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ADULT EDUCATION FOR FOREIGN-BORN  
AND NATIVE ILLITERATES

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in the United States, 1922-1924]



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# ADULT EDUCATION FOR FOREIGN-BORN AND NATIVE ILLITERATES

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## AMERICANISM AND AMERICANIZATION

Americanism embraces the ideals of the good citizen in political, social, economic, and cultural relationships. The definition and interpretation of these ideals determine the scope of one's understanding of the movement of Americanization; that is, those programs and activities that aim to promote Americanism.

It is commonly understood that Americanization work is restricted to education and social service for the foreign born. The school programs of English and citizenship for adult aliens are generally termed Americanization. The school supervisors and teachers in this new type of work, however, are the first to deny that the foreign born are the only group that need instruction and help in learning the principles and ideals that govern the conduct of the good citizen. Moreover, the experienced worker with the foreign born realizes that we can not Americanize immigrants until our native born practice in their daily lives those principles which are commonly understood to be the distinguishing marks of citizenship in the United States. Granting the aim of this work to be the promoting of better citizenship, then the correction of every un-American condition may properly be termed "Americanization work."

Consider our outstanding social problems in America to-day. Ignorance based on illiteracy, due in turn to inadequate school support, racial and religious prejudices and intolerance, poverty, dependency, and all types of social inadequacies are certainly not limited to immigrants. And the correction of these conditions is very definitely a part of our national Americanization problem.

In our political life we have the discomfoting situation illustrated in the national election of 1924, when 30,000,000 citizens failed to vote. The percentage of nonvoters in the native-born group was larger in several sections of the country than that of the naturalized



citizens. This neglect of the highest privilege of citizenship by 50 per cent of the eligible voters is a most serious phase of our Americanization problem.

The flood of trashy novels, magazines, motion pictures, and plays that is poured out annually to satisfy the low standards of the American public to-day deserves much more attention from parents, educators, and clergymen than is apparently given. Raising the general level of appreciation is obviously a part of our national problem of bettering citizenship.

The term "Americanization" is in disrepute among a large number of the intelligent leaders of the foreign groups in this country. This is due very largely to the utterances of those Americans who believe that the immigrant must conform absolutely to certain fixed standards of thinking and acting in the United States. Despite the fact that there is no agreement and obviously never will be any agreement as to the definition of these standards, it would be absurd for America to scrap the magnificent contributions which her immigrants have brought not only to our industrial and agricultural productivity, but more important still, to the spiritual and cultural life of America. As a Jewish mother in an English class in Chicago well said:

Some of the things taught me in the Old World which I want my children to preserve are respect for parents, the teacher, and old age. The tradition for thoroughness and honesty of purpose is also one that the people of the New World would do well to follow. The race for success may result in subordinating religion, high moral standards, and the fine arts, and in considering material gain as the height of achievement.

Are not the standards of conduct and the appreciation of the nobler things of life as expressed by this immigrant mother valuable contributions to America?

John Daniels, in *America Via the Neighborhood*, states that Americanization does not mean rigid conformity or injection, but does involve the intelligent participation of native and foreign born in America's upbuilding.

The aim of any sound Americanization program is to promote an intelligent, loyal, united citizenry. The millions of immigrants who have come to America in the past, and those who will continue to come voluntarily in the future, have services to render and gifts to offer, if we but understand their motives and treat them fairly. The evolving of American life and the raising of our standards of citizenship depend on the joint contributions of native and foreign born working together in a spirit of friendly understanding and cheerful cooperation. Americanization applies directly to the immigrant, but the native American must see to it that his life exemplifies the Americanism which we wish the immigrant to emulate.



**SIGNIFICANT FEDERAL CENSUS DATA ON SIZE OF THE IMMIGRANT EDUCATION PROBLEM**

Granting the general definition that Americanization has to do with promoting good citizenship for the native and foreign born, we shall consider now the problem of education for immigrants, and especially the approximate number that need school help.

No immigrant can participate intelligently in American life unless he has a good working knowledge of English. He must speak and understand our language, and should be able to read and write simple English. Moreover, he should be familiar with the important events of American history and the significant facts in our national development. He must understand the form of our Government, the duties and privileges of a citizen, and the real meaning of citizenship in our Republic. The ability to use English and a knowledge of American history and Government are not as essential for his Americanization as a genuine feeling of loyalty to the United States. No one can command or control the immigrant's feelings toward America, but fortunately most of these newcomers are well disposed when they come. The schools can teach English, history, and civics, but the inculcation of loyalty can come only through inspiration from contacts with good American citizens.

How many immigrants are there in the United States, and how many need school help in the Americanization process? The 1920 Federal census shows the following:

1. Total number of foreign-born persons.....	13, 712, 754
2. Total number of aliens.....	4, 364, 909
3. Total number of illiterate foreign born (unable to write in any language and presumably unable to read).....	1, 763, 740

It is obvious that all illiterate immigrants who possess normal physical and mental faculties would be helped by attending English classes.

No data are available to show what percentage of the 4,364,909 aliens need school help. Undoubtedly many well-educated immigrants can fit themselves for citizenship by private home study and reading. On the other hand, most aliens, from non-English-speaking countries in particular, would be benefited by instruction in English and citizenship. This means attendance at evening classes by all except those who would benefit from private or correspondence instruction. Regardless of educational attainments, any immigrant who aspires to become a citizen should receive from the United States Government authoritative, definite, practical information as to the methods and requirements of naturalization. On these general principles it is fair to assume that more than 3,000,000 aliens need school help before taking the oath of allegiance to the Government of the United States.



Number of aliens and of foreign-born illiterates, according to States (1920 Federal census)

State	Adult aliens	Foreign-born illiterates	State	Adult aliens	Foreign-born illiterates
Maine.....	40,427	11,604	West Virginia.....	33,382	14,548
New Hampshire.....	34,598	13,746	North Carolina.....	1,772	474
Vermont.....	14,263	4,837	South Carolina.....	1,504	391
Massachusetts.....	442,351	135,720	Georgia.....	3,873	861
Rhode Island.....	57,007	28,100	Florida.....	16,446	2,657
Connecticut.....	159,928	63,131	Kentucky.....	5,272	2,244
New York.....	1,011,120	389,603	Tennessee.....	3,356	1,263
New Jersey.....	275,027	111,595	Alabama.....	3,669	1,893
Pennsylvania.....	541,510	258,812	Mississippi.....	2,065	1,057
Ohio.....	218,288	81,387	Arkansas.....	2,385	1,145
Indiana.....	35,662	17,555	Louisiana.....	18,294	9,707
Illinois.....	272,391	131,996	Oklahoma.....	9,499	5,456
Michigan.....	201,549	70,535	Texas.....	166,061	112,417
Wisconsin.....	98,941	38,359	Montana.....	13,626	5,178
Minnesota.....	72,649	26,242	Idaho.....	66,706	2,501
Iowa.....	29,070	11,004	Wyoming.....	6,756	2,233
Missouri.....	37,093	17,669	Colorado.....	28,142	14,224
North Dakota.....	13,719	7,238	New Mexico.....	14,032	7,250
South Dakota.....	7,500	3,848	Arizona.....	40,785	19,291
Nebraska.....	22,195	9,468	Utah.....	12,984	3,504
Kansas.....	21,396	11,291	Nevada.....	5,044	1,241
Delaware.....	7,164	3,373	Washington.....	52,526	11,630
Maryland.....	30,634	13,575	Oregon.....	23,126	5,172
District of Columbia.....	6,333	1,728	California.....	231,671	69,768
Virginia.....	8,119	2,150			

Care must be exercised in interpreting the above statistics on the number of foreign born reported as aliens in 1920. These totals have been increased by the number of new arrivals and have been decreased by the number who have been naturalized during the five-year period from 1920 to 1925. The number of aliens admitted to citizenship in the United States during the fiscal year July 1, 1923, to June 30, 1924, was 150,510. Using this figure as an average, the total number admitted since 1920 is 750,000, which represents approximately 17 per cent of the total number reported in 1920. A deduction of 20 per cent from the total for any State would give a fair estimate of the number of aliens in 1925.

No statistics are available to show the number of illiterate foreign-born adults who have learned to read and write during the five-year period since 1920.

#### SIZE OF NATIONAL ILLITERACY PROBLEM AMONG THE NATIVE BORN

The native illiterate population in the United States by the 1920 Federal census, is as follows: Native white illiterates, 1,242,572; native negro illiterates, 1,842,161. It is significant to note that the native illiterate group represents 64 per cent of our total national illiteracy problem. The total number of native illiterates in 1920, however, shows a marked decrease as compared with the number in 1910 and 1900. The 3,000,000 citizens of the United States who are



unable to read and write constitute a challenge to American education. The immediate extension of adequate programs of adult elementary education would insure a marked reduction of illiterates in the census of 1930.

Number of native illiterates, according to States

State	Native white	Native negro	State	Native white	Native negro
Maine.....	8,396	64	West Virginia.....	44,324	10,513
New Hampshire.....	1,973	33	North Carolina.....	104,844	133,674
Vermont.....	3,613	28	South Carolina.....	38,742	181,422
Massachusetts.....	7,780	2,565	Georgia.....	66,796	261,115
Rhode Island.....	2,255	839	Florida.....	13,169	55,639
Connecticut.....	2,927	1,078	Kentucky.....	112,206	40,548
New York.....	28,406	5,032	Tennessee.....	101,809	79,532
New Jersey.....	9,636	5,910	Alabama.....	65,394	210,690
Pennsylvania.....	38,870	14,645	Mississippi.....	22,242	205,813
Ohio.....	33,726	12,715	Arkansas.....	41,411	79,245
Indiana.....	27,929	6,476	Louisiana.....	81,957	206,730
Illinois.....	30,907	10,476	Oklahoma.....	30,418	14,205
Michigan.....	14,172	2,203	Texas.....	80,643	102,053
Wisconsin.....	10,449	182	Montana.....	1,067	87
Minnesota.....	5,955	241	Idaho.....	914	44
Iowa.....	8,275	1,283	Wyoming.....	421	66
Missouri.....	47,066	18,528	Colorado.....	8,624	619
North Dakota.....	1,307	16	New Mexico.....	25,519	228
South Dakota.....	1,490	35	Arizona.....	3,233	338
Nebraska.....	3,360	556	Utah.....	925	59
Kansas.....	7,179	4,228	Nevada.....	157	313
Delaware.....	2,427	4,700	Washington.....	2,379	246
Maryland.....	15,368	35,404	Oregon.....	1,990	89
District of Columbia.....	640	8,053	California.....	8,747	1,579
Virginia.....	70,475	122,822			

The social, political, economic, and cultural losses due to illiteracy can not be estimated. Disrespect for law, disregard for personal and community health standards, suspicion, ignorance, and an undemocratic point of view—all these undesirable conditions are generally found in districts with high percentages of illiterate adults.

#### A NATIONAL SURVEY OF STATE PROGRAMS OF ADULT EDUCATION IN 1925

In May, 1925, the Federal Commissioner of Education sent a questionnaire<sup>1</sup> on elementary education in English and citizenship for adults to every State superintendent of education in the United States. The questions asked in this report covered the following:

1. State legislation favoring this work.
2. State educational leadership.
3. State financial assistance.
4. Number of local communities providing adult classes.
5. Number of adult students enrolled in 1923 and 1924.
6. State teacher-training help for adult classes.
7. Present outlook for this work.

Returns were received from 44 of the 48 States and from Alaska, Virgin Islands, Canal Zone, and Hawaii.

<sup>1</sup> Results of the questionnaire appear on a following page.

The following summaries show the returns according to geographical districts:

States that have enacted legislation favoring the establishment of adult schools number 34, as follows:

Minnesota.	Michigan.	Rhode Island.
Iowa.	Wisconsin.	Connecticut.
Missouri.	Tennessee.	Montana.
North Dakota.	South Carolina.	Idaho.
South Dakota.	Arizona.	Delaware.
Alabama.	Utah.	District of Columbia.
Mississippi.	Nevada.	New York.
Arkansas.	Washington.	Pennsylvania.
Maine.	Oregon.	California.
New Hampshire.	Virginia.	Alaska.
Wyoming.	Virgin Islands.	
Ohio.	Massachusetts.	

States that furnish leadership for adult education in the State departments of education number 27, as follows:

Alaska.	Minnesota.	Massachusetts.
Virgin Islands.	North Dakota.	Rhode Island.
Vermont.	South Dakota.	Connecticut.
New Hampshire.	New York.	Nevada.
Wyoming.	Pennsylvania.	Oregon.
Utah.	Ohio.	California.
Wisconsin.	Delaware.	Alabama.
District of Columbia.	Mississippi.	South Carolina.
Arkansas.	Maine.	Oklahoma.

States that provide financial aid to local districts conducting adult classes number 24, as follows:

Wyoming.	Minnesota.	Massachusetts.
Alaska.	North Dakota.	Rhode Island.
Virgin Islands.	South Dakota.	Connecticut.
New York.	Nevada.	Pennsylvania.
Washington.	Wisconsin.	California.
Tennessee.	Delaware.	Alabama.
District of Columbia.	Maine.	Virginia.
New Hampshire.	South Carolina.	Arizona.

Local communities in which adult classes are conducted, reported from 28 States, number 1,310.

Students enrolled in classes for adult illiterates and adult foreign-born in 25 States numbered approximately 286,000 in 1924.

States conducting special teacher-training courses for adult schools number 14, as follows:

California.	Wisconsin.	North Dakota.
Delaware.	Massachusetts.	Michigan.
South Carolina.	Rhode Island.	Maine.
New York.	Connecticut.	Pennsylvania.
Arkansas.	Oklahoma.	



In addition to the 286,000 students recorded officially from the 25 States in the above survey, there are undoubtedly 50,000 adults enrolled in classes in the larger cities of those States, which have not provided State leadership for this work; for example, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Baltimore, Trenton, New Orleans, and Milwaukee.

This grand total of more than 336,000 adult students is the most significant proof of the strength of the adult elementary education movement in the United States. Despite waning of public interest in Americanization and the serious retrenchment policy in public expenditures, the school programs for native illiterates and adult foreign born have steadily improved during the past five years, and the general outlook for the Nation is most promising.

The 1920 Federal census shows that every State in the Union has more than 10,000 foreign-born adults and native illiterates. Thirty-four States to date have recognized the importance and the need of public-school programs for adults needing elementary civic instruction and have enacted legislation favoring this work. It is significant to note, however, that in only 27 of these States has the work been recognized by the State department of education as deserving the services of a supervisor on full time or part time.

The rapid development and expansion of adult programs in those States where trained leaders have been appointed in the department of education prove the value and need for personal leadership in the 25 States and Territories where no professional leadership has been provided.

Financial aid to local communities conducting adult classes is provided by 27 States. The form of State aid varies considerably, but the general practice in most of the States is to furnish reimbursement on the dollar for dollar basis. The Massachusetts State-aid law,<sup>2</sup> which has been copied in several Eastern States, is as follows:

Sec. 9. The department, with the cooperation of any town applying therefor, may provide for such instruction in the use of English for adults unable to speak, read, or write the same, and in the fundamental principles of government and other subjects adapted to fit for American citizenship, as shall jointly be approved by the local school committee and the department. Schools and classes established therefor may be held in public-school buildings, in industrial establishments, or in such other places as may be approved in like manner. Teachers and supervisors employed therein by a town shall be chosen and their compensation fixed by the school committee, subject to the approval of the department.

Sec. 10. At the expiration of each school year, and on approval by the department, the Commonwealth shall pay to every town providing such instruction in conjunction with the department one-half the amount expended for supervision and instruction by such town for said year.

The teaching of English and citizenship to adult aliens requires a methodology and subject matter quite distinct from the work in day schools for children. Special training is essential for good teaching

<sup>2</sup>Gen. Laws, ch. 89, sec. 9 and 10; amended May 27, 1921.

of adults, and the increased enrollment in States where such training has been provided is due in large measure to the indorsements of the new type of teaching by the immigrants and native illiterates who have been taught by trained experts who know what to teach, how to teach, and how much to teach. There is no more important or valuable form of State service than that of training teachers. Fourteen States offer such training. Obviously, there is an urgent need for the immediate expansion of this phase of the work in every State.



EDUCATION OF FOREIGN-BORN AND NATIVE ILLITERATES

Elementary education in English and citizenship for adults, by States

State	Has the State legislation favoring adult classes in English and citizenship?	Does State department help supervise adult classes?	Does State give financial aid to local communities for this work?	Number local communities having classes for foreign-born or natives illiterates	Enrollment of adult illiterates and foreign born in all classes in State		Does State conduct special teacher training courses for adult classes?
					Year	Number	
Montana	Yes	No	No	Very few	1922-23	No.	No.
Idaho	Yes	No	No	10	1923-24	724	No.
Wyoming	Yes	Yes	Yes	34	1921-24	912	No.
Colorado	No	No	No	19	1922-23	90	No.
New Mexico	No	No	No	5	1922-23	180	No.
Arizona	Yes	No	Yes	4	1923-24	1,123	No.
Utah	Yes	Yes	No	Not known	No data	340	No.
Nevada	Yes	Yes	Yes	4	1922-23	1,802	No.
Washington	Yes	No	Yes	4	1923-24	3,777	No.
Oregon	Yes	Yes	No	No data	No data	27,463	Yes.
California	Yes	Yes	Yes	103	1923-24	30,908	Yes.
Minnesota	Yes	Yes	Yes	40	1922-23	9,399	No.
Iowa	Yes	No data	No data	No data	1923-24	10,679	No data
Missouri	Yes	Yes	Yes	22	1922-23	2,283	Yes.
North Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes	5	1924	164	No.
South Dakota	Yes	Yes	Yes	0	No data	No.	No.
Nebraska	No	No	No	6	No data	No.	No data
Kansas	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data	No.	No data
Kentucky	No	No	No	No data	No data	No.	No data
Tennessee	Yes	Yes	Yes	No data	No data	No.	No data
Alabama	Yes	Yes	Yes	No data	1922-23	5,409	No.
Mississippi	Yes	Yes	No	No data	1923-24	7,486	No.
Arkansas	Yes	Yes	No	No data	1922-23	3,450	Yes.
Louisiana	No	No	No	210	1923-24	3,901	Yes.
Oklahoma	No	Yes	No	No data	No data	5,060	Yes.
Texas	No	No	No	140	1922-23	87,000	No.
New York	Yes	Yes	Yes	No report	1923-24	102,384	Yes.
New Jersey	No report	No report	No report	No report	No report	21,000	No report.
Pennsylvania	Yes	Yes	Reopens 1927	60	1923-24	Yes.	Yes.

## Elementary education in English and citizenship for adults, by States—Continued

State	Has the State legislation favoring adult classes in English and citizenship?	Does State department help supervise adult classes?	Does State give financial aid to local communities for this work?	Number local communities having classes for foreign-born or native illiterates	Enrollment of adult illiterates and foreign born in all classes in State		Does State conduct special teacher training courses for adult classes?
					Year	Number	
Ohio.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	No.....	40-60	1922-23 1923-24	18,000 22,000	No. No. No.
Indiana.....	No.....	No.....	No.....	No data.	No data.		No.
Illinois.....	No.....	No.....	No.....	Many, but no data.	No data.		No.
Michigan.....	Yes.....	No.....	No.....	No data.	No data.		Planning to conduct courses this year.
Wisconsin.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	47	1923-24	2,806	Yes.
Delaware.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	15	1923-24	5,000	Yes.
Maryland.....	No.....	No.....	No.....	3	No data.		City course in Baltimore.
District of Columbia.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....		1922-23 1923-24	815 971	No.
Virginia.....	Yes.....	No.....	Yes.....	No data.	No data.		No.
West Virginia.....	No report.....	No report.....	No report.....	No data.	No data.		No report.
North Carolina.....	No.....	No.....	No.....	No data.	No data.		No.
South Carolina.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	310	1922-23 1923-24	6,428 9,673	Yes.
Georgia.....	No.....	No.....	No.....	No data.	No data.		No.
Florida.....	No report.....	No report.....	No report.....	No data.	No data.		No report.
Maine.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	18	1922-23 1923-24	1,127 2,078	Yes.
New Hampshire.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	17	1922-23 1923-24	1,292 1,762	No.
Vermont.....	No.....	Yes.....	No.....	No data.	No data.		No.
Massachusetts.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	104	1922-23 1923-24	28,000 30,000	Yes.
Rhode Island.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	16	1922-23 1923-24	2,536 3,187	Yes.
Connecticut.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	42	1922-23 1923-24	8,979 11,481	Yes.
<i>Territories and possessions</i>							
Alaska.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	10 <sup>a</sup>	1922-23 1923-24	85 340	No.
Virgin Islands.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	Yes.....	1	1923-24	62	No.
Canal Zone.....	No.....	No.....	No.....	0	0	0	No.
Hawaii.....	No.....	No.....	No.....	0	80 adults enrolled in Y. M. C. A. class.		No.



## FEDERAL LEADERSHIP IN ADULT EDUCATION

From 1915 to 1919 the Federal Bureau of Education provided educational leadership for immigrant education programs in the United States. Mr. H. H. Wheaton and Mr. Fred C. Butler rendered valuable assistance to the school people and representatives of civic organizations who were interested in improving the then limited programs of Americanization. This work of the bureau was discontinued soon after the war, owing to financial retrenchments. The schools suffered when Federal direction was withdrawn, and especially in 1919, when public opinion had been educated as to the need for Americanization programs by the war-time propaganda on this subject.

The State and local directors of school programs for aliens in 1920 organized as a department in the National Education Association. The outstanding aim of this organization has been to secure Federal educational direction for this work. The department of immigrant education was enlarged in 1924 to include the supervisors and teachers of native illiterates, and the name was changed to the National Department of Adult Education of the N. E. A. At the 1925 meeting of this department in Indianapolis, resolutions were adopted indorsing the recently announced competitive examination for the position of specialist in adult education in the United States Bureau of Education. The appointment of such a specialist will undoubtedly strengthen the work nationally and will insure the necessary development of adult-education programs in the large number of States where the ambitious illiterate and immigrant have no opportunity for learning English and preparing for citizenship.

The immigration restriction laws of 1924 have cut down considerably the number of new immigrants to be admitted to the United States in the future, and consequently the number needing instruction in English and citizenship. Attention is called, however, to three significant considerations, as follows:

1. The number of immigrants admitted under the new law in 1924 was 706,896.
2. The total number of illiterate foreign-born persons residing in the United States in 1920 was 1,763,740.
3. The total number of aliens residing in the United States in 1920 was 4,364,909.

Obviously we have a tremendous educational problem on our hand in the number of foreign born now here who need school help, and an annual influx of approximately 500,000 under the new law is large enough to need a continuous program of adult citizenship education.

There is considerable misunderstanding in the minds of many people about the need for further work. Surely the facts set forth in the three considerations listed answer this question in convincing



form. No extended reference will be made in this report to the educational activities of the Bureau of Naturalization. Suffice it to say that this Federal office has furnished the public schools an abundant supply of lesson materials for English and citizenship classes. The schools have been helped also by the lists of names and addresses of applicants for first and second papers provided by the bureau. The school people generally have cooperated with the Bureau of Naturalization in preparing petitioners for naturalization procedure.

The present outlook for effective cooperation between all public agencies that touch the immigrant in his adjustment to the normal life of an American citizen is most hopeful. The schools can not accomplish this work alone. School leaders and teachers must invite and seek the active cooperation of every group of citizens interested in helping immigrants to become truly Americanized.

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