

lynching itself and provided the terms for national discussion in its aftermath.⁴²

As the event lingered in public memory, racial understanding of Italian character inevitably tended toward the period's broader discussion of immigration and its consequences for the republic. Most forceful in this connection was "Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration," Henry Cabot Lodge's essay for the *North American Review*. Lodge was as quick to defend the anti-Italian hysterics from the charge of racism as he was to defend ordinary, law-abiding Italian immigrants from blanket racial charges of lawlessness or proneness to violence. "The killing of the eleven prisoners had in it no race feeling whatever," he assured. "There has been no hostility to the Italians in America, as such." Various "dangerous societies" among immigrants—like the Mafia, the Molly Maguires, anarchists, and "Secret Polish Avengers"—derived not from "race peculiarities," Lodge explained, but from "the quality of certain classes of immigrants from all races." He did go on, however, to blame the Italian victims for the mob violence in New Orleans: the lynching had been a reasonable response of good citizens to the immigrants' offensive secret organizations and their lamentable power. Such mob scenes were destined to be repeated—and here is the real relationship between "lynch law and unrestricted immigration"—if the tide of immigration were not ~~X~~ stemmed.⁴³

Lodge's protestations notwithstanding, the gist of his *North American Review* article was indeed to vent a certain "hostility to the Italians of America, as such." Although he insisted that "race" was not at issue, Lodge took the occasion to quote at length from a State Department report on immigration which insisted, among other things, that "the immigration of those races which had thus far built up the United States, and which are related to each other by blood or language or both, was declining, while the immigration of races totally alien to them was increasing." Lodge, for his part, insisted to the end that it was Mafia behavior and not Italian character that lay at the heart of the New Orleans affair. He nonetheless asserted that "not only was our immigration changing in point of race, but . . . it was deteriorating."⁴⁴

Such views on immigration made it into even the lightest, most popular and lurid renditions of the New Orleans tragedy. The first treatment of the lynching in fiction appeared only weeks after the event, in the April 1891 number of the New York Detective Library, *The New Orleans Mafia: or, Chief of Police Hennessy Avenged*. Though geared toward a thrill-

seeking audience and not necessarily a politically engaged one, this account retained all the key elements common to the *New York Times* editorials and the piece by Henry Cabot Lodge: the depiction of the Italian colony as not properly white; the question of good citizenship; and, hence, the ultimate righteousness of the lynch mob.

The racial dimension of the story is announced in the opening pages, when the boy hero, Tom Duff, first comes upon the villains: "The upper half of their countenances were covered by black half-masks, out of the eyeholes of which gleamed the snakiest of black eyes." Notwithstanding their obscured visages, "it was evident to the boy that both were Italians for the color of their skin and the contour of their features amply proclaimed their nationality. 'Dagoes!' he muttered." Lest the reader mistake the implication, the narrative likewise compares the Italians to another nonwhite group ("Like the Negro," we are told, "the favorite weapon of the Sicilian is the razor"), and offers some observations on their essential racial character ("the Sicilians have always been the most bloody-minded and revengeful of the Mediterranean races . . . These traits are probably owing to their Saracen origin, murder and intrigue being natural with them").⁴⁵

These racial traits alone are enough to commend the rising nativist argument that Italians are not such stuff as republicans are made of, and to exonerate the lynch mob for its lamentable but finally necessary brand of rough justice in New Orleans. *The New Orleans Mafia* does both. Early passages establishing the scene and setting the stage for the story's central drama include a fictional letter to local officials, in which the "Chief of the U.S. Secret Service" opines, "Italian immigration should receive the same check as the Chinese has . . . Legislation should suppress what is becoming a menace to the country." And at the story's end, Tom Duff, who had emerged as one of the key figures in the "avenging" lynch mob, appears enviably unconflicted in his role in the violence: given the characters involved and the deeds they had committed, "he did not feel guilty of having done any more than his duty."⁴⁶ Nativist misgivings at the Italian presence and remorseless support for the chivalric lynch mob, then, are the two primary sentiments bracketing this adventure tale; racialism is the ideological undercarriage that lends shape to both.

Finally, the episode was reworked yet again, in less direct fashion, in Mark Twain's set piece "Those Extraordinary Twins," later a subplot for *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Surely the New Orleans affair was somewhere in the back of Twain's mind when, after one of the novel's white

characters has an altercation with “that derved Italian savage” and another (who happens to be—like Hennessy—a city official) has been murdered, the twins land in jail to await their lynching. Luigi is indicted for the murder and Angelo is held as accessory (echoing the New Orleans case); the two are “in constant danger of being lynched” until Pudd’nhead Wilson himself is able to discover the real murderer. Most telling, however, is that the tale would surface here, in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain’s tortured exploration of race itself as a “fiction of law and custom.” The Italians perfectly embody the problematic status of the “racial Italian” in a bifurcated political culture: one was “dark-skinned . . . up to all kinds of mischief and disobedience when he was a boy, I’ll be bound”; and the other was “blonde,” with “such kind blue eyes, and curly copper hair and fresh complexion.”⁴⁷

Italians long continued to occupy that middle ground in the racial order. As late as 1925, a study of immigrants and the justice system could conclude that Italians “are by nature emotional and demonstrative,” and “should not be allowed to drift into racial communities [ghettos], forming habits of thought . . . that are limited and warped.” The more famous expression belongs to William Faulkner: in *Light in August* (1932), in response to his “confession” that he is a Negro, a woman casually says to Joe Christmas, “I thought maybe you were just another wop or something.”⁴⁸ (The court in *Rollins v. Alabama* basically concurred with this candid confusion, ruling in essence that the Sicilian Edith Labue might have been just another Negro or something.)

Decades after the New Orleans affair, as Georgia was abuzz with news of the Jew Leo Frank’s alleged misdeeds in Atlanta, Tom Watson’s *Jeffersonian* called for a “vigilance committee,” reminding readers of the clarity and decisiveness with which New Orleans had dealt with the Italian “murderers” in 1891. Watson finally did get his wish. It may well be, as Seth Forman has recently argued, that Jews in the former slaveholding states of the South were the first Jews in North America to see themselves as “white.” But, as the Leo Frank case demonstrated, even in the context of strict, white-over-black social bifurcation, complete with its own imperatives, rituals, etiquette, and patterns of deference and domination, Jews could be racially defined in a way that irrevocably set them apart from other “white persons” on the local scene. The evidence and nature of the testimony in the case, public sentiment, questions of the relative veracity of the accounts of the Jewish defendant and a key black witness, and questions of Frank’s character, his alleged “perversion,” and his status as

a social "outsider," all combined to form one overarching question of race and the identity of the Jew. As one black journalist asked at the time, in puzzling out the complex public sentiments, "Is the Jew a White Man?"⁴⁹

Leo Frank's ordeal began in April 1913, when the body of a fourteen-year-old white girl, Mary Phagan, was discovered in the basement of a pencil factory in Atlanta, Georgia. Frank, a young graduate of Cornell University, was part-owner and manager of the factory. A note the girl had allegedly scrawled—presumably as she died—seemed to point to a night watchman named Newt Lee as the assailant. But after a long and sensational trial, Frank himself was eventually convicted, largely on the testimony of a Negro janitor named Jim Conley. In August 1915, after the lame duck governor of Georgia commuted Frank's sentence, a mob descended upon the prison where Frank was being held, took him to the outskirts of Marietta, and hanged him. As the Fulton County coroner told a reporter soon after, the lynching reminded him of "the old Ku Klux Klan days"—and he had been a member.⁵⁰

During an interview in the aftermath of Frank's murder, incoming Governor Nathaniel Harris gave the lynching a chivalric twist: "There is something that unbalances men here in the South where women are concerned," he explained. "Let a strong man use his strength to force a helpless woman to yield to him, and there is something that arouses the tiger in Southern men . . . It is something that goes with this," he said, tapping his "white cheek," according to the interviewer. "It goes with the white man's skin and I have even seen it in some cases among niggers." Southern chivalry, not anti-Semitism, explained the lynching of Leo Frank, argued Harris, in rebuttal of the common Northern interpretation. But the Frank case itself had generated a new level of anti-Semitism in Georgia, Harris had to concede: there was now an uncomfortable feeling among Georgian Gentiles that Jews had "banded themselves together as a race or a religion to save a criminal," and had thus "ranged themselves in opposition to men of other races and religions."⁵¹

Harris's syntax reveals the indeterminacy of the Jewish position in Georgia's local knowledge of race. That Jews had banded together "as a race or a religion" itself raises the question of who, precisely, Jews were. More than this, however, Harris's erasure of Jews in his discussion of chivalry indicates the Jews' problematic position in the Southern economy of races: in identifying violent chivalry as something that "goes with the white man's skin and . . . in some cases [can be found] among niggers," Harris marks Frank as a double outsider—as a Northerner excluded from

the Southern community of white and black chivalric masculinity, and as a racial outsider, neither precisely "white" nor precisely "a nigger"—fit, certainly, to be a lynch victim, but never to be part of a lynching party. This imprecision itself constitutes the terrain upon which observers, in North and South, discussed and debated the case.

There was much about the trial and the surrounding spectacle that actually upheld the South's traditional social bifurcation along the lines of black and white. Conley testified that he "was willing to do anything to help Mr. Frank because he was a white man and my superintendent." "Mr. Frank, you are a white man and you done it," he later testified that he had exclaimed to the Jew. The emergent contest between Conley and Frank, too, had the effect at the time of pitting "black" against "white." For instance, once it was clear that someone other than Phagan had written the note found along with her body, the question became, who was that someone? Race seemed to many to hold the answer. The journalist C. P. Connelly was not alone when, in his *Truth about the Frank Case*, he argued that the note was "so idiotic that no white man of intelligence . . . would have conceived it." Indeed, Frank himself wrote from prison that it was "preposterous for any white man of average common sense to leave documentary evidence behind [in] any crimes." On the broader question of veracity, Frank's lawyers, for their part, denounced Conley as a "dirty, filthy, black, drunken, lying nigger"; and in implicating Conley they were not at all reluctant to evoke the mythology of the Negro rapist (an especially powerful complex of images in 1915, the year of D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*).⁵²

The dyadic racial sensibility of black and white came into play, too, in response to the unusual circumstance of a "white" defendant's guilt being established by a "Negro" witness. One clergyman called the fairness of Frank's trial into question on this basis, remarking that he "wouldn't hang a yellow dog on James Conley's testimony, much less a white man." Even the radical Carey McWilliams would register suspicion years later: "For the word of a Negro to be given this weight in a murder prosecution against a white man in Georgia was, in itself, a rather remarkable manifestation of anti-Semitic prejudice."⁵³

We need not lament that Conley's testimony was accepted without corroboration—a circumstance that merely represents his momentary ascent to the status of a full citizen in the courtroom—nor is it fruitful to reify the whiteness of the Jew by identifying Frank's conviction on Conley's testimony as an insult to that whiteness. Rather, we might take this ex-

traordinary conviction as a sign of Frank's *contested* whiteness at the time, and explore more fully the layers of racial signification that defined the status of the Jew at that moment in Georgia. Like Edith Labue, whose indeterminate racial status would result in the not-guilty verdict in *Rollins v. Alabama*, Leo Frank was *inconclusively white*.

No one has examined the racial element of the Frank case as closely as Jeffrey Melnick in his recent study of Black-Jewish relations early in the century, and there is no improving upon his analysis. The racial Jewishness that enveloped Leo Frank, according to Melnick, was heavily freighted with the ideological baggage of region, class, and sexuality. In a Jim Crow setting, "Jews like Leo Frank were more likely to take up whiteness as a self-concept and mode of behavior than their Northern counterparts," but even so, Frank's whiteness was open to question once the charges had been leveled. Although one detective on the case had early referred to Frank as a "racial descendant of the carpet-baggers," thus marking the significance of the Jew's Northern origins in this melodrama of criminality, finally it was the charge of perversion that crystallized Frank's Jewishness as race in public discussion. This is not to say, along with Frank's attorney, that "if Frank hadn't been a Jew, there never would have been a prosecution against him."⁵⁴ (Indeed, as a salve to the Jewish exceptionalism that colors much of the scholarship on Frank, it is worth asking which elements of the Frank story would have remained unchanged if he had been Italian, say, rather than Jewish.) But Frank's Jewishness did lend certain suspicions a ready frame.

First of all, Frank "looked Jewish," and, as Melnick argues, his Jewishness "came to light" for public consumption via the press's descriptions of the *physical* markers of his perversity. As Tom Watson put it, Leo Frank's "face looked the part to perfection." The *Jeffersonian* luridly described "those bulging satyr eyes . . . the protruding fearfully sensual lips; and also the animal jaw." Even sympathetic reporters were apt to mention Frank's "high-bridged nose"; and the general press stressed his "bulging eyes" and "thick lips."⁵⁵ Such descriptions of Frank's physicality conjoined nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century assumptions of lechery as a Jewish racial trait. In *The Old World in the New* (1914), for instance, the sociologist Edward A. Ross had written of the Jew's penchant for cross-racial perversion—sparing the Jewess but pursuing the Gentile.⁵⁶

Watson brought the full force of the stereotype to bear directly on the Frank case: "Here we have the typical young libertine Jew who is dreaded and detested by the city authorities of the North for the very reason that

Jews of this type have an utter contempt for law, and a ravenous appetite for the forbidden fruit—a lustful eagerness enhanced by the racial novelty of the girl of the uncircumcised.”⁵⁷ Thus Frank’s racial status as a Jew and his criminal status as a “pervert” were inseparable—and both were proven by his physiognomy.

The perversion charge may have saved Jim Conley’s life and sealed Leo Frank’s fate, Melnick argues, but the racial inflection of Jewishness-as-difference paradoxically united the two men as well—it “posited the public identities of Negro and Jew as equally divergent from normative whiteness.” On the one hand, Rabbi Stephen Wise could object that “crimes against women are not typical of our race.” Whether Wise was actively defining Jews racially here in order to highlight their counterpoise with “Negroes,” as Melnick argues, or rather unself-consciously revealing his own assumptions about Jewishness-as-difference, Wise clearly was contrasting Frank with the Negro Jim Conley, for whose race, presumably, crimes against women *were* “typical.”⁵⁸

Someone like Tom Watson, on the other hand, could steer the Black-versus-Jew question of racially determined criminality in a very different direction. It was not just that Frank seemed to be under the legal protection of a “Hebrew cabal” from New York, nor that the Jew seemed to “expect extraordinary favors and immunities because of his race.” Nor was it merely that “it was determined by the rich Jews that no aristocrat of their race should die for the death of a working-class Gentile.”⁵⁹ In addition, Watson constructed a complex racial equation by which the “perverse” nature of the crime at once exonerated the Negro, incriminated the Jew, and proved the Jew to be the greater racial menace to boot. The crimes committed against Mary Phagan (couched rather vaguely under the apparent misnomer “sodomy”) represented “[vices] not of robust negroes but of decadent white men,” according to the *Jeffersonian*. “Sodomy is not the crime of nature, barbarism, or of lustful black brutes; it is the overripe fruit of civilization and is always indicative of a decaying society.”⁶⁰ In Watson’s worldview, then, the perversion of the Jew surfaced not only as a racial trait, but as a racial trait of *overcivilization*. In the web of significations that, for Watson, at once contained and explained the case, Frank’s race became the site where his Jewish looks, his perverse behavior, his outsider status, and his threatening class position converged. As C. Vann Woodward rather economically put it in his classic study of Watson, Frank “was a Jew, a Northerner, [and] an employer of underpaid female labor.”⁶¹ He was thus the perfect villain to suit the needs of the

postbellum, industrializing South, complete with its special regional sorrows, its class antagonisms, and its racially accented, chivalric mythologies of pure white womanhood and avenging white manhood. And, as Watson noted, Frank *looked* the part. (The pastor of Mary Phagan's church, for one, concurred: in the Jew he saw "a victim worthy to pay for the crime" of Mary Phagan's death—and "a Yankee Jew at that.")⁶²

It is worth noting, in this connection, that though Tom Watson may have acted like a self-appointed, one-man anti-Semitic posse during 1914 and 1915, the circulation figures of his journal, the *Jeffersonian*, leapt from 25,000 to 87,000 during the period of the Frank case.⁶³ His rantings are more than a mere sideshow in the overall story of the Frank case; and his view of Frank is more than a mere oddity in the overall racial economy of pre-World War I Atlanta. Watson at one point warned Frank's defense team that they had "blown the breath of life into the monster of Race Hatred: AND THIS FRANKENSTEIN, whom you created at such enormous expense, WILL HUNT YOU DOWN." Indeed, it is impossible to understand or even to narrate the Frank case without reference to Frank's racial status—by which one cannot simply mean his whiteness, even if that does seem to be the likely option offered by the binary caste system of the New South. In the years before Mary Phagan's murder, Southern nativism had risen sharply in response to an influx of South and East European immigrants. The *Manufacturers' Record*, for instance, had bluntly announced, "The South will have human sewage under no consideration." Throughout the Frank case, observers from Stephen Wise to Tom Watson to incoming Governor Nat Harris remarked in various ways upon the slippage between the defendant's whiteness and his Jewishness; to many, it was his racial Jewishness that finally settled the case against him and exonerated the more "barbaric" Negro, Jim Conley. Following Governor Slaton's commutation of Frank's sentence, Slaton was burned in effigy as "King of the Jews, and Georgia's Traitor Forever"; and Jews themselves were warned out of Canton and boycotted in Marietta.⁶⁴

Perhaps the most telling piece of racial commentary in the entire affair was the *Marietta Journal and Courier's* self-satisfied report, after the lynching, that "we are proud, indeed, to say that the body hanged for more than two hours amid a vast throng and no violence was done. Cobb county people are civilized. They are no barbarians."⁶⁵ This, it seems, is race thinking carried to its logical extreme (and, in American political culture, *only* race has consistently had the ideological power to turn a savage lynch mob into a haughty exemplar of "civilized" comportment).

However different in other respects, then, the New York draft riots, the New Orleans lynching, and the Leo Frank case all illustrate the mobilization of racial languages and logics to interpret the social order and to provide a basis for social action. The three episodes illustrate as well the extent to which racial identity is inseparable from contests over class and sexuality. In each case racial depictions of the Irish, Italians, and Jews overlapped with an existing discourse of American nativism, which set a racial standard for good citizenship. But, significantly, these episodes played out largely independent of the immigration question proper, and so they afford a glimpse of how *live* these racial distinctions were when it came not only to debating the issue of immigration, but also to the more general matter of simply understanding the workings of a heterogeneous society. The intellectual history, as it were, of American nativism offers an even more detailed portrait of the European immigrant through the lens of race, but it will be important to keep in mind that, as we have just seen, nativism in no way represents an isolated or anomalous ideological pocket in its constructions of race, classification, and the inherent inclinations and capacities of various populations.

Race and American Nativism

The shifting perception of racial difference *among* "free white persons" points up two critical but largely neglected dimensions of the history of American nativism: first, nativism was a response to the political crisis created by the 1790 naturalization law—the over-inclusivity of the category "white persons." Hence, second, the history of American nativism from the 1840s to the 1920s is largely the history of a fundamental revision of whiteness itself. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' frankly racial depictions of European immigrants were not mere oddities—unjust but finally quaint or quirky conceptions of ethnic difference. Rather, the racialism expressed in simian caricatures, naturalistic novels, and acts of Congress are more fruitfully examined within the broader pattern of race-bound notions of "fitness for self-government" that had characterized American political culture since the framers first plumbd the "utopian depths" of experimentation with republican government.

Modern scholars are most comfortable discussing Poles, Greeks, or Italians as "ethnic" or "national" groups, and thus they tend to disparage and dismiss the lexicon of white races that characterized an earlier era. But this is anachronism. As Lothrop Stoddard put it in 1924, "Race is

what people physically really are; Nationality is what people politically think they are." Race and nation are not synonymous, Stoddard cautioned, but "blood-kinship ('Race') is "one of the strongest factors which can go to make up a nation." Hence when the Senate Commission on Immigration reported in 1911 that Poles are "darker than the Lithuanians" and "lighter than the average Russian," for instance, this was a statement of what the Poles "physically really are." (Along with this immutable physical trait, it turns out, in temperament Poles are "more high strung than their neighbors").⁶⁶

Throughout the race-based, eugenically driven political debates that followed, Americans pressed long-standing racial idioms into the service of a familiar argument about what constitutes good material for citizenship. This was not a new departure "toward racism" but a continuation of republican tradition. At issue now was simply which "white persons" truly shared what an earlier generation had indiscriminately conceived of as—in James Fenimore Cooper's phrase—the "white man's gifts." The restrictive legislation of 1924 decisively segmented the community of "white persons" and ranked its disparate members—the arrival of desirable "Nordics" continued to be favored, whereas the numbers of problematic "Alpines" and "Mediterraneans" would be dramatically curtailed. But in the context of the late nineteenth century's scientific racialism, even earlier restrictions on "convicts, idiots, lunatics, and people likely to become public charges" (1882) and "people with physical or mental defects" (1907) rested upon racial distinctions, as the scientific probabilities for such conditions were themselves determined by a calculus of race.⁶⁷

Beginning with the arrival of the Irish in the 1840s and throughout the great waves of East Europeans in the 1880s and after, then, popular nativist logic shifted toward a racial conception of immigrant "difference" and its significance to the republic: from the American Party's concerns about dubious "Papist" allegiances or unfair labor competition, to that veritable cult of Anglo-Saxonism known as the Immigration Restriction League, to the frankly eugenic nativists of the 1910s and 1920s, who saw the immigrant "not as a source of cheap or competitive labor, nor as one seeking asylum from foreign oppression, nor as a migrant hunting a less strenuous life, but as a parent of future-born American citizens"—so much "hereditary stuff" that would have to be compatible with "American ideals."⁶⁸

The loudest voices in the organized nativism of the 1840s and 1850s harped upon matters of Catholicism and economics, not race. Most wor-

ried, for example, that Catholic immigrants would taint this polity of independent freemen, as one writer put it in an early nativist tract, because they would "obey their priests as demigods."⁶⁹ But race was not altogether absent even from this anti-Papist brand of American nativism. One American Party address entitled "To the Native and Naturalized Citizens of the United States" (1844) described national greatness in these terms: "By superior energy, and through the influence of more enlightened institutions, the Anglo-Saxon race acquired pre-eminence, and placed almost the whole country under the tutelage of Great Britain." The tract went on, also in racial terms, to discuss the meager prospects for the assimilation of Scots, Italians, and Germans.⁷⁰

Concerning the "Papist," too, religion was sometimes seen as a function of race. As an article entitled "Romanism and the Irish Race" in the *North American Review* explained (1879), the gravest objection to Irish immigrants was their incapacity, as Catholics, to participate in a democracy: "A republican form of government implies freedom and self-reliance," traits that are "extinguished in Romanism, as flame goes out in carbonic acid." Familiar enough. But further, by this account the persistence of Irish Catholicism was inseparable from the issue of Celtic racial identity. "The Celtic nature requires something which is intense, real, and passionate," the piece explained; and this is why the Irish are so ill suited to Protestantism and so stubbornly unconvinced by its merits. The Catholicism of the Irish immigrants "has prevented a fusion [of blood]" with their Protestant hosts, and so race and belief have conspired to leave the Irish as an unmetabolized lump in the body politic—"separate in blood, separate in religion."⁷¹

Daniel Ullman, a Know-Nothing leader in New York, proved an avid follower of then-current scientific thought on race. The "question of races," he pronounced in "The Constitution of the United States," a speech delivered throughout New York in 1868, "is perhaps as important as any which concerns humanity." Striking the familiar, anti-Papist chord of earlier Know-Nothing rhetoric, Ullman did argue that "there must be a common religious sentiment, pervading the whole mass of the people, or all else is vain." Yet he paid far more attention and energy to the question of race. Citing such racialist luminaries of the day as Gobineau, Morton, Augustin Thierry, and Louis Agassiz, he told audiences that "the origin of nations, the elements which constitute the strength of nations, and the sources of the American Republic and its Constitution, are among the most important subjects of human inquiry." "Origins," "elements,"

and "sources," as it turned out, were all racial terms in this explication of American political genius. A republic "situated as is the United States, must become one of vast strength, if it be chiefly peopled by one dominant, leading race." And that race was defined not merely as "white" but as "the Anglo-Saxon branch of the Teutonic race of the Caucasian group."⁷²

Much of this tract detailed a racial myth of the origins of American political institutions. By this account God had hidden the continent of North America from Europe's "civilized races" until they were properly prepared to undertake the bold experiment of self-government. The American republic thus represents the "crown" of all European history. Ullman went on to trace the genius of American constitution to the four racial "elements" of Britain: "The chief element was undoubtedly Germanic. Hence springs the inherent love of freedom of the Anglo-Saxons in England and America, which has been the hereditary characteristic of the Teutonic or Germanic race from the earliest period." Teutons found Britain peopled by Romans, Danes, and Normans; and from this union "proceed the institutions of England, and, in the main, of America."⁷³

But racial greatness itself does not eliminate political peril; on the contrary, if history demonstrates the racial potential for occasional political genius, so does it indicate the ever-present threat of decline. Just as the most powerful empires "have drawn their energy from the life vigor imparted by one single, dominant race," so a heterogeneous society, constituting a mere "mixture of discordant races," "contains, within itself, the elements of weakness and final ruin." Thus Ullman urged that racial distinctions were particularly important for Americans, whose porous political culture allowed for ever-increasing racial diversity: "Proximate species of the same type may assimilate," he warned, but "distinct types, never." By way of tragic example, he pointed to the Austrian Empire, a mere "congeries of peoples" populated by "four of the seven races of Europe." On the question of racial diversity, Ullman concluded, "Let not America . . . exalt herself so high, as to presume that she can disregard, with impunity, the laws, which God has established . . . for the moral and physical government of nations."⁷⁴

This interpretation of human history was no academic exercise. Americans' handling of racial questions had profound implications for the political experiment for which God had set aside the continent in the first place. For Ullman, as, indeed, for many of his compatriots, the matter at hand was no less than the fate of "self-government" as a viable political

principle. Upon the broadening of the male franchise in the Jacksonian period, and in a rapidly industrializing United States, a constant tension existed between the necessity of huge numbers of immigrants as laborers on the one hand, and the menace posed by these same immigrants as ill-equipped citizens on the other. Antiradicalism (a kind of class vigilance) was one common response to these new conditions; nativism (a kind of race vigilance) was the other. The problematic white immigrant was central to both of these often intertwined discussions.

Thus Daniel Ullman was in good company (or at least a lot of it). "We speak of self-government as if it was . . . a grand triumph of political sagacity," cautioned the *North American Review*. "We all admit, that particular races, the Asiatics for instance, are not yet fit for it. We interpret their incapacity by assuming that they are not sufficiently advanced on the road to perfection. Quite possibly these peoples may never advance along that road, and have no need to advance."⁷⁵ The democratic experiment may be forever closed, in other words, to certain peoples inherently unfit for the arduous demands of political self-possession.

But whereas this author and many others were quick to point to non-European peoples, there were those who wondered whether all Europeans themselves would prove to be "fit for self-government." In an essay entitled simply "Democracy" (1884), James Russell Lowell pointed to the brief history of urban bossism and machine politics as proof of immigrants' permanent state of unfitness: "If universal suffrage has worked ill in our larger cities, as it certainly has," he wrote, "this has been mainly because the hands that wielded it were untrained to its use." There government is controlled by "the most ignorant and vicious of a population which has come to us from abroad, wholly unpracticed in self-government and incapable of assimilation by American habits and methods." Or again, as Francis Walker wrote in the *Atlantic Monthly* (1896), the newer immigrants represented "beaten men from beaten races" who "have none of the ideas and aptitudes which fit men to take up readily and easily the problem of self-care and self-government, such as belong to those who are descended from the tribes that met under the oak trees of old Germany to make laws and choose chieftains."⁷⁶

The period between the first massive Irish migration of the 1840s and the triumph of racially engineered immigration restriction in the 1920s was thus marked by a profound ideological tension between established codes of whiteness as inclusive of all Europeans, and new, racialist revisions. The newly urgent question of European immigration prompted a

redefinition of whiteness; and yet, within a shifting context of slavery and Emancipation, continued continental (and later trans-Pacific) expansionism, and anti-Chinese agitation, that definition was fraught with contradictions.

Questions of citizenship, fitness for self-government, and race were reopened at the legislative level in 1870, when Senator Charles Sumner introduced an amendment providing that "all acts of Congress relating to naturalization be . . . amended by striking the word 'white' wherever it occurs, so that in naturalization there still be no distinction of race or color." A senator from Oregon, where anti-Chinese sentiment was mounting, quickly added, "But this act shall not be construed to authorize the naturalization of persons born in the Chinese empire." Both the significance of Sumner's proposal and the ramifications of Western dissent were acknowledged and summed up in an amendment proposed by a third senator in jest, "Provided, that the provisions of this act shall not apply to persons born in Asia, Africa, or any of the islands of the Pacific, nor to Indians born in the wilderness. [Laughter]." 1870

Congressional jesting aside, the ensuing debate revealed the complex interplay between citizenship and race, and raised the issue of what, exactly, whiteness was taken to denote. Were certain peoples disqualified from the republic, for instance, by their color or by their alleged "heathendom"? Sumner himself announced that, in striking the word "white," he merely wanted to "bring our system in harmony with the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States." "The word 'white,' " he offered, "cannot be found in either of these great title-deeds of this Republic." To senators from the West, by contrast, the word "white" provided a critical bulwark against national decline. "Does the Declaration mean," one wanted to know, "that the Chinese coolies, that the Bushmen of South Africa, that the Hottentots, the Digger Indians, heathen, pagan, and cannibal, shall have equal political rights under this Government with citizens of the United States?" The implicit logic of this list is telling in its very confusion. "White, by implication here, is a designation that indicates not only color but degree of freedom (as against 'coolies'), level of 'civilization' (as against 'cannibals'), and devotion to Christianity (as against 'heathens' and 'pagans')". Indeed, throughout the debate the senators opposing Sumner's amendment objected to Chinese immigration on the alternating grounds of "their pagan allegiances," their position as "slave labor in competition with free labor," and the frankly racist view that "Mongolians . . . will never lose their identity 1870

as a peculiar and separate people."⁷⁸ According to one senator from Nevada, the Chinese had to be both "republicanized and Christianized" before they could safely become citizens—a possibility logically denied by the entangled threads of race, civilization, and religion.

As the impossibility of Asian citizenship was asserted and reasserted, this congressional debate itself demonstrated the alchemic effects of racial discourse. Rethinking the problem of naturalization *through* race, first of all, could only result in a highly limited, paradoxical, and ultimately mean-spirited brand of liberality at the very best. After the Senate hit upon the formula of extending the privileges of citizenship to "any person of the African race or of African descent," for instance, Senator Trumbull spoke out on the Asians' behalf: "Is it proposed to deny the right of naturalization to the Chinaman, who is infinitely above the African in intelligence, in manhood, and in every respect?"⁷⁹ As long as no one challenged the core republican principle that not all peoples were capable of self-government, then such deprecations were inextricably woven into racially accented political discourse—even where that discourse was employed in the service of antiracism. As long as the core principle of "fitness for self-government" was intact, the argument for inclusion could only generate other exclusions; this or that group's asserted "fitness" for self-government could only be measured by some group's unfitness.

* At the same time, the presence of racially marked Others reified and further united the "white persons" of the 1790 naturalization law. Inasmuch as no one was suggesting that citizenship actually be revoked from those who had already entered under the terms of 1790, any discussion of the total exclusion of certain groups—whether Africans, Asians, or both—tended tacitly to endorse the unifying logic of a single European race whose credentials for self-government were above reproach. "The people coming here from Europe are of our own race," argued a senator from Nevada. "They are of us, and assimilate rapidly, and aid in the development and progress of our country. Let them come . . . But how is it with these Asiatics?"⁸⁰ Sumner's hope of raising whiteness itself as a point of debate finally fell afoul of the very white supremacism that such a debate was meant to challenge.

* From 1870, then, "free white persons" were joined by persons "of the African race or of African descent" in eligibility for citizenship. This deliberate exclusion of Asians paired with the legal difficulty of whiteness as a stable, meaningful category gave rise to a series of legal challenges, beginning with *Ah Yup* eight years after the debate over Sumner's pro-

posals (1878), and culminating with the famous *Halladjian*, *Ozawa*, and *Thind* cases in the 1910s and 1920s (see Chapter 7). Throughout these years, as the naturalization law was continually challenged in the courts by those hoping to get in, and as immigration restriction was kept alive in the nation's editorial columns and in the halls of Congress by those hoping to keep still others out, whiteness itself was subject to a curious, competing set of assumptions and interpretations.

The main currents of this peculiar dynamic had already been discernible in the congressional discussion of 1870. Whiteness was so freighted with political meanings and moral judgments that common usage of the term itself hinted at the problematic character of certain groups that, by custom, had already been included. Given the popular connotations of the phrase "white man," that is, one might question its applicability to certain of the Europeans now washing ashore at Castle Garden. But as *the tool of exclusion barring Asian citizenship, the category "white" proved self-sustaining: whiteness at once depended upon, and created political capital out of, a series of contrasts whose very terms reinforced the original assumptions undergirding whiteness in the first place. Thus in this period of volatile racial meanings, peoples such as Celts, Italians, Hebrews, and Slavs were becoming less and less white in debates over who should be allowed to disembark on American shores, and yet were becoming whiter and whiter in debates over who should be granted the full rights of citizenship. The discourse of immigration restriction favored a scheme of hierarchically ordered white races, that is, and found some of these sorely wanting in the characteristics required for self-government, whereas naturalization discourse discovered fundamental and unforgiving differences between the white races on the one hand, and the hordes of nonwhite Syrian, Turkish, Hindu, and Japanese claimants who were petitioning the courts for citizenship on the other.*

An insightful, if vexed, exploration of these contradictions appeared in the *American Law Review* in 1894, as John Wigmore, a Northwestern University law professor, puzzled over both the basis and the implications of legal whiteness. Wigmore wondered whether the word "white" in the 1790 statute had properly referred to literal "color-quality," to "people of the original race-stock known as the 'Caucasian' or 'Aryan' race," or to "the European peoples and their colonial progeny." His particular interest was in unlocking the bar to naturalized citizenship for Japanese immigrants, and he found whiteness elastic enough to suit his needs. Southern Europeans were so dark, he averred, that they "can be termed

'white' not in the ordinary sense, but only in contrast with the African negro." This he felt true of "the Semites, the Balkan people, the Greeks, the Italians, and the Hispano-Portuguese in Europe and in Latin America"—all "white" by U.S. naturalization standards. If these and other "dark and swarthy Europeans" were "white" only in contrast with Africans, as was surely the case, he argued, then should not anyone else who contrasted with Africans—Japanese immigrants, for instance—qualify as "white"?⁸¹

Wigmore did concede that "Caucasian" or "Aryan" was probably the intended meaning of "white" in the law as it was conceived in 1790, but this, too, presented significant logical inconsistencies: "If [the Aryan race] includes as eligible the Slav, Celt, Scandinavian, Germanic, Pelasgic, and Italic stocks, whose claims to naturalization are undisputed . . . it also includes the Afghans, Persians, and pure Hindus, and other minor Asian stocks, whose claims . . . can hardly be said to be conceded." One group in particular confounded the logic of standing naturalization law, being at once decided outsiders to the proper category "Caucasian," and yet accepted—if begrudged—insiders to American citizenship: "The disposition of the Semitic peoples . . . especially the Hebrews, caps the climax; for [the category "Caucasian"] involves the exclusion of a whole race whose industrious workers are found in all states of the Union." Jews are not Caucasians. Hence although the term "white" in the 1790 code does seem to refer to "Caucasians," neither the exclusion of Hindus nor the inclusion of Hebrews is supportable by that logic. The "systematic application of the term 'white' is attended with the greatest difficulty," Wigmore concluded. But clearly Japanese immigrants "could pass as Bulgarians or Spaniards" where literal color is concerned, and are therefore "'white' enough to satisfy the statute" and hold "as good a claim to the color 'white' as the Southern European and Semitic peoples."⁸²

Wigmore's device of casting "contrast with Africans" as the key to whiteness while dismantling the seeming fixities of the idea "Caucasian" conveys the central contradiction regarding the immigrating white races of the period: their own whiteness was questionable in regard to proper Americanism (whatever Wigmore's good intentions on behalf of Japanese immigrants, his 1894 audience could not have missed the restrictionist implications of his revising away the difference between Eastern Europeans and Asians); and yet they were rendered indelibly white by the presence of populations even more problematic than themselves.

The ascendent view among native-born Americans in the 1890s, even

as John Wigmore was writing, was not that Japanese immigrants held "as good a claim to the color 'white' as the Southern European and Semitic peoples," and therefore ought to be granted citizenship, but rather, that Southern European, Semitic, and Slavic immigrants held as *poor* a claim to the color "white" as the Japanese, and therefore ought to be turned away at once. The racialism of this prevailing view of the newer European immigrants, its basis in republican logic, and its relationship to racialized assessments of Asians were all nicely embodied in another piece by Henry Cabot Lodge for the *North American Review* in 1891. After rehearsing the history of how the thirteen colonies had been founded by "people of the same stock" whose "community of race" contributed to the work of assimilation, Lodge went on to investigate the repercussions of the recent shift in the sending countries—particularly the "Slavic" countries of Eastern Europe. Quoting the U.S. consul at Budapest, Lodge announced that "these Slovacks are not a good acquisition for us to make, since they appear to have so many items in common with the Chinese." Not only would their presence in large numbers "interfere with a civilized laborer's earning a 'white' laborer's wage," but, indeed, representing "races most alien to the body of the American people," they would be "very difficult to assimilate" and hence "do not promise well for the standard of civilization of the United States."⁸³

Lodge held this logic in common with other New England patricians, including Prescott F. Hall, Robert DeCourcy Ward, and John Fiske, who went on to found the Immigration Restriction League in 1893. The league crystallized around the issue of a literacy test for incoming aliens. Race was central to the league's conception of literacy from the beginning, and it became more prominent over time in its rhetoric of Americanism and civic requirements. From its founding in 1893 to World War I, the league moved steadily away from that vague set of prides and prejudices that Barbara Miller Solomon has called an "Anglo-Saxon Complex," and toward a fully eugenic program concerning questions of racial pedigree, national character, and the proper role of the state in tending the biological make-up of its population. Indeed, the historian Kenneth Ludmerer has traced the pedigree of the American eugenics movement to the Harvard class of 1889, a group that included some of the key figures of the Immigration Restriction League—Charles Warren in addition to Hall and Ward. By the 1910s league officials like Hall would not only embrace the term "eugenics" and the science it represented—that is, the *biological engineering* of the body politic—but would couch the entire discussion of

the immigration question in a language of "desirable" versus "useless" races, the important national work of "breeding," and the statistical averages for this or that race's possessing this or that trait. But the eugenic implications of mere Anglo-Saxon prejudice had been evident in embryo even in 1891, when Henry Cabot Lodge voiced his concern over "races most alien to the body of the American people" and his ideas about which peoples would and which would not represent "a good acquisition for us to make."⁸⁴

If the ideology of the eugenic standpoint emerged more or less logically and gradually from the mid-nineteenth-century scientific and political arguments regarding racial stocks and their inherent qualities, the *apparatus* of eugenics as a presence on the American scene rose rather dramatically after the turn of the century. In 1904 the Carnegie Institution put up money to open a Station for the Study of Evolution at Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, under the direction of Charles Davenport. Davenport himself was among the enthusiastic supporters within the scientific community who felt that, to paraphrase the historian Daniel Kevles, "nationality" was primarily a function of "race," and "race" was the prime determinant of behavior. "The idea of a 'melting-pot' belongs to a pre-Mendelian age," Davenport wrote to one colleague, showing his hand on the immigration question. "Now we recognize that characters are inherited as units and do not readily break up." In the ensuing years, under Davenport's direction, the station at Cold Spring Harbor provided critical institutional focus to the eugenics movement, serving both as a major intellectual and material resource and as a dispenser of information and data.⁸⁵

The influence of eugenics on legislation in the United States crested, of course, with the immigration act of 1924, whose provisions ensured that those new arrivals who were still allowed entry, in the self-congratulatory words of the immigration commissioner, once again "looked exactly like Americans." But such views of race and immigration had become fixed in the lexicon of the state as early as 1911. Most significant in this respect is volume nine of the Dillingham Commission's Report on Immigration, A Dictionary of Races or Peoples. In an attempted clarification of terms, the commission endorsed Blumenbach's five-tier scheme ("Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, Malay, and American"), yet also noted that "the bureau [of immigration] recognizes 45 races or peoples among immigrants coming to the United States, and of these 36 are indigenous to Europe."⁸⁶

The phrase "races or peoples," used throughout the document, leaves plenty of room to wonder about this taxonomy of "difference." And indeed, in addressing the "popular looseness of the word ['race']" directly, the commission asserted that "race is determined by language in such phrases as 'the races of Europe,' but by physical qualities, such as color, hair, and shape of head, when we speak of 'the five great races' or grand divisions of mankind." Nonetheless, Europe's linguistic groups are irretrievably cast as racial groups throughout the *Dictionary*, so that even within the unifying construction of a grand "Caucasian" race, among European peoples difference itself is consistently defined as both biological in nature and extreme in degree. (Indeed, even the *Dictionary's* definition of "Caucasian" is begrudging: it includes "all races, which, although dark in color or aberrant in other directions, are, when considered from all points of view, felt to be more like the white race than like any of the other four races.") Although the report insists that race is primarily a linguistic category and not a physical one when it comes to "the European races," nonetheless the Albanian "has one of the broadest heads not only of Europe but of the world"; "the weight of [the Bohemian's] brain is said to be greater than [that of] any other people in Europe"; modern Greeks are "broad-headed, broad-faced, and more heavily built, although perhaps no darker than the ancients"; "the 'Jewish nose,' and to a less degree other facial characteristics, are found well-nigh everywhere throughout the race"; and Poles are "darker than the Lithuanians" and "lighter than the average Russian."⁸⁷

As ever, physical properties here are keyed to essential characterological, moral, and intellectual qualities: despite a tone of scientific detachment, the commission's *Dictionary of Races or Peoples* is fundamentally a hierarchical scale of human development and worth. Alongside its observations on Slavic, Iberic, Hebrew, and Celtic physicality, the *Dictionary* argues, for instance, that Bohemians are "the most advanced of all [the Slavs]"; "the savage manners of the last century are still met with amongst some Serbo-Croatians of to-day"; "the ancient Greeks were preeminent in philosophy and science, a position not generally accredited to the modern Greeks as a race . . . they compete with the Hebrew race as the best traders of the Orient"; "the Gypsy resents the restraint of a higher social organization . . . to him laws and statutes are persecutions to be evaded"; the South Italian is "an individualist having little adaptability to highly organized society"; Poles are "high strung"; Roumanians "compare favorably with the races of the Balkans, although some say that they are