Silent Partners and Missing Links: History, Architecture and the Challenge of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum

by

Linda R. Weld

Master of Arts in Art History
Boston University, 2008

Master of Architecture in Urban Design
Harvard University, 1983

Bachelor of Architecture, with Distinction
University of Minnesota, 1974

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Signature of Author_____
Department of Architecture
May 22, 2008

Certified by:_____
Mark Jarzombek
Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture
Associate Dean for the School of Architecture and Planning
Thesis Supervisor

Certified by:_____
Arindam Dutta
Associate Professor of the History of Architecture
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted By:_____
Julian Beinart
Professor of Architecture
Chairman, Department Committee on Graduate Students

Thesis Committee:
Thesis Supervisor
Mark Jarzombek
Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture
Associate Dean for the School of Architecture and Planning
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Thesis Supervisor
Arindam Dutta
Associate Professor of the History of Architecture
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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Abstract

As this nation's first and largest immigration station Ellis Island not only processed millions of immigrants, but also functioned to develop mechanisms of control and procedures for inspecting thousands of immigrants on a daily basis. Ellis Island operated at the intersection of conflicting cultural paradigms as economic concerns exacerbated by the influx of unskilled laborers before the turn of the century shifted to fears that the large numbers of "new" immigrants from southern and eastern Europe would degrade the gene pool of "old" American stock. The persistent perception of immigrants as vectors of disease that lay behind these fears did not disappear after the turn of the century. Rather, that perception evolved to embrace the belief that science would clearly demonstrate that some people, because of their racial or national constitution, were less capable of becoming 100% Americanized than others.

The Ellis Island Immigration Museum, housed in the restored main building on Ellis Island, presently ignores the presence and narrative potential of the traces of immigrant processing and the many remarkable structures which would bring Ellis Island's unique role in the history of immigration to light. My purpose in this thesis is to foreground the role of the United States government at Ellis Island, and offer a critique of the manner in which the success of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum frustrates a full consideration of the complex historical processes it is meant to commemorate.

Thesis Supervisors:
Mark Jarzombek
Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture
Associate Dean for the School of Architecture and Planning
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Arindam Dutta
Associate Professor of the History of Architecture
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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INTRODUCTION

The Challenge of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum

"From the moment someone arrives here I want people to know and feel what others before them felt coming through these doors, walking through these halls."[1] Heeding the words of encouragement from M. Anne Belkow, superintendent of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, visitors to the Ellis Island Immigration Museum mount the stairs to the registry room on the second floor of Ellis Island's main building (Fig. 1). For immigrants arriving at Ellis Island one hundred years ago this is where the dreaded "line" inspection began. Public Health Service physicians observed those struggling up the stairs for signs of lameness, shortness of breath, physical deformities and other outward indications of conditions that warranted a more thorough examination, or debarment. Arriving at the second floor, today's visitors admire the room's vaulted ceiling covered in Gustavino tiles fifty six feet overhead,[2]

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[1] M. Anne Belkow quoted in Erica Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe*, (Durham: The Duke University Press, 2005), 231. Rand is Professor of Art and Visual Culture and Women and Gender Studies at Bates College in Auburn, Maine where she has taught since 1990. Rand received her Ph. D. from the University of Chicago and has written extensively about gender issues as they are depicted in art.

[2] The Gustavino tile ceiling was installed in 1917 when the original lath and plaster ceiling was damaged in the Black Tom wharf explosion of 1916. Gustavino was a Spanish immigrant who brought with him the ancient Catalonian tile building technique. The interlocking terra cotta tiles are "light, strong, fireproof and economical." See Colin Hamblin, *Ellis Island: The Official Souvenir Guide* (China: Aramark, 2006), 36.

and, in a comprehensive glance, grasp the expanse of the one hundred foot wide by two hundred foot long open space, unaware that for immigrants the great space of the registry room had been divided into a warren of alleys and fenced enclosures. Tagged, lined up, observed, inspected, examined, questioned and cross examined (Figs. 2, 3, 4), immigrants passed through a series of iron pipe rail passages as they were processed by officials of the Immigration Service and physicians of the Public Health Service before being passed on to their destinations or detained for further examination.

As this nation's first and largest immigration station Ellis Island not only processed millions of immigrants, but also functioned as a laboratory for the development of mechanisms of control and procedures for processing thousands of immigrants on a daily basis.[3] Methods for inspecting and certifying the immigrants' compliance with existing laws that permitted entry into the United States were developed at Ellis Island as a response to the practical necessity of ordering and controlling large numbers of bodies. The "line" inspection in particular as implemented at Ellis Island became an efficient mechanism, subjecting immigrants to the gaze of a series of medical and immigration department professionals in the interests of making expedient determinations at the same time that its mechanisms of surveillance and control asserted the role of the United State's government as a powerful agent in the immigration process.

The exhibition strategy at the Ellis Island Museum never quite conveys the extent to which immigrants became the subject of the gaze of Ellis Island immigration officials and

[3] Ellis Island's role of enforcing immigration control evolved in the absence of any models for processing large numbers of immigrants. Immigration formalities including customs control and medical inspections had previously been administered by individual states at ports in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and San Francisco. Facilities for processing immigrants were provided by these local jurisdictions or in some instances by steamship and railroad companies; in a few situations immigration formalities were carried out entirely onboard ship. Following the Immigration Act of 1891, however, the federal government assumed sole responsibility for processing immigrants and constructing facilities to accommodate them

Public Health Service physicians as they passed through the maze of fenced enclosures in the registry room (Figs. 5 & 6). The restoration of the registry room to its condition in 1918[4] (Fig. 7) shifts the visitor's momentum from a direct engagement with the traces of the immigration process—entering the main building and mounting the stairs--to a portrayal of the processing of immigrants that is mediated through the museum's more conventional exhibition strategy. Through the distancing achieved in this transition, the museum's narrative develops with a historical disconnectedness and temporal one dimensionality that belie the underlying cultural anxieties and ongoing political tensions that shaped the processing of immigrants at the Ellis Island immigration station.

These observations are offered not in an effort to trivialize the exhibition strategy of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, rather, my purpose in this thesis is to enlist these slippages, elisions and omissions as the basis of a critical interpretation of the manner in which the success of the museum frustrates a full consideration of the complex historical processes it is meant to commemorate, and obscures a complete understanding of Ellis Island's unique role in the history of immigration to the United States. My intention in what follows is to challenge the terms on which the museum's narrative is constructed by foregrounding the federal government's role on Ellis Island and to link the remaining traces of immigrant processing and many remarkable structures on Ellis Island that currently remain outside the museum's narrative, to their historic roles.

[4] Colin Hamblin states that the restoration to the 1918-1924 period "was selected as it coincided with the construction date of the hall's 56 foot high barrel-vaulted ceilings and peak immigration years." I disagree with Hamblin's statement that these were peak immigration years, see Fig. 50, also from Hamblin's book. See Colin Hamblin, *Ellis Island: The Official Souvenir Guide* (China: Aramark, 2006), 37.

The construction of buildings on Ellis Island after 1891,[5] however, must be read not only as a response to the requirements for processing the increasing number of immigrants entering the United States at the close of the nineteenth century, but equally importantly as the reification of cultural attitudes and beliefs that characterized the Progressive era in the United States. Inscribed in the buildings on Ellis Island is the evidence of the Progressives' belief in the efficacy of science and rational management,[6] evidence that is currently missing from the interpretive themes at Ellis Island.

Spurred by the energetic administration of William H. Williams, Ellis Island's commissioner from 1902-1905 and again from 1909-1914, the inspection and examination of immigrants at Ellis Island was expanded to meet stricter immigration laws passed after the turn of the century. Williams, appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt, lobbied ceaselessly for more, and more scientifically based medical examinations as well as additional space in which to process immigrants. He was among the growing class of professionals, bureaucrats and experts who acted on the belief that government could be run in an efficient and expert fashion far preferable to the power of the political machine characteristic of the end of the century. Under Williams the political imperatives of the Progressives were reified as administrative policies and procedures at Ellis Island.

Far from embodying a unified attitude towards immigration, however, the Progressive era was characterized by a swirl of competing and conflicting interests. Ellis Island operated at

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[5] The first building on Ellis Island built to house the federal immigration station was completed in 1891 or 1892 depending on which source is consulted. A wooden structure, it burned to the ground in 1897 and was replaced by the one we see today which opened in 1900. The first unit of the general hospital was complete in 1903, an addition to the hospital was opened soon after. The psychiatric pavilion opened in 1907 and the contagious disease hospital in 1911. A variety of other structure for support of immigration station activities such as the power house and laundry buildings are also located on the three islands. Ellis Island grew form an initial 2.7 acres to nearly 30.

[6] For a discussion of the transformation of American cultural attitudes during this period see Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

the intersection of shifting cultural paradigms as economic concerns exacerbated by the influx of unskilled laborers before the turn of the century shifted to a fear that the large numbers of "new" immigrants from areas of southern and eastern Europe would degrade the gene pool of the "old" American genetic stock, leading eventually to "race suicide," a worrisome scenario advanced by the then-popular pseudo-science of eugenics. The perception of immigrants as vectors of disease that lies behind these fears did not, and has not disappeared. Rather, following the turn of the century that perception expanded to embrace a belief that science would clearly demonstrate that some people, because of their racial or national constitution, were less capable of becoming 100% Americanized than others.

The processing of immigrants on Ellis Island required the development of policies and procedures to enforce legislation that was purposefully discriminatory, drawing on distinctions of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and physical as well as mental disabilities as the basis for determining an immigrant's admissibility. Coding the prejudices underlying immigration laws in terms of physical and mental characteristics, and in the case of the legislation of 1917, literacy, enabled the passage of restrictive legislation in a nation with an electorate built on an immigrant population. But it is important to understand that these prejudices represented cultural attitudes and beliefs that were widely held and often openly expressed by Americans in the early decades of the twentieth century, prejudices that are not congruent with the dominant narrative of unity, inclusiveness and nation building that the Ellis Island Immigration Museum presents.

While the purpose of this thesis is to foreground the role of the federal government in the problematic and conflicted history of immigration at Ellis Island, an understanding of the terms upon which the museum was created is necessary as a point of departure. My

investigation therefore begins by focusing on the involvement of the National Park Service in the creation of the immigration museum on Ellis Island, and a critique of the museum's interpretive strategy as a foundation for my premise that the success of the museum obscures a full understanding of the historical processes it is meant to commemorate.

In the sections that follow I shift my focus to an exploration of the manner in which the federal government asserted its power over the process of immigration on Ellis Island. The "line" inspection as well as policies and procedures under Commissioner William Williams represent underlying cultural tensions that remain largely unexplored in the museum's narrative. Finally, I look at the design of the hospitals, the role of physicians, and efforts to regularize categories of mental deficiency, as evidence that challenges the interpretive approach and contests the simplified story of immigration to the United States constructed at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum.

Chapter I

Creating the Museum

With over two million visitors a year the success of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum continues to exceed the expectations of even its most enthusiastic supporters. The museum's broad appeal is achieved through an interpretive strategy that emphasizes themes of nation building, unity and inclusiveness intended to reinforce national identity, an approach characteristic of many sites administered by the National Park Service. Foregrounding these themes at Ellis Island, however, privileges a narrative that obscures the conflicts and ambiguities inherent in a full consideration of the complex history of immigration through Ellis Island.[7] By emphasizing the experience of the immigrants, the museum promotes a narrative that leaves unexplored the cultural and political tensions underlying Ellis Island's unique role in enforcing immigration legislation, legislation that became progressively more discriminatory throughout the sixty two years of the immigration station's operation.

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[7] John Bodnar, "Symbols and Servants: Immigrant America and the Limits of Public History," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 73, No. 1 (June 1986); 143. Bodnar is professor of history at Indiana University and has written about the evolution of the National Park Service's unifying narrative in *Remaking America, Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

The museum reinforces a theme of unity and nation building by encouraging visitors to actively identify with immigrants arriving at Ellis Island and personally connect with the story of immigration to the United States. The strategy of engagement obscures issues of historic veracity in the museum, and discourages a critical and analytical attitude towards the topic of immigration. For instance, the use of photographs in the exhibitions decontextualizes the images and confuses the issue of historic documentation in the museum. At Ellis Island, as historian Mike Wallace suggests, "[h]istory was to be confined to providing entertainment, nostalgia, or interesting insights into vanished ways of life."[8]

The museum's exhibition strategy further obscures Ellis Island's unique role by separating the history of Ellis Island from the cultural and political context in which it operated. "Ellis Island Chronicles" and "Peak Immigration Years" are exhibitions that address political and historical issues as distinct topics (Fig. 8), but fail to link the subjects explored in each to the administration and enforcement of immigration legislation as it was carried out on Ellis Island. By not addressing the politics of immigrant processing on Ellis Island, and other topics that confront a conflicted history, the museum promotes a simplified story of immigration acceptable to general audiences and the private corporate and commercial sponsors that collaborated with the National Park Service in the creation of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum.

[8] Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on the History and the Public*, Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 157. Michael Wallace is a professor of history at the University of Michigan and has contributed extensively to the study of how historical memory is constructed and presented at sites such as Ellis Island.

Preservation of the Site: The Public, the Private and the Politics

The politics of remembrance advanced at National Park Service sites has historically privileged interpretive approaches that developed from a desire to celebrate concepts of American heritage, unity and nation building which have historically characterized the National Park Service's approach to interpretation at the historic sites it administers. Recently these themes have been challenged by a generation of social historians and interested citizens advocating a more pluralistic understanding of American history. In analyzing the changes that have been incorporated in interpretive approaches that reflect these shifts, Wallace observes that at sites such as Colonial Williamsburg and Monticello a more complex history has been advanced where, as Wallace observes, "the limits of the acceptable [have] been pushed back," but, he is careful to note, "limits remain[ed] nevertheless." [9] The limits Wallace describes require avoiding an articulate and thorough discussion of the traumatic conflicts that characterized the history of this nation, and connecting that past to our nation's ongoing struggles and conflicts. Wallace's analysis of this evolution at other historic sites provides an important paradigm for understanding the story of immigration presented through the National Park Service's interpretive themes at Ellis Island, where the circumstances that led to the creation of an immigration museum on Ellis Island (Figs. 9 & 10), informed the manner in which its message was constructed.

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[9] Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on the History and the Public*, Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 137-161. Wallace has also written about the Ellis Island museum specifically, see "Exhibition Review: The Ellis Island Immigration Museum." *The Journal of American History* Vol. 78 No.3 (Dec 1991); 1023-1032. Equally important and useful for understanding the evolution of the National Park Service's approach to interpretation at its historic properties are: Charles B. Hosmer Jr., *Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949.* Vols. I & II (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1981), and Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage: Principles and d Practices for Visitor Services in Parks, Museums, and Historic Places* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957).

Recognition of Ellis Island's historic significance had waxed and waned in both the public and political realms since its closure as an active port of entry by the Immigration and Naturalization Service in 1954. Its buildings had fallen into disrepair by the 1960s when a broader understanding of the ways in which immigration quotas worked to the detriment of the civil rights efforts of the period was reflected in an increased interest in immigration issues, and second and third generation Americans with political power and sophistication provided a significant constituency interested in preserving Ellis Island as an historic site. Since the 1960s the National Park Service has received a succession of development proposals for the Ellis Island that have included restoration and rehabilitation of some or all of the buildings, preservation of the site as a historic ruin, as well as commercial development as shown in this proposal for housing developed by the office of Frank Lloyd Wright (Fig. 11).

The designation of Ellis Island as a National Historic Landmark occurred in conjunction with a similar designation for the Statue of Liberty at a time when a growing interest in American heritage, spurred by preparations in anticipation of this nation's two hundredth birthday renewed interest in preservation of the site. The passage of the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965[10] provided President Lyndon B. Johnson with the opportunity to create political capital by staging the signing of the immigration bill on Liberty Island at the same time that Ellis Island was granted landmark status as part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument. Staging the signing event on the Ellis Island site effectively camouflaged the continuing ambiguity of the United States position towards immigration while foregrounding Ellis Island as an important site in the history of American immigration. Ellis Island was

[10] Robert S. Chang, "Toward an Asian American Legal Scholarship: Critical Race Theory, Post Structuralism, and Narrative Space," *California Law Review*, 81, 5; 1241-1322.

opened to the public on a limited basis between 1976 and 1984 before initiatives to create a museum at Ellis Island set the restoration project in motion.

Public sentiments mobilized by the political act of designation gained momentum during the following decades, and in 1984, with restoration work already underway on the Statue of Liberty, it was determined that the American Museum of Immigration, housed in the base of the statue, should not be renovated but that the main building on Ellis Island would be restored to house a new immigration museum.[11] The linking of these two sites ensured a level of publicity and support for Ellis Island that the museum may not have been able to achieve on its own.

Funding for the preservation and restoration of Ellis Island was greatly aided by Revisions to the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act which were passed in 1980. These revisions allowed the National Park Service to earn income from leasing its buildings to private contractors, thus facilitating public-private co-operation that proved essential to raising funds for the maintenance of preservation projects.[12] The concept of the involvement of private enterprise in the restoration and preservation of public monuments and landmarks was an untried idea in the nineteen eighties, and prompted heated debate among the project's supporters as well as among National Park Service preservationists. In spite of the reservations expressed by these groups, and as a result of President Ronald Reagan's push for privatization, Lee Iacocca, president of Chrysler Corporation, was charged with heading private fundraising efforts as chair of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission in 1982.

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[11] F. Ross Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insider's View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 162. This determination was easy to justify in terms of the space requirements for the museum but was fraught with political machinations that made it rather difficult to realize. Holland's account offers details of the political struggle to move the museum from Liberty Island to Ellis Island

[12] F. Ross Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insider's View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 144.

Iacocca appealed directly to individual Americans for their support, whether their ancestors had entered the country through Ellis Island or not, asking them to contribute one hundred dollars to have their name listed on Ellis Island's Wall of Honor. Iacocca's grass roots fund raising targeted families whose ethnic heritage would make the concept of an immigration museum resonate regardless of the country of origin. Iacocca's personal approach was successful beyond expectations; the initial goal of $250,000,000 was surpassed by an amount of $100,000,000 by 1991, and the Wall of Honor continues to grow. Space for display of donors' names on the sea wall around the island has been exhausted, and a steel structure behind the administration building has been erected to hold the plethora of new donor names (Fig. 12). The impact of Iacocca's strategy for involving broad participation in fund raising for the Ellis Island museum effectively instantiates the message of Ellis Island as the preeminent icon of American immigration.

The incorporation of private and commercial interests at the outset determined the direction that development of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum would take and has colored the content and interpretive approach of its exhibitions. The developer's pro-forma calculations for the Ellis Island museum included revenue and expense calculations based on entertainment as well as museum functions. For example, expenditures at the Immigration Building and Museum were projected to generate $7 per capita while "all other areas" were projected to bring in $14 per capita in 1983 dollars.[13]

[13] John Burgee, *Economic Parameters for the Ellis Island Restoration and Immigration Park Development,* prepared for: The Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty Centennial Commission, February 14, 1983, Prepared by: Harrison Price Company, 16.

An early development plan for Ellis Island was conceived as what Iacocca termed "'an ethnic Williamsburg.'"[14] The plan submitted to the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Centennial Commission by John Burgee of the New York architecture firm Burgee and Johnson in 1983[15] (Fig. 13) included "exhibits telling about the origins of the immigrants and the contributions they made to their new country. It was to have a lot of arts and crafts activity and demonstrations, such as beer making..."[16] The overall plan for Ellis Island described an "open park-like space devoted to festivals and events where each summer an Ethnic Celebration will take place. Temporary structures, arenas, colorful tents, mobile stands and serving carts will transform the 3 acre park into a joyous celebration of America's ethnic diversity."[17] (Figs. 14, 15, 16 & 17)

The National Park Service reacted negatively to the "ethnic Williamsburg" thinking and to the concept of tearing down any of the buildings on the Ellis Island site to make way for development of the various hotels, spas and conference centers that had been part of the original proposal, and as the project moved forward, initiatives for commercial development on the site were revised in response to National Park Service concerns. Today, commercial and entertainment spaces are taken for granted as a part of the visitors' experience at many National Park Service sites, but it is important to emphasize that at Ellis Island the presence of the

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[14] Ross Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insider's View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 145.

[15] John Burgee, *Economic Parameters for the Ellis Island Restoration and Immigration Pak Development,* prepared for: The Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty Centennial Commission, February 14, 1983, Prepared by: Harrison Price Company. It is interesting to note that in this publication a table of comparable attractions lists Knott's Berry Farm, Busch Gardens in Florida and Williamsburg, Virginia among many others.

[16] Ross Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insider's View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 146.

[17] John Burgee, *Economic Parameters for the Ellis Island Restoration and Immigration Park Development,* prepared for: The Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty Centennial Commission, February 14, 1983, Prepared by: Harrison Price Company, 2,3.

private corporate sponsor in a federally funded project was the result of innovative legislation specifically designed to enhance the viability of preservation projects.

In addition to exhibition areas, final plans for Ellis Island incorporated concessions and commercial space as well as outdoor areas for festivals and site tours. Exhibition designs enlisted up to date technology and viewing strategies meant to actively engage visitors on many levels, making the Ellis Island museum a lively and entertaining tourist destination. The impact of these changes is found in the parameters of the interpretive strategy and informs the manner in which possibilities for development of the remainder of the Ellis Island site have been conceived.

Planning for the exhibition strategy began in 1984 and was carried out by a committee composed of National Park Service personnel and prominent historians. Ross Holland, a National Park Service employee involved in the Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island restoration project, describes the committee as "a good cross section of specialists in immigration history" that "included two of the three titans in the field: John Higham of Johns Hopkins and Rudolph Vecoli of the University of Minnesota."[18] The committee agreed that the interpretive approach would include three major themes: 1.the Ellis Island story, emphasizing the actual experience of immigrants at Ellis Island, 2.immigration history, "*all* immigration to this country" would be included and, 3.the diverse American society. Professor Alan Kraut, a member of the committee that aided in planning the exhibition explained that decisions regarding the direction of the exhibition strategy for the Ellis Island museum reflected a desire to emphasize the

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[18] Ross Holland, *Idealists, Scoundrels, and the Lady: An Insider's View of the Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Project* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 159. Holland was part of the National; Park Service team that worked on the restoration of Ellis Island's main building. His book is a somewhat bitter account of the restoration of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, nevertheless it is a very valuable source of information about the process of the creation of the museum.

experience of the majority of immigrants who passed through Ellis Island without being detained, and that should be the focus of the narrative presented in the museum's narrative. [19]

Representation is Political

Perhaps nowhere at Ellis Island is the political context and the accuracy of historic documentation as adroitly avoided as it is in the use of photographic images from contemporaneous sources that provide the background for the exhibitions "Peak Immigration Years" and "Through America's Gate." Enlargements of work by teacher and sociologist Lewis Hine and Ellis Island clerk Augustus Sherman constitute the background for these exhibitions and also fill the walls of atrium spaces on the second floor, setting a tone of historic authenticity. However, in its use in the exhibitions, the work of these important photographers is decontextualized and enlisted to support themes that are not related to the photographer's original intent, and in some instances use of the photographs contradicts the messages contained in texts or labels that originally accompanied the photographs.

For instance, Augustus Sherman's photographs provide many of the faces that line the circulation spaces on the second floor of the Ellis Island Museum outside of the exhibitions focusing on the peak years of immigration. A registry room chief clerk on Ellis Island from 1897 until 1924, Sherman's photographs were done as a hobby, clearly apart from his official duties. However, his position on Ellis Island and his status as senior clerk and personal secretary to the commissioner provided Sherman with the opportunity to produce some two

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[19] Interview with Prof. Alan Kraut, member of the original committee of historians who helped the National Park Service plan the exhibition, March 14, 2008. Kraut is a professor of history at American University in Washington, D. C. Kraut specializes in the history of American medicine and has written several books and numerous articles that are useful in understanding the context in which Ellis Island operated. See Kraut, Alan M. "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924." *Social Science History* 12. 4 (1988); 377-394, and *The Huddled Masses: The Immigrant in American Society, 1880-1921* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc.), 1982.

hundred and fifty photographs of detained immigrants. It is Sherman's photographs that are often found as illustrations in the many Ellis Island histories that tend to emphasize the diversity of nations that made up the immigrant stream entering the United States at the turn of the century. Wall text in the second floor atrium explains that some of Sherman's photographs were displayed at Ellis Island during his tenure thus creating a link between the enlargements we see displayed today and Sherman's original work. But by including the work of other photographers, in one case an enlargement titled "Mexican Woman, Beeville, TX, 1915" by Ida Trevino, the museum's message has misrepresented the intent of Sherman's photographs and obscured a correct interpretation of his work

The archive of Sherman's photographs on Ellis Island from which the exhibition enlargements are drawn make it apparent that Sherman was primarily interested in portraying immigrants as representative of ethnic "types." Most photographs, and the handwritten notations on them, appear to be an attempt to classify and categorize individuals as representatives of identifiable nationalities. Sherman shows us, for example, Dutch and Greek immigrants (Figs. 18 & 19) in clothing that reinforces commonly held stereotypes of these nationalities. Rand explains the relevance of Sherman's work as an archive in the larger context of prevailing attitudes towards immigrants, observing that: "the images cannot be fully separated from the scientific racism in criminological schemes to identify racial types with propensities to crime and disease—especially considering the role of stereotypes in informing...the work of Ellis Island inspectors..."[20] Rand's comments foreground the particular cultural context of Sherman's work as well as providing insights into Sherman's motivations in a manner that sharply contrasts with the message they impart through the museum's use of his work.

[20] Erica Rand, *Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham: The Duke University Press, 2005), 96.

Characteristic of Sherman's photographs is a direct frontal pose, the expression neutral, the subject's gaze directed at the viewer without guile. Sherman posed his subjects against a neutral backdrop, or in some cases the Ellis Island buildings served as background. Varying the portrait heads with a profile or view of the entire body, Sherman's photographic studies are embedded in a system of representation that functioned to ennoble the subject as representative of a type while simultaneously repressing individuality. Dressed in the best examples of clothing that represented their country of origin, the identity of Sherman's subjects is rendered secondary to their nationality. Sherman's labels reflect his preoccupation with type and the photograph as document. His work does not retain the devices of lighting and composition that dramatize the immigrant and which distinguishes the work of others working on Ellis Island at the time.

In contrast to Sherman, the educator, social worker and activist Lewis Hine choose his subjects with the objective of heroicizing immigrants and used composition and lighting to produce photographs that advance his particular vision of the current tide of immigrants. Hine photographed immigrants on Ellis Island between 1904 and 1909, portraying immigrants who possessed, in his interpretation, the same qualities and characteristics that had spurred an earlier generation of immigrants which enabled the nation to grow and succeed, Hine advanced his personal view of the current wave of immigrants as inheritors of the heroic tradition that characterized previous generations of American immigrants and from which this nations grew to greatness (Fig.20).

Hine had a progressive's belief in education, convinced that through his photographs he could effect reforms that would motivate others to work to ameliorate the miserable conditions

under which many new immigrants lived and labored.[21] As an educator at the School of Ethical Culture in New York, Hine espoused a belief in the efficacy of photography as a tool of observation and education as well as a tool of social change.[22] His visual sophistication allowed Hine to understand the importance of making photographs that connected his subject viscerally to his audience rather than portraying conditions that would distance the viewer and subject.

The persuasive force of Hine's photographs transcends their temporal specificity, gaining impact through their re-presentation in the context of the immigration museum, although they were not intended as images to be understood primarily in terms of their esthetic qualities. The use of Hine's photographs by the exhibition planners at Ellis Island draws the visitor into the life of the immigrants. Viewing the exhibition we are encouraged to believe, as did Hine, that the future of America will be enriched by the labor of these able bodies, and we identify with his belief in the future of the United States built on the greatness of its immigrant population.

The personal and political agendas that shaped the work of these photographers, as well as others whose work is incorporated in the exhibitions, is not addressed in the museum's exhibitions. The contribution that a full understanding of the motivation of Sherman and Hine would make to the story of immigration has been sacrificed by the generalized and universalized concept that the presentation of their work receives at Ellis Island.

"Museumania" at the Close of the Twentieth Century

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[21] Michael Sundell, "Golden Immigrants at the Door: Lewis Hine's Photographs of Ellis Island," *Social Text,* 16 (Winter, 1986-87); 172. For more information on Hine see Judith Mara Gutman, *Lewis W. Hine and the American Social Conscience* (New York: Walker and Co., 1967), also Walter Rosenblum, Naomi Rosenblum, and Alan Trachtenberg, *America and Lewis Hine* (Millerton, NY: Aperture, 1977).

[22] Michael Sundell, "Golden Immigrants at the Door: Lewis Hine's Photographs of Ellis Island," *Social Text,* 16 (Winter, 1986-87); 170.

The concept of the museum was being reexamined at the same time that the Ellis Island – Statue of Liberty complex was conceived and realized. Andreas Huyssen explains that:

> The success of the museum may well be one of the salient symptoms of Western culture in the 1980's: ever more museums were planned and built as the practical corollary to the "end of everything" discourse. The planned obsolescence of consumer society found its counterpoint in a relentless museumania. The museum's role as site of an elitist conversation, a bastion of tradition and high culture gave way to the museum as mass medium, as a site of spectacular mise-en-scene and operatic exuberance.[23]

Within this context, the transformation of the Ellis Island immigration station into a museum affords a provocative instance of shifting paradigms as the concept of museum emerged as contested territory at the close of the twentieth century. The Ellis Island museum was clearly not conceived of as a "temple of the muses" where, removed from the imperatives of the mundane, visitors could contemplate themes in great depth and subsequently understand the conflicted relationship towards immigration that characterized the attitude of many Americans at the turn of the century. As Andreas Huyssen notes, the reformation of the post-modern museum "has buried the museum as temple for the muses in order to resurrect it as a hybrid space somewhere between public fair and department store."[24]

The Ellis Island Immigration Museum provides a number of opportunities for visitors to see themselves as part of the story of immigration that the museum represents. Through ranger guided, self guided or audio tours visitors are invited to move from the ferries into the main building and up the stairs to the reception hall where immigrants were processed in what is referred to as the "line" inspection. Immigrants endured a process of medical inspection and

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[23] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge,1995),14.
[24] Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 15.

official questioning that took place in the great two story space of the registry room which has not been replicated in the museum. Conspicuously absent is perhaps the most significant feature of the space. The pipe rails and mesh fencing that formed pens and enclosures controlled the movements of immigrants as they arrived for the medical examination, the first in a number of inspections they faced before being passed on to their final destination, or being detained. These mechanisms of control and the surveillance of immigration officials communicated the message of the authority of the government of the United States over the process of immigration (Fig. 21).

It is at this point that the exhibition strategy shifts, as the restoration of the registry room to its 1918 appearance dislocates the visitor's experience from engagement to voyeurism (Fig. 22). Our opportunity to understand the processing of immigrants on Ellis Island, a procedure that effectively robbed immigrants of their autonomy and rendered them subject to the mechanisms of power enlisted by the United States government to achieve an expedient processing of immigrants, is truncated through the distancing effects of more conventional museum exhibitions. Museum goers thus identify with a simplified story of immigration, one that avoids the political context in which Ellis Island operated and which distinguishes it from other immigration stations.

The trope of countermemory advanced by French philosopher Michel Foucault is a useful paradigm for understanding the construction of the simplified message offered at Ellis Island and its success, as well as for dismantling the structure of the dominant narrative in the museum's exhibitions. In Foucault's construct, countermemory seeks to dismantle totalizing narratives by recording "the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality[,]"and

"cultivat[ing] the details and accidents that accompany every beginning,"[25] Countermemory looks to the past for the hidden histories that are lost in the dominant narrative and attempts to supply new perspectives on the past through the exploration of specific events and actions that lie buried in the dominant narrative. But it is important to understand that the concept that Foucault advances in countermemory is a rhetorical device that contains an inherent duality, and its application may in fact be used to advance contradictory aims.

For example, a quote from Fiorello LaGuardia's autobiography describing the experience of an Italian immigrant girl appears in an abridged version in the exhibition's wall text In describing the immigrant's medical exam in the exhibition "Through America's Gate" the wall text reads: "I could imagine the effect in this girl, who had always been carefully sheltered and had never been permitted to be in the company of a man alone, when a doctor suddenly rapped her on the knee, looked into her eyes, turned her on her back and tickled her spine to ascertain her reflexes. The child rebelled—and how!" Ending with an exclamation we get the sense that LaGuardia has described a spirited young woman whose healthy rebellion got her through an unusual encounter. However, this abridgement significantly distorts the meaning of LaGuardia's words. In fact the statement in his autobiography continues: "It was the cruelest case I ever witnessed on the island. In two weeks time that child was a raving maniac, although she had been sound and normal when she arrived on Ellis Island."[26] LaGuardia's entire statement speaks to the full complexity of the processing of immigrants on Ellis Island and reveals how the museum enlists an approach to constructing memory that relies on a particular

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[25] Michel Foucault, *Language, Countermemory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews,* Donald F. Bouchard, ed., Sherry Simon, tr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 139, 144, 150.

[26] LaGuardia quoted in Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924* (New York: BasciBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994), 72-73.

construction of LaGuardia's memory that supports its dominant narrative, selecting from the past as described by Foucault.

Similarly, oral histories and interviews have been selected as "singular events", "outside of the monotonous finality" both to help us identify with the story of immigration and to construct the preferred picture of the immigrants' experience on Ellis Island. Presented by the immigrants themselves, these stories help to "cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning" that Foucault claims for countermemory. But the oral history evidence introduced both in wall text and in recorded interviews with immigrants works to neutralize any questioning of the processing of immigrants. For instance, the presentation of immigration officials' attitudes towards the aliens is devised, in a clear attempt to create balance, by employing recorded opinions that contradict one another. In the exhibition "Through America's Gate" one oral testimony stating that Ellis Island officials were hostile and unsympathetic toward the new arrivals is countered by the adjacent recorded memory asserting that the staff was helpful and encouraging in their dealings with immigrants.

Through the American Family Immigration History Center visitors can contribute to the Ellis Island Oral History Project. By filling out a form which asks for biographical information, reasons for immigrating, details of the voyage, memories of seeing the Statue of Liberty and New York City for the first time, age of arrival at Ellis Island, memories of facilities and processing at Ellis Island, destination after Ellis Island and any other details, anecdotes, stories or memories, immigrants can contribute what they remember of their experience to the Ellis Island Oral History Project. The completed forms become part of the museum's oral history collection, available to researchers and the general public.[27] Among the numerous Ellis Island oral histories already collected and presented in books are many memories that contradict each

[27] The information is quoted from the Ellis Island Immigration Museum's Oral History Project form.

other and the message that the carefully constructed exhibition attempts to advance. For instance, the memories recorded in the oral histories collected by David M. Brownstone and Irene M. Franck in 1948 present a variety of contradictory impressions. Brownstone and Franck report that: "People sharply recall their reactions to the food at Ellis Island. It is variously described as wonderful and terrible, as interestingly diverse and institutional slop. The dining and food service facilities are called immaculately clean and unutterable filthy."[28] But oral histories, those presented throughout the exhibition spaces in wall text and audio clips, and those recorded in the American Family Immigration History Center as well as existing texts, present a challenge to the historical veracity of the museum.[29]

Historian John Bodnar is among a number of those who have begun to explore the ways in which collective memory is formed. Writing about oral histories in a special issue of *The Journal of American History* in March 1989, Bodnar analyzed interviews of workers and managers at the Studebaker Corporation automobile plant in South Bend, Indiana. Based on his research, Bodnar found that the presence of "narrative structures" gave meaning to an individual's memories. Bodnar asserts that

> Memory was a cognitive device by which historical actors sought to interpret the reality they had lived—and, it appears, they could never do so alone, without reference to a social context. I mean that the details they recalled were varied, but the themes to which they linked those details often represented the interests of powerful institutions as much as they did the interpretations of ordinary people.[30]

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[28]David M. Brownstone and Irene M. Franck and Douglass L. Brownstone, *Island of Hope, Island of Tears* (New York: Rawson, Wade Publishers, Inc., 1948), 179. The Brownstones collected oral histories well before the creation of the museum. Published in 1948, their work makes clear the fleeting and selective nature of memories not long after the occurrence of events.

[29] For more Ellis Island oral histories that help illuminate this issue see Peter M. Coan, *Ellis Island: In Their Own Words* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1997).

[30] John Bodnar, "Power and Memory in Oral History: Workers and Managers at Studebaker," *The Journal of American History* Vol. 75, No. 4 (March 1989); 1202.

Bodnar's research and his observations suggest that the trope of countermemory, when applied to interpreting oral histories, must be considered as a device that can be applied to work both to support and to disrupt totalizing narratives. The selection and presentation of specific oral histories engages Foucault's countermemory as a device for creating narratives as well as disrupting them.

Using a direct appeal to engage visitors in the story of immigration, the American Family Immigration History Center presents an opportunity for visitors to search ships' manifests from the years 1892-1924 for names of their forbearers who immigrated to the United States through Ellis Island. Advertising in the hand out available at the museum states that the center "[c]ontains ships' passenger records for arrival in the Port of New York..." and that over 3.5 million actual manifest pages are available with "[a]cess to pictures of over 800 ships, including info [sic] about the vessels' history." Visitors are invited to make use of a free 35 minute on line search for the names of their ancestors who may have entered the United States through Ellis Island. But the American Family Immigration History Center does not encourage users to distinguish among those immigrants listed on a ship's manifest that may actually have come through Ellis Island and those who, traveling in first and second class cabins, may well have been inspected and interrogated while still aboard ship and were not processed on Ellis Island. In effect, by entering the United States through Ellis Island immigrants had already sorted themselves by class. Some who had reason to believe that they might not pass the inspection at Ellis Island purchased second cabin accommodations, or if possible, first cabin, knowing that these passengers were subject to less scrutiny than steerage passengers. The issues of class among those entering the United States that determined whether an immigrant would pass through Ellis Island are ignored as the brochure exhorts visitors to

"Search 25 million records-Find your ancestors-Discover Immigration History-And much more!"[31]

Erica Rand observes that Ellis Island's American Family Immigration History Center is perhaps "no place for a naked guy."[32] Her reading of the suppression of gender issues in the exhibitions at Ellis Island provokes us to consider how much richer our understanding of the American immigrant experience might be if the stories presented at Ellis Island gave full consideration to the variety of ways in which individual sexual orientation and family relationships are really understood and lived rather than emphasizing the stereotypes of traditional nuclear and extended families. Rand thinks that:

> The American Family Immigration History Center is all about interesting personal stories: finding them through research, composing them for one's 'family history scrapbook.' Yet from the exemplars provided it appears that the 'American family' story is the one where the part about the uncle who used to be the aunt...somehow gets left out.[33]

Rand recounts the specific instance of Mary Johnson who entered Ellis Island crossed dressed as a man identifying himself as Frank Woodhull (Fig 23). Johnson/ Wood hull's sexual characteristics were discovered during the medical examination, she was photographed and the photograph was later archived at Ellis Island. Johnson's case was widely reported in New York news papers at the time, but receives little attention at Ellis Island today. Rand notes that Johnson/ Wood hull's photograph hangs from the ceiling in the Island's American Family Immigration History Center. But because the photo is reduced to a headshot, Rand argues that Johnson's complex sexuality has been deleted from the Ellis Island story. For Rand this is only one example of the many elisions that have flattened the presentation of the Ellis Island immigration experience in favor of presenting a more homogenized picture, one that is easily

[31] These quotes are from the brochure available at the information desk at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum.
[32] Erica Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham: The Duke University Press, 2005), 99.
[33] Erica Rand, *The Ellis Island Snow Globe* (Durham: The Duke University Press, 2005), 99.

digested by a broad audience looking for entertainment rather than provocation. The politics of representation in this instance are influenced by the sponsors of the Ellis Island Museum which affects the choice of images, where those images are displayed and how they are interpreted. As Rand has suggested the emphasis on conventional family structures, genealogy and straight sexuality is readily apparent to anyone with an eye attuned to reading for differences from the norm.

The Immigrant Wall of Honor (Fig. 24) invites everyone to support the museum financially and join the bandwagon of inclusiveness even though the person honored may have had no contact with Ellis Island. Furthering the perception of Ellis Island as an icon of immigration, the Wall of Honor is an artificial construct behind the main building that serves purposes of inclusiveness but in fact distracts from the veracity of the museum's historical documentation and distances the narrative presented at Ellis Island from the conflicts that characterize contemporary immigration issues by not acknowledging controversial issues that still disrupt the process of immigration for many. The brochure available at the museum's information desk tells visitors that "At first they came on ships and now they come by air..." and we are "invited to honor these people no matter when or how they came or through which port they entered. For a minimum contribution of one hundred and fifty dollars these names will be inscribed for posterity on The American Immigrant Wall of Honor."[34] Not only will the names appear on the Wall of Honor but donors will receive a certificate (additional copies can be ordered for an additional fee) that proclaims:

> The Statue of Liberty—Ellis Island Foundation, Inc. proudly presents this Official Certificate of Recognition in the American Immigrant Wall of Honor to officially certify that_____came to the United States of America from_____joining those courageous men and women who

[34] These quotes are taken directly from the brochure available at the museum's information desk, its title is "The American Immigrant Wall of Honor".

> came to this country in search of freedom, economic opportunity, and a future of hope for their families.[35]

This certificate and the wall itself raise the issue of the standards for accuracy and historical documentation at the museum. If the only criterion for inclusion of a name on the Wall of Honor is a monetary donation, and the Wall of Honor is part of the museum how are we to think critically about the information that is presented in the exhibitions? What standards are required for historical documentation in the museum? The issue has been muddled by the efforts at inclusiveness perpetuated in the museum's approach to the history of immigration.

As these findings suggest, by transforming Ellis Island into a tourist destination the story of immigration risks being overwhelmed by contemporaneous imperatives to actively engage visitors in an experience that entertains rather than provokes critical analysis, and perhaps more importantly, offer a message that appeals to a mass audience rather than striving for historical integrity. Through the strength of its symbolism and the power of its appeal to a mass audience Ellis Island has achieved the status of American icon, becoming a frequent point of reference for contemporary sites of immigration rather than a site significant for the development of mechanisms for processing the tide of immigrants to the United States around the turn of the century.

[35] This quote is taken from the certificate as it is reproduced in the brochure available at the Ellis Island Museum's information desk, its title is "The American Immigrant Wall of Honor".

Chapter II

The Federal Government at Ellis Island: Managing the Multitude

On a single day in 1907 a record number of 6,500 immigrants passed through the immigration facilities at Ellis Island, "each one of whom received some individual attention..."[36] What seemed like a tidal wave of humanity during the peak years of immigration, 1892 through 1924, challenged the government of the United States to devise procedures capable of dealing with the unprecedented number of aliens arriving from around the world. At Ellis Island the "line" inspection was developed to be a highly expedient means for subjecting immigrants to the gaze of a series of medical and immigration department professionals even as its mechanisms of inspection and surveillance asserted the authority of the United States government as the dominant agent in processing immigrants.

The federal government's role in enforcing immigration control at Ellis Island evolved in the absence of any models for processing large numbers of immigrants and in response to the requirements of increasingly restrictive legislation. Immigration formalities including customs control and medical inspections had previously been administered by individual states at ports

[36] The Ellis Island webpage is the source of these statistics, see http://www.ellisisland.org.

in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, Miami and San Francisco. Facilities for processing immigrants had been provided by these local jurisdictions, or in some instances by steamship and railroad companies; in a few situations immigration formalities were carried out entirely onboard ship. Following the Immigration Act of 1891, however, the federal government assumed sole responsibility for processing immigrants and constructing facilities to accommodate them.

The first building on Ellis Island built specifically to process immigrants was opened in 1892 and destroyed by fire in 1897. The New York firm of Boring and Tilton was chosen to design a replacement, the red brick and limestone Beaux-arts style main building seen on the island today. Representative of a gateway to America with its recreation of a Roman triumphal arch on the main façade, the main building on Ellis Island embodies the authority of the United States government and the control of government bureaucracy over the immigration process and thus over the future of the immigrants themselves (Figs. 25 & 26). The formal logic and dogged axiality of Ellis Island's main building present a stark contrast to the contingent nature of the mechanisms of control experienced by the immigrants within.

Welcome to America

The limestone and red brick Beaux-arts facade of 1900 effectively masked the more irregular, evolving and even ad hoc nature of the inspection processes. The spaces of the registry room and even the baggage room on the first floor were reconfigured by commissioners on Ellis Island in their efforts to regulate the processing of immigrants according to the ever changing requirements of increasingly restrictive immigration legislation even as the facilities were pressed to accommodate record numbers of individuals. For

example, as the number of medical exclusions listed in the immigration acts of 1903 and 1907 mounted, part of the baggage hall on the main floor was commandeered for the initial inspection by Commissioner William Williams in his efforts to promote the most expedient inspection of immigrants by Public Health Service physicians. Williams reversed the traditional order of the medical inspection when he observed that the doctor doing line inspections could perform the eyelid eversion required for detection of trachoma twice as quickly as the doctor doing the general inspection and questioning each immigrant. With one doctor examining eyelids on two lines instead of one, four inspection lines could be processed by the same number of medical personnel as had performed inspections on two lines (Figs. 27 & 28).

But for most immigrants the ordeal of the inspection began as they were suspended in the indeterminate space of the stairway from the first floor baggage room to the second floor registry room. New arrivals climbed the stairway under the gaze of Public Health Service physicians, unaware that mounting the stairway itself constituted a form of examination (Fig. 29). The stairway at the east end of Ellis Island's main building functioned like the neck of a funnel, regulating the flow of bodies and slowing the rate of ascent so that physicians positioned at the top of the stairs could observe a few individuals at a time. Public Health Service physicians were looking for symptoms of lameness, deformity, hernia, shortness of breath and coughing that might indicate conditions that either mandated exclusion of the immigrant, or required a more thorough medical examination.

For the immigrant the experience was fraught with ambiguity and complexity. After weeks in the steerage compartment of a steamship in the company of hundreds of strangers, immigrants were now being scrutinized as individual. Their bodies were inspected for signs of physical and mental conditions that might mean exclusion. Subsequently immigrants were

questioned about issues of a legal, political or moral nature that mandated debarment. After being transported over thousands of miles of ocean by ship, upon arrival at Ellis Island immigrants had to manage the next few yards towards their goal under their own power, in a liminal space, and with no guaranteed outcome. Ascending the stairs from the baggage room, immigrants moved upward in pursuit of the moment when their inspection card would be stamped and they would be allowed to enter the United States. Emerging from below into the great two story space of the registry room, however, did not mean gaining entry to the United States; rather, at the top of the stairs immigrants encountered the mechanisms of control enlisted by immigration officials to facilitate processing the multitude of immigrants.

The processing of immigrants depended on the notion of surveillance as a means of control that resonates with the nuances of Foucault's heterotopia, a subtle concept of being in the space and the power of institutions, seen or unseen. Characteristic of Foucault's heterotopia is "a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time. Usually one does not go into a heterotopian location by one's own will. Either one is forced, as in the case of the barracks or the prison, or one must submit to rites of purification. One can only enter by special permission and after one has completed a certain number of gestures." [37] The immigrants' movement through the main building on Ellis Island was a progression through a Foucault-like maze of heterotopian spaces. As immigrants navigated the stairs and encountered the pipe rail alleys and passages that controlled the space of the registry room, they were constantly under the surveillance of the institution "seen or unseen," in the form of Public Health Service physicians and immigration officials.

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[37] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in cultural theory,* Neil Leach,ed. (New York: Routlege, 1997), 355. Foucault's concepts of institutional surveillance are relevant here, more the heterotpia than the panopticon but there are many applications of his theory that could be cited.

At the top of the stairs submitting to the power of the institution became a physical reality. The immigrants' first encounter was with the "eye men," made infamous by their use of button hooks or bare fingers to evert the immigrants' eyelids in a brief but painful examination for trachoma (Fig. 30). Immigrants were then handed stamped medical inspection cards that they invariably scrutinized, giving the doctors an idea of whether the individual's eyesight was normal. Doctors quickly checked the immigrant for other signs of disease and deformity; immigrants' fingernails and scalps were examined for favus and lice, after which men were sent along one line as women and children entered a separate alley. As the immigrant approached the next doctor a quick glance from head to foot usually spotted conditions such as flat feet, lameness, and stiffness of hip, ankle, knee or other bodily deformation. Pipe railings forced immigrants to take a right hand turn so that profile and posture could be studied (Fig. 31). Historian Alan Kraut asserts that "Each immigrant might be required to turn the head so that facial expressions could be studied. Certain expressions were believed by physicians to indicate mental illness or insufficiency."[38] Ellis Island physician Victor Safford stated that doctors liked to have immigrants "make two right angle turns, the scheme served to bring the light on both sides of a passenger's face. The turns also helped bring out imperfections in muscular coordination."[39] As the immigrant passed by the doctor would note gait and attitude, and the rear view would reveal deformity of the spine.[40] Further inspection for deformation of

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[38] Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924* (New York: BasicBooks, A Dvision of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994), 54.
[39] Quoted in Lorie Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 32.
[40] Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers, Gene, Germs, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York: Basic Books, A Division of Harper Collins Publisher, Inc., 1994), 54. Other descriptions of the medical inspections can be found in Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate, A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), and Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985).

hands or paralysis as well as inspection of the head and neck for goiter, enlarged glands and scars rounded out the preliminary visual inspection.

The paradigm of power promulgated by Michel Foucault is an appropriate means for decoding the immigrant medical examination as it was implemented at Ellis Island, where from the time they left ports of debarkation until they arrived in America, immigrants could exercise very little autonomy. The concept of mechanisms of control explored by Foucault asserts that when talking about the use of power, "It is always the body that is at issue...the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission." Foucault insists that "power relations have an immediate hold upon [the body]." "They invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs." For agents of the United States immigration service

> [T[he body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body. This subjection is not only obtained by the instruments of violence or ideology...it may be calculated, organized, technically thought out; it may be subtle, make use neither of weapons nor of terror and yet remain of a physical order.[41]

Those immigrants turned aside from the line were directed to fenced enclosures around the great hall where more thorough medical inspections took place. Although separated by gender, immigrants were still subject to public scrutiny in the secondary exam. Reflecting on the process as an adult, Enid Griffiths Jones, who passed through Ellis Island at age ten remembers that "we went into this big, like an open room, and there were a couple of doctors there, and then they tell you, 'Strip.' And my mother had never, ever undressed in front of us. In those days nobody ever would... and it was all these others, all nationalities, all people

[41] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 25-26.

there."[42] The public nature of the examinations as well as the presence of enclosures and iron railed passageways were the constant, visible reminders of the presence of the United States government. The public setting communicated the federal government's power over the immigrant in a manner easily perceived by those whose language or culture might otherwise prove an impediment to understanding. Ellis Island physician Dr. Alfred C. Reed, outspoken and assured, reported that "in all the manifold and endless details that make up the immigration plant there is system, silent watchful, swift, efficient."[43]

An immigrant who passed the medical inspection successfully would proceed to be questioned by immigration officials who included the medical certificate with any other pertinent information such as the immigrant's sponsors and financial status, required for admitting the immigrant. In addition, immigrants were asked detailed questions about their country of origin, occupation, marital status, relatives already in this country, and whether they in fact had enough money to ensure that they could maintain their livelihood until they found employment.

The public nature of the immigrants' inspection and its status as a spectacle for visitors to Ellis Island served to communicate and reinforce the presence and power of the United States government. Amy Fairchild points out that: "Discipline was achieved through immersion in a particular set of ritualized and ordered set of motions, waiting in line, moving forward, stepping up to the inspector, answering questions and moving forward again. It is significant that immigrants not only endured the line inspection in an open, public setting, but also

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[42] Quoted in Amy L. Fairchild, Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Labor Force (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 64.
[43] Dr. Alfred C. Reed, "The Medical Side of Immigration." *Popular Science Monthly* (April, 1913).

witnessed the inspection process as it was enacted on others."[44] The power to reject those who were not judged fit for entry demonstrated for all to see the government's strength. Foucault's paradigms of power effectively inscribed the dominion of the United States government over the body of the immigrant on Ellis Island.[45]

William Williams and the Progressive Imperative

Inscribed in the mechanisms for controlling and processing immigrants at Ellis Island such as the line inspection, were Progressive era notions of scientific management that had been incorporated in American factories of the current industrial age. We don't know for certain whether, as commissioner of Ellis Island, William Williams intentionally applied some of the techniques of industrial management that characterized current thinking to the means of processing immigrants. However it is probable that Williams was well aware of the concepts of such individuals as Frederick Taylor and saw their efficacy and applicability to Ellis Island.[46] Williams's efforts to bring efficiency and regularity to the inspection of large numbers of immigrant bodies incorporated the division of tasks that lay behind the assembly line. As Siegfried Giedion explained in *Mechanization Takes Command,* "[m]echanization, as envisaged and realized in our epoch, is the end product of a rationalistic view of the world. Mechanizing production means dissecting work into its component operations[.]"[47] Breaking down the task of the medical inspection to discreet operations each carried out by a different doctor aided Williams in achieving the efficiency he sought and needed to make possible the

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[44] Amy L. Fairchild, Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Labor Force (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 68.
[45] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 34, 111.
[46] For a discussion of the importance of bureaucratic thought to the ordering of society along the workings of the factory and for principles of scientific management see, Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).
[47] Siegfried Giedion, *Mechanization Takes Command, a Contribution to Anonymous History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), 31.

processing of the record numbers of immigrants arriving on Ellis Island after the turn of the century.

Concepts of scientific expertise, bureaucratic management and industrial models of management demonstrated by the enforcement mechanisms of the line inspection carried out on Ellis Island had their basis in Progressive era beliefs in the efficacy of a government. Run in an expert and efficient manner, government could provide an antidote to the corruption of the political "machine" of the late nineteenth century. Corruption on Ellis Island became a chief concern of Theodore Roosevelt soon after he assumed office in 1901, and by April of 1902 he had appointed William H. Williams as the new commissioner with the intent of giving him a strong hand in cleaning up the myriad problems that had plagued the island since its opening (Fig. 32). Williams, a graduate of Yale with a law degree from Harvard, was a practicing lawyer in New York City at the time of his appointment. Under Williams cultural imperatives of the Progressive era were reified in administrative policies and procedures.

Rapidly establishing a reputation as a reformer in the spirit of Roosevelt's progressives, Williams was renegotiating contracts for food service, baggage handling and money exchange by June of 1902. His aggressive pursuit of corruption tolerated under the former commissioner angered the political interests served by the awarding of contracts, and caught the attention of the press. But Williams was ready for a fight with the corrupt concessionaires and ready to take on his critics; he relished the conflict and did not flinch from the notoriety that followed. To Roosevelt, Williams reported confidently:

> For the politicians to represent that I am discriminating against any class, and any steamship companies to represent that I am discriminating against them in any way, is nothing more or less than a contemptible lie. This office has been run in the past largely in the interests of the restaurant privilege holder, and partly in the interest of some steamship companies, who have been violating our statutes with impunity. This office is

> now being run in the Government's interest. The change sufficiently explains the hostile attitude of the politicians and the steamship companies.[48]

Williams was not only ready to tackle corruption, he also took the role of the government further in interpreting the laws for excluding immigrants than it had been in the past. Williams's concern with implementation of the law became, for Williams the lawyer, a concern with interpretation of the law as well. Personally endorsing many Progressive notions, Williams enjoyed the support of the Immigration Restriction League and exercised the wide latitude extended to the immigration officials by the government. Historian Michael C. LeMay's explains that: "[t]he creation of a federal immigration bureaucracy was especially important in that the Supreme Court tended to defer to those administrative officers all the power granted Congress over immigration matters. By the mid-1890s, those immigration officers could and did operate with fairly wide latitude, and their actions reflected the growing racist ideas of the period."[49] Williams's administration of Ellis Island is thus situated within the shift to a more powerful and pervasive governmental presence in the lives of all Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century.

For example, although the immigration law of 1893 required that all passengers be listed on the ship's manifest and pass through immigration formalities, in practice the tradition of exempting first and second class cabin passengers from strict adherence to the inspection procedures required by immigration laws continued after enactment of the law because "[i]t was considered a great annoyance to bother cabin passengers with the highly personal questions needed to fill out and later check the detailed manifests."[50] But Williams insisted on

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[48] William Williams Papers, New York Public Library.

[49] Michael C. LeMay, *From Dutch Door to Open Door, An Analysis of U. S. Immigration Policy Since 1820* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 59.

[50] Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate, A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 91.

compliance with the law by all of those entering the United States, first and second class cabin passengers as well as those from steerage.

When protest against Williams's new policies erupted, his superiors in Washington backed his stance, declaring that: "This bureau has always held that it is as necessary for cabin passengers to satisfy the immigration officer of their right to land as it is to comply with the customs law."[51] But the powerful interests of the steamship companies intervened, and the feeling that it was insulting to "the better class" of passengers to be bothered with the intrusive questions required by law prevailed. Williams was overruled and he and his superiors in Washington came to an understanding that a while a "literal" interpretation of the law should apply to steerage passengers, a "reasonable" compliance was sufficient for cabin class passengers. Williams may have had additional motivations, however. It was widely known that traveling by second class cabin had become a means for immigrants who had reason to think that they might be detained to attempt to evade the inspectors, and inspection of second cabin passengers thus resulted in a number of detentions that might have otherwise passed undetected.

With the zeal of Roosevelt's Progressive era reformers Williams developed mechanisms for processing large numbers of immigrants that reflected the belief in science and bureaucratic management that typified Progressive era idealists. Initiated by Commissioner Williams in 1903, the double line inspection not only improved the efficiency of the line inspection, it also became an effective way to spot more cases of disease, trachoma in particular. The surgeon-general at Ellis Island reported that "it is quite possible that a number of aliens suffering from excludable disease, especially trachoma, might have been overlooked, but for the double line

[51] Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate, A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 92, 93.

referred to, and the time afforded thereby for more careful examination especially the turning of all eyelids..."[52] With two doctors to process the line of immigrants each had more time to conduct a thorough medical inspection and, as Surgeon-General Stoner's comments reflect, the more thorough exam resulted in the detection of more cases of excludable diseases.

In 1903 immigration services were moved from the Treasury Department to the newly created Department of Commerce and Labor. "The 1903 act also strengthened the organization and structure of the administrative authority by giving the Commissioner-General of Immigration greater control over personnel and activities involved in the machinery of enforcement." As Commissioner at the Port of New York, Williams took the procedures of the line inspection further than before. In helping draft the 1903 immigration act he further restricted immigration by adding to the categories of exclusion and also by expanding the powers of enforcement of the commissioner of immigration.[53]

The Supreme Court had ruled in 1903 that the constitution did not grant foreigners a right to enter the Unites States, [54]and immigrants had no status within the American legal system while they were on Ellis Island. William Williams, commissioner on Ellis Island from 1902 until 1905 and again from 1909 through 1914, expressed the opinion that he was "not one of those who think that the poor and oppressed of Europe should be welcomed here merely because they may desire to come or selfish transportation agents may succeed in inducing them

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[52] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 589. By 1917 there was class C, not requiring debarment.

[53] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* Vol. I (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 41-42. See also Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 102.

[54] Michael C. LeMay, *From Dutch Door to Open Door, An Analysis of U. S. Immigration Policy Since 1820 (*New York: Praeger, 1987), 58. LeMay also tells us that: "In 1894, Congress enhanced the authority of the Treasury Department by making its decisions final, subject only to appeal to the Secretary of the Treasury. This action essentially prevented the Chinese immigrant (and later, others as well) from exercising a right to redress through the courts."

to do so."[55] Those denied entry could appeal their cases to a Board of Special Inquiry, and if denied there, subsequent appeal could be made to the commissioner on the island. At these hearings friends or relatives were permitted testify to support the immigrants appeal. The immigrant's final opportunity for appeal was to the commissioner-general in Washington, D. C. where legal counsel could be present, but in fact few decisions rendered on Ellis Island were overturned in Washington.

The law of 1903 also articulated more excludable classes of disease. Excluded were "idiots, insane persons, epileptics, and persons who have been insane within five years previous; persons who have had two or more attacks at any time previously, paupers; persons likely to become a public charge; professional beggars; persons afflicted with a loathsome or with a contagious disease...[56] As a response to these strictures Williams initiated more intrusive forms of medical inspection. In the spring and summer of 1903 he implemented an order that required all unmarried males to be stripped of their clothing (Fig. 33) in order "to determine by such examination whether syphilis or any form of venereal disease exists...among arriving immigrants," and whether they were "physically unsound in any particular way which is unlikely to render them public charges."[57] In spite of Williams's aggressive approach only a small number of cases of venereal disease were actually discovered and the inspections were discontinued under Surgeon George Stoner whose decision was supported by the United States Surgeon-General.[58]

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[55] William Williams Papers, New York Public Library.
[56] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. I (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 41.
[57] Williams, *Annual Report of the Commissioner General of Immigration,* 1903, 68, 71. Quoted in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 586.
[58] in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 586

Williams found a solid basis of support among members of the Immigration Restriction League. League members applauded his strict interpretation of the vaguely worded sections of immigration law requiring debarment of those who might become a public charge. He regularly received letters from Robert De Courcy Ward of Harvard University advancing the support of the League for Williams's work on Ellis Island. Letters also came from Joseph Lee, Prescott Hall, Henry Cabot Lodge and others in the Boston based Immigration Restriction League.

Williams himself was outspoken on the issues of immigration restriction. In his speech to Princeton seniors in November of 1904 Williams was not hesitant about expressing his personal beliefs. Referring to new legislation to limit immigration Williams declared:

> Laws cannot be enacted with reference to human beings as easily as they can be with reference to merchandise. The solution of the problem would not be difficult were it possible to legislate directly against the races which are sending undesirable immigrants. This is the plan which was pursued in reference to the Chinese, but serious international complications would follow any attempt to pursue a similar policy toward one of the nations of Europe. It will, therefore, be necessary to try and do by indirection what cannot be done directly.
>
> I am not one of those who think that the poor and oppressed of Europe should be welcomed here merely because they may desire to come or selfish transportation agents may succeed in inducing them to do so. The American standard of living is much higher than that of any other country and should be maintained at its present height, but this cannot be done unless further intelligent checks be applied to the present stream of immigration.[59]

Williams's strong opinions and management style were not universally appreciated, and he was often attacked in the press. It was, however, a falling out with President Roosevelt over the political appointment of his assistant commissioner, a man named Murray who had been effective in promoting Roosevelt's career, that finally caused Williams to end his first term at Ellis Island in 1905.

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[59] William Williams papers, New York Public Library.

By 1906, the new commissioner, Robert Watchorn, could take pride in claiming that his bureau was "an efficient and depersonalized bureaucratic instrument of social policy."[60] The personal account of his friend Professor Edward Steiner, who crossed the Atlantic in steerage in 1906, noted that "we pass into passageways made by iron railings, in which only lately, through the intervention of a humane official, benches (Fig. 34) have been placed, upon which, closely crowded, we await our passing before the inspectors."[61] Immigrants who are marked PC (public charge) are sent before an official who sits in front of a barred gate behind which is the dreaded detention room...the immigrant finds himself in a jail like room often without knowing just why...Let no one believe that landing on the shores of 'The land of the free and the home of the brave' is a pleasant experience; it is a hard, harsh fact, surrounded by the grinding machinery of the law which sifts, picks, and chooses; admitting the fit and excluding the weak and helpless."[62]

In 1907 new immigration legislation represented the shift towards a qualitative basis for exclusion of those entering the United States. Excluded in this new law were "imbeciles, feeble-minded persons, persons with physical or mental defects which might effect their ability to earn a living, persons with tuberculosis, children unaccompanied by parents, persons who admitted commission of a crime before entry even when there had been no conviction..."[63] Even under the new law Watchorn was thought to be more "humane" than Williams, and the lower rate of debarred aliens seems to support that assessment.[64] Under Watchorn

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[60] Quoted in Michael C. LeMay, *From Dutch Door to Open Door, An Analysis of U. S. Immigration Policy Since 1820* (New York: Praeger, 1987), 66.
[61] Edward A. Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1906), 65.
[62] Edward A. Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1906), 68, 72.
[63] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. I (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 47.
[64] Watchorn's autobiography is not very informative about the operation of Ellis Island. For more on Watchorn see Pitkin, Thomas M. *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (*New* York: New York University Press, 1975).

approximately one percent of those coming to Ellis Island were debarred, whereas under Williams, especially in his second term, the percentage debarred rose to over three percent.[65]

Watchorn's leniency was not appreciated by everyone, and as the time approached for Roosevelt to confirm Watchorn's reappointment it was apparent that there was opposition to his continuing in office. As Watchorn himself recounts in his autobiography "Secretary Straus was greatly surprised to learn that there was any opposition against my being continued in office, though he knew only too well that the Immigration Restriction League of Boston was malevolently opposed to my administration and was vociferous in its demands for my retirement."[66]

Reappointed to the post of commissioner under President Taft in 1909, Williams would pursue the application of immigration law even more aggressively than in his previous term. Taft, known as a strict law enforcement man, was regarded as more conservative than Roosevelt, and Williams appears to have been a good fit with Taft and the increasingly forceful restrictionists. As Williams entered his second term as commissioner at Ellis Island in 1909 he again campaigned for more boarding officers, for inspection of second cabin passengers and greater scrutiny of first cabin passengers.[67] Williams also pressed Congress for appropriations for additional improvements including separate space for detention and inspection of passengers from the cabin classes.

During Williams's second term of office the baggage, dormitory and detention building to the north of the main building were completed, significantly relieving overcrowding in the

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[65] These statistics and the statement that Watchorn was thought to be more humane than Williams are found in the wall text at Ellis Island.

[66] Robert Watchorn, *The Autobiography of Robert Watchorn*, edited by Herbert Faulkner West (Oklahoma City: The Robert Watchorn Charities, Ltd., 1958, 149.

[67] Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate, A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 97.

main building. In spite of these improvements crowding continued: "From 1908-1910 dormitories consisted of two long, narrow rooms which ran along either side of the Registry Room mezzanine. Each room slept three hundred people in triple tiered bunks (much like steerage) that could be raised, converting the rooms into daytime waiting areas."[68] (Fig. 35) Additional space for detention of immigrants in a new building also meant that greater numbers of immigrants could be held for longer periods in order to carry out the more rigorous scrutiny of immigrants required by the restrictive legislation passed after the turn of the century.

Supporting the facilities directly related to care of immigrants, space was added to the main building itself to provide offices and administrative areas for Ellis Island employees. Ellis Island staff numbered approximately 350 in 1903 and grew to over 500 in later years. In addition to the Medical division there were inspectors in the Registry Division as well as Divisions of Information, Discharge, Deportation, Statistics, Treasury, Watchmen, Gatemen, Matrons and Engineers. Manifesting the Progressive era's faith in bureaucracy, professionalism and expertise, these various divisions were housed in additions to the main building.

Perhaps as important as the physical improvements that were taking shape on Ellis Island were the attitudes being shaped by Williams's strict enforcement of laws and his explicitly expressed personal attitude towards the immigrant. These were singled out for approval by Madison Grant, the author and friend of Theodore Roosevelt:

> I, and many of your friends, are following with great interest your effort to secure a proper enforcement of the laws and regulations of immigration, and I am writing you to offer my congratulations, and to express the hope that you will follow it up. No greater public benefit could come to this country than to have an issue raised which would bring to the attention of the country the lax character of the immigration laws.[69]

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[68] Colin Hamblin, *Ellis Island: The Official Souvenir Guide* (China: Aramark, 2006), 25.

[69] Letter congratulating Williams on re-appointment and on his strict interpretation of immigration laws, July 16, 1909 from Madison Grant, 11 Wall Street New York, William Williams papers, New York Public Library.

Grant was noted for his racist views and expressed his belief in eugenics in his books *The Passing of the Great Race: Or the Racial Basis of European History* and *The Conquest of a Continent, or the Expansion of the Races in America.*[70] Grant states "The fundamental question for this nation, as well as for the world at large, is for the community...to regulate births by depriving the unfit of the opportunity of leaving behind posterity of their own debased type... wherefore it is our duty, as exponents of that civilization, to substitute scientific control, that civilization may be maintained."[71]

Creating the Subject

A shift in the focus of American's fears about foreigners was taking shape at the turn of the century. Concerns about the economic effects of the influx of unskilled laborers abated as economic conditions improved. But that concern was replaced by a fear that certain classes or races of immigrants did not have the mental capability to become successfully assimilated into American society. Popular conceptions of "race" that emphasized culture and heredity in the nineteenth century shifted after the turn of the century to scientific notions that emphasized biology as the basis of such distinctions. The growing number of immigrants coming from countries in southern and eastern Europe became the focus of this xenophobia, and the nativist movement spread the alarm by warning against the threat of the "new" immigrant. However, a generation of immigrants had now become citizens and would not support candidates who proposed legislation with explicit restriction language. Therefore the 1903 and 1907 legislation cloaked its racial agendas in terms of mental functioning. Categories for idiots and imbeciles

[70] New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1921 and 1933.
[71] Madison Grant, *The Conquest of a Continent, or the Expansion of the Races in America* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons. 1933), 353-354.

appeared in these laws and Ellis Island became a testing ground for defining these categories and devising the means for testing immigrants who appeared to fit within the definition.

An article in *Survey* titled "Mental Examination of Immigrants" by Surgeon E. K. Sprague detailed the growing number of immigrants certified for insanity between 1902 and 1914. His report indicated that

> the number of aliens certified for insanity had increased form 4.8 per 100,000 in 1902 to 12.8 in 1913 and the number certified for mental defects had risen from 5.1 per 100,000 in 1902 to 50.8 in 1913. Nearly 100 mental certificates were issued per month in 1913 and early 1914, and it was expected that the certificates for mental defectives would exceed 1,000 in 1914.[72]

As commissioner of Ellis Island Williams had a vested interest in the process of screening immigrants for mental deficiency. Writing on Oct 7, 1912 to assistant Secretary of Commerce and labor Benjamin S. Cable, Williams noted his compliance with a request to send documents showing the principle things done at Ellis Island by his administration. Williams enclosed a "Memorandum in Relation to Some of the Work Done at Ellis Island Under this Present Administration"

> When the present administration began (May, 1909) the execution of the law was a very lax one. The percentage of deportations was very low, low indeed (much less than ¾ of 1%) and immigrants obviously ineligible under the law were passing through Ellis Island....By September the beneficent results of a correct execution of the law had already become manifest and many ineligible immigrants were being left in Europe, which is as it should be...
> 2. IMMIGRANTS SUFFERING FROM MENTAL DEFECTS
> These usually transmit their mental disability to their descendants, many of whom become criminals as well as burdens on public institutions. The State of New York is perhaps the greatest sufferer in this regard. To all of these matters this office has called attention in no uncertain terms so as to arouse Congress to the seriousness of the situation and induce it to increase

[72]Quoted in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 614-15.

> the appropriations with a view to creating as efficient a medical inspection as possible..... Six additional Marine Hospital surgeons are to be sent at once to Ellis Island. To arouse Congress to the importance of a matter of this sort is not easy, but it is not the fault of this office if it is not done.[73]

Williams's interest in mental defects and its consequences was not limited to his administration of Ellis Island. On November 14, 1912 he delivered an address before the Mental Hygiene Congress that won high praise from members of the Restriction League of Boston among others. Prescott Hall, one of the League's founders, wrote to Williams on March 22, 1912, thanking Williams for a copy of his speech:

> Thanks for your admirable address before the Mental Hygiene Conference. I hope the conference will result in some good. The state officials are hard to get going for practical results, but they seem to be awake at last. We have been at them for a long time.[74]

Letters from League members Robert De Courcy Ward and Ormsby McHarg also praised his address (he sent them copies). Writing on letter head from his office at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass, on November 22, 1912 Ward asks Williams whether "under any circumstances, you would stay in your present position after your present term expires? I can assure you that there are a lot of us who will put our shoulders to the wheel to keep you there."[75] Perhaps spurred by these expressions of support, the examination of immigrants for mental defects received increasing attention in 1913-1914 as Williams completed his second term as commissioner.

However, not everyone was pleased with the harsh reality of Williams's approach to the interpretation of immigration laws. First hand accounts of the line inspection abound, their tone reflecting either the relatively expedient processing that the majority of immigrants experienced or else the anxiety experienced by the roughly twenty percent of all immigrants

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[73] William Williams papers, New York Public Library.

[74] Letter from Prescott F. Hall, Attorney and Counsellor [sic] at Law11 Pemberton Square, Boston dated March 22, 1912. William Williams papers, New York Public Library.

[75] William Williams papers, New York Public Library.

who were detained for further questioning or medical examination. Peter Messenholler's essay translates the record of Arthur Holitscher, a Hungarian-Jewish journalist who

> vividly described the bewilderment of the detainees who, often along with criminals and lunatics, were sent to 'iron-barred rooms, hallways, and endless corridors which immediately reminded me of Chicago's slaughter houses. None of these corridors led to America....they led back to the misery of the Old World. Distress and misery prevail in all of these rooms. This is Ellis Island—the island of pain, the island of final judgment, of abused patience, exposed fate, and the unjust avenger.'[76]

Especially interesting is Holitscher's language describing the processes of an industrializing nation and likening them to the processing of immigrants at Ellis Island. The processing of immigrants in the registry room spared no one's feelings, and Holitscher described the experience of many of those who were detained as "exposed fate", a term that Foucault might love if he had invented it.

Williams was openly criticized in American papers as well as foreign language papers published in the United States that served immigrant communities. In 1911 and 1912 there were several instances of protest against Williams's enforcement of clauses excluding immigrants who were perceived to be unable to earn a living, and cases of children under the age of 16 who were excluded because they were not accompanied by a parent. An editorial in the German language paper *Morgen Journal* of April 17, 1911 shouted:

> "MORE PROTESTS AGINST CZARISM"
> The German press of the Country is United in its Demand for more Humane Treatment of Immigrants. A call in tones of thunder is heard throughout the ranks of the German press of the country: "Away with Czarism at Ellis Island". Almost every exchange received in the editorial offices of the *Morgen Journal* publishes an article in regard to immigration and a protest against the cruel treatment of the new arrivals at the Isle of Tears.

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[76] Holitscher quoted in Peter Mesenholler, *Augustus F. Sherman: Ellis Island Portraits, 1905-1920* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2005), 7.

Williams responded to all of these allegations by proclaiming and demonstrating the factual basis of his decision to debar potential immigrants largely on the basis of their inability to earn a living. He also left an ample record of the praise that his operation of Ellis Island won from official observers and from immigrants themselves.[77]

Williams invited his critics as well as his admirers to visit Ellis Island to see and judge for themselves the conditions on the island as a preemptive maneuver to preclude the criticism his administration attracted. He often had visitors from among his friends and acquaintances as well as official visitors, including presidents Roosevelt and Taft. In 1913, as he codified many procedures before leaving office, Williams wrote a small pamphlet of instructions for visitors; he opens with a general invitation: "This letter if presented at the Ellis Island ferry landing , Battery Park, New York City, will pass you and your friends to Ellis Island on any week day you may wish to come." With the further stipulation that "Groups or classes of more than ten children under twelve will not be admitted to Ellis Island on Saturdays." Once at Ellis Island visitors were instructed to "proceed up two flights of stairs to the gallery above the main floor. On the latter the immigrants undergo inspection and on some days as many a five thousand pass down in lines. For information as to the processes for inspection, see the explanatory typewritten statements posted at the railing at both ends of the gallery. The latter is lined with dormitories which may be inspected." Other rooms that are mentioned for visitors' inspection are the immigrants' dining room, other dormitory rooms, the railroad rooms, the information division and the "kissing post" where immigrants are met by friends.[78]

The mezzanine overlooking the registry room gave access to a series of auxiliary spaces for accommodating immigrants and also afforded a means of surveillance both for immigration

[77] Williams's papers are laced with both the critical comments appearing in the press and his rebuttals, see the William Williams Papers, New York Public Library.
[78] Copy of "Instructions to Visitors at Ellis Island," Library of the Ellis Island Museum.

The mezzanine overlooking the registry room gave access to a series of auxiliary spaces for accommodating immigrants and also afforded a means of surveillance both for immigration officials and for visitors (Fig. 36). As a member of the National Conference on Immigration Professor Edward A. Steiner was among the guests of the commissioner when he witnessed the landing of a ship load of immigrants. As Steiner described the experience:

> We stood in the visitor's gallery and looked down upon a hall divided and subdivided by the cold iron railings. Many of the visitors were beginning to hold their noses in anticipation of the stenches which would come with these foreigners, and we were ready to be shocked by the horrors of steerage.[79]

Commissioner Williams welcomed visitors such as Steiner, and promoted the openness of his administration in his efforts to assure critics that immigrants were treated fairly and within the letter of the law. Philip Cowen, son of Jewish immigrants who became an inspector at Ellis Island recounts "Twenty-five years ago Ellis Island was worth visiting, not 'to see the animals,' as some people went, but to note the kindly care with which the immigrant was treated, and to observe at close range the future builders of America."[80]

In effect Williams's open invitation extended Foucault's concept of surveillance as a mechanism of control in which the agents of the institution achieve and exercise power through surveillance, to visitors who participated in the process of creating the immigrant as subject. Williams was, in effect, offering visitors the opportunity to perceive immigrants as "other," distanced and different from themselves. By strolling the mezzanine and glimpsing the dormitory spaces visitors exercised a degree of autonomy that distinguished them from the multitudes in the registry room below.

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[79]Edward A. Steiner, *On the Trail of the Immigrant* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1906), 73.
[80] Quoted in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 245.

It was not until immigrants reached the west end of the registry room and descended the "stairs of separation" that their passage through the heterotopia of the registry room was complete. For eighty percent of those arriving on Ellis Island that meant descending the stairs to be met by relatives at the "kissing post" or moving toward the railroad ticket office to purchase passage for the next leg of their journey. But for twenty percent of immigrants the "stairs of separation"[81] led to rooms where they awaited further examination, detention or immediate return to their ports of origin. Over the life of the Ellis Island Immigration Station the number of those debarred averaged only two percent of the total who came to Ellis Island as immigrants. For the ninety eight percent who entered the Unites States the presence of the government as an agent in their lives had just begun. The administration of the immigration process on Ellis Island was a symptom of the expanding bureaucratization of the federal government at this significant juncture in the nation's history.

[81] See figure 28 for a plan showing location of the stairs at the east and west ends of the main building.

Chapter III

The Hospital: Silent Partner at Ellis Island

The medical inspection and treatment of immigrants on Ellis Island represented a negotiation between contemporaneous cultural beliefs and prejudices, and the scientific imperatives that characterized the turn of the century. Underlying cultural anxieties that informed attitudes towards immigrants were fueled by an on-going association between immigrants and disease, and the medical examination on Ellis Island was viewed as an essential part of the defense of this nation from immigrant-borne contagion. After the turn of the century the perception of immigrants as vectors of disease grew to encompass conditions that were considered psychological or mental, as well as physical. The belief that certain mental conditions were hereditary and could be associated with specific races or ethnicities exacerbated the growing xenophobia of the pre-World War I decades. In response to these concerns, Ellis Island's role in processing immigrants expanded to include what was considered

to be state of the art testing and treatment for a range of psychological and medical conditions.[82]

Requirements for greater scrutiny of immigrants under increasingly restrictive laws intersected with new developments in medical knowledge to advance the construction of state of the art medical facilities on Ellis Island. The design of the new hospital buildings on Islands 2 and 3 embody the Progressive era's belief in the authority of science that characterized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United States. These buildings are important signifiers, their design and construction foregrounding important aspects of Ellis Island's history. However, the cultural and scientific beliefs and prejudices that drove medical and mental testing and thus the necessity for the hospital buildings on Ellis Island resist a comfortable integration with the museum's dominant narrative and remain silent in the museum's exhibitions. Only recently have these buildings become the subject of sufficient interest to warrant their consideration as evidence in the larger story of immigration through Ellis Island.

Modern Facilities and the Best Care

In March of 1902 the general hospital at Ellis Island was complete (Fig. 37), but even before its opening Surgeon George W. Stoner, head of the Medical Division at Ellis Island warned that it would not be large enough, and contracts for care of aliens currently in force at Long Island College Hospital and with the New York City Health Department were extended. Upon taking his post in 1902 Commissioner Williams lobbied for more medical facilities as well as improvements to existing buildings on Ellis Island. Even as patients were moved into

[82] See especially Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007). Alan Kraut has also written about the mental testing of immigrants.

the new hospital building Williams was writing to Washington to press his case for the inadequacy of the hospital.[83]

Williams was not hesitant about voicing his personal point of view regarding medical scrutiny of aliens wishing to enter the United States. In a speech titled "Our Immigration Laws, What they accomplish & Wherein they Fail" Williams told his audience:

> An enduring commonwealth must of necessity guard the health of its citizens and protect itself against undesirable additions from without... It goes without saying that they [the laws] could not be less severe without exposing us to real danger...It calls for even more careful medical examination than it is possible with the existing facilities to give. ...The Ellis Island plant is already a very large one, but it will have to be increased still further if we are to detect all physically and mentally defective immigrants.[84]

The need for more and better medical facilities grew not only out of concern for humane treatment of the immigrants but from the concern of many like Williams who saw the necessity of protecting Americans from contagious diseases carried by the immigrants entering America at the turn of the century.

First opened in 1903 and expanded in 1905, the General Hospital on Island No. 2 could accommodate 275 patients, making it several times larger than the size of the typical city hospital of the period (Figs. 38 & 39). The design of the hospital building makes a bow to the Beaux-arts design of the main building directly across the ferry slip. The outward symmetry and massing are classical in their appearance and detail. However, the centrality and axiality implied by the hospital's exterior is contradicted by the arrangement of interior spaces as the imperatives of medical knowledge dictated interior spaces rather than the imperatives of architectural design. Especially notable here is the controlled access to the hospital from a

[83] William Williams papers, New York Public Library.
[84] William Williams papers, New York Public Library.

single corridor connecting the hospital to the main building at the head of the ferry slip. This access point serves to regulate who may enter the hospital and where they may go. A single corridor leads through the pavilions, its direction contradicting the implied centering on the facades of the building. The central mass of the hospital building mirrors the central arched opening of the main building across the ferry slip. The hospital functions, however, do not respond to the hierarchy implied by that centering.

Along the spine of the corridor separate wards were provided for men, women and children. Additional facilities included four operating rooms, a delivery room and a morgue. [85] Equipped with a refrigerator for eight cadavers and an autopsy amphitheater, the Ellis Island Hospital rivaled the private hospitals in New York City in the scope and quality of facilities provided. The autopsy amphitheater attracted visiting physicians and medical students from throughout the region as well as foreign physicians interested in the opportunity to study the pathology of a variety of exotic diseases and the advanced medical practices in the modern facilities on Ellis Island.[86]

As the practice of certifying disease through laboratory results became more important in the first few decades of the twentieth century Ellis Island's state of the art facilities were pressed to play a larger role in certifying the presence of excludable diseases. Laboratory techniques and practices were enlisted by physicians of the Public Health Service as a means of certifying the presence of specific diseases and conditions and also enhancing their professional

[85] Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 7.
[86] Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 9.

status.[87] For example, laboratory test results were required for medical certification of the presence of syphilis and gonorrhea.[88]

The hospital's laboratory was staffed twenty four hours a day by a medical officer and an intern whose duties also included aiding the diagnostic requirements of the line inspection (Fig. 40). Laboratory work was essential, for example, in determining "the presence of carriers of cerebrospinal meningitis in the detention rooms..."[89] By 1910 chest X-rays and residue from immigrants' lungs which showed tubercle bacillus in laboratory cultures was scientific evidence that could be enlisted to debar an alien who was carrying tuberculosis. As early as 1891 immigrants suspected of being tubercular had been diagnosed through auscultation, that is studying the sounds in the lungs detected through the use stethoscope as the basis of diagnosis, but by 1910 "only a slide showing the tubercle bacillus in an immigrant's sputum was sufficient evidence to bar a newcomer for TB."[90]

Also with the aid of the laboratory a Wasserman test and microscopic examination of discharge were employed to diagnose syphilis and gonorrhea in immigrants with a degree of certainty not previously possible resulting in an increase in the numbers of those debarred for

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[87] Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Industrial Labor Force* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 84. Fairchild makes the case that the laboratory was incorporated into the medical régime at a later date because it did not advance the purposes of those who were relying on the medical gaze itself as a primary mechanism for detection of disease and disorder and above all of social control. I find the information she presents helpful but her arguments are clearly biased to support her thesis and thus she uses the evidence in a manner that I find cannot bear the weight of her assertions. For example Fairchild claims, on page 101, that "The laboratory as a diagnostic tool was slow in arriving at even the largest stations, reflecting the delicate balance between the social and the scientific..." In my opinion Fairchild's claim ignores the fact that Ellis Island relied on hospitals in New York City for treatment of many patients and the hospital buildings on Ellis Island were not complete until 1911. Under Commissioner Williams the use of the laboratory did increase significantly as the statistics Fairchild quotes on page 100 indicate. Williams was an outspoken champion of restricting immigration, especially from southern and eastern Europe. Thus there was a strong incentive to use the laboratory to certify disease under his administration.

[88] Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 67.

[89] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 617.

[90] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History* Vol. 12, No.4 (Winter, 1988); 384.

venereal diseases. The laboratory, equipped to identify the variety of rare diseases that a facility such as Ellis Island encountered was considered "a model of advanced medicine...second to none."[91] Thus the laboratory became an essential element in efforts to bring the certainty of modern science into the service of correct diagnosis of disease and aid in its treatment. Its use reflected the shifting balance between the social and the scientific, between the normative functions of laboratory testing and the exclusionary uses to which laboratory results could be put at Ellis Island.

Along with the construction of a hospital on Ellis Island in 1903 came the codification of the terms of medical inspection and diagnosis. The *Book of Instructions for the Medical Inspection of Immigrants* published by the United States Public Health Service in 1903, attempted to categorize excludable diseases more systematically than ever before.[92] The *Book...* listed contagious diseases in two categories: In category "A" were three groups 1. the most "dangerous contagious diseases" such as tuberculosis and trachoma, and 2. "loathsome diseases such as favus, syphilis, gonorrhea and leprosy, and 3. idiots and the insane. All of these conditions required mandatory exclusion of the immigrant. In category "B" were the "diseases and deformities which are likely to render a person unable to earn a living."[93] These included: hernia, heart disease, pregnancy, poor physique, rheumatism, nervous affliction, malignant diseases, deformities, senility, poor eyesight and general considerations.[94]

The medical inspection of immigrants on Ellis Island came to require not only the facilities of a general hospital, but a contagious disease hospital and a psychiatric pavilion as

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[91] Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 76..

[92] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History* Vol. 12, No. 4 (Winter, 1988); 390.

[93] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 652-660.

[94] Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924* (New York: BasicBooks, A Dvision of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994), 273-274.

well. By 1903 Commissioner Williams had succeeded in securing an appropriation to accommodate additional hospital space. Ellis Island, however, could not accommodate more buildings, and beginning in 1905 Islands No. 2 and No. 3 were created from the tons of material excavated during the construction of the New York City subway system (Fig. 41).

The islands were situated according to the requirements put forth by the Surgeon General of the United States. Island No. 3, built to accommodate the infectious disease hospital was to be located precisely with "'an outside limit of 410 feet from the present island and with 200 feet of clear water space between the two islands, [the distance] would be amply sufficient to insure freedom from danger or contagion according to modern ideas of hospital construction.'"[95] Island No. 3 was complete and progress on the new contagious disease hospital was underway in 1907, but it was not until June of 1911 the buildings were ready to be occupied.

Equipped to provide the best possible care available at the time for a variety of diseases and afflictions, many of them seldom encountered in other hospitals in the United States, the Ellis Island hospital buildings were significant not only for the services they provided to the immigrants but as pioneering medical facilities. Design and construction of the contagious disease hospital on Ellis Island reflected the most up to date thinking on the transmission of diseases that had been promulgated in the germ theory formulated in Europe under Pasteur, List and Koch. With an autoclave capable of sterilizing not only mattresses but entire beds, its own laundry facilities, and separate kitchens for each hospital, precautions to prevent the transmission of contagious disease were among the most advanced in the United States. In the kitchens for example, "autosan" machines were used for cleaning dishes, and on Island No. 3

[95] Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 7.

dishes as well as utensils were not only put through a sterilizer but also not allowed to be removed from the island.[96] With completion of these buildings Ellis Island took the lead in treatment of certain contagious diseases in the United States.

The hospital buildings reflected the latest medical theories on treatment of contagious diseases; germ theory dictated the layout of the building and the spaces within. With its decentralized pavilions (Figs. 42 & 43), the contagious disease hospital represents a particular theory of contagion and control by isolation carried to its highest point before the appearance of modern antibiotics. In the design of separate wards staggered along a continuous corridor concepts of Beaux-arts planning have been abandoned. As in the general hospital access to the contagious disease hospital can be controlled at the points where the central corridor joins the passage linking it to the general hospital. There is no apparent attempt to develop a façade that responds to any exterior conditions, and in reality there are few opportunities to approach the contagious disease hospital from any vantage point that speaks of a front for this building. Formality in architectural expression is sacrificed to the demands of the spaces within.

The buildings on Island No. 3 held eighteen separate wards, each meant to house patients with a particular disease (Fig. 44). Separate wards were provided for patients suffering from measles, favus, whooping cough, diphtheria and scarlet fever; two wards each were dedicated to tuberculosis and trachoma patients.[97] Floor space per bed averaged 59 square feet and the size of each ward was determined according to health guide lines which dictated precise cubic foot requirements of air for each patient. Wards were designed with banks of

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[96] [96] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 617.

[96] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 642.

[97] Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 9.

windows which provided ventilation and light according to the most current medical theories, and cross contamination between wards was controlled by staggering door openings along the five hundred foot long central corridor. [98] (Fig. 45)

Contagious diseases associated with immigrants such as measles, scarlet fever, tuberculosis, favus, trachoma and diphtheria, as well as more exotic diseases brought by immigrants from every location in the world, all could be properly treated in the facilities available at Ellis Island after 1911. Writing in *Popular Science Monthly* in 1912, Dr. Alfred C. Reed commented that: "A rare variety of diseases is seen. Patients literally from the farthest corners of the earth come together here. Rare tropical diseases, unusual internal disorders, strange skin lesions, as well as the more frequent cases of a busy general hospital present themselves here."[99] The Ellis Island general hospital and contagious disease hospitals constituted "one of the largest hospital complexes to be built in a single campaign in the United States in the first decades of this century."[100]

Calibrating Characteristics of the "New" Immigrant

The traditional association of immigrants and disease included not only those diseases known to be contagious and those considered "loathsome," but by the late nineteenth century the emerging fields of psychology and genetics brought new areas of concern, especially for those who were alarmed about the degradation of the American gene pool by the influx of foreigners predominantly from southern and eastern Europe. As early as 1890 Dr. John Hamilton of the United States Public Health Service had testified before Congress spreading

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[98] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 639-649.
[99] Dr. Alfred C. Reed, "Going Through Ellis Island," *Popular Science Monthly* LXXXII, 11.
[100] Beyer Blinder Belle Anderson Notter Finegold Architects. *Ellis Island Statue of Liberty National Monument Historic Structures Report, Units 2, 3, and 4, Volume 4* (U. S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 9.

alarm about rates of insanity among the "new" immigrants. Quoted in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* Dr. Hamilton asserted that "there would be a diminution of one-third of the inmates in the government asylums" if immigrants who were classified as insane or became insane within one year of their arrival in the United States were to be returned to their country of origin. [101]

It was believed by some that specific "races" did not have the mental capability to become properly assimilated, and their genetic characteristics would degrade the American gene pool. Immigrants passing through the line inspection were being evaluated not only for their ability to be healthy participants in a rapidly urbanizing and industrializing nation, but also on their potential to become "100% Americanized". The notion that the mental status of immigrants could be assessed with certainty began to gain support after the turn of the century, and as the nascent field of psychology gathered adherents in the United States, the classification of mental conditions that could be considered grounds for debarring potential immigrants was reflected in the language of restrictive legislation.

By 1905 the process of evaluating the mental condition of immigrants was receiving serious attention from medical personnel on Ellis Island. Dr. Thomas W. Salmon, who later became an international mental health authority, prepared a study that found 59 immigrants at Ellis Island who were certified insane and debarred from entering the United States. By Dr. Salmon's calculation excluding these aliens had saved the United States $88,500 or "more than the entire cost of medical inspection at the station." Salmon's study justified the thinking that

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[101] Quoted in Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924." *Social Science History* Vol. 12, No. 4 (1988); 386.

there was a "remarkable rate of insanity which prevails in the most recent arrivals..."[102]

Salmon urged that in the line inspection:

> Every effort [be] made to pick out those whose appearance even remotely suggests the existence of mental diseases or the possession of a "psychopathic organization." If the manner seems unduly animated, apathetic, supercilious, or apprehensive, or if the expression is vacant or abstracted the immigrant is held and examined carefully. A tremor of the lips when the face is contorted during the eversion of the eyelids, a hint of negativism or retardation, an oddity of dress unequal pupils, or an unusual decoration worn on the clothing—any mark is sufficient to arouse suspicion. The existence of well-marked stigmata of degeneration always serves to detain the immigrant for further inspection and an examination into his mental condition.[103]

Salmon also argued that a psychopathic pavilion should be built in conjunction with the Ellis Island Hospital to deal with the increasing number of cases of mental disability and to segregate those under observation and those awaiting deportation by reason of insanity from the general medical population.

Designed with the assistance of Dr. Salmon, the new psychopathic pavilion was put into operation in 1907 under Commissioner Watchorn. The new pavilion was a two story facility considered a "model of modernity" in all respects. Open airy wards as well as locked wards with sound proofed walls enabled the psychiatric pavilion to be inconspicuously integrated into the overall hospital design. Dr. Salmon desired that "[e]very suggestion of the cell-like rooms which used to be thought necessary in hospitals for the insane should be studiously avoided in the furnishing of this pavilion."[104]

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[102] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 594.

[103] *Annual Report of the Surgeon-General of the Public Health and Marine-Hospital Service,* 1905, pp. 271-78, quoted in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 595.

[104] *Annual Report of the Surgeon-General of the Public Health and Marine Hospital Service,* 1905, cited in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985),

Immigrants turned off the line for suspected mental deficiency were held in the psychiatric pavilion for observation. The mental examination process typically utilized a number of different methods of screening and observation, took place over three days, and involved several physicians. Diagnosis of certain categories of mental deficiency mandated deportation thus the certainty of the diagnosis was critical to the immigrant's future and doctors on Ellis Island exercised due care in their attempts to verify mental deficiency. There were no known treatments or drugs at this period and the immigrants detained for mental conditions could not hope to be cured as those with some categories of contagious disease might.

United States Public Health Service physicians inspecting and caring for immigrants were also active agents in bringing advances in medical knowledge and practice to their work at Ellis Island. In response to increased concern with detection of mental abnormality among the immigrants at Ellis Island special medical officers were trained at the Government Hospital for the Insane in Washington, D. C. Special training was intended to "ensure a competent corps of alienists at Ellis Island..."[105] In 1907, Ellis Island's busiest year, the growing number of doctors with special training and the increase in the overall numbers of immigrants resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of aliens certified for mental defects. That number had risen from 62 to 355 since 1904, and the percentage of those certified that were actually deported had increased from 13 % to 28 %.[106]

In spite of advanced training for doctors in the field of mental health there was still great uncertainty around the proper diagnosis of mental deficiency, especially among those immigrants with little or no command of English and those lacking formal education. Under

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[105] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 597.
[106] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 600.

Williams, efforts to provide a quantifiable basis for mental conditions that might render an immigrant likely to become a public charge became an important concern at Ellis Island. Prominent psychologist Henry H. Goddard was brought to Ellis Island by Commissioner Williams in 1910 in order to implement a standardized process for testing the mental condition of aliens.[107] Goddard had provided the first English translation of the work of France's Alfred Binet, a pioneer in devising human intelligence tests. He had also been director of research for the Vineland, New Jersey Institute for Feebleminded Girls and Boys where he originated the terms "moron," "imbecile," and "idiot" for use in describing differing levels of mental impairment.[108] The terms "idiot" and "imbecile" appeared in immigration legislation in 1907, guaranteeing debarment.[109]

Goddard's intelligence test was administered following the initial line inspection to those immigrants deemed to be "feeble-minded" or suspected of being mentally impaired (Figs. 46 & 47). Historian Alan Kraut[110] describes the difficulties Goddard encountered in attempting to establish categories of mental deficiency:

> For seventy-five days in 1913, 35 Jews, 22 Hungarians, 50 Italians and 45 Russians were given the Binet (later Stanford-Binet) intelligence test. Of these Goddard found that 83% of the Jews, 87% of the Russians, 80% of the Hungarians, and 79% of the Italians were either feeble-minded or below the mental age of twelve. Over three fourths of the immigrants from these four major groups were morons by Goddard's definition. Somewhat

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[107] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History* 12, 4 (1988); 387. Also mentioned in Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 123 as well as in her documentary DVD. Conway asserts that Williams was responsible for bringing Goddard to Ellis Island but cites no source for her information while Kraut cites several sources for information on Goddard.

[108] Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 124. See also Kraut, *Germs Genes, and American Efficiency,* 387.

[109] The term idiot was introduced in 1891 and imbecile in 1907, see Unrau, 26, 47-48.

[110] Dr. Kraut is Professor of History at the American University in Washington, D. C. and the author of numerous articles and books dealing with American medical history and the history of immigration. He served on the Historic Committee during the restoration of Ellis Island and is currently its chair. His extensive knowledge of the process of creating the Ellis Island Immigration Museum combined with his knowledge of immigration history and medical history have been an invaluable aid in my understanding of this complex interaction.

> embarrassed by his findings, Goddard "corrected" his data...and still published figures suggesting that over half of the newcomers were morons.[111]

Goddard's results and methods of examination were viewed with skepticism among the physicians on Ellis Island. The consequences of a diagnosis of mental deficiency in an excludable category raised the stakes for intelligence testing on Ellis Island and physicians such as Dr. L. L. Williams, E. H. Mullan and E. K. Sprague voiced their concerns regarding the applicability of Goddard's tests, meant to be administered to school children of American and French backgrounds. Sprague defended the expertise of Public Health Service physicians with vigor, stating that using the Binet tests on immigrants on Ellis Island was "as sensible as to claim that with a single instrument any operation in surgery can be successfully performed."[112]

The difficulty of certifying immigrants' mental condition troubled many at Ellis Island, not just the doctors. New York's future mayor Fiorello LaGuardia worked as a translator on the island from 1907 through 1910. In describing the difficulty in evaluating the mental capabilities of those immigrants who did not speak English LaGuardia revealed:

> I always suffered greatly when I was assigned to interpret for the mental cases in the Ellis Island hospital. I felt then, and I feel the same today, that over fifty per cent of the deportations for alleged mental disease were unjustified. Many of these classified as mental cases were so classified because of ignorance on the part of the immigrants or the doctors and the inability of the doctors to understand the particular immigrant's norm, or standard...[113]

LaGuardia was not the only one touched and troubled by the plight of immigrants. Fortunately for many Dr. Howard Knox , serving as chief medical officer on Ellis Island from 1910 until 1916, approached the problem of testing mental capability of aliens in a manner which

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[111] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1988); 387.
[112] Quoted in Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers,1994), 269.
[113] Quoted in Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 249.

demonstrated greater understanding of human beings and their intelligence than did Goddard's test.

While Knox had no credentials in psychological testing he was cognizant of the fact that differences in language and cultural background posed a barrier to accurate assessment of intelligence among immigrants. Knox subsequently devised a number of tests that relied on skills other than language for their successful completion. For example, a wooden board with a variety of shapes cut from it was presented to the immigrant, and, much like solving a puzzle, the immigrant would replace the pieces in the proper location based on recognition of shape and size of the empty spaces (Fig. 48). A second test required the immigrant to repeat the sequence in which the doctor had touched a series of wooden cubes. Knox's examination methods eased some of the difficulties immigrants experienced in the mental examination but they did not achieve the greater degree of certainty that doctors were hoping for in the mental examination. Nevertheless the tests devised by Knox became standard tools in the diagnosis of mental capability on Ellis Island.[114]

Challenging the Medical Gaze

Medical inspections on Ellis Island represented a negotiation between the Progressive era's belief in scientific expertise and the experienced medical gaze, as physicians of the Pubic Health Service attempted to achieve a balance between the gaze of the experienced physicians and laboratory evidence in detecting and certifying the presence of specific excludable conditions. The efficacy of the "line" inspection was defended by Public Health Service physicians even as legislation began to demand laboratory tests to document the presence of

[114] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History* Vol. 12, No. 4 (1988); 387.

certain diseases such as tuberculosis and venereal disease. The "line" inspection relied on the experienced and expedient gaze of the physician in making an initial determination that would turn an immigrant off the line. Many experienced United States Health Service physicians were convinced that this means of diagnosis was as effective as a thorough medical exam. For example, Ellis Island physician Dr. Victor Safford believed that

> Defects, derangements and symptoms of disease which would not be disclosed by a so called 'careful physical examination,' are often recognizable in watching a person twenty five feet away. A man's posture, a movement of his head or the appearance of his ears, requiring only a fraction of a second of the time of an observer to notice, may disclose more than could be detected by puttering around a man's chest with a stethoscope for a week...[115]

Safford was not alone in his faith in the critical necessity of the "line" inspection and the acuity of Public Health Service physicians in determining cases for further diagnosis in a more detailed medical examination. In 1913 Dr. Howard Knox was even more optimistic regarding the diagnoses possible through the physician's gaze, asserting that

> 'facial signs' could reveal 'with considerable regularity' such conditions as 'nationality, temperament, occupation, sexual relations and habits, sensuality, drug addictions... and such 'diseases' as brain tumor...melancholia, manic depressive insanity, chorea, hydrocephalus, idiocy, imbecility, feeblemindedness, higher feeblemindedness (moron) moral obliquity...renal disease, appendicitis... and impending death.'[116]

Physicians were not immune from the prejudices of their time, and their expression of pejorative opinions about immigrants reflected prevailing notions and widely held biases that were often expressed openly. In 1913, for example, Ellis Island physician Dr. Alfred C. Reed was willing to claim that "[o]vercrowding, disregard of privacy, cleanliness and authority, their gregariousness and tendency to congregation along racial lines in cities, are all important

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[115] Quoted in Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers,1994), 63.
[116] Quoted in Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers,1994), 62.

factors in the spread of disease."[117] Alan Kraut quotes two Public Health Service physicians who "concluded that a perceived increase in [trachoma] on Ellis was a direct result of the 'change in the source of arriving immigrants and resulting differences in the character of the people.'"[118] The association of immigrants and disease, sometimes the association of specific nationalities with specific diseases, continued among these men even as wide acceptance of germ theory demonstrated that illness could not be confined to specific classes or ethnicities.

As the use of antibiotics began to bring many of the contagious "germ" diseases under control in the first decades of the new century, the association of immigrants with diseases took a new form. By 1918 the *Manual of the Examination of Aliens, 1918,* prepared under direction of the Surgeon General of the United States and used on Ellis Island warned that:

> Of all the serious problems in the field of public health activity, that of the mental examination of arriving aliens is one of the most important, and the detection of the insane and the mentally defective among arriving aliens and the prevention of their entry has a value that, from the standpoint of national welfare, can hardly be overestimated...In the case of the insane or mentally defective there is imposed a burden which tends to perpetuate itself. Each mental defective may become the progenitor of a line of paupers, vagrants, criminals, or insane persons which will terminate only with the extinction of the race. Were the expense to be purely financial it would be deplorable enough but to the cost in dollars and cents must be added the ever-present moral degeneracy and its pernicious influence upon society.[119]

The belief that mental conditions were hereditary and that allowing aliens with diminished mental capacity to enter the country would lead to "race suicide" was a tenet of the eugenics movement that was garnering adherents at the beginning of the twentieth century. Public Health Service physicians on Ellis Island using this manual were complicit in perpetuating these

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[117] A. C. Reed, "Immigration and Public Health," *Popular Science Monthly,* 83; 320-338 quoted in Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History* Vol. 12, No.4 (Winter, 1988); 383.

[118] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History* Vol. 12, No.4 (Winter, 1988); 388.

[119] Treasury Department, United States Public Health Service, *Miscellaneous Publication No. 18: Manual of the Examination of Aliens, 1918.* Prepared under direction of the Surgeon General. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918, 6.

beliefs. Several physicians practicing on Ellis Island did not hesitate to perpetuate both the typing of ethnic groups and the common assumptions regarding heredity. Dr. J. G. Wilson wrote in *Popular Science Monthly* in 1913 that "[t]he Jews are a highly inbred and psychopathically inclined race" whose defects are "almost entirely due to heredity."[120]

Beliefs such as those demonstrated by Safford and Knox were furthered among some Public Health Service physicians who often engaged in "'typing' immigrants, ... PHS officers spoke of 'steerage types.' Some even referred to 'trachoma types.'"[121] Amy Fairchild states that "even though Public Health Service physicians on Ellis Island, serving as neutral agents of science stood in a position to make and act on powerful statements about racial difference in human populations, framing different races either as agents of specific diseases or as susceptible to specific diseases," there is no evidence that any ever did so.[122]

As early as 1904 the Surgeon-General had written: "All serious cases of physical or mental disability are formally certified in writing by such surgeons to exist, and in the cases of aliens afflicted with any mental or physical disability excluding them from the United States, the Surgeon's certificate practically results in deportation..."[123] The line doctors were, in fact, not responsible for making the final decision regarding debarment of aliens, however, a medical certification that put immigrants in one of the categories of medical exclusions almost guaranteed debarment under the law. It was up to the officials of the Boards of Special Inquiry and ultimately the Ellis Island commissioners to make the final decisions and carry the responsibility for debarring immigrants based on medical certification that had been issued by

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[120] Quoted in Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island : The Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: Collins, An imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 125.
[121] Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Labor Force* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 129.
[122] Amy L. Fairchild, *Science at the Borders: Immigrant Medical Inspection and the Shaping of the Modern Labor Force* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 18.
[123] Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985), 587.

United States Health Service physicians. The passage of the immigration act of 1907 that gave physicians the option of stating that an immigrant would be likely to become a public charge on the medical certificate was supported by Commissioner William Williams's in an effort to shift the responsibility for exclusion from immigration officials to Public Health Service physicians, and reveals his desire to determine more "objective" and "certifiable" bases for exclusion.

Regardless of efforts to involve United States Public Health Service Physicians in directly determining the immigrant's fate through the immigration acts of 1907 and 1927, physicians refused to exceed their expertise and sit on Boards of Special Inquiry. Physicians, especially those of Public Health Service increasingly saw themselves as professionals. As Kraut observes, "the application of professional ethical standards was replacing the notion of the federal physician as merely another bureaucrat in the growing machine of government. When forced to choose between their professional independence and bureaucratic discipline, physicians chose the former."[124]

Ultimately it is evident that medical inspections at Ellis Island, whether concentrating on the diagnosis of contagious disease or the detection of mental illness, did not significantly reduce the increasing numbers of foreigners entering the United States as immigrants before the quota laws of the 1920s. But the percentage of those debarred for medical reasons does reflect the effect of increased scrutiny and more restrictive legislation. For example, the percentage of those excluded for medical reasons in 1898 was less than 2 %; by 1913 it was 57 %, rising to 69 % in 1916.[125]

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[124] Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the "Immigrant Menace"* (New York: BasicBooks, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 69.

[125] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History* 12, 4 (1988); 384, and Harlan D. Unrau, *Ellis Island,* vol. II (Washington: U.S. Department of the Interior/ National Park Service, 1985),

In spite of the failure of medical inspections as a mechanism for significantly lowering the number of immigrants entering the United States in the decades before World War I, Ellis Island continued to play an important role in supporting medical experiments and research carried out by Public Health Service doctors and others. Alan Kraut asserts that "[d]uring World War I, the slower rate of immigration allowed PHS [public health service] physicians in the laboratory of the Ellis Island hospital to conduct some medical research, using newcomers as subjects."[126] Kraut reports that the United States' ongoing interest in bacteriology led to using immigrants for testing, especially for venereal diseases. In addition to those immigrants suspected of being infected with syphilis "Ellis Island physicians had done 'about 1,000 Wassermann reactions' on persons in the line inspection. There were also 'cultural studies on gonococcus bacterium (causing gonorrhea) in comparison with M. catarrhalis...and the meningococcus...' The report concluded with a request for another PHS officer in the laboratory because 'there is not another place in the service where there is more opportunity for good research work from the laboratory side...'"[127]

Just prior to World War I anthropologist and Smithsonian curator Ales Hrdlicka instructed Public Health Service officers in how to take cranial measurements of immigrants, expressing his belief that "much of value could be learned about the racial characteristics of newcomers by examining their skulls."[128] And in 1919 Hrdlicka sought "regular 'anthropomorphic measuring,' saying 'the physical as well as the mental make-up of the future population of this country must be a compromise shaped by the new environment, but in main

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[126] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1988); 387.

[127] Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924* (New York: Basic books, A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994), 76.

[128] Alan M. Kraut, "Silent Traveler: Germs, Genes, and American Efficiency, 1890-1924," *Social Science History, Vol.* 12, No. 4 (1988); 387.

based on the heredity qualities...brought into the country by the European immigration.'" Writing to the surgeon general of the United States in 1926 Hrdlicka continued to press the issue of anthropomorphic measuring: "These studies must soon show whether or not the fears of some of our eugenicists and recent writers as to the probable harm through further immigration to the American people are well founded."[129]

Records from May of 1926 show that the Public Health Service purchased "1 set of anthropometric instruments, consisting of 3 metal calipers, to be used in measuring immigrants" at a cost of $60.00 were ordered for Ellis Island.[130] Immigration inspectors conducted "Bertillion" measurements, named after Alphonse Bertillion, the inventor of "anthropometrics." These measurements were intended to provide a means of personal identification which proved ineffective and was replaced with fingerprinting (Fig 49). The Viennese doctor who attempted to sell his "maniac bed," specially constructed for the restraint of patients in the psychiatric pavilion, fared less well. Perhaps at $100[131] apiece they were an extravagance as the declining number of immigrants passing through Ellis Island after the Quota Laws took effect meant fewer psychiatric patients.

Although neither Hrdlicka nor Williams openly expressed a position on eugenics, many of the experiments carried out on Ellis Island can be interpreted to support the then currently popular pseudo-scientific theories intended to prove the inferiority of certain ethnic groups and thus support efforts for their exclusion from the United States. And certainly in the case of Williams, the racist and nationalistic rhetoric of his speeches and administration of federal

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[129] Letters from Hrdlicka to Unites States surgeons general in 1919 and 1926 quoted in Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 128.

[130] Invoice from the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* to the United States Public Health Service, May 1, 1926, quoted in quoted in Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), n 21, 180.

[131] Lori Conway, *Forgotten Ellis Island, the Extraordinary Story of America's Immigrant Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 149.

immigration policy at Ellis Island as well as the support for his policies as expressed by the Immigration Restriction League and by Madison Grant, merged easily with attempts to establish the scientific credibility of the eugenics movement that was currently gaining popularity.

The phase of Ellis Island's history that began after its primary use as an immigration station ended reflects the pervasive xenophobia of the decades surrounding the world wars. Frederick C. Howe, commissioner on Ellis Island beginning in 1915, wrote in his autobiography that the effects of World War I threw Ellis Island into chaos. The island was requisitioned by the War Department and the Navy Department for emergency use. Howe states that Ellis Island was "admirably suited as a place of detention for war suspects. The Department of Justice and hastily organized espionage agencies made them a dumping-ground of aliens under suspicion, while the Bureau of Immigration launched a crusade against one type of immigrant after another, and brought them to Ellis Island for deportation."[132] In describing his role as commissioner he explains that:

> I was the custodian of all these groups. Each group had to be isolated. I became a jailer instead of a commissioner of immigration; a jailer not of convicted offenders but of suspected persons who had been arrested and railroaded to Ellis Island as the most available dumping-ground under the successive waves of hysteria which swept the country.[133]

But Howe was much more than a jailer; he was an active advocate for rights of those detained on Ellis Island. Howe's administration was noted for its liberal tendencies and for his efforts to provide a humane and even attractive atmosphere on Ellis Island. Taking down the "high iron

[132] Frederick C. Howe, *The Confessions of a Reformer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 266.
[133] Frederick C. Howe, *The Confessions of a Reformer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 267.

screens that suggested a prison" and opening up the registry room, Howe changed the way not only immigrants, but detainees as well, were treated during their period on Ellis Island.[134]

Immigration disappeared from view for most Americans after World War I. No longer did visitors to Ellis Island stroll on the mezzanine and take in the spectacle of masses of foreigners being examined in the great space of the registry room. After 1923 aliens were processed at American embassies and consulates before departing their home countries. And the Quota Acts of 1921 and 1924 effectively slowed what had been a tidal wave of immigrants entering the United States to a slow trickle (Fig. 50). With immigration curtailed and the advent of air travel, Ellis Island was turned to other uses by the federal government and finally abandoned in 1954.

[134] Frederick C. Howe, *The Confessions of a Reformer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 257. Howe's autobiography is a good source of information about the government's handling of immigrants as well as suspected anarchists during a contentious and controversial period in this nation's history. He has a bitter recollection of his own treatment by politicians and a decided liberal bias.

CONCLUSION

By foregrounding the political context in which Ellis Island operated it has been my purpose in this thesis to create a link between the physical evidence of administrative policies and procedures at Ellis Island and the political context in which the immigration station operated, as well as to provoke a more critical attitude towards the museum's interpretive strategy. Connecting the museum's narrative to a more complex and conflicted history of immigration in the United States, however, demands an uncomfortable confrontation with aspects of this nation's attitude towards, and treatment of immigrants. The xenophobia, prejudice and outright discrimination that characterized the attitudes of many Americans in the years leading up to World War I are not congruent with contemporaneous imperatives for promoting unity and inclusiveness which inform the interpretive themes at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. As a consequence the dominant narrative presented at the museum obscures a complete understanding of the history of Ellis Island and its unique role in immigration history in the United States.

Ample opportunity exists for addressing the political context that shaped the processing of immigrants which occurred on Ellis Island by building on the existing exhibitions in the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. By restoring the registry room to a date and condition that more accurately reflects its condition at a time when thousands of immigrants were processed in a single day visitors to the museum will gain a clearer understanding of the mechanisms of control enlisted by the United States government to process thousands of individuals on a single day during peak immigration years. And, as this thesis has attempted to demonstrate, the existing structures on the island provide additional evidence that would support a critical exploration of immigration through Ellis Island. The success of the museum, however, discourages rather than encourages the work that remains to be done in order for the museum to confront and adequately explain the complexity of the cultural context in which Ellis Island operated.

The museum's on-going popularity indicates the broad appeal of its theme as well as the success of strategies that invite visitors to see themselves as part of the story of immigration to the United States, and as the expansion of the Immigrant Wall of Honor demonstrates, we continue to be a nation that honors its immigrant population. However, the popularity of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum is achieved at the expense of a full understanding of this nation's conflicted history with respect to immigration. Nearly two decades after the opening of an immigration museum on Ellis Island plans for its future indicate that the focus remains on a broad look at immigration rather than a critical investigation of Ellis Island itself.

As early as 1999 the success of the museum prompted National Park Service planners to begin considering what the future of the thirty un-restored buildings on the island should be. The first step was to prevent further deterioration of the buildings. By 2002, with funds

allocated by Congress and the state of New Jersey the structures were stabilized. The Save Ellis Island Foundation formally began working with the National Park Service to promote fund raising and planning for the rest of Ellis Island in 2001. These two organizations are currently in the process of evaluating a Development Concept Plan/ Final Environmental Impact Statement, which was completed in 2003. The plan presents three options for development of the vacant historic structures on the site: 1. "No Action," the outcome of which is the eventual deterioration of the structures, 2. "Ellis Island Partners—Day Use Only," in which the buildings would be rehabilitated as a campus for use by non-profit and institutional users whose missions complement the historic themes of Ellis Island, and 3. "Ellis Island Institute with Overnight Accommodations," proposing rehabilitation of the buildings to accommodate a conference and retreat center to "host meetings, retreats, and workshops primarily focusing on issues such as immigration, world migration, public health, family history, historic preservation and the environment."[136] The preferred option, number three, acknowledges the broad context of immigration in its appeal to groups who are addressing the on-going issues that accompany immigration.

In all of these scenarios the distinct role of Ellis Island and its buildings is lost in the possibilities advanced for preserving the buildings. In fact, expanding the focus of the Ellis Island museum through the restoration of the hospital buildings to create an "Ellis Island Institute" with or without overnight accommodations, further masks Ellis Island's distinct role as an immigration station, rendering it an arbitrary signifier in the consideration of a world wide phenomenon.

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[136] The Ellis Island website directs those interested in the future use of the island to http://park planning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?parkId=277&projected=18591 to read and comment on these proposals for development. Now receiving comments on the proposal, the National Park Service and Save Ellis Island are hoping to raise 300 million dollars to proceed with option three.

The documentary video focusing on the hospital buildings on Ellis Island done by Lori Conway in 2007 is evidence of a growing interest in the existing structures on Ellis Island and has the promise to provoke a critical inquiry with a level of complexity that speaks to the conflicted history of immigration that Ellis Island represents. Interest in the hospital buildings may be an impetus to expand the museum's interpretive themes. Recently, issues that lie outside of the focus of the museum's narrative have provoked response from the National Park Service. For instance, in April the Ellis Island Immigration Museum mounted a temporary exhibition that addressed the role of women on Ellis Island. Women who worked on the island as doctors, nurses and matrons were featured along with some of the women who passed through Ellis Island as immigrants. It is significant that the exhibition featured Mary Johnson/ Frank Woodhull and discussed some of the difficulties single women had in attempting to immigrate through Ellis Island. Viewed as a response to Erica Rand's criticism in The *Ellis Island Snow Globe,* this exhibition demonstrates the willingness of the National Park Service to expand the scope of controversial topics that it is willing to discuss. But questions still remain about how the issue of discrimination can be handled within the context of the museum. Reviving the traces of immigration processing, either in the registry room or in the hospital buildings, can provide a link to the unique history of immigration at Ellis Island.

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Fig. 1. Registry room in the main building at Ellis Island, restored to its condition in 1918

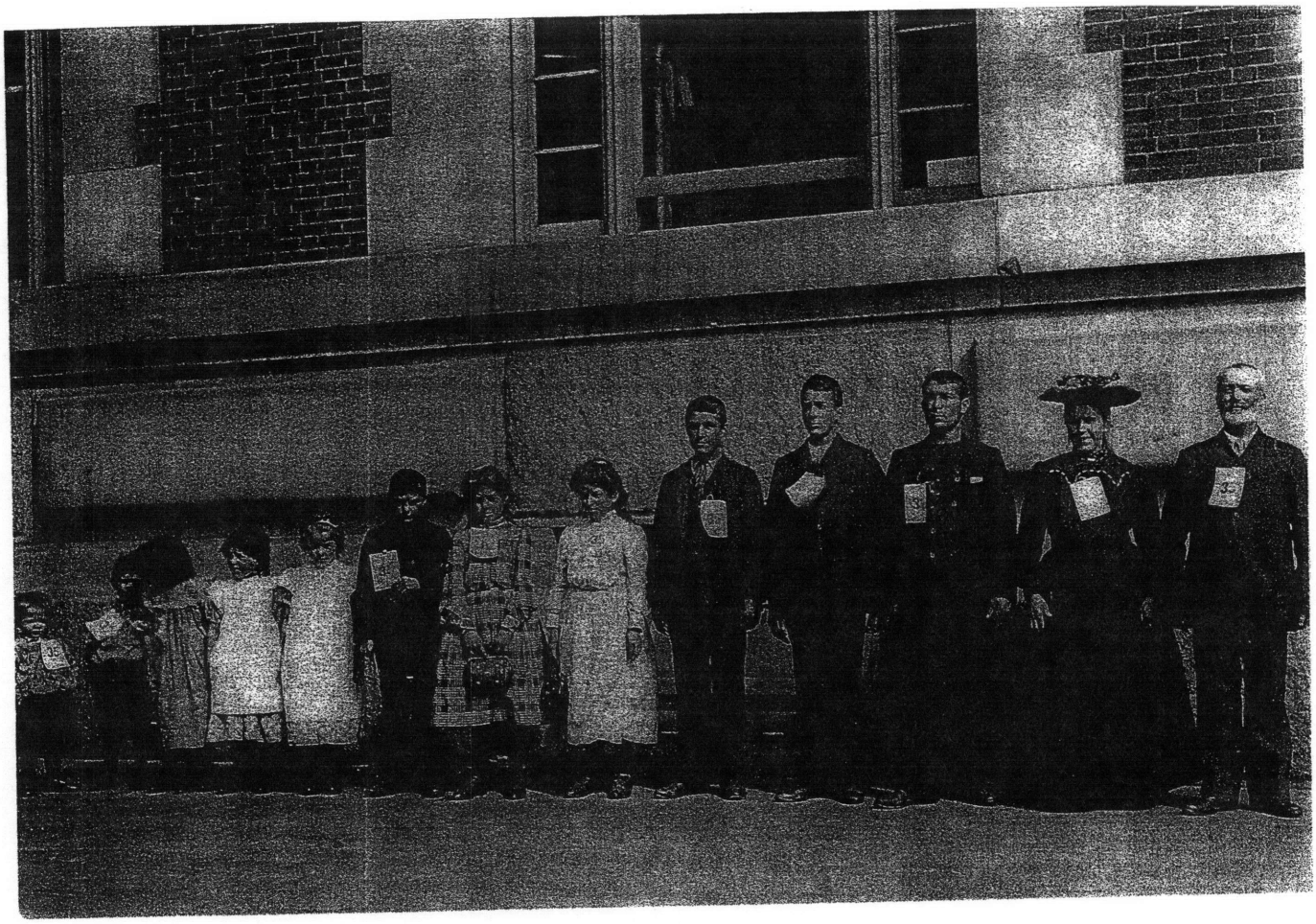


Fig. 2. Immigrants being tagged at Ellis Island

Fig. 3. Eye inspection at Ellis Island

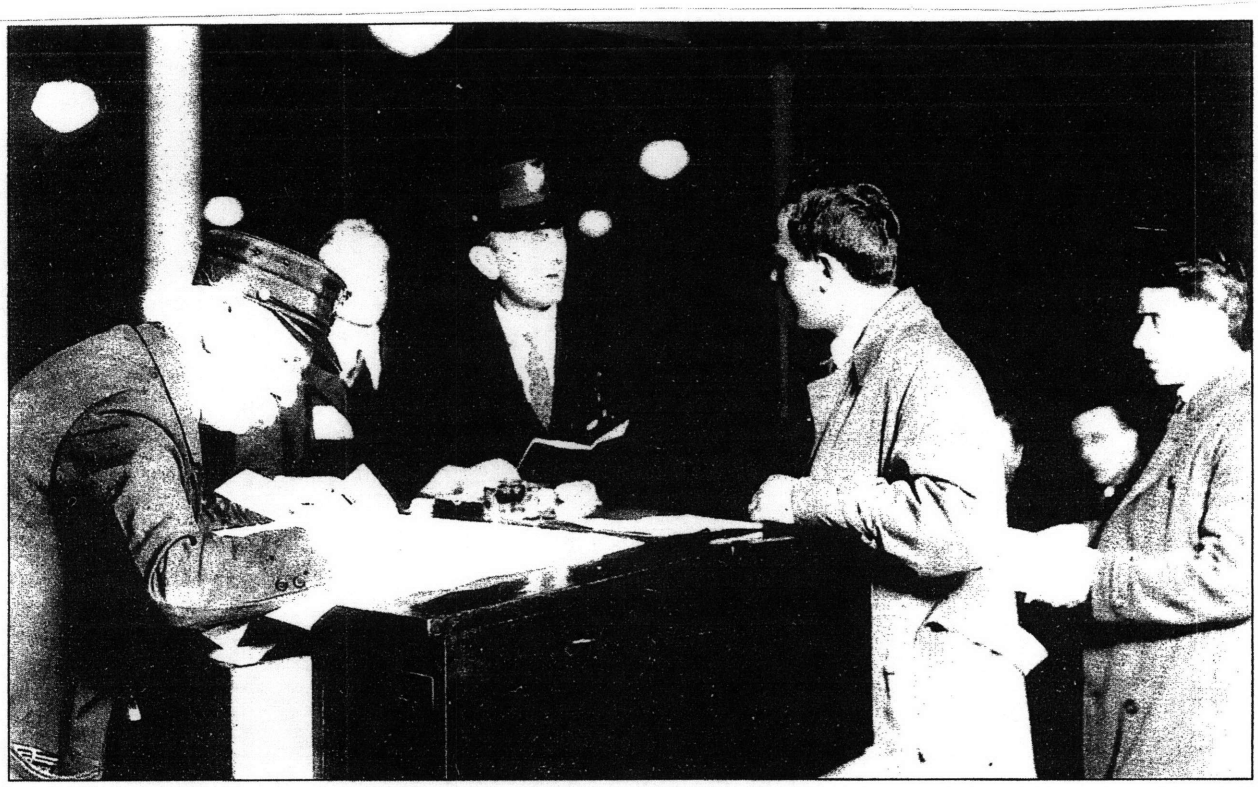


Fig. 4. Questioning immigrants at Ellis Island

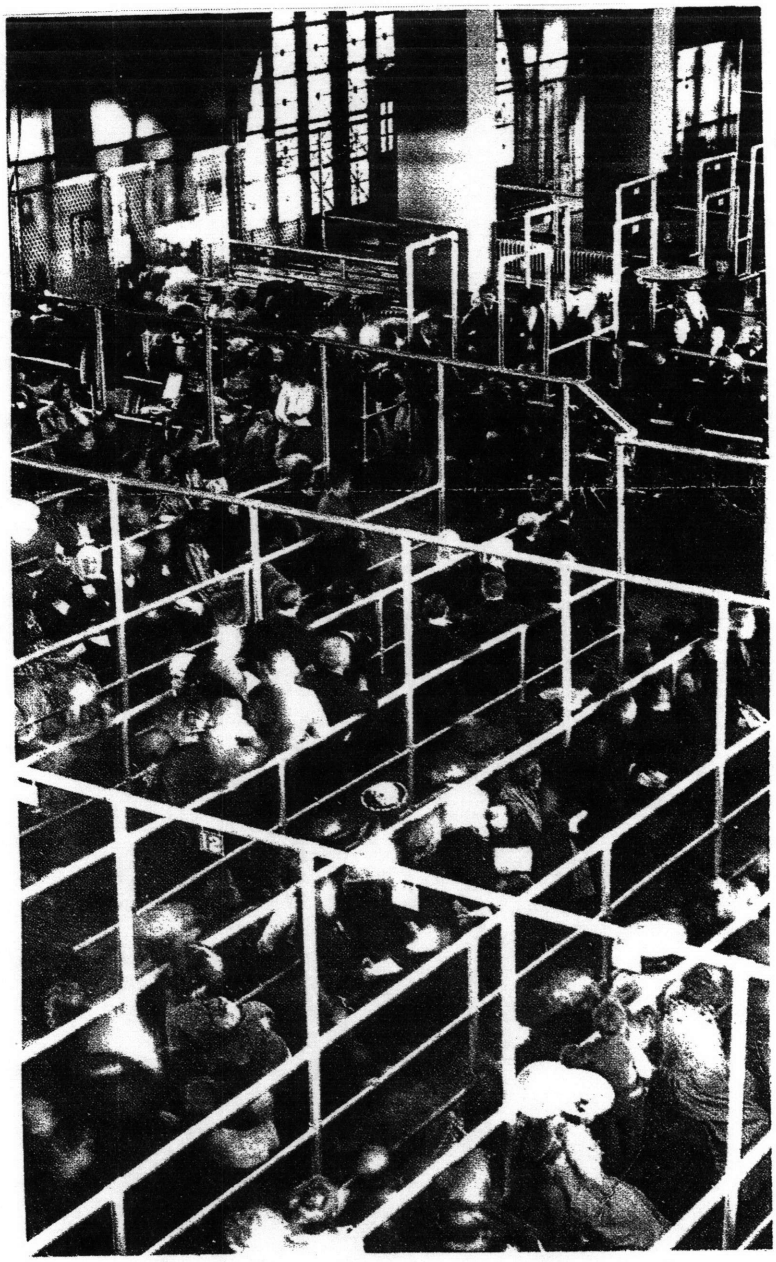


Fig. 5. Pipe rail enclosure at Ellis Island

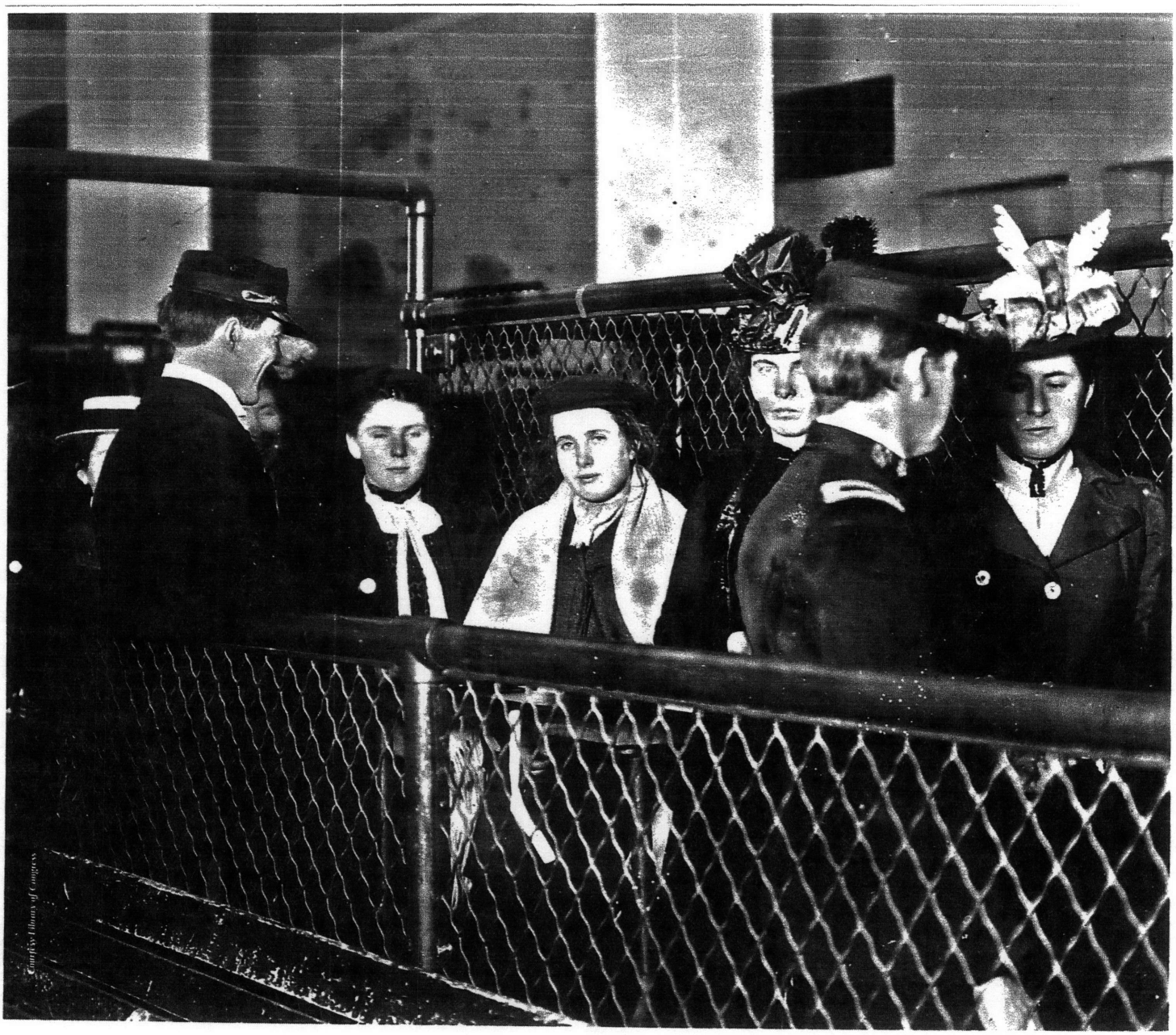


Fig. 6. Fenced enclosure at Ellis Island

Fig. 7. Registry room in the main building at Ellis Island, restored to its condition in 1918

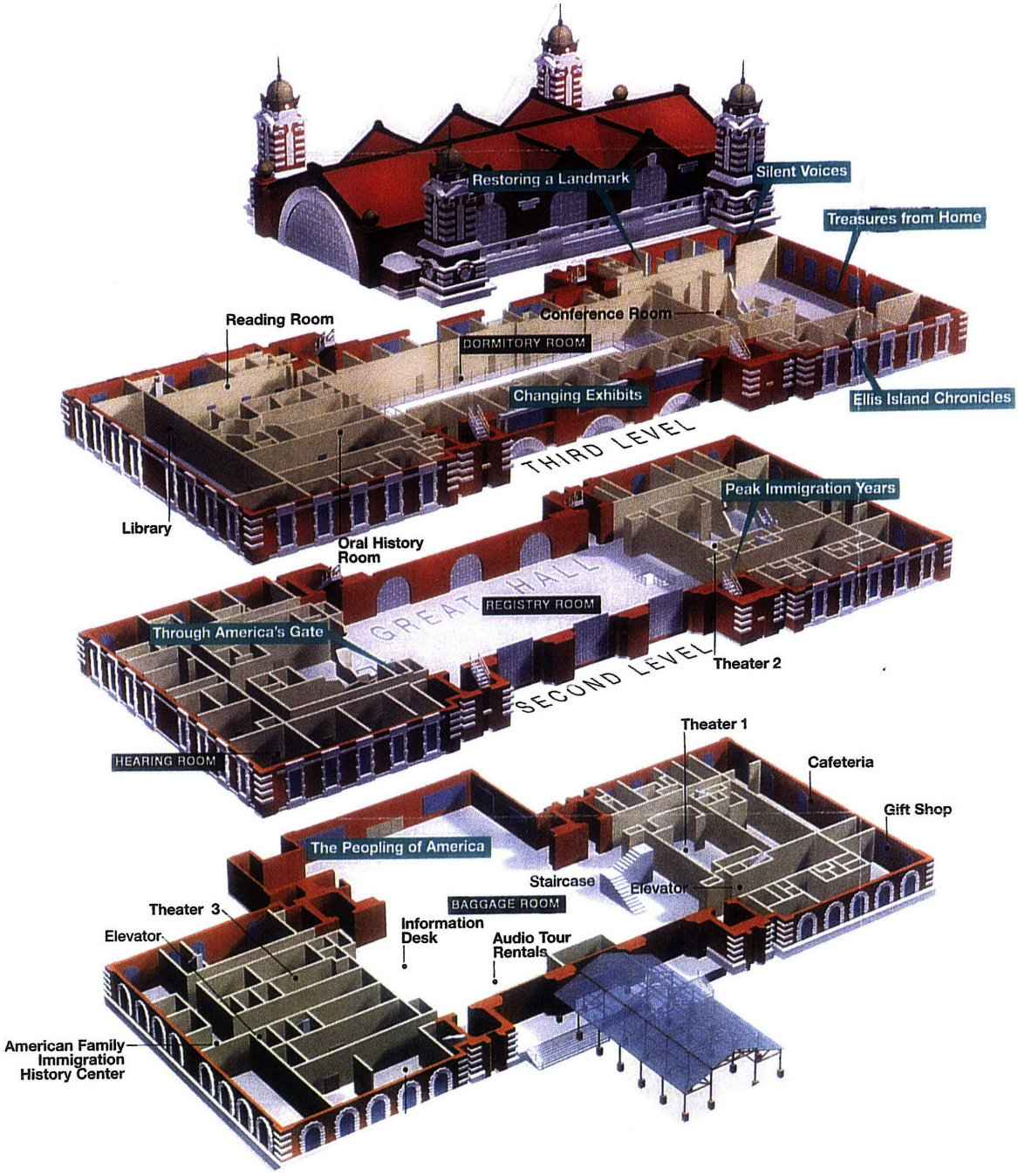


Fig. 8. Axonometric of exhibitions at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum

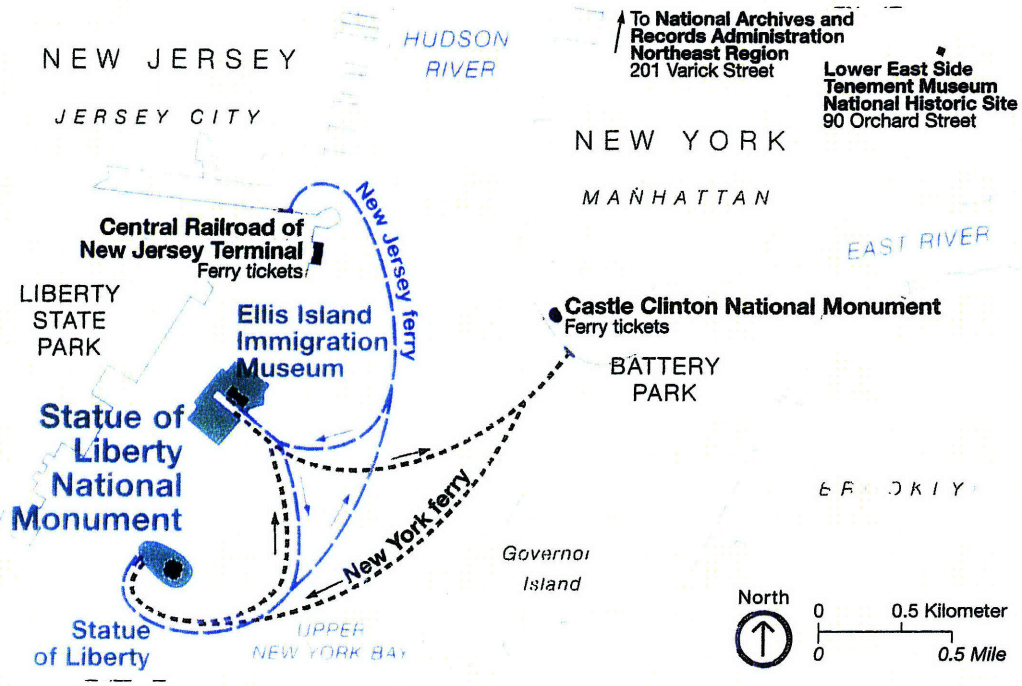


Fig. 9. Ellis Island Immigration Museum and the Statue of Liberty National Monument in New York Harbor

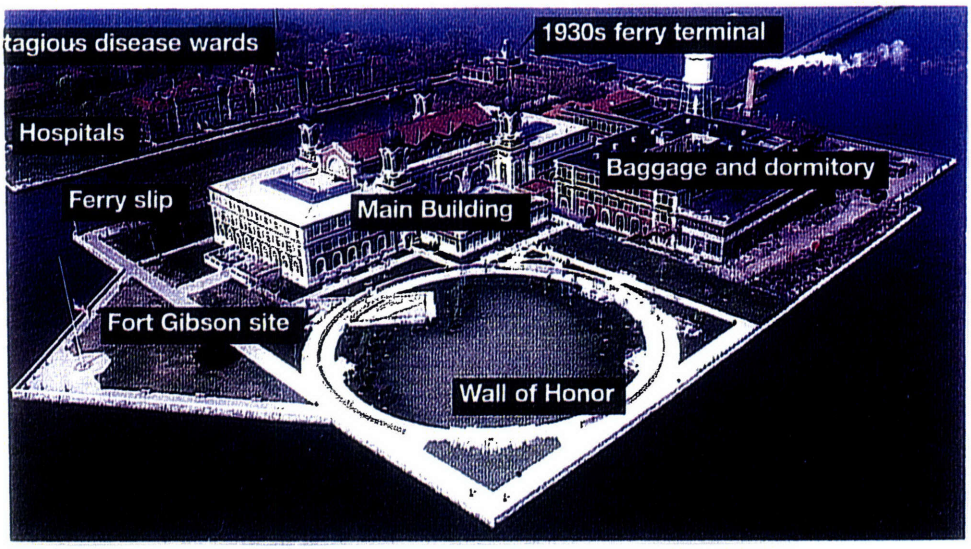


Fig. 10. Ellis Island plan

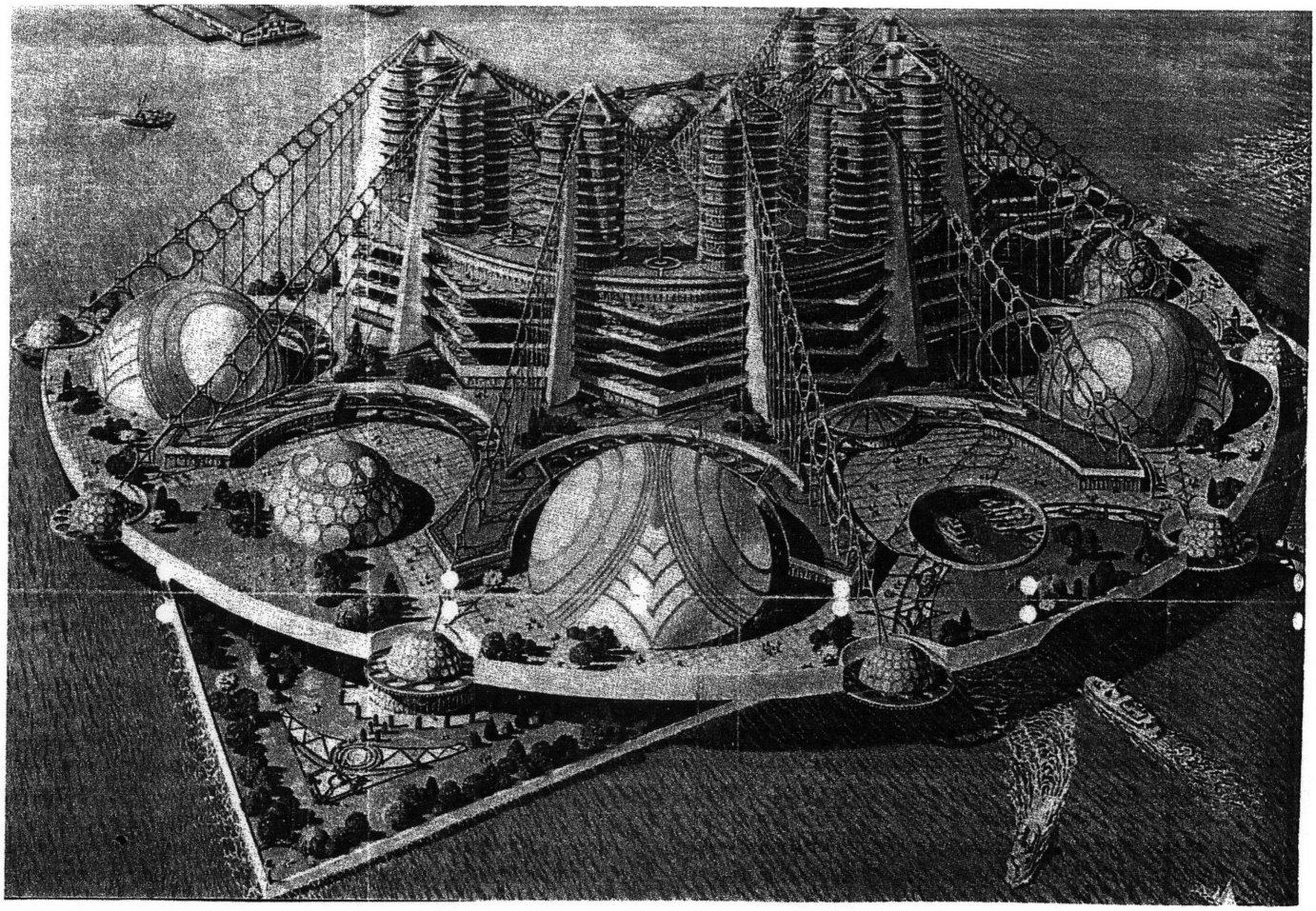


Fig. 11. Frank Lloyd Wright's vision for Ellis Island

Fig. 12. The Immigrant Wall of Honor on Ellis Island

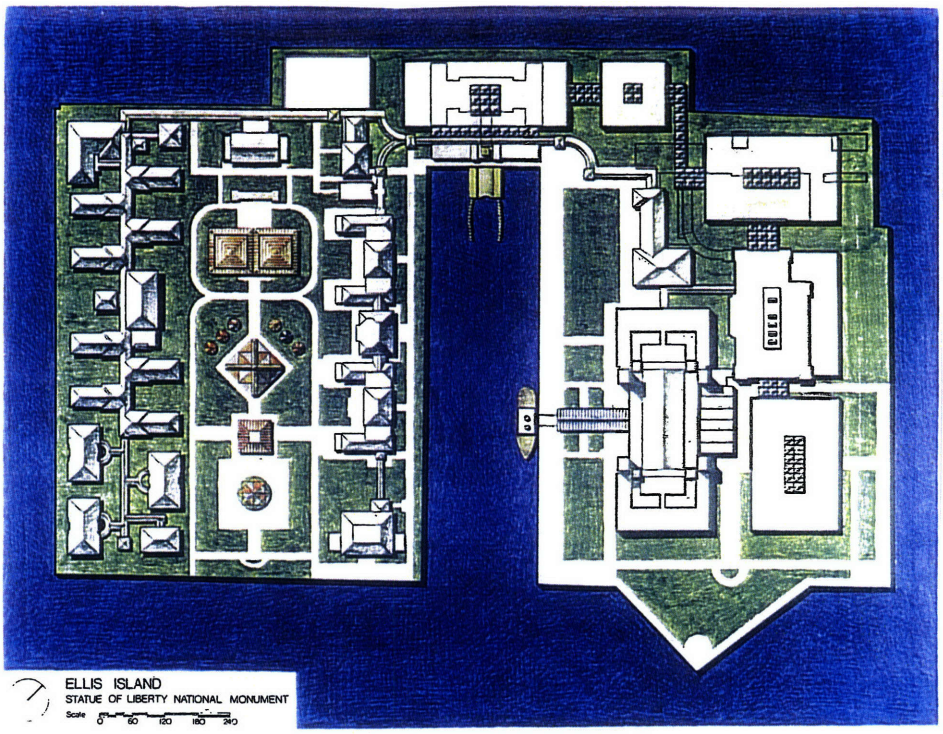


Fig. 13. Johnson and Burgee plan for development at Ellis Island, 1983

Figs. 14, 15, 16 & 17 Development images, Burgee & Johnson plan, 1983

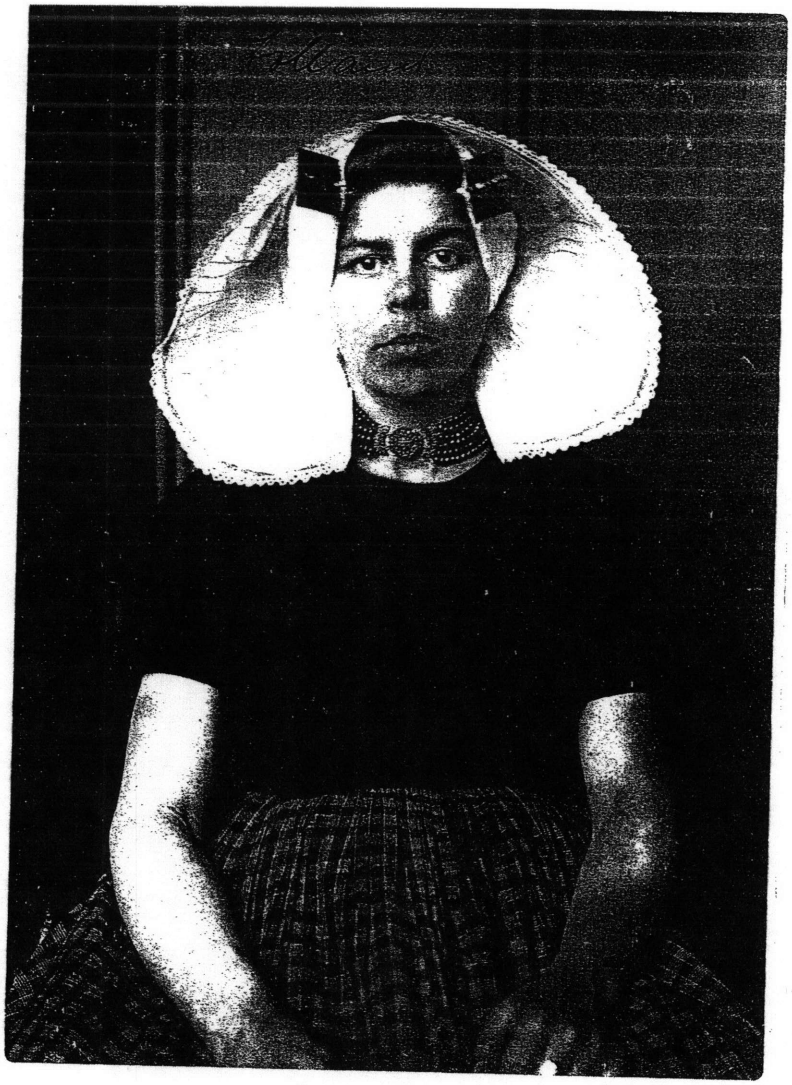


Fig. 18. Augustus Sherman photograph of a Dutch woman

Fig. 19. Augustus Sherman photograph of a Greek woman

Fig. 20. Lewis Hine photograph

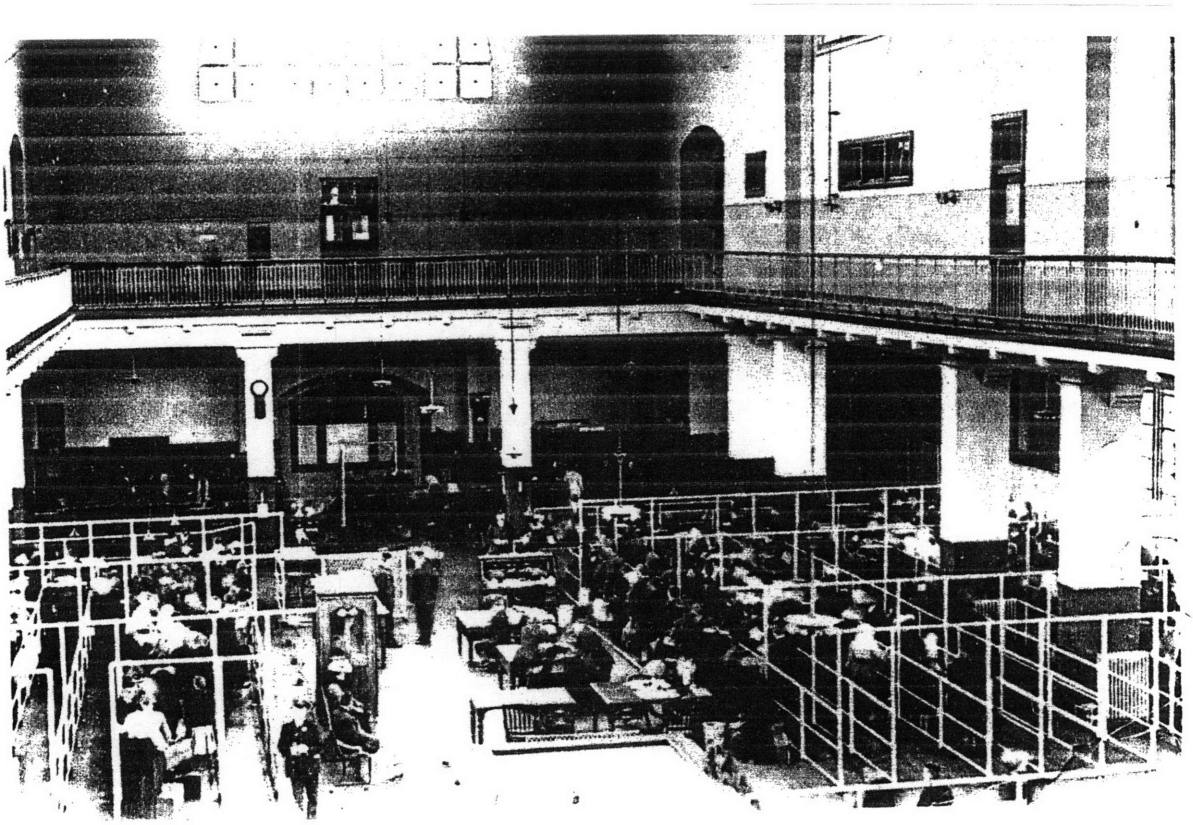


Fig. 21. The registry room

Fig. 22. Exhibition at Ellis Island

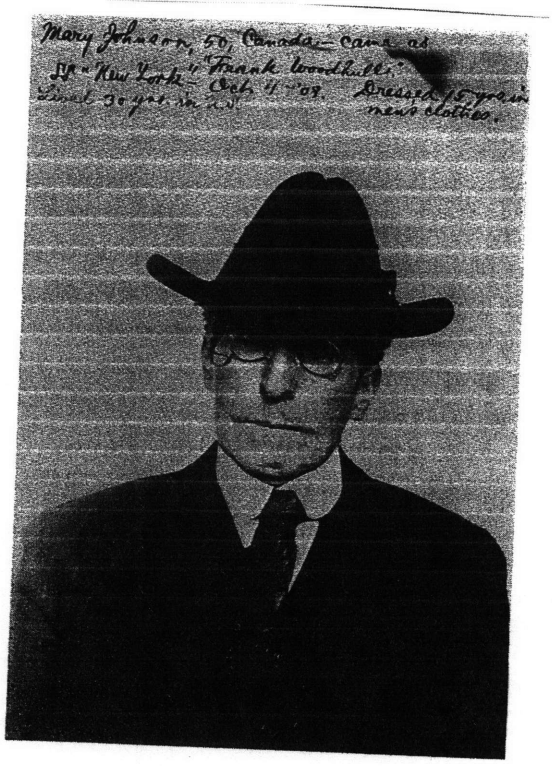


Fig. 23. Augustus Sherman photo of Frank Woodhull

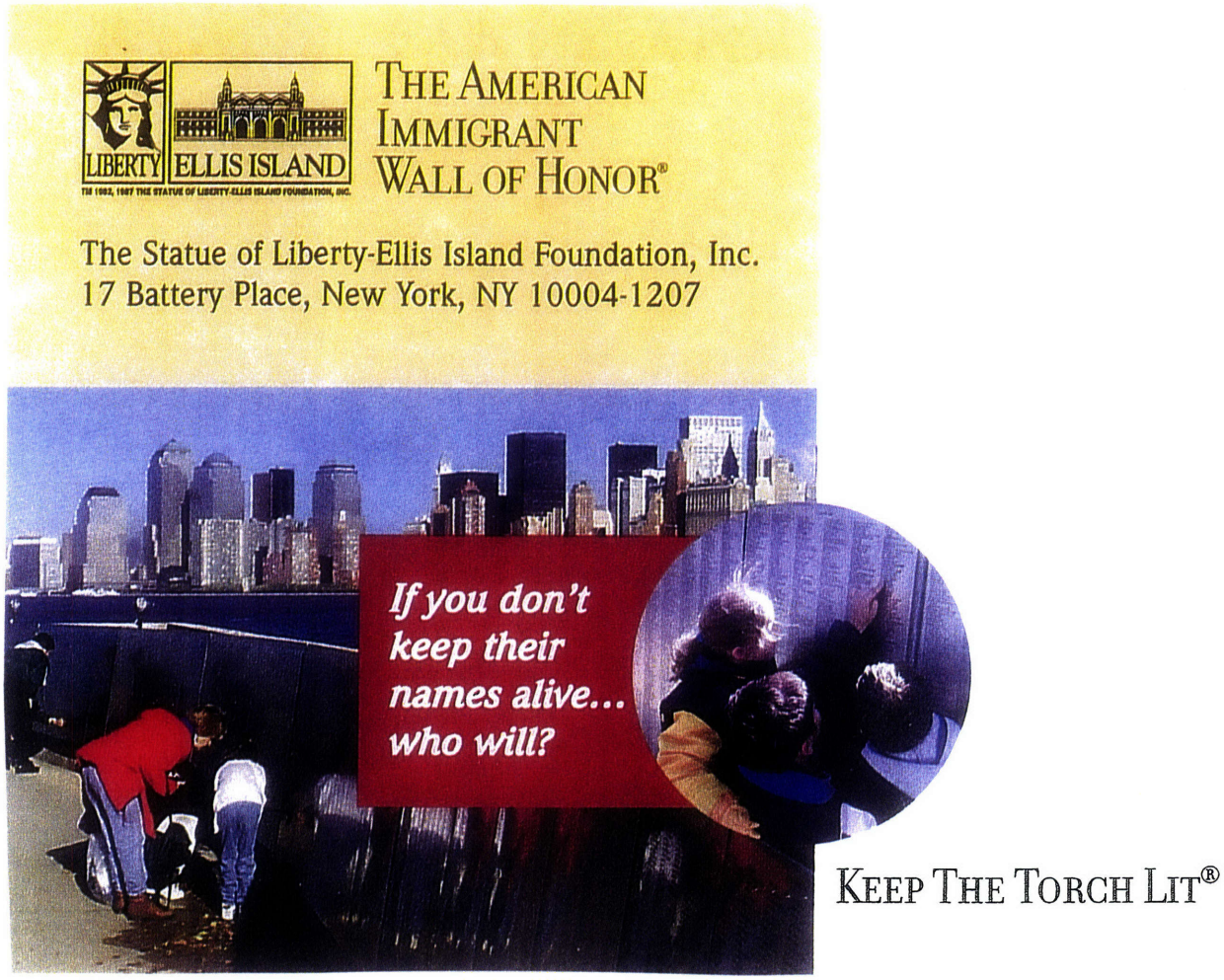
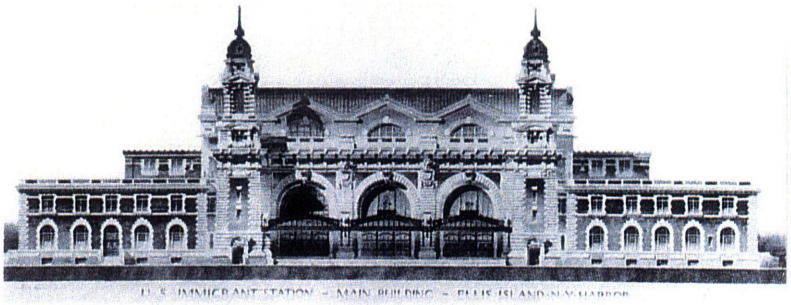
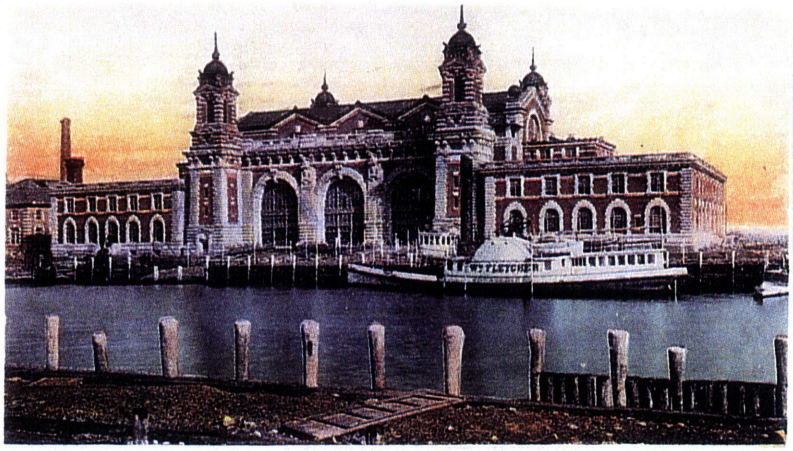


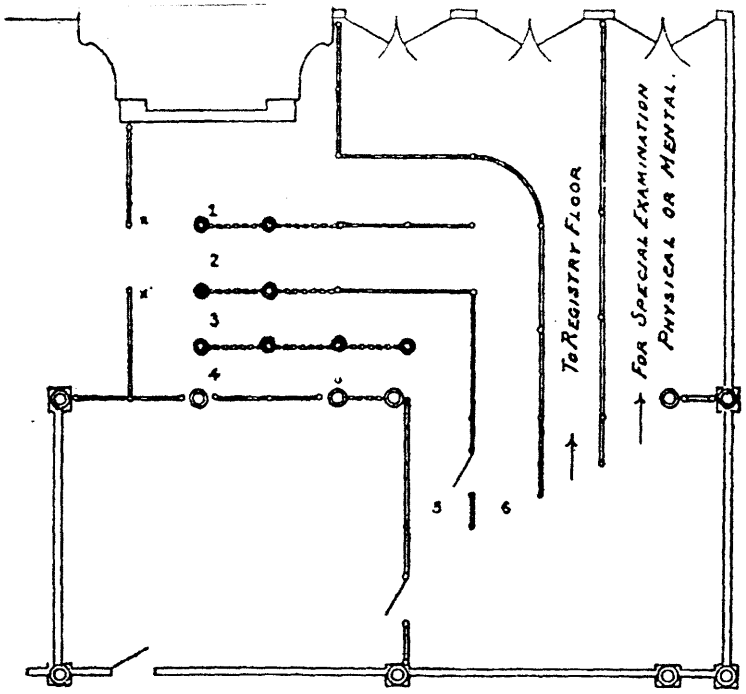
Fig. 24. Solicitation for the Immigrant Wall of Honor at Ellis Island





ELLIS ISLAND—IMMIGRATION DEPOT, NEW YORK.

Figs. 25 & 26. The main building on Ellis Island, design by Boring and Tilton, architects



K & K' Attendants to direct immigrants to lines.
1, 2, 3 & 4 General Physical and Mental Examiners
5-6 Eye Examiners.
Black Circles with broken lines indicate Standards with heavy Bases, connected by Chains.

Floor Plan for Medical Examination of Immigrants.

Fig. 27. Mechanisms of control

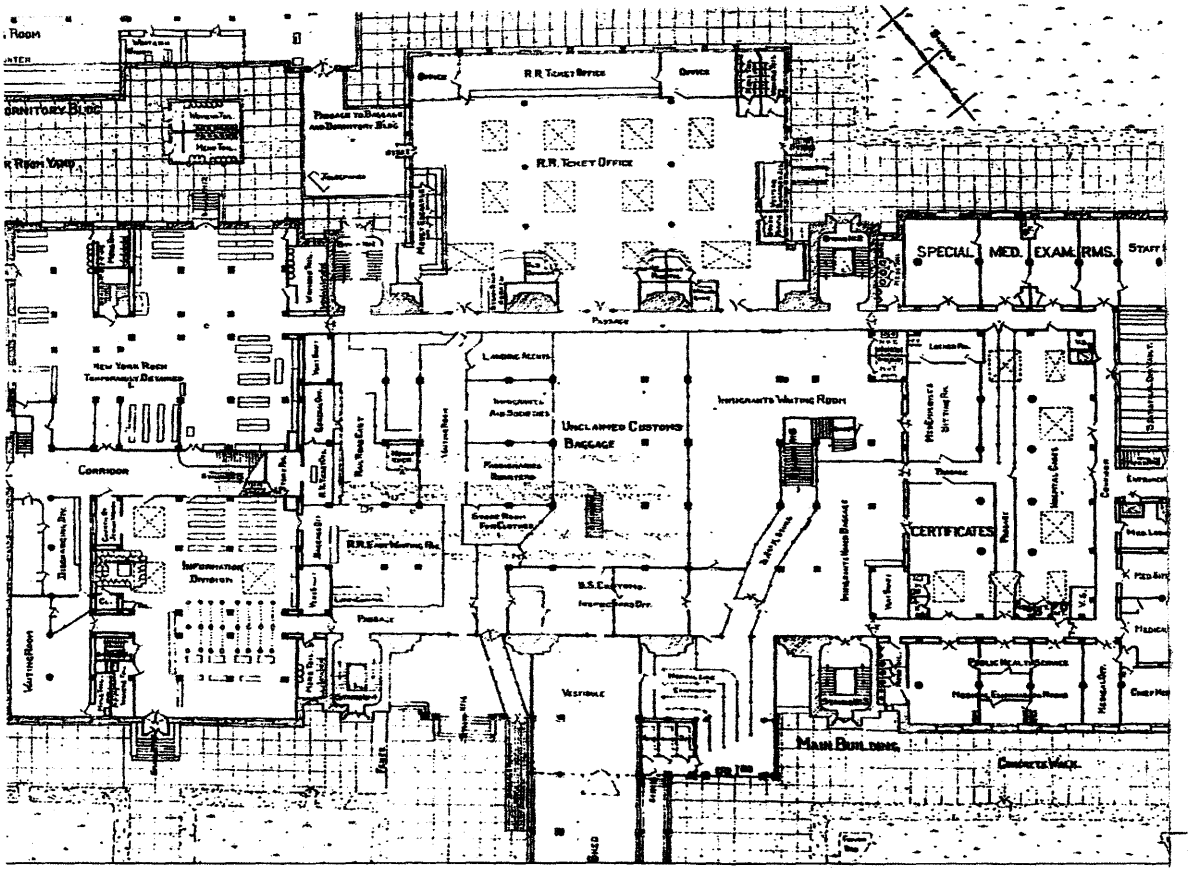


Fig. 28. First floor plan, main building at Ellis Island

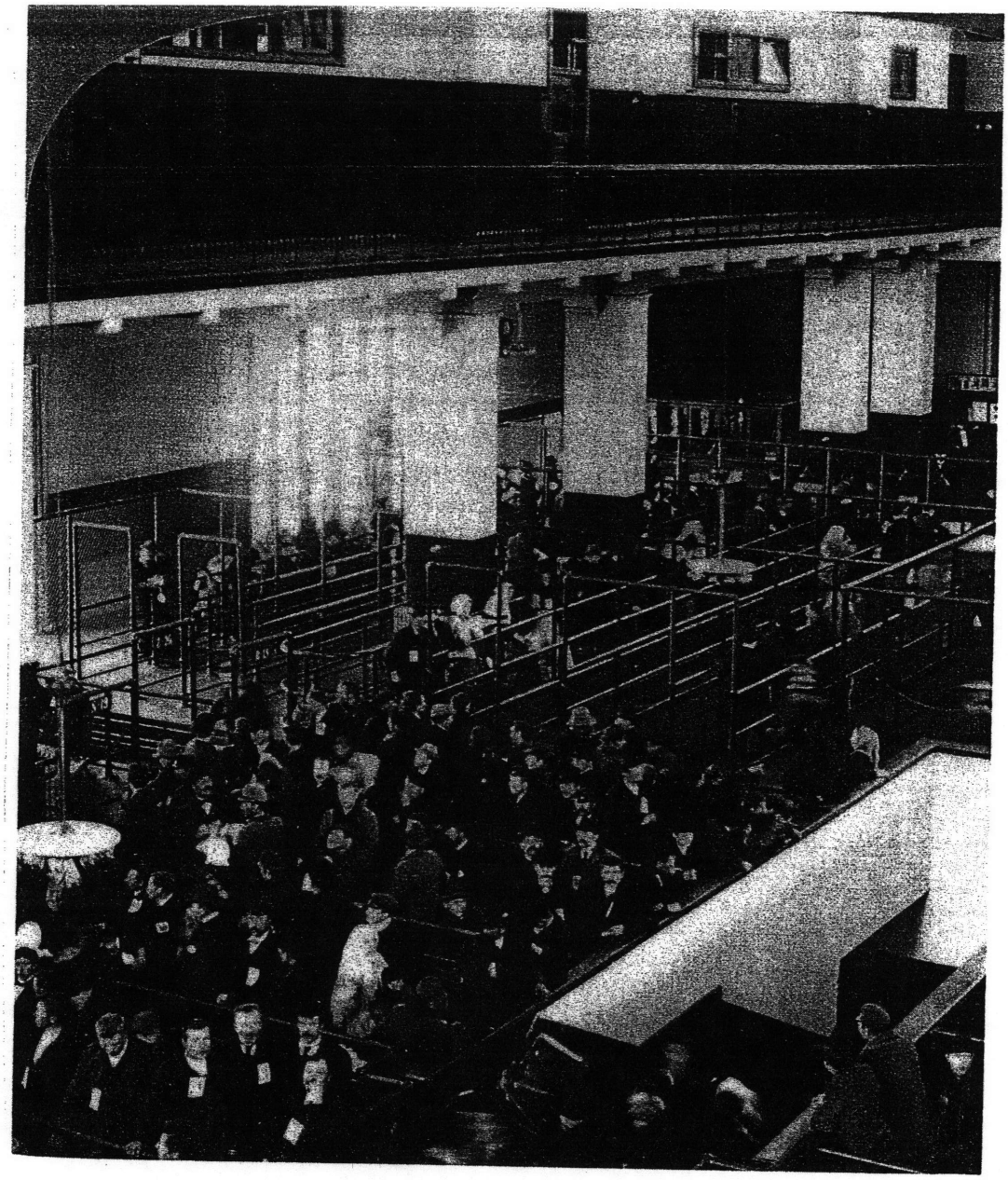


Fig. 29. Immigrants ascending the stairway, main building at Ellis Island

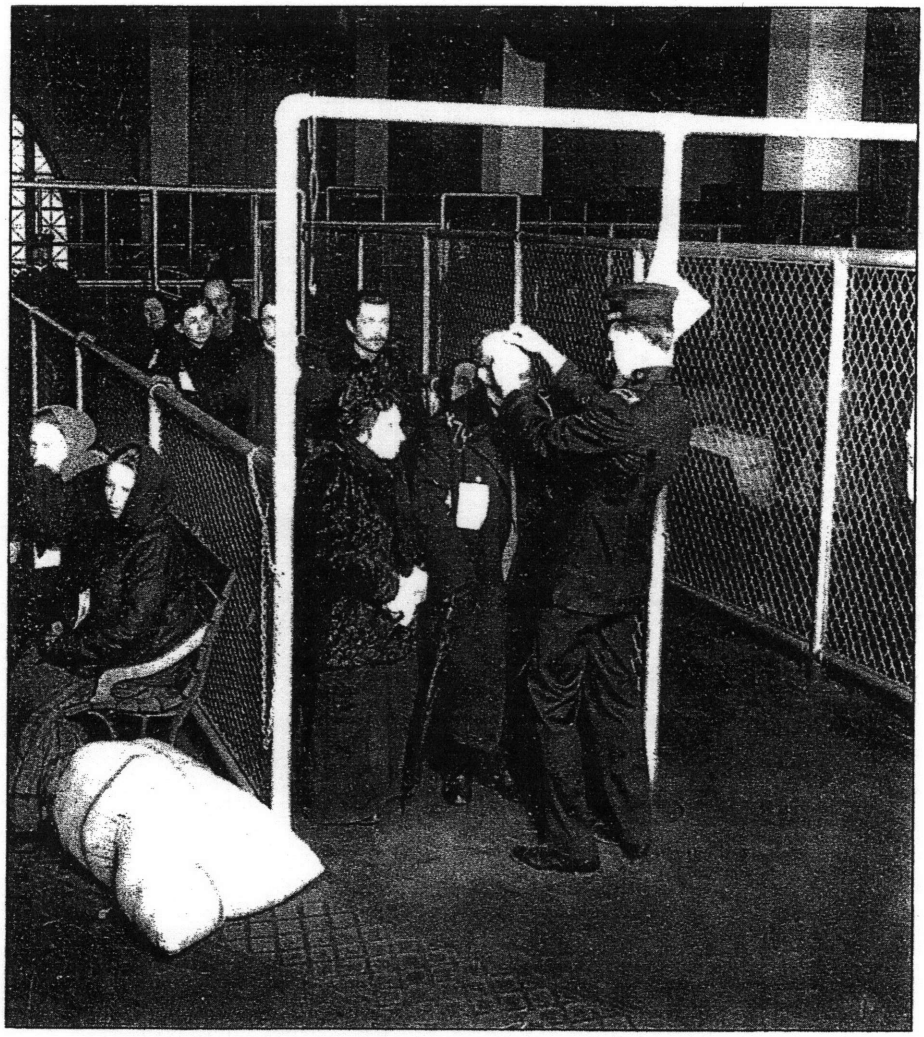


Fig. 30. The eye exam at Ellis Island

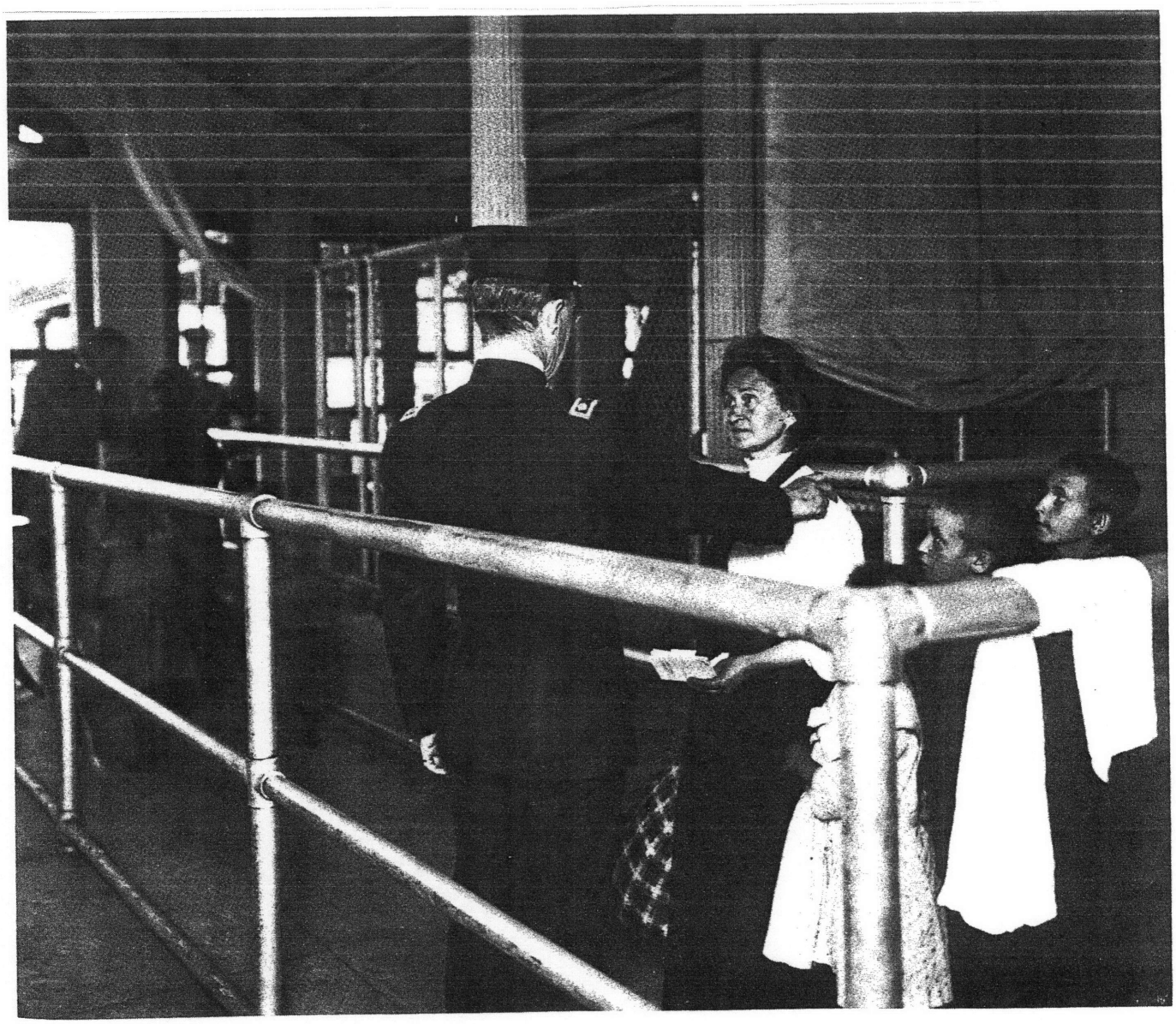


Fig. 31 Right turn on the inspection line

Fig. 32. President Roosevelt visits Ellis Island, September 16, 1903

Fig. 33. Inspection for venereal disease among men

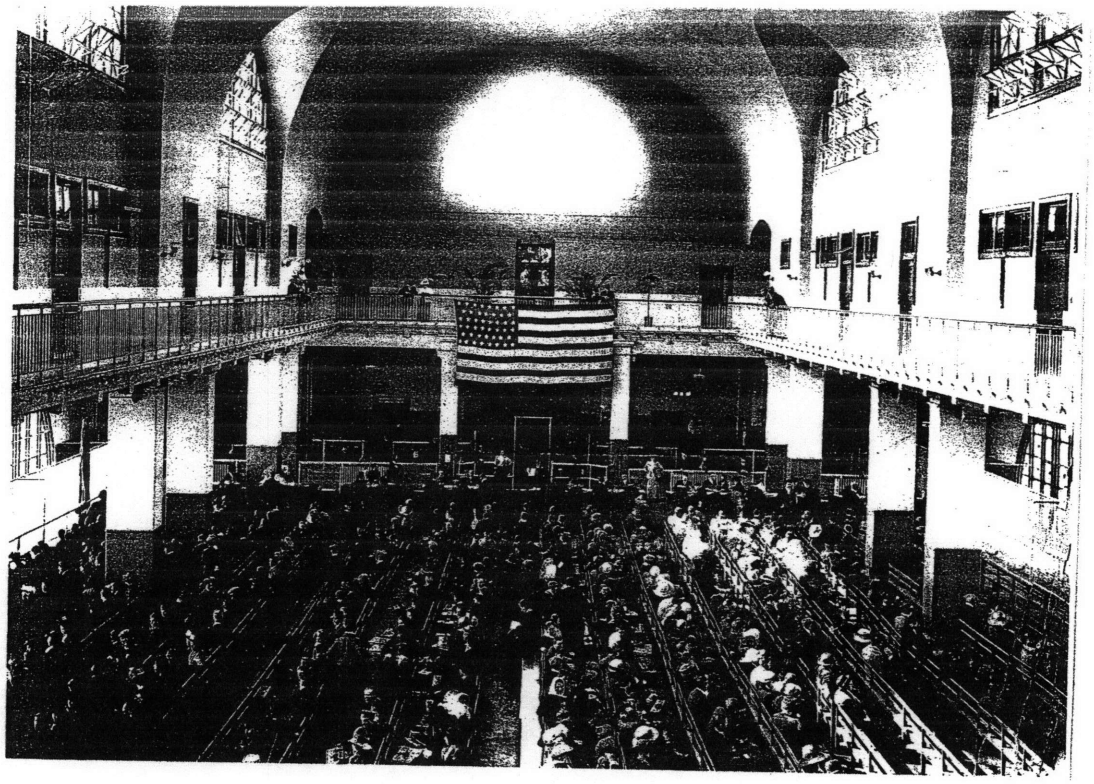


Fig. 34. Benches in the registry room, circa 1906

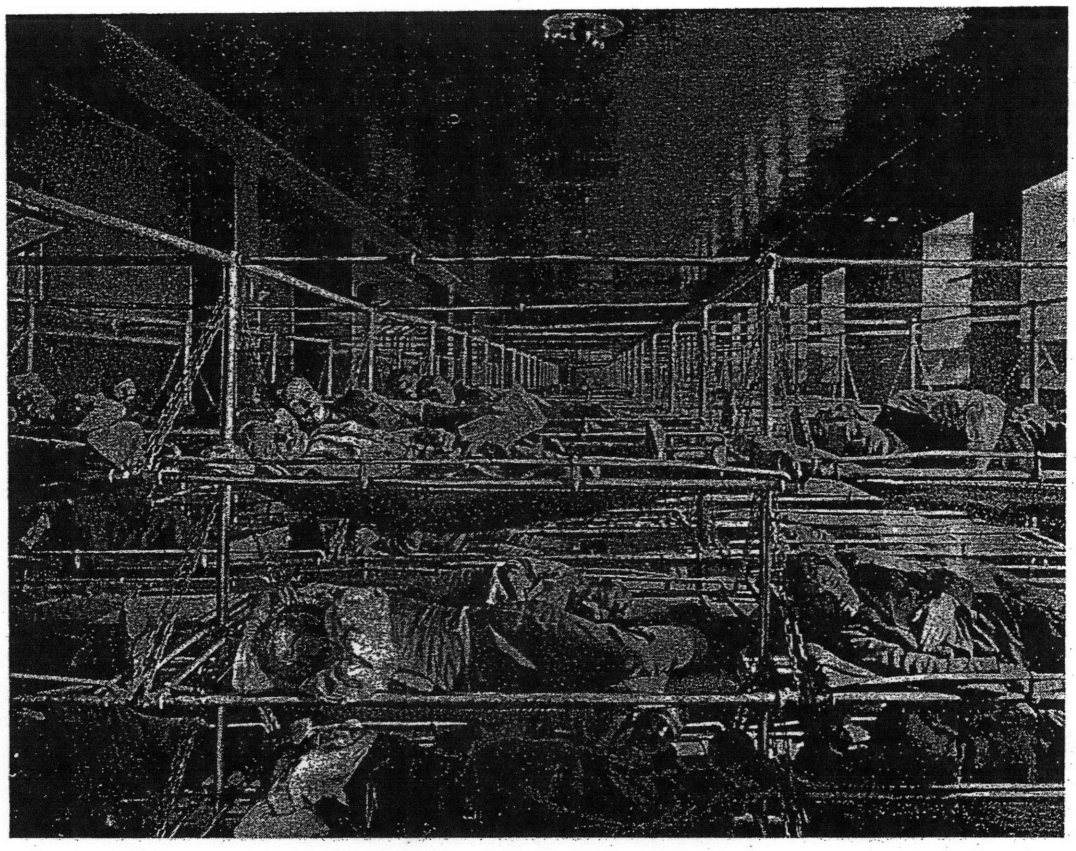


Fig. 35. Bunks in the dormitory

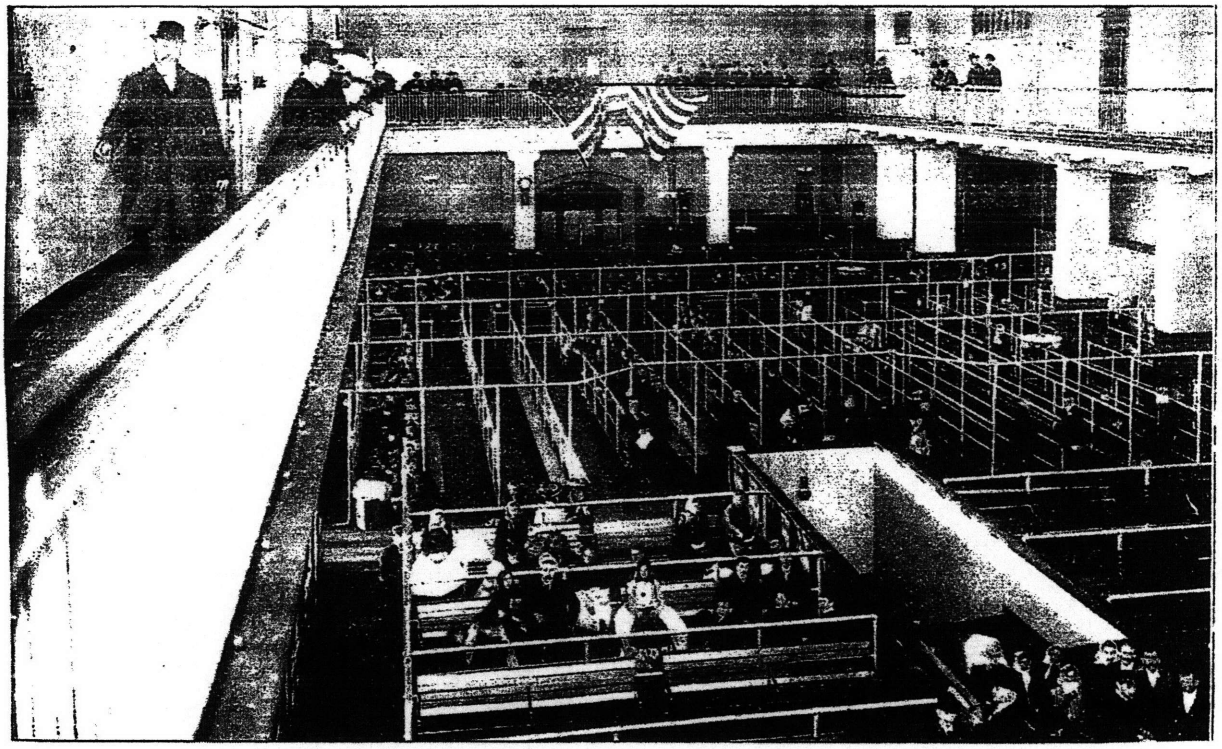


Fig. 36. Visitors on the mezzanine above the registry room

Fig. 37. The general hospital on Island No. 2

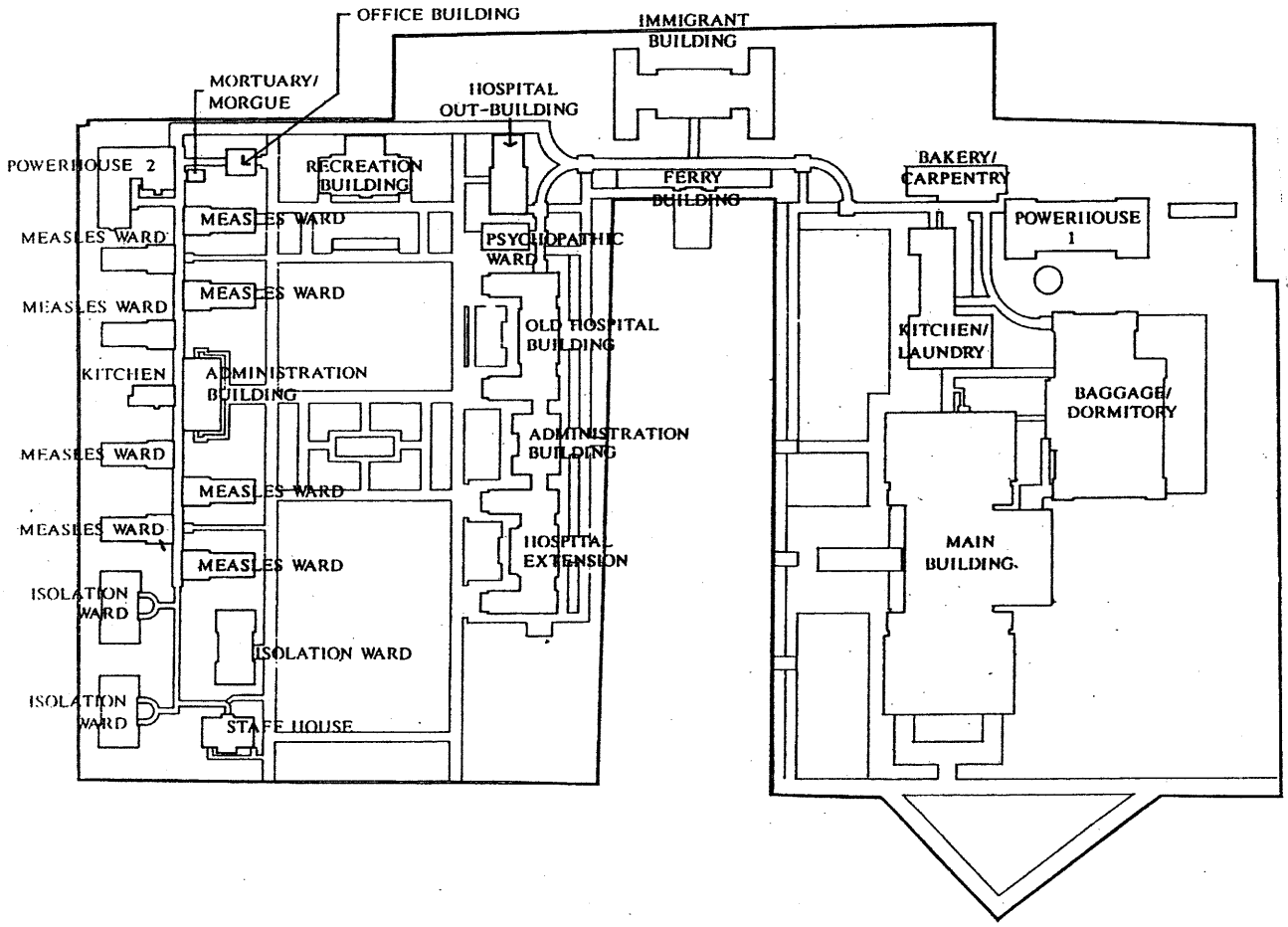


Fig. 38. Diagram of the buildings on Ellis Island

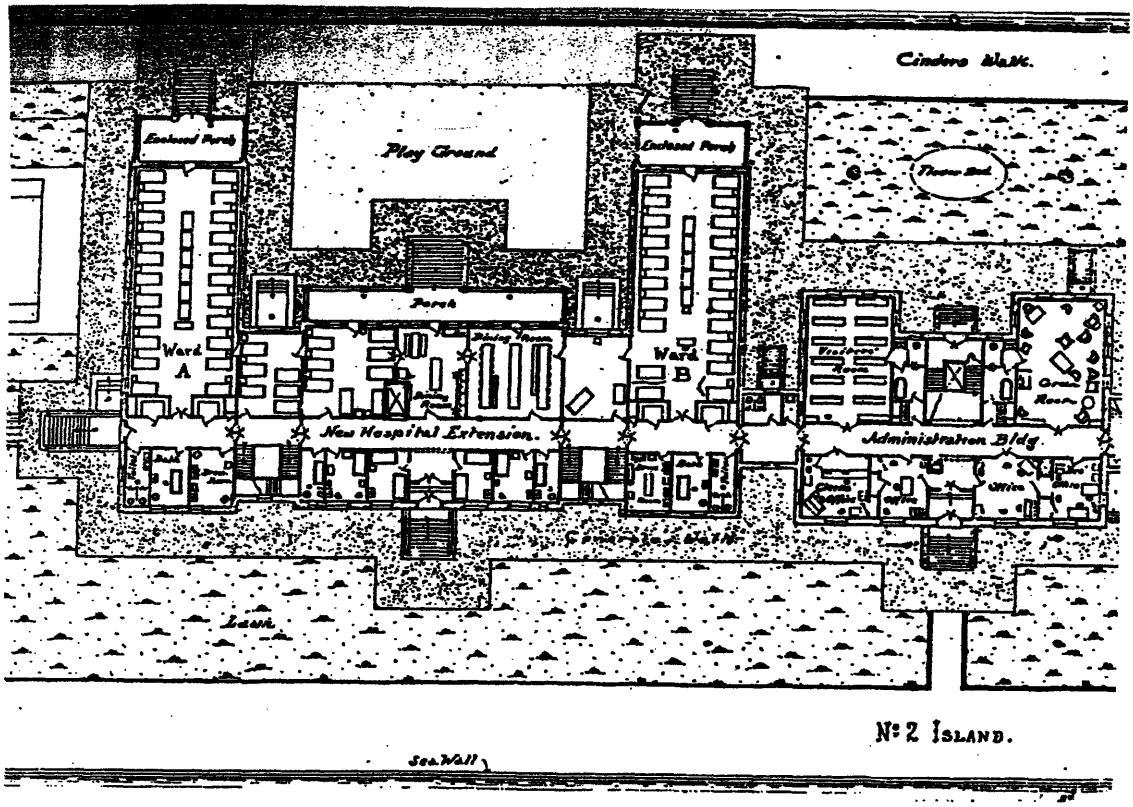


Fig. 39. Partial plan of the general hospital on Ellis Island

Fig. 40. The laboratory in the general hospital

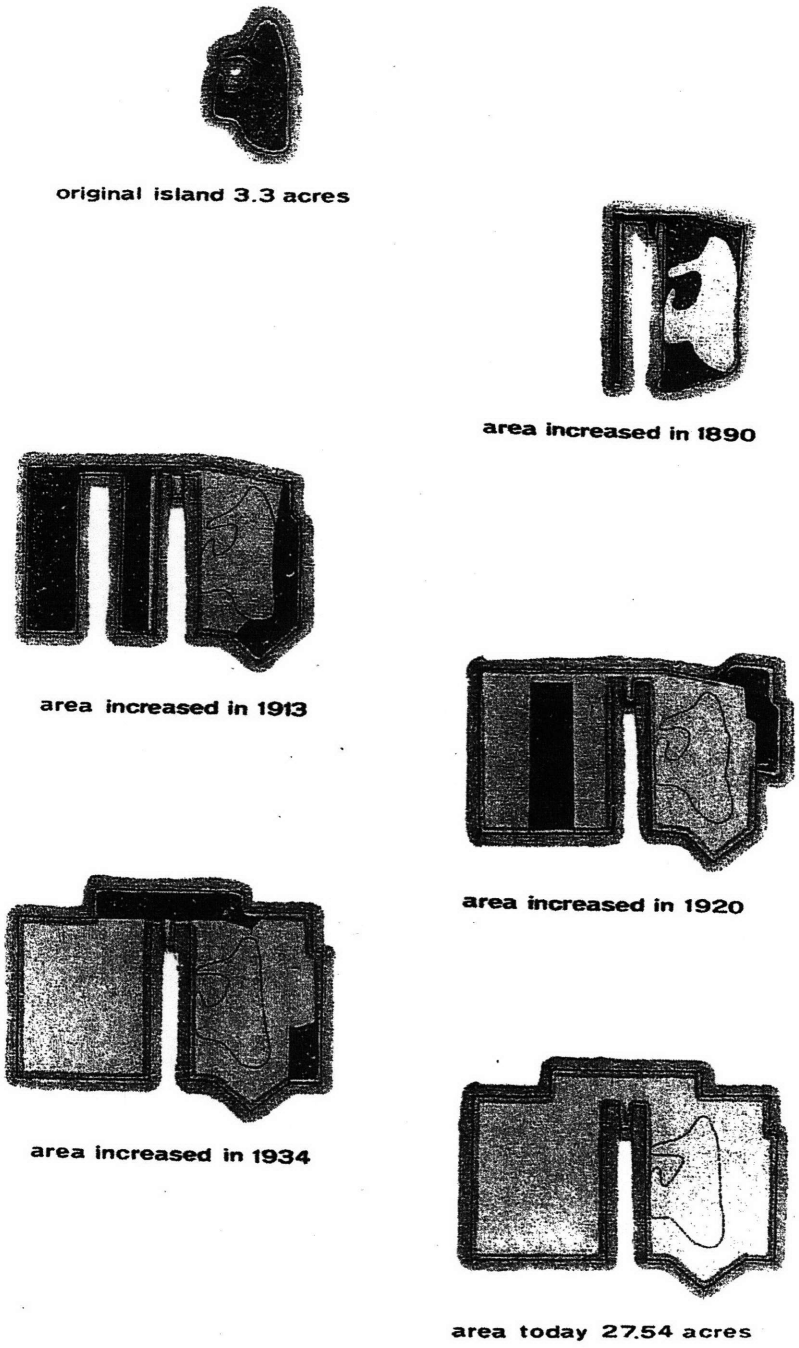


Fig. 41. Expansion of Ellis Island by fill

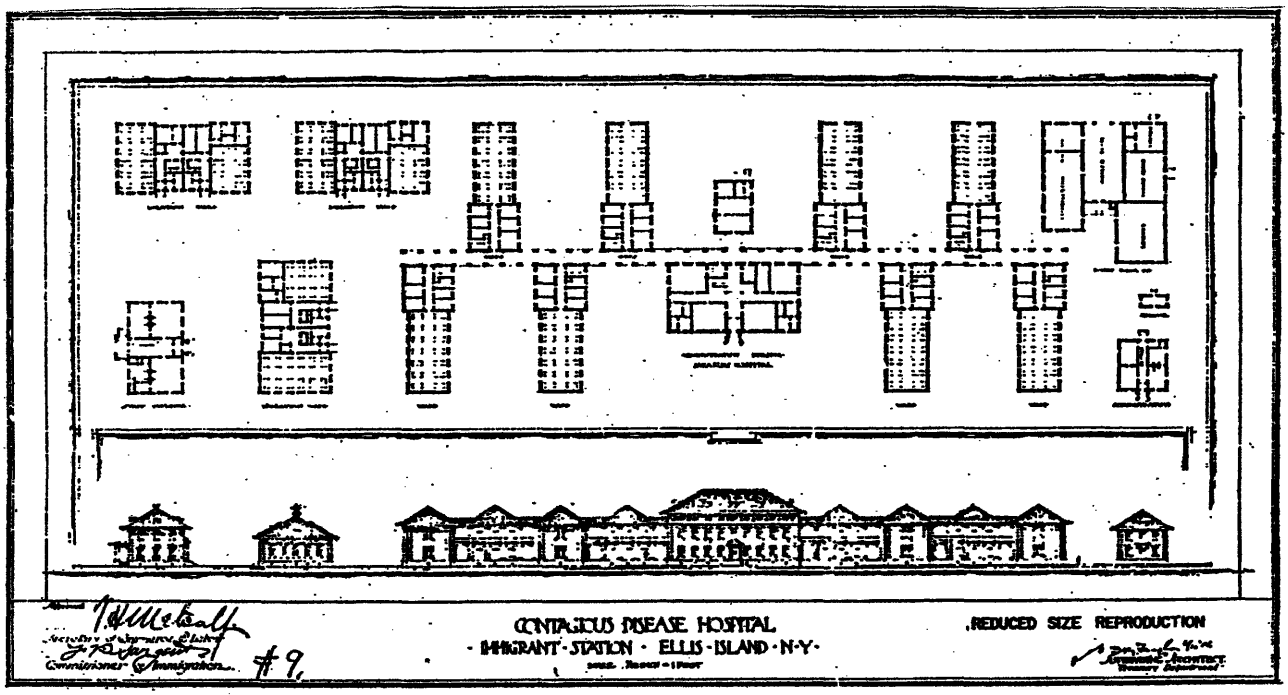


Fig. 42. Plan of Contagious Disease Hospital on Ellis Island indicating pavilions for contagious diseases

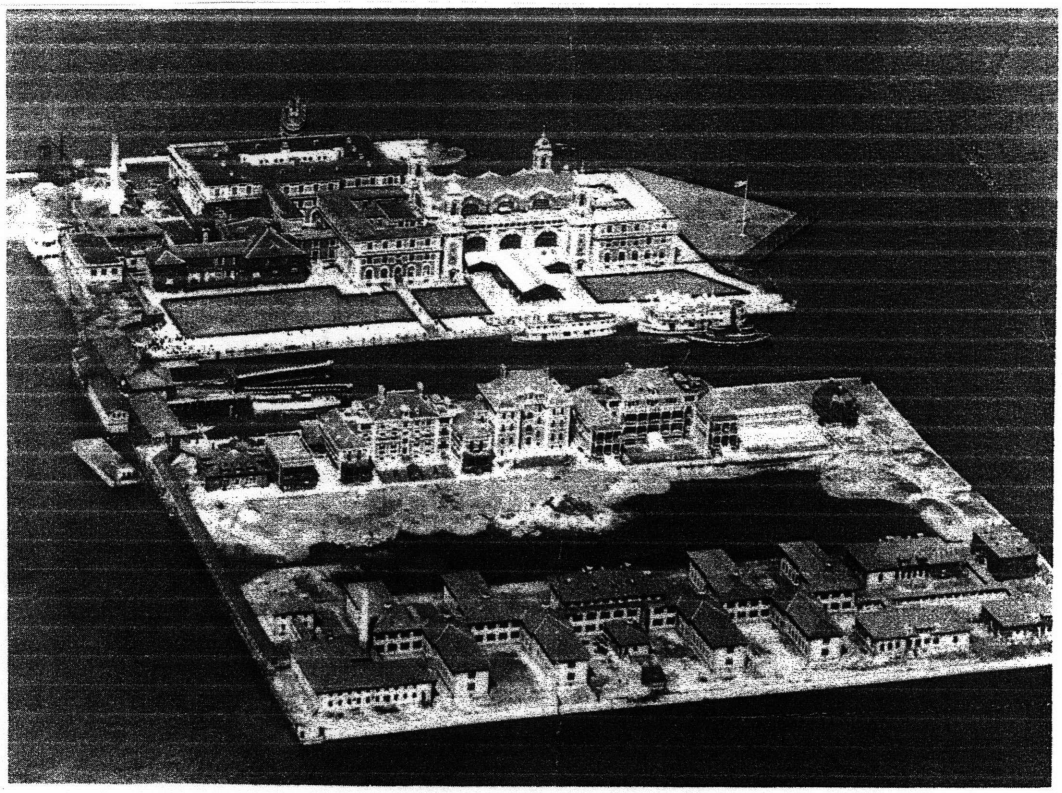
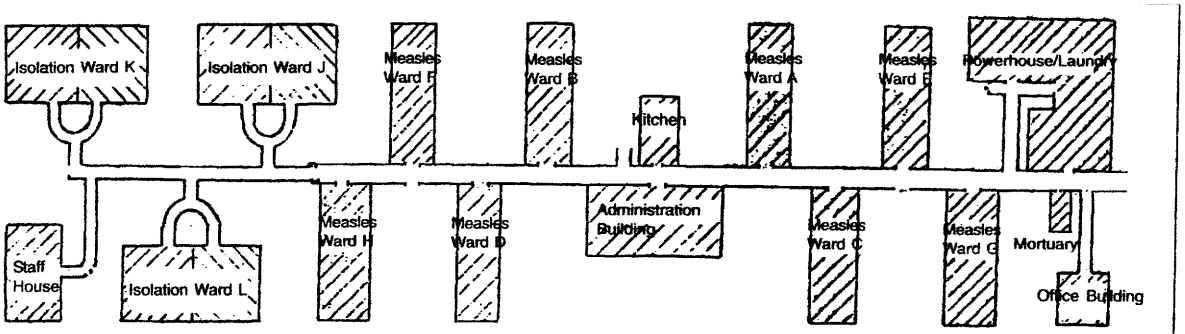


Fig. 43. Aerial photograph of the Contagious Disease Hospital on Ellis Island

Fig. 44. Ward in the contagious disease hospital on Ellis Island



Original Building Name	Public Health Service Name
Administration Building	Administration
Kitchen	Kitchen
Mortuary	Animal House
Office Building	Nurses' Quarters
Powerhouse/Laundry	Powerhouse
Staff House	Staff House
Measles Ward A	Wards 17, 18
Measles Ward B	Wards 19, 20
Measles Ward C	Wards 15, 16

Original Building Name	Public Health Service Name
Measles Ward D	Wards 21, 22
Measles Ward E	Wards 13, 14
Measles Ward F	Wards 23, 24
Measles Ward G	Wards 11, 12
Measles Ward H	Wards 25, 26
Isolation Ward J	Wards 27, 28
Isolation Ward K	Wards 31, 32
Isolation Ward L	Wards 29, 30

Fig. 45. Pavilions in the contagious disease hospital

.g. 2 Low grade imbecile. Age II years.

FACES OF THE "FEEBLEMINDED"

Irritability and surliness. The firm mou
and earnestness of expression suggest combativene

Figs. 46 & 47. Characteristics of the feeble minded identified in Ellis Island photographs

Fig. 48. Dr. Howard Knox and the "cube test" with immigrant on Ellis Island

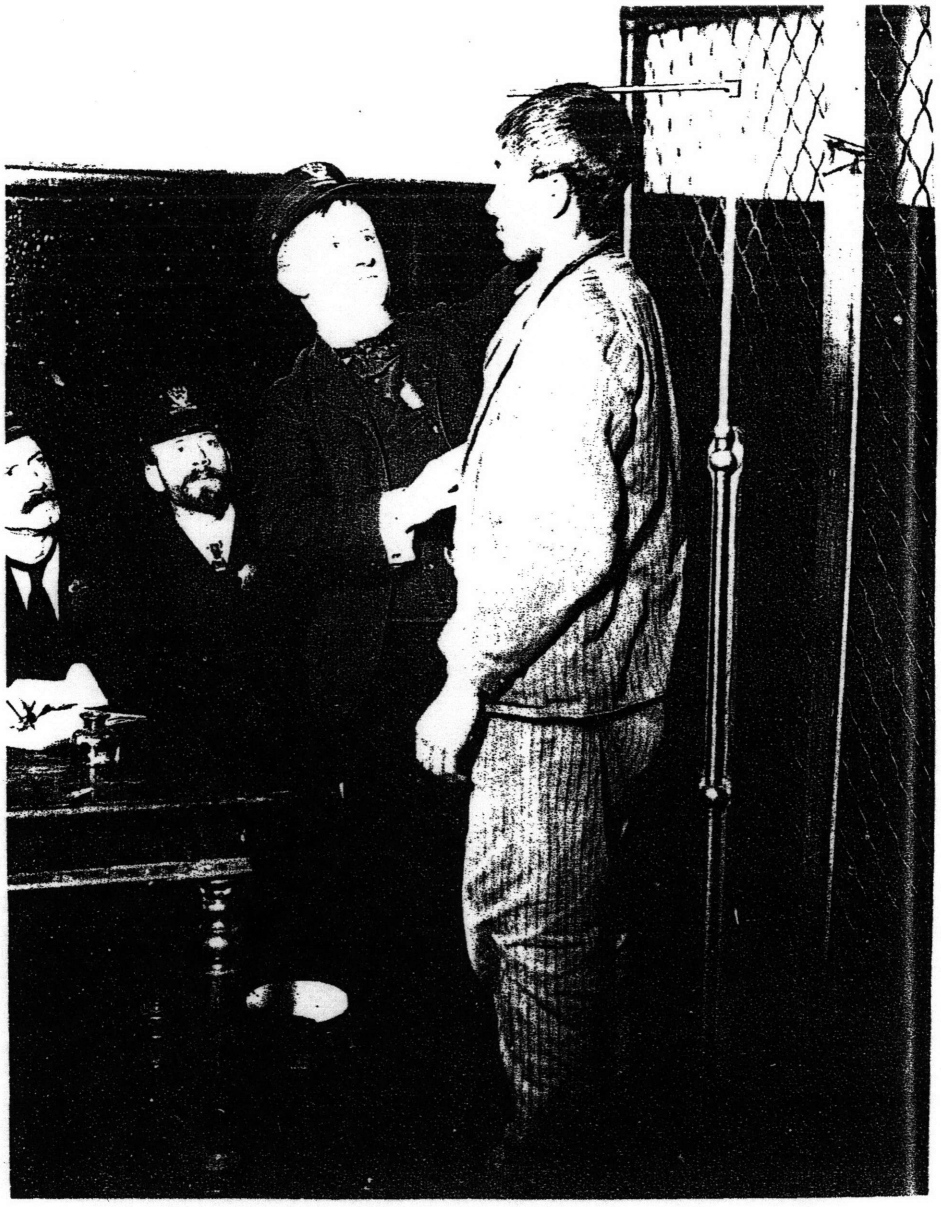


Fig. 49. Taking Bertillion measurements on Ellis Island

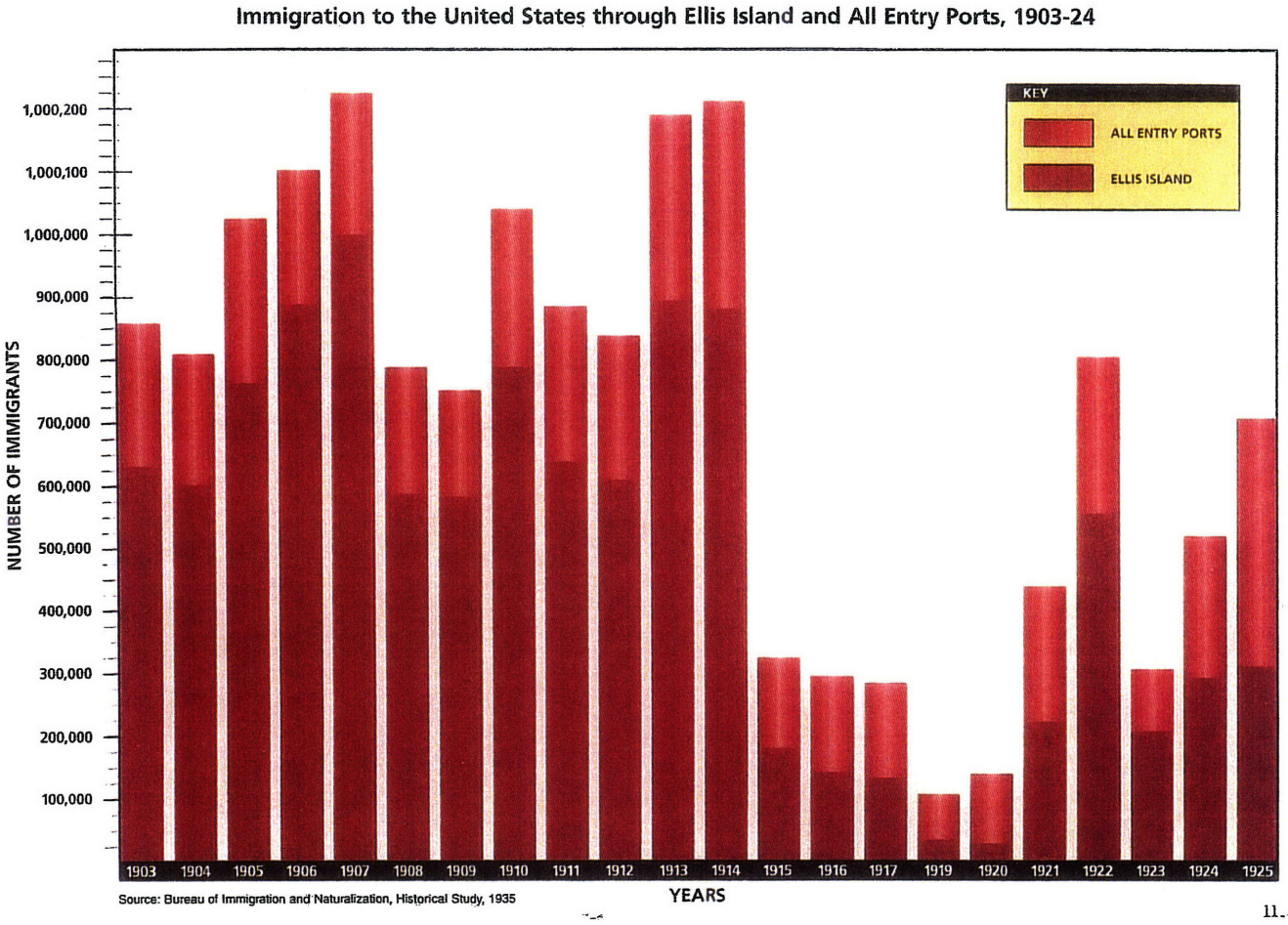


Fig. 50. Graph of immigration to the United States through Ellis Island and all entry points, 1903-24