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**Vermont Nativism: William Paul Dillingham and U.S. Immigration Legislation<sup>1</sup>**

John M Lund  
Keene State College  
Keene, New Hampshire

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Vermont Republican Senator William Paul Dillingham served for twenty-three years in the U.S. Senate and is best remembered as the chair of the 1907-1911 Immigration Commission. Senator Dillingham shaped twentieth century federal immigration policy by establishing, in the early 1920s, a system of racial and ethnic immigration quotas, a scheme that endured until the 1960s. This paper seeks to contextualize Dillingham by addressing the Vermont origins of the senator's nativism. It also suggests how Dillingham illustrates the shift away from harsh nineteenth-century anti-Catholic immigrant rhetoric toward what Jackson Lears terms the "neutral language" of Progressive era social science in order to achieve the goal of controlling the arrival of undesirable immigrants. Arguably, Dillingham's response to the question of immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century bequeathed a troubling legacy. Expanding the logic underwriting the infamous 1896 *Pessy v. Ferguson* decision,

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<sup>1</sup>The author gratefully acknowledges Sam Hand's readings of various drafts of this essay. Hand is professor emeritus of history at the University of Vermont.

Dillingham succeeded in creating a state sanctioned racial and ethnic classification scheme at the national level.<sup>2</sup>

As a representative figure of Victorian middle-class respectability and decorum, Dillingham avoided shrill, bombastic anti-immigrant rhetoric employed by many restrictionists. He therefore appears, as Robert Zeidel has recently argued, to be best understood as a “moderate restrictionist.” Nonetheless, Dillingham firmly supported expanding the power of the federal government to determine the racial and ethnic identity of immigrants and to use such classifications to limit the arrival of newcomers to the United States. While northern European Protestants appeared to Dillingham as the most promising stock to preserve a rural republic, he believed that southern and eastern Europeans were predisposed to huddle in ethnic enclaves in urban industrial America. New arrivals who refused to take up farming and contribute to the economic viability of rural America, Dillingham argued repeatedly, had to remain segregated beyond the boundaries of American civilization.<sup>3</sup>

Dillingham’s nativism derived from his New England Yankee background. Indeed, in his home state of Vermont an unexamined tradition of nativism existed before

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<sup>2</sup> Jackson Lears, “The Managerial Revitalization of the Rich,” in Steve Fraser & Gary Gerstle, eds., Ruling America: A History of Wealth and Power in a Democracy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 203.

<sup>3</sup> Robert F. Zeidel, Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900-1927 (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 26. Dillingham also fits with the profile of progressive reformers put forward by Michael McGerr who points out that progressive reforms, including immigration restriction, was spearheaded by a “crusading middle class.” Progressives labored “to change other people; to end class conflict; to control big business, and to segregate society.” . He consistently demanded that immigrants conform to his vision of a rural republic and worked tirelessly to channel the newly arrived laborers away from crowded industrial urban centers so that they would make their living as American farmers. He believed that successful social engineering would lead immigrants to take up the plow and avoid living as urban industrial wage earners. Such an effort would help the diffuse the staggering class inequalities plaguing an American run by plutocrats. Michael McGerr, A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xiv-xv.

social Darwinism lent scientific credibility to anti-immigrant assertions. His strain of nativism centered on the assumption that rural communities of Anglo-Saxon Protestants instilled virtue, whereas cities bred immorality, disease, poverty, and crime. Vermont proved to be fertile ground for this type of nativist argument as the state's farming population declined after the mid-nineteenth century and the republic became increasingly urban. Immigration restriction appealed to Vermonters as a mechanism to promote healthy rural economic development and to preserve the ideals that reflected rural life. These ideals centered on property rights, morality, and orderly behavior. Dillingham, born into prominent Vermont family in 1843 (his father Paul Dillingham had served in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 1840s and as Governor of Vermont in 1865 and 1866), grew up in an environment where rural New England life appeared threatened by the growth of cities and the arrival of immigrants from diverse backgrounds.

Like many areas of the Northeast, Vermont experienced intense anti-Catholicism in the late 1840s as Irish Catholic immigrants flocked to the state to find work constructing railroads. When cases of cholera appeared in Burlington in 1849 – part of a larger epidemic that struck the East Coast - many pointed to the Irish Catholic as the cause and linked them to a host of social ills.<sup>4</sup> Authorities in Burlington warned that these “immigrants are both paupers, and diseased, and become a charge upon the Town, and a cause of sickness, and source of danger to the public health.” To meet the danger posed by infected immigrants, a physician was authorized to inspect those who arrived

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<sup>4</sup>Alan M. Kraut, Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the “Immigrant Menace” (New York: Basic Books, 1994) 32, 25, 27, 43, 59.

via Lake Champlain and a \$100 fine was imposed on steamship captains who did not comply with the inspections.<sup>5</sup>

The rise of the Know-Nothing (American) Party in Vermont in the 1850s illustrated the intensification of anti-Catholic nativism in the state. Thousands of Vermonters joined Know-Nothing councils and swore oaths of allegiance to protect the republic “against every form of foreign influence.”<sup>6</sup> By some estimates more than 100 members of the Vermont House represented Know-Nothingism in 1856. Ryland Fletcher, a Know-Nothing leader, served as Republican lieutenant governor in 1854 and 1855 and as governor from 1856 to 1857. Fletcher condemned Catholic immigrants, proclaiming that they brought the “mortal disease [of] monarchy and despotism, of Romanism and heathenism . . . which left unchecked would sweep away our most cherished institutions.” In 1855 Know-Nothings in the state organized the American party of Vermont. The party’s principles included a pledge to use the power of the federal government to “secure a modification of the naturalization laws.”<sup>7</sup>

Well-known nineteenth century Vermonters echoed the sentiments of the anti-immigrant Know-Nothing party. George Perkins Marsh, a former Vermont congressman, statesman, and natural philosopher, advocated nativism and was “committed . . . to the repeal or at least restriction of the right of naturalization, and resistance to Catholic

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<sup>5</sup>Immigration Regulations, 1849, Manuscript Records of the City of Burlington, Wilbur Collection, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.

<sup>6</sup>“Constitution of the Subordinate Councils of Vermont,” Formulary of the State Council of the American Party of Vermont (Burlington: Stacey & Jameson, 1855), 11.

<sup>7</sup>Ryland Fletcher, “Circular to the Presidents of the Several Councils Within the Jurisdiction of the State of Vermont,” scrapbook 88, Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, Vermont. See “Letter from Lieut. Gove. Fletcher,” Daily Free Press 12 July 1855.

commandments.” Marsh declared that “our liberties are in greater danger from the political principles of Catholicism than from any other cause.”<sup>8</sup>

When the sectional conflict over slavery split the national Know-Nothing organization, former Vermont council members were absorbed into the new Republican Party. Prominent Vermont Republican leaders, most notably U.S. Senator Justin Smith Morrill, combined nativism with the party policy of protectionism. Morrill introduced successful protective tariff legislation along with bills for establishing (land-grant) agricultural and manufacturing colleges to foster husbandry and domestic production. He also turned his attention to immigration; in 1887 he proposed a bill in Congress to restrict undesirable immigrants. Morrill warned that the “future character of the American people . . . republican institutions, higher wages, land homesteads, [and] universal education” were threatened by immigrants who settled in “the most inferior and wretched abodes found in cities, and [who] will not accept of health and prosperous homes elsewhere.” Applying the doctrine of social Darwinism espoused by Herbert Spencer, Morrill argued that race and ethnicity predetermined the ability to become Americanized. In a speech on the Senate floor, the senator employed the harsh, racist rhetoric of social Darwinism, declaring that southern and eastern Europeans bore “the mark of Cain” and constituted a class of “outcasts and criminals,” imbeciles, idiots, and lunatics. They differed profoundly, he asserted, from the “Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and German immigrants [who] have been easily digested and assimilated.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>George Perkins Marsh to Erastus Fairbanks, 19 April 1855, doc. Box 95, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vermont.

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate Immigration Committee, Immigration Abuses: Remarks of Justin S. Morrill of Vermont in the Senate of the United States December 14, 1887, on His Bill to Regulate Immigration and for Other Purposes (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1887), 4 – 7.

Like other nineteenth century Vermonters, Morrill's successor in the U.S. Senate, William Paul Dillingham, evinced the state's rural biases on questions of immigration. Dillingham's involvement in immigration began during his single term as governor of Vermont. Elected in 1888, Dillingham included in his opening address to the legislature an admonition to its members to guard rural Protestant ideals by enforcing legislation to correct social ills associated with immigrants. Avoiding harsh anti-Catholic immigrant rhetoric, Dillingham directed that "The laws for the encouragement of virtue and prevention of vice and immorality ought to be kept constantly in force."<sup>10</sup>

Rural depopulation presented the most immediate problem facing Governor Dillingham. Indeed, Dillingham confronted a decade of acute agricultural decline as rural Vermonters migrated to Burlington and Rutland, to the industrialized Northeastern cities, and to the American West. From 1880 to 1890 the population of Vermont grew by only 136 people.<sup>11</sup> In a move that foreshadowed his efforts in the U.S. Senate, Dillingham responded to Vermont's acute rural crisis by creating a commission to study ways to induce settlement of abandoned hilltown farms. He appointed A. B. Valentine of Bennington to head the inquiry and to ascertain whether "legislative action" should be taken for "the permanent establishment of a [state] bureau or commissioner of immigration." The governor instructed Valentine to collect "statistical material" on the prices of farm property, compare those figures to those of other states, and investigate the methods other states used to encourage immigrants to take up farming.<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>10</sup>Vermont Senate Journal, 1888, 349-357, 310.

<sup>11</sup> Bureau of the U.S. Census, 1900 Supplement for Vermont, 568.

<sup>12</sup> States throughout the union saw immigrants as the solution to labor shortages. In the South during the late nineteenth century, immigrants were employed in work formerly done by slaves. See

commissioner sent questionnaires to all Vermont towns to establish the amount and location of the most severely depopulated areas. From the figures he gathered, Valentine reported that 10 percent of Vermont farmland that had once been cultivated lay fallow.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to gathering statistical data, the governor also authorized Valentine to travel to the West to personally observe the characteristics of immigrants who were settling there and determine the most desirable group to repopulate Vermont. The commissioner concluded that “the hard-working, honest Scandinavian” immigrant could answer Vermont’s problems. He asserted that geographical similarities between Scandinavia and Vermont made Swedes uniquely suited to Vermont’s climate. Upholding the central place of literacy, the Swedes “are well educated, and hasten to have their children attend school where English only is spoken.” Moral and virtuous, “they are temperate in the habits and are religiously inclined.”<sup>14</sup> In short, these immigrants from northern Europe fit Governor Dillingham’s cultural vision of rural Americanism, a vision that blended the old strain of anti-Catholicism with the scientific racism of social Darwinism.

Acting on the commissioner’s findings, the governor directed that maps of Vermont be sent to Sweden to publicize the opportunities the state offered. This effort persuaded twenty-seven Swedish families to emigrate. Arriving in April 1890, they traveled from New York City to the hilltowns of Wilmington, Weston, and Vershire.

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Rowland T. Berthoff, “Southern Attitudes Towards Immigrants,” Journal of Southern History 17.3 (August 1951): 328-350.

<sup>13</sup> Laws of Vermont: 1888 60, 121-122. The statute that created the investigation, Act 110, was entitled “An Act Providing for the Creation of a Commission to Investigate the Agricultural and Manufacturing Interest of the State, and to Devise Means to Develop the Same.”

<sup>14</sup> A. B. Valentine, Report of the Commissioner of Agricultural and Manufacturing Interest in the State of Vermont (Rutland: Tuttle, 1890), 15.

Dillingham personally visited the towns to welcome them. Celebrating the new arrivals' Protestantism, he noted approvingly that "like our forefathers, they brought their pastor with them."<sup>15</sup>

Dillingham's use of an immigration commission as governor of Vermont in the late 1880s anticipated his latter work as chair of the Congressional Immigration Commission. Dillingham relied on statistical information, data that providing the report with a foundation of respectable objective facts. The governor also personally avoided shrill anti-immigrant rhetoric and the strident scientific racism of the social Darwinists. (Other Vermonters, such as writer Rowland Robinson, used unrestrained anti-immigrant language. According to Robinson, Catholic French Canadian immigrants were "heretics," natural born thieves whose "fingers were as light as their hearts," who would poison the state with "litters of filthy brats.")<sup>16</sup> Governor Dillingham's selection of Swedes as the most desirable migrants to Vermont made abundantly clear his preference for Protestant newcomers from northern Europe. In his valedictory to the legislature, Dillingham employed reserved language to reemphasize the reasons for his selection of Swedes. The governor declared that a rural proletariat composed of a Catholic "foreign-born population" could not "be depended upon to maintain the number of our farmers," whereas Swedes contributed "a great and lasting benefit to the State."<sup>17</sup>

The exaltation of Anglo-Saxonism - evidenced in Dillingham's immigration efforts as governor - carried over into the formation of Vermont hereditary societies. One

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>16</sup>Rowland Robinson, Vermont: A Study of Independence (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 301-307, 328-330, 365.

<sup>17</sup>Vermont Senate Journal 1890, 309-310.



of these, the Society of Colonial Wars, germinated in New York City in 1892 and spread quickly throughout the Northeast. Dillingham played a key role in establishing the Vermont chapter in 1894. Requiring of members sound “moral character” and proof of direct family lineage to colonists who fought for independence during the American Revolution, the society aimed at “perpetuating the memory” of the colonial past. The organization claimed Protestants as the true founders and guardians of the principles that defined the republic’s moral and ethical standards. From 1894 to 1896 Dillingham served as legal council to the society without compensation, and later he served as president. In the 1890s he joined and served as president of the Vermont Society of the Sons of the American Revolution. (Dillingham traced his own ancestry to the settlers of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630.) Dillingham’s active involvement in these hereditary societies bolstered his romantic vision of Anglo-Saxonism and heightened his perception of the inferiority of immigrants who came from different stock than did his English Puritan forebears.<sup>18</sup>

The death of Senator Morrill in October 1899 propelled Dillingham to the U.S. Senate, beginning what became a twentieth-three year senatorial career that led the former Vermont governor to become an acknowledged Republican expert on immigration control. Elected by the Vermont legislature to complete Morrill’s unexpired term, Dillingham first took his seat in the Senate in December 1900. Republican control facilitated his quick access to the Senate leadership.<sup>19</sup> In 1901 Dillingham served on the

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<sup>18</sup> Society of Colonial Wars, Society of Colonial Wars in the State of Vermont: Officers, Committees, and Members (Burlington: Hobart J. Stanley, 1905), 7. William Paul Dillingham to Charles Dillingham, 29 December 1896, Dillingham Family Papers, Woodsen Research Center, Fondren Library, Rice University, Houston, Texas.

Committee on Transportation Routes to the Seaboard, which examined immigration routes from Europe; the following year he was named chairman.<sup>20</sup> After fellow Vermont Senator Redfield Proctor left the Senate Immigration Committee in January 1902, Dillingham took his place.<sup>21</sup> His first speech on the Senate floor in April 1902 initiated debate over the terms of restriction on Chinese immigration, which had come up for renewal. He declared that even though he had “not come into contact with this class of people,” barring the Chinese from entry into the country constituted the best method to “protect American labor.” After a protracted debate, the Senate voted with Dillingham for the permanent exclusion of the Chinese “coolie laborer.”<sup>22</sup>

Reelected to a full term by an overwhelming majority in the Vermont legislature in 1903, Dillingham continued to press for limits on immigration.<sup>23</sup> Named chairman of the Senate Immigration Committee in 1903, he promoted the immigration act passed that year. The law mandated a two-dollar head tax on each immigrant to establish an “immigration fund” for the maintenance of ports of arrival. Proof of the increased concern over the economic dimension of immigration, the law transferred immigration

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<sup>19</sup>When Dillingham assumed his senatorial seat, Republican senators Nelson W. Aldrich of Rhode Island, Orville H. Platt of Connecticut, William B. Allison of Iowa, and John C. Spooner of Wisconsin – known as “the four” – held the reins of power. See Horace Samuel Merrill and Marion Galbraith Merrill, The Republican Command 1897-1913 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1971).

<sup>20</sup>Congressional Directory (Washington, DC: GPO, 1901), 156.

<sup>21</sup>Congressional Record 57<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 7 January 1902, 35, pt. 1:478.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 9-16 April 1902, 35 pt. 4:3894-3939, 4252.

<sup>23</sup>In the Vermont Senate Dillingham received twenty-four votes while his challenger, Elisha May, received four. Vermont Senate Journal 1903, 140. In the House the vote was 179 to 42. Vermont House Journal 1903, 60-61.

responsibilities from the Treasury Department to the newly created Department of Commerce and Labor.<sup>24</sup>

In the following years Dillingham concentrated on securing immigrant farm labor and advocated the creation of an informational display bureau at Ellis Island to describe the opportunities of rural life, another example of his sustained effort to induce migrants to reside in rural America.<sup>25</sup> Dillingham also sought to alleviate overcrowding in immigrant tenement districts. He supported medical and mental examinations of immigrants to prevent the entry of the feeble-minded and those who carried disease. For Dillingham, it was obvious that diseased and feeble-minded newcomers avoided life in the countryside, preferring instead to live in crowded tenements.<sup>26</sup>

In 1906, at the behest of President Theodore Roosevelt, who had appealed to Congress to limit the “wrong” sort of immigrant and to find a method to induce immigrants to settle “the land and keep them away from the congested tenement-house districts of the great cities,” Dillingham offered amendments designed to overhaul immigration policy.<sup>27</sup> In a speech defending his amendments, Dillingham highlighted the difference he viewed between outspoken restrictionists and those who favored a system of selection.

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<sup>24</sup>“An Act to Regulate Immigration of Aliens into the United States,” Statutes at Large 30 (1903): 898-911.

<sup>25</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate Immigration Committee, Information and Display Bureau at Ellis Island, report 1170 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1904), 1-2.

<sup>26</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate Immigration Committee, Regulating Immigration of Aliens into the United States, report 2134 (Washington, DC: GPO 1904), 5.

<sup>27</sup>Congressional Record 59<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess., 5 December 1905, 40, pt. 1:101.

There are in this country two classes of persons who differ in judgment as to the policy to be adopted to control immigration.

One class is made up of pronounced restrictionists who favor drastic measures for the reduction of the number admitted.

The other class think that the demand for labor should govern the number admitted, but that we should select from those offering themselves, and permit only those to enter who are sound in mind, sound in body, sound in morals, and fit to become fathers and mothers of American children. The present law was based upon this latter principle — the principle of selection — and the amendments proposed in this bill were framed in accordance with this principle.

By presenting his amendments as a contrast to the “drastic measures” demanded by ardent restrictionists, Dillingham downplayed the hard edge of his own rhetoric. After all, as readers of The Origin of Species knew, the phrase “principle of selection” was that of Darwin, the basis for the evolutionary theories put forth by Herbert Spencer. In reality the goals of restrictionists and those who favored selection remained largely the same. For Dillingham the language and presentation of the immigration question mattered greatly. Indeed, he seemed acutely aware of the ways in which bombastic nativist rhetoric might alienate Victorian middle-class progressive sensibilities. His amendments passed, paving the way for the creation of the what would become popularly known as the Dillingham Commission, the most exhaustive investigation of subject every conducted.<sup>28</sup>

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In 1911, after four years of exhaustive study (the findings of which filled forty-one volumes of Senate reports), Dillingham submitted to Congress a list of potential methods to restrict immigration from southern and eastern Europe. Authenticated by Progressive science and justified “by economic, moral, and social considerations,” the commission’s list of solutions to the “immigration question” began by proposing literacy tests.<sup>29</sup> (The proposed literacy test laid bare the objectives of Dillingham and other restrictionists committed to limiting the arrival of southern and eastern Europeans. As Robert Zeidel points, “the literacy test had become the restriction of choice among members of Congress” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Literacy tests had also been a preferred method of disenfranchising southern blacks.<sup>30</sup>) A second recommendation advocated quotas by national origin to limit “the number of each race arriving each year to a certain percentage.”<sup>31</sup> The proposed quotas illustrated how progressive science could be an effective tool for restriction. Indeed, the commission had devised a masterful method of making use of seemingly innocuous and neutral statistical data in order to limit the number of non-Protestant immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. The proposed quotas also highlighted the commission’s insistence that the

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<sup>28</sup> William P. Dillingham, *Regulation of Immigration: Speech of Hon. William P. Dillingham, of Vermont, in the Senate of the United States, Tuesday, May 22, 1906.* (Washington, DC: G.P.O., 1906), 7.

<sup>29</sup>U.S. Congress, Immigration Commission, *Brief Statement of the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Immigration Commission with Views of the Minority* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1911), 48. Historian John Higham writes that William Walter Husband “claimed to be the originator of the percentage idea.” John Higham, *Stangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1966), 393-394.

<sup>30</sup>Robert F. Zeidel, *Immigrants, Progressives, and Exclusion Politics: The Dillingham Commission, 1900-1927* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 15-20.

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Congress, Immigration Commission, *Brief Statement of the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Immigration Commission with Views of the Minority* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1911), 48. Historian John Higham writes that William Walter Husband “claimed to be the originator of the

federal government use “race” as the determining factor in admitting newcomers to the United States.

In the wake of the commission’s findings, Dillingham worked tirelessly to restrict immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. In the Senate in 1912 he introduced a bill calling for reading and writing (literacy) tests as well as increased federal authority to exclude and deport undesirables. Although Congress passed an amended version of the measure, President William Howard Taft vetoed it and the House failed to override the veto.<sup>32</sup> Undeterred by his defeat of his proposal for a literacy test, Dillingham turned to the second recommendation of the commission, racially based national origins quotas. Introduced in 1913, Dillingham’s proposal, the first of its kind in U.S. history, called for limiting immigration to 10 percent of the number of nationals in residence according to the 1910 census. Although the quotas encouraged the immigration of northern and western Europeans, Dillingham predicted that the numbers arriving from southern and eastern Europe would be checked. Congress took no action on the bill.<sup>33</sup>

After spending 1914 successfully campaigning for re-election to the Senate, Dillingham resumed the drive for literacy tests. President Woodrow Wilson’s veto of a 1915 literacy test bill that Dillingham sponsored frustrated the senator, and on the Senate floor he expounded on the danger of a nation of cities populated by immigrants. He disdained southern and eastern European newcomers, who ignored “the inducements held

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percentage idea.” John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925 (New York: Atheneum, 1966), 393-394.

<sup>32</sup>Congressional Record 62<sup>nd</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess., 19 February 1913, 49, pt. 4:3429.

<sup>33</sup>See “U.S. Senator William Paul Dillingham Will Introduce Bill for Regulation of Immigration in U.S.” New York Times 2 June 1913, 2:2. “Plan of Sen. Dillingham, Statistics of Immigration,” New York Times 3 June 1913, 8:4.

out by the farmers of America, [and] in spite of all the advantages the aliens might enjoy in country districts . . . move in racial groups . . . [to] the centers of industry.”<sup>34</sup> In 1916, Dillingham declared, “If we adopted the education [literacy] test, it would substantially decrease . . . the races coming here without families . . . [who] will not . . . aid in the agriculture of America.” By 1916, Dillingham anti-immigrant rhetoric had clearly shifted to the use of race as the criteria for determining the immigrant groups that were predisposed to take up farming.<sup>35</sup>

In 1917 Dillingham successfully shepherded through the Senate a House bill calling for literacy tests. Although President Wilson again vetoed the measure, the patriotism intensified by the war aroused sentiment in favor of the test and Congress overrode the veto.<sup>36</sup> Within three years, however, debates over immigration restriction resumed as many in Congress perceived that the tests failed to sufficiently limit southern and eastern Europeans. Moreover, fears that an urban nation was rapidly supplanting an agrarian republic were confirmed by the 1920 census, which indicated that for the first time more people in the United States lived in cities than in rural areas.<sup>37</sup>

In December 1920 Dillingham resuscitated his proposal for national origin quotas by introducing a bill to limit immigration to 3 percent of the number of each nationality in residence in 1910. Dillingham presented his bill as an alternative to a measure proposed by Republican congressman Albert Johnson of Washington that called for a yearlong suspension of all immigration. Dillingham touted his bill, also a temporary one-

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<sup>34</sup>Congressional Record, 63<sup>rd</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> Sess., 11 February 1915, 52, 52, pt. 4:4092.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 64<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 17 August 1916, 53, pt. 13:12769-12777.

<sup>36</sup>Henry Platt Fairchild, “The Literacy Test and Its Making,” Quarterly Journal of Economics 17 (May 1917): 459.

year measure, as a means to avoid the return to prewar levels of immigration and to avert the possibility of an oversupply of labor to America's depressed industries.<sup>38</sup>

In May 1921 Dillingham's quotas easily passed in Congress.<sup>39</sup> Dillingham lived to see the renewal of his system in 1922. After his death in 1923, strong nativist tendencies in Congress prompted the quotas to be reduced to 2 percent of the each nationality resident in 1890. Dillingham had brought Vermont's nativist sentiments into play in the formulation of U.S. immigration policy, establishing a pattern of restrictive laws that endured until 1968.

Vermont nativists perceived the transformation of the United States from a homogenous rural Protestant republic to a culturally heterogeneous urban industrial nation as a loss of virtue. Their alarm mounted as the state experienced a decline in rural population and economic stagnation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scientific theories abetted nativist assertions, seeming to provide credibility to arguments for immigration restriction. Nativists in Vermont ascribed a loss of American ideals, identity, and status to immigrants and took part in national nativist reactions by striking at what they believed to be the sources of rural decay. As a result of Dillingham's efforts to ensure the vitality of rural America, the federal government gained new and unprecedented authority to determine the race and ethnicity of individuals. Ironically, this power of the state not only survived the end of the quota system but has since been employed in ways never anticipated by nativists.

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<sup>37</sup> A city was defined as a center with a population of 2,500 or more.

<sup>38</sup>U.S. Congress, Senate Immigration Committee, Emergency Immigration Legislation 67<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 1920, S. Rept. 17, serial 17:6.



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<sup>39</sup>In the Senate the measure passed 78 to 1, with 17 not voting, and in the House by 216 to 33, with 120 not voting. Congressional Record 67<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> Sess., 3 May 1921, 61, pt. 1:68, 1442-1443, 13 May 1921, 61 pt. 1:1442-1443.