was a time-honored tradition to admit essentially all male students who met their academic requirements. Furthermore, enormous efforts had been expended over the previous two decades to raise their standards of admission. But now, just as these efforts were beginning to bear fruit, the "wrong" students were passing the exams. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton thus faced a painful choice: either maintain the almost exclusively objective academic standards for admission and face the arrival of increasing numbers of Jews or replace them with more subjective criteria that could be deployed to produce the desired outcome. Their decision to do the latter was a great departure from their historic practices and bequeathed to us the peculiar admissions process that we now take for granted.

CHAPTER 3

Harvard and the Battle over Restriction

When the Association of New England Deans convened to consider the "Jewish problem" in the spring of 1918, it did so amid a rising wave of anti-immigrant sentiment. During the decade before America's entry into World War I in 1917, concerns had been growing about the unprecedented wave of immigrants pouring into the United States — a torrent that peaked at over 1.2 million in 1914, when the war in Europe temporarily stemmed the flow. But the American decision to join the British and French in their battle against Germany gave new fuel to nativist sentiment, for it led to an obsession with "100 percent Americanism" — an obsession that cast a suspicious eye toward all Americans not of "Anglo-Saxon" origin.

In June 1917, just two months after Congress declared war, it passed the Espionage Act, which provided penalties of up to twenty years in prison for those who demonstrated, spoke, or wrote against the war. It was followed in May 1918 by the even more draconian Sedition Act, which, in the words of the historian Eric Foner, "criminalized spoken or printed statements intended to cast 'contempt, scorn, contumely or disrepute' on the 'form of government' or that advocated interference with the war effort." Though Eugene Debs, the Indiana-born leader of the American Socialist Party, was sentenced to ten years in prison under these statutes, immigrants bore the brunt of the repression. Thousands of "enemy aliens" were arrested in 1918, and numerous foreign-language newspapers were banned from the mails.

But anti-immigrant sentiment had been rising even before the Wilson administration decided to enter the Great War. In 1911, the famous Dillingham Commission (chaired by the Republican senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont) issued its 42-volume report, giving the restriction forces a legitimacy they had previously lacked. Among the many contributions of the Dillingham Report to the nativist cause was its seemingly scientific documentation of the inferiority of the heavily Catholic and Jewish immigrants of southern and eastern Europe compared to their sturdier, more industrious, and predominantly Protestant "Teutonic" predecessors from Britain, Scandinavia, Holland, and Germany.
Yet it was not until February 1917 — two months before America entered the war — that the restrictionists had their first major legislative victory. Overriding Woodrow Wilson's presidential veto, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917, which imposed a literacy requirement on immigrants for the first time in American history. Though ostensibly a neutral act targeted at individuals, the legislation in fact applied the principle of group exclusion to European immigrants — a status previously reserved, as Gary Gerstle has noted, to nonwhites. The real purpose of the act was to cut the number of "new" immigrants from eastern and southern Europe — a point confirmed by Senator William P. Dillingham, the bill's chief architect, who acknowledged that he had endorsed the literacy test only after learning that it would reduce "new" immigrants by 30 percent while not cutting the flow of "old" immigrants at all. When the bill passed on February 5, 1917, the patrician members of the Immigration Restriction League, which had been founded by three Harvard-educated Boston Brahmins in 1894, were so pleased that they held a quiet celebration dinner in Boston's exclusive Union Club.

Social Upheaval and the Rise of Anti-Semitism

Of all the immigrant groups streaming into the United States, none aroused greater antipathy than the Jews of eastern Europe. As early as 1913 William Barclay Parsons, a Columbia University trustee who was one of the early leaders of the movement to limit the number of Jews in elite private colleges, wrote of them: "In character they are terribly persistent. They realize that there has been for 2000 years or more a prejudice against them, and they are always seeking after special privileges for themselves and their people... They form the worst type of our emigrants, they supply the leaders to anarchistic, socialist and other movements of unrest. In the recent election the socialist vote was confined largely to the East Side and to Brownsville, in Brooklyn, where they live." A year later, Parsons's fears were seemingly confirmed when the Jews of New York City's Lower East Side elected Meyer London, the Socialist Party candidate, to Congress.

Among the most conspicuous public opponents of America's entry into the war was Victor Berger, an Austro-Hungarian Jewish congressman from Milwaukee, then one of the nation's socialist strongholds. Unlike Meyer London, who had reluctantly gone along with American intervention, Berger militantly opposed the war and was sentenced to twenty years in prison under the Sedition Act. Reelected to Congress while headed to jail, he was barred from his seat by his congressional colleagues. Percy E. Quin of Mississippi (Democrat) called Berger "a more dangerous character... within the United States" than any other person and condemned the "colony of Germans... in Milwaukee" for reelecting "that enemy of the Government to the Congress."

Reinforcing these fears of Jewish radicalism was the Red Scare of 1919–1920. Provoked by the massive strike wave of 1919 and by the fear that the Bolshevik Revolution might be exported to the United States, the Red Scare led to the arrest of thousands of radical aliens and the deportation of hundreds. Among those deported were many Jews, including the famous anarchist Emma Goldman.

To nativists, the Bolshevik Revolution became the archetypal symbol of radical threats — whether anarchist, socialist, or communist — to "100 percent Americanism." In the minds of many restrictionists, Jews were the primary carriers of the virus of revolutionary socialism; they had, after all, participated disproportionately in the Bolshevik Revolution and allegedly wished to spread communism worldwide. (Leon Trotsky, who had stayed briefly in New York City during World War I, became a convenient symbol of the internationalist Jew dedicated to spreading the revolutionary bacillus globally.) The literacy requirement of the Immigration Act had proved useless against such revolutionaries; unlike the masses of uneducated immigrants who filled America's factories and mines, they were "literate, cerebral, and clever."

In New York City, by then the population capital of world Jewry, stories circulated that "every Jewish immigrant would become a soldier in the revolutionary army then assembling in America." Never mind that many more Jews were in flight from the Bolshevik regime than were trying to spread its revolutionary doctrines or that socialist Jews such as Victor Berger himself were principled anticommunists; in the context of the Red Scare, Bolshevism had become "Jewish Bolshevism" to much of the public.

Reinforcing the hostility to Jews after World War I was the emergence of the doctrine of "scientific racism." Committed to proving the genetic inferiority of the new immigrants, scientific racism provided a respectable intellectual rationale for immigration restriction. Among its many subdoctrines was racial anti-Semitism, the belief that Jews were a distinct, inferior, and unassimilable race.

The high priest of scientific racism was Madison Grant (1865–1937), a New York socialite and the author of the influential book The Passing of the Great Race (1916). Born into a wealthy family whose roots in America dated to colonial times, he was educated at private schools and tutored for several years in Dresden, Germany, before entering Yale; he graduated in 1887, then received his law degree from Columbia in 1890. Over six feet tall with an upright carriage and a meticulous dresser, the distinguished-looking Grant ra-
diate self-assurance. Among his friends were Theodore Roosevelt, Elihu Root, and the renowned paleontologist Henry Fairfield Osborn.20

Though a lawyer by profession, Grant found his true passions elsewhere. A founder of the New York Zoological Society in 1895, the American Bison Society in 1905, and the Save-the-Redwoods League in 1919, he served from 1922 until his death as vice president of the Immigration Restriction League. Like many eastern patricians, especially those living in centers of mass immigration such as New York and Boston, Grant was deeply worried that America was losing its Anglo-Saxon character. And of the many immigrant groups streaming into the United States, none aroused in him greater animosity than the eastern European Jews then arriving in New York in unprecedented numbers.21

Threatened on one side by the throns of eastern and southern European immigrants and on the other by the rise of nouveaux riches industrial barons, eastern patricians like Grant had been feeling an acute sense of cultural displacement and economic decline since the late nineteenth century. Perhaps the classic displaced patrician was the brilliant Henry Adams, who abandoned the traditional optimism of his class for the dark and defensive musings of a Brahmin resentful that the nation his ancestors had helped found no longer had a place for "a gentleman." To Adams, and to many of his fellow patricians, the Jew became the symbol of an irredeemably vulgar and acquisitive society. By 1890, the temperamental Adams — who a decade earlier had written of Jews without stigma — had taken the first steps down a path that would end in bitter anti-Semitism. Frustrated by his failure to receive the public recognition that he felt was his due and envious of the Jews' apparent adaptability, he became increasingly sour, writing to his brother Brook that even "a sullen Yacooob or Ysaac still reeking of the Ghetto, snarling a weird Yiddish... has a keener instinct, and intenser energy, and a freer hand than he — American of Americans."22 For Adams, the Jew had become a scapegoat for all that he detested about his age, with the word "Jew" becoming interchangeable with "nouveau riche" or "capitalist" and "Jewish" a synonym for "greedy" and "materialistic."23

Grant lent his considerable stature as an intellectual and scientist as well as his formidable writing skills to the anti-immigration movement, endowing it with a legitimacy that it would otherwise have lacked. The leader of a Big Three triumvirate that included Henry Fairfield Osborn (Princeton 1877) and Lothrop Stoddard (Harvard '05), Grant was more responsible than any other person for popularizing the idea that important and biologically based racial differences existed within Europe. Drawing on the work of William Z. Ripley, the author of The Races of Europe and a professor of political economy at Harvard since 1901, he divided Europe's peoples into three basic groups: the Nordics, the Alpines, and the Mediterraneans. Though each group was classified as Caucasian, there were fundamental differences among them.24

At the top of the racial hierarchy were the Nordics, a race of "great stature," "fair skin," and "high, narrow, and straight-nose" whose center of "greatest purity" was in Scandinavia. All over the world, Grant wrote, "the Nordics are...a race of soldiers, sailors, adventurers and explorers, but above all, of rulers, organizers, and aristocrats." The Alpine, centered in the Slavic nations of eastern Europe, is "always and everywhere a race of peasants, an agricultural and never a maritime race." Generally "submissive to authority both political and religious," those Alpines found in western Europe are "usually Roman Catholics." The Mediterranean, in turn, is "inferior in body stature to both the Nordic and the Alpine." Found largely in southern Europe, the Mediterranean race had major accomplishments in art to its credit, but "in literature and in scientific research and discovery the Nordics far excel it."25

Though convinced of the inferiority of blacks — he referred to African Americans as a "serious drag on civilization" from the time "they were given the rights of citizenship" — Grant was not primarily concerned with their threat to Anglo-Saxon dominance.26 To be sure, the distinction among the "so-called Caucasians," the "Negroids," and the "Mongoloids" (from whom the American Indians were derived) was an important one.27 But to early-twentieth-century America, the main threat came not from the nonwhite races but from the Alpines and Mediterraneans who were depleting the Nordic stock that had made the United States great.

According to Grant, "The settlers in the thirteen colonies were overwhelmingly Nordic, a very large majority being Anglo-Saxon in the most limited meaning of the term."28 But America's racial stock, which had changed radically from the great days of the Revolutionary War, was now threatened by mongrelization, for the hard truth was that "the result of the mixture of two races, in the long run, gives us a race reverting to the more ancient, generalized and lower type." Though his fellow citizens suffered from "a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of the environment, as well as education and opportunity to alter heredity," the reality was that "speaking English, wearing good clothes and going to school do not transform a Negro into a white man."29 "Americans will have a similar experience," Grant argued, "with the Polish Jew, whose dwarf stature, peculiar mentality, and ruthless concentration on self-interest are being engrafted upon the stock of the nation."30

Grant's anti-Semitism was not without a powerful cultural component. "The man of the old stock," he wrote, "is literally being driven off the streets of New York City by the swarms of Polish Jews." Above all, the Jew posed the threat of mongrelization. Partly "Asiatic" in origin and hence not genuinely
Caucasian, the Jew was contaminating America’s racial stock. In one of his most memorable passages, Grant specified what was at stake in “racial mixing”: “The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro; the cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu; and the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew.”

Though *The Passing of the Great Race* received little response when it was first issued in 1916, subsequent editions were published to great acclaim in the more receptive atmosphere of 1920 and 1921. Described by John Higham, the author of the classic work on American nativism, as the central intellectual inspiration for the resurgent racism of the early 1920s, Grant’s book sold over 16,000 copies. In addition to having a wide influence on the scholarly community, Grant’s work received a warm reception in the media, receiving favorable mention in the *New York Times*, the *Boston Evening Transcript* (the preferred newspaper of the Boston Brahmins), and *Science*, the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Most important, it was endorsed in 1921 in an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post*, then America’s most widely read magazine, with a circulation of 2 million. Aided by a series of articles in the *Post* by the well-known writer Kenneth L. Roberts on the grave threat posed to America by European immigration, Grant’s tripartite distinction among Nordics, Alpines, and Mediterraneans moved into the popular consciousness.

Joining Grant in the pantheon of leading scientific racists was his close friend and ally Henry Fairfield Osborn (1857–1935). A member of an old Scottish Presbyterian family from New York’s mercantile elite, Osborn grew up in a household closely connected to the leading political and financial figures in nineteenth-century New York City. The son of the president of the Illinois Central Railroad, Osborn studied in England with Thomas Huxley and Francis Balfour after graduating from Princeton in 1877. Receiving his Ph.D. in 1881, he joined the Princeton faculty, becoming a professor of comparative anatomy, biology, and zoology. In 1891, he accepted a joint appointment at Columbia and the Museum of Natural History. President of the museum from 1908 to 1933, he attained international renown as a paleontologist and the moving force behind one of the world’s leading science museums.

A devoted alumnus, Osborn was a vigorous defender of Princeton’s eating clubs and a stout opponent of Woodrow Wilson’s Quadrangle Plan. An active clubman himself, he belonged to the University, Century, Boone and Crockett, Princeton, and Half Moon clubs of New York and the Cosmos Club of Washington. Like his friend Grant (who served as a trustee of the Museum of Natural History), Osborn was obsessed with the threat that southern and eastern European immigrants posed to the nation’s racial stock and to its Anglo-Saxon heritage. In his preface to the second edition of *The Passing of the Great Race*, he insisted that “heredity and racial predisposition are stronger and more stable than environment and education.” A leading member of the eugenics movement, Osborn looked to it “for the conservation of the best spiritual, moral, intellectual, and physical forces through heredity,” for only through eugenics would “the integrity of our institutions be maintained in the future.” Osborn was clear about what he thought was the greatest threat facing America: “The gradual dying out among our people of those hereditary traits through which the principles of our religious, political and social foundations were laid down and their insidious replacement by traits of less noble character.”

Like Grant, a fervent advocate of immigration restriction, Osborn believed that “the Anglo-Saxon branch of the Nordic race” was the group upon which “the nation must chiefly depend for leadership, for courage, for loyalty, for unity, and harmony of action, for self-sacrifice and devotion to an ideal.” He believed that the “Nordic tide which flowed into Italy” provided Raphael, da Vinci, Galileo, Titian, and Botticelli; even Columbus, he claimed, “was clearly of Nordic ancestry.” In his opening address to the Second International Congress of Eugenics, held in 1921 at the Museum of Natural History, Osborn sounded the alarm: just as “science has enlightened government in the prevention and spread of disease, it must also enlighten government in the prevention of the spread and multiplication of worthless members of society.”

The third and youngest member of the triumvirate of scientific racism was Theodore Lothrop Stoddard (1883–1950), a Harvard graduate (A.B. ’05 magna cum laude, Ph.D. in political science in 1914) and the son of the prominent writer and lecturer John Lawson Stoddard. A member of an old Protestant family that had produced many ministers, Stoddard was a militant agnostic and considered himself a “scientific humanist.” Already convinced by 1910 that “the key-note of the twentieth century world-politics would be relations between the primary races of mankind,” he wrote his doctoral thesis on the bloody revolt of the blacks against the French colonists in Santo Domingo in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

A practicing journalist who had served as director of foreign affairs for the important magazine *The World’s Work*, Stoddard was a devout disciple of his friend and mentor Madison Grant. In 1920, he became famous almost overnight with the publication of his volume, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*. With a twenty-page introduction by Grant — who praised Stoddard as a “prophet” who “takes up the white man’s world and its potential enemies as they are to-day” — the book put forward a bold thesis: the “white world,” wracked by “internal Bolshevik dissatisfaction,” was
ill-prepared to confront — the rising tide of color" sweeping across broad sectors of the globe. While emphasizing the global conflict between the "white man" and the "colored man" (yellow, brown, black, and red) to an even greater extent than Grant, he agreed with his mentor on the fundamental threat to the United States: the invasion by "hordes of immigrant Alpines and Mediterraneans, not to mention Asiatic elements like Levantines and Jews." The "melting pot," he declared, flatly, was "an absurd fallacy," for "each race-type, founded ages ago, and 'set' by millenniums of isolation and in-breeding, is a stubbornly persistent reality." When different races intermarry, "the offspring is a mongrel — a walking chaos so consumed by his jarring heredities that he is quite worthless." 

In Stoddard's schema, the Jew was perhaps the most menacing figure of all. More Asiatic than white, Jews constituted a kind of vanguard for Asian barbarism in its timeless conflict with European civilization. Jews, Stoddard insisted, were a mongrel race, a people with "dwarfish stature, flat faces, high cheekbones, and other Mongoloid traits" — a set of characteristics that he traced to their putative origins among Mongolian Khazars. The very archetype of the "Under-Man" who posed a threat to the civilized world, the Jew — "instinctively analytical, and sharpened by the dialectic subtleties of the Talmud" — had provided the leadership of the "largely Jewish Bolshevik regime in Soviet Russia." 

Released at the dawn of what E. Digby Baltzell has aptly called the Anglo-Saxon decade, The Rising Tide of Color was highly controversial even then. Yet though satirized by F. Scott Fitzgerald in The Great Gatsby (the dull and brutal Tom Buchanan praises "The Rise of the Colored Empires by this man Goddard"), the book was a great commercial success, going through fourteen printings by 1923. Stoddard was considered an authoritative figure by many military officers, with his books standard reading at the Army War College, and he testified before Congress as an expert witness on immigration. But the clearest sign of his influence came from the respect he received from President Warren G. Harding in a 1921 speech in Birmingham, Alabama: "Whoever will take the time to read and ponder Mr. Lothrop Stoddard's book on The Rising Tide of Color... must realize that our race problem here in the United States is only a phase of a race issue the whole world confronts. Surely we shall gain nothing by blinking at the facts."

By early 1921, the racist and nativist ideas promulgated by Stoddard, Grant, and Osborn had come to dominate respectable opinion. In February 1921, Calvin Coolidge, as vice president-elect of the United States, endorsed their essential principles in an article in Good Housekeeping: "There are racial considerations too grave to be brushed aside for any sentimental reasons. Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not mix or blend. The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides. Quality of mind and body suggests that observance of ethnic law is as great a necessity to a nation as immigration law." Later that spring, both the New York Times and the Saturday Evening Post published editorials sympathetic to these views. The stage was now set for the scientific racists to achieve their most cherished objective: the passage of a law that would restrict the immigration of "undesirable" peoples. In addition to the favorable cultural and intellectual atmosphere, economic and political conditions were ripe; by late 1920, the United States was suffering from both high unemployment and the lingering suspicion from the Red Scare that immigrants posed a radical threat to the American way of life. At the epicenter of these nativist fears were Jews. According to testimony given to the House Immigration Committee by an official in the State Department, America was threatened by an inundation of "abnormally twisted" and "unassimilable" Jews — "filthy, un-American, and often dangerous in their habits." Testimony delivered before the Senate Committee on Immigration on January 11, 1921, was even more explicit; according to Captain John B. Trevor, Harvard '02 and a friend of Madison Grant's who had worked for the Military Intelligence Division (MID) of the army, a map of New York City that coded in red neighborhoods with high levels of radical activity revealed that these districts were "chiefly inhabited by Russian Jews."

Alarmed, the House and Senate passed by overwhelming margins a bill that imposed "the first sharp and numerical limits on European immigration." Initially vetoed by President Wilson, who was by then a lame duck, it was signed into law by President Harding on May 19, 1921. Unlike the 1917 law, which had failed to stem the flow of "non-Nordic" immigrants, the 1921 law accomplished its goal. By 1923, the number of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe had dropped from 513,813 to 151,491. As a proportion of immigrants from all over the world, this group's share had shrunk from almost two-thirds to barely more than a quarter.

Intended to preserve the predominantly Anglo-Saxon composition of the population, the Immigration Act of 1921 was also a self-conscious attempt to keep political radicals out of the United States. Devised in part to limit the entry of Italians (who were thought to produce anarchists like Sacco and Vanzetti), the new law was designed to drastically reduce the number of Jews from Poland and Russia — widely believed to be the primary carriers of the un-American ideology of socialism. Though the law never explicitly mentioned Jews, there was little question at the time of its target. In Jews in America, published just two years after the immigration law of 1921 was enacted, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Burton J. Hendrick did not mince words: the law was "chiefly intended — it is just as well to be frank about the matter — to restrict the entrance of Jews from eastern Europe."
Anti-Semitism, though it had not yet reached high tide, was by 1921 surging across America.

**Harvard: The Quota Controversy and the Quest for Restriction**

As the nation moved to limit the number of Jewish immigrants, the Big Three confronted their own "Jewish problem." Harvard, just minutes away from the nation's fourth-largest concentration of Jews and long considered more open and democratic than Yale and Princeton, was particularly vulnerable to a "Jewish invasion." By 1918, when the Association of New England Deans first discussed this issue, Harvard's freshman class was 20 percent Jewish. This was by far the highest proportion in the Big Three: three times the percentage at Yale, six times that at Princeton.41

A vice president of the Immigration Restriction League, President A. Lawrence Lowell was no friend of the Jews. But even had he been free of anti-Semitic sentiments, he would have had reason to worry about the consequences for Harvard of its growing Jewish presence on campus. For at a certain point, the arrival of the Jews would mean the departure of the sons of the Protestant upper and upper-middle classes whom Harvard most wished to enroll. Far more than an expression of cultural prejudice, Harvard's preference for these young men—which it shared with all the other leading private colleges—was quite rational from an organizational perspective. After all, who but the sons of the Protestant elite would provide the "paying customers," the gentlemanly atmosphere, and the future leaders in business and government—not to mention generous donors—on which Harvard's claims to preeminence ultimately rested?

For anyone who doubted the existence of a "tipping point" of Jewish enrollment beyond which the WASP elite would abandon a college, Columbia served as a sobering example. Located at the epicenter of European immigration, Columbia could hardly ignore New York's vast Jewish population, which dwarfed that of any other American city. As early as 1908, the headmaster of Horace Mann, a leading private school in New York, reported to Columbia's president Nicholas Murray Butler that the prevailing view among parents with children in private school was that "the University undergraduate body contains a prepondering element of students who have had few social advantages and that as a consequence, there is little opportunity of making friendships of permanent value among them. As a result, most of the parents sent their children out of the city for college."42 One year later, a visitor to Princeton reported sentiment among the students that the Jews had already ruined Columbia.43 And by the 1910s a college song offered a revealing glimpse into students' perceptions of Columbia:

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By 1914, the "Jewish problem" was so great at Columbia that its dean, Frederick Keppel, openly acknowledged the widespread perception that the large number of immigrants had made it "socially uninviting to students who come from homes of refinement." While publicly insisting that "Columbia is not 'overrun' with Jews any more than it is with Roman Catholics or Episcopalians," Keppel privately admitted that "boys whose families are in New York society" had a strong tendency to go out of town for college and that no conceivable plans that Columbia could devise would attract them.44 In truth, New York's upper class had begun to abandon Columbia as early as the 1890s. But the arrival of large numbers of Jews in the years after 1910 seems to have decisively accelerated the process; still attracting 16 percent of the sons of New York's elite between 1900 and 1909, the proportion dropped precipitously the following decade to 6 percent.45

By the time Columbia finally moved vigorously to repel the "Jewish invasion," it was far too late. Though the proportion of Jews, which had reached perhaps 40 percent, was reduced to 22 percent by 1921, the sons of the Protestant elite had abandoned Morningside Heights, never to return.46 In the 1920s, just 4 percent enrolled at Columbia; meanwhile, 84 percent matriculated at the Big Three.47 A contemporary observer, writing under the veil of anonymity, captured what had happened to the Columbia campus:

As one casually observes the men of the College, one is struck by the complete lack of undergraduate atmosphere about any group of them. Singularly absent is the grace, the swagger, the tall attractive sleekness which, if it does not always dominate the usual college group, at least always touches it importantly. These men, one senses at once, are not of the highest caste, nor have they among them an influential sprinkling of members of the highest caste for their models . . . Seen quickly, there is even a certain grubbiness about them. One somehow expects them all to be Jews, for it is usually the Jewish members of such a group who lower the communal easy handsomeness.48

As the case of Columbia had demonstrated, the possibility of "WASP flight" was a clear and present danger for any institution with a substantial Jewish presence.49

The specter of Columbia was very much on the mind of President Lowell
as he confronted Harvard’s "Jewish problem." With Columbia and NYU taking active measures to limit Jewish enrollment, Lowell moved in February 1920 to inquire about the number of Jews at Harvard College. Although the dean's office did not provide a precise estimate, Lowell had ample reason to worry; a study of higher education enrollment patterns in 1918-1919 among the leading private colleges revealed that only Columbia and the University of Pennsylvania — the very institutions that many members of the eastern upper class believed had already been "ruined" by the Jews — had a higher percentage of Jewish students than Harvard.72

Though the proportion of Jews in Harvard's freshman class had ranged from 13 to 20 percent between 1912 and 1919, Harvard retained its close connection to Boston's upper class throughout the 1910s. Indeed, the link between Harvard and Brahmin Boston was far tighter than the historical ties between the upper classes of New York and Philadelphia with Penn, respectively.73 By the 1910s, Harvard enrolled 85 percent of the sons of the Boston upper class, whereas just 52 and 6 percent of their counterparts in Philadelphia and New York matriculated at Penn and Columbia.74 Harvard, moreover, enjoyed a close relationship with the upper class of New York City, which in recent decades had come to dwarf Boston in economic importance; in the 1910s, nearly a third of the sons of New York's elite enrolled at Harvard.75 To Lowell, Harvard's rising Jewish enrollment posed a threat to these crucial relationships, making it imperative to bring the "Jewish invasion" under control.

In a letter to the Harvard philosophy professor William Earnest Hocking, who had proposed enlisting the Jewish alumni to assist in eliminating the "undesirable Jews" (as he claimed had already occurred at Williams),76 Lowell explained that his main concern was that the sheer number of Jews would cause the flight of the Protestant elite and thereby "ruin the college":

The summer hotel that is ruined by admitting Jews meets its fate, not because the Jews it admits are of bad character, but because they drive away the Gentiles, and then after the Gentiles have left, they leave also. This happened to a friend of mine with a school in New York, who thought, on principle, that he ought to admit Jews, but who discovered in a few years that he had no school at all.77 A similar thing has happened in the case of Columbia College; and in all these cases it is not because Jews of bad character have come; but the result follows from the coming in large numbers of Jews of any kind, save those few who mingle readily with the rest of the undergraduate body. Therefore any tests of character in the ordinary sense of the word afford no remedy.78

Lowell's personal preference was "to state frankly that we thought we could do the most good by not admitting more than a certain proportion of men in a group that did not intermingle with the rest, and give our reasons for it to the public." But he also anticipated quite presciently that "the Faculty, and probably the Governing Boards, would prefer to make a rule whose motive was less obvious on its face, by giving to the Committee on Admission authority to refuse admittance to persons who possessed qualities described with more or less distinctness and believed to be characteristic of the Jews." For Lowell, however, it was crucial that "the Faculty should understand perfectly well what they are doing, and that any vote passed with the intent of limiting the number of Jews should not be supposed by anyone to be passed as a measurement of character really applicable to Jews and Gentiles alike."79

In frankly endorsing a double standard, Lowell was rejecting the argument that applying ostensibly neutral criteria such as "character" would be sufficient to reduce the number of Jews. On this issue, as on many others, Lowell was utterly forthright: his goal was restriction itself. In a letter to Julian Mack, a member of Harvard's Board of Overseers and a federal judge, Lowell made explicit some of the cultural assumptions behind his commitment to a Jewish quota: "It is the duty of Harvard to receive just as many boys who have come, or whose parents have come, to this country without our background as it can effectively educate: including in education the imparting, not only of book knowledge, but of the ideas and traditions of our people. Experience seems to place that proportion at about 15%."80

By the spring of 1922, when Lowell moved decisively, the proportion of Jews had already reached 21.5 percent. Unless immediate measures were taken, Lowell wrote in a letter on May 20, it would suffer the fate of Columbia. At Harvard, he warned, "the danger would seem to be imminent."81

Compared to rural and small-town institutions such as Dartmouth, Princeton, Williams, and Amherst — which had already taken measures to limit the size of the freshman class and overhaul their admissions policies — Harvard was particularly vulnerable.82 An urban institution with a long tradition of openness to graduates of public as well as private secondary schools, Harvard was not insulated from the growing numbers of public school graduates who met its entrance requirements. Between 1900 and 1920, the number of male graduates from the nation's high schools had risen from 95,000 to 311,000 — an increase of over 300 percent.83 The democratization of the opportunity to graduate from high school was a mixed blessing for institutions such as Harvard. While their numbers meant a much larger pool of academically qualified students, it also meant a surge in the number of applicants who lacked the social graces of an earlier generation.84 Many of these students were from urban areas, and a disproportionate number of them — especially in the college preparatory track — were the children of Russian and Polish Jews.85
Left to his own devices, the authoritarian Lowell would have been more than willing to impose his own solution to the "Jewish problem." Indeed, that is precisely what he tried to do when he asked the Committee on Admission to admit as transfers only those "Hebrews . . . possessed of extraordinary intellectual capacity together with character above criticism" and to impose a higher standard for admission to the freshman class on members of the "Hebrew race." This was a covert attempt to impose a quota, but it was rejected by Chairman Henry Pennybacker, a graduate of Harvard (1888) who had served as headmaster of Boston Latin School from 1910 to 1920. Though Lowell's subordinate, Pennybacker told him that the group's members "felt that the Committee should not practice discrimination without the knowledge and assent of the Faculty," of which it was "merely the administrative servant." The stage was thus set for a conflict between the autocratic Lowell and a faculty that, while hardly free of anti-Semitism, was reluctant to publicly endorse a policy of discrimination.

By this time, the faculty was actively involved in the debate about the "Jewish problem" that Lowell had initiated. At a meeting on May 23, Lowell's brother-in-law and personal friend, James Hardy Ropes, the Hollis Professor of Divinity, introduced a three-part motion; its most controversial elements instructed the Committee on Admission "to take into account the proportionate size of racial and national groups in the membership of Harvard College" and declared that "it is not desirable that the number of students in any group which is not easily assimilated into the common life of the College should exceed fifteen percent of the whole college." These proposals, which clearly had Lowell's support, generated a complex and at times bewildering array of amendments and counter motions, some of them supporting the basic thrust of Ropes' proposals and others opposed. Though the motion proposing a 15 percent quota on "any group which is not easily assimilated" (an unsubtle euphemism for Jews) was not approved, the meeting was a partial triumph for Lowell, for a slightly revised version of the other controversial element was passed by a vote of 56–44. It called upon the Committee on Admission, "pending further action by this Faculty . . . to take into account the . . . proportionate size of racial and national groups in the membership of Harvard College." This was a dramatic departure from Harvard's historic commitment to nondiscrimination and, for that very reason, was warmly welcomed by Lowell.

Yet even before the faculty meeting, opposition to Lowell's efforts to limit Jewish enrollment had been growing. In addition to Mack, who had exchanged a series of increasingly tense letters with Lowell, further opposition was expressed by Jerome D. Greene, who had served as secretary to President Eliot (1901–1905) and then secretary to the Corporation (1905–1911). Reportedly Eliot's top choice as his successor, Greene left Harvard to become an important banker in New York two years after Lowell took office. On the Board of Overseers, he was generally thought to represent the views of Eliot, who remained a towering figure at Harvard (and a troublesome presence for Lowell) even though he had retired thirteen years earlier and was nearing the age of ninety.

After conferring with several Harvard officials, including Director of Admission Pennybacker, Greene wrote to Lowell, expressing his view that the "Jewish problem" resided less in any deficiencies among Harvard's Jewish students than in the response of their non-Jewish classmates to their very presence on campus: "The real kernel of this problem seemed to consist not in any question of the relative delinquency of the class of students in question as to either scholarship or conduct, but in the actual disinclination, whether justified or not, on the part of non-Jewish students to be thrown in contact with so large a proportion of Jewish undergraduates." Yet even Greene did not propose maintaining Harvard's policy of admitting students almost exclusively on the basis of academic criteria. Instead, he suggested a faculty study whose objective would be to devise a new policy of admissions "whereby numbers would be kept down or reduced, and the student body limited to the most promising individuals without reference to any question of race or religion." While insisting that these criteria be applied equally to Jews and Gentiles, Greene assured him that the consequence of the new policy "would undoubtedly be to reduce materially the number of those Jews who are of objectionable personality and manners." That men of goodwill like Greene apparently believed that Jews were far more likely than non-Jews to possess disagreeable personal qualities suggests that even principled opponents of Lowell were not immune to the anti-Semitic sentiments taken for granted in their milieu. Indeed, even Eliot, the leading public critic of Lowell's policy and long a defender of Jews and immigrants, believed that Jews had many "undesirable qualities" rooted in the "century-long persecution to which they have been subjected in the European and Asiatic countries through which they have been scattered." In a 1919 article sympathetic to Zionism that he published in The Maccabean, Eliot described many Jews as having "feeble, stunted, undeveloped bodies, and morbid nervous systems" — qualities that made "the Jewish element of the population . . . dreaded at all the large public and private hospitals and dispensaries because it provides so many neurasthenic patients, the treatment of whom is always prolonged and tedious and not infrequently unsuccessful." According to Eliot, Jews' susceptibility "to sudden attack from their Christian neighbors . . . had the inevitable depressing effect on the spirit of the people," rendering them "subservient rather than independent, submis-

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sive rather than resistant." Lacking "the good elements in the martial spirit," Jews met "the indignities and cruelties to which they were subjected not with indignant protest but with lamentations, both public and private." Excluded from many occupations, "Jews in all generations developed skill in buying at low prices and in selling at high and also skill in lending money at high rates to impecunious Christians" — qualities that led to their acquiring "among Christians a reputation for being grasping and sharp in their money transactions." "The present Christian generation of European and American origin," Eliot wrote, "dread the clannishness of the Hebrew people who live among them." And although Christians considered "the refined, educated, and public-spirited Jew . . . a thoroughly satisfactory friend and neighbor, the coarse, ignorant, ostentatious Jew is a peculiarly disagreeable product of free institutions, especially if he be newly rich."90

This was the classic litany of complaints against Jews, and such sentiments were likely commonplace among the Harvard faculty. Yet faced with the full implications of its actions at the May 23 meeting, the faculty drew back from its implicit endorsement of discrimination. By May 29, Lowell had received four separate petitions requesting that he call a special meeting to permit the faculty to reconsider the motions it had passed less than a week earlier. One petition, signed by 31 faculty members, described the "action of the Faculty relating to controlling the percentage of the Jews in Harvard College" as "a radical departure from the spirit and practice of the College" and declared "that racial considerations should not influence the Committee on Admission before a careful and deliberate study of the whole question of the Jews shall be made by the Faculty."91 Faced with broad sentiment within the faculty that the actions taken on May 23 were too precipitous and required reconsideration, Lowell had little choice but to call a new meeting.

By now the eyes of the public were fixed on Harvard, and the meeting of the faculty convened on June 2 was a historic one. Early in the meeting, Professor of Biological Chemistry Lawrence Joseph Henderson, a close ally of Lowell's who held strong anti-Semitic views, introduced a motion: "That the Committee on Admission be instructed, pending the report of the special committee, to keep the proportion of Jews in Harvard College what it is at present."92 This motion would in fact mean the imposition of a Jewish quota. The faculty voted down Henderson's motion, 64–41 — a major setback for Lowell.93 Yet the call to set a ceiling on Jewish enrollment was supported by some of Harvard's most eminent professors; among them were Albert Bushnell Hart (History), George Lyman Kittredge (English), Richard C. Cabot (Medicine and Social Ethics), and James Bryant Conant (Chemistry), the man who would succeed Lowell in 1933.94

Compounding Lowell's defeat was the faculty's decision to rescind by a vote of 69–25 the motions passed at the May 23 meeting.95 But the faculty stopped short of rejecting Lowell's initiatives altogether, leaving in place the earlier decision to appoint a special committee "to consider principles and methods for more effectively sifting candidates for admission." A key concession, it implicitly recognized Lowell's major point: the "Jewish problem" facing Harvard was a genuine one. Never one to shrink from blunt public declarations, Lowell made it explicit in a statement that was incorporated into the minutes of the June 2 meeting: "The primary object in appointing a special Committee," he declared, "was to consider the question of Jews." If any member of the faculty did not concur, Lowell warned: "Let him speak now or forever after hold his peace."96

Utterly convinced of the rectitude of his position, Lowell was confident that he could persuade others that there was no alternative to a quota. But in addition to the equivocal response of the faculty, there was the overwhelmingly negative reaction of the press. Within days of the announcement of Lowell's plan, the Boston Telegram ran an editorial: "Down Hill from Harvard to Lowell." In New York, the Times responded with an article, "Discrimination Against Jews Suspected in New Harvard Policy on Admission."98 And the Nation, despite its reference to "pushing young men with a foreign accent, accustomed to overcome discrimination by self-assertion," came out unequivocally against Jewish quotas. "A university which bars a persecution-scarred race," its editorial of June 14, 1922, declared, "cannot keep alive the traditions of intellectual integrity, of noblesse oblige, and of essential democracy which have made our older universities play so great a role in American life — or it must open its doors frankly and fairly to all who can meet its requirements of scholarship."99

Lowell's proposal also created a storm of political controversy. In addition to an attack from Boston's mayor James Michael Curley ("If the Jew is barred today, the Italian will be tomorrow, then the Spaniard and the Pole, and at some future date the Irish") and a formal resolution of opposition from Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, the proposal also generated a call for a legislative committee, to be appointed by Governor Channing Harris Cox, to investigate whether Harvard was acting in violation of a bill already on the books that mandated equality of opportunity.100 But Lowell was undeterred.

Believing that the meeting of June 2 had been a success, Lowell wrote to Professor Kittredge, offering his own assessment: "We . . . attained by far the most important object, which was that of making substantially every member of the Faculty understand that we had before us a problem, and that that problem was a Jew problem and not something else. We had also brought the Faculty to the point of being ready to accept a limitation of the number of
Jews, for their own benefit as well as that of the college, if the Committee should, on investigation, report that it is necessary. I have no doubt that they will so report, because I think I know the situation well enough to be persuaded that there is no other solution. However confident Lowell may have been about the faculty's eventual decision, he was not about to delay all action until it had finished its deliberations. In January 1922, four months before the faculty began its debate, Lowell instructed the dean's office to use the allocation of scholarships to limit the number of Jews. In an internal memorandum, the dean's office reported that "Mr. Lowell feels pretty strongly that of the scholarships controlled by us the percentage allotted to Jews in their first year at Harvard should not exceed the percentage of Jews in the Freshman Class." In essence, Lowell had imposed a quota on the number of scholarships awarded to Jews regardless of academic performance and need. Though awards were still to be given "primarily on the basis of high scholarship," recipients henceforth were required to be "men of approved character and promise."

At the same time, Harvard was also beginning to gather the information that would permit it to identify which applicants were Jewish. Starting in the fall of 1922, applicants were required to answer questions on "Race and Color," "Religious Preference," "Maiden Name of Mother," "Birthplace of Father," and "What change, if any, has been made since birth in your own name or that of your father? (Explain fully.)" Lest any Jews slip through this tightly woven net by failing to disclose their background (a pattern thought to be rather common, given their alleged lack of character), the high school principal or private school headmaster was asked to fill out a form that asked him to "indicate by a check [the applicant's] religious preference so far as known ... Protestant ... Roman Catholic ... Hebrew ... Unknown."

While moving behind the scenes to stem the flow of Jewish students, Lowell was publicly taking great pains to constitute a visibly balanced Committee on Methods of Sifting Candidates for Admission. Realizing that this committee, which was entrusted with reviewing Harvard's admissions policies, needed to have Jews among its members if it was to have any public legitimacy, Lowell appointed three — Paul J. Sachs ('00, associate professor of Fine Arts), Harry G. Wolfson ('12, professor of Jewish Literature and Philosophy), and Milton J. Rosenberg (Honorary '14, professor of Medicine) — to the thirteen-member body. Sachs and Wolfson had voted against Henderson's motion. But Lowell also appointed three men who had voted for the motion (Professor of Hygiene Roger I. Lee '02, Chairman of the Committee on Admission Henry Pennypacker '88, and Henderson himself) and a fourth (Dean Wallace B. Donham '98 of the business school) known to share his position. Though the committee's members represented a wide range of views, Lowell believed that it would in the end give his proposed policy of restriction a much-needed seal of approval.

Lowell managed to resist strong pressure to place Felix Frankfurter on the committee. The most visible Jewish member of the faculty, the brilliant law professor was an obvious choice. Such, in any case, was the view of Julian Mack, the sole Jewish member of the Board of Overseers, who urged Lowell to appoint him. In making the case for Frankfurter, who had been his close friend for more than a decade, Mack wrote: "If a Jewish member of any of the Faculties is to be on, I think it would be the unanimous judgment of those interested that Frankfurter, by training and by personal experience, is the most fitted to study and deal with the problem. While a Viennese by birth and belonging to the German Jewish, not the East European Jewish, element, he understands the latter as he has grown up side by side with them." But Lowell, who had tangled with Frankfurter on a number of matters and despised his generally liberal political views, was not moved. "All members of the Committee ought," Lowell wrote to Mack, "to be persons in whom all Harvard men feel confidence, and you know that there are many people — including many on the Governing Boards of the University — who have not that feeling towards Professor Frankfurter. Many people with a high opinion of Professor Frankfurter's ability do not trust the solidity of his judgment."

In refusing to appoint Frankfurter, Lowell was doing his utmost to ensure a favorable report from the committee. A formidable debater with a strong personality, Frankfurter might well sway others to his viewpoint, which was strongly against restriction. Equally worrisome, the irascible Frankfurter had a powerful streak of independence and might issue a stinging dissent even if a majority of the committee supported Lowell — a trait that later became visible on the Supreme Court where he wrote 291 dissents. There were still three Jews on the committee. But none of them posed the threat that Frankfurter would have; Sachs was an upper-class German Jew "far removed from the element" that Lowell was targeting. Wolfson was a "scholar pure and simple," and Rosenberg was scheduled to be abroad while the committee would do much of its work. From Lowell's perspective, it seemed designed to produce the desired outcome but with enough variety to ensure public legitimacy.

The committee's internal organization gave Lowell little reason to worry. Divided into four subcommittees, the larger committee assigned all three Jewish members to the subcommittee that would meet and correspond with prominent Jews as well as Harvard's Jewish alumni. Jews were not represented on the three other subcommittees, two of which — the subcommittee assigned to see how other colleges were handling their "Jewish problem" (chaired by Henry Pennypacker) and the subcommittee assigned to gather statistics about Jewish students at Harvard — were far more important than
the one on which the Jewish faculty served.\textsuperscript{111} The fourth subcommittee was enjoined to sample undergraduate opinion, which Lowell believed was largely in favor of restriction.\textsuperscript{112}

Of the four, the Subcommittee to Gather Statistics arguably held the greatest potential for long-term impact. In order to count the number of Jews, one had to develop techniques for identifying them — techniques that could later be used to identify Jewish applicants. The subcommittee went about its work with a chilling enthusiasm. It consulted “the original enrollment cards or entries in admissions books” (which included the student’s name, place of birth, father’s name and occupation, mother’s maiden name, home address, and school or college last attended), “bondsmen’s names,” and “individual college records (as obtained from the Senior Album).” Armed with this information, the group proceeded to classify each Harvard student into one of four categories: “J1,” “J2,” “J3,” and “Other.” A “J1” was assigned “when the evidence pointed conclusively to the fact that the student was Jewish,” a “J2” when a “preponderance of evidence” suggested the student was Jewish, and a “J3” where “the evidence suggested the possibility that the student might be Jewish.” This classification system provided the framework — right down to the tripartite distribution among “J1,” “J2,” and “J3” — that would be used three years later to limit Jewish enrollment.\textsuperscript{113}

After seven months, the subcommittee received a 104-page report with the conspicuously dry title “Statistical Report of the Statisticians.”\textsuperscript{114} But its contents were anything but dry. A remarkable investigation into the lives of Harvard students between 1900 and 1922, it was designed to provide the statistical evidence that Lowell hoped would clinch his case. Yet the results of the study, which had been conducted with great care, offered ammunition to both sides in the increasingly heated debate.

For those worried that the number of Jews at Harvard was rising, the study offered ample confirmation of their fears. Just 7 percent of freshmen in 1900, Jews had increased steadily over the entire period, rising to 10 percent in 1909, 15 percent in 1915, and 21.5 percent in 1922.\textsuperscript{115} But nothing in the study suggested that this growth posed an academic problem for Harvard; on the contrary, the Jewish students outperformed their Gentile classmates by a considerable margin. Massively underrepresented among students reported for unsatisfactory academic records (15 percent of Jews vs. 37 percent of non-Jews), they were heavily overrepresented among those who received degrees with distinction (28 vs. 15 percent).\textsuperscript{116} Were Harvard committed to raising the academic level of its student body, the proportion of Jews, the evidence suggested, should be increased rather than decreased.

Yet Lowell, aware of these numbers and inclined to dismiss them as the product of the Jewish students’ greater dependence on scholarships, had never rested his case for quotas on academic grounds. Convinced that deficiencies in the “character” and ethical standards of Jews resulted in more frequent “discipline for offenses of a moral nature,” he planned to press this issue.\textsuperscript{117} Even before the faculty had begun to discuss the issue of quotas, Lowell had launched his own investigation. Having received a preliminary report on the misdeeds of Harvard’s Jewish and non-Jewish students, he wrote back to the dean’s office: “You have basely gone back on me. Somebody told me that of the fourteen men discussed last year for cheating and lying about it, thirteen were Jews. Now you make out that there were twelve of them, of whom only five were Jews. Please produce at once six more!”\textsuperscript{118} Around this time, Lowell also told a distinguished alumnus that 50 percent of the students found guilty of stealing books from the library were Jewish. But when asked how many students he had apprehended, Lowell told him, “Two.”\textsuperscript{119}

The statistical report offered more systematic data on the distribution of offenses of a moral nature. Here Lowell found some apparent support, for the period covered, 4.7 percent of Jews, but only 3.0 percent of non-Jews, were found to be “under discipline.” Though less likely to have been found guilty of drunkenness (0.1 vs. 0.5 percent), Jewish students were more likely to have committed “offenses invoking dishonesty” (3.7 vs. 2.0 percent). These findings may, of course, have reflected genuine group differences in the propensity to commit such offenses; on the other hand, they may also have reflected a discriminatory pattern of treatment by the university authorities — a possibility compatible with the barely mentioned finding that over 25 percent of Jewish students “under discipline” were expelled compared to only 11 percent of non-Jews.\textsuperscript{120} Though the numbers were small, the statisticians did not hesitate to draw out their implications: “The [higher] proportion of Jews under discipline . . . adds much to the strength of any case that could be based on the records.”\textsuperscript{121} In its final report, the committee as a whole wrote of the Jewish Harvard student in its cover note to President Lowell: “In morals, he seems to be more prone to dishonesty and sexual offenses, but much less addicted to intemperance.”\textsuperscript{122}

The findings on patterns of student participation in extracurricular and social activities also seemingly lent some support to Lowell. It was his belief that Jewish students were less likely to “do something for Harvard” than their Gentile classmates, and the results of the study confirmed that they were in fact less involved in the nonacademic side of college life. In athletics, which occupied such a central place in campus culture during the 1920s, non-Jews were almost twice as likely to participate as Jews: 48 vs. 25 percent. The discrepancy was even more pronounced off the playing field; there the figure was 33 percent for non-Jews and 11 percent for Jews.\textsuperscript{120} But the meaning of these figures was not self-evident. It was possible that the relative paucity of
Jews in Harvard’s extracurricular life reflected the lower participation rate of commuting students in general—a group among whom Jews were heavily overrepresented. It was also possible that the Jewish students’ low participation rate was in no small part a response to exclusion or hostility on the part of Gentile students.

The committee’s findings on social as opposed to extracurricular life in Cambridge offered ample confirmation of the hypothesis that anti-Semitism was a powerful force among the undergraduates. Segregation between Jewish and non-Jewish students was the rule rather than the exception; only 3.6 percent of Jews belonged to social clubs (other than the six Jewish fraternities), compared to 8.6 percent of non-Jewish students. Particularly striking were the committee’s findings on the final clubs; for the seven classes that entered Harvard between 1912 and 1918, not a single Jew was elected to any of the five most prestigious clubs: Porcellian, AD, Fly, Spec, and Delphic (Gas). The total exclusion of Jews from the summit of Harvard’s social system confirmed what many had long suspected: the sheer fact of being Jewish—regardless of background, education, and personal demeanor—remained a serious social handicap at Harvard.

Lowell hoped that findings like these would convince the “better class” of Jews, many of them of German background, that something needed to be done to stem the flow of “undesirable” Jews. This hope was not unrealistic; at Williams, well-established Jewish alumni had reportedly assisted the college in excluding their “less fit” brethren, and some years later their counterparts did the same at Dartmouth, expressing satisfaction that their alma mater was admitting only “the better type of Jews and not the Brooklyn and Flatbush crowd.” At Harvard, hostility on the part of upper-class Jews toward their working-class and immigrant ethnic brethren was hardly unknown. Jesse Isidor Straus, an eminent businessman with three generations of ties to Harvard, reported to Charles Eliot that the “catastrophe” (the bitter controversy over Lowell’s proposed policy) had been caused by the increase in Jewish students commuting from East Boston. Though opposed to blanket quotas, he wondered whether “there might have been found some less obnoxious method of discriminating against them.”

If Lowell was hoping for a prominent Jew to come out in favor of his policy, few prospects seemed more promising than Walter Lippmann ’yo. Already a renowned writer, Lippmann was an upper-class German Jew who shared Lowell’s visceral distaste for the immigrant Jews from Poland and Russia. About the Jewish masses, Lippmann had written: “I worry about upper Broadway on a Sunday afternoon where everything that is feverish and unventilated in the congestion of a city rises up as a warning that you cannot build up a decent civilization among people who, when they are at last, after centuries of denial, free to go to the land and cleanse their bodies, now huddle together in a steam-heated slum.” Those Jews of modest origin who had been lucky enough to succeed fared even worse with Lippmann: “The rich and vulgar and pretentious Jews of our big American cities are perhaps the greatest misfortune that has ever befallen the Jewish people. They are the real fountain of anti-Semitism. When they rush about in super-automobiles, bejeweled and furred and painted and overbarbered . . . they stir up the latent hatred against crude wealth, and that hatred diffuses itself.” Rejecting the cultural pluralism of fellow intellectuals such as Randolph Bourne and Horace Kallen, Lippmann believed that the only solution for Jews, who were more “conspicuous” than Gentiles, was total assimilation. In the words of his biographer Ronald Steel, “The good Jew should lie low, dress and behave unobtrusively and be as indistinguishable as possible from the crowd.”

Given these sentiments, it is not surprising that, when Harvard’s “Jewish problem” erupted into public view, Lippmann’s first inclination was to find a discreet way to reduce the number of Jews. Accepting Lowell’s premise that it would be “bad for the immigrant Jews as well as for Harvard if there were too great a concentration,” he went so far as to suggest that Massachusetts set up a state university led by Jews to “persuade Jewish boys to scatter.” Later, in a draft of a letter to a member of the faculty’s committee considering admission criteria, he wrote that “I am fully prepared to accept the judgment of the Harvard authorities that a concentration of Jews in excess of fifteen percent will produce a segregation of culture rather than a fusion.” In the clash between the culture of Jews and that of Christians, he added, “My sympathies are with the non-Jew. His personal manners and physical habits are, I believe, distinctly superior to the prevailing manners and habits of the Jews.”

Yet, in the end, even Lippmann could not bring himself to endorse an outright quota. Contacted by both Judge Mack and Felix Frankfurter (who was very active behind the scenes), he arranged to meet with Laurence Henderson on October 25, 1923. While sharing his hostility to Polish and Russian Jews, Lippmann was appalled when Henderson—who professed to favor higher intellectual standards—proposed a loophole for students who could not pass the examination if they showed promise of being “business and social leaders.” A higher required grade on the entrance examination, Lippmann said, “would be a form of selection wholly without offence to the Jewish people.” Though sympathetic to the idea of recruiting students from a wider geographical area—a change that he realized might reduce the number of Jews from New York and Boston—he was opposed to any direct methods of restriction.

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By January 1923, as the committee was nearing the end of its deliberations, Lippmann turned militantly against Lowell’s policy. In an editorial in
the New York World, he wrote that at Harvard there had been "a change of soul at the top . . . In the place of Eliot, who embodied the stern but liberal virtues of New England, there sits a man who has lost his grip on the great tradition which made Harvard one of the true spiritual centers of American life. Harvard, with the prejudices of a summer hotel; Harvard, with the standards of a country club, is not the Harvard of her greatest sons." In articulating these sentiments, Lippmann was expressing the views of not only the Jewish alumni of Harvard but of Jews nationwide. In carrying out its work, the committee had interviewed eighty "representative Hebrews on the subject of our Jewish problem." Though of diverse views, "all, or virtually all, were of one accord in vehement opposition to any system based on racial proportion."

Not convinced that Lowell's distinction between "desirable" and "undesirable" Jews would not in the end be used against all Jews, Julian Mack and Felix Frankfurter had been successful in convincing Jews on and outside the committee that the best response to Lowell's attempts to divide the Jewish community was one of principled solidarity. But their success in temporarily blocking Lowell's initiative would have not been possible without the active and vigorous support of many distinguished Protestant alumni of Harvard. Particularly crucial was the support of Eliot, then eighty-eight years old, and Greene, Eliot's disciple and an influential member of the Board of Overseers. Throughout the controversy, Eliot and Greene were in close contact, united by their conviction that Lowell had violated fundamental Harvard principles. Believing Lowell to be flawed and untrustworthy, Eliot worked assiduously to block his efforts to impose a quota. Assisted by the tireless and combative Greene and working closely with Mack and Frankfurter, he was able to convince the Board of Overseers that supporting Lowell's proposal would constitute an abdication of Harvard's best traditions.

Completed on April 7, 1923, the final report of the Committee on Methods of Sifting Candidates for Admission was a major setback for Lowell. In the letter accompanying the report, Chairman Charles H. Grindel wrote that of 100 "Harvard graduates not of Hebrew stock" (many of them "persons of high distinction"), "nearly all protested with earnestness . . . against the principle of racial discrimination." A few suggested restriction," Grindel wrote, but "hardly one favored frank limitation." Discussion "in the public and academic press," he noted, was of "like tenor."

A man of extraordinary hubris, Lowell had made a grave error in making public his plan to impose a Jewish quota. As his counterparts at Yale and Princeton grasped intuitively, the public declaration of an intent to discriminate violated core American principles and was likely to lead to a bitter public controversy. This is precisely what happened at Harvard, with Jewish and non-Jewish foes of restriction mobilizing both inside and outside Harvard. Yet Lowell was utterly forthright about his intentions, making it impossible for Harvard to take measures in full public view that more prudent administrators elsewhere were already carrying out behind closed doors. It was a mistake that Lowell would not repeat.

To Eliot's great satisfaction, the committee's members were unanimous in recommending that "no departure be made from . . . the policy of equal opportunity for all regardless of race and religion," adding, "Any action liable to interpretation as an acceptance of the principle of racial discrimination would to many seem like a dangerous surrender of traditional ideals." In the context of 1923, this was a double rebuke to Lowell, for it overturned his policy of excluding African Americans from the freshmen dormitories at the same time that it repudiated his proposed Jewish quota. The committee further stated that "even so rational a method as a personal conference or an intelligence test, if now adopted here as a means of selection, would inevitably be regarded as a covert device to eliminate those deemed racially or socially undesirable and . . . could not fail to arouse damaging suspicion." Finally, in an effort to thwart any attempt by Lowell to circumvent its stand, the committee expressed its opposition to "an arbitrary limitation of the number of students to be admitted" and specified that "if the size of our Freshman class is to be reduced, the reduction can best be accomplished by raising the standard for admission."

To be sure, the report did not give the Mack-Eliot coalition everything that it wanted; in particular, it opposed the committee's recommendation that Harvard admit students "whose scholastic rank places them in the highest seventh of the boys of their graduating class" and "who have satisfactorily completed an approved school course" at "schools which do not ordinarily prepare their pupils for college examinations." Designed to facilitate the admission of "a new group of men from the West and South," the top one-seventh plan seemed to men like Eliot and Frankfurter a thinly disguised attempt to lower the Jewish proportion of the student body by bringing in boys — some of them academically ill equipped for Harvard — from regions of the country where there were few Jews. Despite the opposition of a number of faculty members, however, the top seventh was formally approved at a special meeting of the faculty on April 24, 1923, by a vote of 73–20.

Despite the faculty's approval of the top-seventh plan, Lowell realized that the report constituted a major defeat. While publicly professing support for the committee's work, Lowell wasted little time in working to undermine it. Barely two months later, he persuaded the Fellows of the Harvard Corporation to let him commission a faculty study to determine "whether it might be wise to limit the number of students admitted to the Freshman class to
that he now had the authority to begin reducing the number of Jewish students as long as he did so discreetly.

In his continuing push for the restriction of Jews, Lowell was assisted by the growing momentum of the movement to further limit immigration. Since the passage of the Immigration Act of 1921, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and racism were all on the rise. Propelled by the exponential growth of the Ku Klux Klan, whose membership peaked at over three million in 1924, and by the mass dissemination of anti-Semitic propaganda in Henry Ford's Dearborn Independent, hostility to Jews, blacks, and immigrants escalated from the already high levels of 1921. The nativist wave, which had ebbed and flowed over the course of the nation's history, would reach its crest in 1924.

Adding fuel to the popular sentiment against immigrants were the writings of important Anglo-Saxon intellectuals, many of them alumni of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Joining Grant, Osborn, and Stoddard as scientific racism's most prominent proponents were the eugenics. In 1923, Brigham published A Study of American Intelligence, a widely publicized work based on the testing of army recruits in World War I — the first mass testing of a population ever conducted. Using the categories of Nordic, Alpine, and Mediterranean developed by Madison Grant, Brigham offered seemingly scientific documentation for the intellectual superiority of Nordics. With considerable alarm, he reported that the average intelligence of Americans was declining — a product, he believed, of increasing immigration from southern and eastern Europe as well as miscegenation between white and black Americans.

Contributing to this decline was the growing number of Jews, whom he classified as Alpines because they shared "the head form, stature, and color" of their Slavic neighbors. The results of his study, Brigham claimed, "disprove the popular belief that the Jew is highly intelligent," instead showing immigrant Jews to have LQ's well below average. Unless the United States wished the average intelligence of its population to continue to decline, drastic action was needed. Such action, he wrote, would include not only a much more restrictive and selective immigration policy but also "the prevention of the continued propagation of defective strains in the present population."

Also contributing to the nativist upsurge was the Yale alumnus Burton J. Hendrick (1895), whose widely read book, The Jews in America, was published in 1923. Though pleased to inform his readers that the Jew was not as serious an economic threat as many believed (a review of a list of rich New Yorkers
revealed the good news that “the racial stocks which founded the United States one hundred and fifty years ago still control its wealth”), Hendrick believed that the Jew did pose a grave political threat. Declaring that “there is a great mass of radicalism among the Polish Jews” — a community that showed “enthusiasm for the doctrines of Karl Marx, in preference to the doctrines of Washington and Jefferson and Franklin and Lincoln and Roosevelt” — he maintained that they were “devoid of patriotism” and “unsympathetic with the thing known as Americanism.” Jews, he argued, could best be judged by the newspapers they edited, published, and read — newspapers such as the Forward (circulation 160,000), which preached “political principles whose success means the destruction of the American system of government.”

Buoyed by the works of sympathetic intellectuals and scientists as well as popular support, the Immigration Restriction League was finally poised to realize its goal: the passage of legislation that would preserve America’s predominantly Anglo-Saxon character. With the coalition supporting immigration restriction now ranging all the way from the crude racists of the Ku Klux Klan to the refined gentlemen of the Immigration Restriction League and with the nativist cause now invested with unprecedented intellectual and scientific respectability, the passage of new legislation was all but inevitable. But the proposal favored by leading restrictionists in Congress — to reduce the number of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe by basing the annual quotas on the 1890 rather than 1920 census — seemed to many transparently discriminatory and hence faced strong political opposition. The solution was provided by John B. Trevor, the Harvard alumnus who had played a critical role in passing the Immigration Act of 1921. A truly fair immigration policy, he argued, should be based not on the number of foreign-born in the United States but on the national origins of the entire current population of the United States. By this standard, going back to the 1890 census was more than fair; it was actually generous, for it would allocate 15 percent of the slots for immigrants from the nations of southern and eastern Europe even though only about 12 percent of Americans traced their origins there. With this brilliant rhetorical sleight-of-hand assuaging the consciences of reluctant senators, the watershed Immigration Act of 1924 passed the Senate easily, with only six negative votes, and was signed into law by President Coolidge on May 26, 1924. Reducing the number of immigrants from 350,000 to 150,000 per year while slashing the annual quota for southern and eastern Europeans to fewer than 20,000 (compared to its average annual prewar level of 738,000), the act constituted a historic triumph for the small band of patriots who, thirty years earlier, had formed the Immigration Restriction League.

For Lowell, a former national vice president of the league, the passage of the immigration act was deeply gratifying. But as he surveyed the situation in Cambridge that year, he could not have been equally pleased with the progress of his campaign for restriction at Harvard. Despite his best efforts, Jewish enrollment continued to rise — a striking contrast to the situation at Yale and Princeton, which had moved quietly to limit the number of Jews. By 1924, their measures had succeeded in dramatically cutting Jewish enrollment — at Yale from 13.3 percent in 1923 to 10.0 percent, at Princeton from 3.6 percent to 2.0 percent. Meanwhile, Harvard was nearly 25 percent Jewish and already having difficulty, Lowell believed, in getting applicants from western cities and the “great preparatory schools” because of its “reputation of having so many Jews.”

With an eye on his chief rivals, Lowell decided that he could no longer tolerate half-measures. The seriousness of the situation became fully apparent in the fall of 1925, when statistics from the dean’s office reported that the proportion of Jewish freshmen had risen to 27.6 percent — not even counting the additional 3.6 percent in the “J3” category. Ironically, it was the top-seventh plan — a measure intended to reduce the proportion of Jewish students — that was in good part responsible. Of the 276 students admitted under this plan, 42 percent were Jews. Designed to bring Harvard “a new group of men from the West and the South,” the plan was in fact admitting more Jews from the Middle Atlantic states and New England.

As Lowell was contemplating the disturbing figures, he was also receiving letters from alumni expressing concern that Harvard was being overrun by Jews. Among these letters was one from W. F. Williams ’01, of Greenwich, Connecticut. Williams, who had attended a recent Harvard-Yale game, was profoundly troubled by the change in Harvard’s atmosphere since his undergraduate days. As an expression of the sentiments held by a segment of the alumni, his letter is worth quoting at length:

Naturally, after twenty-five years, one expects to find many changes but to find that one’s University had become so Hebrewized was a fearful [sic] shock. There were Jews to the right of me, Jews to the left of me, in fact there they were so obviously everywhere that instead of leaving the Yard with pleasant memories of the past I left with a feeling of utter disgust of the present and grave doubts about the future of my Alma Mater. One thought that kept recurring in my mind was as to what the future of the University would be when the Jew graduates of the present and future would have a possible preponderating vote for the Overseers and the right to fill the “Seats of the Mighty” in University Hall. A pleasant prospect to consider!

My recent re-introduction to the University was when I left the street car at Beck Hall on my way to the Union to get my ticket for the game. Being uncertain what entrance to use I stopped a boy, evidently a student, to ask direc-
tions — he was a Jew. Rounding the corner of the Union, being still in doubt where to go I made enquiries from three other boys, also very evident (sic) students, — two Jews and a Negro, fraternizing. I was ushered to my seat at the game by a Jew and another of the same “breed” followed me to my seat and required me to sign my ticket. And not one of these appeared to be of the same class as the few Jews that were in college in my day but distinctly of the class usually denominated “Kikes.”

Shades of my New England parents that Harvard University should come to such a pass that its graduates not only doubt about sending their sons to their University but that they are in many, many cases actually sending them elsewhere — on account of the Jews.

My business life has been spent in New York where one stumbles over Jews at every step and I am not anxious for my boys to come in contact with them until they absolutely have to. They are without doubt the Damned of God and the skunks of the human race. I grant you that there are many Jews like the Strauss family who cannot be even remotely criticized, but generally speaking they’re a menace to decent society and the American race. I cannot but feel that your New England blood must run cold when you contemplate their ever-increasing numbers at Harvard or what I cannot fathom is why you and the other Overseers don’t have the backbone to put you (sic) foot down on this menace to the University . . .

The Jew is undoubtedly of high mental order, desires the best education he can get CHEAPEST, and is more persistent in other races in his endeavors to get what he wants. It is self evident, therefore, that by raising the standard of marks he can’t be eliminated from Harvard, whereas by the same process of raising the standard “White” boys ARE eliminated. And is this to go on? Why the Psychology Test if not to bar those not wanted? Are the Overseers so lacking in genius that they can’t devise a way to bring Harvard back to the position it always held as a “white man’s” college?

Lowell told Williams that he “had foreseen the peril of having too large a number of an alien race and had tried to prevent it,” but that “not one of the alumni ventured to defend the policy publicly.” He concluded by indicating that he was “glad to see from your letter, as I have from many other signs, that the alumni are beginning to appreciate that I was not wholly wrong three years ago in trying to limit the proportion of Jews.”

Yet Lowell still faced serious obstacles. Apart from the continued opposition of the redoubtable Eliot, he still had to gain the approval of the Special Committee on the Limitation of the Size of the Freshman Class. Chairman by Henry James (1899), the son of the great philosopher William James and later the author of a two-volume biography of Eliot that won the Pulitzer Prize, the committee had the power to frustrate Lowell’s plans. Sensing that James might not share his views, Lowell turned his considerable energies to the task of convincing him that there was no realistic alternative to restriction.

Receiving a first draft of the Special Committee’s report, which conspicuously failed to offer any specific measures to limit Jewish enrollment, Lowell responded with a confidential letter in which he noted that “questions of race,” though “delicate and disagreeable,” are not solved by ignoring them. Declaring that “the presence of Jews in large numbers tends to drive Gentiles elsewhere,” he reminded James that “a few years ago many of us thought the proportion of Jews in Harvard College was reaching a dangerous point.” Then, Lowell said, the figure was 21.7 percent; now it was more than 27 percent. Moreover, “the measures adopted at the time of the previous inquiry” — which included the limitation of the freshman class to 1,000, the creation of the top-seventh plan, and the use of letters and interviews to assess applicants — “have produced no effect.”

From Lowell’s perspective, there was no alternative but to act immediately.

To prevent a dangerous increase in the proportion of Jews, I know at present only one way which is at the same time straightforward and effective, and that is a selection by a personal estimate of character on the part of the Admission authorities, based upon the probable value to the candidate, to the college and to the community of his admission. Now a selection of this kind can be carried out only in case the numbers are limited. If there is no limit, it is impossible to reject a candidate who passes the admission examinations without proof of defective character, which practically cannot be obtained. The only way to make a selection is to limit the numbers, accepting those who appear to be the best.

The Overseers, Lowell told James, had only three choices: “They must either assume the responsibility for the increase in the percentage of Jews, or they must assume the responsibility of saying what should be done about it, or they must leave the administrative officers of the University free to deal with it.” And should they choose the last option, which Lowell clearly favored, it would require “a limitation of numbers” that “must be continued as long as there is need for it.”

James’s initial reaction was less than enthusiastic. “Everything in my education and bringing up,” he wrote, “makes me shrink from a proposal to begin a racial discrimination at Harvard — there’s no use my pretending this isn’t the case.” Yet he acknowledged that Lowell was “quite right in saying that a situation which contains serious and unfortunate elements ought to be faced again.” He then assured Lowell that he would “endeavor to bring an open mind to its consideration and not to follow my predisposition blindly.”

Sensing James’s irresoluteness, Lowell insisted that he was not proposing discrimination against the Jews but rather “discrimination among individu-
als in accordance with the probable value of a college education to themselves, to the University, and the community,” carefully adding that “a very large proportion of the less desirable, upon this basis, are at the present time the Jews.” 167 While hardly the kind of argument that would have persuaded Frankfurter or Mack, it apparently persuaded James. Declaring that he agreed in principle with Lowell’s notion of “a sound and discerning ‘discrimination’ among individuals,” he expressed confidence that “such a discrimination would inevitably eliminate most of the Jewish element which is making trouble.” Then, revealing that he was himself not immune to the anti-Semitism common in his milieu, he added: “I don’t think that all Jews are particularly intelligent by any means. What intelligence they have seems to ripen early. But apart from their precocity and a certain advantage it gives them in the way of a head start, I am not afraid of any competition.” Nevertheless, James could not go along with those Overseers who advocated “a candid regulation excluding all but so many or such a proportion of Jews.” 168 More subtle measures, he advised Lowell, would provide the best means of reducing the number of Jews at Harvard.

With James now on board and Judge Mack having completed his term as an Overseer, there was no one left to block Lowell’s plans. When the Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Consider the Limitation of Numbers was approved by the Board of Overseers on January 11, 1926, Lowell had every reason to be pleased. In addition to endorsing a limit of 1,000 freshmen, it recommended that “the application of the rule concerning candidates from the first seventh of their school be discretionary with the Committee on Admission” — a provision that would make it possible to eliminate schools that sent too many Jews to Harvard. Equally important, the committee decisively rejected an admissions policy based on scholarship alone, stating that “it is neither feasible nor desirable to raise the standards of the College so high that none but brilliant scholars can enter” while stipulating that “the standards ought never to be too high for serious and ambitious students of average intelligence.” 169

When the faculty formally approved the report eight days later, Lowell was further elated, for they also approved measures making the admissions process even more subjective. In particular, the faculty called on Pennypacker to interview as many applicants as possible to gather additional information on “character and fitness and the promise of the greatest usefulness in the future as a result of a Harvard education.” Henceforth, declared the faculty, a passport-sized photo would be “required as an essential part of the application for admissions.” 170

The actions of the faculty and the Committee on Limitation, Lowell realized, provided a tremendous opportunity to impose, at long last, the policy of restriction he had favored since 1922. But as he had learned from his bitter experience with the Committee on Methods Sifting Candidates for Admission, the wrong personnel could frustrate the best-laid plans. This time Lowell would ensure that the men on the Committee on Admission, which had final authority over applicants, shared his views. Toward this end, he appointed two new members, Kenneth B. Murdock and Robert DeCourcy Ward. The appointment of Ward was especially significant, for he had been one of the founders of the Immigration Restriction League and a critical congressional witness on behalf of the Immigration Act of 1924. 171 All in all, the Committee on Admission in 1925–1926 had seven members, four of whom had voted for Henderson’s 1922 failed motion in favor of restriction and none of whom had voted against it. 172 And whereas the earlier committee on sifting candidates had three Jewish members, not a single Jew served on the Committee on Admission.

By the fall of 1926, a new admissions regime was in place. In a visit with Henry Pennypacker in late 1926, Dean Clarence W. Mendell of Yale learned that Harvard was “now going to limit the Freshman Class to 1,000 . . . After this year they are going to discontinue — for the East at least — the ‘first seventh’ arrangement which is bringing in as high as 40% Jews. They are also going to reduce their 25% Hebrew total to 15% or less by simply rejecting without detailed explanation. They are giving no details to any candidate any longer.” 173

Less than four months before Mendell’s visit, Charles W. Eliot had died at the age of ninety-two. With Lowell no longer in his shadow, Harvard entered a new era.