Legal Aliens: Immigrants in Early Twentieth Century American Fiction

In the late-19th and early-20th century, anti-immigrant feeling ran high in the United States. In 1924 a new law severely restricted immigration. This course will analyze a series of texts that represent immigrant experience in the U.S. between the 1890s and the beginning of the Great Depression (1929). We will examine images of Chinese, Jewish, Irish and other immigrants in stories, novels, and commentary of this period, comparing the perspective of authors and characters who consider themselves full-fledged Americans with that of immigrant authors and characters who aspire to that status (or resist it). These texts use diverse rhetorical strategies to explore the meaning of Americanness and foreignness; the issues they raise include the cultural significance of racial purity, whiteness, social class, and gender norms as well as the role of education and the English language itself in facilitating entitlement (or failing to do so). We will begin by addressing the so-called color line that divided black Americans from white ones because the black/white distinction is indispensable for understanding the blurry line between "white" Americans and others, then and now.

Required Reading:
Education and the Color Line
Booker T. Washington from the "Atlanta Speech" (1895)
W.E.B. DuBois from Souls of Black Folk (1903)

Chinese Immigrants
Frank Norris, short stories: "After Strange Gods," (1894); "The Third Circle" (1909)
Li-Young Lee, "Persimmons" (1986)

Jewish Immigrants and the Lower East Side  
Henry James, *The American Scene* (selected chapters) (1905)  
Mary Antin, *The Promised Land* (selected chapters) (1912)  
Ernestine Rose, "Bridging the Gulf" (partial) (1917)

Bohemian Immigrants in Nebraska  
Willa Cather *My Antonia* (1918)

Immigrants and Contamination  
Madison Grant, "America for the Americans" (*Forum*, 1925)  
Franz Boaz, "This Nordic Nonsense" (*Forum*, 1925)

Whiteness, Family, and Class  
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)

Either  
Blackness, Whiteness, & Mixed Blood in the North and the South  
Nella Larsen, *Quicksand* (1928) (TBD)

OR  
Irish Catholics in Chicago  
James Farrell, *Young Lonigan* (1932) (TBD)

**Written Requirements:**

Class participation - 10%  
Two short (500 word) assignments – 20% (10% each).  
Paper Proposal (500 words) plus short Bibliography - 20% (presented in class and submitted by Feb. 1.).  
Final paper approx. 2500 words, 10 pages - 50%. Due March 1  
OR  
Seminar paper, approx. 5,000 words, 20 pages- 60%. Due April 30. (N.B. If you choose to do a seminar paper you may hand in one short assignment, instead of two.)