

Adaptation and the Process of Assimilation in Chicago Document Set

Document 1.1: “I Discover Hull-House,” Chapter 6 in *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl* by Hilda S. Polacheck

Follow this link and download Chapter 6 from the Table of Contents: <http://tigger.uic.edu/depts/hist/hull-maxwell/vicinity/nws1/documents/hullhouse/polacheck/ICameAStranger/polacheck.stranger.TOC.htm#>

Source: Hilda S. Polacheck, *I Came a Stranger: The Story of a Hull-House Girl*, University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Document 1.2: “Chicago’s Urban League Offers Assistance to Southern Migrants”

During the Great Migration, the Chicago Urban League provided support and information for African Americans arriving from the South. The League distributed cards and pamphlets to help guide the new arrivals. Two examples can be accessed here: <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1597>.

Source: Chicago Urban League, “Chicago’s Urban League Offers Assistance to Southern Migrants,” *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed November 11, 2014. <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1597>.

Document 1.3: Excerpt from “How It Feels to Be a Problem: A Consideration of Certain Causes Which Prevent or Retard Assimilation” by Gino C. Speranza (1904)

Now, considering the large percentage of foreign born in the population of the United States, it is a strange fact how few Americans ever consider how very unpleasant, to say the least, it must be to the foreigners living in their midst to be constantly looked upon either as a national problem or a national peril....

Many imagine that the record and strength of the American democracy suffice of themselves to make the foreigner love the new land and engender in him a desire to serve it; that, in other words, assimilation is the natural tendency. Assimilation, however, is a dual process of forces interacting one upon the other. Economically, this country can act like a magnet in drawing the foreigner to these shores, but you cannot rely on its magnetic force to make the foreigner an *American*. To bring about assimilation the larger mass should not remain passive. It must attract, *actively attract*, the smaller foreign body.

It is with this in mind that I say that if my countrymen here keep apart, if they herd in great and menacing city colonies, if they do not learn your language, if they know little about your country, the fault is as much

yours as theirs. And if you wish to reach us you will have to batter down some of the walls you have yourselves built up to keep us from you....

There is one more question that an Italian, speaking for his countrymen here, may urge upon Americans who are interested in the problem of assimilation. It is this: That you should make my countrymen love your country by making them see what is truly good and noble in it. Too many of them, far too many, know of America only what they learn from the corrupt politician, the boss, the “banchiere” and the oftentimes rough policeman. I have been in certain labor camps in the South where my countrymen were forced to work under the surveillance of armed guards. I have spoken to some who had been bound to a mule and whipped back to work like slaves. I have met others who bore the marks of brutal abuses committed by cruel bosses with the consent of their superiors. What conception of American liberty can these foreigners have?

This, then, is the duty upon those who represent what is good and enduring in Americanism—to teach these foreigners the truth about America. Remember these foreigners are essentially men and women like yourselves whatever the superficial differences may be. This is the simple fact far too often forgotten—if not actually denied. And this must be the excuse if you discuss these people as a menace, pitching your discussion as if we were beyond hearing, and beneath feeling, and sometimes even as if beyond redemption.

Make us feel that America has good friends, intelligent, clear-sighted friends; friends that will not exploit us; friends that will not be interested merely because of what Italy did in the past for all civilization, but friends that will extend to us the sympathy which is due from one man to another. You will thereby make us not merely fellow voters, but will prepare us for the supreme test of real assimilation—the wish to consider the adopted country as a new and dear Fatherland.

Source: Gino C. Speranza, “How It Feels to Be a Problem: A Consideration of Certain Causes Which Prevent or Retard Assimilation,” *Charities* v. XII, no. 18 (May, 1904); 457-463, UIC:

<http://tigger.uic.edu/depts/hist/hull-maxwell/vicinity/nws1/documents/ethnicity/italian/speranza/speranza.htm>