

*The Lady Who Came With Me: An Investigation into the Americanized Rhetoric of Immigration*



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## I. Preface

A little over one year ago in the winter of 2020, I became overwhelmed by a rather deep and all-consuming train of thought: *How did I get here?* By “here” I didn’t necessarily mean UC Santa Barbara, where I was in the third year of pursuing my undergraduate degree in Political Science. Instead, I meant “here” in the broader sense of America, specifically Southern California. The catalyst for this rather complex consideration was the course in immigration politics that I was enrolled in at the time, which had immeasurably broadened my perspective on the legal, political, economic, and social hurdles that migrant groups have faced since the founding of this nation. As I sat in the class listening to my professor describe the nuanced, convoluted, and ever-shifting nature of migration history, I was struck with a few questions: how had my own family managed to escape the perils of Europe in the early 20th century and come to the United States? Were there deeper factors of privilege, based primarily in the color of our skin, that played a crucial role in not only bringing my family to this country, but ensuring they lived a good life?

It is no secret that since the beginning, America has been built on a strong tradition of exclusionary policy and the favoring of certain factions over others. Over the course of that ten-week quarter, I learned about the federal government’s abundant attempts to block specific groups from coming to this country, while providing various loopholes and technicalities through which others can. As perfectly stated by a 21st century immigration scholar, “Citizenship in the United States has always been relatively easy to acquire for immigrants defined as white, but for immigrant groups defined as non-white, citizenship was often out of reach.”<sup>1</sup> Prior to the passage of the 1965 Immigration (Hart-Cellar) Act, discriminatory policy was almost frighteningly overt, as demonstrated by pieces of legislation like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, 1892 Geary Act,

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<sup>1</sup> Gerstle, Gary. "Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Immigrant Political Incorporation: The American Experience." *International Labor and Working-Class History* 78, no. 1 (2010): 110.

and 1924 National Origins Act. Every aspect of these laws--from the unabashedly discriminatory rhetoric in their names to the harsh limitations and stipulations they set forth--was aimed at keeping certain ethnic groups out of the nation. In the wake of the civil rights era however, legislators deemed the playing field to be “fair:” Hart-Cellar set migration quotas to be the same across the board and created a preference category based on professional skill set, refugee status, family reunification, and a few other factors.<sup>2</sup> As I will explore later, however, the system that so heavily stressed equality for migrants from all nations, has nonetheless been one of the biggest components in blocking immigration for individuals in countries that need it the most.

The 1965 Immigration Act has not stopped nativist sentiment from showing its nasty underside, though perhaps more implicitly than before its passing. A recent example is in 2005, Congress attempted to pass H.R. 4437, also known as the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act or “Sensenbrenner Bill,” which would have dramatically heightened penalties for illegal border crossing and made it a *felony* to house an undocumented immigrant.<sup>3</sup> Even putting aside the heinous provisions of H.R. 4437, the rhetoric within the article immediately struck me. Classifying individuals who have crossed the border as “aliens” (within an official government document nonetheless), made me reflect deeply about the way specific groups are categorized in public discourse. While this is only one example of exclusionary policy and the rhetoric that lawmakers use to categorize those they perceive as “the other,” there are many more, which have altered the lives of countless individuals across the United States and world.

To say that learning about these various pieces of history deeply altered the way I viewed America’s treatment of migrants would be an understatement. I had always known that

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Zepeda-Millán. *Latino Mass Mobilization : Immigration, Racialization, and Activism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 25.

<sup>3</sup> Zepeda-Millán, *Latino Mass Mobilization*, 40.

immigration was not a level playing field, but now I was incentivized to learn more about the inequity and bias entrenched so deeply within our system, that it poisons even the names we give this demographic. Specifically, I decided it was time for me to learn more about my own family's immigration history beginning with my great-grandfather Petar, who came to America on the eve of World War II. Inspired by the voices of the women I had read about in my immigration politics class, I decided to analyze my family's history specifically through the lens of my great-grandmother Yozica Bogdanovic. Although she passed in 2005, Yozica lives on through the many family heirlooms placed delicately throughout my childhood home.

Through a series of interviews with my father, Michael Bogdanovic (Yozica's great-grandson), my grandmother Marcia Bogdanovic (Yozica's daughter-in-law), and my great- Uncle Peter Bogdanovic (Yozica's only remaining son), I was able to piece together decades of family history. Paired with the extensive research I performed about 20th century immigration policy, these interviews are the main form of data for this project, as they paint a picture of the political, legal, and social landscape of Petar and Yozica's era. What follows is part ethnography about Yozica's life, and part analytical research paper examining how my family settled in California, the factors that worked in our favor and disfavor, and how this experience may overlap with and differ from the experience of an immigrant in 21st century America. As I ventured into the attic in my childhood house to find pictures of the lady who brought my family to this country, I was faced with photographs of a woman with curling brown hair, deep smile lines, and eyes not unlike my own. Staring deeply into photographs of the life that my great-grandparents built for themselves in America, I realized that in many capacities, Yozica's story is my story, and that by investing in her, I am actually investing in myself, and my future. In other words, by learning more about policies and legislation that affected the outcome of my own family and hundreds of thousands of

others around the world, I am setting myself down a path of education, advocacy, and activism on behalf of a group that I care so deeply about.

## II. Introduction to Early 20th Century Immigration

When my great grandmother Yozica Bogdanovic first stepped foot onto the cobble-stoned pathway leading to the inspection offices at Ellis Island in 1939, the United States was emerging from one of the largest influxes in European migration that the nation had ever seen. Beginning in the 1880's, European immigrants had started coming to the country by the masses, in an event deemed by Portes and Rumbaut as "The Great European Wave." As industrialization and capitalism descended upon Europe in the later part of the 19th century, the pace of change was heightened, and many struggled to keep up with the increasing poverty and instability. Still recovering from the aftershocks of World War I, Europe was not prepared for the arduous process of rebuilding the infrastructure, economy, and social fabric that was destroyed during the war. Thus, countless European males made the decision to come to the United States to find work, returning to their home countries sporadically and sending money home each month. Though they were at the bottom of the occupational ladder, the American economy in the late 1800's and early 1900's heavily relied on these laborers. Ultimately, western capitalism was built on "a continuous supply of unskilled Italians, Poles, and other eastern European workers to keep fueling a mass industrial economy that was propelling them into positions of ever greater wealth and prosperity."<sup>4</sup> Initially lured to the United States by prospects of steady work, higher income, and better standards of living, this "Great European Wave" continued from the 1880's into the 1930's, for nearly five decades.

In January of 1938, toward the end of this great wave, my great grandfather Petar Bogdanovic boarded a ship set for Ellis Island and was amongst these individuals who came to the United States in search of more stable income. For nearly his entire life, Petar worked as a

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<sup>4</sup> Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, Fourth Edition (University of California Press, 2014), 7.

fisherman in San Pedro, California, which at the time, was home to an extremely vibrant and eclectic ethnic enclave consisting of Poles, Italians, Greeks, Irish, Portuguese, and of course, other Yugoslavians.<sup>5</sup> Although family connections landed him his first job in the booming fishing industry, it was important for Petar to lay the foundation for his new life in an area where the warmth and camaraderie of other fellow immigrants ran deep. Coupled with the Mediterranean climate and the many opportunities for blue collar work, Petar established himself in a small apartment building nestled in the rolling hills surrounding the port of Los Angeles. A little over a year later in November of 1939, Petar sent for my great grandmother Yozica Bogdanovic, and his two young sons Joseph and Luke--a pattern familiar to many immigrant families of this era.

It is undeniable that the face of immigration looked a little different in California than it did in the major cities of the east coast, such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Californian migration can be largely characterized by the nativist sentiment that sprung out of the Gold Rush. During this time, mass numbers of Chinese immigrants came to the nation, first in search of gold and later in search of jobs working on the two great railway systems of the era: the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific.<sup>6</sup> Later in the 19th century, Japanese immigrants began to come as well, working for low wages on California ranches.<sup>7</sup> On top of this, through the conclusion of the Mexican American War and the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, thousands of Mexican nationals suddenly became American citizens, as large territories in California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, Nevada, and Colorado, suddenly became part of the United States.<sup>8</sup> Combined, the migration of Chinese, Japanese, and Mexican American individuals rendered

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<sup>5</sup> Jessica Garrison, "San Pedro Street Renamed in Honor of Area's Croatians," *Crown*, September 24, 2003. <http://www.croatia.org/crown/articles/4793/1/E-San-Pedro-Street-Renamed>

<sup>6</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> Id.

<sup>8</sup> "The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo." *National Archives and Records Administration*. Accessed March 14, 2021. <https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/guadalupe-hidalgo>.

California a melting pot of cultures, languages, and lifestyles. Unfortunately, along with this diversity came nativist backlash and xenophobic measures.

In 1882, the United States passed the Chinese Exclusion Act which effectively banned immigration from a majority of Asian countries. Large numbers of Chinese individuals were pushed off of California ranches, where they had worked for many years as agricultural laborers, and into crowded Chinatowns in major metropolises such as San Francisco and Los Angeles. Although opening jobs for white, naturalized Americans, this forcible removal further exacerbated ethnic tensions, essentially confining individuals of Asian descent to a specific geography and social sphere. A little over 40 years later, a second and perhaps even crueler wave of nativist sentiment surfaced, with 1924 marking the passage of the National Origins Act (also known as Johnson-Reed) which further tightened quotas and ended the honeymoon period of “open door policy.” The act sought to keep out certain “undesirable” immigrant groups, mainly from the Asian continent, while allowing individuals from European countries to continue coming to the nation, provide cheap labor, and keep the nation white.<sup>9</sup> Put perfectly by Portes and Rumbaut, “Through various loopholes and administrative devices, the federal government endeavored to keep the ‘back door’ of immigration open to Western capital, while closing it to new southern and eastern European migrants.”<sup>10</sup> During World War II, however, the National Origins Act served as a block for countless European Jews whose countries had already “maxed out” their quotas, ultimately trapping these individuals in their home countries, where perilous politics and the rise of Nazi rule, lead them to their death. It was not until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, also known

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<sup>9</sup> “Closing the Door in Immigration,” *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, Accessed March 14th, 2021. <https://www.nps.gov/articles/closing-the-door-on-immigration.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, 14.



as the Hart-Cellar Act, that these policies would be reformed to a system deemed to be more equitable by policy makers of the era.

While California developed on a basis of Asian exclusion and begrudging acceptance for Mexican nationals incorporated in the aftermath of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the composition of immigration looked quite different in other parts of the country. As depicted by Jacob Riis in his infamous photographs, the “other half” in New York was composed mainly of white Europeans, amongst whose ranks included Irish, Italian, Greeks, Hungarians, Slavs, and other similar ethnic groups. While these individuals were undeniably treated as second class-citizens when they opened their mouths and thick accents tumbled out, it was unlikely they would ever be accosted as they walked down the street, for not being a native-born citizen. In California, however, the “other half” mainly included anyone whose skin was not white, thus creating a tangible divide within the kind of neighborhoods people settled in, the schools their children attended, the jobs they held, and the general lifestyle they lived.

The history of California, both in regards to the kinds of demographics that came here and the legislation implemented to counteract this migration, is vital to understanding Petar Bogdanovic’s privilege in not only being able to enter the United States, but to settle in California. Though it is true that Petar’s work was considered heavily blue collar and money was not exactly a commodity, he still was able to come to the nation in a decade where immigration had become a highly contentious and exclusive issue. My family's ability to come to America can be attributed largely to the hard work and generosity of Martin Bogdanovic, Petar’s uncle who had come to the country in the early 1900’s and established himself in San Pedro, where he had founded a prosperous fishing cannery. Martin granted Petar his first job in the cannery, ultimately serving as his first source of steady income and later making it possible for Yozica’s immigration as well. In other words, having well-established family in the country was a leading cause of my family’s

ability to emigrate in the time period that they did-- a privilege that many others did not have. Incalculable numbers attempted to flee their home as the extremist policies of fascist leaders began to dominate day-to-day life. Out of this group, however, too many were turned away owing to their country having already exceeded their immigration limit. According to the dates on Yozica's immigration certificate and family folklore, she and her sons were on one of the last passenger boats out of Gibraltar, before Europe descended into the treachery and peril of World War II.

As proudly stated on Ellis Island's website, more than 12 million immigrants passed through this checkpoint from 1892 to 1954.<sup>11</sup> First-class passengers aboard large ships did not have to go through the inspection process at Ellis Island, as policy makers believed that those wealthy enough to purchase this type of ticket would not be a "burden" on their new nation.<sup>12</sup> Although Yozica and her sons were not wealthy, they were fortunate enough to arrive in their new country with their papers in order and with no visible signs of sickness, so they passed through easily. At its best, Ellis Island simply deemed first and second-class passengers more desirable than those in third third class. At its worst, the policies at Ellis Island set the tone for these migrant's new life in America, by using class and race as a metric to decide which immigrants were deserving, and which were not.

After passing inspection at Ellis Island, Yozica boarded a train with her two young sons and headed west to San Pedro, to reunite with her husband. There is something undeniably symbolic about an immigrant woman seeing her new country for the first time from the window of a train, gliding through on railways built on the labor of other fellow migrants. While aboard, Yozica befriended and developed an extremely close friendship with a fellow immigrant woman,

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<sup>11</sup> Ellis Island Foundation, "The History of Ellis Island," Accessed February 9, 2020.

<https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/>

<sup>12</sup> Id.

also from Yugoslavia. Although I can only speculate about the topics the two discussed throughout the week-long train ride,

With this historical context in mind, the story I am about to tell is about Yozica's life: the type of woman she was, the sacrifices she made for her family, but perhaps most importantly, the relationship she developed with her new country. By recounting Yozica's narrative, I hope to analyze the rhetoric that has been used within public discourse to characterize immigrants since the early 20th century, and even draw comparisons between then and now. On a more symbolic level, I hope to inspire thought about our own families' immigration histories: Who were the people, similar to Yozica's "lady who came with me" who guided and helped our own families when they established themselves in this country?

Although based on historical facts about my family, Yozica's vignettes are works of historical fiction, meaning that they are a blend of truth, and my own personal imagination about my great grandmother, as I attempt to capture the emotions she felt as she lived through these pivotal moments. While some of what follows is imagined, the action and plot points are all based from the interviews conducted with family members. The following portions will transition from vignettes, written in first person from Yozica's perspective to analysis of the era, using historical context and data. They will be presented as follows:

- iii. Vignette of Yozica's Journey to America: Aboard *The Re*
- iv. Analysis of Yozica's Journey: Rhetoric, Experience, and Public Attitude
- v. Vignette of Yozica's American Life: Seasons in San Pedro
- vi. Analysis of Yozica's Experience in California
- vii. Conclusion

Evidently, Yozica's story is important to me because it is a testament to the tenacity and unbreakable spirit of the women in my family, as well as a story about coming to a new place for

the first time. As perfectly depicted by Pulitzer Prize winning author Oscar Handlin in 1952, “Once I thought to write a history of immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history.”

### III. Aboard *The Re*: Yugoslavia, Genoa, Gibraltar, and New York City

#### *November 1939, Genoa, Italy*

The cold fall wind hit Yozica squarely in the face as she bent down to pick up Joseph, who had squirmed away from her once more, determined, it seemed, to hurl himself off the side of the loading dock and into the frigid gulf waters. Nearby, other passengers with small children granted her sympathetic looks, as they clutched tightly to the three most important things: their documentation papers, their luggage, and their children's hands. November in Genoa would normally be quite a lovely time, Yozica thought to herself, perhaps if her husband had been here.

Ever since receiving the letter from Martin Bogdanovic a little over a year ago, Yozica had lived a quite liminal existence. Martin, Peter's uncle, had written to say that he needed more workers and fishermen for his booming cannery business, and that he would be more than willing to employ Petar if he could buy a ticket to Los Angeles. Petar's own father had passed away from the Spanish Flu in 1919, and although located hundreds of thousands of miles away, his uncle had been a consistent source of generosity in their lives. Having come to America in early 1900, Martin had essentially transferred the family business from the Dalmatian Coast to the California Coast, and ran a relatively profitable fishery. In the true Yugoslavian spirit, Martin had sponsored numerous Bogdanovic family members, given them jobs in his enterprise, and encouraged them to become naturalized United States citizens. Now, it was Yozica's turn.

With her husband many miles across the sprawling Atlantic Ocean, Yozica had remained in Komiza with their two small sons: Luke (who was now age five) and Joseph (now age three). As Martin had written in his letter, Yugoslavia was not exactly the pinnacle of abundance. Komiza in particular was still suffering deeply from the aftershocks of the global economic crisis of 1929, which had practically decimated the once prosperous fishing and winemaking town. With the

majority of Petar's family relocated to America, Yozica had relied primarily on help from her side of the family, the Polandos. They had survived the last fourteen months mainly through subsistence farming, bartering with neighbors in the village, and the small allowances that Petar sent over from San Pedro. On the opposite end of the globe, Petar had been busy working ten-hour days at his uncle's fish cannery and saving every cent to send over to Yozica and the two children, to purchase their freedom as well.

A few days earlier Yozica had boarded a different ship, set to take them from the island of Vis, Yugoslavia, to the port of Genoa, Italy. Saying goodbye to the island she had spent her entire life had seemed like a hazy lucid dream, as she floated through the living rooms of people she had always known, promising to write and maintain contact. Although both her parents had already passed, leaving behind her sisters, especially in the wake of ever-increasing poverty and escalating political tensions elsewhere in Europe, worried Yozica deeply. Barely able to afford the traveling expenses for her own two young children, however, Yozica bit her lip to hold back tears, and promised her sisters she would help them as soon as she could afford to.

Now standing on the dock in Genoa, the full gravity of the situation seemed to hit Yozica square in the face, as the wind had moments earlier. She had exactly ten dollars and twenty-seven cents in her pocket, two young children who required constant supervision, and perhaps most importantly, an extremely limited English vocabulary. Arriving in New York in one piece seemed like only half the battle; she had been warned that very few people in America spoke anything other than English. There were many times over the past year without Petar, where she had wondered if she would be forever stuck in this liminal zone. Would she be caught between fear of a new life and relief to be moving forward, and a family that was torn between the Dalmatian and Los Angeles coast? Most importantly, would she be powerless in the face of uncontrollable

political movements and economic conditions that had already separated many families throughout Europe? As she handed her papers to the inspection officers, who eyed the squirming Joseph with a look mixed with apprehension and slight annoyance, she decided that this moment would mark the end of this liminality.

*December 1939, Ellis Island, New York City*

It had been 10 long days since departing from Genoa, a time which had been crammed with excitement, anticipation, fear, and everything else in between. In Genoa, Yozica and the children had boarded a boat named *The Re*, Italian for king, which she hoped would keep them safe as they crossed the Atlantic ocean for the next ten days. Constantly on her mind were the number of things that had the potential to go awry during this time. The main excitement had come when the boat had attempted to pass through the strait of Gibraltar. At the inspection checkpoint, the boat had been stopped by British officers, who eventually let the liner pass, but not without voicing deep suspicion about the cargo and personnel aboard the ship. This past September, what would come to be known as the second World War had begun, with Nazi invasion of Poland.<sup>13</sup> Although it would be a little less than a year before Italy entered the Axis alliance, anything coming from this region of the world was already under increased scrutiny.<sup>14</sup> Heightened tensions and the anxiety from those who had lived through the first great war nearly a decade earlier, made it extremely difficult to travel, let alone migrate, without being stopped by probing and sometimes invasive questions about your destination, travel plans, and country of origin. It was almost like attempting to tread water in the swirling grey waters before a tsunami. Little did Yozica know that the ship that she and the children were aboard, *The Re*, would never return to America after sailing back to

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<sup>13</sup> “World War II,” History, Accessed January 14, 2021, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/world-war>.

<sup>14</sup> Id.

Genoa. It was moments like being blocked at Gibraltar that served as a constant reminder of the political conditions that many were leaving behind.

Now, *The Re* was about to dock at Ellis Island New York, the nation's leading entrance point for European immigrants. The atmosphere aboard was an odd mix of manic excitement and existential dread over what was about to transpire in the infamous Ellis Island inspection offices. Although officers had come aboard to explain the protocol, Yozica gathered very little. Her English comprehension was truly limited. Many of her fellow passengers were on the same page, with only a few fully understanding what the immigration officials had uttered to them. This, coupled with the countless horror stories of families being detained, separated, and sent away, kept Yozica's heart steadily pounding as she compulsively checked and re-checked her pocket for the manifest document that had been given to her in Genoa.

There were three vital points Yozica had gathered, which she kept reiterating in her head. First, although no papers like a visa, passport, or birth certificate were needed, everyone had to hold onto their manifest document: a piece of paper that had been given to Yozica in Genoa, that stated her name, place of origin, occupation, and destination.<sup>15</sup> Without this, inspection officers would have no understanding of her background, migration purpose, and might develop a reason to believe that she would become a burden on the country. Second, Yozica needed to keep their story straight, which would be difficult taking into consideration her narrow English abilities. This was vital, because as the tensions of wartime Europe had percolated into the United States, more and more immigration officers became suspicious of newcomers like never before. Wild and outrageous stories about German spies and Russian revolutionaries had generated tightened

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<sup>15</sup> "Immigration and Deportation at Ellis Island," Public Broadcasting Service, n.d.  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldman-immigration-and-deportation-ellis-island/>



restrictions from inspection officers. Although her English was limited, Petar had written to prompt her with answers to the most common and important questions: *Where are you going? Do you have money to purchase a train ticket? Where is your husband?*

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it was crucial that Yozica, Joseph, and Luke not show any visible signs of illness. Most specifically, Yozica had been warned not to show the slightest cough, which could be attributed to anything from tuberculosis, to cholera, influenza, smallpox, or something even worse that would certainly get the entire family placed in detention. Although exhausted and anxious from the past 10 days of travel, Yozica did her best to feign a smile and told her children to behave themselves, lest the ship would take them back to Komiza and they would never see their father again. This was a fear she told them only half-jokingly, as she somewhat believed this herself.

Before even entering the island, the ship stopped at a quarantine checkpoint, so health officers could come aboard the ship to scrutinize the new immigrants. Men and women were quickly separated, but because the boys were so young, Yozica clutched even more tightly to their hands than before, refusing to let them be swallowed by the crowd. The actual medical examination itself took less than a minute per passenger, with inspectors only hunting for overt signs of contagious illness. Internally, Yozica thanked her lucky stars that no one aboard had been viciously or blatantly ill.

After passing the health inspection, the ship was allowed to finally enter Ellis Island, with those deemed ill taken to an entirely separate part of the island, where they would be quarantined in detention centers. Walking cautiously off the dock and gripping her two children's hands, Yozica was prepared to stand in line for what later seemed like centuries- though in reality only a few hours. Overwhelmed with the thought of what lay ahead, she barely had time to take in the

colors of her new homeland: the blue, choppy waters of the New York Harbor, drab colors and peeling paint from the dilapidated buildings, and billowing smoke emitted from the factories across the harbor, which quickly blended with the dreary, grey December sky. Instead, she focused on entering the immigration offices and securing a spot in the winding line that twisted and turned like a snake, coiling tightly before striking its prey.

As they inched closer and closer to the daunting men dressed in military uniforms, she prepared herself to be aggressively questioned, especially since she was arriving to the country without her husband. When she arrived in front of one of the men, however, Yozica found his piercing eyes to be the most invasive component of the process. He asked her two questions: *What's your name and where are you going?* She replied easily and from here, he grunted, signaling that she and the boys were free to go. With her heart beating as though it would come out of her body, Yozica walked briskly away from the officer, the line, and the entire emotionally grueling process. Once again, she thanked the universe that she hadn't been deemed a felon, anarchist, arsonist, overzealous activist, or something else that would arouse suspicion and get her placed on a boat back to Europe. She was now an American.

### ***December 1939, Train to Los Angeles, California***

They had done it. Rivaling against what had seemed like Yozica's worst anxieties and deepest nightmares, she had managed to complete the entire immigration process, and was now waiting to board a train that would take her across the country. The entire venture seemed like an outlandish and distant dream, made real only by the probing questions and uncomfortable stares she had faced from the officers along the way. Now standing in the station, she couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

Except, perhaps, that the sigh had come a bit too early. Looking around the massive station, Yozica realized that she was not entirely confident in her selection of the loading area. She had purchased the tickets at a counter from a portly man who seemed to know she couldn't truly speak the language, and whose harsh, pounding stamp had indicated that he was not exactly the person to ask. With less than five minutes until arrival time, Yozica began to feel waves of anxiety constrict her body. Trains to Union Station in Los Angeles only came once a day, and if they missed this one, she and the boys would be forced to spend an uncomfortable night in the station, as she only had enough money left for food while aboard. Glancing frantically around the station, she felt Luke tug at her skirt. "Mama" he said sleepily, "Where are we?" *If only I knew for myself*, Yozica thought to herself.

High pitched screeching sounds and the bark of a horn indicated that a new train was coming into the platform in front of them. Because Yozica wasn't sure if it was the correct one, she looked around anxiously for anyone who could help. Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted an older woman, unassuming in dress and stature, and from the looks of her multiple worn suitcases, most likely had just come from the immigration offices as well. Panicked at the prospect of ending up in San Antonio instead of San Pedro, Yozica desperately approached her and said in a standard dialect "Excuse me, does this train go to Los Angeles?" With a non-assuming look to her and the boys, the lady replied "Yes it does. I wondered when you would ask." As the train screeched to a full stop, the lady reached down to help Yozica with her bags and helped her corral the boys onto the train.

Aboard, Yozica thanked the woman deeply and took a seat across from her. As the first friendly face she had witnessed in the new country, Yozica was eager to speak with another adult. She quickly learned a few things about her new friend. First, she was also a Yugo, but had come

on a liner earlier, having spent the last week detained at Ellis Island because of a smallpox outbreak aboard her ship. Second, she was also headed to Los Angeles to reunite with her son and his family, who she hadn't seen in three years since he had migrated to find work. Third, her experience at Ellis Island had been starkly different from Yozica's mainly due to the illness that had plagued her entire ship, and which Yozica realized she was incredibly lucky to have avoided. Officers had kept the boat detained at the quarantine checkpoint for a week, but once she had been deemed healthy by several health officers, she had passed through easily.

Friendship developed easily between the two women as they realized the similarities between not only their background, but their migration experiences. Speaking in deep, hushed tones about the lives they had left behind, the two bonded immediately. They spoke not only about the years of hardship they had lived through following the global economic crisis, but all they had done to make the cards fall into place: meticulously saving money, organizing the logistics of their travel, and extracting themselves from their homeland. In the moment, Yozica couldn't possibly have imagined that after a week aboard the train together, the two women would maintain some correspondence for the rest of their lives, connected forever through the initial feelings of liminality, fear, ambition, anticipation, and hope that they had for their new country. For countless years after, Yozica never spoke this woman's name, instead referring to her more descriptively as "the lady who came with me," as if signaling that because they had come into the nation together, she would always be with her.

#### **IV. Analysis of Yozica's Journey to America: Rhetoric, Experience, and Public Attitude**

When asked about the small island of Komiza many years after immigrating, my great-grandfather Petar famously remarked, "All that tiny little island had going for it was wine, fish, and goats." Although I never had the chance to meet him, I can almost picture Petar saying this, a thin smile stretching slowly across his face, as he drank deeply from his own cup of wine, and memories flickered nostalgically across his weathered face and cloudy eyes. Although undeniably fond of his home nation, Petar had lived through economic deprivation so extreme that he was pushed out of the place where he spent his entire life, and into a strange new world.

In the prior section, Yozica's vignette is meant to symbolize the unspoken stories of the twelve million individuals who came to Ellis Island in the period between 1892 and the park's closure in 1954.<sup>16</sup> There are a few components of this experience which truly illustrate the public attitude toward immigrants at the time. For one thing, it is important to keep in mind that even though twenty percent of those arriving on the island were detained for some reason or another, less than two percent were actually denied access to the country.<sup>17</sup> This is to say that although individuals arriving to the island did indeed face an emotionally, physically, and mentally grueling process, America did not necessarily have the intention of rejecting them. As quintessentially put by Portes and Rumbaut, "...The European waves were not well received by everyone, but they were welcomed by a politically decisive class, namely, capitalists bent on breaking the hold of independent craftsmen and skilled workers so as to meet the demand of a vast market for cheap manufactures."<sup>18</sup> In short, the powerbrokers of the era knew that the budding capitalist system simply couldn't function without a steady stream of cheap labor.

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<sup>16</sup> Ellis Island Foundation, "The History of Ellis Island," Accessed February 9, 2020.

<https://www.statueofliberty.org/ellis-island/>

<sup>17</sup> Id.

<sup>18</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, 3.

Thus, the curious paradox of the early 20th century is the fact that although capitalism was solely dependent on immigrant laborers, a fierce animosity developed towards these individuals. Oftentimes, this animosity was expressed through the very rhetoric employed by the heads of the very corporations that employed these immigrant classes. Harsh denunciations from major powerbrokers were not uncharacteristic of the era, the irony lying in the fact that their massive operations could run only because of the men and women who toiled for up to twelve hours each day in factories. The main takeaway is that immigrants built the capitalist system and in return were met with exclusionary policy, arduous loopholes, and unforgiving classifications.

Finally, overlapping patterns of privilege are also crucial aspects to consider. Both Yozica and the lady she came with had a place to go after arriving in Los Angeles. Upon arriving in San Pedro, Yozica was met with not only her husband, but a support network consisting of other Yugoslavian migrants and even a few dispersed family members. Simply having the emotional support of other individuals who had been through a similar journey was most likely a great relief. Many others did not have this same privilege. Thus, rhetoric that emerges where families insist that their predecessors “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps” truly falls short. As seen by Yozica’s story, it is undeniable that hard work and dedication is a quality inherent to our early 20th century counterparts. Nonetheless, this rhetoric consistently overlooks the deeper factors of privilege, often based on intersecting qualities such as gender, socioeconomic status, and skin color.

## V. Seasons in San Pedro

### *September 1945, San Pedro, California*

The last few years had swept by faster than the train that had brought Yozica and the boys across the country. If she stopped to think about it for a moment, Yozica couldn't quite believe that she'd been in her new nation for this long. Immersed fully in life in California, a few notable things had happened in the interim between the day she and the boys stepped foot onto the dock at Ellis Island, and today.

First, Yozica's third son had arrived a year earlier in 1944. In the midst of one of the most intense and wide-reaching conflicts the world had ever borne witness to, Peter had been born. He was the first in the family to be an automatically naturalized United States citizen, simply by virtue of birthright citizenship. Peter's arrival was undeniably an exciting moment for the entire family, who seemed to view the child as a symbol of their establishment in the country. His birth marked the beginning of a new generation of Bogdanovic Americans.

Second, not long after their third child had been born, Petar had gotten the notion into his head that the family needed to move out of the small apartment they rented, and into a proper house. Without consulting his wife, Petar had taken matters into his own hands. For \$7,200, he had purchased a home from an older couple, a place nestled comfortably in the hills surrounding the port. Built in the 1920's, the home had a solid foundation, small space in the backyard for a garden and for the children to play, and charming yellow walls. Although unsettled at first by the prospect of spending a large portion of their savings, Yozica eventually came to the realization that this home was a tangible representation of all that she had overcome in the past few years--especially the repressive waves of liminality that had crashed over her from the moment the boat docked in the Port of New York. Little did Petar know that in 2006, the home would be sold for \$550,000- a sum he surely could never have imagined.

Finally, Yozica felt as though she had just gotten used to the ebb and flow of the mercurial fishing season that her husband, and entire family for that matter, was fully immersed in. In some ways, Petar's profession was a blessing: it had exempted him from the war draft a few years prior, as the nation had given food production workers a status called "occupational deferment." Workers were still needed to keep the country fed and especially in these new times of scarcity, canned fish, sardines, tuna, and mackerel were in high demand. As Yozica watched the husbands of many of her friends, family, neighbors, and other regulars in their small town be drafted into the war effort, she breathed a sigh of relief, comforted that her husband could support the combat through his normal occupation.

At the same time, however, the fishing season had its quirks especially considering that from January through October each year, Yozica's husband was either in the Los Angeles port, or down in Mexico. In particular, when Petar went down to Baja, Mexico, he would be completely gone for a minimum of three weeks, busy trudging off to sea on small boats meant to capture up to 100 pounds of tuna. Even after coming back from these trips, the next week he would spend up to twelve hours each day in the port unloading. During these periods of time, Yozica was left completely alone with the children, relying mainly on the help of their extended family to keep everything in order. She struggled deeply during these periods of time, but concealed this from her husband, whom she did not want to worry.

In addition to this, Yozica quickly realized that the family's financial stability was largely tied to what the fishing cycle looked like that year. Although extremely fortunate not to be in an economically precarious situation- they *had* in fact been able to purchase their first home earlier in the year- part of this stability did rest upon the family's ability to save money. Overall, Yozica



was grateful for her husband's ability to produce a paycheck, but also grappled with the number of responsibilities placed on her shoulders in the periods of her husband's absence.

## VI. Analysis of Yozica's Experience in California

In an interview with Peter Bogdanovic, Yozica's only remaining son, a recurring theme presented itself: his father had been very obstinate when it came to the concept of the boys working hard in school and completing their education. Peter even recounted his father saying on several occasions, "You can be anything you want, just don't be a fisherman." Although recalling a small chuckle and hint of sarcasm in his tone, Peter knows that his father's determination to give his sons a better life and his frugal lifestyle is largely the reason he and his brothers were all able to attend such prestigious universities when it came time for college. Essentially, Petar knew that the kind of small boat fishing that he did was not a dynasty but instead a dying industry. As he watched his colleagues encourage their children to undertake the family profession, he became more and more steadfast in his conviction to orient his children away from this, to expect more, and do more. This sentiment of hard work and persistence was not unusual in any respect within their immigrant enclave, but the conviction for education certainly was. *Who are we to want more*, most people reasoned. But not Petar.

In the previous section, Yozica's life in San Pedro is cemented. She adapts to the quirks of the fishing season, she combats ever-lingering sentiments of liminality, she retains lively correspondence with the lady who came with her, and perhaps most importantly, she welcomes her third child. A crucial component to consider here, is that in today's climate, Peter's birth would have been characterized by the rhetoric of "anchor baby." Essentially, this term is used to describe "purposeful procreation by foreign-born residents within the borders of the United States" ultimately for the purpose of parents who aim to obtain citizenship.<sup>19</sup> As put by *The Guardian*, this

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<sup>19</sup> Lederer, Jenny. "'Anchor Baby': A Conceptual Explanation for Pejoration." *Journal of Pragmatics* 57, (2013): 248.

term “insinuates that these children are little more than pawns used by their parents to get a foothold in the U.S. and eventually become citizens themselves.”<sup>20</sup>

In 2010, Senator Linsey Graham incited fear by arguing that immigrants come to America to “drop a child.”<sup>21</sup> In his 2016 campaign, Donald Trump took matters a step further by drawing heavily upon the ‘anchor baby’ myth to argue that individuals south of the border were coming here in massive numbers to bring crime, drugs, violence, and to have children, thus “anchoring” themselves to the country through their children. He went on to challenge the concept of birthright citizenship and deny pregnant asylum seekers the ability to attend their court hearings, in order to obtain short-term visas to the U.S.<sup>22</sup>

Although it is true that Yozica’s situation is different because she was granted citizenship upon leaving Ellis Island, her story is symbolic of something deeper. Had she migrated today, she easily could have been denied this privilege thus leaving her in a precarious situation. Upon giving birth to Peter, he immediately would have been deemed an “anchor baby.” The takeaway is this: today, neo-nativists use the term to strike fear in the American public when in reality, “anchor babies” are largely a myth. This trend has been around for a long time but was deeply exacerbated by Trump’s 2016 campaign. Ultimately, this is an example of a new rhetorical device used to signify that immigrants are conniving individuals, utilizing any possible mechanism necessary to stay in the country. We must see through this.

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<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Villarreal, “‘Anchor Babies’: The ‘Ludicrous’ Immigration Myth that Treats People as Pawns,” *The Guardian*, March 16, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/16/anchor-babies-the-ludicrous-immigration-myth-that-treats-people-as-pawns>

<sup>21</sup> Villarreal, “Anchor Babies.”

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

## VII. Conclusion

When Yozica passed away in the spring of 2006, my family took a trip up the coast to San Pedro, to savor the last moments in her home surrounded by relics of the life that she and Petar had built for themselves over the years. Although I was only six at the time, I can distinctly recall several potent memories from this day: walking carefully up the steep stairs leading from the street to the front door while my own mother bid me not to fall, the bright yellow tiles lining the 1920's kitchen-- devoid, might I add of any dishwasher or modern appliance-- the green carpeting that although worn with time, still reminds me now of the emerald sea Yozica must have looked out upon as she crossed the Atlantic ocean. Most importantly, however, might be the delicate china teacups, placed thoughtfully on the bedside tables in each room: a relic of Yugoslavia in the early 20th century. In the backyard, I clearly remember Yozica's extravagant garden and reaching out a hand to pick one of the plump tomatoes that hung from a vine of one her most prosperous plants. Although covered in grease and cobwebs on that visit in 2006, a chandelier hung in the tiny living room, the deep green carpeting reflecting off of its shimmering exterior and overlooking all the different memories that the family went through over the years. Today, that very same chandelier hangs in my Uncle Peter's house in Sacramento. When asked about it, he remarks that, "It's something to remind us of San Pedro."

Through this analysis of my family history, I have attempted to recreate a narrative of Yozica's life: the conditions upon which she arrived to the United States, the rhetoric towards immigrants at the time, and the subsequent public attitude that naturalized citizens adopted towards this demographic. Nonetheless, the takeaway of this piece is to highlight that although it is undeniable that my great-grandparents, Yozica and Petar, worked *exceptionally* hard for everything they had in their lives, they still had a good amount of help along the way. From the

beginning, they had the support of Martin Bogdanovic to sponsor and grant Petar employment, and later, they had numerous family and extended family members in the area to aid in the process of assimilation and to ease the waves of liminality and homesickness that inevitably crashed over them. The point here is not to undermine my family's hard work but instead to recognize the harmful narrative that often emerges when individuals look back at their own family history and insist that their predecessors did it all by virtue of their own hard work. As quintessentially summarized by Portes and Rumbaut, "A good part of American literature is made up of these nostalgic retrospectives of the trials and accomplishments of immigrants by their children and grandchildren...This cycle of negative and positive stereotyping only skims the surface of the phenomenon of immigration, however."<sup>23</sup>

Thus, my purpose through this analytical and narrative driven paper is to urge readers to dig deeper into their own family history and really think about the individuals, like Yozica's "lady who came with me," who helped bring their families to this nation. Instead of adopting the infamous "pulled ourselves up from our bootstraps" rhetoric that is so commonly employed in America, I encourage readers to sit and ruminate over their family immigration history. When asking the important question of "*How did I get here?*" it is important to keep in mind the many factors that went right in order for us to be here today, and the people that helped along the way. Many times, confronting our own family histories of privilege and opportunity are stigmatized as uncomfortable or impolite to the individuals who brought us here. In this thought piece, however, I really seek to abolish this notion. The sacrifices Yozica made for many years in order to enable her sons to come to America, get a proper education, attend some of the nation's top private universities set my entire family down a path, have ultimately percolated into the very life that I

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<sup>23</sup> Portes and Rumbaut, 372.

live today. In the beginning of the essay, I started with the question “*Why am I here today?*” The answer to this question is because of the sacrifices that women in my family made for me.

From here, I urge readers to take three actions. First, it is vital to support immigrants in any way possible. This means recognizing harmful rhetoric within the realm of public discourse, and actively choosing against employing it. This also means recognizing the role we’ve played, at one point or another, in proliferating harmful rhetoric ourselves. Utilizing terms such as “illegals” or “aliens” connotes a sense of criminal behavior, as though the individual’s status in this country is suspect for some reason or another. President Obama attempted to shift the narrative in 2008 by framing young undocumented individuals as “Dreamers,” in reference to the age-old search for the American Dream. Even here, however, the Dream Act acronym stood for Development, Relief, and Education for *Alien* Minors.<sup>24</sup>

Second, it is vital that we truly listen to immigrants’ stories. Although everyone is comfortable with sharing varying degrees of their experience, when someone does want to share, it is important that we listen. If I hadn’t heard stories about Yozica over the dinner table when I was growing up, I never would have known about her life or the lady who came with her. Undocumented Americans comprise some of the most underserved demographics within the country, whose narratives are consistently scrutinized and overlooked. By listening and allowing these individuals to share their stories, we help break the cycle of silence and oppression that is inflicted upon a group that so often comes to the nation seeking asylum from unthinkable conditions in their home countries.

Finally, it is imperative that we help fix the system. This does not mean storming the capital or attempting to overthrow the government, but instead understanding how the Hart-Cellar system

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<sup>24</sup> Camila Ruz, “The Battle Over the Words Used to Describe Migrants,” BBC News, August 28, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-34061097>.

that the United States has in place today, has created a strange paradox where certain categories are favored more deeply than others. Although fundamental to abolishing the discriminatory quotas that had consistently excluded certain demographics, the act is not without flaws. Since the implementation of the Hart-Cellar Act in 1965, certain countries have consistently “maxed out” their immigration quotas, year after year, without fail. At the end of the day, we must ask ourselves if New Zealand should have the same immigration quota as Mexico, taking into consideration the populations of these nations, and the social, political, and economic conditions of these nations.

When I visit Sacramento today as an adult, I enjoy observing the chandelier that hangs in the staircase of my family’s home. It serves as a reminder of the culture that was indeed left behind by Yozica and Petar, but at the same time a new one that was created. I hope we can all find the relics within our homes and our lives that are symbolic of our family’s journeys to this country and the people or “ladies” that aided their journeys, while at the same time remembering those who are still fighting for immigration justice in this country today.

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