

Same Machine, Different Hemisphere

How Thailand and the United States each manufactured a national culture, where the manufacturing failed, and why 2026 is an American ebb tide and a Thai door ajar — not an ending in either country

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What this is. A comparative position essay in history, written for the educated general reader. It is labeled a working paper, not peer-reviewed scholarship. The claims are the author's; the argument is stated up front and defended, not discovered pretend-neutrally.

AI disclosure. This paper was produced with substantial AI assistance (research sweeps in English and Thai, independent re-verification of headline figures, drafting, figures, and build tooling), under a documented pipeline in which a human set the question, the stance, and the scope, and owns every claim. Every number in the text, tables, and figures lives in an audited data file (data.py) with its source attached; figures regenerate from that file. Facts that could not be independently pinned down are hedged in the text.

Conflicts. None known. The paper takes no funding and advocates no policy beyond its historical argument.

1. Two countries with nothing in common, except the one thing

Pick two countries at something close to random and you could hardly do better — or worse — than Thailand and the United States. One is a Buddhist monarchy on the Southeast Asian mainland that was never colonized; the other is a secular settler republic that began as someone else's colony and filled itself with strangers. One runs on ritual deference to a sacred center; the other, at least on paper, on the absence of any sacred center at all. They sit very nearly on opposite sides of the planet. And yet, by the middle of the twentieth century, both had accomplished the same improbable feat: each had taken a population of remarkable diversity and convinced most of it — and most outside observers — that it was one people, with one language, one story, and one name.

Thailand's censuses from the 1960s onward are reported in the standard accounts as describing up to 99 percent of the population as "ethnically Thai," in a country whose own linguists would later map 62 distinct ethnolinguistic communities, with the Central Thai of the Bangkok plain amounting to only about a third of the whole. The United States, a country assembled from roughly thirty million European arrivals in one long wave, reached the 1950s with a mass culture so unified that three television networks could command over 95 percent of what the entire nation watched in an evening. Neither homogeneity was a fact of nature. Both were manufactured — deliberately, expensively, and in the same half-century, roughly 1890 to 1940.

This paper makes one two-legged claim and wears one hat. The claim: Thailand and the United States each installed the same globally diffused nation-making toolkit — a prestige center, schools, names and symbols, an enemy, a gate — which absorbed the culturally proximate wherever structural membership was offered, and failed violently wherever it was withheld. And their 2026

strains differ by design: **the United States is in the ebb phase of a documented, thermostatically driven intake cycle; Thailand is prying open, under demographic pressure, a blood-law gate it built shut.** The word 'cycle' belongs to the American story only — Thailand has closed its gate once (after 1949) and cracked it once (2024), which is a door's history, not a tide's. The hat: the closing section speculates — labeled as speculation, with dated falsifiers — about where each machine goes next. (A first draft of this paper claimed a single cyclical law for both countries; an adversarial review, kept in the project record, killed that version, and this draft is built on what survived.)

The road map. Section 2 assembles the Thai machine from its parts, 1892 to 1942 and then through the Cold War, and weighs its largest success — the absorption of one of the world's great overseas-Chinese communities — alongside the gap between Thailand's official and measured diversity. Section 3 does the same for the American machine: the intake, the school-flag-factory apparatus, the measured evidence that it worked, and the 1924–65 gate that finished the job. Section 4 lays the two machines side by side and extracts the shared design. Section 5 maps both failure zones — the race line in America, the religion-and-script line in Thailand — and adds the American culture's self-inflicted fragmentation, which no immigration policy caused or can cure. Section 6 reads 2025–26 in both countries as an ebb phase; section 7 answers the four strongest objections; section 8 forecasts, with named falsifiers; section 9 concludes.

A note on method: this is a comparison of *machines*, not a moral audit of two peoples, and the machines were not invented independently. Both were local installations of the nation-making technology that diffused out of Europe in the late nineteenth century — Vajiravudh imported it from Oxford as surely as American schoolmen imported Prussian pedagogy. That is precisely what makes the pairing useful: when the same imported module is installed in two receiving societies as different as Siam and the United States, the variance in outcomes cannot be blamed on the kit. It must come from the societies — which is what this paper is actually about.

2. Siam's machine: from galaxy to geo-body

2.1 The many peoples of the mandala

The kingdom that became Thailand did not begin as a bounded country at all. Scholars describe premodern Siam as a "galactic polity": a bright center — the court — surrounded by tributary lords whose loyalty dimmed with distance, and whose smaller courts could, without contradiction, send tribute to two or three overlords at once. Chiang Mai in the north, the Lao principalities of the Mekong, the Malay sultanates of the peninsula: all orbited Bangkok the way moons orbit a planet that itself orbits something larger. Borders in the modern sense did not exist; sovereignty faded out gradually, like lamplight.

Nor was the center itself ethnically simple. Early Bangkok, founded in 1782, was built substantially by war captives swept in from Laos, Cambodia, Kedah and the Mon country, and a royal legal text of the era matter-of-factly lists the realm's peoples: Malay, Khmer, Lao, Burmese, Mon, Chinese, Cham, Javanese. The city was a mosaic of ethnic quarters — Portuguese and Persian included — and John Bowring, visiting in 1855, guessed the whole kingdom held no more than about five million people. By the early twentieth century, roughly a third of Bangkok's population was Chinese. "Siam," in short, was an empire wearing the clothes of a kingdom — as plural as the Habsburg lands, on a smaller stage.

2.2 Chulalongkorn: building the container (1892–1910)

What changed everything was the arrival, on both flanks, of empires with maps. With British Burma and Malaya on one side and French Indochina on the other, gradual lamplight sovereignty became fatal ambiguity: whatever was not clearly Siamese would be clearly someone else's. The Franco-Siamese crisis of 1893 — French gunboats forcing the mouth of the Chao Phraya — made the lesson explicit, and Siam paid for survival in territory: the left bank of the Mekong in 1893, western Cambodia in 1904–07, four Malay states in 1909. The historian Thongchai Winichakul calls what replaced the mandala the "geo-body": a hard-edged, mapped Siam that had never existed before the surveyors drew it, and which then demanded a single people to fill it.

King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) built the container. In 1892 he replaced the four great traditional ministries with twelve functional ones on the European model; in 1897 the thesaphiban system placed Bangkok-appointed commissioners over provinces that had been hereditary domains. The absorption was not gentle bookkeeping. In 1899 the state simply abolished the word "Lao" from its administrative map — inventing the neutral coinage "Isan" ("northeast") for provinces whose people spoke Lao and considered themselves Lao — and the 1904 census deleted Lao as a category outright, making the kingdom officially 85 percent "Thai" by the stroke of an enumerator's pen. In 1902 the raja of Patani, the Malay-Muslim sultanate annexed in stages since 1786, was deposed and exiled when he refused the new administrative regulations. The periphery noticed: 1901–02 brought simultaneous revolts in Isan (the Holy Man's Rebellion), the north (the Shan rising at Phrae), and Patani. All were put down. The container held.

The Lanna case shows the container-building at its smoothest, and is worth a moment because it is the template the Deep South was supposed to follow and did not. Chiang Mai had been a tributary kingdom with its own dynasty, script and language; Bangkok inserted a royal commissioner in 1875, converted the region into an ordinary administrative circle (Monthon Phayap) in 1899, reduced the local princes to ceremony after 1901, and simply let the princely title lapse when its last holder died in 1939 — a sixty-year absorption conducted almost without gunfire. Note what did NOT stop it: Lanna had its own script — the Tai Tham alphabet, in which its literature and law were written — so a distinct script alone was no barrier to absorption. What Lanna shared with Bangkok was Theravada Buddhism and a closely kin language; what it lacked was a rival state

tradition with an external patron. Keep that combination in mind for section 5, where the one region missing all of it is examined.

2.3 Vajiravudh: naming the contents (1910–1925)

Chulalongkorn's son Vajiravudh (Rama VI) supplied what the container still lacked: an identity for what was inside. Educated at Oxford, he imported the forms of European official nationalism and translated them into Siamese: the triad *Nation–Religion–King*, modeled on "God, King and Country," which remains Thailand's civic formula today; a new tricolor flag (1917); paramilitary and scouting movements (1911) to drill the young in it. His Surname Act, promulgated in 1913 and enforced from 1915, required every subject to adopt a heritable family name — at a stroke giving every resident, whatever their origins, a Thai-form legal identity. (The dating carries a footnote: under the old Siamese calendar the year began on 1 April, so some sources render the promulgation year as 1912.)

Vajiravudh also demonstrated, early, the machine's talent for choosing an internal enemy. In 1914, under a pen name, the king published *The Jews of the East*, an anti-Chinese pamphlet accusing Siam's commercial minority of clannishness and disloyalty in terms borrowed directly from European antisemitism. Benedict Anderson would later cite the episode as a textbook case of official nationalism: a dynasty naturalizing itself by pointing at an alien within. Thongchai puts the same point structurally: Thainess has always been defined negatively — by the un-Thai at the border, and the un-Thai inside.

2.4 Phibun: the machine at full throttle (1938–1944)

The absolute monarchy fell in 1932; the machine survived the change of drivers and accelerated. Field Marshal Plaek Phibunsongkhram issued twelve *rattaniyom* — "state mandates" or cultural mandates — between June 1939 and January 1942. Mandate No. 1 renamed Siam "Thailand": the land, for the first time, named for the ethnicity. Mandate No. 3 abolished regional and ethnic self-designations: no more northern Thai, Isan, or Malay-Thai — only Thai. Mandate No. 9 made the Thai language the mark of the nation; No. 10 prescribed "civilized" dress. Compulsory Thai-language schooling, in force since 1921, carried the mandates into every village. The pressure on the Chinese minority became explicit policy: of 271 Chinese schools operating at their 1933 peak, 242 were forced shut between 1938 and 1940, with every Chinese school in Bangkok closed by 1940, and most Chinese-language newspapers closed with them.

The mandates did not die with the war. A National Culture Act followed in 1942 to give the new conscience statutory form, and when the defeated Phibun's restrictions briefly lapsed, the rebound revealed how much demand the machine had been suppressing: some 430 Chinese schools reopened in 1946 alone — before a 1948 quota recapped them at 152, where the squeeze resumed. Meanwhile the Cold War handed the machine a new argument: with China communist after 1949 and immigration effectively ended, the remaining Chinese of Thailand faced a simple menu —

assimilate into Thainess, or be suspect. Most chose the first, and the state, to its considerable advantage, kept the door open for them.

2.5 The Chinese absorption: precondition, funnel, gate

Here is the astonishing part: absorption happened — but the machine deserves only part of the credit, and it is worth being precise about which part. Chinese assimilation into Siam was already far advanced in the nineteenth century, before surnames, mandates or compulsory schools existed: male-dominant migration and an open society had been blending Chinese traders into Siamese life for generations. Skinner himself found the process had actually stalled by the 1910s–30s, as rising female Chinese migration re-sinified the community. What the machine then contributed was a funnel and a gate: the Surname Act channeled Sino-Thai families into Thai-form legal identity, and the effective closure of Chinese immigration after 1949 cut off the replenishment that had been slowing absorption — after which the generational grind resumed and finished. The Chinese share of Siam's population stood near 10 percent in 1909 and never rose much above an eighth. Skinner, in the classic 1957 study, predicted near-total assimilation within four generations, and the broad outline held: Chinese men married Thai women in great numbers, took Thai-form surnames (the Surname Act quietly serving as an assimilation funnel), sent their children to Thai schools, and moved — this is the crucial difference from every neighboring country — all the way to the top. Thais of Chinese descent, today perhaps 11–14 percent of the population, dominate commerce, fill parliaments, and have supplied prime ministers; by the late 1950s roughly 70 percent of Bangkok's businesses were Chinese-owned, and the distinction between Sino-Thai and Thai elite has since blurred toward invisibility.

Why did assimilation succeed in Bangkok while Chinese minorities in Malaysia and Indonesia remained separate, resented, and periodically brutalized? Three differences recur in the comparative literature. First, Siam was never colonized: there was no colonial legal caste system, like the Dutch East Indies' "Foreign Orientals" category, to freeze the Chinese into a separate and resented middle layer. Second, the prestige culture was open at the top: becoming Thai carried real rewards, up to and including nobility, and Theravada Buddhism raised a far lower barrier to intermarriage than Islam did in Malaya or Java. Third, the machine offered a door, not just a wall: schools, surnames, and citizenship were available to anyone willing to walk through, even as pressure mounted on those who would not. Assimilation-by-invitation, backed by assimilation-by-coercion, absorbed one of the largest overseas-Chinese communities on earth into the very identity that had been invented, in part, against it. The caveat matters too: later scholarship shows the absorption was never as total as Skinner forecast — hybrid Sino-Thai identity persists, quietly — but as state projects go, this one came as close to complete as the twentieth century offers.

2.5b The second engine: throne, army, and the Cold War (1957–1980s)

A first draft of this paper let the Thai machine's story stop in 1944, which a reviewer rightly called a hole where the subject should be, because the machine's biggest decades came after. Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat's coups of 1957–58 rebuilt Thai nationalism around a revived, sacralized monarchy — the young King Bhumibol sent endlessly into the provinces — and fused it with American Cold War money and counter-insurgency doctrine. The apparatus that resulted did the machine's deepest work: Border Patrol Police schools carried the Thai language into the hills; royal development projects made the crown the visible source of modernity in Isan and the north; the Village Scouts, founded by the Border Patrol Police in 1971 and put under royal patronage the next year, enrolled millions of villagers in loyalty ritual; and the lese-majeste law (three to fifteen years per count) policed the sacred center's boundary. The same apparatus showed the machine's capacity for violence against internal dissent: on 6 October 1976, state-aligned forces and royalist mobs — Village Scouts among them — massacred students at Thammasat University; the official toll is cited at about 45–46, with witness and scholarly estimates running far higher. The point for this paper: the machine survived its third change of drivers (court, then field marshals, then a throne-army condominium) and it was under this configuration, not Phibun's, that the 99-percent-Thai census era arrived.

2.6 The official story and the measured one

By the 1960s the machine was confident enough to declare victory in its statistics: Thai censuses of the era are reported in the secondary literature as describing up to 99 percent of the population as ethnically Thai — a figure this paper has not traced to a specific census volume, and therefore treats as a characterization of the series rather than a datum — and it was repeated in schoolbooks and tourist brochures until it became common knowledge, inside the country and out, that Thailand was among the most homogeneous nations on earth. The claim was an artifact of the machine itself — the census counted what the 1904 enumerators had been instructed to count, Thai citizens as Thai people. When linguists at Mahidol University actually mapped the country's mother tongues in the 1990s, they found Central Thai — the standard language of Bangkok, the schools and the state — was the home language of only about 34 percent of the population. Lao-speaking Isan accounted for another quarter; northern Kham Mueang and southern Pak Tai roughly a sixth together; and beyond the Tai family lay Khmer, Malay, Chinese, Mon, Karen, Hmong and dozens more — 62 ethnolinguistic communities in the government's own 2011 report to the United Nations. None of this means Thainess failed: most of those 62 communities' members carry Thai identity cards, salute the same flag, and would tell a pollster they are Thai. It means Thainess is a civic-cultural achievement wearing an ethnic costume — a distinction that matters enormously for what the machine can and cannot digest, as section 5 will show.

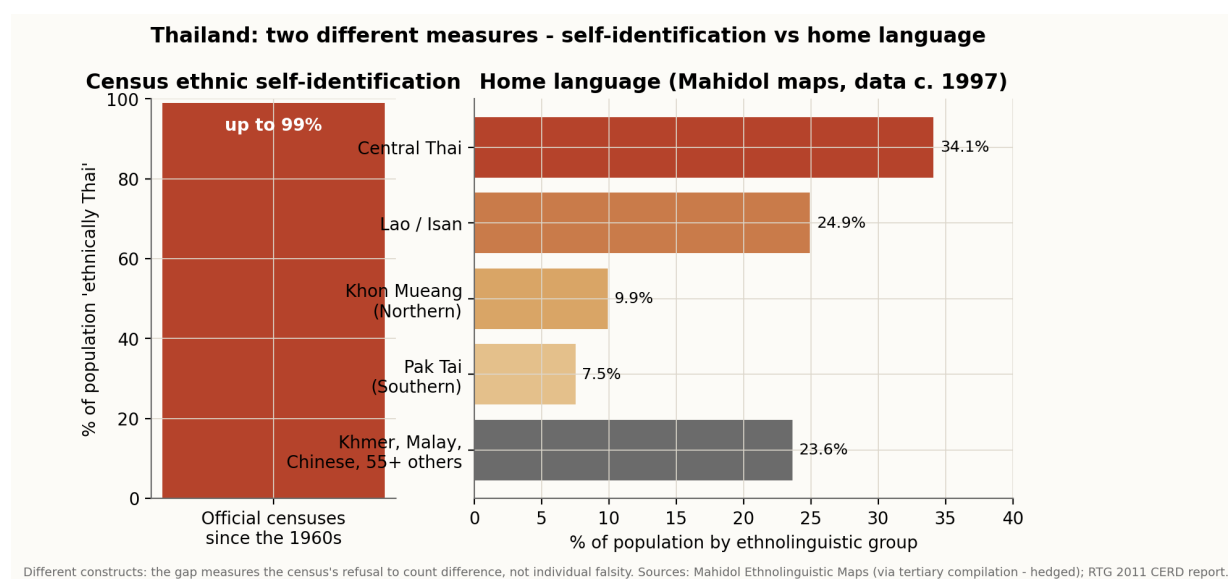


Figure 1. Two different measures, honestly labeled: census ethnic self-identification (left) versus home language (right, Mahidol mapping, data c. 1997). The constructs differ - a bilingual Isan speaker who tells the census she is Thai is not lying - so the gap measures the census's refusal to count difference, not individual falsity. Sources in data.py (both figures rest on secondary/tertiary compilations and are hedged in text).

One more Siamese peculiarity deserves its own paragraph, because it explains the machine's distinctive cruelty and its distinctive confidence at once. Because Siam was never colonized, its elite performed colonization's cultural work on itself — the project Thongchai calls the quest for *siwilai*, from the English word "civilized." Bangkok aristocrats toured their own hinterlands with the eyes of European ethnographers, classifying hill peoples and Lao peasants as backward others to be uplifted into Thainess — an internal colonialism run by an indigenous court. The United States, a colony that became an empire, arrived at the same posture from the opposite direction. Both machines, in other words, were staffed by elites who believed they were performing a civilizing mission on their own territory — which is why both could pursue absorption with missionary confidence and meet refusal with punitive bewilderment.

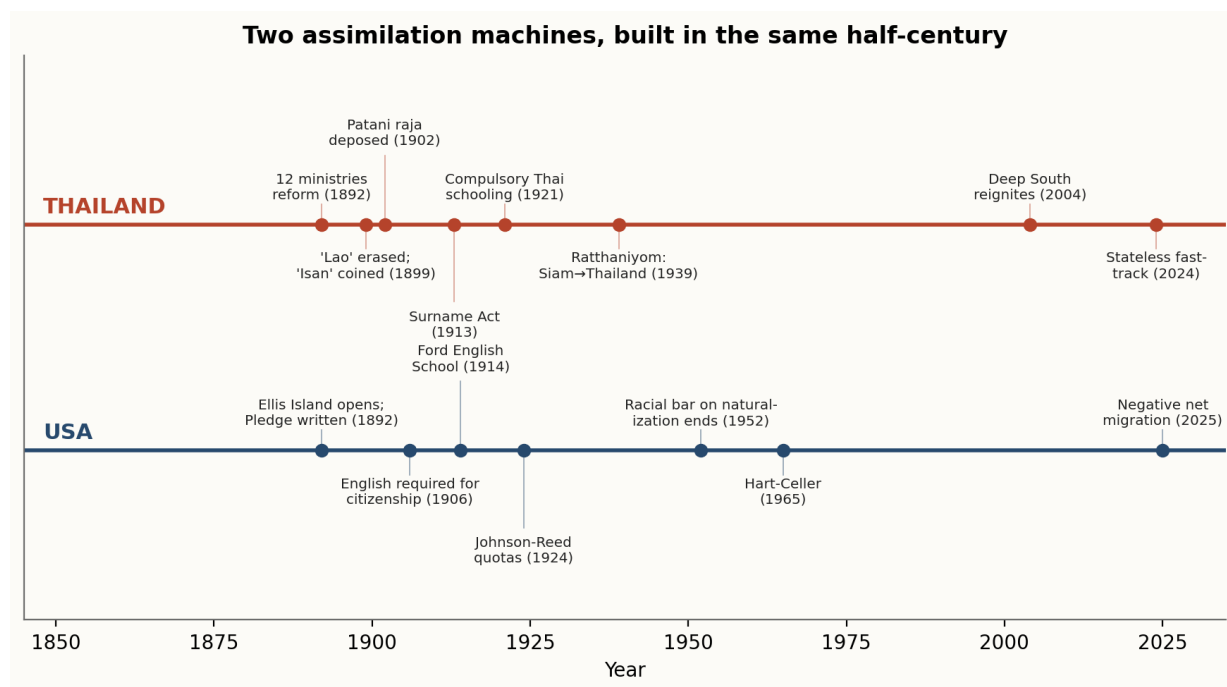


Figure 2. Two assimilation machines, built in the same half-century. Milestone dates from the sources listed in data.py.

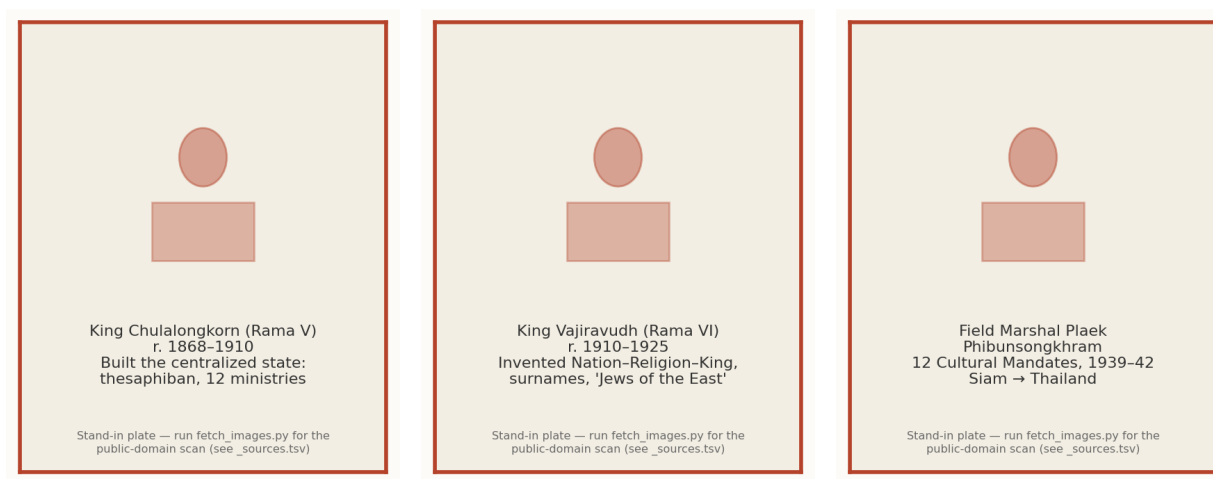


Plate A. Chulalongkorn (Rama V).

Plate B. Vajiravudh (Rama VI).

Plate C. Phibunsongkhram.

3. America's machine: the melting pot as infrastructure

3.1 The scale of the intake

The American problem was predominantly the mirror image of the Siamese one. Siam mostly made one people out of populations it had conquered in place; the United States mostly out of populations that kept arriving — though America conquered in place too: roughly 80,000 to 100,000 Mexicans came with the territory ceded in 1848, Puerto Ricans were made citizens collectively in 1917, and Hawaii arrived as an annexed kingdom; their partial, uneven absorptions

are the closest American analogues to Isan and Patani. And arrive they did: roughly 30 million Europeans between 1850 and 1913, the largest voluntary migration in recorded history to that point. Ireland alone sent some 4.5 million people between 1820 and 1930, driven first by famine; nearly a million Germans landed in the 1850s; more than four million Italians came between 1880 and 1924, and over two and a half million Eastern European Jews between 1881 and 1924. Ellis Island processed more than 12 million people between 1892 and 1954 — over a million in the peak year of 1907 alone. By 1890 the foreign-born were 14.8 percent of the population, a share that would stand as the record for 135 years.

3.2 School, flag, factory

Like Siam, America built its machine mostly between 1890 and 1940, and built it of the same three materials: schools, symbols, and pressure. The common-school movement — Horace Mann's "great equalizer" — had aimed since the 1830s at forging shared civic identity; compulsory attendance laws spread state by state from Massachusetts (1852) to Mississippi (1918), so that universal schooling arrived precisely on top of peak immigration. The Pledge of Allegiance was written in 1892 explicitly as a flag ritual for schoolchildren, millions of whom recited it in unison that October; states passed laws requiring flags over schoolhouses. In 1906 the federal government made English ability a condition of naturalization. By the early 1920s, twenty-two states had gone further and restricted teaching in foreign languages outright, until the Supreme Court struck the laws down in *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923).

The factory joined the school. Henry Ford's English School (founded 1914) required immigrant workers to attend English and civics classes, and its graduation ceremony staged the national metaphor literally: men in Old World costume descended into a giant stage cauldron labeled MELTING POT, teachers stirred with outsized ladles, and the graduates emerged in identical American suits, waving small flags. The metaphor itself had premiered six years earlier in Israel Zangwill's 1908 play *The Melting Pot* — with Theodore Roosevelt in the audience. Roosevelt supplied the machine's sharpest slogan in 1915: "There is no room in this country for hyphenated Americanism." It is worth pausing on the parallel: within two years of each other, the King of Siam was assigning surnames to make Thais, and the leading American ex-president was demanding the deletion of hyphens to make Americans.



Plate D. Ellis Island, c. 1902.

Plate E. The Ford melting-pot pageant.

Below the state and the factory ran a third layer, voluntary and often gentler: the settlement houses. Jane Addams opened Hull House in a Chicago immigrant ward in 1889, and by 1910 roughly four hundred such houses were teaching English, civics, cooking and citizenship in the tenement districts of every major city — Americanization as neighborly uplift rather than decree. The gentleness had a wartime expiry date. When the United States entered the First World War, "100 percent Americanism" campaigns turned on the largest and best-organized foreign-language community in the country: German-Americans saw their language banned from schools and pulpits in dozens of states, their newspapers boycotted, sauerkraut renamed, and — in the worst documented case, the lynching of Robert Prager at Collinsville, Illinois, in April 1918 — a neighbor killed by a mob, amid widespread tarrings, floggings and forced flag-kissings. It is the closest American analogue to Phibun's squeeze on the Chinese schools — the machine dropping the invitation and keeping only the pressure — and it worked the same way: the German-American public sphere, the one that had sustained eight hundred publications, never recovered.

3.3 Did it work? The measurable answer is yes

Modern economic history has put numbers on what the pageantry claimed. Using millions of census records from 1900–1930, Abramitzky, Boustan and Eriksson found that immigrants closed half of the "name foreignness" gap with natives within 20 years of arrival — the Giuseppes becoming Joes at a measurable, steady rate — and that name Americanization carried a real payoff: at least a 14 percent gain in occupation-based earnings in one careful study. Language followed the classic three-generation grinder, and still does: among US Hispanics today, the immigrant generation is 61 percent Spanish-dominant, while the third generation is 69 percent English-dominant and essentially none remain Spanish-dominant — the same curve the Germans and Italians rode a century earlier. The German case is the cleanest natural experiment: about 800 German-language publications existed in 1894; World War I nationalism and language bans cut the count to roughly 230 by 1920, and the largest non-English public sphere in American history

simply dissolved into English.

Marriage, the deepest measure, moved the same way. A famous New Haven study found ethnic in-marriage collapsing by 1940 into a "triple melting pot" of Protestant, Catholic and Jew; by the 1980 census, intermarriage among European-descended Americans was so pervasive that scholars declared white ethnicity "symbolic" — a matter of grandma's recipes, not of marriage markets or job ladders. And the pot kept melting across lines once thought uncrossable: newlywed marriages across racial or ethnic lines rose from 3 percent in 1967, the year the Supreme Court struck down intermarriage bans, to 17 percent in 2015.

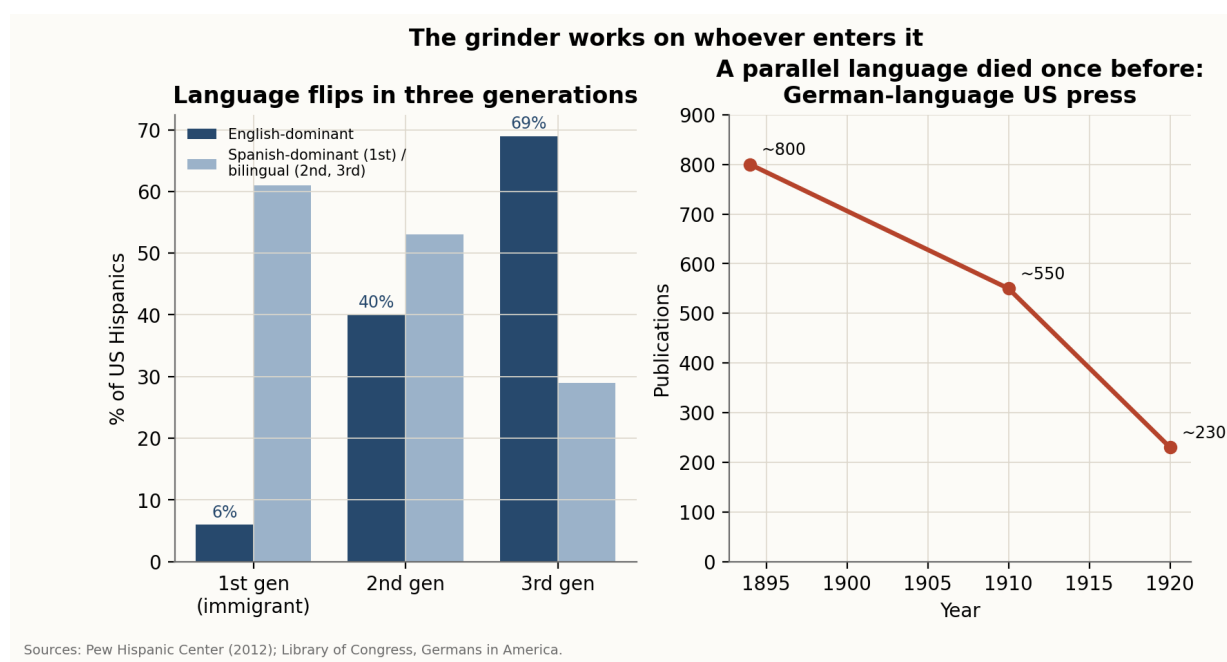


Figure 3. The grinder works on whoever enters it. Left: language dominance of US Hispanics by generation (Pew, 2012). Right: the German-language press, 1894-1920 (Library of Congress).

3.4 The quiet component: the gate (1924–1965)

The machine's least advertised component was a gate. The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 cut immigration quotas to 2 percent of each nationality's presence in the 1890 census — a base year chosen deliberately to predate the Italian and Jewish waves — capping total quota immigration at roughly 165,000 a year (about 150,000 under the national-origins formula that followed in 1927–29), and barring Asians outright. Admissions fell off a cliff, from over 700,000 in fiscal 1924 to under 300,000 in 1925. Italy's allowance dropped to under four thousand a year, from over 200,000 arrivals in a single pre-quota year.

An honesty note before crediting the gate: the pause was not the only thing happening. The Great Depression collapsed immigration below quota levels regardless of law; the Second World War mobilized 16 million people into the most powerful mixing institution America ever ran; and the GI Bill then moved the mixed cohort into colleges and suburbs together. Any account that hands

the 1924 gate sole credit for mid-century consolidation is over-claiming, and this paper's forecast section is disciplined accordingly: the only consolidation effect it projects from the current pause is the compositional one — cut replenishment, and the second and third generations mechanically become a larger share of each group, carrying language shift and intermarriage with them by arithmetic.

Demographers of the "pause" school — Hirschman most explicitly, Alba and Nee in their reconstruction of how the mainstream absorbed the white ethnics — argue that the ensuing forty years did real assimilative work: with replenishment cut off, ethnic neighborhoods, presses and marriage markets thinned out, and the second and third generations consolidated into a single "white American" category. By 1960, 84 percent of a much-shrunk foreign-born population was of European or Canadian origin, and the foreign-born share was falling toward its 1970 trough of 4.7 percent. The mid-century homogeneity that Americans over fifty remember as normal — three networks with 95 percent of prime time, a civil religion with "under God" (1954) and "In God We Trust" (1956) stamped into it, 16.1 million WWII veterans as a shared cohort — was, like Thailand's 99 percent censuses, the output of a machine: wave, then gate, then grind.

The 1965 Hart-Celler Act reopened the gate and reversed the mix: 59 million immigrants arrived between 1965 and 2015, about half from Latin America and a quarter from Asia. The machine was asked, for the first time at scale, to do its work across the very color line it had spent its first century enforcing — a test still running, and the subject of section 5.

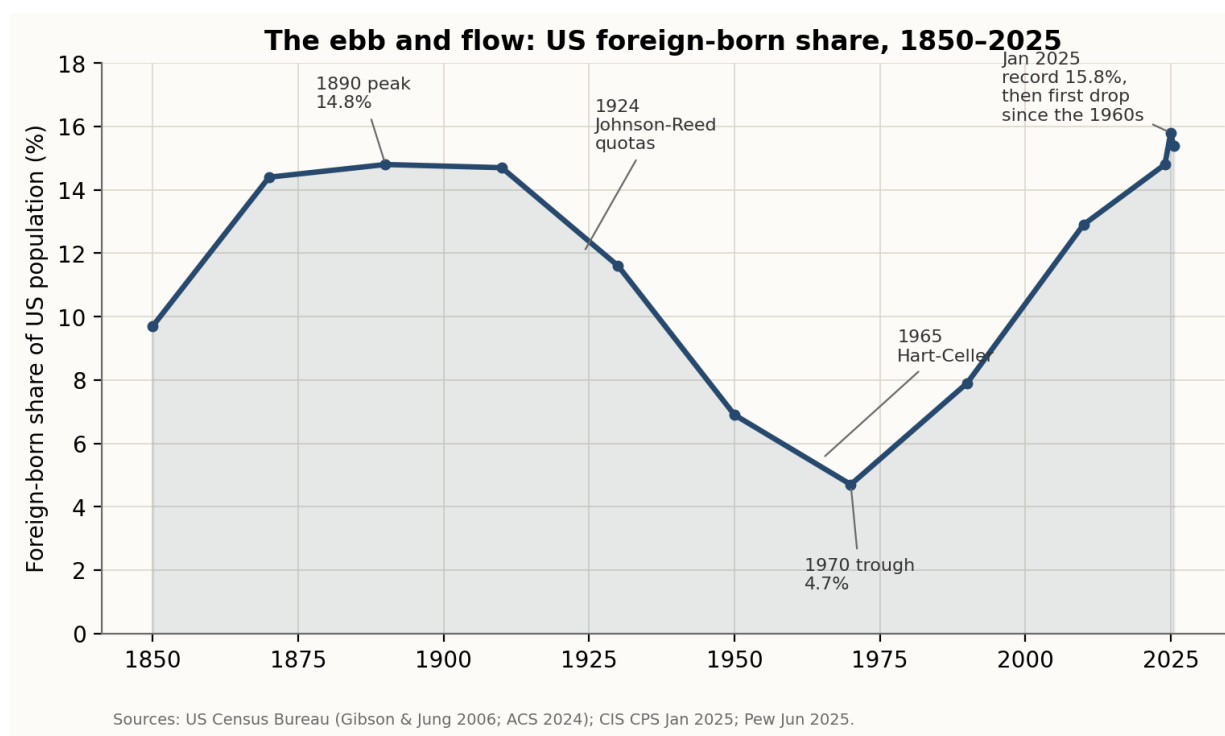


Figure 4. The ebb and flow: US foreign-born population share, 1850-2025. The 2025 record (15.8 percent, January) was followed by the first sustained decline since the 1960s. Sources in data.py.

4. What both machines got right

Strip away the flags and the two machines are the same device, assembled from the same five parts — a fact worth displaying in one table before examining where the two diverged.

Component	Siam / Thailand	United States
A prestige center worth joining	Court culture, Buddhism, royal honors; becoming Thai opened ranks to the top	Wage ladder, land, citizenship; becoming American paid ($\geq 14\%$ name premium)
Schools as the engine	Compulsory Thai-language schooling (1921); Chinese schools closed (1938-40)	Common schools; compulsory laws 1852-1918; English for citizenship (1906)
Names and symbols	Surname Act (1913); flag (1917); Nation-Religion-King	Pledge (1892); melting-pot creed (1908); 'no hyphens' (1915)
An enemy to define the edge	'Jews of the East' (1914); the un-Thai within	Nativist cycles: Know-Nothings, APA, quota lobby
A gate (used as a consolidation window)	One-time permanent closure (1949-); never reopened; no naturalization path	41-year pause (1924-1965), then reopening

Table 1. The shared toolkit. Sources for each cell in data.py and research notes.

Since the toolkit was standard issue — Gellner and Anderson catalogued it decades ago, and France, Japan, Turkey and Mexico ran versions of it in the same years — what does this particular pairing add? Three things the theory canon does not supply. First, variance identification: the kit was near-identical, the receiving societies maximally different, so where outcomes diverge (Chinese absorbed in Bangkok but not in Jakarta; Europeans melted but Patani not), the explanation must sit in the receiving structure — the ladder, the marriage market, the membership rule — not in the technology. Second, the gate-as-consolidation-window mechanism, demonstrated independently twice: the 1924–65 pause and the post-1949 Chinese closure did the same work in the same way, which no single-country history can show. Third, the shared failure mode at the boundary where structural membership was withheld — the subject of section 5.

4.1 What the theorists add

The scholarly vocabulary for all this was built on the American case, and it transfers to the Thai one with almost embarrassing ease. Milton Gordon's classic 1964 taxonomy distinguished cultural assimilation — food, language, manners — from *structural* assimilation: entry into the receiving society's clubs, marriages and elites. His rule was that structure is the keystone: once a group enters the primary institutions, everything else follows within a generation or two. The Sino-Thai case is Gordon's rule running at full speed — commerce, then parliaments, then palaces — while the Deep South is its contrapositive: a century of cultural pressure with the structural doors (religion, marriage, elite entry) never opened, producing exactly nothing. Alba and Nee's more recent reformulation — assimilation as the decay of an ethnic distinction's everyday salience, a two-way process in which the mainstream itself expands — describes what actually happened in both countries better than any image of minorities dissolving into a fixed majority: "American" stretched to absorb the Irish and the Jews, as "Thai" stretched to absorb the lukjin, and both

categories were changed by what they swallowed. Portes and Zhou's warning about *segmented* assimilation — that the second generation can assimilate downward into poverty, or ride an ethnic enclave upward, rather than marching into the middle class — names the live risk in both countries now: Thailand's Burmese and America's post-1965 arrivals face receiving societies with colder ladders than the ones the success stories climbed.

Gordon's distinction also forces a discipline this paper's first draft lacked: success must be graded on two axes, not one. Call them identity absorption (do people carry the national identity and language?) and structural assimilation (do they enter the marriages, elites and income distribution of the core?). By that grid: the Sino-Thai succeeded on both axes; the American white ethnics succeeded on both; Isan succeeded on the first and clearly not the second — a third of the population producing, by commonly cited estimates, around a ninth of GDP; and Patani and the pre-1965 American race line failed on both. The gradient, not any single case, is the finding.

Three lessons stand out from the successes. First, **assimilation ran on invitation backed by pressure, never on pressure alone**. The Chinese in Siam and the Italians in America were squeezed — schools closed, languages banned, names mocked — but they were simultaneously offered something scarce: a real ladder. Where the ladder was withheld (Patani; Black Americans), the same pressure produced not absorption but permanent, organized refusal. Second, **both machines used time as a component**. America's 1924–65 gate and Siam's effective closure of Chinese immigration after 1949 each gave the grinder a stationary target; the three-generation curve needs the generations. Third, **both machines told a story bigger than ethnicity that arrivals could join without ancestry**. Nation-Religion-King is not a bloodline; neither is the Constitution-and-flag civil religion. A Chinese grandson could revere the Thai king; a Sicilian grandson could revere the founders. The successful cores of both projects were, in the strict sense, creedal.

5. Where the machines broke, and how alike the breakage is

5.1 Thailand's limit: the Deep South, and the uninvited

The Thai machine's hard limit runs along religion and script. The same toolkit that absorbed Lao-speaking Buddhists and Teochew-speaking migrants failed against Malay-speaking Muslims in the far south — the provinces of the old Patani sultanate, annexed in 1902 and locked in by the Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909. Forced assimilation was tried in earnest: the Phibun-era mandates reached the south as bans on Malay dress and language in official life; the reformist cleric Haji Sulong, who petitioned in 1947 for autonomy, language rights and Islamic law, was arrested and later disappeared, presumed murdered, in 1954; at Dusun Nyor in 1948 a rising ended with roughly four hundred Malays dead. The insurgency that reignited in January 2004 has killed, by the independent Deep South Watch count, about 7,837 people in twenty-two years — the official compensation-based count is 5,999 — including 85 protesters who died at Tak Bai in 2004, a case

that reached its statute of limitations in 2024 with no one ever tried. Some 1.5 million Malay Muslims remain, by every cultural measure, unassimilated after twelve decades: more than 70 percent of the three provinces, poorer than the rest of the country, and increasingly assertive — recent Malay-identity gatherings have drawn tens of thousands.

Why here and nowhere else? The first draft of this paper answered 'religion and script,' and the answer died under review, because Thailand itself supplies the control case. Satun province — Malay-Muslim in origin, roughly three-quarters Muslim today, detached from Kedah and confirmed to Siam by the very same 1909 treaty — has produced essentially no separatist violence in a century: the standing anomaly of the insurgency literature. Nor did Islam block the absorption of Bangkok's Cham or the northern Chinese-Muslim Haw; nor, as section 2.2 showed, did Lanna's separate Tai Tham script slow its absorption at all. What Patani had, and Satun did not, is a compound: a rival state tradition (a deposed sultanate, its raja exiled rather than co-opted — Satun's governing family was retained); a treaty border with a co-ethnic homeland on the far side; a distinct literary-legal identity (Jawi script, Islamic law) that the Thai prestige center could not absorb without ceasing to be itself; and an accumulating archive of atrocity — Dusun Nyor, Haji Sulong, Tak Bai — that renews the grievance each generation. This paper states that plainly as a conjecture fitted to one positive case, not a law: with $n=1$ on the failure side of the Thai ledger, description is all the evidence can honestly support. But the conjecture travels: it is also a fair description of what the American machine's race line looked like from the inside — and of why the machines' failures, unlike their successes, do not fade with generations.

The second Thai failure is quieter: the people the machine simply declines to process. Thailand hosts one of the world's largest registered stateless populations — over 570,000 at the end of 2022, mostly hill peoples whose families have lived inside the border for generations — for whom citizenship applications average four and a half years and often, by rights monitors' accounts, a bribe. And it hosts more than four million Myanmar nationals, roughly three-quarters of its 3-4 million registered migrant workers, who keep Thai factories, fisheries and kitchens running under a policy treadmill of temporary cards and cabinet-resolution extensions, with no path to citizenship at all: Thai nationality law runs on blood, and a child born in Bangkok to two Burmese workers is Burmese. Even Isan, the machine's showcase, shows the pattern scholars call integration without inclusion: by commonly cited (and admittedly soft) estimates, roughly a third of the population producing around a ninth of the GDP. The machine made them Thai; it did not make them equal.

5.2 America's limit: the race line

Begin with the dates, because the dates carry the argument. The Supreme Court ruled in *Dred Scott* (1857) that Black people, free or enslaved, were not and could never be citizens — judicial exclusion from the civic nation itself. Chinese exclusion, enacted 1882, was made permanent in 1902 and repealed only in 1943, as a wartime courtesy to an ally, with a token quota of 105 Chinese per year. And 1924 — the year the gate closed on southern and eastern Europeans — was

also the year Congress finally granted Native Americans blanket citizenship, an irony worth sitting with: the machine extended membership to the continent's first peoples in the same season it perfected the science of ranking everyone else's blood.

America's machine had its boundary written into its founding statute. The very first naturalization law, in 1790, opened citizenship to "any alien, being a free white person" — and the racial bar took 162 years to remove fully (1952). Inside that line, the machine melted Irishmen, Jews, and Sicilians into a single "white" category. At the line, it did something else entirely. Black Americans were held out of the pot by slavery, then by nine decades of legal segregation. Chinese laborers were excluded by name in 1882 — the first US immigration ban aimed at a race. In 1922 and 1923 the Supreme Court told two model assimilators, one Japanese and one Indian, that no amount of English, Christianity or patriotism made them "white" within the meaning of the statute: whiteness, not assimilation, was the gate. In 1942 the machine's verdict on its own Japanese-American graduates was internment — about 120,000 people, two-thirds of them citizens.

And for Native Americans the machine ran in reverse gear, as coercion without invitation: allotment stripped tribal land from 138 million acres in 1887 to 48 million by 1934, while a system of 417 federal boarding schools, operating from 1819 to 1969 under the motto "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man," separated generations of children from their languages; the government's own 2024 investigation documented at least 973 children who died in them. The comparison with the Deep South is uncomfortably exact: in both countries, where the prestige center offered membership it got assimilation, and where it offered only obedience it got graves, and a grievance that outlived the policy by a century.

The starkest demonstration, though, is the one the first draft of this paper omitted entirely: the Great Migration. Roughly six million Black southerners moved north and west between about 1910 and 1970 — into the same cities, the same public schools, even the same Ford factories that were melting Poles and Sicilians into Americans at that very hour. Same machine, same decades, same classrooms; membership withheld; no melting. No cleaner within-country experiment on the paper's central distinction will ever be run. And its sequel carries the paper's most important lesson: the race line MOVED. Between 1954 and 1968 — Brown, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, Loving — the legal architecture of the line was dismantled by pressure from the excluded themselves, and intermarriage across it has risen from 3 to 17 percent of newlyweds since. The dismantling is incomplete; structural gaps persist and section 5.4's fragmentation makes 'the mainstream' itself a moving target. But a boundary that legal architecture built, legal architecture can unbuild — which is the one evidence-based ground for hope this paper can offer about Patani, and the reason its Thai forecast watches the membership rule, not the battlefield.

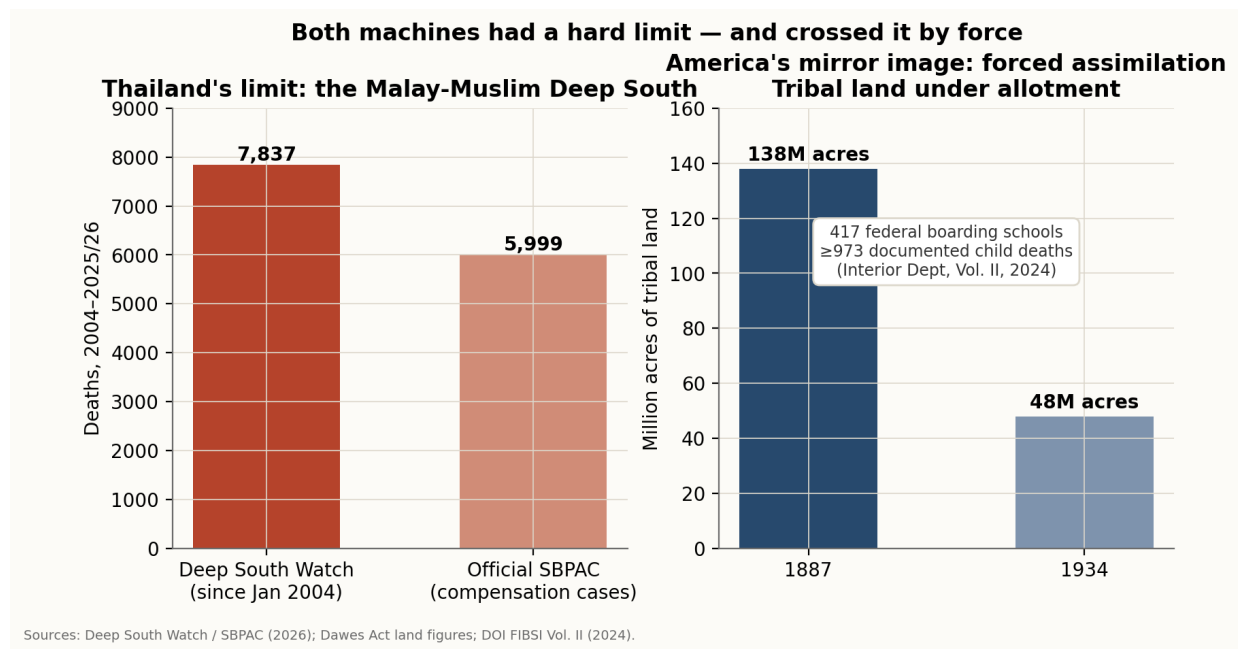


Figure 5. Both machines had a hard limit - and crossed it by force. Left: Deep South insurgency death counts (two tallies). Right: tribal land under US allotment, with the boarding-school system's toll.

Two Thai footnotes complete the ledger. The hill peoples' statelessness has a specific legal genealogy — a 1972 decree stripped citizenship from children of "aliens," and though a 2008 amendment partially repaired the law, the machinery of proof (documents most hill families never had, officials with discretion to demand payment) kept hundreds of thousands of the native-born officially foreign in their own country; between October 2020 and September 2021, a typical year before the recent reform, exactly 2,740 stateless people were granted citizenship — at which rate the queue would take two centuries. And Isan's absorption, the machine's largest single success, carries its own asterisk: the state that erased the word "Lao" in 1899 acknowledged a Lao identity to the United Nations only in 2011, and its 2015 ethnic master plan still declines to recognize "Isan" as an ethnicity at all. Twenty-two million people were made Thai; the categories that might have described what they were before remain, a century later, administratively unspeakable.

5.3 The recurring weather: nativist cycles

The American record adds one more structural fact, crucial to this paper's thesis: hostility to newcomers arrives in cycles, and always has. The Alien and Sedition Acts (1798); the convent-burnings of the 1830s-40s; the Know-Nothing Party, which claimed a million members and took 21.5 percent of the presidential vote in 1856; the American Protective Association's millions in the 1890s; the 1924 quotas; Operation Wetback's million claimed apprehensions in 1954; Proposition 187 in 1994; the post-9/11 registries — each surge recycled, as the historian Peter Schrag documents, nearly identical arguments (unassimilability, disease, crime, wages) against whichever group was newest, beginning with Benjamin Franklin's alarm at the Germans in 1751. John Higham's classic study tied the surges to periods of national anxiety and the recessions

to periods of confidence. The point for what follows: the United States has been here before, repeatedly, and each previous ebb was followed by a flow — usually while the country was busy insisting it had closed the door for good.

It is worth lingering on the first great cycle, because its shape is the shape of all of them. The Irish Catholics of the 1830s–50s were, to the Protestant republic receiving them, everything later nativists would say about later groups: impoverished, diseased, criminal, fertile, and loyal to a foreign potentate — the Pope then playing the role assigned in other eras to the Kaiser, the Comintern, or the cartels. A mob burned the Ursuline convent outside Boston in 1834; the Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1844 killed about twenty people and burned two churches; Samuel Morse — the telegraph's Morse — wrote the era's bestselling conspiracy tract. The panic elected governors and nearly elected a president. And then, over two generations, it simply dissolved: the Irish captured the cities' police forces and political machines, the Church built a parallel school system that Americanized as efficiently as the public one, and by 1960 the grandson of famine emigrants was president and anti-Catholicism a curiosity. Nothing in the record says a panic's intensity predicts the target's fate; the machine's door, not the mob's temperature, decides.

Two details underline how literal the recurrence is. The Know-Nothings at their 1854 peak did not merely poll well — they swept Massachusetts whole: the governorship, the entire congressional delegation, every state senate seat. The republic survived, absorbed the Irish the movement existed to exclude, and within two generations was electing their grandchildren. And the oldest tool in the kit never left the toolbox: the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, the surviving fragment of the first great nativist panic, was invoked again in March 2025 — a 227-year-old statute doing 2026's work, which is about as concise a demonstration of the cycle as the archive offers.

5.4 The homogeneity that faded on its own: America's cultural unraveling

One thread of the American story has no Thai parallel, and it matters for reading 2026 honestly: the mid-century homogeneity did not merely come under pressure from new arrivals — much of it dissolved from within, among the already-assimilated, for reasons that had little to do with immigration. The shared information commons went first. The three networks that held over 95 percent of prime time in the 1950s and 60s gave way to cable, then to streaming, which in May 2025 passed broadcast and cable *combined* for the first time; there is no longer any single thing most Americans watch. Trust followed the fragmentation down: confidence in mass media fell from 72 percent in 1976 to a record-low 28 percent in 2025; trust in the federal government from 77 percent in 1964 to roughly 22 percent; average confidence across fourteen major institutions stood at 27 percent in mid-2026, against 48 percent in 1979. Putnam documented the associational collapse a generation ago — league bowling down 40 percent while bowling itself grew; club meetings down 58 percent — and partisan mutual loathing has more than doubled since the 1990s. The relevance to this paper is double-edged. On one hand it cautions against romanticizing the machine: some of what looked like assimilation's triumph was simply the mid-century's unusual

institutional gravity — the draft, the networks, the churches — which pulled on natives and newcomers alike, and which no immigration policy can restore. On the other hand it clarifies the 2026 anxiety: Americans experiencing the loss of a shared culture are not wrong about the loss; they are wrong, on the evidence above, about its principal cause.

6. 2025–26: watching the ebb phase in real time

6.1 The United States: from record flow to negative net migration

The present American moment is best read against Figure 4, and it begins with an event the first draft of this paper under-weighted: the surge. In fiscal 2023 alone, Border Patrol recorded 2,045,838 apprehensions between ports of entry on the southwest border — over two million in each of two consecutive years, with a single-month record of 249,740 in December 2023. That flow, unprecedented in absolute terms, is the proximate cause of both the 2024 restrictionist peak in public opinion (55 percent wanting less immigration) and the political mandate for what followed. In January 2025 the foreign-born population hit an all-time record — 53.3 million people, 15.8 percent of the country, finally surpassing the 1890 share after 135 years — at the end of a decade of high inflows. What followed was the sharpest policy reversal since 1924. Removals reached 442,637 in fiscal 2025 by ICE's own accounting (independent analysts put calendar-2025 removals lower, around 310–315 thousand, and note the deeper change was collapsed *entries*); southwest border encounters fell to 237,538 for the entire fiscal year — the lowest since 1970, and fewer than the single month of December 2023; the refugee ceiling was cut to 7,500, the lowest in the program's history; and by Brookings' January 2026 estimate the United States experienced negative net international migration in 2025 — somewhere between minus 295 and minus 10 thousand — for the first time in at least half a century. The foreign-born population began falling within months — the first sustained decline since the 1960s, with Pew's own caveat attached: falling survey response among immigrants may overstate the drop.

The enforcement wave's texture belongs in the record alongside its totals. Active-duty Marines and federalized National Guard were deployed to Los Angeles in June 2025, then to Washington, Memphis, Portland, Chicago and New Orleans — roughly half a billion dollars of domestic troop deployments in 2025 by the Congressional Budget Office's accounting, with courts blocking two of them. The administration claimed by May 2026 that more than three million unauthorized immigrants had left the country, including two million "self-deportations"; independent demographers found the claim unsupported, but even the cautious estimates agree the unauthorized population — about 14 million people in 2023, over a quarter of all US immigrants — has begun shrinking for the first time in years. The refugee program's fate compressed the era into a single statistic with a twist: a ceiling of 7,500, the lowest ever, with the slots primarily reserved for white South African Afrikaners — an admissions policy that would have been legible, in every detail, to the drafters of the 1924 national-origins formula.

Two details complicate the simple story, and both matter to the thesis. First, public opinion swung hard against restriction while restriction ran. Gallup's series shows "immigration is a good thing" hitting a record 79 percent in June 2025 (73 by mid-2026), "want less" collapsing from 55 to 30 percent — driven partly by Republicans reverting once their side held power, a 40-point drop — and 62 percent disapproving of the administration's handling of immigration in the same poll. Political science has a name and a model for this: thermostatic opinion (Wlezien's classic formulation; applied to immigration by Jennings and others) — the public pushes back against whichever direction policy currently runs. The thermostat is the cycle's engine, and it is symmetric: the same mechanism that is now generating demand for reopening generated the 2024 demand for closure when the flow was high, and will swing restrictionist again when flows resume. This paper's American forecast is a bet on that mechanism, not on any national change of heart. Second, the country's institutions held a line the 1920s never tested: in June 2026 the Supreme Court ruled 5–4 in *Trump v. Barbara* that the executive order stripping birthright citizenship was unconstitutional, reaffirming the Fourteenth Amendment rule that soil, not blood, makes Americans. The gate closed; the definition of membership did not narrow. That distinction is the hinge of section 7.

6.2 Thailand: millions outside a gate that barely opens

Thailand's 2025–26 strain is the inverse shape. Where America's problem is a machine throttling a flow it long invited, Thailand's is a machine that never built an intake at all, pressed against by the largest migration in its history. More than four million Myanmar nationals now live in the kingdom — refugees from the 2021 coup, the civil war, and the 2024 conscription law, on top of decades of labor migration — with roughly 1.7 million undocumented. Policy has been a treadmill of registration windows and cabinet-resolution extensions covering hundreds of thousands of workers at a time, punctuated by mass deportation drives (some 144,000 Myanmar nationals in one three-month stretch from August 2024) and, for those handed back to the junta, forced conscription. The nine border camps holding over 107,000 refugees lost most of their international support to US aid cuts in 2025. Meanwhile an actual shooting war opened on the Cambodian border in July 2025 — at least 35 dead and over 300,000 displaced in five days, a ceasefire, then renewed airstrikes in December — driving nationalist temperature higher still.

Against that backdrop, the one genuine widening of the gate looks both historic and fragile. In October 2024 the cabinet approved fast-tracked status for 483,626 long-term residents and their Thailand-born children — potentially, in UNHCR's words, the most dramatic reduction of statelessness the world has ever seen. Implementation then stalled for months under nationalist backlash branding it a "Thai nationality giveaway"; by April 2026, 113,274 people had actually received status, with the enabling notification set to expire and its future uncertain under a new government. The pattern is Thai to the core: the machine can absorb — it is arguably better at absorption than any state in Southeast Asia — but its default setting, hardened in the era when

Thainess was invented, is that membership is inherited, not earned. Blood law with a narrow, revocable side door.

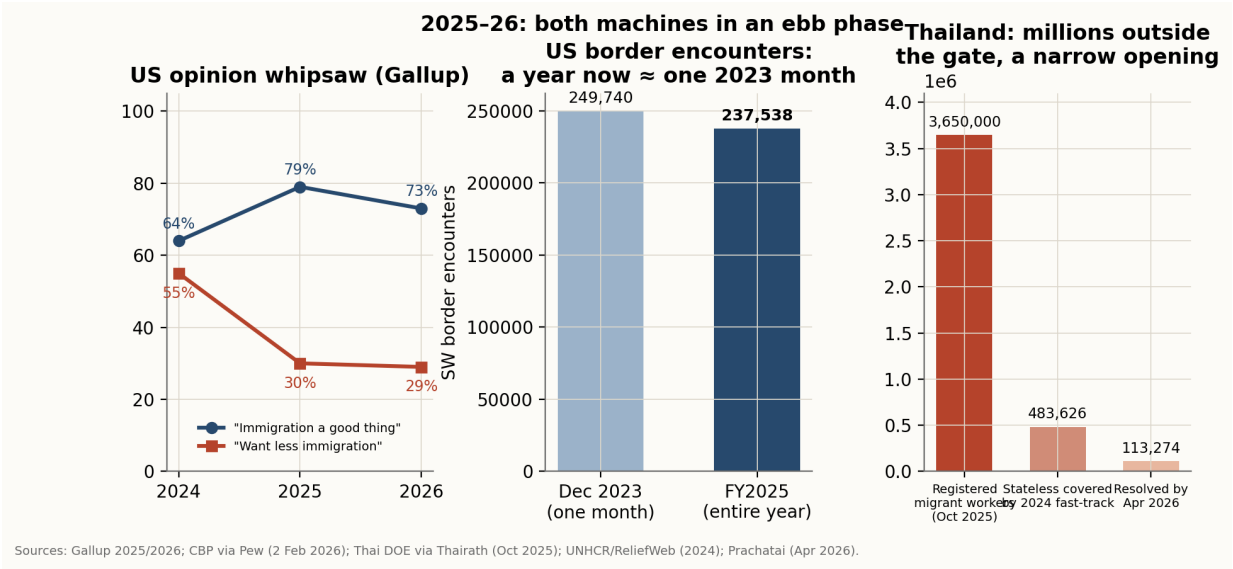


Figure 6. 2025-26: both machines in an ebb phase. Left: Gallup's opinion whipsaw. Center: the US flow collapse. Right: Thailand's outsiders and the narrow opening. Sources in data.py.

The border's criminal economy sharpened everything. In February 2025 Thailand cut electricity, fuel and internet to the Myanmar border zones hosting industrial-scale online-scam compounds — within weeks more than seven thousand trafficked workers released from the Myawaddy compounds were stranded awaiting repatriation through Thai territory. The episode matters here for what it did to the politics: it fused, in Thai public discourse, the categories of migrant, victim and criminal into a single border menace, at precisely the moment the stateless fast-track needed public patience. Machines idle fastest when the gate acquires a smell of danger; 1919 America and 2025 Thailand would understand each other perfectly.

6.3 The same ebb, two mechanisms

	United States, 2025-26	Thailand, 2025-26
The stock at peak	53.3M foreign-born = 15.8% (Jan 2025, all-time record)	>4M Myanmar nationals; ~3-4M registered migrant workers; 570k+ stateless
The policy turn	After the 2021-24 surge (FY2023: 2.05M apprehensions): 442,637 ICE removals FY2025; refugee cap 7,500; negative net migration	~144k deported in one 3-month stretch; renewal treadmill (no naturalization)
Force at the edge	Troops in six cities (~\$496M in 2025); courts blocked two deployments	Cambodia border war: 35+ dead, 300k+ displaced (Jul 2025); resumed Dec
The membership rule	Jus soli challenged by EO 14160 - struck down 5-4 (Trump v. Barbara, 2026)	Jus sanguinis intact; fast-track for 483,626 -> 113,274 resolved by Apr 2026
Opinion	Pro-immigration record high during crackdown (79% 'good thing', 2025)	Nationalist backlash branded reform a 'nationality giveaway'

Demography beneath	Under-18 already majority-minority; workforce shrinks without migrants	0.42% growth, lowest ever; civil registry shrinking
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Table 2. The two 2026 crises, side by side. All figures from data.py with sources.

Set side by side, the two 2026 crises rhyme in structure while differing in mechanism. Both countries are richer, older and lower-fertility than their machines' design era — Thailand's 2025 census growth rate, 0.42 percent, is the lowest ever recorded there, and the US working-age population now shrinks without immigrants. Both face inflows more culturally distant, in the receiving society's eyes, than the flows their machines mastered. The Thai case needs care here, and the first draft was careless: on the confessional axis, most Myanmar migrants (Burman, Mon, Shan — the last actually Tai-speaking; Burmese itself is a Sino-Tibetan language) share Theravada Buddhism with their hosts, the very door that opened for the Chinese; but on the narrative axis they are the textbook enemy — the sackers of Ayutthaya in 1767, a role the Thai curriculum and cinema have curated for two centuries — and in 2025–26 the narrative axis is visibly winning. Post-1965 American arrivals cross the old color line by definition. Both are experiencing nativist surges championed from the top of the political system, and in both the surge coexists with broad evidence that the grinder still works — third-generation language shift in America is as fast as it was in 1910, and second-generation Burmese children in Thai schools speak Thai. The difference: America is choking a working intake; Thailand never built one. Ebb, in one case, of flow; in the other, of an absorption the law refuses to begin.

7. Objections, taken seriously

A comparison this convenient should be distrusted on sight, so here are the four strongest objections the author can construct, with replies.

Objection 1: Thailand's homogeneity is suppression wearing assimilation's clothes. The 99 percent census, this objection runs, measured not absorption but the state's refusal to count difference — and the Deep South, the stateless hill peoples, and the unspeakability of "Isan" as a category prove the whole project was coercion. Reply: partly conceded, and the paper's own Figure 1 is the concession. But the objection cannot explain the Sino-Thai case, where the measure of assimilation is not the census but behavior no state can fake at scale: intermarriage, language shift, and the voluntary self-identification of a commercial elite that had every resource to remain separate. Nor can it explain Isan's political loyalty through two centuries in which secession was geographically thinkable. The honest summary is that Thainess ran two programs — absorption where it opened doors, suppression where it did not — and the paper's argument depends precisely on keeping both in view.

Objection 2: the American machine never worked either — it only ever melted white people. Reply: as a description of 1790–1965, largely conceded; section 5.2 is built on it. But the claim has a testable modern form, and the tests keep failing to confirm it. Post-1965 immigrants and their

children — mostly Latin American and Asian, mostly outside the old whiteness — show name-giving convergence as fast as the Italians', three-generation language shift as complete as the Germans', and intermarriage rising steadily across the very line the machine once enforced. The race line was the machine's shame, but it has proven to be a policy, not a law of nature — which is exactly why its partial dismantling after 1965 changed the machine's outputs.

Objection 3: 2026 is not an ebb but a rupture — this time is different. The strongest version points to features 1924 lacked: mass deportation of settled residents rather than mere exclusion at the border, troops in cities, an attempt (defeated) to redefine birthright membership itself. Reply: the differences are real and the paper does not minimize them; an ebb that deports is crueler than an ebb that merely excludes. But the cyclical claim is about direction and duration, not gentleness, and on those the structural evidence — opinion moving against the crackdown while it runs, the membership rule surviving its direct challenge, the economy's deepening labor dependence — matches the profile of every previous ebb's final years, not of a new permanent settlement. The falsifiers in section 8 state what evidence would prove this reply wrong.

Objection 4: the comparison itself is apples and oranges — a 70-million kingdom that absorbed neighbors is nothing like a 340-million republic built on oceanic immigration. Reply: the difference in intake is conceded and doing work throughout — it is why Thailand's 2026 crisis is about a missing gate and America's about a closed one. What the comparison rests on is not similarity of circumstance, and — as this draft concedes openly, correcting its predecessor — not independent invention either: both countries installed the same European-diffused nation-making module. The comparison's value is the natural experiment that diffusion creates: one technology, two maximally different receiving societies, so the divergent outcomes isolate what the receiving structure — ladder, marriage market, membership rule — contributes. That is the sense in which this paper compares.

8. The genius-history hat: a forecast, labeled as such

Everything to this point has been history with sources. This section is explicitly speculative — pattern-matching from the record above, stated falsifiably where possible.

Claim 1. The United States is running the 1924 playbook; the compositional consolidation effect will partly repeat, and the pause will be shorter than 41 years. The claim is deliberately narrower than the first draft's. What a pause reliably does is compositional: cut replenishment, and the second and third generations mechanically become a larger share of each origin group, carrying English dominance and intermarriage with them by the generational arithmetic of section 3.3. What this paper does NOT forecast is a rerun of mid-century cultural unity, because section 5.4's institutional gravity — the draft, the networks, the churches — is gone and no immigration policy restores it. On duration: the mechanisms, not the need, argue for a short gate — the thermostat is already swinging (79 percent 'good thing' during the crackdown), and the expansionist coalition

Tichenor describes (employers, agriculture, health care, both parties' donor wings) is intact rather than defeated as in 1924. The guess: under ten years. **Falsifiers, disjunctive and dated:** this claim is wrong if by end-2030 net migration is still negative, OR if Gallup's 'good thing' share has fallen below 60 percent with 'want less' above 45 percent for two consecutive years while restriction runs — either alone kills it.

Claim 2. Thailand will widen Thainess — reluctantly, incrementally, and first for those already inside. Thailand's demographic arithmetic is harsher than America's: lowest-ever recorded growth, a shrinking labor force, and an economy that already runs on three to four million foreign workers the law treats as permanently temporary. The path of least resistance, visible in the 2024 stateless resolution, is to regularize the long-present and native-born first — hill peoples, then perhaps the Thailand-born children of migrants — while keeping the Burmese labor force itself on the treadmill. Expect no *jus soli*, no mass naturalization, and continued nationalist eruptions against each step; but expect the steps to continue — not because need magically makes policy, but because the specific bureaucratic channel already exists (the 2024 cabinet resolution and its registries) and the coalition behind it (employers, the interior ministry's own registration apparatus, UNHCR) persists. The out-of-sample test is Japan, the other aging East Asian state with a blood-law gate: under identical pressure it has moved exactly this way — record 2.3 million foreign workers (October 2024), a record near four million foreign residents by mid-2025, the 2019 Specified Skilled Worker visa, and the 2024 replacement of the exploitative trainee system with an explicit skill-development-to-residence track from 2027 — widening labor membership while barely touching citizenship. That is the Thai trajectory this paper predicts. The Deep South, tragically, changes least: the Patani compound of section 5.1 — rival state memory, co-ethnic homeland, atrocity archive — is precisely what incremental regularization cannot touch, and only a change in the membership rule itself, of the kind America's moving race line shows is possible, would register. **Falsifiers, disjunctive and dated:** this claim is wrong if by end-2029 the stateless fast-track has lapsed with no successor program for 18 months, OR cumulative grants under it stall below 200,000 — either alone kills it.

The demography beneath both claims — read with Alba's correction. The 2020 US census counted the non-Hispanic White share at 57.8 percent, and 2018-vintage projections put the crossover below 50 percent around 2045. Richard Alba's *The Great Demographic Illusion* (2020) shows why that number should not be read the way it usually is: the projection counts anyone with any non-white ancestry as 'minority,' so the fastest-growing group — mixed-ancestry children, most with a white parent — is booked wholly against the majority even as, on Alba's evidence, it largely integrates into an expanding mainstream (least so, he stresses, for Black Americans). The 'majority-minority America' of the headlines is thus partly a classification artifact — and, for this paper, a confirmation: the mainstream absorbing its own boundary cases is the Alba-Nee mechanism running in real time. The real demographic constraint is arithmetic, not identity: the US working-age population shrinks without immigrants, and Thailand's census — 70.3 million

growing at 0.42 percent, the slowest ever, with the civil registry already shrinking — is harsher still. Neither nostalgic self-image is recoverable; what the shrinking arithmetic supplies is not an automatic policy, but a standing constituency for the coalitions of Claims 1 and 2.

Reading 3 — an interpretive stance, not a forecast (it names no falsifier because, as the review of draft 1 established, it can have none): neither machine is dying; both are idling. The deeper reading of 2026 is not that assimilation has failed in either country but that both societies have, for the moment, stopped asking their machines to run — America by throttling the intake, Thailand by refusing to install one. The machinery itself — schools, prestige ladders, national creeds open to joiners — remains in place and demonstrably functional in both. Putnam's finding is the right frame for the era: diversity depresses trust in the short run, and societies respond, in the long run, by building larger identities that re-encompass the strangers. Both countries have done exactly that before, each within living memory of someone's grandmother. The wager of this paper is that the American tide turns again through the thermostat and the standing expansionist coalition, and that Thailand's door opens wider by increments through the registries it has already built. And the homogeneity each country is nostalgic for — a whiter America, a more purely Tai Thailand — was itself the manufactured product of the last great absorption, which is the quiet joke of both nostalgias.

9. Conclusion

Two countries on opposite sides of the earth, with opposite founding stories, solved the same problem with the same machine: a prestige center worth joining, schools to carry it, names and symbols to seal it, an enemy to define its edge, and a gate to control its intake. Both machines produced spectacular successes — the Sino-Thai absorption, the white-ethnic melting pot — and both failed identically at the boundary where membership was withheld: the race line in America, the religion-and-script line in Thailand, each failure enforced by violence and each still unhealed. Both official homogeneities were manufactured and both are currently strained — but differently, by design: America's working intake is throttled mid-cycle, with the thermostat already swinging toward reopening; Thailand's blood-law gate, built shut in the era Thainess was invented, is being pried open a crack at a time under the hardest demographic arithmetic in its history, on the path Japan is already walking. The machines are idling, not broken; the schools, the ladders, and the creeds open to joiners all still stand.

End on the two images that anchor the argument. Detroit, July 4, 1917: grown men in the costumes of a dozen countries climb into a painted cauldron and climb out American, waving flags, while their employer's cameras roll — absurd, coercive, sincere, and effective, all at once. Bangkok, 1915: clerks across the kingdom register family names newly required by royal decree, names that within two generations will make grandchildren of Teochew shopkeepers indistinguishable, on paper and increasingly in fact, from the descendants of Ayutthaya. Neither scene shows a natural

process. Both show a machine, staffed by people who believed in it, offering strangers a deal — dignity's price paid in difference surrendered — that millions, given a real ladder, chose to take. The deal is out of fashion in both capitals in 2026. For Washington, the record assembled here says: not for the first time, and — if the thermostat and the coalitions behave as they always have — not for long. For Bangkok it says something quieter: the machine that once made Thais out of Teochew shopkeepers' grandchildren has already registered, in its own ledgers, the next several hundred thousand people it could make Thai, whenever it decides to run.

Appendix: provenance and method

This paper was produced under a documented human-AI pipeline (PROCESS.md in the project folder): (0) question, stance and scope fixed in writing before research; (1) research sweeps in English and Thai — Thai-language sources were searched first for the Thai side, including Silpa Watthanatham, Matichon, Thai Wikipedia/Wikisource primary texts, Thairath, Thai PBS and Deep South Watch reporting; (2) an independent AI re-verification pass on 22 headline numbers against primary or near-primary sources, which corrected two figures before drafting (the federal boarding-school count, 408 to 417, and the Thai registered-migrant-worker total, 4.08M to ~3.65M) and hedged three others; (3) every number moved into data.py with source and a three-tier verification status (primary-verified / secondary / tertiary-only, plus UNVERIFIED) before prose was written — tertiary-only and UNVERIFIED figures are hedged in text and never headline; (4) figures generated by script from the same file; (5) this document built by script (build_paper_v2.py), so the whole paper rebuilds from source in two commands. Public-domain historical images are fetched by script from Wikimedia Commons with a license log (_sources.tsv); where downloads are unavailable the build substitutes labeled stand-in plates, as in this draft. This is draft 2: draft 1 underwent a full adversarial review (ATTACK_NOTES.md, DEFENSE_NOTES.md, VERDICT.md, all kept in the project folder). The verdict sustained eight of eighteen charges outright and ordered the revisions embodied here — most substantially: the retraction of the claim that the two machines were independently invented; the splitting of the cyclical thesis (US cycle documented; no Thai cycle claimed); the addition of Satun as the control case that killed draft 1's religion-and-script boundary law; the addition of the Great Migration, the moving race line, conquered-in-place America, and post-1957 Thailand; the re-tiering of the audit file; and dated, disjunctive falsifiers in the forecast. Draft 1 and its build script remain in the folder, unmodified, per the pipeline's versioning rule.

Principal sources are cited inline throughout data.py and research_notes.md; key works relied on include Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped* (1994) and "The Quest for Siwilai" (2000); Tambiah (1976); Vella, *Chaiyo!* (1978); Skinner, *Chinese Society in Thailand* (1957); Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983); Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (1955); Zolberg, *A Nation by Design* (2006); Tichenor, *Dividing Lines* (2002); Gordon (1964); Alba and Nee (2003); Portes and Zhou (1993); Abramitzky, Boustan and Eriksson (2016, 2020); Putnam (2000, 2007); and, for 2025-26 events, Gallup, Pew, Brookings, CBP, ICE, the Federal Register, the US Supreme Court's slip opinion in Trump v. Barbara, Deep South Watch, SBPAC, UNHCR, HRW, Prachatai and the Thai Department of Employment. Added for draft 2: Wlezien (1995) and Jennings (2009) on thermostatic opinion; Alba, *The Great Demographic Illusion* (2020); Bowie, *Rituals of National Loyalty* (1997); Thak Chaloemtiarana on the Sarit era; the 'Anomaly of Satun' literature (NPS 2012; Parks 2009); Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010); Griswold del Castillo (1990); and MHLW/ISA data on Japan via Nippon.com and the Japan Times.