Lost Generations and the Problem of American Identity: The Emergence of Racial Nativism in American Culture (1890s-1920s)

Gloria Lugo

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Abstract

This thesis problematizes traditional generic groupings (such as realism, naturalism, and modernism) since such categories segregate texts into literary periods defined largely by artificial formalist criteria. These ahistorical distinctions tend to deemphasize social and cultural import and also occlude analyses of texts as cultural products that express the dominant ideology of a particular epoch. A historical analysis focusing on cultural ideology can offer new insights to how various canonical texts perpetuate American mythologies and stereotypes. When interrogating texts of the Progressive and Modernist Eras, a pattern emerges that conflates racism and nativism in an effort to define Americans as elite Anglo-Americans and configure other social and ethnic groups as racial Others.

In traditional literary criticism, canonical texts of both periods are widely celebrated for their literary merit, whereas racist and nativist impulses tend to be overlooked, understated, or dismissed. Walter Benn Michaels is a notable exception; he argues in Our America that nativist modernism identifies “culture as the determinant of identity,” claiming “it is only when we know which race we are that we can tell which culture is ours” (15-16). The research in this thesis differs from Michaels’s in two critical respects: first, it reformulates Michaels’s claim by arguing that nativists saw cultural identity as a composite of race, class, ideologies, and practices; second, the broader historical scope identifies similar expressions of racial nativism in pre-WWI works by writers such as William Dean Howells, Theodore Dreiser, and Stephen Crane—whom Larzer Ziff calls the first “lost generation” (343-348). The 1890s and 1920s writers can
both be called “lost,” since they express the nativist problem of American identity in a racially heterogeneous nation.

In addition to Michaels’s theory, the research in this thesis applies perspectives from Thorstein Veblen, Kenneth Burke, and Toni Morrison, which are explained in the introduction. The texts are examined through two categories of analysis: cultural identity (race, class, ideologies, practices, geographic origin, and language) and ideas of racial purity rooted in scientific racism. The two chapters divide the texts into pre- and post-WWI periods, and both chapters examine each era’s historical context. Sociological texts by Jacob Riis, Madison Grant, and Lothrop Stoddard provide the ideological framework for literary texts written by Howells, Crane, Frank Norris, Dreiser, Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and Nella Larsen. The conclusion argues that texts of both eras express racial nativist ideology through similar treatments of cultural identity and ideas of racial purity but differ in terms of degree.

This research yields new insights to cultural products that have been widely celebrated for their literary merits without sufficient consideration of how they reaffirm racial nativist ideologies that materialized in social and legislative controls engineered to marginalize and exclude various social groups. In configuring American identity as white, the texts reaffirm contemporary fears that racial Others threaten the nativist fantasy of an Anglo-American nation and, in doing so, express a problem for ideas of cultural identity that rely on racial homogeneity.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Context</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Perspectives</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Products</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 1: Pre-World War I Cultural Products (1890-1910s)</strong></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riis’s <em>How the Other Half Lives</em> (1890)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howells’s <em>A Hazard of New Fortunes</em> (1890)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crane’s <em>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</em> (1893)</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norris’s <em>The Octopus</em> (1901)</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norris’s <em>The Pit</em> (1903)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dreiser’s <em>The Financier</em> (1912) and <em>The Titan</em> (1914)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cather’s <em>O Pioneers!</em> (1913)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Post-World War I Cultural Products (1910s-1920s)</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grant’s <em>The Passing of a Great Race</em> (1916) and Stoddard’s <em>The Rising Tide of Color</em> (1920)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitzgerald’s <em>The Great Gatsby</em> (1925)</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dos Passos’s <em>Manhattan Transfer</em> (1925)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cather’s <em>The Professor’s House</em> (1925)</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemingway’s <em>The Sun Also Rises</em> (1926)</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larsen’s <em>Quicksand</em> (1928)</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identity</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas of Racial Purity</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lost Generations and the Problem of American Identity:
The Emergence of Racial Nativism in American Culture (1890s-1920s)

Gloria Lugo

Introduction

Generic distinctions are traditionally drawn between literary realism, naturalism, and modernism based largely on texts' structural and stylistic differences. These artificial groupings are problematic because they segregate texts into literary periods defined largely by formalist criteria. These categories further create ahistorical distinctions that tend to deemphasize social and cultural import and also occlude analyses of texts as cultural products that express the dominant ideology of a particular historical epoch. A more historical analysis that focuses on cultural ideology can offer new insights to how various canonical texts function to perpetuate American mythologies and stereotypes. When interrogating texts published in the Progressive and Modernist Eras, which were both marked by racism and anxiety about American identity, a pattern emerges that conflates racism and nativism in an effort to define Americans as racially pure Anglo-Americans of the elite class—a cultural project that involves configuring all other social and ethnic groups as racial Others.
In traditional literary criticism, however, canonical texts of both periods are widely celebrated for their literary merit while racist and nativist impulses tend to be overlooked, understated, or dismissed. The most notable exception is Walter Benn Michaels, who argues, in the seminal and controversial *Our America*, that the heightened racism in the years following World War I made possible the “nativist modernism” that is “deeply committed to the nativist project of racializing the American” to formulate an ethnocentric and nationalist concept of American identity (13). Michaels claims that Progressive-Era writers (such as Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and Edith Wharton) were “comparatively indifferent” to nativist concerns, arguing that their texts are preoccupied with socioeconomic issues (68). He also claims that nativist modernism expresses a “move to culture as the determinant of identity,” claiming “it is only when we know which race we are that we can tell which culture is ours” (15-16).

My argument differs from Michaels’s in two critical aspects. First, I argue that nativists saw cultural identity as a composite of race, class, ideologies (beliefs), and practices. In racially segregated, class-based societies such as the United States, social stratification is determined largely by race; therefore, it is both race and class that are (typically) inherited and provide the external cues to cultural identity.\(^1\) That contemporary nativists would have seen social class as a primary component of cultural identity is evident in the evolution of the term *cultural*, which acquired a specific “class distinction” by the late nineteenth century (Williams 92). Conflating race and class, nativist texts represent the elite as propertied Anglo-Americans in positions of power and racialize the working classes as non-Anglo and subservient. David R. Roediger’s *The

\(^1\) Michelle Alexander puts forth, in *The New Jim Crow*, a convincing argument that the United States is structured on a racial caste system, which, she argues, continues today through mass incarceration.
Wages of Whiteness shows that wage labor, particularly domestic service, was equated with not only slavery but also “blackness”; therefore, many white workers sought in white privilege compensation for the loss of autonomy in what was labelled “white slavery” and “slavery of wages” (original emphases, 66-87). The white working class, Roediger points out, first adopted racist ideologies against African-Americans and then equated “blackness with the ethnicity of the new immigrant groups” (179). Through this historical lens, Michaels’s argument can be thus reformulated: it is only when we know the racial and social group to which we belong that we know which culture is ours. Contemporary theories of scientific racism also conflated race, class, and culture, and fears of the mob came to be expressed through racialized representations of the working classes that were perceived as a threat to Anglo-American social dominance.

The confluence of race, class, and culture in pre-WWI conceptions of identity is the second difference between my argument and Michaels’s. Michaels dismisses many pre-WWI texts for being unconcerned with nationalist conceptions of identity. For instance, he discounts Dreiser’s An American Tragedy as an economic novel and Stephen Crane’s The Red Badge of Courage as a “local color” novel that is “insufficiently national” (original emphasis, 67), but he omits Dreiser’s The Titan, Crane’s Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, and all works by William Dean Howells, including A Hazard of New Fortunes. All of these texts employ the trope of the city to express nativist concerns over perceived “foreign” threats nationwide. Moreover, Howells, Crane, and Dreiser are among the 1890s writers whom cultural historian Larzer Ziff calls the first “lost generation” whose fiction expresses the first “strong and sure labor pains of modern American literature” (343-348). Both generations of writers can be called “lost” since
their texts express the nativist problem of defining American identity in a racially heterogeneous nation.

I also argue that the pre-WWI texts represent ideas of racial purity as an underlying (often unseen) determinant of cultural identity and, therefore, anticipate the post-WWI texts’ more fully expressed treatments. The 1920s texts express an ideology that evolved for decades through nativist efforts to define American identity in opposition to racial Others, thereby reinforcing the idea that social and legislative controls are necessary to contain foreign threats. The writers, therefore, performed the role of social critics who reaffirmed ethnocentric notions of national identity and racialized as Other any social group perceived to challenge Anglo-American dominance. The historical context that made possible these cultural products began long before World War I.

**Historical Context**

The decades following the Civil War were marked by rapid social and economic changes that led to rural-to-urban migration and increased immigration. The growth of the industrial economy challenged Republican ideals and associated myths of an agrarian utopia as more of the population worked for wages and lived as tenants. The concomitant urbanization and class inequality led to nationwide labor conflicts and prompted Progressive-Era reforms (Trachtenberg 70-99; Boyer 121-87). These reforms included conservative economic reforms (such as the Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890), social reforms such as tenement regulations and Prohibition, and exclusionary immigration restrictions supported by the latest generation of nativists.

The most comprehensive account of the historical cycles of American nativism is John Higham’s *Strangers in the Land*, which continues to be highly influential to scholars.
exploring connections between immigration and the fluidity of racial constructions.

Higham defines nativism as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections” (4). In this research, I use the term racial nativism to describe the project of racializing all internal social groups imagined as a “foreign” threat to Anglo-American dominance and racial purity, including people of color, the working classes, and women who resisted traditional gender roles. While the nativist movement was formalized in 1894 through the Immigration Restriction League and is traditionally attributed to the reaction against the “new” immigrants from southern and eastern Europe (Jou 68), it was first codified through immigration restrictions against the Chinese and has its ideological basis in post-Reconstruction institutional racism against African-Americans, indigenous peoples, Mexicans, Portuguese, Italians, and the Irish, who were represented with racist stereotypes connecting the “black” Irish with African-Americans. Contemporary theories of scientific racism appeared to validate institutional racisms that sought to engineer racial homogeneity.

The perceived scientific validity of racial difference provided the backbone of post-Reconstruction institutional racism that was sanctioned at the federal level when the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the legality of racial segregation through its “separate but equal” ruling in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896). This decision codified Jim Crow laws that persisted until Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ended de jure racial segregation. The U.S. Supreme Court also, in Pace v. Alabama (1883), affirmed the constitutionality of state-level anti-miscegenation laws that excluded unions between whites and African-Americans, native peoples, Asians, mestizos, and other “half-breeds” (Pascoe 2, 119). The latter category could apply to virtually anyone since the “one-drop rule” of
blackness, codified in several states such as Tennessee (in 1910) and Virginia (in 1924), prevailed as the dominant ideology that categorized as black any person with African ancestry, no matter how remote, and even if he or she were visibly white. This racist construct meant that any ethnic group (or individual) could symbolize the perceived threat of invisible black blood entering the Anglo-American family. Accordingly, anti-miscegenation laws functioned to prevent biracial marriages and mixed-race reproduction, which was increasingly feared by contemporary eugenicists.

Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, widely recognized as one of the founders of scientific racism, was among the first to express the idea that miscegenation would lead to the end of white supremacy (and Western civilization). Gobineau’s *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853-55) influenced eugenicists in Europe and the United States. Applying the Darwinian reproductive struggle between “fit” and “unfit” individuals to a social competition between “fit” and “unfit” races, American eugenicists sought to socially engineer the racial hygiene of the nation by encouraging reproduction of the “fit” while limiting the reproduction of groups considered innately “inferior”. Fears of miscegenation were closely tied to the fear of Anglo-American “race suicide”—a term popularized by Theodore Roosevelt, who claimed low birth rate was a “crime” caused by “those evil enemies of America, the hyphenated Americans” (qtd. in Schultz). While eugenics programs could influence reproduction of individuals already inside the nation’s

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2 Throughout this paper, I use the language of scientific racism to convey the full import of contemporary meanings. I use the terms *race* and *ethnicity* interchangeably with an understanding that both are socially constructed concepts with no basis in human biology. Generally, I have put such terms in quotation marks only at the first use (such as “Caucasian,” “Nordic,” “Alpine,” “Mediterranean,” “Asiatic,” “Negroid,” “Indian,” “mestizo,” “mulatto,” “undesirable,” “mongrel,” “degenerate,” “hybrid,” “racial contamination,” “racial degeneration”). In every instance, these terms are used to convey ideologies expressed in the texts under analysis, not my own.
borders, racial nativists believed immigration restrictions were essential to the project of preserving racial purity.

Immigration, like sexual reproduction, was feared because it increased the national population of racial Others. In this way, nativism and institutional racism intersected through immigration restrictions that were increasingly racialized beginning in the 1880s. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the first of several expanded restrictions against Asians, while subsequent acts used the racially coded term “undesirables” to exclude specific ethnic groups believed to be innately predisposed to criminality, prostitution, mental illness, political radicalism, and illiteracy (Pegler-Gordon 105-07, Engs 9-11). “Nation of origin” quotas, first proposed in the 1890s (Sadowski-Smith 786), were achieved through the Immigration Act of 1924 (Johnson-Reed Act), which is widely considered the “triumph of American nativism” that began in the late nineteenth century (Pegler-Gordon 2-7). As Mae M. Ngai points out, the quotas codified American identity as “white” by implying through omission that the “colored races” had “no country of origin” and “were not even bona fide immigrants” (original emphasis, 27).

In this research, I use the following theoretical perspectives to interrogate how literary texts—as cultural products of American society in this historical period—functioned within the context of these institutional controls to both express and reaffirm racial nativist ideologies.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

Thorstein Veblen’s economic theory provides insight to how the late-nineteenth-century industrial economy and social hierarchy influenced cultural values, and this theory serves as a useful lens through which to analyze the cultural identity of social
groups represented in cultural products. Veblen was an American economist who, in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), posits that, in the modern industrial economy, the elite class expresses wealth and power through "conspicuous consumption" and "conspicuous leisure." Veblen argues that productive work is considered an "alien factor" (ch. IV) while inherited wealth is "even more honorific than wealth acquired by the possessor's own effort" (ch. II). He also posits that the antebellum master/slave hierarchy persists through the "master and servant" relationship; instead of resisting subjugation, even the "most abject poor" strive to emulate the elite by practicing conspicuous consumption (ch. IV). The concept of emulation is useful in analyzing how working-class and non-Anglo-American literary characters attempt to resist and transform their cultural identities.

In *The Instinct of Workmanship and the Industrial Arts* (1914), Veblen coined the term "trained incapacity" to describe a problematic in American business (Wais). Kenneth Burke, in *Permanence and Change* (1954), applied this concept to the sociocultural phenomenon he describes as "that state of affairs whereby one's very abilities can function as blindnesses" (7). This construct describes how various socioeconomic apparatuses and cultural institutions work in concert to indoctrinate each member of society so thoroughly that he or she develops an inability to see beyond dominant cultural ideologies. According to Burke, this cultural training is universal among all classes of society—dominant and oppressed—and often manifests unconsciously. Burke's theory of "trained incapacity" is similar to Antonio Gramsci's Marxist theory of the "philosophy of common sense," whereby members of the working class are indoctrinated with the dominant class's ideologies and unconsciously accept
them as self-evident truths (343). John Reed’s *Insurgent Mexico* (1914) is exemplary of how trained incapacity functions with regard to racial nativism. Despite Reed’s sympathy toward Mexicans, he is unable to resist racializing them. He describes Pancho Villa as having the “naïve simplicity of a savage” (122-25) and distinguishes between the “pure Spanish type of the highest breed” (61) and the “fierce brown” *mestizos* (141). The construct of trained incapacity supports literary analyses that rely on dominant ideology rather than authorial intent.

Critical race theory provides perspective on the fluidity of racial constructs that makes it possible to identify racialized representations of ethnic populations—such as Jews, Irish, and Italians—that have since been reconfigured as “white.” Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark* (1990), in particular, lends insight to how Anglo-American writers characterize “the milieu of the working poor, the unemployed, sinister Chinese . . . female predators” (80) as the “Africanist presence” by which white characters and readers understand their own cultural identities (59). Morrison’s list of linguistic strategies commonly employed to signify the racial Other includes using stereotypes that rely on readers’ recognizing markers of race through physical attributes; equating racial Others with the animalistic characteristics such as “grunts” (68); and representing African-American dialect as “alien,” which functions to “reinforce class distinctions and otherness” (52). Additionally, Morrison points out the practices of fetishizing racial Others, which includes “the purity of blood; the purity of white female sexuality, the pollution of African blood and sex” (68), and of racializing sexuality through stereotypes of African-American women as “the antithesis to femininity” (85). Morrison’s identified
strategies provide tools that are useful in analyzing how American writers signify racial ambiguity and otherness in characters otherwise configured as white.

Michaels’s *Our America* (1995) provides a critical framework for analyzing how nativist constructs of American identity rely on concepts of race and culture. Arguing that literary modernism articulates a “commitment to identity—linguistic, national, cultural, racial,” he posits that modernist texts, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*, express the same nativist ideology that led to the Johnson-Reed Act and Indian Citizenship Act in 1924 (3). Michaels argues that nativist modernism signifies “a certain fantasy about the family—that it might maintain itself incestuously” (2). He posits that the writers contain the threat of miscegenation through treatments of incest, homosexuality, and nonreproduction, and these treatments function to convey the nativist idea that “the comparative sterility of Nordics” signified both the problem of “race suicide” and “a solution—their low birthrate testified to the irreducibility of their difference from the non-Nordics” (12). Michaels’s insights allow for an analysis of similar expressions in pre-WWI cultural products.

**Cultural Products**

While I focus on literature, I use the term *cultural products* in the way that American Studies scholars apply it to describe the examination of literary texts as cultural artifacts that express dominant ideologies. Accordingly, Chapters 1 and 2 begin with a description of the pre- and post-WWI historical context, respectively, followed by an examination of sociological texts that provide the ideological framework for the literary texts analyzed in each chapter. Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), and Lothrop Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide*
of Color Against White World-Supremacy (1920) represent three decades of evolving racial nativist ideology that is expressed in the literary texts. Each text is analyzed through two categories of analysis—cultural identity and ideas of racial purity—which are organized as subsections within the analysis of each text.

The category of cultural identity considers the characters' race, social class, ideologies, values, and practices, as well as geographic origin and language/dialect. Individual characters are analyzed as representations of social types, such as capitalists, the professional middle class, the working-class mob, immigrants, or political radicals.

The category of racial purity relies on the era's scientific racism to analyze how writers express a character's race, which, if not named, is signified through physical attributes or behaviors that nativists associated with racial purity or ambiguity. It is the characters' racial purity that ultimately defines their cultural identities, determines if they are "American," and signifies whether they threaten the nation's racial hygiene through miscegenation and/or reproduction. While nativists believed that race was hereditary and fixed at birth, the texts express the fear that individuals can resist and even transform their cultural identities by adapting to social conditions. In the case of racially ambiguous Others, evolving identities are not treated as celebrations of successful assimilation but as warnings of racial "passing."

These categories of analysis reveal how texts produced in the decades preceding World War I anticipate the more explicit racial nativism expressed in the post-WWI texts. Accordingly, this research yields new insights to cultural products that have been widely celebrated for their literary merits without sufficient consideration of how they reaffirm racist and nativist ideologies that materialized in social and legislative controls.
engineered to marginalize and exclude various social groups. In configuring American identity as white, and specifically Nordic, the texts reaffirm contemporary fears that racial Others threaten the nativist fantasy of an Anglo-American nation and, in doing so, express a problem for ideas of cultural identity that rely on racial homogeneity.
Chapter 1: Pre-World War I Cultural Products (1890-1910s)

The cultural products of the Progressive Era reflect racial nativist ideology as it evolved during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a response to socioeconomic change, class conflict, and—when the Census of 1890 proclaimed the end of the western "frontier"—finite geographic boundaries. The ideological significance of the "frontier" is exemplified in Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis that celebrates the "colonization of the Great West," including its indigenous peoples, as the fulfillment of Anglo-American Manifest Destiny (ch. 1). The idea of a "closed frontier" harkening the end of Western settlement in the midst of nationwide class conflict led social commentators to explore alternate "safety valve" solutions for the social unrest associated with increasing working-class urban populations. Western historian Henry Nash Smith argues that the safety valve theory was meant to protect the "rich against the potential violence of the poor," but the theory proved false when the late nineteenth century experienced "the most bitter and widespread labor trouble" in U.S. history (205-08). A notable example is the Chicago Haymarket Affair of 1886, a labor rally that received nationwide attention after anarchists were accused and convicted, without due process, of a bombing (Trachtenberg 191-92, Lopate x, Arms 260-63). Because sociopolitical radicalism challenged the myth of American Exceptionalism, the Haymarket Affair was blamed on immigrants and followed by a "red scare" that stigmatized the working classes as a "foreign, alien" threatening force (Trachtenberg 71-90). Eugene Leach argues that the Haymarket Affair led to "a substitution of ethnicity for class" since, thereafter, the media racialized class conflict by representing the "savagery of immigrants" and blaming violence on the "'Socialistic, atheistic, alcoholic European classes'" (209-10). Associating
class conflict with the “new” immigrants resulted in an increased racialization of the working classes in general.

Rapid social changes, combined with increased immigration and ethnic diversity, led contemporaries to fear that America was losing its Republican ideals and “Anglo-Saxon tradition,” which was predicated on Protestant conceptions of morality and gender, as well as the racist belief that the “Caucasoid race” was the most “superior” of the era’s racial taxonomies. Additionally, the war against Spain in 1898 marked the advent of U.S. overseas imperialism with the annexation of the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. The annexation of Hawaii occurred that same year, followed by the acquisition of Panama in 1903. Imperialism was both celebrated as a reaffirmation of Manifest Destiny and resisted since the new territories brought into the American empire more populations of people of color, which further increased nativists’ concerns about a national cultural identity predicated on ideas of racial purity.

In response, nativists increased demands for immigration exclusions against specific ethnic populations. The first wave of restrictions excluded Asian immigrants, even as the United States was increasing commercial trade through the Open Door Policy (1899) and the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) to ensure access to Chinese markets. Beginning with the Page Act of 1875, which officially barred Asian prostitutes and “coolie” labor but was enforced primarily against Chinese women, landmark Asian-specific legislation included the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the Geary Act of 1892, and the 1907 Gentlemen’s Agreement with Japan (Pegler-Gordon 2-6; Engs 115). Additional legislation was aimed toward “undesirable” immigrants such as criminals,

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3 For deeper analyses of racial classifications, American nativism, and immigration restrictions, see Engs’ *The Eugenics Movement: An Encyclopedia*; Higham’s *Strangers in the Land*, especially ch. 3, 4, and 6.
idiots, paupers, polygamists, beggars, prostitutes, and anarchists (Pegler-Gordon 105). These racially coded labels targeted specific ethnicities believed to be racially predisposed to dysgenic traits. Additionally, literacy requirements and nation of origin quotas were proposed in the 1880s and 1890s, respectively, although they did not pass until subsequent decades (Sadowski-Smith 786).

While immigration restrictions were supported and enacted by the social and political elite, the white working class tended to scapegoat the “new” immigrants as racial Others in an effort to maintain exclusive rights to white privilege. As Roediger points out, “the anti-Chinese movement won tremendous working class response” as the Chinese were “cast as nonwhites, as ‘slaves,’ and even as Black” (179). Similarly, Italians and Jews were lynched by native-born Southern working-class whites (Jou 68), with the largest mass lynching in U.S. history occurring in 1891 against eleven Italian-American immigrants in Louisiana (LaGumina). These acts of violence convey the degree of racial hatred against southern and eastern European immigrants—more than thirty years before the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act. Such hate crimes expressed fears of both economic and sexual competition from racial Others who were stereotyped as sexual predators in contemporary cultural products.

Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots* (1903), and its sequel *The Clansman* (1905), portrays African-Americans as aggressive hypersexualized animals who rape Anglo-American women with the ultimate goal of creating a “Mulatto nation” (81). D. W. Griffith’s enormously successful film, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), is based on these novels and celebrates the Ku Klux Klan, which reorganized the same year. Griffith’s film inspired William J. Simmons, the founder of the second Klan, to adopt the regalia and
rituals that were imagined by Dixon but not part of the original Klan (Pegram 7). The second Klan’s broader racist agenda included purifying America of blacks and southern and eastern Europeans, particularly Jews, whom they racialized as “not true Jews . . . but only Judaized Mongols” (54). Griffith’s film was also celebrated by President Woodrow Wilson, who purportedly commented after the White House screening that the film’s representation “is all so terribly true” (qtd. in Wormser). The nativists’ ultimate fear of miscegenation is that it increases the biracial population (defined as black) and threatens the nation’s racial purity. Contemporary cultural products express the anxiety of miscegenation and reproduction in the context of the “one-drop” ideology of blackness.

Kate Chopin’s “Désirée’s Baby” (1893) expresses the fear that black blood hides in white skin until it manifests in future generations. When Armand, the son of an elite French Creole family, realizes that his toddler has developed the same skin color as a “little quadroon,” he rejects his son and wife (179). Since Désirée’s parentage is unknown readers are led to believe that she has African ancestors, until the narrator reveals that it is Armand’s mother who “belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery” (182). Anti-miscegenation laws, like Jim Crow segregation, worked to prevent racial integration that could increase the mixed-race population. This ideology was codified in twenty-nine states (Browning 26) and excluded unions between whites and Native Americans, Asians, mestizos, and other “half-breeds” (Pascoe 2, 119). The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed, in *Pace v. Alabama* (1883), the constitutionality of state-level anti-miscegenation laws the same year Francis Galton published his treatise on eugenics (Rydell 674).
In the 1890s, the leading American eugenicist, Charles Davenport, fused Francis Galton’s theories of selective breeding with racial taxonomies that classified humans based on phrenology, a pseudoscience popularized by Orson Squire Fowler and Lorenzo Niles Fowler that purported to assess intelligence, physiological characteristics, and behavior based on skeletal formations. William Z. Ripley’s *The Races of Europe* (1899) offered a cephalic index to formulate a tripartite racial taxonomy classifying three distinct “Caucasian” subraces: “Teutonic,” “Mediterranean,” and “Alpine” (Jou 68). Using these racial constructs, Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) substituted “Teutonic” with “Nordic” to emphasize the racial (as opposed to linguistic) differences that made the Nordic the “white man par excellence” (150). According to the racist logic of the “one-drop rule,” the Mediterranean and Alpine subraces were not really white since they were believed to be mixed with African and Asian blood, respectively. In addition to perceiving eastern and southern Europeans, along with other “new” immigrant ethnic groups, as racially “inferior,” nativists believed non-Nordics were innately predisposed to criminality and mental and physical illnesses.

The theories of Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, an early-nineteenth-century French evolutionary biologist, influenced American nativists who correlated the “new” immigrants with increases in urban crime, poverty, and alcoholism. Progressive-Era politicians and reformers, such as Riis and Theodore Roosevelt, were influenced by Lamarck’s theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, which provided pseudo-scientific support to the belief that specific ethnic groups were disproportionately predisposed to “racial degeneracy” (Pegler-Gordon 105-07; Engs xiv-3, 9-11). 4 As

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4 On the associations between eugenics and Social Darwinism, see Russett 89-110, Engs xiii-xv, Leonard 689-99. For the correlative influence on immigration policy, see Pegler-Gordon 122-124.
Alexandra Stern points out, eugenicists and reformers feared that “unfit” races were spreading “polluting ‘germ plasm’” and causing societal and cultural “degeneration” (6-15). The principles of eugenics were also expressed through the era’s myriad cultural products.

Eugenics was celebrated through popular cultural products such as Harry Laughlin’s play *Acquired or Inherited* (1912), exhibits displayed at the San Francisco Panama-Pacific International Exposition (1915), and the widely circulated film, *The Black Stork* (1917) (Rydell 676-77). Its racist principles are also expressed in sociological texts such as Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), which provides the ideological framework used in this chapter to analyze the era’s elite literature: Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), Frank Norris’s *The Octopus* (1901) and *The Pit* (1903), Dreiser’s *The Financier* (1912) and *The Titan* (1914), and Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* (1913). Interrogating these texts through the lens of racial nativism reveals how the fear of the working-class mob came to be expressed as the fear of racial Others.

These texts have been widely celebrated for their sympathetic portrayals of working-class immigrants, but their apparent verisimilitude thinly veils underlying inherent biases that reaffirm xenophobic assumptions and anxieties. The writers represent “new” immigrants as racial Others characterized as dangerous to the dominant class’s social safety, Protestant morality, and perception of a racially homogeneous Anglo-American identity. These treatments are largely overlooked or understated in traditional literary criticism. Howells, for instance, is widely acknowledged as the Gilded Age’s “Dean of American Letters” and continues to be celebrated for his works of literary
“realism.” *Hazard*, for example, earned him the reputation as a “social and economic radical” who is “profoundly” sympathetic to the working class (Arms 260-75). Similarly, although William Deverell’s historical analysis reveals Norris “did not have the concerns of a reformer” (139), *The Octopus* is widely read as a “muckraking” novel considered emblematic of the writer’s tendency to be “[a]gainst the prejudices of the day” (Hanson). Likewise, traditional Catherian criticism coalesces around Cather’s celebrations of the Nebraska frontier and multicultural values that occlude the writer’s tendency to racialize immigrant characters according to the dominant ideology of scientific racism (Wasserman; Helstern 262-65; Prchal 3-4, 10). Critics also continue to overlook the racist import of Riis’s *Other Half*, labelling it “muckraking” journalism that “seared the conscience” of New Yorkers (Madison v-viii), or claiming Riis “merely shared in the conventional wisdom” of his era (Yochelson and Czitrom 17). In contrast, the following analysis reveals Riis as a leading nativist whose text racially delineates New York City in a way that anticipates the color-coded global map presented in Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920).

**Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890)**

Riis’s stated aim in *Other Half* is to garner support to reform tenements that housed the urban poor, but he identifies the underlying problem as “tremendous immigration” (2). Riis begins and ends by raising the specter of class conflict, recalling the violent European Revolutions of 1848 and New York City Draft Riots of 1863, to entreat readers “on top” to consider how the “discomfort and crowding below” will lead to violent resistance (1). Expressing the dominant ideology that associates “new” immigrants with class conflict, Riis warns of the “standing army of ten thousand tramps
with all that that implies” (emphasis added, 2). His language is emblematic of the decade’s reformist impulse to warn that “revolutionary upheaval is a real and immediate threat” (Boyer 184-85). Riis suggests that housing reform is only an initial step “toward exterminating” the “paupers,” while the “real remedy, is to remove the cause” (199), which he identifies as the “swelling crowd of wage-earners” (223). Riis racializes this social group by arguing that the “new” immigrants are innately inferior and unassimilable.

Lamenting that the Lower East Side has been “engulfed by the color tide” of “heterogeneous elements,” Riis color-codes the city’s “colonies” in which a “distinctively American community” of “old inhabitants” is nowhere to be found, implying that the “new” immigrants are displacing native-born Anglo-Americans (19-22). Riis uses green (Irish) and blue (German) to signify regions dominated by the previous decades’ “new” immigrants. He claims Germans are the most assimilable since they are “hard-working” and have “Teutonic wit” (25). Classifying Germans as “Teutonic” supports the idea of the Nordic subrace that unites Anglo-Saxons with northwestern Europeans imagined as racially superior (Engs 162).

**Cultural Identity**

As a Danish immigrant, Riis identifies racially with the dominant class and subscribes to its ideology that labels the Irish as “Celtic” (32). Accordingly, he represents the Irish as alcoholic criminals whose children remain in tenements due to an inherited inferiority (207). His harshest invectives, however, are aimed at the Chinese, Italians, and Jews. Riis contends that “our Blacks” are “immensely the superior of the lowest of the whites, the Italians and Polish Jews” (emphases added, 115-118). Riis’s nativist
comparison simultaneously configures native-born blacks as foreign and racializes Italians and Jews as inferior to the social group configured as the antithesis of whiteness. Riis’s *The Battle with the Slum* (1902), his sequel photo-documentary to *Other Half*, continues to argue, in the chapter “On Whom Shall We Shut the Door?,” that Italians and Jews should be prohibited entry to the United States (ch. VIII).

In *Other Half*, Riis’s narrative map designates the Italian district with red, an “aggressive” color “forcing its way northward” and “pushing the black of the negro” into other areas (22). The spreading of what Riis calls the “black mark” signifies the fear of racial integration (22), while the color red connotes a fear of radicalism (Leach 187). Riis signifies this fear by claiming that “Red bandanas” pervade the Italian district (52). Ahistorical readings lead critics such as Keith Gandal to miss the racialized import of the color-coding and attribute it to Riis’s “bizarre preoccupation with color” (79), claiming that the red bandana “in no way symbolizes poverty or degradation” (32). But red bandanas did symbolize radicalism, as evidenced by the 1888 publication of “The Red Bandana,” a pamphlet identifying the titular object as the anarchists’ “proud ensign” (Absinthe 26). Riis also implies that the pervasiveness of the “Italian tongue” is indicative of the Italians’ ability to learn “slowly, if at all” (44-52). He claims tenement reform would not improve Italians since their “natural bent” degrades their environment (44). Representing Italians as innately inferior and incapable of being assimilated, Riis draws the same conclusion for eastern European Jews.

Riis claims that the “dull gray” area of New York City is “overrun” with Russian and Polish Jews who, nearly as “aggressive” as the Italians (22), present a “terrible menace to society” (83). Riis claims that moving Jews into better apartments “would be
to treat a symptom of the disease” (106) since Jews “carry their slums with them” (22). In addition to anti-Semitic portrayals of Jews’ “constitutional greed” and disease-ridden “hidden fever-nests” (88-98), Riis adds the charge of radicalism, claiming Jews “recruit the ranks of the anarchists” (102). He also signifies foreignness by describing “Jewtown” as a “Babel of confusion” (95) in which English is lost amid the “queer lingo” (50). In the same way, he portrays the Chinese’s English as unintelligible—“Lem Ilish [Irish] velly bad” (32). These representations of immigrant dialect function to signify the nativist idea that these groups are racially unassimilable.

Riis designates Chinatown by a “streak of yellow” (22) that signifies the contemporary fear of the “yellow peril.” He reaffirms racist stereotypes by claiming the “veneer of cleanliness” obfuscates the hidden immorality of those endowed “by nature” with “cruel cunning” (78-80). Claiming the Chinese are not “a desirable element,” Riis proposes an incongruous solution: “Rather than banish the Chinaman, I would have the door opened wider – for his wife” (83). Some critics have read this passage literally as “a halfhearted invocation of a domestic ideal as panacea” (Yochelson and Czitrom 113) or Riis’s “vision of sympathy” (Gandal 72). On the contrary, Riis’s sardonic expression signifies the nativist belief that existing legislation was inadequate to assuage contemporary fears of miscegenation that were based on ideas of racial purity.

_Ideas of Racial Purity_

The Chinese, Riis claims, adopt Christianity with the “ulterior motive” of obtaining a “Christian [white] wife” (78). Omitting reference to existing exclusions against Chinese women, Riis emphasizes that “a very few, Chinese merchants have wives of their own color” and claims that they use opium to enslave their white “wives” through
prostitution (78-80). This racist portrayal reaffirms the widely held idea that the Chinese used opium to “[lure] American women into prostitution” (Merry 212). Historically contextualized, Riis’s “open door” language expresses the nativist belief that existing immigration restrictions, which excluded virtually all Chinese women except those married to diplomats and merchants, exacerbated the perceived problems of “white slavery” (prostitution) and miscegenation associated with male Chinese immigrants.

Riis also claims that it is specifically foreign-born women and their tenement-reared daughters who turn to prostitution while “the American-born girl will not” (184). In doing so, he racializes female sexuality and conflates issues of immigration, miscegenation, and reproduction to signify that racial Others threaten the nation’s racial purity and social stability. Contemporary canonical texts such as Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes* convey racial nativist ideology through similar treatments. Published the same year as *Other Half*, Howells’s *Hazard* also configures the working class as a foreign threat to Anglo-American dominance, identity, and social safety. Contrary to Howells’s claim that literary realism “portray[s] men and women as they are” (*Criticism* 27-36), critical scholarship points out how Howells’s representations reflect “class-based ideologies” (Corkin 29-30). The following analysis of *Hazard* reveals that Howells racializes social class in a way that correlates cultural identity with ideas of racial purity.

**Howells’s *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890)**

Howells portrays character types that convey the ambiguous cultural identity of the professional middle class within a capitalist system threatened by racial Others. These types, all recently moved to New York City, converge through the elite magazine, *Every* 

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5 For details of the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which excluded most Chinese immigrants but allowed merchants and their wives, see Pegler-Gordon 23-25.
Other Week. Basil March is the central character who leaves his unfulfilling insurance career to pursue his dream as a literary editor. Leaving their spacious Boston home, Basil and Isabel March struggle to maintain their cultural identity as middle-class Anglo-Americans in an urban environment. Claiming "the Anglo-Saxon home" is "impossible in the Franco-American flat," Isabel voices the idea that urbanization is not conducive to the Anglo-American family (56-57).\(^6\) Moreover, she insists on amenities, such as an elevator, that distinguish their apartment from the working-class tenements.

Cultural Identity

To assure themselves of their perceived social superiority, the Marches tour tenement neighborhoods populated by immigrants imagined as both "picturesque" (47) and "disgusting" (55). When their dialogue turns to issues of social inequality, however, Basil wants to "go to the theater and forget" (60). This inability to interrogate social inequality expresses Howells's "smiling aspects" of American life philosophy put forth in Criticism and Fiction, which identifies optimism as the defining feature of American literature (42). This sanguine view manifests in sanitized representations of poverty, as when the Marches imagine there is "not real suffering - among those people" (58).

Distinguishing "those people" as racially different than Anglo-Americans, Basil contrasts the "raggedness of Southern Europe" with the "old-fashioned American respectability" and claims the "international shabbiness [has] invaded the southern border" (47). This representation signifies the nativist idea that the "new" immigrants are an occupying foreign presence that threatens the Marches' cultural identity.

In contrast to the Anglo-American middle-class professionals, the urban working class is racialized as servants, such as the African-American janitors, Italian waiters, and

\(^6\) On French architectural models for New York City's middle-class apartments, see Dolkart 10-15.
the “little Neapolitan” who shines Anglo-Americans’ shoes (398). Although Basil is part of the professional middle class, he relies on wages like the working class, which prompts him to express that he feels like a “hireling” treated as “the foreman of a shop” (316). Basil signifies the association between wage labor, slavery, and race through his assertion that his employer “doesn’t own me” (original emphasis, 317). Partially identifying with the working class leads Basil to sympathize with the strikers at the beginning of the rail strike scene that was inspired by the Haymarket Affair. In contrast to media representations of the angry mob, Basil sees “quiet, decent-looking” strikers (373) but concludes they are a social menace fighting a “private war” against the rail company at “our pains and expense” (370). In this way, Basil functions as what Stanley Corkin calls Howells’s “rationalist bourgeois male” who persuades readers to adopt his “class-based ideologies” (29-30), which are aligned with Howells’s view that the Haymarket anarchists “ought to have been indicted for conspiracy” (qtd. in Corkin 22). Basil also condones violence against the strikers by rationalizing that the police have the right to “club the ideal when he finds it inciting a riot” (391). Howells racializes the working-class “ideal” through his characterization of Lindau, his representation of the immigrant anarchist.

Lindau represents the nativist fear of the dangerous foreign radical who came to the United States after participating in the German Revolution of 1848 (80-81). As a Civil War veteran, Lindau claims that post-bellum corporate capitalism and concomitant wage system is another form of slavery that is unconducive to the traditional American ideal of autonomy: “Dere iss no Ameriga anymore!” but only a nation in which everyone “iss the slafe of some richer man” (287-292). Although Basil is an old friend of
Lindau's, he does "not sympathize" with such "preposterous" ideas (345). Fulkerson, the manager of *Every Other Week*, vocalizes racial nativism more explicitly and functions to delegitimize Lindau by mocking his dialect and claiming that his "brincibles" are "un-American" (287-92) and that such foreign "poison" should "stay at home" (72). At the same time, Fulkerson publishes Colonel Woodburn's article that advocates the reinstitution of slavery as a solution to class conflict, an idea that racializes the working class as a social group in need of Anglo-American paternalism. By disseminating the Colonel's ideas, Fulkerson suggests that institutional slavery is more "American," and less dangerous, than "foreign" socialism. Socialism is represented as an ideological threat, as when Isabel worries that Tom is becoming "infected" by Lindau's ideas, and a social threat, as when Lindau's ideas materialize in the labor strike's violent end (249). Howells racializes the labor conflict by attributing the violence to the arrival of the foreign radical who instigates the police—"Glup [club] the strikers — gif it to them!" (383). It is Lindau's taunts that incite the violence that leads to his own and Conrad Dryfoos's deaths (383).

Conrad is the son of the novel's capitalist, Jacob Dryfoos, who is represented as "an old Pennsylvania Dutch farmer" descended from the "first settlers" (73). Initially a Western farmer who resists corporate monopolies, Dryfoos's identity evolves after selling his farm to Standard Oil and making millions by speculating on Wall Street. As a new member of the capitalist class, he represents the *nouveau riche* who show "money too plainly" (135). While transforming into a capitalist, he "devolved upon a meaner ideal" that is contemptuous of the hard-work ethic (236). He hires Pinkertons against his workers and identifies Lindau as a "foreigner" responsible for strikes and unions,
claiming his type “ought to be hung!” (313). As the financier of *Every Other Week*, Dryfoos also guarantees the Marches’ position in the professional middle class, which is why Isabel judges him “a better man than Lindau” (441). While Dryfoos ensures the Marches’ social stability, however, he cannot achieve his family’s acceptance among the social elite.

Despite Dryfoos’s millions, his daughters (Christine and Mela) are described as “ignorant and unbred” (233), while Conrad is described as a “silly” reformer (132) and, like Lindau, “a kind of crank” (323). While Amy Kaplan points out that Lindau’s death is the “necessary expulsion of this threatening foreign force” (58), Conrad’s death also functions to eliminate a social type that contributes to the survival of foreign populations. His death serves as punishment for both his charity and his intervention in what Basil calls the “bad cause” of the strike (409). This ideology is in line with ideas of contemporary sociologists who, as Cynthia Russett notes, saw “do-gooders” as interfering in social problems in a harmful way (99). Conrad’s humanitarian work also signifies his efforts to resist his identity as the son of a capitalist; in a similar way, Angus Beaton, Howells’s representation of the urban artist, resists his family’s working-class identity.

Angus is portrayed as a “kind of an orphan” in that he rejects his cultural identity as the son of a tombstone cutter and strives to be successful as an artist (144). To work against his identity as a working-class Anglo-American, he lives in Paris for three years, where the French environment “obliterate[d] many traces of native and ancestral manner” that he inherited from his Anglo-American parents (93). As a struggling artist in New York City, he compensates for his social status as a “nondescript” by spending his small
income through conspicuous consumption instead of repaying his debt to his aging father. Having no place in modern capitalist America, he desires death but is ineffectual in taking his own life (445).

Although Beaton the character lives, his inability to marry and reproduce signifies nativist fears of race suicide. While he is initially attracted to Margaret Vance, an elite Anglo-American, she dedicates her reproductive years to charity, an occupation that Isabel claims is “rather dismal for the homes” (410). Margaret’s becoming a nun signifies a commitment to celibacy that leaves Anglo-American homes without children. Unable to marry Margaret, Beaton’s next choice is the poor but Anglo-American Alma Leighton, but her own professional ambitions lead her to resist traditional gender roles and equate marriage with slavery: “I don’t want any slave—nor any slavery. I want to be free always” (352). Beaton then determines to attain upward social mobility by marrying Christine Dryfoos, but his deciding against it signifies the threat of miscegenation. The possibility that the Dryfooses are not racially pure is signified through Howells’s characterization of Christine as a “black leopard” who scratches Beaton’s face when he rejects her (147).

Ideas of Racial Purity

The Dryfooses’ racial ambiguity suggests they are, although Christian by religion, racially Jewish. Although Howells claimed he unintentionally gave the Dryfooses a Jewish surname (Bauch 27), he nevertheless characterizes Hazard’s capitalist with Jewish stereotypes, such as what the narrator describes as Dryfoos’s rapacious “greed” and desire to “breed more money” (236). While Howells may have intended to represent an “old stock” Anglo-American capitalist, his trained incapacity is evident in his
racialized portrayal. Incapable of resisting the inclination to conflate ideas of the *nouveau riche*, particularly those profiting through speculative finance, with fears that racial Others were penetrating the elite class of Anglo-Americans, Howells is unable to portray an avaricious capitalist without imagining him as Jewish. He further implies Dryfoos’s racial difference when the Anglo-American characters express an unnamed repulsion toward Dryfoos. Colonel Woodburn and Fulkerson refer to “certain aspects” of his “character” that signify that “he is not a gentlemen”; coupled with the Colonel’s claim that “commercialism” is “the poison at the heart of our national life,” this racially coded language relies on anti-Semitic stereotypes that blame Jews for the social problems associated with modern capitalism (304).

Dryfoos’s Pennsylvania Dutch ancestral identity adds to his racial ambiguity since the Pennsylvania Dutch have religious and cultural similarities to Hasidic Jews (Bauch 18). Moreover, Howells implies that the Pennsylvania Dutch comprise diverse types, as evidenced when Dryfoos mistakenly thinks that the members of the elite social clubs, which reject his daughters, “were all the same kind of Dutch” (76). Unwilling to wait another “generation or two” for their acceptance among the elite (76), Dryfoos moves his family to Europe where, in Paris, they are embraced as “American plutocrats” since, as the narrator explains, “society has them . . . in translation (448). Howells implies that the Parisians see the Dryfooses as English-speaking American citizens but cannot discern the markers that Anglo-Americans perceive as racial differences. Accordingly, while Dryfoos could not marry his daughter to an elite Anglo-American, she is able to marry a French nobleman who assumes they belong to the same class (and race).
Lindau is another character whose racial ambiguity signifies Jewish ethnicity. Although Lindau is identified as a German immigrant, the narrator states that he has an “aquiline profile uncommon among Germans” (72), and Fulkerson calls him a “Dutchman” (129). Jonathan Bauch points out several distinctions that identify Lindau as Jewish, the most convincing being associations between the tropes of the Flying Dutchman and the Wandering Jew, the ethnic origins of Lindau’s name, and the “scull-cap” Lindau wears in the novel’s original illustrations (not included in modern editions) (27). Moreover, as Howells’s representation of radical labor, Lindau is more explicitly racialized than Dryfoos. Reaffirming Riis’s claim that Jews remain in tenements by choice, Howells’s Lindau lives in the tenements not “because I was too boor” but because he refuses to assimilate (168). Also like Riis, Howells divides the city into ethnic colonies that signify racial Others are contributing to Anglo-American “race suicide.”

In stark contrast to the non-reproductive Anglo-American characters, the tenement districts “swarmed with children,” and the narrator employs “poverty” as a racially coded term that signifies a type of dysgenic reproduction, “like leprosy” (54-55). Basil observes the increasing populations “of Germanic, of Slavonic, of Pelasgic,7 of Mongolian, stock” who “outnumber the prepotent Celts,” but he, like Riis, specifically racializes Jews, Italians, and the Chinese (163). Reaffirming Riis’s racist stereotypes, Howells’s narrator suggests that the Chinese’s “immaculate cleanliness” hides a clandestine immorality and that Anglo-Americans are the “foreign” element in Chinatown (165).

Similarly, Howells’s text supports nativist ideas that “pure Americanism” is “almost extinct” among the “foreign tongues” (270), particularly the “unintelligible

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7 “Pelasgic” refers to ethnicities of the eastern Mediterranean and Aegean coastal regions (“Pelagian”).
dialect” of Jews and Italians (162). Howells also signifies the idea that the city’s heterogeneity is leading to social and sexual miscegenation. The Italian restaurant, for example, brings together “all nationalities,” including “Hebrews and Cubans” (69), while the multi-ethnic cuisine in a French restaurant signifies the amalgamation of a French woman who has a Spanish husband and a “Cuban negro” cook (267)—a representation that signifies the threat of miscegenation in an integrated society. Howells also uses the language of scientific racism to identify class conflict as a racial struggle. While Basil briefly ponders “the future economy of our heterogeneous commonwealth” given “the fierce struggle for survival” (164), Howells prompts readers to conjecture the future of American identity while he focuses primarily on the “smiling aspects” of middle-class society. Crane’s *Maggie*, in contrast, omits capitalist- and middle-class characters entirely and focuses on the racialized types who live in New York City’s tenements. In the context of nativism, Crane’s representation of “new” immigrants and their native-born children functions to portray the tenement community as a microcosm of an America in which “old stock” Anglo-Americans have been completely displaced by racial Others who are represented as socially dysgenic.

**Crane’s Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893)**

Despite, or because of, the titular implications, *Maggie* focuses less on the protagonist’s prostitution and more on the presumably hereditary behaviors that pervade the working-class tenements. Crane’s novella focuses on the Johnson family whose ethnicity or nation of origin is not named, but Maggie’s name and the pejorative term “micks” suggest Irish origins (7). They are characterized with behaviors nativists associated with racial Others, including alcoholism, criminality, insanity, and
prostitution. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson are both characterized as subhuman violent alcoholics. Crane’s narrator describes Mr. Johnson as a “lurching figure” with a “hairy throat” that makes a grotesque movement when he guzzles beer (15), while Mary Johnson—the mother of Jimmie, Maggie, and Tommie—is the polar opposite of the Anglo-American feminine ideal. She is described as a “red mother” (28) whose “look of insanity” signifies her racial Otherness as well as her perpetual rage that leads her to destroy her home and get arrested regularly (36-38). Crane’s characterizations imply that these behaviors are external manifestations of a racial inferiority that is inherited by the Johnsons’ children.

_Cultural Identity_

Crane’s characterization of Jimmie functions to reaffirm warnings of nativists like Riis who claim native-born child “urchins” become adult “toughs,” many of whom are Irish criminals with animalistic behaviors (Other 155-172). Accordingly, Crane’s Jimmie begins as street-fighting “urchin” (11) and grows up to become a “young man of leather” who has inherited his parents’ animalistic behaviors (18). His unintelligible dialect is punctuated with grunts, and the narrator claims he “snarls like a wild animal” (41-44). Upon his father’s death, he becomes his father through behaviors such as “stumbling up-stairs late at night, as his father had done before him” (22). In addition to perpetual drunkenness, his working-class profession as a truck-driver further racializes him as he is portrayed as being “immured like an African cow” (29). This confinement increases his belligerence against authority, and he despises anyone whose appearance suggests social or moral superiority, such as “well-dressed men” and “obvious Christians” (19).
Following the moral code of the streets, Jimmie turns against his sister when she disgraces him by sleeping with his friend.

Maggie is also characterized with innate criminality since, as a child, she steals a flower for her baby brother’s casket. As an adult, she is told by Jimmie that she has two options: she can either “go teh hell [prostitution] or go teh work” (22). Since she has the “feminine aversion of going to hell,” she takes the only employment available—a low-wage job in a clothing factory (22). When she meets Pete, she becomes dissatisfied with her social position and compares the “endless grinding” of the factory to his “high-class customs” and “elegant occupation” as a bartender (26-29). Far removed from the elite class, Maggie does not realize that Pete is a member of the working class who resists his cultural identity by emulating the elite whom he serves. Likewise, Maggie mistakes as elite theater a popular venue whose entertainment includes racist minstrelsy that allows the white working-class patrons to feel a part of the “aristocratic theatre-going public” (30). Crane further racializes the working class by representing a subversive melodrama.

While Hazard’s Marches visit the elite theater to escape issues of social inequality, Crane’s representation of working-class theater suggests it fosters social discontent. For Maggie, the “theater made her think” and question if she, “a girl who lived in a tenement house and worked in a shirt factory,” could acquire “culture and refinement” (35). Influenced by the play’s celebration of the “triumph for the hero, poor and of the masses” over the wealthy villain, Maggie begins to self-identify with the “unfortunate and the oppressed” class (35). David Huntsperger argues that, historically, such plays “actually contributed to spontaneous political protests” and theater riots (312), and Progressive reformers frequently warned that “low theatrical performances” had a
detrimental effect on the urban poor (Boyer 160). Crane racializes this fear by representing a potentially subversive working-class audience comprising all the “nationalities of the Bowery” (29). The threat of Maggie’s potential radicalism is contained when her homelessness forces her to focus on mere survival.

Evicted from her home, Maggie turns to Pete as the figure of “philanthropy,” but he takes her to progressively seedy venues where she becomes increasingly sexualized as a “good-looker” (48-49). When Pete leaves her for another woman, Maggie becomes the “girl of the streets” and the presumed prostitute in the penultimate chapter. Rejected by more affluent men, Maggie is pushed farther into the “gloomy districts” where she attracts a “ragged being” who follows her to the site of her death (63-66). Crane’s representation reaffirms racist beliefs that the “new” immigrant ethnicities, and their native-born children, are more likely than Anglo-Americans to turn to prostitution. In Other Half’s “Working Girls” chapter, the titular double entendre conveys Riis’s claim that low-wage employment leads working-class women to prostitution. Crane suggests a similar message since Maggie cannot support herself on a five-dollar-a-week income.

While arguments for higher wages may seem humanitarian, however, many Progressive-Era reformers “regarded minimum-wage-induced disemployment as a social benefit – a eugenic virtue” that would “deny new immigrants industrial employment” (original emphasis, Leonard 703). Nativists believed that removing economic incentives would reduce immigration and restore racial homogeneity. In the same way, Maggie’s death functions to remove the threat of a racial Other who functions as a potential vessel for radical ideas and dysgenic traits.
Contrary to traditional readings of *Maggie*, Corkin argues that the “reformist impulse” of literary naturalism differs from social activism in that there is no plan to change the behavior; accordingly, characters unfit for survival “must die” (81). Read through the lens of racial nativism, Maggie’s behavior cannot change because Crane configures her as racially “unfit,” and her death functions as a eugenic technology to prevent her from procreating and endangering the nation’s racial hygiene.

_**Ideas of Racial Purity**_

The Johnson family, traditionally interpreted as Crane’s portrayal of Irish immigrants and their native-born children (although their ethnicity is not named), are represented as racial Others who are indoctrinated with the dominant class’s ideology of racial purity. This is why Maggie’s sexual relationship with Pete—who is racialized as “dat doe-faced jude”—is punished so severely. Maggie’s family evicts her from their tenement for being “a disgrace teh [her] people” (39). Implying that Pete is Jewish suggests that Maggie has betrayed both her immediate family and ethnic “people.” Sentiments of racial betrayal are expressed by neighboring tenants who approve of Maggie’s eviction, as well as by Jimmie’s reacting to Maggie’s touch with the “horror of contamination” (60). The language of contamination anticipates Maggie’s turn to prostitution and the associated threats to racial purity perceived as inherent to the racialized profession.

The figure of the prostitute, by the late nineteenth century, “merged with the perception of the black” and racist associations of the African “primitive” with “unbridled sexuality” so that the “black and the prostitute” were both “bearers of the stigmata of sexual difference” (Gilman 229). The contemporary correlation between
blackness and prostitution is why Maggie becomes increasingly racialized as her cultural identity devolves from a factory worker to a prostitute who is increasingly associated with blackness. In Crane’s *Maggie*, the titular prostitute descends into the “darker blocks,” past “black factories” and “into the blackness of the final blocks” (65-66). Concurrently, Crane portrays Pete in a state of “benevolence” that configures him as a type who “would have fraternized with obscure Hottentots” (67). This imagery positions *Maggie* among the late-nineteenth-century cultural products that, as Gilman points out, links “the icon of the Hottentot female and the icon of the prostitute” (206). Pete’s being associated with Hottentot imagery identifies him as impelling Maggie’s social devolution, which Crane relates to racial degeneration.

Sander L. Gilman identifies connections between nineteenth-century fears of miscegenation and prostitution, claiming that “[i]nterracial marriages were seen as exactly parallel to the barrenness of the prostitute; if they produced children at all, these children were weak and doomed” (237). In Crane’s text, Maggie’s death functions to contain the type of dysgenic reproduction that Crane portrays in the tenement community, which the narrator describes as a “dark region” whose inhabitants reproduce “loads of babies to the street and the gutter” (10). Jimmie, for instance, has two children whom Crane suggests are biracial since the two mothers live in “different parts” of a city largely segregated along racial and ethnic lines (22). In addition to dysgenic reproduction, Crane also represents working-class dialects as a type of linguistic amalgamation.

Several critics have analyzed the function of dialect in Crane’s and other late-nineteenth-century cultural products (Jones 150; Howard 105-06). June Howard notes that dialect functions in *Maggie* to polarize the characters as “irredeemably Other,” while
the narrator's standard English provides a "common ground" between the narrator and readers (105-6). Contemporary criticism, however, reveals that dialect also signifies racial mixing. Howells praised what he perceived as Crane's accurate representations of dialect in *Maggie* but lamented "how greatly the common pronunciation of our language has been corrupted by the mixture of races in the poorer quarter, and how a whole glossary of new words has sprung up from the rank life of that mixture" (qtd. in Slotkin 41). Crane's representation of the "babble of tongues," therefore, signifies the nativist idea that a linguistic miscegenation results when American English is contaminated by racial Others (61). Norris, in contrast, treats language as one of several cultural markers of assimilation that can mask biracial ancestry in characters otherwise configured as "white." Norris's characterizations are infused with racist stereotypes that function to reaffirm nativist fears that racial Others are causing both social conflict and Anglo-American race suicide.

**Norris's *The Octopus* (1901)**

Norris's *The Octopus* largely omits and marginalizes working-class characters to focus on elite- and middle-class characters embroiled in a property dispute with the railroad corporation over large wheat farms in California. The ranchers—Magnus Derrick, Buck Annixter, Broderson, and Osterman—do not actually own their land, however, which belongs to the railroad corporation. Therefore, they do not represent the yeoman ideal but speculators who emulate the capitalists whom they imagine as their oppressors.
Cultural Identity

Magnus Derrick is their “natural leader” (56), partly because of his “well-chosen English” (31), and partly because he manages the largest tract of land—the 10,000-acre Los Muertos Ranch. He is identified as an “old-time” Anglo-American (219) who has an antipathy toward the “new order of things” (55). While he imagines himself as “exploited,” however, his desire for control leads him to emulate the economic elite (141). He has the capitalists’ imperial ambitions and fantasizes about “organizing into one gigantic trust” to gain a monopoly in exporting wheat to China; as a rancher-turned-capitalist, he would belong to the new class of imperial “pioneers” continuing the “march of empire” that will culminate in “the invasion of the Orient” (152). Accordingly, his identity changes as he evolves from a man with integrity to one who resorts to bribery to gain political influence against the corporation. Unable to compete in modern capitalist society, he ends up disillusioned, evicted, and grateful to accept a wage-earning position with the railroad company. His son Lyman, in contrast, succeeds because he is more willing than his father to adapt to changing social conditions. While Lyman has “every tie of blood” to the ranchers (138), he represents the “city-bred” representative of the “new school” (36). Accordingly, his political ambitions trump familial loyalty and lead him to betray his father and brother in exchange for the railroad’s promise to back him in the gubernatorial election.

In contrast to the effete Lyman, “Buck” Annixter represents the rugged masculinity associated with the mythology of the American West. Despite his inheritance and college education, he remains a “rough” and “ferocious worker” on his Quien Sabe ranch (13), but, as one who works by choice and not necessity, he shares the dominant
class’s disdain for the working class, claiming “unions make me sick” (81). He also
discharges employees without cause and considers his tenants “inferior” (39).
Technically a tenant himself, his antipathy toward laborers and tenants expresses his
frustration that he cannot yet self-identify as a landowner: “I want to own my own land . .
. I want to feel that every lump of dirt inside my fence is my personal property” (93). To
attain that goal, Annixter resists his cultural identity as a tenant by fighting the railroad
corporation for the land, but he does not survive S. Behrman’s forces.

As the official “representative of the trust,” as well as the ranchers’ banker and
real estate agent, S. Behrman represents the “enemy” (163). Characterized as a
stereotypical Jewish moneylender, he charges usurious freight rates, as high as “All—
the—traffic—will—bear” (164). But it is Shelgrim, the railroad’s president, who
represents corporate capitalism itself. Norris configures Shelgrim as a necessary evil of
modern transportation and commerce and absolves him of responsibility for the
“complications” (human casualties), which should be blamed on “conditions, not men”
(273-75). With Shelgrim absolved of accountability, Norris identifies S. Behrman as the
scapegoat for the deaths at the Quien Sabe fight, as well as the tragic fate of Dyke, the
former railroad engineer fired after refusing to accept a cut in wages.

Dyke was a loyal employee who stood with the railroad corporation against
striking workers since, as an engineer, he did not wholly identify with the working class.
Accordingly, when the corporation reduces his wages, he refuses to “do first-class work
for third-class pay” and is summarily discharged (10). Working against his cultural
identity as a wage-earner, he determines to raise hops, so he can be “no longer a
subordinate” but “his own man, a proprietor, an owner of land” (163). S. Behrman puts
an end to Dyke’s aspirations by arbitrarily increasing freight rates, which causes Dyke to lose his mortgaged homestead, and the “fury of impotence” leads Dyke to Caraher’s saloon where he receives the alcohol and radical ideology of the stereotyped Irish saloon-keeper (168). Caraher also represents the “Red Terror” (262), which is signified as racial through his red face, red beard, and “inevitable red necktie” symbolic of anarchism (111). He is an “evil” racial Other who “poison[s] the farmers’ bodies with alcohol and their minds with discontent” (296). It is Caraher’s influence that prompts Dyke to hold up the train, steals the railroad corporation’s money, and kill the brakeman, which lands him in jail for life. Caraher’s influence also transforms Presley’s cultural identity from an artist to a social radical.

Norris introduces Presley as a college-educated poet with an “insatiable ambition” to write the “Song of the West” (6), a nationalistic ode to the “forerunners of empire” meant to celebrate the myths associated with Western expansion and Manifest Destiny (20). Presley missed the mythical past because he was “born too late,” and the social tensions conflict with his vision of the American West as social utopia (12). Although he is neither a ranch manager, propertied owner, nor a salaried professional, he expresses the dominant class’s antipathy for the working class. He considers Hooven, Magnus’s immigrant tenant, as “one of the uncouth brutes of farmhands and petty ranchers” whom he finds “odious” (4). After his friends die at Quien Sabe, however, he identifies as a labor radical and adopts Caraher’s rhetoric, claiming “I’m a red!” (255) and writing “The Toilers,” a “Socialistic” poem inspired by Jean-François Millet’s painting of a struggling yeoman farmer (187). “The Toilers” is Norris’s representation of Edwin Markham’s poem, “The Man with the Hoe” (1899), which epitomizes agrarian revolt. Presley’s poem
fails to inspire social resistance but achieves “enormous” commercial success as it is appropriated for cereal (wheat) advertisements (187).

Presley is as ineffectual as a poet as he is as an orator, a revolutionary, and as S. Behrman’s would-be assassin. Saving the Hooven women from the perils of the city is his “one last attempt” to prove himself effectual, yet he gives up his half-hearted search to return to his comfortable social club and dine in a railroad executive’s mansion while Mrs. Hooven dies of starvation in the streets (270). Presley, no longer a radical, concludes that injustice is a temporary social problem that, like the market, will self-correct without human intervention (311). Therefore, “no one” is to blame, and the corporate capitalists cannot be considered “enemies” (275). Ultimately, Presley’s circular evolution functions to lead readers to accept the defenses of corporate capitalism espoused by Shelgrim and Cedarquist.

Cedarquist is not aligned with the railroad corporation but foresees the problem inherent to U.S. manufacturing (over-production) and envisions a new era of U.S. global commerce. Emulating the railroad capitalists, Cedarquist invests in transportation (ships) to transport wheat and other consumer exports to Asia. Norris’s narrative reaffirms the idea that Pacific trade is essential to both dominate “new markets” and continue the “course of empire” (145). It is the “Swanhilda”— the “mother of the fleet” that will ensure the full circle of the Anglo-Saxon’s “manifest destiny” (309). The ship’s name, which combines swan and battle (Campbell), signifies Norris’s belief that the Anglo-Saxons are progressing through not “War but Trade” (Responsibilities 72). This ideology is reaffirmed by The Octopus’s most noble character, Vanamee, who echoes the capitalists in claiming “evil, cruelty, oppression, selfishness, greed” are not only
temporary but even acceptable if serving “the greatest good to the greatest numbers” (304). Norris implies that the excesses of corporate capitalism are both democratic and humanitarian, but his racist characterizations also signify the nativist fear that global trade threatens the nation’s racial hygiene.

**Ideas of Racial Purity**

Norris uses wheat as a metaphor for reproduction that signifies the desire to ensure that the “race goes on” (311). While the land gives birth to a wheat bonanza that will reproduce capitalist wealth, Norris expresses the fear of “race suicide” through ideas of racial purity that signify the sterility of the Anglo-American family. Magnus is identified as an Anglo-American whose physiognomy signifies the “dignity” and “pride of race” that drives his desire to “control” and dominate others; it also leads him to racialize hard work as “niggardly, Hebraic” (32). He is not killed in the Quien Sabe fight, but he is financially ruined and suffers the humiliation of submitting to S. Behrman, agreeing to “turn railroad” and “take orders,” which signifies that his slavish subservience to the Jew is a fate worse than death (298). Moreover, neither of his sons marry or reproduce, which signals the end of the Derrick family (140). Harran, who has the “Derrick nose” that signifies racial purity, dies at Quien Sabe, while Lyman, who resembles his mother and is racialized with “much darker” physical attributes and a “foreign expression,” survives (135). Lyman’s dark foreign features signify that Annie Derrick has an unexpressed biracial ancestry that manifests in Lyman, and Lyman’s racial ambiguity functions to explain his ability to adapt to modern capitalism and willingness to betray his racial family.
Lyman’s survival comes at the expense of Annixter’s life. Annixter is identified as a “Yankee” whose racial purity is correlated to his “genius” as well as his racism (12-13). He calls a Mexican a “lazy” “greaser” (96) and abuses his Chinese cook (107), claiming he has a “hereditary” hatred for “Chink” pudding sauce (59). Sexually, he is attracted to Hilma Tree’s “fine white arms” that signify “full-blooded” racial purity (39-40). Their marriage initiates his “astonishing transformation” that instills in him traditional family values (206). His paternal instincts increase his desire for survival, but his death and Hilma’s subsequent miscarriage signify race suicide and sterility, which are blamed on two racial Others—the Jewish S. Behrman and German Hooven. The Quien Sabe massacre is prompted by Hooven, racialized as the “slovenly little Dutchman”—code for the “Wandering Jew” (Bauch 41). Racial ambiguity is why Hooven misunderstands the racial/nationalist import of “Fatherland” (83) and shouts “Hoch, der vaterland!” to protect his own family as he initiates the deaths of Anglo-Americans (248).

Presley survives the Quien Sabe fight because he is excluded. He has a “nature more composite” than the Anglo-Americans, and his “dark olive” skin (17) and “loose lips” are “suggestive of a mixed origin” (100). His forehead “argued education,” but his small chin suggests his “refinement” came with a “loss of strength”—a tradeoff eugenicists associated with mixed races (5). Moreover, Norris does not specify Presley’s genealogical or geographical origins; Presley arrives at the Derricks, seemingly out of nowhere, and he is characterized as a “dreamer” who wanders among the Spanish and Mexican communities (14). His cultural identity as part of the educated elite initially leads the Anglo-Americans to accept him in their “family affair” (131), but they exclude him from the Quien Sabe fight, claiming it is not his “business” (244). Their exclusion of
Presley signifies that they are aware that, as Norris reveals in Book II, Presley, as Mrs. Cedarquist’s nephew, is related to Shelgrim, which suggests Presley is at least partially Jewish.

While S. Behrman is widely recognized as Norris’s Jewish character, Shelgrim’s racial identity is overlooked since he is ostensibly Norris’s representation of Collis P. Huntington (Levy 511-12, Pizer 88). However, as Donald Pizer points out, S. Behrman’s character is based on a non-Jewish historical figure whom Norris characterizes with anti-Semitic stereotypes (90). This characterization resonates with Howells’s racialization of Dryfoos and reveals the phenomenon whereby putatively “Jewish” traits have been used to signify an imagined racial difference that is independent of the characters’ actual cultural identities. In the same way, Norris signifies that, while S. Behrman is the railroad’s visible agent, Shelgrim represents the stereotype of the unseen Jew, the invisible force behind “New Finance” (50). Shelgrim’s “ogre’s vitality,” even at seventy years old, signifies his indefatigable energy that “sucked the life-blood from an entire People” (272). In case readers miss the racist import of the blood-sucking stereotype, Norris marks Shelgrim with the Jew’s “silk skull-cap” (273). In line with anti-Semitic stereotypes, Shelgrim’s real power lies in his ability to manipulate his appearance, as when he appears to Presley as a “sentimentalist” and benevolent employer who bears no responsibility for the casualties of the corporation (273-75). This façade of benevolence absolves him of accountability and deflects animosity toward S. Behrman, whose first initial hints at the possibility that S. Behrman’s identity is part of Shelgrim’s chicanery and that they are one in the same character. This possibility gains further credence when considering that S. Behrman and Shelgrim never appear together.
With Shelgrim as the unseen evil, S. Behrman is the more visible Jew characterized with grotesque anti-Semitic stereotypes such as his “great stomach” and “tremulous jowl” (32). Although S. Behrman performs the role as a greedy moneylender, Norris’s representation transcends the Shylock stereotype, as Richard S. Levy contends, to paint Jews as “toxic agents in nature itself” (511-12). Accordingly, S. Behrman is scapegoated as the evil force causing all misfortune and social unrest, and he is invincible against all human resistance—surviving Dyke’s bullets, Presley’s bomb, and the ranchers’ armed revolt. His ironic fate of drowning in his own shipment of wheat on the Swanhilda functions to suggest that only supernatural forces can defeat him.8

Vanamee is also associated with mystical forces, but readings of him as a Christ figure become more complex considering his denial of the Judeo-Christian God and his claim that Heaven is a “delusion” (70). Like Presley, Vanamee is a racially ambiguous “alien” with no specified origins (161). He is among the “glossy brown backs” who work amid the “cracking of whips” that resonate with slavery (63). His face is “as brown as an Indian’s,” and his “long, black hair” and “olive pallor,” coupled with his brand of spirituality and prolonged disappearances, suggest that he is Norris’s representation of the myth of the so-called vanishing Indian (101). Consistent with that myth, Norris omits native peoples from his text, and Vanamee remains childless and celibate since Angèle died while delivering the child of the rapist “Other” (19). Angèle is also racially ambiguous since her name is French, but she has “Egyptian” lips (185) and “slant” eyes that give her face “a strange, oriental cast” (18). Her “oriental” attributes, coupled with

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8 The ship’s name, Swanhilda, also signifies the trope of the swan evolving into different forms, as employed through Richard Wagner’s opera Lohengrin (1850). In the context of American nativism, the ship’s name suggests that the (Jewish) essence of S. Behrman will take on a new form in global capitalism.
her reappearance in the wheat, suggests that she represents a celestial being (an angel, as her name suggests) encouraging reproduction for Asian exports.

Norris’s Asian characters, however, are given no identity, agency, or voice. Erasing the Chinese from the railroad’s history, Norris represents only the Chinese cook who is silent and subservient to his Anglo-American employer. Norris also characterizes Mexicans, not as individuals, but as a racial stereotype, portraying them as “idle, living God knew how, happy with their cigarette, their guitar, their glass of mescal, and their siesta” (11). Norris’s narrator employs racial nativist language to contrast the “degenerated blood” of Portuguese, Mexicans, and “mixed Spaniard” (239) with the “good” (pure) “Anglo-Saxon” of “good stock” who are “Americans” (240). This racist representation functions to define “American” as “Anglo-Saxon” while racializing all other ethnic group as foreigners who are not racially pure. Norris continues his racialization of American identity in The Pit but shifts focus from a rural to urban environment.

Norris’s The Pit (1903)

In The Pit, Norris focuses on the financial elite imagined to control the nation’s imperial “Trade” (38). Curtis Jadwin is characterized as an old-stock native of Michigan who began “life without a sou,” being born to “hardy, honest” farmers (47). Lacking formal education, he obtained his wealth from speculating in Chicago real estate. As a capitalist, he counts among his possessions not only houses and boats but also servants, including a “negro coachman” (94), who “adore” him despite his objectifying them (131). He succeeds in the Pit because he has the “inexplicable instinct” of a “born speculator” (54). With excessive capital and leisure, he sees speculating as the only “legitimate”
pastime (143) and is unaffected by the working class’s “vague rumblings of discontent” when his corner in wheat threatens the social equilibrium (206). Jadwin’s transformation from an “honest” farmer to a callous speculator suggests that he has been corrupted by “new” finance.

_Cultural Identity_

Although Jadwin is wealthy, it is not until he belongs to the Board of Trade that he is “no longer an ‘outsider’” (141), but even as the “Unknown Bull,” he is considered a “stranger” (162). His sense of invincibility leads him to disregard Gretry’s warnings against challenging the “Great Bear” (Calvin Hardy Crookes), which precipitates Jadwin’s failure (121). Gretry and Jadwin have similar cultural identities in that they “had risen together” in Chicago and “belonged to the same club” (51). While Gretry is “friends” with but not one of the “large, powerful Bears,” his elite firm excludes small traders as “outsiders” (50). The “Lambs” are the “nondescripts” whom the Bears and Bulls “crushed to death” (50-51), and among these are Landry Court who, like Jadwin’s other servants, is “loyal to the last” (242) and Charlie Cressler, Jadwin’s “best friend” who commits suicide after losing everything in the corner (226).

Laura Dearborn/Jadwin is also a casualty of speculative finance. She and her sister Page are “orphan girls” whose inheritance makes them financially “independent” (27). Moving to Chicago from a “second-class town” in Massachusetts, Laura values the city’s elite culture but detests the “poorer neighborhoods” (37). Laura’s antipathy for the working class is emblematic of her own social insecurity, which is also expressed through her affected “grand manner” (10). Represented as a modern woman who is “too material” (79), she also desires to escape the “sordid, material modern life” and “drift off into the
past” idealized in literary classics (15). She has “vague ambitions” of being an actress (12) but becomes attracted to the financial world, which she sees as the “other drama” that is superior because it is “real, actual, modern” (22-25). She enters this world by marrying Jadwin and, in doing so, undergoes a “transformation” that brings into question her racial purity (126). Laura’s ethnicity is not identified, but Norris’s characterization suggests that she is racially ambiguous.

**Ideas of Racial Purity**

While Laura’s stature conveys the “fine dignity” (4) associated with an Anglo-American “daughter of the frontier” (40), she has inherited her mother’s “temper of the South” (29). Laura’s ancestral roots in the slave-holding South, coupled with her “coal-black hair” (93) and “unusual paleness” that is paradoxically “yet a colour,” signify a biracial identity (124). Norris correlates Laura’s “black, black hair” with the type of women who “are born to trouble” (94). This trouble manifests through her racialized split identity: her Anglo-American self values Protestant ideals of femininity, while her Other self has an affinity with darkness—“black velvet, black jet, and black lace” (155).

This “black” self emerges through her sexual desires that lead to her affair with Sheldon Corthell, but Norris contains the threat of miscegenation by limiting “conception” to the “birth of a new being” inside Laura that is not a fetus but the emergence of a third self, which the narrator describes as a “change [that] would be slow, slow—would be evolution not revolution” (250). Laura’s evolving split identity signifies her deteriorating mental condition that initially manifests through her performing behaviors associated with racial Others such as the “Spanish dance” through which she moves with a “wild, untamed spirit” that Jadwin calls “unnatural” (192). Her obsession
with drama also contributes to her identity as a racial Other since Norris represents the theater through his characterization of a “little Frenchman” (74) who wears the “inevitable carnation” that signifies homosexuality and non-reproduction (71).

In contrast to the effete Frenchman, Jadwin is characterized as the “strong” and “brave” Anglo-American masculine ideal (40). Speculative finance, however, is diminishing Jadwin’s virility, and he comes home “worn out” and unable to perform the sexual activities necessary for reproduction (178). Moreover, as in *The Octopus*, Norris continues to racialize new finance with representations of anti-Semitism.

It is the “Jew Hirsch” and his brother who spread a false rumor that manipulates stock prices (56), which leads another trader to scapegoat Grossman by setting on fire “the Jew’s hat band” (63). Norris also characterizes Calvin Hardy Crookes, the “Great Bear” of speculation, with anti-Semitic markers, including “red gloves” and a “dark” face that is “secretive” (166). Crookes is “like Rothschild” (169), which says that he is, if not Jewish, like a Jewish capitalist who has inexhaustible “millions and millions” against which Anglo-Americans cannot compete (121). Crookes is also a great deceiver who manipulates Cressler, whom he needs to provide the façade of a “conservative character,” into believing betting against the Unknown Bull is not speculation (170). This trickery leads to Cressler’s failure and subsequent suicide, which identifies Crookes as a racial Other contributing to Anglo-American race suicide. Dreiser’s *The Financier* and *The Titan* also racializes new finance through portrayals of the titular financial titan’s evolving cultural identity, his marriage to a racial Other, and reproductive sterility that has the dual function of protecting racial purity and signifying Anglo-American race suicide.
**Dreiser’s The Financier (1912) and The Titan (1914)**

In *The Financier* and *The Titan*, Frank Algernon Cowperwood is Dreiser’s central character against which all others function to either facilitate or obstruct his upward social mobility. While Dreiser suggests that Frank’s spectacular failure and recovery are due to the Panics of 1871 and 1873, respectively, Frank ultimately succeeds because he is willing and able to adapt to conditions by any means necessary, which includes unethical behaviors that conflict with traditional Anglo-American Protestant values and signify the corruptive qualities of new finance.

**Cultural Identity**

In *The Financier*, the young Frank is described as a “financier by instinct,” and his ostensibly innate financial prowess drives him to resist his professional middle-class identity (15). Unlike his “cautious” and “honest” father who is content as a banker (13), Frank desires the power and social status that comes only with vast amounts of wealth. Challenging Protestant morality, he has no “spiritual or religious feeling” (125) but maintains an individualistic creed that includes sexual freedom from the constraints of monogamy. Even though Frank becomes a millionaire in Philadelphia, the “principal cause” of his financial and social failure to gain acceptance among the city’s elite is his affair with Aileen Butler, whose father seeks revenge on Frank by ensuring his financial defeat and subsequent imprisonment (365). In *The Titan*, Frank continues to succeed financially and fail socially in Chicago, remaining “an outsider” (45) among that city’s “great people” (23).

Dreiser represents Chicago as analogous to Babylon and “the Nineveh of a younger day”; with only “a handful of native-born” Americans, the city is “packed” with
a “strange company” of “riffraff” identified as immigrants, African-Americans, prostitutes, and gamblers (13-14). Frank considers working-class individuals his inferiors who do not have “the brainpower either to understand or to control” social conditions (429). Regardless of his antipathy to the working class, Frank creates his image as a “public benefactor” who supports the World’s Columbian Exposition, held in Chicago in 1893, as well as a “patron of science” who donates three hundred thousand dollars for a university’s telescope (338-39). This largesse brings Frank the capital and political support necessary to win the passage of the Mears bill, which grants him a fifty-year franchise on the city rail system. This virtual monopoly on public transportation exacerbates class tensions in the wake of the Haymarket Affair. Challenged by both the working class and the financial elite, Frank bribes aldermen who influence their ethnic districts, but the aldermen are intimidated by the racialized angry mob that leads to Frank’s losing his last battle in America, but he continues to take on “new struggles” in Europe (500). Dreiser suggests that Frank’s ability to succeed in financial struggles is due to his being a “natural-born leader” (*Financier* 7), which Dreiser directly correlates to Frank’s identity as an Anglo-American whose “family had always belonged” in Philadelphia (421). Although Dreiser appears to signal Frank’s social superiority through imagery of Darwinian biology, his metaphors also signify ideas of racial purity.

_Ideas of Racial Purity_

Dreiser’s “Black Grouper” metaphor resonates with contemporary fears of racial passing. Its “power of simulation” lies in its ability to change “the pigmentation of its skin ... from being black it can become instantly white” (447). This imagery signifies not only the racist fear of black blood hiding in white skin, but also the anti-Semitic
stereotype of Jews’ being able to change their outward appearance. The Black Grouper metaphor functions, like Frank’s “notably commercial” skull (25), to foreshadow Frank’s victories by suggesting that he, like the Jews imagined to control finance, succeeds because of his ability to “adapt” to “conditions” through manipulation and deceit (447). In this way, Dreiser’s characterization of Frank falls within the broader racial nativist discourse that associates new finance, the bedrock of American society and culture, with Jews and foreign influences. These anti-Semitic implications are further signified through Frank’s opposition to “Free Silver,” which positions Frank on the side of the Jews who, nativists believed, conspired to keep the gold standard (367).

Dreiser underscores this connection in *The Titan* when Frank’s association with Haeckelheimer, Gotloeb & Co. appears to give credence to the charge that Frank is empowered through the “sinister motives” of “eastern banking houses”—also associated with Jews (483). Gotloeb is characterized as the stereotypical Jewish moneylender who speaks in an intelligible “semi-German, semi-Hebraic dialect” (428) and controls U.S. finance: “Ve haf it fixed” (474). While Dreiser represents Jews as controlling finance, however, he portrays the Irish as having comparable political control.

*The Financier’s* “Big Three” includes Edward Malia Butler, a racialized Irish immigrant with a “peculiar accent” who is rich but not “refined” and exercises his political influence to ensure Frank’s indictment and imprisonment (66-67). In *The Titan*, Frank learns from his experience with Butler and forges relationships with Chicago’s powerful Irish. The corrupt John J. McKenty is the immigrant Irish “patron saint of the political and social underworld” who manipulates elections in Frank’s favor (82). Dreiser also racializes Chicago’s aldermen with physical attributes—such as Tiernan’s “bovine
head . . . hairy hands and large feet”—that resonate with historical racist illustrations of the so-called Black Irish (268). Similarly, Simon Pinski, has an “oleaginous eye” that correlates the Jewish alderman with “a small pig” (486). Dreiser also positions Pinski as the Jewish scapegoat whom the racialized working-class mob threatens to lynch if he does not vote against Frank’s franchise (488). Like most contemporary social critics, Dreiser racializes the mob by correlating the Haymarket Affair to the “influx of a heavy native- and foreign-born [working-class] population” and, more specifically, the radical ideology of “foreign groups” (173). Frank voices the dominant ideology that “men like himself” are destined for “social dominance” over the “dull” masses who are “rather like animals” (173-74). While the racialized mob influences politics, however, Dreiser’s financier continues to succeed, like Howells’s Dryfoos, among Europeans who are unaware of his past.

Like the Black Grouper, Frank’s identity evolves in response to his environment and sexual relationships. In The Financier’s old American setting, Frank marries Lillian Semple, a “dignified” Philadelphian native (37). She is a “fit mate” who functions to fulfill Frank’s “primitive interest” (49) to have a “brood of young Cowperwoods” (55). Dreiser reaffirms fears of race suicide, however, by portraying lower rates of reproduction among younger generations of Anglo-Americans. Frank’s parents have “a child every two or three years,” but Frank has only two, and he abandons his Anglo-American family for the Irish Aileen Butler (10). Through his affair with Aileen, Frank resists the Christian “one-love ideas” and disregards the “subtleties of evolution” that nativists associated with miscegenation and reproduction (120). Dreiser identifies Aileen as “dangerous” (258) not only because she leads to Frank’s failure, but also because she
is characterized as a racial Other. Aileen is described as a “Celtic” (67) with “red-gold hair” (69) whose colors signify anti-Semitic physical (red hair) and economic (gold) stereotypes. Her dressing “too conspicuously” functions to convey that she is not “refined” (108). Dreiser’s characterization of Aileen as a hypersexualized reaffirms racist ideas that correlate sexuality with racial Others. In doing so, Dreiser identifies Aileen as the racial Other most detrimental to Frank’s upward social mobility.

In *The Titan*, Dreiser continues to imply that Frank is not accepted among Chicago’s elite because he is not married to the right racial type. The elite Anglo-Americans conclude that Frank “needs another kind of woman” if he hopes to “get into society” (72), claiming they cannot accept the woman with the “red hair” (96). Frank suspects his social “defeat” is due to Aileen’s inferiority and regrets not marrying the racial type associated with “Old World” femininity (102). Dreiser increasingly portrays Aileen as a racialized “savage” (61) who reacts “like an animal” in attacking Frank’s lover, Rita Sohlbert (155). Thereafter, Aileen continues to devolve into a type of prostitute who participates in “an orgy” involving “bestiality” (455).

Immersed in the “dark” world of finance, Frank is continually attracted to racial Others. He finds the Polish Antoinette (Minka) Nowak “charming in a dark way” and considers her “American enough” to gratify his sexual desires (122). Frank also has an affair with Stephanie Platow, described by the narrator as a “Russian Jewess” whose face has a “semi-Jewish cast” (187). The narrator also racializes Stephanie as an “Asiatic” (192), “an African native” (199), a “lying prostitute,” and “free lover” (212). Compared to Frank’s explicitly racialized wife and mistresses, Berenice Fleming is characterized as the “high-born lady” who represents the racial “ideal” for which has been searching
Lugo 55

(317). Her father was an Anglo-American Southern aristocrat, but Dreiser’s emphasis on her mother’s history of marital infidelity calls into question Berenice’s racial purity. Berenice has “fair skin” but “strange” “deep, almost black-blue eyes,” and she performs behaviors “after the fashion of the Asiatic and the African” (319-20). On the surface, she has “the lineage, the blood” of the Anglo-American (326), but she has an internal charm that is “part Greek, part Oriental” (415). Although Frank brings Berenice to Europe, he continues his infidelity and never becomes more “conservative” for “the good of the [racial] family” (59). Dreiser contains the threat of miscegenation, however, since Frank and Berenice do not marry or reproduce. Cather’s *O Pioneers!* is another cultural product whose characterizations function to signify threats of miscegenation and reproduction. In this text, Cather employs various strategies that function to protect the racial purity of her Nordic characters and to convey the idea of “native” American race suicide in the American West.

**Cather’s *O Pioneers!* (1913)**

The central characters of *O Pioneers!* represent, as the title suggests, the Europeans who settled the Nebraska territory in the 1880s. Cather perpetuates the “virgin land” mythology by omitting all peoples of color and represents Nordic immigrants as “native” Americans based on their cultural identity as Swedes. The Bergsons are celebrated as the archetypal pioneers who facilitate the “beginnings of human society” by cultivating agribusiness in what Cather portrays as a region of “somber wastes” (8). The Bergsons’ success is attributed to Alexandra, who inherited her Swedish grandfather’s “strength of will” and ability to succeed with “no capital but his own skill and foresight” (13). Inheriting this cultural capital, Alexandra succeeds by challenging conventional
gender roles and adapting to the post-bellum economy. Alexandra assumes her late father’s patriarchal role and mortgages her family’s homestead to buy more land. Refusing to be like her failed neighbors, she takes risks and speculates “like the shrewd ones,” and her self-assurance lies in her sense of innate superiority: “Our people were better people than these in the old country. We ought to do more than they do, and see further ahead” (35). The Bergsons’ ensuing success functions to reaffirm racist ideas that Swedes are racially superior than non-Nordic ethnic groups.

_Cultural Identity_

Cather contrasts the Swedes with neighboring ethnic groups by representing the Bergsons as superior in foresight, intelligence, industriousness, and perseverance. Accordingly, the Bergsons are the most successful, and most assimilated, social group. Fluent in both Swedish and English, they are represented as speaking without dialects typically associated with immigrants. Their conversations are “all in English,” and, while Oscar speaks with a “thick accent,” Lou is not mistaken as a “foreigner” because he “speaks like anybody from Iowa” (51). While they are fluent in English, however, they speak the language of the working class and are resentful of Alexandra’s and Emil’s intellectualism. Cather characterizes Emil as being “just like an American boy,” and Alexandra is motivated by her desire for him to receive the college education that will allow him to enter the professional middle class (60). Raised among struggling immigrant farmers, Emil’s identity evolves throughout the text as he returns from college acculturated with the values of the educated elite (121). His brothers resent Emil’s “university ideas,” but his promotion of technology and innovation, such as the silo, contributes to the family’s collective capital (156). Dissatisfied with rural life, Emil’s
post-collegiate “wandering fit” (122) and desire for a “reckless life” (89) lead him to Mexico.

Cather represents Mexican cultural identity only through Emil’s descriptions of the “gay” city of beautiful women, “bull-fights and cock-fights, churches and fiestas” (102). This representation reaffirms stereotypes that Mexicans’ cultural practices are antithetical to Western ideas of civilization and the Protestant work ethic. The reference to Porfirio Díaz’s rule signifies that the action of the novel occurs before the Mexican Revolution of 1910 that prompted large-scale Mexican immigration (Weise 754). The post-Mexico-visit changes in Emil’s character function to reaffirm nativist ideas that an environment of racial Others influences the cultural identity of Nordics. Emil returns from Mexico “a man” (111) with an increased sexuality that leads to his affair with the married Marie Shabata and, ultimately, his death.

Cather introduces Marie Shabata as Marie Tovesky, identified as “the little Bohemian girl” who is a “stranger in the country” (6) and a sexualized “crazy child” (61). Her father, having immigrated to the American West in the early 1870s, is distinguished from the “new” immigrants as “one of the more intelligent Bohemians” who forbids his daughter to marry Frank Shabata, who emigrated from eastern Europe during the mid-1880s (71). Marie’s defiance to patriarchal authority—first her father and then her husband Frank—positions her as a type that is “quick in adapting themselves to circumstance” (41). She is a “good Catholic” while in church, but functions as Emil’s temptress in a “short skirt” when they meet in the orchard (75). Blaming Marie for Emil’s death, Alexandra concludes there is “something wrong” with her “warm-hearted and
impulsive” nature (153). While Emil is a victim of Marie’s sexuality, his death is directly caused by Frank Shabata’s criminality represented as insanity.

Frank is characterized as a different type of “crazy” Bohemian (137), and his murdering Marie and Emil is the culminating expression of his “savage energy” (74). His violent temperament also threatens social stability. Frank and Lou are both “political agitators” who feel “outraged” against the wealthy—particularly Eastern finance (75). While Lou talks about bombing Wall Street, however, it is only Frank who performs violent acts—a representation that is consistent with contemporary racist portrayals of social unrest. Similarly, Frank has a low intelligence that Cather signifies through his “read[ing] English slowly” (75). His English deteriorates further while in prison, where he resolves to, if released “not trouble dis country no more. I go back where I come from” (153). His promise of self-deportation functions to fulfill the nativist fantasy of reducing the population of eastern Europeans in the United States. Cather’s increasingly racialized characterization of Frank functions to reaffirm nativist ideas that non-Nordic races are innately predisposed to criminal behaviors.

*Ideas of Racial Purity*

Alexandra sympathizes with Frank after concluding that his behaviors are a natural consequence of his “being what he was,” which attributes his actions to his racial identity (148). Cather employs the language of phrenology to signify that Frank, as a “new” immigrant, is predisposed to insane and criminal behaviors. His shaved head reveals the “conformation of his skull,” which gives him “a criminal look” that is “not altogether human” (151-52). In this dehumanized state, his semi-acculturated veneer degenerates: “I no can t’ink without my hair” (152). This cognitive and linguistic
deterioration implies that physical attributes such as hair can hide physical indications of race. Frank’s “yellow curls” give him a Nordic appearance that obfuscates the shape of his head, which, coupled with his surname that signifies the Hebrew Shabbat, signifies that he is racially Jewish. This is why Albert Tovesky forbids Marie to marry a man whose “gloves” hide hands that, like his mother’s, are “[l]ike old horse’s hoofs” (74). This analogy relies on anti-Semitic stereotypes to signify that Frank’s “gloves” mask his race. His killing Emil functions to characterize him as a racial Other responsible for Nordic “race suicide,” as well as to contain the threat of miscegenation and reproduction between Marie and Emil.

Emil is characterized as a blue-eyed, blonde, “tall young Swede with the fine head” (91). Just as Frank’s skull signifies his criminality, insanity, and low intelligence, the shape of Emil’s head signifies nativist ideas of racial superiority. Cather implies that he is “fit” for survival (110) and represents “the best” racial type (157). Although Emil is characterized as a racially pure Swede, the racially diverse environment leads him to reject his “own people” (122). He prefers, instead of Swedish “family parties” (51), socializing with the “spirited and jolly” French and Bohemians (110). Cather identifies the influence of racial Others as the cause of his evolving cultural identity. Returning from Mexico as “a strangely exotic figure” who dresses “like a clown” in a “Mexican costume,” Emil acquires Mexican behaviors: he plays the guitar, smokes their cigarettes, speaks Spanish, and walks like a Mexican (109-15). Talking and walking like a Mexican, Emil figuratively becomes a Mexican through cultural osmosis, and he returns from Mexico with a heightened sexual desire for Marie.
Like Dreiser’s Aileen, Cather’s Marie is not only “too beautiful” but also sexualized as a dangerous racial Other (157). Marie is a racially ambiguous “dark child” with a “coaxing little red mouth” (6), which, like her “dark red cheeks,” make her look “like some queer foreign kind of doll” (99). Her favorite toy, a music box decorated with a Turkish woman with a “gold crescent on her turban” (71), adds to her racial ambiguity by associating Marie with the “heathen Turks” (41), an ethnic group that eugenicists classified as “Asiatics” who had a “mania” for “white women” (Grant 204). Marie’s foreign toy, her brown eyes that are “curiously slashed with yellow” (69), and her costume that includes a “yellow silk turban” (111) all function to characterize her as a racial Other. By describing Marie’s fortune-teller costume as traditional “Bohemian dress” (109), Cather plays on contemporary misconceptions of Bohemians (Czechs) that associated Bohemian with the French word for gypsy (bohème) and led to the erroneous belief that Bohemians were “gypsies” (Laegreid 108). Similarly, Cather characterizes Clara Vavrika, in “The Bohemian Girl” (1912), with physical attributes similar to Marie’s, particularly her eyes and “red” cheeks that signify “Tartar or gypsy blood” (ch. III). Such representations reaffirm ideas that “gypsies” (Roma) were a threat to national identity because they live, like Jews, in a diaspora. Marie’s death, therefore, functions to prevent miscegenation and reproduction that could result from Marie’s and Emil’s sexual encounter.

Cather underscores Marie’s racial Otherness by contrasting Marie’s and Alexandria’s physical appearance: “the Swedish woman so white and gold” contrasted with “the alert brown one” (69). In contrast to Marie’s dark features and yellow-brown eyes, Alexandra has “clear, deep blue [Nordic] eyes” (4) and skin that is “of such
smoothness and whiteness as none but Swedish women ever possess” (45). Cather’s characterization of Alexandria’s racial purity functions to define her cultural identity as a fully assimilated American whose material success is attributed to racial superiority. Dedicated to her family’s business, however, Alexandra facilitates “race suicide” since she neither marries nor reproduces.

Lou and Oscar protest the possibility that Alexandra will marry Carl Linstrum because the land “has got to be kept in the family” (85). Their coded language refers to Carl’s racial ambiguity since he is the only character whose ethnicity is not named. He has German social connections, but his “dark eyes and black hair” and “thin” and “frail” stature do not signify Nordic ancestry (6). The racialization of Carl becomes evident when considering Cather’s article on Israel Zangwill; written in 1899, Cather describes the Jewish writer as a “slender, pale gentlemen” whose “physiognomy is typically Semitic”; his “dark eyes” and “black hair, suggested not only the Jew, but Oriental Jew” (qtd. in Wasserman). Moreover, Cather’s description of Carl—“There are always dreamers on the frontier” (155)—is strikingly similar to her comment on Zangwill: “The ghetto has always had its dreamers” (qtd. in Wasserman). Cather contains the threat of miscegenation between Alexandra and Carl by having Carl move out of Nebraska to return only when Alexandra is (presumably) beyond her reproductive years. The conclusion implies that Alexandra and Carl will marry, but they will do so as “friends” in a platonic marriage that is “safe” from reproduction (159). Alexandra’s barrenness, like Emil’s early death, functions to protect the family from miscegenation and ensure neither produces mixed-race children.
Through Amédée and Angélique Chevalier’s offspring, Cather illustrates the fear that unions between racially ambiguous characters result in biracial offspring. Historical records of Nebraska indicate that the Chevaliers are Cather’s representation of French-Canadians (Laegreid 107), a group that Grant racializes as an “indigestible [Alpine] mass” as unimportant as “negroes” (72). While Angélique is “blonde and fair,” Amédée has “brown and white skin” that signifies racial ambiguity (80-81). As a result, the Chevaliers have a “black-eyed son” who “looks exactly like the Indian babies,” which prompts Emil to suggest Amédée had an ancestral “squaw” (124). Cather’s representation resonates with contemporary fears that even “one drop” of ancestral blood can manifest in subsequent generations. Amédée’s death functions to contain this threat since it prevents him from fulfilling his professed desire to have many children.

The Chevaliers’ biracial baby is Cather’s only reference to native peoples—an egregious omission that functions to celebrate the myth of the “vanishing Indian” through the process of Western settlement. If the land “belongs to the future” (158), as Cather implies, then the disappearance of “prehistoric races” is the fulfillment of Manifest Destiny (11). Cather’s focus on the Norwegian cemetery draws parallels between the native tribes and Nordic settlers in that the latter are also represented as a disappearing race that will own the land only “for a little while” (158). The language of impermanence signifies the nativist fear that the Nordics are undergoing race suicide as a result of both immigration and non-reproduction.

The tropes employed by Cather and other Progressive-Era writers anticipate more overt expressions of racial nativist ideology in post-WWI cultural products. The 1920s texts analyzed in Chapter 2 continue to express nativist ideas of racial purity through
treatments of miscegenation, non-reproduction, racial ambiguity, and the evolution of cultural identity. Reflecting the heightened nativism that followed World War I, the post-WWI writers are more explicit in racializing characters by naming race as the defining factor of cultural identity and employing racist stereotypes that function to reaffirm contemporary fears that racial Others preclude the nativist fantasy of a homogeneous Anglo-American national identity.
Chapter 2: Post-World War I Cultural Products (1910s-1920s)

The problems of defining American identity according to nativist ideology increased significantly after the United States intervened in World War I and cemented its status as an imperial power. Similar to the earlier “lost generation” of American writers, those of the post-WWI generation struggled with a national identity defined by racial purity in an increasingly diverse society. The 1920s modernists are a “lost generation” in the British sense of the term, which connotes the belief that a disproportionate number of elite Anglo-Saxons were killed in World War I and so had a “dysgenic” effect on Western civilization (Winter 449). In the United States, this idea was based not only in Anglo-American deaths, but also in the social changes that followed the Armistice.

While wartime production fueled the nation’s economic growth, involvement in a global war reignited nativists’ fears that international finance was destroying America. The introduction of the federal income tax in 1913, coupled with the War Revenue Act of 1917, meant that U.S. citizens were, in part, funding a foreign war imagined to be fought in the interests of capitalists. The July 1920 bombing of the office of J.P. Morgan & Co.— the primary lender financing the British and French governments during and after World War I—is one indication of the resentment aimed at Wall Street (Ahamed 211). Since many Americans believed Jews controlled Wall Street, and international finance in general, Jews were imagined as responsible for World War I.

Henry Ford’s writings, such as the four-volume The International Jew (1920), are representative of the era’s increased anti-Semitism. In his weekly newspaper, The Dearborn Independent (1920-1927), Ford published the fraudulent Protocols of the
Elders of Zion, which originated in Russia, to validate conspiracy theories of the Jewish plan for global domination (Diner). Like many of his Anglo-American contemporaries, Ford configured Jews as "the symbol of a world that was being manipulated and controlled" and blamed them for everything from financial scandals to labor strikes to economic depressions (Diner). The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, led by Vladimir Lenin (half-Jewish) and Leon Trotsky (Jewish), appeared to affirm nativists who paradoxically held Jews responsible for both capitalism and communism. Accordingly, Bolshevism became a racially coded term for Jews.

Subsequent communist movements in Europe led to increased fears of radicalism within the United States. Social conflict had decreased during World War I since the working class was able to leverage power during a period of increased production and reduced labor competition. By 1918, the American Federation of Labor had more than three million members, and wages in unionized sectors such as mining and transportation had risen by twenty percent since 1914 (Kennedy 258). Post-WWI inflation, however, eroded wages as unions lost power when employers could again rely on fresh supplies of immigrant labor. Renewed social discontent led to nationwide conflicts that led to the Red Scare (1918-1920) and climaxed with the steel strike of 1919 (Mintz and McNeil; Kennedy 231-88).

The fear that foreign radicals were behind the labor movement led to the Palmer Raids (1919-1920), which largely targeted immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, with one raid resulting in the deportation of 249 Russians (Kennedy 290). The inherently xenophobic legislation passed during World War I—the Espionage Act of 1917, Sedition Act of 1918, and Alien Act of 1918—allowed authorities to easily target, arrest, and
deport immigrants suspected of subversion. The highly publicized Sacco and Vanzetti murder case, which began in 1920 and ended in 1927 with the controversial execution of the two Italian anarchists, further cemented the image of foreign-born immigrants as radicals. While the working class had been racialized for decades through portrayals of the angry immigrant mob, nativists more explicitly associated “foreign” ideologies with blackness after the Great War accelerated the Great Migration.

“Out of the war has come,” states a 1919 *New York Times* editorial, “a new negro problem” caused by militant black leadership and “Bolshevist propaganda” (“For Action”). Since World War I essentially halted European immigration, employers solicited African-Americans to fill the vacant factory jobs in northern and Midwestern cities. Nearly 454,000 African-Americans left the Jim Crow South during the war years, with an additional 800,000 during the 1920s (Christensen). Returning white World War I veterans resented competing with African-American workers, who employers used to break strikes and prevent unionization. This practice fueled racial tensions that led to increased white-on-black violence and culminated in what James Weldon Johnson called the “Red Summer” of 1919, when race riots erupted in cities across the country (Arnesen).

Post-WWI racism also prompted the expansion of the Ku Klux Klan as a nationwide organization starting in the 1920s. Whereas the original Klan was contained in the rural South, the new Klan appealed to Anglo-Americans in cities nationwide. In addition to its anti-Semitic and anti-Catholic platform, the new Klan exemplified the nativists’ anti-immigrant, anti-union, and pro-Prohibition platform, which appealed to white urban populations. Explaining the Klan’s stance on Prohibition, historian Thomas
Pegram argues that “it was nativism that dominated the Klan’s dry convictions” since “prohibition encapsulated the Klan’s commitment to establish native white Protestant values as normative” (121). The new Klan, like other 1920s nativist organizations such as the American Legion, insisted on “100 percent Americanism” and resisted Wilson’s efforts to join the League of Nations (Pegram 10).

Nativist opposition to the League of Nations was part of a larger effort to protect racial purity through isolationist policies. Nativists feared that membership in the League could, as expressed by former President William Howard Taft, compel the United States “to receive immigrants contrary to our national desire from Japan or China” (183). The idea of an open-door Asian immigration policy was reprehensible to nativists already pushing for expanded immigration restrictions in face of the post-WWI global migration. Nativists secured the literacy requirement and anarchist exclusions in the Immigration Act of 1917 and achieved the decades-long goal of the “nation of origin” quota system through the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924. Basing quotas on the Census of 1890 instead of 1920 (or 1910 or 1900) ensured that Great Britain and northern and western European nations had the highest quotas, while eastern and southern European nations were allotted only one hundred immigrants per year, and most Asian and African nations, as well as those in the Western hemisphere, were excluded altogether (Ngai 28-29).

President Calvin Coolidge signed the Johnson-Reed Act, whose quotas were aligned with his desire that “America might be kept American” (qtd. in Higham 318). His complicity in the quota system suggests that he considered racial homogeneity essential to “preserving the purity of our own language and literature” (“Address”). Signing the Indian Citizenship Act the same year in no way threatened his Anglocentric vision given
that native peoples were imagined as a race facing extinction—a myth epitomized through Zane Grey’s *The Vanishing American* (1924) and myriad 1920s cultural products that represent native peoples as an endangered species due to low rates of reproduction. Moreover, “declaring” Indians as citizens was an act of power that denied native peoples’ agency and autonomy, and it functioned to align Indians with Anglo-Americans as the nation’s two “native” groups imagined as racially pure.

Native peoples considered racially mixed, such as Mexicans, were neither declared citizens nor allowed an immigration quota. On the contrary, the Immigration Act of 1917 restricted Mexican immigration through literacy tests, head taxes, and medical examinations, while Mexican migration in the United States was limited through *de facto* and *de jure* racial segregation (Ngai 64; Sadowski-Smith 790). Considered a “bad hereditary ‘stock’ of immigrants,” Mexicans were racialized as non-white, and the creation of the Border Patrol in 1924 accelerated their deportations at rates higher than any other ethnic group (Stern 75-81). Alexandra Stern identifies the Border Patrol as among the multifaceted strategies of eugenicists whose 1920s victories included both the Johnson-Reed Act and the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Buck v. Bell* (1927), which upheld the constitutionality of state-level involuntary sterilization programs (1). To nativists, Mexicans symbolized the threat of interracial “breeding,” and this fear did not subside after the passage of the quota system since nativists remained concerned about racial Others already in the nation’s borders, whether as immigrants or migrant laborers. In the post-WWI context of global migration, nativists no longer trusted national origin as indicative of race. Nationality came to be imagined as, like skin color, a marker that can mask racial identity (especially the invisible “one drop”) and enable racial Others to
“pass” into the United States. The pervasiveness of this fear is evidenced through the era’s cultural products that express fears of racial “passing” through treatments of racially ambiguous characters.

The fear of African-Americans appearing white is represented through “passing” novels such as Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929) and James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, republished in 1927. In this chapter, an analysis of Grant’s *Passing* (1916) and Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (1920) provides insight to how post-WWI literary texts signify cultural identity as an expression of racial purity and express contemporary fears of “passing” through treatments of racial ambiguity and evolving cultural identities. Grant’s and Stoddard’s sociological writings provide the ideological framework used to analyze the era’s elite literature: Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), John Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925), Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), and Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928). While few critics have analyzed these texts in the historical context of nativism, many either understate or overlook the writers’ racialized characterizations. Michaels’s *Our America* has prompted more critical analyses of Fitzgerald’s racism (such as by Carlyle Van Thompson and Bryan Washington), but *Gatsby* is still celebrated as the “Great American Novel,” and the 2013 film received two Academy Awards after grossing $144.8 million. Critics attribute *Gatsby*’s popular appeal to the idea that Jay Gatsby represents the “truly self-made man” (Symkus)—an analysis that overlooks the import of Fitzgerald’s racialization of American identity.

With regard to Cather’s texts, the celebratory perspective, as Phyllis Frus and Stanley Corkin argue, prevails and perpetuates cultural myths and assumptions that
Cather’s novels contain a “historical truth” of “quintessential ‘Americanness’” (208). The radical feminist perspective developed in the 1980s after Sharon O’Brien’s biography claimed that Cather implicitly identified as a lesbian (126), but, while radical feminist scholars such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Jane Rule are more critical than traditional Catherians, their focus on gender and sexuality overlooks sociohistorical contexts and, in doing so, occludes Cather’s tendency to portray racial types according to nativist conceptions of identity typified in the works of Grant and Stoddard.

**Grant’s *The Passing of a Great Race* (1916) and Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920)**

Stoddard and Grant were two of the era’s most prominent nativists who garnered support for the Johnson-Reed Act; in doing so, they constructed a narrow definition of white supremacy that excluded all ethnicities not considered “Nordic.” Fearing that southern and eastern Europeans threatened to foment social revolution, Stoddard and Grant led the nation’s crusade against immigration and advocated the national origins system of exclusion.

**Cultural Identity**

Grant and Stoddard argue that cultural identity is defined by biological ideas of race and that so-called inferior races threaten Nordic social dominance. In *Passing*, Grant uses Ripley’s Caucasian subraces but substitutes “Teutonic” with “Nordic,” claiming the latter is the only “purely European type,” the “white man par excellence,” while the “Alpine” and “Mediterranean” are “Asiatic subspecies” (150). The thrust of Grant’s rhetoric is that immigration is a form of reproduction that leads to the “extinction” of “native” Nordics (185).
Passing conflates ideas of racial superiority with social privilege and an innate right to dominate racial Others. Grant labels World War I a "civil war" between the "Nordic" races that is accelerating both race suicide and "class suicide on a gigantic scale" (200). Framing his racist rhetoric as a global issue, he applies his criticism to the United States and warns that urbanization and industrialization are creating an environment unconducive to native Nordic American survival. The "master race," he claims, thrives in agricultural societies and cannot compete with the "Mediterranean" in the "cramped factory" and "crowded city" (186-87). The new immigrants are not only taking jobs necessary for Nordic survival, he claims, but are also using assimilationist strategies to assume a native cultural identity (81). For instance, he warns that German and Polish Jews are "assuming American names" (73) and argues that changing one's name and performing other acts of assimilation do not change one's cultural identity. He illustrates his point through an analogy between African-Americans and non-Nordic whites, claiming that "speaking English, wearing good clothes, and going to school and to church, does not transform a negro into a white man" and claims the same is true of non-Nordic whites such as Jews (14). This ideology rejects previous decades' efforts to assimilate new immigrants and advocates exclusion of all racial Others.

Grant introduces Stoddard's Rising Tide by claiming the only way to prevent the "catastrophe" that would result if non-Nordics displaced the Nordic elite is to reject altruism and internationalism and reassert "the pride of race and the right of merit to rule" (xxx). Writing several years after the Armistice, Stoddard warns of the imminent threat of "race suicide" in the post-WWI context in which "[c]olored migration is a universal peril" (original emphasis, 297). Stoddard's color-coded global map reflects his emphasis
on the primacy of race in determining cultural identity. Stoddard states explicitly, in *Racial Realities in Europe* (1924), that "race," not nationality, is "what people physically are," and that race is based on scientific fact (101).

In *Rising Tide*, Stoddard attempts to reaffirm Grant's social theories, claiming that modern society is inherently "dysgenic"; beyond immigration, urbanization and industrialization lead to the survival of the "less valuable elements," and the loss of elite values will ultimately lead to "the collapse of civilization" (302-03). Writing after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, Stoddard racializes communism as another threat imagined as Jewish, claiming Bolshevism is an "incitement to racial as well as to class war"—a threat so great, because of its professed commitment to equality, that it must be "crushed out" even if by more war (220-21). Stoddard prioritizes a list of actions considered necessary to prevent the collapse of Nordic-dominated Western civilization, which includes a revised Treaty of Versailles, global controls on Asian migration, and tighter U.S. immigration controls to combat global migration.

Stoddard and Grant were also the leading American eugenicists campaigning for programs aimed at increasing the reproduction of "fit" Nordics while limiting the reproduction of "unfit" races through sterilization, segregation, and immigration restrictions. Their writings were highly influential not only in the United States, where the first edition of Grant's *Passing* sold more than 16,000 copies in 1916 alone, but also in Germany (Jou 68). Adolf Hitler wrote to Grant to thank him for writing *Passing*, which he considered "his Bible" (qtd. in Kuhl 85). The ideas in *Passing* influenced eugenics programs in Nazi Germany and formed the basis of similar programs in the United States.
Ideas of Racial Purity

Using scientific racism to validate his arguments, Grant claims “physical characters,” not “political grouping” or “spoken language,” define cultural identity (xv). His ideas are rooted in the Mendelian inheritance theory, which gained dominance in the United States between 1900 and the 1920s when eugenicists applied the theory to humans, with the “corollary that specific racial and degenerate types had distinct ‘unit characters’” (Stern 16). Accordingly, Grant identifies four primary “unit characters” that define race—skull shape, stature, eye color, and hair color—but he claims the most important are eye color and stature since skin color changes in response to environmental factors (26). According to Grant, Nordics are “long skulled, very tall” and have blonde hair and light eyes, while Mediterraneans, which he claims are “equally African and Asiatic” (208), are distinguished by “very dark or black” eyes and hair and a “stunted” stature, and the “round-skulled” Alpines are “medium height” with light, “especially gray,” eyes (17-18). Grant claims the Swedes have the “greatest purity” as manifested externally through blonde hair, blue eyes, fair skin, and a “great stature” (150-51). He claims the tendency of (Western) novelists to characterize heroes with the physical attributes associated with Nordics, and villains with “dark” traits, indicates a “deeply rooted” racial consciousness (199).

Grant identifies two main threats to the Nordic race, which he claims are both caused by racial Others. The first is the threat of Nordic race suicide through non-reproduction, which happens, he claims, when Nordics are crowded out by racial Others, as in highly populated cities with dense populations of immigrants. He also claims that native Nordic Americans are showing a “rapid decline” in birth rate because the “poorer
classes of Colonial stock, where they still exist, will not bring children into the world to compete in the labor market with the Slovak, the Italian, the Syrian, and the Jew” (80). This racist logic functions to reaffirm nativist ideas that urbanization and industrialization are leading to the extinction of native Anglo-Americans.

The second threat Grant identifies is miscegenation that leads to mixed-race reproduction. In an effort to lend scientific validity to the “one-drop” rule, Grant insists that a child’s race is defined by what he considers the “inferior” racial type: “The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a negro is a negro . . . and the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew” (16). Although Grant does not articulate how Jews fit into the tripartite categories of scientific racism, he makes it clear that Jews were considered to be a completely separate (non-white) race. Moreover, he claims that traits associated with the racially inferior ancestor can remain latent for generations before reappearing in “remote descendants” (12). This ideology reaffirms contemporary fears that white skin can mask black blood and that widespread miscegenation will have a dysgenic effect on the nation.

Stoddard, in *Rising Tide*, reaffirms Grant’s claims that the mere presence of “inferior races” means many Nordics “are prevented from coming into existence at all” (original emphasis, 257). Grant racializes Mexicans as “half-breeds” to warn that miscegenation leads to a dysgenic process of national “mongrelization” (128), claiming that the Spanish conquistadors were Nordics who have “vanished utterly” (174). He implies native Anglo-Americans will suffer the same fate if institutional controls do not prevent Nordic extinction. Like Grant’s *Passing*, Stoddard’s *Rising Tide* was enormously influential in both Germany and the United States, where it was praised by President
Herbert Hoover (Kühl 61). Stoddard’s racist worldview is also celebrated in Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* in which Tom Buchanan claims everyone should read “The Rise of the Colored Empires,” which he calls a “fine book” written by “Goddard” (12-13). While the book’s title is a thinly veiled reference to Stoddard’s *Rising Tide*, the name “Goddard,” typically read as code for Stoddard, also signifies another prominent eugenicist—Henry H. Goddard, whose research on mental hygiene introduced Alfred Binet’s intelligence test to the United States (Stern 50). In *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald not only references eugenicists’ names but also assigns characters cultural identities in line with Grant’s and Stoddard’s ideas of racial purity and theories that racial Others threaten the dominant class.

**Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925)**

Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby* centers on elite character types whose cultural identities signify whether they represent “old stock” Anglo-Americans with inherited wealth or the *nouveau riche* with an indeterminate ancestry. The names of the two elite communities represented in the text—East Egg and West Egg—euphemistically identify their “old stock” and *nouveau riche* residents, respectively. While both groups are phenomenally wealthy, Fitzgerald signifies essential differences in their cultural identities.

**Cultural Identity**

Tom Buchanan is unambiguously characterized as an “old stock” type; he has an Anglo-Saxon surname, a home in the elite East Egg, and the inherited wealth that allows him a life of leisure. His wife Daisy, the “golden girl” whose “voice is full of money,” functions as another symbol of Tom’s elite social status (120). He has extramarital affairs but married Daisy because she is a “nice girl” (148), though her past associations with a “fast crowd” identify her as a modern (sexualized) woman (77). Sensitive to the idea of
losing his material and cultural privileges, Tom espouses Stoddard’s racist ideology as fact: “Civilization’s going to pieces . . . the [Nordic] race will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved” (12-13). Daisy’s sardonic reply that he is “getting very profound” suggests Tom is not to be taken seriously (13), yet Fitzgerald expresses similar views in a letter to Edmund Wilson: “The negroid streak creeps northward to defile the Nordic race. Already the Italians have the souls of blackamoors. Raise the bars of immigration and permit only Scandinavians, Teutons, Anglo-Saxons and Celts” (qtd. in Slater 60). Fitzgerald’s nativist expressions support an analysis of *Gatsby* that uses Tom’s racist polemic as a critical framework.

Daisy’s cousin, Nick Carraway, represents the archetypal Anglo-American “original settler,” who, migrating from the Midwest to capitalize on the 1920s bond market, feels “uncivilized” amid the decadence celebrated in modern New York (3-12). Nick does not have the Buchanans’ wealth, but his cultural capital lies in his identity as an Anglo-American educated at the same elite university as Tom. He expected to find the American ideal in New York—“the last and greatest of all human dreams” (180)—but discovers instead that no one is what he or she appears—Jay Gatsby is a fraud, Tom and Daisy are self-absorbed destructive “careless people” (154), and Jordan Baker, his love interest, is an “incurably dishonest” cheating golf champion (58). He also sees the modern city through a racist lens that groups eastern Europeans, Jews, and African-Americans as racial Others, and he concludes that the city is foreign to Anglo-American “Westerners” who are “subtly unadaptable to Eastern life” (176). This conclusion reaffirms nativists’ claims that Nordics cannot thrive in urban environments and are being displaced by racial Others.
Nick’s reference to the “Dutch sailors” resonates with the nativist idea that the original Nordics have “vanished” like the trees hewn to make space for “Gatsby’s house” (180). Fitzgerald uses “Gatsby’s house” as a metaphor to signify the nativist idea that the racially heterogeneous *nouveau riche* are displacing the “old stock” Nordics and making America “foreign.” The real America, Nick believes, is lost; it is an “obscurity beyond the city”; he can “run faster” to chase it, but he would be like “boats against the current . . . borne back ceaselessly into the past” (180). This imagery signifies the nativist fantasy of turning back the immigrant tide imagined to have changed American identity, which cannot exist in the modern city but only in the agrarian past, where decades-old homes are known by “a family’s name”—the Anglo-Americans who are “utterably aware of our identity with this country” (175-76). In the city, in contrast, cultural identity is as blurry as the distinctions between the text’s two elite but segregated communities.

Nick functions as the link between East Egg and West Egg. He has familial connections in East Egg, but, just starting out in New York, he is a tenant in West Egg. Fitzgerald represents the East Egg “leisure class” as comprising what Veblen calls the “highest grades” who “outrank the remoter-born” (ch. IV). Both social groups are wealthy, but Fitzgerald conveys difference through the interwoven concepts of class, race, and culture that imply that all markers of native Anglo-American identity are inherited. This idea is exemplified when Gatsby’s East Egg guests self-segregate from the raucous West Egg crowd and form their “own party” that has a “preserved and dignified homogeneity” and serves “the function of representing the staid nobility” (44). Although Fitzgerald represents members of East Egg as culturally superior, their behaviors, such as getting drunk (Nick, Tom, Jordan) and “cheating” (Tom, Daisy, Jordan), signify the
cultural decay of the dominant class, which Fitzgerald attributes to the influence of the West Egg “foreigners.” Fitzgerald racializes the West Egg crowd that comprises many Jews who achieved upward social mobility not by hard work but “easy money” (42). The racist implications exist in the background of the elite enclaves, such as the robust library that includes “Volume One of the ‘Stoddard Lectures’ . . . a bona-fide piece of printed matter” that signifies that its owner, Jay Gatsby, is aware of racial nativist ideology (45).

It is Nick who introduces Gatsby as the type that “represents everything for which I have an unaffected scorn” (2). Gatsby is contemptible not only because he represents modern decadence, but also because he is “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (130). As a “man without a past,” Gatsby has no cultural identity and is the object of speculation, which he encourages through his self-made myths (149). He claims to be the son of “shiftless and unsuccessful farm people” but resists this identity by changing his legal name (James Gatz) and constructing his identity as Jay Gatsby (98). Although he worked as a janitor to pay his way through college, Gatsby served in World War I as a soldier, not as an officer, which suggests he did not obtain a degree. From a starving, unemployed veteran, Gatsby capitalized on Prohibition to become a bootlegger and evolve into the spectacularly wealthy Gatsby who throws lavish parties from his mansion.

In an effort to belong among the East Egg elite, Gatsby claims he is an Oxford-educated son of wealthy old-stock Westerners and a decorated World War I hero. Self-identifying as an “Oxford man” (49) adds to his constructed identity the critical nativist element of “family tradition” (650). The claim to Oxford expresses, as Michaels puts it, Gatsby’s “desire for a different past,” one that “has been rendered genealogical, a matter of ‘ancestors’” (26). Sensing Gatsby’s counterfeit identity, the Nordic characters—whose
cultural capital and social privileges depend on ancestral inheritance—are preoccupied with discovering Gatsby’s real identity. It is Gatsby’s patterns of speech that initially mark him as different from the East Egg elite. Tom questions the origins of Gatsby’s “old sport business,” referring to the latter’s trademark phrase that is noted forty-two times (127). The phrase functions to identify Gatsby as an outsider who does not speak the language of the elite, as does his “elaborate formality of speech” that is “absurd” (48). Gatsby’s tendency to choose his words carefully implies that he is attempting to hide his home dialect and affect the diction and dialect associated with elite English. As Betsy Nies claims, Gatsby’s careful word choice suggests “a family line of intelligent, financially endowed men (an obsession for eugenicists who carefully tracked physical bodies, educational attainment, and generational stability)” (103). It is when Gatsby hurries his phrase “educated at Oxford” that Nick begins to attribute Gatsby with a “sinister” identity (65-66).

Gatsby’s fabricated claim to an elite Anglo-Saxon institution destabilizes his identity, and the fracture reveals that Gatsby’s upward social mobility was made possible through Meyer Wolfsheim’s financial backing. Gatsby’s connection with Wolfsheim signifies that Gatsby is, at least culturally, Jewish and that his name change from Gatz to Gatsby was done to mitigate any Jewish identity. As Fitzgerald’s anti-Semitic representation of the sinister Jew, Wolfsheim’s name (Wolf-sheim) fuses a Christian symbol for evil with secular anti-Semitic stereotypes of greed and social destruction. Consistent with the era’s anti-Semitism, Fitzgerald’s racist characterization reaffirms stereotypes that Jews control finance, organized crime, the media, and even the 1919
World’s Series, which Wolfsheim “fixed” to play “with the faith” vested in the American sport (73).

Wolfsheim leads the criminal class of bootleggers whose illegal liquor is excessively consumed by the elite at Gatsby’s parties, but his physical absence situates him as the anti-Semitic figure of the unseen Jew who is upsetting social balance. It is when Nick is entering Wolfsheim’s realm, where “[a]nything can happen,” that he observes “three modish negroes” being chauffeured by a white driver (servant), signifying the nativist fear of a social hierarchy that challenges white supremacy (69). This representation also draws a connection between eastern European Jews and African-Americans in that nativists feared both social groups could “pass” as white provided their physical attributes and cultural identities allowed them to do so. Wolfsheim’s appearance as a “small, flat-nosed Jew” and his dialect, especially his pronunciation of “Oggsford,” preclude him from passing as a native Anglo-American (71). His ability to “pass” lies in how he functions through Gatsby, who, in turn, functions as the link between West Egg and Wolfsheim’s criminal class (69). Gatsby, then, functions as a symbol for the “Wolf” in disguise.

Ideas of Racial Purity

Fitzgerald signifies the nativist idea that correlates “breeding” with racial purity. Tom’s identification of Gatsby as a non-Nordic racial Other challenges Wolfsheim’s claim that Gatsby is a man with “fine breeding” (72). Similarly, Myrtle Wilson prefers the Nordic Tom to her working-class husband George, whom she racializes as a Jew when she calls him a “little kike” who knows nothing about “breeding” (35). Through the language of “breeding,” Fitzgerald implies that Jews, who were considered “not white” in
the era of scientific racism, do not understand the racial nativist concept of “breeding,” which is signified through social class and elite culture but is ultimately defined by racial purity. Fitzgerald reaffirms nativists’ ideas of Nordic racial purity through Tom, who is characterized with a “big, hulking physical” stature and who self-identifies with the “dominant race” (12-13). Accordingly, Tom has a preoccupation with distinguishing Nordics from non-Nordics. He includes in the former category himself, Nick, and Jordan, but his “infinitesimal hesitation” before including Daisy as a member of the Nordic family signifies the misogynistic fear that his “golden girl” will not protect his “white palace” (120). Fitzgerald reaffirms this through Daisy’s affair with Gatsby, whom Tom identifies as not only non-Nordic but non-white.

Gatsby’s racial ambiguity has been noted by critics such as Michaels, who claims Gatsby “isn’t quite white” (25), and Van Thompson, who reads Gatsby as a “light-skinned black man passing as white” (8). Fitzgerald’s identification of other non-Nordic characters who resist racist stereotypes, such as the “flat nosed Jew” (69) and the “pale well-dressed negro” (139), imply that Gatsby can also “pass” as “white” albeit not as a “Nordic.” Fitzgerald applies to Gatsby anti-Semitic stereotypes—such as an indeterminate ancestry, name changing, and an evolving identity. Moreover, Gatsby’s and Wolfsheim’s identities converge when Fitzgerald reveals that Gatsby is one of “Wolfsheim’s people”—people being synonymous with the Jewish race and criminal class (143). The evolution of James Gatz to Jay Gatsby, then, is not a Horatio Alger myth but a nativist warning that the modern city provides opportunities—crime, gambling, speculation—for racial Others to penetrate the dominant class. Fitzgerald also implies that, once light-skinned racial Others have the financial capacity to perform
conspicuous consumption, they can pass among the “old stock” elite and gain access to Nordic women.

It is Gatsby’s desire to marry Daisy that drives him to succeed, and it is Wolfsheim who provides the means for Gatsby to achieve the material success necessary to win Daisy. From Gatsby’s perspective, Daisy functions as the portal into the old-stock Anglo-American family he so desperately wants to join. Tom performs the role as the gatekeeper of racial purity by convincing Daisy to honor his racially coded conception of “family institutions” and to share his view that marrying “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” (130) equates racial “intermarriage” (130). Jordan’s claim that they are “all white” misses Tom’s point that, even if Gatsby is “white,” his unknown origins, coupled with his *nouveau riche* class, racializes him as non-Nordic. Tom’s deconstruction of Gatsby leads Daisy to reject marrying a “man without a past” (racial miscegenation) and one of Wolfsheim’s “common swindlers” (class-based miscegenation) (130-33). By the end of the novel, Fitzgerald contains the threat of both types of miscegenation through the deaths of Myrtle, Gatsby, and George. As Nick describes the discovery of George’s corpse, “It was after we started with Gatsby toward the house that the gardener saw Wilson’s body a little way off in the grass, and the holocaust was complete” (162).

Before the word *holocaust* was applied to the mass murder of Jews by the Nazis (1939-1945), it denoted “sacrifice” or “a great slaughter or massacre” (“Holocaust”). Fitzgerald’s application of the term anticipates an ethnic connotation in that all three characters who are killed are identified in some way with Jews who are configured as a threat to the purity of Tom’s racial family. Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer*, like Fitzgerald’s *Gatsby*, is another cultural product that portrays evolving cultural identities
and treats miscegenation as a nexus of race and class. Whereas Fitzgerald contains the threat of miscegenation through Gatsby’s death, however, Dos Passos represents a racial Other whose marriage to a native-born Anglo-American is the culminating step in the process of his transforming cultural identity.

**Dos Passos’s *Manhattan Transfer* (1925)**

Issues of identity become even more complex in *Manhattan Transfer*, which represents a mosaic of character types whose identities evolve throughout the action of the novel. Dos Passos’s literary technique reinforces the feeling of rupturing time and space, which conveys the fragmentation of individual characters and their place in society. Jackson Lears points out that the “modernist transformation of time and space” coincided with advances in physics such as Albert Einstein’s theories on the instability of matter and spatial forms (276-80). Dos Passos’s style conveys the idea that cultural identity is also unstable and that modern society allows for fluid identities. Beginning in 1898, the year of the Spanish-American War, and ending in the post-WWI years, *Manhattan Transfer* implicitly criticizes imperialism by representing New York City as a microcosm of the increasingly heterogeneous American empire, where racial Others can outcompete Anglo-Americans by evolving and transcending their types.

Dos Passos’s vignettes frame New York City as an international port city being “spoiled” by ferries importing a seemingly endless supply of immigrant cargo (3). The action begins when New York City becomes a metropolis, establishing the topos of the modern-day Babylon headed toward destruction by fire, crime, and the metaphorical flood of racial Others. The vignette at the beginning of the “Dollars” chapter challenges the myth that the nation is the “land of opportunity” for Anglo-Americans, as it racializes
the “new” immigrants as inferior to the previous generation’s “wild Irish” (49). Dos Passos captures the nativist idea that the “new” immigrants are dangerous because only the “Lord knows where they come from” (49). This expression signifies the fear that nationality was insufficient in defining cultural identity, an idea exemplified by Congo Jake.

**Cultural Identity**

As a migrant worker, Congo Jake’s national origin is nearly impossible to discern. He arrives on the same ship as the French Emile, but Congo Jake’s name, physical attributes, and rejection of Christianity signify that he is not ethnically French. He is called a “lousy wop,” a racial epithet traditionally applied to Italians, but his pronunciation of English as “Angleesh” (37) differs from the Italian anarchist’s (Marco) pronunciation of “Engleesh” (36). Not identifying with any nation, he rejects nationalism and believes cultural identity is tied to one’s present location. Initially apolitical with no interest in U.S. citizenship, he later self-identifies as an anarchist who desires to become a U.S. citizen (227). This is ironic since anarchists were labeled as inadmissible, but the representation functions to reaffirm the notion that the “new” immigrants were innately predisposed to “foreign” radicalism. Although Dos Passos protested injustice against the Italian anarchists, Sacco and Vanzetti, in “Facing the Chair” (Spencer Carr & Pizer 222), his novel does not allow Congo Jake to become an American until after he transcends his type and forgoes anarchism.

Congo Jake is “unlucky” until the years following World War I usher in the Prohibition Era that makes him a millionaire. His criminal activity signifies that he is the type who is willing to succeed by any means necessary, and that includes resisting his
cultural identity as he transcends his original type as a migrant laborer to become a
millionaire bootlegger. In the process, he rejects his Africanist moniker in favor of the
French name, Armand Duval. Historically, it was not uncommon for immigrants, such as
Jews and Italians, to change their names to avoid racial discrimination (Higham 161), but
nativists considered name-changing a form of “passing.” Congo Jake’s new name
signifies the final step in his evolving identity as a French-immigrant-turned-naturalized-
American citizen, which is marriage to an Anglo-American woman (Nevada Jones). His
economic and sexual success functions to reaffirm the idea that, as Lears puts it, good
luck is “the reward of crime” and bad luck “the penalty of virtue” (156). Congo Jake will
serve a short six-month jail sentence, but he will be released a happily married
millionaire. In contrast, native-born Anglo-Americans are portrayed as having a
competitive disadvantage.

Despite differences in social class, the text’s native-born Anglo-Americans cohere
through nativist ideology. Bud Korpenning is a rural migrant who cannot find sustainable
work in New York City. He claims washing dishes is “no job for a white man,” while his
Jewish coworker responds: “I don’t care so long as I eat” (42). Bud is expressing the
tendency of the white working class to racialize service-sector work, and, as Roediger
puts it, equate “blackness with the ethnicity of new immigrant groups” (179). Dos
Passos’s representation functions to support the nativist idea that Jews are racial Others
who are more willing than Anglo-Americans to accept lower wages and, in doing so,
make it difficult for Anglo-Americans to compete in urban environments. Unable or
unwilling to change his survival strategy, Bud never finds the “center of things”—the
myth of American opportunity—and fails because he does not adapt to changing social
conditions (121-22). Instead of evolving to succeed in the modern city, he devolves into a “Bowery bum” and commits suicide by jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge (122).

Anglo-Americans of the elite class are no less dissatisfied than Bud. Stanwood (Stan) Emery, the “born capitalist,” symbolizes the old-stock class of inherited privilege (210). Born into wealth, Stan sees no inherent value in money or the elite education it affords him. He conflates the idea of “success” with consumption, concluding that he can only “eat it or drink it,” and he does this by consuming alcohol excessively, which transforms him into a “black sheep” who speaks what Jimmy calls “niggertalk” (176). Equating Stan’s inebriated speech with black dialect signifies the racial nativist belief that the modern city degrades Anglo-Americans’ cultural identities. While Dos Passos’s representation of Manhattan largely excludes African-Americans (excepting the marginalized black maid and street performer), the nativist idea of the racialized city is expressed when Stan’s restless wandering leads him to pass Ellis Island.

Gazing at the symbol of immigration, Stan has apocalyptic visions of the biblical flood, thinking “the only man who survived the flood / Was the longlegged Jack of Isthmus” (252). The flood is a metaphor for the “rising tide” of racial Others through immigration and becomes more prominent when Stan commits suicide, which correlates immigration with nativist fears of race suicide. Before his death, Stan changes the lyrics and imagines that the sole survivor “rode a great lady on a white horse” (253). Signifying the myth of Lady Godiva has both economic and racist implications since it implies a need for the Anglo-Saxon elite to repeal taxes considered oppressive, such as the federal income tax. Phillip Arrington argues that the lyrics anticipate the marriage between James (Jimmy) Herf and Ellen Thatcher, a reading based largely on the fact that the same
lyrics appear when Ellen’s thoughts transition to the scene of Jimmy’s dining with his Uncle Jeff (439-40). However, in this instance, the man “survived” (not escaped) the flood (118). Reading Jimmy as the “Jack of Isthmus” is problematic considering that Dos Passos suggests that Jimmy escapes the city but does not survive the apocalyptic flood.

Jimmy’s cultural identity is similar to Stan’s; he is born “luckier than most” (176), reared in “cultured surroundings,” and educated in an elite university (119). Also like Stan, he is dissatisfied with society, but he is indoctrinated by his uncle, Joe Harland, to blame not capitalism but the “peculiar predominance of luck” (105). Joe functions to reaffirm this ideology since he was the “Wizard of Wall Street” before losing everything when his girlfriend burned his secret talisman (a necktie). Jimmy is also influenced by the racist ideology espoused by his uncle Jeff Merrivale, one of the text’s most vociferous nativists, whose goal is to keep “our own country” from being “overrun with kikes and low Irish” (101). Jimmy’s own fear of racial Others manifests when he is a child who imagines that “chinks are terrible kidnappers” (83). While Jimmy shares his uncle’s nativism, he rejects the offer to work in the family firm; in doing so, he resists the identity of inheritance and attempts to succeed on his own merit as a writer.

Like other writers of the “lost generation,” however, Jimmy cannot get inspired in the city and desires “old world” environments imagined as more conducive to creativity, such as Mexico and Europe. After serving as a World War I correspondent, Jimmy returns even more disillusioned with New York as a “rotten town” (301) and asks (and answers) a rhetorical question: “Where in New York shall I bury my twenties? . . . maybe they were deported” (353). Associating with the types (radicals and criminals) targeted for deportation, Jimmy seeks in the culture of risk the inspiration he cannot find as the
newspaper's "automatic writing machine" (346). As an unsuccessful writer, he is unable to perform his gendered role as "breadwinner," and this signals a change in his cultural identity that is accompanied by downward social mobility. Divorced and unemployed, Jimmy is a "misfit" for whom there is no place in the modern city (386). He self-deports to try his "luck" somewhere else, hitching a ride with a "redhaired man" (404). This ominous stereotypical representation of the red-haired Jew signifies that Jimmy has neither survived nor escaped the apocalyptic flood.

It is not Jimmy but Congo Jake who is the "Jack of Isthmus" that survives the flood of economic competition. Congo Jake-turned-Armand Duval is "going up" while Jimmy is "going down" (383). This representation exemplifies the nativist fear that the Anglo-American dominant class is being displaced by "inferior" types. Dos Passos suggests that modernist values of conspicuous consumption facilitate this trend since the (racialized) working class is motivated by a desire to emulate the Anglo-American elite. This is why, while Jimmy rejects consumerist products with no social utility, Congo Jake embraces the "grand Babylonian stuff" as markers of his new cultural identity (384).

Like Congo Jake, George Baldwin, one of the few successful native-born Anglo-Americans, succeeds by adapting to social conditions. Despite George's privileged position as an educated attorney, George cannot compete with "shysters," Dos Passos's racially coded term signifying the stereotype of Jewish lawyers, so he becomes one of them (50). Being a nativist who considers "foreigners" the "scum of the universe" does not stop George from capitalizing on the opportunity to initiate a lawsuit on behalf of Gus McNeil, whom he considers "low Irish" (51). The case impels his subsequent success as an attorney for the prestigious Emery and Emery and as District Attorney and mayoral
candidate. The import/export capitalists, Blackhead and Densch, support George’s candidacy because his reformist platform will, Dos Passos implies, include immigration restrictions to help contain “bolshevism” (288) by excluding “undesirable elements” blamed for post-WWI social conflict (327). Although George is materially successful, he remains “very unhappy,” and his history of marital infidelities suggests he will remain dissatisfied even after marrying Ellen Thatcher (219).

Ellen also resists her identity and evolves to achieve material success. Her parents are working-class native-born Anglo-Americans, Ed and Susie Thatcher, but, even as a child, Ellen claims she would like her father better if he were “rich” (62). Ed adheres to the hard-work ethic, even after a German immigrant informs him he will succeed only if he takes “chances” (9). This representation implies that immigrants are more aware than native-born Americans that risk-taking is essential in modern society. In this way, the incoming ships whose “decks are black” with immigrants are an ominous sign that Ed, and Ellen, will not be able to compete unless they adapt (64). Holding on to his belief in “workin my way up,” Ed refuses to speculate in even a “sure thing,” and his failure to become a certified accountant teaches Ellen that she must exchange traditional values and evolve by any means necessary (109-110).

In a novel permeated with biblical metaphors, Ellen represents the mythic “great whore” of the modern-day Babylon, the city “where the whore sitteth” among “peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (1611 King James Bible, Rev. 17.15). Accordingly, Ellen expresses a desire to be a “harlot” (262) and performs this role through continuous infidelities that lead George Baldwin, one of her lovers, to claim she is “no better than a common prostitute” (229). She begins her career on Broadway, which
Dos Passos represents as a micro-society of promiscuity and homosexuality run by Jews who have commercialized theater, such as Harry Goldweiser who prides himself on his ability to make “big money” (204). On Broadway, Ellen can perform different roles and resist her cultural identity as a member of the working class. She uses JoJo Oglethorpe as a social stepping stone, vowing “till divorce do us part,” to meet more elite prospects such as Stan, Jimmy, and, finally, George (140). Just as she rejects her sex through misogynistic remarks—“I hate women” (188)—and her desire to “be a boy” (117), she resists her ancestral identity through name-changing (Ellen-Ellie-Elaine-Helen), which signifies that her identity is not fixed but evolves to suit her social ambitions. Insisting on being called Mrs. Oglethorpe, and then Mrs. Herf, she asserts that she is no longer identified by her father’s class.

When Jimmy becomes unemployed, however, Ellen re-enters the working class in a masculine role that Jimmy labels as the “breadwinner” (302). Her decision to leave Jimmy—who racializes himself as “the white man’s burden” (302)—for George coincides with her devolution into the “Elliedoll” (301). Feeling like her mind is like a “busted mechanical toy” devoid of human emotion, Ellen begins to question modern values (400). She briefly considers social inequality after she escapes the fire that disfigures Anna Cohen, who self-identifies as a “homely lookin kike” born without Ellen’s ability to attract wealthy suitors (313). Escaping into elite social spaces, however, Ellen continues to strive to become Mrs. Baldwin and thereby secure the aristocratic identity she coveted since childhood.
Ideas of Racial Purity

Ellen’s role as a sexualized adulteress who marries largely for material gain positions her as a type of prostitute that threatens nativists’ ideas of racial purity. Choosing her husbands based on class without racial considerations, she marries the racially ambiguous, and sexually ambivalent, John “JoJo” Oglethorpe. Despite his “very fine name” that signifies Anglo-Saxon ancestry, he is characterized as a “crookednosed” man with “red hair”—two common Jewish stereotypes that suggest he chose Oglethorpe as a stage name (133). While JoJo’s sexual orientation functions to contain the threat of miscegenation, Dos Passos suggests that Ellen also contributes to Anglo-American “race suicide” by terminating an unwanted pregnancy (presumably not JoJo’s) and convincing Cassandra Wilkins to do the same (188). Deciding to abort a second pregnancy conceived with Stan, she visits Dr. Abrahms, who is racialized with features associated with anti-Semitic stereotypes, and his “hissing” in anticipation of performing the abortion suggests Anglo-American women collude with racial Others against the survival of Anglo-American men (268). Stan also represents fears of Anglo-American sterility since he considers procreation “the admission of defeat” and chooses “whiskey” over “blood” (210). His suicide helps to ensure that he dies childless, but Dos Passos’s time-rupturing technique makes it difficult to ascertain whether Ellen had the abortion.

Returning from Europe as Mrs. Herf, Ellen’s baby, Martin, has a fear of fire engines that signifies a preternatural awareness that his biological father died in a fire. However, Ellen’s fear that she has “produced an imbecile” (339), coupled with Martin’s “dark round goldstone eyes,” suggests that Martin is neither Stan’s nor Jimmy’s son but the product of a racial Other (278). Martin’s “goldstone” eyes resonate with the names of
Dos Passos’s Jewish characters: Goldweiser and Goldstein. Martin’s physical attributes signify the possibility that Jimmy is an Anglo-American who has unwittingly (like Larsen’s John Bellew in *Passing*) accepted a racial Other in his family. The baby’s dark eyes also recall Susie Thatcher’s ominous rejection of the newborn Ellen, insisting that her baby “was dark” and thereby expressing the paranoia that “dark” blood can lie dormant until reappearing in subsequent generations (7). Through Ellen, then, Baldwin risks “contaminating” his family’s racial purity by marrying someone who carries the blood of ancestral miscegenation.

Congo Jake’s marrying Nevada Jones also functions to signify a threat to nativist ideas of racial purity. His racial ambiguity exemplifies the nativist problematic of associating nationality with racial purity. Dos Passos does not state Congo Jake’s nation of origin, but his claim that he will return to Senegal “to be a nigger” (37), coupled with his “deepset black eyes” (224), “kinky black hair” (20), and skin that he describes as being “dark like a nigger” (226), signifies attributes that nativists associated with southern Italians, Africans, and biracial products of colonialism.

Congo Jake’s fantasies of a “little blonde girl” materialize in his marriage to Nevada, and this representation resonates with Dixon’s racist portrayals of black sexual predators obsessed with white women (21). While Dixon’s white female characters fear the visible racial Other, however, Dos Passos’s Nevada is ostensibly unaware that her new husband is non-white since she knows him not as “Congo Jake” but as Armand Duval. Nevada marries Congo Jake/Armand Duval only after discovering that her former lover, Tony Hunter, is a homosexual—a type she considers “one of God’s mistakes” (384). Dos Passos names Tony’s sexual orientation, as well as his intention to kill
himself, directly after he signals the start of World War I—signifying that suicide, homosexuality, and imperialist wars all contributed to race suicide in that they increase the odds for racial Others to reproduce with Anglo-American women. With one fewer potential Anglo-American partner, Nevada marries Armand, unaware that she is committing miscegenation with a racial Other who is “passing” with a French name. The trope of miscegenation is made even more explicit in the next cultural product, *The Professor’s House*, in which Cather portrays a family destroyed after the eldest daughter consciously marries a Jew after her Anglo-American fiancé is killed during World War I. 

**Cather’s *The Professor’s House* (1925)**

In *The Professor’s House*, Cather expresses the racial nativist ideology that elite Nordics were disproportionately killed in World War I. She does this by focusing, not on an urban or rural community, but on a single family—the St. Peters—whose cultural identity is changed when the Professor’s daughter Rosamond marries a Jew after her Nordic fiancé, Tom Outland, dies in World War I. Unable to accept a Jew into his family, the Professor escapes psychologically through flashbacks in which Tom lives on as his idealized son-in-law. 

**Cultural Identity**

Professor Godfrey St. Peter is characterized as a native-born American descended from “American farmers” and French-Canadians whose ancestors emigrated from France after Napoleon’s defeat in 1814 (2). In line with his cultural identity, the Professor adheres to traditional Western values and rejects modern ideas of progress, claiming “ingenious toys” are mere “distraction” compared to the “richer pleasures” of classical education (23). The Professor also expresses elitist ideas of higher education as a
privilege of the dominant class, complaining the university’s “common” students of the
“new generation” have declined in “quality” (17). He and Dr. Robert Crane work to
preserve the institution’s “dignity” against “the new commercialism” that is “vulgarizing”
the university by transforming it into “a trade school” (51). The Professor’s research
culminates in the *Spanish Adventures in North America*, whose (undisclosed) thesis
brings him “international reputation” and an Oxford award that allows him to transition
from a tenant to a home owner (9). But this social advancement means nothing since his
family has become estranged when his eldest daughter, Rosamond marries Louis
Marsellus instead of Tom Outland—the Professor’s protégé killed in World War I (2).

The Professor resents his wife Lillian not only because she was “fiercely jealous
of Tom,” but also because she embraces her sons-in-law, both of whom the Professor
considers inferior substitutes for Tom (15). He “expected a better match” for Kathleen
(Kitty) than Scott McGregor, a journalist, but he “trusts” Scott (21) because he is of
Scotch descent and was Tom’s friend and university classmate (63-64). Louie Marsellus,
in contrast, is the “foreign” Jewish “stranger,” who took Tom’s place in the “family
circle” (27); consequently, it is he who is represented as the cause of the St. Peters’
“dismantled house” (2). Louie is characterized with anti-Semitic stereotypes that identify
him with “new commercialism” and manipulation (51). As an electrical engineer, Louie
lacks Tom’s innovation that led to the latter’s discovery of the “bulkhead vacuum,” but
he has what Mrs. Crane calls the “salesman’s ability” to trick Dr. Crane into telling him
the details so he could make it “succeed commercially” (50). By marrying Rosamond,
Louie profits on the proceeds of Tom’s ingenuity, even though he did nothing but raise
the capital for its practical application in the aviation industry, and he has what the
Professor calls the "brazen impudence" of naming his and Rosamond's newly designed home "Outland" (12-14). Naming her new husband's home after her late fiancé is emblematic of what Kitty calls Rosamond's "bad taste" that developed since her marriage to Louie, which has "entirely changed" her to the extent that she has "become Louie" (30). This language functions to signify that marriage, independent of reproduction, changes one's cultural identity and resonates with eugenic ideas of miscegenation as degradation.

The Professor also claims that both Rosamond and Lillian have "changed bewilderingly," while Louie, "who had done the damage, had not damaged himself" (60). Louie, in contrast, gains both material and cultural capital, imagining the marriage makes him Tom's brother and one of the Professor's "splendid Spanish-adventurer sons" (62). Kitty and Scott reject him as "a Jew," however, and exclude him from the elite country club (30). Louie still becomes inextricably tied to the St. Peter family when Rosamond becomes pregnant. The announcement of what is typically "the happiest of expectations" solidifies the division between the Professor's "own family" and fills him with a desire to escape; accordingly, he takes no action to prevent his "accidental" death (102). He survives and wakes understanding that he cannot recover the "lost" identity of his pre-marital youth, and he relinquishes his dream of Tom Outland's returning to join his family (97).

Tom is represented through the Professor's flashbacks as the archetypal Anglo-American explorer of the American West. As the orphan of pioneers who died en route to Kansas, Tom was raised by a surrogate father in New Mexico, where he worked as a rural laborer. He is willing to work hard in any capacity but expresses the dominant racist
ideology when he refuses to “wait table” (41). Although Tom was raised without a formal education, he shares the Professor’s cultural values, earns a university degree, and becomes renowned as a “brilliant young American scientist and inventor” (12). But his life is cut short when he follows his teacher, the French (Belgian) missionary Father Duchene, to die in Flanders in August 1914, even before the United States entered World War I. While Tom’s invention is appropriated posthumously for Louis’s profit, Cather implies his more important legacy lies in his contributions to the Professor’s *Spanish Adventurers in North America*, to which he added details of the Southwest that “was the scene of his explorers’ adventures” (95).

Tom’s major input surrounds his “discovery” of the cliff dwellings at the Blue Mesa in Colorado. Cather identifies Tom as the first Anglo-American to climb the mesa, and he does so with the assistance of Rodney Blake—his closest friend until Rodney becomes “like Dreyfus” and “sold [his] country’s secrets” to a German “Dutchman” (89-90). Associating Rodney with Dreyfus is significant given the degree to which the Dreyfus Affair contributed to the era’s anti-Semitic discourse. Rodney’s insistence on the innocence of both Dreyfus and anarchists functions to racialize Rodney as a “day-laborour” whom Tom treats as a “hired man,” as well as a foreign traitor to his race and nation (91). Selling the Anasazi’s cultural artifacts, which Tom imagines as having “belonged to my poor grandmothers a thousand years ago,” is configured as robbing the cultural heritage of native-born Anglo-Americans who “have no other ancestors to inherit from” (90-91). Through Tom’s disavowal of his European heritage, Cather suggests that American identity is predicated on defining a native-born culture that originated in the
confines of the United States. She does this by characterizing the Anasazi as the cultural ancestors of native Anglo-Americans.

Cather portrays the "ancient" culture of the cliff-dwellers as one of "fixed residents" who practiced early forms of irrigation, husbandry, architecture, and astronomy (73). She contrasts the "extinct civilization" with that of surviving native peoples, such as "our roving Navajos," and claims it manifests a "marked difference" that signifies a civilization more "complex" than and "superior" to "existing pueblos" (77-83). Moreover, Cather's Anasazi evolved to transcend "conditions of savagery" before they were "exterminated, by some roving Indian tribe without culture" (83-87). Cather's portrayal relies on the tropes of the "savage Indian" and the "noble savage" to construct a new category that allows "vanished" native peoples to be the progenitors of Anglo-American civilization and culture.

*Ideas of Racial Purity*

The cultural superiority of the Anasazi is defined by nativists' ideas of racial purity. Cather suggests the Anasazi were able to remain pure because they were "isolated" (87) and "had never been sacked by an enemy" (79). This representation signifies that they neither committed miscegenation with, nor were their women raped by, conquering tribes and that "race suicide" can actually function as a technology to preserve racial purity. Applying the methodologies of scientific racism, Tom performs the role of archeologist who documents his excavations with field logs and photographs, while Father Duchene performs racial analysis through craniology and declares the mummies "had good skulls" (82). While Cather portrays Cliff City in great detail, a description of the summer Tom and the Professor spend in "Old Mexico" is
conspicuously absent (96). This omission signifies the writer’s trained incapacity to include Mexicans in a text that celebrates Americanness through definitions of racial purity. This racist ideology was codified in the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, which applied only to native tribes (imagined to be racially pure), while it excluded colonized peoples, such as Spanish-speaking Mexicans, whom nativists identified as being mixed with Spanish and/or African blood.

Cather signifies the idea that indigenous racial purity necessitates pre-colonial extinction by claiming the Anasazi disappeared “before Columbus landed” (43). This portrayal resonates with President Calvin Coolidge’s speech, delivered in 1925 at the Norse-American Immigration Centennial, that gave credence to the claim that a Norwegian explorer arrived in America long before Columbus (Schultz). This idea helped assure nativists that Nordic Americans were more “native” than those of Spanish descent. It also echoes Stoddard’s fantasy of the racially homogeneous society that could have resulted if Leif Ericson and his Vikings “planted a colony” in North America (Stoddard, *Racial* 38). In Cather’s text, Tom’s adopting the Anasazi as his cultural ancestors functions to align two types of “vanished/vanishing” native Americans imagined as racially pure.

Cather never states Tom’s ethnicity, but she characterizes Tom with physical attributes, such as blue eyes, “sandy hair,” and “well built” stature, which eugenicists associated with Nordics (40). The shape of his head is implied through his genealogical identification with “Mother Eve” (81) and the “filial piety” he feels toward the Anasazi (93). Moreover, while under the tutelage of Father Duchene, Tom gained fluency only in “Mexican Spanish”—which Cather differentiates from (pure) “Spanish” by signifying
racial hybridity (41)—and he struggled with Latin until breathing the “pure” air of the Anasazi (76). This environment facilitates his own intuitive grasp of Latin, considered a “pure” language because it is “dead” and preserved in cultural products. As part of his cultural training in racial purity, Tom studies Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which, according to Grant, represents as “huge blond [Nordic] princes” the heroes of Western civilization (144). Cather suggests Tom’s study of the *Aeneid* also inspires him to emulate the warriors by volunteering in World War I. His death in the “great catastrophe” (96) functions to solidify his identification with the indigenous “fine people,” who also underwent a “catastrophe” that ensured their racial purity through extinction (81). Michaels claims that it is the Professor’s fear of “becoming Louie” that leads him to imagine his own “extinction” (52). However, it is Tom who actually facilitates the extinction of his own family by performing a voluntary martyrdom to protect his family’s racial purity, which risks contamination if he married and reproduced with Rosamond.

While Cather signifies Tom’s racial purity, she explicitly identifies the Professor as being a product of “mixed marriages” and characterizes him as racially ambiguous (35). His maternal ancestors are identified as “American farmers,” and his mother’s religion (Methodist) and translation of Longfellow suggests that the Professor is half-Swedish. She identifies his father’s side, however, as French-Canadian, an ethnic group that she racializes in *O Pioneers!* in a way that resonates with Grant’s claim that they are an “indigestible mass” (72). Moreover, the Professor’s “darkest secret” is that his full name is “Napoleon Godfrey St. Peter,” which indicates his family’s tenacious loyalty to the Corsican, which nativists racialized as Mediterranean (61). Cather signifies this further through the Professor’s physical attributes, which are the opposite of Tom’s. The
Professor looks “like a Spaniard,” with a “long brown face” and “very black hair”; his head is his “best” feature, but his skull’s “rounded ridge” and his tricolored eyes (“brown and gold and green”) suggest a complex racial hybridity (2-3).

Kitty has inherited her mother’s Nordic “light hazel eyes,” but Rosamond has the Professor’s “black hair” and “deep dark eyes” (11). The differences in the siblings’ racial identities manifest in their selection of husbands. Kitty marries the Nordic (Scottish) Scott and resents Rosamond for marrying “a Jew” (30), while Rosamond does not consider racial difference as an obstacle to marrying Louie, especially since there is “nothing Semitic about [Louie’s] countenance,” except for his nose, and he has “vividly blue eyes” associated with Nordics (13). This characterization resists dominant anti-Semitic physical stereotypes and reaffirms the nativist fear of unseen Jewish blood.

Part of Rosamond’s “becom[ing] Louie” (30) manifests in her developing a “snake’s hate” toward her sister, a metaphor that relies on the stereotype of the Christian-hating Jew (30). Cather implies through Rosamond’s evolving identity that miscegenation causes racial contamination even before sexual reproduction, although it is when Rosamond becomes pregnant with “a young Marsellus” that the Professor wants to escape “his own family,” which he increasingly considers foreign to him (102). The Professor’s hopelessness is rooted in his perception that his Scandinavian blood will not survive further racial contamination. While Tom might have contributed an infusion of Nordic blood, the Professor’s rejection of his family signifies that he will reject his half-Jewish grandchild as a Jew, which is in line with Grant’s racist logic, “the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew” (16). This is why the Professor considers “accidental extinction” through suicide, which he considers acceptable “as a
form of protest” to racial contamination (105). Cather’s text ends with the Professor’s realizing that he is impotent to protect his family’s racial purity from the “foreign” Jew. This representation is similar to the ineffectual protests against the figure of the intrusive Jew represented in Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises. In this text, the Jewish character is also racialized as a threat to racial purity and represented as a foreign invader of the Anglo-American expatriate family.

**Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises (1926)**

Hemingway prefaces The Sun Also Rises with an epigraph that conveys the concept of the “lost generation,” a phrase coined by Gertrude Stein, to frame his representations of American expatriates who struggle with post-WWI social change through various methods of escapism. The expatriates—Jake Barnes, Brett “Lady” Ashley, Bill Gorton, and Robert Cohn—live Bohemian lifestyles in Europe, where their identity is not fixed to a geography but an idea of “Old World” cultural identity. Post-WWI inflation in the United States, combined with Prohibition, also means that they can more easily maintain lives of relative leisure that involve, as in Gatsby, excessive consumption of alcohol. As Veblen posits, the “conspicuous consumption” of “intoxicating beverages” is indicative of the “superior status of those who are able to afford the indulgence” (ch. IV). While countries such as France and Spain allow Americans to indulge in cheap liquor, however, the expatriates continue to struggle with their cultural identities and, as Jake puts it, learn that it is impossible to escape “yourself by moving from one place to another” (19). This language is another way of expressing the nativist belief that identity is not tied to place but race, and the expatriates experience in Europe the same problems they faced in the United States (82).
**Cultural Identity**

Through the characterization of Robert Cohn, Hemingway treats the problem of American identity by racializing it as a Jewish problem. Although Cohn is a native-born American, he is identified not by his nation of origin but his race; he first and foremost the “damn Jew” (187). Cohn is identified as a Jew despite, or because of, his being American-born and a fully assimilated “member” of the “oldest” and “richest Jewish families in New York” (12). His elite social class protected him from feeling “different” until Princeton’s Anglo-American elite made him feel “inferior” (11-12). Similarly, the Anglo-Americans’ animosity toward him is defined as racial and expressed as resentment against his “Jewish superiority,” which is at least in part due to Cohn’s being the only American of the group who succeeds professionally, and he does so, not in a sector traditionally associated with Jews (finance, real estate, law), but as a writer (165). While Jake is “only a newspaper man” (119), Cohn gets his “very poor novel” published in the United States (13). Accordingly, he returns from his visit “quite changed,” with an “enthusiasm” not shared by the non-Jewish Americans (16). Their resentment signifies the anti-Semitic belief that Jews were responsible for vulgarizing and commodifying art and literature, which leads Bill to feel “ashamed of being a writer” (179). This representation expresses the racist idea that Jews’ corruptive qualities extend beyond the economic and into the cultural sphere. It also signifies the fear that modern American society is more conducive to the success of racial Others.

The Anglo-Americans’ perception of Cohn’s arrogance signifies another problem with American identity, which is that Jews, perceived as having no *national* identity, feel superior to Anglo-Americans who are similarly struggling to define their identity in a
geographic space that is not their ancestral home. Accordingly, Hemingway portrays Cohn as a Jew whose lack of nationalist ideology prevents him from recognizing that he is one of “the foreigners” in Spain (158). The Anglo-Americans, performing the anti-Semitism that led to immigration restrictions against Jews, work to deport the Jewish foreigner from their expatriate family. Cohn’s refusal to leave signifies the nativist fear that it is difficult to get rid of unwanted groups once they are assimilated into American society. Hemingway also suggests the racist idea that Jews are essentially (biologically) different and can never be fully assimilated. As much as he wants to belong, Cohn does not share in the Anglo-Americans’ cultural practices. He does not understand the social significance of their excessive consumption of alcohol and rarely participates. Similarly, he does not share their enthusiasm for Spanish bullfighting and anticipates feeling “bored” (165). Despite his social incompatibility, however, Cohn clings to them tenaciously.

Michael (Mike) Campbell is the group’s most vocal anti-Semite who identifies as a “Jewish problem” the group’s social nuisance. He functions to distinguish between the racial and economic applications of the label Jew; by clarifying that Brett’s Scottish bankers are “not really Jews,” he underscores that the term Jew is a specifically racial epithet when applied to Cohn (234). Although Mike is a “bankrupt,” he is identified by the cultural capital and wealth of his Scottish “people,” and, as a representative of the Anglo-Saxon elite, he expresses the nativist fear that Jews threaten Nordic dominance (70). Accordingly, he persists in reminding Cohn that he is “not wanted” among “our friends,” and his outbursts are cathartic for the Anglo-Americans unable or unwilling to express their own racism (146-47). Bill, for example, calls Cohn “That kike!,” but only
when Cohn is not there (168), while Jake expresses vicarious relief in admitting he “liked to see [Mike] hurt Cohn” (152). However, Mike’s racist yet diplomatic pleas for Cohn to “[take that sad Jewish face away” are ultimately ineffectual (181). It takes the hyper-masculine Spanish matador (Pedro Romero) to expel the foreign element through force, which signifies Spain’s expulsion of the Jews in 1492—the same year that Spain financed Columbus’s expedition. The import of this analogy lies in the nativist fantasy of expelling Jews from the United States, but Hemingway’s characterizations of the other characters signifies that removing Cohn does not solve all the problems associated with American identity.

As an Anglo-American who inherited “class” from her “very good family,” Brett is preoccupied with maintaining her elite social position (64-69). Like Fitzgerald’s Daisy, Hemingway’s Brett capitalizes on her physical beauty to attract wealthy Anglo-Saxon husbands, but she is also represented as a modern woman who resists performing traditional gender roles. She rejects motherhood, and, while she relies on the institution of marriage to maintain her position in the leisure class (which she cannot do on her small inheritance), she is unfaithful, sexually promiscuous, and self-absorbed. She evolves into a “Lady” by marrying a British aristocrat, but, although getting divorced, she is already engaged to Mike and has multiple affairs, which relates the irony of her title since she resists the gendered values of monogamy, motherhood, and religion. Preoccupied with social class, she interrogates Jake’s ancestral cultural identity: “Why haven’t you a title, Jake”? (63). Brett knows that Americans do not formally recognize a hereditary aristocracy, but her rhetorical inquiry functions to signal Jake’s precarious social
position. Unlike Mike, Jake cannot offer Brett his family’s wealth if he is does not succeed professionally as a writer.

It is Jake’s class-consciousness that prompts him to respond cynically when Brett imagines that they could have been happy together under different circumstances—ostensibly the war wound that left him “impotent” (120)—but Jake’s response signifies his awareness that he and Brett belong to different social groups: “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (251). Jake asks this rhetorical question directly after he and Brett are pressed closer together by the car’s momentum, and his punctuating cynicism signifies that their incompatibility transcends sexual desire and lies in their different cultural identities.

Originally from Kansas City, Jake resists his American identity, as evidenced in his preferring restaurants that are “untouched by Americans” and leaving places with “too many compatriots” (82). He prefers to live in Paris because of what he considers the “clear financial basis” of France, where life is “simple” and he is accepted despite having only “a little money” (237). He is also welcomed in Spain, where he is considered an anomaly since “an American could not have aficion [sic]” for bullfighting (137). This characterization identifies Jake’s cultural identity as un-American, a sentiment echoed when Bill labels him an “[expatriate] of the worst type”—one who embraces “fake European standards” (120). Part of Jake’s difference lies in his being the only Catholic among Protestants, and his religious apathy (as a “rotten” Catholic [103]) signifies atheism as well as his inability “to dream,” which Bill identifies as the key to success (129). Jake is also blamed for bringing Cohn into the Anglo-American expatriate family, which prompts Bill’s sarcastic question: “Haven’t you got some more Jewish friends you could bring along?” (107). Jake considers Cohn his “best friend,” and their family-like
bond brings into question Jake's racial purity while signifying that Jake identifies more with the text's Jew than the Anglo-Americans (47).

Ideas of Racial Purity

Jake's ambiguous cultural identity, coupled with Hemingway's style of omission, brings into question Jake's racial purity. Although Michaels notes that Cohn and Jake are in some respects "indistinguishable," he overlooks Jake's performing a function similar to that of Fitzgerald's Gatsby, which is to interrogate conceptions of Anglo-American identity in white but racially ambiguous characters (27). Hemingway does not name Jake's ethnicity, but Jake's given name (Jacob) is questioned twice, first by a woman asking if the name is Flemish or American, and then by Brett who questions its "biblical" (i.e., Hebrew) origins (30). Jake's being "technically" a Catholic signifies the nativist belief that religion is a fluid cultural practice that, like language and nation of origin, does not indicate biological race (129). At the same time, Jake's religion signifies ethnic groups associated with Catholicism (such as southern Europeans and Mexicans), and Hemingway racializes Catholics through Bill's claim that they are "enough to make a man join the Klan" (93). The Klan reference functions to identify religious difference as racial difference, regardless of religious practices. Just as Cohn is identified as a Jew despite there being no indication of his practicing Judaism, Jake is identified as a racial Other even though he is only Catholic in name. In asking Jake why Brett does not chose "her own people? Or you?," Mike excludes Jake as separate from Brett's "people" in identifying him as being, racially, somewhere in between an Anglo-American (Brett) and a Jew (Cohn) (107).
Like Cather’s Louie Marsellus, Hemingway’s Cohn is not characterized with stereotypical anti-Semitic attributes other than a reference to his (Jewish) nose being “improved” through boxing, and this un-Jewish appearance signifies the nativist fear of unseen Jewish blood (11). Cohn’s insatiable desire for Brett functions to extend to Jews the racist stereotypes applied to African-Americans, typified in Dixon’s texts, that represent them as aggressive sexual predators of white women. Cohn leers at Brett with the “eager, deserving expectation” of Jews who “saw the promised land” in the figure of a white woman (29), and his lecherous gaze makes Bill and Mike feel “sick” (107, 147). It is also after Cohn has sex with Brett that Jake turns against him, and Cohn’s sense of “Jewish superiority” exacerbates Jake’s sense of emasculation since his World War I injury has removed him from the sexual competition and rendered him sterile (165). In contrast with Jake’s sterility, Cohn has already fathered three children, and his aggressive pursuit of Brett signals the nativist anxieties of miscegenation and reproduction.

While Brett has the “certain quality” associated with racial purity and “breeding,” she is not represented as an innocent victim of Cohn’s sexual aggression (46). She not only willingly sleeps with a Jew, but she is sexually and/or socially intimate with the Spanish Romero, the Greek Count, and the “nigger drummer” (69). She has no moral concerns about promiscuity, but sleeping with “that damn Jew” makes her lose her “self-respect” that is tied to racial pride (187). Similarly, Mike tolerates her infidelities with “better people” (146) but is outraged when she sleeps with “Jews and [Spanish] bullfighters” (207). Mike’s tolerance suggests that he considers her affairs with Anglo-Saxons as mere infidelities to him as an individual, whereas her liaisons with racial Others threaten the purity of his race. His failures in getting Cohn away from Brett
represent a type of impotence that is different than Jake’s in that Hemingway signifies that Mike cannot protect his fiancé from the lecherous Jew or the hyper-masculine Spanish bullfighter.

Romero, like his Spanish Catholic ancestors of 1492, is able to expel the Jew, but, in doing so, he performs the role of a racial Other motivated by a sexual desire for the Anglo-American “Lady” Brett. She has an affair with him but refuses to marry him because, while she will have sex with virtually anyone, she is more discriminating when it comes to marriage. She sleeps with dark men but will not go so far as committing miscegenation. Marrying only elite Anglo-Saxons functions to both ensure her social position and preserve her racial purity. While the Greek Count’s aristocratic title assures her that he is “one of us” despite his Greek nationality, her questioning why Jake has no title expresses her uncertainty about his racial purity (40). Similar to Daisy’s rejection of Gatsby, Brett fears that in marrying Jake she would risk committing both racial- and class-based miscegenation. Her resolve to marry Mike, the Scott, mitigates the threat of miscegenation, just as her decision to remain childless ensures that her liaisons will not result in mixed-race progeny. The fear of miscegenation is also a central theme in Larsen’s *Quicksand*, which explores the American problematic of defining identity by biological ideas of race.

**Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928)**

While conventional wisdom tends to attribute racist representations to the personal prejudices of individual authors, Larsen’s *Quicksand* exemplifies Burke’s theory of “trained incapacity” in that it reveals how African-American writers can be indoctrinated with the racist beliefs of the dominant class. Accordingly, Larsen’s
characterizations align with nativists’ ideas that biological race is the defining element of cultural identity. In *Quicksand*, Larsen explores the problematic of African-American identity in a racially bifurcated nation that equates Americanness with whiteness. She complicates issues of identity by portraying a biracial American whose cultural identity is defined by her African blood, which reflects the era’s institutional racism and “one-drop” conception of blackness.

*Cultural Identity*

Helga Crane, like the author, was born to a Danish immigrant mother and an Afro-Caribbean father from the Danish West Indies (Lunde and Stenport 230). According to the categories of institutional racism, Helga is a “mulatto,” a social construct that determines how she and others perceive her cultural identity (17, 85). Unable to wholly self-identify as either white or black, Helga has no “people” and is literally and figuratively without a “family” (8). Larsen applies the terms *people* and *family* in a manner similar to how nativists used the terms to signify the nexus of culture, class, and race (8). For instance, in the Jim Crow South, Helga is rejected by the African-American elite because of her sociocultural position and biracial identity. The Vayles, a “first family” of Naxos, disapprove of James and Helga’s engagement not only because of Helga’s “lack of family” (8), but also because they consider her a “despised mulatto” (16). Helga’s position as a school teacher identifies her as a member of the professional middle class, and this social status adds to her feelings of alienation. Her “middle” class is like her “mixed” race in that binary social constructions (upper/lower, white/black) preclude her from belonging to any social group. She identifies neither with the African-American elite, whom she considers hypocritical in their desire to emulate elite Anglo-
Americans, nor with the black working class, whose presence makes her feel “self-loathing” (50). Similar to Dos Passos’s Ellen, Larsen’s Helga exhibits a trained incapacity to resist a self-hatred that mirrors the dominant class’s antipathy toward her type. Since Helga, unlike Ellen, is unable to transform her identity, her desire to belong impels her migration from the South to Chicago to Harlem to Copenhagen before returning back to Harlem and, ultimately, the South. Despite her initial optimism in each new place, her identity as a “mulatto” remains fixed, which expresses the nativist belief in the primacy of race—imagined as immutable regardless of social environment.

Larsen underscores the nativist idea that cultural identity is racial through Helga’s question: “Why couldn’t she have two lives, or why couldn’t she be satisfied in one place?” (87). In both black- and white-dominant societies, Helga is defined as black; even in Harlem, she cannot reveal that her “people are white” (39). But Helga does not self-identify as black, and her mixed-race precludes her from having a unified cultural identity that accords with American binary constructions of race. In Harlem, Helga considers herself “different” from the “despised black folk” who have an “inexplicable” “alien” quality (50). She feels superior to Harlem’s black residents and resists identifying with them. Her “racial markings,” she reasons, are not enough to make her “belong to these dark segregated people,” and she concludes that cultural identity transcends “color” (51). Her desire to find the inexplicable “something” that “made folk kin” prompts her to live with her Danish relatives in Copenhagen (51).

Desiring to escape the American racism that defines her as black, Helga envisions Denmark as a place with “no Negroes, no problems, no prejudice” (51). This belief is ironic considering that Helga’s paternal ancestors were enslaved in the Danish West
Indies, and her experiences in Copenhagen function to challenge the myth that Denmark, like other European colonial powers that did not institute domestic chattel slavery but participated in the slave trade, is any less racist than the United States. Helga is welcomed warmly by her Uncle Poul and Aunt Katrina Dahl and receives the material comforts she always wanted—“not money, but the things which money could give, leisure, attention, beautiful surroundings. Things. Things” (61). The Danes’ racism soon becomes apparent when Helga realizes they treat her as a racialized object. She does not experience the Jim Crow type of racial discrimination, but she is overtly treated as “a foreigner,” and she realizes that the Danes embrace her precisely because of her exotic (Africanist) qualities (62). Larsen suggests that it is Helga’s African blood that prevents her from being accepted as a Dane, just as it prevents her from being accepted as an American, and this is true despite her ancestral ties to both countries and ability to speak both native languages. Larsen’s characterization of Helga, whose English is not portrayed as stereotyped black dialect, echoes Grant’s racist claim that “speaking English ... does not transform a negro into a white” person (14). In the same way, Larsen suggests that Helga’s speaking Danish does not transform her into a Dane; instead, Helga’s “slow, faltering Danish” appears “more attractive” to the Danes since it appears to accentuate her role as an exotic spectacle (68).

Helga’s Danish relatives treat Helga as a racialized commodity that they hope to exploit to enter the “artistic” circle of the cultural elite (85). Accordingly, they are disappointed when Helga refuses Axel Olsen’s marriage proposal. Represented much like a slave-trader, Axel offers himself as Helga’s “highest bidder” and is “puzzled” when Helga resists the stereotype of the black “prostitute” and insists that she does not “care to
be owned” (81). Indoctrinated with a deeply embedded cultural racism, Axel is oblivious to his racist assumptions, which materialize in his portrait of Helga that depicts her as a “disgusting sensual creature” and a “tragedy” (84). This image functions to identify Helga as the stereotype of the “tragic mulatto” who does not belong in black or white societies that define cultural identity by race. Her disillusionment with Denmark leads her to feel the “irresistible ties of race” that she imagines she will find upon her return to her native country’s “Negro environments” (86-87). Her “tragic” ending, however, reaffirms nativist beliefs that “American” identity necessitates racial purity.

*Ideas of Racial Purity*

Larsen’s characterization of Helga signifies the racist belief that it is Helga’s Nordic ancestry (her “yellow satin” skin and “good” nose) that keeps her from identifying with African-Americans, and that her Africanist physical attributes (“dark” eyes and “sensuous lips”) define her as an innately unassimilable racial Other among Nordics in both Denmark and the United States (2). Expressing the dominant ideology that correlates whiteness with superiority, Larsen associates elite African-Americans with lighter physical attributes. Although Dr. Robert Anderson is not identified as biracial, Larsen characterizes him with an eye color that causes Helga to speculate why “some brown people have grey eyes” (15). Since eugenicists argued that eye color was indicative of race, Larsen suggests that Robert’s eye color was inherited from white ancestors. In turn, Robert sees in Helga “dignity and breeding” that he believes she “inherited from good stock” (20). Helga erroneously assumes that he is referring to her parents’ social class and declares her mother’s immigrant status, which shows that she “missed the import of his words” (20). What Helga misses is Robert’s racist assumption
that her “dignity” is an external manifestation of her white blood. By implying that Helga’s noble qualities are inherited from her Nordic mother, and not her African father, Larsen appropriates and inverts nativist ideology to signify a not-less-racist idea that Helga is racially superior because of her white blood. This ideology is also expressed through Larsen’s treatments of black characters who reject miscegenation and interracial “breeding.”

Helga is adamantly against miscegenation not only because of her own experiences as a biracial American, but also because she is a product of a society that values racial purity. While U.S. anti-miscegenation laws were engineered to protect the racial purity of Anglo-Americans, Larsen represents African-Americans who see miscegenation as a threat to African-American social advancement. Anne Grey, one of Harlem’s black elite, believes miscegenation is the crux of the “Negro problem” because it interferes with the racial solidarity seen as crucial to African-American cultural identity (57). James Vayle also claims to “detest” racially integrated social gatherings because they present opportunities for white men to sexually pursue black women (95). While Helga professes disagreement with Anne’s and James’s views, her own experiences as an oppressed biracial individual have solidified her position against miscegenation.

Most notably, Helga is rejected in Chicago by her Danish uncle, Peter Nilssen, after his wife claims that Helga “isn’t exactly” his niece since her parents were not legally married, implying that a legal marriage would have made a difference (26). Suggesting that legal unions define “family” regardless of blood relations is similar to the racist rationale used to delegitimize children born to white male slaveholders and black female slaves. Moreover, the idea that marriage itself “contaminates” a family’s racial
purity, as expressed in Cather’s *The Professor’s House*, functions to validate the racist idea that anti-miscegenation laws protect the nation’s racial hygiene. Miscegenation becomes a central issue when Helga refuses to marry Axel.

Larsen characterizes Axel as a racially pure Nordic who sees in Helga racist stereotypes applied to African women. Her “warm impulsive nature” and “deliberate lure” have captivated him to the extent that he imagines marrying her will have a transformative effect by making him “Immortal” (80-81). Helga’s response that she “couldn’t marry a white man” (82) reveals that, despite her inability to identify with African-Americans, Helga does self-identify as black (at least in white-dominant Denmark). Larsen’s portrayal reaffirms the ideology of the dominant class, as well as U.S. institutional racism that classifies biracial individuals as black. Even though Helga is equal parts Dane and African, she considers marriage to Axel (but not the African-American James Vayle or Reverend Green) an act of miscegenation, which she believes is “wrong, in fact as well as principle” (73). Indoctrinated with racist ideology, Helga believes that biracial marriages are inherently antithetical to nativist ideals of racial purity, which were codified in the United States through anti-miscegenation laws.

Because such laws did not exist in Denmark, Helga’s relatives dismiss her concerns about miscegenation. Aunt Katrina thinks Helga is a “fool” to refuse Axel based on racial differences (72); similarly, Uncle Poul claims Helga’s concerns are “foolishness,” but he suggests that he would think differently if Helga were not the only “mulatto” in Denmark (85). Even as Katrina dismiss Helga’s concerns, claiming the Danes “don’t think of those things here,” she adds a significant caveat: “Not in connection with individuals, at least” (72-73). The Danes’ approval of an interracial
marriage between Helga and Axel is predicated on the assumption that it is an anomaly. Denmark’s racial homogeneity, in relation to the United States, meant that miscegenation on a national scale was only a theoretical concept. Therefore, their responses indicate that, while they are not concerned if “individuals” marry a person of another race, they would not accept widespread miscegenation that threatened their nation’s racial hygiene.

Equating marriage with reproduction is what leads Helga to reject James Vayle’s proposal. To Helga, marriage “means children,” and she refuses to produce “more unwanted, tortured Negroes” (96). Although Helga’s fears are rooted in the social realities of racial inequality and oppression, James responds by claiming that higher rates of reproduction among the black elite will result in the social advancement of African-Americans. Expressing the dominant ideology of nativists and eugenicists who equated sterility with the race- and class-based suicide, James claims: “The race is sterile at the top. Few, very few Negroes of the better class have children” (96). Refusing to “contribute” to “the cause” of James’s black eugenics, Helga marries a black preacher and relocates to an all-black rural community in the South (96).

There, Helga adds three children to the “despised race” of the Jim Crow South (117). After giving birth to a fourth, Helga feels “revulsion” toward her husband and equates his sexual desire with the “flick of a whip” that signifies the slavery of marriage and motherhood (119-121). Her sense of “asphyxiation” is stronger but “different” in the sense that there is no longer the “element of race” since she and her children are “all black together” (124). This language implies that giving birth to black children has finally instilled in Helga a bond with the black community. In this way, Larsen’s representation reaffirms the dominant ideology that marriage and reproduction affect both racial purity
and cultural identity. Similar to Grant’s claim that “the cross between a white man and a negro is a negro” (16), Larsen’s representation reaffirms the racist belief that the cross between a “mulatto” and a “negro” makes the family “all black.” But with this identification, Helga feels the brunt of “oppression” and “degradation,” and she resists her black identity by resolving that she “would have to die” (125). Her fifth pregnancy signifies that suicide is the only way she will be able to escape her situation, a conclusion that is in line with the racist stereotype of the “tragic mulatto”—a trope epitomized in cultural products such as Frances Harper’s *Iola Leroy* (1892), Langston Hughes’ “Mulatto” (1927), and Larsen’s *Passing* (1929)—who is unable to resolve the problem of identity.

Larsen’s configuration of the “tragic mulatto” functions to reaffirm nativist ideology that racial purity is essential for a cohesive national identity. Contextualized within nativist discourses, Larsen’s text reaffirms the racist ideology that sees blackness and Americanness as mutually exclusive concepts. Indoctrinated with the ideology of the dominant class, Larsen cannot help but imagine Americans with African ancestry as both foreign and unassimilable. In this way, Larsen’s *Quicksand* is similar to the contemporary texts produced by white writers whose characterizations reaffirm nativists’ ideas of racial purity predicated on one-hundred-percent whiteness. Considering that nativists considered Nordics the only “purely European type,” all non-Nordic characters can be read as variants of Helga in that they represent the perceived threat of the “mulatto” nation.
Conclusion

Analyzed as cultural products of a continuous historical period (1890-1920s), the literature analyzed in this research, regardless of the genre, expresses the nativist impulse to racialize American identity. The writers represent various social groups—capitalists and communists, elite and working classes, gays and women, “new” immigrants and African-Americans—imagined as a “foreign” threat to the Anglo-American elite. While most of the writers identified with the dominant class, Larsen’s text underscores the “trained incapacity” of American writers to formulate cultural identity as anything other than one-hundred-percent-white, regardless of the writer’s subject position. Moreover, collectively set in nationwide geographies—from urban New York and Chicago to rural Nebraska and California—shows that racializing American identity became a national project as early as 1890.

The inherent illogic of contemporary racial constructs, epitomized through the invisible “one-drop” rule, is expressed through the writers’ portrayals of a future America in which Anglo-Americans “vanished” inside of a “mulatto nation.” The pre- and post-WWI texts do differ, however, in terms of how they imagine the threat to Anglo-American national identity. The pre-WWI literature tends to emphasize sterility and nonreproduction to signify race/class suicide while subtly conveying the fear of miscegenation, whereas the post-WWI texts are more explicit in identifying miscegenation and representing racial ambiguity. The difference conveys the heightened nativism that was precipitated by World War I and exacerbated by the subsequent global migration. In response, white Americans—particularly north and west of the Jim Crow South—resisted the increasing populations of African-Americans and the “new”
immigrants whose cultural identities did not fit neatly into the black/white racial binaries engineered in the antebellum United States. Scientific racism seemed to validate those racial binaries, even as it worked to narrow the definition of “whiteness.”

As more ethnic groups were configured as racial Others, the writers expressed nativist anxieties through strategies that mirror the Johnson-Reed Act’s method of exclusion—limiting southern and eastern Europeans (non-Nordic whites) but omitting virtually all groups categorized as black, brown, yellow, or red. Accordingly, non-Nordic ethnicities are represented as racially ambiguous, but people of color are omitted and/or marginalized in the cultural products just as they were in the society that produced them. These omissions signify the writers’ inability to include Africans, Asians, and indigenous peoples in narratives of American identity.

This research lends new insights to how American writers and social critics represent American identity through the lens of racial nativism. In their efforts to distinguish “real” Americans from “foreigners,” the writers reaffirm stereotypes that scapegoat racial Others for virtually all problems, real and imagined, associated with modern America. An awareness of the multifaceted evolution of racial nativism is particularly important to recognize its currency. Since racial nativism emerged during decades of immense social and economic change, the examination of Progressive- and Modernist-Era cultural products can inform how we read the coded language of the latest generation of nativists who emerged in the current era of globalization and inequality.

Given the extraordinary social, economic, and political parallels between the current decade and the 1890s-1920s, social commentators such as economist Paul Krugman and cultural historian Jackson Lears have termed our current era the “new
Gilded Age.” With social inequality at levels unseen since the 1920s (Desilver), it is simpler for white Americans to scapegoat racial Others than to confront the systemic problems associated with decreasing opportunities for sustainable work, due in large part to corporate practices that include replacing employees with technology, exporting jobs to exploit cheaper labor markets, and refusing to pay employees a living wage. Although, as Krugman argues, there is “an inherent conflict between the [Republican] base’s nativism and the corporate desire for abundant, cheap labor,” nativist rhetoric continues to appeal to white Americans because of its ideological utility (A27). As Morrison puts it: “there is still much national solace in continuing dreams of democratic egalitarianism available by hiding class conflict, rage, and impotence in figurations of race” (64). As in previous decades, racial nativism also performs a social function for the dominant class.

As Michelle Alexander convincingly argues in *The New Jim Crow*, institutional racism evolved in the years following the Civil Rights Acts of 1964-65 when a “new race-neutral language” replaced appeals for “segregation forever” with those for “law and order” in order to perpetuate the “racial caste system” through a color-biased justice system that oppresses people of color through mass incarceration (40). It is precisely because “crime” is racialized that mainstream white America accepts racial profiling and police killings of African-Americans nationwide—from Ferguson to New York to North Charleston to Baltimore. In addition to being racialized as criminals, African-Americans continue to be imagined as “foreign,” as evidence by the insistence that President Obama provide his birth certificate to prove his nation of origin, which is just one example of how nativists continue to conflate race with Otherness even decades after the Hart-Celler Act abolished the national origins quota system in 1965.
Since that time, definitions of "whiteness" have expanded to include (generally) all European ethnicities, but nativists continue to racialize people of color as a "foreign" threat. Just as "crime" is used as a racially coded term to signify African-Americans; nativists use "terrorist" and "immigrant" to signify brown Muslims and Mexicans, respectively. While the "War on Terror" is performed against Muslims racialized as Arabs, Asians, and North Africans, Ngai points out that Mexicans continue to be represented as the "iconic illegal aliens"—a legacy that first emerged through the mass deportation policies of the 1920s (58). Continuing the nativist tradition of codifying racism, state-level legislation proposed in the 2010s—such as the Arizona Senate Bill 1070 that served as a model for similar proposals in Indiana, Georgia, South Carolina, and Alabama—continues to racialize Mexicans and other Latino immigrants (Jou 79). At the federal level, the discourse on immigration is infused with racist ideology; as New York Times op-ed columnist Charles M. Blow puts it, the so-called Gang of Eight's "border surge" proposal "isn't about border security; it's about complexions and elections" (A19). Some political commentators are even more explicit in racializing immigration. Ann Coulter, for instance, at the 2014 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), warned of the "browning of America," claiming that immigration "determines every single other issue" and that passing amnesty warrants "organiz[ing] the death squads for the people who wrecked America" ("CPAC 2014"), and she recently advocated reinstituting voter literacy tests ("Debate"). In addition to conveying the paranoia that racial Others are "wrecking" (white) America, Coulter expresses the social, economic, and political issues at the core of nativism—from taxation and social welfare
to labor competition and bipartisan struggles for political control, based on perceptions that immigrants and people of color vote Democrat.

On the other side of the spectrum are those who claim America is a “post-racial” society that celebrates cultural pluralism, defined as multiracial. *National Geographic* celebrated its 125th anniversary with an article featuring “intriguing” images representing the thirty-two percent of Americans who self-identify as “multiracial” and announcing: “We’ve become a country where race is no longer so black or white” (Funderburg). The thrust of the article is that the population of multiracial Americans is increasing exponentially, and its cited statistics are based on U.S. census data that continues to track racial demographics. Even while acknowledging that race is not biological (or anthropological or genetic), the U.S. Census Bureau collects data on race with the professed aim to protect civil rights, promote equal opportunities for employment, and assess health and environmental risks based on “racial disparities” (“About”).

Regardless of the organization’s intent, however, the data is appropriated to either exoticize multiracial identity, as in the *National Geographic* representation, or appear to reaffirm nativist fears of the “browning of America”—a racist rearticulation of Dixon’s “mulatto nation.” The focus on the race of the national population reveals the continuing nativist desire to reify race as the primary component of American identity. The works of literature analyzed in this research help illuminate how cultural products can both reflect and reaffirm dominant ideologies through representations that signify racist and nativist beliefs. The texts that I have discussed throughout this paper express the type of nativism that became increasingly racialized from the 1890s through the 1920s. A similar analysis
of the current era of American nativism could lend insight into how more recent cultural products express nativist ideology through similar treatments of racial Others.
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