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Atlantic Entanglements: Narratives of Self and Other at the Turn of the 20th Century[1]

Abstract: Although the mobility of populations across the Atlantic has a long history, the decades around the turn of the 20th century witnessed an unprecedented movement of migrants from Europe to the Americas. This increased movement of peoples coincided with the overseas expansion of the United States, in the wake of the Spanish-American War (1898), which led to the acquisition of territories in Central America and the Pacific region. This period, then, is a turning point in the history of US relations with the world, marking the emergence of a new global system in which the US would come to play an increasingly important role.

These are some of the significant points that provide the backdrop for the issues I discuss in this paper. The heated debates provoked by the so-called "new immigrants" (i.e. those from southern and eastern Europe) as well as by the "imperial venture" of the US show clearly that significant sectors of US society saw both as threats to the integrity of the nation and to a supposedly pure American identity, based on Anglo-Saxon traditions. I will draw on texts with a variety of viewpoints, from nativists such as Edward A. Ross and Madison Grant to immigrants like Mary Antin, to discuss the reconceptualization of the nation and its identity within the emerging global context that I mentioned above.

1. Introduction

The topic chosen for this conference, "Intercultural relations: The United States and the World," places the concept of culture at the center of our discussion. And, given that this is a conference organized by the Argentinian Association of American Studies, it posits the United States as the focus of our inquiries. However, this title introduces another term: the world. These are the questions that I asked myself: should I talk about

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the relations of the U.S. with the world or about the relations of the world with the U.S.? Is it the same thing, or does our subject (and our perspective) change when we reverse the order of the terms? And what about the conjunction "and"? Does it mean that we should give equal attention to both terms?

The topic that I finally settled on for this lecture was inspired by the following words from one of my favorite historians, John Higham, whose work on immigration, nationalism, and U.S. culture has been guided by "a need to make connections," as he puts it (2001: ix). Here are his words:

> To choose a nation deliberately as the subject or protagonist of a history is to render it as actor, or at least as an active presence, in a story that includes other participants (individuals, groups, and institutions) within the nation and without. No single theater of action necessarily constricts the story. It may transport the historian to distant scenes, where external players and conditions impinge on a nation's destiny. (2001: 242)

Higham's theatrical metaphor helped me choose the stage, the time, and the actors for my presentation. At the center of the stage is the Atlantic world, although only a small portion of it, since Africa and even South America will only figure briefly in my account. However, the distant scenes of Asia and the Pacific will once in a while make short appearances. The actors are abstract entities ("America" and "Europe"), states and nations, as well as collective groups (immigrants and natives) and individuals such as Teddy Roosevelt, Edward A. Ross, Madison Grant, and Mary Antin, among others. Finally, the time when these actors meet on the stage: the decades around the turn of the 20th century. The action involves both transnational and intra-national entanglements of several sorts: connections and divisions, conflicts and alliances, inclusions and exclusions. I will first use a macro-historical perspective to trace the extraordinary movement of populations across the Atlantic, as well as the movement of western nations across the world's "waste spaces," as the phrase went. I will then move on to

discuss the impact of these events on individuals and groups, both within the U.S. and without, drawing on texts from many different contemporary sources (congressional records, legislation, political and scientific tracts, works of literature, cartoons, newspaper and magazine articles). I am ultimately interested in discussing how both immigration and expansionism shaped notions of American citizenship and identity in the four decades around the turn of the 20th century.

Although, as I pointed out above, the concept of culture is highlighted in the title of this conference, I will primarily focus on "race," since this was the dominant idiom of the period about which I will be talking. However, given the slippery meaning of the term, I think it is important to define it within the historical context I mentioned above. Although it is not my aim here to explore the connections between the two concepts, I should point out that the shift to culture in the 1920s did not signify the end of racialist conceptions of identity. Indeed, as Henry Yu has argued, "The rise and triumph of the concept of culture in the beginning of the 20th century supposedly eclipsed earlier biological definitions of race, but in some ways the idea of culture, and of multiculturalism, is little more than the grafting of nonbiological claims onto preexisting categories of race" (Yu, 2000: 228; 233; see also Michaels, 1993: 366-7). Thus, one of the interesting things about this period is precisely the fact that it witnessed the shift from "race" to "culture" as categories used to establish boundaries among groups of people and define their distinctive characteristics. As we shall see, establishing boundaries between self and other, native and immigrant, citizen and foreigner, the civilized and the barbarous, as well as dividing, classifying, and creating hierarchies is what this period is all about. Which is ironic, given that the unparalleled mobility of people across the world created opportunities for transnational and transcultural contacts that had never happened before on such a scale.

2. Falling into the World: Migration and Expansion in the Atlantic and Beyond

Although the mobility of populations across the Atlantic has a long history, the decades around the turn of the 20th century witnessed an unprecedented movement of migrants from Europe to the Americas (see Table 1).

Table 1

Transatlantic Migration to Chief American Receivers, 1871-1914 (000 omitted)						
	1871-80	*1881-90*	*1891-00*	*1901-10*	*1911-14*	*1871-1914*
Argentina	262	842	648	1765	966	4483
Brazil	218	530	1144	690	581	3163
Canada	343	887	341	1713	1286	4570
U.S.A.	2811	5245	3689	8796	4133	24674
Total	3634	7504	5822	12964	6966	36890

Source: Walter Nugent. *Crossings. The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870-1914* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. 14)

From 1871 to World War I, 36 890 million people migrated to Argentina, Brazil, Canada, and the U.S., which were the four major receiving countries. The heaviest influx was in the period between 1891 and 1914: almost 26 million, of which over 16 million (16,618,000) migrated to the U.S. But besides this difference in numbers, we should also take into account the diversity of the migrants that settled in the U.S. Whereas Argentina received primarily migrants from Italy and Spain, and Brazil from these countries as well as Portugal, the U.S. received in the same period large contingents from Italy, Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, the British Isles, and the Scandinavian countries, as well as smaller numbers from Armenia, Greece, and Portugal, among others (Higham, 1975: 15-16). The maps in appendix 1, which show the numbers and sources of immigration to the U.S. in two periods, between 1820 and 1879 and between 1880 and 1919, allow us to see not only the considerable increase in the 2nd period, but also the change in sources, from northern and western Europe to mostly southern and eastern Europe. Comparisons between

the "new immigrants" and the "old immigrants," as each group came to be called at the time, led to a fierce public debate on which I will focus later. For the moment, I want to draw the larger contours of the context in which the transatlantic migrations occurred.

According to Walter Nugent, "a unique set of factors operated to promote migration: steam-powered transportation, an absence (compared with periods before or since) of legal and political restraints, potential agricultural development on several New World frontiers, and industrialization" (3). But we should also take into account the economic boom between 1890 and 1914. According to Ayerbe, this is "a period of expansion of business and prosperity, strongly influenced by the reorganization of capitalism" and "[t]he integration of the world economy" (46-7). Spurred by scientific and technological developments, the rate of industrialization accelerated, especially in some areas of Europe and North America, as well as in Japan; population growth, urbanization, the increase in per capita income, and the growth of consumption, all contributed, according to Ayerbe, to making the more developed countries dependent on the supply of raw materials. The need to control the territories where these could be found, especially in Africa, Asia, and South America, as well as the need to find new markets for the growing production of modern economies, led western powers to a fierce race to occupy the world's "waste spaces." By the time of World War I, a quarter of the globe had been colonized by the major European nations (Stephanson, 1995: 72), and the United States, in the wake of the Spanish-American and Philippine Wars (1898-1902), had acquired a modest empire of its own, which included Hawaii, the Philippines, and several other islands in the Pacific, as well as a number of countries in the Caribbean and in Central America, which were variously occupied, annexed, or turned into protectorates (Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, and Panama) (Tindall, 1999: 1048-65).

At the end of the 19th century, then, the United States emerges as an economic giant among the western nations, and assumes the lead previously held by Great Britain in industrial production, jumping from a share of 3% in 1870 to 30% in 1900 and 38% in 1913. Britain continues to dominate the world trade, with 36%, but its share of industrial production declines from 32% in 1870 to 14% in 1913 (Ayerbe, 2002: 48). At the same time, the U.S. gross national product increases dramatically, from 6.7 billion dollars in 1870 to 31.6 billion in 1910 and almost 89 billion in 1920, while the average annual earnings per worker grow from $438 in 1890 (the 1st year the census recorded earnings) to $574 in 1910, and $1,407 in 1920 (Caughey and May, 1964: 739) (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2

Capitalist development, 1870-1914

Country	(1) Foreign investment (in millions of pounds)			(2) % of world industrial production			(3) % of world trade		(4) Number of branches of national firms abroad	(5) Evolution of real wages 1860=100
	1870	**1900**	**1914**	**1870**	**1900**	**1913**	**1880**	**1913**	**Until 1914**	**1913**
Great Britain	1006	1485	4004	32	20	14	23	36	60	190
France	513	1068	1766	10	7	6	11	7		160
Germany	---	986	1376	13	17	16	10	12		160
USA	---	103	513	3	30	38	10	11	122	150
Continental Western Europe									167	

Adapted from Luis Fernando Ayerbe. *Estados Unidos e América Latina. A construção da hegemonia* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2002. 48)

Table 3

U.S. Economic Indicators, 1870-1920

Census year	**1870**	**1890**	**1900**	**1910**	**1920**
Work force (in thousands)	12,920	23,740	29,070	36,730	41,610
GNP (thousands of $USD)	6,710,000	12,3000,000	17,300,000	31,600,000	88,900,000
Avg. annual earnings per worker	——	$438	$438	$574	$1,407

Adapted from John W. Caughey and Ernest R. May. *A History of the United States* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964. 739)

I quote these figures because their sheer magnitude points to the sweeping changes that inevitably occurred in U.S. society and culture as a result of the expansion of the economy. This expansion could not have happened without a massive influx of immigrants, nor without foreign markets. And this, in turn, had an impact on the make-up of the nation, as well as on its relations with the rest of the world. As Matthew Frye Jacobson points out, "American integration into the world economic system in this period of breathtaking industrialization exposed a rather profound dependence upon foreign peoples as imported workers for American factories and as overseas consumers of American products" (2000: 4). Thus, the spectacular rise of the U.S. standard of living, which made it a magnet for migrants from all over the world, was based on foreign labor *and* foreign consumption.

Both immigration and overseas expansion were hotly debated and contested issues within the U.S. At the center of both was the figure of the "foreigner" as racial Other, and thus, by implication, the definition of the "American." Although social and political arguments were important in these debates, racial arguments were branded by both defenders and opponents of imperialism to harness their rival positions. In turn, the earliest attacks on the "new immigrants" "stressed a social and economic peril" (Higham, 1975: 44): they were accused of being cheap labor and thus lowering the American worker's standard of living, they concentrated in slums and contributed to the degradation of cities, and they swelled the ranks of the diseased, the criminal, and the insane (Higham, 1975: 45). However, towards the end of the 19th century, arguments based on the "racial menace" they posed to the nation came to dominate the debate, as we will see. At the same time, ideas of a superior American race, linked to the Anglo-Saxon branch of the Caucasian races, which had developed during the course of the 19th century (Horsman, 1981: 4-5; 301-2), were now increasingly used by the

proponents of immigration restriction. As Higham states, "a number of patrician intellectuals turned the Anglo-Saxon tradition into a defensive attack on immigrants and an aggressive doctrine in foreign policy. They summoned Anglo-Saxon America to protect herself at home and to demonstrate her mastery abroad" (1975: 46).

It is thus no coincidence that, at the same time that the United States fell into the world and demonstrated its mastery by occupying certain strategic areas in the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Central America, it also began to devise means of shutting its doors to immigrants from "undesirable races." Expansion was defended as a mission and a duty, and at the same time as a racial imperative: it was the "Anglo-Saxon impulse," proclaimed Senator Albert Beveridge in a 1898 speech, that had driven past American leaders to occupy the North-American continent; now, the question was

> Shall the American people continue their march toward the commercial supremacy of the world? Shall free institutions broaden their blessed reign as the children of liberty wax in strength, until the empire of our principles is established over the hearts of all mankind? Have we no mission to perform[,] no duty to discharge to our fellow man? ("March of the Flag")

Expansion would also bring about world peace, in addition to liberty, as Teddy Roosevelt put it in 1901: "Peace cannot be had until the civilized nations have expanded in some shape over the barbarous nations. […] It is our duty toward the people living in barbarism to see that they are freed from their chains" (qtd in Cheyfitz, 1991: 4). This duty, however, did not entail extending full citizenship rights to the new "imperial wards" of the Republic, who were seen as "barbarous race[s]" and incapable "of self-government in the Anglo-Saxon sense," as Beveridge put it in a speech in Congress in 1900 (56th Congress, 1st session, Jan. 9). Contemporary cartoons often depicted the peoples of the new American territories as unruly children, dependent on the strong paternal figure of Uncle Sam, who provides "a wise supervision, at once firm and

beneficent," as Teddy Roosevelt wrote regarding the Filipinos (qtd in Jacobson, 2000: 223). (see appendixes 2 and 3)

While, on the one hand, imperialists defended that the U.S. had the mission and the duty to demonstrate the supremacy of its Anglo-Saxon traditions abroad, on the other hand, proponents of immigration restriction argued that it was imperative to protect the "Anglo-Saxon stock" at home. In the words of a member of Congress, "the primary reason for the restriction of the alien stream [...] is the necessity of purifying and keeping pure the blood of America" (qtd in Michaels, 1995: 143). The passing of the National Origins Immigration Act in 1924 significantly reduced the influx from "undesirable" countries by establishing what were at bottom racist criteria for legal admission into the U.S. Thus, ideas of race played a central role in both national and international affairs.

3. Anglo-Saxons and Others: Race and Race Struggle

Between the last decades of the 19th century and the early 20th century, science and the state formed a particularly strong alliance that led to the definition of a complex framework of racial categories on which depended immigrants' admission to the country as well as the rights and privileges of US citizenship. But, in point of fact, as Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue, the question of categorizing races and determining racial identities has been for centuries at the center of "intense debates and conflicts, particularly in the U.S.—disputes over natural and legal rights, over the distribution of resources, and indeed, over who shall live and who shall die" (54).[2]

Thus, the vigorous debate over race in this period has a long history behind it. From the first Naturalization Law of 1790, which determined that only "free white

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[2] In the period with which I am concerned here, the Jim Crow South stands as a paradigmatic case of the crucial issues involved in racial classification.

persons" were eligible for citizenship, through the Civil War, fought over the inclusion of enslaved black persons into the polity, to the first decades of the 20th century, when the subjects of the new territories occupied and annexed by the U.S. were excluded from citizenship and when the National Origins Immigration Act was passed, the definition of what an American is (to echo Crèvecoeur's famous question) has hinged on racial classification.

From the long list of European authors whose studies are relevant to the understanding of the meanings of race and racial classifications in this period, we can mention two: Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1775), who divided the world's population into five "varieties" (Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, Malay, and American) and coined the term "Caucasian" to designate "the most beautiful race of men" (Pereira, 1993: 18; Gossett, 1997: 37-8; Williams, 1985: 249);[3] and Arthur, Comte de Gobineau (1853-55), who established a hierarchy of three races (white, yellow, and black) and proposed the idea of a superior "Aryan race" (Williams, 1985: 249; Pereira, 1993: 23-4).

What I want to highlight here are some of the ideas that were articulated by Gobineau, which, in conjunction with Darwin's theory of the evolution of the species (1859), became widespread in the second half of the 19th century both in Europe and America: the association between people or nation and race, the idea of the inequality of the races, of "pure racial stocks," and of competitive race struggle as the basis of the development of history and civilization (Pereira, 1993 23-25; Williams, 1985: 249). Thus arose a racist worldview which, taking the conceptual construct of race as a *fact*, was founded on the following set of premises:

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[3] It may be relevant to note that the US Immigration Commission used Blumenbach's taxonomy in *A Dictionary of Races or Peoples*, volume 5 of its 42-volume report on immigration published in 1911. But it also pointed to the fact that "the bureau recognizes 45 races or peoples among immigrants coming to the United States, and of these 36 are indigenous to Europe" (2).

- the actual existence of races conceived according to the model of animal species;

- external physical characteristics correspond to inner intellectual, moral or temperamental traits;

- "race traits" predetermine the behavior of individuals;

- these traits are inherited and cannot be changed or transcended; and

- races are not only different, but superior or inferior in relation to each other; in other words, there is a hierarchy of races (see Pereira, 1993: 9; Jacobson, 1998: 32).

In short, all of this implies a form of essentialism which establishes a causal nexus between "biological characteristics and cultural creations," in Miguel Baptista Pereira's words (9), and which, "under the custody of power, [...] reads social differences as immutable biological phenomena" (11).

In the context of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the so-called native Americans, and particularly what Randolph Bourne calls "the ruling class of Anglo-Saxon descendants" (96), felt they were being "swamped and submerged by an overwhelming tide of latecomers from the old-world hive" (Ross, 1914: 282). Henry James, for instance, in his observations on the ubiquity of immigrants in New York and Boston at the beginning of the 20th century, reveals his profound anxiety about the present and future of an America where "the alien was truly in possession," "in serene and triumphant possession" (117, 231). Incapable of establishing any kind of relationship with them, he "gasp[s] with the sense of isolation" (125). But what is most significant is the frequent comparison of "aliens," as James constantly refers to them, to animals—fish (131), squirrels and monkeys, ants (134), snakes and worms (132)—thus representing immigrants as non-human species.

This type of conception frequently appeared in this period, as well as the quite widespread idea that southern and eastern European immigrants constituted a primitive stage of the human species. The words of Sociology Professor Edward Ross, in his 1914 tract *The Old World in the New*, illustrate both points:

[T]he blood now being injected into the veins of our people is "sub-common." To one accustomed to the aspect of the normal American population, the Caliban type shows up with a frequency that is startling. Observe immigrants [...] in their gatherings, washed, combed, and in their Sunday best. [...] They simply look out of place in black clothes and stiff collar, since clearly they belong in skins, in wattled huts at the close of the Great Ice Age. These oxlike men are descendants of those *who always stayed behind*. (Ross, 1914: 285-6; italics in the original)

Significantly, the new immigrants were described in much the same way as the "darker peoples" of Africa, Asia, and South America. They were seen as primitive, animal-like, incapable of self-government, and lacking in morals. Indeed, comparisons between the new immigrants and blacks were quite frequent, as in the following words about the Portuguese from Ross's book: "The idea of family morality among them is quite primitive, resembling that of the negroes of the South" (180). Irish immigrants, for instance, like blacks, were often portrayed as monkeys, as the cartoon from *Harper's Weekly* (1876) in appendix 4 shows. Classified as Celts, the Irish came increasingly to be defined in opposition to native white Anglo-Saxons, as in the following 1896 *Atlantic Monthly* article: "A Celt [...] lacks the solidity, the balance, the judgement, the moral staying power of the Anglo-Saxon" (qtd in Jacobson, 1998: 49). In other words, they were unfit for "participation in the governance of the nation" (Jacobson, 1998: 48-9).

Associated with primitivism, disorder, irrationality, depravity, and disease, the new immigrants were considered constitutionally incapable of assimilation (Higham, 2000: 137-8, 140) and, thus, their presence threatened not only the political and cultural

traditions of the nation, but also its "racial purity." Immigration restriction was imperative, "so that the physical stock shall not degenerate" (qtd in Higham, 2000: 138).

The idea of "racial purity" and of the supremacy of the "great Nordic race" would find its "purest" expression in Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race*, which was first published in 1916, and had revised editions in 1918, 1921, and 1923 (Higham, 2000: 201, 218, 271).[4] Grant's direct source was the work of an MIT Economics professor, William Z. Ripley, whose interest in geography and anthropology led him to study the interplay between race and environment (Higham, 2000: 154-5). It was from Ripley's 1899 work *The Races of Europe* that Grant derived the classification of European peoples into three distinct races: the Teutonic (which Grant changes to Nordic), the Alpine, and the Mediterranean (Grant, Intro. and Part I, ch.2). Subtitled *The Racial Basis of European History*, Grant's work is described in the Introduction as "an attempt to elucidate the meaning of history in terms of race." Defining race as the immutable "physical and psychic structure of man" (Introduction), Grant distinguishes race from nationality and language and associates it with social strata, stating that "in the beginning all differences of class, of caste, and of color, marked actual lines of race cleavage" (Part I, ch. I). All his subsequent argumentation, based on the clichés of evolutionism, on racist anthropological studies, and on nebulous interpretations of the history of the world in general and the West in particular, seeks to demonstrate the importance of the laws of heredity for the maintenance of an actual caste system. At the same time, Grant attacks all environmentalist theories, but especially the theory of the melting pot, in the parts of the book in which addresses the specific case of the United States:

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[4] An interesting piece of information about this book, which reveals its longevity and popularity among racist circles, is that it is available online through a site named God's Order Affirmed in Love (GOAL) Reference Library for Reconstructing a National Identity for Christian Whites. Among the several documents that can be easily accessed is *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World Supremacy*, published in 1920 by one of Grant's disciples, Lothrop Stoddard. Also very popular at the time, Stoddard's book called attention to the threat posed to Nordics by the high fertility rates of "inferior races."

> There exists to-day a widespread and fatuous belief in the power of environment, as well as of education and opportunity to alter heredity, which arises from the dogma of the brotherhood of man, derived in turn from the loose thinkers of the French Revolution and their American mimics. Such beliefs have done much damage in the past, and if allowed to go uncontradicted, may do much more serious damage in the future. (Part I, ch. 2)

According to Grant, one can already see the damage done in Mexico, where the melting pot of "the Spanish conquerors" and "the native Indian population" produced "a mongrel race," incapable of "self-government" (Part I, ch. 2).

In his grand sweep of American history, Grant reinvents a mythical past in which the whitest of the white held undisputed sway over the land until the Civil War, which marks the beginning of the invasion of the "foreign peril." The Civil War, then, represents a watershed in the evolution of the "master race," the "distinct type" of "native American" derived from the "Teutonic part of the British Isles," since it destroyed "great numbers of the best breeding stock" (Part I, ch. VII). But the greatest problem came after the war with the so-called "new immigration," which brought "a large and increasing number of the weak, the broken, and the mentally crippled of all races drawn from the lowest stratum of the Mediterranean basin and the Balkans, together with the hordes of the wretched, submerged populations of the Polish Ghettos" (Part I, ch. 7). The result of this invasion can already be seen in New York, which "is becoming a cloaca gentium which will produce many amazing racial hybrids and some ethnic horrors." The open-door immigration policy of the U.S. and the belief in the influence of education and American institutions and environment to change "immemorial hereditary tendencies" (Part I, ch. 7) have been leading to the extermination of the "pure" native American, which leads Grant to conclude that

> We Americans must realize that the altruistic ideas which have controlled our social development during the past century, and the maudlin sentimentalism that has made

America "an asylum for the oppressed," are sweeping the nation toward a racial abyss. If the Melting Pot is allowed to boil without control, and we continue to follow our national motto and deliberately blind ourselves to all "distinctions of race, creed, or color," the type of native American of Colonial descent will become as extinct as the Athenian of the age of Pericles, and the Viking of the days of Rollo. (Part II, ch. 14)

Consequently, Grant proposes specific measures to halt this apocalyptic scenario. Besides immigration restriction, he advocates the prohibition of miscegenation (Part I, ch. 5), as well as eugenic measures that include the elimination of "defective" individuals, and the segregation and sterilization of "undesirables."

4. The Making of Americans

The question of biological reproduction, and specifically the reproduction of the "fittest," i.e., the white Anglo-Saxon or Nordic Americans, was at the heart of the matter for racists like Grant. The declining fertility rate among the upper classes, in contrast to the high fertility rate of the poorer classes and immigrants (two largely overlapping categories), contributed to the nativist and racist hysteria in this period. In the mid-1890s, Francis A. Walker, former superintendent of the U.S. Census, raised the issue in a statistical study of the decline of the "native stock" in New England. Attacking the new immigrants as "beaten men from beaten races; representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence" (qtd in Gossett, 1997: 303; cf. Jacobson, 2000: 156-7), Walker argued that they represented a source of degradation and corruption, and were the real reason behind the declining birth rate of native-born Americans, who "became increasingly unwilling to bring forth sons and daughters who should be obliged to compete in the labor market and in the walks of life with those whom they did not recognize as of their own grade and condition" (qtd in Gossett, 1997: 302). This rather convoluted thesis, which came to be called "race suicide" by Edward A. Ross in

1901, gained wide currency in the following years, especially after Theodore Roosevelt began using it in his campaign for fecundity (Gossett, 1997: 171; Higham, 2000: 147).[5] For Ross, the low fertility rate that ensured the higher standard of living of the "superior race" constituted "a fatal weakness" in the context of competition with a "race that multiplies on a lower plane" (1901: 211). In rather elegiac terms, he goes on to say that

> For a case like this I can find no words so apt as "race suicide." There is no bloodshed, no violence, no assault of the race that waxes upon the race that wanes. The higher race quietly and unmurmuringly eliminates itself rather than endure individually the bitter competition it has failed to ward off from itself by collective action. (212-3)

This rather grim view of U.S. society as a battlefield where different races fight for survival was countered by intellectuals like Horace Kallen and Randolph Bourne, who recognized the divisions that separated the different ethnic groups, but still insisted that true "Americanism," based on the "democratic [...] theory of government" (88), meant the acceptance of difference. Writing "Democracy versus the Melting Pot" in 1915 as a response to Ross's *The Old World in the New*, Kallen rejects his depiction of the new immigrants as a threat to the nation, and uses throughout a musical metaphor to represent two alternative models of society: "What do [Americans] *will* to make of the United States – a unison, singing the old Anglo-Saxon theme 'America', the America of the New England school, or a harmony, in which that theme shall be dominant, perhaps, among others, but one among many, not the only one?" (89). The first alternative, involving repressive state action, would "violate" "the spirit of American institutions"

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5 Madison Grant uses Walker's thesis in ch. 7, Part I, of *The Passing of the Great Race* to explain the decline in the population of colonial descent. He also uses the concept of race suicide in the section in which he advocates that eugenic measures should be applied to the development of the "desirable" social classes, calling attention to the fact that "[t]o attack race suicide by encouraging indiscriminate breeding is not only futile, but is dangerous if it leads to an increase in the undesirable elements. What is needed in the community most of all, is an increase in the desirable classes, which are of superior type physically, intellectually, and morally, and not merely an increase in the absolute numbers of the population" (Part I, ch. 4). He might be hinting at the misguided aims of Roosevelt's campaign.

(89); the second, although also involving "concerted state action," would integrate "our existing ethnic and cultural groups" into a "Federal republic," made up of "a democracy of nationalities, cooperating voluntarily and autonomously," and, in the process, forming "a multiplicity in a unity, an orchestration of mankind" (90-2).

Randolph Bourne, in an article entitled "Trans-national America," published in 1916, defends a similar idea. Attacking "the ruling class of Anglo-Saxon descendants" as slavish imitators of English culture and society, and accusing them in fact of having a colonial mentality (96-7), Bourne claims that the country "needed the new peoples […] to save us from our own stagnation" (95). For him, "America is already the world federation in miniature," "a cosmopolitan federation of national colonies, of foreign cultures," and can in fact become "not a nationality, but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors" (102; 106).

Mary Antin, who emigrated to the U.S. in 1894 from the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia, uses a similar metaphor to represent the connectedness of the peoples of Europe and America, seeing the immigrants as "the strands of the cable that binds the Old World and the New" (2). Her autobiography *The Promised Land,* published in 1912, indeed makes a conscious effort to establish connections in a deeply divided world. As Werner Sollors notes in his introduction to this book, "*The Promised Land* is an autobiography of twoness, of divisions, and of ways to overcome them" (xxix). In the first part of the book, Antin recalls her life as a member of an oppressed minority in Russia, while the second part describes and reflects upon her life in the United States. Russia, representing both her personal past and the historical past of the Middle Ages, means oppression, poverty, and imprisonment; in contrast, America, representing both her present and modernity, means freedom, opportunity, and abundance.

In spite of her idealized view of America, Antin's narrative also gives voice to another America, the America of the slums, which are seen "as a sort of house of detention for poor aliens, where they live on probation till they can show a certificate of good citizenship" (145). The story of her father, who never managed to prosper in America, and who never ceased to be an alien, represents the other side of the American Dream: "His history is the history of thousands who come to to America, with pockets empty, hands untrained to the use of tools, minds cramped by centuries of repression" (144). By telling her father's story and her own as "illustrative of scores of unwritten lives," Antin hopes to "span the bitter sea of racial differences and misunderstandings" (2) that divides citizens from immigrants.

In contrast to her father's story of failure to assimilate, which would only confirm the worst fears of people like Ross and Grant, she presents her own story of successful Americanization. The first words of her autobiography are "I was born, I have lived, and I have been made over." Most of the pages that follow are dedicated to this "making over," this transformation of a Jewish immigrant into an American, who, nevertheless, does not "disown" her "father and mother of the flesh" or her "entire line of ancestors" (1). Although her parents and ancestors have a part in the "generation" of her "second self," the most important part is played by the public school. Whereas Kallen sees the American public school as a negative instrument of conformity to the norm of "the contemporary American of British ancestry" (75), Antin sees it as a positive and absolutely essential means of making Americans out of "foreigners":

> The public school has done its best for us foreigners, and for the country, when it has made us into good Americans. I am glad it is mine to tell how the miracle was wrought in one case. You should be glad to hear of it, you born Americans; for it is the story of the growth of your country; […] of the recruiting of your armies of workers, thinkers, and leaders. (175)

Thus, Antin's book, by telling the "miracle" of the making of one American who "is typical of many" (2), provides a refutation of the dominant racial theories of the early 20th century. Against those that conceive of identity as something innate, inherited in the blood, that can't be changed or transcended, she proves that it is something that is acquired, and that needs to be actively constructed within communities.

But Antin's, Kallen's, and Bourne's views did not prevail, at least not until much later. What prevailed, in the form of the most important piece of legislation passed until that time on immigration, the 1924 National Origins Act, was the idea of a racialized and homogeneous American identity, based on a mythical, and indeed fabricated, Anglo-Saxon past. By establishing an intricate system of racial classifications, this law not only defined a hierarchy of races according to which admission to the country would henceforth be determined, but it also gave a clear answer to Crèvecoeur's often quoted question, "What, then, is the American, this new man?" though not in his terms. The "strange mixture of blood" which, according to Crèvecoeur, could be found in no other country at the end of the 18th century (897) was wiped out from the nation's memory by the early decades of the 20th century. The invention of a mythical past in which the original settlers were "not only purely Nordic, but also purely Teutonic" (Grant, Part I, ch. 7) was the basis on which the law set its blueprint for the future, putting an end to "the day of unalloyed welcome to all peoples, the day of indiscriminate acceptance of all races" (A. Johnson, 1927, qtd in Daniels, 1991: 284).

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Appendix 1
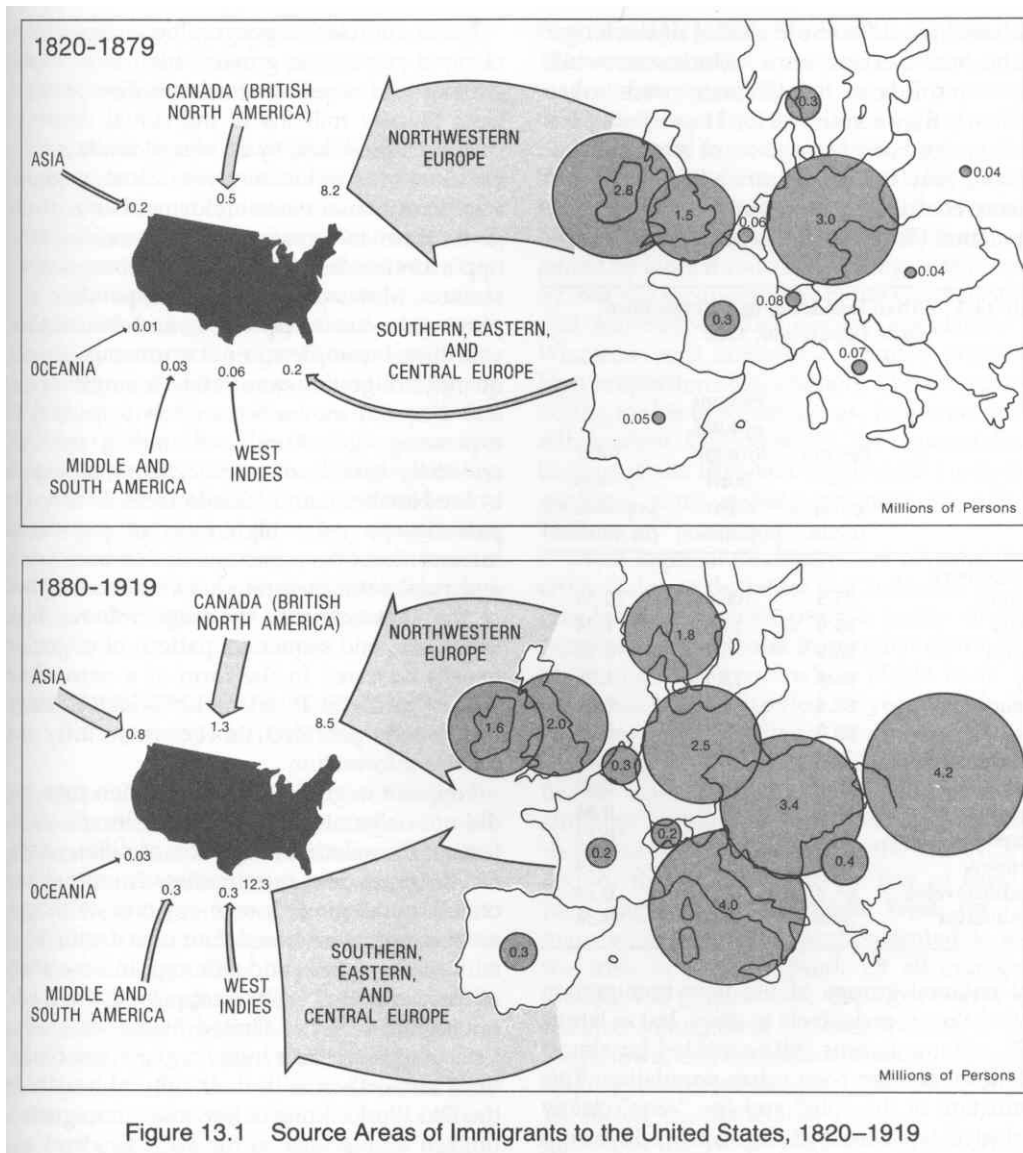
Figure 13.1   Source Areas of Immigrants to the United States, 1820–1919

Source: Université de Moncton, Nouveau Brunswick, Canada. Guy Vincent (2003), GEOG 1103: Le milieu humain (Odyssée humaine) (TP 1) <www.umoncton.ca/facarts/hstgeo/vincent/immigration%202.jpg>. Accessed on 10 August 2005.

Appendix 2

CARTOON 3
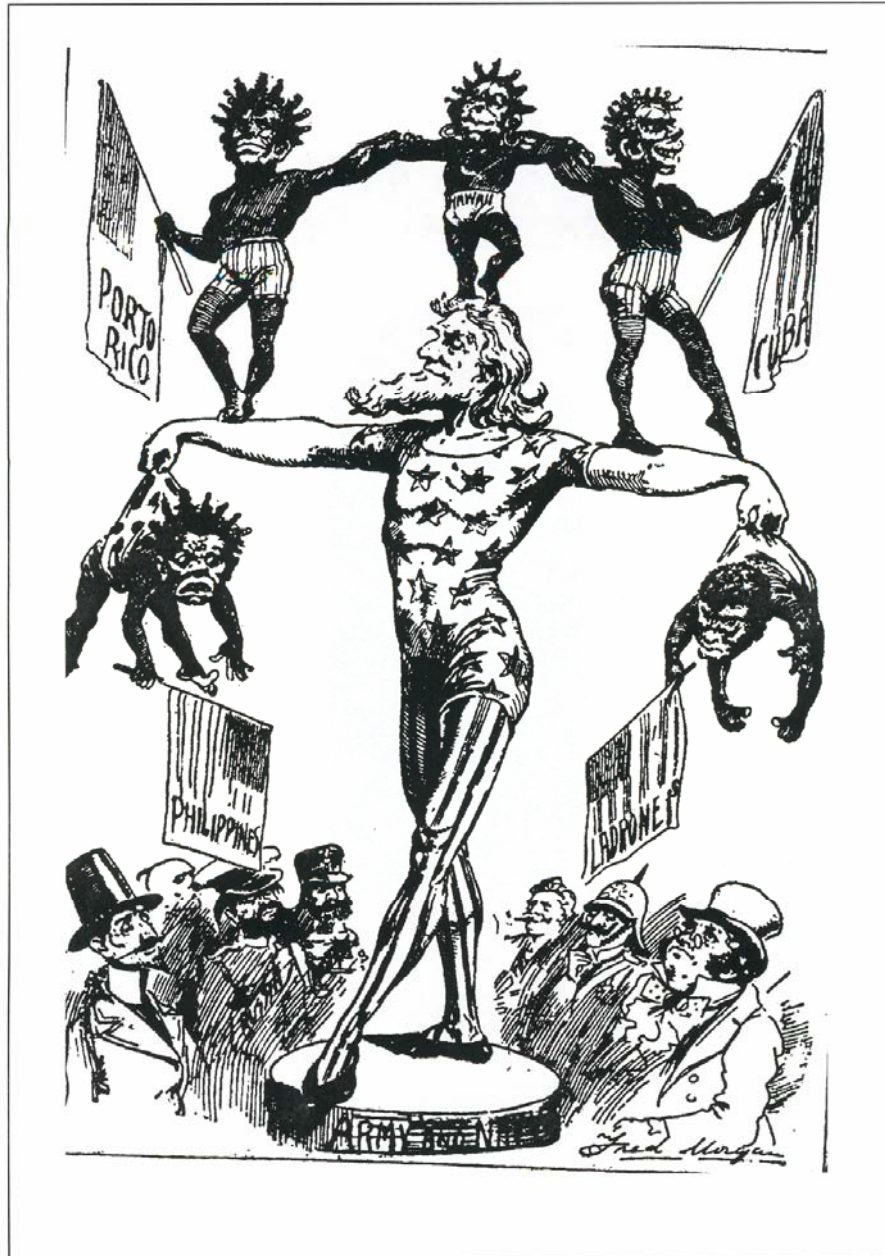
Cartoon 3. JOHN BULL: @It@s really most extraordinary what training will do. Why, only the other day I thought that man unable to support himself.@ (Fred Morgan, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1898.)

Source: *Engaging Students in American History*. Project hosted at the Grand Forks Public Schools, Grand Forks, North Dakota. http://history.grand-forks.k12.nd.us/ndhistory/LessonImages/Sources/Cartoons/john%20bull.jpg. Accessed on 7 August 2005.
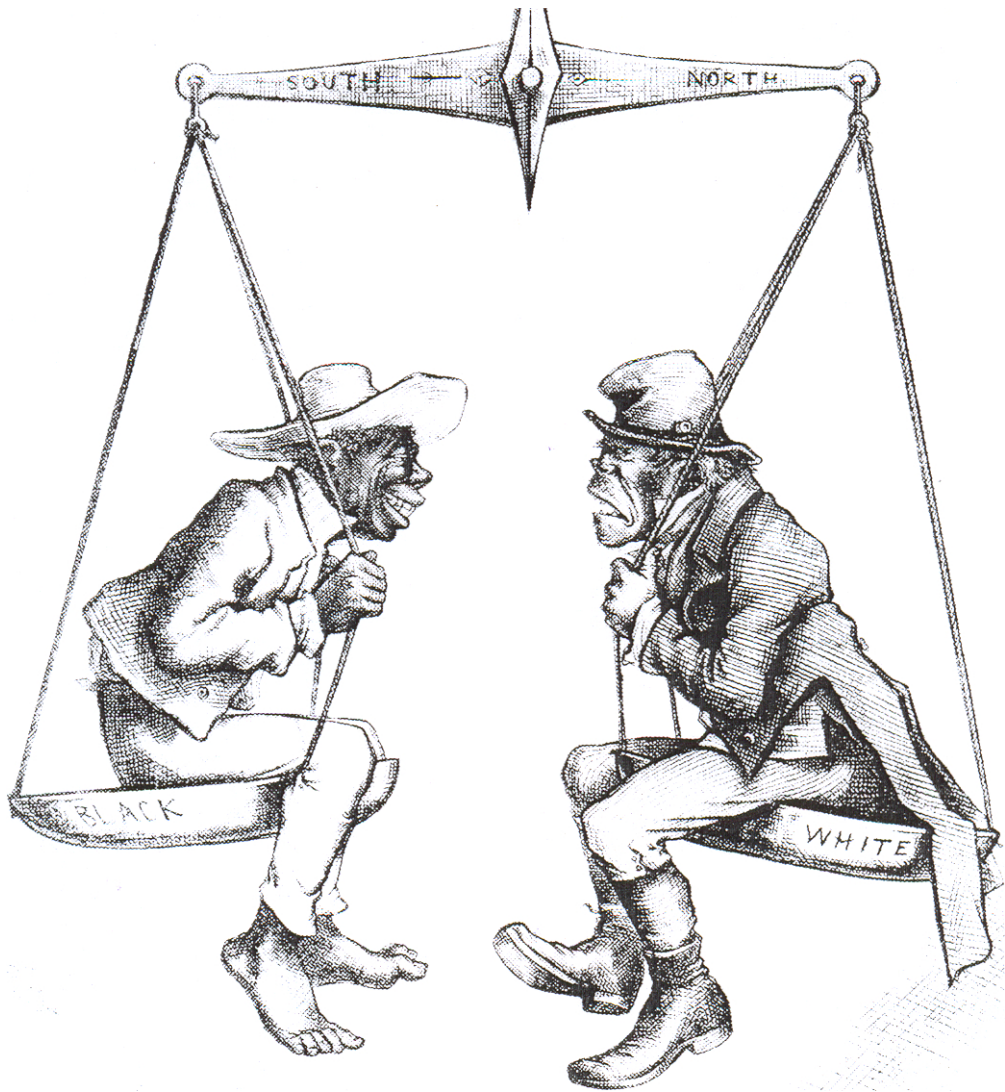
Appendix 3

CARTOON 2

Cartoon 2. How Some Apprehensive People Picture Uncle Sam after the War. (*Detroit News*, 1898.)

Source: *Engaging Students in American History*. Project hosted at the Grand Forks Public Schools, Grand Forks, North Dakota. http://history.grand-forks.k12.nd.us/ndhistory/LessonImages/Sources/Cartoons/uncle%20sam%20after%20 war.jpg. Accessed on 7 August 2005.

Appendix 4

"The Ignorant Vote – Honors Are Easy." Cartoon by Thomas Nast, Harper's Weekley, 1876 (rpt. in Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues. The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000.)