**Title of Project: Whiteness in the Golden age of Immigration (1890-1924)**

Abstract. To become a citizen in the United States required the individual to be white. Non-citizens were barred from owning property, and from voting. The definition of whiteness in the period I am examining (1890-1924) was narrower than today, only including Germanic peoples from Northern Europe. Excluded were groups such as the Finns, Syrians, and Greeks who are considered white today. These three groups used institutions and the legal system in order to gain whiteness. This research will explore the political processes required to gain whiteness for new Immigrant groups

FURSCA Proposal: Whiteness in the Golden Age of Immigration (1890-1924)

Introduction: My research explores and explains what immigrant groups were required to do in order to become white in the United States in the golden age of immigration (1890-1924). I plan to do this by reading historical sources on both American and immigrant attitudes towards whiteness, looking at the role community organizations played in each, and examining the legal framework that made claiming whiteness necessary. Since this topic is both historical and political, I will be using political theories as well as historical analysis in my research. My research on these groups will culminate in my honors thesis.

Whiteness was, as it is today, not a biological reality but is a societal construct. The definition of whiteness in the United States began as only including those from Great Britain, Scandinavia, Germany, the Netherlands, and Northern France. In the 1840s that definition began to expand to Irish Catholic immigrants, and then later to groups such as Syrians, Finns, and Greeks. These three groups struggled to attain whiteness, because citizenship in the United States required immigrants to be white1. Non-citizens were barred from owning property, and from voting. To become American, immigrants had to become white.

Research Description: I began working on this topic in a directed study this semester with Dr. Deborah Kanter titled “American Whiteness”. Thus far I have focused on exploring Greek immigration to the United States and how groups such as the American Hellenic Education and Progressive Association (AHEPA) and the Greek Orthodox Church were influential in gaining whiteness for Greek Americans. Greek Americans, I discovered, had two approaches to whiteness, based on location. Northern urban Greeks preferred a route that maintained Greek religion and culture, not sacrificing anything to assimilate. Southern Greeks, who had a history of being targeted by the Klan, asserted their place in American society by joining fraternal organizations that fought against discrimination, such as AHEPA2.

With FURSCA funding I will advance my research on how Greeks, Finns, and Syrians became white in the eyes of the United States government and general populace. I selected these groups because they faced discrimination in this country as a result of not being considered white. The Ku Klux Klan targeted Greek Americans in Oregon, Michigan, and Washington. A lynch mob in Omaha, Nebraska ran the 1,000+ Greek American community out of town2. Finnish and Syrian immigrants both had to fight to be considered white in court the gained whiteness as a result of court cases. For immigrants, being white was a necessity to gain citizenship. During the 1890s, when Southern and Eastern European immigrant arrived, the definition of Whiteness was challenged by the establishment. I will examine the political implications of Arabs, Greeks, and Finns attaining whiteness in the United States. I will focus especially on the role of institutions (i.e fraternal organizations, church groups, and unions) within the respective communities and how they navigated the preexisting racial hierarchy upon their arrival in the United States.

Methodology: I will be gathering primary sources from archives and libraries including the

Chicago Foreign Language Press Survey (Newberry Library), Materials from the Finnish

American Heritage Center (Hancock, MI) on labor involvement, and AHEPA archival materials

(Bloomfield Hills). I will also visit the University of Michigan graduate library, the Arab American Museum (Dearborn), and the National Hellenic Museum (Chicago). There will also be a literature review.

In my research I will highlight the voices and perspectives of new immigrants by examining primary sources from immigrants attaining whiteness. I will include court sources, such as Dow v. United States (1915) and the 1908 case of John Svan4. These rulings recognized Syrians and Finns, respectively, as white. It will be examining a cross-section of sources from across society to provide an overview of American political culture from 1890-1924.

Outcomes: I will complete my honors thesis for December 2019. By April I will complete a draft chapter of my thesis. I have been working with my advisor to create a summer schedule for thesis research that would have full draft prepared by September 1st. By the end of FURSCA I will have an outline completed and drafts of the immigrant groups chapters completed.