

***ZA CHLEBEM*/FOR BREAD: THE POLES IN AMERICA**

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Mountaineer, are you not sad at leaving your beautiful mountains?
Yes, for bread.

--- *Za Chlebem* [For Bread], Old Polish Song

The Polish writer Wislawa Szymborska has encouraged us to “know other worlds, if only for comparison,” so here, with that in mind, is an article on the Poles in the US and something of the contribution they have made—not much to English here but certainly a considerable amount to the industry and culture here. Over all, migrants have enriched our country, the Poles not least among them.

I choose to write about Polish because with the admission of Poland into the European Union recently the number of Polish immigrants to countries farther west in Europe has reached amazing proportions and they will have geolinguistic impact there. Hundreds of thousands of Polish speakers have moved to Britain to live and work there and so the matter is in the press, especially since Britain is suffering a kind of fear that the British nation is being too drastically changed by foreigners from the EU.

I shall not deal with the Poles now in Britain, however, but with the history of Poles in the US, a country traditionally far more welcoming of immigrants than has been the British nation. Today immigration, or more specifically illegal immigration, is now very much on the American mind.

Between 1892 and 1954, 17 million immigrants passed through Ellis Island. They are the ancestors of 100 million Americans of today. Germans and Scandinavians moved to people the prairies. Jews bolstered retail and manufacturing business and Chinese and Irish built the railroads. Cornishmen and Poles worked the mines. People from foreign shores created and shaped US institutions, those from Africa suffering and to some extent still suffering from the “peculiar institution” of slavery, some Caucasian groups integrating more easily. The blacks have become people of color. The Jews and the Italians have become white. Language in action is a central part of it all.

The subject here is one single linguistic group of immigrants from Europe, from which continent the US got most of its growth in its period of the building of industries and infrastructure and the emergence as a world power and what Thomas Paine called it in his *Common Sense* (1776): “an asylum for mankind”.

I mean Polish-Americans. Today the US and Poland, getting into NATO, developing more business connections with the US, are involved in “Polish pride, American profits” (see Wayne). All along immigration has involved Polish-American identity (Zaborowska, dissertations by such as Majewski’s, studies of women writing such as by the Gladskys, and of men writing as in Joseph Vogel’s *Man’s Courage*, for which see Bergmann). Language is key. Geolinguistic aspects are scant in such political and cultural histories as Zamoyski’s.

Let’s redress the balance. The geolinguistic approach is essential, and I want to provide it, because nationhood and immigration, national and ethnic identities, and related matters tend to be studied from non-linguistic angles. Historians deal mostly in political change and population moves. Economists speak of market moves, the impact of skilled and unskilled labor availability, particularly the advantages and disadvantages cheap labor, and the growth and competition of economies. But who speaks of what languages perform and where, and what the results are in terms of political and cultural history and trade, quality of life and individual freedoms and fates, poverty and prosperity? Who examines the sociolinguistic factor? That deserves serious attention.

To start with immigration to these shores, we note that the US census reports show that the foreign-born population from Europe grew steadily from 1850 to 1880. A string of numbers can be confusing, but simply consider the trend I can present in round figures. There were of the foreign-born about 3 million in the US in 1850, about 4 million in 1860, about 5 million in 1870, 5.75 million in 1880, and then there was a ballooning with the immigration prompted by the vast changes in politics and economies of the nineties of the nineteenth century. There were 8 million immigrants in the US by 1890, nearly 9 million of various nationalities in 1900, nearly 12 million in 1910. The figure in the US census stood around 12 million until 1930. Legislation and other factors then caused it to drop. It was a little over 7 million in 1960, 5.7 million in 1970, 5.1 million in 1980, 4.35 in 1990. These are large numbers. Even small numbers, such as the recent 6 percent of non-citizens and 400,000 foreign-born reported in the census of the Republic of Ireland, can mean a great deal to a country. Ireland has remained basically Irish despite the huge loss of population to overseas in the nineteenth century and the influx of non-Irish in the twentieth century. Over the same period, the US has become increasingly multicultural.

Europe’s contribution to a growing America declined from 92 percent of immigrants in 1850 to about 23 percent in 1990. By 1990 the foreign-born in the US were about 20 million, roughly ten times the number of foreign-born here in 1850. In the last decade of the twentieth century Asia and South America were considerably greater sources of the foreign-born here than was Europe. The census of 2000 identified more than 9 million persons in the US of Polish heritage, when the entire US population was well over a quarter of a billion souls. That European group from Poland, far too much neglected by scholars of geolinguistics and other sciences, is our focus.

The US for a long time was considered to be a child of Europe, the result of exploration and settlement here by English, Dutch, French, Spanish, Italian and other

Europeans. Today New York City's traditional gateway to the US is no more. Ellis Island, where 95 percent of the Poles who arrived in America came ashore, is a museum. In its active days, only two percent of immigrants arriving at Ellis Island were turned away because of health problems; they did not get in the cursory examination the needed chalk mark on their coats and had to go back to Europe. While two percent seems like a small number, in Ellis Island's history it actually meant 240,000 people. Ellis Island has long been inoperative as a gateway to the US and the most notable increase in foreigners may be the movement of illegal aliens into the US from Mexico. Hispanics are a growing concern. They will be the largest political group by 2050 in Texas and California. Right now New York City has 800,00 Dominicans and even more Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and other Hispanics, while some groups of European origin, such as the Poles, have much declined in the city. However, Polish-Americans are important.

Of Polish-Americans here the first were glassblowers hired by the London Company who arrived in what is now the US at Jamestown in 1608. They also had some connection with the later and very important presence of Polish-Americans in unions, because the Jamestown Poles struck soon after. The Polish-American presence can be addressed in a briefer essay than can, for example, the Germans, Italians, and other, nineteenth-century arrivals and the later Jewish and Hispanic arrivals. In addition, Polish-Americans tend not to be written about as much as some others, so this notice may be welcome. Moreover, the experience of Polish-Americans is naturally very much like that of other people who arrived in the US not speaking a language long established here (such as English and in some parts of the country Spanish or French), and Polish-Americans can be singled out for geolinguistic comment because of the factors that first kept them speaking Polish in the US and then caused them to learn English and assimilate. It is remarkable how long and how well they have retained much of their Old World heritage. They have become full-fledged Americans without losing the identity and character they continued to treasure as *Polish-Americans*. Ordinarily a hyphen signals ethnic diminution. In this case it does not.

Little or nothing has been written from the geolinguistic point of view of the arrival in America and the adaptation here of immigrants from Poland, I repeat, especially the non-Jewish population of the US with ancestral roots in Poland. This study hopes to correct that lack, in a small way, partly because the Americans of Polish extraction now constitute a major part of the millions of Polish speakers outside Poland. They are a significant though not leading percentage of the millions of Americans whose mother tongue is not English.

The hippie movement of the 1960's and the census of the 1970's may be said to have launched our still current emphasis on ethnicity in a diverse society. The 1970 census recorded 33 million Americans whose mother tongue was not English, and identified them as principally speakers of Spanish, followed by German, Italian, French, Polish, or Yiddish. Polish was among the foreigners, though not as dramatically so as in the case of Yiddish and German, two languages that showed a decline from earlier census figures.

Here is, then, the Polish-American experience, not without reference as we go along to comparable or contrasting experience of immigrants of other origin, for we must not forget that the Poles who came to the US were but one foreign group among the many in a nation in which all but the aboriginal Amerindians were immigrants to start. Even the Red Men, it now appears, were immigrants who displaced even earlier peoples here. The US is a microcosm of the world's ethnicities and cultures.

We focus on the Polish-Americans also because of the way the Polish-Americans have managed to cling to their native language, as European Jews, Irish Catholics, and African-Americans have not. The Polish-Americans claiming Polish as their mother tongue in the US 1970 census were recorded as 2,437,938. Joshua A. Fishman (1984) estimated that by the end of the 'seventies there had been a five percent increase in this number, while Yiddish declined by 24 percent and German by 10 percent, Spanish growing by 46 percent.

Poles naturally have a certain interest in Esperanto, created by Ludwig Lazarus Zamenhof, because he was one of their countrymen (though he first presented in Russian, as *Mezhdunarodny yazyk* or International Language, in 1887), but Poles, whether in Buffalo (see Archibold) or Brazil, tend to adapt to the language and conditions of the society into which they move. For evidence of that in a novel, consider among many other works Keith Mallard's *The Clarinet Polka* (reviewed by Wigod).

Polish is part of the minority-language picture in California and New York (each with 25 percent minority languages, mostly Spanish), and Polish appears in the lesser minority-language position of states such as Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio, and also Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The migration of Polish speakers in the US can of course, as in connection with any language, be studied on the basis of languages spoken and names put on the land. We do not have the space here for tracing settlement patterns on the basis of toponymical evidence, though that is one way that language study serves history. A few places in the US are named by non-Poles for famous Poles but most Polish place names (such as Warsaw) in the US were given by Polish-Americans. Onomasticians have basically ignored this, writing only a little on Polish personal names of individuals, not even their personal names on the land.

The history of the Poles who sought a new life in the US starts with a few in the seventeenth century and involves later some political exiles and intellectuals and veterans of Napoleon's Polish Legion in the nineteenth century. It basically goes back to tiny holdings or hard labor in mines and rural areas of Poland.

On arriving in the US Poles generally did not go west to start farms, as did (for example) the Scandinavians from agricultural backgrounds. The Poles who did manage to acquire small farm holdings often tried also to open small businesses in nearby communities. Communities such as Sandusky (Ohio) bear slightly altered Polish names. The Poles in Buffalo and Chicago, Detroit (Waldo surveys Polish-American theater there) and Milwaukee, Los Angeles (see Sandberg) and elsewhere huddled together in

larger and settled English-speaking communities. Those who went to East Texas and the Middle West were more rural and in those new Polish communities they established any enterprises that could be launched without much capital. These small businesses were usually patronized by customers who spoke Polish, and that increased the cohesion of the group; that helped to preserve its identity.

The Poles in America could use their native language here because they did not have to meet current naturalization rules which are supposed to demand for citizenship a command of English, speaking, reading, and writing. Many Polish-Americans arrived before any literacy test was imposed (1917) and before 1921 laws tightened restrictions. Poles came at a time when immigration was more or less wide open to Europeans and against the Chinese, for example, barred by a law of 1882. The early Poles here just got off the boat and tried to connect with still earlier Polish-speaking immigrants who might be able to orient them and get them started in the new land. The law neither helped nor hindered the new arrivals; they were on their own and able to get assistance only from others who spoke their language. Nonetheless, they came here in large numbers and all who could pass a cursory medical inspection were put immediately on the streets of the big city. It is not so long since Poles years after arriving were still speaking their mother tongue in the US, still trying to perfect their English and get ahead. The census of 1970 reported 417,912 Polish-Americans still speaking Polish, down from 581,936 still speaking Polish in 1960.

From the beginning of the twentieth century the condition of New York, among other reasons, caused demands for some restriction on the admittance of poor immigrants to slums and a rocky labor pool. Consequently, the immigration law of 1921 was the first such law here to control directly the national origin of immigrants. Under the new rules of 1921 a nation's immigrants could not exceed 3 percent of people of that nationality in the US in 1910. Quotas were made more stringent in 1924 and again in 1929. This affected Poles trying to get here between the two world wars. In 1965, an annual quota of 120,000 from the western hemisphere was imposed but since that date there have been further adjustments and very large numbers of people, many of them Asians, have entered the US to live. Irish and Jewish immigrants who came to the US before 1910—and they did so in great numbers—had some advantages over Poles who came in the 1920's and after. The period 1920 – 1940 saw a notable rise in US immigration. The Poles had some share in it.

Many Poles arrived, especially in the large cities. There they could find work in factories or as unskilled laborers. They also mined coal; they made or laid steel; they worked in slaughterhouses; they made shoes and clothes; they practiced trades such as baking or construction work or plumbing. Some went to work in mines in Pennsylvania. Some migrated to the South. Large Polish enclaves soon appeared in the New England states, at that time a place of busy mills and manufacturing concerns. Some settled in burgeoning cities then still far from being called the Rust Belt.

In a number of our busiest cities Poles labored, as did some Chinese on the West Coast or Mexicans in the Southwest, in the hope of earning enough money to go back

eventually to their country of origin, to live there comfortably, perhaps in the case of Poles buying some land for a farm, which to Poles always represented stability, to be buried in their native soil. One could never make enough money on a farm in the US to save up the price of a farm in Poland. And increasingly the Polish-Americans were caught up in a general movement in America from an agricultural to an urban civilization. Instead of winding up as truck farmers they wound up as truckers, or presidents of corporations or of universities.

Not everyone caught the brass ring of financial success. Leadbelly sang:

Woke up this mornin'
Blues was in my bed.
Ate my breakfast,
Blues was in my bread.

A great many people of all ethnic origins who became urban immigrants “for bread” in America did go back home, especially Italians. Some few Poles did, and of those some found the need to come back to the US. Here they could stay and keep trying. The experience of Polish-Americans is not really comparable to that of the *Gästarbeiten* who have so altered the language and cultural conditions in Europe. That is because immigrants to the US, once admitted, had the possibility of US citizenship. Being able to speak American to become an American was not at first a condition of admission and, in fact, recently people have been sworn in at naturalization ceremonies in foreign languages. Always it has been the case that refugees from what might euphemistically be called “disturbed areas” were welcomed into the US even if they had no English as well as no money. It was always possible for an adventurous member of the family or two to come, get a foothold, and send for the rest of the clan later. Meanwhile, being Roman Catholics and opposed to birth control, Polish-Americans had large families here. An American child was a way for a whole family to gain citizenship.

The Poles came in both as economic refugees and as people seeking freedom, pursuing hope, seeking a better a better life for themselves and their children. The faith in progress and in God of those who lived in American urban communities was centered on the churches. Polish-Americans soon erected those churches. Many of those churches were large and ornate because of the generosity of parishioners however poor and because of the desire of newcomer Poles not only to express their Roman Catholic faith but also to win the respect of a generally Protestant America. A similar attempt to impress is to be seen among other immigrant groups such as the Irish-Americans who built the first St. Patrick’s cathedral, grand for its time, downtown in New York City well before the even more magnificent St. Patrick’s cathedral uptown on Fifth Avenue.

An imposing Polish church was established in San Antonio (Texas) before the First World War. It looks rather Texan. Later churches, oddly, as the Polish-Americans grew more American, began to look more and more Polish, elaborate in the Central European style. Today even Polish-Americans who hear Mass in English and whose Polish is dormant or lost continue to support their churches on patriotic as well pious

principles. But Polish-Americans are so scattered now that they form fewer Polish-American parishes.

Because they lived, as Jews and Greeks and Chinese and other immigrants did, in small neighborhoods, the Polish parishes were able to hold onto their language. Many of the Polish Jews came here after anti-Semitism grew stronger about 1905 in Poland. The Polish Jewish migration produced such writers as Isaac Bashevis Singer, Sholem Ash, and Samuel Yosef Agnon. Jews over time generally assimilated, except for the very orthodox. Many put aside Yiddish in their upward movement, as well as Hebrew except for religious purposes, at least until, in the general resurrection of ethnic pride in the 1960's and 1970's and after, the respect for roots returned among the more or less assimilated immigrant groups. The Poles, on the other hand, may have Americanized in various ways and even altered some names but they retained identities and they strenuously worked to retain their native language.

The history of the area called Poland is older than the history of the Polish language. The earliest connected texts of Polish are found in the fourteenth century, though there are Polish names in Latin documents of the twelfth. For the descendants of the tribes that gathered into the nation of Poland, Polish was essentially the language of Poland in the Renaissance, the Polish golden age. It was also the language that represented Polish resistance in every era since the Renaissance to other people attempting to eradicate Polish identity and oppress Poles. Pogroms and the Holocaust weakened numbers but strengthened pride and determination in the surviving Jews. Half of the Jewish Poles perished in the Holocaust. As the attack on Polish Jews made survivors more determined, so every attack in history upon the integrity of Polish lands only made the Poles more Polish. Their language (which is what made them Polish, as the French language made the French people) was ever more to be cherished. Often the Poles had had to use it to accomplish little more than to bewail their sad fate in the center of greedy Central European neighbors.

If you look, for example, at the translation of *Pater noster* (Our Father) in Czech, Russian, and Ukrainian as well as Polish, you will see that language differences are comparatively slight among the Slavs and, of course, Christianity, which used among other languages Old Church Slavonic, is common to all, but other determinants created misunderstandings and land grabs and conflicts.

The vocabulary of the Polish language was influenced by foreign languages at least as far back as the tenth-century Czech Christian missionaries who arrived in Polish lands. (The prince of Poland at that time was married to a Czech princess.) Polish has been expectably influenced by languages with which it has come in contact, including English, but sometimes Polish words that look familiar are misleading: Polish gypsies are familiar to us but the word *karawan* has to be translated in English (or in French borrowed by English) as *cortège*.

Polish in America has given few words to the US. Polish Jews and other Yiddish speakers contributed a lot of slang and even some informal structural changes ("how's by

you?,” “be me it’s alright already,” “nobody but nobody”, etc.). The Poles gave us names of food such as *pi(e)rogi* and *kielbasa*. Poles in the US tended to keep Polish and American English separate to a striking degree, perhaps because this Slavic language differs so much from English. In the same way, recent Russian immigrants in Brooklyn, New York regard speaking Russian and speaking English as two rather separate activities. Although there is some code switching among bilinguals, especially when the vocabulary in the foreign language is insufficient, Russians here keep the efforts and the hearers apart. Sometimes I think these new Russian-Americans regard the rest of us as rather alien and address us in a sort of special language, as we address babies or animal pets, using a language which is friendly but gives little away, a language that does not really project the personality or express important ideas of the speaker.

This retention of the Poles’ native language among themselves was largely due, as was the case with German immigrants in some communities, to their churches, as I said. Ever since Mieszko I, a tenth-century prince, converted to Christianity and placed his lands in the care of the pope, the church hierarchy has been an immense influence on Polish life. Because they were converted from the west, Poles (like Czechs and Slovaks, Croats and Slovenes) use the Roman alphabet. Those Slavs converted by Christians from Byzantium (the Great Russians and the Little Russians, which is to say Ukrainians, and the Bulgarians and Serbs) use the alphabet attributed to St. Cyril, the Cyrillic. Their churches are also different. The church has always been important to Slavs, even under “godless communism”. The great John Casimir Vasa (king of Poland 1648 – 1668) was in fact a cardinal at the time he was called to the Polish throne (at that time the monarch was elected by all the nobility). He was the brother of the previous king, Vladislav II Vasa (1632 – 1648, himself the son of a king of Sweden and Poland). The Vasa kings had to fight for Christianity against the Ottoman Turks as well as against Christian enemies, such as the Russians. The fact that the Christian church gave Poles a Roman alphabet and a Roman Catholic rather than Orthodox religion was extremely important in making Poles in their language and their churches more understandable and more acceptable in the US, where the Russian and Greek ways of writing and worshipping were more baffling to Americans. Just having a basically Roman alphabet rather than a “foreign” one makes a big difference, as we can see from the Turks after Atatürk forced them to adopt the Roman alphabet rather than writing in Arabic script.

Any writing except in the Roman alphabet (and, of course, sometimes a variation of that) looks odd to Americans, because it is unfamiliar. At least Polish looked readable, despite the fact that there was an L with a line through it that had to be pronounced like a W: it looks like this, Ł, as in the name of the city of Łódz, which name should sound something like “Wodge”. It looked as strange to America as the extra “line” on the cross of the Orthodox.

In the unfamiliar environment of the US the Poles spoke their strange-sounding tongue as they congregated in their places of worship, in the church halls used for all community events, and in the parochial schools Poles set up, many of those schools teaching in both Polish and English. If Italian-Americans learned Italian or Sicilian it was probably from the family and the neighbors in the crowded streets and tenements.

The Jews might set up extra Hebrew schools. The Poles insisted that Polish be handed on not only at home but taught in their regular schools. That may account for the fact that Polish is spoken more correctly by Polish-Americans who can speak it at all than Italian is spoken correctly by most Italian-Americans. Of course the fact that Sicilian differs so much from Tuscan Italian and that Polish has been, one might say, somewhat evened out in America, may explain a lot.

The schools under church auspices were inexpensive for the poor because they were largely staffed by non-salaried nuns. The parish church with Polish as its working language, and often with some provision for the poorest in time of need, was the center of Polish-American lives. Being Roman Catholic—Poland itself was always at least 90 percent Roman Catholic—at least once a week on Sunday the early Polish-Americans went to Mass and listened to the sermon and announcements in Polish, although at that time the Roman Catholic Mass everywhere was in the traditional Latin.

Of course not every single immigrant from Poland spoke Polish as a native tongue. This was due to the fact that the Austrians, the Germans, the Russians and other groups that three times partitioned Poland in the eighteenth century were always ready thereafter to carve pieces of Poland off to improve their positions in *Mittel Europa*. There is an old joke about Cossacks riding into a Polish village and declaring, “This is Russia now. This is no longer in Poland.” “Thank God,” an old crone replied, “I am a weak old woman and I couldn’t take another Polish winter!”

Because of all the border shifts, the Polish population as late as 1931, for example, reported about a third of Poles in Poland did not speak Polish as their mother tongue. Some spoke German, a kind of lingua franca in Central Europe at the time. Some US immigrants here from Poland had to gather and set up neighborhoods in which neither Polish nor American was spoken at first. On the whole, Polish-Americans who spoke Polish could communicate in their various dialects as easily as English-speaking Americans could understand each other’s dialects. The Slavic dialect continuum connected shades of Czech and Slovak, Ukrainian and Russian to Polish. Within the Polish language, Polish dialects did not vary so much as to obviate mutual intelligibility. There were certain inflexible rules, such as the accent falling on the penultimate syllable.

Some other ethnic groups coming to America did not enjoy so much solidarity in their ranks as did Polish-Americans. To some extent cohesion in the ranks naturally delayed adoption of English here in the case of certain minorities. Today the Mexican-Americans are the slowest of all immigrant groups to adopt English, but it must be added that many Chicanos plan to return to Mexico.

Some immigrants who are in the US to stay have no intention of assimilating. *Hasidim* in Brooklyn today, for example, live in a kind of transported European ghetto and deal as little as possible with others, including other Jews. This both annoys and is perfectly OK with their neighbors in Crown Heights, Brooklyn who are mostly Caribbean blacks, but once in a while there is racial violence. Objections to immigrants in the US have always been that they keep to themselves and that they do not keep to themselves.

The Polish-speakers at first did keep to themselves, even if unwillingly. Whatever the language, the parish priest was almost always the most educated among the immigrant Poles, most of whom had been peasants in Poland and had only elementary education, if that. The parish priest was their connection to God and to the Old Country. He was their spiritual guide and adviser on all daily matters. Often he was the sole link between what was essentially a recreated Polish village and the larger society—the priest was bilingual—until Poles began to move out of Polish neighborhoods and attend the public schools and even the universities.

As Catholics, many attended Notre Dame, whose football team was called The Fighting Irish but usually had many “unpronounceable” Polish names on the roster. A parody of the college fight song began:

Shame, shame, on old Notre Dame
For keeping the Irish out of the game.

This success in sports like football of rugged Poles—although baseball was able to boast Stan “The Man” Musial—was repeated in the professions. Gradually the secular society reduced the power of the religious authorities. This resembled the initial dependence of the immigrant Jews, some of whom were Polish in origin and some of whom were not, as you know, on the rabbis. The Polish Jews, 10 percent of the population of Poland until the Holocaust, were looked down upon by the more educated German Jews who had arrived in the US earlier. To speak Yiddish rather than good German was regarded as low. Polish Jews who spoke no Polish were looked down upon by other Poles. There was little fraternization between Polish Catholics and Polish Jews. Language was as big a barrier as religion. One group spoke Polish and the other Yiddish, for the most part. The Poles entered the struggle for a better life with all the other “tired...poor...yearning masses” the Statue of Liberty welcomed at Ellis Island, a couple of million of those Poles, and the Poles did not for the most part have to face the anti-Semitism that persisted. The Poles in America basically had to deal with less virulent anti-Catholicism as well as the language barrier.

In the twentieth century the anti-Roman Catholic feelings of America, which were vicious before that and greatly disadvantaged the Irish for a time, largely disappeared. Anti-Semitism to some extent continued. An Irish Catholic, Al Smith, made a bid for the presidency and failed (1924) but later the Irish Catholic John Fitzgerald Kennedy was elected president. The Irish had been active in US politics from their earliest arrival here and the time came when “lace-curtain Irish” had the money to buy votes from others than “their own”.

Many Jews have been successful in US politics but to date none has risen higher than a failed bid for the vice-presidency. No Pole has been elected to the highest office, but Zbigniew Brezinski was an important advisor to President Carter and continues to be active in a Washington think tank, and a woman of Polish descent, Barbara Mikulski, serves in the US Senate at this time.

The governor of New York State as I write is George Pataki. In Polish, *potoki* is “lake,” but most people do not know that and are aware that Gov. Pataki is some kind of “ethnic” but probably do not know which kind, Polish or otherwise. Governor Pataki did not campaign with strong ethnic backing as did his predecessor, Mario Cuomo, obviously Italian-American like New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani. One’s name and ethnic background has always been a major factor in New York politics. Fiorello Laguardia, running for mayor, half Italian and half Jewish, as we say in New York, “had it made”. There are sections of the country where a Polish surname is a valuable asset when running for office. (In Britain one “stands” for office; in the US one “runs”—a much more vigorous verb.)

Polish names ending in *-wicz* or *-witz* or *-ski* (for “son”, the latter considered to be of higher caste and actually more common in Polish America than in Poland now) are often thought to come from similar languages. *Kowalski* (son of the smith) is the common Polish name that Tennessee Williams chose for the male lead in his play *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Common Polish surnames such as *Janowicz* (son of John), *Niziolek* (comparable to our Short), *Jurek* (comparable to our Hill or Mount), *Bialas* (comparable to our Light or White) and *Czernik* (our Black), mean little to most non-Polish-Americans, though *Abramowitz* and *Adamski* and such they can figure out. The suffix *-ik* (as in *Lukomnik*, “the little onion man”) was picked up in slang for *peacenik* *nextdoornik*= neighbor and such and the Jews combined native and foreign elements to create the very useful term *nogoodnik*.

For Polish-American surnames see Smith. For changes of Polish surnames in the US see Borkowski and others in *Polish American Studies* 20 (1963). Borkowski makes it clear that Poles did not change their names in the US to abandon their Polish identities. Jews adopted *Bloomington* in place of *Blumenthal* although many liked German names here because they were thought to be nicer than distinguished religious names such as *Cohen* and *Levy*, the way Jews invented. Some Jews took *LeVine* in place of *Levine*, *Robinson* in place of *Rabinovitch*, and so on. The Polish-Americans simply saw that *Barr* was easier to cope with in English than *Barzyk*, that *Bolan* or *Kozol* still *foreign* but easier than *Bolanski* or *Kozlowski*. *Gladys* looked English but really a spelling of *Gladysz* as *Walter* is the English for *Wladyslaw*. This last also occurs as a forename: it was dropped by the musician known as Liberace. Most Polish-American surname changes were for business and Americanization reasons and some changes were admittedly drastic: *Czarneki* to *Scott*, for one.

For some reason I cannot understand, Jews, some of them Polish Jews, liked to adopt Scottish names both as surnames (*Gordon*, *Irving*, *Stuart*) and as forenames (*Stuart*, *Murray*, *Scott*). Poles tended to avoid that. Immediately in America the Polish practice of a wife or daughter bearing a female version of the family name was given up. See Rzetelska-Felezko for information on how the father, mother, sons and daughters in a Polish family can have different versions of a surname.

The European Jews were forced to take surnames because German authorities wanted that. In the US we want all members of a family not only to have a surname but

to have the same surname, even if it means that the Thomson father and Jones mother (whether they are married or not) will not only call their children Thomson-Jones but will call themselves that (which is wrong, for only the children are an amalgam of Thompson and Jones). America has its own way with names and so the Polish-Americans “simplified” and the Chinese-Americans and Hungarian-Americans (both of whom traditionally put what Americans consider the “last name” first) turned family and given names around. Here in the US, Spanish surnames became single (not the surnames of both parents for the child), and most women took their husband’s surname and were (say) *López*, not the old Spanish *de López* (“belonging to” the man of that name). In fact the diacritical marks/accents were dropped on foreign names, Spanish names among them, and the “extra” letters some foreign versions of the Roman alphabet need for sounds Americans do not make have been eliminated from almost all surnames in use in modern America. “Ordinary Americans” say “spell it in American”.

There are vital sociodynamic clues in things that the so-called Ordinary American may think is just amusing rather than profound like the onomastics of name change, whether for social or other reasons, whether of surnames or just of forenames. Some Hispanics now call the boy *Robert* instead of *Roberto* but do not alter the surname other than by using *Garcia* (no accent) instead of *García y Rodríguez*. These things are not to be ignored. In fact they are something that language can tell us about life. In the case of the Poles and other Slavs (as Kaleta observes) there have been five different stages in the surname process, stabilization coming at Stage 3. Polish-Americans in many cases faced a Stage 6: Americanization. This tells us something crucial about history and sociology.

So do historical figures and their reputations. Polish immigrants—623,000 of them between 1820 and the early 1900s, at which point conditions in Poland began to improve and emigration declined although it never has ceased—benefited somewhat in the US because of two Polish heroes of our War of Independence which, as you well know, antedated 1820.

One hero was Tadeusz Kosciuszko (or Kościuszko, 1748 – 1817). Though born in Lithuania and trained in the military arts in France, he was regarded here as a Polish patriot and honorary American because he was a strong supporter of our Revolution. He arrived in America in 1777 and won the rank of brigadier-general in the American forces. Americans remember his Revolutionary service more than his heroics against the Russians after he left America and his important political career in Poland. He returned briefly to America in 1797 but soon went to France. Disagreeing with Napoleon’s plan for the restoration of Poland (1806), he left for Switzerland, where he died about a decade later.

The other great Polish hero of our Revolution was Count Kazimierz Pulaski (1748 – 1779). Like the French Marquis de La Fayette (who was eventually granted actual honorary US citizenship) and the German Baron von Steuben (1730 – 1794, whose military career began when at the age of 14 he participated in the siege of Prague and who lived to participate in our Battle of Yorktown), Pulaski was one of the European military men who fought beside Washington. La Fayette was just an eager young man

with hardly any military training. Steuben and Pulaski were seasoned veterans and good strategists. Having been outlawed by the Russians after the partition of Poland in 1772, Pulaski arrived in America in 1777 and soon distinguished himself at the Battle of Brandywine. Then he formed Pulaski's Legion and captured and held Charleston and died at the Battle of Savannah. Pulaski is called The Father of the US Cavalry.

Americans never forgot the service of these two Poles. A statue to Kosciusko stands in Washington (DC), a bridge is named for him in New York, a county in Mississippi, a township in South Dakota, and many parks and schools bear his fame. There is a Kosciusko National Military Park in Pennsylvania. Pulaski has 15 cities and towns named Pulaski in the US (plus a Pulaskville in Ohio). His name is borne by more than half a dozen townships, innumerable physical features and parks (in the one in Washington, DC, his statue stands). Fort Pulaski (Georgia) is a National Monument. There is a tradition of annual Pulaski Day parades, as the Irish have St. Patrick's Day parades and the Germans Steuben Day parades.

Pulaski had the advantage, not shared by all Poles here, of a surname Americans could spell and pronounce. One of the features of Americanization was the simplification of all foreign surnames here (even that of Paul Revere, from the French, and General Pershing, from the German). This was not always done from the same motives as the translating of Irish surnames into English or the exchanging of Jewish surnames for more Gentile ones. The surnames of Poles were considered especially "difficult" and pressure to alter them was strong.

The Poles were in prejudice linked with the *bohunks* (Bohemians and Hungarians) and there was a fad for Polish jokes in which they were derided as stupid. Q: What do the following numbers have in common: 27, 92, 76, 181? A: They are adjoining rooms in the Warsaw Hilton. In a presidential campaign, Ronald Reagan perpetrated a Polish joke: "Have you heard that the Polish Army has bought 10,000 septic tanks? As soon as they learn how to use them they plan to invade Russia." An anti-African-American joke could and did get a man thrown out of the Cabinet. An anti-Jewish quip might lose a man a presidential election. A Polish joke is just bad taste, not a hanging offense in modern America. Prejudice against Catholics such as Italians and Poles dies hard here.

Polish-Americans were regarded as big and strong but dumb. This was wrong. They were able, in fact, to take full advantage of the system of public education in the US and comparatively quickly become quite Americanized. Like the Greeks and some other ethnic groups, however, they clung to their heritage of surnames (often Anglicizing their forenames) and they kept their religious and folk customs and language. They made sure that Polish was learned by the children even as they went to the regular schools, as you have heard, and yet they participated more and more in mainstream American life.

At the same time that many Polish immigrants became Michiganers or Ohioans they remembered their regional origins as *Kaszuby* (Cassubians of East Pomerania), *Mazowsanie* (Mazovians), *Polanie* (Polans, either *Maslopolanie* "Great Polans" or *Wielkopolanie* "Little Polans"), *Slazacy* (Silesians), and *Wislanie* (Vistulans). In those

regions the anthropological elements might be Nordic or Lapp, Hun or Germanic. That is why some Poles and Polish-Americans look somewhat Scandinavian and some a little Asiatic, but our American idea is that Poles are all blond and blue-eyed. Actually, they are a mixed group that a language came to unite.

Naturally there were, especially among isolated mountain and rural people, many dialects of Polish. Those did not, however, differ so greatly as to make it impossible for those from different regions of Poland, whether in Poland or in the diaspora, to understand each other, as I said earlier and feel the need to reiterate. The dialects differed just enough to remind speakers of regional loyalties and to create enclaves in America. Some dialects had a great number of speakers, some very few. Today in Poland, southwest of Gydnia and Gdansk (the latter known to most Americans because of the name Danzig and the Solidarity movement), only a few thousand people speak the language of the *Kaszuby*. Wendish, which may be considered as a dialect of Polish if not a separate language, has few speakers in Poland at this time. In a few pockets of Polish-Americans you can hear traces of most if not all dialects of Polish, but when people of Polish descent born in America began to study Polish formally the dialects were obscured. However, immigrants here, generations after leaving home, retain a little of what has been lost in the country of origin. They may even get some few things more correct than average Poles in Poland do, just as some Cornish people in America today bear surnames more correctly spelled than the similar surnames in modern Cornwall.

It was this combination of regional dialects and a shared language that created out of a mixture of tribes the nation of Poland and the nature of the Poles. It was retaining their original regional identities, like Jews who moved *shtetls* to America and stayed unified also in religious groups that contributed to Poles sticking together here and taking advantage of more opportunity to hold onto their distinct original language and culture. There were some Polish areas in cities comparable to the Little Italy, Chinatown, and Irish Channel neighborhoods. As long as those areas lasted Polish was the daily language in them. In them the Polish-Americans lived, socialized, shopped, and worshipped, moving into the wider society only when they commanded English and were able to progress to better jobs.

It was only when Polish speakers got out of the Polish-speaking community and mingled with English speakers that they effectively were Americanized. Here is the full text of an awkwardly eloquent letter received by officialdom in Boston in 1914. It was laboriously written by a Pole in America known to the record as simply F. N. I believe you will be moved by it and forgive its length

I'm in this country four months (from 14 Mai 1913-Noniton-Antverpen} [the ship out of Antwerp].

I am polish man. I want to be american citizen—and took here first [naturalization] paper in 12 June N 635. But my friends are polish people—I must live with the—I work in the shoes-shop with polish people—I stay all the time with them—at home—in the shop—anywhere.

I want live with american people, but I do not know anybody of american. I go 4 times to teacher and must pay \$3 weekly. I wanted to take board in an english house, but I could not, for I earn only \$5 or 6

in a week, and when I pay teacher \$2, I have only \$4-\$3—and now english board house is too dear for me. Better job to get is very hard for me because I do not speak well english and I cannot understand what they say to me. The teacher teach me—but when I come home—I must speak polish and in the shop also. In this way I can live in your country many years—like my friends—and never speak—write well english—and never be good american citizen. I know here many persons, they live here 10 or moore years, and they are not citizens, they don't speak well english, they don't know geography and history of this country, they don't know constitution of America—nothing. I don't like be like them I wanted they help me in english—they could not—because they knew nothing. I want to go from them away. But where? Not in the country, because I want to go in the city, free evening schools and lern. I'm looking for help. If someone could give me another job between american people, help me live with them and lern english—could tell me the best way how I can fast lern—I would be very, very good for me. Perhaps you have somebody, here he could help me?

If you can help me, I please you.

I wrote this letter by myself and I know no good—but I hope you will understand whate I mean.

Excuse me,
F. N.

One hopes that there were many who moved to assist such worthy people to make full use of the evening classes that workmen attended to better themselves and the free libraries that civic authorities and private philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie established. One can only hope that this ambitious “N. H.” and other Polish-Americans who wanted a better life in America were identified and helped and admired for their desire to be full “american citizen”! These persons deserved respect.

At the same time, Polish-Americans like “N.H.” arrived at a time when modern entitlements and government handouts were basically unknown and even the lowest of the low was expected like the ragged boys of fiction who were “bound to rise” to get ahead by “luck and pluck,” on their own, without government assistance. They clawed their way upward with public schools but no local or Fulbright scholarships, no student exchanges between the US and Poland, little assistance indeed.

Just as society's attitudes and provisions have changed, so the general US attitude toward Poland has altered over time. It has been affected over the years by such factors as Woodrow Wilson's calling for a united and independent Poland after World War I, the heroism of Polish reaction to the Nazi onslaught in 1939 that commenced World War II and the courage of the Free Polish pilots in the RAF of World War II, the criticism of Polish anti-Semitism in World War II, the sympathy for Poland under Soviet occupation, the admiration of the success of the Solidarity movement in Poland, and so on. What happens in any Old Country long affects those who have long been Americans.

The reputation and acceptance of any foreign language in America depends upon history such as that and on the political climate of the day, whether it be the anti-German feelings occasioned by the world wars or simply France opposing the US war in Iraq, when a congressman managed to get Freedom fries instead of French fries on the menu

of the capitol restaurant. Earlier we renamed sauerkraut victory cabbage and the British called hamburger Salisbury steak. Places named Berlin disappeared from our maps.

Because German was considered one of the leading languages of scholarship, science, and culture it was once widely taught in the US. Today German is taught in far fewer US universities than it once was. German is not regularly demanded of doctoral students now, the doctor of philosophy degree being inherited, like so much of American education, from the kindergarten on up, from German models of the nineteenth century. Our doctoral programs began here in 1852 in an effort to keep so many Americans from going to Berlin, Heidelberg and other German universities for higher study.

Today German is absent from many departments of modern languages. Today all Slavic languages are much less taught than Spanish. One can learn a great deal about the world from noticing which foreign languages are considered crucial or useful in the view of governmental and educational institutions. The languages that are in favor and those which are not shift places continually. Polish, except for Polish-Americans, is hardly what a US student would choose to learn, though Berlitz teaches it or rather, as the word for “learn” in Russian has it, you “teach yourself”.

The French-Americans have tried to make Americans believe that French is a fine second language to add. Once Poles also thought so. Polish-Americans have led the way for us to believe that Polish is a good second language for those of Polish extraction. The Polish-Americans still believe this even if grandma by now manages English or has passed on. Still the Polish-Americans continue to believe that Polish-Americans and all other Americans can and ought to speak American English in order to participate fully in American life. You might well find Poles supporting an initiative for English as the official language of the country or backing a move in various states for English immersion, not bilingualism, in the public schools. In this Polish-Americans find themselves on the opposite side of the fence from Spanish speakers, who have in recent decades greatly grown in numbers and concomitant political clout. Polish-Americans are on the same side as African-Americans and others of a more practical than political bent who say that good English is the only language in which one can get an honest and well-paying job and achieve a respected place in American society.

Times change. We used to think of Miami as Jewish; now it is Cuban. We used to offer courses in Portuguese at the University of Rhode Island. Is Polish taught in the colleges and universities of your area? Is it part of public education in Manhattan?

The Poles who settled on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, for instance, beside the Ukrainians (as the Jews had settled beside the Germans much earlier), eventually moved to the suburbs of New York City, to New Jersey, all around the country. The benevolent *Dom Polski* (Polish Home) became the disco Electric Circus when the hippies hit St. Mark’s Place in what came to be called the East Village. Today the East Village or Lower East Side or LES is *Loisada*, what the Puerto Ricans call the Lower East Side.

Slowly the Spanish speakers are being driven out of *Loisada* by rising rents and the influx of young trustifarian well-off bohemians. The artistic and truly bohemian types who moved from Greenwich Village (when rents went up there) to the East Village (where rents also escalated) have had to find cheaper accommodations, first in SoHo (South of Houston street) and later in the borough of Brooklyn. There we now have DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass) and Williamsburg, a trendy new Berliniamsburg of the 1920's. The US is all about becoming more than being, about moving on, moving ahead. It is about leaving Polish town and still attempting to retain some Polish tradition. There are Poles in Brooklyn but no Polish Town on our mental maps.

Once calling an area Polish Town or a street Strivers Row was denigrating. Now real-estate moguls and social climbers realize that a named area can be more successfully given a price rise and prestige. Now a family of Polish-Americans can buy a home in any housing market, even gated communities, joining the country club, if they have the money. In today's America it is money rather than national origin that determines social rank and, in our allegedly classless society, it is money that creates a bewilderingly complex and constantly shifting social hierarchy. One can leave one's ethnicity more or less behind, cut one's connections, abandon the language and culture of one's ancestors, alter Lefrak to LeFrak or Cohen to Gordon, change one's name or one's nose or one's friends, and replant oneself at any level one can financially afford. Those who lose connection with their origins are lessened. The Polish-Americans don't wish for that.

In recent decades more and more Poles do not have the Polish language but they still at all social levels cherish their Polish roots, their polkas, their ethnic food, their Polish relations. They remain Poles at heart. When Poles fled the Russian take-over of their country, many came to the US and set up a Polish National Academy. During the Cold War, that organization competed with the Soviet version in Warsaw. After the end of the Iron Curtain the two established fraternal connections. When the Solidarity movement succeeded in Poland, American Poles rejoiced. Polish-American stock, one might say, went up in everyone's estimation here. Polish-American joy was even greater when the Roman Catholic Church elected its first Polish pope.

Polish-Americans are proud of Polish accomplishments anywhere but, naturally, Polish-Americans point with special pride to Andy Warhol (who slightly altered his surname from Warhola) and Korczak's huge (and unfinished) monument to Chief Crazy Horse has now been unveiled (see Worthington). Martha Stewart (who uses her married name) and other Polish-American celebrities are in the news, for better or worse. Polish-Americans boast of Copernicus (born in Poland in 1437) and Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849) and even more about Anton Rubenstein (1829 – 1894), Helena Modjeska (Modrzejewska, 1844 – 1909, see Holmgren), Ignace Jan Paderewski (1860 – 1941) and other Polish artists who had their greatest successes in the US.

The Poles in America have been successful in many arts and sciences and businesses, starting back when some of them were not very good in English. Think of the major US cultural force in the twentieth century: motion pictures.

Back in the 1920's, the silents did not bar those who spoke Polish from becoming movie idols. Appolonia Chaluppek, born in Poland in 1897, starred as Pola Negri. Negri's popularity explains much of why Theodosia Goodman, born in 1890 in Brooklyn, called her "vamp" character Theda Bara, which some publicity hack in Hollywood said was an anagram of a movie title, *Arab Death*. There never was such a movie; it was just a case of creating a name that sounded exotic, foreign, sexy. The movies went through a succession of sexy ethnicities, the Latin Lover and the Italian gangster being probably the most notable.

Pola Negri in her *Memoirs of a Star* said Hollywood of her era had "beneath the illusions, the harsh reality of a desperate place" but "the prizes to be won were very nearly beyond belief" for the talented and the lucky—and you could get by speaking Polish. Later on, Slavic languages of course and even Slavic professional names were taboo. Films from Poland became an art-house rage. Americans learned of Aleksander Hertz and Aleksander Ford, Andrzej Wajda and Andrzej Munk, Jerzy Kawalerowicz and Jerzy Skolimowski, and others. What Americans perceived as the strangeness of names in Polish movies, and of Grotowski and others in the avant-garde theater of gestures and grunts, only added to the elite tone, but Polish names for American performers were a practical matter and were more or less banned from the marquees though not from the credits for cinematography and other "backstage" work. Polish cameraman Ryszard Boleslawski became Hollywood director Richard Boleslawski and many composers had Polish or other "unpronounceable" names, of which a few were Polish and we learned how to cope with them. One example will be sufficient to make my point. Think of Joseph L. Mankiewicz, producer, writer, and director. The movies brought us images of Poland, bits of Central European history, Leopold Stokowski as a symphony conductor (reinforcing the popular idea that classical music was "long-hair"), and a dark and usually depressing modern Polish cinema. It was probably from the movies that most Americans learned of the Polish background of Marie Curie (1867 – 1934).

Even some Polish-Americans may be unaware of the stars of Polish origin who changed their names to something that sounded less Polish, people such as Bobby Vinton, Pat Benatar, Stefanie Powers, Jack Palance, Ted Knight, even Liberace (whom many believed to be Italian). Although Charles Bronson (Charles Buchinski) has played everything from Amerindians to Russians in the movies, most people think of him as Polish. Sidney Pollack is a famous film director. Actor Michael J. Pollard was born Pollack. Roman Polanski and Nastassja Nakszynski stayed Polish but she simplified the last name to Kinski, known from Klaus Kinski (another simplification), but name change makes other Poles and Polish-Americans unidentifiable as such. Polish-Americans cannot easily claim them, any more than they can lay claim to such African-Americans celebrities as James Brown (born in Pulaski, Tennessee) or Oprah Winfrey (born in Kosciusko, Mississippi).

The experience of the Polish immigrants in America in some ways inevitably mirrors that of other groups who arrived unable to speak English. What is remarkable is the way that the Polish-Americans proceeded to become full-fledged Americans

comparatively quickly and how they still manage to retain their Catholic and, in some ways, even pre-Christian Old Country customs and for a long time taught their Old World language to their descendants in the New World. There are still Polish newspapers and magazines published in the US but here is an easily remembered fact: there are many fewer than the 60 or so published in 1960 that survive. Today there is a long list of relevant publications: *Polish American Journal*, *Polish American Studies*, *Polish Footprints*, *Polish Heritage*, *Polonia Today*, *Post Eagle Nowy Kurier* [New Courier, for news of Poles in the US and Canada], *Tygodnik Polski* [Polish Weekly]. Those are just a few. For books, see the catalogue of the Library of Congress or the New York Public Library, the collections at the University of Buffalo (Lockwood Library, Polish Room) and other universities, or just go online. There you will find thousands upon thousands of references.

Today there are a number of American institutions such as the Kosciusko Foundation and the Polish National Alliance but more and more Polish-Americans are mainstream Americans and speak American English.

Poles tend to retain their heritage even in foreign countries where they have settled. The continual carving up of Poland—European history bristles with terms such as *Congress Poland*, the *Polish Problem*, the *Polish Corridor*—led over the centuries to millions of autochthonous Poles living in Austrian, German, Baltic, and Russian and later Soviet lands and still others suffering from deteriorating conditions within Poland itself. Political upheavals and intolerable economic conditions prompted a great deal of emigration. To the fairly small numbers of Poles who came to America before World War I more were added between the wars and World War II brought many Poles here as refugees. At the same time many Poles fled to Australia, Britain, and Canada, and hundreds of thousands flocked to South America, the great majority to Brazil (where there are still important Polish enclaves) but hundreds of thousands also to Argentina and other countries.

So that is a bit of the story of the Poles who came to America and changed the nature of some large cities and some rural landscapes. They put their stamp on some aspects of the US and are recalled in many ways. Look at the names on the land. In the US we have towns or cities called Poland in eight states, three Poland Townships, a couple of Poland Centers, and Poland Mines (Pennsylvania), Poland Grove (Iowa), and, nationally known for its bottled water, Poland Spring (Maine). In addition there is a place called Warsaw in 18 states, three Warsaw townships, a Warsaw Landing (Louisiana) and a Warsaw Junction (Ohio), as well as a great many features and settlements named by or for Polish-Americans, heroes or politicians or postmistresses and so on, or places in the Old Country that, having come here and become fully integrated into American society, Polish-Americans never have forgotten. They have made their unique addition to the multicultural society, once a melting pot and now some say a tossed salad, each constituent retaining its identity in the mix that is the United States. At the same time they have performed a similar service not only to the rest of North America but likewise to the continents of South America and Australia.

Mario Pei wrote (p.278) after World War II: “‘Polack’ and ‘Bohunk’ were until recently, and possibly still are, fighting words in some parts of the United States.” Those insults have disappeared.

Geolinguistics is a limited but useful scientific instrument. Like a seismograph, it can perceive and comprehend, in this case by studying one immigrant language, the underlying large and small upheavals in society; it finds in the introduction, use, and decline of language profound indications of forces that shape human events. A full understanding of the impact of the Polish-Americans is essential for writing the social and political history of several key American cities and states. It is indeed likewise essential for understanding the power of immigration and naturalization in the history of the entire democratic experiment.

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