

✓gering *inclusivity* of the 1790 naturalization law. It was this law's un-  
 questioned use of the word "white" that allowed for the massive European  
 migrations of the nineteenth century, beginning with the Famine Migra-  
 tion from Ireland, and ultimately including the '48ers from Germany, the  
 \* Scandinavian pioneers, and then successive waves of East European Jews,  
 Italians, Greeks, Poles, Ruthenians, Slovenians, Magyars, Ukrainians,  
 Lithuanians—none of whom the framers had ever envisioned swelling the  
 polity of the new nation when they crafted its rules for naturalization.  
 This law, its unexamined inclusivity, and its unforeseen consequences set  
 the stage for a nineteenth-century political crisis of remarkable urgency  
 and scope.

Even as early as the eighteenth century there were some who saw white-  
 ness not as monolithic but as variegated. In what was to become a stan-  
 dard political refrain in the nineteenth century and beyond, for instance,  
 Benjamin Franklin wanted to know in 1751 why Pennsylvania, "founded  
 by English, [should] become a colony of aliens, who will shortly be so  
 numerous as to Germanize us, instead of our Anglifying them, and will  
 never adopt our language or customs any more than they can acquire our  
 complexion?" "The number of purely white people in the world is pro-  
 portionably very small," he lamented in this essay on human population.

All Africa is black or tawny; Asia chiefly tawny; America (exclusive  
 of the newcomers [that is, the English]) wholly so. And in Europe,  
 the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians, and Swedes are generally  
 of what we call a swarthy complexion; as are the Germans also, the  
 Saxons only excepted, who, with the English, make the principal  
 body of white people on the face of the earth. I could wish their  
 numbers were increased.<sup>2</sup>

But such concerns never found their way into the debate over the first  
 naturalization law, probably because legislators at the time were so con-  
 sumed by the legal problems posed by slavery, whiteness, and blackness.  
 Consequently, whiteness in the early decades of the republic remained a  
 legislative and conceptual monolith that left the gates open to all Euro-  
 pean comers.

The perceived over-inclusivity of the first naturalization law and the  
 dawning political problem of whiteness itself in the mid-nineteenth cen-  
 tury are nicely encapsulated in Richard Henry Dana, Jr.'s, sea-voyaging  
 memoir *Two Years before the Mast*. A patrician New Englander who had  
 dropped his studies at Harvard to go to sea in the early 1830s, Dana

published a travelogue of his journey around the cape to California in 1840. A shift in the languages of peoplehood in this text indicates the profound cultural reorientation that had taken place between the book's initial publication and the time of Dana's added postscript for the 1859 edition. Throughout the original manuscript, Dana refers to Europeans and Euro-Americans as "whites" and "white men"—most often in contradistinction to the "drawling, lazy half-breeds" of San Pedro, to the Pacific's "primitive" Kanakas only recently "advanced [from] barbarism," or to the "darkies" among the ship's crew itself. In the postscript of 1859, however, the phrases "English race" and "Anglo-Saxon race" appear in the text for the very first time. Significantly, these alternative racial appellations crop up within a paragraph of this remark: "The Cathedral of St. Mary . . . where the Irish attend, was . . . more like one of our stifling Irish Catholic churches in Boston or New York, with intelligence in so small a proportion to the number of faces."<sup>3</sup> This racial refinement from "white" to "Anglo-Saxon" is neither accidental nor idiosyncratic; rather, it reflects a political revision of whiteness in Dana's New England during the two decades bracketing the Famine in Ireland and the tremendous Celtic exodus to North America.

Whereas the salient feature of whiteness before the 1840s had been its powerful political and cultural contrast to nonwhiteness, now its internal divisions, too, took on a new and pressing significance. The main currents in this period (c.1840s–1920s) included, first, a spectacular rate of industrialization in the United States, whose voracious appetite for cheap labor—combined with political and economic dislocations across industrializing Europe—brought unprecedented numbers of migrants to New World shores; second, a growing nativist perception of these laborers themselves as a political threat to the smooth functioning of the republic; and third, consequently, a fracturing of monolithic whiteness by the popular marriage of scientific doctrines of race with political concerns over the newcomers' "fitness for self-government."

This increasing fragmentation and hierarchical ordering of distinct white *races* (now in the plural) was theorized in the rarified discourses of science, but it was also reflected in literature, visual arts, caricature, political oratory, penny journalism, and myriad other venues of popular culture. It was this notion of variegated whiteness that surfaced in 1863, for instance, when the New York *Tribune* characterized the rioting Irish in New York as a "savage mob," a "pack of savages," "savage foes," "demons," and "incarnate devils." It was this notion of variegated white-

ness that undergirded Henry Cabot Lodge's claim, in 1891, that Slovak immigrants "are not a good acquisition for us to make, since they appear to have so many items in common with the Chinese." It was this notion of variegated whiteness that prompted one Colorado congressman, during an exchange on the merits of an immigration-restriction bill in the 1920s, to offer this cautionary fable:

Suppose we should move out of the United States all the hundred and six million people who are here now and put in their places a hundred and six million people who are to-day vegetating in darkest Africa. How long do you suppose that America would retain any similarity to its condition of the present time?

The picture appears plain enough when we paint it in such broad lines of black and white. But is it not essentially the same picture if we use shades—if instead of bringing in people who are entirely different we bring in people who are somewhat different?<sup>4</sup>

As these comments indicate, the older, supremacist meaning of whiteness was not completely overthrown by the new paradigm of plural white races. The key here is in his implicit ranking of human difference by degree—peoples who are "entirely" different and those who are "somewhat" different. But even if painted in "shades" rather than in stark, black-and-white polarities, the importation of "different" peoples posed a terrible threat to the well-being of the republic.

Thus race is not tangential to the history of European immigration to the United States but absolutely central. "Fitness for self-government," a racial attribute whose outer property was whiteness, became encoded in a naturalization law that allowed Europeans' unrestricted immigration and their unhindered (male) civic participation. It is solely because of their race, in other words, that they were permitted entrance. But the massive influx borne of this "liberal" immigration policy, in its turn, generated a new perception of some Europeans' *unfitness* for self-government, now rendered racially in a series of subcategorical white groupings—Celt, Slav, Hebrew, Iberic, Mediterranean, and so on—white Others of a supreme Anglo-Saxondom. This does not simply represent a shift in American thinking "toward racism," as John Higham, still the premier historian of American nativism, would have it.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the political history of whiteness and its vicissitudes between the 1840s and the 1920s represents a shift from one brand of bedrock racism to another—from the unquestioned hegemony of a unified race of "white persons" to a contest over

political "fitness" among a now fragmented, hierarchically arranged series of distinct "white races." Race has been among the central organizers of the political life of the republic all along, and the racial reclassification of various European immigrants as their numbers swelled is among the most salient reminders of how powerful its sway has been.

### Rethinking Whiteness

The demographics of the republic began to change dramatically in the mid-nineteenth century. In the early decades of the republic, immigration had been calculated by the mere thousands per year—an influx of 8,385 from all sending countries combined in the year 1820, for instance. But these yearly figures climbed to the tens of thousands per year by the mid-1820s, and to the hundreds of thousands per year by the 1840s. In 1847, among the worst years of the Famine in Ireland, total immigration to the United States leaped to 234,968, of whom nearly half (105,536) were from Ireland. From 1846 through 1855 a total of 3,031,339 immigrants came ashore in the United States, including 1,288,307 from Ireland and another 976,711 from Germany, the two new leading sources of immigration. By 1860 (that is, by the time "Anglo-Saxon" had displaced "white" in Dana's racial lexicon) the foreign-born population of the United States was more than 4 million, of whom 1,611,304 had been born in Ireland, and 1,276,075 in Germany. Over the next several decades the economic and political dislocations across Europe continued to send increasing numbers of migrants to American shores, with each region furnishing its own statistical curve of migration slopes and peaks: Irish migration peaked at 221,253 in 1851; German migration peaked at 250,630 in 1882; Italian migration peaked at 285,731 in 1907; and Russian (largely Jewish) migration peaked at 258,943 also in 1907. By 1920 the "white" foreign-born population was more than 13.5 million, most of whom would not have qualified for Benjamin Franklin's appellation "Saxon" (nor, indeed, "lovely white," if even the Swedes are "swarthy").<sup>6</sup>

It is against this backdrop that the history of political whiteness took shape and that the fluidity of certain groups' racial identities became apparent. The crosscurrents here are terribly complex. The Mexican War, slavery and Emancipation, Reconstruction, Indian wars, anti-Chinese agitation, Pacific expansion, and popular accounts of Pacific, Asian, and African exploration all kept vividly alive the crucial distinction in American political culture dividing white from nonwhite populations, as did

hiring practices, most labor agitation, and miscegenation statutes. And yet the multitudes of European immigrants who arrived in waves beginning in the 1840s, it was said, posed a new threat to democratic institutions. This emerging political crisis lent a new, multifaceted character to whiteness itself.

Thus, on the one hand, in *The Inequality of Human Races* (1855) Arthur Comte de Gobineau could look across the Atlantic at the United States and predict the decline of the Anglo-Saxons, who now found themselves suddenly overwhelmed by "the most degenerate races of olden day Europe. They are the human flotsam of all ages: Irish, cross-bred German and French, and Italians of even more doubtful stock." Although penned in Europe, this sentiment would become increasingly common in North American discussion whenever immigration was the question of the moment. But when questions pertaining to slavery or expansion took center stage, on the other hand, racial differences among white populations receded. As Van Evrie put it, "Irishmen, Germans, Frenchmen, etc., come here, settle down, become citizens, and their offspring born and raised on American soil differ in no appreciable or perceptible manner from other Americans . . . [But the Negro is] as absolutely and specifically unlike the American as when the race first touched the soil and first breathed the air of the New World." Or again, setting the Europeans' environmentalist potential for change against the Africans' hereditary stasis, Van Evrie declared, "The coarse skin, big hands and feet, the broad teeth, pug nose etc. of the Irish and German laborer pass away in a generation or two."

There was hardly consensus on the prospect of immigrant "difference," marked by physicality ("coarse skin," "pug nose"), merely "passing away" with time. As had been the case with public debates over slavery and the displacement and extermination of American Indians, the gathering debate over immigration and the crisis it represented drew upon "knowledge" of peoples derived from the sciences. Indeed, as Ruth Benedict has remarked, the proportion of racialist literature in American intellectual history that deals with purportedly white peoples is staggering (perhaps, as she proposes, because "our treatment of the Negro conforms so closely to the predilections of these authors that they doubtless had little to suggest"). From Samuel Morton's 1839 comment on the "unsophisticated Celts" of southwest Ireland, who "recall the memory of a barbarous age," to the ascendent eugenics movement of the early twentieth century, the relative merits of the white races of Europe and America represented one of the abiding concerns of American ethnological sciences, anthropology,

sociology, literature, politics, and historiography. As Gobineau noted on the tenor of white supremacism at mid-century, "The most ardent democrats are the first to claim superiority for the *Anglo-Saxons* of North America over all the nations of the same continent." And indeed, even a staunch abolitionist like Theodore Parker could intone, "No tribe of men has done such service for freedom as the Anglo-Saxons, in Britain and America." (Elsewhere Parker would present an elaborate interpretation of world history, based upon a racial scheme of "five great powers of the civilized Christian world": Russia, "a great Slavic people"; France, "a great Celtic people, variously crossed with Basque, Roman, and Teutonic tribes"; Germany, "a great Teutonic people"; England, "a great Saxon-Teutonic people"; and the United States, "a great English-Saxon-Teutonic people.")<sup>8</sup>

Josiah Nott was among the first in this country to invest the discourse of white races with full polygenetic implications. Objecting to the construction of a more or less unified "Caucasian" race presented in Samuel Morton's *Crania Americana* (the category "Caucasian" was known in scientific discourse at this time, but was still rare in popular discourse), Nott commented that "the Teuton, the Jew, the Hindoo, the Egyptian, &c., have all been included under the term Caucasian; and yet they have, as far as we know, been through all time as distinct in physical and moral characters from each other, as they have from the Negro races of Africa and Oceanica." The differences among the races were so pronounced, in Nott's view, that "nothing short of a *miracle* could have evolved all the multifarious Caucasian forms out of one primitive stock . . . There must have been many centers of creation, even for Caucasian races, instead of one center for *all* types of humanity."<sup>9</sup>

Engaged as they were in both scientific inquiry and social observation, writers like Nott and the more avowedly polemical Van Evrie faced a complex task when it came to comprehending the divisions and rankings within the superior "white" race. For these authors slavery, not immigration, was the pressing question of the day and the real point of scientific inquiry into human types. Whether or not "all the multifarious Caucasian forms" could have developed from a single "primitive stock," white supremacism did entail its own imperatives—especially at a time when slavery as an institution was under attack. Like Van Evrie, Nott considered slavery to be fully "consistent with the laws of God." Thus standing firmly upon a bedrock of religiously and scientifically explained white supremacism generated within the context of slaveholding Mobile, Alabama,

he could only greet racial findings generated in the nativist Northeast or in the British Empire with some caution. For example, a contemporary English observer had described certain native Irish as "pot-bellied, bow-legged, and abortively featured; and [they] are especially remarkable for open, projecting mouths, with prominent teeth and exposed gums, their advancing cheekbones and depressed noses bearing barbarism on the very front. In other words, within a short period they seem to have acquired a prognathous type of skull, like the savages of Australia." Nott responded by pointing out that "a healthy, well-developed race of men, like our domestic animals, (horses, cattle, and sheep) may be much more quickly and certainly altered for the worse than for the better." These poor Irish merely represented a "diseased stock," he argued, and their "abortive features" could be brought back "to their original type" in better circumstances: "It is wonderful how rapidly the lower class of Irish . . . do improve in America when they are well fed and comfortably lodged."<sup>10</sup>

By the 1860s Van Evrie was even more pronounced in his efforts to redeem the European immigrant, viewing the Irish as key constituents in a Northern, pro-slavery coalition. "Something like five hundred millions of money" had been funneled to the antislavery cause in Britain, he lamented, "money taken from Irish laborers within the last seventy years and expended for the assumed benefit of the negro." The Irish, by this account, were so many "unfortunate white people" who should have been saved.<sup>11</sup> Thus, as would be the case in the pan-white-supremacist agitation against Chinese immigrants in California in the 1870s, recouping or shoring up "Celtic" whiteness was among the chief tasks of political coalition-building among pro-slavery Northerners.

But as the discussions of Semites, Teutons, Slavs, or Anglo-Saxons on the part of Morton, Nott, and Gobineau suggest, notwithstanding the pressing slavery question these white races were subject to the new epistemological system of difference—a new visual economy keyed not only to cues of skin color, but to facial angle, head size and shape, physiognomy, hair and eye color, and physique. As the first to immigrate in huge numbers at once well within the literal language but well outside the deliberate intent of the "free white persons" clause of 1790, Irish and German arrivals of the 1840s and after drew special attention in discussions of race and its implications for assimilability and citizenship. In popular perception German immigrants generally remained the less racially distinct—or dangerous—of the two. By longstanding tradition in

the high discourse of race, the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic traditions were closely aligned; indeed, by many accounts Anglo-Saxons traced their very genius to the forests of Germany—Anglo-Saxondom represented one branch of a freedom-loving, noble race of Germanic peoples.<sup>12</sup>

Further, in contrast with the Irish, a large proportion of German immigrants settled not in the polyglot, industrializing Northeast, but in the West. Thus even if in theory the various “New Germanys” of the West were to “keep the German settlers racially and culturally distinct,” they were nonetheless subject to the racial alchemy of a “frontier” society that saw the world divided between whiteness and others. As one scholar remarked in 1909, the historian “will find the German element on the frontier line at every single stage of its progress westward, securing and defending it.” German immigrants themselves also were less likely than their Irish counterparts to find the notion of a unified German race either terribly appealing or politically useful. According to one historian, the religious diversity of the German immigration in particular “made it very difficult for German Catholics . . . to see themselves as part of a larger ‘German’ entity” defined by race. Hence the Germans did not participate very actively in their own racial formation as non-Anglo-Saxons.<sup>13</sup>

Even so, ascriptions of Germanic racial identity were not uncommon. Richard Henry Dana could describe the '48er Carl Schurz as a “red-bearded Teuton”; the *Ohio Republican*, a Know-Nothing paper, could lament that Germans were driving “white people” out of the labor market; and Henry Cabot Lodge could glibly conclude that Germans “produced fewer men of ability than any other race in the United States.” Nor was racial self-ascription unknown among German immigrants: even in addressing assimilationism, speakers often turned to a language of “racial amalgamation.” After the failure of one “New Germany” in the West, a writer for the *Illustrierte Welt* (1859) identified racial amalgamation as the solution to the German problem: “Wouldn't it be wiser to seek the cultural-historical task of the German emigration in a melting of Germanic idealism with the realism of the Anglo-Saxon?” According to one Anglo-American observer in the 1880s, German newspapers and German clubs fairly rattled with the question, “Will the Teutonic race lose its identity in the New World?” Even by World War I, however, it had not: one speaker at a Swiss festival in Philadelphia called for “the final, decisive victory of the Teutonic race,” while Germans in Chicago greeted war with Russia as a “war of the Teutonic race against the Slavic” and classed Slavs as the “natural serf races of Europe.” Another writer, more inclined to-

ward the allies, averred, "German blood has flowed freely in past times for the American union. It will flow as freely again if the Union again calls on its sons of the German race to be its sword and its buckler in its hour of danger."<sup>14</sup>

But by far the more powerful language of racial differentiation applied to the Irish. As Dale Knobel has amply demonstrated, beginning in the 1840s American comment on the "Irish character" became not only more pejorative but also more rigidly cast in a racial typology. During the mid-1840s, Knobel notes, American discussion of Irish immigration and urban social conditions rested upon the unquestioned fact of "something contemporaries had begun to call 'Irishism'—an alleged condition of depravity and degradation habitual to immigrants and maybe even their children." Negative assessments of Irishism or Celtism as a fixed set of inherited traits thus became linked at mid-century to a fixed set of observable physical characteristics, such as skin and hair color, facial type, and physique. The Irishman was "low-browed," "brutish," and even "simian" in popular discourse; a *Harper's Weekly* piece in 1851 described the "Celtic physiognomy" as "distinctly marked" by, among other things, "the small and somewhat upturned nose [and] the black tint of the skin." This comprehension of racial Irishness would surface in a wide range of contexts, including popular jokes, political speeches, newspaper cartoons, constabulary reports, and social policy guidelines. The Massachusetts State Board of Charities, for example, identified the immigrants' "inherited organic imperfection, vitiated constitution, or *poor stock*" as the chief cause of their pauperism and public dependency. Ultimately such racial conceptions would lead to a broad popular consensus that the Irish were "constitutionally incapable of intelligent participation in the governance of the nation."<sup>15</sup>

Racialism thus provided a powerful frame for interpreting and explaining Irish immigrant behaviors of all sorts, and for rearticulating at every turn the unbridgeable chasm separating natives (Anglo-Saxons) from immigrants (Celts). Whereas Irish nationalists themselves invoked their own yearning for liberty and fondly drew parallels between their cause and the glories of the American Revolution, native commentators often saw only chaos and irresponsibility in Irish political conduct. In the wake of an abortive Fenian raid on Canada in 1866, the *Atlantic Monthly* concluded, "All the qualities which go to make a republican, in the true sense of the term, are wanting in the Irish nature." To the "Celtic mind," the journal explained, "when anything comes in the guise of a law, there is

an accompanying seizure of moral paralysis." The Irish rebel lives "in a world of unrealities almost inconceivable to a cool Saxon brain." Or again, in response to violence involving the radical Molly Maguires in 1877, the *New York Tribune* identified the Irish as "a race with more wholesome and probably unreasonable terror of law than any other." "Is there no other way [besides violence] to civilize them?" this editorialist wanted to know.<sup>16</sup>

Toward the century's end, Irish immigrants' innate "unfitness for self-government" would be familiar enough in the lexicon of America's public sphere to serve as the stuff of casual satiric allusion in works of fiction. Of the immigrant vote, one character in Marion Crawford's *An American Politician* (1884) remarks, "It is the bull in the china shop—the Irish bull amongst the American china—dangerous, you know." An *Atlantic Monthly* piece in 1896 similarly noted that "the unscrupulousness of the Irish in politics arises from the Celtic ardor and partisanship with which he pursues his objects . . . A Celt . . . lacks the solidity, the balance, the judgement, the moral staying power of the Anglo-Saxon." By their very peculiarities of "Celtic blood," in this estimation, the Irish posed a threat to the republic; but even more so in their eagerness to assimilate: the Celt "imbibes with avidity the theory of equality, and with true Celtic ardor pushes it to excess . . . there are many Irish-Americans, young men growing up in our cities, who are too vain or too lazy to work, self-indulgent, impudent, and dissipated."<sup>17</sup>

But because the animosity between Celts and Anglo-Saxons drew upon a long, racially accented European history of Saxon conquest, this racial divide was evoked and respected on the Celtic side as well. Many of the Irish in America, in other words, fundamentally agreed with American commentators like the editorialists of *Harper's* and *Atlantic Monthly* that a discernible racial chasm separated the Celt from the Anglo-Saxon; and though these Irish observers rejected the argument of Celtic inferiority in all its shades, they rejected the idea of Celtic racial difference not at all. For them no less than for their Anglo-Saxon contemporaries, physical differences marked an inner, natural "difference" separating the two races undeniably. This is a dimension of the overall racial picture of immigrant life that has gone largely unnoted.<sup>18</sup>

As Hugh Quigley wrote with considerable race pride, "The modern Irish are the most genuine, unmixed, and unchanged Celtic people that exist on the globe. Even the most prejudiced writers against the Irish . . . acknowledge that Ireland, today, is the land where the world-renowned

race is to be found in its purity and its ancient characteristics." John Brennan's passage on the "physiognomy" of Irish-American children underscores the extent to which the category *Celt* reflected not simply how "difference" was conceived, but how it was actually seen. As in the case of other racial categories, the social meanings and distinctions surrounding the Celt were so ideologically thick as to translate into an immediate perception of discernible physicality. The biological dimension of Celtic identity was expressed most clearly by the Irish editor James Jeffrey Roche, who answered the anxieties of "race suicide" articulated by Anglo-supremacists like Teddy Roosevelt and Edward A. Ross with a rather mirthful argument we might properly call "race homicide." "Let the Anglo-Saxon call the roll of his relations," Roche wrote with some satisfaction, "and confess, with shame, that a grand race like that of the Puritan and pilgrim is vanishing . . . The fittest will always survive when they care to do so." Roche thus characterized the genetic contest between Saxon host and Celtic immigrant in the very same terms as the staunchest of American Anglo-Saxonists.<sup>19</sup>

Among self-ascribed Celts it was the discourse of nationalism above all that carried and enforced the racial meanings of Irish identity. Irish nationalism, of course, has a complex history of its own, but for the present purpose the specific ins and outs of Irish nationalism as a political program are less important than the more diffuse currents of myth and sensibility that were embedded in Irish immigrant culture. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recalled the ubiquity of street-level nationalism in her autobiography, *The Rebel Girl*: "The awareness of being Irish came to us as small children through plaintive song and heroic story . . . As children we drew in a burning hatred of British rule with our mother's milk." This highly nationalist "awareness of being Irish" was carried not only in song and story but in the strains of Irish Catholicism and its hagiography; in the outlook of the Irish-American press; in holidays, festivals, and celebrations like St. Patrick's Day; in the martial tones of associational life (groups like the Clan na Gael and the Ancient Order of Hibernians were steeped in an ethos of national regeneration); and in popular entertainments such as vernacular theater and even parish dramas.<sup>20</sup> This "awareness of being Irish," in addition to being heavily nationalistic, was frequently accented by the racialism of a distinctly "Saxon" brand of historic oppression and a uniquely "Celtic" (or sometimes "Gaelic") brand of impoverishment and resilience. It was a worldview in which the Irish and

the English on both sides of the Atlantic were racially distinct and thus shared a mutual animosity rooted in nature.

Confronting the proposition that his "mad" hatred for the British stemmed from his experience in British prisons, for example, the physical force nationalist Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa remarked, "That kind of talk is all trash of talk. What I am now, I *was*, before I ever saw the inside of an English prison. I *am so from nature*." Elsewhere, in describing his parents' reflexive hatred for the English, he suggested, "That kind of instinct is in the whole of the Irish race today." This language of racial unity was among the staples of Irish nationalist polemic, and nationalist leaders continually sounded the chords of racial obligation and a race-bound group destiny in their efforts to keep the overseas Irish oriented toward the homeland and toward the promise of its eventual liberation. As Robert Ellis Thompson wrote in the 1890s, "The greater Ireland [that is, the diaspora] which English misgovernment and deportation has created, sends its confirmation back to the old Ireland of its love and its hate. From every quarter of the inhabited world the Irish race watch and wait for the hour of deliverance." This sense of collective memory, injury, and desire was expressed in a variety of locutions, from the compact trope of "the sea-divided Gael," to the poet's refusal of an "Anglo-Saxon" America because "you are not of the self-same race / Nor blood of the self-same clan," to the Irish Race conventions of the 1910s.<sup>21</sup>

These Irish nationalist and American republicanist dimensions of Celtic racial identity fed off one another, even if they arose independently. On the one hand, the Anglo-Saxonist strains of American political culture replicated and thus reinvigorated the Irish sense of Celtic injury that had been cultivated across the Atlantic. As Rossa put it, "I cannot feel that America is my country . . . the English power, and the English influence and the English hate, and the English boycott against the Irishman is today as active in America as it is in Ireland."<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the heated speech and the brash actions of Irish nationalists seemed to confirm Anglo-Saxon doubts about Celtic reason; and so nationalist manifestations fed back into the loop of dominant racial discourses on republican virtue.

In the matter of racial character, then, naturalization law allowed Irish immigrants entrance as "white persons," and the labor competition under capitalism may frequently have encouraged an aggressive embrace of that whiteness. And yet both U.S. and Irish nationalisms generated a racial

crosscurrent that placed a high premium indeed upon the differences between distinct white races, the Anglo-Saxon and the Celt. This racially inscribed experience of the Irish on New World shores marked a more general shift in the ideological and visual lexicons of whiteness that affected a number of other groups of "free white persons" between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries.

### The White Other

Because racial classifications so successfully masquerade as features of the natural landscape, they are seldom commented upon overtly. But there have been certain moments when commentary on racial boundaries does present itself for examination. Three moments of violence and civic unrest surrounding three different white races between the 1860s and the 1910s provide glimpses of the assumptions attending this period's regime of variegated whiteness: the largely Irish uprising known as the New York City draft riots (1863), the lynching of eleven Italian prisoners in New Orleans by a white mob (1891), and the lynching of the Jewish "outsider" Leo Frank by an avenging mob in Atlanta (1915) each afford an unusually clear view of the contests over power and meaning that attended the question of racial difference in the case of European immigrant groups.

In recreating the New York City draft riots for *Harper's Magazine* (1867), Eleanor Leonard recalled, "A great roaring suddenly burst upon our ears—a howling as of thousands of wild Indians let loose at once . . . the cry arose from every quarter, 'The mob!' The mob! The Irish have risen to resist the draft!" Her reference to "wild Indians" was neither accidental nor entirely metaphorical. Indeed, the "savage" nature of the Irish became a point of much discussion. Those days of violence in the wake of the 1863 Conscription Act raised many questions about class and the burdens of war; about Republican leadership; about unity in the North; and about Northern whites' willingness to make sacrifices perceived to be for the benefit of Southern blacks. According to one contemporary account, for example, a particularly visible leader of the mob denounced "this damned abolition draft," whereas others "threatened to kill every Black Republican-nigger-worshipping s— of a b—, and burn their houses." Among the most dramatic acts of violence during the rioting, too, was the burning of a Colored Orphans' Asylum.<sup>23</sup>

But as the *Times* announced on the fourth day of violence, "it is a fact, patent to anyone who has seen anything of the mob, that it is composed

almost exclusively of Irishmen and boys," and hence chief among the questions that lingered in civic discussion as the violence waned was, Just who *are* these Irish? Were they, as they had proclaimed by their actions, so many aggrieved "whites"? Or, on the contrary, were they, as some native New Yorkers openly wondered, a "savage" people, as Leonard had implied, like "wild Indians let loose" in the city streets? Thomas Nast had put the matter most compactly: a cartoon of the rioters later in the summer bore the caption, "A Gorilla on the Loose."<sup>24</sup> The riots thus became the occasion for a contest over the racial meaning of Irishness itself—an assertion of pan-white supremacism on the one hand, versus vigorous denials of Celtic equality with the Anglo-Saxon on the other.

Although the class antagonisms that were played out during July 1863 are significant, as Iver Bernstein has shown, the riots themselves nonetheless enacted a deeply embedded race politics, a violent racial melodrama. As Bernstein points out, racial antagonisms ran high during the spring because of the decision of local shipping companies to break a longshoremen's strike by employing black labor.<sup>25</sup> The local pro-slavery paper, the *Weekly Caucasian*, announced at the head of every issue that it stood "firmly for WHITE SUPREMACY, a defense of the rights and welfare of the Producing and Working Classes, now imperiled by the doctrine of Negro Equality."<sup>26</sup>

And indeed the rioters' actions over the course of the week were in part a violent enactment of this brand of whiteness itself. Rioters targeted their perceived enemies among prominent Republican politicians, to be sure, but they vented much of their fury in such a way that the rioting itself seems a racial ritual of civic differentiation. "It would have been far from safe for a negro to have made his appearance in [the Eleventh Ward]," reported the *Herald*, "for the laboring classes there appear to be of the opinion that the negroes are the sole cause of all their trouble, and many even say that were it not for the negroes there would be no war and no necessity for a draft." Common enough were reports that "the rage of the mob was exclusively directed against colored people," or, again, that a certain black woman had been "badly beaten about the head by Irish-women."<sup>27</sup>

But the rioters' assaults were not directed solely at blacks; nor was their insistence upon whiteness drawn only by a contrast with blackness. According to the *Herald*, one rioter had "endeavored to lead an attack on a house . . . where negroes visited white women. Ambitious to regulate the races and prevent amalgamation, his hostility was not confined to Afri-

cans." He had also destroyed the furniture of a white man who "had married a squaw." Here antiblack feeling verged on a more general expression of white supremacy aimed at any person or community defined as "nonwhite"—whose equality, in the logic of the *Weekly Caucasian*, imperiled the producing and working classes. Hence "having caused a general exodus of negroes," as one reporter observed, "[rioters] turned their attention to the Chinese who delight to reside in that precinct. The celestials had been found guilty of uniting with white wives, and their headquarters were sacked. The John Chinamen escaped, but in some instances their inconstant consorts have not followed them." The crowd descended on the Chinese neighborhood of the Fourth Ward after one speaker urged that the Chinese represented "a modification of the negro."<sup>28</sup> When the violence subsided, casualties were found to include one Ann Derrickson, "a white woman, the wife of a colored man," and Peter Heuston, a Mohawk Indian "with dark complexion and straight black hair." According to one witness, Heuston had been murdered because "a gang of ruffians . . . evidently thought him to be of the African race because of his dark complexion." But not necessarily: as the antidraft protest became an unleashing of white-supremacist violence, merely being "dark" was sin enough.<sup>29</sup>

If the actions of the rioters seem to have embodied a working-class entitlement based both on race (white entitlement) and on class (their privileged status as producers in a producers' republic), many non-Irish onlookers and commentators, in their turn, registered their own republican claims by questioning the rioters' full status as "white persons." In response to a New York *Herald* piece that referred to the rioters as "the people," a *Times* editorialist objected that those who could rightly lay claim to that title "regard with unqualified abhorrence the doings of the tribe of savages that have sought to bear rule in their midst." The *Times* went on to decry the "barbarism" of the riots and to characterize the rioters themselves as "brute," "brutish," and "animal."<sup>30</sup>

This quickly became the reigning paradigm within which the rioters' actions were interpreted and described in genteel quarters. A second *Times* article two days later asserted, "Few imagined that there was such a race of miscreants extant . . . In spite of our Christian institutions we have thousands of barbarians in our midst, every whit as ferocious in their instincts as the Minnesota savages, and never wanting anything but the opportunity to copy every Indian deed of horror." A Brooklyn minister averred that "the cruelties of the aboriginal savages can hardly rival those

of the brutal mob that has disgraced [New York]." The *Tribune* reported that "a white gentleman (the son of a missionary), born in the East Indies . . . said, when he saw the rioters yesterday, 'I am proud of the heathen.'" The *Tribune* routinely characterized the Irish as a "savage mob," a "pack of savages," "savage foes," "demons," and "incarnate devils." In his rousing account *The Bloody Week*, an anonymous "Eye Witness," too, chimed in that the mob consisted of "barbarians and inhuman ruffians." (The language here is strikingly similar not only to colonial rhetoric regarding Indians, but to contemporary accounts of the Indians in the West. That same month, July 1863, for instance, the *Oroville Union* [California] would refer to Indians as "devils of the forests.")<sup>31</sup>

Even *Harper's Weekly*, which early on had tried to dispel the notion that the riot derived from "the perversity of the Irish race," and which had argued that "there was nothing peculiar . . . to the Irish race in this riot," later suggested that "the impulsiveness of the Celt . . . prompts him to be foremost in every outburst, whether for a good or an evil purpose." By summer's end writers at *Harper's* were noting the "riotous propensities" of the Irish and comparing them unfavorably to African-Americans: "Where, either in our colonial or our national history, have the Irish, as a race, won so clear a title to the gratitude of the people of the United States as the negroes have won within the past three months?"<sup>32</sup>

Given that the uprising took place during a time of war—and a war for the liberation of slaves, no less—it was perhaps inevitable that discussion would turn to the imperatives of citizenship and the Celt's "fitness for self-government." As one commentator put it in a book review of *The Wrong of Slavery* for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1864, "The emancipated Negro is at least as industrious and thrifty as the Celt, takes more pride in self-support, is far more eager for education, and has fewer vices. It is impossible to name any standard of requisites for the full rights of citizenship which will give the vote to the Celt and exclude the Negro."<sup>33</sup> The comment is double-edged: like the cartoon years later (1876) that would place the Celt and the Negro on the scales of civic virtue and find them weighing in identically, here an argument on the Negro's behalf seems to make as strong a case for actually *stripping* the rights and privileges that have already been conferred upon the Celt as a "free white person." The war, which was going to entail some revisions in the notions of American citizenship, was a most fitting occasion for some reflection upon the civic virtues of the Celtic immigrants and their contribution to the republic.

This image of Celtic savagery was revived and pressed into service as a cautionary metaphor years later, in the wake of the Haymarket affair, when an anonymous "Volunteer Special" outlined the perils to "Americanism" posed by unchecked immigration. In his suggestively titled *Volcano under the City* (1887), "Volunteer" resurrected the Irish mob of 1863 as "whooping, yelling, blaspheming, howling, demonic, such as no man imagined the city to contain . . . none of them seem to be Americans." And conditions had only worsened since 1863. Among the most pressing problems faced by the republic were the ever-expanding "race-colonies" of unmetabolized, un-Americanized Europeans now in every major city.<sup>34</sup>

Whereas in New York in 1863 an Irish mob action seemed to ratify a common conception of Celtic "savagery," in New Orleans in 1891 a perception of immigrant Italians as "savage" led to an anti-Italian mob action. The racial discourse within which the events were comprehended and narrated, however, was similar. Is an Italian a white man? a journalist asked a West Coast construction boss in the 1890s. "No sir," he answered, "an Italian is a Dago." Similarly, a *Harper's Magazine* piece offered a guided tour of "Italian Life in New York," in which the exoticized accounts of the human landscape echoed then-current travel accounts from Africa or the Levant: "It is no uncommon thing to see at noon some swarthy Italian . . . resting and dining from his tin kettle, while his brown-skinned wife is by his side." (The exotic body's swarthy surfaces, of course, contain "the quick intuition of Italian blood.")<sup>35</sup>

In New Orleans in 1891 such perceptions of Italians' racial distinctness became deadly. In the wake of a spectacular murder trial whose verdict was widely believed to have been "fixed" by local Mafiosi, a popular understanding of Italians' *innate* criminality not only allowed, but indeed prompted, the brutal lynching of eleven immigrants accused of conspiring to murder the police chief of New Orleans. So blithely was the guilt of the immigrants presumed, that, utterly without irony, even a Northern journal like the *New York Times* could refer to the lynch mob as consisting of the city's "best element." So fused in popular perception were the issues of Mafia conduct and Italian racial character that, in editorials about the affair, the *Times* would cast Italian immigrants' behavior as racially determined and question their fitness for citizenship. "These sneaking and cowardly Sicilians," pronounced one editorial, "who have transplanted to this country the lawless passions, the cutthroat practices, and the oathbound societies of their native country, are to us a pest without mitigation. Our own rattlesnakes are as good citizens as they."<sup>36</sup>

The social location of Italian immigrants in Louisiana in this period

points up just how complex the vicissitudes of race can be. It was not the case that the various probationary white races of the nineteenth century were invariably "whitened" by the presence of nonwhite Others in the cultural and political crucible of a given locale. Although it is true that whiteness *could* emerge by its contrast to nonwhiteness (as seems to have been the case with Celts in California during the anti-Chinese campaign of the 1870s, for instance), immigrants who were white enough to enter the country as "free white persons" could also lose that status by their association with nonwhite groups. This was precisely the case with Italians in New Orleans.

In certain regions of the Jim Crow South Italians occupied a racial middle ground within the otherwise unforgiving, binary caste system of white-over-black. Politically Italians were indeed white enough for naturalization and for the ballot, but socially they represented a problem population at best. Their distance from a more abiding brand of social whiteness (what Benjamin Franklin might have meant by "lovely white") was marked by the common epithet "dago"—a word whose decidedly racial meaning was widely recognized at the time and was underscored by the more obviously racial "white nigger."<sup>37</sup>

It was not just that Italians did not look white to certain social arbiters, but that they did not *act* white. In New Orleans Italian immigrants were stigmatized in the post-Civil War period because they accepted economic niches (farm labor and small tenancy, for instance) marked as "black" by local custom, and because they lived and worked comfortably among blacks. According to one social historian, by their economic pursuits alone, which often set them side by side with black laborers, "Italian immigrants assumed the status of Negroes . . . [and] Southern thinking made no effort to distinguish between them." Italian immigrants ran further afoul of white supremacists in the region when they "fraternized with local blacks and even intermarried," and when—like blacks—they supported Republican and Populist candidates instead of the party of white supremacy. From being "like Negroes" to being "as bad as Negroes" was but a trifling step in dominant Southern thinking; and hence in states like Louisiana, Mississippi, and West Virginia, Italians were known to have been lynched for alleged crimes, or even for violating local racial codes by "fraternizing" with blacks. (It is worth noting that the execution of the eleven Italian prisoners in New Orleans was carried out by the White League, a Reconstruction-era terror organization much like the better-known Ku Klux Klan.)<sup>38</sup>

After the sensational trial of the eleven immigrants for the murder of

Police Chief Hennessy, and after the even more sensational vigilante raid on the jailhouse and the retaliatory murder of the prisoners themselves, one of the first questions to arise in the press and elsewhere was the relationship of these events to the Italian character. Did Italian racial character have anything to do with the original crime? Did the mob murder the prisoners because they were Italian? When Italians across the country (and, indeed, across the Atlantic) denounced the lynching as a brutal act of persecution and racial violence, the *New York Times* responded that, no, these Italians had *not* been persecuted "as Italians." In an editorial striking for its success in combining a tone of cool, irreproachable rationality with an argument that *lauded* the lynch mob, the *Times* went on to warn that, if Italians failed to fall in behind other "decent" American citizens and to applaud the mob's success in doing away with the "criminals" (even while deploring the lawlessness of the lynchings), then Americans would draw the conclusion that all Italians were lawless ruffians with Mafia ties. Then, indeed, all Italians would be persecuted "as Italians," "and this would not be a prejudice, but a sentiment founded upon facts and sustained by reason." The men who were murdered were guilty, the *Times* flatly asserted; "there is no doubt whatever." "This is a fact that the Italians in Italy are not supposed to know, but that the Italians in this country have no excuse for not knowing."<sup>39</sup>

Others were even more blunt in their condemnations of the Italian immigrants and more forthcoming in their commendation of the New Orleans mob. As one merchant characteristically put it, "The Italian colony in New Orleans . . . is a menace to American citizenship and good government. Why, I had rather have a thousand Chinamen than one Italian. They are treacherous, revengeful, and seek their revenge in most foul and cowardly manners. They have no regard for the truth . . . The lynching, terrible as it was, is a blessing for New Orleans." One local judge, R. H. Marr, Jr., pointed to the racial clannishness of the Italian colony to explain the community's fierce outpouring of anti-Italian sentiment in the wake of the Hennessy murder. Convictions in crimes involving Italians had been notoriously scarce, he charged, because, when questioned, "any number of Dagoes . . . swear to the most positive and circumstantial alibi" on behalf of the accused. "Until the killing of Hennessy," moreover, "these people had so far as the public knew, confined their operation to their own race." Even journals as far from the crime scene as the *Portland Oregonian* were inclined to depict the behavior of the New Orleans Italians in racial terms—"an explosion of cheap Latin fury and braggadocio."<sup>40</sup>

Another dimension of this apprehension concerning lawless or degenerate "dagoes" was a certain racial pride in the masterly bearing of the "Anglo-Saxon" lynch mob. At a moment when the "patriotism of race" uniting Great Britain and the United States was just beginning to find its adherents in both countries, the lynching could be assimilated to self-flattering, chivalric narratives of virile Anglo-Saxon manhood. A letter to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (England), reprinted in the *New York Times*, commended "the men on the Mississippi who are not spoiled by the spirit of submission to the letter of the law, which has done so much to emasculate the human race." The *Gazette* criticized the letter, but nonetheless did conclude that "one branch of the Anglo-Saxon race does not differ from another in this matter. The citizens of New Orleans, finding that the jury did not do its duty, said: 'We must by one means or another put crime down.'" (In another telling twist on the alchemy of race, it is worth noting the significance here in "Anglo-Saxon" New Orleans' being represented by the *Irish* Police Chief Hennessy in this racial drama. As one social historian argues, Irish immigrants represented 13 percent of the local population by 1890, and, unlike Italians, they had thoroughly assimilated to the "white" population—thus becoming, one might say, honorary Anglo-Saxons.)<sup>41</sup>

Significantly, Italian comment, too, reflected a racial interpretation of the entire affair. Secretary of State James Blaine received telegrams from Italian organizations all over the country protesting the "outrage" at New Orleans and demanding that "all Italian citizens of the United States be properly protected against violence and race prejudice." Grasping at once the racial significance of American ("Anglo-Saxon") rhetoric, Italian protestors themselves mobilized a racially accented language of "barbarism" and "civilization" in addressing the wrongs perpetrated in New Orleans. Not only must Italian protest be "noble, dignified, and measured," counseled the Italian journal *Cristoforo Colombo*; further, "it must impress upon Americans the mark of savage people; it must be the lesson of a civilized nation to one that is not so." Likewise, *L'eco d'Italia* urged that since the United States had shown "unexampled barbarism" toward the immigrants, therefore "let us answer by setting before them our example of true civilization." It is not clear whether such spokespersons shared the Anglo-Saxons' deep-rooted concern for "civilization" and "savagery," or simply recognized the rhetorical purchase of this language in American political culture. In either case, however, it is clear that they recognized the significance of the ideology of diverse peoplehood that framed the