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# Keeping »Undesirables« at Bay: Discourse and Practices of U.S. Consul Henry W. Diederich in Bremen (1900–1906)

## Abstract

To explore the role played by U.S. consuls in the infrastructure aimed at controlling and restricting migration at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, this paper looks at ›despatches‹ [*sic*] from U.S. consul Henry W. Diederich in Bremen from 1900 to 1906. The focal point of this paper is the discourse in his letters to the Department of State on the so-called ›new immigration‹ from southern and especially eastern Europe. Important aspects of this paper include the essentialization and othering of transmigrants, particularly Jews from the Russian empire, as well as exclusionary practices. Although adhering to the letter of the law and relying on bureaucracy and ›scientific‹ categories to exclude ›undesirables‹, he continually sought to extend the role of consuls in controlling migration and asserting state power over private actors, such as the steamship company North German Lloyd operating in Bremen. Another aspect examined in this paper is the discourse on ›old‹ and ›new immigration‹ in a comparative perspective in his despatches as well as in despatches from other consuls.

## Keywords

Migration, transmigration, diplomacy, bureaucracy, United States, Germany

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## »Unerwünschte« Auswanderer\*innen fernhalten. Diskurse und Praktiken des US-Konsuls Henry W. Diederich in Bremen (1900–1906)

### Zusammenfassung

Der folgende Beitrag analysiert die Rolle der US-Konsulin in der zur Migrationsverwaltung und -beschränkung dienenden Infrastruktur am Ende des 19. und zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts anhand von ›Despatches‹ des US-Konsuls Henry W. Diederich in Bremen aus den Jahren 1900 bis 1906. Im Mittelpunkt dieses Beitrags steht der Diskurs über die ›neue Einwanderung‹ aus Süd- und Osteuropa in seinen Briefen an das US-Außenministerium. Wichtige Aspekte dieses Beitrags sind die Essentialisierung und Fremdbestimmung von Transmigrant\*innen, insbesondere russischen Juden, sowie Ausgrenzungspraktiken. Obwohl er sich an den Wortlaut des Gesetzes hielt und sich auf die Bürokratie und ›wissenschaftliche‹ Kategorien stützte, um ›unerwünschte‹ Einwanderer\*innen auszugrenzen, war er ständig bestrebt, die den Konsulin zugewiesene Rolle bei der Migrationskontrolle zu erweitern und die staatliche Macht gegenüber nichtstaatlichen Akteuren wie der in Bremen tätigen Dampfschiffahrtsgesellschaft Norddeutscher Lloyd durchzusetzen. Ein weiterer Aspekt, der in diesem Aufsatz untersucht wird, ist der Diskurs über die ›alte‹ und die ›neue Einwanderung‹ in vergleichender Perspektive in seinen ›Despatches‹ sowie in den Briefen anderer Konsulin.

### Schlagwörter

Migration, Transmigration, Diplomatie, Bürokratie, Vereinigte Staaten, Deutschland

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## 1 Introduction

In his autobiography, former Immigration Service inspector, mayor of New York, and congressman Fiorello H. La Guardia recounts the inspection routine he had established as a consular agent in Fiume in 1903–1906. He recalls the absence of clear guidelines for consular officers with regard to the inspection of emigrants (La Guardia 1948, p. 57):

›Washington never gave a decision on whether I was right or wrong in my interpretation on the regulations and my insistence on prior physical examinations before sailing. But I kept right on with the practice, and many years afterwards I learned that the

Public Health Service as well as the Immigration Service was greatly interested in my innovation.«

Paradoxically, the involvement of consuls and other consular agents in this process remained variable across ports of departure, despite ever-increasing numbers of transatlantic migration and subsequent efforts to contain the spread of »loathsome and contagious diseases«. Such prophylactic measures additionally served the purpose of preventing the transatlantic crossing of migrants deemed »undesirables« by the U.S. authorities.

Thorough research has been conducted on the regulation of transmigration through Germany, focusing on the enforcement of stricter migration policies in both Prussia and the United States (Brinkmann 2008, 2013); additionally, an important body of literature has been built on migration control, bureaucracy (Fahrmeir et al. 2003), and deportation practices in the European/North-Atlantic realm in 1880–1914 (Moloney 2012; Hester 2017). However, in research on the control and restriction of migration and transmigration during that time period, scant scholarly attention has been paid to consuls and consular activity. Consular service has only recently received more attention (Schulte Beerbühl 2018). Scholars have placed the emphasis on policy or bodies and on agents tasked with regulating migration, such as steamship companies and public health authorities at ports of departure or arrival and at control stations (Kraut 1994; Lüthi 2009; Fairchild 2003). The focal point of this paper is the exploration of the role consuls could play in the migration infrastructure and of the ways in which they were involved in carrying out »remote control« (Zolberg 2003, p. 197); it conducts this exploration by looking at a singular case study. By »migration infrastructure«, I mean the wide array of actors (people and physical structures) that facilitate or condition mobility (Xiang and Lindquist 2014). I argue that the U.S. consul stationed in Bremen was part and parcel of the infrastructure designed to control and restrict migration.

The increasing concern with southern and eastern European migrants traveling through Germany on steamships bound for the United States, disparagingly called »new immigrants«, in opposition to the »old« and pioneering Anglo-Saxon (and thus German) immigration at the end of the nineteenth century, is reflected in consular correspondences. I analyze the discourse used to refer to both Germans and the »new immigrants«, as well as the exclusionary practices described in those correspondences. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate how the consul in Bremen assured himself of the enforcement of immigration laws and actively participated in the essentialization and othering of transmigrants at the borders, thereby challenging the assumption that consuls had a limited role. In addition, the case study presented here examines the way in which the law could prove a resource to

legitimize prejudices, a key aspect of street-level bureaucracy (Alpes and Spire 2014, p. 271). It also highlights the ways in which the consul tried to maintain and expand his autonomy, another critical dimension of the work of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980, p. 19); in doing so, he contested the role of a key (commercial) actor in the migration infrastructure, the North German Lloyd.

The following analysis is based on a sample of correspondences previously called ›consular despatches‹ (reports) from Henry William Diederich, U.S. consul in Bremen in 1900–1906, to the Department of State. This study only briefly maps out migration policy during that timeframe, as comprehensive research on the legal framework in which consuls operated already exists. Rather, the predominant aim of the paper is to provide a qualitative analysis of the discourse on (trans)migrants in consular despatches. They offer a rare glimpse into the personal views of consuls and into the trajectories of migrants, who often had to negotiate their passage to the United States or circumvent restrictions and thereby showed agency, even though their experience is ›filtered through the lens‹ of public officials (Moloney 2012, p. 20). This is especially important with regard to the lack of individual accounts of migrants and especially transmigrants, as many were illiterate and did not leave any written accounts (Schenk 2020, p. 282). The data presented here is limited in view of the overall volume of consular despatches, given that I look at a singular case study; however, these letters provide a better understanding of the scope of consular duties and of the role of consuls in the transatlantic bureaucratic process conditioning mobility.

In the first section, I briefly map out the legislative changes in 1880–1914 to elucidate the prevailing views on the ›new immigration‹ at the time as well as the prevalence of medical terminology in migration policy in general and in consular despatches in particular. In the second section, I explore the sense of duty displayed by Henry W. Diederich in restricting migration and his advocacy for a uniform and more systematic inspection system. The third section examines the essentializing discourse on German and eastern European migration in consular correspondences, as well as the exclusionary practices deployed in Bremen to restrict the mobility of so-called ›undesirables‹.

## 2 Changing Patterns of Migration and the Beginning of Restriction (1880–1914)

### 2.1 Excluding ›Undesirables‹ as a Paradigm of Migration Policy

The despatches examined in this paper were sent during the final decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, as the

United States started to enact stricter migration policies and implemented a systematic categorization of migrants. Aristide Zolberg has cogently demonstrated that the actions of monitoring migration and selecting ›desirable‹ citizens while attempting to deter ›undesirables‹ from reaching the United States did not originate in the 1880s: attempts to contain the migration of ›paupers‹ or criminals from Germany to the United States, for instance, had been made prior to that time period (Focke et al. 1976, p. 38). Nor was migration regulation a U.S.-specific development during the three decades that followed: for example, the German imperial government introduced a passport requirement in 1879 for people coming from Russia (Zolberg 2006, p. 206), and Prussian authorities expelled ›Poles‹ in the mid-1880s, reflecting the dominant anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic sentiments. This development was in part linked to the development of the welfare state and the fear that foreign migrants would become public charges (Brinkmann 2008, p. 466–467). The more stringent migration policies implemented at the end of the nineteenth century and the federalization of migration policy in the United States were prompted by the evolution of not only the sources but also the patterns of migration (Zolberg 2006, p. 205) that was facilitated by low transportation costs. One of the concerns was the growing return migration, which is reflected in consular correspondences: in a report on emigration from Bremen during January and February 1900, consul Henry W. Diederich raised this issue:

»As stated above, their sole object is to get to our country to make money fast by slaving day and night and living on almost nothing, and after a few days to return to their native country, where they may enjoy in a measure, their hoarded possessions. This is the case chiefly with the Hungarians passing through here.«<sup>1</sup>

He feared that »many of them leave their own country [...] without the slightest idea of ever becoming citizens of the United States of America«<sup>2</sup>, echoing the theory of Henry Cabot Lodge that these »short-term migrants in low-skilled work« (also named »birds of passage«) would be detrimental to the United States (Perlmann 2018, p. 52). A growing number of ›new immigrants‹ came from southern and eastern Europe, as opposed to the »old stock« (Kazan 2004, p. 110) from northern Europe (or Anglo-Saxons), a distinction popularized by the Immigration Restriction League, founded in 1894 (Kazan 2004, p. 122), that gave rise to the fear of a changing composition of the population.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry W. Diederich, »Emigration via Bremen during January and February 1900«, March 12, 1900; Vol. 184, Consular Posts, Bremen, Germany; Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group (RG) 84; National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was key in initiating a major transformation in migration policy. Although the act initially focused on Chinese laborers, it established inspection and deportation practices and placed migration control under the aegis of the government (Lee and Yung 2010, p. 6–7). Adam McKeown (2008, p. 150) argued that the act shaped the very principles of modern migration control. In subsequent years, numerous laws were passed to prevent migration from Asia and, later, members of the ›new immigration‹<sup>3</sup> from Europe. The Immigration Act of 1882 was introduced to prevent the migration of ›undesirable classes‹: it prohibited convicts, »idiots«, »lunatics«, and »persons likely to become public charges« to enter the country, and it introduced a head tax on migrants of 50 cents. In the wake of that act, the Foran Act was passed in 1885 to prevent contract laborers from reaching the shores of the United States. In 1891, the list in the 1882 act was extended to include polygamists, persons convicted of crimes involving »moral turpitude«, and those suffering from »loathsome and contagious diseases« (Weil 2003, p. 273). In 1903 and 1907, further »excludable classes« were added to the list. The Bureau of Immigration, initially housed in the Treasury Department, was transferred to the Department of Commerce and Labor in 1903, and the Dillingham Commission, a congressional committee, was established in 1907 to study migration; it called for further restrictions as well as a literacy bill in an authoritative report that laid the basis for the quota system established in the 1920s. Drawing on eugenics, the most important message of this report was that the ›new immigration‹ needed to be curbed (Moloney 2012, p. 14).

This exclusion based on qualifications, health, morality, and education went hand in hand with a »›racialist‹ selection based on national or ethnic origin«. A »list of races and peoples« was introduced in 1898 and adopted by the Bureau of Immigration to classify and categorize migrants (Weil 2003, p. 272–273). Furthermore, the Immigration Service on Ellis Island often conflated occupation, health, moral qualities, and literacy with a migrant’s country of origin or ›race‹ (Fairchild 2003, p. 18, 193). Health and socio-economic categorizations constituted »racially based proxy methods« of exclusion (Moloney 2012, p. 4).

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<sup>3</sup> The focal point of this paper is migration from and through Europe; however, migration restrictions in the early 1880s primarily and dramatically targeted Chinese migrants with the enactment of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which set in motion a series of measures destined to restrict Asian migration in particular. See Tichenor (2002) for a thorough analysis of the racist design of the migration control system, as well as Lee and Yung (2010) for an examination of migration in the Pacific realm and the exclusionary practices on Angel Island, which sharply differed from those on Ellis Island.

## 2.2 Disease and Disability as a Rationale to Exclude

The role of medicine and public health in the selection of migrants has received close attention in the past two decades, although attention has predominantly been given to ports of arrival (Fairchild 2003; Lüthi 2009). Bacteriological and medical discoveries led to the implementation of disinfection practices at ports of departure and to systematic physical and cognitive examinations in the last decade of the nineteenth century. In 1892, a surge of cholera led to stringent health checks at control stations at the eastern German border and in German ports, and transatlantic migration was suspended for a few months in September 1892 to prevent the spread of the disease (Brinkmann 2008, p. 464). This outbreak and the ones that followed expanded the role of what became the U.S. Public Health Service, which placed physicians in charge of the medical inspection of migrants at ports of arrival (Fairchild 2003). New bacteriological discoveries by Robert Koch (among others) contributed to growing concern around pathogens, contagion, disease, and disinfection methods. After the passage of the Quarantine Act of 1893, migrants were required to undergo disinfection and inspection procedures at control stations (Brinkmann 2008, p. 465). From 1894 onward, the steamship companies – HAPAG in Hamburg and North German Lloyd in Bremen – managed transmigration stations at Germany's border with Russia and directed migrants directly to Hamburg and Bremen. Thus, German steamship companies were important actors in carrying out remote controls at transmigration nodes.

Research on medical inspections at transmigration control stations indicates that Russian migrants, particularly Jews, were often stigmatized as carrying contagious illnesses, especially trachoma. This representation of Jewish migrants as disease-bearers was gaining momentum at the turn of the century and was partly fueled by anti-Semitic diatribes in the German press (Hoerder 1993, p. 92). The use of medical terminology often served as a powerful tool to marginalize these migrants and restrict their mobility. This is echoed in one of the letters sent by consul Henry W. Diederich to the State Department in 1906, presumably in reaction to the mass migration of Russian Jews between 1903 and 1906 prompted by the Kishinev pogrom of 1903 (Brinkmann 2012, p. 61):

»A mere superficial inspection shows that they are unintelligent, of poor physique and low vitality. Wherever they will come in competition with American labor, they cannot but reduce the standard of living. They happen to be mostly Russians who are now being driven out of their country by the political unrest and persecution prevailing there.«<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Henry W. Diederich to the Assistant Secretary of State, April 13, 1906, Vol. 188, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

The words »mere superficial inspection« indicate that the appearance of migrants was of paramount importance in determining their health status and »desirability«: officers at Ellis Island established diagnoses at a glance, making a »snapshot diagnosis« (Baynton 2005, p. 37; Yew 1980, p. 497). Here, the »poor physique« trope is juxtaposed with socioeconomic concerns, and this association exemplifies the use of medical discourse to debar groups that would not be perceived as valuable additions to the nation in socioeconomic and political terms. The words »poor physique« offered a margin of interpretation (Lüthi 2001) and was often a »wastebasket label of nativist groups such as the Immigration Restriction League« (Markel and Stern 1999, p. 1319). The definition provided by Diederich shows that physical attributes were associated with social considerations and concerns about competition in the labor market. The expression of nativism – defined by John Higham (1956, p. 4) as the fear of an outside influence threatening the nation from within – in scientific terms legitimized efforts to »erect barriers« (Markel 2000, p. 558). As Alan Kraut points out, unhealthy (»poor physique«, »low vitality« in Diederich's discourse) and disease became a »convenient metaphor for excludable« and »public health bureaucrats – first state, later federal [became] – the instrument of cure« (Kraut 1994, p. 6).

### 3 Advocating for Stringent Inspections

#### 3.1 Consular Responsibilities and Competing Agendas on Migration Control

Until 1906, there was no tenure of office for consuls. That year, a career consular service that divided consular officers into different classes with salaries was established for the first time (Kennedy 1990, p. 218). The activities of consuls were multifarious and predominantly commercial; some of the mainstays of consular work included the certification of documents (such as shipping certificates), providing assistance to American citizens or destitute seamen abroad, or carrying out notarial duties, such as signing death certificates of American citizens (Strupp 2010, p. 219) and taking charge of their belongings. Their tasks could be divided into various categories: the promotion of bilateral trade relations, the representation of American interests abroad (Schulte Beerbühl 2018, p. 5), and the protection of citizens and reporting (Morgan and Kennedy 1991, p. 3). In the 1920s, as the United States introduced a stringent quota system, consuls were eventually tasked with issuing visas (Strupp 2010, p. 233) and hence officially granted the freedom to »weed out those considered undesirable« (Kraut 2017, p. 26).



U.S. consuls were instructed to send thorough reports on emigration in circulars sent by the Department of State containing questions that evolved over time. In 1888, for instance, the list titled »Questions propounded to our consuls in Europe« contained questions on voluntary or involuntary migration, trade, assisted migration, and contract laborers, including the following: »What classes of people, within your observation, emigrate to this country?« and »What is your opinion, having reference generally to the persons who emigrate to this country, as to whether or not they will prove a desirable addition to our population, and make good citizens of the United States?«<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, in a circular from 1903, the questions included: »What examinations of emigrants are now made by consuls, and in what manner?« and »Are the laws and regulations upon this subject satisfactory and ample, or, if not, what is suggested for their improvement?«<sup>6</sup> These questions suggest that consular responsibilities in the migration infrastructure varied from one port to another and that consuls were consulted on this matter.

Further despatches from consuls in Hamburg indicate that consuls had to verify manifests in accordance with the provisions of the immigration act of March 3, 1893, which required the master or commanding officer of the steamer or vessel to deliver passenger lists and manifests of freight and present them to a U.S. consul or consular agent at the port of departure, who had to confirm the accuracy of the information presented. This was amended in 1903: a letter explains that after the passage of the act of March 3, 1903, »the certifying of immigrants' manifests by consular officers was abolished«, and passenger lists were verified by the immigration officials at the port of arrival. Nevertheless, consular officers had to »continue to make general reports on any attempted violations of the immigration laws and regulations«. In Hamburg, manifests provided by steamship companies continued to be carefully examined, and consular officers attended the medical examinations of steerage passengers (other classes of passengers were rarely subjected to such scrutiny). The consul-general or another consular agent continued to be present at examinations;<sup>7</sup> this indicates that their consular duties evolved over time and that in 1903, they may have been discharged from certifying passenger lists, but they continued to advise the Department of

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5 Circular by G.L. Rives, July 24, 1888, Vol. 060, Consular Posts, Frankfort on the Main, RG 84, NARA.

6 Circular by the Department of Commerce and Labor, Bureau of Statistics, July 27, 1903, Vol. 035, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

7 E.H.L. Mummenhoff to Robert Bacon, Assistant Secretary of State, December 7, 1905; Despatches January 3, 1905–August 4, 1906 (Microscopy N° T-211, Roll 35); Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Hamburg, Germany, 1794–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consul Officers 1789–1906; RG 59; NARA.

State, to be present at examinations and to ensure the good sanitary conditions of the vessels.

Unsuccessful attempts had been made to expand the involvement of consuls in migration control at ports of departure. Consular inspection had been broached but was never implemented: a bill passed the House of Representatives in 1894 that »provided for the examination of all emigrants abroad by the United States consuls.« The Senate Committee on Immigration amended the bill, on the grounds that a consular inspection was not feasible (Hutchinson 1981, p. 111–112; Zolberg 2006, p. 225), and »substituted for consular inspection, the examination of emigrants in foreign ports by inspectors appointed by the United States Treasury«, according to Diederich in 1901.<sup>8</sup> Concerns over the corruption and lack of supervision of consuls were also raised. Furthermore, private steamship companies were perceived as a more efficient means of regulating migration (McKeown 2008, p. 224–225). Thus, consular tasks were limited to the authentication of documents, such as lists of passengers or manifests of freight, a task which was abolished on March 3, 1903, after which they remained in charge of reports on the violation of immigration laws and regulations.

### 3.2 Implementing a »Picket Line of Consular Inspection«?<sup>9</sup>

Historian Dorothee Schneider has demonstrated that in Fiume, the consul was occasionally asked to provide advice to the steamship company but that overall, his role remained »consultative«. She adds that most consuls did not wish to be involved in the inspection procedure and that they did not regard themselves competent enough to exercise such functions (Schneider 2006, p. 230). They could send a telegram to Ellis Island to prevent the arrival of an »undesirable« migrant, but they had no influence on the final decision of admission or deportation made by the Immigration Service. The case of Henry W. Diederich is only partially consistent with this claim: in his correspondences to the Department of State, the consul repeatedly sought to extend consular duties and asked for a uniform, systematic, and rigorous inspection of migrants under the auspices of the consul in all ports, as was done at the consulate in Bremen.

Referred to by H.D. Peirce as »a most respectable gentleman, doing excellent work at Bremen« in a report on the conditions of United States consu-

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<sup>8</sup> Henry W. Diederich to David J. Hill, November 29, 1901, Vol. 186, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. »Why not, therefore, use all the facilities at our command for effectually enforcing our immigration laws? Why not make this caravan of aliens pass through the picket line of consular inspection before embarking for our shores?«

lates abroad to John Hay from 1903<sup>10</sup>, Diederich was a native-born American from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and former »Lutheran clergyman and educator«. He resided in Fort Wayne, Indiana, before his appointment as consul in Leipzig in 1889, after which he was appointed to Magdeburg in 1897 and then promoted to Bremen in 1899.<sup>11</sup> Evidence from correspondences with the Department of State indicates that he had not resided in Germany prior to his appointment but that he had a »thorough knowledge of the German language« from his college days.<sup>12</sup> A letter from 1898 explains that »Professor Diederich« had been in charge of the »National Committee work among natives of Foreign countries« and »clerk to the House Committee on Immigration during the last Congress«, suggesting that he had been at the forefront of discussions on migration regulation, including debates on the introduction of a literacy bill and the implementation of more stringent policies.<sup>13</sup>

Medical inspections in Bremen were performed under the supervision of the consul, but the steamship company could accept passengers at their own discretion. As early as 1900, Diederich lamented the cumbersome task of inspecting emigrants, carried out on behalf of the steamship company and in which he partook. Inspections usually took place with every outgoing steamship and outside of the six office hours, usually from four to nine o'clock in the morning, around noon, and after 5 p.m. The presence of the consul or one of his assistants was required in 1900, as he had to supervise the inspection, sign lists of passengers and manifests of freight, and authenticate signatures of physicians before the steamship's departure. Three to four North German Lloyd steamships left the port every week, requiring the consul or his assistants to attend nine to eleven inspections per week. The compensation was, in Diederich's opinion, not proportional to the »services rendered«:

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**10** Report from Herbert H.D. Peirce to John Hay. Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division. <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o42778>. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University. Accessed: 5.5.2022.

**11** Letter from Frederick William Holls to Theodore Roosevelt. Theodore Roosevelt Papers. Library of Congress Manuscript Division. <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o35467>. Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library. Dickinson State University. Accessed: 5.5.2022.

**12** Henry W. Diederich to the Assistant Secretary of State, May 7, 1906; January 2, 1901–August 2, 1906 (Microscopy No. T-184, roll T-21), Despatches from United States Consuls in Bremen, Germany, 1794–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers; RG 59; NARA.

**13** E.F. Acheson to Robert Adams Jr., April 26, 1898, enclosed in letter from Robert Adams Jr. to William R. Day, April 28, 1898; Despatches: Vol. 1: July 23, 1890–1898 (Microscopy No. T-633, roll 1); Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Magdeburg, Germany, 1890–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers, 1789–1906; RG 59; NARA.

consular officers charged a fee of \$1 for every list of passengers signed, as prescribed by an order of the President until the act of March 3, 1903. Diederich underlined the fact that his predecessors had accepted a regular salary from the steamship company, which had turned them into »employees of a foreign corporation« – a position that he »would and could never be found in.«<sup>14</sup> In February 1903, he again stressed the fact that inspections were performed for the benefit of the steamship company and drew attention to the absence of clear guidelines regarding inspections and of a fair compensation for his work:

»But I fail to see anywhere any instructions ordering such a detailed inspection of emigrants as we have been having here for years at this Consulate, requiring the personal attention of the Consul himself or one of his assistants. As I have performed these onerous duties for three years largely myself, and have done so patiently and faithfully, as I believe, and at all continue to do so, should the Department determine that such is my duty in the future, I know that my remark here will not be misunderstood by the Department.«<sup>15</sup>

In addition, Diederich advocated for the implementation of a uniform and systematic inspection directed by the federal government and not a private company, reiterating the conflict between these actors and his plea for an independent consular inspection:

»I had hoped that a uniform system of inspection by United States Consulates at all ports of emigration might be established, based on instructions from the Department of State, which would give the Consul proper authority, and make it a government inspection. [...] And if at any time the new Department of Commerce and Labor, which is to assume change of the Bureau of Immigration, desires to have my views as to a simple and practical plan of a Consular Inspection of emigrants, that could be generally adopted, I shall be pleased to offer them.«<sup>16</sup>

The consul stationed in Antwerp in 1903, although more concerned with the surveillance of »criminally or politically objectionable« emigrants at ports of embarkation, also bemoaned the absence of government-led examinations. He lamented the loss of security after the passage of the Act of March 1903 and suggested a more rigid examination at ports of departure.<sup>17</sup> However,

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<sup>14</sup> Henry W. Diederich to David J. Hill, October 15, 1900; Despatches January 1, 1898–December 27, 1900 (Microscopy N° T184, Roll T20); Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Bremen, Germany, 1794–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers, 1789–1906; RG 59; NARA.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Diederich to the Assistant Secretary of State, February 15, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Diederich to the Assistant Secretary of State, February 15, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

<sup>17</sup> Church Howe to Francis B. Loomis, November 16, 1903; Despatches January 13, 1902–August 11, 1906 (Microscopy N° T-181, roll 14); Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Antwerp,

such suggestions went unheeded, and it took many years for consuls to be endowed with the right to effectively carry out inspections (Schneider 2006, p. 233). A letter from May 1903 reveals that the Treasury Department was well aware of the inspections conducted under Diederich's supervision and that he had even received a »kind and appreciative note«<sup>18</sup> from them. In 1904, Diederich eventually accepted a compensation voluntarily offered by the North German Lloyd steamship company; he accepted the offer »not as gift, but as hard earned quid pro quo« to which he was »entitled by right«, as he saw it.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3 A Sense of Duty

As described above, emigrants (and especially steerage passengers) about to embark on steamships bound for the United States had to undergo thorough physical examinations and be vaccinated in Bremen. After a physical inspection and disinfection of their baggage at control stations under the supervision of the steamship companies (such as Illowo or Tilsit), transmigrants from Russia transited through Ruhleben near Berlin and then were taken to Bremen to board a steamer. Control stations were established at the border with Austria-Hungary. Transmigrants from Russia were required to carry a passport and be in possession of a steamship ticket. Steerage passengers had to undergo a third inspection under the supervision of the U.S. consulate in Bremen; this medical inspection took place before the sailing of the vessel, in the presence of the U.S. consul or one of his assistants, and was led by Dr. Peltzer – a sworn medical officer of the consulate – and two physicians of the steamship company. Migrants afflicted with an illness were rejected, and the consul sent the list of all rejected emigrants to the Commissioner of Immigration in New York, Baltimore, or Galveston. The steamship company was also provided with the list and could decide whether or not to take the rejected passengers, although it faced penalties if a migrant was rejected and deport-

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Belgium, 1802–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers, 1789–1906; RG 59; NARA. The consul in Liverpool expressed a similar concern, although he was mainly preoccupied with the enforcement of the quarantine regulations at ports of embarkation so as to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. See James Boyle to Francis B. Loomis, October 6th, 1903; Despatches January 1, 1902–December 28, 1904 (Microscopy N° 141, roll T-54); Despatches from United States Consuls in Liverpool, 1790–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers, 1789–1906; RG 59, NARA.

<sup>18</sup> Henry W. Diederich to Francis B. Loomis, May 11, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

<sup>19</sup> Henry W. Diederich to Francis B. Loomis, December 23rd, 1904, Vol. 187, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

ed after arrival. Migrants fortunate enough to cross the Atlantic were then subjected to another inspection upon their arrival.<sup>20</sup>

An important body of literature indicates that deportations from the United States, that is, expulsions of noncitizens to their country of origin (Moloney 2012, p. 8), were low, rarely exceeding 3 % of the total number of migrants in any given year during this time period (Kraut 1988, p. 384).<sup>21</sup> These low numbers can be explained in part by the stringent selection procedures at transmigration points at the borders with the Russian empire and Austria-Hungary and at ports of departure, such as Bremen. A striking aspect of Diederich's despatches to the Department of State is the sense of activism, zeal, and pride exhibited in his descriptions of inspections: he often portrays them as a mission to safeguard the vitality of the country by conducting a »weeding-out« or a »sifting-out« process in order to keep »undesirable emigrants«<sup>22</sup> from reaching U.S. shores. (Both »weeding-out« and »sifting« are leitmotifs in his letters.) In addition, he repeatedly emphasized the strenuous nature of his mission, referring to it as a »thorough and painstaking work« or »laborious« or »arduous« labor<sup>23</sup> requiring »rigor« and »vigilance«.<sup>24</sup> He indicated in a letter from February 1903 that most migrants who were deported from the United States were rarely returned »on account of some physical disability« but rather on account of being »public charges«, implying that the medical inspection conducted in Bremen was, in his opinion, meticulous and that the work of the consulate was »successful«.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, his rhetoric pertaining to migration and transmigration shows the prevalent »fear of an invasion from the East« (Lüthi 2013, p. 31): he spoke of

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20 Henry Diederich, »Inspection of emigrants at Bremen«, February 15, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

21 See also Fairchild (2003), p. 4, for a detailed quantitative study of deportations. She writes that disease and economic dependency were the main cause of rejection and that the deportation rate from Ellis Island for medical reasons never exceeded 1 %.

22 Henry W. Diederich to David J. Hill, November 29, 1901, Vol. 185, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

23 Henry W. Diederich to the Assistant Secretary of State, September 17th, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

24 Henry W. Diederich to David J. Hill on November 29, 1901, Vol. 185, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA. The consul in Rotterdam described the services rendered as »onerous, far from pleasant and sometimes even dangerous«. He demanded that a compensation be paid by the steamship company. The supervision by the consul was also, in his opinion, necessary in order to prevent »undesirables« from embarking. S. Listoe to Francis B. Loomis, June 8th, 1903; June 18, 1898–June 30, 1904 (Microscopy N° T-232, roll 12); Despatches from United States Consuls in Rotterdam, 1801–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers, 1789–1906; RG 59, NARA.

25 Henry Diederich, »Report on Emigration«, September 17th, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular Posts, RG 84, NARA.

the »half million of aliens that are annually flocking to our shores«<sup>26</sup>, the »hordes of aliens swarming to our shores«<sup>27</sup>, or the »throng«<sup>28</sup> of migrants. To further demonstrate how much time and energy was devoted to the inspection of migrants and detecting »undesirables«, he narrated an incident that unfolded during an inspection in 1905:

»The following incident will illustrate that the emigrants cannot be inspected too carefully or too often. Some time ago a Russian woman passed along the line at the inspection. She was vaccinated on the left arm by one of the physicians. Her eyes were next examined and she was about to be passed, when the physician noticed a peculiar bundle in her right arm. When questioned as to what the passage contained, she pretended she did not understand the query and attempted to walk away. But the doctor insisted on her opening the bundle and, as she did so, an infant came to view about 6 to 8 weeks old, covered with confluent small pox.«<sup>29</sup>

The woman and her infant child passed the inspections at the Russian border and then travelled through Ruhleben near Berlin. This led Diederich to reiterate the necessity of a strict inspection in Bremen: »All of which goes to show, that as in other cases of public danger, eternal vigilance also is the price of safety from undesirable immigration.«<sup>30</sup>

Sympathy for transmigrants is expressed on a few occasions, often as a way of underscoring the necessity to turn away »undesirables« at an earlier stage. The following excerpt testifies to this:

»While an able corps of faithful physicians are attending to this, the consul or his assistant is present to see to it that the immigration laws of the United States are carried out to the letter. For him to sit by in all the stench and turmoil, and oftentimes to witness most heart rendering scenes, whenever it becomes his plain duty to reject an unfortunate alien, and to turn a deaf ear to the most pathetic appeals uttered in strange accents by poor fellow creatures whose fondest hopes have been changed by him in an instant to darkest despair, is certainly not an easy task nor a very pleasant one, but that all this work was not done in vain may be seen from.«<sup>31</sup>

Many migrants who passed the inspection in Bremen were rejected at ports of arrival, predominantly on account of being »public charges« or »contract

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26 Ibid.

27 Henry W. Diederich to Francis B. Loomis on May 1, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

28 Henry W. Diederich, »Report on emigration«, November 10th, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

29 Henry W. Diederich to Francis B. Loomis on March 21st, 1905, Vol. 188, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

30 Ibid.

31 Henry W. Diederich, »Annual report on emigration via Bremen in 1905«, February 20, 1905, Vol. 188, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA. This paragraph is followed by a table with causes and numbers of rejection.

laborers«, as per Diederich. In a letter from 1904, he explicitly revealed his satisfaction about what he perceived as a successful procedure:

»Through the kindness of my brother officials in the various bureaus of immigration I receive regularly a list of such aliens as had passed our inspection here, but could not be admitted to our shores. I may be pardoned for saying that I scan these lists with no small degree of pleasure.«<sup>32</sup>

As can be seen in these letters, Diederich displayed an unabating sense of mission and zeal in defending national interests. Although pecuniary and practical concerns are addressed, the language used in his letters to describe migrants and his sense of pride in detecting »undesirables« reveals a general attitude of suspicion toward transmigrants dressed up as professionalism. In addition, a manuscript note at the bottom of a confidential letter from 1904 betrays an overt concern with Jewish migration from Russia.<sup>33</sup>

## 4 Exclusionary Practices and Discourse on (Trans)migrants

### 4.1 »Scientific« Categories and Exclusion in Bremen

In 1900, Diederich received a letter from an attorney from Dayton, Ohio, Allen C. McDonald; in this letter, McDonald explained that a couple, Wulf and Rita Galipsky, were detained at a control station in Illowo on their way to the United States. According to the attorney, the couple was falsely diagnosed with trachoma, and their children in the United States reached out to him after receiving a letter from their parents stating that they had been rejected on account of the diagnosis. He wrote that »their eyes were no doubt somewhat inflamed or irritated from excessive weeping on account of parting with loved ones, but they feel they were unjustly charged with having eye disease«.<sup>34</sup> A decision based on a purportedly rational, medical diagnosis was difficult to circumvent, although this example demonstrates that relying on kinship, co-religionist groups, and legal mobilization enabled contesting a diagnosis and appealing a rejection decision.<sup>35</sup> Health became the predominant ground for exclusion in Bremen at the turn of the century; overall, a

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32 Henry W. Diederich to Francis B. Loomis, »Emigration via Bremen, Germany, to the United States, during the year 1903«, February 8, 1904, Vol. 187, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

33 Henry W. Diederich to Herbert H.D. Peirce, August 1st, 1904; January 2, 1901–August 2, 1906 (Microscopy No. T-184, roll T-21); Despatches from United States Consuls in Bremen, Germany, 1794–1906; Despatches from U.S. Consular Officers, 1789–1906; RG 59; NARA.

34 Allen. C McDonald to Henry W. Diederich, July 17, 1900, Vol. 138, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

35 See Brinkmann (2008) for the role of aid societies.



discourse on disease and disability in association with ›new immigrants‹ permeates Diederich's letters.

In February 1903<sup>36</sup>, Diederich wrote that he had gone »a step farther« in the medical examination and that he had »the eyes of each individual more carefully examined than ever before« to eliminate trachoma, a contagious disease of the eye labeled a »dangerous« disease in 1897 (Markel 2000, p. 533). Reports on emigration from Diederich show that trachoma or »diseases of the eye« were common diagnoses at control stations as well as in Bremen, as the disease was often associated with ›new immigrants‹ and especially with (impoverished) eastern European Jews (Markel 2000), despite the limited knowledge on the infection's etiology (Markel 2000, p. 529). The following numbers speak to the predominance of medical motives and especially trachoma in excluding migrants in Bremen: in 1902, 1,707 migrants out of 143,600 were rejected; of these, North German Lloyd transported 1,232, leaving 475 »totally and irrevocably rejected«. Of the 475 migrants rejected and stranded, 230 were diagnosed with trachoma and 91 were diagnosed with a »non-contagious disease of the eye«. <sup>37</sup> These numbers speak to the discrepancy in the agendas of the consular office and of the steamship company, which sought to maximize the number of passengers. Those with a prepaid ticket who had not passed consular inspection could board when the steamship company was willing to transport them at their own risk. In 1903<sup>38</sup>, as reported by Diederich, out of 124,271 migrants passing through Bremen, 1,276 people were rejected; 780 were diagnosed with a »contagious disease of the eye«, and 367 with a »non-contagious disease of the eye«. Other, less significant grounds for rejection (numerically speaking) included »febrile diseases«, »cripples«, »measles«, »lupus«, »favus«, »illegitimate pregnancy«, and »idioty«. <sup>39</sup> In 1904, out of 121,870 migrants, 2,164 were rejected; 913 were »unfortunate individuals suffering from some contagious disease of the eye, mostly from the loathsome scourge called trachoma«. <sup>40</sup> In 1905, 2,343 migrants out of 169,725 were rejected—1,145 on account of trachoma; 1,468 migrants were »finally and irrevocably rejected« <sup>41</sup>.

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36 Henry W. Diederich, »Inspection of emigrants at Bremen«, February 15, 1903, Vol. 186, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

37 Ibid.

38 1903 is the year that he required a meticulous inspection of the eyes.

39 Henry W. Diederich, »Emigration via Bremen, Germany, to the United States, during the year 1903«, February 8th, 1904, Vol. 187, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

40 Henry W. Diederich, »Annual Report on Emigration and Inspection of Emigrants at Bremen, Germany«, January 31, 1905, Vol. 188, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

41 Henry W. Diederich, »Annual Report on Emigration via Bremen in 1905«, February 20, 1906, Vol. 188, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

The case of Aloisie Poupal in September 1901 illustrates the consequences of such rejections as well as the conflicts that could arise between the consul and the steamship company. Although psychiatric illnesses such as »idiocy«<sup>42</sup> were rarely used as a motive for rejection in Bremen (as stated above), such a diagnosis could have far-reaching consequences, like family separation. Seven-year-old Aloisie Poupal, labeled a »Bohemian«, was allowed to enter the United States, despite being classified as an »idiot« by Dr. Peltzer and a physician of the steamship *Frankfurt*. Physicians in Baltimore deemed Aloisie as only »weak-minded« and contested the diagnosis made in Bremen. Her father, Frank Poupal, had immigrated to the United States seven years prior with his son; after having saved enough money, he had »sent for his wife Barbara and three children, to come and join him in the United States«. Diederich recalled this inspection vividly and wrote:

»it was my sad but plain duty to have the interpreter tell the mother that her child could not go to ›America: I knew what that meant to the poor mother, and I felt for her, however, I am not put here to dispense charity at the expense of the United States government [...] and of all the undesirable immigrants, in my judgment, an idiot is the most undesirable.«<sup>43</sup>

Despite Diederich's suggestion to send Aloisie back to Bohemia where she could receive »support and maintenance [...] in one of the asylums of that country«, North German Lloyd provided her a place on the steamship, as the family had prepaid tickets. In addition, Diederich's letter suggests that the representative of North German Lloyd appealed the Bremen consulate's decision to exclude Aloisie Poupal, to a higher medical authority in the United States. A letter to the Commissioner of Immigration recounts that when Frank Poupal learned at Locus Point that his daughter was pronounced an »idiot« and that she could be returned to Europe, he told »one of the gatemen that he would kill himself if they would not let him have her.«<sup>44</sup> She was eventually admitted in the United States after another examination by another physician, who declared that she did not seem to be an »idiot« when she was seen interacting with her sister in her native language<sup>45</sup>, indicating that she may have failed a test because of the language barrier or a failure on the

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<sup>42</sup> As stated above, the first immigration law, the Act of 1882, banned all »lunatics, idiots«, and migrants »likely to become a public charge«, among others.

<sup>43</sup> Henry W. Diederich to David J. Hill on October 21, 1901, Vol. 185, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

<sup>44</sup> Bertram N. Stump (inspector) to the Commissioner of Immigration, November 14, 1901, Vol. 143, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

<sup>45</sup> Dr. Carter (Marine Hospital Service, Office of Medical Officer in Command) to the Commissioner of Immigration, November 14, 1901, Vol. 143, Consular Posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

part of the authorities to understand cultural differences (Galusca 2009, p. 155). He wrote that he found »no evidence of idiocy, or even weak-mindedness« and that she seemed »as bright as [he] would have expected other children or her age to be.« Diederich's caveat that she may become a »public charge« in the event of her parents' death was ignored, and Frank Poupal, her father, having saved enough money in Shamokin, Pennsylvania, was »able and willing to support them«.

Medical labels were »strikingly protean« (Markel and Stern 2002, p. 758). Moreover, the etiology of trachoma was not well understood (Markel and Stern 1999, p. 1318), and the understanding of psychiatric illnesses was evolving. Such labels were often reinforced with other categories, such as »likely to become a public charge« (Moloney 2012), as »idiots« or »insane« individuals were deemed economically dependent. Although this family's experience is mediated through official correspondences, the distress caused by the contingent nature and the arbitrary use of such labels is overt. Again, Diederich displayed an unabating sense of duty and relied on the »persuasiveness of ›expert testimony‹ in the form of medical diagnoses« (Kraut 1988, p. 68) as well as on immigration laws to find the motive best suited to ensure the rejection of Aloisie. Accordingly, he made extensive use of the immigration laws and of the apparent neutrality of scientific classifications to ensure that ›undesirables‹ would be effectively excluded at the country's (remote) borders.

#### 4.2 Representations of (Trans)migrants in Consular Despatches

The rhetoric and the ubiquitous dichotomies in consular letters, such as ›desirable/undesirable‹ and ›healthy/unhealthy‹, are not idiosyncratic: they reflect the prevailing popular and ›scientific‹ views of the time on the ›new‹ as opposed to the ›old‹ immigrants and are part of a broader process of othering and excluding. An estimated 5.5 million Germans emigrated to the U.S. from 1816 to 1914, and the last emigration phase spanned the years 1880–93 (Bade et al. 2011, p. 69). At the end of that period, as Klaus J. Bade points out, Germany »ceased to be a country of mass migration« (Bade 1980, p. 358). Migrants from the third ›wave‹ (i.e., 1880–1893) predominantly came from the agrarian regions of the northeast, which up until then had not contributed to emigration. By the mid-1890s, Germany's transition from an agrarian to an industrial society fostered internal migration, and as a result, overseas migration declined (Bade 1980, p. 362). This decline in transatlantic migration from Germany, as well as the country's reliance on foreign contract laborers, is echoed in consular correspondences. In a report on emigration during January and February 1900, Diederich wrote that

»no foreigner, as a rule, can get work in any manufacturing establishment or in any other place where skilled labor is required, the German artisan, mechanic, and higher grade laborer need not leave his country in quest of employment. In fact, the German labor market today far outweighs the supply.«<sup>46</sup>

The decrease in German migration is evoked in another letter from 1902. In what resembles an ethnographical account of migrants passing through Bremen, Diederich deemed the newcomers to be of »superior quality as to general health and physique« and recounted the »somber-looking peasants from Russia, with their cherry-cheeked wives«, the »dark-skinned and gayly dressed« Hungarians, the »fair-haired sons and daughters of Norway and Sweden«, and the »dusky denizens of the Orient«. He praised the general appearance and habits of these field laborers who were »enjoying crude physical health that come from out-of-door occupation and poverty«, and he advocated for the creation of a »bureau of colonization in the United States« to »distribute them over the western farm country, where there is still a great demand for their labor« so as to avoid overcrowding cities – another commonplace of the Progressive Era. Here, the complex nexus of these migrants' origin, occupation, appearance, social practices, and their eligibility in relation to nation-building and economic utility is evident.

The decrease in German migration became a source of concern as the numbers of ›new‹ immigration rose. Diederich's prejudicial attitude toward the ›new‹ immigrants is salient in later consular despatches: Germans are referred to as a ›desirable‹ addition to the nation and are pitted against the ›new immigrants‹. Nevertheless, Hungarians come second in the hierarchy elaborated by Diederich:

»The most desirable emigrants for our country that pass through Bremen are the Germans, but their number is small. Next come the Hungarians. As they trip along our line of medical inspectors it is a delight to see these able-bodied and healthy men, woman [*sic*] and children ambitious to seek a new and better home in a country far away.«<sup>47</sup>

The language used to describe the newcomers in 1906 contains fewer metaphors, and the racialization of the ›new immigrants‹ is more conspicuous. In the same letter, he referred to the »less desirable sorts« among Russians (Russian Jews in particular) but also »Italians, Syrians, and others«<sup>48</sup> who were »on the increase« in other ports of embarkation and shared his observations after a cursory inspection:

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46 Henry W. Diederich, »Emigration via Bremen during January and February 1900«, March 12, 1900, Vol. 184, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

47 Henry W. Diederich to the Assistant Secretary of State, April 13, 1906, Vol. 188, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

48 *Ibid.*

»Their very appearance, and port, and bearing show that all their lives they have been physical weaklings, underfed, illy-housed and insufficiently clad, uneducated and even in their native country they belonged to the lowest type of their race.«<sup>49</sup>

This example from 1906 reveals that he took active part in the construction of »undesirables« by essentializing the »new immigrants« (in particular Russian Jews) and referring to them in sociobiological and racial terms (Zolberg 2008, p. 208). According to Diederich, their place of origin, lifestyle, and environment predisposed them to a certain set of traits and physical differences.

Although not yet permeated with the language of medicine, earlier letters from other consuls in Bremen and Hamburg suggest that the discrepancy in perceptions of transmigrants and German emigrants was a widespread phenomenon prior to 1900. Already in 1886, consul Albert Loening sent a report on emigration from Bremen stating that even though he had had »little opportunity of personally judging their conditions and characteristics«, he considered the »Bohemians, Hungarians, Poles, Italians and poor Russian Jews who emigrate to the United States« as a »worthless lot«. In contrast, he deemed the Germans, »especially the North Germans«, a »very desirable class of emigrants«, as they were »peaceable, industrious, and most all of them have a little ready money, or friends in America who have work prepared for them when they arrive, and assist them on«. <sup>50</sup> In 1888, a letter from the U.S. consul in Hamburg mentioned the extreme poverty of the emigrants who were »illegally provided to commence a new life in a new country«, especially »Polish and Russian Jew emigration«; by contrast, he wrote, among German emigrants, »the good largely predominate«. <sup>51</sup> An identical appraisal of the general appearance of German emigrants was made by consul Hugh Pitcairn in Hamburg in 1904: he described Germans as a »very desirable class of emigrants« and praised their work ethic, morals, and political standpoints (although some were former »believers in socialistic principles«!). Again, a superficial examination led the consul to the following conclusion about Germans: »The emigrants are generally strong and sturdy, well developed, of good physique and healthful in appearance. Almost all men have had military training and are clean in dress and otherwise«. <sup>52</sup> What is noteworthy here is the use of »good physique« as opposed to the »poor physique« asso-

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49 Ibid.

50 Albert Loening to James D. Porter, May 26th, 1886, Vol. 180, Consular Posts, Bremen, Germany, RG 84, NARA.

51 W. Lang to Assistant Secretary of State G.L. Rives, May 14, 1888, Vol. 180, Consular posts, Hamburg, Germany, RG 84, NARA.

52 Hugh Pitcairn, »Emigration to the United States«, March 31, 1904, Vol. 186, Consular posts, Hamburg, RG 84, NARA.

ciated with Russian Jews in Diederich's letters, corresponding to a growing concern about health and fitness at the turn of the twentieth century. Again, these labels reveal the complex nexus of migrants' national origin or ›race‹, general appearance, fitness, class, social practices, and eligibility, and they highlight the prevailing belief on the »atavistic dispositions« of each group (Zolberg 2006, p. 207).

## 5 Conclusion

The views on migrants expressed in Diederich's despatches were widespread at the beginning of the twentieth century: the representation of migrants as carriers of germs and as a menace to the physical and social body of the nation was ubiquitous on Ellis Island (Kraut 1988; Yew 1980) and culminated in more restrictive policies in the 1920s. In fact, Diederich's discourse on ›new immigration‹ seems to mirror the representations and expectations that the Immigration Service (which consisted of civil servants and bureaucrats) had of different immigrant groups (Fairchild 2003, p. 18). Alan Kraut concluded that Public Health Service physicians were reluctant to participate in exclusion processes and prided themselves on the impartiality of their medical judgment; however, as he underscores, medical knowledge is always a »negotiation between the biological and the social«, and PHS physicians often »linked the immigrants' physical condition to a supposed inferior character and lifestyle« (Kraut 1988, p. 383). Diederich, too, seems to adhere to these views: he relied on the purported impartiality of immigration laws, bureaucracy, and ›scientific‹ categories to justify rejections, reinforcing Alan Kraut's observation of the penchant of the Progressive Era for »science and bureaucratic efficiency« as a »bulwark of the nation's defense« (Kraut 1988, p. 379). The rhetoric permeating Diederich's letters conflates an individual's character, appearance, health, origin or ›race‹, and economic utility, drawing on medicine, and popular tropes of the Progressive Era perceiving the detrimental effect of immigration; this discourse had far-reaching consequences. Aside from the stereotypes created by such connotations, consuls could spearhead exclusion processes in the migration infrastructure. They could thus hinder or steer mobilities, compelling migrants to negotiate their passage with consular agents or to find their way to the United States through a different port of departure, such as Liverpool, Southampton, or Libau (Liepāja in Latvia).<sup>53</sup>

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53 Henry W. Diederich to the Assistant Secretary of State, May 2, 1906, Vol. 188, Consular posts, Bremen, RG 84, NARA.

While (earlier) letters from other consuls in Bremen and Hamburg show consistency in views on southern and eastern European migration, the extent to which these views influenced their practices needs to be determined. A more systematic and broader examination of consular despatches and of consuls' backgrounds at different ports of departure is required in order to ascertain the involvement of seaport consuls in remote control more generally; it is possible that some consuls were more willing to assume this role while other consuls felt more compassion for (trans)migrants. Nonetheless, a report from the Bureau of Immigration from the beginning of the twentieth century suggests that Diederich was not the only consul or consular agent who felt compelled to defend what he perceived as the national interests. Other examples support this position. Dorothee Schneider describes a U.S. consul in Trieste who was particularly intent on ensuring that »undesirables« would not emigrate (Schneider 2006, p. 231). The consul stationed in Antwerp, as we have seen, advocated the idea of a more rigid examination before embarkation so as to detect criminally or politically objectionable emigrants. La Guardia stated in his memoir that he showed initiative by personally inspecting each emigrant together with a doctor and stamping their cards; his work went against the interests of the Cunard Line and prompted the British consul to file a protest against him. La Guardia (erroneously) wrote that »Fiume was the only port where emigrants were inspected before embarkation«, and he stressed the necessity of such »speedy and efficient inspections« (La Guardia 1948, p. 57). However, when writing about his later work for the Immigration Service, he wrote that he was well aware that deportations for »alleged mental diseases were unjustified« and resulted from a poor understanding of the immigrants' »standards« (La Guardia 1948, p. 65). He recalled the mental anguish he felt when witnessing scenes of rejection, suggesting that views on migrants and regulation practices differed from one seaport consulate to another.

Diederich's example reveals that some consuls saw themselves as gatekeepers at the nation's de-territorialized borders. Additionally, it shows how bias was cloaked in bureaucratic necessity and science. His letters also reveal the attempts made to go beyond his consultative role and to advocate for the extension of his duties in examination procedures, especially after 1903. In addition, they highlight the involvement as well as the conflicts between government and private actors, such as the steamship company North German Lloyd, which profited from high numbers of transatlantic migration. Further research is needed to determine whether Diederich and potentially other consuls were mere vectors of prejudice, or if consuls' reports on emigration from ports of departure had a direct influence on policymaking, as before the establishment of a professional consular corps, appointments were

highly influenced by politics (Plischke 1999, p. 210). The comparisons made in the analyzed despatches may have fed the narrative of an uncontrolled migration stream from eastern Europe, which led to the enactment of strict quota laws in the 1920s.

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