	4,136,646	3,420,629	2,187,776	1,784,449
Germany	1,608,814	1,686,108	2,311,237	2,663,418	2,784,894	1,966,742	1,690,533
Poland	1,268,583	1,139,979	937,884	383,407	147,440	48,557	14,436
Czechoslovakia	491,638	362,438					
Austria	370,914	575,627	845,555	432,798	241,377	124,024	70,797
Hungary	274,450	397,283	495,609	145,714	62,435	11,526	3,737
Yugoslavia	211,416	169,439					
U.S.S.R.	1,153,628						
Latvia	20,673	1,400,495	1,184,412	423,726			
Estonia	3,550				182,644	35,722	4,644
Lithuania	193,606	135,068					
Finland	142,478	149,824	129,680	62,641			
Romania	146,393	102,823	65,923	15,032			
Bulgaria	9,399	10,477	11,498				
Turkey in Europe	2,257	5,284	32,230	9,910	1,839	1,205	302
Southern Europe	2,106,295	1,911,213	1,525,875	530,200	206,648	58,265	25,853
Greece	174,526	175,976	101,282	8,515	1,887	776	390
Albania	8,814	5,608					
Italy	1,790,429	1,610,113	1,343,125	484,027	182,580	44,230	17,157
Spain	59,362	49,535	22,108	7,050	6,185	5,121	3,764
Portugal	73,164	69,981	59,360	30,608	15,996	8,138	4,542
Other Europe	16,255	5,901	12,871	2,251	12,579	3,786	1,678
Danzig	1,483	2,049					
Europe, not specified	14,772	3,852	12,871	2,251	12,579	3,786	1,678
Asia	275,665	237,950	191,484	120,248	113,396	107,630	64,565
Armenia	32,166	36,628					
Palestine	6,137	3,203					
Syria	57,227	51,901	59,729				
Turkey in Asia	46,654	11,019					
China	46,129	43,560	56,756	81,534	106,701	104,468	63,042
Japan	70,993	81,502	67,744	24,788	2,292	401	73
India	5,850	4,901	4,664	2,031	2,143	1,707	586
Korea							
Philippines							
Other Asia	10,509	5,236	2,591	11,895	2,260	1,054	864
America	2,102,209	1,727,017	1,489,231	1,317,380	1,088,245	807,230	551,335
Canada-French	370,852	307,786	385,083	395,126	302,496		
Canada-Other	915,537	817,139	819,554	784,796	678,442	717,157	493,464
Newfoundland	23,980	13,249	5,080				
Cuba	18,493	14,872	15,133	11,081		6,917	5,319
Other West Indies	87,748	64,090	32,502	14,354	23,256	9,484	6,251
Mexico	641,462	486,418	221,915	103,393	77,853	68,399	42,435
Central America	10,514	4,912	1,736	3,897	1,192	707	301
South America	33,623	18,551	8,228	4,733	5,006	4,566	3,565
All other	77,876	73,672	43,330	31,868	27,311	20,772	14,711
Africa	8,859	5,781	3,992	2,538	2,207	2,204	2,657
Australia	12,816	10,914	9,035	6,807	5,984	4,906	3,118
Azores	35,611	33,995					
Other Atlantic Islands	9,467	10,345	18,274	9,768	9,739	7,641	4,434
Pacific Islands	4,527	3,712	2,415	2,013	3,369	1,953	910
Country not specified	1,588	3,589	2,687	2,546	479		954
Born at sea	5,008	5,336	6,927	8,196	5,533	4,068	2,638

The Evidence

All tables from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 1975), p. 105.

TABLE 1 Immigrants, by Country: 1891-1925*

Year	Europe													
	All Countries	Total	Northwestern Europe				Central Europe			Eastern Europe		Southern Europe		
			Great Britain	Ireland	Scandinavia	Other Northwestern	Germany	Poland	Other Central	U.S.S.R. and Baltic States	Other Eastern	Italy	Other Southern	
1925	294,314	148,366	27,172	26,650	16,810	8,548	46,068	5,341	4,701	3,121	1,566	6,203	2,186	
1924	706,896	364,339	59,490	17,111	35,577	16,077	75,091	28,806	32,700	20,918	13,173	56,246	9,150	
1923	522,919	307,920	45,759	15,740	34,184	12,469	48,277	26,538	34,038	21,151	16,082	46,674	7,008	
1922	309,556	216,385	25,153	10,579	14,625	11,149	17,931	28,635	29,363	19,910	12,244	40,319	6,477	
1921	805,228	652,364	51,142	28,435	22,854	29,317	6,803	95,089	77,069	10,193	32,793	222,260	76,409	
1920	430,001	246,295	38,471	9,591	13,444	24,491	1,001	4,813	5,666	1,751	3,913	95,145	48,009	
1919	141,132	24,627	6,797	474	5,590	5,126	52	(†)	53	1,403	51	1,884	3,197	
1918	110,618	31,063	2,516	331	6,506	3,146	447		61	4,242	93	5,250	8,471	
1917	295,403	133,083	10,735	5,406	13,771	6,731	1,857		1,258	12,716	369	34,596	45,644	
1916	298,826	145,699	16,063	8,639	14,761	8,715	2,877		5,191	7,842	1,167	33,665	46,779	
1915	326,700	197,919	27,237	14,185	17,883	12,096	7,799		18,511	26,187	2,892	49,688	21,441	
1914	1,218,480	1,058,391	48,729	24,688	29,391	25,591	35,734		278,152	255,660	21,420	283,738	55,288	
1913	1,197,892	1,055,855	60,328	27,876	32,267	28,086	34,329		254,825	291,040	18,036	265,542	43,526	
1912	838,172	718,875	57,148	25,879	27,554	22,921	27,788		178,882	162,395	20,925	157,134	38,249	
1911	878,587	764,757	73,384	29,112	42,285	25,549	32,061		159,057	158,721	21,655	182,882	40,051	
1910	1,041,570	926,291	68,941	29,855	48,267	23,852	31,283		258,737	186,792	25,287	215,537	37,740	
1909	751,786	654,875	46,793	25,033	32,496	17,756	25,540		170,191	120,460	11,659	183,218	21,729	
1908	782,870	691,901	62,824	30,556	30,175	22,177	32,309		168,509	156,711	27,345	128,503	32,792	
1907	1,285,349	1,199,566	79,037	34,530	49,965	26,512	37,807		338,452	258,943	36,510	285,731	52,079	
1906	1,100,735	1,018,365	67,198	34,995	52,781	23,277	37,564		265,138	215,665	18,652	273,120	29,975	
1905	1,026,499	974,273	84,189	52,945	60,625	24,693	40,574		275,693	184,897	11,022	221,479	18,156	
1904	812,870	767,933	51,448	36,142	60,096	23,321	46,380		177,156	145,141	12,756	193,296	22,197	
1903	857,046	814,507	33,637	35,310	77,647	17,009	40,086		206,011	136,093	12,600	230,622	25,492	
1902	648,743	619,068	16,898	29,138	54,038	10,322	28,304		171,989	107,347	8,234	178,375	14,423	
1901	487,918	469,237	14,985	30,561	39,234	9,279	21,651		113,390	85,257	8,199	135,996	10,685	
1900	448,572	424,700	12,509	35,730	31,151	5,822	18,507		114,847	90,787	6,852	100,135	8,360	
1899	311,715	297,349	13,456	31,673	22,192	5,150	17,476		62,491	60,982	1,738	77,419	4,772	
1898	229,299	217,786	12,894	25,128	19,282	4,698	17,111		4,726	39,797	29,828	1,076	58,613	4,633
1897	230,832	216,397	12,752	28,421	21,089	5,323	22,533		4,165	33,031	25,816	943	59,431	2,893
1896	343,267	329,067	24,565	40,262	33,199	7,611	31,885		691	65,103	51,445	954	68,060	5,292
1895	258,536	250,342	28,833	46,304	26,852	7,313	32,173		790	33,401	35,907	768	35,427	2,574
1894	285,631	277,052	22,520	30,231	32,400	9,514	53,989		1,941	38,638	39,278	1,027	42,977	4,537
1893	439,730	429,324	35,189	43,578	58,945	17,888	78,756		16,374	57,420	42,310	625	72,145	6,094
1892	579,663	570,876	42,215	51,383	66,295	21,731	119,168		40,536	76,937	81,511	1,331	61,631	8,138
1891	560,319	546,085	66,605	55,706	60,107	21,824	113,554		27,497	71,042	47,426	1,222	76,055	5,047

* For years ending June 30.

† Between 1899 and 1919, included with western Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia.