

# THE IMMIGRANT STRUGGLE

By Karen Lesiak, Digitizing Partner, Hartford, Connecticut

Some of the first Pilgrims came to our distant shores as separatists who had fled to the Netherlands from England, fleeing religious persecution. Having left their homeland, they feared their English culture would be lost, and decided that the only thing to do was to set out for the New World. They journeyed on the *Mayflower*, setting foot on hallowed ground, and founded Plymouth Colony in 1620, one of the first of the original thirteen colonies. I remember from my grammar school history, a portrait of men with black hats, boots, and buckles, and women in their aprons and linen caps, dining together in thanksgiving with the Native Americans, finding common ground and bartering their goods. In the early founding, a peace treaty was signed between the two alliances. In reality, many violent conflicts ensued, and there was an unjust system of slavery in the settlements.

With the establishment of the colonies, millions of immigrants followed to build upon a foundation that continues to emerge today with an abundance of cultures and religions, but it has not come without formidable adversity and struggle. With the growth of the nation, we learn about the mass displacement of the indigenous inhabitants from their homes, forcing them to relocate, and accounts of genocide. Still today, Native Americans are socially and economically disadvantaged.

It was a daunting passage for Roman Catholics. Puritans regarded Catholics as inferior, with no religious rights, and the pope was considered the Anti-Christ, prompted by a declaration given by Ussher, the Reformation archbishop of England, that "to give toleration to papists was grievous sin" (quoted in "Readers Speak to Readers" by Harold Hamilton, *Our Sunday Visitor*, Nov. 24, 1918). When Irish Catholics began to immigrate in large numbers in 1762, they were met with overwhelming intolerance because of their Catholic faith. Their personal and religious rights were disregarded for fear of a

growing allegiance to the papacy. In Massachusetts, all religions were generously accepted and permitted, except for the Roman Catholic. (James O'Donnell, *The Diocese of Hartford*, Rev. Boston: Hurd, 1900).

Today, we witness violence and hate crimes against Muslims and Jews. The ethnic onslaught of discrimination based simply on the color of one's skin or country of origin portrays an overt cultural blindness. African Americans have indelibly suffered from the evils of slavery and discrimination and the fight for racial justice is engrained in those who must live it and those who want to change it. During the Depression, in the midst of food shortages and job insecurity, the most excessive restrictions were placed on Mexican immigrants. In 1931, only 3,333 entered the United States while 14,442 departed, as it appeared in the *Catholic Transcript*, Aug. 20, 1931, under the headline "Immigration Figures Show Large Decline..." The threat of deportation has continued in Latino, Mexican, and other communities in our current political climate.

Though the immigration struggle continues, millions who have immigrated to the United States have enjoyed freedoms, and have prospered educationally and economically in our country. I recount the story of a friend and member of my Catholic parish who came here alone, with little, from Cuba in the 1960s upon the establishment of the Cuban refugee program for those seeking asylum from a communist government and religious persecution. She made her way to American shores, joining her father in Florida, who had arrived months earlier at the home of a relative who was his sponsor. Her mother had to remain behind and not until four years later, in an effort to join her family, journeyed in a small vessel with other passengers that nearly took their lives in turbulent waters.

Later, settling in Connecticut, although she did experience some discrimination among peer groups, my friend went on to get

her citizenship, pursued a college education, and became a guidance counselor, among other career pursuits in the educational field, and has enjoyed political and religious freedoms in the United States. Others have not been so fortunate, having had to face deportation, loss of businesses, and separation from family.

## ***The Naturalization Act and Subsequent Legislation***

The enactment of law and legislation has governed immigration and citizenship in a continual reevaluation and revision throughout the years. The Naturalization Act, enacted by Congress in 1790, excluded Native Americans, indentured servants, slaves, and the freed Black population, and later Asians, and a ruling determined that a woman's citizenship was largely dependent upon her marital status. In 1819, the first legislation on immigration in the United States, known as the Steerage Act, was established in an attempt to improve conditions of cross-Atlantic travel, adding a requirement that a record of immigrants should be kept by the ship's captain and include names of those who died during the voyage.

Between 1892 and 1924, more restrictions emerged as an influx of European immigrants, many from South, Central, and Eastern Europe, came through Ellis Island and other American ports. Acting on national prejudices, the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924 was based on a national origins quota, allowing only 2 percent of each nationality into the United States, and continuing to exclude Asian immigrants. In 1952, President Truman signed the McCarran-Walter Immigration and Nationality Act. The act abolished some restrictions of the Naturalization Act of 1790, but the establishment of the amendments were based largely on fears about communist infiltration stemming from Cold War apprehension between the United States and the Soviet Union. It also extended discrimination against other nationalities with

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**NOT ONE PETAL HAS YET FALLEN**



Nearly 30,000 persons have visited St. Mary's Catholic Church, Meadon Norris, Bedford Diocese, Great Britain, to view this statue of the Blessed Virgin with its crown of real roses, which remain unwithered since they were placed there at the annual May Queen ceremony seven months ago. Rev. Dr. James Turner, pastor of the church has been flooded with letters from many countries. (NYC Photos)

**THEY FIND A HAVEN IN AMERICA**



Bishop William T. Mulloy of Covington, attending a meeting of the National Catholic Resettlement Council, in New York, takes time out to visit the pier to greet a group of Displaced Persons newly arrived. The DP's were assisted by Thomas F. Mulholland, port director for the Bureau of Immigration, National Catholic Welfare Conference, which arranged for their entry into the United States. (NYC Photos)

**WAR VICTIMS-FRIENDSHIP FOOD**



Following the arrival in Rome of the Friendship Train, bearing 20 cartons of food from the people of America (Irene Pearson, of the U. S., originator of the train, is shown distributing food packages to two war-mutilated kids. The boy at the extreme right is missing his right hand and part of the arm, is completely blind and bears powder burns and scars on his face. The other boy has neither hand and part of his arms are missing. There are 10,000 such kids in Italy. The two old folks on the extreme left, representing the aged poor, also benefited by the food distribution. (NYC Photos)

**HEADS CAPITAL SEE OF NATION**



Photographed for the first time in his episcopal robes of office is the Most Rev. Patrick Aloynus O'Boyle, consecrated Archbishop of Washington, in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, January 14, by Cardinal Spellman. He will be installed in St. Matthew's Cathedral, Washington, January 21, by Archbishop Ambrogio G. Cicognani, Apostolic Delegate to the United States. His coat-of-arms (left) bears the motto "Stare in Fide"—"Stand Fast in the Faith." The new archbishop was formerly executive director of Catholic Charities for the Archdiocese of New York and director of War Relief Services—National Catholic Welfare Conference. (NYC Photos)

NC — Is a Mark of GOOD PICTURES

**'NEW LOOK' FOR 100 BOYS WHO WERE GOOD**



One hundred deserving schoolboys, two from each of the 50 parishes in the Archdiocese of Chicago, smile broadly as they emerge from a Chicago department store where they received complete outfits of clothing, the gift of their archbishop. His Eminence Samuel Cardinal Stritch. The custom inaugurated by the late Cardinal Mundelein at Christmas time 16 years ago has been continued by Cardinal Stritch. (New World photo. (NYC Photos)

**For My People**



Archbishop Michael J. O'Doherty of Manila who has announced that he has made plans to become a citizen of the Philippines, thus giving expression to his deep devotion to the people of the new Republic. The Archbishop, who was born in Ireland has been in the Philippines since 1911. This picture was taken in 1945 during his visit to the United States. (NYC Photos)

**40th Unity Rite**



Most Rev. Dr. Mar Ivanios, O.C.C., Archbishop of Trivandrum, of Travancore State, India, prelate of the Syro-Malankarite Rite, who will participate in the 40th anniversary observance of the Church Unity Octave, in Washington, January 18-25. Similar services will be held in various parts of the United States during these dates. (NYC Photos)

**Medalist**



**Catholic Pictures With Authority**

In recognition of "distinguished service in Inter-racial Relations," George K. Hinton (above), of New York, has been awarded the annual medal of the Brooklyn Alumni Society. He is secretary of the Catholic Inter-racial Council and editor of the "Inter-racial Review." Mr. Hinton is one of the founders of the Council, a work national in scope. (NYC Photos)

**STRANGE BUT TRUE**  
 Little-Known Facts for Catholics  
 By M. J. MURRAY

**THE ROLLING STONE DOOR** to the RELICS CHAPEL of the NEW LIVERPOOL CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST THE KING is CARVED FROM SOLID MARBLE.

There are 30 HOLIDAYS of OBLIGATION in the EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCH in AMERICA as against 6 in the ROMAN RITE.

MOST FISHING TRAWLERS SAILING FROM GLOUCESTER, MASS. CARRY A SHRINE TO OUR LADY IN THE WHEELHOUSE.

The VATICAN CITY is said to have the highest percentage of telephone subscribers in proportion to its population.

NOTE: This cartoon is available in two or three-column mast.

**A PRAYER CRUSADE FOR PEACE MIDST RUINS OF WAR**



In the presence of the Apostolic Visitor to Germany, Bishop Aloisius J. Muench of Fargo, N. D., more than 20,000 Catholic men assembled in front of the bomb-ravaged Palace of Charlemagne, in the market square of Aachen, Germany, to assist in the celebration of Holy Mass. The services concluded a diocesan Crusade of Prayer for Peace, during which a large wooden cross was paraded through the streets. (NYC Photos)

"They Find a Haven in America," *The Catholic World in Pictures*, 9 January 1948.

national-origins quotas, highly criticized by advocacy rights groups, organizations, and Church leaders, although sometimes their efforts were felt only in single-person cases, such as "Special Bill permits Catholic nun to remain in the U.S." (*St. Louis Register*, 13 April 1956).

The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was then signed into law by President Johnson at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. It was amended with the inclusion of a significant provision stating, "No person shall receive any preference or priority or be discriminated against in the issuance of an immigrant visa because of the person's race, sex, nationality, place of birth, or place of residence." Later, the Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 raised income requirements for those attempting to enter as well as their sponsors. Under the headline, "A Meaner-Spirited Immigration Law" in the *Catholic Worker* (August 1, 1997), Anne Pilsbury was highly critical of the act, saying that it harkened back to the exclusion acts against Chinese laborers, and was most detrimental to those from South and Central America, Mexico, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic.

The Catholic Church's position has long been one of charity as expressed in 1924 by the United States bishops in a statement issued in opposition to the national origins quota. In the article, "Christian Charity Urged as Basis of Immigration Laws" (*St. Louis Register*, Mar. 22, 1946), Pope Pius XII called upon the United States, in its restriction on foreign immigration, "to exercise Christian charity as an alternative to the enforced transfer of helpless, innocent populations."

On May 9, 2007, multireligious congregations united to create the "New Sanctuary Movement" to counteract laws by Congress that would deny aid to undocumented immigrants, whereby congregations would offer sanctuary to those facing deportation. This Sanctuary Movement began in the 1980s when church-sponsored networks

of people began offering assistance with the arrival of large numbers of undocumented immigrants fleeing war and violence in Latin America. In the *Catholic Worker* article by Anne Pilsbury, she concludes with a quote from Leviticus 19:33-34, "One of our most basic Biblical tasks is to welcome the stranger...we need to begin somewhere and we need to begin now." In his latest encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis has called for a more welcoming attitude towards migrants and cautions "great numbers of lives are at stake." He calls for "love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance," and refers to an episode in the life of St. Francis "that shows his openness of heart, which knew no bounds and transcended differences of origin, nationality, color or religion."

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**Search Terms:** immigration, emigration, immigration legislation, Native-Americans, church and immigration, Latin America immigration, European immigration, Ellis Island, Johnson-Reed, McCarran-Walter

**Sources referred to in the Catholic News Archive:**

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N.C.W.C. News Feeds. March 3, 1924. Senator Reed of Pennsylvania to Regulate the Admission of Aliens.

*Catholic Transcript*. April 4, 1928. Bigoted Forces Rally Against New Religious Equality..."

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*St. Louis Register*. June 6, 1952. NCWC Urges Truman Sign McCarran Immigration Bill.

*Catholic Transcript*. Oct. 8, 1965. Immigration Reform Bill Becomes Law.

*Catholic Worker*. Dec. 1, 1974. Native Americans: the Enduring Tragedy by Ann Hill.

*Catholic Advocate*. Sept. 30, 1976. The First Stop by Jo-Anne Price (illustration)

*Catholic Worker*. Aug. 1, 1997. A Meaner-Spirited Immigration Law by Anne Pilsbury.

**Other newspaper resources on immigration:**

*La Esperanza*, a national Catholic Spanish-language weekly magazine is directed toward the Mexican community. With newspaper issues from November 1929 to December 1954, it is an exceptional publication that offers a great opportunity for scholars to uncover the Spanish-speaking communities' activities during the first half of the twentieth century.

**Other resources on immigration in the Catholic Portal:**

<<https://www.catholicresearch.org/catholic-portal>>

Gilberto Cárdenas Papers, University of Notre Dame. Institute for Latino Studies.

The Cárdenas papers on Mexican Americans were collected by Gilbert Cardenas to be used for scholarly research. Cárdenas served as Director of the Institute for Latino Studies, 1999-2012, was Assistant Provost during this time and held the Samora Chair in Latino Studies, dedicated to the legendary sociologist, Julian Samora. He is Emeritus Professor of sociology, Executive Director of the Notre Dame Center for Arts and Culture, and former Fellow of the Kellogg Institute for International Studies.

**Catholic Resources in Digital Form:**

Catholics and Cultures / Practices and Values: Migration and Immigration. <<https://catholicsandculture.org>> ■

# The first stop

By JO-ANN PRICE

NEW YORK (NC) — Like the millions of immigrants who touched its shores, New York's Ellis Island now shows its age.

Sitting in New York harbor mute and neglected, its 35 buildings in disrepair, Ellis Island — where more than half the immigrants entering this country between 1892 and 1924 were examined and processed — is this city's newest tourist spot, attracting more than 22,000 visitors since late May.

Despite a \$1 million appropriation by Congress to spruce it up, Ellis Island is a wreck. The paint on the building is peeling, rats abound, and the rooms have been vandalized. To restore the island would cost up to \$100 million, according to present estimates.

Nevertheless, the National Park Service runs tours to the place five times a day, taking visitors across the harbor and back in a small boat, the G. Washington Colyer, for \$1.25, and a Circle Line boat leaves Liberty Park, Jersey City, daily, except Mondays at 2:30 p.m. for the same fare. The tours will continue until Oct. 3, when Ellis Island will be up for grabs.

For some, Ellis Island was the first stop on an uncertain journey that ended with distinction. Father Edward Flanagan, founder of Boys Town, was a lean youth of 18 when he landed on the island in 1904 from his native Ireland. Knute Rockne, football coach at the University of Notre Dame from 1918-1931, was 5 when his family emigrated from Norway in 1893. The Trapp Family Singers from Austria were among those in the "intellectual migration" in 1938, escaping the wave of fascism that swept Europe.

"It took courage, a kind of courage that is outside the realm of violence and war, to burn all your bridges behind you," a youthful Park Service ranger told a recent tour. "If you were weaker or timid, you would not have done it."

More than 110 million living Americans are said to have relatives who passed through Ellis Island. Not all the newcomers became as famous as song writer Irving Berlin, Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter or the impresario Sol Hurok, but they all had the same start — on Ellis Island.

"The immigrants used to call it the 'Island of Tears,' but we prefer to call it the 'Island of Emotion,' commented Luis E. Garcia-Curbelo, manager of the Statue of Liberty, who came from Puerto Rico five years ago. "Quite a few come to Ellis Island with grandfathers, or grandmothers, and they tell us 'I remember the noise' or 'I remember sitting on those benches.' It was a place of pain and laughter and love." Up one flight of stairs in the main building, visitors are brought into the registry hall, where a tape recorder reproduces the sounds of the past.

Mrs. Alice Lenk, of Valley Stream, N.Y., recalled how her father, the late Charles Ashman, came with an uncle from Lithuania. The boy was fleeing from the Russian army. The uncle, as soon as he cleared immigration at Ellis Island, promptly deserted the youth for a woman, giving him \$2.

"A priest got my father a job on a farm in Flushing," Mrs. Lenk continued. "Forty years later, the uncle showed up at our home in Port Washington, N.Y. I don't know how he found us. He had come to ask my father's forgiveness for deserting him. He said he could not die without doing it. He was in his 80s. My father, of course, was amazed and he gave him back his \$2. And the uncle went back to Binghamton, N.Y. And he died."

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Woman alone in Ellis Island waiting room came here as a baby 70 years ago.



Paint peels and rats scurry in room once used as a chapel.

Since 1924, when immigration practices changed, Ellis Island has been a Coast Guard station, detention center for enemy aliens and "U.S. government surplus property." The Park Service asks visitors to fill out questionnaires on what they think should

be done with the island.

New York today is still the largest immigration port of entry welcoming 114,179 of the 1975 total of 386,194 immigrants. An estimated 100,000 "illegals" — immigrants without documents — also have crossed

borders into the U.S.

"It's still the golden land," says Robert G. Wright, director of the U.S. Catholic Conference Migration and Refugee Service. "People will do almost anything to get here."

## Carny priest carries 'church' with him

By RAY BARTH

MONROE, Wis. (NC) — Father Mac makes house calls on persons who have more contact with the public than most people but, in their own way, are shut-ins. Msgr. Robert J. McCarthy of Watertown, N.Y., is chaplain to the 100,000 people who travel with carnivals and outdoor shows.

Known as the Carny Priest, he has found that the spiritual needs of circus people are equalled by their need for acceptance by the public they serve. "They're trying to live down something that started in 1929 and 1930 with roughnecks," he explained. They regard themselves — and so does he — as benefitting the towns they play but separated from town life by the requirements of their jobs and kept apart also by the distrust which still persists.

"I carry water, wine, the host, candles, vestments and altar linens — my own little church — right with me," he said. "I do

counseling when I can, bless equipment and set up prayer sessions."

At the Great Mississippi Valley Fair in Davenport, Iowa, he celebrated Mass for 100 show people in a bingo tent, baptized a baby 1,000 miles from home and greeted old friends with evident pleasure. "They are affectionate people. Carnies are great for shaking hands," he observed.

Father Mac travels back across his bridge to the general public, taking his message to the press, radio and TV through interviews he is not shy in seeking. He wants the outside world to know that outdoor showmen "are ordinary family and business people" with the same range of needs, hopes, fears, joys and sorrows — and a great capacity for kindness and helping one another.

Red-haired and freckled-faced, as a youth, he spent several summers as a carnival "talker." At age 58, he is chaplain to seven regional and national showmen's associations while serving Holy Family

Church in Watertown. He has plans in that upstate New York community for building a showmen's chapel in connection with Precious Blood Monastery whose cloistered nuns say daily prayers for carnival people.

His work has won praise from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, whose general secretary, Bishop James S. Rausch, wrote, "Without the presence of friendly and interested priests like yourself their lives could be cut off from the Lord."

"I'd like to get more priests to give their time," says the Carny Priest. No Protestant clergyman has come forward to serve as a chaplain to carnivals, he noted. "They are generally married and can't travel as easily as I do."

Msgr. McCarthy visits 25 to 30 shows each season and attends the winter meetings. "He's done a great service for this business," said Jerry Spalding, owner of Spalding Shows, Dallas, Tex.