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 lynchings 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.)

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
lychee itself and provided the terms for national discussion in its aftermath.\textsuperscript{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"—\textit{if the tide of immigration were not stemmed}.\textsuperscript{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."\textsuperscript{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, \textit{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”).

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.”

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 damned 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 1913, the year of D. W. Griffith’s Birth of a Nation).

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.”

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 Jewish-
ness 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 un-
changed if he had been Italian, say, rather than Jewish.) But Frank's Jew-
ishness did lend certain suspicions a ready frame.

First of all, Frank "looked Jewish," and, as Melnick argues, his Jewish-
ness "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 de-
scribed "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 Jew-
ish 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.” 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.”

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.” 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.” 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.” 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.”)\(^2\)

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.\(^3\) 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.\(^4\)

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.”\(^5\) 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 plumbed 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