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## MIGRAMEDIA



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# Anti-Immigration Rhetoric in the United States of America: From the Chinese Exclusion Act to Donald Trump's First Presidential Term<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Donald Trump's presidential campaign of 2015/16 marks a turning point in the use of inflammatory anti-immigration rhetoric. This paper will examine how this moment has once again magnified a specific type of discourse around race. Under the Trump administration, the call for immigration control at borders, building walls, as well as stopping immigration altogether for selected nationalities, has come into the center of public and political debates. However, today's discourse on immigration, security, and exclusion can be traced back to examples of public and political discourse at various times in the history of the United States. Moreover, solutions for the immigration "problem" from the 19th and early 20th century still resonate in today's debates on restrictions and exclusions of immigrants. The paper analyses the anti-immigration rhetoric in media products from different historical moments to trace the genealogy of exclusivist and discriminatory discourse and politics.

**Keywords:** immigration, media, anti-immigration rhetoric, United States of America immigration history, invasion

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Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. Whether it is obscuring state language or the faux-language of mindless media; whether it is the proud but calcified language of the academy or the commodity-driven language of science; whether it is the malign language of law-without-ethics, or language designed for the estrangement of minorities, hiding its racist plunder in its literary cheek – it must be rejected, altered and exposed. It is the language that drinks blood, laps vulnerabilities, tucks its fascist boots under crinolines of respectability and patriotism as it moves relentlessly toward the bottom line and the bottomed-out mind. Sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas. (Toni Morrison, “Nobel Lecture” 1993)

Donald Trump’s first presidential campaign of 2015/16 and his subsequent election as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States marked a turning point in the use of inflammatory anti-immigration rhetoric. During the first Trump administration, the call for immigration control at borders, building walls, as well as stopping immigration altogether for selected nationalities, came into the center of public and political debates. *The New York Times* in 2019, for instance, looked at the use of inflammatory comments by Trump and others in news media: “In the four years since Mr. Trump electrified Republican voters with slashing comments about Muslims and Mexicans, demonizing references to immigrants have become more widespread in the new media” (Jeremy Peters 2019). *Invasion and replacement* to describe immigrants is a reoccurring trope, as *The New York Times* concluded its findings. Yet, building walls and closing borders in the rhetoric of national security and well-being for the American people was not new. Over three decades ago, immigration, perceived as a national security threat under the Clinton administration led to stricter immigration legislation. On 27 July 1993, President Bill Clinton declared a “Message to the Congress Transmitting Proposed Legislation on Illegal Immigration.” Clinton explained: “The simple fact is that we must not and we will not surrender our borders to those who wish to exploit our history of compassion and justice.” And further states:

I am pleased to transmit today for your immediate consideration and enactment the ‘Expedited Exclusion and Alien Smuggling Enhanced Penalties Act of 1993.’ This legislative proposal is designed to address the growing abuse of our legal immigration and political asylum systems by illegal aliens holding fraudulent documents and by alien smugglers [...]. The proposal is part of a larger Administration initiative that I announced on June 18, 1993, to combat the illegal entry and smuggling of aliens into the United States. (Clinton 1993)

The United States of America, by its very nature, is a nation that consists almost entirely of immigrants. The country’s economic and political growth – internally as well as abroad – depended on the millions of people who arrived throughout history, people who arrived in good faith in the hopes of bettering their lives and the lives of future generations. As Oscar Handlin (1951/2002) writes in his influential book, *The Uproot-*

ed: *The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American*, first published in 1951: "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history". A fitting description of immigrants and immigration as "American history." Handlin's work has resonated with scholars for decades, as Katherine Benton-Cohen (2018) explains in *Inventing the Immigration Problem: the Dillingham Commission and Its Legacy* (8). The relationship between the United States and immigration is complex. Immigration has not always been viewed as a benefit. The first extensive ban on immigration was introduced with the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. As Erika Lee (2002) explains: "[the Act] was also the first to restrict a group of immigrants based on their race and class" (36). This legislation, so Lee, marked a "watershed" moment and "helped to shape twentieth-century United States race-based immigration policy" (36).

A few decades later, in an enormous bureaucratic effort, *The Dillingham Commission*, named after Senator William P. Dillingham, also known as the *United States Immigration Commission*, active from 1907 until 1910 (publications in 1911), as Benton-Cohen describes, "produced forty-one volumes of reports, summarized in a brief but potent set of recommendations [for immigration laws] that was far more restrictive than its own evidence supported" (1). With consequences far-reaching for today, as Benton-Cohen summarizes: "Within a decade, almost all of these policy initiatives [of the Dillingham Commission] were implemented into law. They included literacy tests, a quota system that varied by nationality, the continued exclusion of Asians, and a panoply of new immigration rules" (1). The commission's report led to the immigration act of 1924 that reduced mass immigration for the next 25 years until the Hart-Celler Act in 1965 [ , which ended the quota system] (1-2).

In 1911, with the publication of the *United States Immigration Commission*, detailed criteria for assessments were available to apply to incoming immigrants. People in the country now had official reference books to see immigration as a problem. "Exclusion! That means peace" a headline in *The Seattle Star* summarizes one branch of public sentiment on 27 July 1920. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87093407/1920-07-27/ed-1/seq-1/> (accessed 20 November 2024).

In 1993, the same year when the new legislation against "illegal immigration" was introduced under President Clinton (27 July 1993), Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize in Literature and Language from the Swedish Academy. In her acceptance speech (see above excerpt) in December of the same year, Toni Morrison concludes, that oppressive language is violence. "Racist, sexist, theistic language" is an act of assault, it exerts power, and, according to Morrison, enables "the policing languages of mastery."

Power relations through language have enabled a racialized immigration history in the United States that has become until today the immigrants' concrete experience. To be clear from the beginning, race is not a category and not a scientifically based hierarchy, race is a social construction, as recognized in the UNESCO statement in 1967 (Hiernaux 1967, 51). However, the use of race as a category, the language of race, will play a significant role in how certain groups create and assert power.

In studies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), research tries to show the importance of the discourse of racism and power in the racially negative portrayal of immigrants. As Teun A. van Dijk introduces the field's objective:

[t]he major point of our work is that racism (including antisemitism, xenophobia, and related forms of resentment against “racially” or ethnically defined Others) is a complex system of social and political inequality that is also reproduced by discourse in general, and by elite discourses in particular. (Van Dijk 2001, 362)

I found that studies in this field have concentrated on research of anti-immigration rhetoric at specific times. I would like to offer in this paper to bridge this gap by looking at certain “keywords” of anti-immigration rhetoric metaphors. I will ask what the similarities and differences are in texts and speeches by President Donald Trump on the one hand, and texts directed at Japanese and Chinese Immigration in the early years of the United States, on the other hand. I am, however, aware of the broader scope of anti-immigration rhetoric applied to many other immigration experiences in the immigration history of the United States.

Donald Trump's recurring description of migrants as “an invasion” serves as an entry point for a comparative look into migrants and migration being equated with the trope “invasion”. The promised wall was central to Donald Trump's election campaign from the beginning of 2015. According to the *New York Times*, Trump has used the word “invasion” 2000 times in his re-election campaign on social media and his rally speeches between January and August of 2019 (Kaplan 2019). Trump's use of language has drawn linguists to analyze his style of language from the time he decided to run for president as described in an interview of the *Scientific American*: “Two Linguists Use Their Skills to Inspect 21,739 Trump Tweets” (Stix 2019).

In general, language is a set of choices that one makes. But how is choice determined? What can be said for example about the recurrent usage of the word “invasion” by Trump? What does Trump put into action or service and in which context when he texts “invasion” to describe migration and immigrants? Further, Donald Trump has mobilized social media such as *X* formerly known as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and *Instagram* to extend the reach of his rhetoric.

Contrary to popular misconception, Mr. Trump's use of social media shows technical sophistication and strategic acumen. The linguist, Jack Grieve, describes in the above-mentioned interview with *Scientific America* his and his colleagues' study “Stylistic variation on the Donald Trump *X* (Twitter) account: A linguistic analysis of tweets posted between 2009 and 2018”:

[O]ur aim was to describe how they [the campaign] used [*X*] Twitter from a linguistic perspective—not to understand *if* it was effective but to understand *why* it was effective. And I think we show there was an underlying strategy—that they were shifting the styles of their tweets to achieve certain communicative goals. (Stix 2019)

In their study, they specifically sought “to discover the most important general patterns of stylistic variation on the Trump X (Twitter) account and to see how the style of language used on this account changed over time” (Clarke 2019). The study also tried to lay out the importance of a specifically conducted academic data collection by different communication platforms during Trump’s presidential campaign and his presidency. In the final statement of their study, they pointed to the challenges the amount of data collection poses to users and interpreters.

This new communicative landscape has led to a proliferation of what are essentially linguistic analyses being published in the popular press, hoping to make sense of internet chatter. These analyses, however, have largely been conducted by journalists and data scientists; from a linguistic perspective they are superficial at best and often appear to be politically biased. This need not be the case. The theories and methods of linguistics—including corpus linguistics, forensic linguistics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis—offer a foundation for linguists to make sense of these large collections of textual data, rather than to simply increase the amount of noise online. (Clark 2019)

The “online noise”, one could argue, has been a reaction to the shift in the actual use of language in the Trump presidency. One thread of this proliferation of language has been the trend to express certain words and concepts that had hitherto been banished from mainstream political discourse. With the reoccurring use of “invasion” by Trump to describe the influx of migration at the border of the United States, Masha Gessen comments in *The New Yorker*: “By turning unspoken assumptions about outsiders into hateful rally chants, Donald Trump has initiated a radical renegotiation of what it means to belong in this country” (Gessen 2019).

The idea to investigate a comparative analysis of the anti-immigration rhetoric stemmed from the article “Why Trump is making Muslims the new Chinese?” by Mae Ngai (Ngai 2017), an American historian and professor at Columbia University, who commented in a CNN article on January 30, 2017, on Donald Trump’s just signed so-called “Muslim travel ban.” Executive Order 13766 (FederalRegister.gov 2017) signed on January 28, 2017, affected “7 Muslim countries” as well as a refugee suspension for 4 months. The order barred citizens from Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen from entering the United States for 90 days (BBC 2017). Ngai in her article calls attention to the fact that the ban on a number of foreign nationals who come from countries of Muslim faith is comparable to the “[s]ixty years of Chinese Exclusion, which lasted from 1882 to 1943 [...]. Chinese laborers could not immigrate, and no Chinese could obtain naturalized citizenship” (Ngai 2017).

In the *Chinese Exclusion Act* of 1882, as Erika Lee points out in her article “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924”, for the first time a whole group of immigrants were affected by the new law, which helped to set the framework for racist immigration policies to come (Lee 2002, 36).

Coming back to findings regarding “keywords” of anti-immigration rhetoric, I collected the following words in my research that I found targeting immigration and immigrants the most: *invasion, disease, exclusion, border, and wall*. Those words are metaphors that are used to describe immigration and immigrants directly. According to the *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*, a *metaphor* is “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them” (Merriam-Webster Online 2024).

Let us take a closer look at the meaning of *invasion*. *Invasion* is used in warfare. Merriam-Webster definition is the following: *invasion* is an incursion of an army for conquest or plunder. (Merriam-Webster Online 2024). One country invades the other. The receiving country and society will be the victim and helpless. An *invasion* is a term that describes motion. An invasion seeks to occupy the space you are in. Further, it is something that cannot be stopped. In addition, in the world of flora and fauna, *invasion* can also be deceptive to the human eye, one might only realize the consequences later. For example, an *invasion* of non-local plants and animals can alter the receiving biotope to the extent that local populations of flora and fauna may be eliminated. Thus, experience tells us that an *invasion* is something to be feared. In addition, an invasion implies a critical mass that is needed to feel the consequences, and an invasion is there to stay and will alter the course of life. Another example is the *Bible* with the story of the great locust plague (Bible Gateway “Plague” 2024). In scripture, *invasion* may only be overcome by religious faith. The term *invasion* is used to point to and make sense of something that alters and changes the course of life and which brings death. Furthermore, if unchecked, the death which it brings is not just an individual death, instead it brings a death that wipes out the memory of that which was destroyed by the invasion. The victim of invasion no longer has the power to tell its own story.

Whether having an authentic experience or having been exposed to stories and storytelling of possible consequences of an *invasion*, the labeling of immigration and immigrants as *invasion* will set in motion the anticipation of negative repercussions that can and will be perceived as real. Further, addressing immigrants and immigration as an *invasion* does not need to have evidence as such, it only needs the metaphor to build up a threat. Still, more insidiously, the lack of evidence of the invasion is itself proof of the risk that the invasion has already made progress in erasing its own traces. The more the word *invasion* will be used in public discourse, the more it will create a perceived reality that before only existed on paper, in speeches and nowadays on the World Wide Web. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson suggest in their book *Metaphors We Live By* in the chapter “Metaphor, Truth, and Action” that

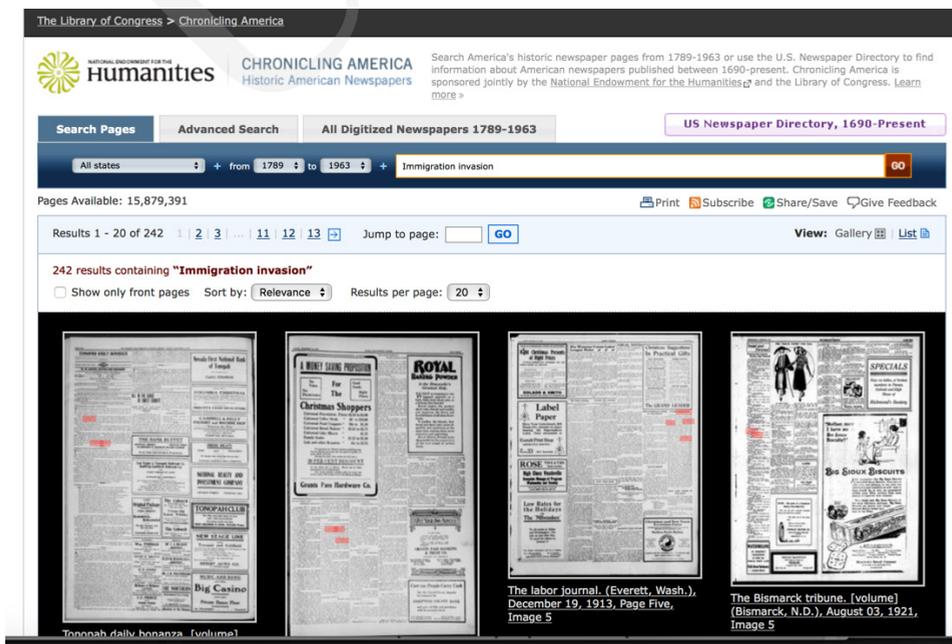
Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies. (Lakoff 2003, 156)

This has powerful consequences in the context of anti-immigration rhetoric. Lakoff and Johnson further emphasize that

[i]n most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it. In all aspects of life, not just in politics or in love, we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor. (Lakoff 2003, 158)

Immigration in the United States has also been tied to the legal framework in which people seek to have their status as citizens recognized. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first law with far-reaching restrictions for one group of people (Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institut. Accessed 20 November 2024).

In my analysis, I ran searches for the “keywords” *invasion, disease, exclusion, border, and wall* in connection with immigration through different online databases. For current material, I accessed online sources such as social media *Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube*. For historical material, I used U.S. government databases, *The Library of Congress* website (The Library of Congress “Immigration Invasion” 2024) with its U.S. all-digitized newspaper section from 1789 until 1963 as well as its U.S. Newspaper directory from 1690-present, and the *California Digital Newspaper Collection* from 1846-presented by the *University of Riverside* in California (California Digital Newspaper Collection 2024). Following is a screenshot of *The Library of Congress* website, as an example of how I conducted my research.



I searched with the keywords “immigration *invasion*” to get the most relevant examples of *invasion* in connection with immigration. Tellingly, the search for *Invasion*, by itself, prompted in articles about war or infestation by vermin.

Guided by the initial research question when accessing the material, I followed a framework of tools of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The term *discourse*, based on Michel Foucault’s discourse theory, plays a significant role to CDA (Jäger 2009, 34). As Language is composed of rules and patterns in a system, for instance, grammar, semantics etc., *discourse*, as Simpson and Mayr put it, “is what happens when language ‘gets done’” (Simpson 2018, 5). *Discourse* points to the representation of patterns of language in “real contexts of use” (5). More specifically, the aim of CDA is, as Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak explain in their article “Critical discourse analysis: a Preliminary Description” from 1997: “The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analyzed.” Discourse in speech and writing is viewed by CDA as a “form of ‘social practice’” (Fairclough 1997, 258). This ‘social practice’ is in turn a reflection of “institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them” (258). Discourse has the ability or consequence to be “socially constitutive as well as socially shaped” with repercussions “for social identities [...] and relationships between people and groups of people” (258). This forms a dynamic in which a social status quo may be reproduced or transformed (258). Discursive practice, so Fairclough and Wodak, contributes to

[...] major ideological effects [in which] they can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations [affecting] (for instance) social class, women and men, and ethnical/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which the represent things and position people. So discourse may, for example, be racist, or sexist, or try to pass off assumption (often falsifying ones) about any aspect of social life as mere common sense. Both the ideological loading of particular ways of using language in relations of power which underlie them are often unclear to people. CDA aims to make more visible these opaque aspects of the discourse. (258)

When applying the “keywords” in the database searches, I also found the topics of anti-immigration language combined with graphics and cartoons. Although visual analysis has been home in the field of Media and Cultural Studies, *CDA* has also established research in “how language, image, and other modes of communication, such as toys, monuments, films, sounds, etc., combine to make meaning. This [was then] broadly referred to as ‘multimodal’ analysis” (Machin 2012,1).

When looking into historical media use, here especially newspapers, a trend can be traced. In the years of the Anti-Japanese Legislation between 1889 and 1924, newspapers on the West Coast of the United States were especially invested in portraying Japanese immigrants resentfully, as Doug Blair describes in his online paper “The 1920 Anti-Japanese Crusade and Congressional Hearings” on *The Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Project*-website of the University of Washington, Seattle (Blair 2006):

Both in California and Washington, newspapers and newspaper men were prominent in creating anti-Japanese sentiment. The publisher of *The Sacramento Bee*, V.S. McClatchy, was perhaps the most outspoken anti-Japanese agitator in California. House Committee Chairman Albert Johnson had been in the newspaper business for two decades prior to the Washington State hearings, having published and *Times*, *The Tacoma News*, and *The Grays Harbor Daily*. [...] *The Seattle Star* was the primary anti-Japanese voice in the Puget Sound area. In the weeks preceding the congressional hearings, *The Seattle Star* ran a series of articles that portrayed local Japanese in a negative light. (Blair 2006)

When Laura Ingraham on her show *The Ingraham Angel* on *Fox News* channel in August of 2018 spoke of “massive demographic changes” that America is going through, she was quickly criticized on X (Twitter) for her open racist remarks (Ecarma 2018). Her address to the television audience was the following:

In some parts of the country, it does seem like the America that we know and love doesn't exist anymore. Massive demographic changes have been foisted upon the American people, and they are changes that none of us ever voted for, and most of us don't like. From Virginia to California, we see stark examples of how radically, in some ways, the country has changed. Now, much of this is related to both illegal, and in some cases legal immigration that, of course, progressives love. [...] This is a national emergency and he must demand that Congress act now. (2018)

Ingraham later claimed that she did not mean to comment on race or ethnicity and rejected her remarks as racist, nevertheless, she underlined her claim that there is a “common understanding” of who could acquire American citizenship: “There is something slipping away in this country and it's not about race or ethnicity. It's what was once a common understanding by both parties that American citizenship is a privilege, and one that at a minimum requires respect for the rule of law and loyalty to our constitution” (2018).

The underlying assumption with which Ingraham talks to the public is an understanding and belief that diversity in society, here she refers to “changing demographics”, is a threat to society and needs to be treated as an emergency that calls for measures by Congress.

While Ingraham uses her show on television and the context of immigration to send a racist message, Donald Trump was willing to go a step further a few months earlier. He met on May 16 in 2018 at the White House where he discussed with law and enforcement officials from California who opposed the “sanctuary” law introduced in 2017 that would give federal immigration agents less access to local law enforcement to detain illegal immigrants (Misra 2019). Trump went on to frame illegal and legal immigrants who enter the United States and commit crimes as follows:

We have people coming into the country, or trying to come in — and we're stopping a lot of them — but we're taking people out of the country. You wouldn't believe how bad these

people are. These aren't people. These are animals. And we're taking them out of the country at a level and at a rate that's never happened before. And because of the weak laws, they come in fast, we get them, we release them, we get them again, we bring them out. It's crazy. (Trump 16 May 2018)

A practice to dehumanize immigrants, the urgency to secure and control national borders as well as the deportation of those not wanted, show the earlier examples. Additionally, they also reveal how ideas of a "selection" of worthy citizens is necessary to form and protect the claim of a peaceful society. In this reoccurring generalization of negative labels and traits ascribed to immigrants during different times in the history of the United States still persists.

### Immigration and Disease: Case Studies

*"Who is speaking, writing about what, to whom, when, and with what goal?"*  
(Van Dijk 2011, 399)

**Case Study 1:** Dr. W.H. Ballou "A Brand New Disease Arrives in America" *The Washington Times*. [volume], February 16, 1919, NATIONAL EDITION, American Weekly, Image 26

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1919-02-16/ed-1/seq-26/>

This newspaper article<sup>2</sup> addresses the danger that infectious disease is being introduced to the United States from Japan in the form of the so-called blood fluke, a parasitic flatworm of the Schistosome species — *Schistosoma japonicum*. The article describes in detail the parasite's transmission and life cycle within the human body. The article includes illustrations as well as some of the historical background of its discovery. After summarizing studies by Fujirō Katsurada as well as earlier findings by the German Dr. A Looss, who discovered that the worms penetrate the skin, the author Dr. D. W. Ballou warns that "[o]ur studies on human schistosomes are of peculiar importance on account of the introduction here of the disease by immigration from countries where the disease is prevalent." Although the article mentions the occurrence in other countries, the unique feature of the immediate threat of the disease is the Japanese immigrant, as the illustrations emphasize. The reader is walked through stages of a nightmare scenario of "**invasion**". First, the "Japanese Laborer" acquires the worm in the fields of Japan. He then seeks entry into the United States to work. At the point of entry, health tests fail to detect the worm. The laborer is then admitted into the country, a human Trojan horse teaming with disease. Consequently, through water sources, which the Japanese laborer unwittingly contaminates in a remote American

<sup>2</sup> All quotes in this paragraph, unless otherwise stated, are from the above article "A Brand New Disease Arrives in America." 1919.

field, the parasite is brought into the home of the American people. The author speculates about the course the infected hosts may take: “[t]hese [hosts], carrying the tiny worms far afield, infected with them the water courses and in this way may be borne to bathtubs, sinks and so on where they come in contact with human epidermis [...]” There is no mention in the article of possible precautions that could be taken to prevent this outcome. The article clearly conveys that the Japanese immigrant laborer, with to this day unknown “brand new” disease in the United States, carries the threat of death to the American people. This message is strongly supported by a drawing of a blood fluke with a step by step description of its organs. The “Detailed Sectional Diagram of the Blood Fluke Tremendously Enlarged,” invokes a vivid image of horror of the parasite that may enter the human body. This image--complete with the serpentine tail and long whiskers of an Asian dragon-- resonates with the article's subtitle: “Japanese Laborers from the Rice Fields Spread Little Worms Hitherto Unknown Here, Which Burrow Into the Skin, Travel Along in the Blood to the Liver Where They Settle Down and Gnaw the Liver Until You Die.” The line of text, like the serpentine worm, links the “Japanese laborer” along a twisting path to death: “until you die.” This is the only message the reader need understand. In addition, the cartoonish sketch of a worm, titled “The Dragon Nematode—Another Microscopic Cousin of the Blood Fluke That Preys Upon Man,” with a scarily hungry looking mouth facing the reader, illustrates further that one should be fearful, implying the parasite arrived by the Japanese laborer is already after “you.” An added photograph with a caption states, as matter of fact, the origins of a location where the parasite lurks: “Photograph of an Infected Oriental Rice Field in Which the Japanese Laborer Acquires the Parasite Producing the New Disease.” The description of the image suggests the origination of the parasite.

Overall, the article combines scientific findings with easy-to-follow explanatory illustrations that give a sense of urgency for the reader to come to one conclusion: Japanese laborers bring death (“gnaw the liver until you die”). There is no explicit mention of the Japanese as victims affected by the disease. In addition, the author asserts that “American and Japanese morphologists have been intensely stirred by the discovery that a blood fluke, or parasitic disease of the liver, has developed in Japan, and has been introduced into this country by laborers brought over to cultivate rice fields.” This introductory line assumes that Japanese experts acknowledge the fact that a “New Disease” entered America. The article's tone is a mix of competence, assertive presentation of knowledge with sensational descriptions of the disease for the vivid imagination, as in this description: “For the blood fluke [...] makes straight for the liver [...], proceeds to eat heartily, to multiply exceedingly [...] and to live luxuriously until its favorite food is, if not all gone, at least so reduced as to be of no use to its legitimate owner, who then quite naturally dies.” In narratology terms, the story's plot of the parasite's attack, introduced by the Japanese laborer, follows a carefully considered “arrangement of events”, which has a beginning, a middle, and a tragic ending (I follow here the definition of “Plot” by Karin Kukkonen in the online source *Living handbook of narratology* (Accessed 20 November 2024).

The article supplies the reader with horrific details about eating fish and ends the article by quoting a biologist with a grim outlook: ‘If, like the dread trichina, they [the *Schistosoma japonicum*] can resist the digestive juices of the human stomach, they might easily penetrate the mucous membrane and, carried by the blood, finally lodge in congenial tissues of the body, to become encysted.’ W. H. Ballou’s message in his article points to a simple solution: Restriction of immigration of Japanese laborers, otherwise, the threat of death is looming, and the well-being and security of the American people are at stake.

**Case Study 2:** *Ladysmith news-budget*. [volume] (Ladysmith, Rusk County, Wisconsin., 26 March 1915. “Immigration and Disease” *The Ladysmith news-budget* appeared from 1907 until 1927.

“Immigration and Disease”

Immigration is one of the most important problems that confront the American people. While the country needs strong men and women in its development, we are securing too large a proportion of the other kind. The inspection at our ports of entry is too rapid to permit of as thorough an examination for disease, mental defects and degeneracy as is desirable. Intelligent admission or exclusion is of far reaching importance, inasmuch as it is now a well[-] established fact that today’s mental degeneracy must affect the sanity and stability of future generations.

According to the report of the United States Immigration Commission, “there are in the United States many thousands of insane or feeble[-]minded persons of foreign birth.” [...] The investigations of the above commission have shown that literacy is no guarantee against insanity or mental degeneracy. On the contrary, the report says, “In general, the nationalities furthest advanced in civilization show, in the United States, a higher proportion of insane than do the more backwards races.” (*The Ladysmith news-budget 1915*)

The article’s headline “Immigration and Disease” from 1915 starts with an essential message in the first sentence: “[i]mmigration is one of the most important problems which confront the American people.” The author ascribes the ‘problem’ not to the number of immigrants arriving in the country, but to people with “disease, mental defects and degeneracy.” The author asserts that the ineffectiveness of medical control at borders is to blame. By 1911, the *Dillingham Commission* or *Immigration Commission* had concluded its intensive production of data that laid the ground for rating, evaluating, and assessing immigrants. The quote “there are in the United States many thousands of insane or feeble[-]minded persons of foreign birth” is taken directly from the commission’s report to show the reader a legitimate source of information and facts. Both quotes from *The Commission Report* can be found in the summary section about “Immigration and Insanity” (The Immigration Commission 1911, 251).

For the high ratio of insanity among the foreign-born, several causes have been assigned, and while it is difficult to determine the values of the various factors it is

probably true that racial traits or tendencies have a more or less important influence. A further cause of mental disease is probably to be found in the total change on climate, occupation, and habits of life which the majority of immigrants experience after arrival in the United States. (251)

The Commission, despite their harsh “assessment” of “Immigration and Insanity”, had also a more sympathetic view on challenges immigrants could experience upon arrival in the United States. Nevertheless, the report gives very direct and concrete guidelines and instructions for the government branches to decide on. For instance:

It is desirable in making the restriction that— [...]

- (a) The exclusion of those unable to read or write in some language.
- (b) The limitation of the number of each race arriving each year to a certain percentage of the average of that race arriving during a given period of years.
- (c) The exclusion of unskilled laborers unaccompanied by wives or families (251).

Coming back to the article in the *Ladysmith news-budget*, the author’s argumentative layout of the text seems quite convincing. The question of immigration, in the beginning, is not entirely rejected, though addressed as a problem. The author views immigration as favorable for the advancement of the country: “[...] the country needs strong men and women in its development.” However, the author has in mind that people’s psychological stabilities are the pillar of a healthy future for the country. The article’s tone is a plea to follow the already established instructions of the Immigration Commission and a call for its implementation.

## Immigration and Exclusion

**Case Study 3:** “Exclusion! The Solution That Means Peace.” Publication/date: *The Seattle Star*. 27 July 1920.

[...] Some other remedy than the “gentlemen’s agreement” must be found. [...] There is a solution—RIGID EXCLUSION, as rigid as the Japanese apply to Chinese and Koreans in their own country. Economic necessity demands it. Racial differences intensify the demand. We have imitated the ostrich long enough. We cannot hide from the issue any longer. We must face the future resolutely, for the peace and contentment of the American people (1920).

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87093407/1920-07-27/ed-1/seq-1/>

*The Seattle Star* was a harsh critic of Japanese Immigration, and, according to Doug Blair, “lead a campaign for Japanese exclusion” (Blair 2006)

For the historical context, after the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, when Chinese immigration stopped, the west coast of the United States suddenly saw a need for cheap labor that before was satisfied by Chinese laborers. Consequently, Japanese immigrants filled this gap and were even able to start their own businesses (2006). Especially on the West Coast, in San Francisco, where Japanese immigrants settled, nativist movements vehemently opposed Japanese immigration. As Benton-Cohen states: “Since the turn of the century, San Francisco’s labor leaders and nativists had been demanding that Japanese immigrants be excluded, like the Chinese had been in 1882” (Benton-Cohen, 46). On the federal level though for diplomatic importance, a relationship between a foreign policy with Japan and Japanese immigration needed to be kept. President Roosevelt at the time could not ignore Japan’s standing when “in 1905 Japan had decisively defeated Russia in the Battle of Tsushima, demonstrating itself as a military empire worth attention” (Benton-Cohen, 47). However, on the local level, the disaster of the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco, Benton-Cohen summarizes, “unmasked the racism and social divisions of urban life in chaos. It destabilized institutions and gave free rein to those willing to use fear and prejudice to seize social and political control” (Benton-Cohen, 45). What followed were explicit initiatives to segregate the Japanese population in San Francisco, for instance, by excluding Japanese children from public schools. After this incident, Roosevelt “called the people of San Francisco ‘idiots’ and ‘infernal fools’ for insult[ing] the Japanese recklessly” (Benton-Cohen, 49) acknowledging the racist intentions. The conflict between local and federal government interest in the question of immigration developed further, after the San Francisco school crisis. As a result, the so-called “Gentlemen’s Agreement” was put forward in 1907 as a compromise between diplomacy towards Japan and the demand for immigration restrictions on the local level. The issue was published on July 27, 1920, and appeared right after the *House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization* had started a hearing on “the Pacific Coast Japanese question to the State of Washington” (Blair 2006) on July 26th, in Seattle.

## Immigration and Border

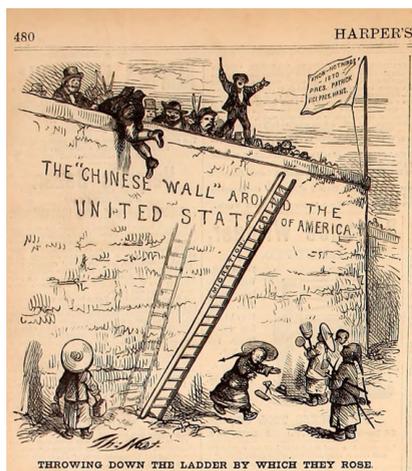
**Case Study 4:** Blake, Aaron. “The final Trump-Clinton debate transcript, annotated.” *Washington Post*, October 20, 2016.

[Donald Trump:] In the audience tonight, we have four mothers of [...] whose children have been killed, brutally killed by people that came into the country illegally. You have thousands of mothers and fathers and relatives all over the country. They’re coming in illegally. Drugs are pouring in through the border. We have no country if we have no border. [...] ICE last week, endorsed me. First time they’ve ever endorsed a candidate. It means their job is tougher. But they know what’s going on. They know it better than anybody. They want strong borders. They feel we have to have strong borders. [...] All of the problems -- the single biggest problem is heroin that pours across our southern border. It’s just pouring and destroying their youth. It’s poisoning

the blood of their youth and plenty of other people. We have to have strong borders. We have to keep the drugs out of our country. We are -- right now, we're getting the drugs, they're getting the cash. We need strong borders. [...] Now, I want to build the wall. We need the wall. And the Border Patrol, ICE, they all want the wall. We stop the drugs. We shore up the border. One of my first acts will be to get all of the drug lords, all of the bad ones -- we have some bad, bad people in this country that have to go out. We're going to get them out; we're going to secure the border. And once the border is secured, at a later date, we'll make a determination as to the rest. But we have some bad hombres here, and we're going to get them out. (Blake 2016)

Before the election in November 2016 in the final debate with Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump focused again on the question of national security. In his talk, Trump makes a direct equation of illegal immigration and death (“brutally killed by people that came into the country illegally”). His message: The border is a dangerous zone and it is porous; an influx of drugs is threatening the future of the country and the youth; the very existence of the country is in jeopardy. In Trump’s definition “We have no country if we have no border,” the border itself becomes a physical entity, not having a border, means not being whole. Trump evokes a metaphor for the wall itself currently not being whole, permeable for “drugs [...] pouring in through the border,” and for illegal, brutal immigrants. Trump quickly shifts to the idea of the market and in capitalist ideas, the profit is one-sided: “right now, we’re getting the drugs, they’re getting the cash.” In addition to the threats at the border, the perils within the country are also imminent: “one of my first acts will be to get all of the drug lords, all of the bad ones -- we have some bad, bad people in this country that have to go out.” Trump presents himself as the caring parent who will take care of his people and his family and will “heal” the border.

**Case Study 5** Thomas Nast. “**Throwing down the ladder by which they rose.**” *Harper’s Weekly*. 23 July 1870. <https://archive.org/details/harpersweeklyv14bonn/page/480>



Thomas Nast (1840-1902), the author of the caricature, was an illustrator and cartoonist for *Harper’s Weekly* from 1857 to 1887. He was a well-known cartoonist in his “30-year career with the magazine. Nast drew approximately 2,250 cartoons” (Walfred 2014). The genre, caricature, can be described as a “purposeful distortion or exaggeration of physical characteristics of human beings or animals for the purpose of humor or satire. [...] It is an important tool in political or editorial art” (Walfred “Caricature” 2014). The caption “Throwing down the ladder by which they rose”, gives a clear critique of the anti-Chinese im-

migration discourse at the time. Prior groups of immigrants Irish and Germans, could “climb up the ladder” to enter the United States, while now, kicking down the ladder, the following Chinese cannot do the same, coming to the United States as immigrants (Walfred 2015). A detail on the ladder, an inscription reads “emigration”, points to the Chinese that they should not consider starting the journey. The wall’s lettering “The Chinese Wall Around The United States of America” is a strong statement – a model for keeping immigrants out. The flag on top of the wall reads “Know-Nothings, 1870, Pres. Patrick and Vice Pres Hans.” *The Know Nothing*, also known as the *American Party*, was a strong nativist movement that opposed the immigration of Irish Catholics as well as Germans (Boissoneault 2017). The Chinese in the cartoon are depicted in stereotypical costumes and with tools as if ready to go to work, but their hope is now interrupted by the falling ladder. Thomas Nast’s target is clear, the *Know-Nothing Party* once shunned the Irish and the Germans. Now people from those nations are part of the country and are eager to engage in anti-Chinese sentiment. Nast depicts the Chinese as childlike, physically short, and in a long garb, this racist stereotype, despite Nast’s apparent support of the Chinese at the time, continues to evoke negative racial connotations.

## Immigration and Invasion

**Case Study 6:** *Factbase Videos* “Speech: Donald Trump Holds a Political Rally in Panama City Beach” *YouTube*, 8 May 2019.

[W]e love our country, but we’re afraid of it for purposes of getting into the United States, we’re afraid of our country [...]. (Factbase 54:25) [...] No nation can tolerate a massive organized violation of its immigration laws, and no one should run for office without an iron clad pledge to protect and defend America’s borders. Shouldn’t be allowed to run. And to confront this crisis, you saw that it was a big deal two months ago. I declared a national emergency, which is what it is. This is an invasion. When you see these caravans, starting out with 20,000 people, that’s an invasion. I was badly criticized for using the word invasion, it’s an invasion and it’s also an invasion of drugs coming in from Mexico, OK. It’s an invasion of drugs. (Factbase 55:05-55:50)

Three years after his election, President Trump rallies for his re-election campaign in 2020. His focus of topics is, again, national security. At the beginning of 2019, the arrival of families, mostly from Central America at the southwest border of the United States, saw a major increase (Bickerton 2019). Trump uses the expression caravan (as has the media) to describe the arriving families and evokes a never-ending stream of people. The declaration of a national emergency met with harsh criticism that the actual crisis, a humanitarian, was not addressed (2019). Again, Trump speaks of an *invasion* in connection with immigration. But this time he uses the caravan metaphor

and the alleged number of people as proof of an *invasion*, as if he presented a calculation that adds up to *invasion*. He acknowledges that he has been criticized by others for using the term, *invasion*. He uses this criticism itself as proof of the urgency of reporting the truth.

**Case Study 7:** Donald Trump. “We have an **INVASION!** So we are **BUILDING THE WALL** to **STOP IT.**” *Facebook*, 21 February 2019.

Trump’s re-election campaign ran an ad on *Facebook* with the following message:

[...] We have an **INVASION!** So we are **BUILDING THE WALL** to **STOP IT.** Dems will sue us. But we want a **SAFE COUNTRY!** I cannot allow America’s safety and security to be put at risk any longer. We need the wall, and I must put **AMERICA FIRST!** We need the American people to make a powerful statement to these Democrats to **FINISH THE WALL.** **DONATE NOW** to show you want to **FINISH THE WALL!** (Trump Facebook 2019)

Facebook was strongly criticized for letting political ads go on their website unchecked. To defend Facebook’s policy of allowing advertising without vetting the accuracy of advertising content, Mark Zuckerberg has framed the issue as one about free speech and not about truth (Zuckerberg 2019). The Trump ad directly asks the reader to donate to his campaign. The words in capital letters scream the message at the reader, the repetition of his message implements the “brand” Donald Trump into the reader’s mind.

## Conclusion

The glorification of one race and the consequent debasement of another—or others—always has been and always will be a recipe for murder. There is no way around this. If one is permitted to treat any group of people with special disfavor because of their race or the color of their skin, there is no limit to what one will force them to endure, and, since the entire race has been mysteriously indicted, no reason not to attempt to destroy it root and branch. (James Baldwin, 1962)

What unifies the usages of negative connotations towards immigration in different times, is the common position of the group that asserts power in framing the language. Further, to convince people of certain ideas, a platform is needed to shape the discourse. The Immigration Commission with its publication in 1911 about criteria for letting immigrants into the country, asserted the dominance of the discourse of “racial contamination”. Drawn from the Commission’s “findings”, as the example in “Immigration and Disease” shows, racist views can be used as legitimate facts. And those “facts” led to a halt of immigration in 1924 and to the creation of a long-lasting

bureaucratic structure for immigration policies. On this point, the work of Bent-Cohen is again insightful:

The commission's reforms ended mass immigration from 1924 [...]. Between 1881 and 1924, approximately twenty-four million immigrants came to the United States; during the twenty-five years that followed, fewer newcomers arrived than in 1907 alone. Even though its overt racial biases have been eliminated, the architecture built by the commission still undergirds federal immigration. (Benton-Cohen, 1-2)

There is no doubt that the history of immigration policy over time in the United States has been a contested ground for racism, exclusion, deportation, documentation and surveillance. Today's discourse in rhetoric and legislation around immigration, security, and exclusion can be traced back to examples of public and political discourse at various times in the history of the United States. Moreover, solutions for the immigration "problem" from the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century still resonate today in restrictions and exclusions on immigrants in general and particularly towards whole groups of people, as President Trump's *Executive Order* (Trump 24 September 2019), the so-called "Muslim ban" (Niayesh 2019), in 2017 showed. In debates around the question of what causes anti-immigration rhetoric, one point is made that in relation to a competing labor market as well as a sudden rise in immigration, resentment and rejection against immigrants surge. Nonetheless, I have tried to convey in this paper that past concepts and belief systems were a significant aspect in shaping immigration laws, legislation and anti-immigration public discourse. As a consequence, a bureaucratic system that categorized favorable and less favorable immigrants had a long-lasting effect. Language, in this context, plays a decisive role in putting aspects of power relations and racist language into context.

This could be especially applied to the role of media in their messages and strategies. For example, the chilling example of the 3 August 2019 deadly shooting in El Paso, Texas (Murphy 2019) highlights the role of conservative media stars in their inflammatory language: "Days after the shooting, the "Fox & Friends" co-host Brian Kilmeade dismissed a connection between words used by the gunman and by President Trump, saying: "If you use the term 'invasion,' that's not anti-Hispanic. It's a fact" (Peters 2019). The first Trump administration mobilized a trope that has a long history. It adopted pervasive imagery that associates immigration with contamination and invasion. As I have shown, this trope has a history. In particular, it was employed as a description of Chinese and Japanese immigration to the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, the discourse supported a new type of legislation, one that used the newly invented concept of race to regulate the flow of people across borders. Trump's first administration appeared to revive this historic discourse, however, this revival occurs within a new context in which categories of race are newly problematized, and the very notion of territory and borders have been largely reconceived. This paper shows that in spite of the radical shifts in context, the imagery of *invasion* is still capable of mobilizing – which is to say, creating – political power.

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