Bring Us Your Tired, Your Poor. Or Don’t.

Unlikely as it seems, the Statue of Liberty once represented not open arms but a kick in the pants.

BY EDWARD T. O’DONNELL

The cartoon of Nast and his muscular immigrants is much as they imagined their passions. Far more influential and sinister was the emergence at the turn of the century of the nativist movement, which argued that certain races, principally the “Roman” of northern and western Europe, were more fit than others. This theory was used to justify restriction of the behevedly superior immigration of what were deemed racially inferior peoples from Asia and southern and eastern Europe.

If the nativist movement had a national headquarters, it was New York. Two of its most prominent proponents, Charles J. B. Dillingham and Madison Grant, lived in the city, and both played major roles founding the Ghetto Society, the leading eugenics organization, and the Eugenics Record Office, a sort of social-policy think tank in Cold Harbor, Long Island, just across the Narrows from the City.

Grant, who came from a prominent New York family, also wrote a highly influential essay titled “The Passing of the Great Race” in 1893. In the book he warned that the nation was being colonized by “a large and increasing number of the weak, the broken, and the mentally crippled.” The race was drawn from the lower strata of the Mediterranean basin and the Balkans, together with the wretched, the wretched populations of the Polish Jews.

FIVE years later, he helped found the Second National Eugenics Conference in New York City. History, where 258 participants heard papers such as “Aryan and Dithsonian Races” and “The Passing of the Great Race.” Also in 1913, Grant consulted on the construction of the statue of Liberty, which was named for its large scale, and its influence was such that the statue was given the name of the nation’s eugenics movement, the 1905 General Council Act, which sharply curtailed immigration and set quotas for foreign workers based on race and nationality.

Quotas remained until 1965, but migration never again enjoyed such coddling. The cancel-under-the-Second-Centric Immigration Act renounced the name of national and the symbol of the eugenicist movement, the statue of Liberty, the “Gone with the Wind” for the new era.

The Statue of Liberty was transformed from a symbol of republican values into one proclaiming immigration, the iconic immigrant neighborhood, the Lower East Side, and the once-great Registry of Historic Places. This transformation would not surprise anyone, for the city has long been home to the multicultural ideal. Even at the height of the Know Nothing movement, Walt Whitman wrote of America’s “City of the World” (for all races were here). All the lands of the earth make contributions to the nation here, even those who portrayed immigrants as decent people trapped not by inferior genius but byinhuman conditions. And when the United States was born in 1776, its fertile became a cauldron for multiculturalism for a century to come.