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Reminiscing the past, pointing to the future: immigrant memoirs from the early- twentieth-century United States

> [Y]esterday he [an immigrant] was a solid citizen in his particular village of Sicily or Rumania, of a piece with his ancestral background, surrounded by friends and kindred, apparently rooted in his native soil. To-day he is adrift in a foreign world, mute and helpless and tragically ridiculous – a soul in purgatory, a human creature cut from its moorings, the most pitiable sight to be met on this earth. To-morrow? Who knows? To-morrow very probably you will find him a prosperous citizen again …[1]

The above words, found on the first page of Marcus Eli Ravage's memoir (one of the four life narratives analyzed here), embrace the linear vision of time, encompassing the past, the present, and the future in order to imagine the possible trajectory of an immigrant's life. Although we tend to think of memoirs, the written records of our life experience, as being

[1] Marcus Eli Ravage, *An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1917), p. 3.

entirely immersed in the past, memoirs – as the above epigraph indicates, and this paper is going to demonstrate – are frequently oriented towards the future. There are numerous works in the field of life narrative studies devoted either to the relationship between narrative and identity or to the retrospective presentation of the self, but while the representations of the past are widely examined, the future aspect in life narratives is largely ignored, and this paper is going to address this omission.

To write a memoir one has to engage memory, and we usually think of memory as a capacity to remember and recollect past events, impressions, people, or places. However, although commonly memory is associated with the past, from the evolutionary point of view, memory is as much about the past as it is about the future. Pascal Boyer thus explains: "the past does not affect an organism, except through its consequences for present circumstances. So if we consider memory as a biological function, we are led to consider that memory is certainly not about the past but about the present and future behavior."[2] Memory allows us to analyze our past experiences and to draw conclusions from them so that we can avoid the same mistakes in the future. This, in fact, is so-called directive function of autobiographical memory. Cognitive psychologists distinguish three main functions of autobiographical memory: self function, social function, and directive function.[3] The last one is connected with the future: Memory can help us solve problems, predict the future outcomes, and make decisions for the future. What is more, talking from a strictly neuroscientific perspective, it turns that "imagining future circumstances modulates activation of the same cortical networks as remembering past episodes."[4] Our mind is therefore like a time machine that moves flexibly between the past and the future.

Apart from telling stories from bygone times, memoirs also engage the future in several ways. First of all, they are dead without their present and future readers. Like any other book, a memoir comes to life only in the process of reading. Secondly, and more importantly to our argument, memoirs are often written with a purpose. Similarly to memory, which

[2] Pascal Boyer, "What are memories for? Functions of Recall in Cognition and Culture," In *Memory in Mind and Culture*, eds. Pascal Boyer and James Wertsch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 3.

[3] See for example Susan Bluck, "Autobiographical Memory: Exploring its Functions in Everyday Life" *Memory* 11(2) (2003), pp. 113–123.

[4] Ibid., p. 18.

exists to help us navigate the present and the future, memoirs are often written for the records of family members, or for the benefit of a certain community, if not the whole society. Some of them bear witness to the atrocities of the past; others recollect the past and simultaneously imagine a better future. The latter, as it will become evident in this essay, is particularly true about some immigrant memoirs from the early twentieth century. Many of them seem to be written not to dwell nostalgically on the past or to recreate the image of the lost homeland but in order to envision a brighter future for the immigrant community in the adopted country. This point is going to be illustrated on the example of four memoirs: *From Alien to Citizen* (1914) by Edward Steiner, *An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant* (1917) by Marcus E. Ravage, Constantine Panunzio's *The Soul of an Immigrant* (1922), and Jacob Cash's *What America Means to Me* (1925). All the four texts were authored by European immigrants who arrived in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Steiner came from Hungary, Ravage from Romania, Panunzio from Italy, and Cash from Czarist Russia (Steiner and Cash were Jewish). They were therefore representatives of the wave of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe that dominated the American immigration at the end of the nineteenth century.

Most of these memoirs are typical rags to riches accounts – stories of success, self-making, and determination – that are deeply engrained in the American tradition and can be traced to at least Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* (1791), which promotes the model of a self-made man. They document the process of becoming a perfect American citizen, which is even suggested by their titles. They display no or few dilemmas connected with the uprooting,[5] and their pages are not devoted to the search for identity. Questions such as "who am I?" or "where do I belong?" do not

[5] Out of the four authors examined here, Ravage is most critical of the American society and he talks most extensively about the difficult process of becoming a citizen of a new country. In her paper "Marcus E. Ravage's *An American in the Making,* Americanization, and the New Immigrant Representation," Cristina Stanciu argues that Ravage's memoir does not fit the contemporary canon of immigrant autobiography because, unlike better-known autobiographers such as Mary Antin or Jacob Riis, he does not believe in the smooth assimilation process. Stanciu says that Ravage "writes back, responding to previous representations of "the immigrant" by both immigrant and American writers and critics of the social scene" (5). She also adds that "In a polemical work, which often challenges the dialectic of Americanization, he shows the reader "an American in the making," as neither fully Americanized nor a greenhorn but a subject of literary production, aware of his objectification in contemporaneous sociological studies and photo-journalistic exposés (such as Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* [1890]" (5). In *MELUS* vol. 40, No. 2.

seem to trouble the authors of these memoirs, who are focused on a set of entirely different issues. The writers usually mention the struggles and difficulties they had to face in a new country, and concentrate on economic problems and other hardships they had to overcome, such as finding the right employment, learning a new language, or living and working in extremely poor conditions. The authors also show very little nostalgia for their native countries, and the descriptions of their lives in their respective homelands are rather succinct, usually limited to the first few pages. In contrast, they portray America as a land of opportunities, where one can become successful if one tries hard enough, even if they mention their initial disappointment with the host country. They often openly express their gratitude towards America and glorify American values. Moreover, the individual stories frequently serve as a springboard for discussions of what ails the contemporary American society in relation to migration and what can be done to improve it.

Such a perspective is the result of what these texts intended to accomplish. I argue that they were written in order to help the immigrant community by envisioning and promoting a better future for the American society, a future based on tolerance and equality. It becomes especially evident when we consider the times when these books were published. Roger Daniels distinguishes three phases of anti-immigrant feelings between 1820 and 1920, the period that is frequently referred to as 'the century of migration': anti-Catholic, directed mainly against the Irish people and particularly visible from the 1830s to the 1850s; anti-Asian, directed mainly against Chinese, which resulted in the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882; and the one relevant here – anti-all-immigrants which began towards the end of the nineteenth century and brought about the significant restriction of immigration at the beginning of the twentieth century.[6] First, the Emergency Quota Act was introduced in 1921, which was supposed to limit immigration by allowing a certain number of people from each country to enter the United States. This eventually led to the passage of the Immigration Act in 1924, which considerably changed the law and severely restricted immigration.[7] The numbers of the foreign-born speak for themselves. In the last four years before the Immigration Act,

[6] Roger Daniels, *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 2002), p. 265.

[7] Ibid.

over 2 million people arrived, despite the quota being already in place, and this reduced the number of immigrants by half in comparison to the prewar levels. Ten years later, in the period between 1931 and 1935, immigration dropped to seven hundred thousand.[8]

However, the diminishing numbers of immigrants were accompanied with the growing numbers of memoirs written by them. Diane Bjorklund in her study *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (1998) accounts for one hundred and seventy texts written by migrants between 1800 and 1979, with only eleven memoirs published in the nineteenth century. The immigrant memoirs therefore really flourished in the twentieth century, and their number was growing with each decade, with 7 memoirs published in the first decade, 12 in the second, 13 in the third, and 33 in the fourth one.[9] These four memoirs examined here belonged not only to a growing canon of life narratives composed by first-generation immigrants at the beginning of the twentieth century but also to a broader category of immigrant literature. As Cristina Stanciu notes, "The immigrant experience as a literary trope has been the subject of many genres of American literature. Established American writers such as Willa Cather (*O, Pioneers* [1913] and *My Antonia* [1918]) and Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle* [1906]) incorporated themes of the immigrant experience in their work, from alienation to poverty to second-language acquisition and the costs of Americanization."[10] All these literary works, both fictional and non-fictional, were an interesting contribution to the debate about immigration that was ever-present in the American life at the turn of the century.

The three most popular positions in this debate were represented by assimilationists, pluralists, and restrictionists. The first group put forward the idea of American nation as a melting pot and believed that immigrants should blend into their new environment. Pluralists, as Stanciu puts it, "argued for Americanization education as a process of cultural exchange rather than coercion," while restrictionists, inspired by "the rise of scientific racism" strongly believed that "new immigrants were destroying

[8] Ibid., p. 289

[9] Diane Bjorklund, *Interpreting the Self: Two Hundred Years of American Autobiography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 177 (Appendix B, Table 1).

[10] Cristina Stanciu, "Marcus E. Ravage's *An American in the Making,* Americanization, and the New Immigrant Representation," *MELUS*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2015), p. 11.

the national racial stock"[11] and therefore campaigned for the restriction of immigration.

In the light of popular interest in the immigration and the ever-growing prejudice, many memoirs composed by first-generation immigrants were written in order to mitigate anti-immigrant sentiments and put a human face on immigration. Life narratives in general have always been an important means of social change. In the nineteenth century, for example, there was a growth of slave narratives, which were supposed to give a first-hand experience of slavery in order to show its inhuman dimension, to open the dialogue between white and black people, and to convince the undecided that slavery should be abolished. Memoirs, such as Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*,[12] were used by abolitionists to further their cause. Similarly today, narratives written by people who suffer from mental illness can help medical students and practitioners to understand better their patients and the difficult conditions with which they have to cope.

The four immigrant memoirs analyzed here seem to have been written with a specific reader in mind, and I believe the intended readers were of two kinds: American citizens who were supposed to sympathize with immigrants after reading these texts, and fellow immigrants who were presented with an example of people from their own community who succeeded. While it is customary to ignore the intention of the author, the aim of these books was frequently openly stated in the prefaces or forewords and therefore should not be ignored.

Panunzio, for example, tries to defend migrants and evoke sympathy by announcing in his foreword that his only "desire is that this little book may help Americans to understand, a little more fully perhaps, what fire the immigrant passes through as he lifts his face toward the real America."[13] Similarly, Ravage in his introduction notes that migrants are treated as "the scum of Europe", and he indignantly states that by adopting such an attitude, "Americans have forgotten America."[14] He further insists that

[11] Ibid., p. 15; p. 16.

[12] After escaping from slavery, Frederick Douglass wrote *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave* that was published in 1845. Douglass became an ardent abolitionist and social reformer.

[13] Constantine M. Panunzio, Forward to: *The Soul of an Immigrant* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), p. xiii.

[14] M. E. Ravage, Introduction to: *An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant* (Harper and Brothers, 1917), n.pag.

immigrants can be useful in showing Americans "what America stands for in the family of nations,"[15] and he tries to enlighten American citizens about the harsh realities immigrants had to endure:

> Oh, if I could show you America as we of the oppressed peoples see it! If I could bring home to you even the smallest fraction of this sacrifice and this upheaval, the dreaming and the strife, the agony and the heartache, the endless disappointments, the yearning and the despair – all of which must be ours before we can make a home for our battered spirits in this land of yours. [16]

Steiner in his preface narrates the story of a Hungarian minister who visits Chicago and meets with Steiner there. The minister is appalled at the city's dirtiness and lack of harmony but amazed by the process of quick assimilation of immigrants to the American way of life and wants to know what is behind it. Steiner says that his book is an answer to this question because, as he explains, "I have been fortunate, not only in watching the process and trying to analyze the forces at work, but in being myself a product of it."[17] He further says that he will be happy if his readers "learn to see in the alien the potential fellow citizen, and treat him as such."[18] So his preface clearly spells out the reasons behind him writing his life story: it is not written to commemorate the past, but in order to imagine a better tomorrow. Towards the end of his narrative, Steiner spells out his aim again, summarizing: "I have been pleading with voice and pen and soul for an understanding and brotherly attitude toward the immigrant."[19]

Jacob Cash's memoir is the only one here that was not written individually by Cash. He told his story to Frank A. Rexford, who made it into a coherent narrative with a very explicit purpose which is clearly specified in a letter that Rexford sent to Cash. The letter appears after the title page, and the fragment of it reads: "In compliance with your wishes I have attempted to prepare a small book in simple language dealing with

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Edward Alfred Steiner, Preface to: *From Alien to Citizen: The Story of My Life in America* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914), p. 14.

[18] Ibid., p. 17.

[19] Edward Alfred Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen: The Story of My Life in America* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1914), p. 325.

the rights and responsibilities of American citizenship as they have built themselves into the life of this boy who fled from Warsaw."[20] The letter is followed by a one-page preface by Cash himself who in its first sentence says: "The purpose of this book is to imbue the residents of our country with an intelligent and friendly attitude toward the government of the United States."[21] He also explains the origins of the book which was first written as a book about citizenship, but then he and his friends found it rather boring so he decided to add personal touches to it. Although the book was modified, one still can see its original purpose because at times it reads like a citizenship manual. In this respect, Cash's memoir differs from the other texts examined here. His book, which has a clear didactic purpose, mixes personal reminiscing with lessons about various social and political realities of the United States to a larger extent than any other text, and therefore is the most manifest example of a text with a specific agenda. This curious hybrid can be better understood when we accept Maria Lauret's argument about the Americanization movement. Lauret claims that the Americanization movement – which had its origins in the settlement movement that initially was supposed to help the poor and immigrants – soon became a nation-wide coercive programme for both the native- and foreign-born.[22] She explains: "The purpose of the Americanization movement by the 1920s was … a far wider one than its initial agenda of fitting the immigrants to American life and industrial work had intended; it was to produce a "one-minded" nation through assimilation of the "foreign element," in the parlance of the day, to the American*ist* cause."[23] Cash's text, with its aim of producing an ideal citizen, is therefore intended not only for other migrants but for all Americans who should strive to fulfill their civil duties.

In fact, all four memoirs have these two types of intended audience: American citizens and fellow immigrants, although some narratives focus more on addressing the former group while others address primarily the latter. Now we shall examine how each audience is engaged in the texts,

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[20] Frank A. Rexford, Letter to Jacob Cash in: Jacob Cash, *What America Means to Me* (New York: United States Patriotic Society, 1925), n. pag.

[21] Jacob Cash, *What America Means to Me* (New York: United States Patriotic Society, 1925), n. pag.

[22] Maria Lauret, "Americanization Now and Then: The 'Nation of Immigrants' in the Early Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries," *Journal of American Studies*, 50 (2) (2016), pp. 435–36.

[23] Ibid. p. 435.

starting with American citizens. One of the strategies the authors employ to arouse sympathy among potential American readers is by recording their difficult experiences and describing openly the mixed feelings that accompanied them. Out of the four memoirs, Ravage's is the one which brims with heart-wrenching passages to the greatest extent. In the following fragment, for instance, he describes immigrants' feelings upon their arrival to, what may seem to many people as, the promised land:

> It seems to be assumed by the self-complacent native that we immigrants are at once and overwhelmingly captivated by America and all things American. [...] Have we not left our own country because we were in one way or another discontented there? And if we have chosen America, it is quite clear that we must have been attracted by what she offered us in substitution. Besides, no man with eyes could fail to see right off the superiority of this great Republic to every country on the face of the earth. Witness how the tide of immigration is forever flowing – and always in one direction. [...] And yet, in spite of logic and appearances, the truth remains that the immigrant is almost invariably disappointed in America.[24]

But although he describes the disillusionment he experienced when he arrived to America, he quickly adds, as if to reassure Americans, that there was not nothing in fact to be disappointed with because "[i]t was not America in the large, but the East Side Ghetto that upset all my calculations, reversed all my values, and set my head swimming."[25] Almost every author mentions his initial disappointment with the country, and all of them end up praising America because they wish to gain favor with their American audience.

Another way of evoking the sympathy of Americans is to show immigrants as individuals who not only deserve compassion and help, but also have something valuable to contribute to their newly adopted nation. Ravage at some point of his memoir writes that the immigrant is not "the raw material that Americans suppose him to be. He is not a blank sheet to be written on as you see fit."[26] In this attempt to negotiate more freedom for the immigrants in shaping their future destiny, Ravage wants Americans to notice what might seem obvious, namely that immigrants

[24] Ravage, *An American in the Making*, pp. 59–60.
[25] Ibid., p. 61.
[26] Ibid., p. 60.

were once the citizens of a different country, inhabited a different culture, and brought with them certain values and ideals which are sometimes at odds with those of the host country. But the fact that they are different does not make them worse; on the contrary, they should be appreciated and respected. He explains that an alien "brings with him a deep-rooted tradition, a system of culture and tastes and habits,"[27] and further in the text he expands on this idea:

> My good friends are unwilling to see that the alien has as much to teach as to learn, that his readjustment is inevitably a matter of give and take, and that he only begins to feel at home in this new country when he has succeeded in blending his own culture and ideas and mode of life with those of the people that came before him.[28]

Panunzio seems to share Ravage's point of view, for he convinces in a strikingly similar manner that "every immigrant brings something with him from his native land which is worthy of perpetuation, and which, if properly encouraged and developed, may become a contribution to our national life."[29] He believes that assimilation will be facilitated if migrants are allowed to contribute the best their nations have to offer. So although immigrant authors do not want their past to be totally erased, they also do not want it to overshadow their future. It has to be cherished, but only as a contribution to the development of their adopted nation.

Ravage published his memoir in 1917 and Panunzio in 1922, and this period of American history was characterized by strong prejudice towards immigrants. The growing immigration, especially from southern and eastern Europe, made Americans doubly wary of the foreign-born. In the first decade of the twentieth century, 1.5 million people came from Britain, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia, but these groups from western and northern Europe were outnumbered, for the first time in history, by immigrants from southern and eastern European countries such as Italy, Russia, and Austro-Hungary, which together sent 6.5 million people.[30]

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., p. 138.

[29] Panunzio, *The Soul of an Immigrant*, pp. 188–89.

[30] Daniels, *Coming to America*, p. 188. As far as Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires are concerned, it is difficult to specify of what ethnicity migrants were as those two countries "contained peoples who did not get recorded in the American data, which listed only national origin, not ethnicity" (188), such as Poles, Jews, Czechs, etc.

The new arrivals were quickly designated "new immigrants" and were distinguished from "old immigrants" who had come before the 1880s from Western Europe. Although, as June Granatir Alexander notes, many scholars question the justification of this division claiming it blurs the real picture of immigration, Alexander defends it because in her opinion it reflects the contemporary beliefs and convictions of people at the turn of the twentieth century which affected the lives of immigrants in numerous ways.[31]

There was indeed a plethora of harmful stereotypes about new immigrants which could be seen, if one was willing to adopt certain perspectives, as being supported by Darwin's theory of evolution and later the pseudo-science of eugenics that were brought forward to confirm the supposed inferiority of some ethnic and national groups.[32] The prejudice against people from southern and eastern parts of Europe is best exemplified by an utterance of one of the founders of the Immigration Restriction League, which, as Daniels, explains "became the most influential single pressure group arguing for a fundamental change in American immigration policy."[33] Prescott F. Hall said that Americans have to decide whether they want their country "to be peopled by British, German, and Scandinavian stock, historically free, energetic and progressive, or by Slav, Latin and Asiatic races, historically down-trodden, atavistic and stagnant."[34] Such ideas were also circulated in popular pseudo-scientific works of the times, such as Madison Grant's *Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920).[35]

Anti-immigrant prejudice intensified during World War I. Alexander states: "At no point in America's history were attempts to eradicate all evidence of ethnic cultures as strident as in the period after the United States became embroiled in World War I."[36] There was a growing antagonism towards "hyphenated Americans," whose alleged uncertain political

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[31] June Granatir Alexander, *Daily Life In Immigrant America, 1870–1920: How the Second Great Wave of Immigrants Made Their Way in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), p. 13.

[32] Jeffrey E. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization Education and European Immigrants* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 38-39.

[33] Daniels, *Coming to America*, p. 276.

[34] Ibid.

[35] John Powell, *Encyclopaedia of North American Immigration* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005), p. 199 s.v. "nativism"

[36] Alexander, *Daily Life In Immigrant America, 1870–1920*, pp. 241–42.

allegiance became problematic. A very harsh criticism of "composite Americans" came from the former president himself. On 13 October 1915, *New York Times* reported Theodor Roosevelt's speech in an article entitled tellingly "Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated." Talking at Carnegie Hall on Columbus Day, Roosevelt bluntly declared that:

> There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americans. When I refer to hyphenated Americans I do not refer to naturalized Americans. […] The only absolutely certain way of bringing this nation to ruin […] would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities, an intricate knot of German-Americans, Irish-Americans, English-Americans, French-Americans, Scandinavian-Americans, or Italian-Americans, each preserving its separate nationality, each at heart feeling more sympathy with Europeans of that nationality than with the other citizens of the American Republic.[37]

Many authors were well aware of this prejudice. Ravage definitely was, for the opening words of his preface are: "When I hear all around me the foolish prattle about the new immigration […] that is invading and making itself master of this country, I cannot help saying to myself that Americans have forgotten America."[38] And further in the text, he insists that "[i]t is quite overlooked that the adoptive American has always been and will always remain a composite American."[39] It is a counter-story to the official public discourse that was hostile towards the composite or, in other words, "hyphenated" Americans.

The only thing the immigrant authors could do to improve the situation was to either fight the bias towards immigrants by showing the unfairness of the stereotypes or to diagnose the mechanisms that prevented migrants from succeeding in a host country. Panunzio does both. For instance, in an attempt to dispel the stereotypes about migrants, he recounts the story of his unfair imprisonment. Shortly after arriving to the United States, he was put to jail for riding a train for free. After standing in court, he was eventually released, but he thus comments on the whole experience: "somewhere a careful student of criminal tendencies of the foreign-born people of this country has counted my name along with thousands of others

[37] "Roosevelt Bars the Hyphenated" *The New York Times,* 13 October 1915, p. 1. Retrieved 1 February 2019 from https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1915/10/13/105042745.pdf

[38] Ravage, Introduction to: *An American in the Making*, n.pag.

[39] Ravage, *An American in the Making,* pp. 137–38.

in his impersonal statistical study of the criminality of the immigrant groups in the United States."[40] Steiner recounts a very similar experience, describing the injustice of the whole process of the imprisonment and the trial. He says that it is difficult for him to recall his prison experience and he does so only because "*no changes* have occurred, and that my experience then is still the common fate of multitudes of immigrants who swell the criminal records of their group, and are therefore looked upon with dislike and apprehension."[41] He further mentions that his later visits to prisons as an inspector, and conversations he had with wardens made him aware that many aliens find themselves in trouble due to their ignorance and the lack of sufficient knowledge about the laws in a given country.[42] Both stories are therefore supposed to illustrate that migrants, who are often wrongfully imprisoned for minor misdemeanors, are often subjected to unfair stereotyping which then leads to their marginalization.

Panunzio's book is also an attempt to diagnose what does not work in the American society in regards to immigration and a guide on how this state of affairs can be improved. So his personal story is interspersed with fragments that are supposed to point out the problems touching the foreign-born. He tries to assess the situation objectively and to recognize the responsibility of both parties for the creation of a better society. In his opinion, Americans are responsible for crowding immigrants together in one place which leads not only to overpopulation in certain cities and bad housing conditions but first and foremost to the isolation of the immigrant communities. Thus isolated, immigrants can neither appreciate American standards and traditions nor assimilate to their new environment. Although Panunzio does not frame these arguments in reference to the future, the future is clearly at stake here – it is the matter of who controls it and what opportunities are created (or not) for immigrants to develop and to assimilate.

But when Panunzio discusses the shortcomings of the Americans, he is rather cautious in his critique and prefers to quote a letter from a prominent American who evaluates the situation of migrants, especially the growing strikes, in such a way:

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[40] Panunzio, *The Soul of an Immigrant*, p. 118.

[41] Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen,* p. 138 (original italics).

[42] Ibid., pp. 141-42.

> We need them for the growth of our industries, we wanted them to come and we did see them come to us by hundreds. But we refused to admit them to our civic and social life; we gave them no access to our societies, our schools and our churches. We called them 'undesirable aliens.' And we forced them to segregate into sections of their own and to organize into separate groups in which only their own language is used.[43]

All four authors in question express their disapproval of the United States in a rather cautious manner: either, as Panunzio does here, by quoting others, or as Ravage, by softening his critique. Whether they feared for their own well-being or preferred not to ignite any rebellions, one thing is evident, namely that they are very reticent in their criticism.

In his next chapter, Panunzio says that the unwillingness to accept immigrant as fully-fledged American citizens is only part of the problem. He claims "there are characteristics inherent in the very nature of the immigrant people themselves which must be considered if a true assimilation is to be effected."[44] The first problem that he observes is that most migrants came when they were adults and therefore they are set in their ways – they have already acquired values of their home country, and their outlook is difficult to change. He gives an example of an Italian man from Sicily and his rough treatment of his family. Panunzio tries to reason with him and change his behavior, but his attempts fail. He comments that despite the fact that this man spoke English and was a proud citizen, "he had passed the age when a man absorbs new ideas and forms new habits."[45] Secondly, he mentions the fact that educated foreigners find it hard to adapt as they are often forced to perform jobs much below their qualifications.[46] Another obstacle is the tendency of immigrants to cluster together. He claims that "all-important factor which set me upon the road to Americanization was my having been entirely separated from all immigrant community life during the period I was attending school and college, and thus having an opportunity to get a real taste of American life."[47] It is interesting how Panunzio divides American into 'false' America to which immigrants are exposed to, and 'real' America that they should, in

[43] Panunzio, *The Soul of an Immigrant*, p. 244
[44] Ibid., p. 247.
[45] Ibid., p. 249
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., p. 251.

his opinion, get to know, a view that he seems to share with Ravage. Finally, he mentions parents who are afraid to let their children learn English and assimilate because they fear losing control over them. So not only systemic prejudice but also individual factors prevent immigrants from building a better future in a new country.

Another author who tries to evaluate the situation of immigrants is Edward Steiner. His own experiences serve as a springboard for an examination of some deep-rooted social problems. For example, after recounting his difficult voyage to America, he offers a two-page entry in which he explains what he would like immigrants to know about their new country.[48] Although at first glance it may read like a lesson, for most paragraphs start with the words: "I should like to teach them/tell them," it is in fact a diagnosis of what does not work in the American society.[49] Steiner says he would like all newcomers to know that they are welcome, that they will receive fair remuneration for their labor, and that they will work in a safe environment. Steiner's optimistic vision of the immigrants' future in their new country was, however, a far cry from what they really experienced after the arrival.

The common stereotypes asserting that "new immigrants" were "stupid" influenced how they were being treated in the workplace, and had a direct impact on the positions and payment they were offered. Because they were considered inferior, and, as Steiner often repeats,[50] treated no better than "cattle," no one really cared for their well-being. They were willingly employed to carry out the most difficult jobs, and as Alexander shows, immigrants constituted almost half of the workers employed in mining, manufacturing, and mechanical industry.[51] She also points out that "[f]rom the time they entered factories and foundries, immigrants passed their days in harsh surrounding and under conditions potentially damaging to their health."[52] What is more, various ethnic groups often clustered in certain areas and industries because of the chain migration,

[48] Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, pp. 43-44.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Steiner was aware of this, for later on in his memoir he says that immigrants are treated no better than a cattle – a description he uses on numerous occasions. See, for instance, page 102: "I was merely one of the 'cattle,' as certain 'captain of industry' expressed it the very day of the drive." For other examples see pages: 104; 105; 107; 108; 112.

[51] Alexander, *Daily Life in Immigrant America, 1870-1920*, p. 99; 152.

[52] Ibid., p. 110.

which often led to the creation of so-called "foreign districts" or "foreign quarters" in urban areas, which were synonymous with slums. These were overpopulated and individuals resided in bad housing conditions. As Alexander comments: "While it was true that conditions in cities were generally bad, residents of immigrant neighborhoods experienced the worst of them."[53]

Throughout his book, Steiner points to social phenomena and institutions that make the lives of immigrants difficult, and points out the unfairness of the system. For example, recounting the times when he was involved in hard physical labor, he says that long hours and exhaustion dull a man's mind and make him into "one of the 'cattle' – a dull, dumb, brute, ready to be fed and lie down to sleep."[54] He also gives very straightforward advice on how to improve things, and these are usually very basic and humble demands. He believes, for instance, that better housing conditions would result in a greater work efficiency, for the men could rest properly.[55]

By demonstrating their awareness of the social ills related to migration and by offering possible solutions, the authors of these narratives presented themselves as responsible and committed citizens. Such self-presentation, which affirmed the dedication of immigrant population to social and economic progress, can be regarded as another way of convincing the American public that immigrants could contribute to the American society in significant ways. As Stanciu notes, "While restrictionists looked for ways to make immigrants more and more excludable, the immigrant writers' memoirs attempted to make them more includable."[56]

As for another group of intended readers – fellow immigrants – the memoirs seem to have two intentions: to teach them about their adopted country and to present the life of the authors as an example to follow thus shaping the future of those willing to read these narratives. Cash's memoir, as mentioned earlier, is the most evident manifestation of the lessons he wants to impart to his fellow citizens in order to help them notice the benefits of becoming committed residents of the Unites States. In his memoir, he relates how three years after his landing in America he decided

[53] Ibid., p. 155.

[54] Steiner, *From Alien to Citizen*, p. 104.

[55] Ibid., p. 105.

[56] Cristina Stanciu, "Marcus E. Ravage's *An American in the Making,* Americanization, and the New Immigrant Representation," p. 23.